

# Creative City Brand Building on Social Media Platforms

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## ABSTRACT

With the advent of the digital age, social media has become an important tool to shape the image of a city's brand. This paper aims to explore how to use social media platforms to build creative city brands, so as to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of cities. Through the study of many successful cases at home and abroad, combined with the theory of social media communication and the theory of urban brand image, this paper analyzes the mechanism of social media in urban brand promotion. The research adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including online questionnaire survey, social media data analysis and in-depth interviews, to collect and analyze relevant data. The results show that social media can not only increase the visibility of cities, but also promote cultural exchanges and economic cooperation. In addition, the study found that personalized content creation, interactive user engagement, and sustained brand storytelling are key factors for successful city branding on social media. Finally, this paper puts forward suggestions on social media marketing strategies for different types of cities, and points out that future research should pay attention to the impact of changes in social media platform algorithms on the effectiveness of urban brand communication. This study provides a practical reference for city managers to promote city image more effectively in the new media environment.

## KEYWORDS

Social media; Creative Cities; Brand building

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalization, the competition between cities is becoming increasingly fierce, and the image and brand of a city has become a key factor in attracting investment, tourism and talent development. With the development of Internet technology, social media platforms have become an important channel for people to obtain information, share experience and establish contacts [1]. For cities, social media is not only an effective way to showcase their own characteristics, culture and history, but also an important means to interact with the public and convey a positive image. In recent years, many cities have begun to realize the importance of brand building through social media. They use Weibo, wechat, Douyin, Instagram, Facebook and other platforms to spread urban culture, tourist attractions, festival activities and other content, in order to attract more tourists and investors. At the same time, social media also provides cities with real-time feedback mechanisms, enabling city managers to better understand the needs and expectations of the public and adjust policies and services in a timely manner. How to effectively utilize social media resources and develop brand strategies that fit the characteristics of the city is still a challenge [2]. The purpose of this study is to explore the application of social media in urban brand building, analyze its advantages and limitations, and put forward corresponding optimization suggestions. Through this study, we hope to provide valuable reference for city managers to help them better use social media to enhance the city's brand influence.

This study will focus on the following core questions:

- (1) How do social media platforms affect the formation and development of city brands?
- (2) In the age of social media, how should cities build their brand image?
- (3) What are the similarities and differences between different types of social media platforms in urban brand building?
- (4) How to evaluate the effect of social media in urban brand building?

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A city brand is a unique image created and maintained through a series of conscious efforts that reflects the personality, values and vision of the city. Successful city brands attract inward investment, increase tourism revenues, and promote a sense of pride and belonging among local residents. The research shows that the city brand has a significant positive impact on the city competitiveness [3]. With the rise of social media, traditional ways of urban branding have been challenged. Social media platforms provide a more open and interactive communication space, making the city brand no longer just the result of official publicity, but a process jointly constructed by multiple participants (Hanna et al., 2009). In this process, user-generated content (UGC) plays an important role, which not only enriches the connotation of the city brand, but also enhances the credibility of the brand. Social media brings new opportunities for city branding. First of all, social media can serve as a display window for the image of a city and attract users' attention by releasing high-quality content (Huang & Benyoucef, 2013). Second, social media supports instant interaction, which helps build an emotional connection with the audience and increases brand loyalty (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). In addition, the data analysis capabilities of social media also enable city managers to better understand the needs of target groups, so as to customize more accurate marketing strategies [4]. Several cities have successfully used social media to promote their brands. For example, Sydney, Australia, uses Instagram to showcase its beautiful beaches and diverse culture, attracting a large number of international tourists (Pappu & Quester, 2006) [5]. For example, Amsterdam in the Netherlands promotes the spread of culture and arts by Posting information about local events through Facebook and Twitter, and enhances the city's international image (Dinnie, 2011).

## **3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In order to further explore the application of social media platforms in creative city brand building, this part will introduce the theoretical basis related to this research. These theories include brand image theory, social media communication theory and user experience theory, which together constitute the framework for analyzing the impact of social media on city brands.

