

## CONSTRUCTING A WANGHONG MUSEUM: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON DOUYIN

XIJIA, D.<sup>1</sup> – ISMAIL, R.<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Faculty of Creative Arts, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.*

*\*Corresponding author  
e-mail: roslina\_i[at]um.edu.my*

(Received 26<sup>th</sup> April 2025; revised 08<sup>th</sup> August 2025; accepted 18<sup>th</sup> August 2025)

**Abstract.** Cultural heritage institutions increasingly engage with social media platforms to broaden their reach and transform their public image. This study examines how the Sanxingdui Museum in China constructs its wanghong (online celebrity) identity through Douyin (TikTok China). We employ multimodal critical discourse analysis to investigate 300 popular videos from the museum's official account. The analysis reveals that the museum develops a dual identity as a playful cultural idol and an authoritative guardian. The playful persona emerges through five key attributes that transform archaeological artifacts into accessible cultural symbols. Meanwhile, the authoritative dimension positions the museum as both a knowledge gatekeeper and performer of national confidence, maintaining scholarly credibility while engaging contemporary audiences. This duality creates a synergistic relationship where institutional authority enhances the credibility of entertainment content, while playful elements increase accessibility and engagement. The museum's approach demonstrates how cultural institutions navigate between educational missions and digital platform demands, transforming heritage preservation into symbolic consumption experiences. The findings illuminate the intersection of China's national cultural strategy promoting cultural confidence with the attention-driven dynamics of social media platforms. Sanxingdui's success reflects broader transformations in cultural communication, where traditional institutions adopt market-oriented strategies to revitalise heritage for contemporary audiences. The study contributes an analytical framework for understanding multimodal discourse in digital cultural spaces and provides insights into the commodification processes that reshape cultural heritage presentation in the digital era.

**Keywords:** *museum, multimodal critical discourse analysis, wanghong economy, social media, Douyin*

### Introduction

Museums worldwide actively engage with social media platforms to communicate with broader audiences. The use of social media has become an important component of museums' digitalisation processes, and consequently, recent years have seen a surge in research examining museum social media usage (Fernandez-Lores et al., 2022; Najda-Janoszka and Sawczuk, 2021; Capriotti and Losada-Díaz, 2018; Vassiliadis and Belenioti, 2017; Fletcher and Lee, 2012). These studies explore how museums use social media to achieve two-way communication and co-create content with users (Bonacini, 2018; Capriotti and Losada-Díaz, 2018). In particular, as digital technology develops, short video social media platforms represented by Douyin or TikTok provide museums with rich multimodal communication affordances (Schellewald, 2023). Dance challenges, meme culture, and AI technologies enable museums to shape more humanised institutional identities (Vázquez-Herrero et al., 2022; Literat, 2021). The Douyin platform provides museums with a digital space to establish closer connections with visitors. Furthermore, Douyin's platform affordances have created a traffic-driven platform economy model (Huang and Ye, 2024). Content that receives algorithmic promotion on Douyin can gain more attention and even help content creators become internet celebrities (Han, 2022). Museums also hope to use platform characteristics to

shape their image and increase their visibility and influence (Chen, 2023). On this basis, museums attempt to transcend traditional educational functions and work to create 'wanghong images' that can stand out in digital spaces.

Under China's policy background of 'building the country into a powerhouse in culture' (Hua, 2024), public cultural institutions such as museums actively advance digital transformation and proactively adapt to new platforms and technologies. Douyin has become one of the main digital display platforms for these institutions. Statistics show that the vast majority of Chinese museums have established official accounts on Douyin to showcase themselves. Browsing museum content on Douyin and engaging in virtual visits has become a new cultural consumption trend among younger generations. Compared with museums in Western developed countries, Chinese museums present unique Eastern cultural characteristics on social media, drawing on their long history and profound cultural heritage to adopt discourse strategies and presentation styles with Chinese characteristics (Yuan, 2021).

Among these, the Sanxingdui Museum has successfully transformed itself into a wanghong museum through various digital strategies, gaining substantial attention on social platforms. According to Zhang (2024), multiple Sanxingdui-related topics became popular online topics, with total views exceeding 2 billion. The Sanxingdui Museum adopted digital technologies relatively early and actively promoted museum digitalisation, including official website development, virtual reality technology applications, and social media operations (Shi et al., 2023). Due to the diverse types and peculiar shapes of unearthed artefacts, Sanxingdui civilisation has been consistently associated with mysterious and fantastical labels. Moreover, as a significant representative of ancient Shu culture in China, it offers rich materials and unique advantages for content creation on social media platforms. Although existing research has extensively examined museum social media usage, including museum performance on platforms like Douyin (Huebner, 2022; Vassiliadis and Belenioti, 2017), there remains a lack of empirical studies that deeply understand how museums strategically shape their image to become influential online celebrities, particularly how they utilise platform multimodal characteristics to construct this wanghong image. This study employs multimodal critical discourse analysis to systematically examine how the Sanxingdui Museum uses the coordinated effects of textual, visual, and auditory semiotic resources to shape its wanghong identity. Additionally, this study combines symbolic economy concept with an analysis of China's specific national cultural policy background to address theoretical and empirical gaps in existing research. Therefore, this study poses the following research questions.

RQ1: What are the key wanghong features that constitute the Sanxingdui Museum's identity on Douyin?

RQ2: How are these specific features realised through the museum's multimodal discourse strategies?

RQ3: What do the features of museum wanghong images reveal about broader trends in China's national cultural strategy and the evolving digital media landscape?

In the following sections, we will first introduce the basic concepts and theoretical foundations adopted in this research, then outline the constructed theoretical framework and research methods, followed by analysis of the Sanxingdui Museum's specific

strategies for wanghong image construction, and finally provide in-depth discussion in relation to China's national cultural policy background.

