

Navigating Cultural Boundaries: A Comparative Study of Content and Execution Styles of Foreign Online Content Creators in Thailand and Taiwan from a Cross-Cultural Communication Perspective

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Abstract

This research article investigated the phenomenon of foreign online content creation through the lens of Cross-cultural Communication, focusing on two distinct yet culturally significant East Asian hubs: Thailand and Taiwan. As digital media platforms facilitate the rise of “Cultural Intermediaries,” foreign creators residing in these host countries play a pivotal role in translating local cultures for global consumption. The specific objectives were to: 1) categorize the thematic content produced by these creators, 2) analyze their execution styles as strategic forms of digital acculturation, 3) investigate their intercultural perspectives toward the host societies, and 4) evaluate local audience reception through digital engagement. Employing a mixed-methods research approach, the study analyzed 20 foreign content creators (10 per country) by evaluating their top 10 most-viewed videos (totaling 200 videos) and a corpus of 10,000 audience comments. Data was analyzed using analytic induction to interpret content through High/Low-context and Acculturation frameworks. The findings revealed that content in Thailand leaned toward “Experience-oriented” exoticism, while Taiwan focused on “Value-oriented” social integration. Execution styles effectively bridged the gap between creators’ native Low-context backgrounds and the host countries’ High-context environments, creating strong parasocial bonds. This study concluded that foreign creators acted as vital digital bridges, facilitating a unique form of global-local dialogue and contributing to the co-creation of national Soft Power.

Keywords: Foreign online content creators, Execution style, Cross-cultural communication, Digital acculturation, Soft power

Introduction

The landscape of global communication has been radically reshaped by the proliferation of social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. Within this digital ecosystem, a unique demographic has emerged: the “Foreign Online Content Creator.” These individuals, who often migrate to a host country for personal, professional, or lifestyle reasons, utilize digital

media to document their experiences. Unlike traditional travel journalists, these creators offer long-term, immersive perspectives that blend the objectivity of an outsider with the lived experience of an insider.

According to Cunningham and Craig (2019), these creators functioned as “Social Media Entertainers” who occupied a unique space in the global media industry,

acting as digital cultural intermediaries. They did not merely consume culture; they curated it, performing a form of digital labor that constructed a specific narrative of the host country for a global viewership (Gretzel, 2018).

In the context of East Asia, Thailand and Taiwan represent two of the most dynamic locations for this phenomenon. Thailand, with its established global reputation as the “Land of Smiles,” has long been a magnet for international travelers drawn to its gastronomy, heritage, and affordable lifestyle (Gretzel, 2018; Jiwasiddi et al., 2024). Similarly, the Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has proactively leveraged influencer marketing through its “Amazing New Chapters” initiative and the “5F” Soft Power strategy (Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, Festival), partnering with international content creators to showcase the country’s diverse experiential offerings through “Meaningful Travel” narratives (TAT, 2023). This aligned with findings that such organic storytelling by foreign residents served as a credible validation of Thai hospitality, often reaching global audiences more effectively than traditional advertisements (Jongsuksomsakul, 2024; Xiao, 2021). Conversely, Taiwan has emerged as a high-tech cultural hub known for its democratic values, social safety, and preserved traditional Chinese customs (Huang, 2024). The nation has strategically leveraged influencer marketing through innovative initiatives like the “Be My Guest” campaign (Spend a Night @ Taiwan’s Presidential Office Building), which empowers international creators to showcase Taiwan’s warmth and openness through autonomous and authentic storytelling (Taiwan Insight, 2024). Such strategies aligned with academic findings that influencer credibility in the Taiwan context was a primary catalyst for generating parasocial relationships and enhancing positive destination brand image (Kanwar & Huang, 2022). For both nations, the presence of foreign creators provided a form of “organic” promotion that bypassed official government narratives (Bhatia et al., 2025; Li et al., 2025), making their content a critical subject for academic inquiry in the fields of communication arts and intercultural studies. This study seeks to analyze how these creators navigate cultural boundaries and serve as digital ambassadors through their unique storytelling.

Despite the immense popularity of creators who act as cultural bridges, academic research has largely ignored the communicative mechanics of their success. Most existing studies categorized these creators under “influencer marketing” or “digital tourism” (Gretzel, 2018; Jiwasiddi et al., 2024), overlooking the complex Cross-cultural Communication (CCC) strategies they employed to navigate local environments (Bhatia et al., 2025). A significant gap exists in understanding how these creators—many of whom originate from Western, “Low-context” cultures—negotiate the social norms of “High-context” East Asian societies (Hall, 1976; Huang, 2024). This lack of focus on the “strategic communicative labor” behind digital acculturation limits our understanding of how global-local identities are co-constructed on social media platforms, which are not merely reflections of global culture but active creators of it (Mark & Ahmed, 2023; Yao, 2025). As noted by Kim (2021), the process of digital acculturation involved a constant negotiation between the creator’s original cultural identity and the host country’s societal expectations. There was an inherent tension between the creator’s need to remain “foreign” enough to provide a unique perspective and the need to be “local” enough to gain audience trust. Failure to balance this can lead to cultural stereotyping or a lack of engagement. Therefore, a systematic study of their content and execution style is necessary to understand how digital media acts as a space for acculturation and cultural diplomacy. The research focused on the performance of culture and the resulting dialogue between creators and local audiences, addressing how foreign creators navigate the “Stranger” objectivity while seeking “Insider” authenticity.

