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**How to cite:** Shan L, Sun Y. Design and Japanese Communication Strategies of Cultural-Themed Textile Tourism Souvenirs for International Tourists. Textile & Leather Review. 2026; 9:3387-3407.  
<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3387>

**How to link:** <https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3387>

**Published:** 25 April 2026



# Design and Japanese Communication Strategies of Cultural-Themed Textile Tourism Souvenirs for International Tourists

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## Article

<https://doi.org/10.31881/TLR.2026.3387>

Published 25 April 2026

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## ABSTRACT

*Cultural-themed textile souvenirs are important carriers of textile materials, craftsmanship, and cultural symbolism in international markets. However, cultural and technical meanings embedded in textile products are often insufficiently understood by consumers from culturally distant regions. This study examines how Japanese-language communication strategies influence Japanese consumers' responses to non-Japanese cultural textile souvenirs.*

*A sequential mixed-methods approach was adopted. Qualitative interviews with textile designers and tourism practitioners were conducted to identify key communication elements related to textile materials, production processes, and cultural narratives. Two communication strategy prototypes were developed: an information-centric strategy focusing on materials and manufacturing techniques, and an integrated narrative – aesthetic strategy emphasizing cultural symbolism and artisan stories. A controlled experiment with 150 Japanese participants was then conducted.*

*The results show that both strategies enhance consumers' understanding of cultural textile products. The information-centric strategy mainly improves cognitive understanding and perceived authenticity, while the narrative – aesthetic strategy leads to higher affective engagement and purchase intention. The findings highlight the role of communication as a supplementary design component for the international dissemination of cultural textile products.*

**KEYWORDS**

*cultural textile souvenirs, cross-cultural communication, Japanese tourism market, Aesthetic and cultural comprehension, Cultural narrative framing*

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**INTRODUCTION**

Textile souvenirs hold unique potential as carriers of cultural narratives across regions and traditions; however, the global souvenir market is increasingly characterized by homogenization. Generic patterns and standardized forms are frequently applied to culturally themed products, resulting in superficial representations that fail to convey deeper cultural meanings or perceived authenticity sought by international tourists [1,2]. Such practices not only limit meaningful cross-cultural exchange but also undermine the sustainable valorization of diverse cultural heritage.

The development of culturally resonant textile souvenirs for international markets involves three interconnected challenges. First, there is a design challenge related to translating complex cultural narratives into contemporary and marketable textile products, a process that requires more than symbolic ornamentation and demands culturally informed abstraction [3,4]. Second, and central to this study, is an audience-specific communication challenge: cultural meanings embedded in a product's design may remain opaque to visitors from culturally distant backgrounds if not effectively mediated. Third, designers and marketers must balance commercial viability with cultural authenticity in competitive tourism markets [5,6]. These challenges are particularly salient in the context of Japanese outbound tourists, a market segment widely recognized for its appreciation of craftsmanship, nuanced aesthetics, and culturally meaningful consumption experiences [7]. While concepts such as wabi-sabi reflect a sensitivity to material quality and artisanal value [8], the cultural distance between Japan and many destination cultures introduces significant barriers to interpretation. Effective engagement with this market therefore extends beyond literal translation and requires communication strategies aligned with Japanese cultural codes, aesthetic sensibilities, and consumption psychographics [9,10]. Despite the importance of this issue, systematic and empirically testable frameworks for developing audience-specific communication strategies for non-Japanese cultural textile products remain limited.

In this study, Japanese communication strategies are conceptualized as structured approaches to mediating

cultural meaning between source cultures and Japanese consumers. These strategies encompass interpretive communication that contextualizes cultural narratives, experiential communication that supports sensory and emotional engagement, and strategic framing that leverages culturally familiar lenses to facilitate understanding. To enable empirical examination, these dimensions are operationalized into two contrasting communication strategy prototypes: an information-centric strategy emphasizing factual explanation, and an integrated narrative – aesthetic strategy designed to support affective and interpretive engagement.

While existing research has provided valuable insights into souvenir authenticity and experiential value [2,5,11], design and communication are often examined as separate domains. There remains a notable lack of integrative, mechanism-oriented research investigating how specific communication strategies shape tourists' cognitive understanding, affective responses, and subsequent behavioral intentions toward culturally distant textile souvenirs. Addressing this gap, the present study develops and empirically evaluates a framework linking communication strategy design to sequential cognitive and affective evaluations among Japanese tourists.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What communication dimensions are most effective in facilitating Japanese tourists' understanding and evaluation of non-Japanese cultural textile souvenirs?

