

# Construction and Communication of Xi'an's Urban Image on Short Video Platforms

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## ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop of globalization and informatization, urban image has become a crucial component of a city's soft power, directly influencing its economic development, cultural dissemination, and social identity. A positive urban image not only attracts foreign investment and promotes tourism but also strengthens local residents' sense of belonging and pride, thereby driving sustainable urban development. From a communication studies perspective, urban image communication is a process of delivering multi-dimensional information about a city to audiences through various media channels. With the rapid development of internet technology, urban image communication channels now include mass media, new media, outdoor media, and interpersonal communication. Traditional communication methods are gradually being replaced by new media platforms, especially the rise of short video platforms, which have provided entirely new possibilities for urban image communication.

## KEYWORDS

Douyin; Xi'an; Urban image; Construction

## 1 Background of Xi'an's urban image communication

### 1.1 Resource advantages and official image positioning of xi'an's urban image communication

#### 1.1.1 Resource advantages of Xi'an

As the capital of thirteen dynasties, Xi'an boasts a thousand years of accumulated civilization. Walking along the city walls, one can feel the weight of history; visiting the Terracotta Warriors, one can admire the majesty of the Qin Empire; exploring the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, one can listen to the stories of Xuanzang's journey to the West. This ancient pagoda has witnessed the prosperity of the Silk Road and the hardships of Monk Xuanzang's pilgrimage. Strolling through the Muslim Quarter, one is greeted by a dazzling array of specialty snacks such as roujiamo , yangrou paomo , liangpi , and saozhi noodles, all of which make one's mouth water. At night, walking through the brightly lit Datang Ever-bright City, one feels as if transported back to the prosperous Tang Dynasty, experiencing the scene of "fiery trees and silver flowers on a night without darkness." Xi'an is a charming city with rich resource advantages in history, nature, and industry.

#### 1.1.2 Official image positioning

Xi'an is positioned as a national central city, signifying its important status in national development strategies. In terms of regional coordinated development, as the largest central city in northwestern China, Xi'an can drive economic development in the western region and promote industrial transfer and collaborative innovation among regions. Additionally, as a historical and cultural city, Xi'an has strengthened the protection of cultural relics, historical buildings, and historical and cultural blocks, and actively promoted the innovative development of historical culture by integrating it with modern industries, achieving good economic and social benefits.

### 1.2 Overview and Platform Characteristics of Douyin

Overview and Platform Characteristics of Douyin Short Video Development Launched in September 2016, the Douyin short video platform quickly attracted a large number of users with its rich music library, diverse special effects filters, and convenient creation tools, gradually developing into a national-level short video platform beloved by users of all ages. It has distinct platform characteristics: precise algorithmic recommendations that quickly match user interests; rich and diverse content covering life, knowledge, entertainment, and other fields; strong social interactivity supporting likes, comments, duets, and other features; and a mature commercial model where live-streaming commerce and advertising create value for users and businesses.

## 2 Construction of Xi'an's urban image on Douyin

The external urban image is the intuitive impression a city gives to the outside world and the primary and most basic

condition for people to understand the city. Through searching the keyword "Xi'an" on the Douyin short video platform and browsing 300 sample videos, the author categorizes and analyzes how Douyin constructs Xi'an's external urban image.

## 2.1 Urban Spatial Landscapes

**Urban Spatial Landscapes** Nearly 30% of the sample videos use aerial shots by creators to showcase Xi'an's urban spatial landscapes. From a high-altitude perspective, the city centered on the Ming City Wall resembles a giant dragon coiled in the city, with its regular chessboard-style road pattern setting off the city walls, where traditional buildings and modern skyscrapers coexist harmoniously in the same frame. The towering Giant Wild Goose Pagoda stands in Qujiang New District, perfectly integrated with Qujiang's modern buildings, attracting large numbers of tourists to check in. Meanwhile, the architectural complexes in the High-tech Zone attract users' attention with their unique design styles. The silk-like flowing shape of the Silk Road International Convention and Exhibition Center shines in the sun, paired with dynamic background music and fast-paced editing, highlighting the innovation and vitality of Xi'an's modern urban space and showcasing Xi'an's image as an international metropolis.

## 2.2 Cultural landscapes Xi'an's popularity on Douyin

largely stems from its rich cultural landscapes and connotations. Many creators in the sample videos focus on cultural relics such as the Terracotta Warriors and the Giant Wild Goose Pagoda, or cultural performances in Datang Ever-bright City. By filming the crowded scenes at the Terracotta Warriors and Datang Ever-bright City attractions, creators vividly demonstrate the popularity of Xi'an's cultural relics. Additionally, landscapes related to Xi'an's intangible cultural heritage have also become popular shooting subjects. In intangible cultural heritage projects such as Huaxian shadow puppetry, Fengxiang clay figurines, and northern Shaanxi paper-cutting, the superb skills, unique artistic styles of inheritors, and details in the production process allow users to deeply feel the unique charm of Xi'an's cultural landscapes, reinforcing Xi'an's external image as a historical and cultural city.

