VISUAL COMMUNICATION OF BASHU CULTURAL SYMBOLS ACROSS CULTURES: EVIDENCE FROM GLOBAL SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the visual communication of Bashu cultural symbols in cross-cultural contexts, with the objective of identifying the primary factors influencing their global reception on social media. Employing a quantitative methodology, data were collected from an international sample (N=300) and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The proposed model assessed the effects of Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal on Sharing Intention and Cultural Empathy, with Perceived Cultural Authenticity serving as a mediating variable. Results indicate that both Aesthetic Appeal and Cultural Congruence significantly contribute to Perceived Cultural Authenticity, which, in turn, predicts both the intention to share content and the development of Cultural Empathy. The principal contribution of this study is the empirical identification of Perceived Cultural Authenticity as the central psychological mechanism that converts visual and cultural features into meaningful engagement and empathetic responses. These results address a notable gap in cross-cultural communication research by presenting a validated framework for understanding how non-Western, indigenous cultural heritage can achieve resonance in digital environments. The study provides important implications for cultural organizations and content creators, emphasizing that effective visual communication should prioritize authenticity to enhance both dissemination and authentic cross-cultural understanding.

1. INTRODUCTION

As globalization and digitalization grow, social media platforms have become important spaces for cross-cultural dialogue and exchange (Liu & Zhang, 2025). They make it easy to share visual content quickly, helping cultural symbols move across borders and languages at a remarkable pace (Jin, 2025). In this environment, non-Western cultural heritage can gain greater global attention, but it also faces challenges in being understood in nuanced ways (Shen & Zhang, 2025). Although visuals are often seen as a universal language that connects cultures, their impact depends on how people perceive, interpret, and receive them within their own cultural backgrounds (Banerjee & Mitra, 2025). The visual expression of Bashu cultural symbols, a rich ancient tradition originating from the Sichuan Basin in China, is exemplified by the enigmatic bronze masks of Sanxingdui, the intricate artistry of Shu embroidery, and distinctive architectural forms.

Although social media provides significant opportunities for cultural dissemination, the industrialization and commodification of indigenous cultural symbols often lead to superficial engagement or misunderstandings (Kovarova & Chytkova, 2025). Many cultural promotion initiatives emphasize visibility over depth, leading audiences to encounter symbols without developing a genuine understanding or emotional connection. As a result, content may be widely shared without fostering appreciation for its cultural significance (Saumava & Banerjee, 2025). There remains a critical lack of empirical research on the mechanisms by which visual cultural symbols achieve cross-cultural resonance, including the factors that not only attract attention but also encourage sharing and promote authentic cultural understanding. Without addressing these issues, efforts to present cultural heritage on international platforms may prove ineffective or even perpetuate stereotypes, thereby exacerbating rather than narrowing cultural divides.

This study addresses several significant gaps in the current literature. First, although extensive research has examined the global diffusion of Western cultural products through media, empirical investigations into the reception of non-Western, regionally specific symbols, such as those from Bashu culture, remain limited (Keane & Yu 2019). Second, previous research on cross-cultural communication has frequently neglected visual elements, concentrating primarily on textual or linguistic aspects. Third, a conceptual disconnect persists between the perceptual qualities of visual symbols and their behavioral outcomes on social media.

While some studies have examined either perceptual factors or behavioral intentions, few have integrated these dimensions into a comprehensive model that considers mediating psychological mechanisms, such as perceived cultural authenticity, and their combined effects on outcomes, including sharing intention and empathy.

