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ENHANCING CROSS-BORDER E-COMMERCE PURCHASE INTENTION: THE INTERPLAY OF CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AND EMPATHY

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Abstract

The burgeoning cross-border e-commerce (CBEC) market in Asia demands talent with strong cultural intelligence (CQ) beyond technical skills. This study investigates the interplay among CQ, empathy (E), self-management (SM), and consumer purchase intention (PI) among 307 students from Yunnan's Higher Vocational Colleges, key to developing CBEC talent for Southeast Asian markets. A quantitative survey collected data from these students, who are jointly trained with CBEC enterprises. Analysis reveals CQ significantly influences both empathy and purchase intention. Self-management positively moderates the CQ-E relationship, enhancing host-consumer connection. Empathy partially mediates the effect of CQ on purchase intention, highlighting its crucial mechanistic role. These findings offer robust recommendations for designing targeted CQ training and operational strategies for CBEC enterprises and HVCs in Yunnan, enhancing sales performance and talent cultivation. This research contributes valuable insights for fostering successful CBEC talent development and strategies in the dynamic Asian market.

Keywords: Cultural Intelligence, Empathy, Self-Management, Purchase Intention, Cross-Border E-commerce

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Introduction

The political and economic cooperation between China and ASEAN countries is becoming increasingly close, particularly in neighboring countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, where trade and economic exchanges have accelerated significantly. Not only has the volume of transactions in product and service trade increased, but there is also a growing trend of mutual learning in economic models between China and ASEAN countries. The success of China's e-commerce model, especially live-streaming sales, is widely recognized, leading to the expansion of online live-streaming for product promotion from the Chinese mainland to Southeast Asian countries. Live streamers can quickly achieve high sales volumes, providing new and effective channels for companies to promote their products (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). Additionally, the personalized explanations and demonstrations by live-streamers engage consumers, increasing their willingness to purchase. However, the effectiveness of live-streaming varies widely across hosts, making it crucial for companies to understand the characteristics that can stimulate overseas consumers' purchasing intentions and the mechanisms behind these stimuli. A key difference between cross-border live streaming and domestic online live-streaming sales is that live-streamers must not only possess the basic traits of domestic live streaming but also be mindful of cultural differences in cross-border live streaming. They need to develop cultural intelligence (CQ) to adapt to market and consumer demands in different cultural contexts (Earley & Ang, 2003). Higher Vocational Colleges of Yunnan Province (HVC) bear responsibility for cultivating cross-border e-commerce talent for China and Southeast Asian countries. They pay early attention to cultivating cross-border anchor cultural intelligence, aiming to enhance cross-border anchors' adaptability to new cultural contexts and improve live delivery performance.

In e-commerce live broadcasts, hosts create realistic scenarios through interactions, enabling consumers to receive more personalized product information. This 'social presence' shopping experience influences consumer behavior. External environmental stimuli affect individuals' emotional experiences, which, in turn, influence their behavioral intentions. Therefore, consumers' purchasing behavior is not directly influenced by e-commerce hosts but is shaped by the cognitive foundation of emotional experiences. Thus, when discussing the impact mechanism of cross-border host cultural intelligence characteristics on overseas consumers 'purchase intentions, it is essential to consider the mediating role of consumer cognition. Empathy, a crucial concept in social cognition, plays a key role in interpersonal interactions (Decety & Svetlova, 2012). This article explores how the cultural intelligence characteristics of hosts in cross-border e-commerce live broadcasts induce empathy, thereby influencing overseas consumers' purchase intentions.

This article focuses on cross-border live-streaming students whom Yunnan higher vocational colleges and cross-border e-commerce companies jointly trained. These students are expected to join relevant cross-border e-commerce companies in the future and engage in online product promotion activities between China and Southeast Asian countries. Online live-streaming is a key component of their training. The training process for these students involves learning cross-border e-commerce knowledge and skills at school, as well as practical training at Chinese mainland companies, where they promote cross-border e-commerce with Southeast Asian countries. Given individual differences, students' self-management abilities vary as they cultivate cultural intelligence. Therefore, self-management is included as a moderating variable in the research model. Using a questionnaire survey, data were collected from students jointly trained by Yunnan higher vocational colleges and cross-border e-commerce companies. Using empirical research methods, the study analyzes the direct and indirect effects of students' cross-border live-streaming on their cultural intelligence and on overseas consumers' purchase intentions. It also provides scientific recommendations for the practice of cultural intelligence among cross-border live-streamers, based on an examination of relationships among variables,

offering practical guidance for cross-border e-commerce enterprises to select and train cross-border anchors and helping Yunnan's higher vocational colleges optimize the training programs for cross-border e-commerce talents.