### ***Literature review***

The phenomenon of wanghong, commonly translated as 'online celebrities' or microcelebrities, represents a defining characteristic of contemporary Chinese digital culture (Jing and Xinxin, 2019). These individuals cultivate widespread fame and influence through strategic engagement across social media platforms. However, the concept has undergone significant transformation since its emergence. What began as individual celebrity cultivation has evolved into a sophisticated, professionalised economic framework that operates as a replicable communication strategy (Hu, 2023). This evolution demonstrates how the attention economy has repositioned online traffic generation, strategic persona construction, and interactive engagement as fundamental mechanisms for accumulating both social and economic capital. The strategic adoption of wanghong communication approaches has extended beyond individual practitioners to encompass diverse institutional actors. Public institutions, commercial entities, cities, and museums have increasingly incorporated these rhetorical styles and interactive methodologies into their promotional strategies (Cao, 2024). Central to this institutional adaptation is the deliberate personification of organisational identity, a process whereby institutions adopt more accessible, entertaining, and digitally fluent communication modes to differentiate themselves within saturated information environments (Fan and Lin, 2022). This shift reflects broader changes in how authority and expertise are constructed and maintained in digital spaces.

The transformation of museum communication practices exemplifies these broader trends. Social media platforms have fundamentally disrupted traditional museum communication models, which historically operated through unidirectional, hierarchical information dissemination (Arnaboldi and Diaz Lema, 2022). Digital platforms privilege interactivity, participatory engagement, and community formation, characteristics that have compelled museums to reconsider their relationship with audiences (Agostino and Arnaboldi, 2021). Contemporary museum social media strategy extends beyond conventional functions such as collection documentation or exhibition promotion. Instead, museums increasingly focus on generating creative content designed to stimulate user participation, encourage user-generated content (UGC), and establish vibrant online communities centred around institutional brands (Booth et al., 2020). This strategic reorientation requires museums to navigate complex tensions between educational mission and entertainment value. Successful digital engagement often depends on an institution's ability to maintain professional credibility while adopting more informal, accessible communication styles (Kidd, 2014). The challenge lies in preserving scholarly authority while embracing the vernacular languages and interactive formats that characterise social media culture.

Within this context, museum content becomes embedded in broader systems of symbolic consumption. Cultural artefacts and institutional knowledge function beyond their traditional educational roles, transforming into symbols that audiences consume and circulate through their digital interactions. Baudrillard's analysis of contemporary consumption behaviour provides a useful framework for understanding this transformation. He argues that modern consumption transcends material utility, instead operating through the pursuit of symbolic value (Baudrillard, 2016). From this perspective, consumption represents a process of social identity construction and

cultural recognition mediated through symbolic engagement rather than practical use. The application of Baudrillard's framework to museum social media reveals how cultural institutions participate in symbolic economies. When museums employ wanghong strategies to generate online engagement, their primary objective extends beyond knowledge dissemination to encompass the facilitation of symbolic consumption experiences. This dynamic transform museum content into consumable cultural symbols that audiences can deploy in their own identity construction projects. The implications of this transformation warrant careful examination, particularly regarding how it affects the traditional educational and preservation functions of cultural institutions. In the case of Sanxingdui's Douyin presence, museum content operates simultaneously as an educational resource and cultural commodity. The videos function as vehicles for both archaeological knowledge transmission and symbolic consumption, creating complex relationships between institutional authority, audience engagement, and cultural meaning-making in digital environments.

## **Materials and Methods**

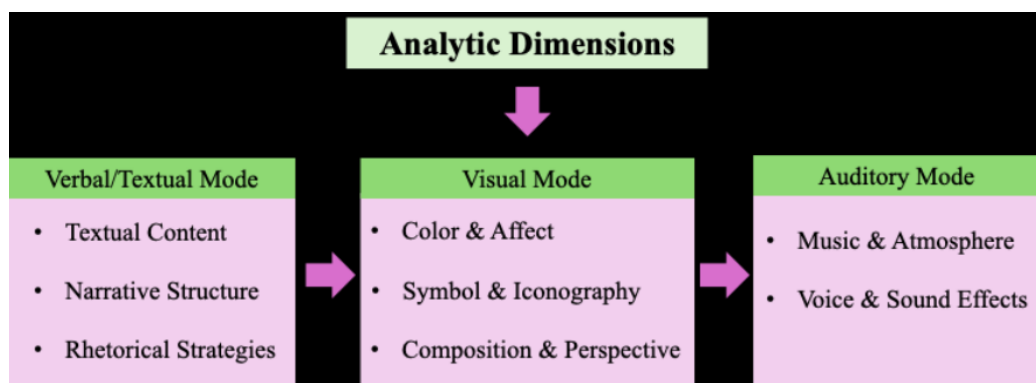
### ***Sample and data***

This study takes a Douyin account created by the Sichuan Guanghan Sanxingdui Museum (China) as a case study. We selected this particular case because the museum has rapidly become enormously popular in recent years. This popularity is prominently reflected in media coverage, which frequently employs internet celebrity-related terminology such as top-tier traffic or traffic explosion to describe it (Sichuan Daily, 2025). According to Sichuan Daily (2025), the Sanxingdui Museum welcomed over 6 million visitors in 2024, its Douyin account attracted nearly 400,000 followers, and cultural creative products generated annual sales of nearly 200 million yuan. Moreover, the inherent unsolved mysteries surrounding Sanxingdui civilisation provide the museum with unique advantages for narrative creation on social media platforms. Consequently, Sanxingdui's internet celebrity attributes make it an ideal case for examining how cultural institutions present and communicate themselves in the digital age. To conduct an empirical study of this phenomenon, our research draws data from the official Douyin account of Sanxingdui Museum. We systematically collected the top 300 most popular videos (N=300) posted by this account from its creation on 18 May 2018 to 31 May 2025, forming our analytical corpus. Selecting popular videos better demonstrates the museum's traffic-oriented approach and the construction of its internet celebrity status. We chose the Douyin platform not only because it represents one of the most widely used social media platforms among Chinese museums, but also because its short video format and inherent multimodal features provide an appropriate environment for our analysis.