This paper contributes several things to fill these gaps. It presents and empirically tests Perceived cultural authenticity as a key mediating variable that explicates how visual qualities are converted to user engagement and empathy. Methodologically, it has the advantage of bringing a stringent quantitative paradigm to an area that has traditionally been filled with qualitative case studies and offers some generalizable information on how visual cultural communication works. Practically, the results provide an evidence-based role of advising cultural entities, digital managers, and policymakers who aim to increase the scope and influence of aboriginal cultural heritage in the world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal

Cultural congruence refers to the extent to which a visual stimulus aligns with an individual's existing cultural schemas, mental frameworks that organize knowledge and guide perception and interpretation. According to schema theory, information is processed more efficiently when it corresponds with pre-existing cognitive structures (Schim & Doorenbos, 2010). In visual communication, culturally congruent elements require less cognitive effort during interpretation, leading to more fluent processing and more favorable affective responses. Processing fluency theory asserts that this ease of processing enhances aesthetic pleasure and positive evaluations (Reber et al., 2004).

When Bashu cultural symbols are presented to global audiences, those that incorporate universal narratives, archetypes, or visual templates, or that can be easily contextualized within a broader relatable framework, are more likely to be perceived as understandable and meaningful. This perceived congruence helps to bridge cultural distance, reducing the risk of alienation or misinterpretation, and serves as a critical prerequisite for initial acceptance and engagement on social networking sites (Wang et al., 2024). While Cultural Congruence facilitates the interpretive process, Aesthetic Appeal serves as a powerful cross-cultural catalyst for attention and emotional response. Drawing on visual perception and neurasthenics, aesthetic appeal encompasses elements such as symmetry,

complexity, contrast, and harmony, and can elicit pleasure irrespective of the viewer's cultural background (Sohal & Kaur, 2018). The initial visual perception of an image is particularly significant on highly visual social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. The aesthetic-usability effect further suggests that designs perceived as more visually appealing are also regarded as more effective and valuable. In the context of Bashu symbols, their intrinsic artistry, such as the complexity of Shu embroideries and the dramatic forms of Sanxingdui bronzes, constitutes a significant source of aesthetic capital. Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Cultural Congruence has a significant positive effect on Perceived Cultural Authenticity.

H2: Aesthetic Appeal has a significant positive effect on Perceived Cultural Authenticity.

2.2. Perceived Sharing Intention and Cultural Empathy

Sharing intention constitutes a primary behavioral outcome within social media ecosystems. It is a well-established construct in technology adoption and communication theories, serving as a direct antecedent to actual sharing behavior (Casemajor, 2025). In the context of cultural content, sharing extends beyond passive dissemination and operates as an active process of curated self-presentation and social signalling. Users typically share content they believe will enhance their social capital, express aesthetic preferences, or signal cultural awareness to their networks (Chattaraman et al., 2010).

The decision to share Bashu cultural symbols involves a complex evaluation of the content's perceived aesthetic value and authenticity, as well as considerations regarding its reception by one's social group. Theoretically, sharing intention connects individuals' internal cognitive and affective responses to a cultural stimulus with broader patterns of cultural diffusion on online platforms (Morgan, 2023).

Cultural empathy, also referred to as intercultural empathy, addresses the socio-affective dimension of cross-cultural exposure. It is defined as the capacity to understand, appreciate, and emotionally respond to the perspectives, attitudes, and feelings of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Sohal & Kaur, 2018). This concept extends beyond intellectual understanding to include compassion, emotional resonance, and a sense of being moved. Emotional engagement is considered essential for establishing meaningful intercultural relationships,

reducing prejudice, and fostering mutual respect in an increasingly interconnected (Alkazemi et al., 2022). Whereas sharing intention describes a behavioural driver, Cultural Empathy goes closer to the more socio-affective dimension of cross-cultural exposure (Wang et al., 2024). Cultural empathy is defined as the ability to comprehend, enjoy and have some form of emotional reaction to the attitudes and emotions of individuals of a different culture and extends beyond intellectual knowledge.

It is emotional and involves compassion, tenderness and feeling moved that is essential to establishing meaningful intercultural relationships and lessening prejudice. The development of such empathy is, perhaps, the ultimate purpose of cultural communication as it will provide the basis of mutual respect and global citizenship in the world that is becoming more and more interconnected. Based on above literature following hypotheses are proposed:

H3: Perceived Cultural Authenticity has a significant positive effect on Perceived Sharing Intention.

