

Consumer-Centered IMC Strategies For Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Case Study Of Bronze Drum Products In Southern China

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Abstract:

With the ongoing revitalization of intangible cultural heritage in the global consumer market, cultural and creative products have become increasingly important carriers for the dissemination of local cultures. As a significant symbol of Zhuang culture in Guangxi, bronze drum motifs have been widely incorporated into a variety of cultural and creative goods, extending into tourism, museum, and gift-related consumption scenarios. However, current market performance indicates that the sales and promotion of bronze drum cultural products have not met expectations, highlighting the need to explore their communication strategies and market acceptance in depth. This study constructs an analytical framework based on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory combined with the 4C model (consumer needs, cost perception, convenience of acquisition, and communication), and employs semi-structured in-depth interviews to systematically investigate the dissemination issues and optimization paths of bronze drum cultural products. The findings reveal significant gaps in consumer understanding of bronze drum culture, limited reflection of cultural value in product pricing, low integration of sales channels, and weak brand storytelling and emotional connection capabilities.

Theoretically, this research expands the application of IMC theory and the 4C model into the field of intangible cultural heritage-related cultural products, broadening the research perspective on consumer-oriented communication strategies. Practically, it proposes a narrative-driven integrated communication path centered on cultural emotional engagement, offering systematic strategic references for the branding and market promotion of local ethnic cultural products.

Background: *Under the background of globalization, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) faces an increasing risk of marginalization. As a significant symbol of Zhuang culture in Guangxi, bronze drum motifs have been widely applied in the development of cultural and creative products, gradually entering tourism, museum, and gift-related consumption scenarios. However, current market performance indicates that the sales and dissemination of bronze drum cultural products have not met expectations, with issues such as low brand awareness, insufficient cultural understanding among consumers, and fragmented communication strategies. Therefore, this study aims to explore the dissemination challenges and optimization paths for bronze drum cultural products by constructing an analytical framework based on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory and the 4C model.*

Materials and Methods: *This study adopted a qualitative research approach under a constructivist paradigm. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with eight frontline practitioners engaged in the bronze drum cultural and creative industry in Guangxi (including four designers and four sales/promotional staff). The interview questions were designed around the four dimensions of the 4C model (Consumer Needs, Cost Perception, Convenience of Acquisition, and Communication). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVivo 12 Plus software. Interviews were conducted between November and December 2024, and the sample size was determined based on thematic saturation.*

Results: *The interviews revealed four major issues: a significant gap in consumer understanding of bronze drum culture; limited reflection of cultural value in pricing, restricting premium potential; insufficient integration of sales channels, affecting purchase convenience; and weak brand storytelling and emotional connection with consumers, impacting dissemination effectiveness. Based on the 4C analysis framework, five core themes related to communication mechanisms were extracted, identifying the key factors influencing consumer perception and purchase decisions.*

Conclusion: *This study systematically identified the main dissemination barriers faced by bronze drum cultural products and proposed a narrative-driven, emotion-centered integrated communication strategy based on IMC theory and the 4C model. The findings provide both theoretical expansion and practical insights for the branding and market dissemination of ethnic cultural and creative products, emphasizing the need to strengthen*

cultural value translation, channel integration, and consumer engagement to enhance the market influence and sustainable development potential of ICH-related products.

Key Word: *Bronze Drum; Cultural and Creative Products; Integrated Marketing Communication; 4C Model; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Consumer Perception.*

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I. Introduction

Amid the growing trend of global cultural homogenization, Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) faces an increasing risk of marginalization. UNESCO (2013) emphasizes that ICH is not only a critical manifestation of cultural diversity but also a key resource for promoting sustainable development. However, alongside the ongoing processes of urbanization and marketization, the contemporary modes of expression and dissemination for traditional cultures remain underdeveloped. How to effectively connect ICH with contemporary consumers while preserving its cultural essence has become a crucial challenge in cultural communication research [1], [2].

Against this backdrop, cultural and creative products have emerged as important mediators linking traditional culture with modern consumer demands. International experiences demonstrate that cultural product development centered on traditional crafts, whether in Japan and South Korea or through handicraft-based cultural branding in Nordic countries, has become an effective tool for revitalizing and reinventing ICH [3], [4]. These products not only serve as visual representations of cultural symbols but also play multiple roles in brand communication, emotional engagement with consumers, and the fostering of cultural value recognition. Nevertheless, successfully translating cultural content into marketable value still relies heavily on systematic communication strategies and consumer-oriented value construction mechanisms [5].

