



Cross-Cultural Differences in Tourism Communication on Instagram: A Comparative Analysis of Parallel Chinese and U.S. Accounts

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ABSTRACT

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This study compares tourism communication on Instagram across parallel accounts aimed at Chinese and U.S. audiences. As social media now plays a central role in tourism promotion, the study considers how cultural values influence digital messaging across different markets. Limited research has explored how cultural adaptation operates within Instagram's platform environment. Drawing on cross cultural communication theory, this research investigates that whether collectivism versus individualism, power distance and high versus low context communication are reflected in Instagram posts. Whether these differences influence user engagement. A quantitative content analysis was conducted on 1,973 posts from May to August 2024, with supplemented by 2,570 posts from the same period in 2025. All posts were coded across three dimensions and statistical tests examined content patterns and engagement which is measured by likes and comments. The results show clear cultural differences in communication style. The Chinese account showed stronger collectivist tendencies and more implicit, context rich messaging, meanwhile the U.S. account emphasized individualist themes and direct expression. What is notable, however, these differences did not result in statistically significant variations in engagement, although culturally congruent posts showed slightly higher interaction descriptively. The results suggest that cultural values shape communication strategies, but Instagram's platform logic may constrain their impact on audience response.

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Introduction

Social media has transformed the way tourism companies and destinations reach out to the world. Instagram is one of the platforms that has been important for the promotion of tourism, because they have enabled the creation of destination images, visual storytelling and communication with users in various cultural contexts (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). At the same time, these platforms are situated in a context of standardized technological and algorithmic settings, and this creates important questions concerning the representation and perception of cultural differences in the online communication spaces (van Dijck, 2013).

Based on the theory of cross-cultural communication, this study proposes that cultural values influence communication styles. Some of the most discussed differences in the literature are those of collectivism and individualism, power distance, and high- versus low-context communication (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001;

Triandis, 1995). These dimensions affect message framing, meaning, and meaning-making, and the interpretation of both text and pictures. Cultural values can impact the approach to content in tourism communication, whether it's personal or group experiences, direct or indirect expression, or explicit or implicit meanings (de Mooij, 2019).

Past research has demonstrated the significance of social media on crafting the destination image, tourist perceptions, and user behaviours (Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Govers and Go, 2009). Likes and comments are among the most frequent engagement metrics used to measure the effectiveness of communication and reaction of the audience (Huertas and Marine-Roig 2016). Despite the common belief that cultural adaptation leads to better communication effectiveness, however, there are relatively few studies that have looked at whether any measurable differences in engagement occurs on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube when using culturally differentiated communication styles.

It is important for companies with parallel social media accounts geared toward various cultural segments. Platforms might constrain or transform communication practices through their visual formats, visibility (as determined by the algorithms), and the standardized ways of interacting with them. Therefore, it is not known whether the observed intercultural differences in communication style are linked to differences in users' engagement.

The present study investigates the cross-cultural differences in the communication of tourism in this instance, through the use of Instagram, and is based on two parallel accounts aimed at Chinese and U.S. audiences. The focus of the analysis is on three cultural dimensions namely: cultural orientation = collectivism versus individualism; power distance; communication context = high-context versus low-context communication. This study uses content analysis and statistical testing to achieve this goal, to get a better understanding of the cultural communication patterns in the environment of a shared platform and the impact on audience response.

Based on this context, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the key differences in terms of content and communication style in the Chinese and U.S. Instagram tourism pages?

RQ2: To what extent do these differences align with cross-cultural communication patterns, particularly high- versus low-context communication?

RQ3: Are there significant differences in user engagement with Instagram when the communication strategy is different across cultures?

RQ4: How influential are platform logics in the convergence of communication practices in cultural contexts?

Literature review

Cross-Cultural Communication and Digital Media

The staple of cross-cultural communication study claims that cultural values contribute to the creation, transmission, and reception of messages. The idea of high-context and low-context communication by Hall (1976) is among the strongest paradigms. High context cultures are based more on underground meaning, mutual understanding, and symbolism, whereas low context cultures underline articulate, direct, and explicit communication. China is usually considered a high-context culture, and American is considered to be a low-context culture (Hall, 1976; Gudykunst, and Ting-Toomey, 1988). These differences have typically been evident in advertising, branding, and media communication in cross-cultural media (de Mooij, 2019).