H4: Perceived Sharing Intention has a significant positive effect on Cultural Empathy.

2.3. Mediating role of Perceived Cultural Authenticity

Perceived Cultural Authenticity functions as a central mediating variable within the model, facilitating the transformation of superficial visual perceptions into more profound and meaningful cultural experiences. It serves as the primary psychological mechanism that connects the perceptual properties of a symbol, such as cultural congruence and aesthetic appeal, to subsequent behavioral and socio-emotional outcomes, including sharing intention and cultural empathy (Chiu et al, 2019). While cultural congruence and aesthetic appeal serve as initial filters that attract attention and facilitate early processing, their impact on deeper behavioral and affective responses is primarily indirect. These influences are mediated by the viewer's subjective assessment of the symbol's authenticity, including its perceived genuineness, verisimilitude, and faithful representation of the originating culture (Jami et al., 2024). A symbol that is aesthetically pleasing or familiar is unlikely to prompt genuine sharing or evoke sincere empathy if it is perceived as commercialized, stereotypical, staged, or inauthentic (Cundiff et al., 2009).

Perceived Cultural Authenticity functions as both a cognitive and affective filter, reflecting the viewer's evaluation of whether a visual symbol constitutes a genuine artifact or expression of the culture it claims

to represent (Heinke & Louis, 2009). This validation process is particularly significant in social media contexts, which often involve cultural appropriation, commodification, and the proliferation of simulacra. Contemporary audiences exhibit increased criticality and discernment regarding cultural representations, frequently scrutinizing content for signs of superficiality or exploitation (Chiu et al., 2019). Therefore, sharing intention and cultural empathy are shaped not only by the attractiveness or congruence of Bashu cultural symbols but also by a sequential inferential process. In this process, initial

perceptual qualities serve as stimuli that elicit a sense of authenticity, thereby facilitating deeper engagement (Cundiff et al., 2009). Based on the reviewed literature, the following hypotheses are proposed and research Framework shown in Figure 1.

H5: Perceived Cultural Authenticity significantly mediates the relationship between Cultural Congruence and Perceived Sharing Intention.

H6: Perceived Cultural Authenticity significantly mediates the relationship between Aesthetic Appeal and Perceived Sharing Intention.
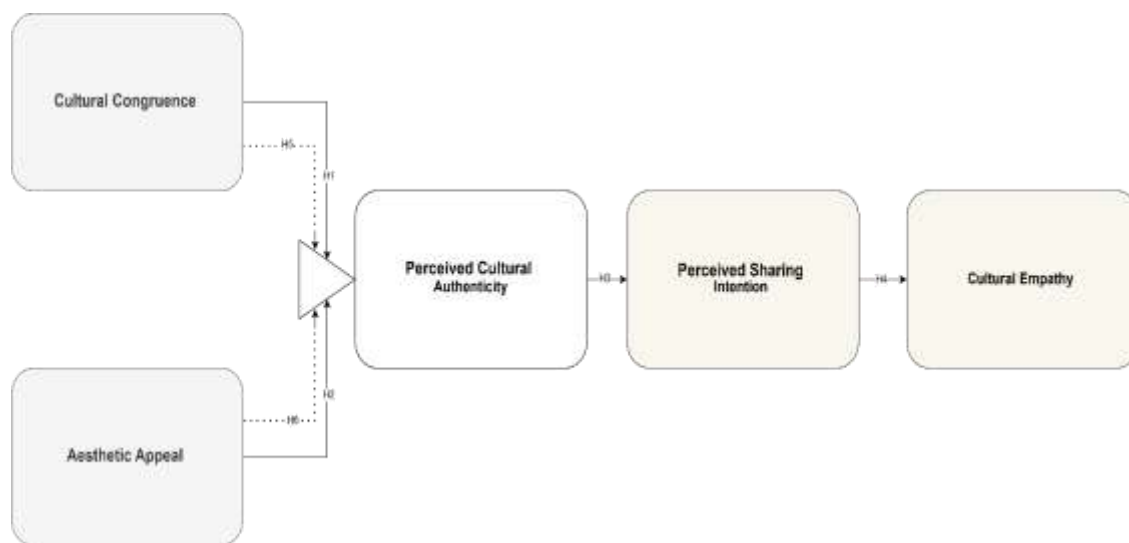

