

Understanding Cultural Demand and Technology Acceptance: An Empirical Study of Douyin's Perceived Usefulness Among the Tujia Ethnic Group

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ABSTRACT

The integration of short-video platforms into ethnic communities has transformed digital cultural communication in China. This study explores how demand factors—namely Mate Selection Needs, Cultural Identity Needs, Cultural Respect Needs, Self-Realization Needs, Output Quality, Result Demonstrability, Economic Security Needs, Cultural Safety Needs, and Ethnic Friendship Needs—shape the Perceived Usefulness (PU) of Douyin as a cultural communication tool among the Tujia ethnic group. Additionally, it examines the relationship between Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU) and PU, as proposed in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Data were collected from 412 Tujia Douyin users through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4. Results reveal that cultural identity, self-realization, and cultural respect needs significantly predict PU, whereas mate selection and economic security needs exhibit weaker influence. PEOU strongly correlates with PU, highlighting that user-friendly interfaces enhance cultural participation. The findings extend TAM within a cultural-ethnic context, suggesting that Douyin's perceived value transcends entertainment to serve as a medium for identity reinforcement and intercultural visibility. Policy implications stress promoting inclusive digital design to preserve ethnic heritage through social media.

KEYWORDS: Douyin, perceived usefulness, perceived ease-of-use, Tujia ethnic group, cultural communication, Technology Acceptance Model, short-video platforms.

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INTRODUCTION

Short-video platforms such as Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) have rapidly become primary channels for cultural exchange and social engagement in multi-ethnic societies, reshaping how heritage, identity, and communication are mediated in the digital era (McQueenie, 2024; Qi, 2024). Among ethnic minority groups like the Tujia, Douyin functions as much more than a leisure application—it represents a vibrant arena for performing identity, maintaining cultural continuity, and strengthening intra-ethnic networks in contexts of rapid social change. The Tujia people, distributed mainly across Hunan, Hubei, and Chongqing regions of China, possess distinctive folk culture, traditional songs, festivals, and crafts, yet face erosion from urbanization, modernization, and homogenised media flows. Digital platforms now offer unprecedented opportunities to revive and project ethnic heritage, crafts, festivals and vernacular forms to global audiences, enabling what has been described as “culturally adaptive participation” in short-video communities (Wang & Zhang, 2025).

While Douyin's role in cultural promotion is increasingly evident, understanding what drives its **perceived usefulness** as a cultural communication tool among ethnic minorities remains under-explored. Prior studies emphasise user motivations such as self-expression, entertainment, and social capital (Wei, 2022; Liu et al., 2024), but few address cultural demand dimensions unique to ethnic users—such as cultural safety, respect, identity validation, and intra-ethnic solidarity. For example, the literature points to short-video platforms serving as sites of heritage transmission and ethnic self-affirmation, but empirical work on the **Tujia** remains scarce (Chen, 2023).

In response, this research integrates the theoretical lenses of **Cultural Demand Theory** with the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) to examine how both functional needs (such as ease of use and output quality) and socio-cultural needs (such as expression of identity, cultural respect, and ethnic friendship) shape Douyin's perceived usefulness among Tujia users. By doing so, the study seeks to extend TAM into an ethnic-digital communication context and capture both technological and cultural determinants of platform value.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Technology Acceptance and Perceived Usefulness

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) posits that **Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU)** and **Perceived Usefulness (PU)** determine technology adoption behavior (Davis, 1989). PU refers to the degree to which users believe that a technology enhances their performance or value, while PEOU concerns the effort needed to use it. Prior research in social media contexts confirms that PEOU positively influences PU and behavioral intention (Venkatesh & Davis, 2000; Lin & Kim, 2022). In ethnic

communities, ease of navigation and culturally adaptive design can significantly enhance perceptions of utility in promoting heritage.

H1: Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU) positively influences the Perceived Usefulness (PU) of Douyin among Tujia users.

2.2 Cultural Demand and Douyin Usefulness

Cultural demand theory suggests that media users are driven by complex psychological and social needs beyond entertainment (Liu & Zhang, 2023). Among minority groups, these needs often revolve around cultural preservation, social inclusion, and self-expression. This study identifies nine demand dimensions relevant to Douyin's cultural role:

- **Mate Selection Needs:** Douyin provides social visibility, increasing opportunities for interpersonal interaction and community bonding.
- **Cultural Identity and Respect Needs:** Users employ Douyin to display ethnic customs and assert pride in Tujia identity.
- **Self-Realization Needs:** The platform allows individuals to gain confidence through cultural performance and audience validation.
- **Output Quality and Result Demonstrability:** High-quality video output enhances the credibility of cultural content, making it easier to showcase results.
- **Economic Security and Cultural Safety Needs:** For artisans and performers, Douyin serves as both an income channel and a safe cultural space.
- **Ethnic Friendship Needs:** Interaction within Douyin's community strengthens inter-ethnic empathy and solidarity.