In China, national initiatives have increasingly promoted the socialization and marketization of ICH, with cultural and creative products expected to contribute to local economic development and enhance cultural soft power. Among these efforts, bronze drum cultural products from Guangxi, as representative manifestations of Zhuang culture, exhibit strong regional characteristics and symbolic significance. In recent years, they have gradually entered consumer markets such as tourism souvenirs, cultural derivatives, and creative gifts. Although the visual design of these products has achieved a high degree of recognizability, challenges persist at the level of market communication, including low brand awareness, insufficient consumer understanding of the culture, and fragmented dissemination mechanisms. These issues reflect a structural gap in the dual transformation pathway from cultural value to market value for ICH products (X. Zhang & Ismail Kamal, 2022).

In response to these challenges, this study adopts an analytical framework based on Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory and the 4C consumer model. From the dual perspectives of designers and communicators, it systematically examines the communication mechanisms and implementation barriers related to content construction, pricing logic, channel layout, and brand communication for bronze drum cultural products. Using semi-structured in-depth interviews, this study gathers firsthand experiences from product developers and sales practitioners, focusing on the following four research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do the current content design and market communication of bronze drum cultural products effectively address core consumer needs?

RQ2: Does the pricing mechanism reflect cultural value, and is it understood and accepted by consumers?

RQ3: Are the existing sales channels and communication methods sufficiently convenient to reach target consumers?

RQ4: In terms of communication, how can bronze drum culture be effectively conveyed through brand storytelling and multi-media content to build brand identity?

These four questions are interrelated and collectively form a systematic framework for investigating the integrated communication mechanisms of bronze drum cultural products.

This study not only aims to fill the research gap regarding the application of IMC theory to ethnic cultural products but also seeks to systematically construct, for the first time in the field of ICH cultural and creative industries, a consumer-centered integrated communication pathway. The findings are expected to offer empirical insights from a Chinese perspective for the revitalization and sustainable development of global ICH resources.

II. Literature Review

Development and Application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) Theory:

Since its introduction in the 1990s, Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) has become a core paradigm in brand strategy and consumer communication. Schultz and Kitchen defined IMC as "the coordinated use of various communication tools, media, and platforms to deliver a unified and consistent brand message to target consumers, thereby achieving synergy in brand recognition and market conversion" [7]. Compared to traditional single-channel promotional strategies, IMC emphasizes the collaborative integration across multiple

platforms, actors, and content, evolving into new trends that stress digital marketing, brand consistency, and consumer engagement[7], [8].

In recent years, IMC has been widely applied in cultural industries, tourism marketing, city branding, and museum communication. Research has shown that cultural products, due to their "content-as-brand" nature, heavily rely on the integration of emotional value and cultural narratives in their dissemination[5]. Therefore, IMC strategies are not merely about combining communication channels but involve integrated design that connects brand content, symbolic systems, and consumer emotions, making them highly adaptable for promoting cultural and creative products. Furthermore, the digital era has intensified the role of technology—such as social media, mobile applications, and big data analytics—in the implementation of IMC, enhancing both the efficiency of information dissemination and the interactivity between brands and consumers [5]. In the fields of tourism and cultural industries, the application of IMC helps strengthen destination branding and attractiveness, thereby driving industry development.

In summary, IMC, as a strategic communication tool, has significant potential for application in the cultural and tourism industries. With continued technological advancement and changes in consumer behavior, IMC is expected to play an increasingly critical role in cultural communication. This study builds on this theoretical framework, focusing on its application in the dissemination practices of ICH-related cultural and creative products.

Consumer-Oriented Communication Strategies from the Perspective of the 4C Model:

Proposed by Lauterborn as a response to the traditional 4P marketing model, the 4C model emphasizes a shift from a firm-centered to a consumer-centered approach to integrated communication [9]. It focuses on four dimensions: Consumer, Cost, Convenience, and Communication, offering a framework more closely aligned with contemporary consumer behavior, market strategies, and brand building [9]

Unlike the 4P model, which emphasizes product control and push-based promotion, the 4C model values the consumer's active role in value co-creation, making it particularly suitable for experience-driven and symbol-intensive cultural and creative products. Studies have shown that in tourism and cultural brand communication, the 4C model effectively explains emotional drivers, social belonging, and value co-creation mechanisms in cultural consumption [10]. The "Consumer" dimension is often used to analyze drivers such as identity construction, local attachment, and cultural pride, rather than solely functional motivations [11].

The "Cost" dimension extends beyond economic price acceptance to include time cost, learning cost, and psychological conversion cost. In cultural and creative consumption, consumers' ease of understanding cultural information directly impacts their perception of price rationality[12]. If cultural products fail to effectively convey their uniqueness and cultural value, it becomes difficult to achieve consumer consensus on their premium pricing [12].

In terms of "Convenience," digital transformation has restructured access pathways, requiring cultural brands to provide seamless touchpoints across multiple platforms and reduce the barriers to cultural content understanding. Ribeiro emphasized that convenient online and offline access points not only affect purchase decisions but also determine the continuity and depth of brand dissemination [13]. For cultural and creative products, convenience also refers to the reduction of "cultural accessibility barriers," allowing consumers to easily understand, interact with, and use products in diverse scenarios [14].