In addition to the Hall framework, Hofstede (2001) dimensions of culture especially on individualism/collectivism shed more light on cross-cultural difference. Collectivist cultures emphasize

group identity and harmony, as well as relational communication and individualistic cultures emphasize personal expression and direct persuasion (Hofstede, 1999; Triandis, 1995). These cultural characteristics are reflected in marketing communication in message framing, emotional tone, and pictorial image (de Mooij, 2019).

However, the classic cultural theories need to be revisited in the digital world. Social media forums are never neutral and the technological structure of these sites and the ways of interaction constructively influence the way we communicate. Instagram instruments graphics and brevity, and a feedback measure (likes and comments) are prioritized, and this may solidify cross-cultural patterns of communication (Kozinets et al., 2010; van Dijck, 2013). As a result, both cultural differentiation and convergence can be identified as communicative phenomena on the global platform.

This brings us to another critical theoretical issue: How far do platform logics replace or change cultural expression? Others suggest that digital spaces facilitate homogenization of content due to sharing formats and algorithmic visibility (van Dijck, 2013), but others insist that cultural differences remain due to local ways of adapting (Kraidy, 2005). Therefore, cultural communication via the social media needs to be perceived as a dynamic interaction between the cultural values and the constraints of the platforms.

Tourism Communication, Destination Image, and Social Media

The conventional tourism communication has focused on the development and how the destination image can be projected, which is one of the biggest determinants of the perception and choice of a tourist. The conceptualization of destination image is that it is a series of cognitive and affective judgements concerning a destination based on the information sources, which includes marketing, media, and personal experiences (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993). Tourism bodies design message content strategically to depict attractive features, cultural symbols and experiences as a way of influencing the targeted people.

Initial studies on destination marketing have shown that projected images in most instances are selective and constructed as opposed to objective representations of reality. In particular, Stepchenkova and Morrison (2008) demonstrated that destination marketing organizations take the initiative to build national images through specific narratives and visual images to entice target audiences. On the same note, Govers and Go (2009) maintained that destination branding involves the deliberate development of identity by use of symbolic communication, narration and imagery. With the introduction of social media, communication in tourism has greatly changed. In contrast to the traditional one-way promotional systems, other websites such as Instagram allow interaction and user-generated communication, regulating access to the content, as audiences are able to directly communicate with it through likes, comments, and shares (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). This has significantly enhanced the metrics of engagement as a crucial measure of success in communication and response to an audience.

Instagram has become one of the most popular tourist-sightseeing marketers with visual leaning capability and international coverage. The platform also allows tourism organizations to represent destinations with curated content in the form of lifestyle photos of destinations, emotionally touching stories, and images with the emotional touch of the tourism consumption (Mariani et al., 2018; Huertas and Marine-Roig, 2016). According to a study, visual contents play an important role in the attractiveness of the destination and intentions to travel (Tussyadiah and Fesenmaier, 2009). Nevertheless, the social media landscapes are also associated with new limitations and destination communication opportunities. The functionality of the platform such as the type of image, the presence of caption characters, hashtags, and visibility as a result of algorithms can contribute to communication style convergence regardless of the cultural background (van Dijck, 2013). On the other hand, tourism organizations can proceed with localization of content, depending on the cultural inclinations and incorporating culturally specific icons, aesthetics, and stories to attract target markets (Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018).

Although this body of research is emerging, the existing study mainly focuses on destination communication in the context of individual cultural or national frameworks or compare different destinations without taking into account organizational issues. Therefore, it is still not clear whether differences in communication styles are caused by a cultural difference, specifics of various platforms, or brand-based strategies. This weakness accentuates the necessity of controlled comparative studies that examine concomitant communication behaviors when addressed across cultural setting within the identical organizational set up.

Research Gap and Research Questions

Although the current literature has some valuable insights into cross-cultural communication and tourism marketing, a number of limitations remain important. In the first place, numerous works use traditional cultural models: Hall (1976) differentiating between the high- and low-context communication and Hofstede (2001) dimensions in order to understand intercultural differences in communication styles. Although helpful, these models were created before the popularization of worldwide digital environments and might not be entirely applicable to the dynamics of communication in a highly standardized online environment.

Second, studies of social media in tourism have been less advanced with most concentrating on the image-building of destinations, visualization, and interaction with the audience in single cultural frameworks (Huertas and Marine-Roig, 2016; Mariani et al., 2018). Comparisons of cultures normally focus on different locations or unrelated companies, thus making it difficult to ascertain whether seen differences were brought about by cultures, organizational policies or the limitations of the platform.