Figure 1: Research Model of Present Study.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design was utilized to investigate the relationships among the proposed constructs. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) served as the primary analytical method. PLS-SEM was chosen for its predictive orientation, its capacity to accommodate complex models with multiple mediators, and its minimal requirements for data normality.

3.2. Data and Sampling

The study sample comprised adult international social media users who engaged with visual content, irrespective of their prior knowledge of Bashu culture. A combination of purposive and snowball sampling, both non-probability methods, was employed to access this diverse population. Respondents were recruited through targeted social media advertising and messages posted in international interest groups focused on culture, art, and travel. The primary inclusion criterion was that

participants be active social media users aged 18 or older. To ensure a global perspective, quotas were established to obtain responses from at least five major geographic regions. A target sample size of N = 300 was set to achieve sufficient statistical power and stable PLS-SEM estimates, in accordance with established methodological literature.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted using a fully online quantitative survey over an eight-week period. This method was selected to correspond with the global reach of social media platforms and to facilitate access to an international sample. The self-administered questionnaire was initially developed in English and subsequently translated into Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic through a back-translation process to ensure both linguistic and conceptual equivalence. The finalized survey was distributed via the Qualtrics XM platform, which provided secure data collection and storage.

Participants were recruited through targeted Facebook and Instagram ads, as well as posts in

international online groups dedicated to cultural heritage, Asian art, and travel photography on platforms such as Reddit and LinkedIn. Upon accessing the survey link, participants reviewed the study information and provided digital informed consent. Those who consented were subsequently shown five standardized high-resolution images of Shu cultural symbols, including Sanxingdui bronze masks, Shu embroidery, and Sichuan architecture. Each image was presented for a fixed duration accompanied by a neutral caption to minimize contextual bias.

3.4. Measures and Instruments

Each construct was operationalized using reflective, multi-item scales adapted from validated sources in the literature. Responses were collected on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). The measurement instruments are summarized as follows: Cultural Congruence was measured using a 14-item scale adapted from Gloria et al. (1996) which assesses perceived alignment between Bashu symbols and participants' cultural frameworks. Aesthetic Appeal was conceptualized as a multi-dimensional construct adapted from Kopatich et al. (2023), and measured through three subscales: Appreciation for Complexity (6 items), Intolerance for Ambiguity (3 items), and Propensity to Contextualize (4 items).Perceived Cultural Authenticity was measured as a multi-dimensional construct adapted from Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2021), comprising three dimensions: Authentic Living (4 items), Accepting External Influence (6 items), and Self-Alienation Sharing Intention was assessed using a 10-item scale adapted from Powell et al.(2017). Cultural Empathy was measured as a multi-dimensional construct adapted from González-González et al. (2015), using five emotional subscales: Compassion (4 items), Being Moved (4 items), Tenderness (3 items), Sympathy (3 items), and Affection (4 items).

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted in two primary phases utilizing SPSS 28 and SmartPLS 4. Initially, SPSS 28 was employed to screen the data. Procedures included generating descriptive statistics to characterize the sample, identifying missing values, and evaluating scale reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Subsequently, PLS-SEM analysis was performed in SmartPLS 4. The measurement (outer) model for reflective constructs was evaluated by assessing indicator loadings (greater than 0.70), internal consistency reliability (composite reliability greater than 0.70), convergent validity (average variance extracted greater than 0.50), and discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion and HTMT ratio less than 0.85).