### ***Analytical method***

Given the highly multimodal nature of our research data, purely textual or content analysis would prove insufficient to capture the full scope of meaning construction. Therefore, this study employs Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) as its core methodology. MCDA understands discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2023; Machin and Mayr, 2012) and emphasises that meaning emerges through the collaborative operation of multiple semiotic resources, including text,

visuals, and sound (Kress, 2010). It aims to explore how Sanxingdui Museum constructs its wanghong identity through discursive practices within the specific media ecology of Douyin. Here, we regard wanghong image as a complex social symbolic process that manifests not merely as quantifiable traffic, but as evaluative construction achieved through multimodal discourse strategies driven by platform technological logic. To systematically dissect this process, we developed an analytical framework (*Figure 1*) specifically designed to decode how Sanxingdui's wanghong image is achieved through a series of attributes. This framework integrates theoretical resources from textual, visual, and auditory semiotics, focusing on how these core attributes are constructed through three major modalities. In our specific analytical procedure, we coded each video in the corpus individually. Analysts first identified the primary evaluative attributes that each video sought to construct, then systematically recorded specific manifestations across textual, visual, and auditory modalities according to the analytical elements outlined in *Figure 1*. We paid particular attention to how different modalities complement and reinforce each other to collaboratively generate complex meanings (Kress, 2010). For instance, Mystery and Fantasy might be collaboratively constructed through the linguistic modality of '... is so mysterious' titles, visual modality cold tone rendering, and auditory modality of suspenseful background music. Through this multimodal analysis, we identified the primary characteristics of Sanxingdui Museum's wanghong image.



*Figure 1. The framework of multimodal analysis.*

## Results and Discussion

### *Evaluation attributes in Sanxingdui museum*

Based on our analysis of the 300 most popular videos, this study identifies a clear set of attributes that the Sanxingdui Museum employs to construct its wanghong identity. This identity is dualistic, encompassing two distinct roles: the Playful cultural idol and the Authoritative guardian, as detailed in *Table 1*. The former persona is achieved through personification and entertainment-oriented strategies that transform the museum into an engaging cultural celebrity (Wilkin et al., 2025), including Mystery and Fantasy, Trendiness and Fashion, Aesthetics, Relatability, and Sense of technology. These attributes allow the museum to move beyond its traditional educational role and create a space for mass entertainment and symbolic consumption (Luna-Cortés, 2017; Van Aalst and Boogaarts, 2002), making the enigmatic ancient civilisation accessible and captivating to contemporary audiences. The Authoritative Guardian is built by

positioning the museum as the Knowledge gatekeeper of ancient Shu civilisation and through the Performance of national confidence. By presenting authoritative archaeological knowledge and linking its heritage to national pride, this dimension provides a foundation of credibility for its more playful online persona. Next, this paper will provide a detailed analysis of how these attributes are constructed through short videos.

**Table 1.** *Evaluative attributes in Sanxingdui museum's wanghong identity.*

Category	Frequency
Playful cultural idol	148
Mystery and Fantasy	26
Trendiness and Fashion	36
Aesthetics	25
Relatability	45
Sense of technology	16
Authoritative guardian	152
Knowledge gatekeeper	115
Performance of national confidence	37

### ***Sanxingdui museum as a playful culture idol***

#### ***Mystery and fantasy***

We first identified an attribute named Mystery and Fantasy. This attribute aligns with a significant trend in contemporary museology that utilises immersive technologies to foster deeper, more affective forms of visitor engagement beyond traditional learning (Mondloch, 2022). It aims to leverage the inherent mysticism of the Sanxingdui civilisation and the extraordinary visual forms of its excavated artefacts. Through this process, the museum reframes its collection from static archaeological exhibits into dynamic cultural symbols, which can be understood as possessing a form of digital agency within their new media ecosystems (Budge and Burness, 2018). It is noteworthy that, in the coding process, this study excludes content such as documentaries whose primary objective is realistic demystification. Although such documentaries also touch upon elements of mystery, their function is fundamentally one of demythification. In contrast, the Mystery and Fantasy strategy follows a path of re-mystification. This deliberately creates an aura that prioritises affective experience, a logic particularly potent in the attention economy of social media platforms (Taibanguai and Suraratdecha, 2022). To achieve this, their discourse frequently incorporates words like 'unveiling' or 'exploring' or poses questions in titles and captions to guide the audience into an exploratory context. Visually, a common approach involves dim, hazy lighting that allows artefacts to appear enigmatically, supplemented by stylised visual effects. Besides, suspenseful background music or a deep, resonant narration combine to establish a solemn and mysterious atmosphere. For instance, in *Figure 2*, a short video of a semiotic reconstruction of the bronze sacred tree. The video's narrative logic transcends a simple representation of the artefact, instead constructing a mythological context imbued with revelatory and magical qualities. Firstly, the video achieves the decontextualisation of the artefact through scene displacement. The tree is not presented in a conventional museum display case but is situated within a fictional, ethereal space. It is re-situated within a mythological narrative framework.



*Figure 2. The Bronze Sacred Tree being reconstructed amidst a mystical aura.*

Secondly, the core narrative driver is its spectacular dynamic process. The tree is not initially shown in its complete form; instead, it first deconstructs into several floating fragments, which then reassemble. This dynamic, self-assembling motion visually imbues the artefact with a sense of life and inner agency. As Carah and Angus (2018) emphasised that the agency of technology and trend algorithmic entities in how culture is presented and understood. Finally, the integration of multimodal resources completes the semiotic reconstruction of the Bronze Sacred Tree. The epic score enhances the scene's sense of the sublime, while the omission of narration encourages an emotional interpretation. This approach is central to the design of immersive experiences, which privilege embodied, affective responses over the detached, rational reception of information (Mondloch, 2022).

