

# *City Culture Promotion through Short Food Videos*

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**Abstract:** In recent years, mobile short videos have emerged as a new force, attracting a large number of netizens with its low production threshold and strong user interaction. Short videos that explore food shops have become one of the most popular short video types due to its content close to life and wide audience. WuLaLa is one of the bloggers in TikTok whose short food videos are practical in content and user-friendly in style, winning many netizens' love and interest in tasting food in different cities. This research discussed the intimate contact between food and local city culture through analyzing the cut-in points of the content and the presentation of the food in Wulala's short food videos. The research explored how people feel the culture and customs of the city through food. Besides, the study also shown that the short food videos could play a positive role in the publicity of urban culture.

**Keywords:** food, city culture, short videos, TikTok

## **1. Introduction**

As one of the current main forms of mass communication, short video is getting more and more popularity in our daily life. With its lightweight, fragmented and entertaining characteristics, short video has attracted the attention and love of the majority of users, and further subdivided into beauty, food, funny and other fields. Food short video is one of the most popular types. As the energy source necessary for people's survival, food has always played a very important role in our life. Meanwhile, the cuisine of a region can also show the local folk customs and culture to a certain extent.

The paper discusses the presentation of food in short videos and the cultural significance behind them from around China. This study took "Special Wulala"'s short videos as examples. "Special Wulala" is a blogger who posted his explorations of food shops on the social media TikTok . He currently has 842.8 million followers and has totally received over 4864 million likes for his videos. It can be seen that his videos are in line with the aesthetic preferences of the public to some extent. Each of Wulala's shop-hopping videos is themed around exploring local cuisines across the country, using similar shooting techniques and narratives to show the local specialties. His videos present diverse selections of food in different places from the perspective of his own view, which are of certain representativeness and research values. Wulala has also caught the attention of young people due to his approachable style and realistic food sharing.

From the users who give the likes, retweets and comments on each video, it is found that the viewers are mainly young people covering a wide range of areas, including vloggers, students,

housewives and other people engaged in various industries. This paper selects three kinds of videos, discussing the local food in Yunnan, Chongqing and Shanghai respectively and showing four different cuisines at each place. It not only compares the characteristics of different food in specific cities, but also compares the differences and characteristics of the food selected by the blogger in different cities. In the selected shop-exploring videos, the cultural characteristics and cultural differences of the city behind the food are presented to the public. After discussing the reasons why these regional cuisines become the signature of specific city and the differences among the restaurants in three cities in food taste, environment, price and other aspects, a more complete and detailed understanding of local food and culture presented in short videos may be achieved and achieved.

## 2. Literature Review

Nowadays, there are abundant discussions and studies on the relationship between food and culture both at home and abroad.

Joan discussed the relationship between food and culture in the context of globalization in Singapore[1]. He argued that the food of a region, while being influenced by the forces of globalization, maintained its unique national character and heritage value, and played an active role in the attraction of tourism and destination culture. There was also a new awareness and understanding of food culture in relatively young Asian countries.

By an analysis of Italian food and beverage producers, research found that food, when combined with the interests of entrepreneurs and local culture, can contribute to local interests by generating positive benefits such as promoting tourism [2].

Mohamed pointed out that the local destination marketing in Egypt was related to the food culture [3], and promoting the development of local food culture was also conducive to promoting the development of tourism, after analyzing 20 Egyptian DMO websites and counted information about cuisine marketing and food culture. This showed that optimizing the local food culture can enhance the tourism potential.

As for domestic related researchs, Zhou Rui pointed out that the name card of “The City of Food” was more popular because Chengdu [4], which complied with the new media boom, integrated food culture with the Internet and the local tourism industry to strengthen the city image and public reputation.

Shu Ziyi and Xu Da investigated the content production and operation mode of the short video of food exploration shop [5], and summarized some successful experiences of related industries and some strategies to deal with problems. Researches showed that a large part of the reason why such food short videos can be so successful lied in the plain truth content and strong combination of audio-visual language, which shorten the distance between the public and promoted universal favourable impression.

