

From Ritual Construction to Value Reconstruction: Communication Ritual and the Transformation of Consumption on Second-Hand Book Platforms — A Case Study of Duo Zhua Yu

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Abstract

This paper examines Duo Zhua Yu, a second-hand book trading platform, through the lens of James W. Carey's ritual view of communication, supplemented by Jean Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Drawing on this integrated theoretical framework, the study investigates how the platform constructs a cultural brand ritual through ritualised communication strategies and, in doing so, drives the reconstruction of consumers' consumption values. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive single-case design, the study draws on platform content, user-generated material, documentation of offline cultural events, media coverage, and the author's participant observation as a platform user. The findings reveal that Duo Zhua Yu has established a mutually reinforcing ritual system across three dimensions (space, content, and procedure) through which second-hand consumption, originally centred on the circulation of goods, is endowed with symbolic meanings encompassing cultural taste, emotional belonging, and identity expression, thereby transforming into a socioculturally embedded consumer

practice. Furthermore, this paper critically examines the platform's ritualised construction, arguing that, in reinforcing cultural identity and lifestyle narratives, an inherent tension persists between its performative tendencies and the imperatives of commercial capital. By integrating these theoretical perspectives within a single empirical case, the study offers an analytical paradigm for understanding how digital platforms mobilise ritualised mechanisms to reshape consumer culture more broadly.

Keywords: ritual view of communication, sign consumption, cultural construction, second-hand economy, Duo Zhua Yu

1. Introduction

With the continued expansion of the digital platform economy and the structural transformation of consumer culture, digital second-hand platforms have become an increasingly important infrastructure supporting circular consumption and sustainable lifestyles. Recent studies suggest that users' participation in these platforms is shaped not only by economic considerations but also by trust, hedonic motivation, habitual use, and social interaction (Godinho Filho et al., 2024). A recent systematic review further shows that secondhand consumption has shifted from a practice associated primarily with financial necessity to one increasingly adopted by consumers across income levels for reasons tied to sustainability and identity (Gilal et al., 2024). Consequently, the social function of second-hand consumption is no longer confined to resource conservation and price exchange. Instead, it has increasingly assumed pronounced cultural and symbolic dimensions. Particularly among younger consumer groups, the purchase, use, and sharing of second-hand goods are being invested with multiple layers of meaning, including environmental awareness, aesthetic sensibility, and cultural identity. At the same time, consumption itself has shifted from the mere satisfaction of functional needs to a form of social practice that simultaneously enacts identity expression and articulates value.

Among the various categories of second-hand goods, books occupy a distinctively privileged position. Unlike ordinary durable goods, books possess not only material properties but also carry intellectual, experiential, and cultural-mnemonic dimensions rooted in knowledge production, reading experience, and cultural memory. Their circulation is thus frequently accompanied by the reproduction of affective meaning and cultural value (Spence, 2020). Second-hand book trading, therefore, cannot be reduced to the mere recirculation of commodities; rather, it constitutes a process of social interaction involving cultural identification and the sharing of meaning. Against this backdrop, Duo Zhua Yu, founded in 2017 under the brand ethos of "truly good things are worth buying twice", has progressively established a standardised operational system encompassing collection, sorting, quality inspection, refurbishment, and resale, operating through a C2B2C self-operated buyout model. According to publicly available platform data, by the end of 2021, Duo Zhua Yu had accumulated a user base exceeding six million, with its business scope gradually expanding beyond books to encompass clothing, electronics, and other product categories. By 2024, the platform's annual book circulation had approached 6 million copies (Zhang, 2024). Amid intensifying competition in the second-hand trading sector, Duo Zhua Yu has, through its

relatively mature standardised processes and distinctive cultural positioning, consolidated a cultural brand identity that extends well beyond mere "idle goods trading," gradually emerging as a representative case that integrates both commercial and cultural attributes.