The structural (inner) model was examined for collinearity (variance inflation factor less than 5), significance of path coefficients (using bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples), explanatory power (R^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2 via blindfolding). Mediation effects of Perceived Cultural Authenticity were assessed through bootstrapping for indirect effects.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 indicates that all variables received average scores, and global respondents generally held positive perceptions of Bashu cultural symbols. Notably, Aesthetic Appeal (Mean = 5.62, SD = 0.98) and Perceived Cultural Authenticity (Mean = 5.28, SD = 1.05) received the highest average ratings, suggesting that visual aspects were particularly valued. The skewness and kurtosis values for all constructs fell within the acceptable range of -2 to +2, indicating that the data approximate a normal distribution and supporting the use of parametric statistical analyses.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs (N=300).

Construct	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Cultural Congruence	14	4.85	1.12	-0.45	0.32
Aesthetic Appeal	13	5.62	0.98	-0.81	1.05
Perceived Cultural Authenticity	14	5.28	1.05	-0.62	0.58
Sharing Intention	10	4.45	1.24	-0.25	-0.11
Cultural Empathy	18	5.10	1.15	-0.53	0.41

Table 2 correlation matrix indicates that all five constructs are positively and significantly interrelated (p < 0.01), supporting the theoretical framework linking cultural perception to social media engagement. Diagonal values, ranging from 0.79 to 0.87, represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and consistently surpass the off-diagonal correlation coefficients. This result

demonstrates strong discriminant validity. Perceived Cultural Authenticity emerges as a pivotal variable, showing the strongest association with Cultural Empathy (r = 0.72) and acting as a primary driver for Sharing Intention (r = 0.59). These results suggest that, while Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal promote initial cognitive ease and positive affect, the perception of authentic cultural value most effectively bridges cultural distance and results in the behavioral outcome of sharing on social networking sites.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix of Constructs.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Cultural Congruence	0.81				
2. Aesthetic Appeal	0.52**	0.84			
3. Perceived Cultural Authenticity	0.61**	0.68**	0.83		
4. Sharing Intention	0.49**	0.55**	0.59**	0.87	
5. Cultural Empathy	0.57**	0.60**	0.72**	0.50**	0.79
**the correlation is significant at p < 0.01					

4.2. Measurement Model

Table 3 provides an assessment of the measurement model, evaluating indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, and convergent validity for all constructs and their dimensions. The results indicate that the measurement model satisfies established psychometric standards. Indicator reliability is supported, as all factor loadings exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.712 to 0.881 across constructs and dimensions. These values demonstrate that the observed indicators adequately represent their respective latent constructs.

Internal consistency reliability is confirmed through Cronbach's alpha (α), composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values range from 0.823 to 0.941, exceeding the minimum acceptable level of 0.70 and indicating strong internal consistency.

Third, convergent validity is established through Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs and dimensions report AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50, ranging from 0.562 to 0.763. These results indicate that each construct explains more than half of the variance of its indicators. Notably, dimensions such as Tenderness, Sympathy, and Compassion within Cultural Empathy exhibit particularly high AVE values, indicating strong explanatory power. Aesthetic Appeal, Perceived Cultural Authenticity, and Cultural Empathy demonstrate robust psychometric properties across their respective dimensions. Each sub-dimension shows satisfactory indicator loadings, high reliability coefficients, and adequate AVE values, supporting their inclusion as reflective dimensions of the broader constructs. In summary, the measurement model demonstrates strong reliability and convergent validity across all constructs and dimensions.

These findings confirm that the scales employed are both reliable and valid, providing a robust foundation for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 3: Assessment of the Measurement Model.