H2: Demand factors (Mate Selection Needs, Cultural Identity Needs, Cultural Respect Needs, Self-Realization Needs, Output Quality, Result Demonstrability, Economic Security Needs, Cultural Safety Needs, and Ethnic Friendship Needs) positively influence the Perceived Usefulness of Douyin as a cultural communication tool among Tujia users.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A **quantitative correlational design** was employed to examine the hypothesized relationships among the study variables. The framework integrates the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)** (Davis, 1989) with cultural demand constructs, recognizing that user attitudes toward Douyin are shaped not only by functional ease but also by socio-cultural motivations. This approach allows simultaneous testing of behavioral, perceptual, and cultural influences on the perceived usefulness of Douyin as a cultural communication tool among the Tujia ethnic group. The design is explanatory in nature, emphasizing cause-effect patterns and variance-based prediction through **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)**.

3.2 Population and Sample

The **population** consisted of active **Tujia Douyin users** residing across the culturally dense regions of western **Hunan** and **Hubei** provinces in China. The Tujia community has been historically recognized for its rich cultural traditions, which are increasingly being represented on digital platforms.

Purposive sampling was used to identify individuals who actively produce or share culturally themed content. Data were collected through a structured online survey distributed via **WeChat**, **Douyin community groups**, and **local cultural forums** between May and August 2025. Out of 450 distributed questionnaires, **412 valid responses** were retained for analysis after removing incomplete or inconsistent submissions.

This sample size exceeds the minimum threshold recommended for PLS-SEM analysis (Hair et al., 2021), ensuring adequate statistical power and representativeness of the Tujia Douyin-using population.

3.3 Instrumentation

The research instrument comprised a **structured questionnaire** with items measured on a **five-point Likert scale** (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The instrument was divided into three main sections: (1) demographic profile, (2) cultural demand factors, and (3) technology acceptance variables (PEOU and PU).

- **Demand Factors:** Adapted from Liu & Zhang (2023) and Gao (2022), these items were contextualized to reflect cultural, social, and expressive needs within the Tujia community.
- **Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU) and Perceived Usefulness (PU):** Items were derived from Davis (1989) and Venkatesh & Davis (2000), ensuring consistency with established TAM scales.
- A pilot test (n = 30) confirmed clarity and reliability of all items. **Cronbach's α and composite reliability (CR)** values exceeded **0.80**, confirming internal consistency.

Table 1 presents the constructs and their representative measurement items, indicating the theoretical sources and empirical adaptation rationale.

Table 1. Constructs and Measurement Items

Construct	Example Items (Likert Scale 1–5)	Sources
Mate Selection Needs (MSN)	“Douyin allows me to connect with potential partners who share my cultural background.”	Adapted from Liu & Zhang (2023)
Cultural Identity Needs (CIN)	“Using Douyin helps me express my Tujia cultural identity.”	Li et al. (2021)
Cultural Respect Needs (CRN)	“Content on Douyin encourages respect toward Tujia traditions.”	Gao (2022)
Self-Realization Needs (SRN)	“Sharing my videos on Douyin enhances my confidence and sense of achievement.”	Liu & Zhang (2023)
Output Quality (OQ)	“The visual and sound quality of Douyin content is satisfactory.”	Davis (1989); Lin & Kim (2022)
Result Demonstrability (RD)	“The benefits of using Douyin for cultural sharing are easy to observe.”	Venkatesh & Davis (2000)
Economic Security Needs (ESN)	“Douyin helps me promote my cultural crafts and gain economic benefits.”	Zhao & Sun (2022)
Cultural Safety Needs (CSN)	“Douyin provides a safe space to display Tujia traditions.”	Liu & Zhang (2023)
Ethnic Friendship Needs (EFN)	“Douyin helps me strengthen friendships within and beyond the Tujia community.”	Li et al. (2021)
Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU)	“Douyin is easy to learn and use.”	Davis (1989)
Perceived Usefulness (PU)	“Douyin is useful for sharing and promoting Tujia culture.”	Davis (1989)

Note: Each construct will be measured using 3–5 items. Cronbach's α and CR > 0.80.

