Digital Campaign Strategies to Engage Consumer Multiculturation: Pakistani Gen Z Responses

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Indonesia's digital campaigns, which include engaging content and social media activities, influence Pakistani Generation Z consumers' multiculturation using the Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) framework. Using consumer multiculturation theory and the Stimulus–Organism– Response (S–O–R) model, it describes CCU as a key process connecting digitally driven diplomatic and marketing stimuli to how young people interpret and incorporate foreign cultural cues into their consumption habits. Focusing on Indonesia's digital outreach in Pakistan—such as cultural, tourism, and culinary storytelling; embassy and consulate social media channels; and platform-based campaigns—this study tests a streamlined structural model where digital content and social media initiatives predict CCU among Pakistani Gen Z. PLS-SEM analysis reveals that both digital content and social media campaigns positively and significantly influence CCU, with campaign efforts exerting a notably stronger effect. The model explains a significant portion of the variance in CCU (R²≈0.674). Overall, the research indicates that CCU should be seen not only as a measure of visibility but as the main point of conversion in consumer multiculturation. It reinterprets digital campaigns as culturally driven learning platforms that deliver intercultural knowledge through relatable narratives and promote dialogue-driven meaning-making via platform-specific engagement. The study provides practical design principles for Indonesia's digital nation branding, applicable to similar countries, especially in Muslim-majority, youth-centered markets.

Keywords: *Digital Content, Social Media Campaign, Digital Engagement, Cross-Cultural Understanding, Consumer Multiculturation*

INTRODUCTION

Digital media has changed how states communicate with foreign publics, shifting nation branding from elite-driven, one-way messaging to everyday, youth-centered interactions on platforms where audiences actively interpret, adapt, and negotiate meaning through platform features and user cultures. In digital diplomacy research, state activity on social media is no longer seen just as message delivery; it is increasingly viewed as a form of public engagement shaped by technological features, such as commenting, sharing, remixing, and participatory formats, that influence how publics respond to and understand content (Manor, 2021). Similarly, place-branding scholarship shows that the "publics" of place and nation brands on social media are formed through networked interactions among diverse actors. As a result, nation-brand meaning is not solely created and controlled by institutions but co-created within digital spaces (Lucarelli et al., 2024). Although digital campaigns are growing in scale, their success is often measured by visibility and behavioral metrics such as likes, reach, and engagement rates. However, these indicators can be deceptive because engagement encompasses multiple meanings and dimensions; visible platform actions do not necessarily reflect understanding, learning, or enduring cognitive change (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021).

This issue is especially relevant in Pakistan, one of the largest youth markets globally, where Generation Z, as digital natives, engage with social media for various purposes, including entertainment, identity exploration, knowledge acquisition, and social connection. Consequently, exposure to such campaigns may garner attention but fail to promote internalized cross-cultural understanding (Hu et al., 2022).

In this context, Indonesia has launched various digital campaigns in Pakistan that focus on cultural, tourism, and culinary storytelling; the social media channels of official representatives; and platform-based activities, including short-form videos, thematic series, and hashtag campaigns. The managerial and scholarly challenge, therefore, is not just whether these campaigns are seen, but whether they promote Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU), the mental ability to recognize, compare, and balance local, global, and foreign cultural influences, which is essential for consumer multiculturation. Research on consumer multiculturation highlights that integrating cultural influences into consumption is an active and complex process of negotiating meaning; therefore, CCU is better regarded as a primary "conversion point" rather than merely a by-product of visibility (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021). The main research gap is the absence of empirical models that position CCU as the key link between government-led digital campaigns and consumer multiculturation among young audiences, especially in the Indonesia–Pakistan context. This context is a Muslim-majority, youth-focused market, and existing studies often examine only surface engagement indicators (Manor, 2021; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). To fill this gap, this study examines how the quality and cultural clarity of Indonesia's digital content, along with interactive and dialogic social media practices based on platform features, influence CCU among Pakistani Gen Z. It also investigates which campaign element has a greater impact on CCU and explores the implications for crafting Indonesia's digital nation-branding strategies in Muslim-majority, youth-oriented markets (Hu et al., 2022; Lucarelli et al., 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital diplomacy and cross-border marketing are increasingly converging within social media, where governments use platform-specific content and interactive campaigns to communicate with foreign audiences. Scholars argue that digital diplomacy is not merely an online extension of traditional public diplomacy but also involves new engagement practices enabled by participatory technologies integrated into daily social media use (Manor, 2021). Additionally, research on place and nation branding shows that brand meaning is no longer solely controlled or broadcast by institutions. Instead, it is shaped through networked interactions among diverse actors and publics on digital platforms, making meaning co-created and relational (Lucarelli et al., 2024). This evolution suggests that "campaign performance" cannot be judged only by output volume or exposure, as message interpretation is affected by the platform's communicative structure and the social practices that develop around it.

