ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.9, Issue 2: 25-32, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2026.090204

How Cultural Value Shapes Communication Behavior: A Chain Mediation Model of Positive Emotion and Cultural Identity

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Abstract: *Within transcultural communication, foreigners in China are increasingly acting as localized communicators on social media. Yet, the psychological mechanisms underlying their communication behavior—especially the interplay between cognition and emotion—remain unclear. By integrating the Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) model and the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model through an affective-appraisal lens, this study examines how perceived cultural quality, perceived cultural value, positive emotion, and cultural identity shape communication intention among foreigners in China. Drawing on 435 valid responses, the findings indicate: (1) cultural communication follows a sequential "cognitive grounding→emotional catalysis →identity transformation" path, with perceived cultural value serving as a key bridge; (2) positive emotion functions not as a direct driver but as a catalyst for identity construction; (3) cultural identity operates as the core mechanism, directly influencing intention and mediating the cognition to action transition. These results challenge linear emotion-behavior assumptions and advance a "cognition-driven, emotion-enabled, identity-transformed" framework to support the shift from cultural dissemination to co-creation in China's international communication efforts.*

Keywords: *Transcultural communication; Cultural identity; Positive emotion; Structural equation modeling; Foreigners in China*

1. Introduction

With China's growing global influence and advancing cultural outreach, foreigners in China are transitioning from "cultural experiencers" to "localized communicators" via social media. Xiaohongshu serves as a key platform for this group to share their in China experiences, with its content often recirculated internationally. Studies confirm that deep local engagement boosts communication willingness. The recent migration of some foreign users to Xiaohongshu further underscores its communicative potential.

Existing research, however, lacks a systematic examination of the psychological drivers behind such communication. Prior work focuses either on macro level models and technological pathways or on how emotional experience shapes cultural identity, often overlooking the dynamic interplay between cognition and affect. Although theory highlights meaning co-creation through digital negotiation, evident in international students' rational cognition or "foreign influencers" emotional resonance, it remains unclear whether short-term positive emotion directly drives communication or must be internalized through longer-term cultural identity.

To address this, we integrate the Cognitive-Affective-Conative (CAC) model and the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) model, introducing Affective Appraisal Theory to construct a progressive framework encompassing cognitive appraisal (perceived quality/value), affective response (positive emotion), and meaning internalization (cultural identity). Focusing on foreigners in China on Xiaohongshu, this study asks:

Q1: How does cultural cognition influence their communication intention?

Q2: What mediating roles do positive emotion and cultural identity play?

Q3: Do they form a chain-like pathway from "emotional arousal" to "identity internalization"?

By answering these questions, we aim to build a more explanatory psychological model of cultural communication, offering theoretical insight into "otherness subjectivity" in the digital age and practical

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guidance for enhancing China's international cultural outreach.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Research Hypotheses

2.1 Transcultural Communication and Otherness Subjectivity

Transcultural communication has evolved from focusing on cultural interpenetration to examining power dynamics and meaning negotiation between dominant and other cultures [1]. This shift underscores the agency of the "other" as active communicators. Homi Bhabha's "Third Space" theory further posits that the other can renegotiate cultural boundaries through participation, moving beyond passive reception[2]. Thus, effective international communication of Chinese culture requires shifting from "being viewed" to "co-creation" through narrative and mechanism innovation.

Yet, existing research often emphasizes symbolic representation over the other's performative agency in digital media. While cross-cultural groups are seen as intermediaries [3], the mechanisms enabling them to transcend power structures and achieve subjective expression remain unclear. This study argues that transcultural communication hinges not on one-way information output, but on the other's participatory meaning co-creation through understanding, reinterpretation, and reproduction-exemplified by the cultural practices of foreigners in China.

2.2 Behavioral Intention

Although behavioral intention is traditionally tied to cognitive appraisal (Fishbein & Ajzen), emotional factors in cross-cultural contexts often surpass rational frameworks. For example, foreign tourists' short-video creation blends short-term positive emotions (e.g., aesthetic pleasure)[4] with long-term cultural identity. While high quality cultural experiences enhance identity and indirectly influence intention [5], research has not clearly distinguished the roles of short term emotion versus sustained identity.