RQ2: How do different Japanese communication strategy prototypes influence cognitive understanding, perceived authenticity, affective engagement, and purchase intention?

RQ3: Through what cognitive and affective mechanisms do communication strategies shape Japanese tourists' valuation of culturally distant textile souvenirs?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Characteristics and Perceived Value of Textile Tourism Souvenirs

Tourist souvenirs are commonly evaluated through attributes such as uniqueness, authenticity, and symbolic meaning, which play a central role in shaping purchase decisions. Authentic souvenirs typically integrate local culture, history, and craftsmanship, often manifested through material choices, production techniques, and culturally significant patterns. In the context of textiles, these attributes convey not only economic and artisanal value but also cultural and experiential significance. Prior research indicates that the experiential

quality of a tourism encounter substantially influences the perceived value of associated souvenirs, thereby affecting satisfaction and subsequent behavioral responses [11]. For cultural souvenirs, perceived value is closely linked to tourists' perceptions of authenticity [5,12] and their ability to cognitively comprehend the cultural meaning embedded in the object [13].

Importantly, souvenir evaluation involves both cognitive and affective processes. Cognitive evaluations relate to tourists' understanding of cultural context, origin, and symbolism, whereas affective responses reflect emotional engagement, attachment, and enjoyment. The interaction between tourists and souvenirs may further foster psychological ownership, enhancing perceived value and purchase intention through emotional and participatory involvement [1]. These findings suggest that textile souvenirs function not merely as commodities but as experiential cultural artifacts, whose value emerges through sequential cognitive and affective evaluations. It is important to clarify that the present study focuses on perceived authenticity rather than objective heritage authenticity. In line with constructivist perspectives in tourism research (e.g., Wang, 1999), authenticity is understood as a socially and cognitively constructed judgment formed through interpretive processes. Accordingly, the study examines how communication framing shapes tourists' authenticity perceptions, rather than making claims about the intrinsic cultural or historical legitimacy of the textile products themselves.

### **Design as Cultural Encoding: From Cultural Translation to Meaning Formation**

The transformation of traditional craft into contemporary souvenirs is fundamentally a process of cultural encoding, whereby abstract cultural knowledge—such as narratives, values, and aesthetic principles—is translated into tangible material form [3,4,14]. Through design, cultural meaning is selectively preserved, adapted, and recontextualized to align with contemporary usage scenarios. This process involves critical decisions regarding which cultural elements to foreground, how symbolic motifs are simplified or abstracted, and how functionality and aesthetics are balanced.

Within this context, innovation is often conceptualized as meaning-driven rather than purely technological. Meaning-driven innovation emphasizes reinterpretation of a product's cultural and emotional significance for new audiences or contexts [3]. For cultural souvenirs, effective design establishes the cultural content that can potentially be communicated and interpreted by users. However, design alone does not guarantee successful meaning transfer, particularly when the target audience is culturally distant from the source culture.

Instead, design functions as a necessary but insufficient condition for cultural understanding, requiring complementary communication processes to support interpretation and valuation [2,6].

### **Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies for the Japanese Market**

When cultural products are presented to international tourists from high-context cultures such as Japan, cross-cultural communication plays a decisive role in mediating interpretation. Cultural background influences how consumers process information, form evaluations, and derive meaning from products [9]. Japanese tourists, in particular, tend to rely on contextual cues, aesthetic coherence, and narrative resonance when evaluating cultural offerings [7,10]. Consequently, communication strategies must extend beyond literal translation to align with culturally specific cognitive and aesthetic frameworks.

Prior studies suggest that cross-cultural communication can be conceptualized across complementary dimensions. Informational communication provides explicit explanations regarding cultural origin, production techniques, and symbolic meaning, thereby supporting cognitive understanding and authenticity perception. Narrative and aesthetic communication, by contrast, engages affective processes by situating the product within emotionally resonant stories and culturally meaningful aesthetic frames, such as principles associated with wabi-sabi [8]. Experiential communication further enhances emotional engagement through sensory interaction or participatory encounters. Together, these strategies influence how cultural authenticity is cognitively comprehended and affectively experienced by Japanese tourists [2,5].

