



How does the Chinese animation *Ne Zha 2* journey to the world?—From the perspective of Intercultural New Media Studies

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Abstract With the deep integration of new media into everyday life, the intermediary environment of intercultural film communication has undergone significant transformation. In this context, the remarkable success of the Chinese animated film *Ne Zha 2* remains insufficiently understood in terms of its overseas communication. Drawing on the framework of Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS), this study integrates Bourdieu’s field theory with the Cultural Diamond Model to construct an Intercultural communication diamond model that explains this evolving environment. The study argues that the traditional one-way communication model has evolved into a dual structure, in which cultural and digital intermediaries collaborate and interact with audiences. To validate the model, a mixed-methods case study was conducted to analyze news reports, tweets, and user comments on three major international platforms—X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Reddit. The findings reveal that: (1) on X, the news media’s traditional “gatekeeper” function has become decentralized through adaptation to digital dissemination; (2) on YouTube, *Ne Zha 2* aligns with audience preferences, though language barriers remain a key obstacle to emotional resonance; and (3) on Reddit, diverse discussions emerge within virtual communities, reflecting participatory meaning-making. The study concludes that the global communication of Chinese films should foster strategic collaboration between cultural and digital intermediaries and develop adaptive, platform-specific strategies to navigate the increasingly complex intermediary environment.

Keywords Chinese animation · *Ne Zha 2* · Intercultural communication · Digital intermediaries · Intercultural New Media Studies · Intercultural Communication Diamond Model

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Introduction

During the 2025 Chinese New Year period, the Chinese animation *Ne Zha 2* made a remarkable debut on the international box office rankings. As of June 18th, the box office of this film has ranked fifth globally (Maoyan 2025). Notably, it was the only non-American film among the top ten globally. In the context of the post-pandemic global economy, this commercial success not only revitalized confidence in the Chinese film industry, but also drew substantial attention from Western media outlets. The *New York Times*, for instance, published an article titled “Who Needs Hollywood? Chinese Animation Film Shatters Box Office Records” (Wakabayashi and Fu 2025), positioning Chinese cinema in direct comparison and potential competition with Hollywood, which has long dominated global film production and served as a primary arbiter of cinematic taste. While *Ne Zha 2*'s box office success reflects growing recognition of Chinese animation, its revenue composition reveals a strong domestic dependence: approximately 97% of its global box office earnings were generated within China (Maoyan 2025). This landmark achievement raises a critical question: despite its commercial triumph in the domestic market, can Chinese animation genuinely emerge as global taste makers in cinema and challenge the long-standing cultural hegemony of Hollywood?

The term “taste maker” originated from the emergence of a profession that provides the production and dissemination of symbolic values (Bourdieu 1989), thereby introducing new cultural tastes, and was known as cultural intermediaries. However, with the rise of new media and the integration of social media into everyday life, cultural intermediaries are no longer the sole agents facilitating the intercultural dissemination of film products. The development of digital intermediaries has reshaped the environment for intercultural communication. Digital intermediaries, including technological infrastructures, institutions, and automated systems, play a crucial role in decision-making, distribution, and the supplementation of cultural production along the value chain (Hutchinson 2023). According to the 2025 Global Digital Report, social media users now account for 63.9% of the global population (Meltwater & We Are Social 2025). Platforms such as YouTube, X, and Reddit have become key arenas for participatory meaning-making and functioning as functional digital intermediaries. These digital spaces not only reflect transformations in cultural product markets but also broader political, economic and cultural dynamics that operate between global economies (McFall 2014). How Chinese films are disseminated in a complex intercultural communication environment and how social platforms map the dynamic changes are more critical questions to be explored that lie beneath the glamorous box office performance.

There are two common perspectives for intercultural research in film: one emphasizing the macro-level industrial development structure, and the other focusing on the text. However, in the context of digital technology's deep integration into social life, these two perspectives are difficult to capture the dynamic changes of intermediaries in the evolving new media environment. Therefore,

based on the framework of Intercultural New Media Studies (INMS), this study integrated the Field Theory and the Cultural Diamond Model to construct the intercultural communication diamond model. This model aims to systematically interpret the dual intermediary interaction and power redistribution in the fields. Subsequently, taking the animation *Ne Zha 2* as a case study, this research discusses the evolving relationships between cultural intermediaries and digital intermediaries. As a typical cultural intermediary, it is necessary to analyse whether the “gatekeeper” role of news media has been affected, and how the audience’s discussions around the film differ on various social media platforms.