## 2.3 Special Events

**Special Events** Large-scale events held annually, such as the Silk Road International Art Festival, the "Xi'an New Year · Most Chinese" lantern festival, and the Xi'an Marathon, trigger heated discussions on Douyin. Various special performances in Datang Ever-bright City, such as the "Tumbler Girl" performance, have quickly gone viral through Douyin short videos. Creators film the performance site from multiple angles, close-up shots of actors' exquisite makeup, graceful dancing, and joyful scenes of interaction with the audience, paired with popular music and interesting copywriting, attracting many users to like, share, and imitate, making Xi'an's dynamic urban image deeply rooted in people's hearts.

## 2.4 Daily Life Landscapes

**Daily Life Landscapes** Videos on Douyin about Xi'an's daily life show the city's urban hustle and authentic living atmosphere. In the Muslim Quarter, endless streams of diners fill the antique streets, the aroma of grilled lamb skewers fills the air, stall owners wave long-handled fans, and charcoal fires sizzle as they grill the lamb, sprinkled with cumin and chili powder, causing tourists to stop and buy. On the mirror cake stalls, colorful mirror cakes are neatly arranged, and the boss skillfully picks up one with a spatula and hands it to an expectant customer. YongxingFang is also a popular check-in spot on Douyin, where tourists hold "bowl-breaking wine" stand beside wine jars, boldly take a sip, and then heavily smash the bowl, the crisp sound of breaking symbolizing "peace year after year." In addition, Xi'an citywalk is also a popular filming content. Well-lit streets, uncles playing chess in the sun, and aunts sitting by the roadside chatting with fans—these short videos showcasing relaxed and comfortable daily life make users feel the warmth and a feeling of closeness and familiarity of Xi'an, enriching the connotation of Xi'an's external urban image and presenting a city full of life.

# 3 Communication of Xi'an's urban image on Douyin

## 3.1 Communication subjects

### 3.1.1 Official subjects

The official Shaanxi Culture and Tourism account on Douyin has become a typical representative of the official-led section by interspersing and editing the highly popular drama *Mysterious Events in Tang Dynasty*\* with Xi'an's beautiful scenery and food, achieving high production standards and profound cultural heritage, gaining 77,000 likes on Douyin. Xi'an Culture and Tourism's cultural tourism promotional video *\*Rhythms of Tang Poetry, Twelve Hours in Chang'an*

released on Douyin introduces digital avatars into cultural tourism promotion, allowing audiences to follow the digital avatar "Chang'an" on a romantic journey through time. The cultural tourism promotional videos released by official accounts have authority, which makes the content more likely to gain users' trust and enhance the credibility and influence of the urban image. The excavation and presentation of cultural depth can not only meet users' needs for knowledge and culture but also elevate the cultural level of Xi'an's urban image, making Xi'an stand out among many cities and establish a unique cultural brand image <sup>[1]</sup>. For example, after the release of the Encountering Xi'an series of promotional videos, they triggered significant user attention and sharing, with many users stating that they gained a deeper understanding of Xi'an's history and culture through the videos and thus developed a yearning for Xi'an, effectively promoting the communication and enhancement of Xi'an's cultural tourism image.

### 3.1.2 User subjects

The core content of the user-generated section on Douyin consists of ordinary users' self-initiated "check-in" videos, which record all aspects of Xi'an from a personal perspective and are full of life and authenticity. Unlike official promotional videos, users' "check-in" videos and motivations focus more on sharing personal experiences and feelings, with filming locations possibly being Xi'an's streets and alleys or internet-famous shops, such as Xi'an's internet-famous bars, and content possibly being moments of tasting food or experiencing Xi'an's characteristic Hanfu makeup. The videos come in various forms, from simple casual shots to edited creative videos. Users' "check-in" videos break the single perspective of official promotion, providing a more diverse and three-dimensional presentation for the construction of Xi'an's urban image. These real-life clips make Xi'an more approachable and tangible, narrowing the distance between the city and users, providing practical travel references for other users, promoting word-of-mouth communication of Xi'an's tourism, and further driving the shaping and promotion of the urban image.

### 3.1.3 Commercial subjects

The combination of the "Tumbler Girl" with cultural tourism IP is a successful model of commercial cooperation for Xi'an on Douyin. Through collaboration with commercial brands, the "Tumbler Girl" has rapidly become a national-level cultural tourism IP from an ordinary street performance project. Commercial brands have provided funding, technology, and communication channels for the promotion of the "Tumbler Girl" creating exclusive promotional videos and peripheral products. At the same time, the "Tumbler Girl" has also brought huge traffic and attention to the cooperating brands, achieving a win-win situation for the brand and the city's cultural tourism image, injecting new vitality into the construction of Xi'an's urban image. The participation of commercial brands makes urban image communication more market-driven and innovative, able to attract more young users' attention, and makes Xi'an's urban image more concrete and symbolic, facilitating user memory and communication <sup>[2]</sup>.