Third, not many empirical studies have tested the hypothesis of whether culturally adjusted communication styles indeed yield increased user engagement on social media. Though the assumption of cultural congruence as promoting effectiveness is common in cross-cultural marketing, platform-mediated experiences, in which the visibility of algorithms and the coordination of interactions to be standardized, have hardly been studied with regard to the diminution of the effects of cultural differences (van Dijck, 2013).

A considerable exception concerns Mele et al. (2021), who performed the content analysis of Instagram posts of national tourism organizations of four countries with similar cultural traits. Nevertheless, they compared the reports of different organizations that marketed their destinations in their study. The current research offers a valuable contribution to the literature in having a more controlled comparison of the parallel accounts that are run with similar branding and similar thematic objectives but with culturally different target audiences. This design has less likelihood of confounding the effect of culture with brand-level confounds.

In order to address these gaps, the present study focuses on Instagram-based tourism communication by comparing two parallel, highly comparable destination marketing accounts targeted at Chinese and U.S. audiences. By analyzing independent parallel accounts with matching thematic objectives and visual branding strategies, this study minimizes brand-level confounding variables and provides a controlled analysis of how cultural values and platform logics interact in tourism communication.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The primary data in this project is entailed Instagram posts made between May and August 2024. Two public tourism related Instagram accounts, namely, the china.travels and the USA.explores were used to gather data. These stories are chosen due to the similarity of their destination-centered communication but their targeted cultures are different.

The public profiles were browsed through to retrieve all the posts manually. There was no third party and automated API or scraping software. In the context of data collection, captions and pictures were logged

along with the evident signs of engagement, that is, likes and comments. Only publicly available posts were taken into consideration. There was no access and no storage of any private accounts or direct message, as well as no user identifying information.

The posts without clear images of tourism-related or cultural attraction were not included as it did not fit the coding framework. Once this screening was complete, the final dataset of 2024 consisted of 1,973 valid posts, with 772 posts made by the Goal Page of @china.travels and 1,201 posts made by the Goal Page of @usa.explores.

In order to check the stability of the results over time, another data were gathered during the similar time in 2025. The same exclusion criteria and collection criteria used. After the process of filtering out invalid posts, the 2025 dataset consisted of 2,570 valid posts comprising of 980 posts of account china.travels and 1,560 posts of account USA.explores. This sample was applied as a complement and not as the primary sample.

Table 1: Sample Overview

Indicator	2024 Main Dataset	2025 Supplementary Dataset
Research period	May–August 2024	May–August 2025
Initial crawled posts	2,204	2,865
Excluded posts	231	295
Final valid sample	1,973	2,570
@china.travels	772	980
@usa.explores	1,201	1,560

Coding Framework

The deductive content analysis approach was employed in this study. The coding scheme was designed on the previous theories of cross-cultural communication, in particular, collectivism/individualism, power distance, and high/low context (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001).

There were three primary dimensions that were coded.

To begin with, cultural orientation was classified as either an individualist or collectivist. The content with a collectivist focus focuses on group identification, community, experience, or group cultural representation. The individualist content is the one focused on the individual / personal experience, personal choice, individuality, or individualism.

Second, power distance has been coded as by high or low. High power distance content indicates content of hierarchy, authority, status difference or formal social distance. Low power distance content: It brings out the equality, access, informality or proximity amongst individuals or places.

Third, the context of communication was coded as the high-context or low-context. High-context communication is seen as implicit, symbolic, visually hinting or atmosphere based communication. Low context communication is outright, illustrative, and is someone who is straight forward in communication.

Due to the presence of several culture cues concurrently in some of the Instagram posts, there was no assumption that the types of codings were mutually exclusive. It was possible to have a single post coded in more than one category. Because of this reason, percentages that are presented in the results could be over 100%.

Table 2: Coding Dimensions and Definitions

Dimension	Category	Definition
Cultural orientation	Collectivism	Content emphasizing group identity, community, or shared experience

Cultural orientation	Individualism	Content emphasizing personal experience, autonomy, or individual-centered representation
Power distance	High power distance	Content reflecting hierarchy, authority, or status difference
Power distance	Low power distance	Content emphasizing equality, accessibility, or informality
Context style	High-context	Implicit, symbolic, or visually suggestive communication
Context style	Low-context	Explicit, direct, and clearly stated communication

Data Processing and Coding Consistency

Each post was manually coded according to the predefined coding scheme. To improve consistency, the coding process followed the same definitions and decision rules across both the 2024 and 2025 datasets. Ambiguous cases were reviewed carefully and coded according to the dominant visual and textual meaning of the post. Because the coding involved both images and captions, some degree of interpretation was unavoidable. However, using clear definitions for each cultural dimension helped reduce inconsistency. The same coding logic was applied to both accounts and both years so that the results could be compared fairly.