The intercultural intermediary environment of film has undergone a significant transformation, with cultural and digital intermediaries as the core to construct diverse networks to reach audiences. Different rules are formed in the cultural and digital fields, which made cultural intermediaries adapt to such changes. The platform recommendation mechanism and user self-intention have greatly dispersed the discourse power of cultural intermediaries. The authoritative “taste maker” is no longer the cultural myth that the world expects. Valuing the dynamic changes in the intermediary environment will contribute to the intercultural dissemination of Chinese films. This study seeks to interpret changes in the intermediary environment to contribute to the optimization of intercultural communication pathways.

Literature review and research questions

The existing research on intercultural communication in film mainly focuses on two perspectives. One focuses on a macro perspective, employing analytical units such as “country”, “homogeneous cluster” and “film industry”. Research from this perspective categorized the dissemination of film products as either industry advantages or state-driven structural processes. The exploration of Hollywood’s global hegemony is an important theme that elucidates the formation of the role of the taste maker. Since the 1970s, Hollywood has expanded its global market dominance through the advantages of industrialized production, leading to the emergence of local film-based clusters, strong homogenized clusters, and weak homogenized clusters (Chon et al. 2003). Panel data studies of box office performance indicated that the similarity in taste between different regions and Hollywood is positively correlated with cultural distance and the size of the film market (Fu and Govindaraju 2010). However, as research has shown, the correlation between Hollywood penetration and English understanding is more significant than cultural distance, the film taste would be homogenized by reducing language differences (Fu 2012). The study on the internationalization of Chinese films has also been conducted from this perspective, such as the dissemination effect brought by international awards (Li 2024). The value spillover effect enhanced the international discourse power of Chinese films (Luo 2025).

This perspective did provide empirical research on intercultural communication of films in the process of industrial development, but it remains limited in explaining the dynamic interaction of audiences at the micro level. Especially, the development of the new media environment has become a crucial condition

shaping intercultural communication practices (Shuter 2011), and the interactive development at the micro level is significantly affected. Thus, more in-depth research is required to explore how information and communication technologies (ICTs) influence the cultural mechanisms, dynamics, and effects of intercultural communication.

The other perspective centers on film texts, viewing films as carriers of cultural symbols and meanings, with the aim of proposing intercultural strategies. Many studies from this perspective aimed to minimize cultural discounts through various narrative strategies. In terms of text content, it is necessary to consider the differences between China and the West to explore themes (Wang 2017), or enhance cultural accessibility for Western audiences through a “dual coding” strategy (Shao and Pan 2006). In terms of film narrative, it is necessary to explore the commonalities between different cultures (Zhang 2006). By combining Chinese ethnic instruments with Western music (Kang 2020), an atmosphere can be created and emotions can be conveyed (Wu et al. 2021). Additionally, multimodal analysis can be used to bridge the gap in meaning expression (Lu 2023). Moreover, incorporating film visual symbols into poster design and integrating ethnic narratives can also be one of the strategies for intercultural communication (Guo 2024).

The implicit assumption of such research is that as long as the film text has been appropriately encoded and decoded, it could smoothly reach overseas audiences. However, in the scenario where social media is widely used, the meaning of text is negotiated and continuously recreated with the audience during dissemination. For example, Hollywood often sets the theme of “rebellion” narrative, when addressing ethnic or religious groups, such as Muslims, the change of meaning in communication has caused cultural misunderstandings and conflicts (Ghofrani 2024). In Malaysia, social media has become a strategy for filmmakers to bypass policy restrictions (Lim 2014). These studies all indicate that text-based communication strategies have certain limitations and overlook how digital intermediaries have reshaped the communication environment.

In summary, current research on intercultural communication of films requires a perspective that connects films to intercultural audiences. Especially regarding digital platforms as a social space with specific rules embedded in the process of intercultural communication. In recent years, some scholars have paid attention to the role of social media in the intercultural communication of films. For example, in the studies of comments on social media, the bias of international mainstream media towards Chinese films has changed (Xiang and Wang 2020), and the differences in comments reflected the influence of different countries’ politics, economy and culture (Liu and Deng 2022). Digital technology has transformed intercultural communication from a rare phenomenon to a universal possibility (Sun 2013). However, as new media continue to reshape the intercultural communication environment, the mechanism has not yet been fully developed.