Objectives

1. To categorize the thematic content produced by foreign online content creators in Thailand and Taiwan.
2. To analyze execution styles as a manifestation of digital acculturation and cross-cultural communication strategy.
3. To investigate the intercultural perspectives of these creators regarding their host environments.
4. To evaluate local audience reception and the formation of parasocial bonds with foreign creators through the lens of cultural hybridity.

Research questions

1. How do foreign creators select and present cultural symbols from Thailand and Taiwan to their audience?
2. In what ways do execution styles (visual and verbal) reflect the creator's level of cultural adaptation to "High-context" norms?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between foreign creators and local audiences in the digital comment section when discussing cultural topics?

Theoretical and conceptual framework

High/low-context communication

Hall's (1976) framework of High-context and Low-context cultures provided a critical lens for understanding the communicative frictions and successes of foreign creators. In High-context (HC) societies like Thailand and Taiwan, communication is heavily embedded within the social fabric; meaning is not just in the spoken words but in the environment, the relationship between speakers, and non-verbal cues. Communication in these cultures tends to be indirect, implicit, and harmony oriented. Conversely, many foreign creators originate from Low-context (LC) backgrounds (such as North America or Northern Europe), where communication is characterized as being explicit, direct, and literal—relying almost entirely on the verbalized message.

For foreign online content creators, this dichotomy creates a unique communication gap that serves as a primary content opportunity. In their role as "Digital Cultural Decoders," creators often explicitly vocalize the implicit rules of the host culture. For instance, an LC creator might produce content that meticulously explains the unspoken social hierarchies in a Thai workplace or the indirect ways Taiwanese people express refusal. By making the implicit (HC) explicit (LC), they add immense value for international viewers while building rapport with local audiences who feel seen and understood. Furthermore, their execution style—such as adopting a softer tone, using local honorifics, or editing videos to emphasize social harmony—reflects their strategic transition from an analytical outsider to a participant who respects the host country's contextual nuances.

Acculturation and integration

Berry's (1997) model of Acculturation provided a multidimensional framework to analyze the psychological and sociological changes that occur when individuals from different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact. He proposed that acculturation was not a simple linear path toward assimilation, but a complex choice based on two core dimensions: 1) the extent to which individuals wished to maintain their heritage culture and identity, and 2) the extent to which they sought to engage with and participate in the host society. From these dimensions, four distinct strategies emerged: (1) Integration: The individual maintained their original cultural identity while simultaneously seeking to interact with and adopt elements of the host culture. In this study, this was termed "Digital Integration," where a creator retained their unique foreign perspective (e.g., Western humor or analytical style) but actively embraced local traditions, language, and social values. (2) Assimilation: The individual gave up their original cultural identity to fully immerse themselves in the host culture. In the digital context, an assimilated creator might try so hard to become local that they lost the unique "outsider appeal" that initially attracted their audience. (3) Separation: The individual held onto their original culture and avoided interaction with the host society. This was often seen in creators who remained within "Expat Bubbles," producing content that critiqued or mocked the host country from a distant, detached perspective. Finally, (4) Marginalization: The individual lost interest in both their original culture and the host culture, leading to social alienation. This strategy was rarely observed among successful content creators as it lacked a relatable cultural base. For foreign online content creators in Thailand and Taiwan, Integration is hypothesized as the most effective strategy for building long-term sustainable engagement. By publicly performing the act of integration—such as showing their language journey or participating in local festivals—they signal a respect for the host country (HC) while maintaining the clarity of their native perspective (LC). This dual-performance creates a "Hybrid Identity" that local audiences perceive as both authentic and respectful.

The concept of the stranger and outsider perspective

Simmel's (1908) classic sociological figure, "The Stranger," was defined not as a wanderer who "comes today and goes tomorrow", but as a person who "comes today and stays tomorrow." This individual existed in a state of paradox—physically "near" to the host society yet socially "remote." This unique position granted the stranger a distinctive form of "Objectivity," a quality that Simmel argued did not mean a lack of engagement, but rather a specific blend of nearness and detachment.

In the contemporary digital landscape, this concept had evolved into the role of the "Professional Stranger" (Agar, 2008; Rogers, 1999). Foreign content creators leverage this objectivity to perform "defamiliarization"—taking everyday cultural practices that locals might overlook or take for granted (such as the ubiquity of 7-Eleven culture in Thailand or the melodic garbage trucks in Taiwan) and presenting them as novel, meaningful, or even exotic experiences. Recent scholar on digital nomads and global vloggers (Thompson, 2021) suggested that this stranger status served as a form of strategic marginality. It allows creators the freedom to bypass local social hierarchies and ask probing questions that a native resident might find awkward or taboo. This objectivity acts as a "Third Eye," providing a perspective that is refreshing for locals (who see their culture through a new lens) and educational for international viewers. Consequently, the foreign creator's outsider perspective becomes their most valuable cultural capital, enabling them to curate narratives that bridge the gap between indigenous reality and global perception.