Nevertheless, existing scholarship on Duo Zhua Yu has predominantly focused on its business model, platform operation, and marketing strategies, while relatively little attention has been paid to its role as a cultural communication platform. More importantly, existing studies tend to explain second-hand consumption primarily through economic, technological, or marketing perspectives, offering limited insight into how digital platforms construct shared meanings and reshape consumption values through communicative and cultural practices. To address this gap, this study adopts James W. Carey's ritual view of communication as its primary theoretical framework, complemented by Jean Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption, Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus, and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Drawing on this integrated perspective, the study addresses two interrelated research questions: (1) How does Duo Zhua Yu construct and sustain a ritualised communication system that transforms second-hand book consumption into a culturally meaningful practice? (2) How does this ritualised communication system reshape consumers' perceptions of value, and what tensions arise between cultural meaning-making and the platform's commercial logic? Addressing these questions requires an analytical framework that connects communication, culture, and consumption. The following section therefore develops the theoretical perspectives that underpin the subsequent analysis.

2. Theoretical Framework

In *Communication as Culture*, James W. Carey (2005) distinguished between two models of communication: the "transmission view," which centres on the conveyance of information, and the "ritual view," which centres on the sustenance of community. Whereas the former conceptualises communication as the transportation of messages across space, the latter primarily attends to how communication maintains social community and shared meaning over time. Carey argued that communication is not merely an exchange of information but a form of symbolic social activity, whose core function lies in sustaining common beliefs, social order, and collective identity through repetitive ritual practices (Carey, 2005, p. 7). Carey's formulation was significantly informed by Émile Durkheim's sociology of religion. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (2006) proposed that rituals serve as the means by which social groups periodically reconsolidate themselves: participants mutually animate one another's emotions through collective action, generating a state of "collective effervescence" that transcends individual boundaries and thereby reinforces a sense of belonging to shared beliefs. To understand communication through the lens of ritual, therefore, is to recognise that the communicative process is essentially a cultural practice — one whose function lies in the production and reproduction of a shared symbolic system, through which participants' collective identity and affective belonging are continually constructed.

Nevertheless, Carey's ritual view of communication is largely premised on the sharing of values within an established community and offers comparatively little discussion of how "common meaning" is produced in modern consumer society. Sen (2017) addresses this

shortfall directly, extending Carey's framework to argue that everyday digital practices — from routine platform interactions to algorithmically mediated exchanges — function in a highly ritualistic manner and remain a productive lens for analysing the construction of self and community online. As communicative activity becomes ever more deeply embedded in platform-mediated and commercial logics, what is designated as "shared belief" is frequently not organically emergent but may instead be the product of systematic construction (Sen, 2017). In this regard, Jean Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption provides a complementary explanatory framework. Baudrillard (2001) argued that in late-capitalist society, consumption has transcended the satisfaction of a commodity's use-value and shifted progressively toward the consumption of symbolic meaning. The significance of a commodity is no longer determined primarily by its functional properties, but by the social status, lifestyle, and cultural meaning it signifies. Consumption itself thus becomes a form of symbolic practice, through which consumers articulate social identity by aligning with particular sign systems. This dynamic is not confined to Western consumer contexts: platform-mediated symbolic consumption among international consumers in China has been shown to intensify, rather than dissolve, Baudrillard's logic of sign value, as personalisation and algorithmic mediation deepen users' engagement with objects as carriers of social meaning (Nouri Dehnavi & Sioofy Khoojine, 2026).

Building on this foundation, Pierre Bourdieu's theorisation of cultural capital and habitus offers a more structurally grounded account of how consumer symbols generate social distinction. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu (1984) argued that individuals' aesthetic tastes and consumption preferences are not purely the product of personal choice but are intimately bound up with their social class position and the habitus accumulated over time. Digitalisation has not displaced this logic but given it new material: individual-level data and platform-mediated practices now constitute what some scholars term "digital capital," an emergent resource through which Bourdieusian patterns of distinction and inequality are reproduced within online fields (Verwiebe & Hagemann, 2024). Cultural capital is manifested through forms such as educational experience, aesthetic competence, and lifestyle, functioning as a principal mechanism of social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu's concept of the "field" further emphasises that social practices always unfold within specific relational structures. In the context of second-hand book consumption, value orientations such as "reading taste," "environmental consciousness," and "an aesthetic of simplicity" may be understood as symbolic expressions of cultural capital, while the platform itself serves as the concrete field in which such cultural distinctions are displayed and reinforced.