Therefore, this study proposes to shift the focus of analysis from text-centric and macro structure-centric to digital-mediated social practices. For the purpose above, the perspective of INMS was introduced into this study, and Bourdieu’s field theory and the cultural diamond model have been integrated to construct an intercultural diamond model. This model regards film intercultural communication as a dynamic

field mediated by digital platforms, in which cultural products, producers, audiences and platform rules interact to jointly lead to communication effects.

Rather than discussing “how the textual design of *Ne Zha 2* goes global”, this study focuses on “what is the digital intermediary mechanism for intercultural communication of *Ne Zha 2* as a cultural product.”

The specific questions are as follows:

- (1) In the context of the rapid development and widespread use of new media, how is the intermediary environment for the intercultural communication of film formed?
- (2) As an important cultural intermediary, how do news media adapt to the changing environment? What changes have occurred in the traditional role of a “gatekeeper”?
- (3) What are the characteristics of comments on *Ne Zha 2* on overseas digital platforms: YouTube and Reddit?

Research design

This study adopts a mixed research approach guided by theoretical model construction and supported by case analysis. It aims to develop and interpret a new model that systematically discusses the composition of the changing intermediary environment that has been changed by the development of new media. Subsequently, the animation *Ne Zha 2* would be selected as a case study to test its dissemination in the context of changing intermediary environments within the framework.

As an animation primarily targeted at Chinese audience, *Ne Zha 2* had limited preparation time for global promotion and distribution. Consequently, the process of digital dissemination for this film experienced minimal significant intervention from intermediaries. The film has attracted the attention of intermediaries, especially internationally renowned news media, due to its exceptional production and box office success. Therefore, taking this animation as a case study to examine how traditional “gatekeeper”, namely news media, influence the dissemination of the film on social media platforms.

The focus on social media stems from its pivotal role as a digital intermediary. By 2024, 62.3% of the global population used social media, with the average user spending 2 h and 23 min per day on their chosen platforms (WAS & Meltwater 2025). The social media, as a representative digital intermediary, constructs the dissemination rules of the digital field with users through different operational logics. The study of the dissemination of *Ne Zha 2* will focus on the comparison between cultural intermediaries and audiences on social media.

This research design employs a mixed approach that integrates qualitative content analysis, quantitative data mining and cross-platform comparative analysis. At the data-collection stage, based on global influence and platform characteristics, the study specifically selected three major platforms operated by overseas companies: X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and Reddit. All data were manually cleaned, and the analysis was restricted to English-language comments to maximize focus on

feedback from overseas audiences. The details of reproducible operations will be described in the corresponding sections later to ensure a compact structure.

Reconstruction of the intermediary environment

This study aims to explore the mediating mechanism of intercultural dissemination of film products in the environment of new media embedded. To elucidate this core issue, the “Intercultural Communication Diamond Model” was constructed (see Fig. 1):

The construction of this model is based on the INMS framework, integrating Bourdieu’s field theory and the cultural diamond model. It is used to interpret the complex communication environment formed by the interaction between Cultural Intermediaries and Digital Intermediaries.

Interaction in dual intermediary

The optimized cultural diamond model elucidates the relationship among cultural products and their intermediaries, recipients and society. “Art is communication” has been claimed from a sociological viewpoint, exactly as cultural products are linked to “society” through intermediaries and the audience whose choices and interpretations of consumption could differ greatly (Alexander 2019).

In an environment increasingly shaped by new media, the process of “art communication” has become more complex. The intercultural dissemination of film products no longer depends on a single type of cultural intermediary, but rather on a dual connection between cultural intermediaries and digital intermediaries to connect audiences. Two types of intermediaries interact and are embedded in a society undergoing profound transformations driven by digital technology. They can be defined as follows:

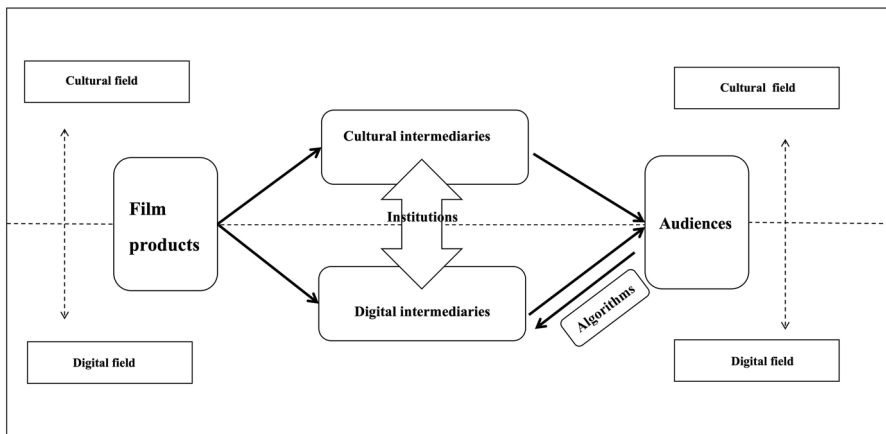


Fig. 1 Intercultural communication diamond model

Cultural Intermediaries: refer to individuals engaged in intermediary professions, as well as intermediary organizations (Matthews and Maguire 2014). For example, journalists, producers and publicity companies and so on. They insist on inheriting traditional standards and once became the “gatekeeper” of taste.

Digital Intermediary: composed of technology and institutions (Hutchinson 2023). The technical aspects include interactive platform interfaces, databases, and algorithm recommendation systems. At the institutional level, it includes news organizations, MCN companies and other organizations operating on digital platforms.

These two intermediaries are interdependent rather than isolated. With the rise of information sharing and interaction on new media platforms, digital intermediaries have gradually influenced the operation of cultural intermediaries. In digital intermediary communication, new media platforms can construct a shared space with the audience as communicators. Different from cultural intermediary communication which the audience only passively receives, the information flow between digital intermediaries and the audience is bidirectional. This feature has attracted the attention of cultural intermediaries and driven their digital transformation, thereby retaining the attention of the audience. For example, many traditional news organizations, while preserving their “gatekeeper” role through official websites, now also operate verified accounts on digital platforms such as X to adapt to the evolving new media environment. In such a dual mediation and interaction, many intermediary agencies balance the connection of resources with cultural intermediaries while also seizing resources on digital platforms. This fusion makes the boundary between the two types of intermediaries increasingly blurred. Ultimately forming a mixed intermediary chain of “two types of intermediaries—institutions—audiences”.

As new media become embedded in everyday life, transformations in social communication patterns have accelerated the emergence of these dual intermediaries. The obvious factor among them is, certainly, the audience’s choice of the shared space constructed by the digital platform that advocates equal participation. In the context of digital intermediary communication, platforms largely function as invisible infrastructures beyond users’ control (Hutchinson 2023), posing unavoidable nudges that intermediary institutions must confront. In the process of communication between digital intermediaries and audiences, audience’s behavior, such as likes, comments and sharing, imply the reception of information. Different digital platforms use differentiated operational logic to attract audience attention and convey information widely. Therefore, when managing digital platform dissemination accounts, cultural intermediaries also need to face the requirements of its rules, and it remains to be evaluated whether their traditional “gatekeeper” role could be affected as a result.

In summary, in the process of intercultural dissemination of films, the traditional situation of cultural intermediaries has changed in the new media environment. The dual intermediary composed of cultural and digital intermediaries spreads information to the audience through interaction. Under the active selection of digital shared spaces by audiences, the dissemination of film products by traditional cultural intermediaries may be influenced by the rules of digital platforms. The advantage of such changes in the intermediary environment for intercultural dissemination of films is

that as long as digital infrastructures remain embedded in society, the traditional role of cultural intermediaries in taste-making could continue to be influenced. Further research is therefore required to examine how intercultural communication of films is achieved on overseas digital platforms.

Structure transformation in the field

The integration of new media into social life not only drives changes in the intermediary environment for intercultural communication but also brings new possibilities for social and cultural flow in society. These possibilities arise from the close interconnection between digital platforms and the public. In particular, social media empowers audiences with the potential to shape cultural trends. The participatory logic of social media—emphasizing interactivity, visibility, and sharing—caters to audience engagement and, in doing so, enables users to assume roles traditionally associated with cultural intermediaries, such as “taste makers” or opinion leaders. Therefore, in the process of intercultural dissemination of film, comments on social media may attract more attention and evolve into a trend. Compared to the “gatekeeper” mechanism of cultural intermediaries, in digital intermediaries, the audience’s comments on film are more likely to approach their true thoughts. Another important factor is the openness of digital platforms, which provide more direct channels for the intercultural dissemination of film products, transcending institutional and regulatory barriers that typically regulate overseas film screenings. While increased accessibility of information does not necessarily guarantee audience acceptance, it does expand opportunities for intercultural communication.

