

From Localization to Global Localization: The Art of Storytelling on the Platform for Brand Building of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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Abstract: This study explores the crucial role of “platform-specific storytelling” in the global localization of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) brands. Despite the potential of global platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to tailor content for diverse audiences, there often exists a “narrative gap” between official narratives and platform-native user engagement. Through a comparative analysis of multi-platform content, this study dissects how their unique affordances—from visual aesthetics to participatory interaction—reshape brand identities and foster brand co-creation. The research findings aim to provide ICH practitioners with a strategic framework for bridging this gap through platform-optimized storytelling, effectively transforming local heritage into globally resonant cultural brands.

Keywords: Intangible cultural heritage; Global localization; Cross-cultural communication; Social media empowerment; Digitalization

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1. Introduction

Driven by new media, the international communication of intangible cultural heritage is undergoing a profound transformation from “unidirectional output” to “global localization” adaptation.

The 2023 Global Digital Culture Consumption Report delivers eye-opening data: Short video platforms saw a 47% surge in cultural content reach compared to the previous year, with TikTok-powered platforms achieving over 20 billion views on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) topics. This demonstrates ICH’s immense potential in the digital age. Platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok leverage their unique algorithms and community cultures to craft tailored narratives for diverse audiences. For instance, they transform craft processes into immersive documentaries or embed cultural symbols into interactive challenges, showcasing the cross-cultural potential of “platform-specific brand storytelling.”

However, this theoretical framework still faces structural challenges in practice, particularly for communication

entities with limited resources and discourse power: misinterpretations of cultural connotations, disruptions in narrative continuity, and a lack of high-quality digital content collectively hinder the effective “translation” and resonance of their brand stories within the global communication ecosystem. Therefore, this study aims to thoroughly analyze this “narrative gap” and explore how intangible cultural heritage can systematically bridge the transformation path from “local cultural assets” to “global cultural brands” through brand narrative strategies deeply integrated with platform logic, achieving truly sustainable global localization communication ^[1].

2. Research background, objectives, and significance

2.1. Research background

This study is proposed in the context of profound changes in cultural communication paradigms under globalization, based on the practical challenges of the international dissemination of China’s intangible cultural heritage. By constructing a theoretical framework and a brand narrative model, it aims to address the theoretical needs of cultural brand building in the digital era.

2.2. Research objectives

Based on the analysis of the current situation of the international communication of intangible cultural heritage and the importance of platform brand stories, this study sets the following four levels of research objectives, aiming to build a systematic and operable innovation system for the international communication of intangible cultural heritage:

2.2.1. Dismantling the brand story mechanism

This study conducts an in-depth analysis of brand storytelling mechanisms across major international social platforms, including Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. By applying the channel logic and cultural adaptation dimensions from the “5C” framework, it systematically examines content tonality, narrative structures, and emotional appeals on each platform. The research further deciphers how algorithmic preferences and reinforcement mechanisms shape narrative styles, while exploring how platform community cultures both constrain and facilitate content dissemination. Ultimately, it establishes a brand storytelling analysis framework tailored to each platform’s unique characteristics.

2.3. Research significance

This study develops a platform-based framework to improve global communication of China’s intangible cultural heritage by addressing narrative gaps in cross-cultural dissemination. Its significance lies in three areas:

First, it enhances international recognition of local cultures, turning cultural resources into competitive advantages. Targeted platform strategies boost regional visibility, attracting tourism, investment, and supporting sustainable development.

Second, it promotes intercultural exchange and mutual learning. By reducing the “cultural discount” through contextualized storytelling, it transforms traditional heritage into relatable narratives, fostering cross-cultural understanding and emotional connection.

Third, it helps present a multidimensional national image. Showcasing diverse and modern cultural landscapes challenges overseas stereotypes, strengthens China’s cultural soft power, and enhances its global discourse.

3. Building an integrated analytical framework: The “5C” model

3.1. Global localization theory and cultural communication

The global localization theory emphasizes the dialectical unity between globalization and localization. In the field of intangible cultural heritage studies, this theory provides a crucial perspective for understanding cross-cultural communication of cultural products. Existing research indicates that successful cultural dissemination requires maintaining cultural authenticity while implementing appropriate localization adjustments. However, most studies remain at the macro-strategy level, lacking in-depth exploration of specific narrative translation mechanisms and their practical implementations across different digital platforms.

3.2. Platform society and media ecology

Platform social theory demonstrates that the architecture, algorithms, and governance models of digital platforms profoundly shape cultural dissemination. In the study of digital dissemination of intangible cultural heritage, scholars have begun examining how platform-specific characteristics influence communication effectiveness. For instance, Instagram emphasizes visual storytelling, YouTube thrives on in-depth content, while TikTok fosters participatory culture. These platform characteristics directly determine how intangible cultural heritage brand narratives are constructed and their communication impact ^[2].

3.3. Brand storytelling and value co-creation

Contemporary brand theory emphasizes that brand value is co-created through multi-party interactions. In the field of intangible cultural heritage, this means that brand narratives are no longer unilaterally defined by cultural custodians but continuously evolve through user engagement. By commenting, sharing, and re-creating, users actively participate in constructing the meaning of intangible cultural heritage brands, forming a dynamic brand narrative ecosystem ^[3].