Key limitations include: reducing emotion to a rational tool; failing to differentiate short vs long term affective mechanisms in behavior generation[6]; and lacking a quantitative framework for capturing cognition emotion dynamics. To address these, this study integrates the CAC and ACSI models to construct a more explanatory pathway for behavioral intention.

2.3 Cognitive-Affective Dual Mediation Model: Integration and Innovation

This research integrates the dynamic three-tiered CAC model with the measurable "perceived quality→perceived value→behavioral intention" pathway of the ACSI model. A key innovation is the refined conceptualization of affect. Drawing on Affective Appraisal Theory, affect is differentiated into two sequential dimensions: short-term positive emotion (an immediate evaluative response) and long-term cultural identity (a stable affiliation formed through reflective appraisal). This produces an integrate "cognitive appraisal→affective appraisal→identity internalization→behavioral intention" framework. The model specifies emotion's role not merely as a direct driver but as a catalyst and meaning-transformation hub, thereby offering a more nuanced analytical tool for understanding the psychological mechanics of "other-led" storytelling in transcultural communication.

3. Research Hypotheses and Model Construction

3.1 Research Hypotheses

Based on the CAC psychological sequence and ACSI evaluation pathways, this study develops a psychological model of transcultural communication: "cognitive appraisal→affective experience→identity internalization→behavioral drive." The model posits that cognition forms the foundation of psychological evaluation, emotion enables meaning processing, and identity accomplishes deeper psychological transformation. The following hypotheses are proposed accordingly.

- Cognitive Appraisal Path

An individual's assessment of the authenticity, consistency, and comprehensibility of cultural content constitutes perceived quality, which serves as the starting point for value appraisal [7]. High

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perceived quality enhances the audience's overall evaluation of the content's utility, significance, and social meaning, that is, perceived value [8]. Thus:

H1: Perceived cultural quality positively influences perceived cultural value.

▪ Emotion and Identity Formation Paths

Perceived value reflects a positive evaluation of the cultural experience. It can elicit short-term positive emotions such as pleasure and novelty[9], initiate meaning processing, strengthen long-term cultural identity, and further influence behavioral intention. Cultural identity is a stable psychological affiliation formed through the integration of cognition and emotion. Hence:

H2: Perceived cultural value positively influences positive emotion.

H4: Perceived cultural value positively influences cultural identity.

Positive emotion carries dual attributes of emotional response and value resonance [10]. It not only directly enhances communication motivation [11], but also facilitates the formation of cultural identity through emotional connection[12]. Cultural identity, in turn, is a key psychological link connecting cognitive appraisal with behavioral intention, guiding value perception toward concrete action [13]. Therefore:

H3: Positive emotion positively influences cultural communication behavioral intention.

H5: Cultural identity positively influences cultural communication behavioral intention.

H6: Positive emotion positively influences cultural identity.

▪ Mediating Transmission Paths

Following the progressive structure "cognition→emotion/identity→behavior" the effect of perceived value on behavioral intention is expected to be realized primarily through psychological mediation. Positive emotion provides immediate activation, whereas cultural identity undertakes deeper meaning transformation; together they may form a chain-like pathway from emotional arousal to value internalization and then to behavioral drive. Consequently:

H7: Positive emotion mediates the relationship between perceived cultural value and cultural communication behavioral intention.

H8: Cultural identity mediates the relationship between perceived cultural value and cultural communication behavioral intention.

H9: Positive emotion and cultural identity act as chain mediators between perceived cultural value and cultural communication behavioral intention.

3.2 Model Construction

Based on the nine hypotheses above, the theoretical model constructed in this study is presented in Figure 1. This model systematically delineates the complete psychological pathway from perceived quality and perceived value, through positive emotion and cultural identity, to cultural communication behavioral intention.

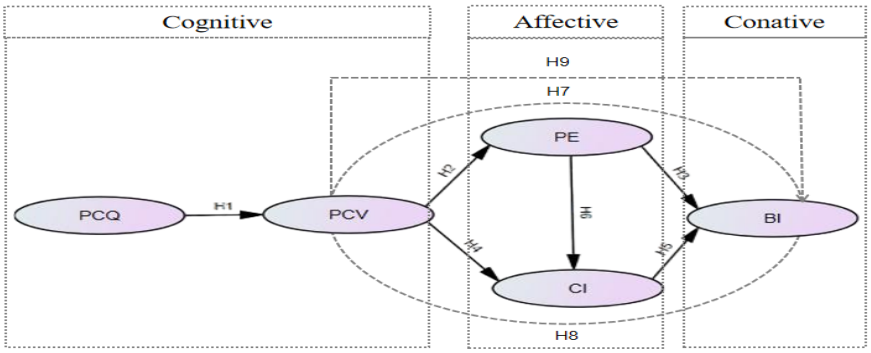

Figure 1 Model Assumption diagram

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4. Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