To interpret the dual intermediary in the context of social dynamic changes, the study extends Bourdieu’s concept of “field”. The “field” abstracts the subject relationships and structures, pointing to the network of relationships that exists between participants at different locations in social space (Bourdieu 1989). In the intercultural communication of films, the network of information dissemination revolves around cultural and digital intermediaries, enabling information to spread in societies of different cultures. Thus, two intertwined and diverse fields were formed: the “cultural field” and the “digital field”:

Cultural Field: With cultural intermediaries as the core, network development relies on institutionalized standards. In the intercultural dissemination of films, the international box office, professional film reviews and awards at film festivals are the main criteria for identifying value in this field. The legality of its cross-border exhibition is determined by the trade rules.

Digital Field: With digital intermediaries as the core, the evaluation criteria are jointly constructed by audience consensus and platform operation logic. The rules of the platform and audiences’ preferences constitute the legitimacy mechanism of the digital platform.

As new media become increasingly embedded in society, films have gained unprecedented opportunities in intercultural communication. In the past, the relevant departments made decisions about a film’s international release, including its timing, distribution regions, and how it would reach audiences. And the dissemination

of films mostly relied on cultural intermediaries. Once releases concluded or a film received unfavorable reviews, intercultural communication could be impaired. However, in the dual intermediary communication environment, films can be continuously accessed on digital platforms and directly promoted to audiences, thereby creating more opportunities for films to gain audience attention in the digital field. The evaluation criteria in the digital and cultural fields may vary due to their different ways of formation. Films align with the audience's taste may have more opportunities to be noticed and recognized.

In summary, the theoretical framework of this study, the intercultural communication diamond model, has been interpreted. The process of intercultural dissemination of films is placed in an intermediary environment driven by the dual intermediaries. This is a disruptive change in the communication environment brought about by the widespread use of new media. The social network of the fields, which develops with dual intermediaries as its core, has different characteristics due to different communication mechanisms. In such dynamic changes, the intercultural dissemination of films can gain more opportunities to directly connect with audiences. At this point, it can be further explored how cultural intermediaries are influenced by the rules of digital platforms, and how the evaluation criteria in the shared space of digital platforms differ from those of cultural intermediaries.

Case study: *Ne Zha 2* on social media

News media: “Gatekeeper” meets the new rules

Cultural intermediaries are adapting to transformations in the communication environment. News media can manage content on their own websites, but they should face uncontrollable platform mechanisms in social media.

This part of the research selects news media that have a certain international influence, and all carry out collaborative communication on traditional news websites and the X platform. This provides a complete comparative sample for observing the behavioral adaptation of cultural intermediaries in the digital field. The X platform is characterized by algorithm-driven information flow and real-time performance as its core features. News media constructs targeted exposure mechanisms on social media platforms by promoting and highlighting content. Therefore, comparing the dissemination of *Ne Zha 2* on news websites and the X platform, this part examined whether the role of “gatekeeper” is influenced by social media.

By searching the headline keyword “*Ne Zha 2*” through Google and limiting the language to English, a total of 22,100 results were found as of May 27, 2025. From these results, 9 representative news media outlets were selected, originating from five regions: the United States (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Malaysia, Philippines and Japan. News reports on *Ne Zha 2* from these 9 media outlets were included as part of the data. In addition, manual searches were conducted to retrieve relevant film-related posts published by the same media outlets on the X platform. For media outlets operating multiple X accounts, data were collected from their

Table 1 News media coverage and X-platform tweet data statistics

Media	Country	Number of website reports	Total tweets on Platform X	Total comments	Total retweets	Total page views
Variety	USA	23	27	77	348	457 k
The New York Times	USA	1	1	22	8	36 k
The Hollywood Reporter	USA	7	8	9	37	95.8 k
BBC	UK	2	2	248	104	219.2 k
Reuters	UK	3	4	9	9	34.4 k
Independent	UK	3	2	2	1	7.9 k
Kyodo News	Japan	1	2	0	0	1.201 k
Malay Mail	Malaysia	9	6	0	1	3.037 k
Business world	Philippine	2	3	0	3	881

main, international accounts, China-specific accounts, Asia-focused accounts and entertainment/film accounts. The collected data are as follows (see Table 1):

Traditionally, news media served as the primary decision-makers determining whether a film could enter the public sphere. With the integration of social media into mass society, however, news media have also begun to publish news on social media. As Lewin (1947) emphasized, “gatekeeper” means the management and significant influence that leads to society, news media maintain the role of “gatekeeper” by integrating digital channels. As stated in the framework of intercultural communication, integrating digital platforms is a necessary approach for cultural intermediaries as they compete with digital intermediaries for audience attention.