A key conceptual lens to explain this architecture is technological affordances, which describe the action possibilities offered by a medium that become consequential when activated by users. Affordances like visibility, persistence, editability, and association help explain why publics not only consume information but also publicly react to, reinterpret, and circulate content, thereby shaping collective meaning (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). In diplomatic and nation-branding contexts, these affordances interact with engagement dynamics, making "being seen" an incomplete indicator of impact. Research on social media engagement shows that engagement is complex and multifaceted, and that behavioral metrics (likes, comments, shares) can reflect entertainment or social signals as much as learning or attitude change (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021). Public diplomacy research also emphasizes that online country-image building involves diverse actors and communication flows, including key influencers and network structures that influence how messages spread and become salient (Ingenhoff et al., 2021). Overall, these insights highlight the need to evaluate digital campaigns not just by visibility but by whether platform-mediated interactions lead to deeper cognitive outcomes.

This need becomes more evident among Generation Z. As digital natives, Gen Z users select and evaluate content based on various rewards, from entertainment and social connection to identity exploration and information gathering, which makes official messaging compete in highly selective attention environments (Hu et al., 2022). For state-led campaigns, this suggests that persuasive power relies on culturally understandable, emotionally resonant narratives that align with platform norms and encourage participation, rather than solely on polished promotional messages. Narrative techniques are especially important because being absorbed in stories can reduce counterarguing and reinforce story-consistent beliefs, making narrative exposure a credible way to learn culture beyond just delivering information (Green & Brock, 2000).

To link campaign stimuli to internal learning outcomes, the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework offers a simple explanation: environmental stimuli influence internal states, which in turn affect responses. Meta-analytic evidence supports the broad relevance of S–O–R logic by showing that stimuli consistently predict internal states, which in turn predict responses across consumer settings (Vieira, 2013). Building on this idea, consumer multiculturation research views cultural integration in consumption as an active process of interpreting, negotiating, resisting, and recombining cultural meanings when individuals encounter multiple cultural influences (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021). In this framework, cross-cultural understanding (CCU) is key because it reflects the ability to interpret norms, values, and practices of other cultures and to understand cultural meanings in marketplace interactions. Therefore, the main contribution and novelty of this research lie in identifying CCU as the primary point at which Indonesia's digital campaign stimuli can be transformed into intercultural learning: small pieces of cultural knowledge delivered through storytelling and reinforced through dialogic exchange, enabled by platform features. This approach fills a consistent gap in digital nation branding research, which often focuses on surface engagement metrics rather than exploring the cognitive processes that lead to ongoing multiculturation outcomes.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

This study describes Indonesia's digital campaign in Pakistan as a two-part framework: Digital Content (DIG) and Social Media Campaign Practices (SMC). DIG involves culturally rich, engaging, and enjoyable media formats, such as short videos, stories, and interactive content, designed to make diplomatic messages memorable and understandable across cultures. SMC includes coordinated, platform-based methods of dissemination and dialogue, such as strategic posting schedules, interactive threads, real-time engagement, and feedback loops that encourage audiences to respond, ask questions, and help shape meaning. This distinction is important because social media communication is influenced not only by message design but also by technological features (e.g., visibility, persistence, editability, association) that allow audiences to share, remix, and openly interpret content (Treem & Leonardi, 2013). In digital diplomacy, these feature-driven practices increasingly form new types of public engagement rather than mere online extensions of traditional public diplomacy (Manor, 2021).

To explain how these campaign elements shape intercultural outcomes, the study adopts the Stimulus–Organism–Response (S–O–R) framework, which posits that external stimuli influence internal organismic states, which in turn guide responses. Meta-analytic evidence confirms that the S–O–R model is a robust explanatory framework, demonstrating that environmental stimuli reliably predict organismic states, which then influence subsequent outcomes (Vieira, 2013). In this research, DIG and SMC act as stimuli, with Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) serving as the key organism. CCU is defined as a consumer's ability to recognize, compare, and harmonize various cultural influences and to interpret the cultural meanings embedded in encounters with brands and countries. These skills facilitate consumer multiculturation as an active process involving negotiating and integrating cultural meanings, rather than passively absorbing them (Ibarra-Cantu & Cheetham, 2021). Notably, engagement metrics alone are inadequate proxies for

these cognitive outcomes because social media engagement is inherently polysemic and multidimensional (Trunfio & Rossi, 2021).

Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that both campaign components improve CCU by increasing culturally understandable exposure and enabling interpretive interaction. H1 suggests that Digital Content (DIG) positively influences CCU by supporting narrative-based comprehension and retention, consistent with evidence that narrative transportation enhances story-consistent beliefs and meaning internalization (Green & Brock, 2000). H2 suggests that Social Media Campaign (SMC) practices positively affect CCU by creating dialogic, participatory reinforcement where cultural meanings are clarified, questioned, and stabilized through repeated interaction. As a new extension, the model further argues that DIG mainly works through narrative transportation and message retention. In contrast, SMC functions through dialogic meaning-making and reinforcement, implying that campaign designs emphasizing two-way interpretive spaces should produce deeper CCU than content exposure alone.
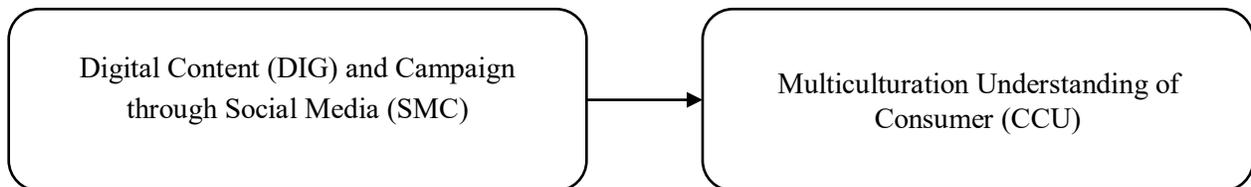

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

METHOD AND ANALYSIS

This study uses an explanatory quantitative approach with a cross-sectional survey design to examine how the components of Indonesia's digital campaign influence Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) among Pakistani Generation Z. A cross-sectional design is suitable because it assesses relationships among constructs within the same measurement period and generates prediction-focused findings through structural modeling. In the context of Indonesia–Pakistan relations, the focus is on digital campaign touchpoints that reach the Pakistani public, particularly content and digital communication activities shared through official channels, such as embassy or consulate social media accounts, and related campaign materials.

The target population is Pakistani Generation Z (born 1997–2012; respondents included in the analysis were aged 12–27). Purposive sampling ensures participants have substantial exposure to Indonesia-related digital content and campaigns, so their responses accurately reflect relevant experiences rather than general opinions. The minimum sample size, based on Cochran's formula for large populations, is at least 400 respondents; after screening, 545 valid responses are used for analysis. Data collection involves a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale and a mixed approach, combining online distribution with offline support via educational institutions to increase respondent reach.

Construct measurement involves three latent variables: Digital Content (DIG) and Social Media Campaign Practices (SMC) as predictors, and CCU as the outcome. Indicators for DIG and SMC capture respondents' perceptions of content experience quality (e.g., format appeal, informational value, and interactivity) and platform-based campaign practices (e.g., dissemination consistency, dialogic space, and responsiveness). CCU is operationalized as the cognitive capacity to understand cultural meanings, interpret cultural cues in brand or country encounters, and demonstrate readiness to incorporate foreign cultural elements into consumption preferences. To minimize common method bias, the instrument design incorporates construct

block separation, guarantees anonymity, and instructions that emphasize there are no right or wrong answers. This strategy follows method-bias guidelines that recommend using both procedural controls and statistical diagnostics (Kock et al., 2021; Williams & McGonagle, 2021).

Data analysis employs PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4 because it is ideal for prediction-oriented goals, flexible with non-normal data, and enables simultaneous assessment of measurement and structural models through bootstrapping (Cheah et al., 2024). Model evaluation includes testing for reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity using an advanced criterion such as HTMT2 (Roemer et al., 2021). Structural model analysis involves path significance, R^2, and effect size (f^2). Reporting and interpretation adhere to best-practice guidelines and checklists for PLS-SEM, emphasizing transparent model evaluation and correct application of assessment criteria (Cepeda-Carrión et al., 2023; Vaithilingam et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Measurement Model: Validity and Reliability

Before testing the hypotheses, the measurement model's quality was confirmed through internal reliability and construct validity. The results in Chapter 4 show that all main constructs used in the model, Digital Content (DIG), Social Media Campaign Practices (SMC), and Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU), meet the reliability standards. Cronbach's alpha values were high (CCU = 0.883; DIG = 0.854; SMC = 0.856), and Composite Reliability was also strong (CCU = 0.909; DIG = 0.895; SMC = 0.897). These results confirm good internal consistency of the indicators and support that the digital campaign and CCU constructs are measured consistently. In current PLS-SEM reporting, such reliability is crucial because it helps prevent path coefficient estimates from being distorted by measurement errors (Guenther et al., 2023).