Literature Reviews

Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that behavioral intention is the most direct factor influencing actual behavior, with other factors indirectly affecting behavior through shaping behavioral intentions. Currently, TPB has become a key topic in consumer behavior research and a focal point for marketing scholars (Sohn & Kim, 2020). The primary determinants of behavioral intention are: 1) attitude toward the behavior, which refers to an individual's positive or negative feelings about performing a specific action; 2) subjective norms, which refer to the perception of social pressure to perform or avoid the behavior, reflecting how external societal evaluations, such as opinions from family, friends, or social groups, influence personal decision-making processes; 3) perceived behavioral control, which refers to an individual's assessment of their ability to perform a specific action according to their own will, particularly the perceived ease or difficulty of doing so (Ajzen, 1985).

In cross-border live-streaming sales, although this study does not directly incorporate subjective norms and perceived behavioral control into the research model, the core logic of TPB still provides a theoretical basis for exploring the impact of cultural intelligence on overseas consumers' purchase intention. Consumers 'purchasing intentions are influenced not only by these three aspects but also by cultural symbolic dimensions. Recognizing the impact of cultural factors on consumer behavior intentions is crucial in marketing (Bodhi et al., 2023). To influence overseas consumers' purchasing intentions, cross-border streamers must consider not only the roles of overseas consumers' behavioral attitudes but also the interpretative differences of products across different cultural backgrounds(which are closely related to subjective norms in specific cultural contexts) and the convenience of cross-border consumption (related to perceived behavioral control). Therefore, cross-border streamers need to develop their cultural intelligence, fully understanding that overseas consumer behavior is driven by rational planning (consistent with TPB's core view) and deeply rooted in the mechanisms of cultural identity. This study connects TPB to the research framework by emphasizing that cultural intelligence helps cross-border streamers align with the cultural context underlying consumers' subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, thereby influencing purchase intention through empathy.

Cultural Intelligence and Purchase Intention

The purchase intention (PI) refers to the psychological tendency or subjective likelihood that a consumer will purchase a specific product or service in a particular context. It reflects the consumer's future purchasing plans or decision-making tendencies, influenced by multiple factors, including the product, the consumer's personal characteristics, and the external environment. In an online purchasing environment, consumers' purchase intentions are closely linked to the characteristics of the media and the communicator (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). In live-streaming sales, the host represents the communicator's image, and their characteristics are directly related to consumer cognition and purchase intention. In cross-border live streaming, the host and the consumer belong to different cultural backgrounds, so communication between them must overcome cultural barriers to be effective. The cultural intelligence of cross-border hosts is crucial to overcoming cultural differences. Earley & Ang (2003) defined cultural intelligence as an individual's ability to adapt effectively to new cultures. Gutama et al. (2021) found that the cultural intelligence of cross-border hosts is reflected in three aspects: cognitive evaluation, emotional drive, and behavioral preparation. Cross-border hosts with high levels of cultural intelligence can more easily interpret cultural

symbols, brand stories, and marketing messages, and better meet the needs of consumers from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the cultural intelligence of cross-border hosts positively influences consumer purchase intention by enhancing cross-cultural understanding, reducing bias, and improving information processing capabilities. Based on the above research, this paper puts forward the following research hypotheses:

H1: The cultural intelligence of cross-border anchors has a significant positive impact on the purchase intention of overseas consumers

Empathy and Its Mediating Role

In the study on empathy (E), researchers categorized empathy into two dimensions: cognitive empathy and emotional empathy. The professionalism and interactivity of live streamers facilitate the generation of cognitive empathy among consumers, which involves processing live broadcast information to form behavioral decisions. Meanwhile, the fame and appeal of live streamers foster emotional empathy, as celebrity recognition can directly and significantly influence recipients' positive judgments of information effectiveness, thereby enhancing their perceived trust (Kwon & Wen, 2010). The cultural intelligence of cross-border live streamers directly affects their empathy toward overseas consumers. Higher cultural intelligence enables cross-border live streamers to understand better the cognitive and emotional factors influencing overseas consumers. Through interactive engagement during live broadcasts, these live streamers can more effectively connect products with the emotions of overseas consumers. Hu et al. (2021) noted that cross-border live streamers with higher cultural intelligence exhibit greater empathetic awareness during cross-border live streaming. Additionally, high-cultural-intelligence live streamers have positive, optimistic expectations for achieving overseas live-streaming outcomes and align product performance, user experience, new cultural contexts, and overseas consumer needs. They focus on integrating product functions and consumer experiences into new cultures.