Furthermore, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory illuminates the performative dimensions inherent in consumer practices. Goffman (1959) contended that social actors engage in continuous "impression management" in the course of everyday interaction, constructing a self-image directed toward others through the deliberate presentation of a "front stage." Consumer behaviour thus constitutes a scene of self-performance oriented toward a specific audience. Guo et al.'s (2024) study of self-presentation among older influencers on TikTok illustrates how thoroughly this dramaturgical logic has migrated into platform environments, where users continuously calibrate a curated "front stage" persona for an audience that is simultaneously algorithmic and interpersonal.

Grounded in the theoretical perspectives outlined above, this paper conceptualises Duo Zhua Yu as a culturally ritualised field. Through spatial construction, content production, and proceduralized interaction, the platform continuously cultivates a shared cultural atmosphere, enabling users to develop an identification with particular consumption values in the course of their participation. In this process, second-hand consumption is invested with cultural and affective meanings that transcend material exchange, while users' participatory behaviour simultaneously reflects an identification with a specific lifestyle and cultural identity, and constitutes — in Bourdieusian terms — an act of taste-based distinction and social performance.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive case study design, in which Duo Zhua Yu is treated as a single instrumental case for examining how ritualised communication practices on second-hand trading platforms drive the reconstruction of consumption value. The case was selected on three grounds. First, Duo Zhua Yu is widely regarded as a representative case in China's second-hand book trading sector, having established a relatively mature, standardised operational model that distinguishes it from less institutionalised peer-to-peer resale platforms. Second, the platform's cultural branding practices represent a comparatively novel object of analysis that has not yet been systematically examined through the lens of communication ritual theory. Third, existing research on Duo Zhua Yu has concentrated overwhelmingly on its business model and marketing strategy, leaving its cultural and communicative dimensions largely unexplored; the platform's distinctive combination of commercial and cultural attributes therefore offers fertile ground for theoretical elaboration.

Data for this study were drawn from multiple secondary and observational sources, collected between February and April 2026 through the author's sustained engagement with the platform as a registered user. These sources include: content published through Duo Zhua Yu's official WeChat account and its podcast *Fishing and Drying Nets*; user-generated content within the app, including book reviews, reading lists, and reading reflections; documentation of offline cultural activities; publicly available platform data on user scale and book circulation volume; and media coverage of the platform's operations and market position. As a long-term user of the platform, the author additionally engaged in participant observation, drawing on first-hand experience of the platform's transactional process, app interface, and offline events to inform the contextual interpretation of the above materials.

Materials were analysed through an iterative, theory-guided interpretive procedure. Collected materials were first organised according to their site of occurrence — online platform content, offline spatial practice, and community interaction — and then interpreted against the core constructs of the study's four-part theoretical framework: Carey's ritual view of communication, Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus, and Goffman's dramaturgical theory. Through repeated comparison between empirical material and theoretical constructs, three recurring and mutually reinforcing dimensions of ritual construction were inductively distilled: spatial, content-based, and procedural, which subsequently structured the analysis presented in Section 4. This analytical procedure draws on

secondary material collected from multiple independent sources, complemented by the author's sustained participant observation as a platform user.

4. The Mechanisms of Cultural Ritual Construction on Duo Zhua Yu

4.1 Spatial Construction: The Production of a Ritual Field

Spatial construction provides the material foundation through which communication rituals become socially meaningful, enabling repeated participation, emotional co-presence, and the production of shared symbolic meanings. Carey argues that communication rituals are sustained through collective participation in a shared cultural world rather than the simple transmission of information; Rimé and Páez (2023) similarly show that collective gatherings reinforce social belonging through shared emotional experience. Duo Zhua Yu should thus be understood not as a second-hand trading platform but as a cultural space that cultivates users' identification with particular values and lifestyles through ritualised participation.

