

Research on the Construction and Dissemination Pathway of City Image in Short Video Social Field

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Abstract: With the arrival of the new media era, short video platforms have witnessed rapid development, opening up new avenues for people to access information and enjoy entertainment while also providing new opportunities for building the image of local cities. Effectively adapting to the trend of the times and utilizing the convenience of short video platforms to construct and disseminate the city's image, thereby expanding its popularity and influence, has emerged as an important direction for deep exploration. This study focuses on elucidating the construction and dissemination model of a city's image on short video platforms by sorting out the relevant theories in existing research and integrating them with the distinctive features of the new media era and short video platforms. Furthermore, it provides optimization strategies for existing problems. Through research, cities can navigate the wave of new media to achieve effective communication, thereby promoting better economic development and cultural promotion.

Keywords: Short video social field, city image, new media era.

1. Introduction

With the rapid development of new media technologies such as the internet, paths for people to obtain information have been further expanded. Among them, short video platforms have emerged prominently, winning the subscription of a vast user base. The features of short videos are their concise and eye-catching content, which cater to the public's habit of fragmented reading in their busy lives and captivate viewers. The rising popularity of these platforms has not only changed people's socializing methods but also provided new avenues for the construction and dissemination of city image.

In the process of urbanization, the construction of city image has become a more important component of a city's soft power and played a significant role in enhancing the city's visibility, attractiveness, and competitiveness. The rise of short video platforms has offered new opportunities to advertise cities, but it also brings a series of challenges.

This study explores how cities can seize the opportunities presented by new media development in today's short video social field to construct their city image and achieve effective communication of their city brand. It aims to reveal the new laws of city image communication in the new media environment, providing new theoretical support for the establishment and promotion of city image.

It employs the method of literature review, by reading and organizing papers, books, and other materials on urban image and new media communication from both Eastern and Western countries,

extracting the essence of the content, and summarizing the discussions related to this topic. Based on this, combined with the author's experience in using and understanding new media platforms, viewpoints are proposed.

The study can truly enable urban managers to adapt to the new media environment, help them formulate city communication models that are more in line with the times, enhance promotional effectiveness, and promote urban development. Exploring methods for creating the city brand and offering advice can optimize its communication pathways, as well as increase the city's visibility and attractiveness, drawing more tourists and investments, and promoting the city's economic development and social progress. Furthermore, building a national city brand is not limited to gaining fame within the country; it also has the potential to open doors to the world, establishing a positive international city image for the nation and promoting its culture.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Emergence of City Image Research

Research on city image encompasses multiple disciplines, involving communication, marketing, management, and other related fields. The exploration of city image can be traced back to 1960 when Kevin Lynch, an eminent American urban planning expert, published his work *The Image of the City*, wherein he introduced the theory of “the image of the city” [1]. This theory suggests that people's understanding and formation of an image of a city is achieved through the observation of the city's environmental structure. In the 1990s, British scholars began integrating urban planning with theories such as marketing, thereby broadening the research perspective on city image and establishing theories on both city image and city marketing.

The recognition of city image in China originated in the late 1920s, coinciding with the establishment of the capital by the Nationalist Government in Nanjing, which marked the emergence of both theoretical and practical aspects of city image design. In 1928, Chen Zhi, a forestry expert and landscape architect, published an article in *Oriental Magazine* emphasizing the importance of urban aesthetics. However, during this period, the concept of city image was primarily confined to aesthetics and had not yet been associated with communication. It was only since the 1990s that it became formally integrated into research within China due to deepening reform and opening-up policies as well as accelerated urbanization. Guangzhou, serving as a prominent example characterized by its openness to the international world and rapid economic development, took pioneering steps towards exploring urban landscapes and image symbols. This also marked the emergence of the concept of urban marketing in China.

2.2. City Image Communication in the Media Field

Since the turn of the 21st century, research on global city image has significantly expanded to encompass the field of communication, resulting in increased complexity and diversity. The establishment and dissemination of city image, urban marketing, and other related research topics have yielded abundant results. Especially against the backdrop of rapidly evolving media technologies, the swift development of economic and cultural construction, as well as the accelerating process of globalization, the concept of city image has extended to include its portrayal in simulated environments.