In high-context cultures such as Japan, authenticity is often inferred not solely from emotional resonance but from signals of provenance transparency, craftsmanship continuity, and cultural traceability. Japanese consumers frequently associate detailed disclosure of material origin and production process with artisanal sincerity and heritage legitimacy. Structured informational disclosure may therefore function as a credibility cue, reducing interpretive uncertainty and supporting authenticity attribution. In this sense, factual explanation operates not as an objective authenticity determinant, but as a mediating transparency mechanism facilitating subjective authenticity judgment within the Japanese evaluative framework.

## Research Gaps and Conceptual Positioning

Although existing literature has examined souvenir attributes [11,13], authenticity [2,6,7,12], design innovation [3,4], and cross-cultural consumption [9–13], these streams are often treated independently. In particular, limited research has empirically examined how audience-specific communication strategies interact with culturally encoded product design to shape tourists' cognitive understanding, affective responses, and subsequent behavioral intentions. This gap is especially evident in studies focusing on specific product categories, such as cultural textile souvenirs, and on high-context markets such as Japan.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts an integrative perspective that conceptualizes communication as a mediating mechanism between culturally encoded design and tourist valuation [15]. By operationalizing distinct communication strategy prototypes and empirically examining their effects on cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes, this study advances a mechanism-oriented understanding of how cultural meaning is translated, interpreted, and valued in cross-cultural tourism contexts.

## STUDY METHODS

### Research Context and Research Path

This study is situated in the context of non-Japanese cultural textile souvenirs marketed to Japanese outbound tourists. In such settings, a communicative gap frequently arises when cultural meanings are encoded within one cultural system but decoded by consumers from a culturally distinct, high-context society such as Japan. Examples include Chinese silk embroidery, Peruvian alpaca textiles, and West African batik, whose symbolic systems, production logics, and aesthetic conventions may not be readily interpretable to Japanese tourists without appropriate mediation.

Rather than redesigning the textile products themselves, this research focuses on the development and evaluation of supplementary communication strategies that function as a cultural interface between source cultures and the Japanese market. Accordingly, the study follows a design-oriented and iterative research path comprising three stages:

- (1) diagnosing communicative gaps in existing cultural textile products and their associated informational materials;
- (2) developing prototype Japanese-language communication strategies grounded in theoretical insights and

expert input; and

(3) empirically evaluating the effectiveness of these strategies with the target audience.

This approach allows the study to isolate the role of communication as a mediating layer between culturally encoded design and market reception, avoiding confounding effects associated with product redesign. The overall conceptual structure and hypothesized cognitive – affective pathways examined in this research are illustrated in Figure 1.

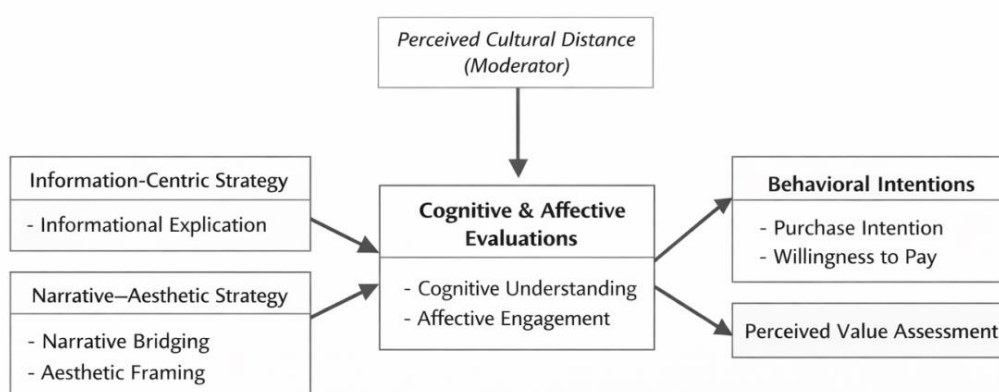


Figure 1. Integrated design–communication framework and hypothesized cognitive–affective pathways.

## Overall Research Design

A sequential exploratory mixed-methods design was adopted. In this design, qualitative inquiry was used to inform and constrain the development of experimentally testable communication strategy prototypes, rather than to generate a standalone theoretical model. The subsequent quantitative phase was designed to examine the effects of these communication strategies and assess the robustness of observed patterns across a larger sample.

Methodological triangulation was achieved by combining qualitative methods—including semi-structured expert interviews and focus group discussions—with a quantitative survey-based experiment comparing alternative communication strategy prototypes across cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcome variables.

This mixed-methods approach is particularly suitable for examining both the formation of culturally informed communication materials and their measurable impact on tourist responses under controlled conditions.