Cultural capital and digital intermediation

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of Cultural Capital referred to the social assets of a person—including education, intellect, style of speech, and physical appearance—that promoted social mobility in a stratified society. In the context of foreign online content creators, this study expands Bourdieu's framework into the digital realm, identifying three primary states of cultural capital: 1) The Embodied State: This manifests as the creator's digital fluency and cultural competence. It includes long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body, such as the mastery of host culture nuances (e.g., local language proficiency

or social etiquette). 2) The Objectified State: This involves cultural goods or "visual assets." In the digital age, creators utilize this by featuring traditional clothing, authentic local cuisine, or significant historical landmarks in their content. These objects serve as semiotic signals of their immersion and respect for the host country's heritage. 3) The Institutionalized State: While traditionally referring to academic credentials, in the influencer economy, this encompasses verified status, partnerships with official institutions (e.g., tourism board), or formal awards from the host country. This institutional recognition converts their cultural influence into a formal, sanctioned authority.

The role of Digital Intermediation is where this capital is leveraged. Creators act as gatekeepers who curate and commodify cultural experiences for a global market. They perform cultural translation by selecting specific aspects of Thai or Taiwanese life that possess high engagement value. This intermediation is a form of power; the creator decides which parts of the host culture are exotic, authentic, or modern, thereby shaping the global perception of these nations. Through this process, they successfully convert their accumulated cultural capital into social capital (follower growth) and ultimately economic capital (monetization and sponsorships).

Literature reviews

Digital influencers, platform affordances and soft power

The concept of Soft Power, coined by Nye (2004), referred to a nation's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. In the digital age, this power is increasingly decentralized, shifting from state-led propaganda to individual-led narratives. Recent scholars (Liu, 2025; Manfredi et al., 2024) argued that digital influencers—particularly those who traverse cultural boundaries—had become potent agents of public diplomacy. Unlike official state media, which may be viewed with skepticism, foreign content creators provide a crucial 'third-party endorsement.' As demonstrated in the case of global influencers (Liu, 2025), their perceived independence and authenticity granted them a unique credibility that official government campaigns often lack, effectively humanizing national narratives through an unscripted outsider's perspective.

Complementing these findings, recent empirical studies further highlighted that the success of these creators depended heavily on their ability to strategically display cultural capital. In the context of East and Southeast Asia, this capital acted as a bridge to overcome cultural distance. For instance, research on foreign YouTubers in Taiwan, Chang and Chang (2019) demonstrated that “Embodied Capital”—manifested through the mastery of local social norms and etiquette—was essential for constructing a relatable digital identity. A creator’s ability to navigate complex Taiwanese social expectations fostered understanding and trust. Expanding on this, Kitnur (2025) underscored that cultural adaptation was effectively articulated through ‘digital storytelling’. By utilizing the affordances of YouTube, creators did not merely

navigate complex social expectations to nurture reliance, but they also transformed these intercultural experiences into powerful narratives of belonging. This storytelling process allowed creators to manifest their cultural capital in a way that resonated with local audiences, thereby solidifying their role as influential transcultural mediators. In addition, Wang (2025) illustrated that identity construction on niche social media such as REDnote required a more nuanced approach to ‘Hybrid Identity.’ Influencers on these platforms often synchronized their foreign backgrounds with local cultural sensibilities to establish authenticity. This process further demonstrated that digital identity was not static but was continuously negotiated through the interplay of personal agency and platform-specific affordances.

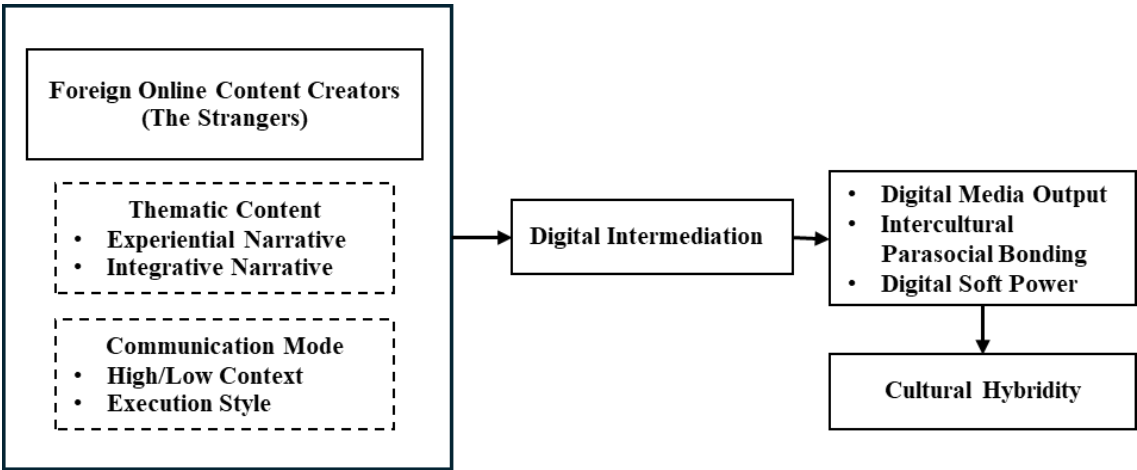


Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Similarly, the display of “Objectified Capital” in Thailand served as a potent vehicle for digital intermediation. By highlighting experiential soft power, specifically culinary heritage and the “Land of Smiles” hospitality—creators synchronized their personal narratives with the government’s “5F” policy (Food, Film, Fashion, Fighting, Festival). This strategic synergy allowed foreign influencers to act as credible third-party endorsers, broadening the accessibility of Thai cultural heritage to global market (Jongsuksomsakul, 2024; Xiao, 2021; Yan et al., 2025;).