3.4. Building an integrated analysis framework

Building upon the theoretical framework, this study proposes an integrated analytical framework comprising five dimensions: The Content Strategy dimension examines how core narratives achieve cross-platform adaptation through theme selection and format innovation; The Cultural Adaptation dimension analyzes how narrative elements undergo contextualization in diverse cultural environments; The Channel Logic dimension investigates how platform-specific technological characteristics influence narrative expression; The Co-Creation Ecosystem dimension systematically tracks user engagement in narrative construction across multiple dimensions; The Communication Effectiveness dimension establishes multidimensional metrics to evaluate narrative dissemination outcomes. As **Figure 1** illustrates, this framework provides a visual representation of these interconnected dimensions. By organically integrating these five dimensions, the framework provides a systematic theoretical tool for analyzing platform-specific brand narratives of intangible cultural heritage. This approach facilitates a deeper understanding of cultural communication mechanisms within global localization contexts and promotes the creative transformation of intangible cultural heritage from local resources into globally recognized brands.

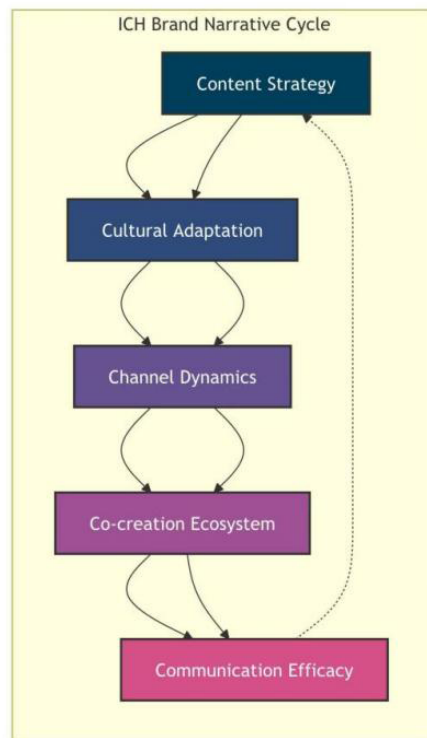


Figure 1. ICH brand narrative cycle

4. Brand-building platform with story and international communication strategy

In the era of deep integration between globalization and digitalization, the branding and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) face both unprecedented development opportunities and numerous challenges. To effectively bridge the potential gap between official narratives and platform-native user engagement, thereby achieving global localization of ICH culture, this study systematically proposes the following international communication strategies.

4.1. Differentiated construction and adaptation of content strategies

Developing tailored content strategies is crucial for different digital media platforms. Instagram, with its unique visual aesthetic, serves as an ideal platform to showcase the exquisite craftsmanship and distinctive charm of intangible cultural heritage. By utilizing high-resolution images and premium short videos, it effectively attracts user attention and sparks interest in exploring intangible cultural heritage. YouTube, on the other hand, is better suited for in-depth content dissemination and interpretation. It can plan and launch documentary series, expert interviews, and other programs to systematically present the historical origins, cultural significance, and intricate production techniques of intangible cultural heritage, meeting audiences' demand for knowledge and cultural depth. As a Chinese product expanding globally, TikTok excels in AI technology application, community ecosystem development, and commercialization of social attributes, primarily through short videos. With explosive content growth, TikTok rapidly forms trending topics through hashtag aggregation and user co-creation, igniting global user participation and creative enthusiasm.

4.2. Localization and integration of cultural elements

In the international dissemination of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), cultural adaptation stands as the cornerstone of success. This requires maintaining cultural authenticity while implementing thoughtful localization strategies. First, people must thoroughly understand the cultural context, aesthetic preferences, and consumption patterns of target markets. By skillfully integrating ICH elements into local traditions, people can create cultural products that embody China's profound heritage while resonating with global aesthetic sensibilities. Second, narrative adaptation is crucial. Employing language styles, pacing, and emotional expressions that align with local audiences' preferences will significantly enhance cultural resonance and foster deeper audience engagement ^[4].

4.3. Precise matching and application of channel logic

Given the distinct technical characteristics and user demographics across digital platforms, achieving precise channel logic alignment is crucial. Instagram's user base primarily consists of young, fashion-conscious individuals seeking personal expression, requiring content strategies that emphasize innovation and high interactivity. YouTube's broader appeal to diverse age groups and interests demands content that balances depth and breadth. TikTok's core audience of younger users prioritizing instant engagement and entertainment calls for strategies focusing on rapid response and creative expression. By aligning channel logic precisely, people can ensure content seamlessly integrates with platform features, significantly enhancing communication effectiveness.

5. Epilogue

This study employs a "5C" integrated analytical framework to examine the pivotal role and communication strategies of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) in platform-specific brand narratives. The research highlights that achieving global localization of ICH requires systematic development and continuous optimization across five dimensions: content strategy, cultural adaptation, channel logic, co-creation ecosystems, and communication effectiveness. By implementing differentiated content strategies, localized cultural adaptations, precise channel alignment, diversified co-creation ecosystems, and multidimensional evaluation of communication effectiveness, people can effectively bridge the narrative gap between official narratives and platform-native user engagement, significantly enhancing the international communication impact of ICH. Future research should further explore ICH communication strategies and evaluation methodologies across diverse cultural contexts, providing richer theoretical support and practical guidance for global localization efforts.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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