Offline, Duo Zhua Yu operates bookstores, thematic exhibitions, and pop-up events under a unified visual identity, minimalist design, and eco-friendly packaging, creating a cultural atmosphere that sets it apart from ordinary second-hand marketplaces. Users' participation extends beyond purchasing: browsing, photographing, checking in, and sharing on social media transform consumption into a publicly visible cultural practice that reaffirms identification with the platform's values.

The Factory Open Day illustrates this further. By opening its refurbishment and sorting processes to public view, Duo Zhua Yu renders visible what would otherwise remain backstage. Beyond the trust benefits of operational transparency documented by Hwang, Lee, and Legendre (2024), witnessing the "rebirth" of used books collectively turns refurbishment into a shared cultural narrative, generating trust through ritual participation rather than information disclosure alone.

A similar mechanism operates in the exhibition *Creatures Found in Books*, which displays train tickets, notes, photographs, and letters found inside second-hand books. Rather than treating these as mere traces of ownership, the exhibition reframes them as carriers of memory and emotion. Following Baudrillard, this reconstructs "used" from a sign of depreciation into one of warmth and cultural memory; following Carey, visitors collectively reinterpret these artefacts through shared participation, continuously reproducing symbolic meaning.

Online, the official WeChat account, the podcast *Fishing and Drying Nets*, and user-generated reading content maintain an environment centred on reading culture rather than product promotion, functioning as spaces for repeated participation that reinforce the platform's cultural identity over time, consistent with Carey's view of ritual as the maintenance of shared meaning.

Online and offline spaces operate as a mutually reinforcing system: offline participation extends into online sharing, while digital interaction sustains expectations of future offline engagement. As Sandikci, Saatcioglu, and Fischer (2025) argue, digital platforms increasingly orchestrate hybrid ritual spaces that sustain emotional synchronisation and community

belonging across physical and virtual contexts—a pattern that Duo Zhua Yu exemplifies, establishing, through this integrated ritual field, the cultural conditions for reconstructing consumption value.

4.2 Content Construction: The Production of Ritual Meaning

If spatial construction provides the material foundation for ritual, content construction supplies its symbolic resources. For Carey, communication continually reproduces shared beliefs and cultural identities rather than simply transmitting information. Duo Zhua Yu's content practices should accordingly be read not as marketing but as an ongoing production of ritual meaning, operating through three mechanisms: symbolic reconstruction of commodities, moral articulation of consumption, and continuous reproduction of community identity—mechanisms consistent with Zimand-Sheiner's (2024) argument that brand narratives achieve lasting cultural influence only through repeated ritual reinforcement rather than one-off communication.

First, campaigns such as the *Positive and Negative Life Letter Exhibition* and annual reading lists (*I Wish Someone Would Give Me This Book*, *Let Me Read You a Poem*) organise narratives around readers' emotional experience rather than books' physical attributes, foregrounding memory and attachment. Following Baudrillard, this shifts attention from material utility to embedded cultural meaning, making consumption an act of participating in a shared symbolic system.

Second, Duo Zhua Yu incorporates reading, environmental protection, and sustainability into charity book sales and wildlife conservation campaigns. Rather than functioning as ordinary CSR, these narratives frame second-hand consumption as socially responsible and culturally desirable. In Bourdieusian terms, this allows users to accumulate cultural capital by aligning consumption with recognised moral values, so purchasing second-hand books becomes a visible expression of taste and identity.

Third, sustained communication through the WeChat account's long-form articles and the podcast's regular episodes maintains an ongoing rhythm of participation that repeatedly reconnects users with the platform's identity. This reflects Carey's argument that communication maintains society through repeated enactment of shared beliefs rather than the transmission of new information, allowing content to reproduce a stable community organised around common values.

Ritual meaning, in other words, is produced cumulatively rather than through isolated messages. The symbolic reconstruction of commodities, the moral framing of consumption, and the repeated reproduction of community identity together transform content into a resource that reinforces cultural identification and prepares the symbolic ground for the reconstruction of consumption value.