The decentralization of Soft Power has allowed these global influencers to become primary agents of national branding; however, they do not operate in a vacuum. Recent research suggested that they must

constantly negotiate with platform affordances (Bhatia et al., 2025). Affordances—the technical features of a platform (such as algorithms, hashtagging, or video length) that enable specific actions—shaped how creators practice vernacular creativity to represent foreign cultures. This ongoing negotiation between the creator’s intent and the platform’s algorithmic logic influenced whether cultural representation remained a superficial aesthetic or achieved significant sociocultural depth (Bhatia et al., 2025; Mark & Ahmed, 2023). Expanding on this technical negotiation, Wang (2025) demonstrated that unlike the broad reach of YouTube, REDnote’s affordances—such as its interest-based recommendation system and emphasis on visual-textual interplay—compelled creators to synchronize

their personal narratives with localized cultural sensibilities. This strategic alignment, achieved through the use of niche hashtags and community-centric engagement, demonstrated that platform affordances did not merely facilitate communication but actively governed the boundaries of authentic cultural representation. Ultimately, social media platforms acted as powerful agents in shaping cross-cultural perceptions (Mark & Ahmed, 2023), fostering empathy by exposing users to diverse values instantaneously.

As asserted by L'Etang (2009), digital soft power functioned as a double-edged sword. While it significantly enhanced a nation's image, the inherent objectivity of independent creators implied a risk of highlighting negative societal dimensions. This autonomy generated a complex and occasionally contradictory national narrative—one that remained beyond the absolute control of state agencies.

Cultural values, participatory culture, and parasocial interaction

The consumption of cross-cultural content is deeply influenced by the audience's cultural values. According to Park et al. (2017), cultural distance significantly affected how global audiences consume YouTube videos. Han et al. (2024) further emphasized that cultural dimensions—such as Individualism vs. Collectivism and Uncertainty Avoidance—dictated user engagement patterns (likes, shares, and comments) on international platforms. Parasocial Interaction (PSI), a concept first introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956), described the one-sided psychological relationship that media users developed with media personae. Although the viewer knew the creator only through a digital screen, they perceived a sense of intimacy and friendship. In the era of social media, PSI had evolved from a passive experience into a more participatory and bidirectional engagement (Giles, 2002). For foreign content creators, PSI was a crucial mechanism for bridging cultural divides. Recent research (Chung & Cho, 2017) indicated that PSI was significantly enhanced by self-disclosure and authenticity, which were hallmarks of the vlog format. Liu (2025) highlighted that this bond was further amplified when creators act as a 'cultural bridge' between local realities and global perspectives. In this context, the audience's role transcended passive observation; viewers became

'digital mentors' who actively provided advice, corrections, and cultural insights within the comment sections. As Liu (2025) demonstrated, this bidirectional engagement reinforced the social bond, integrating the creator into the local digital community and fostering deeper mutual cultural empathy. The role of foreign social media influencers has evolved into that of 'cultural brokers' who navigate complex ideological landscapes to foster intercultural understanding. According to Li et al. (2025), these influencers provided a unique 'third-party viewpoint' that allowed audiences to negotiate their understanding of both foreign societies and their own national identity. This process was mediated by a tripartite filtering mechanism—comprising cultural, state, and commercial filters—where audiences actively evaluated the authenticity of the content. Rather than accepting overt propaganda, viewers tended to favor 'friendly yet critical' perspectives, shifting their role from passive consumers to active participants who engaged with influencers as credible intermediaries in an increasingly platformed society (Li et al., 2025).

This engagement was often framed within Participatory Culture (Sethi, 2025), where fans and viewers were active participants in building a collective identity. For foreign creators, this participation facilitates PSI, where the audience feels an intimate connection to the creator's acculturation journey. In a cross-cultural context, PSI often manifests through the shared struggle narrative. When a foreign creator shares their vulnerability—such as their difficulty in learning the tonal nuances of the Thai language or their culture shock when navigating Taiwan's complex recycling systems—it triggers a protective and empathetic response from the local audience. This phenomenon, often referred to as "Intercultural Parasocial Bonding," transformed the creator from a mere traveler into a relatable friend who was trying their best to integrate (Sethi, 2025).

The sense of perceived intimacy in digital spaces is a pivotal factor in social media engagement. According to Gong (2021), PSI created an 'illusive mutual awareness' that fostered a strong psychological bond between creators and their audience. This interaction was significantly amplified on microblogging platforms, where creators functioned as a bridge by sharing personal narratives and engaging in

real-time updates (Gong & Li, 2017). In this environment, the audience's role evolved from passive observation to active participation; followers provided direct feedback through comments and retweets, effectively becoming an integral part of the creator's digital community and reinforcing mutual empathy through bidirectional engagement (Gong, 2021).

Digital media and the construction of cultural identity

Digital media applications play a transformative role in the construction of cultural identity. Through symbolic representation and social engagement, creators help redefine what it means to be a global citizen. Yao (2025) highlighted that technological affordances acted as mediators, where symbolic representation allowed creators to articulate their evolving identities in a foreign land. Huang (2024) argued that social media interactions in the era of digital globalization were heavily influenced by Social Stratification, where individuals with high cultural and social capital were better positioned to influence cross-cultural narratives.

Moreover, platforms served as fluid spaces where cultural heritage was digitized and disseminated (Huang, 2024). For foreign creators, this means their content contributes to the preservation and reinterpretation of the host country's heritage. Digital platforms thus functioned as contact zones (Pratt, 1991)—liminal spaces where diverse cultural backgrounds intersected, leading to the creation of Cultural Hybridity.

