

# Urban Communication Strategy Based on Short Video Platform: A Case Study of TikTok

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**Abstract.** The concept of urban communication bred in the new media era takes short video platforms as the vehicle for emerging Internet-famous cities. The internal relationship between the communication strategy and development orientation of urban communication and the image practice and performance space of short videos is worth studying. Taking Chongqing and Xi'an as the research objects, this paper explores the operation mode and communication concept of urban space in the new media era from the perspectives of communication origin, user participation, and in-depth communication. The research shows that the advent of mobile short-video platforms offers a new vehicle and channel for the communication and reconstruction of urban space and enriches the audience's cognition of city images.

## 1 Introduction

The external image of a city can be spread through media. Zhou et al.<sup>[1]</sup> believe that the influence of the Internet on urban space is fundamental, and the evolution of the relationship between physical space and cyberspace is an ontological transformation. Short videos spreading in urban space can be regarded as a product of an informatized "space of flow"<sup>[2]</sup>. Strangers from all over the world make a virtual tour of Internet-famous cities through short videos. The openness of short video platforms often has a certain imagination of "decentralization" and "freedom and openness."<sup>[3-4]</sup> It allows strangers from different classes and standpoints to present themselves in the same digital space, which promotes the long-distance communication of the culture and characteristics of Internet-famous cities. Urban communication has thus evolved from one-way communication to multi-way communication, and an individual-centered We-media communication network for visiting Instagram-worthy places has been formed.

"Transduction of space" [5] is fully reflected in the short video release. Landmarks displayed and intra-city recommendations allow scattered strangers to share and interact with each other, which promotes personal presentation. Virtual short videos bring a novel experience to the audience, and then an offline visit to Internet-famous cities helps them feel the cultural atmosphere of the cities. Media worker Wei Chuan once said that in the context of new technology, "visiting Instagram-worthy places" is to win the recognition and resonance of the target audience [6]. Such behavior has become a unique recording behavior, showing "a sense of place and space under the constant intertwining and flowing between people and media" [7].

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Through the investigation of videos about visiting Instagram-worthy places released by users of major short video platforms, it is found that the purposes of video release are various, ranging from recording mood, sharing food, visiting places of interest, to returning to tradition. The release of short videos is influenced by bloggers' age, gender, knowledge structure, team operation, and other factors, which verifies a "process of self-invention" [8]. Individuals hope to obtain social attention and recognition through short video platforms; as a result, their images presented on the homepage and interpersonal networks tend to be heterogeneous.

The Global Cultural Industry proposed by Scott Lash and Celia Lury [9] points out that media is undergoing a transformation "from representation to things." Short video promotion, which is popular in the digital age, also has new problems in high-speed operation, which affects the communication of Internet-famous cities. Therefore, this paper takes TikTok as an example to analyze how city images are marketed and promoted through short videos and reveal the linkage relationship among short video makers, followers, Instagram-worthy places, and Internet-famous cities.

## 2 Theoretical Analysis

### 2.1 The origin of mass media intervention in urban communication

Activity communication and image communication are two effective ways of urban communication. Mass media is constantly involved in urban communication, and mainstream media give information feedback to the urban image. Certainly, the carrier of city image promotion is not

limited to mass media. What we emphasize here is that mass media is an effective means of urban communication. In the research on city image promotion, Li <sup>[10]</sup> studied all links in urban space from the overall, macro, and government levels. The mass media constructs a pseudo-environment with words, sounds, and images, in a unique symbolic, and non-forced way, which enables the public to skip the process of experiencing the city in person and form cognition and imagination about the city in an easier way.