To enhance empathy with overseas consumers, cross-border live streamers need to improve both their psychological tendencies and actions. Psychological tendencies include actively monitoring overseas market demand for their products, willingness to accept cross-border live-streaming sales, and determination to overcome the barriers to cross-border live streaming. Actions include improving language skills, learning about the target country's culture, and gathering information on consumers' attitudes towards cross-border live streaming. Empathy is influenced by multiple factors, including cultural intelligence, a multidimensional psychological capability system that shapes empathy levels through complex, systematic mechanisms. Guang & Charoensukmongkol (2022) found that cross-border live streamers with high levels of cultural intelligence possess a rich reserve of cross-cultural knowledge, enabling them to anticipate differences in live-streaming promotion styles, communication habits, and market concepts across different cultural environments. They typically exhibit a stronger sense of cultural curiosity and a spirit of adventure, viewing cross-cultural challenges as opportunities for personal growth rather than threats. They also take concrete actions to enhance their empathy in cross-border live streaming.

In the context of overseas live streaming, the professional knowledge of cross-border streamers serves as a source of information that helps consumers empathize emotionally. This information is processed to form perceptions of products and services, ultimately leading to purchasing decisions. However, communication between cross-border streamers and overseas consumers is not a one-time, unidirectional process. Features like bullet comments and messages in live streams provide technical support for interaction between cross-border streamers and overseas consumers. Interaction is a method for quickly establishing empathy with consumers, thereby uncovering unmet needs (Decety & Svetlova, 2012). Whether cross-border streamers are providing product information or interacting with consumers, they need to understand consumers in new cultural contexts well. By leveraging the Internet, big data,

scene experience technology, and new marketing strategies, they can engage the physical sensations and emotions of overseas consumers, forming somatic markers that evoke explicit and implicit emotional memories (Hu et al., 2021). With the help of new technologies and live-streaming methods, the cultural intelligence of cross-border streamers, as reflected in their empathy with overseas consumers, can significantly increase their willingness to purchase recommended products. Based on the above research, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H2: The cultural intelligence of cross-border anchors has a significant positive impact on empathy ability

H4: Empathy ability partially mediates the relationship between anchor cultural intelligence and overseas consumers' purchase intention

The Moderating Role of Self-Management

Sommer (2011) defines self-management as the proactive management of one's own affairs to achieve good adaptation and seek development. Lahmers & Zulauf (2000) found that students' self-management can improve academic performance, reduce psychological stress and anxiety, and enhance their confidence in future career planning. It also enables them to continuously develop the professional skills and knowledge needed for future careers, guided by market demands. This study focuses on cross-border live streaming students jointly trained by Yunnan higher vocational colleges and cross-border e-commerce companies. These students take on the role of cross-border live streamers in practical work, with cultural intelligence courses being the primary focus. Students who have strong self-monitoring and self-assessment abilities and demonstrate higher levels of self-management can better plan their learning of knowledge and skills. They are also more willing to learn new cultural values and behaviors (Gao et al., 2021). Therefore, in the process of learning cultural intelligence, students with higher self-management levels are more sensitive to cultivating empathy in cross-border live streaming and more inclined to focus on developing their own cultural intelligence, which, in turn, affects their empathy toward consumers in overseas live streaming.

As mentioned in the aforementioned study, the cultural intelligence characteristics of cross-border streamers influence their empathy with overseas consumers. However, individual differences also affect the changes in these relationships. Therefore, in this study, individual self-management is used as a moderating variable to examine whether there are significant differences among students with different levels of self-management. Thus, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

H3: Self-management level positively moderates the cultural intelligence and empathetic relationships of cross-border anchors.

