Literature, Language and Cultural Studies
ISSN Print: 3079-5095
ISSN Online: 3079-5109
https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9181

Analysis of Short Video Platforms' International Communication Effect on City Branding: The Case of Chongqing on TikTok

Chen Chen
School of International Studies Hangzhou Normal University, Hangzhou 31121, China
Email: chenwtr0110@163.com

How to cite this paper: Chen, C. (2026). Analysis of Short Video Platforms' International Communication Effect on City Branding: The Case of Chongqing on TikTok. Literature, Language and Cultural Studies, 6(1), 31–40. ISSN Print: 3079-5095; ISSN Online: 3079-5109.
https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9181
Published: 2026-07-20

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Erytis Publishing Limited.
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).
http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Abstract

In the context of the accelerating globalisation process, the international dissemination of urban images has become a subject of increasing importance. Short video platforms, notably TikTok, have emerged as a significant channel for the dissemination of city images, owing to their substantial user base and advanced communication capabilities.This paper investigates the city image communication strategy of Chongqing on the TikTok platform, employing the agenda-setting theory to analyse the communication channels and effects of Chongqing's city image. The study found that Chongqing's communication content on TikTok mainly focuses on landmark buildings, but there is still room for improvement in terms of communication depth and diversity.

Keywords

City branding; TikTok; Chongqing; International communication

1. Introduction

In the face of globalization and digitalization, shaping and communicating a city's image has become one of the most important means for cities around the world to enhance their international competitiveness. A city's image is not just a collection of landmarks and buildings, but a comprehensive reflection of the city's culture, values and soft power. It has a significant impact on a city's ability to attract investment, tourism and talent. With the rapid development of new media technology, the emergence of short-form video platforms has changed the traditional model of communicating a city's image. Short video platforms such as TikTok, with their fragmented communication, algorithmic recommendations, and multimodal communication capabilities, have opened new avenues for the international communication of city images. Especially in the context of the global pandemic, online communication has become an important way for cities to increase their international visibility.

In recent years, the number of users of short-form video platforms has grown rapidly worldwide. TikTok, as a representative of international short video platforms, covers more than 150 countries and regions, and its unique algorithmic recommendation mechanism can quickly promote city-related content to a wide international audience. For emerging international cities like Chongqing, short-form video platforms provide a window to showcase their unique culture, landscape and lifestyle. Chongqing is known both domestically and internationally for its "8D Magic Terrain", hot pot cuisine, Hongyadong and Liziba Light Rail. However, whether these labels can fully reflect the cultural connotations of Chongqing and achieve the desired communication effect still deserves in-depth discussion.

Existing research on urban image communication focuses on traditional media or domestic social media platforms such as Weibo and TikTok, but there is less research on international short video platforms such as TikTok. Although some studies have discussed the communication characteristics of short video platforms and their role in urban branding, there is still a lack of research on the communication strategies, communication effects, and audience feedback analysis of cities with distinctive geographical and cultural characteristics such as Chongqing on international short video platforms. At the same time, there is an urgent need to answer questions such as how the theme setting of short video content affects international audiences' perception of Chongqing's urban image, and how short video platforms can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural communication and play a key role in the content production and dissemination mechanism.

Based on this, this paper takes short videos related to Chongqing on the TikTok platform as the research object, and combines agenda setting theory to analyze Chongqing's communication strategy on international short video platforms and its communication effects. This paper focuses on content agenda setting, audience response, and high-frequency keyword extraction to reveal the characteristics and challenges of Chongqing's urban image in international communication. The significance of this research is, on the one hand, to fill the theoretical gap in the application of short video platforms in the international communication of urban images and, on the other hand, to provide empirical evidence and strategic suggestions for Chongqing and other cities to shape their images on international short video platforms. By analyzing the case of Chongqing's communication on TikTok, this paper will provide insights into how short video platforms can be used to communicate a city's image at a deeper level.