Engagement Measurement

User engagement was measured using visible interaction indicators on Instagram. The study used likes and comments because these are the most directly observable forms of post-level audience response.

Engagement was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Engagement} = \text{Likes} + 0.5 \times \text{Comments}$$

This composite measure was used to provide a simple and comparable indicator of interaction across posts. Comments were weighted at 0.5 because they occur less frequently and vary more strongly than likes. The purpose of this measure is not to capture the full complexity of audience response, but to provide a practical indicator of relative engagement across coded content categories.

Statistical Analysis

The analysis combines descriptive and inferential statistics. First, descriptive coding results were used to compare the distribution of cultural dimensions across the two accounts. These findings indicate whether each account is predisposed towards focusing on collectivism or individualism, large or small power distance, high or low contextual communication. Second, the chi-square tests were conducted to study whether the differences in the categorical distributions observed between the Chinese and the U.S accounts were statistically significant. It is a suitable method to match categorical tendencies between groups and corresponds to the statistical findings presented in the study.

Third, independent-sample t-tests were used to compare mean engagement levels across cultural categories. These tests examined whether posts coded with culturally aligned traits generated higher interaction than comparison categories. All statistical tests were interpreted using the conventional significance level of $p < .05$.

Supplementary 2025 Analysis

Analytic processes and codes applied to the 2024 dataset were utilized to analyze the 2025 dataset. Nevertheless, it was considered as an additional vigor assessment but not the primary data set. The intention of enclosing the 2025 information was to determine whether the trends that occurred in the 2024 dataset would be consistent over the years. Separating the two datasets will allow preserving a clear research design as well as increasing the validity of the results.

Results

Descriptive Coding Results

The descriptive coding results show clear differences between the Chinese and U.S. Instagram accounts across the three cultural dimensions. These differences are most visible in the collectivism–individualism dimension, while the other dimensions show more similar patterns.

As presented in Table 3, the China account shows a higher proportion of collectivist content (44.7%) compared to the U.S. account (19.1%). In contrast, the U.S. account shows a higher proportion of individualist content (48.8%) than the China account (37.5%). This suggests that the Chinese account tends to emphasize shared experience and group-oriented representation, while the U.S. account focuses more on individual-centered communication. For power distance, both accounts show relatively low levels of high power distance. The China account records 10.3% high power distance content, while the U.S. account shows 7.3%. Correspondingly, low power distance dominates in both accounts, suggesting that hierarchical representation is generally not emphasized in this type of tourism communication.

In terms of communication context, both accounts rely heavily on high-context communication. High-context content accounts for 74.6% of posts in the China account and 73.1% in the U.S. account. Low-context communication is much less frequent in both cases, indicating that both accounts use relatively implicit and visually driven communication styles.

The extended 2025 dataset shows a similar overall pattern. As shown in Table 4, the China account continues to display higher levels of collectivism (50.8%) compared to the U.S. account (21.7%), while the U.S. account maintains a stronger individualist tendency (60.3%) than the China account (42.5%). High power distance remains low in both accounts, and high-context communication continues to dominate. These results suggest that the observed cultural patterns are consistent across time and are not limited to a single dataset.

Table 3: 2024 Descriptive Coding Results (%)

Dimension	@china.travels	@usa.explores
Total collectivism	44.7	19.1
Total individualism	37.5	48.8
High power distance	10.3	7.3
Low power distance	89.7	92.7
High context	74.6	73.1
Low context	24.2	26.5

Table 4: 2025 Descriptive Coding Results (%)

Dimension	@china.travels	@usa.explores
Total collectivism	50.8	21.7
Total individualism	42.5	60.3
High power distance	8.5	5.7
Low power distance	91.5	94.3
High context	82.2	78.0
Low context	17.8	22.0

Note. Percentages may exceed 100% because posts can be coded into multiple categories.