To sum up, the proposed theoretical framework of this paper (Figure 1)

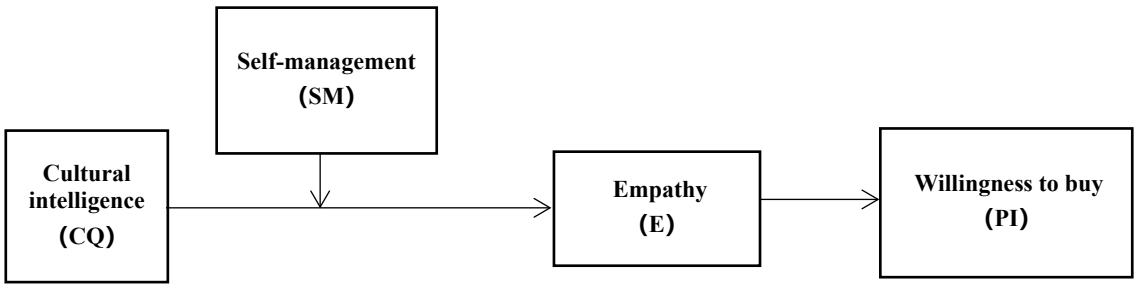

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Research Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

This study employs a quantitative research method by distributing questionnaires to students in cross-border live streaming programs jointly trained by Yunnan Province's higher vocational colleges and cross-border e-commerce enterprises. These students have completed cultural intelligence courses at their institutions and have interned in cross-border live streaming at these enterprises. The questionnaires were distributed at four institutions: Kunming Metallurgical College, Yunnan Energy Vocational and Technical College, Yunnan Transportation Vocational and Technical College, and Yunnan Land Resources Vocational College. These four higher vocational colleges have, in line with China's 'Belt and Road' policy, trained a large number of technical and management talents for Chinese mainland companies expanding their business in Southeast Asian countries. Therefore, this study investigates these institutions to test the proposed models and hypotheses.

The sampling method adopted in this study is stratified sampling. First, according to the scale of cross-border e-commerce live-streaming talent training in the four higher vocational colleges, the sample size of each college is allocated proportionally (the allocation ratio is determined based on the number of students in the cross-border e-commerce major of each college, accounting for approximately 15% of the total number of students in the major of each college). Then, within each college, simple random sampling is used to select students who meet the criteria (have completed cultural intelligence courses and have cross-border live-streaming internship experience) to distribute questionnaires. The questionnaire collection involved online surveys conducted via Questionnaire Star and offline distribution. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed in this survey, and 307 were collected, yielding an effective recovery rate of 87.7%. The collected data were processed using statistical software, and a structural equation modeling approach was used to construct the questionnaire, which helped verify its reliability and validity, as well as the relationships among the variables.

This survey collected 307 questionnaires, all from four higher vocational colleges in Yunnan Province. The age distribution is as follows: 231 students (75.2%) are aged 18-20, 27 students (8.8%) are aged 23-24, and 49 students (15.9%) are aged 21-22. In terms of gender, 67 males (21.8%) and 240 females (78.1%) participated. Regarding the duration of cross-border streaming activities, 31 students (10%) have been active for less than one year, 233 students (75.8%) have been active for 1-2 years, 40 students (13%) have been active for 2-3 years, and 3 students (1%) have been active for more than three years.

Measurements

According to empirical research using structural equation modeling, each construct must be measured by at least 3 items (Shiau et al., 2019). This study uses a mature scale from previous research, and the operational definitions and measurement items of each variable are as follows:

1) Cultural Quotient (CQ): Refers to the ability of cross-border anchors to effectively adapt to and interact in different cultural contexts (Earley & Ang, 2003). It is measured using six questions from Pandey & Charoensukmongkol (2019), such as "I can quickly understand the cultural customs of the target market for cross-border live streaming".

2) Empathy (E): Refers to the ability of cross-border anchors to perceive and resonate with the emotions and needs of overseas consumers (Decety & Svetlova, 2012). It is measured using three questions from Kwon & Wen (2010), such as "I can accurately grasp the needs of overseas consumers during cross-border live streaming".

3) Self-Management (SM): Refers to the ability of cross-border anchors to proactively plan, monitor, and adjust their own learning and work behaviors to achieve goals (Sommer, 2011). It is measured using three questions from Mezo (2009), such as "I can formulate a reasonable learning plan for cultural intelligence improvement".