### ***Trendiness and fashion***

A key component of Sanxingdui's playful cultural idol image is the deliberate cultivation of Trendiness and Fashion, a strategy designed to align the ancient brand with contemporary youth culture (Manna and Palumbo, 2018). This is achieved mainly through the promotion of cultural and creative products and the unique presentation of its artifacts. This attribute is primarily constructed through a rich lexicon of internet slang and the personification of its artefacts as trendy online influencers. Textually, the museum creatively appropriates internet vernacular, transforming terms like 土味 (literally 'earthy taste,' typically meaning unfashionable) into trendy expressions that

celebrate its archaeological identity as ‘unearthed treasures.’ Through phrases like 整活了 (roughly ‘pulling off something cool’), 请求出战 (requesting to battle), and claiming the C位 (center position), the museum adopts the vernacular of digital natives to create relatable content. They also create special terms such as 堆堆粉 (Duidui fans), borrowed directly from modern celebrity fan culture (Liang and Shen, 2016), which redefines museum visitors as active, emotionally invested members of a fan community rather than passive tourists. Similarly, the term 打卡 (clock in), originally referring to workplace attendance but now carrying consumptive connotations of visiting or coming to experience, is frequently employed to position the museum as a consumable destination. Visually, this playful persona is reinforced through dynamic animations of Sanxingdui sculptures engaging in contemporary activities such as enlarging, shrinking, dancing, exercising, and performing callisthenics, accompanied by accelerated video editing techniques typical of social media content. The museum further amplifies its visibility through 显眼包 (attention-grabbing) strategies, incorporating internet celebrity stickers and staging spectacular public appearances, such as participants wearing Sanxingdui-inspired costumes in marathons. Additionally, from an auditory perspective, the institution strategically creates original dialect rap performances, memes, and trending background music to cultivate playful, dynamic, and romantic atmospheres that resonate with contemporary platform users’ pursuit of trends and fashion.

With these strategies, Sanxingdui is constructed as an idol that attracts audience consumption. For example, in *Figure 3*, an animated video for creative IP products, ancient bronze figures are endowed with a playful narrative of ‘clocking off from work’ and ‘travelling around Sichuan’. This narrative co-constructs a unique sense of Trendiness and Fashion through the synergy of multiple semiotic resources. The video adopts the popular 萌 (cute) art style, shaping the artefacts into ‘people’ with humorous and even rebellious personalities, and endowing them with a series of highly contemporary actions: they browse social media on smartphones, play mahjong with companions, eat hotpot, and even put on lipstick or casually cross their legs. Meanwhile, the use of a Sichuan dialect voiceover throughout not only adds a strong local flavour and comedic effect but also establishes a relatable and authentic interactive discourse style. This is accompanied by upbeat and fashionable electronic music, which further strengthens the video’s modern sensibility and entertaining atmosphere. By endowing the artefacts with a fashionable and consumable persona, the museum guides the audience to perceive them as trendy cultural icons. Moreover, this animated persona is not an isolated symbol; it is directly linked to the physical creative products sold by the museum. This strategy successfully creates a pathway from the consumption of visual symbols (liking and sharing the video) to the consumption of physical products (purchasing the corresponding merchandise) (Huang et al., 2023). This comprehensive multimodal approach enables the museum to transform ancient artifacts into relatable cultural icons that resonate with modern audiences (Wilkin et al., 2025). Promoting a range of modern lifestyle experiences intertwined with its cultural heritage.





*Figure 3. An urban life capture of Sanxingdui bronze idols.*

### ***Aesthetics***

Aesthetics represents a distinctive attribute of museums that differs from merely showcasing the beauty of exhibits or exhibitions themselves. Instead, this attribute is manifested through the display of natural scenery surrounding the museum grounds. This aesthetic attribute is achieved by moving beyond the exhibition halls to associate the Sanxingdui brand with a broader, romanticised vision of traditional Chinese natural and cultural beauty. Rather than focusing solely on artifacts, this approach integrates seasonal landscapes of spring blossoms, golden autumn scenes, or winter snowfall to create an immersive cultural experience that transcends traditional museum presentation modes. These scenic videos strategically package the museum as a wanghong destination, using cinematographic techniques to attract visitors for photography and social media sharing, effectively transforming cultural sites into consumable experiences (Zhang et al., 2022). A representative example is a short video featuring a pond of lotus flowers in summer, which masterfully blends multiple semiotic resources to create a poetic atmosphere that resonates with traditional Chinese aesthetic values (*Figure 4*). Visually, the video centres on a young woman dressed in elegant ancient costume (hanfu), holding a traditional oil-paper umbrella. Her presence is not that of a typical tourist, but rather a personification of classical elegance. The camera fluidly cuts between her graceful figure and evocative close-ups of lotus flowers, creating a serene and picturesque visual texture. The video title quotes a famous Tang dynasty poem

about lotuses, inviting the audience to interpret the scenery through a classical literary lens.



**Figure 4.** A woman in Hanfu admiring lotuses.

This entire visual-audio and textual strategy co-constructs a highly stylised and desirable 中国风 (Chinese style) atmosphere. Throughout this video, the Sanxingdui Museum's architecture appears repeatedly, establishing a tight visual connection between the external aesthetic landscape and the museum while creating an aspirational atmosphere of serene beauty. The protagonist appears as a temporal traveller who has crossed from ancient times to the present, engaging in profound dialogue with precious artefacts across millennia. This narrative strategy significantly enhances the brand's cultural appeal and emotional resonance, particularly on the Douyin platform, where period costume elements, time-travel themes, and traditional cultural revival are all highly sought-after trending topics that can effectively reach younger audiences and inspire their interest in and identification with traditional culture (Tang and Wang, 2022).