Chi-Square and Two-Proportion Z-Test Results

Two-proportion z-tests and chi-square tests were used to examine the statistical significance of cross-account differences identified in the descriptive analysis, using the 2024 dataset. Results are presented in Table 5.

Differences in collectivism between the two accounts were statistically significant ($z = 12.41$, $p < .001$), with a medium effect size (Cohen's $h = 0.56$). Differences in individualism were also significant ($z = -4.89$, $p < .001$), with a small effect size (Cohen's $h = 0.23$). Similarly, high power distance and low power distance both showed significant cross-account differences ($z = 2.33$, $p = .020$; $z = -2.33$, $p = .020$, respectively), with small effect sizes.

In contrast, differences in high context and low context communication were not statistically significant (both $p > .05$), with negligible effect sizes. This indicates that the two accounts were more similar in their use of implicit versus explicit communication styles than in collectivist–individualist orientation or power distance framing.

Overall, significant cultural differences exist in collectivism–individualism and power distance, while context-related communication patterns are more convergent between the two accounts.

Table 5. Two-Proportion Z-Test Results for Cultural Traits (2024)

Trait	China Proportion	US Proportion	z-statistic	p-value	Cohen's h	Effect Size	Significant
Collectivism	0.447	0.191	12.41	<0.001	0.56	Medium	Yes
Individualism	0.375	0.488	-4.89	<0.001	0.23	Small	Yes
High power distance	0.103	0.073	2.33	0.020	0.11	Small	Yes
Low power distance	0.897	0.927	-2.33	0.020	0.11	Small	Yes
High context	0.746	0.731	0.74	0.459	0.03	Negligible	No
Low context	0.242	0.265	-1.15	0.250	0.05	Negligible	No

Note. Cohen's interpretation of h : 0.10 = small, 0.30 = medium, 0.50 = large. Proportions do not sum to 1.00 because posts could be coded in multiple categories.

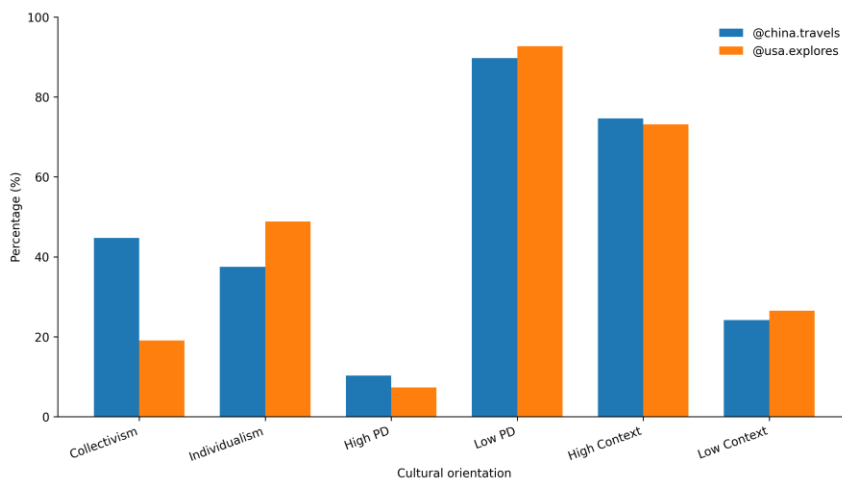


Figure 1: Distribution of cultural traits across @china.travels and @usa.explores (2024 dataset)

Bars show the percentage of posts coded with each trait. The biggest variance between accounts is in the collectivism and individualism, with power distance and context having a smaller difference.

User Engagement Cultural Orientation (2024 Dataset).

Independent-samples t-tests were performed to assess whether culturally congruent content resulted in a greater user engagement (in the form of likes + comments). To provide independence of groups, posts that contained both opposing traits were not included in each comparison.

Mean differences in engagement were always in the anticipated direction as evidenced in Table 6. Content that was collectivist was a little higher on the Chinese account and individualist content was a little higher on the U.S. account. Likewise, low power distance, high-context content exhibited slightly more engagement in both narratives. All these differences, however, were not statistically significant (all $p > 0.05$), and the 95 percent intervals contained zero.

The supplementary data of 2025 was utilized mostly to confirm the time stability of the patterns of coding (shown in Table 4). The coding findings were also similar over the years, as the Chinese account was more collectivist (50.8% vs. 21.7%) and both accounts were still characterized by the prevalence of high-context communication (82.2% and 78.0%).