4) Purchase Intention (PI): Refers to the psychological tendency of overseas consumers to purchase products recommended by cross-border anchors (Wongkitrungrueng et al., 2020). It is measured using four questions from Wongkitrungrueng et al. (2020), such as "I am willing to purchase the products recommended by this cross-border anchor".

All questionnaires use a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 5 ('strongly agree'). In this study, the scale's reliability is evaluated using Cronbach's α. According to Nunnally's (1978) standard, a Cronbach's α coefficient greater than 0.7 indicates acceptable reliability. For the model fit test, the commonly used evaluation indicators include CMIN/DF (minimum fit function chi-square divided by degrees of freedom), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), TLI (Tucker-Lewis index), CFI (comparative fit index), and SRMR (standardized root mean square residual). The standard criteria are: CMIN/DF < 3, RMSEA < 0.08, TLI > 0.9, CFI > 0.9, and SRMR < 0.1 (Hair et al., 2010).

Research Results

Measurement Model, Reliability, Validity

Table 1 Item reliability table

Variable	Measure the number of items	Cronbachα
CQ	6	0.808
E	3	0.839
SM	3	0.816
PI	4	0.898
All questions	16	0.849

As shown in Table 1, the analysis results indicate that the Cronbachα coefficients for CQ, E, SM, and PI are 0.808, 0.839, 0.816, and 0.898, respectively. The Cronbachα coefficient for all items is 0.849, all above 0.7 (the standard for acceptable reliability proposed by Nunnally, 1978), indicating acceptable reliability of the scale. Using statistical software, the model fit was tested using indicators such as CMIN/DF, RMSEA, SRMR, CFI, and TLI, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2 Measurement values of model matching degree

Model test values	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	TLI	CFI	SRMR
Requirement	<3	<0.08	>0.9	>0.9	<0.1
Model fit values	2.74	0.054	0.909	0.927	0.049

As shown in Table 2, the TLI and CFI exceed 0.9, the RMSEA is less than 0.8, and the SRMR is less than 0.1, all of which meet the model fit criteria (Hair et al., 2010). This indicates that the model's fit in this study is good, which ensures the reliability of the follow-up research.

Hypothesis Testing Results

Table 3 Correlation coefficient matrix

	CQ	E	SM	PI
CQ	1			
E	0.804**	1		
SM	0.817**	0.860**	1	
PI	0.856**	0.880**	0.884**	1

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

Through correlation analysis, significant positive correlations were found between CQ and E ($r = 0.804$, $p < 0.01$) and between CQ and PI ($r = 0.856$, $p < 0.01$). To further test the direct effect, a regression analysis was conducted. The results show that cross-border broadcasters 'cultural intelligence has a significant positive impact on their empathy ability ($\beta = 0.682$, $t = 12.345$, $p < 0.01$), thus supporting H2. Additionally, cross-border broadcasters' cultural intelligence has a significant positive impact on overseas consumers 'purchase intention ($\beta = 0.721$, $t = 13.124$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a significant direct effect of cultural intelligence on overseas consumers' purchase intention, thus supporting H1.

Table 4 The moderating effect of SM on the relationship between CQ and E

Regulatory role 1		**Non-standardized coefficients**		**standard coefficient**	**t**	**P**	**B is 95% confidence interval**		**Collinearities are statistics**	
		B	**standard error**				**lower limit**	**superior limit**	**tolerance**	**VIF**
1	(constant)	1.129	.171		4.182	.000	.723	1.635		
	CQ	.571	.083	.480	8.771	.000	.421	.806	1.000	1.000
2	(constant)	1.311	.168		7.344	.000	1.327	1.648		
	CQ	.311	.127	.035	4.766	.035	.141	.271	.318	4.119
	CQ*SM	.109	.023	.470	6.901	.000	.083	.161	.403	4.577

a. dependent variable: E

As shown in Table 4, after introducing the interaction term CQ×SM, the interaction term has a significant positive impact on E ($\beta = 0.470$, $t = 6.901$, $p < 0.01$), and the coefficient is 0.109. This indicates that SM has a significant positive moderating effect in the relationship between CQ and E. H3 is supported.