The role of digital platforms in intercultural dialogue

Digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok functioned as third spaces (Bhabha, 1994)—liminal zones where the traditional boundaries between the “self” (the foreign creator) and the “other” (the host culture) were continuously negotiated. Unlike physical spaces, these digital environments served as contact zones (Pratt, 1991) where cultural differences were not only displayed but were actively debated and hybridized. According to Oldenburg (1989), digital platforms fulfilled the role of a great good place, providing a neutral ground for informal social interaction that was separate from home and work. Focusing on the practical dynamics of these spaces,

Seotan and Mark (2023) and Mark and Ahmed (2023) further elucidated how these spaces function as decentralized ecosystems for intercultural dialogue. While these platforms facilitated instantaneous global conversations that bypassed traditional media hierarchies, they did not remain neutral. Instead, they acted as powerful agents in shaping cross-cultural perceptions by fostering empathy and exposing users to diverse values (Mark & Ahmed, 2023). However, this dialogue was simultaneously governed by algorithmic curation and narrative power, which Seotan and Mark (2023) identified as critical factors that could either bridge cultural divides or reinforce existing biases. Thus, the digital platform is not merely a backdrop for interaction but a dynamic mediator that dictates the authenticity and depth of the resulting intercultural exchange.

The “Comment Section” emerges as the most critical site for this intercultural dialogue. It serves as a space for collaborative sense-making, where local audiences act as cultural gatekeepers. When a creator presents a cultural symbol, the audience provides immediate feedback that validates, corrects, or expands upon the creator's interpretation. This process represented “Digital Multiculturalism” (Kraidy, 2005), where hybrid identities were co-created through the interaction between the creator's outsider lens and the audience's indigenous insight. Furthermore, algorithms on these platforms played a significant role in Cultural Proximity (Straubhaar, 1991), pushing local content to international viewers while simultaneously exposing local audiences to foreign interpretations of their own culture. This reciprocal exchange facilitates a decentralized form of cultural diplomacy, where digital platforms act as catalysts for global-local understanding and the evolution of cultural hybridity in the digital age. Recent empirical studies further emphasized the complexity of this interactive space. Reimer et al. (2023) asserted that user comments provided a unique arena for ‘deliberative interaction,’ where diverse discursive practices—ranging from emotional support to rational-critical debate—allowed for the inclusion of alternative voices that might otherwise be marginalized. This inclusivity enriched the intercultural dialogue by providing a platform for nuanced, multi-perspective exchanges. However, this digital contact zone can also become an ‘unruly public arena,’ as Dobber and

Hameleers (2025) caution. Their research suggested that exposure to uncivil or trust-eroding sentiments within comment sections could distort perceptions and undermine the very empathy that intercultural exchange aimed to foster. Consequently, while the comment section acted as a vital bridge for ‘Digital Multiculturalism,’ its role as a constructive mediator was continuously negotiated between the benefits of open participation and the risks of social friction.

Methodology

This research utilized a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative paradigms to achieve a holistic understanding of how cultural boundaries were navigated in the digital sphere. By combining the depth of Content Analysis with the breadth of Descriptive Statistics, the study ensured a rigorous triangulation of data concerning creators, their narratives, and audience reception.

Population and sample selection

The population for this study was multidimensional, consisting of: 1) foreign online content creators in Thailand and Taiwan, 2) the corpus of video content they produced, and 3) the digital audience that engaged with their work.

Sampling of content creators

The study employed Purposive Sampling to identify 20 key foreign content creators on YouTube (10 from Thailand and 10 from Taiwan). This choice was made due to the platform’s long-form content format, which allows for more in-depth cultural narratives and extensive comment-based interaction. The selection was based on the following academic criteria: 1) thematic relevance: content focused on tourism, lifestyle, local culture, and intercultural perspectives, 2) consistency and recency: a track record of regular and ongoing content publication, and 3) influence and reach: a minimum threshold of 10,000 subscribers per channel.

Sampling of video content

From the identified 20 creators, the researchers selected the top 10 most-viewed videos from each creator’s channel. This resulted in a total sample size of 200 videos (100 from Thailand and 100 from Taiwan),

ensuring that the data analyzed represented the content with the highest impact and cultural resonance.

Sampling of audience feedback

The study analyzed all audience interactions within the sample videos, focusing on quantitative metrics (Likes/Dislikes) and qualitative feedback (Comments) to assess the effectiveness of the creators’ cross-cultural communication.

Research instruments

The research utilized a suite of structured instruments designed to capture the complexity of digital narratives:

1) Content and Execution Recording Form: This form was used to document metadata and qualitative attributes of each video, including title, duration, publication date, view count, spoken language, subtitles, synopsis, presentation style, and technical filming techniques.

2) Creator Information Sheet: A centralized form to track creator-specific variables such as channel name, platform utilized, start date, total subscriber count, and cumulative views.

3) Audience Engagement Form: Designed to capture viewer responses, including comment volume, “Like” and “Dislike” counts, and the textual content of comments for thematic analysis.

4) Classification Database: A synthesized repository of secondary data and theoretical frameworks categorized to support the qualitative induction process.

Data analysis and interpretation

The analysis was conducted through four integrated stages:

Step 1 Creator and Video Stratification: Creators and their most influential videos were ranked and categorized. This established a hierarchy of cultural influence, where the most-viewed content served as the primary unit of analysis.