Table 6: T-test results for engagement by cultural dimension (2024)

Dimension	Account	Mean engagement	t	df	p-value	Result
Collectivism vs. individualism						
	@china.travels	486.2 (Collectivism) vs 472.5 (Individualism)	-1.60	530	.109	Not significant
Collectivism vs. individualism	@usa.explores	512.8 (Individualism) vs 498.3 (Collectivism)	-1.12	757	.264	Not significant
Power distance	@china.travels	492.3 (Low PD) vs 488.7 (High PD)	-0.044	764	.965	Not significant
Power distance	@usa.explores	521.6 (Low PD) vs 515.9 (High PD)	-0.506	1199	.613	Not significant
High vs. low context	@china.travels	490.1 (High Context) vs 485.6 (Low Context)	0.195	735	.846	Not significant
High vs. low context	@usa.explores	518.4 (High Context) vs 509.7 (Low Context)	1.045	1085	.296	Not significant

Note: "Neither" refers to posts coded for neither collectivism nor individualism (neutral orientation). For power distance and context, comparisons are between high and low only; posts containing both were excluded.

Table 7: T-test results for engagement by cultural dimension (2025)

Dimension	Account	Mean engagement	t	df	p-value	Result
Collectivism vs. individualism	@china.travels	487.1 (Collectivism) vs 473.3 (Individualism)	-1.41	692	.159	Not significant
Collectivism vs. individualism	@usa.explores	513.6 (Individualism) vs 499.1 (Collectivism)	-1.03	981	.302	Not significant
Power distance	@china.travels	493.0 (Low PD) vs 489.4 (High PD)	-0.061	976	.951	Not significant
Power distance	@usa.explores	522.4 (Low PD) vs 516.7 (High PD)	-0.447	1558	.655	Not significant
High vs. low context	@china.travels	490.9 (High Context) vs 486.3 (Low Context)	0.227	969	.821	Not significant
High vs. low context	@usa.explores	519.2 (High Context) vs 510.5 (Low Context)	1.104	1551	.270	Not significant

Note: "Neither" refers to posts coded for neither collectivism nor individualism. For power distance and context, comparisons are between high and low only; posts containing both were excluded.

Robustness Check: Cross-Year Consistency (2024 vs. 2025)

To confirm the reliability of the main findings, a robustness test was performed using an alternative engagement measure: only likes (excluding comments).

Independent t-tests were repeated using this new metric.

All results remained non-significant ($p > .05$), consistent with the main analysis.

Table 8: Robustness Test Results (Engagement = Likes Only, 2024)

Dimension	Account	Mean Likes	t	df	p-value	Result
Collectivism vs Individualism	@china.travels	480.2	vs -1.52	530	.130	Not significant
Collectivism vs Individualism	@usa.explores	466.1	vs -1.08	757	.281	Not significant
Power Distance	@china.travels	505.7	vs -0.051	764	.959	Not significant
Power Distance	@usa.explores	491.2	vs -0.472	1199	.637	Not significant
High vs Low Context	@china.travels	485.6	vs 0.210	735	.834	Not significant
High vs Low Context	@usa.explores	481.9	vs 1.091	1085	.276	Not significant

Mean user interaction levels across cultural orientations (2025)

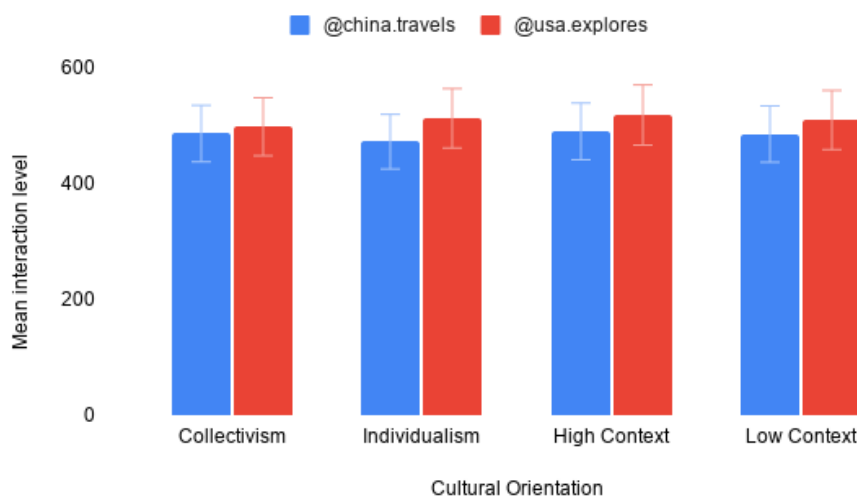


Figure 2: Mean user engagement levels across cultural orientations for @china.travels and @usa.explores (2025). Error bars represent standard deviations. Overlapping error bars confirm no significant differences in engagement (all $p > .05$).