4.3 Procedural Construction: The Repetitive Practice of Ritual

If spatial construction provides the setting and content supplies meaning, procedural construction sustains ritual through repeated practice. For Carey, rituals gain social

significance through continual enactment rather than isolated symbolic acts; Sohi et al. (2018) similarly show that frequent ritual participation strengthens community attachment and group identification. Duo Zhua Yu's standardised procedures thus function as a ritual mechanism through which users repeatedly experience and reproduce the platform's cultural values.

First, the transaction process itself is ritualised: barcode-based valuation, appointment scheduling, quality inspection, sanitisation, refurbishment, and personalised recommendation organise book circulation into a structured, repeated sequence. For sellers, this represents participation in giving books a "second life" rather than simple disposal; for buyers, it transforms purchasing into an experience of anticipation and trust. The transaction thus functions as a ritual enacting the cultural meaning of second-hand circulation, not merely a commercial workflow.

Second, community participation is proceduralised through rating, reviewing, and reading-list practices after each transaction. Although these appear as ordinary interactions, their repetition enables users to collectively produce meaning around books and reading, each review simultaneously recording individual experience and publicly affirming community identification, deepening emotional attachment and belonging over time.

Third, cyclical brand activities—annual exhibitions, travelling pop-ups, limited-time buyback campaigns—create recurring moments that repeatedly draw users back into the platform's cultural environment. Bradford and Sherry (2024) distinguish *chronos* (the regular rhythm of recurring ritual) from *kairos* (the heightened significance of special moments), arguing that brands sustain ritual vitality by synchronising both. Duo Zhua Yu combines predictable annual activities with time-sensitive promotions, embedding consumption within an ongoing rhythm of collective engagement. Wen, Wang, and Wang (2025) further show that repetitive, symbolically meaningful brand rituals outperform one-off promotions in stimulating online word-of-mouth, since repetition strengthens psychological immersion and long-term attachment.

What emerges across these three dimensions is a form of ritual sustained not by symbolic meaning or spatial participation alone, but by repeated, structured practice embedded in everyday consumption. Transactions, community interactions, and brand events are thereby turned into recurring performances that continually reproduce cultural identification and complete the procedural foundation for the reconstruction of consumption value.

5. The Reconstruction of Consumption Value Driven by Communication Ritual

5.1 From Functional Value to Symbolic Value: The Displacement of Meaning

In conventional consumption logic, a book's value derives primarily from its functional role as a carrier of knowledge. Within Duo Zhua Yu's ritualised communication system, however, books acquire meanings extending beyond practical utility: through repeated participation in the platform's spatial, content, and procedural rituals, consumers come to interpret second-hand books as cultural artefacts tied to particular values, lifestyles, and identities. The value transformation observed on the platform is thus a broader process of meaning reconstruction rather than a simple shift in preference.

This can be understood through Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption, which holds that contemporary consumers increasingly consume the symbolic meanings attached to commodities rather than their material functions. On Duo Zhua Yu, second-hand books are no longer associated with thrift or economic necessity but represented as symbols of environmental awareness, cultural taste, and reflective living—purchasing one becomes an act through which consumers express not only what they read but who they are.

This resonates with Bourdieu's conception of cultural distinction. By participating in the platform's rituals, users gain opportunities to display cultural competence and taste, so consumption functions as identity performance that positions individuals within a broader cultural hierarchy: what is acquired is not merely a book but access to a symbolic system that enables self-expression and social recognition.

The production of symbolic value, however, also depends on material infrastructure. Rigorous quality inspection, branded biodegradable packaging, and consistent visual presentation reduce the uncertainty typically associated with second-hand goods (Jang & Kim, 2023) and give tangible confirmation of the platform's values, keeping symbolic meaning credible rather than purely rhetorical—reinforced continuously by users' everyday experience of quality and reliability.

What this reveals is a displacement, rather than an elimination, of the dominance of functional value: utility remains necessary but is no longer sufficient to explain consumers' attachment to second-hand books. Through the continuous production and circulation of symbolic meaning, consumption is transformed into a cultural practice through which value is experienced, communicated, and socially recognised.