Step 2 Qualitative Analysis (Analytic Induction): The core of the study involved Analytic Induction, where video content and execution styles were interpreted against the theoretical frameworks (High/Low context, Acculturation). This stage aimed to

explain the “how” and “why” behind the creators’ intercultural perspectives.

Step3 Quantitative Categorization: Descriptive statistics, specifically Percentages, were used to categorize thematic content and classify audience feedback into positive or negative sentiments.

Step 4 Comparative Synthesis: Findings from Thailand and Taiwan were compared to identify regional patterns in digital cross-cultural communication, allowing for a broader understanding of East Asian digital intermediation.

Findings

The findings of this study are categorized according to the four primary research objectives, synthesized through the theoretical lens of cross-cultural communication.

Profile of the sample content creators

Before analyzing the content, it was essential to establish the profile of the selected foreign online content creators. These individuals represented a significant digital presence in their respective host countries. To protect the privacy of the participants and maintain academic ethical standards, each foreign online content creator was assigned a unique code (e.g., TH-01 for Thailand-based creators and TW-01 for Taiwan-based creators). Table 1 provides a comprehensive summary of the 20 selected creators, highlighting their cultural origins, reach, and content specializations.

Content categories and thematic analysis

Based on the data presented in Table 1, the data analysis revealed a significant divergence in content strategies, reflecting how creators negotiate their role as digital cultural intermediaries in two different host societies.

Thailand: The experiential and participatory narrative

In Thailand, the content produced by foreign creators (TH-01 to TH-10) was heavily categorized as “Experience-oriented”. The analysis of Table 1 showed that top-tier creators like TH-01 (USA) and TH-02 (South Korea), who had combined views exceeding 3.7 billion, focused extensively on tourism and gastronomy.

A unique thematic trend identified in the Thai sample was the high prevalence of “Task-oriented cultural challenges.” This was particularly prominent among creators from East Asian backgrounds, such as TH-02, TH-04, and TH-10 (South Korea), as well as TH-08 (Japan). These creators often filmed themselves undertaking local missions, such as surviving on a 100-baht budget, eating extremely spicy street food, or navigating complex local transportation. This narrative of “foreigners navigating local intricacies” framed Thailand as a space for sensorial discovery and hedonic exploration. The results suggested that for creators in Thailand, the stranger status was used as an asset to highlight the exotic and vibrant nature of the host culture, which resonated deeply with global audiences seeking novelty.

Taiwan: The sociocultural and integration narrative

Conversely, creators in Taiwan (TW-01 to TW-10) adopted a “Value-oriented” narrative, emphasizing cultural exploration and family life. Even among creators with significant reach like TW-01 (Japan) and TW-02 (France), the focus remained on decoding Taiwan’s daily social fabric rather than short-term travel experiences. The content analysis showed that TW-05 (USA) and TW-07 (South Africa) frequently produced content revolving around inter-cultural family dynamics and the integration of Western lifestyles into Taiwanese society. This reflected a narrative of “Digital Integration”, where creators acted as long-term residents rather than transient observers. Taiwan was presented as a sophisticated society where safety, modern convenience, and traditional Confucian values coexist. The intercultural perspective in Taiwan was characterized by a deep-dive into the host country’s social values, positioning the creator as a bridge for deep cultural understanding.

Execution styles as forms of cultural adaptation

Execution styles are not merely media production techniques; they function as a primary mechanism for digital cultural acculturation and the manifestation of strategic communicative labor used to bridge the understanding gap between native Low-context (LC) backgrounds and the High-context (HC) host environments. Table 2 summarizes the key components identified from the analysis.

The data in Table 2 revealed a distinctive strategic bifurcation in how creators perform digital acculturation. In Thailand, creators predominantly operated within an affective dimension. By adopting the “Travel Buddy” persona, they prioritized emotional resonance and sensory immersion. This was evidenced by their focus on linguistic adaptation via phonetic slang and non-verbal performance through the “Wai” and constant smiling, which aligned with the High-context Thai cultural value of fun and harmony. Visually, these creators leveraged platform affordances to frame Thailand as a vibrant and accessible experiential playground, fostering connectivity through grassroots interactions with street vendors and local citizens.

Conversely, creators in Taiwan adopted a normative dimension, positioning themselves as

“Cultural Decoders.” Their strategic labor focused on cognitive translation rather than just sensory discovery. Their linguistic adaptation was notably more formal and bilingual, aimed at demonstrating a serious commitment to local integration. The non-verbal performance here emphasized social compliance—such as following strict public order and recycling protocols—which translated the implicit High-context values of collective responsibility into explicit digital narratives. Visually, the content framing prioritizes safety and infrastructure, branding Taiwan as a structured and sophisticated society. By collaborating with institutional bodies or traditional family units, these creators validated Taiwan’s socio-political values, moving beyond exoticism to achieve a deeper level of sociocultural depth.