Discussion

The results of this research give a discerning perspective of cross-cultural communication in social media. On the one hand, the findings prove that the cultural differences are still apparent in the tourism-related Instagram posts. Conversely, they indicate that these differences cannot be translated into significant differences in user engagement. This set of results provides valuable information on the functioning of cultural communication in platform-based contexts.

First, the descriptive findings have a clear indication that cultural values still influence the style of communication. Chinese account reflects more inclination to collectivist and high-context communication, in which shared communication, atmosphere and unspoken meaning are more important. On the contrary, there is more individualism and more direct communication in the U.S. account. These trends are in line with the recognized cross cultural communication theory, especially the differences identified by Hofstede (2001) and Hall (1976). The fact that these differences do not disappear implies that cultural constructs are still applicable in very global digital environments.

But the statistical findings make it more complicated. Although the statistical significance of some differences in content distribution is observed, the analysis of the engagement indicates that these differences do not result in significant changes in user interaction. In both the 2024 and 2025 datasets, there is no significant difference in the mean levels of engagement between the cultural categories, and all t-test values are non-significant. This means that, despite the variation in content in form and focus, audience response is not statistically significant.

The observation contradicts a general belief in the cross-cultural marketing and communication studies, which state that culturally adapted content ought to result in increased audience engagement. Applying to the Instagram case, the findings indicate that cultural alignment might not be the only factor that could determine the behavior of users. Rather, the engagement results might be more influenced by other elements, like visual attractiveness, algorithm behavior on a platform, post frequency, or overall quality of contents.

The nature of the platform itself may be one of the possible reasons. Instagram is a highly standardized space, with content shown in the same format, and the user interface being restricted to a set of predetermined actions, such as commenting or liking. Platform structures have the potential to influence the formation of communication practice and user behavior, as van Dijck (2013) argues. The platform, in this instance, can decrease the effects of the cultural differences by promoting more homogenous forms of interaction. Due to this, even culturally different content can produce equal amounts of engagement.

The other vital aspect is the consistency of the findings in datasets. The data of 2025 offered helps to reveal that the descriptive patterns as well as the results of the engagement are not changing with the time. This enhances the validity of the findings and indicates that the trends identified are not only confined to a given sample or time. Rather, they are indicative of more broad trends in the production and consumption of tourism content on Instagram.

Altogether, the research paper adds to the literature by filling a gap between two topics that are commonly researched independently, i.e., cross-cultural communication and social media interactions. It demonstrates that despite the fact that cultural values still influence the audience response to content created, their impact on the audience response might be less in platform-driven contexts. This emphasizes the need to take into account cultural and technological aspects in the analysis of communication in global digital environments.

Conclusion

This study investigated the extent to which cultural orientations influence tourism communication and user engagement within platform-mediated environments. By conducting a comparative content analysis of parallel Chinese and U.S.-focused Instagram accounts, the findings demonstrate a persistent divergence in visual and textual framing that aligns with established cultural dimensions. The Chinese-targeted account

exhibited stronger collectivist and high-context communication styles, whereas the U.S.-targeted account emphasized individualism and direct expression. Crucially, however, this cultural divergence did not generate statistically significant variance in user interaction metrics. These findings suggest that while cultural values continue to shape the production of tourism content, Instagram's highly standardized platform architecture and algorithmic logic act as cultural homogenizers, heavily constraining how audiences engage with that content. This study advances cross-cultural marketing literature by highlighting the overriding influence of platform mechanics on digital communication effectiveness.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. We only looked at two types of tourism communication using two Instagram profiles. Even though we compared accounts our findings might not apply to other platforms, industries or organizations. Also our way of coding the data while based on theory can be open to interpretation. We used a method and checked to make sure we were consistent but there might still be some inconsistencies in how we coded things like collectivism and communication context.

Additionally, we measured user engagement using metrics like likes and comments. We did not look at metrics, like shares how long people watched videos or how many people saw the posts. Lastly our analysis was fairly straightforward. Did not consider many other factors that could influence the results.

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