## 3.2 Symbolic carriers of communication <sup>[3]</sup>

### 3.2.1 Food symbols

With Xi'an's rise on short video platforms in recent years, it has gradually become the top choice for many tourists' short-distance travel. When mentioning Xi'an, one cannot help but hear the title "Capital of Carbohydrates," and Xi'an's rich and diverse cuisine has become a highly attractive symbolic carrier. Roujiamo features a golden, chewy crust wrapping tender and juicy braised meat; yangrou paomo is steaming hot, rich in ingredients, and delicious; liangpi is sour, spicy, refreshing, and chewy; zenggao is soft, glutinous, sweet, and full of jujube fragrance. On Douyin, official accounts and bloggers use close-up shots to showcase the color and texture of the food, paired with professional narration to tell the historical origins and production techniques behind the cuisine, conveying the profound heritage of Xi'an's food culture, attracting many tourists to check in and taste, and recording their process of tasting food and sharing interactions with stall owners, authentically presenting the hustle and bustle of food. In addition to satisfying everyone's taste expectations, roujiamo's round image is also deeply loved. Xi'an has launched a cultural and creative product named "Rongmomo" in the shape of roujiamo, which quickly became popular online. It uses two soft "buns" cleverly clamping a piece of soft filling simulating "meat," full of creativity. When purchasing, customers are asked if they want to add "lettuce." More than ten thousand "Rongmomo" have been sold in just over half a month. These food symbols not only evoke the audience's taste memories but also make Xi'an's image as the "Capital of Carbohydrates" deeply rooted in people's hearts.

### 3.2.2 Special landscape symbols

Xi'an's special landscapes, with their unique architectural styles, have become important visual symbols for displaying the city's image, carrying the weight of history and cultural inheritance. In addition to famous historical relics, modern imitation of antiquity buildings also have unique characteristics. Datang Ever-bright City is modeled after the architectural style of the Tang Dynasty, with upturned eaves and brackets decorated with exquisite color paintings and carvings.

Vermilion pillars paired with golden plaques reproduce the grandeur and splendor of Tang Dynasty architecture. At night, the buildings are illuminated by lights, showcasing the bustling scene of the Tang Dynasty in all its glory, making tourists feel as if they have traveled through time to experience the charm of the thousand-year-old capital. Furthermore, the architecture of Daming Palace National Heritage Park integrates modern design concepts while preserving the Tang Dynasty architectural style, retaining the grand, simple, and honest characteristics of Tang Dynasty architecture while meeting modern functional needs such as exhibitions and tourism, embodying the perfect integration of tradition and modernity.

### 3.2.3 Dialect symbolic carriers<sup>[4]</sup>

The Shaanxi dialect is a highly recognizable linguistic symbol in the communication of Xi'an's urban image, though dialects vary slightly across Shaanxi, and it is more accurate to refer to the Xi'an dialect. Regional dialect words such as "liao za lie", "e di shen ya", and "die mian" frequently appear in Douyin videos. The official Shaanxi Culture and Tourism account promotes Xi'an's beautiful scenery through dialect poetry recitations, adding a sense of intimacy and fun to the content. Users film dialect skits in videos, vividly showing local life scenes, narrowing the distance with the audience, and sparking curiosity among viewers from other regions. Commercial promotions cleverly use dialect creative copy to attract users' attention, such as "come and eat a bowl of authentic Xi'an biangbiang noodles". Dialect symbols make Xi'an's urban image more unique and memorable, allowing the audience to feel a strong local flavor and enhancing the appeal of the urban image.

## 3.3 Communication forms

### 3.3.1 Big data algorithm pushing

Douyin's big data algorithm constructs user interest models based on behavioral data such as browsing duration, likes, favorites, comments, and shares. The algorithm accurately pushes content to corresponding user groups based on the matching degree between content tags and user interest tags. For example, if a user frequently browses travel-related videos, especially those about Xi'an tourism, the algorithm will prioritize pushing Xi'an travel guide videos. If a user pays high attention to food videos, they will receive recommendations for Xi'an specialty foods such as roujiamo, yangrou paomo, and lu zhi liangfen. This precise targeting can effectively improve communication efficiency, allowing more potential audiences to learn about Xi'an's history and culture, special landscapes, and local customs, while also satisfying users' personalized content needs and enhancing users' favorability and sense of identity toward Xi'an's urban image.

