

Study on the Construction and Communication Strategy of Urban Tourism Image from the Perspective of Mobile Short Videos

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Abstract: With the iteration of mobile Internet technology, short videos have become the core carrier for the dissemination of urban tourism images. This paper takes Bayingolin Prefecture as the research object, integrates tourism management and communication theories, and uses text analysis, questionnaire survey and semi-structured interview methods to systematically explore the current situation and predicaments of Bayingolin Prefecture's tourism image dissemination in the short video perspective. The research finds that there are cognitive biases, such as "obvious stereotypes and lack of humanistic connotations," in the tourism image of Bayingolin Prefecture, and the short video dissemination faces core problems such as content homogenization, imbalance in platform adaptation, superficial exploration of cultural genes and lack of interaction mechanisms. Based on this, this paper constructs a five-in-one communication strategy of "precise positioning - segmented communication - content innovation - co-creation and collaboration - long-term guarantee", providing theoretical references and practical paths for border cities to upgrade their tourism images and promote cultural and tourism economic development through short videos.

Keywords: Mobile short videos; Urban tourism image; Communication strategy; Frontier city; Bazhou

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1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

As an important part of a country's soft power, the transmission effect of urban image directly affects regional tourism development and economic vitality ^[1]. After the short video became popular in 2018, the "two super and many strong" industry pattern gradually formed. With the "fragmented narrative algorithm recommendation" mechanism, platforms such as TikTok and Kuaishou have promoted cities like Chongqing and Chengdu to achieve dual benefits in image and economy ^[2]. By 2024, TikTok had 620 million daily active users and a daily usage time of 98 minutes, making short videos the "infrastructure of city branding" ^[3].

As a key node of the southern and central routes of the ancient Silk Road, the western border city of Bazhou is rich in cultural tourism resources such as the ancient city of Loulan and the Bayin Gobi grassland. However, in the "2023 TikTok Big Data Report", it did not enter the top 10 of popular cities or scenic spots, missing the short video traffic dividend. For a long time, the public's perception of Bazhou is still limited to the stereotype of "remote frontier, backward facilities," which is in contrast to its brand positioning of "Silk Road Landscape · Magnificent Bazhou" ^[4]. Against this backdrop, it is of distinct epochal

value to explore the construction logic and dissemination path of Bazhou's tourism image in the context of short videos.

1.2. Research significance

1.2.1. Theoretical significance

Existing research mostly focuses on popular cities in the central and eastern regions, lacking in-depth analysis of the transmission mechanism of “cultural genes-media presentation-cognitive transformation” in border areas^[5]. This article takes Bazhou as a case, constructs a “short video-cultural genes-urban tourism image” analysis framework, fills the research gap in the dissemination of border city tourism image, and provides a localized case supplement for mobile short video dissemination theory.

1.2.2. Practical significance

Through empirical research, it is clear that Bazhou's communication pain points are clearly defined, and feasible optimization strategies are proposed to help it break through stereotypes and improve the efficiency of cultural and tourism traffic conversion. At the same time, providing a replicable model of “short video + cultural tourism” for similar border cities, promoting the coordinated development of cultural dissemination and economy in border areas^[6].

2. Research object and method

2.1. Research object

The core research object of this article is “the urban tourism image Bazhou in the context of mobile short video”, which specifically covers three dimensions: (1) cultural and tourism resource layer, including natural landscapes such as the Bayin G grassland and the Tarim River, and human resources such as the ancient city of Loulan and the Turhot culture that returned to the east; (2) current situation communication layer, selecting TikTok, Kuaishou, and Bilibili as the research platform, and analyzing the content characteristics and interaction data of relevant short videos from January 2023 to June 2024; (3) Cognition feature layer, focusing on the cognition and expectation of tourists, citizens, and cultural and tourism on the tourism image of Bazhou.

