

Urban Image of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area from the Perspective of the “Short Video Turn”: Construction, Dissemination, and Governance

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Abstract: Short videos, as a representative form of new media, have significantly expanded the breadth and depth of individual communication capabilities. This study employs content analysis, comparative research, and focus group interviews to examine the current state of urban image dissemination of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area on short video platforms. It explores users' perceptions and attitudes toward the urban image of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area on these platforms and identifies existing issues. It is recommended to innovate urban image communication strategies by integrating diversified image dissemination, enhancing the influence of mainstream media, and encouraging public interaction and participation, thereby reshaping and elevating the overall image of the Xi'an metropolitan area in a multidimensional manner.

Keywords: Urban Image; Short Video Turn; Xi'an Metropolitan Area; Construction; Dissemination and Governance

1. Introduction

The “short video turn” refers to a recent trend in media content production and consumption shifting toward short videos. Various media platforms and production teams have transitioned from traditional static content to more intuitive and dynamic short video formats. From language to text and images, the medium of human communication has achieved a qualitative leap. The integration of sound and visuals in videos lowers the threshold for information access, making it one of the primary ways people perceive and understand the world. The internet and social media in the new era are undergoing a “short video turn” in content, evolving from one-

dimensional readable forms to multidimensional, visual, and dynamic presentations. This enriches the forms of information representation, improves communication efficiency, and enhances audience reception experiences [1].

The urban image is the sum of impressions and characteristics a city holds in the public mind, encompassing natural landscapes, historical culture, economic development, architectural styles, and other aspects. It is not only an external manifestation of a city's essence but also a reflection of its attractiveness and competitiveness. New communication technologies have given rise to new forms of dissemination. Short videos, as a representative medium, empower individuals with unprecedented communication capabilities and abundant resources. Urban image dissemination has evolved from traditional large-scale centralized campaigns to more refined, scenario-based, and highly penetrating approaches [2, 3].

Among the cities in the Xi'an Metropolitan Area, Xi'an holds significant advantages in transportation, historical culture, modern industries, and comprehensive innovation capabilities, making it a crucial growth pole for regional development. In April 2022, the Xi'an Metropolitan Area Development Plan was officially approved. This plan is the fifth metropolitan area development plan approved by the national government, following those for Nanjing, Fuzhou, Chengdu, and the Changsha-Zhuzhou-Xiangtan metropolitan areas, and the only one in Northwest China. The plan repeatedly emphasizes Xi'an's dual roles: leveraging its influence as a national central city and serving as a regional leader. In recent years, cities have increasingly recognized the importance of urban image shaping and dissemination. To attract more

tourists and resources, their awareness of image communication has grown, with many cities constructing unique urban images and disseminating them through various media platforms. Thus, urban image building is an integral part of the development of the “Xi'an Metropolitan Area.”

2. Exploratory Practices in Urban Image Dissemination of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area

In recent years, to align with the inherent logic and developmental trends of short videos, relevant authorities have formulated strategies for the construction and dissemination of the urban image of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area. Taking Xi'an, a regional central city, as an example, the official slogan “Ancient Capital of a Thousand Years, Always Welcome to Chang'an” has demonstrated remarkable communication efficacy on short video platforms, deepening public awareness and admiration for Xi'an. Existing short video content leverages the rich historical and cultural resources of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area, vividly interpreting its humanistic image. While the overall image of the metropolitan area has been positively promoted, several issues remain unresolved: insufficient expressive power of the image, inadequate enthusiasm and depth of mainstream media and official accounts in promoting the urban image and creating short videos, lack of content innovation, and prominent homogenization.

2.1 Prominent Humanistic Image of the Metropolitan Area

Most existing short videos focus on historical and cultural heritage, urban cuisine, traditional customs, and leisure scenes, comprehensively and vividly outlining the profound humanistic heritage and unique cultural features of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area. Videos such as “Hanfu Dress-Up” and “Secret Box of the Tang Dynasty” have sparked users' longing for cities like Xi'an, Xianyang, Tongchuan, and Weinan. However, during the humanistic image construction process, content related to talent cultivation, educational development, and scientific and technological innovations is scarce. The Xi'an Metropolitan Area is home to numerous renowned universities and research institutions, with many cutting-edge

research projects and breakthroughs originating from local institutions [4]. Yet, influential short videos on education, talent, and technological development are limited, failing to showcase the unique advantages and potential of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area in modern development.