### **Relatability**

The construction of Relatability is another vital component of Sanxingdui's wanghong attribute. This attribute is largely achieved by inviting celebrities or building influencer images of museum employees. According to Wang et al. (2025), the relatability of influencers can positively influence users' intentions to engage in

consumer behaviours on social media platforms. In this context, the Sanxingdui Museum seeks to bridge the gap between itself and its audience by presenting celebrities in a more approachable manner. For example, a group of celebrities visit the museum. In the video, the celebrities act in the role of the audience, their visit mirroring an ideal tourist experience. Their interactions, such as enthusiastically taking photos with exhibits and expressing genuine awe with exclamations like ‘This is so interesting!’ are presented as authentic, unscripted reactions. They show surprise as they listen to explanations that are reactions typical of real visitors, with no trace of celebrity aloofness. This strategy uses their public appeal to mediate the museum’s authority; when a famous personality listens intently to a guide’s explanation, it makes the educational content seem more engaging and less intimidating to the general public. Furthermore, the discourse constructs the physical visit as an irreplaceable, authentic experience. One celebrity host explicitly states that seeing the artefacts in person is far more shocking than viewing pictures online, a direct appeal that validates and encourages the act of tourism. The video also portrays the visit as a social activity, with the caption highlighting that the celebrities are ‘teaming up’ to explore. This narrative then extends to the museum’s gift shop, where their visible delight in browsing and purchasing IP products frames symbolic consumption not as a commercial add-on, but as a natural and joyful culmination of the cultural tour. By showcasing famous personalities engaging in behaviours typical of any visitor, Sanxingdui effectively diminishes the distance between the institution and the public, creating a powerful sense of shared experience and relatable appeal.

### ***Sense of technology***

Sanxingdui Museum also constructs its image by cultivating a Sense of technology. This attribute is constructed by explicitly demonstrating the museum’s engagement with contemporary digital tools, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Reality (VR), which serve as a transformative tool for creatively reinterpreting its collections and enhancing visitor engagement through innovative technological approaches (Li et al., 2024). These videos typically post with slogans such as ‘immersive’, ‘virtual’, ‘AI’, and ‘technology’. Visually, they are characterised by dark-toned colour schemes, complemented by luminous halos, fiery glows, or fluorescent reflections, alongside particle effects, glowing borders, and neon aesthetics.

### ***Sanxingdui museum as an authoritative guardian***

Sanxingdui Museum is positioning its Douyin account’s image as the primary source of credible information about the ancient Shu civilisation. It is identity as a role of Knowledge gatekeeper. This attribute is constructed by granting audiences privileged, behind-the-scenes access to the scientific process of archaeological discovery. In cultivating its wanghong status, the Sanxingdui Museum maintains the authority of a public institution. The museum’s online celebrity image serves as a conduit for positive cultural transmission without compromising its authoritative function as a knowledge disseminator. The museum strategically balances its popular appeal with a clear defence of its core institutional mission. In maintaining its authority, the primary focus is the protection and dissemination of knowledge (Robinson, 2020). The digital landscape is frequently plagued by misinformation (Basch et al., 2021), making it the obligation of public institutions to disseminate authentic knowledge and safeguard intellectual

integrity. In Sanxingdui Museum's video content, the role of knowledge gatekeeper manifests primarily through educational content presented in documentary formats or expert commentary. Additional behind-the-scenes content showcasing exhibition preparation and artifact restoration work further reinforces this authority through demonstrations of authenticity and professional expertise (Komarac et al., 2020). To enhance its internet celebrity status and increase viewership, much of this authoritative content employs media convergence strategies, collaborating with television stations and other short video platforms for broader dissemination (Jenkins, 2006). While these materials predominantly maintain a serious and rigorous tone, some incorporate recognisable creative elements and engaging features to attract audiences without compromising scholarly standards.

For example, a series of documentary short videos comprising 30 episodes reports on the excavation progress. This series of short films originated from Bilibili, a Chinese social media platform, and underwent cross-media transmission on Douyin. The video titles in this series have been organised into a collection, with each episode beginning with 'Episode No.' as the title opener. Simultaneously, each title incorporates a creative headline designed to enhance intrigue and viewer engagement. For example, the title '解除封印！#三星堆绝无仅有的文物被唤醒(Breaking the Seal! #Sanxingdui's Unique Artefacts Are Awakened)' employs the buzzword 'Breaking the Seal' to suggest themes of liberation or the revelation of hidden mysteries. Visually, these productions transport audiences directly to the excavation site, where archaeologists in full protective gear work meticulously within excavation pits, immediately establishing a professional and scientific context. The camera's steady, observational perspective and intimate close-ups of newly unearthed artifacts function as a form of heritage representation that emphasises the process of discovery. The deliberate and careful actions of archaeologists, such as gently brushing away soil or extracting fragile items, visually embody the concepts of scientific rigour and profound respect for cultural relics. This visual authenticity is reinforced through informative discourse, where a calm, authoritative narrator explains the context and significance of findings using formal, descriptive language. This narrative voice, combined with on-site dialogue between archaeologists discussing their work, constructs a discourse of scientific legitimacy.

Through this multimodal strategy, the museum transcends simple historical fact presentation; it actively performs its gatekeeping role by allowing the public to witness the 'birth' of historical knowledge in real-time. This approach solidifies the museum's authority and enhances the credibility of its subsequent interpretations and exhibitions. The construction of this scholarly foundation serves as crucial groundwork, adding credibility to the more playful internet celebrity content presented in other contexts, creating a balanced digital presence that maintains institutional gravitas while embracing contemporary engagement strategies. Complementing its role as a knowledge gatekeeper, the Sanxingdui image is also mobilised in the Performance of national confidence, a process guided by top-level political directives that explicitly link Chinese traditional collections with the goal of enhancing audience cultural identity (Wang et al., 2021). This positioning also facilitates audiences' engagement in constructing Douyin platform's playful patriotism through positive energy content (Chen et al., 2021). This attribute is constructed through a grand narrative that links the Sanxingdui site to broader themes of cultural and national confidence, thereby framing its heritage as a part of national pride. For instance, Figure 6 documents an official

inspection of the site by then-Premier Li Keqiang. Visually, the video's power lies in the presence of the state leader. The images of the Premier inspecting the excavation pits and observing artefacts in the conservation labs function as a powerful state endorsement. In the Chinese context, such a high-level visit visually signals that the institution and its work are aligned with national strategic priorities. This visual association elevates the museum's status from a regional institution to a project of national importance, bestowing upon it a level of significance that transcends mere academic or cultural interest.