2. Literature Review

2.1. City Branding Research

City branding has been conceptualised as a form of urban governance in the sense that it can be used strategically to stimulate and direct urban development and growth; applied to manage perceptions about places, and utilized to formulate

unique city identities (Eshuis & Edwards, 2012; Van Ham, 2008; Vuignier, 2015). Following the reasoning of Anholt (2006), place branding in the Chinese context is a form of urban governance, rather than a separate communication or promotion method (Ye & Björner, 2018). The concept of place branding as a form of governance has a strong state-dominated character and a multi-level governance structure (Syssner, 2010).

The positioning of a city requires the stimulation and expression of stakeholder aspirations and identities and the implementation of urban marketing activities, which in turn leads to the development of stakeholder and urban marketing strategies for the communication of the city's image; the effectiveness of city branding depends on the participation of stakeholders and the management of their expectations (Oguztimur & Akturan, 2016).

In the field of city branding, scholars have developed various approaches to capture a positive and attractive image of the city brand. A great deal of research on city branding is based on the city's existing tourism resources, such as highlighting the country's unique natural landscapes, specific historical and cultural heritage, or distinctive culinary traditions to build the city's brand image. In the Chinese context, the study of city branding also needs to take into account the specific political, economic, and cultural contexts, as well as the phenomenon of the rise of social media in city communication (Ye & Jeon, 2020).

2.2. The Impact of Short Video Platforms on City Brand Communication

Short videos, with their convenience and ease of use, social attributes and emotional functions, have made it possible for everyone to become producers, disseminators and receivers of images, as well as cognisers and constructors of the national image, and have become an important force in the construction and dissemination of city images (Vaterlaus & Winter, 2021).

The platforms have transformed from being dedicated to promoting and shaping internet-famous cities to creating value around the city's genes, with more in-depth online and offline linkages and more frequent cross-border co-operation. From the perspective of city branding, the effects of city communication through short video platforms are mainly reflected in the expansion of communication subjects, the innovation of communication content, and the optimization of communication effects.

2.3. The City of Chongqing

The platforms have transformed from being dedicated to promoting and shaping internet-famous cities to creating value around the city's genes, with more in-depth online and offline linkages and more frequent cross-border co-operation. From the perspective of city branding, the effects of city communication through short video platforms are mainly reflected in the expansion of communication subjects, the

innovation of communication content, and the optimization of communication effects. Chongqing is a financial centre, an international comprehensive transport hub and an international gateway hub in the western part of China. The Chongqing region is the birthplace of the Ba-Yu culture, and the long history and unique regional environment have created its distinctive urban character. As a municipality directly under the central government, Chongqing occupies an important position in China's national strategy and is an important node city of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

In the era of rapid development of social media, Chongqing has become a 'net red city"in recent years, attracting the attention of various video platforms and netizens at home and abroad. The unique positioning of the city's functions and its natural geographic and cultural environment have determined that Chongqing has unique advantages in city image communication. Its three-dimensional cityscape, spectacular night views, and distinctive cuisine provide rich material for short video creation.

However, most of the current research on Chongqing's urban image communication focuses on domestic platforms, with less research on international platforms such as TikTok. There is also a lack of cross-cultural perspectives. Existing studies lack systematic analyses of how international audiences perceive Chongqing and how the platform's algorithms influence the dissemination of city-related content.

Future research needs to analyse the communication mechanism of international platforms such as TikTok in depth, and explore the role of the platform's algorithms in promoting the communication of the city's image, or accurately grasp the effect of the communication content through quantitative research methods.

3. Methodology

This study employs Agenda-Setting Theory as a methodological framework to examine the communication subjects and audience feedback concerning Chongqing's urban image on the TikTok platform. With the evolution of social media, the primary agenda-setting entity has transitioned from conventional news outlets to algorithm-driven social platforms, thereby giving rise to algorithmic agenda-setting. TikTok, a global platform predicated on the dissemination of brief videos, utilizes algorithms to determine which content pertaining to urban topics can achieve heightened exposure and influence the audience's cognitive framework concerning Chongqing. This study utilizes the TikTok platform as a data source and employs a keyword search method to procure research specimens. Initially, the search keyword "Chongqing" is selected, and the recommended ranking of TikTok's organic traffic is employed to ensure that the selected videos garner substantial user attention. Second, the inclusion criterion was set to videos with more than 1,000 comments to ensure videos obtained had high dissemination and discussion, and could more fully reflect the content of international users' attention to Chongqing. Third, videos with

