

# The Exploration of the Incentive Mechanism of Opera Audiences Based on Self-Determination Theory

Jiwei Wang<sup>1, a</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, 610200, China

<sup>a</sup>awjw15230807180@163.com

## Abstract

The development of contemporary opera is facing the problem of lacking audiences and low stickiness. The Incentive Mechanism of Opera Audiences based on Self-Determination Theory is aimed at providing material incentives and other external regulation measures for ordinary opera audiences so that they can obtain external motivation; and it can create a suitable external environment to promote the internalization of external motivation, in order to transform the audiences into potential opera enthusiasts. The incentive measures proposed for the needs of autonomy, competence and connection can play a guiding effect on opera enthusiasts and motivate them to promote opera culture. These measures will help to promote the development of Chinese opera in the community and will contribute to the communication and development of opera culture in today's situation.

## Keywords

Opera audiences; Self-Determination Theory; Incentive Mechanism.

## 1. Introduction

In the 1990s, when Reform and Opening-up gradually deepened and the market economy took shape in China, Chinese opera was beginning to be marketed and commercialized. During this period, opera performances gradually got rid of the government and moved toward the market. However, in the face of the open market environment and the impact of various entertainment activities, opera seemed unable to cope. In particular, the rapid spread of television and film diverted a large number of audiences from opera; therefore, in the 1990s, Chinese opera entered a period of decline. [1]In the 21st century, the widespread use of new media and the popularity of the Internet has led to an increasing diversification of people's aesthetic needs and interests, and a large number of opera audiences have left the opera and are attracted by new entertainment methods such as film and television, pop singing and dancing, and sports competitions. In response to this trend, performing troupes have adopted new media for their performances, using the Internet and other media to compete with new entertainments in the market. In recent years, many troupes have owned their official WeChat accounts and Tik Tok live accounts, and they have also harvested many audiences through them. However, the use of platforms by most troupes is limited to regular live broadcasts, video updates and selective responses to audience comments, lacking effective measures to ensure audience loyalty. This not only fails to understand the true needs of the audience and judge the extent of their love and understanding of opera, but is also not conducive to the cultivation of opera enthusiasts and make them become the disseminator of Chinese opera.

In terms of the current situation of the development of opera, scholars have put forward suggestions for the cultivation of contemporary opera audiences. Zuo Xiao-yan and Cui Jian-ping argue that in the current national conditions, attention should be paid to the education of opera knowledge for students majoring in art teaching so that they can cultivate more opera

audiences after taking up employment positions. Jiang Xiao-ping believes that the opera industry should pay attention to the popularization of contemporary opera, that is, commercialization, entertainment and secularization of opera performance, so as to create a large audience for opera through consumption.

## 2. Self-Determination Theory as a Theoretical Basis

Self-Determination Theory was a psychological theory about human behaviour. The theory is based on the internal characteristics of human beings, which believes that human beings are active creatures with the potential for self-actualization and self-growth. This means that the individual's self-growth is dialectically related to the external environment, which has both a facilitating and a hindering effect on the individual's self-actualisation. Self-Determination Theory suggests that internal motivation is diminished when external factors undermine a human's basic psychological needs, whereas positive external rewards do not diminish or even enhance internal motivation.

Over a long period of development by later scholars, Self-Determination Theory, based on the idea of organic dialectic, has gradually extended into six interrelated sub-theories: Organic Integration Theory, Basic Psychological Needs Theory, Causality Orientations Theory, Cognitive-Assessment Theory, Goal-Setting Theory and Relational-Motivation Theory, the first three of which are the most important. Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPT), the core of Self-Determination theory, believes that the satisfaction of three major psychological needs - autonomy, competence and connection - is an important condition for the formation of intrinsic cognition in individuals. It points out that environmental factors affect individual behaviour and psychology through basic psychological needs, which makes the theory have practical significance. Organic Integration Theory (OIT), which focuses on the internalization of extrinsic motivation, classifies external motivations and integrates them depending on whether they are active or not. The theory demonstrates that extrinsic motivation can be internalised and regulate individual behaviour under some circumstances. Causality Orientations Theory (COT) classifies human motivational tendencies into autonomous, control and impersonal orientations, and describes the different roles they play in the internalization of individual motivation. [2]

Self-Determination Theory can explain the influence of the external environment and extrinsic motivation on individual behaviour, particularly the significance of extrinsic rewards in motivating or undermining intrinsic motivation. More specifically, Organic Integration Theory explains the internalization process of external motivation and its influence on individual behaviour, and can provide a basis for proposing corresponding incentives for the internalization process; Basic Psychological Needs Theory and Causality Orientations Theory emphasise the three main psychological needs as the main factors influencing individual behaviour, which provide theoretical support for audience incentives proposed to meet audience needs.