4.1 Questionnaire Design and Measurement Instruments

To test the theoretical model, this study employed a structured online survey and conducted statistical analysis using SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 26.0. All constructs were measured with scales adapted from well-established instruments[14-17], carefully contextualized to ensure content validity and reliability in cross-cultural communication research. During the scale selection and adaptation phase, measurement tools from seminal literature were referenced. Scale development primarily drew on classic instruments; specific sources and measurement items are detailed in Table 1. All scales used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

To ensure semantic equivalence and content validity in the cross-cultural context, a systematic adaptation procedure was followed: standard back-translation was applied to align Chinese and English versions; three domain experts reviewed the questionnaire for cultural appropriateness and theoretical coverage; and a pilot test (N=52) provided feedback to further enhance item clarity and comprehensibility.

4.2 Data Collection

This study targeted foreigners with lived experience in China who were active on social media. Data were collected primarily online, supplemented by offline samples to enhance diversity.

Online sampling was conducted via Xiaohongshu. The research team: 1) searched for posts tagged #ChinaCulturalExperience or #ForeignersInChina; 2) identified non-Chinese posters with visible traces of life in China and activity within the past month; 3) contacted potential respondents via private message to explain the study's purpose, anonymity, and voluntary nature; 4) sent the questionnaire link (available in Chinese and English) to those who consented; and 5) employed snowball sampling by encouraging initial participants to share the survey within their foreigner communities.

Offline samples were collected from international students at four universities in Hefei (e.g., University of Science and Technology of China, Anhui University) to balance potential "high-activity" bias from the online sample. Stratified sampling was used based on continental origin, with 4-8 full-time international students surveyed per university via paper questionnaires.

Data collection took place from January 16 to March 16, 2025. Of 500 questionnaires returned, 435 were valid after removing incomplete, patterned, or too-short responses, yielding an 87% valid response rate.

4.3 Sample Characteristics

The final sample (N=435) was gender-balanced (55.17% male, 44.83% female) and predominantly young (64.35% aged 19-26). It demonstrated international diversity: Asia (59%, 17 countries, with South Korea at 15.5%), Africa (21%), Europe (14%), and the Americas (6%). Educational attainment was high: bachelor's (58.39%), master's (32.64%), and doctoral (8.97%). Most had substantial experience in China: over 3 years (44.37%) or 2-3 years (26.21%), providing a solid basis for measuring cultural perceptions and affect.

4.4 Data Analysis and Results

4.4.1 Reliability and Validity Tests

Reliability and validity were assessed to ensure measurement accuracy. Bartlett’s test of sphericity indicated the data were suitable for factor analysis (see Tables 1 and 2). Reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s α. All subscales exceeded 0.7, and the overall scale α was 0.909 (>0.8), indicating good reliability (Table 3).

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.916
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approximate Chi-square	3501.673
	Degree of Freedom	171
	Significance	0.000

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.9, Issue 2: 25-32, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2026.090204

Table 2 The results of the reliability of the model

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
Perceived Cultural Quality	0.804	3
Perceived Cultural Value	0.805	4
Positive Emotion	0.803	4
Cultural Identity	0.822	4
Behavioral intention	0.835	4
Total Quantity Table	0.909	19

For construct validity, standardized factor loadings should exceed 0.60 (ideally >0.70), composite reliability (CR) >0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) >0.50. The results (Table 3) met these criteria, confirming good convergent validity.