### **Data Collection Process**

#### Phase 1 and Phase 2: Qualitative Exploration and Strategy Development

An exploratory qualitative study was conducted to support the development of the experimental communication strategies. Six experts (two souvenir designers, two tourism marketing practitioners, and two cultural studies researchers) participated in semi-structured interviews lasting 45 – 60 minutes. In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with Japanese participants ( $n = 6$  per group) who had prior overseas travel experience.

All interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Two independent coders conducted open coding and theme refinement, achieving substantial inter-coder agreement (Cohen's  $\kappa = .82$ ). Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The qualitative analysis highlighted two recurrent emphases in participants' and experts' discussions—informational reassurance and aesthetic immersion. These emphases were treated as pragmatic design considerations rather than exhaustive theoretical dimensions, and they were used to guide the construction and framing of the experimental communication strategy prototypes evaluated in the subsequent quantitative phase.

Experts were selected based on the following criteria: (1) at least five years of professional experience in cultural product design, tourism marketing, or cultural studies; (2) prior involvement in cross-cultural product development or research projects; and (3) academic publication or recognized professional contribution in relevant fields. These criteria were used to ensure domain-specific expertise and enhance methodological transparency.

### **Experimental Stimuli and Manipulation Check**

Two Japanese-language communication strategy prototypes were developed to represent contrasting approaches to cultural mediation. Prototype A emphasized factual and functional product information, including material origin, production process, and usage attributes, presented in a concise, bullet-point format. Prototype B emphasized experiential and cultural meaning, highlighting artisan narratives, sensory

imagery, and symbolic associations through a continuous narrative format.

To ensure comparability, both prototypes were matched in overall length (approximately 180 Japanese characters), included the same single product-related image across all experimental conditions to control for potential visual confounding effects, and avoided explicit price cues. The primary distinction between the prototypes lay in communicative framing and narrative structure rather than in the quantity of information presented.

Although Prototype A adopted a bullet-point format and Prototype B employed a continuous narrative structure, these formatting choices were intentionally aligned with their respective communicative framings. Informational explication is conventionally associated with structured presentation that enhances clarity and segmentation of factual cues, whereas narrative immersion is typically conveyed through continuous textual flow. Therefore, textual layout was treated as an integrated component of communicative framing rather than as an independent manipulation variable. Nevertheless, future research could further isolate framing effects by standardizing textual format across conditions to eliminate potential structural influences on readability. Examples of the original Japanese stimuli are provided in Appendix A.

A manipulation check was included to verify participants' perceptions of the communication strategies. Participants rated the extent to which the description emphasized factual information versus aesthetic and narrative qualities using two seven-point Likert-scale items.

## Measures

The questionnaire included the following measures. An overview of constructs, sample items, and reliability statistics is presented in Table 1. All Likert-scale items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Cognitive understanding was measured using two items assessing participants' perceived clarity and comprehension of the cultural meaning conveyed by the textile product. The two items were highly correlated (Pearson's  $r = .84$ ), indicating acceptable internal consistency for a parsimonious measure. In this study, cognitive understanding was treated as a focused indicator of perceived interpretive clarity rather than as a multidimensional latent construct.

Perceived authenticity was measured using six items adapted from prior tourism and heritage research, capturing perceptions of cultural genuineness and craft tradition (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). Affective engagement

was assessed using three items reflecting emotional involvement and positive affective responses (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). Psychological ownership was measured with three items capturing feelings of personal connection and sense of possession toward the product (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ). Purchase intention was measured using three items assessing respondents' likelihood of considering purchase (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ). Willingness to pay (WTP) was measured using a single open-ended item asking respondents how much extra they would be willing to pay for the product, reported in Japanese yen (JPY). No fixed market price anchor was provided; therefore, WTP was interpreted as a relative indicator of comparative valuation across experimental conditions rather than as a precise market estimate. Perceived cultural distance was measured with three items assessing the perceived dissimilarity between the source culture of the product and Japanese culture (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .85$ ).

Table 1. Measurement Constructs and Reliability

Construct	No. of Items	Sample Item	Scale	Reliability
Cognitive Understanding	2	"I can clearly understand the cultural meaning conveyed by this textile."	7-point Likert	Inter-item correlation (r) = .84
Perceived Authenticity	6	"This item reflects the true craft tradition of its culture."	7-point Likert	Cronbach's $\alpha = .89$
Affective Engagement	3	"This product evokes positive emotional responses."	7-point Likert	Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$
Psychological Ownership	3	"I feel a sense of personal connection to this item."	7-point Likert	Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$
Purchase Intention	3	"I would consider purchasing this souvenir."	7-point Likert	Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$
Willingness to Pay (WTP)	1	"How much extra would you be willing to pay for this item?"	Open-ended (JPY)	—

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Perceived Cultural Distance	3	“The source culture of this product is very different from Japanese culture.”	7-point Likert	Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$
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Note. All Likert-scale items were rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). For constructs measured with two items, reliability is reported using inter-item correlation rather than Cronbach’s alpha. All questionnaire items were translated into Japanese using a back-translation procedure. A pilot test (n = 20) confirmed item clarity, linguistic appropriateness, and response variability.

## Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

### *Quantitative Data Analysis*

Survey data were analyzed using SPSS 27, the PROCESS macro (version 4.0), and AMOS 28. Preliminary analyses confirmed that assumptions for parametric testing were satisfied, including homogeneity of variances (Levene’s test,  $p > .05$ ) and approximate normality of residuals (Shapiro – Wilk tests,  $p > .05$ ). Demographic equivalence across experimental groups was also verified (all  $p$ s  $> .05$ ).

Main effects of communication strategy condition were examined using one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey HSD post-hoc tests. Effect sizes were reported using partial eta-squared ( $\eta^2$ ). Given the positively skewed distribution of willingness-to-pay (WTP) data, group differences in WTP were assessed using non-parametric Kruskal – Wallis tests, with medians and interquartile ranges reported.

To examine the hypothesized psychological mechanisms, serial mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS Model 6 with bias-corrected bootstrapping (5,000 resamples). Although each experimental condition included approximately 50 participants, bootstrapping procedures are widely recommended for testing indirect effects in moderate sample sizes because they do not rely on normality assumptions and provide more stable confidence interval estimation. Moreover, the mediation model was estimated using observed composite variables rather than a full latent structural equation model, thereby reducing model complexity and parameter burden. All reported indirect effects were statistically significant, with confidence intervals excluding zero, indicating adequate estimation stability.

Moderation effects of perceived cultural distance were examined using PROCESS Model 7, with experimental condition dummy-coded prior to analysis.

To further assess the internal consistency and directional plausibility of the proposed conceptual relationships, a supplementary path analysis was conducted using maximum likelihood estimation. Model fit was evaluated using  $\chi^2/df$ , CFI, and RMSEA. This analysis was intended to examine coherence among the modeled relationships rather than to provide a confirmatory test of a fully specified structural equation model.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Theme 1: Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies for the Japanese Market

Through thematic analysis of expert interviews combined with iterative prototype development, three interrelated dimensions of effective Japanese-language communication strategies for foreign cultural textile souvenirs were identified.

The first dimension, Informational Explication, focuses on translating complex, culture-specific knowledge into clear and structured Japanese narratives. This dimension emphasizes explicating production techniques, historical background, and the symbolic meanings of motifs in a factual and respectful manner, thereby supporting transparency and informed cognitive evaluation.

The second dimension, Narrative Bridging, employs culturally resonant storytelling to foster emotional engagement. Experts highlighted the effectiveness of monogatari-style narratives that convey artisans' lived experiences, the historical evolution of patterns, or the cultural journeys of materials. Such narratives align with Japanese preferences for provenance, continuity, and contextual depth.

The third dimension, Aesthetic Framing, involves presenting unfamiliar cultural characteristics through culturally accessible interpretive references. Rather than equating foreign cultural products with Japanese aesthetics, this strategy adopts familiar Japanese aesthetic concepts (e.g., wabi-sabi, shibui) as reference frames that facilitate intuitive appreciation. By offering culturally familiar points of orientation, aesthetic framing supports interpretive accessibility beyond literal translation.

Together, these three dimensions informed the design of the experimental communication strategies, with Prototype A primarily operationalizing informational explication, and Prototype B integrating narrative bridging and aesthetic framing.

**Manipulation Check**

A manipulation check was conducted to verify whether participants perceived the intended differences between the communication strategy conditions. Participants rated the extent to which the product description emphasized factual information and narrative – aesthetic qualities on two seven-point Likert-scale items.

Results of one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated a significant effect of communication strategy condition on perceived informational emphasis,  $F(2, 147) = 106.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .59$ . As expected, Prototype A (information-centric strategy) was rated significantly higher on informational emphasis ( $M = 5.67, SD = 0.95$ ) than both Prototype B ( $M = 3.33, SD = 0.93$ ) and the control condition ( $M = 3.58, SD = 0.75$ ) (all  $ps < .05$ ).