Huang Lili made a cultural analysis from the perspective of semiotics on video of “Li Ziqi” [6], which was famous both at home and abroad, and explained that the current short video of food was not only a presentation of food itself, but more a symbol of cultural consumption. The videos used a large number of panoramic and mid-range shots close to people's visual experience in life, making the viewers have a stronger sense of substitution and intimacy. Meanwhile, it used dark natural lights combined with bright colors of food to increase people's visual stimulation. Mainly set in ancient style, the shooting content and form of videos showed more personality characteristics. The food presented in the videos is more symbolic of the traditional Chinese lifestyle, bringing viewers an immersive and virtual psychological experience of the ideal life.

This paper uses the relevant theories and methods of semiotics to elaborate and analyze. semiotics is a study of sign system, which was first proposed by Saussure, a Swiss linguist, and

Peirce, an American philosopher and the founder of pragmatic philosophy at the beginning of this century. The former focuses on the meaning of symbols in social life and its relation with psychology. The latter focuses on the logical meaning of symbols and the connection with logic. According to Saussure: Language symbol unit is not a thing, nor a name, but a concept and sound and image, is a two-sided psychological unity. In Peirce's perspective, the "sign" is said to be all "pointing" things, which includes not only the language sign, but also includes the non-language sign. Semiotic is a kind of general theory about symbols and their application, which takes the process of symbols as its research object. Language sign is not a narrow thing, but has arbitrariness. It can not only be the thing itself, but also a carrier, carrying the information sent by the two parties. In this paper, the symbol can be not only the food itself shown in the video, but also the environment and atmosphere of the shop, the price of the food and other factors.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. The taste of food

Obviously, the clearest symbol in the video is food. Just as Yunnan is home to many ethnic groups, the taste of Yunnan cuisine has been influenced by the different ethnic groups around it. In Shanghai, you can taste delicious food from all over the world, and because of Shanghainese's love of sweet taste, sugar is usually used in Shanghai food, which shows that Shanghai is a city that embraces everything. Chongqing cuisine is mostly spicy, which also symbolizes the warmth of this city and the enthusiasm of Chongqing people.

For Yunnan food, the videos chose to show the famous small pot rice noodles, the local bug dinner and Yunnan barbecue. Yunnan has cuisines which are praised as "eating four seasons a day and ten meals with different tastes". Numerous ethnic minorities, advantaged climate and natural resources have created Yunnan's unique food culture for thousands of years, which is composed of the characteristics of the three regions. Its cooking characteristics are influenced by Tibetan, Hui and temple dishes, and ethnic minority dishes are the main dishes. The climate in southern Yunnan is mild, the rainfall is abundant, and the natural resources are rich, so Yunnan cuisine has a wide selection of materials to cook the delicacies of mountains and waters. The flavor of Yunnan cuisine features fresh and tender fragrance, moderate sour and spicy, and pays attention to the original flavor. Someone summed up Yunnan's food taste like this, "spicy but Guizhou, but Sichuan hemp". Yunnan food is a bit spicier for provinces with more bland food; meanwhile, which is not spicy enough for provinces like Sichuan and Hunan. Therefore, it has distinct national and local characteristics.

For Food in Shanghai, the videos chose to show the traditional snack of spareribs and rice cakes, the signature crab roe noodles and a high-quality steak shop. In line with the image of Shanghai as a bustling and international city, food from different countries can be seen everywhere in Shanghai, so people are more willing to taste more international and exquisite food in Shanghai. As Shanghai people tend to have a sweet taste, sugar is often added to their food which also makes the food look more colorful and appetizing. Usually, the cuisine in a Shanghai restaurant is presented on a delicate plate with a small portion but it looks like the dish is very advanced, which can also reflect the smart personality of the Shanghainese. Among the many high-end dishes, the spareribs rice cake, as one of the local snacks with a long history, is also a big sign of Shanghai's time-honored brand. The combination of Chinese and Western cultures and the spread and inheritance of traditional food culture all reflect the inclusiveness and greatness of Shanghai.