2.2 Notable Social and Civilized Features

Short video platforms feature numerous videos reflecting the social life of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area, revealing the optimistic and uplifting qualities of its cities. By delicately depicting the humanistic landscapes and diverse social activities, these videos effectively enhance the positive impressions and emotional resonance of audiences toward Xi'an and other member cities of the metropolitan area. Some popular videos with millions of likes, centered on uplifting events, evoke positive emotional tendencies and evaluations among users. These videos not only convey positive values but also highlight the unique warmth and charm of Xi'an and its neighboring cities, strengthening public identification and aspiration.

2.3 Lack of Government Image Representation

The government image is one of the most important intangible assets of a government and a fundamental element of its influence. Unfortunately, no short video content explicitly relates to the government image of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area. Information about the governance philosophies, official images, major policies, and development plans of the cities' governments is inadequately presented on short video platforms. In recent years, short video platforms have seen the emergence of widely disseminated and influential government accounts, such as “Beijing Government Affairs,” “Siping Police,” and “Xiaojing Ate.” These accounts adapt to new media trends, innovate content forms, follow hot topics, and disseminate government information while shaping government images. The absence of government image construction and dissemination for the Xi'an Metropolitan Area on short video platforms reflects the insufficient communication efficacy of related government accounts [5]. Existing content fails to attract public attention, limiting public

awareness of government work and lacking necessary public interaction and participation mechanisms, which hinders the comprehensive shaping and enhancement of the government image.

3. Analysis of Issues in the Construction and Dissemination of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's Urban Image

3.1 Diverse Video Producers, Insufficient Media and Government Participation

Video producers, or the publishers of short video content, on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou primarily include individuals, influencers, media, celebrities, and government accounts. Among these, individual and influencer accounts constitute the main sources of content about the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image, accounting for over 70% of the research samples. Government-related accounts are nearly absent, particularly within the Xi'an Metropolitan Area. Among the official and mainstream media accounts, only “Shaanxi Urban Express” on Douyin has achieved notable influence. In contrast, other local media accounts exhibit obvious shortcomings in communication effectiveness and performance.

3.2 Short, Original, and Homogenized Content

Short videos can quickly capture user attention, provide concise information, and adapt to fragmented reading habits, facilitating sharing and dissemination. The sources of short videos about the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image mainly include original recordings, adapted videos, surveillance footage, and reposted content. Original recordings, predominantly from individual and influencer accounts, are the most numerous. Original videos can better convey genuine emotions, increasing user trust and resonance. The brevity and originality of these videos enhance the communication effectiveness of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image on short video platforms.

However, further analysis reveals a trend toward homogenization in these videos. Many share similar themes, styles, and techniques, lacking innovation and diversity. The “Hanfu Dress-Up” series is a typical example, with videos often featuring the Bell Tower as the

backdrop, using the same background music and similar filming and editing methods. From content presentation to narrative approaches, these videos exhibit significant homogenization. For the Xi'an Metropolitan Area, historical and cultural heritage, iconic landscapes, modern architectural styles, and artistic performances are potential elements for diversifying urban image representation.

3.3 Reasonable Use of Audiovisual Language, Limited Video Symbols

Audiovisual language integrates visual and auditory elements to convey information and express meaning. Most videos under topics related to the Xi'an Metropolitan Area present urban scenery and various city scenes, accompanied by background music, sound effects, subtitles, and narration, creating vivid and engaging short videos about the urban image. Although these videos construct the metropolitan area's image through text, narration, music, and visuals, the narration is primarily in Mandarin, and the background music consists mainly of upbeat instrumental tracks. Symbols unique to the Xi'an Metropolitan Area, such as local dialects and music, are rarely used, which hinders the construction of a distinctive urban memory and image.

3.4 Outstanding Performance of Opinion Leaders, Mediocre Mainstream Media

On short video platforms, certain influencers and individual accounts produce content with high likes and comments, such as “@Bing Dan” and “@Shi Deshan Ya-Xu Kai.” Their content, often related to historical and cultural explanations or positive social energy, garners widespread praise and emotional resonance. As opinion leaders with large followings, they effectively communicate the historical culture and social features of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area to users.

