

Image Reproduction and Expression Reconstruction: Urban Image Communication in the Era of Short Video

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ABSTRACT

The booming mobile short video serves as a new carrier for urban image communication and a window for the public to understand urban image and cultivate their own perception towards city. Analysis of short video involving urban image reveals that mobile short video reappears new urban space, urban landscape and urban life through short and interesting videos, and realizes the transformation of the expression of urban image from official narration, image output, unified overview and landscape duplication to folk narration, image negotiation, highlights description and emotional connection.

Keywords: short video, urban image, image, communication

I. INTRODUCTION

Thanks to the popularity of Internet and the rise of social media, mobile short video has become an important choice for mass information consumption due to its features such as brevity, novelty and interest. Short videos concerning urban image, urban landscape and urban life are especially popular among the public and become an important carrier of urban image communication and shaping.

Mobile short video broadens the communication channels of urban image and endows urban space, urban landscape and urban life with more symbolic value. What's more, the clicks and network traffic can be transformed into economic benefits, driving the spread of urban image and spike of tourism income. In the era of "we media" where everyone are allowed to voice, the urban image communication with the participation of citizens and the promotion of the government takes advantage of short video tailwinds to achieve certain communication effects.

II. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Urban image, an integral part of its comprehensive strength, refers to "public image, that is, the common impression of the city in the minds of most residents, or the comprehensive impression resulting from the combination of psychological feeling of external material world and their own cultural background." [1]

In addition to some first-hand experience, most of the audience's perception of the urban image relies on the construction of urban image by the media. Media plays a vital role in the process of urban image communication and construction. Mobile short video serves as both a new carrier for urban image communication and a window for the public to understand urban image and foster their perception towards city.

According to *White Paper on Short Video and Urban Image Research*, there are 11 "faddish city" with more than one million videos on TikTok. The top three list Chongqing, Xi'an and Chengdu, whose popularity on short video platforms has surpassed that of first-tier cities in the east, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen. [2] In addition to the huge traffic brought by the first- and second-tier cities, short video platforms contribute to urban image communication and construction in some small and medium-sized cities. The "long tail effect" has also been realized in the vast third- and fourth-tier cities that make up the majority of China's population. For example, scenic spots such as Chaka Salt Lake in Qinghai, Qipo in Maanshan, special snack in Maoming and Glass Bridge in Quzhou garnered higher clicks on short video platforms. Short video featuring interactive communication not only shifts previous one-way communication of urban image, but also allows the public to create and express urban image freely. Its fragmented content shows the image of the city from various dimensions, which adds a pluralistic, fresh and friendly atmosphere.

Taking urban image in short videos as starting point, the paper studies image reproduction and expression

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shift of urban image, so as to find the commonness and rules and drive the urban image communication through short video platform.

III. IMAGE REPRODUCTION OF URBAN IMAGE IN MOBILE SHORT VIDEO

In a media-oriented society, media shoulders the role of content production and information dissemination, and at the same time subtly shapes the impression of the public on daily life and their perception of cultural communication. Mobile short video reappears the new urban space, urban landscape and urban life through short and interesting videos, extending public cognition and feeling towards urban image virtually.

A. New urban space

Henri Lefebvre, a French thinker, pointed out that "space is the product of society". He held that space was not only material space, but also social and political space, bearing complex contents. [3] Urban space refers to the geographical space in which citizens live, work and communicate. It is the basis for building a urban image, and mass media is an important tool to describe urban space. From the perspective of media, urban space is not only a materialized existence, but also a virtual space with extended consciousness constructed by mediating effect of media. The rise of short videos inject vitality to tourist and cultural attractions in many cities. Ciqikou and Yangtze River Cableway in Chongqing, Muslim Street and Tang Paradise in Xi'an, Temple of Marquis and Broad and Narrow Alley in Chengdu are the scenic spots that often appear in popular short videos.