### 3.3.2 Topic interaction

Officials, individual users, and commercial brands can all initiate topics related to Xi'an's urban image on Douyin. Official topics such as EncounteringXi'an and Xi'anHistoricalCulture usually combine with urban promotion activities, guiding users to create and post videos around the theme and encouraging them to share their understanding and feelings about Xi'an, also bringing some traffic to Xi'an's promotion. The form of topic interaction breaks the limitations of traditional one-way communication, allowing users to widely participate in topic dissemination, triggering more user attention and discussion. Topic interaction not only enriches the communication content of Xi'an's urban image but also enhances users' sense of participation and belonging, transforming users from information recipients to disseminators, achieving viral communication of Xi'an's urban image, and effectively improving Xi'an's urban visibility and influence.

### 3.3.3 Collaborations with influencers

During the communication of its urban image, Xi'an actively collaborates with various internet celebrity bloggers on Douyin. Travel bloggers produce detailed Xi'an travel guide videos, recommending special attractions, niche check-in spots, and travel routes. Food bloggers share authentic food experiences by visiting stores and tasting Xi'an's specialty foods. College student bloggers attract many young people by filming Xi'an's daily life and leisurely citywalks.

## 3.4 Analysis of communication effects

Based on the above analysis of communication methods and carriers, combined with 300 sample videos on Douyin, the communication effect of Xi'an's urban image on Douyin is very significant. In terms of likes and comments, short videos related to Xi'an all have more than 10,000 likes, with food videos reaching up to nearly 500,000 likes. In terms of tourist numbers, during the 2025 Labor Day holiday, the city received a total of 14,750,800 tourists, a year-on-year increase of 5.2%. In recent years, Xi'an has implemented traffic control at scenic spots during holidays and has been listed as one of the "Top 10 Most Popular Tourist Destinations" nationwide. On Douyin, Xi'an has achieved remarkable results in enhancing urban visibility, shaping a diverse urban image, and promoting the cultural tourism industry through the effective communication of symbolic carriers such as food, special landscapes, and dialects. These symbolic carriers

complement each other and work together, attracting user attention and participation with their unique charm, constructing a three-dimensional and rich image of Xi'an. In the future, Xi'an can further tap the potential of symbolic carriers, innovate communication forms, continuously optimize urban image communication effects, promote the city's higher-quality development in the new era, and provide valuable experience for other cities to use new media for image communication.

#### 4 Conclusion

This study explores the construction of Xi'an's urban image on the Douyin platform. Through content analysis and communication path research of short videos related to Xi'an on Douyin, it deeply analyzes the presentation and communication mechanism of Xi'an's urban image on the platform. The study finds that Douyin vividly presents Xi'an's multi-dimensional image, including its historical culture, food characteristics, and modern vitality, through its unique algorithm recommendation and diverse content ecology. Users' active creation and dissemination have shaped a composite urban image of Xi'an as "interwoven historical gravitas and modern fashion," and this participatory image construction has significantly enhanced the city's popularity and attractiveness.

However, this study also reveals limitations in the construction of Xi'an's urban image on Douyin. Most short videos suffer from insufficient creativity, homogeneous content, and a lack of in-depth interpretation<sup>[5-6]</sup>. Creators overly rely on templates or mimic the ideas of popular videos, including in presentation forms, editing techniques, movements, and soundtracks. This not only causes audience aesthetic fatigue but also lacks content that truly promotes cultural development or engages with social reality issues, affecting the communication effectiveness of short videos<sup>[7]</sup>. For example, food-related videos in Xi'an mainly focus on popular dishes like roujiamo and yangrou paomo, filmed mostly at locations such as Xiaonanmen Morning Market and Huimin Street. Shooting angles and presentation forms are largely similar, under-exploring Xi'an's rich and diverse food culture. These videos often only show the appearance of food and the tasting process, without delving into the historical stories or cultural heritage behind them. Few even focus on the preparation and cooking processes, merely following trends for check-in purposes. Similarly, popular attractions like the Terracotta Warriors and Datang Everbright City have surprisingly uniform "check-in" camera angles and poses, while Hanfu makeup, shooting locations, and trending gesture dances lack originality. Such internet-famous entertainment behaviors easily overshadow the city's inherent historical heritage, potentially diminishing audiences' curiosity to explore Xi'an over time.

Additionally, this study has its own limitations. The research timeframe is relatively short, failing to fully capture the long-term dynamic evolution of the urban image. Theoretically, it lacks an in-depth exploration of the deep psychological mechanisms and social motivations behind users' participation in urban image construction. Based on this, future research could expand to comparative studies across multiple platforms, establish a cross-platform database for urban image communication, extend the research period to dynamically track the evolution of urban images, and integrate theories from psychology, communication, and other disciplines to deeply analyze the complex motivations behind user participation, further improving the theoretical framework for urban image construction in the short-video era.

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