By comparing the reports from 9 news media outlets and the tweets on X platform: In the coverage of *Ne Zha 2*, the number of reports on news websites is relatively close to the total number of tweets. In cases where the same news is pushed twice, there may also be a situation where the news is pushed again with a different focus. When this form of “forward+link” becomes routine, their ability to attract audience engagement may diminish. But without social media platforms, the total amount of information released by news media would be reduced by approximately half. Thus, as news media adapt to the rules of forwarding and linking on X platform, the social platform has become an implicit reliance for news “gatekeeper”.

The impact of social media rules on news media is not only in the form of “forward+link”, but also in the dissemination effect that is presented by comments, forwarding and total views. On social media, the “participatory journalism” model offers a framework to discuss how news construction influences communication outcomes: media posts that trigger user comments and shares signify processes of reception and meaning-making (Deuze et al. 2007). The reposts and comments of *Ne Zha 2* on the X platform are far below the views, which means that integrating digital platform channels does not necessarily mean gaining users’ participation. A high number of the total views does not indicate that the “gatekeeper” is still authoritative in information management. This may be because audiences can choose social media with stronger interactive attributes or the topics that interest them more, so they mainly browse news. In the digital field centered on digital intermediaries for information construction, audiences have more choices and can spread information according to their preferences. Although news media continue to embody the image of “gatekeeper”, their adaptation to the logic of digital platforms reveals an underlying process of decentralization.

Following independent review and verification by two researchers, themes presented in these news were summarized: the film content of *Ne Zha 2*, Box office tracking, preview of release area, animation technologies, cultural connotation and geopolitical topics. These themes are the focus of cultural intermediaries’ attention to a film.

In summary, the interaction of dual intermediaries is reflected in the intercultural dissemination of *Ne Zha 2*. While news media have retained their agenda-setting framework within the cultural field—centering coverage around film content, box office results, and production technology—the effectiveness of dissemination in the digital field is no longer determined unilaterally by news media. Examining the tweets of *Ne Zha 2* on the X platform, the news media failed to present resonance

with platform audiences according to platform rules, thereby diminishing their traditional “gatekeeper” role. The “gatekeeper” function of news media is showing a trend of decentralization in the digital field. The process of decentralization of this function precisely demonstrates that the widespread use of new media has changed the intercultural environment of film, and the game between cultural intermediaries and digital intermediaries has brought about the reconstruction of power structures.

Analysis of audiences’ comments on social media platforms

In order to gain a deeper insight into the distribution of the film *Ne Zha 2* in digital intermediary environments, this study selected two representative overseas platforms for comparative analysis, YouTube and Reddit. These two platforms have essential differences in their functional positioning and operational rules. They also reflect different mechanisms of digital intermediaries: YouTube, one of the world’s largest video-sharing platforms. Comments on the platforms focus more on intuitive perception and emotional expression of the content. In contrast, as a platform centered around a topic community, the discussions on Reddit are more likely to delve into specific issues. Comparing and analyzing both platforms allows for a comprehensive examination of overseas audiences’ viewing habits and preferences.

Analysis of comments on YouTube

Just as film trailers serve as the most direct audiovisual representations of a film, the comments on *Ne Zha 2*’s official trailer released by CMC (the distributor in North America, Australia and New Zealand) on January 30, 2025 were selected as the analysis data.

The trailer has a duration of 1 min and 33 s, with 3.68 million views and 32,000 likes and 1633 first-level comments obtained by Python in May 2025. Having removed invalid and duplicate comments and limited the comment language to English, the final number of comments was 1,121.