In addition, the excavation and reproduction of daily life scenes by citizens gave birth to new city landmarks and life scenes, and some areas even became "popular landmarks", which triggered many tourists to come here and "clock in" as a souvenir. Examples include glass walkway in Oroovician Park in Chongqing, Yongxingfang and Qujiang Bookstore in Xi'an, Eti Rose Garden and Aromatherapy Valley in Chengdu. The behavior of "clock in" is also the interpretation and re-creation of urban image from the perspective of "others". Urban image communication activities with local citizens and non-local tourists as main body extends and enriches urban space.

B. New urban landscape

Different from natural landscape, urban landscape is mostly constructed according to production, transportation, leisure and other demands. Short video platform is a platform based on users' voluntary sharing and dissemination, and users' image-based construction of urban landscape makes urban landscape more meaningful. Guy Debord, a French thinker, takes that

"the landscape is not an aggregation of images, but the social relationship between people mediated by images." [4] Therefore, the media's display of urban landscape reflects, to some extent, the power relationship behind the media production of urban landscape. The media production and consumption of urban landscape are influenced by mass media, while the construction and display of urban landscape by short videos make urban landscape a media landscape, which changes public's impression and imagination of urban landscape to a certain extent.

The original site of Yongxingfang in Xi'an was the residence of Wei Zheng in Tang Dynasty. After the renovation was completed in 2007, it was moved to Guanzhong snack street, and was obscure to tourists. Xi'an people's Song has made Yongxingfang's bowl throwing wine a hit on short video platforms. Bowl throwing wine was originally the wine that soldiers drank before the war in ancient times. After drinking the wine, they would throw their glasses, thus the extended meaning of heroism and generosity. Thanks to the promotion of short video platform, the bowl throwing wine of Yongxingfang has become a punching place for tourists. Every day, a large number of tourists come and queue up to experience the bowl throwing wine and the ritualized folk customs.

C. New urban life

Urban life is directly reflected in the clothing, food, housing, transportation and other aspects of citizens. Food dominates urban life, as well as main content of popular videos on short video platforms. According to statistics, among the top 100 videos involving urban image on TikTok platform, urban food takes a lion's share. [5] Local cuisine reflects urban image and livelihood of a city, serving as an important way for non-local tourists to experience the life of local citizens. The short video platform covers the special delicacies of different cities: Chongqing's special hotpot, Xi'an's Chinese sandwich, Guiyang's potato cake and Lanzhou's hand-pulled noodles, which not only reflect the normal life and diet of local citizens, but also attract foreign tourists.

Transportation means is the symbolic product of the city, the inevitable choice of citizens to travel, and the name card of the urban image. Urban transportation culture is the epitome of urban culture. On the short video platform, the phenomenon of "light rail crossing buildings" at Liziba Station of Chongqing Light Rail Line 2 adds a bit of magic color to Chongqing. Dalian's iconic trams make the city with nostalgic aura. The video of the "army of e-bikes crossing the road" in the streets of Nanning create the title of "City of electric bikes" and spread the image of the local government in effective management of electric bikes.

IV. RECONSTRUCTION OF URBAN IMAGE EXPRESSION IN MOBILE SHORT VIDEO

The construction of traditional urban image is mainly rest with relevant government departments, which focuses on the overall image of a large and complete city. However, the construction of urban image in mobile short videos usually takes the public as the entry point and spreads through individual short videos. The small and micro perception of urban image from an individual perspective reconstructs the expression of urban image.

A. *The transformation from official narration to folk narration*

For a long time, government serves as the planner of urban image and the main body of urban image communication. The emergence of social media encourages more and more users to describe their city life or travel track through social media spontaneously and actively. In particular, short video, which covers text, music, image and video, has become an important channel to describe, perceive and express the city. The public presents urban food, scenery and folk customs in their eyes through short videos, so that the content they shoot and create can be seen by the outside world and attract attention, which to some extent reduces the group loneliness in the Internet era. Statistics show that about 80% of urban image videos on TikTok are created by citizens.

Some cities, aware of the promotion effect of short videos on urban image, have launched "TikTok Challenge" to encourage the public to participate in the shooting of short videos, and attract more people to participate in the construction of urban image.[6] Zhengzhou launched the "Urban TikTok Challenge" from May to August 2018, inviting netizens to participate in the "Meet Zhengzhou" Challenge, and releasing original videos featuring Zhengzhou's cultural scenery, scientific and technological innovation, clothing, food, housing, transportation and other urban characteristics, which inspired netizens' enthusiasm for displaying the city's image with short videos.