5.2 From Commodity Exchange to Affective Community: The Reconstruction of Relations

Duo Zhua Yu facilitates more than the circulation of second-hand books. Through repeated participation in its spatial, content, and procedural rituals, users become connected through shared cultural meanings rather than purely transactional interests. As Carey argues, communication's ritual function lies in maintaining society through the continual reproduction of shared beliefs and collective participation—here, Duo Zhua Yu reconstructs consumer relationships by transforming market exchange into an ongoing process of cultural interaction and social belonging.

Buyer-seller relationships are accordingly organised less around price or efficiency than around shared commitments to reading culture, sustainability, and reuse. Writing reviews, compiling reading lists, attending in-person exhibitions, and discussing books on social media extend the exchange beyond the completion of a transaction, allowing consumers to participate in the collective production of meaning around books and sustainable living. The platform thus functions less as a marketplace than as a cultural community sustained through ritual participation.

This affective community also reflects the mechanisms described by Durkheim and later ritual scholars: collective participation generates emotional synchronisation, while repeated interaction reinforces mutual trust and belonging. Community attachment arises not because

users consume similar products, but because they repeatedly engage in similar cultural practices, embedding emotional bonds in consumption itself and extending social relationships beyond individual transactions.

This community is not, however, entirely open or socially neutral. From Bourdieu's field theory, the values Duo Zhua Yu promotes function simultaneously as mechanisms of cultural distinction: users who identify with the platform tend to share similar educational backgrounds and aesthetic preferences, making participation most accessible to those already possessing the relevant cultural capital. Ritual communication thus strengthens cohesion while also producing subtle inclusion and exclusion that shape the boundaries of belonging.

Ritual communication, in this sense, reconstructs consumer relationships by replacing purely transactional ties with emotionally and culturally grounded association. Consumption becomes not only an act of exchange but also a means through which individuals establish social belonging and cultivate shared identity within a continuously reproduced cultural community.

5.3 From Consumer Behaviour to Cultural Participation: The Transformation of Practice

The most profound consequence of Duo Zhua Yu's ritual communication is the transformation of consumption itself into cultural participation. For Carey, the significance of communication ritual lies in participation rather than transmission: individuals join a shared cultural world by repeatedly enacting common practices. Duo Zhua Yu accordingly reconstructs consumption not as an economic activity but as an ongoing cultural practice through which users actively produce and circulate meaning.

This is possible because the platform extends book circulation beyond material exchange into cultural transmission. Unlike ordinary commodities, books carry knowledge, memory, and emotional experience, so their circulation involves the continued movement of stories and personal meanings alongside physical objects. Features that allow sellers to leave messages for buyers reinforce this symbolic continuity, creating interpersonal communication that extends beyond conventional transactions and turning books into media that connect readers across time and space.

Participation is reinforced through users' engagement with the platform's interconnected rituals. Browsing exhibitions, writing reviews, sharing reading lists, listening to podcasts, attending offline events, and circulating books all require active involvement rather than passive consumption—users do not simply consume the platform's cultural meanings but help reproduce and extend them, making consumption simultaneously an act of cultural production, social interaction, and identity performance.

This also reflects Bourdieu's understanding of practice as the embodied expression of habitus. As users repeatedly participate in the platform's rituals, values associated with reading, sustainability, and cultural refinement become incorporated into everyday consumption practices, evolving from occasional symbolic expression into a stable disposition through which individuals perform identity in daily life. Ritual communication thus operates not only through discourse but through the formation of enduring cultural practice.

The cumulative effect is a shift from passive participation in market exchange to active participation in cultural production. Consumption is no longer simply the acquisition of goods but a continuous process of creating, sharing, and reproducing meaning within a cultural community—one in which symbolic value, affective relationships, and participatory practice become integrated into a coherent cultural system.