A significant effect of communication strategy condition was also observed for perceived narrative – aesthetic emphasis,  $F(2, 147) = 93.31, p < .001, \eta^2 = .56$ . Prototype B (narrative – aesthetic strategy) received significantly higher ratings on narrative – aesthetic emphasis ( $M = 5.99, SD = 0.94$ ) than Prototype A ( $M = 3.44, SD = 0.89$ ) and the control condition ( $M = 4.14, SD = 1.05$ ) (all  $ps < .05$ ).

These results indicate that the experimental manipulations were perceived as intended and that the communication strategy prototypes successfully operationalized distinct communicative framings.

**Theme 2: Differential Effects of Communication Strategies on Cognitive and Affective Evaluations**

Results from the survey experiment indicate systematic differences in cognitive and affective evaluations across communication strategy conditions. Descriptive statistics and one-way ANOVA results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean Comparisons of Outcome Variables Across Communication Conditions

Outcome Variable	Control (C)	Prototype A (Info-Centric)	Prototype B (Narrative–Aesthetic)	F(2,147)	p	$\eta^2$	Post-hoc
Cognitive	3.43 ± 0.93	4.44 ± 0.89	4.84 ± 0.80	34.84	< .001	.322	A,B > C

Understanding							
Perceived	3.74 ± 0.80	4.39 ± 0.84	4.79 ± 0.76	21.77	< .001	.229	B > A > C
Authenticity							
Affective	3.79 ± 0.97	4.33 ± 1.01	4.85 ± 0.87	15.28	< .001	.172	B > A > C
Engagement							
Psychological	3.33 ± 1.06	3.74 ± 1.14	4.37 ± 1.16	10.85	< .001	.129	B > A > C
Ownership							
Purchase	3.01 ± 0.89	4.08 ± 1.08	4.74 ± 0.98	39.02	< .001	.347	B > A > C
Intention							

Note. Values are mean ± SD.

As shown in Table 2, significant main effects of communication strategy condition were observed for all outcome variables. Relative to the control condition, the information-centric strategy (Prototype A) was associated with higher levels of cognitive understanding, suggesting that structured Japanese-language explanations facilitate clearer interpretive appraisal of cultural meaning.

In comparison, the integrated narrative – aesthetic strategy (Prototype B) was associated with higher affective engagement, psychological ownership, and purchase intention, and significantly outperformed Prototype A on these dimensions. These results indicate that while informational clarity contributes primarily to cognitive evaluation, narrative and aesthetic framing are more strongly associated with affective and motivational responses.

### Theme 3: Sequential Cognitive–Affective Mediation Mechanisms

To examine the psychological processes associated with the observed differences in behavioral outcomes, serial mediation analysis was conducted using PROCESS Model 6. The results were consistent with a sequential cognitive – affective pathway, in which communication strategy condition was associated with differences in cognitive understanding, which in turn related to affective engagement and purchase intention. Bootstrapped indirect effects were statistically significant for both Prototype A and Prototype B relative to

the control condition, with 95% confidence intervals excluding zero. Notably, the total indirect effect was larger for Prototype B, indicating a stronger combined association of narrative and aesthetic framing with the proposed cognitive – affective sequence. Detailed mediation results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Serial Mediation Analysis Results (PROCESS Model 6)

Effect	Indirect Effect	BootLLCI	BootULCI
A vs. C (Total Indirect)	0.49	0.26	0.77
B vs. C (Total Indirect)	0.73	0.42	1.09

Taken together, these findings provide evidence consistent with a structured evaluative process in which perceived interpretive clarity is linked to affective resonance, which is subsequently related to behavioral commitment.

#### **Theme 4: Behavioral Intentions and Willingness to Pay**

Consistent with the mediation analysis, communication strategy condition was significantly associated with behavioral outcomes. Participants exposed to the integrated narrative – aesthetic strategy (Prototype B) reported the highest levels of purchase intention and willingness to pay a premium.

Given the positively skewed distribution of willingness-to-pay (WTP) data, non-parametric analysis was applied. Kruskal – Wallis tests revealed a significant group difference in WTP ( $\chi^2(2) = 30.48, p < .001$ ), with median values increasing monotonically from the control condition to Prototype A and Prototype B. This pattern is consistent with the interpretation that behavioral valuation is related to the combined depth of cognitive and affective engagement rather than to informational clarity alone.