B. *The transformation from image output to image negotiation*

The traditional urban image propaganda video adopts the magnificent narrative framework of natural scenery, historical sites, high-rise buildings and so on, and employs the macro vision and local perspective to describe urban image in a holistic and systematic way, striving to display the urban image with both historical and cultural deposits and modernist style. The selection and display of urban image elements are the responsibility of shooting team, and the urban image is transmitted to the audience through media. Short videos enhance the enthusiasm of the public to participate in

the urban image construction, make the public consciously and actively show the image of a certain aspect of the city, and make the urban image more vivid, three-dimensional and amiable. The construction of urban image by short video prompts some local governments to value the dissemination of short video. Some of them have reached strategic cooperation with short video platforms such as TikTok and Kuaishou, thus opening the curtain of urban image marketing in the field of short video.

As capital of thirteen dynasties, Xi'an enjoys a long history and rich cultural landscape, which has attracted a large number of tourists inside and outside China. The development of short videos has gradually promoted Xi'an from "ancient capital" to "TikTok City". The popularity of songs like Xi'an and Song of Xi'an People on TikTok and the hit topic of "bowl smashing wine" in Yongxingfang attracted a sea of tourists, who drink a bowl of "bowl smashing wine" and post short video to experience the rare heroism in urban life, which aroused the attention of "TikTok users". The combination of short videos and a sense of technology has added a new style and vitality to the city.

C. *The transformation from unified overview to highlight description*

The city publicity videos of traditional media mainly start from government image, economic image, cultural image, ecological image, resident image, urban image and other contents. Its description of urban image is both comprehensive and grand, far cry from the daily life of citizens. The short video with limited duration cannot show the urban image in all aspects within ten seconds. Therefore, the narrative perspective of fragmentation, experience and interaction is employed to perceptibly convey the specific elements of the city, such as food, landscape and traffic, and repeated microscopic focus also deepens the urban features to a certain extent.

The spontaneous publicity of urban image is closer to the real status of daily life of citizens. It is difficult to present urban image in detail in ten seconds of video. When photographing the city, the public are required to present the most essential and attractive part of the city in a short time. For example, a short video of urban food. The cameraman dives deep into the city's streets to find local food that's more local and well-received, including brushstroke cakes in Xi'an, hotpot in Chongqing, Roast Delicious in Chengdu, Youxuan in Jinan and other delicacies with local characteristics, which triggered public attention. According to their own life experience and life scene, the public can present their specific perception of the city in a short video of more than ten seconds, which is easier to shorten the distance between the city and the video

photographer and viewer, making the image of the city more natural, vivid and recognizable.

D. The transition from landscape duplication to emotional connection

The traditional urban image publicity often selects representative urban landscape of humanity and nature in the city, which lacks urban cultural connotation. The urban image presented in the short video not only covers the beautiful scenic spots and tall urban buildings. The fragmented and scene-oriented mode of communication can better present the real life and show the individual stories and colorful life of ordinary people in the city.

The urban image mirrors urban culture and urban life, while the daily life of ordinary people in the city is the most vivid and vibrant part of urban life. As the creation subjects of short videos, citizens and tourists often express their feelings towards city life based on routines they have witnessed and experienced. Through flexible, vivid and interesting ways of expression, the creator endows the viewer a life-like and intimate viewing experience. Communication values emotional exchange and social interaction, and creators, viewers and urban images establish emotional connections at the life and emotional levels, thus arousing viewers' emotional resonance.

V. CONCLUSION

The development of mobile short video positively sway the image reproduction and expression reconstruction of urban image. Short videos not only adapt to the fragmented communication context, but also meet the aesthetic needs of young people. The urban image contains public aesthetic and emotional expression, and makes it more vivid, three-dimensional and close to the people through individual perspective. The building and communication of urban image in mobile short video can make up for the deficiency of traditional channels and realize the multi-dimensional expression and three-dimensional communication of urban image.

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