2.2. Research method

2.2.1. Text analysis method

With “#Address on the western border Bazhou,” #Bayin Gobi,” “#Loulan Ancient City” as keywords, 600 effective samples with a like volume ≥ 100 were selected (30 from TikTok, 180 from Kuaishou, and 100 from Bilibili)^[2]. The samples were coded from four dimensions: “ theme (natural landscape/human culture/food/life), presentation form (real shooting/animation/interview), interaction volume (like/comment/retweet), cultural symbol density,” and text mining and quantitative analysis were conducted using Nvivo12 software.

2.2.2. Questionnaire survey method

The “Baz Urban Tourism Image Cognition and Short Video Communication Questionnaire” was designed, containing 4 modules and 30 questions. The questionnaire was distributed in the form of “online targeted (TikTok, WeChat), offline distribution in scenic spots (Korla City, Yanqi County),” with a total of 900 questionnaires, 826 valid questionnaires recovered, and an effective recovery rate of 91.8%. After testing with SPSS 26.0, Cron's $\alpha = 0.87$, KMO = 0.82, and the reliability and validity both met the research standards^[7].

2.2.3. Semi-structured interviews

Four types of interviewees were selected, totaling 40: 4 managers from the Bazhou Culture and Tourism Bureau, 6 heads of core scenic spots, 10 short video creators (7 local ordinary people and 3N institutions), and 20 tourists (covering

different age groups and regions). The interview lasted for 45–60 minutes, and the core opinions were extracted using the “three-level coding method” after transcribing the audio recordings.

3. Results and analysis

3.1. Cognitive characteristics of Bazhou city’s tourism image

3.1.1. Cognitive bias: Significant stereotypes and obvious regional differences

Survey data show that 8.2% of the interviewees have a “first impression” of Bazhou as a “remote frontier area,” 25.3% think that “tour facilities are not perfect,” and only 6.5% mention “Silk Road culture” or “diverse ecology.” A regional comparison finds that the recognition rate of Bazhou’s cultural resources among interviewees from Address on the western border (38.7%) is significantly higher than that of non-Address on the western border interviewees (8.3, and the recognition of non-Address on the western border interviewees mainly relies on “traditional media (62.1%),” with the proportion of short video recognition being only 1.5%, verifying the judgment that “short videos have not yet become an effective channel to correct stereotypes”^[5].

3.1.2. Single image: Dominated by natural landscapes, lacking humanistic connotation

Text analysis shows that 7% of the content of Bazhou’s short videos is “real shooting of natural landscapes” (such as aerial photography of grasslands, lake scenery), 18 is “food display” (such as whole roasted lamb, hand-pulled rice), and only 10% is “human culture,” and 85% of human content is the traditional form of “tour guide explaining the history of the ruins.”^[8] In the interview, a certain manager of the Bazhou Culture and Tourism Bureau frankly admitted, “We tend to promote natural landscapes because of their strong visual impact and easy to get likes, but we ignore the core IP such as the Loulan culture, resulting in an ‘scenery without a soul.’” This is consistent with the conclusion of Rui Xue and Xiao Nan (2023)^[9] that “the dissemination of humanistic elements in the image of frontier cities is lacking.”

3.2. The core dilemmas of short video dissemination in Bazhou

3.2.1. Content homogeneity: Rigid modeling, lack of innovation

Among the 600 sample videos, 45% of the natural landscape videos adopted the fixed format of “drone shooting background music” without narrative; 30% of the food videos were “finished product display price marking”, lacking the production process or cultural. Local creators said: “To avoid risks, many imitate popular videos, resulting in ‘content uniformity’ and user aesthetic fatigue.” Moreover, the content “aging” is obvious: “Kangyang culture” accounts for 25%, but the interest of the core users of short videos (18-35 years old) in this is only 7.8%, with a serious mismatch between supply and demand^[10].