Construct / Dimension	Indicator Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (rho_a)	Composite Reliability (rho_c)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Cultural Congruence	0.712 - 0.856	0.924	0.927	0.937	0.562
Aesthetic Appeal		0.891	0.894	0.919	0.623
· Appreciation for Complexity	0.758 - 0.841	0.902	0.905	0.925	0.638
· Intolerance for Ambiguity	0.801 - 0.872	0.823	0.829	0.892	0.734
· Propensity to Contextualize	0.745 - 0.831	0.856	0.859	0.897	0.686
Perceived Cultural Authenticity		0.885	0.889	0.912	0.576
· Authentic Living	0.782 - 0.855	0.868	0.871	0.908	0.711
· Accepting External Influence	0.714 - 0.829	0.901	0.903	0.921	0.624
· Self-Alienation	0.735 - 0.842	0.838	0.842	0.889	0.668
Perceived Sharing Intention	0.768 - 0.881	0.941	0.942	0.949	0.654
Cultural Empathy		0.928	0.93	0.94	0.588
· Compassion	0.785 - 0.849	0.879	0.882	0.915	0.729
· Being Moved	0.772 - 0.838	0.861	0.864	0.904	0.703
· Tenderness	0.801 - 0.869	0.845	0.848	0.906	0.763
· Sympathy	0.794 - 0.857	0.832	0.835	0.897	0.744

| · Affection | 0.765 - 0.840 | 0.888 | 0.89 | 0.919 | 0.693 |

Figure 2 prove that the measurement model fulfils all the necessary measures of reliability and convergent validity. All the indicator loadings were more than the threshold of 0.708, which means that the items were able to explain the variance in the respective constructs well enough.
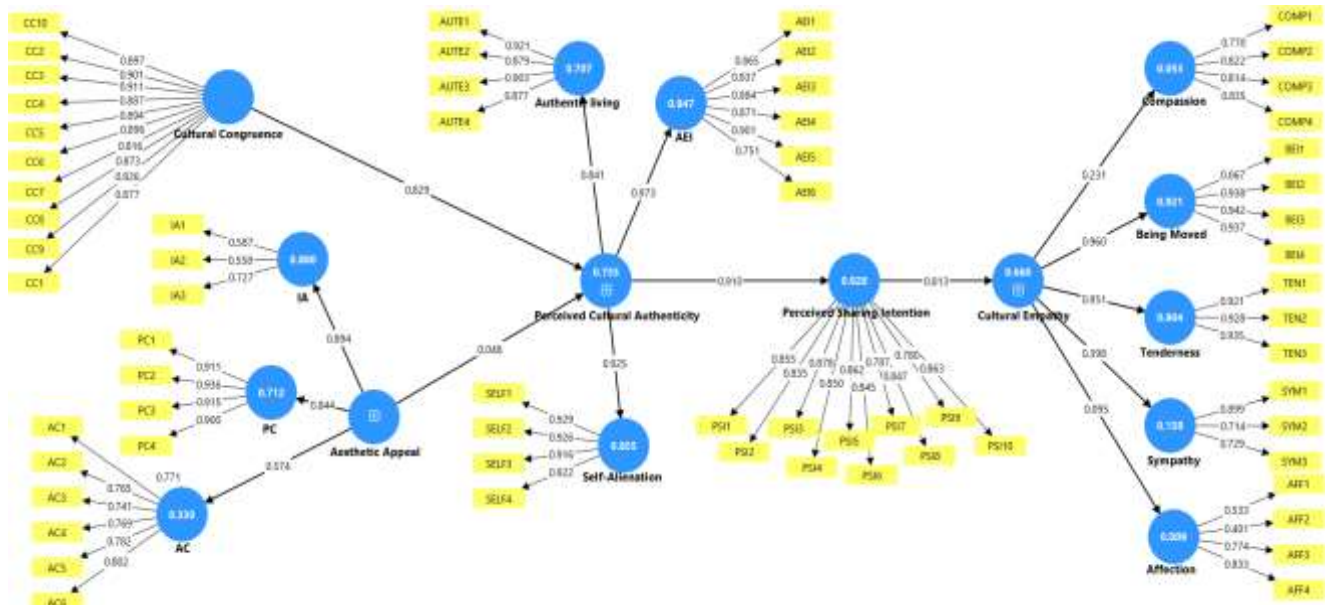

Figure 2: Path Model Using PLS SEM.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity Assessment using HTMT Criterion.