#### **Synthesis: An Integrated Model of Communication Efficacy**

Integrating findings across Themes 1 – 4, the results provide empirical support for an integrated relational model of communication efficacy for cultural textile souvenirs targeting Japanese tourists (Figure 2). The model illustrates how communication strategies are associated with differences in cognitive understanding and affective engagement, which jointly relate to behavioral outcomes.

Path analysis using AMOS 28 indicated acceptable model fit ( $\chi^2/df = 2.31$ , CFI = .96, TLI = .94, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .04). In addition, perceived cultural distance moderated the association between the narrative – aesthetic communication strategy (Prototype B) and cognitive understanding ( $\beta = 0.28$ ,  $p = .004$ ). A simple slope analysis further indicated that when perceived cultural distance was high (+1 SD), the narrative – aesthetic strategy was strongly associated with increased cognitive understanding ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In contrast, when perceived cultural distance was low (–1 SD), the association was weaker though still positive ( $\beta = 0.17$ ,  $p = .048$ ). This pattern suggests that narrative and aesthetic framing becomes increasingly effective as perceived interpretive gaps between cultures widen, indicating that such framing may function as a compensatory interpretive mechanism under conditions of greater cultural distance.

These findings suggest that cultural distance functions not only as a contextual challenge but also as a condition under which appropriately designed communication strategies may enhance interpretive accessibility and perceived value. Accordingly, cultural textile souvenirs can be understood as active mediators of cross-cultural exchange when supported by audience-specific communication framing.

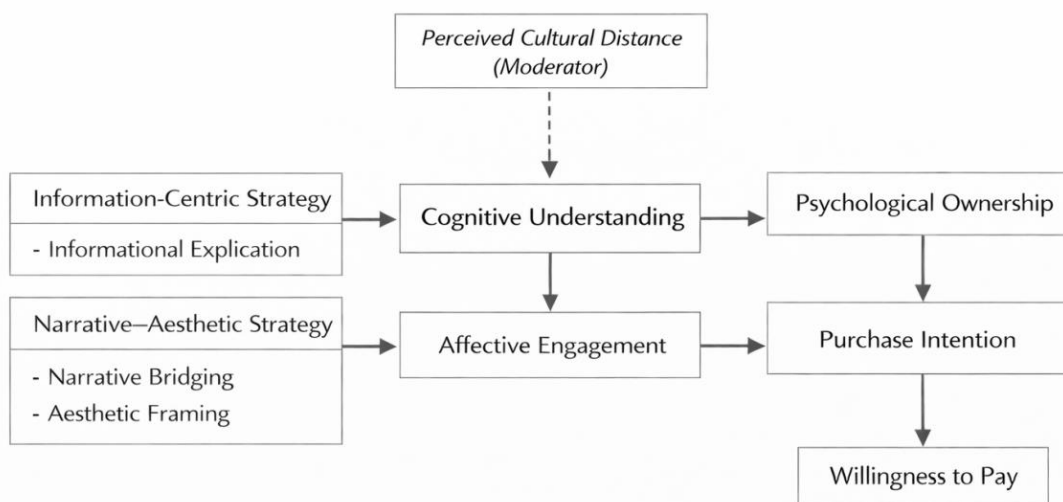


Figure 2. Conceptual synthesis of empirically supported relationships among communication strategy, cognitive evaluation, affective engagement, and behavioral outcomes.

Note. Solid arrows represent hypothesized and empirically supported associations rather than definitive causal relationships. The figure provides a schematic summary of the analytical results rather than a confirmatory structural equation model.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined how strategically designed Japanese-language communication strategies are associated with Japanese tourists' interpretation, evaluation, and valuation of cultural-themed textile souvenirs originating from non-Japanese cultures. Using a sequential mixed-methods approach, the research highlighted three recurrent communication emphases—Informational Explication, Narrative Bridging, and Aesthetic Framing—and clarified their differentiated associations with tourists' cognitive and affective responses. The integrated relational model proposed in this study provides empirical support for the view that communication strategies are linked to behavioral intentions and perceived value through sequential cognitive – affective processes that facilitate cross-cultural comprehension.

### Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to tourism, cultural consumption, and cross-cultural marketing research in several important ways. First, it extends existing discussions of authenticity, interpretation, and country-of-origin effects by proposing an operational, audience-centric approach to communication design tailored to high-context markets such as Japan. Rather than treating authenticity as an inherent product attribute, the findings provide evidence that authenticity perceptions are shaped through structured communication processes that support interpretive accessibility.