Mainstream media, which play vital roles in information dissemination, public opinion guidance, and cultural promotion, should exert significant influence in shaping urban images and fostering social development. However, on platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou, only “Shaanxi Urban Express,” the official account of Shaanxi TV's Urban Youth Channel, has released highly liked and influential short videos. Although some local mainstream

media in the metropolitan area have recognized the popularity of short videos and established their own accounts, the research samples did not identify other accounts with strong communication power and influence.

4. Strategies for Dissemination and Governance of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's Urban Image from the Perspective of the "Short Video Turn"

To address the chaotic discourse system and content homogenization in the dissemination and governance of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image under the "short video turn," certain methods and principles must be followed to ensure consistency in image shaping, effective information delivery, and enhanced content influence [6, 7].

4.1 Prioritizing Government Image Shaping

The government image plays a unique and crucial role in the metropolitan area's image, serving as the primary theme in urban image construction. In the short video construction of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image, the principle of prioritizing government image shaping must be adhered to. As the managers and decision-makers of cities, governments' images directly affect public attitudes and evaluations. A positive and service-oriented government image significantly enhances a city's attractiveness, competitiveness, and developmental potential. Therefore, the government image, as the window and facade of a city, should be the first priority in the metropolitan area's image dissemination.

4.2 Diversified Image Integration and Dissemination

In the short video dissemination of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image, in addition to showcasing its long history and culture, the integration of traditional and modern elements should be emphasized [8]. The modern achievements of the metropolitan area as an economic, technological, and cultural hub should be highlighted, moving beyond the presentation of historical relics and local cuisine. Innovative industrial systems, new patterns of openness, high-tech industries, research institutions, and cultural creativity are all essential components of the metropolitan area's urban image.

4.3 Government Guidance and Public Interaction

Residents of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area are key participants in the dissemination of its urban image through short videos. Constructing the metropolitan area's image requires public involvement and interaction. At the same time, the dissemination and governance of the urban image should be led by relevant government departments, with clear communication goals. Encouraging participation and interaction from residents, tourists, businesses, and other stakeholders through public activities, opinion collection, and platform engagement can foster a sense of identity and belonging toward Xi'an and other cities in the metropolitan area [9].

4.4 Mainstream Media Adapting to Short Video Communication

Currently, local mainstream media in the Xi'an Metropolitan Area face challenges in effectively disseminating its urban image through short videos. In the new media environment and the era of short videos, mainstream media must grasp the communication patterns of short videos and adapt to their evolving trends. First, they should strive to produce high-quality short video content about the metropolitan area's urban image, potentially altering traditional production methods and adopting more vivid and concise narratives to suit short video characteristics. Second, local mainstream media should fully utilize platforms like Douyin and Kuaishou. While short video communication presents challenges, it also offers opportunities. Establishing, operating, and maintaining their own short video accounts, leveraging platform features such as sharing, liking, and commenting, can increase exposure and interactivity [10]. Additionally, collaborations with local short video influencers can amplify the dissemination of the metropolitan area's urban image by leveraging their fan bases.

4.5 Individual Opinion Leaders as Promoters and Spokespersons

Individual and influencer accounts are currently the main forces in disseminating the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image through short videos, with communication power and influence comparable to government and

media accounts. For example, Terracotta Warriors explainer “@Bing Dan” and “Pikachen,” the Doll Lady, have played positive roles in promoting the metropolitan area's urban image. These opinion leaders possess in-depth knowledge of Xi'an's history, culture, landmarks, cuisine, and special events. Through authentic, independent, and professional content, they provide objective and accurate information to their followers, gradually building trust. By producing interesting and high-quality short videos, other cities in the metropolitan area can also cultivate more individual opinion leaders to serve as promoters and spokespersons for the metropolitan area's urban image.

5. Conclusion

In the new media environment, urban image construction and dissemination are no longer confined to grand narratives or single communication channels. Instead, they emphasize precise and penetrating information delivery through diverse life scenarios and new media tools like short videos. This shift not only improves the efficiency and coverage of urban image dissemination but also enhances audience participation, offering broader possibilities for a comprehensive and multidimensional representation of urban images. Similarly, the construction, dissemination, and governance of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area's urban image must effectively utilize short video platforms. By prioritizing government image shaping, diversifying image integration, enhancing mainstream media influence, fostering government guidance, and encouraging public interaction, innovative urban image communication strategies can be developed to reshape and elevate the overall image of the Xi'an Metropolitan Area.

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