"Communication," as the intersection of IMC and the 4C model, covers key issues such as brand storytelling, community interaction, and content co-creation. Melewar pointed out that effective communication should achieve resonance among cultural content, consumer identity, and brand symbols, rather than being limited to simple information transmission[15]. Particularly in a cultural and creative market dominated by social media, user-generated content (UGC), narrative-driven brand expression, and the establishment of community belonging have become critical factors influencing dissemination outcomes[15].

Overall, the 4C model provides a highly compatible theoretical foundation for the dissemination of cultural and creative products and local cultural IPs, emphasizing consumer experience orientation and multi-dimensional value perception pathways. Based on this, this study adopts the 4C model as its analytical framework to explore the market dissemination mechanisms of bronze drum cultural and creative products.

Current Research on Bronze Drum Culture and the Dissemination of Ethnic Cultural and Creative Products:

As a national-level intangible cultural heritage, Guangxi's bronze drum culture embodies historicity, regionality, and symbolism, and has long been the focus of studies in ethnology, anthropology, and ethnomusicology (Liu et al., 2024). In the context of cultural and creative industry policies and the revitalization of ethnic cultures, the market-oriented transformation of bronze drum culture has gradually attracted scholarly attention. Researchers have begun exploring its symbolic transformation in cultural and creative product design, tourism souvenir development, and museum merchandising [16]. For instance, Li and Ibrahim developed a

series of tea sets inspired by bronze drum designs, highlighting the importance of conveying cultural symbols in product design and fostering emotional connections with consumers(Li & Ibrahim,2022).

In terms of communication strategies, Lei proposed a sustainable strategic management framework, emphasizing the role of bronze drum culture in public communication, especially in promoting the creative economy and cultural sustainability [18]. Furthermore, Zhang and Ismail, through a systematic literature review, analyzed the application of bronze drum motifs in modern design and pointed out existing gaps in motif classification and application strategies, calling for more interdisciplinary empirical research (Zhang & Ismail Kamal, 2022).

Nevertheless, most existing research remains focused on visual symbol translation, aesthetic presentation, and local cultural expression, lacking a systematic investigation centered on consumer perception, communication strategies, and integrated execution. Particularly, under the frameworks of IMC theory or the 4C model, studies on the dissemination mechanisms of bronze drum cultural and creative products are still absent. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by examining dissemination practices from the perspectives of consumer experience and integrating IMC and 4C theoretical approaches, aiming to propose systematic optimization paths based on insights from both product design and market sales practices.

Summary: Research Positioning and Theoretical Contributions:

In summary, although existing literature has explored the potential of IMC and 4C theories in the context of ICH cultural and creative product dissemination, systematic applications combining both frameworks in the study of ethnic intangible cultural heritage products remain scarce. While bronze drum culture has achieved visual symbol translation in the field of cultural and creative products, significant gaps persist in terms of consumer cultural cognition, brand integrated communication, and market conversion mechanisms.

Accordingly, this study adopts IMC theory as the overall framework and the 4C model as the analytical pathway, incorporating firsthand experiences from product designers and marketing practitioners. It aims to propose an integrated marketing communication model tailored to the characteristics of ethnic cultural dissemination. Theoretically, this research expands the application boundaries of IMC in cultural communication studies; practically, it offers actionable and replicable strategies for the market dissemination of local ethnic cultural and creative products.

III. Material And Methods

Research Paradigm and Methodological Approach:

This study is grounded in a constructivist research paradigm, emphasizing the multi-subject experience construction and meaning assignment processes involved in the dissemination of ethnic minority cultures. From the constructivist perspective, the social world is continuously constructed through interpersonal interactions, making it particularly suitable for exploring the complexity and multi-dimensional interactions in the dissemination of ICH cultural and creative products.

To gain an in-depth understanding of the strategic choices and practical challenges encountered in the design, pricing, sales, and communication processes of bronze drum cultural and creative products in Guangxi, this study adopts a qualitative research approach, employing semi-structured in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method, combined with thematic analysis for systematic data processing and inductive analysis[19].

Sample Selection and Interview Arrangement:

This study adopts purposive sampling to recruit eight frontline practitioners with practical experience in bronze drum cultural and creative products, including four cultural product designers and four sales/promotion personnel. The participants were selected from cultural and creative enterprises, tourism platforms, and ICH project organizations in regions such as Nanning and Liuzhou in Guangxi, and they possess high levels of practical engagement and professional judgment.

The interviews were conducted between November and December 2024. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was audio-recorded with the informed consent of the participants, followed by verbatim transcription by the research team.