Combining Weiciyun to conduct sentiment analysis and high-frequency word statistics on comments, the results are as follows (sentiment statistics see Table 2, word cloud see Fig. 2):

The results show that the proportion of positive comments is the highest (48.66%), indicating that the majority of these overseas viewers of YouTube hold a positive attitude towards *Ne Zha 2*. Neutral comments emphasize information about the film. The proportion of negative comments was the lowest (12.59%), mainly

Table 2 Proportion of sentiment orientation on YouTube

Sentiment orientation	Items	Proportion (%)
Positive emotions	545	48.66
Neutral emotions	434	38.75
Negative emotions	141	12.59

The appearance of high-frequency words such as “China”, “Culture”, “the West”, “America”, “Europe”, “Worldwide”, and as well as more specific terms like “Pixar”, “Hollywood” and “Disney” shows that *Ne Zha 2* has, to a certain extent, transcended cultural boundaries and entered the international market. When overseas audiences compare *Ne Zha 2* with internationally renowned films produced by Hollywood, Pixar, Disney etc., this comparison carries a dual meaning. Firstly, it indicates that *Ne Zha 2* has reached world-class standards in both narrative and technology. Secondly, the criteria for what overseas audiences appreciate in films have been influenced by Hollywood and other Western film companies for a long time. Thus, the criteria in the cultural field are closely related to the acceptance in the digital field, as shown in the intercultural communication diamond. The standards for measuring the quality of films developed by audiences in the cultural field affect their acceptance criteria in the digital field. Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to the “comparison” in intercultural communication, as it may provide opportunities for mutual understanding. The audience may compare the information received in the digital field with the understanding formed in the cultural field. This lays the foundation for overseas audiences to have a better experience and a better understanding of Chinese films in intercultural communication. An Emotional resonance and audiences’ habits:

Terms such as “Emotional”, “Tears”, “Laughter” and “Happy” indicate that *Ne Zha 2* has successfully evoked emotional resonance among overseas audiences. This reflects that in intercultural communication, films that can evoke emotional resonance among audiences are more likely to receive attention on digital platforms.

However, the appearance of “English” in high-frequency words has exposed the language barrier in intercultural communication. The trailer under analysis features Chinese audio with English subtitles, a format that has caused discomfort to many viewers, as subtitled films have never become a mainstream preference for Western audiences. For example, a line in a trailer can be translated into a lengthy English sentence, requiring viewers to simultaneously process visual information and subtitles within a short span of time, thereby disrupting the overall viewing experience. This issue is particularly significant in animation, as children and teenagers constitute a major audience. Their attention is more easily distracted by long subtitles, leading to a loss of interest.

It indicates that, in the dissemination of digital content through intermediaries, addressing language barriers requires adapting to the audience’s habits to establish emotional resonance. In the digital field, dissemination that does not conform to local viewing habits may lose the audience’s interest, thus losing the opportunity to construct emotional resonance.

Analysis of comments on Reddit

Have collected comments on the four most popular posts about *Ne Zha 2* on Reddit by Python, a total of 428 comments were received by May 2025. Focused on English comments and after removing invalid and duplicate comments, the final number of comments was 312. Although the total number of comments on Reddit is less than that on YouTube, it is still valuable. Because it reflects the different interactive

However, there is a difference in the discussion topics about *Ne Zha 2* on Reddit. The word cloud (see Fig. 3) displays a term, “government”. The audiences discuss the emergence of an excellent film, such as *Ne Zha 2*, due to the government’s support for the film industry. This reflects that the interactivity of the Reddit community may be activated through different topics.

In summary, sentiment analysis across both platforms indicates that *Ne Zha 2* has received positive feedback from overseas audiences. YouTube and Reddit, as overseas digital intermediaries, have demonstrated their interaction with the audience in the intercultural dissemination of *Ne Zha 2*. This responds to the intercultural communication diamond model, which has demonstrated the changing environment brought about by digital intermediaries. Both platforms reflect the audience’s intuitive perception of the aesthetics of film technology and Chinese stories.

Due to differences in operational logic between the two platforms, there are also differences in intercultural communication. Owing to its video-oriented nature, YouTube reveals challenges related to audience adaptation and language barriers. Reddit, as a virtual community, creates diverse discussions on topics in an interactive format. These two platforms have the potential to generate different issues and provide rich culturally themed discussion talks.

The digital platform adopts different operational logic designs to stimulate users’ interaction and reflect various aspects of the audience’s attention. In the intercultural dissemination process of *Ne Zha 2*, the complex changes in the digital communication environment are being examined. Through the dissemination of digital intermediaries, cultural themes flow in the cultural and digital fields through audience interaction.