From a validity perspective, contemporary PLS-SEM research stresses that discriminant validity should be tested using more sensitive methods, such as HTMT², especially when indicator loading patterns are not fully uniform (Roemer et al., 2021). Therefore, this study's narrative positions construct adequacy as the foundation before analyzing structural effects: if the constructs are "clean," then the examination of the DIG/SMC → CCU relationships can be understood as theoretical mechanisms rather than measurement artifacts.

Model Fit and Goodness of Fit

Unlike covariance-based SEM, PLS-SEM emphasizes prediction, but assessing approximate fit remains useful as a check of model plausibility. The results in Chapter 4 show SRMR = 0.053, which is below the common threshold of 0.08, indicating a low model–data discrepancy. This value supports that the simplified model structure (DIG & SMC as predictors of CCU) is globally acceptable. Recent literature also highlights that in PLS-SEM, model fit should be viewed as a "supplementary diagnostic" (rather than a sole determinant), especially when the study's goal is prediction and testing main paths (Cheah et al., 2024).

R Square

The model's explanatory power for the main endogenous variable, CCU, is considered very strong. The R Square table in Chapter 4 reports R^2(CCU) = 0.674. This indicates that approximately 67.4% of the variation in CCU among Pakistani Gen Z can be explained by the digital campaign–based predictors in the model. Within the S–O–R framework, this value suggests that digital stimuli do more than generate organism-level attention (cognitive) in the form of cross-cultural understanding.

Table 1. R Square (Endogenous Construct)

Endogenous construct	R Square
Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU)	0,674

Hypothesis Testing: Path Coefficients and Substantive Discussion

Hypotheses were tested using bootstrapping in PLS-SEM. The results show that both proposed paths are statistically significant, though they differ in strength.

Table 2. Path Coefficient (Bootstrapping) – Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	f	Decision
H1	DIG → CCU	0,117	2,367	0,018	0.016	Supported
H2	SMC → CCU	0,223	4,158	<0,001	0.052	Supported

Hypothesis H1 is supported, indicating that Digital Content significantly influences Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) among Pakistan's Gen Z ($\beta = 0.117$, $p = 0.018$, $t = 2.376$), though the impact is small ($F^2 = 0.016$). This means that greater exposure to Indonesian digital content—rich media that combine visuals, narratives, audio, and interactivity — can lead to measurable improvements in CCU, consistent with Media Richness Theory (Wang, 2022; Yang et al., 2025). According to Uses and Gratifications theory, Gen Z chooses content that provides informational, entertainment, and social-integration benefits, supporting voluntary cultural learning (Hu & Hu, 2022; Falgoust et al., 2022). Indonesian culture reaches audiences not only through official social media but also via a broader digital environment, including TV and streaming platforms, which further boosts cultural understanding and emotional bonds (Lotz et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2024). The small structural effect shows that, although significant, its influence depends on the extent, frequency, and depth of content engagement—aligning with research that emphasizes that cross-cultural impacts through digital media depend on interaction levels, engagement methods, and users' socio-psychological context (Di et al., 2022; Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022). Overall, these findings demonstrate that well-crafted, media-rich digital content can gradually enhance cross-cultural understanding, highlighting the importance of digital diplomacy in shaping international cultural perceptions (Manfredi et al., 2024; Perdani et al., 2024).

Hypothesis H5b is confirmed, indicating that social media campaigns about Indonesia significantly improve Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) among Pakistani Gen Z ($\beta = 0.223$, $p = 0.000$, $t = 4.158$), though the effect size remains small ($f^2 = 0.052$). This suggests that social media efforts involve more than just content sharing; they require strategic, targeted, and continuous communication that aligns objectives, channels, and stakeholders to ensure repeated exposure and consistent messaging (Becker & Gijsenberg, 2022). Exposure to Indonesian cultural elements—such as values, lifestyles, symbols, and social practices—enhances audience cognition, while engagement tools like Calls-to-Action (CTA), participatory challenges, and influencer collaborations facilitate cultural meaning-making (Yuna et al., 2022). Media Richness Theory explains that immersive audiovisual formats reduce interpretive ambiguity, thereby promoting cross-cultural learning, with short-form videos driving higher engagement (Xiao et al., 2022). Projects such