For Chongqing food, the videos chose to show Chongqing small noodles, roasted brain flower and hot pot. Bayu food is a long-standing part of China's traditional food culture. With a history of more than 3,000 years, the unique Bayu culture has been carved on this land. Most of Chongqing's

food originated in residents' home kitchens or roadside restaurants and gradually spread among residents, so it can be seen all around the city and the price is affordable. "Spicy and Hot" has long been a name card of Chongqing city, which is well known for its unique cooking methods and strong local flavors at home and abroad. Chongqing cuisine uses ingredients boldly and variously, through which we can see the generous and rugged image of Chongqing people and their virtue of hospitality. Chongqing people are "dry", frank with a bit of recklessness, warm with a bit of cunning, and humor with a bit of rustic. Maybe it is just the outstanding character of Chongqing people that make them have a thorough study of Bayu food and create such well-known food culture.

Therefore, the food itself can be seen as a symbol of the city, just as the ethnic customs of Yunnan food shows the tolerance and uniqueness of Yunnan, the diverse styles of Shanghai food show the image of this city as developed and prosperous, and the spicy food, as a symbol of Chongqing, represents enthusiasm and unbriated.

### 3.2. The environment of food

Of course, food is not only about the taste of food itself, but also about its environment. From the food environment, decoration style and the placement of tables and chairs, people can also see the difference of the cities.

The more authentic Yunnan cuisine shown in the video is often found in a small street shop in a busy residential area. These places, full of life, are usually crowded with people from the neighborhood, young and old, and are crowded at mealtime. Generally, these unimpressive shops hidden in the streets are inherited from the older generation. After the passage of time, the most original taste has been passed down. And through the changes in the natural environment, the various ethnic minorities in Yunnan also contact with each other more and more widely, so the Yunnan restaurant environment is full of ethnic minority characteristics. For example, the Dai people in Yunnan province have lived by rivers since ancient times, where the weather is hot and moist and live many insects there. Therefore, the Dai people have been used to live in bamboo towers with high feets and developed a habit of eating insects. Because of this tradition and architectural characteristics handed down from generation to generation, the places where you can eat authentic insect feast will often be designed as the unique bamboo buildings of the Dai people. The tables and chairs are also made of bamboo, which can give customers a sense of immersive experience.

Similarly, the origin of Chongqing snacks is also developed from the streets. As you know, Chongqing has a reputation as a "mountain city" around the world, with complex topography and undulating terrain, where ordinary residential buildings are usually scattered around. Therefore, many restaurants in Chongqing will always open in unexpected places. As Chongqing people are outgoing and like lively, there has always been a saying that "the more people eat together, the more delicious food will be". People prefer to gather together to have dinner. Since there is not enough space at home, so Chongqing people come up with setting up a big table in the open air to eat with their neighbors and friends. As time passes, many places grew from private kitchen to street food restaurant that generally set several big tables in the store and shop, and stacked a pile of chairs aside for customers to take freely. The scenery that people enjoy the cuisine with loud chatting voice looks very lively, and can also attract more customers. Of course, although these stores are generally poorly decorated, where the walls have not been renovated for a long time, and the tables and chairs have long been cracked, Chongqing people prefer these small restaurants instead of fancy ones with the rich flavor of life.

On the contrary, Shanghai's restaurants have a more sophisticated feel. As is known, in Shanghai you are capable to taste the delicious food from all over the world. At the same time, the restaurants

of different countries' food will also show their own country characteristics. For example, the places where you eat French food will often have magnificent lighting and beautiful violin music to reflect the elegance of French food. While restaurants that offer Spanish food are always designed as Spanish bistros, with wooden walls and dim lighting to create a cosy atmosphere. Even if for the most authentic Shanghai popular snacks, the environment also gradually become more like that of a chain store, with bright indoor lighting and neat desks and chairs, where the waiter are dressed in the most simple white overalls and orderly serving. No matter where the restaurant is, it is presented the delicacy of this city. It is not difficult to see the people from Shanghai hold different life style compared with other cities.