3.2.2. Imbalance of platform adaptation: Lack of thinking, low efficiency of dissemination

The content strategy of different platforms is seriously homogenous: In Bilibili (mainly users aged 18-2), the average playback volume of Bazhou videos is 21,000, far below the average value of the cultural and tourism category videos of Bilibili 63,000), due to the lack of trendy elements such as “Hanfu Check-in, Cultural Tourism Vlog”; In Volcano Short (mainly users over 45 years old), the interaction rate of “Kangyang Content” is only 9.2%, due to the lack of life- scenarios such as “Local Elderly Kangyang Daily,” which fails to resonate. This violates Chen’s (2008) core viewpoint that “ image dissemination needs to be accurately matched with media characteristics”^[11].

3.2.3. Shallow cultural gene mining: Symbolic presentation, no emotional resonance

The core cultural genes, such as “Loulan Culture” and “Tuerhute’s Return to the East” in Bazhou, only involved 8% of the content in short videos, and 90% of them were simply presented in the form of “ruins and relics shooting text description”^[12]. For example, in the “Loulan Old City” video, only 10% told the story of “the rise and fall of the ancient

country,” and the rest were landscape displays. As Rui et al. (2023) said: “Cultural genes need to be transformed into emotional symbols through ‘storytelling narratives,’ and pure symbolic presentation leads users to identify”^[9].

3.2.4. Lack of interactiveism: One-way Dissemination, Low User Stickiness

79.3% of the interviewees said “did not receive a comment reply from the official account of Bazhou,” and 68.5% thought “lack of user participation entrance (such as topic challenges, creative collection)”. A Shanghai tourist interview reflected: “I ‘the best shooting point of Bayinbluke’ on TikTok, and the official account did not reply, and finally relied on the local netizen to answer the experience is very bad.” One-way communication leads to low user stickiness, and the secondary communication rate is less than 5%, which is contrary to the core of “interactive communication” of TikTok^[13].

3.3. The influence mechanism of short video on the dissemination of tourism image in Ba Prefecture

Despite the dilemma, short videos still have the potential to break through, and their influence mechanism can be summarized as three points: First, “fragmented dissemination” lowers the threshold of cognition, 15-second short videos can quickly present core landscapes such as “Nine Curves and Eighteen Bends”, 72.3% of the interviewees “first learned about Ba Prefecture through short videos”; second, “symbolic presentation” reinforces memory points, the “#Baini Brueke Sunset” topic on TikTok has a playback volume of over 80 million, and 85.6% of the interviewees stated that “seeing this landscape can remind them of Ba Prefecture”; third, “user co-creation” expands the boundaries of dissemination, although the short videos of “Mongolian Herdsmen’s Migration” shot by local amateurs have low traffic (averaging 500–1200 likes), 78.2% of the interviewees stated that “they trust the content of amateurs”, which provides a folk perspective for image dissemination^[14].

4. Short video dissemination strategy for the tourism image of Bazhou city

4.1. Precise positioning: Mining cultural genes and constructing a “double core” image

4.1.1. Refine cultural genes to form a differentiated positioning

Focusing on “Silk Road Culture” and “Diverse Ecology” as a double core: “Silk Road Culture Genes” focus on the former site of Loulan (mysterious history), the Western Regions Protectorate (national identity), and the return of the Torgut tribe (patriotic feelings), which is transformed into “Loulan Exploration” and “Return Story”; “Ecological Genes” highlight the diverse symbiosis characteristics of “Desert-Grassland-Lake.”

4.1.2. Unify visual recognition and strengthen memory points

Design a logo that integrates the “Silk Road Camel Team” and the “Nine Curves and Eighteen Bends”, formulate the “Short Video Shooting Guide”, standardize the use of “Ba Prefecture Blue, Grassland Green, Desert Yellow” as the main color, and require official short videos to add the logo uniformly to strengthen visual memory.