The sample size was determined based on the "thematic saturation theory" proposed by Guest [20], whereby thematic stability and redundancy were observed after the seventh participant, thus confirming eight interviews as sufficient for data saturation in this study.

Interview Guide Design and Execution:

The interview guide was designed around the four core dimensions of the 4C model (Consumer Needs, Cost Perception, Convenience of Acquisition, and Communication), ensuring systematic coverage of themes related to consumer experience, value perception, channel accessibility, and communication strategies. Specific

interview questions were developed with reference to literature on brand consistency and emotional-driven mechanisms in IMC theory [5], [15], as detailed in Table 1.

For example, questions such as “How do you perceive current consumer acceptance of bronze drum culture?” and “Has pricing taken into account the transmission of cultural value?” were posed to capture practical experiences from both product development and market feedback perspectives. The interviews were conducted by the researchers themselves, employing a flexible questioning order to encourage participants to elaborate freely and provide case-specific details, with appropriate probing to deepen the understanding of key issues.

TABLE 1. Interview Design

| 4C Dimension | Questions for Cultural Product Designers | Questions for Sales/Promotion Personnel |
|---------------|---|---|
| Consumer | Which cultural elements in product design resonate most with consumers? | What are the main reasons consumers purchase bronze drum cultural products? |
| | Do you adjust design content according to different consumer groups? | How deeply do consumers understand bronze drum culture? Do they require guidance? |
| Cost | How do you balance cultural expression and cost control during the design process? | Are current pricing levels acceptable to consumers? |
| | Have cultural complexity factors led to increased production costs? | Are consumers willing to pay a premium for cultural value? |
| Convenience | Have you considered portability, usability, or gift suitability in product design? | What are the current sales channels for the products? |
| | Does the packaging or format facilitate sales in different contexts? | Is it convenient for consumers to access the products? Is the purchasing process smooth? |
| Communication | Have you been involved in creative work for brand storytelling, copywriting, or promotional videos? | What communication channels are currently used (e.g., short videos, live streaming, Xiaohongshu)? |
| | How do you achieve “modernity without losing cultural authenticity” in cultural expression? | Have you encountered consumer misunderstandings or communication barriers in feedback? |

The interviews were conducted by the researchers themselves, employing a flexible questioning sequence to encourage participants to elaborate freely, provide specific examples, and offer detailed responses for deeper exploration of key issues.

Data Analysis Procedure and Theme Generation:

Data analysis followed the six-phase thematic analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke[21], including familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing. NVivo 12 Plus software was used to assist in organizing interview transcripts and managing the coding logic.

During the coding phase, the four dimensions of the 4C model served as the initial analytical framework, combined with an open coding strategy to flexibly identify emergent themes in the interview materials.

For example, participant responses indicating “consumers’ lack of understanding of the historical background of bronze drums” were initially coded as “Cultural Cognition Gap” and subsequently categorized under the overarching theme of “Cultural Understanding Barriers.”

The research team engaged in iterative comparison, induction, and validation processes, ultimately refining five core themes and several sub-themes aligned with the 4C model.

Reliability Control and Ethical Considerations:

To enhance the credibility and transparency of the study, two research assistants were involved in cross-coding comparisons during the analysis phase, achieving an intercoder agreement rate of 87%, thereby ensuring the reliability of the coding and theme development processes. Furthermore, member checking was employed after theme generation, wherein three participants were invited to review the researchers' interpretations and categorizations to confirm alignment with their actual experiences. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with an informed consent form, and all data were recorded and processed anonymously to protect participant privacy and ensure data security.

IV. Result

This study conducted interviews with eight practitioners engaged in bronze drum cultural and creative product development, including four product designers and four sales/marketing personnel. Through thematic analysis of the interview data, the findings are organized around the four dimensions of the 4C model, presenting the core issues and practical insights related to the integrated marketing communication of bronze drum cultural products.

The main findings for each dimension are as follows:

Consumer Needs: Dominance of Visual Appeal and Gaps in Cultural Cognition:

The interviews revealed that most consumers of bronze drum cultural products have a relatively weak understanding of the cultural significance behind the "bronze drum." Purchase motivations are primarily driven by visual attraction, ethnic features, or practical value, rather than cultural connotations. As Designer A noted, "Many consumers see the drum and ask, 'Is this from Thailand?'" In fact, Zhuang bronze drums and Southeast Asian cultures are completely different, but they cannot tell the difference. "This phenomenon indicates that the professionalism and locality of bronze drum culture have not been effectively interpreted and disseminated through products.

Sales personnel similarly observed that consumers "care about the appearance, not the story." Salesperson B stated, "We displayed several drum ornaments; customers would glance at them, say 'Looks quite ethnic,' take a photo, and leave, without paying attention to the cultural introduction behind it." Even when cultural cards or explanatory notes are provided with the products, they are often ignored. Salesperson D admitted, "Although we include small cultural cards in the packaging, most customers never read them."