The food environment analyzed above also reveals some characteristics of people in different regions. The architectural style of Yunnan restaurants always shows the traditional characteristics of its own ethnic minorities, reflecting the national pride of Yunnan people and a virtue of inheriting the culture. The local food in Chongqing is homely and simple, with a sense that everyone is part of the family, which once re-confirms the enthusiasm and uninhibited style of Chongqing people. The environment of Shanghai restaurants is like the image of the city, making people feel the high-end atmosphere wherever they go to eat. Therefore, as an essential symbol of Shanghai, delicacy is deeply imprinted on the heart of everyone who has visited this city.

### 3.3. The price of food

Of course, price, as a label of food, can also reflect the differences between cities. In general, food consumption in Shanghai is higher than that in Chongqing and Yunnan, which is not only related to the price of food itself, but also to people's willingness to consume in the local cities.

As for Yunnan, it is located in a remote area and its economic level is in the middle and lower reaches of the country. Under the influence of these natural environment, policy and economic factors, the consumption level of Yunnan people is not high all the time. Therefore, though the price of local food is considered normal for Yunnan local people, for those visiting from developed cities, they can't help marvelling at how cheap such delicious food is. Contrastively, Chongqing and Shanghai, as first-tier cities in China, naturally have higher food prices, but there are also significant differences between them. Whether in the past or now, "the Bund" is not only a resounding name, but also gradually becomes a well-known symbol of Shanghai. Shanghai is known for its glamour, whose cuisine, as one of the representative labels, also appropriately reflects the city's superior status and specialty in price. It has become a common perception that people are willing to eat expensive food in Shanghai and consider that they can get a sense of superiority from such consumption behavior. As the result, the idea that a high price represents a quality food has simply become a symbolic image of Shanghai. In contrast, The city of Chongqing is labeled as warm and friendly to the people, which is not only reflected in the character and social behavior of the Chongqing people, but also in the affordable prices and friendly consumption of them. Just as some of the most famous local snacks in Chongqing are daily food that can be tasted everywhere without expensive ingredients and upscale environment, people are also more willing to taste delicious food at a cheap price and get happiness and satisfaction from it. For example, people are glad to pay hundreds of money for a bowl of noodles with crab roe in Shanghai, while rarely choose to make the same choice in Chongqing, which is precisely the effect of people's different consumption concepts in different cities.

## 4. Conclusion

In general, the cuisine of different regions clearly shows the characteristics and culture of the region. As analyzed earlier, Yunnan cuisine is influenced and fused by different ethnic tastes, while



retaining traditional cooking techniques and forming its own unique regional customs, showing the diversity and inclusiveness of Yunnan culture. In addition, the cheap price of Yunnan cuisine and the traditional building environment also show the simplicity and innocence of Yunnan people. The hot food of Chongqing has become a symbol of the city in the hearts of everyone, showing the hospitality and openness of this city. Its affordable price and unpretentious food environment also show the informality of local people. The exquisite food in Shanghai, together with its high price and beautiful environment, reflects the internationalization and prosperity of this city incisively and vividly.

Certainly, such cultural presentations are not limited to these three cities. A short food video while can show the symbolic features of the local culture. It can be seen that food itself is an embodiment of the local people's personality, which can reflect the local people's eating habits and life attitude. The overall food environment show the style and architectural tradition of the city, conveying the local customs and culture. Besides, the price can reflect the consumption level of a place and people's consumption concept. From the food itself and other aspects, it can be perceived that not only the eating habits and traditions of local people, but also the customs and the image of the city. Today, with the prevalence of Vmeti Media, short food videos appear in the public's view in a generally acceptable way, bringing the promotion of food to a higher level and attracting more people's attention and interest in local food and cities.

When people want to visit a city, the first thing is to get to know it in the simplest way. This is why short videos can promote tourism and city promotion that when the food is more than the food itself when shown in videos, but also gives viewers an intuitive understanding of a city. Such a popular way of communication can also play a positive role in the publicity of cities and cultures. Watching short food videos, people can arouse their curiosity of the food and inner desire for exploring a city, and feel the unique charm of the dishes and the city culture behind it. Short food videos can not only play a beneficial meaning in promoting city image and boosting tourism, but also can be regarded as a good way of cultural heritage and promotion.

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