Table 1 Profile summary of selected foreign online content creators (n=20)

Creator	Origin	Launch Date	Primary Content Focus	Total Subscribers	Total Videos	Total Views
TH-01	USA	Feb 3, 2009	Tourism/ Gastronomy	10.4M	1,392	2.16B
TH-02	South Korea	Jan 5, 2017	Lifestyle/ Task-oriented Cultural Challenges	8.87M	1,055	1.56B
TH-03	Japan	Jan 25, 2013	Tourism/ Daily Life Vlogs	9.10K	917	169M
TH-04	South Korea	May 27, 2019	Daily Life Vlogs/ Task-oriented Cultural Challenges	6.95K	1,210	233M
TH-05	Japan	Oct 8, 2018	Tourism	4.97K	295	54M
TH-06	Canada	Mar 20, 2020	Daily Life Vlogs	4.14K	510	48M
TH-07	Japan	May 18, 2020	Tourism/ Daily Life Vlogs	3.35K	164	37M
TH-08	Japan	Sep 3, 2014	Gastronomy/ Task-oriented Cultural Challenges	2.50K	1,025	38M
TH-09	Germany	Sep 21, 2012	Daily Life Vlogs	2.29K	213	29M
TH-10	South Korea	2019, Feb 13	Gastronomy/ Task-oriented Cultural Challenges	1.79K	113	13M
TW-01	Japan	Sep 24, 2010	Cooking	1.8M	788	201M
TW-02	France	Sep 12, 2012	Gastronomy/ Cultural Exploration	1.74M	350	353M
TW-03	Gambia	Mar 10, 2020	Task-oriented Challenges/ Cultural Exploration	7.20K	532	154M
TW-04	USA	2012, May 16	Task-oriented Challenges/ Cultural Exploration	5.45K	576	76M
TW-05	USA	Sep 21, 2017	Family/ Cultural Exploration	3.56K	200	60M
TW-06	UK	2017, Mar 29	Daily Life Vlogs/ Cultural Exploration	3.27K	440	35M
TW-07	South Africa	Apr 29, 2017	Family/ Cultural Exploration	2.96K	101	24M

Creator	Origin	Launch Date	Primary Content Focus	Total Subscribers	Total Videos	Total Views
TW-08	Sweden	Jun 12, 2008	Cultural Exploration/ Discussion	2.88K	491	45M
TW-09	USA	Feb 2, 2012	Music/ Cultural Exploration	2.46K	238	38M
TW-10	France	Nov 7, 2012	Cultural Exploration	1.80K	61	13M

*Note: Data collected as of April 2023.

Table 2 Execution styles as forms of digital cultural adaptation

Execution style component	Thailand	Taiwan
Narrative Voice & Persona	“The Travel Buddy”: Friendly, fun-loving, and expressive in reactions.	“The Cultural Decoder”: Calm, insightful, and acting as a “Translator” of social codes.
Linguistic Adaptation	Phonetic & Slang: Focus on learning short Thai words/slang to build friendship.	Bilingual & Formal: Focus on correct Mandarin and code-switching to show integration.
Non-Verbal Performance	High-context Etiquette: The “Wai” greeting, constant smiling, and public respect.	Social Compliance: Showing compliance with social rules
Visual Content Framing	Sensory & Vibrant: Focusing on food close-ups and bustling market energy.	Structured & Safe: Focusing on high-tech convenience, safety, and urban infrastructure.
Social Connectivity	Grassroots Collab: Interaction with street vendors and local influencers.	Institutional/Family Collab: Partnerships with government or local in-laws.

*Note: Data collected as of April 2023.

Audience reception and digital dialogue

The digital dialogue identified from 10,000 comments across 20 channels revealed that engagement was a co-creative process termed “collaborative sense-making.” The audiences did not merely consume content but actively participate in shaping the cultural narrative. Table 3 summarizes the comparative reception themes between the two contexts.

The comparative data in Table 3 found that audience reception was not universal but was moderated by indigenous cultural frameworks. In Thailand, the dialogue was distinctly affective, characterized by a strong host-guest dynamic. Audiences frequently adopted the role of encouraging mentors, viewing the creator’s linguistic struggles not as a barrier but as an endearing attempt at acculturation. This led to a digital neighbor role, where comments were often filled with life encouragement and emotional warmth, reinforcing

the national pride associated with Thai hospitality and its sensory charms.

In contrast, the dialogue in Taiwan was predominantly cognitive and value-based. Audiences evaluated content through the lens of social decorum and collective responsibility. They acted as validating translators who respected the creator’s cognitive effort to master Mandarin and decode the unspoken rules of Taiwanese life. Consequently, the audience assumed the role of secondary narrators, often providing lengthy historical or social context to verify the creator’s claims. This validated Taiwan’s societal pride in its democratic infrastructure and stable social order. Ultimately, these interactions transformed social media into digital contact zones, where foreign creators and local audiences co-constructed a hybrid cultural reality that promoted mutual understanding and empathy.

Table 3 Themes of audience reception and digital dialogue

Reception Dimension	Thailand	Taiwan
Primary Engagement Themes	Authenticity & Personality: Focus on the creator’s sincerity, friendliness, and smiling persona.	Values & Decorum: Focus on social responsibility, family bonds, and respect for order.
Linguistic Feedback	“Encouraging Mentors”: High praise for effort in speaking Thai, offering phonetic help and food names.	“Validating Translators”: Appreciation for fluent Mandarin and the ability to decode complex social nuances.
Cultural Validation	National Pride: Gratefulness for showing the charms of Thailand and hidden local gems to the world.	Societal Pride: Gratitude for showcasing Taiwan’s safety, infrastructure, and democratic values.
Audience Role	“Digital Neighbors”: Providing emotional support, life encouragement, and local recommendations.	“Secondary Narrators”: Providing historical context, social verification, and cross-cultural comparisons.
Interaction Nature	Affective/Hospitality-based: Driven by the host-guest dynamic and the spirit of fun.	Cognitive/Value-based: Driven by shared values of community harmony and collective progress.