Conclusions and recommendations

This study departs from the concern about the impact of changes in the intermediary environment on the intercultural dissemination of films. And adheres to the core perspective of intercultural communication research: constructing possibilities for intercultural communication and exploring the possibility of intercultural interaction with the world (Xiao and Hu 2021). It recognized that the development of new media has fundamentally reshaped the conditions of the intermediary environment. By introducing the INMS framework and integrating Bourdieu’s field theory with the cultural diamond model, this study proposed the intercultural communication diamond model to systematically explain this transformation. Using *Ne Zha 2* as a case study, this research examined its dissemination mechanism on digital platforms, especially overseas social media. The main research conclusions are as follows:

The intercultural communication diamond model seeks to illustrate how the intermediary environment of intercultural communication in film has shifted from a one-way framework that was previously shaped primarily by traditional intermediaries to a dual-intermediary structure incorporating both cultural and digital mediators. While cultural intermediaries continue to rely on industry “gatekeeper”, digital intermediaries emphasize two-way interaction and audience participation. Cultural

intermediaries adapt to the operational logic of the digital field to develop their influence.

By using dual intermediaries as the core and following different rules, a communication network has been constructed, forming a cultural field and a digital field. And these two fields both belong to the same society. The cultural field operates according to institutionalized standards such as box office metrics and critical reviews, whereas the digital field constructs legitimacy through audience consensus and platform mechanisms. Of course, because both fields are located in society, they also have an impact on each other.

The case of *Ne Zha 2* illustrates how this dual-intermediary interaction functions in practice. It noted that the operational logic of different digital platforms, along with audiences' preferences and habits, are key points for intercultural communication in digital intermediaries. On the X platform, news media's "forward + link" strategy failed to foster meaningful engagement, indicating a decentralization of their traditional "gatekeeper" role. On YouTube, audience feedback reflected strong interest in Chinese animation's technical aesthetics and mythological narratives, though lengthy subtitles hindered emotional resonance. Reddit comments analysis reflected that, in community discussions, the topics are quite similar to those on the YouTube platform, but there may also be some differences. This case focuses on social media platforms and verifies the interactive relationship between dual intermediaries and the fields in the intercultural communication diamond model. These findings confirm that the intercultural communication of Chinese films faces both structural challenges and new opportunities to reach and engage global audiences.

Based on these insights, several recommendations are proposed:

Firstly, producers and distributors should establish collaborative communication networks that integrate cultural and digital intermediaries. Although the emergence of digital intermediaries has provided opportunities under the constraints of overseas distribution rules, films still require a cinema viewing experience. While digital platforms provide new pathways beyond traditional distribution constraints, strategic partnerships with cinema chains and IMAX theaters remain essential for maintaining the theatrical experience and expanding international visibility.

Secondly, differentiated operational strategies should be designed to align with the logic and user behavior of each digital platform. On visual-oriented platforms like YouTube, enhancing technical presentation and optimizing subtitle design can lower cultural access barriers. On community-driven platforms such as Reddit, initiating culturally relevant discussions can foster sustained user participation. On fast-paced platforms like X, multi-level interactive campaigns can amplify visibility and public engagement. Cultural intermediaries should deeply understand audience preferences on each platform and develop integrated cross-platform communication strategies to enhance overall communication effectiveness.

Thirdly, a long-term communication strategy is necessary to extend the life cycle of films as cultural products. After theatrical release, systematic secondary dissemination through streaming and social platforms should continue to stimulate audience interaction and co-creation. Through sustained engagement, digital audiences' familiarity and appreciation of Chinese films can gradually reshape evaluative standards within the global digital field.

Finally, the study acknowledges several limitations. In terms of methodological scope, the empirical analysis was primarily based on a high-heat trailer on YouTube and a limited dataset from Reddit. While offering valuable insights, this approach may not capture the full heterogeneity of audience engagement across different digital intermediaries. Future research should adopt broader and longitudinal data sampling, incorporating algorithmic analysis to better understand the mechanisms driving intercultural communication within digital intermediaries.

In conclusion, this research advances both theoretical and practical understanding of intercultural film communication. The global journey of Chinese cinema depends on recognizing and responding to the dynamic transformations within the intermediary environment. By embracing the collaborative logic of cultural and digital intermediaries, Chinese films can chart more effective pathways toward global cultural resonance.

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Declarations

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