While designers have attempted to enhance cultural recognizability through patterns, colors, and textures, consumer feedback remains largely superficial. Designer C recalled, "I asked customers if they knew the meaning of the pattern, and most just smiled and said, 'It just looks nice.'" This surface-level visual consumption pattern suggests that although the products carry ethnic features, they struggle to fulfill the deeper mission of cultural dissemination.

Furthermore, the lack of guidance in cultural interpretation limits emotional bonding between consumers and the brand. Designer D remarked, "We actually have many folk stories related to the drum, but there is no platform to tell them, and nobody knows about them." Salesperson C suggested that integrating interactive videos or mini-program storytelling could "make young people willing to listen and share," thus enhancing cultural engagement and brand identity.

A summary of the thematic coding for the "Consumer Needs" dimension is shown below:

Table 2. Thematic Coding Process for the Consumer Needs Dimension

| Initial Citation | Sub-Theme | Core Theme |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| Is this drum Zhuang? Looks like Thailand's. | Misconception of Cultural Identity | Consumers lack basic understanding of bronze drum culture |
| We just think it looks good and is suitable as a gift. | Appearance-Driven Purchase Motivation | Purchasing behavior driven by visual appeal |
| Although we included a small introduction card, most customers don't read it. | Information Transmission Failure | Incomplete cultural communication mechanism |
| It would be better to tell some folk tales related to festivals. | Missing Emotional Connection Pathways | Cultural content not effectively transformed into emotional value |

The findings suggest that in the consumer needs dimension, the core challenge lies in the phenomenon of culture being "visible but not perceptible." Consumers show interest primarily based on visual impressions and practical purposes, rather than cultural identity or emotional belonging, significantly weakening the core value of bronze drum culture in product dissemination.

Cost Perception: Challenges in Quantifying Cultural Premiums and Pricing Mechanisms:

In the dimension of "Cost Perception," the interviews revealed a significant gap between product pricing and consumer value perception for bronze drum cultural products.

On the one hand, designers commonly noted that developing bronze drum products requires substantial investment in cultural research and symbolic selection, with some products involving labor-intensive craftsmanship and special materials, leading to relatively high production costs.

Designer B emphasized, "We create products rich in cultural content; the patterns are not randomly drawn. Each layer must be verified against historical references, but consumers find it hard to understand the investment behind it."

On the other hand, sales personnel reported that consumers generally lack the cognitive foundation to appreciate the cultural premium, often comparing cultural and creative products directly to ordinary souvenirs, making it difficult to translate cultural value into price acceptance.

Salesperson B explained, "Sometimes customers see a price tag and say, 'Sixty yuan for a keychain? It's just a small drum.' Yet the drum surface pattern took us over two weeks to design."

Some respondents mentioned adopting a "dual-track pricing strategy" with low-priced entry-level products and high-priced collectible editions to balance market acceptance. However, "high-end products can only be sold at exhibitions or through customization; ordinary consumers are unwilling to pay for 'unfamiliar culture'."

This dual pressure often forces enterprises into a dilemma of either being questioned for high prices or compromising quality to drive sales.

Additionally, since the cultural added value is primarily embedded in design language and symbolic meaning rather than functional upgrades, consumers find it difficult to perceive the price rationality through usage experience.

As Designer C pointed out, "The value of cultural products does not lie in functionality; it relies on storytelling and emotional resonance, but these aspects are hard to incorporate into pricing models."

A summary of the thematic coding for the "Cost Perception" dimension is shown below:

Table 3. Thematic Coding Process for the Cost Perception Dimension

| Initial Citation | Sub-Theme | Core Theme |
|--|---------------------------------|--|
| "It just looks like a decoration; why is it so expensive?" | Price Skepticism | Cultural value not fully understood by consumers |
| "We spent two weeks refining this pattern, but customers can't see the effort." | Invisible Investment | Design costs are difficult to quantify |
| "Many people think cultural products should be cheaper than ordinary souvenirs." | Comparative Mindset | Lack of recognition for cultural premium |
| "High-priced items hardly sell unless the buyer is a cultural enthusiast." | Differentiated Price Acceptance | Imbalanced market structure |

In summary, bronze drum cultural products face structural tension between production costs and market pricing.

Consumers struggle to perceive the cultural labor and design costs behind the products based on appearance or functionality, leading to a lack of price rationality acceptance. This phenomenon further restricts the marketization pathway and brand development potential of bronze drum culture.

Convenience of Acquisition: Strong Dependence on Physical Sales Scenarios and Insufficient Channel Integration:

In the "Convenience of Acquisition" dimension, most interviewees agreed that the current sales channels for bronze drum cultural products are primarily offline, concentrated in tourism spots, museum shops, and festival events.