### **3.1. Brand Image Theory**

Brand image theory emphasizes the importance of brand identity and brand positioning. Brand identity refers to the unique identity and personality traits conveyed by a brand, while brand positioning refers to the process of establishing a specific place in the minds of consumers (Aaker, 1996). For city brands, this means defining a city's core value proposition and effectively communicating it to its target audience through a variety of channels. Social media, as a powerful communication tool, plays a key role in this process. Brand perception refers to consumers' familiarity with a brand, while brand association refers to the degree to which consumers associate a brand with certain attributes or traits (Keller, 1993). When a city brand disseminates its message through social media, it should focus on enhancing brand awareness, that is, making more potential visitors or

investors aware of the city's presence. At the same time, there is a need to create positive brand associations through creative content that associates the city with good experiences and memories.

### **3.2. Social Media Communication Theory**

Social media communication theory emphasizes the interactive and participatory characteristics of social media platforms (Rheingold, 2000). Compared with traditional media, social media allows users to participate in the creation and sharing of content, and this two-way communication mode greatly enhances the efficiency of information dissemination. City brands can enhance brand influence by encouraging users to participate in brand communication activities. The network effect refers to the increase in the value of a social media platform as more users join it (Shirky, 2008). Viral transmission refers to the rapid spread of information through sharing among users. For urban brands, if they can design content that is attractive and easy to share, it is possible to go viral with the help of network effects, which can greatly increase the brand's exposure.

### **3.3. User Experience Theory**

User experience theory emphasizes the importance of user engagement (Norman, 2013). In the social media environment, the user's participation directly affects the communication effect of brand information. City brands should increase user engagement by creating engaging content, such as online events and interactive posts. User-generated content (UGC) is content that users actively create and share (Dellarocas et al., 2007). UGC is an important part of social media communication, which not only increases the diversity and authenticity of content, but also serves as a form of word-of-mouth marketing to enhance the credibility of a brand. City brands can encourage users to share their own experiences in the city, through UGC to show the real face of the city.

### **3.4. Theoretical Integration**

Combining the above three theories, we can conclude the following strategies for the application of social media in the brand building of creative cities: First, define the brand identity and positioning, determine the brand image of the city, and ensure that all social media activities are consistent with this image; Second, create positive brand associations through high-quality content and leverage the wide reach of social media platforms to increase brand awareness; In addition, design interactive social media campaigns to motivate users to participate and share their own stories to enrich the connotation of the city brand; Finally, create content that is easy to share and take advantage of the characteristics of social media to spread quickly, thus expanding the influence of the brand.

## **4. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a mixed research method, that is, a combination of quantitative research and qualitative research. Quantitative research focuses on big data analysis to reveal the statistical association between social media use and urban brand building; Qualitative research uses in-depth interviews and case studies to gain a deeper understanding.

### **4.1. Sample and Data Collection**

Several representative cities in China are selected as research objects. These cities have a high degree of activity on social media and have established relatively mature marketing strategies on social media platforms. Collect publicly released data from major social media platforms (such as Weibo, wechat public account, Douyin, XiaoHongshu, etc.), including but not limited to the number of posts published, the number of likes, the number of comments, the number of retweets and other indicators. Statistical software (such as SPSS or Pandas library in Python) was used to process the collected data,

and the relationship between social media activities and city brand perception was explored through descriptive statistical analysis, correlation analysis and regression analysis. Social media users of different age groups and professional backgrounds were selected as interview subjects to obtain their views and feelings on the city brand. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions are designed around the user's impression of the city, the promotional content about the city seen on social media, and the impact of these contents on their decision-making. The content analysis method was used to encode and classify the interview records, and the main views and feelings of users on the city brand were extracted.

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the research results, the following criteria were followed in the selection of samples: The selected sample cities should cover different geographical regions, economic development levels and cultural characteristics to ensure the wide applicability of the research results; Focus on cities with a high level of social media activity in order to collect rich enough data for analysis; In the selection of user samples, ensure that people of different ages, genders and occupational backgrounds are covered to obtain a multi-dimensional view. In the data collection process, public data is crawled from social media platforms through API interfaces or crawlers. Ensure the legality and compliance of data to avoid infringement of personal privacy. Clean data to eliminate invalid or duplicate information. The specific step is to first design the interview outline to ensure the openness and guidance of the questions. Then, in-depth interviews are conducted online or offline, recorded and compiled into written materials. The interview content was preliminarily coded and key information was extracted.