For mass media, the transformation from newspapers to movies is an evolution from texts to images and then to videos; it is also an evolution process from cool media to hot media [11]. Urban memory is generated in physical space, virtual space, and people's spatial practice [12]. Media writing constructs urban memory and shows the unique vitality of a city. With the aid of short videos taken by influencers, Xi'an, Chongqing, Chengdu, and other cities have become Internet-famous, with local scenic spots emerging as new Instagram-worthy landmarks. The cross-border integration of short videos and culture has promoted the development of the economy, especially in the cultural tourism industry. According to the "TikTok Statistics on Labor Day 2021", Chongqing has become the city that attracts the largest number of visitors on TikTok for the first time, surpassing Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Suzhou. In addition, 112 million people made virtual tours to China via TikTok studios, and more than 500,000 people to ancient Rome, Sicily, and Bali.

## **2.2 Explanation congruence: Personal perception and preference of short video participants**

Based on the random sampling results of TikTok, this paper explores the dynamic mechanism of publishers' subjective intention and participants' aesthetic perception experience. According to Szulc, social media not only creates new tastes and desires, but also enables users to produce more data by providing them with new "connections" <sup>[13]</sup>. The vogue of trending videos about Internet-famous cities is the external manifestation of the coordination between the subjective perception of publishers and participants and the visualization of Internet-famous cities.

The communication and construction of city image show strong media dependency through short video interactive experiences. From the perspective of participants, the emotional orientation of comments and the increase in the actual number of visits indicate that participants can acquire information more in line with their preferences. Renowned artists and bloggers who make short videos break the "spatial barriers" and "uncertainty obstacles" that prevent participants from generating behavioral intentions[14]. Short videos released by these "opinion leaders" often win more likes, followings, comments, sharing, and discussion, which have an obvious demonstration effect. Moreover, popular short videos released by opinion leaders are connected and systematic, which makes it easier to tap fans in certain fields and greatly stimulates participants to visit Internet-

famous cities[15].

## **2.3 Mediatization: Short video promotion excavates the deep connotation and soul of the city**

Urban communication is actually the visualization of urban memory. In image production, short videos are short decoding of urban memory, which flows in urban cultural space and civic life, promotes urban cultural production in the upsurge of visiting Instagram-worthy places, and constructs a new urban culture. Therefore, some scholars have pointed out that memory representation is a process of cultural construction <sup>[16]</sup>; culture, especially cultural value, is the inherent qualitative definition of cities <sup>[17]</sup>.

Sawyer, who engaged in the study of space theory, has raised a question about the archaeological research of "City First:" "Can cities and urban space be viewed as a specific object of theoretical research, or is it just the result and reflection of a broader social process?" [18] As the carrier of urban exploration, short videos cannot serve as an in-depth and comprehensive urban communication report that allows online-and-offline participants to grasp a better understanding of the city. As Sawyer puts it, the city is only the object of theoretical explanation but cannot explain itself [19]. The author of this paper believes that the functional value of short videos should be fully utilized, so that they can become the "media" of modern cities, which can integrate the physical city and the abstract city, and further dig into the urban connotation and promote the charm of the city [20].

## **2.4 Summary**

In the era of traditional media, government authorities hold the say in city image promotion, while in the era of the Internet, short videos can also tell government officials about the city construction in terms of economic development, civic life, and tourism culture. Short video publishers spontaneously use dynamic images as an important carrier to spread city stories, which is more in line with the expressions and aesthetic preferences of youngsters. Compared with professional videos such as films, TV dramas, and news documentaries, short videos have become a visual expression of people's entertainment in daily life, reducing the gap between virtual images and real life. Taking TikTok as an example, this short video platform has low barriers to production and is decentralized; thus, everyone has the chance to become the builder and spreader of city images.

## **3 Case Study of Short Video Intervention in Urban Communication**

Case study is a common research method in marketing communication. This paper takes the case study as the main research method to investigate the data of viral videos about Chongqing and Xi'an and explore the relationship between the trending content and the construction and promotion of city image.