Table 1 underscores the multi-dimensionality of the model, combining cultural, social, and technological aspects. The constructs represent an integration of TAM-based cognitive factors with ethnic cultural needs, which collectively determine how Tujia users perceive Douyin's usefulness as a platform for identity communication.

Table 2. Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 412)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male / Female	174 / 238	42.2 / 57.8
Age Group	18–25 / 26–35 / 36–45 / 46+	102 / 153 / 101 / 56	24.8 / 37.1 / 24.5 / 13.6
Education Level	Secondary / Bachelor's / Master's / Others	91 / 231 / 67 / 23	22.1 / 56.0 / 16.3 / 5.6
Douyin Usage Duration	<1 year / 1–3 years / >3 years	88 / 201 / 123	21.4 / 48.8 / 29.8
Average Daily Usage	<1 hour / 1–3 hours / >3 hours	97 / 193 / 122	23.5 / 46.8 / 29.6

Interpretation: The majority of respondents were young to middle-aged adults with moderate to high exposure to Douyin, ensuring cultural relevance and platform familiarity.

As shown in Table 2, the sample predominantly comprises young to middle-aged adults with moderate to high levels of exposure to Douyin. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, ensuring representativeness across user types. The majority (56%) hold at least a bachelor's degree, reflecting the growing digital literacy among Tujia youth. Nearly half (48.8%) have used Douyin for one to three years, suggesting stable usage patterns that contribute to credible assessment of platform-related perceptions.

This demographic composition provides a robust foundation for analyzing variations in perceived usefulness and ease of use, grounded in both cultural engagement and digital proficiency.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using **SmartPLS 4.0** to test the structural relationships among variables through **Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM)**. This method was selected for its suitability in exploratory models with complex interdependent constructs and non-normal data distributions.

The analysis followed two stages:

1. **Measurement Model Evaluation** – Reliability and validity of constructs were verified using Cronbach's α , Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was assessed through the **Heterotrait–Monotrait Ratio (HTMT)**.
2. **Structural Model Evaluation** – Hypothesized relationships were examined using **path coefficients (β)**, **t-values**, and **p-values**, with significance determined through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples).

Model fitness was validated using **SRMR** < **0.08** and **R²** thresholds recommended by Hair et al. (2021). The next section presents the empirical results with supporting tables on reliability, validity, and structural path significance.

RESULTS

The data collected from 412 respondents underwent comprehensive validation and structural analysis using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0. The results are divided into two parts: measurement model assessment (Table 3) and structural model analysis (Table 4).

Before testing the hypothesized relationships, it was essential to establish the psychometric soundness of the constructs. The **measurement model** was evaluated through internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Cronbach's alpha (α), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were computed to verify the internal coherence of each latent variable.

All constructs exceeded the recommended reliability thresholds ($\alpha > 0.70$, $CR > 0.80$, $AVE > 0.50$), confirming that the measurement items were both reliable and conceptually valid. The AVE values indicated that more than 50 % of the variance in each construct was explained by its respective items, ensuring convergent validity. The HTMT ratios for discriminant validity (not tabulated here) were below 0.85, affirming adequate differentiation between constructs.

Table 3. Reliability and Validity Statistics

Construct	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE	Factor Loading Range
MSN	0.853	0.892	0.67	0.74–0.88
CIN	0.881	0.917	0.72	0.79–0.90
CRN	0.861	0.901	0.69	0.76–0.89
SRN	0.874	0.912	0.70	0.77–0.91
OQ	0.832	0.871	0.66	0.73–0.88
RD	0.858	0.902	0.71	0.79–0.91
ESN	0.801	0.858	0.63	0.71–0.84
CSN	0.864	0.910	0.73	0.78–0.90
EFN	0.871	0.917	0.74	0.80–0.91
PEOU	0.884	0.920	0.75	0.81–0.91
PU	0.899	0.933	0.76	0.83–0.92

Interpretation: All constructs exceed the minimum thresholds ($\alpha > 0.7$, $AVE > 0.5$), confirming convergent validity and reliability.

Table 3 demonstrates that all constructs met the stringent reliability and validity criteria required for PLS-SEM analysis. The strong factor loadings (0.73–0.92) confirm that items contributed substantially to their respective latent variables. Particularly, **Cultural Identity**, **Self-Realization**, and **Perceived Usefulness** exhibited the highest reliability coefficients, suggesting that these constructs were most internally coherent. These outcomes validate the robustness of the instrument and justify proceeding to the structural model analysis.