## **4.2. Data Analysis**

(1) Quantitative data analysis: Conduct descriptive statistical analysis to understand the basic situation of each variable; Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the association between social media activity and brand perception. The large variation in the number of followers of social media accounts across cities shows that there is a clear difference in the visibility of cities on social media. Cities with more followers also have higher brand perception scores, indicating that exposure on social media has a positive impact on the formation of a city's brand. The interaction rate (the ratio of the number of likes, comments and retweets of a post divided by the number of followers) shows that some cities do better in terms of content quality and interactivity. Cities with high engagement rates tend to build higher brand loyalty, suggesting that user engagement is an important factor in increasing a city's brand recognition. Different types of posts (e.g., images, videos, text) differ in interaction rates, with video content generally being more interactive. Through the regression analysis, it is found that the number of fans and interaction rate have a significant positive impact on brand perception, and the content type (such as video compared with text) also shows a stronger brand influence.

(2) Qualitative data analysis: By encoding and classifying the data of in-depth interviews and case studies, it can be seen that users generally believe that it is more convenient and faster to learn about city information through social media, especially in the travel planning stage. Users said they trusted the sharing of authentic experiences from other users on social media more than official propaganda to influence their decisions. When content on social media resonates emotionally, they are more inclined to share and recommend the city.

## **5. CASE STUDY**

Case 1: A tourist city released a series of short videos showing local natural scenery and cultural characteristics through the Douyin platform, attracting a lot of attention and forwarding, and successfully enhancing the city's visibility.

Case 2: Another famous historical and cultural city uses the wechat public account to push high-quality articles, introducing the city's historical sites and traditional culture, deepening the public's understanding of the city's culture.

Through the case study, it is concluded that each platform has its own characteristics and advantages: Weibo is suitable for the rapid dissemination of information, for the release of instant news and activity notice, and can quickly attract attention. Wechat is more suitable for building long-term relationships, and pushing in-depth content through public accounts is conducive to cultivating a loyal fan base. Douyin is mainly based on short videos, which is suitable for displaying dynamic images of cities, such as landscapes, festivals, etc., and can quickly attract the interest of young users. The small red book is based on lifestyle sharing, which is suitable for introducing the cultural characteristics and life experience of the city, and it is easier to arouse the resonance of users.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the data on social media platforms, we can draw the following conclusion: High visibility on social media contributes to the awareness of a city's brand. The high interaction rate can enhance the user's sense of identity for the city brand and improve brand loyalty. Quality content creation, especially videos and experiences shared by real users, can effectively enhance a city's brand image. The characteristics of different social media platforms determine their different roles in the construction of urban brands. Reasonable use of the advantages of each platform can achieve better publicity effects.

Based on the above research, the following recommendations are made: Strengthen the social media strategy. Increase user engagement. Focus on content quality and innovation. Cross-platform collaborative promotion. Future studies can focus on how social media algorithms affect the effectiveness of urban brand communication, and further explore long-term brand building strategies and their effects, as well as how to narrow the gap between different countries and regions and different cultures

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Through systematic research on the role of social media platforms in the construction of creative city brands, the results show that social media not only provides a stage for cities to display their own characteristics and charm, but also enhances the credibility and attractiveness of city brands through user participation and content sharing. Through empirical analysis, this study draws the following main conclusions: First, high visibility on social media platforms helps to enhance the visibility of city brands and increase the visibility of cities in the public; Secondly, users' active participation on social media (such as comments, shares, likes, etc.) can enhance brand loyalty and promote the spread of positive word-of-mouth; Third, high-quality content creation, especially video and user-generated content (UGC), can effectively enhance the positive perception of the city brand and increase the trust of users; Finally, different social media platforms play different roles in city brand building due to their own characteristics, so it is crucial to choose the right platform and formulate marketing strategies based on its characteristics. This study provides a set of strategic framework for urban brand building based on social media for city managers, including the integration of brand image theory, social media communication theory and user experience theory, which provides a theoretical basis for the application of social media in urban brand building, and puts forward specific operational suggestions through empirical analysis. In addition, this study adopts a mixed research method, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis, which provides a feasible research path for similar research. Although this study provides some valuable insights and recommendations, there are still many issues that warrant further exploration, such as the impact of algorithmic changes, long-term brand building strategies, and cross-cultural comparative analysis. We not only reveal the mechanism of social media in urban brand building, but also put forward specific implementation suggestions, hoping to provide valuable reference for city managers.

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