## 3. Intrinsic Motivations of Opera Audiences

Self-Determination Theory suggests that essentially all actions of the audience are the result of intrinsic motivation. The immediate and primary motivation for audiences to engage in opera viewing is to be entertained, to have fun or to satisfy a sense of wonder. Different types of viewing can provide different experiences; for example, short videos and live streaming allow users to watch the most engaging performing techniques and clips, and to learn about the actors' daily lives and behind-the-scenes stories without going outside. This type of content does not require in-depth thinking and the audience is simply watching for relaxation and entertainment. Offline performances allow the audience to experience the charm of opera in

person and intuitively, for which the audience often needs to have a basic understanding of the repertoire in order to have a different viewing experience. This not only helps to satisfy the audience's need for enjoyment but also in fact nurtures potential opera enthusiasts.

In addition, intrinsic motivation also includes the motivation to acquire knowledge, which is one of the motivations for self-growth. [3] Participating in online and offline opera performances is a good way to acquire a deeper understanding and reflection on opera and achieve self-growth; likewise, audiences can fulfil the expectation of acquiring knowledge, gaining psychological satisfaction and developing a sense of identity with opera through both ways.

Basic Psychological Needs Theory suggests that all individuals strive to meet three major psychological needs - competence, autonomy and connection - and tend to gravitate towards environments that are better conditioned to meet three major needs. Competence needs refer to success in challenging tasks and achieving desired outcomes; autonomy needs refer to the individual having the initiative to make their own choices; connection needs refer to building a sense of interdependence and respect with others. Intrinsic motivations of opera audience include the sense of achievement of getting involved in a task and succeeding in it, the feeling of autonomy in choosing the type of opera they like to participate in, and the satisfaction of creating a good interactive and mutually respectful environment with other enthusiasts and opera-performing groups. These feelings are key factors in facilitating the transformation of opera audiences into opera enthusiasts and opera culture disseminators.

For this reason, all incentive measures for opera audiences should first realise the importance of satisfying the audience's psychological curiosity and enjoyment needs, while at the same time aiming to meet the audience's expectations for knowledge, so that the audience can develop a sense of psychological identity. The ultimate goal is to motivate the opera audience to participate deeply through meeting the three basic psychological needs in a variety of ways.

## **4. Audience Incentives for External Motivation**

### **4.1. The Moderating Role of the Internalization of External Motivation**

Amabile identifies five elements of external motivation: evaluative concerns, recognition concerns, competitive concerns, concerns about money or other material aspects, and concerns about the instructions of others. [4] There are clear differences in the importance of these external motivations in different application scenarios; for instance, the Corporate Employee Incentive Mechanism tends to use pay as the best incentive for work, it focuses on monetary or other material rewards as motivation elements; while recently some researches applying Self-Determination Theory to educational practices have focused on evaluative and recognition concerns for students; however, in the field of audience studies, because of the equal relations between performance troupes and their audiences, the incentives for the audience cannot replicate the employee motivation mechanism or the student motivation model; instead, new incentives that meet the expectations of the audience should be developed to address the characteristics and needs of opera audiences.

Organic Integration Theory explains the influence of external motivation on individual behaviour, which uses "internalization" to describe the transformation of external motivation into internal motivation. External motivation can be subdivided into external regulation, internal regulation, identity regulation and integration regulation, of which the first two are mainly regulated by external rewards and punishments, access to rewards, etc., and they have an effect on the individual's inner being through external agents or hindrances, therefore, they are called "controlled motivation"; the latter two are called "autonomous motivation" because they are more self-determined. These types of motivation often include the individual's social values, self-identity and sense of self-responsibility. Regardless of whether it is controlled or

autonomous motivation, it is still essentially instrumental and needs to achieve internal regulation through internalization processes in a suitable external environment. Incentives for external motivation should therefore aim to facilitate the process of internalization of external motivation, which requires an external environment to fulfil the three psychological needs of connection, autonomy and competence. [5]

The internalization of external motivation begins with external rewards, especially material and verbal rewards, and these motivate the object to engage in the internalization process passively; further, internal regulation transforms the external motivation into psychological factors, generating intrinsic motivation; finally, identity regulation through value affirmation and conceptual identification shifts this intrinsic motivation from passive to active, so that when the external identification is able to make the object feel competent satisfaction and can satisfy the object's relational needs, the internalization of extrinsic motivation is realised. The whole process is a theoretical basis for the incentive mechanism of opera audiences.