This national framing is made explicit in the linguistic discourse. The video's title, 'Premier Li Keqiang Inspects the Sanxingdui Archaeological Site,' immediately establishes the official nature of the event. More importantly, the caption directly quotes the Premier's directive to 'Excavate well, protect well, and research well this rich historical and cultural heritage.' This quote functions as a top-down instruction, framing the archaeological work as a national mission and the artefacts as treasures of the nation. The formal, uplifting background music further contributes to this sense of official gravitas. Through this multimodal performance, the Sanxingdui discovery is positioned as an archaeological finding, and further as a symbol of the depth of Chinese civilisation and a source of collective national pride. This strategy allows the museum to reinforce its authority by aligning its work with the grand narrative of national rejuvenation and cultural confidence. The analysis section clearly demonstrated how these identities are realised through multimodal discourse practices. This section seeks to examine the deeper logic behind these wanghong characteristics and illuminate their complex relationship with contemporary Chinese national cultural strategy and the evolving digital media landscape. The core finding of this research lies in Sanxingdui's construction of a dual-faceted identity. It functions simultaneously as a playful cultural idol and an authoritative guardian. These two identities, although seemingly contradictory, form a highly synergistic symbiotic relationship that proves central to the success of its wanghong image. This finding aligns closely with the growing importance of social media in museum digital communication in recent years (Wilkin et al., 2025). As Stuedahl and Smørðal (2011) observe, modern museums must establish effective connections between historical heritage and younger generations, with the key lying in constructing composite identities that maintain cultural authority while possessing contemporary appeal. The authoritative guardian identity serves as the cornerstone of Sanxingdui's trust system. Through publishing archaeological documentary videos and conducting rigorous knowledge dissemination, Sanxingdui has established its professional standing as an interpreter of ancient civilisation. This authoritative foundation becomes a crucial component of its wanghong appeal, providing users with the credibility and authenticity they seek when engaging with cultural content online (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

Building upon this foundation, the playful cultural idol identity becomes Sanxingdui's most crucial strategy for achieving wanghong. Through constructing evaluative attributes including Mystery and Fantasy, Trendiness and Fashion, Aesthetics, Relatability, and Sense of technology, it strategically lowers the threshold for public understanding of its cultural content. The success of this strategy validates general findings in museum digitalisation research, namely that through effective technological application and innovative communication strategies, museums can significantly enhance their influence on social media (Gori et al., 2020; Russo, 2011). It is precisely this synergistic effect of dual identity that enables Sanxingdui to maintain

both the dignity and depth of cultural heritage while gaining enormous traffic and appeal, successfully crafting a phenomenal wanghong museum. Furthermore, Sanxingdui's wanghong practices profoundly reflect the inherent logic of digital media ecology, particularly the rise of the 'wanghong economy' (Cao, 2024). It no longer functions merely as a unidirectional content publisher, but through distinctive personalised image construction and sustained community operation, has captured massive user attention within the 'attention economy' (Luna-Cortés, 2017). Simultaneously, through appellations such as 'duidui fen' (fans of Sanxingdui) and interactive activities inviting user participation in AI creation, it actively constructs online fan communities, transforming ordinary visitors into 'fans' with high emotional identification and loyalty. This shift from attracting traffic to managing communities represents the core of the 'wanghong economy' (Guan and Zhou, 2024). Sanxingdui's practice demonstrates that through storytelling, generating talking points, and establishing authentic connections, museums can guide and promote 'symbolic consumption' in their interactions with the public. Through its multimodal discourse, Sanxingdui has successfully transformed its artefacts from mere knowledge objects into consumable 'symbols' (Luna-Cortés, 2017). When users purchase Sanxingdui's archaeological blind boxes, they consume not merely the items themselves, but the symbolic values of mystery, trendiness, and cultural taste that these represent. As Huang et al. (2023) emphasised, purchase intentions for museum digital cultural creative products are influenced by multiple factors, with symbolic value and emotional value occupying important positions. Similarly, personally visiting the museum for 'clock-in' and posting on social media represents a form of symbolic consumption of the presence experience, revealing how cultural institutions actively produce and disseminate symbols to construct a symbolic economy around their own intellectual property.

The practices at Sanxingdui reflect the evolving role of museums in the age of social media and, in many ways, have even taken the lead in driving this change. Museums have shifted from being authoritative dispensers of knowledge to equal participants in dialogue and community building (Mägi, 2024). This evolution is realised through developments in digital technology (Wilkin et al., 2025), particularly on the Douyin platform examined in this study, where multimodality, AI and other high-tech functions, ease of editing, and extensive connectivity collectively facilitate the construction of this new digital cultural landscape. Finally, Sanxingdui's wanghong image is closely aligned with the broader national cultural strategy. Its brand characteristics largely reflect China's current pursuit and construction of 'cultural confidence' (Wang et al., 2021). The digital transformation of Chinese museums reflects national-level emphasis on cultural digitalisation strategy. The state advocates for cultural institutions to 'better tell China's stories' and 'bring cultural relics to life' (Zhai, 2023; Hua, 2022), while Sanxingdui, through strategies such as anthropomorphising artefacts, cleverly integrates these seemingly entertainment-oriented wanghong identity constructions into the national cultural strategy framework. This model, which combines national will with marketised, networked communication logic, greatly expands the scope of digital heritage dissemination while gaining the broadest public recognition and enhancing the cultural inclusiveness and modern vitality of Chinese civilisation.