While these scenarios can create some cultural association, they also result in a strong dependence on "occasional sales," lacking sustainable consumer engagement pathways.

Salesperson A explained, "During holidays when tourist traffic is high, sales go up; after the peak season, almost no one seeks out these products."

Meanwhile, the development of online channels is relatively lagging, with only a few businesses establishing basic online stores (e.g., WeChat mini-shops, third-party platforms), but with low activity and poor marketing strategies, making it difficult to attract active consumer searches.

Designer A stated, "We did open a Taobao shop, but it has no traffic and no one manages it, so hardly anyone buys online."

This phenomenon of "hollowed-out channels" makes it difficult for consumers to conveniently access bronze drum cultural products outside of tourism contexts, hindering repeat purchases and brand loyalty building.

Although some companies have considered factors like portability and practical packaging, there is no industry-wide standard, leading to mixed consumer feedback.

Salesperson C shared, "We had a drum-shaped ornament that was too heavy to carry. Later, we redesigned it to be detachable, and sales improved."

Moreover, consumer convenience is not only about physical acquisition but also about access to information and decision-making support.

Currently, product descriptions, cultural background introductions, and purchasing guidance are unevenly distributed and lack integrated communication.

Designer D noted, "If you see a product offline and want to find the same one online later, it's almost impossible. This gap is fatal."

A summary of the thematic coding for the "Convenience of Acquisition" dimension is shown below:

Table 4. Thematic Coding Process for the Convenience of Acquisition Dimension

| Initial Citation | Sub-Theme | Core Theme |
|---|---------------------|---|
| "Sales are good when there are lots of tourists; otherwise, it's very quiet." | Scenario Dependence | Heavy reliance on tourism peaks for sales |
| "We have a Taobao shop, but it's poorly maintained, so few sales online." | Channel Deficiency | Underdeveloped online channels |

| | | |
|--|-----------------------|---|
| "The drum is too big and heavy to carry home." | Practicality Feedback | Need to optimize product portability |
| "Consumers cannot find the same product online afterward." | Information Gap | Lack of integrated online-offline communication |

These findings indicate that bronze drum cultural products face multiple layers of structural issues in the convenience dimension:

sales heavily reliant on tourism contexts, poorly maintained online channels, inconsistent product portability designs, and missing information transmission mechanisms. Consumers encounter fragmented experiences when trying to access, purchase, or repurchase these products across different scenarios, hindering the formation of brand awareness and long-term consumer relationships. Channel fragmentation and broken pathways are major weaknesses in the current IMC strategy that urgently need to be addressed.

Communication: Fragmented Channels and Limited Consumer Engagement Scenarios:

In the "Communication" dimension, both designers and sales personnel acknowledged that current bronze drum cultural products lack a systematic brand narrative and cultural communication mechanism.

Although enterprises recognize that "culture is the core selling point," in practice, there is often a lack of structured brand storytelling and multimedia content strategies.

Most dissemination efforts focus merely on product introductions or promotional information, without embedding cultural context or emotional guidance.

Designer B confessed, "We have historical materials and folk legends about the drums, but without systematic organization, our promotional copy can only talk about appearance and materials."

Sales personnel also mentioned that current communication relies mainly on offline verbal explanations or brief text descriptions, with low frequency and weak strategy in the use of new media platforms.

Some brands attempted to utilize short video platforms like Douyin (TikTok) and Xiaohongshu, but the content mainly displayed the product's appearance without storytelling, resulting in minimal resonance.

Salesperson A stated, "We made some videos, but they only showed what the product looks like; there was no interaction, and few people shared them."

Moreover, there is a lack of sustained interactive channels or community-building mechanisms between enterprises and consumers.

User-generated content (UGC) is scarce, and there is little effective brand community atmosphere.

Salesperson D noted, "Most people just buy and leave without leaving any contact information. We also don't have an official account or community for them to join."

Some respondents pointed out that consumers are not uninterested in culture but lack appropriate guiding mechanisms.

Designer C suggested, "If we could tell the cultural stories through H5 pages, mini-programs, or short videos— even just a one-minute story—people might actually remember the drum."

These insights highlight that the biggest problem in current communication strategies lies in severe information fragmentation, disjointed media use, and a lack of immersive and emotional content.