as the "Wonderful Indonesia" FAMTRIP illustrate how cross-organizational coordination and digital diplomacy expand campaign reach and credibility (Lee & Alhabash, 2025; Manfredi et al., 2024). For effective CCU development beyond awareness, sustaining campaign consistency, segmenting audiences, and integrating multiple channels are crucial.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study fills the research gap by showing that the quality and cultural clarity of Indonesia's digital content, along with interactive social media campaigns that leverage platform features, boost Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) among Pakistan's Gen Z. Media-rich content—including visuals, storytelling, audio, and interactive formats—facilitates gradual cultural comprehension, supporting Media Richness Theory and Uses and Gratifications by emphasizing content choices driven by informational, entertainment, and social needs (Hu et al., 2022; Wang, 2022; Falgoust et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2025). Although content exposure is important, social media campaigns have a stronger effect, suggesting that CCU is more effectively deepened through well-designed, consistent, and targeted campaigns. Engagement strategies like calls to action, participatory challenges, and collaborations with influencers and communities help interpret cultural meanings and foster resonance (Becker & Gijsenberg, 2022; Xiao et al., 2022; Manfredi et al., 2024; Lee & Alhabash, 2025). Practically, Indonesia's digital nation-branding initiatives targeting Muslim-majority, youth-focused markets should prioritize integrated, dialogic campaign structures.

Theoretical Implications

The findings expand scholarship on Cross-Cultural Understanding (CCU) in the platform era by showing that simply providing "content exposure" is not enough; what matters more is how content is activated through interactive, dialogic, and consistent campaign practices. This study also redefines Media Richness Theory not just as an explanation of channel- or message-format capacity, but as a framework that illustrates why media richness is more effective when combined with platform features that encourage engagement and provide social cues. These features help reduce ambiguity in cultural interpretation through interaction and the negotiation of meaning (Wang, 2022; Qin et al., 2024). From a Uses and Gratifications perspective, the findings confirm that informational, entertainment, and social-integration motives drive voluntary cultural learning. However, the quality of cross-cultural learning is enhanced when campaign structures actively encourage participation and promote shared social experiences (Hu et al., 2022; Falgoust et al., 2022). A key contribution of this study is the identification of the main mechanisms: campaigns emphasizing message consistency and engagement serve as amplifiers of cultural clarity, indicating that the overall communication framework more strongly influences CCU than individual content assets alone (Becker & Gijsenberg, 2023; Di et al., 2022; Gaitán-Aguilar et al., 2022).

Practical Implications

The findings indicate that Indonesia's digital nation-branding efforts aimed at Muslim-majority, youth-targeted markets should shift from occasional content sharing to a more cohesive, ongoing, segmented, and interactive campaign strategy. Initially, content must be refined for cultural clarity by emphasizing Indonesian symbols, values, social customs, and stories in ways that are both contextual and accessible. This approach should resonate with Gen Z audiences and utilize media-rich formats to improve understanding and emotional connection (Wang, 2022; Wang et al., 2024). Second, campaigns should include engagement activations, such as calls-to-action, participatory challenges, and UGC prompts, so that audiences not only consume content but also interact with and interpret cultural meanings collectively; this aligns with evidence showing that short-form video and UGC formats can increase engagement and improve message processing (Xiao et al., 2023; Qin et al., 2024). Third, collaboration among various actors—such as influencers, communities, and creator networks and cross-channel integration are vital for

maintaining message consistency, expanding reach, and boosting Indonesia's digital diplomacy credibility (Manfredi et al., 2024; Perdani et al., 2024). This strategy helps Indonesia foster deeper, more lasting cross-cultural understanding within a key demographic, while also strengthening the country's brand in today's digital communication landscape (Tijani et al., 2024).

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations to consider when interpreting the findings. First, focusing on Pakistani Gen Z respondents limits the extent to which the results apply to other age groups and countries. However, this focus is relevant because Gen Z plays a major role in Pakistan's digital scene. Second, the study does not include the government-to-government (G2G) foreign policy dimension; therefore, the impact of bilateral political contexts on public perceptions was not directly studied. Still, this allows the results to better reflect more "natural" audience responses as consumers of diplomacy. Third, the 2021–2025 timeframe limits analysis of long-term trends, opening opportunities for future longitudinal studies. Finally, while using a questionnaire for quantitative analysis is appropriate, future research could include a mixed-methods approach, such as interviews and focus groups, to gain deeper qualitative insights.

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