## Conclusion

This study employed multimodal discourse analysis of 300 popular videos from the official Douyin account of the Sanxingdui Museum, revealing the complex identity construction strategies underlying its emergence as a wanghong. The wanghong image of Sanxingdui Museum results from the resonant convergence of the institution's own agency, the technological characteristics of digital platforms, and the state's macro cultural strategy. The findings of this study not only provide an exceptionally vivid and profound example for understanding how traditional culture gains new life in modern society but also offer important theoretical reference and practical guidance for the digital transformation of contemporary cultural institutions. Within a broader theoretical perspective, the Sanxingdui case reveals a multimodal process of cultural transmission in the digital age. Beyond the protection and display of exhibits, it represents an active and creative process of cultural reproduction. In this process, cultural institutions have sought dynamic balance between authority and affinity, tradition and modernity, thereby maintaining cultural essence while gaining widespread recognition and participation in contemporary society. This study provides an analytical framework for employing multimodal analysis methods to examine these complex discourse practices and, through analysing how Sanxingdui transforms artefacts into consumable symbols, enriches the application of symbolic consumption theory in the field of cultural heritage communication. Although this study has achieved significant findings, certain limitations remain. Firstly, this research primarily focuses on the official discourse of the museum as producer; future research could incorporate systematic audience analysis of viewer comments and feedback to form a more complete picture of the communication ecology. Secondly, this study primarily employs qualitative analysis methods; future research could combine quantitative analysis or mixed methods to test the generalisability of research conclusions. Finally, this study takes Chinese museums as case studies, future research could extend the scope internationally, comparing differences in digitalisation strategies of cultural institutions across different cultural contexts, and exploring issues of localisation and globalisation in cultural communication.

## Acknowledgement

This research study is self-funded.

## Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Agostino, D., Arnaboldi, M. (2021): From preservation to entertainment: Accounting for the transformation of participation in Italian state museums. – *Accounting History* 26(1): 102-122.
- [2] Arnaboldi, M., Diaz Lema, M.L. (2022): Shaping cultural participation through social media. – *Financial Accountability & Management* 38(2): 299-321.

- [3] Basch, C.H., Meleo-Erwin, Z., Fera, J., Jaime, C., Basch, C.E. (2021): A global pandemic in the time of viral memes: COVID-19 vaccine misinformation and disinformation on TikTok. – *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics* 17(8): 2373-2377.
- [4] Baudrillard, J. (2016): *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. – SAGE 224p.
- [5] Bonacini, E. (2018): Heritage Communities, Participation and Co-creation of Cultural Values: The #iziTRAVELSicilia Project. – *Museum International* 70(1-2): 140-153.
- [6] Booth, P., Ogundipe, A., Røyseng, S. (2020): Museum leaders' perspectives on social media. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35(4): 373-391.
- [7] Budge, K., Burness, A. (2018): Museum objects and Instagram: Agency and communication in digital engagement. – *Continuum* 32(2): 137-150.
- [8] Cao, L. (2024): From online to onsite: Wanghong economy as the new engine driving China's urban development. – *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 56(4): 1061-1076.
- [9] Capriotti, P., Losada-Díaz, J.C. (2018): Facebook as a dialogic communication tool at the most visited museums of the world. – *Profesional de La Informacion* 27(3): 642-650.
- [10] Carah, N., Angus, D. (2018): Algorithmic brand culture: Participatory labour, machine learning and branding on social media. – *Media, Culture & Society* 40(2): 178-194.
- [11] Chen, M. (2023): 'Guochao' heyi 'chuquan': Jiyu bowuguan wenchuang duanshipin de neirong kaocha [How 'Guochao' went viral: A content analysis of museum cultural and creative short videos]. – *China Television* 6p.
- [12] Chen, X., Valdovinos Kaye, D.B., Zeng, J. (2021): #PositiveEnergy Douyin: Constructing "playful patriotism" in a Chinese short-video application. – *Chinese Journal of Communication* 14(1): 97-117.
- [13] Fairclough, N. (2023): *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. – Routledge 10p.
- [14] Fan, T., Lin, Z. (2022): Toward Tourists–Media–Cities Tourism: Xi'an as a Wanghong City. – *Sustainability* 14(19): 18p.
- [15] Fernandez-Lores, S., Crespo-Tejero, N., Fernández-Hernández, R. (2022): Driving traffic to the museum: The role of the digital communication tools. – *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 174: 8p.
- [16] Fletcher, A., Lee, M.J. (2012): Current social media uses and evaluations in American museums. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 27(5): 505-521.
- [17] Gori, E., Romolini, A., Fissi, S. (2020): Social Media Digital Innovation and Stakeholder Engagement the Museum 4.0. – *Int. J. Digital Culture and Electronic Tourism* 3(1): 7p.
- [18] Guan, Z., Zhou, O.T. (2024): Wanghong e-commerce in/as China's economic transformation: A case study of beauty wanghong. – *Global Media and China* 16p.
- [19] Han, X. (2022): Platform as new 'daddy': China's gendered wanghong economy and patriarchal platforms behind. – *Internet Policy Review* 11(1): 1-34.
- [20] Hu, K. (2023): Wanghong and the Wanghong Economy in China: A Systematic Review from a Cross-cultural Perspective. – *Academic Journal of Business & Management* 5(22): 122-132.
- [21] Hua, X. (2024): Xi stresses building China into cultural powerhouse by 2035. – *The State Council of the People's Republic of China* 2p.
- [22] Hua, X. (2022): Full text of the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. – *China Daily Web Portal* 76p.
- [23] Huang, H., Chen, H., Zhan, Y. (2023): A Study on consumers' perceptions of museum cultural and creative products through online textual reviews: An example from palace museum's cultural and creative flagship store. – *Behavioral Sciences* 13(4): 15p.
- [24] Huang, Y., Ye, W. (2024): 'Traffic rewards', 'algorithmic visibility', and 'advertiser satisfaction': How Chinese short-video platforms cultivate creators in stages. – *Convergence* 30(1): 659-682.
- [25] Huebner, E.J. (2022): TikTok and museum education: A visual content analysis. – *International Journal of Education Through Art* 18(2): 209-225.