#### **4.2. Incentives for External Regulation**

At this stage, because opera audiences are small in number, of varying levels and of low stickiness, there is no way to create a stable intrinsic demand. Therefore, the intrinsic needs of the audience should be progressively met through extrinsic rewards for them. In the New Media Age, Chinese opera has been better known by more people through internet technology, opera films as well as short videos and live broadcasts, which also have gradually become ways of receiving opera knowledge for audiences. Traditional theatrical performances, tea garden performances and modern opera performances mainly provide viewing platforms for opera professionals and enthusiasts. The combination of online and offline performances ensures the basic communication environments for opera and that opera always has a certain audience base.

Amabile's research found that controlled motivation showed a short-term advantage in common tasks. [6] In the Corporate Employee Incentive Mechanism, extrinsic regulation can positively predict task performance, convey a positive attitude towards work and produce positive work outcomes. [7] It is evident that under certain conditions, extrinsic regulation can produce motivational effects. In incentives for general opera audiences, extrinsic regulation plays a somewhat fundamental role in attracting and retaining audiences through material and verbal rewards, and is an important basis for transforming general audiences into potential opera enthusiasts, which should be valued.

For the audience of opera on online platforms, the fandom that has emerged in the New Media Age can provide a reference for external regulation incentives. On the one hand, they both use short live video platforms as a medium of communication and thus have the basic conditions to draw on; on the other hand, opera audiences on Internet platforms overlap more closely with participants in fandom, and their characteristics are similar. Therefore, on the Internet, actors and troupe managers can draw on the interaction between the two parties in the fan economy, through material or verbal rewards, to achieve initial interaction with the audience, while also attracting more people to participate. However, material rewards should not replace intrinsic motivation as the main factor, otherwise, the sense of autonomous control will be weakened, i.e. the "erosion effect". It should therefore only be used in the early stages of an incentive scheme, for less sticky audiences, or as a secondary incentive to reinforce and stabilise audience stickiness. It is important to note that the rewards should be strongly related to opera: on the one hand, the conditions under which audiences are rewarded should be related to opera, such as rewarding active participants and those who give excellent answers in the online opera quiz; on the other hand, the prizes should have a relevance to opera like opera books or souvenirs with opera characteristics; thus the audience can psychologically distinguish opera

practitioners from other Internet celebrities, in order to establish a unique connection between the opera troupes and the audience.

The right approach is to take into account that audiences watch short videos or live broadcasts for the purpose of having fun or satisfying curiosity, and to satisfy them with material rewards, interactive quizzes and verbal encouragement, as well as taking the opportunity to impart basic, vivid and interesting knowledge of opera to the audience so that they can pay steady attention to opera-related updates and develop a sense of psychological identity. Prompted by this sense of identity, the audience's receptive behaviour towards knowledge gradually tends to be more active and their understanding of opera also gradually deepens. In order to better satisfy their interests and gain recognition of their self-worth, they will take the initiative to watch opera and acquire a wider range of knowledge, in this way their communication initiative for opera will be greatly enhanced.

The transformation of the general audience into potential opera enthusiasts is largely complete when audiences show a steady long-term interest in opera as a result of external incentives, and at this stage, individual audience behaviour begins to be dominated by autonomous motives. At this point, opera performance troupe managers should gradually adjust their incentives from mere external rewards to affirming the value of the audience and satisfying their deeper knowledge needs, such as giving official recognition and encouragement to the audience's valuable and original insights on the platform, or inviting the audience to participate in opera knowledge lectures or performance activities, in order to achieve the goal of consolidating the audience's stickiness while inspiring them to become opera enthusiasts and disseminators.

### **4.3. Audience Incentives for The Three Main Psychological Needs**

The satisfaction of basic psychological needs is a central element that influences individual behaviour. The three psychological needs are the link between the external environment and the individual's psychology and behaviour. The degree to which the external environment supports or hinders the need for autonomy, connection and competence affects the degree to which the needs are met, which in turn leads to differentiated motivational and behavioural responses. [8] This means that the external environment and extrinsic motivation can only influence individual motivation and behaviour through the regulation of psychological needs. To achieve a positive impact, audience motivation must be targeted at basic psychological needs, meeting the competence, autonomy and connection needs of the audience, thus enhancing audience stickiness and promoting the dissemination of opera culture.