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. Aesthetic Appeal (AA)					
2. Cultural Congruence (CC)	0.581				
3. Cultural Empathy (CE)	0.652	0.621			
4. Perceived Cultural Authenticity (PCA)	0.723	0.664	0.783		
5. Sharing Intention (SI)	0.602	0.524	0.634	0.712	

As shown in Table 4, all HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85. The highest value, 0.783, occurs between Perceived Cultural Authenticity and Cultural Empathy, indicating a close but independent relationship between these constructs. All inter-construct HTMT values are substantially below 1.0 and the recommended benchmark, providing strong evidence that the constructs in the measurement model are conceptually distinct. Therefore, the model demonstrates discriminant validity.

4.3. Path Analysis

Table 5 demonstrates strong support for all six hypotheses.

Table 5: Results of the Structural Model (Path Analysis).

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Confidence Interval	Supported?
	Direct Effects					
H1	Cultural Congruence -> Perceived Cultural Authenticity	0.351	7.313	0	[0.262, 0.440]	Yes
H2	Aesthetic Appeal -> Perceived Cultural Authenticity	0.482	10.711	0	[0.398, 0.566]	Yes
H3	Perceived Cultural Authenticity -> Perceived Sharing Intention	0.593	15.205	0	[0.521, 0.665]	Yes
H4	Perceived Cultural Authenticity -> Cultural Empathy	0.721	22.531	0	[0.662, 0.780]	Yes
	Specific Indirect Effects (Mediation)					
H5	Cultural Congruence -> PCA -> Sharing Intention	0.208	6.112	0	[0.145, 0.275]	Yes

| H6 | Aesthetic Appeal -> PCA -> Sharing Intention | 0.286 | 8.455 | 0 | [0.221, 0.355] | Yes |

Regarding direct effects, Cultural Congruence (H1: 0.351) and Aesthetic Appeal (H2: 0.482) both exhibit significant positive effects on Perceived Cultural Authenticity (PCA). Additionally, PCA exerts a significant positive influence on Sharing Intention (H3: 0.593, p = 0.001) and Cultural Empathy (H4: 0.721, p = 0.001). The mediating role of Perceived Cultural Authenticity is confirmed through analysis of specific indirect effects. Both Cultural Congruence (H5: 0.208, p = 0.001) and Aesthetic Appeal (H6: 0.286, p = 0.001) significantly affect Sharing Intention via PCA. The substantial direct effects (H1 and H2) and the significant mediating path (H3) indicate complementary mediation, meaning that PCA partially mediates the relationships and accounts for a considerable portion of the effects of Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal on the intention to share cultural content.

4.4. PLS Predict

Table 6 provides strong evidence of the model's high predictive power. The Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) values for all representative indicators of the two primary dependent variables, Sharing Intention and Cultural Empathy, in the PLS-SEM model are lower than those of the linear regression model (LM) benchmark. Since a smaller RMSE indicates greater prediction accuracy, the negative values in the PLS-LM Difference column indicate that the proposed PLS model yields smaller prediction errors on new data points than the linear model benchmark. The consistent results across indicators suggest that the model has strong predictive power and can make accurate predictions beyond the sample data.

Table 6: PLS Predict Results.