6. Inherent Tensions and Critical Reflections on Ritualised Narrative

The effectiveness of ritual construction must not obscure its internal contradictions and structural limitations. Examined through a critical lens, the practices of Duo Zhua Yu reveal multiple tensions that persist between meaning production and commercial operation — tensions that, to a considerable degree, expose the structural constraints inherent in platform-mediated consumer ritual.

First, the platform's ritual practices risk sliding from "value identification" to "symbolic performance." Within Goffman's dramaturgical framework, individuals engage in "front stage performance" during social interaction as a means of impression management, constructing a self-image that conforms to particular expectations. In the social media environment, this performative dimension is further amplified. User behaviours associated with Duo Zhua Yu — photography, purchase displays, check-ins, and the sharing of reading experiences — may, on the surface, appear to reflect a genuine commitment to environmental protection, reading culture, and the ethos of circular consumption, yet they simultaneously carry a pronounced orientation toward self-presentation. Experimental evidence on green consumption finds that much of what looks like environmentally motivated behaviour is in fact mediated by a self-oriented desire to be seen as virtuous, with the moral display itself, rather than the underlying environmental commitment, doing much of the motivational work (Hasni, Konuk, & Otterbring, 2025). When users become more preoccupied with how their consumption behaviour can be leveraged to project a desired aesthetic sensibility and value stance, ritual participation itself risks devolving into a form of symbolic performance — one designed to be seen and circulated. In this way, the shared values that the platform seeks to cultivate may be progressively exteriorised, within the logic of social media dissemination, into resources for identity display. The common beliefs and affective identification upon which ritual originally depends are, to a degree, undermined by the imperatives of performative logic.

Second, there is a degree of misalignment between the platform's operational logic and its stated cultural values. Duo Zhua Yu has long championed ideals such as "reading culture," "the circulation of pre-owned objects," and "respect for the value of things." Yet at the level of concrete operations, its book buyback mechanism remains heavily dependent on the efficiency of market circulation. The platform typically determines whether to accept a given book based on factors such as popularity, publication date, and user demand; as a result, academic titles, niche publications, and works with limited circulation often struggle to enter the platform's buyback system. From a commercial standpoint, this selective mechanism reduces inventory risk and improves circulation efficiency; from the perspective of cultural communication, however, it implies that the reading culture the platform advocates remains, in practice, constrained by market logic. When the platform gravitates toward books with greater

circulation value, its cultural practice is, in essence, still oriented toward commercial efficiency rather than toward the logic of cultural preservation or knowledge dissemination. A significant structural tension thus exists between this operational mechanism and the cultural ideals the platform espouses.

Third, and at a deeper level, tension is also manifest in the relationship between commercial interest and the authenticity of ritual. As a commercially oriented platform operating with profit objectives, Duo Zhua Yu's deep entanglement of ritualised narrative with commercial interest inevitably invites user scepticism regarding its sincerity. Users have reported a pronounced disparity between buyback and resale prices, with notable gaps between what the platform pays to acquire certain books and what it charges to resell them. Exposing pricing or process information does not uniformly build goodwill; for established brands in particular, transparency cues can backfire and prompt accusations of manipulation rather than reassurance when inconsistencies come to light (Reck et al., 2022). When users perceive a significant discrepancy between the platform's cultural narratives and its actual commercial gains, the ritual trust the platform has constructed may come under strain. This is not a predicament unique to Duo Zhua Yu, but a structural challenge confronting all platforms that seek to mobilise cultural ritual in the service of commercial logic.

7. Limitations and Future Research

As with any single-case interpretive study, the present analysis carries certain limitations. First, because the findings are grounded in the specific institutional and cultural context of Duo Zhua Yu, they should not be generalised to other second-hand trading platforms without caution, as these may differ in scale, business model, or target demographic. Second, the analysis draws primarily on secondary materials and the author's participant observation rather than on primary data such as user interviews; it is consequently better positioned to characterise the platform's ritualised communication strategies than to capture how individual users subjectively interpret, internalise, or resist these strategies in practice. Third, the study did not employ formal procedures for verifying analytical credibility, such as independent coding or member-checking — a limitation common to single-case interpretive research of this kind, which means that the analytical dimensions identified here reflect one theoretically informed reading of the material rather than an intersubjectively validated coding scheme.