4.2. Targeted communication: Adapt to platform characteristics and precisely reach audiences

- (1) TikTok/Kuaishou (general users): Push “short, flat, and fast” hits, such as “15-second animation of Loulan’s princess” and “sunset time-lapse photography,” start the “#the magnificent Ba Prefecture in my eyes” topic challenge, and set a maximum cash reward of 5000 yuan.
- (2) Bilibili (young groups): Create “trendy culture and tourism” content, such as “95 bloggers retrace the ancient road of Loulan vlog” and “how to wear Hanfu in the Populus euphratica forest,” and invite UP main “Desert Uncle” (with more than 10 million fans) to cooperate in dissemination.
- (3) Volcano Short Video (middle-aged and elderly groups): Focus on “health care slow life,” such as “Hot Spring Health Care Guide” and “Retirement Couple’s Self-driving Travel Diary,” and integrate local scenes such as “Mongolian Dance Square Dance”.

4.3. Content innovation: Narrative presentation and emotional resonance

4.3.1. Humanistic content storytelling

Draw on the experience of TikTok's "Cultural Relics Drama Queen Conference"^[13], produce "Loulan Princess's Day" animation, and show the life of the ancient country from the perspective of the princess; shoot "Torgut's Return" micro-drama, invite local herdsmen to participate in the performance, and enhance the sense of reality.

4.3.2. Natural scenic spatialization

Break away from the "pure landscape aerial photography" model and integrate human activities, such as "Baini Brueke Herdsmen's Migration" and "Bosten Lake Fishermen's Fishing," and endow it with emotional temperature through "landscape scene."

4.3.3. Gastronomy content experience

Shoot "The Whole Process of Making Hand-Pulled Meat" and "Yanqi Sp Pepper Noodles Tutorial", set the topic "Learn to Make Bazhou Cuisine with Videos", and form a "Online Experience - Offline Consumption" closed.

4.4. Co-creation and synergy: Linking multiple forces to build a communication ecology

Cultivate folk creative forces, establish the "Bazhou Video Creator Alliance", provide a maximum of 2000 yuan/video creative subsidy and monthly technical training; set up the "Best Folk Work Award" to visualize high-quality content output. Deepen cooperation between government, enterprises, and schools, and involve students majoring in tourism management in creative work and data analysis; join hands with scenic spots to launch the "3 Short Videos Free Ticket" event to enhance user participation, produce professional institutions, cooperate with "Qingteng Culture" and "papitube," the top MCNs, to create "Bazhou Exclusive KOL"; Invite local internet celebrities to shoot content and break through stereotypes with their "border trust endorsement"^[15].

4.5. Long-term mechanism: Perfect operation and feedback to ensure communication effect

Establish an interactive feedback system, appoint 2 full-time staff to be responsible for 4-hour comment replies, open the "Cultural and Tourism Opinion Box" column, and publish the results of user suggestion rectification every week. Balance the off-season peak-season communication, push the "Travel Strategy" content in the peak season (June-October) to guide tourist conversion; focus on "Loulan Culture Festival" and Naadam Festival" in the off-season (November-May) to attract culture and photography enthusiasts. Build a data monitoring platform, develop a "Communication Data Monitoring System" to track the number of plays, likes, and tourist conversion rates in real time, release the "Effect Report" every month, and dynamically adjust the strategy^[15].

5. Conclusion prospect

5.1. Conclusion

This paper draws three core conclusions through empirical research: First, the urban tourism image communication in border areas faces a dual dilemma of "stere binding resource communication inefficiency," and Bazhou's "nature-led, humanistic absence" image is a typical reflection; Second, short videos provide a for border cities to break the deadlock, and the core lies in "accurate mining of cultural genes" and "deep matching of user needs," rather than simply relying on display; Third, building a "government guidance-folk participation-platform synergy" communication ecology is the key path for border cities to achieve "image upgrade economic transformation."

5.2. Limitations and prospects

This research has two limitations: one is limited sample coverage (short video samples are from 2023-2022, and the

questionnaire is concentrated in the main urban area); the other is the lack of a quantitative assessment of the implementation effect of the strategy. Future research can be expanded in two: one is to expand the sample to Kashgar, Yili and other places in Address on the western border, and carry out comparative research on the communication of border cities; the other is quantify the strategy effect through “before and after comparison” (such as assessing the change of tourist volume and recognition rate 6 months later), and provide more accurate practice guidance for “short video culture and tourism” model.

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Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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