*Note: Data collected as of April 2023.

Discussion and conclusion

This study investigated the digital narratives and communicative strategies of 20 foreign online content creators in Thailand and Taiwan. The findings unequivocally demonstrated that these creators had evolved into pivotal Digital Cultural Intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1986), moving beyond simple entertainment to facilitate a decentralized form of cultural diplomacy.

The research concluded that the divergence in content categories—Experience-oriented in Thailand and Value-oriented in Taiwan—reflected distinct and purposeful modes of Digital Acculturation (Berry, 1997). In Thailand, creators leveraged ‘the stranger’s objectivity’ to transform everyday cultural assets into a high impact ‘Experiential Soft Power.’ This narrative style does not merely promote culture; it strategically rebrands the nation as a premier global destination for sensory consumption, directly driving tourism and the cultural economy. This aligned with the ‘Cultural Filter’ identified by Li et al. (2025), which positioned foreign influencers as trusted cultural brokers. By navigating these filters, creators in Thailand successfully bypassed traditional skepticism, presenting cultural assets as authentic experiences rather than manufactured tourism products. Conversely, in Taiwan, creators engaged in a deeper “sociocultural decoding,” aligning their

narratives with High-context values such as family harmony, social stability and democratic progressiveness. This ‘Value-oriented Soft Power’ projects a ‘Normative Power’ that attracts strategic allies. This strategic alignment serves as a sophisticated navigation of the ‘State’ and ‘Commercial Filters’ (Li et al., 2025); by providing a ‘friendly yet critical’ third-party viewpoint, creators in Taiwan avoided the stigma of performative flattery, thereby granting their narratives the legitimacy needed to engage high-value global stakeholders.

Regarding execution styles, the universal adoption of the Vlog format and collaborative strategies functioned as a strategic instrument of cultural mediation, rather than a communicative bridge. These formats did not simply mitigate friction between the creators’ native Low-context backgrounds and the host countries’ High-context norms (Hall, 1976); they actively reconfigured the intercultural encounter. By chronicling personal acculturation struggles, creators systematically fostered Parasocial Interaction (PSI). As argued by Gong (2021), this PSI created an ‘illusive mutual awareness’ and a psychological bond that transcended mere content consumption. This was not a passive social byproduct, but a deliberate strategic maneuver that transformed distant foreign observers

into authoritative digital neighbors whose perceived intimacy granted them the power to validate the host culture for a global audience.

Finally, this study asserted that digital platforms were not passive backdrops but volatile ‘Contact Zones’ (Pratt, 1991) and ‘Third Spaces’ (Bhabha, 1994) where national identity was aggressively co-constructed. The collaborative sense-making in the comment section proved that intercultural dialogue was a high-stakes, co-creative process which constructed a new “Cultural Hybridity” (Kraidy, 2005). Ultimately, these creators function as sophisticated soft power agents whose divergent narrative styles dictate a nation’s global competitive advantage. While recent studies, such as Liu (2025) and Li et al. (2025), observed that foreign influencers can humanize a national brand through unscripted narratives to generate positive affective responses, this study revealed a more nuanced strategic layer. Digital soft power is not a monolithic construct; rather, it is a targeted instrument where Thailand’s experiential narratives drive cultural consumption, while Taiwan’s value-oriented narratives attract strategic ideological allies. Thus, creators do not merely ‘humanize’ brands; they strategically engineer global-local understanding through a complex negotiation of cultural and ideological filters to serve specific national interests.

Practical recommendations

For online content creators: Success and longevity in a foreign digital market require a transition from exoticism to sincere integration. Creators should prioritize mastering High-context communicative nuances, mastering the local language, and demonstrating respect for local taboos. Transparency regarding the shared struggle of adaptation can significantly enhance parasocial authenticity and audience loyalty.

For public diplomacy and tourism agencies: Government bodies in Thailand and Taiwan should recognize these creators as organic ambassadors who provide an authentic voice often more trusted than state-led propaganda. Strategic support should move toward providing these intermediaries with deeper access to heritage stories and marginalized cultural sites, ensuring a diverse and credible representation of the nation’s Soft Power.

For educational institutions: Curricula in Communication Arts and Intercultural Studies should be updated to include “Digital Intermediation” as a core competency. Students must be trained to analyze how digital architecture and algorithmic cultural proximity shape the way national identities are curated and consumed on a global scale.

Suggestions for future research

1) Algorithmic influence on representation: Future research should conduct a comparative analysis between long-form content (YouTube) and short-form content (TikTok/Reels) to determine how different algorithmic structures affect the depth of cultural representation.

2) Longitudinal analysis of Acculturation: A longitudinal study tracking a single creator’s stylistic evolution over 5–10 years would yield profound insights into the psychological transition from stranger to integrated resident.

3) Cross-regional comparison: Expanding this framework to other East Asian or Southeast Asian hubs (e.g., Singapore, Vietnam, or Japan) would help identify whether the “Experiential vs. Value” dichotomy is a localized or regional phenomenon.

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

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CRedit author statement

Pholsaran Sanyatip: Methodology, Formal analysis, Data Curation. **Rotchanakorn Baengthit:** Methodology, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review and Editing. **Sirasa Sornsri:** Conceptualization, Methodology. **Kitiyaporn Intipeek:** Investigation, Data Curation, Visualization. **Pariwat Sirakiatsakul:** Resources, Validation, Supervision. **Y.C. Lo:** Conceptualization, Resources.

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