These limitations suggest several directions for future research. Incorporating semi-structured interviews with Duo Zhua Yu users would help to clarify the extent to which the ritualised meanings identified in this study are genuinely internalised, selectively negotiated, or resisted at the level of individual experience. Comparative analysis across multiple second-hand or circular-economy platforms would further help to establish which dimensions of ritual construction observed here are specific to Duo Zhua Yu and which may generalise more broadly across the platform economy. Finally, future work might usefully complement this study's qualitative framework with quantitative methods, such as survey-based validation of the proposed value-reconstruction dimensions, to assess the robustness of these patterns in a larger, more diverse user population.

8. Conclusion

Drawing on James W. Carey's ritual view of communication as its primary theoretical perspective, and integrating Jean Baudrillard's theory of sign consumption, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, and Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory, this paper has offered a systematic analysis of Duo Zhua Yu's cultural construction practices and the mechanisms through which it reconstructs consumption value. The findings demonstrate that, through the coordinated operation of three dimensions — space, content, and procedure — Duo Zhua Yu has established a mutually reinforcing ritual system that, in the process of ritualising second-hand book consumption, systematically reconstructs the value of consumption itself: from functional value to symbolic value, from commodity exchange to affective community, and from passive consumption to active cultural participation.

Nevertheless, the cultural effects of the platform's ritualised construction are accompanied by inherent contradictions. The erosion of ritual sincerity by symbolic performance, the internal misalignment between platform logic and cultural ideals, and the fundamental tension between commercial logic and ritual authenticity together constitute the deep-seated contradictions of the Duo Zhua Yu model — and, by extension, reflect a more pervasive structural predicament in the contemporary platform economy: the disjuncture between cultural aspiration and capital operation.

Viewed within a broader academic horizon, the value of the Duo Zhua Yu case lies not only in illuminating the operational logic of a specific platform but in furnishing an analytical paradigm for understanding how digital platforms harness ritualised mechanisms to reshape consumer culture more broadly. In a contemporary context marked by the deep interpenetration of consumer ritual and capital logic, the question of how to sustain a necessary tension between ritual authenticity and commercial viability constitutes both a practical challenge for platform operation and an enduring theoretical concern for the study of consumer culture.

Theoretically, this case advances existing scholarship in two respects. First, it extends Carey's ritual view of communication, together with Baudrillard's, Bourdieu's, and Goffman's frameworks, from their predominantly Western and offline points of origin to a Chinese, platform-mediated second-hand economy setting, demonstrating that ritualised meaning-production operates across, rather than within, single spatial or theoretical registers. Second, by tracing how the same three-dimensional ritual mechanism (space, content, procedure) simultaneously reconstructs the functional, relational, and practice-based dimensions of consumption value, the study offers a more integrated account of platform ritual than studies that examine ritual construction and value outcomes separately.

In practical terms, the findings speak to three distinct audiences. For platform governance, the tensions identified in Section 6 indicate that ritual construction carries reputational risk once users perceive a gap between cultural narrative and commercial practice; platform operators are accordingly advised to calibrate the transparency and consistency of their operational logic — for instance, buyback pricing criteria and the treatment of niche or academic titles — in tandem with their cultural messaging, rather than treating the two as independent levers. For the study of consumer culture, the findings suggest that researchers and practitioners

should treat second-hand consumption not as a residual or purely economical practice but as a site of active symbolic and identity work, implying that consumer segmentation and engagement strategies premised solely on price sensitivity are likely to under-capture the motivations of culturally engaged second-hand consumers. For digital marketplace management, the findings indicate that platform operators seeking to build cultural brand equity in second-hand or circular-economy markets should attend jointly to spatial, content, and procedural design, since it is the mutual reinforcement across these three dimensions, rather than any single dimension in isolation, that appears central to sustaining ritual credibility and, by extension, user retention in a competitive second-hand marketplace.

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