Chongqing as the central topic were selected, and pan-China travel content or irrelevant content was eliminated. The final sample comprised 80 videos that met the specified criteria, and a random sample of 60–80 comments was obtained for each video. The sample interval was strategically determined to account for variations in the number of comments for videos of different popularity levels, thereby ensuring sufficient data for analysis. This approach also considered the feasibility of data processing and the representativeness of the extracted comments. The total number of valid comments obtained was 5,652. Subsequent to data collection, the text data underwent a series of preprocessing steps, including the removal of irrelevant information, deduplication, text standardization, and language translation. Invalid data was then removed, including comments containing solely emoticons, garbled characters, or advertisements, such as "follow me for more."



Figure 1. TikTok Video Comment Word Cloud

Text standardization involves the categorization of keywords in various forms; for instance, "hot pot" and "hotpot" are classified into the same category. For comments in languages other than English, such as Spanish, French, Japanese, and Korean, which are utilized by TikTok audiences, Google Translate is employed to translate them into English, ensuring consistency in text analysis. Finally, the extracted comments are analyzed using word frequency statistics. These statistics emphasize the frequency of words in comments, facilitating the identification of those that are frequently used to describe the city image of Chongqing. Prior to the calculation of word frequency, the text data undergoes a preprocessing step. This entails the removal of stop words, such as "the," "and," "another," and other words of negligible significance. Additionally, specific exclusion words are identified, including "Chongqing," a search keyword that is likely to appear frequently but is of minimal relevance for the analysis of unique characteristics. The top 15 keywords are obtained by counting the word frequency of the preprocessed text. These keywords reflect the key content of Chongqing's urban image in international communication from different dimensions. To more intuitively display the results of the word frequency statistics, these keywords are generated into a word cloud map. In this map, the font size corresponds to the frequency of occurrence of the word, making it

easy to quickly identify key information. Subsequently, sentiment analysis was performed on the comments to ascertain the emotional tendencies expressed, which were primarily classified into four categories: positive, neutral, negative, and mixed. This analysis facilitates comprehension of the prevailing sentiment among international users regarding Chongqing's urban image.

4. Results

This study reveals the main characteristics of Chongqing's international image through an analysis of the high-frequency words in TikTok audience comments. The high-frequency words include China, beauty, visiting, night, amazing, cyberpunk, buildings, dreams, shanghai, light, crazy, welcome, living, and trains, reflecting TikTok users' overall perception of Chongqing.

Overall, TikTok users' perceptions of Chongqing are highly focused on the city's visual image, especially elements that create a strong visual impact, such as night scenes, skyscrapers, and rail transit. The high frequency of words such as “night”, “cyberpunk”, “light” , “buildings”, and “trains” in the comments indicates that TikTok audiences are most impressed by Chongqing's visual elements.

word	count	weighted percentage (%)	similar words
China	394	1.59	@china, china, china, chinas
beauty	262	1.06	beauties, beautiful, beautiful, beautifully, beauty
visiting	142	0.57	visit, visited, visiting, visits
night	128	0.52	night, nightly
amazing	124	0.50	amaze, amazed, amazing
cyberpunk	120	0.48	#cyberpunk, cyberpunk
buildings	86	0.35	build, building, buildings
dreams	86	0.35	dream, dreaming, dreams
shanghai	62	0.25	shanghai
light	55	0.22	light, lighting, lightly, lights
crazy	50	0.20	crazy
welcome	49	0.20	welcome, welcoming
living	45	0.18	lived, lives, living
trains	44	0.18	train, trains
floor	43	0.17	floor, floored, floors

Figure 2. The Top 15 Most Frequent Words in the Comment Section

'China"is a high-frequency word in the comments of TikTok users on videos related to Chongqing, indicating that Chongqing is perceived by international audiences as part of China, rather than an independent city brand. In many comments, users' admiration for Chongqing is often accompanied by praise for China, suggesting that Chongqing's international image is closely tied to the national image of China.