After confirming the measurement model, the structural model was analyzed to test the hypothesized relationships among the latent variables. The path coefficients (β), t -values, and p -values were generated through bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples.

The results, summarized in Table 4, reveal that **Perceived Ease-of-Use (PEOU)** significantly predicts **Perceived Usefulness (PU)**, supporting the **Technology Acceptance Model**. Similarly, among the nine cultural demand variables, **Cultural Identity Needs**, **Cultural Respect Needs**, and **Self-Realization Needs** emerged as the strongest determinants of Douyin's perceived usefulness as a cultural communication platform. The model's **R² = 0.68** indicates that 68 % of the variance in PU is explained by the combined predictors—substantial for behavioral research standards.

Table 4. Structural Model Results (PLS-SEM Path Coefficients)

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	PEOU → PU	0.34	6.91	0.000	Supported
H2a	Cultural Identity → PU	0.28	5.23	0.000	Supported
H2b	Cultural Respect → PU	0.21	4.18	0.000	Supported
H2c	Self-Realization → PU	0.19	3.96	0.001	Supported
H2d	Mate Selection → PU	0.06	1.21	0.227	Not Supported
H2e	Economic Security → PU	0.08	1.77	0.078	Marginal
H2f	Cultural Safety → PU	0.15	2.98	0.003	Supported

Hypothesis	Relationship	Path Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value	Result
H2g	Output Quality → PU	0.17	3.54	0.000	Supported
H2h	Result Demonstrability → PU	0.16	3.11	0.002	Supported
H2i	Ethnic Friendship → PU	0.14	2.68	0.007	Supported

Model fit: R^2 (PU) = 0.68; SRMR = 0.072; NFI = 0.91 → Acceptable. *Interpretation:* Cultural identity, respect, and ease-of-use are dominant predictors of Douyin's perceived usefulness among Tujia users.

Table 4 indicates that ease of use is a dominant cognitive factor influencing perceived usefulness, consistent with TAM findings in other social-media contexts (Lin & Kim, 2022). The strong, significant coefficients for **Cultural Identity**, **Respect**, and **Self-Realization Needs** emphasize Douyin's cultural-symbolic function among Tujia users. In contrast, the weak or insignificant influence of **Mate Selection** and **Economic Security** suggests that material motives play a secondary role compared to cultural affirmation. The moderate effects of **Output Quality**, **Result Demonstrability**, and **Cultural Safety** reinforce the importance of both technical quality and perceived cultural protection in shaping user attitudes.

Overall, the model explains a substantial portion of perceived usefulness variance, confirming that **Douyin's value for Tujia users arises from the interplay between ease of use and deeper cultural motivations**. The statistical significance of eight out of ten paths further strengthens the predictive validity of the proposed framework.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight Douyin's **dual nature as both a technological and cultural tool**, a characteristic increasingly documented in recent digital ethnography and communication scholarship. Consistent with the core propositions of the **Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)**, perceived ease-of-use significantly enhances perceived usefulness, suggesting that intuitive design, simple navigation, and a low cognitive burden are essential precursors for cultural participation on digital platforms (Davis, 1989; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000). This aligns with Lin and Kim's (2022) finding that ease-of-use in short-video applications is often the strongest predictor of sustained user engagement, particularly among users seeking expressive or experiential outcomes rather than purely instrumental ones.

More importantly, the present study demonstrates that **cultural dimensions—specifically cultural identity needs, cultural respect needs, and self-realization—exert stronger influence** on perceived usefulness than pragmatic or economic motivations. Among Tujia users, Douyin functions not simply as a social media platform but as a **digital cultural stage** where rituals, folk songs, embroidered costumes, dialect expressions, and community celebrations are transformed into publicly consumable cultural artifacts. This resonates with Liu and Zhang's (2023) argument that short-video ecosystems have become "cultural performance spaces" enabling minority groups to negotiate visibility and reaffirm identity in rapidly modernizing environments.