In 2000, a full professor at Hebrew University, Eli Avraham, published an article titled “Cities and Their News Media Images” in the journal *Cities*. He addressed the previous lack of studies inking city image with media within the field of communication while emphasizing the significant role played by media in shaping a city's image. Avraham emphasized that media portrayal carries

implications for cities' positions within international and national competitions for various resources such as tourism, investments, and businesses [2].

A positive city image reflects a city's competitiveness. As city image has gained increasing attention, the issue of city image has become more and more intense in the competition among international cities. Various cities have begun adopting different city positioning strategies to highlight their unique characteristics. In the journal *Urban Cultural Studies*, a professor at Shanghai Normal University, Nie Yanmei, summarized four key aspects characterizing European and American cities at the beginning of this century: "conference cities, cultural cities, sports cities, and food cities" [3]. These strategic positions aim to create unique brands for each respective city, thereby gaining a competitive edge.

With the advent of the new media era, traditional media has gradually taken a backseat, while online new media platforms have emerged as the mainstream. In Europe and America, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have gained significant international market share and become crucial channels for making new connections and accessing information. In China, TikTok and Red represent the rising force of new media platforms that are increasingly occupying a significant position. Particularly, short video platforms like TikTok encompass users of all ages and social strata, establishing themselves as the leading stream in China's new media market. Consequently, scholars have initiated a fresh round of exploration into the construction of media images within these new forms.

Urban communication in China's new media era has emerged as a prominent research topic in recent years, primarily focusing on short video platforms. In 2020, Professor Sun Wei from the School of Journalism at Fudan University published a paper in *Journalism and Communication* titled "I Photograph, Therefore I Am; We Card-Punch, Therefore the City Is: Short Video-The Mass Image Practices of Cyber Cities." The paper discusses how urban imagery in the new media era has reshaped the relationship between individuals and their surroundings. It points out that short videos serve as an embodied form of media practice by aggregating individual traces from the masses to reconstruct a collective city image, sorting that "we card-punch, therefore the city is" [4].

According to the statistics compiled by Sun in 2018, over 80% of the top 100 short videos related to city image views on TikTok were sourced from personal users. The impetus behind the creation of these videos stems from integrating the self into the content being disseminated. This enormous traffic from social media has subtly driven the establishment and popularization of a city image.

In the article "Multiple interfaces and affective connection: A postphenomenological reading of mediatized tourism" by Huang Peiyong, a lecturer at Cheung Kong School of Journalism and Communication, Shantou University of China, she introduces the perspective of post-phenomenology to the study of mediatized tourism. The article explores the relationship between the self, media, and space, emphasizing the encounters and feelings of individuals during actual travel, and the "empathy" generated with the environment [5].

In a 2023 article published in *Journalism Lover* by Wang Zelin and Qiu Jie, they proposed a logical framework explaining how a city gains popularity on short video platforms. This process involves first activating the city's "visibility" through short videos, then using algorithms to enhance the audience's perception of the city's image, and ultimately attracting people to visit these places for check-in [6].

In the field of international image building, Han Ruixia, based on global public evaluation data of "Shanghai culture," has summarized the mechanism by which media influences the differences in global public evaluations of a city's international image. It was found that cultural stereotypes are an unavoidable premise. High levels of text and image exposure actually decrease the evaluations from high internet usage groups. Conversely, among the high users of Chinese social media, those with high text exposure do not have high evaluations [7].

3. Discussion

From the reviewed literature, it is evident that the topic of city image holds a certain history in the scientific research. The theory of city image states that individuals' perception and construction of a city's image are shaped by their observation of its environmental form, which has been widely applied in contemporary studies and serves as the underlying logic in the field of city image communication research. However, with societal development and progress, the concept of environment has expanded to encompass the pseudo-environment created by the media outlets. Just as Eli Avraham has pioneered a novel research focus on city image through media analysis, this growing prevalence of media globally ensures that, access to news information is no longer limited to a minority of intellectuals or the elite class. Consequently, people's cognition about cities heavily relies on how they are depicted and portrayed by the media.