It is worth noting that the word frequency of 'Shanghai"indicates that some audiences confuse Chongqing with Shanghai, which may be due to the fact that both cities have the same bustling urban landscape, high-density skyscrapers and modern night views. However, Shanghai's international reputation is much higher than Chongqing's, which also reflects that Chongqing still has room for improvement in building a differentiated city brand.

In addition, discussions among TikTok audiences also highlight Chongqing's tourist appeal, with the high-frequency words 'visiting,"'dreams,"and 'welcome"reflecting the audience's interest in travel. The high frequency of the word 'visiting' indicates that Chongqing has become a potential destination for international tourists.

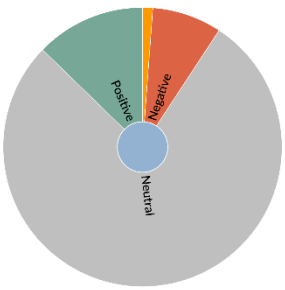


Figure 3. Sentiment Analysis of Comments

From a sentiment analysis, the majority of TikTok users' attitudes towards Chongqing are neutral, accounting for 75.92%, such as 'Chongqing is a city in China,' indicating that their perception of Chongqing mainly stays at the level of objective description, rather than in-depth emotional identification. Positive comments accounted for 19.35%, mainly expressing admiration and amazement at Chongqing's visual image, while negative comments accounted for only 4.73%.

Overall, TikTok users' perception of Chongqing is mainly visual, and their understanding of the city is still at a superficial level of visual impressions. They have less knowledge of the city's culture, social development, historical heritage, and other aspects. In the future, Chongqing's international communication needs to go beyond purely visual displays and strengthen the communication of cultural depth and humanistic connotations.

5. Discussions

This study summarizes the characteristics of the international dissemination of Chongqing's urban image and explores the cognitive patterns of TikTok audiences toward Chongqing through an analysis of high-frequency words related to Chongqing

on TikTok. The study found that Chongqing's communication on TikTok has significant advantages, but also faces some limitations.

Based on the research findings, this section will further explore the advantages and limitations of Chongqing's TikTok communication, as well as future research directions, in order to provide a reference for urban brand communication and new media communication research.

5.1. Advantages of Chongqing's TikTok Communication

Strong visual impact. As a short-form video platform, TikTok emphasizes content that is instantly appealing and highly communicative. Elements such as Chongqing's night view, high-density skyscrapers, neon lights, and light rails running through buildings, etc., fit the platform's algorithmic recommendation mechanism, which can quickly capture the audience's attention and generate widespread dissemination.

Unique railway and terrain. Chongqing's unique light rail transit through buildings, three-dimensional road system and complex terrain structure have become popular content for TikTok. The appearance of high-frequency words such as 'trains"and 'floor"shows that Chongqing's rail transit system is visually striking and has become one of the city's signature elements.

Potential international tourism appeal. The high frequency of words such as 'visit"and 'dreams"indicates that TikTok users have already begun to consider Chongqing as a potential tourist destination. Although Chongqing is not yet as well known internationally as cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong, China, its unique cityscape has already attracted the attention of some international tourists.

5.2. Disadvantages of the TikTok Communication

TikTok has played a significant role in Chongqing's international communication. However, this communication model is not without its limitations, which can be seen in the following aspects:

A singular image of the city. A study of TikTok user perceptions of Chongqing reveals a predominant focus on visual elements such as skyscrapers, nighttime vistas, and light rail systems. However, users' knowledge of the city's cultural history, socioeconomic development, and resident lifestyles remains superficial. This singular image, while effective for initial attraction, limits deeper understanding and sustained interest in the city.

The fragmented nature of audience perception and the absence of in-depth understanding are further exacerbated by the short video format of TikTok, which hinders comprehensive information reception. For instance, a viewer may encounter a video showcasing the nighttime landscape of Hongyadong and form an impression of Chongqing as a 'cyberpunk city,"without learning about the historical significance of the site or the cultural context of the surrounding area.