In the case selection process, we compared the number of likes, comments, content, themes, and picture production skills of short videos published by different types of accounts, and examined the positioning and communication capabilities of opinion leaders of different

accounts. A total of 20 short video accounts were selected. The number of likes, comment sentiment, number of scenes, number of topics, and number of contents of these accounts in the process of urban communication are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Statistics on short videos in the urban communication of Chongqing and Xi'an [Image source: drawn by the author]

Account Type	Account Name	Number of likes	Comment Sentiments	Number of Scenes	Theme	Single/Integrated content
Individual	Lyuxingxiaoyouxia	68.2	6.4 Neutral	Many	Travel Tips	Integrated
Individual	Rouroudasousuo	34.3	3.9 Pleasant	Few	Fat Sausage in Hot Pot	Single
Individual	Jigeliaobude	9.6	1.6 Neutral	Few	Guanyinqiao Food Court	Single
Individual	Phoenix Photo Studio	7.3	0.2 Pleasant	Many	Introduction to Chongqing	Integrated
Official	Chongqing Music Broadcasting	8.2	0.7 Neutral	Few	Street Lantern Show	Single
Official	Chongqing Release	34.2	0.8 Pleasant	Few	Wanzhou North Station	Single
Official	Chongqing Daily	4	0.3 Neutral	Few	Chongqingyukuaibao	Single
Official	Chongqing Today	96.7	0.2 Pleasant	Few	Sanitation Workers	Single
Individual	Foggy Capital Chongqing	1.7	0.07 Neutral	Few	Aerial Chongqing	Single
Individual	Hao'er de Lyutu	2	0.1 Pleasant	Many	Wushan, Chongqing	Integrated
Official	Xi'an Broadcasting Corporation	42.9	2 Pleasant	Few	Bless Xi'an	Single
Official	Xi'an News	39.7	1.4 Pleasant	Few	Xi'an Fighting	Single
Official	Shaanxi Broadcasting Corporation	6.9	0.4 Pleasant	Few	Epidemic Situation of Xi'an	Single
Individual	Xi'an Lehua City	160.2	4.8 Pleasant	Few	Trip to Lehua City	Single
Individual	Laoniepaixi'an	3.9	0.1 Pleasant	Few	Datang Everbright City	Single
Individual	Aerial Qinling Mountains	8	0.3 Pleasant	Many	Music Fountain	Integrated
Individual	Aerial China	17.4	0.7 Neutral	Few	Xi'an City Wall	Single
Individual	Dapang Aerial Xi'an	2.2	0.1 Pleasant	Few	Xi'an Bell Tower	Single
Individual	Moran Photography	4.2	0.4 Pleasant	Few	Chinese Tang Garden	Single
Individual	Xi'ankedaibiao	7.8	0.5 Neutral	Many	Travel Tips	Integrated

Note: (1) Sentiment standard: The consistency and difference between the comments and content of short videos, denoted as pleasant if they are generally consistent, otherwise as neutral. (2) The objects of shots: The shots that focus on different objects are denoted as integrated, otherwise as single. (3) Numbers of scenes

From the analysis in Table 1, it can be seen that videos published by personal accounts and public accounts have the same popularity and excellent communication response. Short video creators associate comprehensive creative factors such as rich life practice, personalized subtitle output, and fitting scene creation with the site-specific communication of local cities, which embodies the prevalence of personal accounts and the greater say of ordinary people. Personalized videos released by high-quality personal accounts such as Lyuxingxiaoyouxia, Rouroudasousuo, Xi'an Lehua City, etc., might be completed by a simple mobile phone, though, the rich flavor of life and personal feelings contained in the videos can arouse participants' curiosity and freshness.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the promotion of city image dissemination, short videos with regional characteristics are more likely to stand out in the