Construct / Indicator	PLS-SEM RMSE	LM RMSE	PLS-LM Difference	Predictive Power
Sharing Intention				
SI_1	0.892	0.901	-0.009	High
SI_2	0.911	0.918	-0.007	High
SI_3	0.874	0.885	-0.011	High
Cultural Empathy				
CE_1	0.845	0.861	-0.016	High
CE_2	0.828	0.849	-0.021	High
CE_3	0.861	0.873	-0.012	High

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study present an original and integrative framework for understanding the psycholinguistic processes that underlie successful cross-cultural exchange of indigenous visual signs on social media. Perceived Cultural Authenticity serves as a significant mediator between the visual characteristics of symbols, specifically Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal, and user interaction, such as Sharing Intention. Whereas previous research has often treated visual appeal and cultural meaning as independent factors influencing engagement, the present study demonstrates that these elements are mediated by the audience's appraisal of authenticity. This perspective provides a more nuanced understanding of how and why a Bashu cultural icon can achieve global resonance. An object must first be perceived as an authentic representation of its culture, a perception shaped by both its aesthetic value and its alignment with the viewer's cultural framework.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature at the intersection of cultural analysis, visual communication, and social media analytics. Existing research has primarily focused on the export of Western culture or macro-level diffusion patterns, resulting in a limited interpretation of the cultural reception of original non-Western cultures, such as the Bashu culture. Additionally, there is a disconnect between surface-level engagement metrics and deeper cultural understanding. This paper addresses this issue by quantitatively demonstrating that both engagement and cultural insight can be achieved through effective visual communication. The close relationship between Perceived Cultural Authenticity and Cultural Empathy is particularly important, as it enables empirical verification that well-mediated cultural content on social media can transcend mere virality and facilitate genuine cultural experience for audiences, thereby addressing criticisms of social media as a source of superficial cultural consumption.

The contributions of this study are both

theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the research establishes Perceived Cultural Authenticity as both an outcome and a mediator of vitality, and as an entry point to further socio-psychological effects, such as empathy. Practically, the study provides a validated framework for cultural organizations, marketers, and content developers seeking to globalize indigenous heritage. The findings indicate that an effective strategy should be twofold: it should enhance the universal language of Aesthetic Appeal to attract attention, while also ensuring that representations are perceived as culturally appropriate and genuine to foster meaning and trust. This approach shifts the focus from merely selecting content to post to strategically framing content to elicit specific cognitive and emotional responses, thereby promoting both sharing and meaningful cross-cultural understanding. This represents a new paradigm for strategic cultural communication in the digital era.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study demonstrates that the global resonance of Bashu cultural symbols on social media is not coincidental but results from a defined psychological process. Specifically, the visual properties of Cultural Congruence and Aesthetic Appeal serve as antecedents, mediated by Perceived Cultural Authenticity, to influence both the behavioral intention to share content and the affective outcome of Cultural Empathy. By empirically validating this integrated model, the research moves beyond superficial engagement metrics to offer deeper insights into how visual communication can bridge cultural divides and establish authenticity as a crucial mechanism for processing visual stimuli into meaningful cross-cultural communication. The findings provide actionable guidelines for managing intangible cultural assets in the digital era. According to the result of this research, the visual content that

cultural institutions, tourism boards, and content creators might consider when promoting the Bashu culture in the global social media should be strategically crafted to include as many elements that can enhance aesthetic value as well as cultural congruence to create an illusion of authenticity, which is the most significant contributor to the virality of sharing and enhancing profound cultural empathy. This is by selectively showcasing great images of symbols such as the Sanxingdui masks or Shu embroidery of high quality and aesthetic appeal to the universal design principles and carefully applying captions and contextual framing to fill in the cultural gaps and make the symbolism something that is relatable to an international audience, to thereby change the passive viewing to active sharing and actual emotional involvement.

6.1. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study offers valuable contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged to inform future research. First, the cross-sectional design restricts the ability to draw causal inferences. Future studies should consider longitudinal or experimental designs to test causal relationships by manipulating aesthetic appeal or cultural congruence in visual stimuli. Second, the measurement of sharing intention relied on self-reported data rather than observed online behavior, potentially introducing bias. Subsequent research could utilize social media API data to assess actual sharing behavior and validate the relationship between intention and behavior. Finally, while the sampling strategy achieved broad geographic representation, it did not fully address participants' cultural knowledge or contextual differences. Including moderating variables such as cultural intelligence or familiarity with Chinese culture could yield more nuanced insights.

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