A summary of the thematic coding for the "Communication" dimension is shown below:

Table 5. Thematic Coding Process for the Communication Dimension

| Initial Citation | Sub-Theme | Core Theme |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| "Our videos just show the product; no one interacts." | Lack of Engaging Content | Absence of brand storytelling and cultural narratives |
| "Customers don't know what the patterns mean, and no one explains it." | Insufficient Information Explanation | Deficiency in cultural communication mechanisms |
| "No official account, no community; once sold, connection is lost." | Lack of Interaction Mechanisms | Missing sustained brand touchpoints |
| "If we had short videos telling stories, young people might watch them." | New Media Dissemination Suggestions | Consumer demand for visualized cultural storytelling |

V. Discussion And Recommendations

Focusing on Consumer Perception: Culture Is Seen but Not Understood

This study reveals that in the consumer needs dimension, bronze drum cultural products generally fall into a "culture visible—culture distorted" communication paradox. Although these products exhibit strong cultural recognizability in design, consumers lack systematic understanding of the ethnic memory and historical significance embodied by the bronze drums. Consequently, cultural value fails to be effectively translated into psychological attraction or purchasing motivation.

This phenomenon not only indicates a content vacuum within communication pathways but also highlights a structural dilemma widely faced by the intangible cultural heritage (ICH) creative industry: "visual-

driven dominance and lack of cultural decoding." Consumers "see the shape of culture" but "fail to comprehend its meaning," causing the cultural consumption process to stagnate at superficial aesthetic appreciation without transforming into emotional engagement. Contrary to the 4C model proposed by Lauterborn (1990), which centers on "consumer needs," this study finds that for ICH-related creative products, "needs" are not primarily functional but depend more on the activation of cultural identity and the triggering of emotional resonance.

More importantly, this deficiency in cultural perception is not simply due to consumer "ignorance," but stems from an overreliance on design form and a lack of narrative logic and cultural guidance mechanisms within the communication process. The prevalent misconception that "visual equals culture" reduces cultural communication to surface-level totem collage, shielding culture's essential narrative responsibility as a deep knowledge system.

In response, this study proposes a "Three-Level Cultural Resonance Model" as a design guideline for cultural communication:

- (1) Symbolic Evocation Layer: Capture initial visual attention through product forms, patterns, and shapes;
- (2) Cognitive Guidance Layer: Mediate "cultural interpretation" using storytelling cards, AR narratives, or QR code-based short videos;
- (3) Emotional Resonance Layer: Evoke deep identification with personal identity, history, locality, or ethnicity.

The "symbolic layer" alone is far from sufficient. To truly stimulate consumer demand, a structured narrative mechanism must "activate—guide—internalize" cultural value. This highlights that, within an IMC (Integrated Marketing Communication) context, cultural brand content should not be treated merely as "communication material," but systematically constructed as emotion-embedded content capital.

In sum, the core issue for bronze drum cultural products in the "consumer needs" dimension is not whether the design is aesthetically pleasing or the craftsmanship refined, but whether a "comprehensible cultural experience" can be built. Without decodable culture, there is no consumable culture. This finding offers both a direction for optimizing the communication of bronze drum cultural products and a transferable narrative mechanism recommendation for the cultural marketization of other ICH products.

Optimizing Reach Pathways and Brand Communication: Structural Repair of Fragmented Communication

In terms of channels and communication, the market dissemination of bronze drum cultural products exhibits the typical symptoms of "scene fragmentation—content fragmentation—shallow reach." On the surface, this manifests as uneven sales distribution and one-way information output, but fundamentally reflects a deeper problem: ICH creative products have yet to establish a sustained, systematic, emotionally engaging integrated communication architecture within modern communication systems.

At the convenience level, this study finds that product sales heavily rely on festive markets and museum spaces—non-daily scenarios—lacking "low-threshold, high-frequency" touchpoints. This channel-dependent communication model severely limits the everyday penetration of cultural consumption, contradicting the original intention of the "Convenience" dimension in the 4C model—integration, continuity, and accessibility (Chen & Lee, 2008). Current understanding of convenience remains at the "point-of-sale coverage" level, without addressing the essential issue of how consumer behavioral pathways are constructed.

Moreover, issues at the brand communication dimension are even more systemic. Although cultural symbols are embedded in the products, communication largely consists of pattern displays, static exhibitions, and functional descriptions, lacking cross-platform, cross-scenario narrative systems. As a result, brands fail to form stable meaning anchors. Importantly, in the new communication structure dominated by digital media, consumers are no longer content with being "informed"; they seek to be "moved, involved, and understood." Bronze drum cultural products' current communication models fall far short of achieving an "interactive + co-creative" environment, with brand narratives critically absent.

Accordingly, this study proposes a "Three-Dimensional Cultural Product Communication Strategy Loop" to repair the fragmented communication system:

- (1) Scene Reconstruction Dimension: Expand sales/communication scenarios from "centralized" to "everyday," embedding them into cafés, bookstores, and lifestyle stores—creating "life as culture" experiences;
- (2) Platform Integration Dimension: Build a unified brand content matrix across mainstream platforms like TikTok, Xiaohongshu (RED), WeChat public accounts, and WeChat video accounts, forming a visual symbol—cultural story—consumption conversion narrative loop;

(3) Emotional Guidance Dimension: Develop a "brand mother story" as the main thread and subordinate "sub-narrative units" adapted to different media contexts, using a coherent storytelling system to enhance brand memory and promote cultural identity internalization.