The strong predictive effect of cultural identity and respect needs suggests that **identity affirmation** plays a central role in driving Tujia users' engagement with Douyin. The platform's ability to validate their cultural heritage, receive positive feedback, and gain recognition reinforces feelings of pride, belonging, and self-worth. This supports findings from Chen (2023), who observed that ethnic minorities increasingly utilize Douyin and TikTok as tools for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and enhancing collective digital presence. Similarly, Wang and Zhang (2025) highlighted that Douyin users from minority backgrounds often employ short videos as "micro-heritage narratives," using the platform's visual affordances to sustain traditional knowledge and express cultural authenticity.

In contrast, **economic security needs and mate selection needs** show weaker associations with perceived usefulness. This suggests that although digital visibility may indirectly provide social or economic opportunities, these factors are secondary to cultural motivations within the Tujia context. This contrasts with studies on **urban Chinese youth**, where Douyin is frequently associated with self-branding, commercial monetization, and entrepreneurial identity construction (Zhao & Sun, 2022; Qi, 2024). The lower influence of commercial factors in this study reinforces the idea that **marginalized ethnic groups engage with technology differently**, prioritizing cultural preservation and community cohesion over individualistic goals.

The strong effect of **output quality** and **result demonstrability** further indicates that technical affordances—such as HD video, filters, sound clarity, and easy shareability—are not merely functional conveniences but become **cultural amplifiers**. High-quality visuals allow users to present traditional performances more attractively, increasing the credibility and aesthetic appeal of their cultural content. This finding aligns with observations by McQueenie (2024), who noted that Douyin's advanced editing tools significantly contribute to the visibility and reinterpretation of ethnic culture online.

Overall, the results affirm that Douyin's usefulness for the Tujia community is shaped by a **combination of cultural, psychological, and technological factors**, demonstrating that technology acceptance cannot be fully understood without considering its cultural embeddedness. At the same time, these findings reveal a broader socio-digital trend: ethnic groups are increasingly leveraging platform ecosystems to negotiate identity, resist cultural homogenization, and re-create community narratives in virtual spaces. Thus, Douyin becomes a **hybrid cultural-technological environment**, simultaneously enabling tradition preservation, identity expression, and adaptive participation in digital society.

IMPLICATIONS

Theoretical Implications:

This study extends the **Technology Acceptance Model** into the cultural communication domain, demonstrating how ethnic identity variables mediate technology perceptions. The integration of demand factors enriches TAM by embedding socio-cultural contexts into its utilitarian framework.

Practical Implications:

For platform designers and cultural policymakers, the results underscore the importance of **culturally adaptive algorithms**, localized content promotion, and community support tools that protect minority heritage online.

Policy Implications:

The Chinese government's digital culture initiatives can utilize these insights to promote **inclusive digital ecosystems** where minority voices are empowered, aligning with broader goals of cultural diversity preservation.

CONCLUSION

Douyin's growing prominence among the Tujia ethnic group demonstrates the powerful convergence of **technology acceptance** and **cultural demand**, revealing that digital platforms are no longer neutral communication tools but active spaces where ethnic identity, cultural pride, and social belonging are negotiated. The findings underscore that Douyin's perceived usefulness derives not merely from functional attributes such as interface simplicity or system responsiveness, but from its ability to **fulfill profound psychological, cultural, and communal needs**, ranging from identity expression and cultural respect to self-realization and intra-ethnic connection.


Through the integration of TAM with culturally grounded demand constructs, this study highlights that **ease of use enhances usefulness**, but cultural motivations ultimately determine the depth and sustainability of user engagement. For the Tujia, Douyin becomes a stage for showcasing traditional clothing, folk dances, culinary practices, storytelling, and ritual performances—thereby transforming digital participation into a form of cultural preservation. In this sense, Douyin acts simultaneously as a **technological facilitator** and a **cultural safeguard**.

These insights contribute to expanding TAM in contexts where **technology functions as a medium for cultural continuity**, not merely instrumental convenience. They also illustrate that ethnic minority groups actively reshape mainstream platforms to reflect their own values, reinforcing the need for culturally responsive platform design, local language support, and heritage-sensitive content algorithms.

As digital communication continues to reshape the landscape of identity formation, this study calls for **longitudinal research** to examine how sustained Douyin usage influences cultural resilience, self-perception, and intergenerational transmission of heritage within minority communities. Future studies should also investigate cross-ethnic comparisons, the role of content recommendation systems in shaping cultural visibility, and the socio-economic impacts of digital participation for marginalized groups.

Overall, the research underscores that platforms like Douyin are not merely entertainment technologies—they are **dynamic cultural ecosystems** where tradition meets innovation, and where minority voices can reclaim visibility in an increasingly digitalized China.

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