Table 3 The results of the convergent validity of the model

Latent Variable	Item	Factor Loading	C.R.	AVE	CR
Perceived Cultural Quality	PCQ1	0.775	14.229	0.569	0.798
	PCQ2	0.761	13.502		
	PCQ3	0.726			
Perceived Cultural Value	PCV1	0.756		0.550	0.830
	PCV2	0.729	12.564		
	PCV3	0.762	12.792		
	PCV4	0.718	12.601		
Positive Emotion	PE1	0.792		0.546	0.828
	PE2	0.736	13.436		
	PE3	0.709	12.696		
	PE4	0.717	12.818		
Cultural Identity	CI1	0.717	14.384	0.525	0.815
	CI2	0.702	13.137		
	CI3	0.718	14.187		
	CI4	0.760			
Behavioral intention	BI1	0.767		0.571	0.842
	BI2	0.705	14.566		
	BI3	0.747	14.322		
	BI4	0.801	15.332		

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 26.0. The model showed good fit (Table 4), indicating a close alignment between the theoretical model and the data.

Table 4 Fit indices.

Fit indices	$\chi 2$/DF	RMSEA	RMR	GFI	IFI	CFI	PNFI
Reference	1-3	<0.05	<0.08	>0.90	>0.90	>0.90	>0.50
Model result	1.943	0.047	0.075	0.937	0.960	0.960	0.781
Conclusion	well	well	well	well	well	well	well

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square root of each construct's AVE should exceed its correlations with other constructs. The results (Table 5) support adequate discriminant validity.

Table 5 Correlation matrices and discriminant validity

Variable	Perceived Cultural Quality	Perceived Cultural Value	Positive Emotion	Cultural Identity	Behavioral intention
Perceived Cultural Quality	0.754				
Perceived Cultural Value	0.654	0.742			
Positive Emotion	0.362	0.553	0.739		
Cultural Identity	0.421	0.645	0.631	0.725	
Behavioral intention	0.406	0.621	0.500	0.615	0.756

Note: Diagonal values are the square roots of AVEs; below-diagonal values are correlation coefficients.

In summary, the measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, convergent validity,

ISSN 2616-5783 Vol.9, Issue 2: 25-32, DOI: 10.25236/AJHSS.2026.090204

discriminant validity, and model fit, confirming the appropriateness of the questionnaire and its dimensions.

4.4.2 Structural Equation Modeling Analysis

Hypothesis Testing. Path analysis was conducted using AMOS 26.0. As shown in Table 6, all hypotheses except H3 were supported. The final model with standardized path coefficients is presented in Figure 2.

Table 6 Results of the model

Hypothesis	Path Relationship			Standard Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Significance P	Conclusion
H1	PCV	<---	PCQ	0.654	0.069	***	Support
H2	PE	<---	PCV	0.553	0.074	***	Support
H3	BI	<---	PE	0.099	0.072	0.157	Against
H4	CI	<---	PCV	0.426	0.076	***	Support
H5	BI	<---	CI	0.321	0.084	***	Support
H6	CI	<---	PE	0.395	0.065	***	Support

P-values less than 0.001 are indicated; the significance level is 0.05.

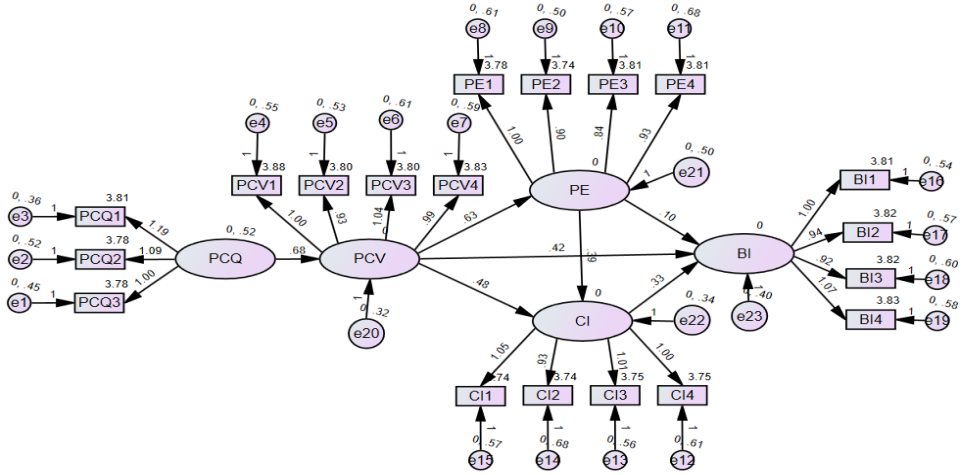

Figure 2: The actual model obtained and standardised path coefficients

4.4.3 Mediation Effect Test

Mediation effects were tested using the Bias-corrected Bootstrap method with 5,000 resamples and a 95% confidence interval (CI). Results (Table 7) show that the paths from perceived cultural value to behavioral intention via cultural identity (H8) and via the sequential mediation of positive emotion and cultural identity (H9) were significant (CIs excluding zero). However, the indirect path through positive emotion alone (H7) was not significant (CI includes zero).