- [26] Jenkins, H. (2006): *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. – NYU Press 368p.
- [27] Jing, S., Xinxin, W. (2019): Wanghong and Wanghong Economy: A Review Based on the Celebrity Theory. – *Foreign Economics & Management* 41(4): 18-30.
- [28] Kidd, D.J. (2014): *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics*. – Ashgate Publishing, Ltd. 176p.
- [29] Komarac, T., Ozretic-Dosen, D., Skare, V. (2020): Managing edutainment and perceived authenticity of museum visitor experience: Insights from qualitative study. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35(2): 160-181.
- [30] Kress, G.R. (2010): *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication*. – Taylor & Francis 232p.
- [31] Li, J., Zheng, X., Watanabe, I., Ochiai, Y. (2024): A systematic review of digital transformation technologies in museum exhibition. – *Computers in Human Behavior* 161: 30p.
- [32] Liang, Y., Shen, W. (2016): Fan economy in the Chinese media and entertainment industry: How feedback from super fans can propel creative industries' revenue. – *Global Media and China* 1(4): 331-349.
- [33] Literat, I. (2021): "Teachers Act Like We're Robots": TikTok as a Window Into Youth Experiences of Online Learning During COVID-19. – *AERA Open* 7(1): 1-15
- [34] Lou, C., Yuan, S. (2019): Influencer marketing: How message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. – *Journal of Interactive Advertising* 19(1): 58-73.
- [35] Luna-Cortés, G. (2017): The influence of symbolic consumption on experience value and the use of virtual social networks. – *Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC* 21(1): 39-51.
- [36] Machin, D., Mayr, A. (2012): *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction*. – SAGE Publications Ltd. 61p.
- [37] Mägi, R. (2024): Museum-audience interaction within permanent exhibitions of natural history museums: A systematic literature review. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 19p.
- [38] Manna, R., Palumbo, R. (2018): What makes a museum attractive to young people? Evidence from Italy. – *International Journal of Tourism Research* 20(4): 508-517.
- [39] Mondloch, K. (2022): The Influencers: Van Gogh Immersive Experiences and the Attention-Experience Economy. – *Arts* 11(5): 2-16.
- [40] Najda-Janoszka, M., Sawczuk, M. (2021): Interactive communication using social media – the case of museums in Southern Poland. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 36(6): 590-609.
- [41] Robinson, H. (2020): Curating good participants? Audiences, democracy and authority in the contemporary museum. – *Museum Management and Curatorship* 35(5): 470-487.
- [42] Russo, A. (2011): Transformations in cultural communication: Social media, cultural exchange, and creative connections. – *Curator: The Museum Journal* 54(3): 327-346.
- [43] Schellewald, A. (2023): Understanding the popularity and affordances of TikTok through user experiences. – *Media, Culture & Society* 45(8): 1568-1582.
- [44] Shi, M., Wang, Q., Long, Y. (2023): Exploring the Key Drivers of User Continuance Intention to Use Digital Museums: Evidence From China's Sanxingdui Museum. – *IEEE Access* 11: 81511-81526.
- [45] Sichuan Daily (2025): San xing dui 'dingliu IP' qiaodong yiji wenlv xinshichang [Sanxingdui's 'Top Streaming IP' unlocks a billion-level new market for culture and tourism]. – *Sichuan Daily Web Portal* 2p.
- [46] Stuedahl, D., Smørðal, O. (2011): Designing for Young Visitors' Co-composition of Doubts in Cultural Historical Exhibitions. – *Computers and Composition* 28(3): 215-223.
- [47] Taibanguai, K., Suraratdecha, S. (2022): Strategies to Grab Attention: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Online Selling Posts. – *NIDA Journal of Language and Communication* 27(42): 47-67.

- [48] Tang, L., Wang, C. (2022): The Research on the Comparison of Hanfu Fashion Short Videos on Douyin and Tik Tok. – 2021 International Conference on Social Development and Media Communication (SDMC 2021) 6p.
- [49] Van Aalst, I., Boogaarts, I. (2002): From Museum to Mass Entertainment: The Evolution of the Role of Museums in Cities. – *European Urban and Regional Studies* 9(3): 195-209.
- [50] Vassiliadis, C., Belenioti, Z.C. (2017): Museums & cultural heritage via social media: An integrated literature review. – *Tourismos* 12(3): 97-132.
- [51] Vázquez-Herrero, J., Negreira-Rey, M.C., López-García, X. (2022): Let's dance the news! How the news media are adapting to the logic of TikTok. – *Journalism* 23(8): 1717-1735.
- [52] Wang, J., Ma, Y., Min, L., Geng, J., Xiao, Y. (2025): The impact of social media fashion influencers' relatability on purchase intention: The mediating role of perceived emotional value and moderating role of consumer expertise. – *Acta Psychologica* 258: 10p.
- [53] Wang, Z., Cui, R., Cong, T., Liang, H. (2021): Overseas dissemination of ancient Chinese costume culture from the perspective of cultural confidence. – *Fibres & Textiles in Eastern Europe* 3(147): 111-116.
- [54] Wilkin, N., Garrow, D., Ryder, C. (2025): From overlooked objects to digital 'icons': Evaluating the role of social media in exhibition making and the creation of more participatory and democratic museums. – *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 31(1): 102-122.
- [55] Yuan, M. (2021): The Intangible Cultural Heritage Communication Based on Douyin Short Video Platform: Content Curation, Participatory Culture and Empowerment. – *China Literature and Art Criticism* 12p.
- [56] Zhai, J.Q. (2023): Rang geng duo wenwu he wenhua yichan huo qilai'-xuexi Xi Jinping guanyu wenwu he wenhua yichan gongzuo de zhongyao lunshu ['Bringing more cultural relics and cultural heritage to life'-Studying Xi Jinping's important expositions on the work of cultural relics and cultural heritage]. – *Literature of Chinese Communist Party* 8p.
- [57] Zhang, A., Roast, A., Morris, C. (2022): Wanghong urbanism: Towards a new urban-digital spectacle. – *Mediapolis* 7(4): 16p.
- [58] Zhang, J. (2024): Digital Revitalization of Museums: An Analysis of the Digital Marketing Strategy of the Sanxingdui Museum. – *Advances in Economics, Management and Political Sciences* 86(1): 170-176.