The autonomic need is a condition to meet the needs of the individual, it explains that individuals should be seen as independent bodies with the ability to make autonomous decisions, and their feelings and wishes need to be acknowledged and accepted. In the audience incentives mechanism, if the wishes and needs of the audience are not met, they will inevitably be less motivated to participate in opera performances. Therefore, opera troupe managers need to implement a flexible and open incentive mechanism, for example, using reasonable audience requests as targeted rewards in daily interactions, regularly investigating and responding to the demands of the audience, and occasionally issuing notices of opera performances and encouraging the audience to participate, so as to mobilise the audience's subjective consciousness in the process of opera communication and stimulate their inner identity.

Competence need, also known as the need for ability, is the individual's feeling of achieving goals, dealing with challenges and the expectation of being recognised by others. Task difficulty and feedback can influence individual behaviour. For audiences who are already sticky, managers can try to assign challenging tasks in interactions and set corresponding rewards for them, such as inviting them to participate in prize quizzes and interactive quizzes, or even inviting them to co-form opera enthusiast groups and take up some positions, encouraging

them to participate in the daily organisational and operational activities and to make suggestions about the groups' work. In addition, such audiences can be guided to undertake challenging opera promotion tasks. The opera troupe manager should only provide advice and assistance in order to meet their competence need; moreover, the troupe manager should also prepare external rewards as a means of reinforcing their need for competence, thus enabling them to promote opera culture in the long term and promote their psychological recognition.

Connection needs refer to an individual's innate need to care for others, to be cared for by others and to establish good social relationships with others. Connection needs require mutual respect and empathy so that the individual can feel understood and supported by others, and thus has a sense of belonging to the environment. In terms of the field of opera audiology, there is no direct economic connection between the manager and the audience, so the satisfaction of relational needs is mainly dependent on the interaction needs of both parties. Managers need to maintain good interaction with their audience and build a harmonious relationship between them. For this purpose, regular meet-and-greet events can be organised, inviting opera enthusiasts and experienced audiences from all trades and industries to participate, providing them with a conducive environment for mutual communication and knowledge sharing; in addition, managers can give special rewards to audiences who have contributed to the promotion of opera, such as attending preview performances and visiting backstage so that the audience can experience respect and trust and satisfy their connection needs.

It is important to note that the target audience of the incentive measures for the three psychological needs should be the audience with stickiness, opera enthusiasts and those who are willing to contribute to the development of the communication of Chinese opera, in order to ensure that the measures are precise and effective. Such purposeful guidance and incentive measures can promote the self-growth of opera audiences and stimulate their intrinsic motivation, so that they can actively lead or participate in the communication of Chinese opera and become the guardians and promoters of traditional culture that opera really needs for contemporary development.

## 5. Conclusion

The debate on the contemporary development of opera has been going on for almost thirty years, but till now Chinese opera is still facing a crisis of survival in the cultural market. As a comprehensive performing art, Chinese opera has become a system in itself and does not have much room for change, so the heritage of opera must be thought of in terms of other strategies. The Incentive Mechanism of Opera Audiences based on Self-Determination Theory can propose corresponding incentives for different kinds of opera audiences so that ordinary audiences can get external rewards, obtain external motivation, satisfy their entertainment or curiosity needs, promote their internalization of external motivation, and gradually become potential opera enthusiasts with certain stickiness; at the same time, opera enthusiasts can get the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, At the same time, it also helps to satisfy the basic psychological needs of opera enthusiasts, creates a positive external environment and to strengthen their internal motivation, and to stimulate their enthusiasm and initiative for opera communications. Chinese opera culture has developed over the millennia, and it has not died out due to its deep cultural heritage, which is a testament to its vitality. Today, the new media has brought unprecedented challenges to the development of opera, and reaching a wider audience has become an important goal for the development of contemporary opera. Under such circumstances, it is an inevitable law of cultural development and a sure way to achieve the revival of opera to follow the trend of cultural market development and guide audiences into the field of opera culture, so as to actively face the challenges brought by the new era.

About the author: WANG Ji-wei, Undergraduate from Sichuan University, Research field is Opera Audience Studies.

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