With the arrival of the new media era, media is undergoing further transformation. New media, social media, and mass media have launched a fierce assault on traditional media. Relying solely on traditional media for promotional content is a thing of the past. Platforms like YouTube in the West and TikTok in China, with their enormous audience base, convenient dissemination, and open social interaction features, have emerged as novel avenues for establishing a city's image. The distinguishing characteristics of new media, such as cost-effective content production, low barriers to entry, strong interactivity, and the ability to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries have empowered the public to become creators, sharers, and disseminators of content. Thus, "influencer check-ins" have gained popularity whereby individuals visit specific locations or landmarks within a city to take photos in front of iconic objects, blend the scene with their own identity, and thus gain a sense of satisfaction. As this check-in trend gains momentum, it inadvertently drives up the popularity of the check-in spots. This rise in popularity conveys a certain symbolized memory point of the location, which also shapes the Internet's collective perception and opinion of the area. In contrast to official reports during the traditional media era, social media platforms provide a more diverse representation where everyone assumes roles as both recorders and voices thereby encompassing both the positive and negative aspects of a city.

Taking advantage of the convenience of such platforms for dissemination, for a city to intentionally build its brand and stand out, the first step is to accurately identify its unique positioning, similar to Nie Yanmei's categorization of different directions for city positioning. However, this basic positioning may lead to serious homogenization, commonly referred to as "thousands of cities with the same face" by Nie [3]. Therefore, it is necessary to amalgamate the distinctive characteristics of a city and refine them beyond this vague positioning.

For example, on the TikTok platform in China, in August 2023, Zibo City gained widespread attention due to a travel review video by the vlogger Super B Tai. The video highlighted the generous portion sizes of barbecue and the sincere and lovely local customs, which received high praise. Subsequently, Zibo gradually achieved comprehensive popularity during the summer vacation. The local government promptly seized this exposure and introduced preferential policies to promote the development of Zibo's food tourism. For a time, people flocked to Zibo to experience its unique dish of rolled pancakes with grilled skewers. This once unremarkable small city has attracted a large number of tourists under the charm of its barbecue cuisine, greatly boosting its tourism economy.

In this way, using the exposure provided by short video platforms, these special symbols representing a city are spread over and over again, subtly influencing the public's perception of the city. By associating the city with its anticipated "landmark," it attracts more people to visit and check in, thereby continuously increasing the exposure and deepening people's recognition and yearning. This cyclical process forms a closed loop for promoting a city image on short video social media.

4. Conclusion

The article provides a comprehensive review of research conducted in both Eastern and Western contexts, synthesizing the extensive scholarly achievements in the field of city image and social media communication. However, despite these accomplishments, there remains a relative scarcity of studies focusing on the construction and dissemination pathways of city image within the short video social sphere, which is an emerging area.

Employing primarily a literature review approach, this paper summarizes research ranging from Kevin Lynch's theory of city image to recent studies in the new media era, with particular emphasis on communication research. Based on previous studies and leveraging insights into short video platforms, the paper proposes a mechanism for establishing and disseminating city image while offering practical suggestions for cities to enhance their promotional influence through using new media short video platforms. Specifically, by strategically capitalizing on the unique characteristics of short video platforms such as accurate city positioning the city, establishment of iconic features, increased exposure rate facilitated by algorithms' promotion mechanisms, and fostering cognitive images among users within stimulated social media environments. As internet usage encourages people to engage in embodied communication through "check-in" behavior patterns, increased positive exposure will lead to more check-ins and shares across personal social media accounts, thereby generating more traffic, exposure, and check-ins.

This study presents an innovative perspective by combining city image research with the emerging short video social platforms. It breaks through the traditional reliance on macro-level and cultural-level analyses, placing more emphasis on the role of user-generated content (UGC) and social media algorithms in the construction and dissemination of city image. However, future data collection and research are needed to refine the theoretical framework and develop practical implementation strategies through questionnaire surveys and data analysis.

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