5.3. Future Research Outlook

This study analyzes the international communication characteristics of Chongqing based on TikTok data, but there are still some research directions that deserve further exploration:

Multi-platform comparative study. This study only focuses on TikTok as the object of study, while there may be differences in Chongqing's communication patterns on other international social media such as YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. For example, does YouTube, as a long video platform, provide a more in-depth narrative of the city's culture? Future research can compare the characteristics of Chongqing's image communication on different platforms.

Audience perception change study. This study mainly analyzed the high-frequency words and sentiment tendencies of TikTok audiences in the comment section, but it did not address how audiences' perceptions of Chongqing changed over time. In the future, interview methods and questionnaires can be used to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamic process of audience perception.

Influence of short-video content creators. Chongqing-related content on TikTok is mainly published by different groups such as ordinary users, travel bloggers, and official accounts. Future research can further explore the agenda-setting strategies of different content creators, analyze the discourse power and influence of different communicators in city communication.

5.4. Limitations

A limitation of the study pertains to the sample selection, which was restricted to videos that had garnered over 10,000 likes and accumulated at least 1,000 comments. This selection criterion may have resulted in the exclusion of videos that offer unique perspectives, despite their less intense reception, thereby potentially narrowing the scope of insights.

Limitations of analysis methods: The sentiment analysis approach is constrained by the intricacies and variations in linguistic expressions, which can introduce errors. For instance, comments employing rhetorical techniques such as metaphor and irony may present challenges for sentiment analysis models, leading to misclassifications.

Moreover, the temporal dimension is conspicuously absent from this study, as it does not examine the influence of the passage of time on the communication of Chongqing's urban image. At different temporal periods, Chongqing may host significant events, policy adjustments, or unexpected events. These temporal elements may have a profound impact on the international communication of the city's image.

References

[1] Eshuis, J. and Edwards, A. (2012) 'Branding the city: The democratic legitimacy of a new mode of governance', Urban Studies, 50(5), pp. 1066–1082.

[2] Van Ham, P. (2008) 'Place branding: The state of the art', The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 616(1), pp. 126–149.

[3] Vuignier, R. (2015) 'Place marketing and place branding: A systematic (and tentatively exhaustive) literature review', Working paper de l'IDHEAP 5/2016.

[4] Oguztimur, S. and Akturan, U. (2016) 'Synthesis of city branding literature (1988–2014) as a research domain', International Journal of Tourism Research, 18(4), pp. 357–372.

[5] Syssner, J. (2010) 'Place branding from a multi-level perspective', Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 6(1), pp. 36–48.

[6] Anholt, S. (2006) 'The Anholt-GMI City Brands Index: How the world sees the world's cities', Place Branding and Public Diplomacy, 2, pp. 18–31.

[7] Ye, L. and Björner, E. (2018) 'Linking city branding to multi-level urban governance in Chinese mega-cities: A case study of Guangzhou', Cities, 78, pp. 29–37.

[8] Ye, Z. and Jeon, H.Y. (2020) 'Chinese city brands and semiotic image scales: A tourism perspective', Social Semiotics, 33(1), pp. 1–24.

[9] Vaterlaus, J.M. and Winter, M. (2021) 'TikTok: An exploratory study of young adults' uses and gratifications', The Social Science Journal, pp. 1–20.

[10] He, G. (2010) 'City image communication: Framework and strategy', Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China), (08), pp. 13–17.

[11] Liu, J. and Luo, J. (2022) 'National image in short videos and its construction: Based on a survey of overseas users', Modern Communication (Journal of Communication University of China), (12).

[12] Li, L. (2021) 'City communication on short video platforms in the post-internet-celebrity era', Journalism Lover, (12), pp. 65–67.

[13] Yu, W. and Wang, C. (2020) 'Research on the construction of city image by short videos: A case study of Changsha', Northern Media Research, (01), pp. 84–87.

[14] Wang, Y. (2024) 'Analysis of the communication effect and influencing factors of city image: A case study of Chongqing city image videos on YouTube', Media, (23), pp. 59–61.

[15] Duan, M. (2023) 'Strategies of local mainstream media in international communication: A case study of Chongqing International Communication Center', Youth Journalist, (04), pp. 111–113.