Second, the study bridges the traditionally separated domains of cultural product design and market communication by showing that communication functions as a mediating interface between culturally embedded design elements and tourists' evaluative responses. In this sense, communication is repositioned from a downstream promotional activity to an integral component of cultural meaning construction and value formation.

Third, the findings refine the concept of experiential authenticity in cross-cultural consumption by illustrating how narrative and aesthetic framing can complement, rather than replace, objective heritage attributes. This contribution underscores the importance of interpretive accessibility in enabling consumers to engage

meaningfully with culturally unfamiliar products.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings offer actionable implications for multiple stakeholder groups. For designers and cultural entrepreneurs, the results underscore the importance of developing communication materials that move beyond literal translation toward interpretive support for cultural understanding. Informational explication may enhance cognitive clarity, while narrative and aesthetic framing can transform product descriptions into resources for emotional engagement and meaning-making.

For destination marketers and retailers targeting the Japanese outbound market, the study highlights the strategic value of audience-specific communication design as a means of differentiation and value enhancement. Appropriately crafted narrative and aesthetic framing is associated with higher perceived authenticity, psychological ownership, and willingness to pay, without necessitating changes to the underlying product.

For heritage practitioners and cultural institutions, the findings emphasize the need to curate communication processes that balance cultural responsibility with commercial viability. By functioning as a cultural interface, communication strategies can support respectful cultural representation while facilitating sustainable economic outcomes.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study focused exclusively on Japanese tourists; future research could adopt a comparative or dyadic perspective that examines both meaning encoding by source-culture designers and meaning decoding by international audiences. Second, the empirical context was limited to textile-based souvenirs and a constrained range of cultural origins; the applicability of the proposed approach to other cultural product categories and creative industries warrants further investigation. Third, the study relied primarily on self-reported evaluations and behavioral intentions; longitudinal or field-based research examining actual purchasing behavior and post-consumption interpretation would further strengthen the robustness of the proposed relationships.

Fourth, authenticity was measured as perceived authenticity following brief exposure to communication materials. Such perceptions may reflect elements of staged or interpretive authenticity rather than objective

heritage authenticity. Future research could incorporate expert-based heritage assessments, certification indicators, or multi-source evaluation methods to triangulate authenticity judgments.

Fifth, willingness to pay (WTP) was assessed using a single open-ended item without a fixed market price anchor. Therefore, the reported premium amounts should be interpreted as relative indicators of comparative valuation across conditions rather than as precise market estimates. Future research could incorporate price anchoring or experimental bidding mechanisms to enhance ecological validity.

Sixth, although the two communication strategy prototypes were matched in overall length and informational scope, they differed in textual layout (bullet-point versus continuous narrative format). While this distinction was theoretically aligned with their respective communicative framings, it may have introduced potential readability or structural influences independent of content framing. Future research could standardize textual layout across conditions to more rigorously disentangle framing effects from formatting-related variables.

In addition, emerging digital channels—such as social media storytelling, augmented reality, and interactive platforms—offer promising opportunities to extend and operationalize the communication strategies identified in this research, enabling more dynamic and participatory forms of cultural mediation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Overall, this study suggests that for cultural-themed textile souvenirs intended for the Japanese market, effective communication should be understood not merely as linguistic translation but as a process of cultural mediation. By deliberately designing this mediating interface through informational, narrative, and aesthetic strategies, stakeholders may foster deeper cross-cultural understanding and more meaningful tourist – culture encounters. Beyond the specific Japanese context, the findings point to a transferable relational mechanism through which culturally informed communication can support value creation and sustainable cross-cultural exchange in global tourism markets.

### *Availability of Data and Materials*

The datasets used and/or analysed during the current study were available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

### *Author Contributions*

Li Shan and Yong Sun designed the study; all authors conducted the study; Li Shan and Yong Sun collected and analyzed the data. Li Shan and Yong Sun participated in drafting the manuscript, and all authors contributed to critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content. All authors gave final approval of the version to be published. All authors participated fully in the work, took public responsibility for appropriate portions of the content, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or completeness of any part of the work were appropriately investigated and resolved.

#### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### *Funding*

This work was supported by “Development and Practice Research on the Online Publicity and Translation Platform for Intangible Cultural Heritage Resources in Liaoning under the ‘Internet+’ Background” (LJ112410152060).

#### *Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate*

This survey was conducted in compliance with Ethics Committee of Dalian Polytechnic University. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose and data usage prior to participation, and responses were collected anonymously. No personally identifiable information was stored.

#### *Acknowledgments*

Not applicable.

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