current market environment. For example, short videos containing dialects, special effects, funny music, etc. tend to make the content more colorful and vivid. Distinctive short videos, such as those that contain dialects, special effects, funny music, etc., often make the content more colorful and vivid, thus standing out in the unwieldy mass of short videos. In addition, short videos can maximize the combined effects of music and images. Urban music has become an important symbol of urban images, which is also an unprecedented change of site-specific expression in the new media era. Besides, food has also become an important aspect of the site-specific communication of Internet-famous cities such as Chongqing and Xi'an. For example, Chongqing's hot pot grilled fish and Xi'an's marinated meat in a baked bun and minced meat noodles have attracted numerous audiences to explore Internet-famous cities on TikTok. With all these factors, the

diversity and authenticity of Internet-famous spaces have been better shaped and presented. As the times require, there are also market phenomena such as the city's official publicity short videos, its own traffic, and the sale of city-specific products through live broadcasts. This further enables operators and practitioners of short videos to obtain financial support through the online model.

## 4 Conclusion

### 4.1 Reconstruction of participatory urban space

Media development promotes the transformation and reconstruction of urban space; short video platforms play an important role in displaying the regional cultural characteristics while publicizing the image of Chongqing and Xi'an as Internet-famous cities. In the era of short videos, the multi-party interaction between online publishers and participants transforms the subject and object of urban communication. As a result, media users have access to a completely immersive experience, and people-to-people exchanges trigger the formation of scene chains<sup>[21]</sup>. Therefore, the author of this paper holds that the change of communication role does not imply that short videos have lost their usefulness for the government to promote regional cultural images. On the contrary, in addition to traditional communication ideas and organizational forms, the competition of regional cultural image communication can enhance the influence of a city, and the integration of communication strategy with the media ecological environment of short videos can guide the public.

### 4.2 Local appeal of Internet-famous space

The sense of place in the study of human geography includes placeness and attachment. The "sense of place" was advanced by Steele, who put it as an experience produced by place and developed by the person based on the interaction between people and places<sup>[22]</sup>. It is not only the special nature of place, but also people's attachment and feelings induce to the place<sup>[23]</sup>. In the new media era, the formation of the human-landscape relationship is featured by the use of short video platforms as the carrier to transmit information, communicate emotions, and promote local appeal and city image.

Compared with the previous "sense of place" formed imperceptibly through personal experience, the new one indirectly shaped by the media is influenced by the characteristics of the media itself, and the content conforming to the characteristics of media communication tends to get more views and attract more public attention. The site-specific communication of the sense of place generally increases the thickness and height of city images through cultural and artistic communication. Therefore, the application of digital images to the site-specific communication of Internet-famous urban spaces has not changed the distinctive urban space of Chongqing and Xi'an, but formed "social synchrony without regional

proximity" in urban communication [24], which has made Instagram-worthy places in Chongqing and Xi'an surpass the shackles of their original forms. Only by excavating the spatial connotation of urban Instagram-worthy places and constructing an image-medium city, can we build an emotional connection with the audience in the site-specific communication of popular cities through short videos.

### 4.3 City identity: Reconstruction of local significance

Short video media transforms urban spatial communication from the traditional relationship between man and land to the relationship between man, land, and media. Both place and media participate in the building of a communication mode and a social information communication mode for the mass [25]. The addition of short video media helps the audience to be exposed to extensive text production at the individual level and community interaction at the collective level<sup>[26]</sup>, so as to enhance urban identity and reshape the local significance. There is a two-way connection between the communication and reshaping of urban space. The frequent and continuous communication effect of viral videos can make "Internet-famous cities" full of news value and publicity value and can transform "attention dividend" into "momentum of development" in city branding [27].

To construct local significance, it is suggested to take tourism short videos as the pivot, dig deep into the connotation of scenes, stimulate the interactive mechanism and increase user viscosity. In the entertainment atmosphere created by short videos, history, culture, and art account for a relatively small proportion and lack in-depth exploration. The author assumes that creators should select topics associated with the history, culture, and art and make distinctive short videos that bear both communication value and content depth. What's more, they should integrate online and offline activities in urban Internet-famous space to reflect the commercial value of tourism, and finally realize the reconstruction of local significance and promote the re-communication of city image.

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