Table 5 Test results of the mediation effect

Way	**Gross effect**	**Direct effect**	**Mesomeric Effect**	**The effect of intermediaries**
CQ=>E=>PI	0.412**	0.217*	0.156**	Some intermediaries

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 5, the direct effect of CQ on PI is 0.217 ($p < 0.05$), and the mediating effect of E is 0.156 ($p < 0.01$), accounting for 37.86% (0.156/0.412) of the total effect. This indicates that empathy partially mediates the relationship between host cultural intelligence and overseas consumers' purchase intention, thereby verifying H4.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study constructs a model to explore the relationships among cross-border anchors' cultural intelligence (CQ), empathy (E), self-management (SM), and overseas consumers' purchase intention (PI), using questionnaire data from 307 jointly trained cross-border e-commerce students of Yunnan higher vocational colleges and enterprises. The empirical findings are discussed as follows:

First, H1 is confirmed: Anchors' CQ exerts a significant positive direct effect on overseas consumers' PI. Consistent with Pandey & Charoensukmongkol (2019), high-CQ anchors better grasp overseas consumers' cultural preferences and consumption habits, avoid cultural taboos, and enhance consumer trust in both themselves and the recommended products—for example, by emphasizing the family-scenario applicability of products when targeting collectivist Southeast Asian consumers to boost resonance and PI.

Second, H2 is verified: Anchors' CQ significantly enhances their E. In line with Guang & Charoensukmongkol (2022), high-CQ anchors deeply understand overseas consumers' cultural backgrounds and social norms, enabling them to perceive consumers' emotional changes and potential needs accurately. For instance, when Buddhist consumers express concerns about product ethics, high-CQ anchors can quickly empathize and explain eco-friendly, ethical production processes to strengthen emotional connections.

Third, H3 is supported: SM positively moderates the relationship between CQ-E. As Gao et al. (2021) noted, high-SM students proactively plan CQ learning (e.g., studying target markets' languages/cultures in their spare time) and refine E during internships. Thus, under the same CQ level, higher SM amplifies CQ's promotion of E, while lower SM limits CQ's potential due to insufficient active learning.

Fourth, H4 is confirmed: E partially mediates the relationship between CQ and PI. Similar to Hu et al. (2021), high-CQ anchors first improve E, then build emotional connections with consumers via empathy to reduce psychological distance, ultimately boosting PI. For example, when consumers raise product-use issues in live comments, high-CQ anchors first empathize with their troubles, then explain solutions—enhancing consumer favorability and purchase likelihood.

In conclusion, cultivating cultural intelligence among cross-border hosts is crucial in cross-border live streaming. Cultural intelligence encompasses language skills, cultural adaptability, new cultural values and behaviors, and the understanding of cultural differences in cross-border live streaming. When cross-border hosts enhance their cultural intelligence, it improves their ability to empathize with consumers, boosts their confidence in overseas live streaming, and fosters a positive, optimistic attitude towards the challenges and risks of cross-border live streaming. This, in turn, increases overseas consumers' willingness to make purchases. Once cross-border hosts' cultural intelligence and empathy are enhanced, they can better integrate into economic cooperation between the Chinese mainland and other countries, gain more market opportunities, and have more career paths for companies and hosts. This also meets the needs of cross-border e-commerce companies seeking cross-border hosts, thereby accelerating the development of cultural intelligence courses at relevant schools and educational institutions.

Although cross-border streamers receive cultural intelligence training at schools and educational institutions, this process relies heavily on their self-learning and self-management skills. High levels of self-management not only enhance the effectiveness of cultural intelligence learning but also help cross-border streamers improve their self-awareness, demonstrating their ability to self-regulate and adapt in new cultures and unfamiliar environments. Therefore, when schools and educational institutions conduct training, they should consider individual differences, focusing on the variations in self-management skills, to ensure the effective cultivation of individual cultural intelligence. Different teaching models and methods should be adopted for cross-border streamers with varying levels of self-management skills, to develop their unique abilities and enable them to seize market opportunities in cross-border live streaming.

Cross-border streamers face the challenge of expanding into overseas markets. On one hand, they need to enhance their professional skills and knowledge. On the other hand, they must integrate market demands into their learning process to improve their understanding of cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence is a key component in cross-border streamers 'ability to resonate with overseas consumers, a critical factor in evaluating live streaming performance, and influencing the purchasing intentions of overseas consumers. Empathy is supported by cultural intelligence. By conducting a comprehensive analysis of market demands, companies, and local culture in new cultural environments, high-level cultural intelligence can enhance

cross-border streamers' ability to identify market opportunities and understand consumer psychology in these new cultures, leading to more overseas live-streaming customers.

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