Table 7 Results of Mediated Effect Tests

Indirect Path	Estimate	Boot SE	Bias-Corrected95% CI		Proportion	Results
			Lower	Upper		
H7	0.055	0.052	-0.04	0.164	21.0%	not significant
H8	0.137	0.058	0.046	0.283	52.2%	significant
H9	0.07	0.032	0.021	0.149	26.8%	significant
Total Effects	0.262	0.072	0.133	0.423	-	

Multi-group Analysis of the Psychological Mechanism. To examine the cross-group generalizability and potential moderating effects of key demographic variables, multi-group SEM was performed. The analysis focused on three variables: length of stay in China (categorized as initial contact: 0–2 years, adaptation: 2–3 years, internalization: >3 years), language background (native English speakers vs. non-native speakers), and education level (undergraduate or below vs. postgraduate).Measurement invariance was assessed prior to comparison. Configural invariance was

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established across all subgroups, allowing for path coefficient comparisons. The unconstrained models showed good fit (e.g., length-of-stay group: $\chi^2/df = 1.464$, CFI = 0.939, RMSEA = 0.033). Tests of structural weight invariance indicated no significant differences for the length-of-stay group ($\Delta\chi^2 = 53.759$, $\Delta df = 42$, P = 0.105) or language background group ($\Delta\chi^2 = 22.101$, $\Delta df = 21$, P = 0.394). A marginally significant difference was found for education level ($\Delta\chi^2 = 55.907$, $\Delta df = 40$, P = 0.049). Overall, the model demonstrated strong robustness and generalizability across groups.

5. Conclusion and Practical Implications

This study refines the CAC-ACSI framework through appraisal theory, distinguishing between "primary appraisal response"(positive emotion) and "deep meaning identification" (cultural identity). Results confirm their sequential roles, catalysis and transformation, in generating communication behavior, advancing the theoretical understanding of emotional dynamics in transcultural contexts.

Cultural identity functions both as a direct behavioral driver (H5) and as an amplifier of preceding influences (H8, H9), underscoring its central role in "other-led" storytelling. The structural model validates the core "cognition-emotion-identity" pathway: perceived quality enhances perceived value (H1), which in turn fosters both positive emotion (H2) and cultural identity (H4). Identity then directly drives communication intention (H5) and mediates the value–intention link (H8).

Notably, positive emotion does not directly affect intention (H3) nor mediate independently (H7). Instead, it promotes cultural identity (H6) and functions within a sequential mediation chain (H9), acting as a catalyst that helps cross a "meaning threshold" to foster sustained identity-driven behavior. This challenges the direct emotion behavior assumption in traditional models. Multi-group analysis further supports the robustness of this pathway across different lengths of stay and language backgrounds.

Based on the established"cognition-emotion-identity"pathway, a three-stage intervention framework is proposed to guide transcultural communication practices. First, at the cognitive stage, efforts should focus on establishing a credible "quality-value" foundation through authentic, consistent, and intelligible narratives, supported by real world examples and immersive storytelling. Second, the emotional stage should facilitate the transition from immediate positive affect to reflective identity formation by designing empathetic narratives, interactive engagements, and value-based dialogue. Finally, the identity stage should enable the external expression of cultural identification through participatory co-creation, such as collaborative content production and multicultural challenges-coupled with accessible multilingual tools to lower barriers to expression and sharing. In essence, effective transcultural communication follows a sequential logic: it should be grounded in cognition, bridged through emotion, and ultimately driven by identity.

Limitations include the cross-sectional design, sample reliance on a specific platform and region (with Asian overrepresentation), and the omission of moderators such as negative emotion and social influence. Future research should: (1) adopt longitudinal/experimental designs; (2) diversify samples culturally and geographically; (3) examine moderators like cultural distance and media use intensity; and (4) compare effects across content types.

Acknowledgements

The paper is the research outcome of the projects funded by Research Project of Universities in Anhui Province(No.2024AH052539)

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