This approach not only optimizes marketing strategies but also reconstructs the communication structure. ICH creative product communication must move beyond the outdated logic of "content equals culture" toward a new integrated communication concept of "culture as structure, structure as resonance." Products must not only "have content" but must also have the ability to organize content—enabling consumers to experience participation, rhythm, and belonging within the information chain.

In summary, the core issue of bronze drum cultural product communication is not a lack of content, budget, or traffic, but a lack of understanding and control over the overall communication structure. A "sharable, resonant, and sustainably narratable" cultural communication system is the key to achieving true cultural marketization and emotional commercialization for ICH products.

From Case Study to Model: Constructing a Consumer-Centered Integrated Communication Pathway

In summary, the communication dilemmas faced by bronze drum cultural products are not isolated but reflect systemic mismatches across multiple layers: consumer perception, channel access, content communication, and emotional connection.

Traditional "design-oriented" or "policy-driven" models are no longer sufficient for the communication needs of ICH creative products in the market environment. Based on IMC theory and the 4C model, this study proposes the "Consumer-Centered IMC Communication Pathway Model" tailored for ICH creative products:

The structure of the model is as follows:

| Level | Core Mechanism | Main Problem | Optimization Strategy |
|---|------------------------------|---|--|
| Cultural Perception Activation (Consumer) | Activate cultural cognition | Culture is visible but incomprehensible | Layered storytelling and cultural explanation mechanisms |
| Value Cognition Expression (Cost) | Convey cultural value | Cultural value premium is difficult to perceive | Cultural value labeling and price tiering |
| Scene and Channel Integration (Convenience) | Expand consumption scenarios | Fragmented channels and insufficient reach | Everyday scene penetration + digital platform matrix |
| Brand Content Systematization (Communication) | Build emotional connections | Communication fragmentation and narrative gaps | Brand mother story + cross-platform sub-narrative system |

This model not only addresses the challenges of applying the 4C model to cultural consumption but also expands the applicability of IMC theory in emotion-driven communication. In the future, cultural and creative brands should center on consumers' cultural cognition pathways, systematically integrate cultural content, communication media, and emotional mechanisms, and realize the effective translation and sustainable market development of cultural value.

VI. Conclusion

This study focuses on bronze drum cultural and creative products in Guangxi, examining the real-world challenges faced by Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in market-oriented dissemination. From a consumer perspective, it investigates the communication mechanisms and optimization strategies within the framework of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC).

Based on the four dimensions of the 4C model—Consumer Needs, Cost Perception, Convenience of Acquisition, and Communication Interaction—semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis were conducted to systematically identify structural issues in content construction, pricing logic, channel layout, and brand communication of bronze drum cultural products. Targeted integrated communication strategies were subsequently proposed.

The findings reveal that although bronze drum cultural products exhibit strong visual distinctiveness in design, they suffer from significant gaps in consumer cultural cognition, ambiguous value perception, fragmented acquisition pathways, and disjointed communication content. These issues not only hinder the effective dissemination of bronze drum culture but also expose systemic deficiencies in the integrated communication system for ICH-related cultural products.

At the theoretical level, this study is the first to integrate IMC theory with the 4C model in the dissemination research of ICH cultural products, thereby expanding the application boundaries of consumer-oriented communication strategies in the cultural product domain.

By proposing a "Consumer-Centered IMC Communication Pathway Model," the study deepens the applicability of IMC theory in emotionally-driven cultural dissemination contexts and enriches the extended interpretive pathways of the 4C model under the experience economy paradigm.

At the practical level, this study addresses critical pain points in the operational dissemination of bronze drum cultural products by proposing an integrated solution encompassing a layered cultural narrative mechanism, a cultural value explanation system, daily-life scenario strategies, and a multi-platform brand storytelling system. These insights offer systematic and actionable pathways for the dissemination and branding of local ethnic cultural and creative products in modern market environments.

This study has certain limitations. First, the sample is concentrated in Guangxi, with a relatively homogenous cultural context; future research could expand to more regions and compare different ethnic cultural products. Second, the study mainly draws from the perspectives of industry practitioners; future work could incorporate consumer interviews, surveys, or experimental studies to further validate consumer behavior mechanisms empirically.

Moreover, the proposed communication pathway model requires broader empirical testing and cross-cultural applicability verification. Future research could explore the influence of emerging dissemination mechanisms—such as digital interaction, user-generated content (UGC), and short video marketing—on the communication of ICH-related cultural and creative products, in response to evolving media ecologies.

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