From “online star city” to “long-term famous city”: Research on the strategy of city image communication in the new media era——Taking Harbin, the “online star city”, as an example

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Abstract. The image of the city represents the impression and evaluation of the city by the urban public, and plays a key role in the current social development. With the rise of new media, new changes have taken place in the dissemination of urban image. In this process, "online star city" came into being. In the winter of 2023, Harbin became popular on the Internet and became an "online star city". Harbin has become a successful case of city image communication, and its popularity has provided reference for the image communication of many cities. In this process, Harbin has shaped and presented the image of the city such as "the pearl on the crown of ice and snow", "the second hometown that has not been met", "ingratiating city style" and so on. At the same time, with the help of new media, Harbin has realized the dissemination of the image of the city, obtained the heat and traffic, and become the "top city in winter. In the future, Harbin should build its city image as a city brand, from "online star city" to "long-term famous city".

Keywords: "Online star city"; City image; New media; Harbin.

1. Introduction

The image of the city is the overall impression left by the city in the eyes of the people, which reflects the soft power of the city to a certain extent. [1] With the rapid development of new media technology, "online star city" has gradually entered the public view. In the winter of 2023, the word "southern small potato" was frequently mentioned, and Harbin became popular in the network and became a veritable "online star city". "Online star city" means that the city has tourism popularity and huge economic effects. Creating "online star city" has gradually become an innovative strategy for urban image communication. However, the "web celebrity effect" is accidental and transient. It is a long-term solution to convert "traffic" into "retention" and move from "online star city" to "long-term famous city".

2. Changes: New changes in the dissemination of urban image in the new media era

2.1 The transformation of city image under the empowerment of new media

The term "city image" was first proposed by American scholar Kevin Lynch in 1960. It refers to the "public impression" generated by the identifiability and visual image of the urban landscape itself[2], emphasizing the image of the city in the physical space. The idea that "city image is people's subjective impression of the city" was put forward by American urbanist Mumford.[3] It can be said that the image of the city is essentially a collection of urban public evaluation of the city as a whole.

Domestic research on "city image" began in the mid-1990s, and its development can be divided into two major trends. One is based on the research framework of mass communication. A group of scholars have extended the research content from the origin and significance of "city image" to the shaping and dissemination of "city image". The second is based on the framework of urban sociology. Scholars regard the city itself as a theme and a medium, and regard communication as a basic form of human communication. They study the significance of human communication activities and media technology to cities, which is also considered by some scholars as a theoretical "turn".
With the development of digital media technology and the popularization of the Internet, the influence of the media on the dissemination and development of the city image is gradually deepening. The 52nd "Statistical Report on the Development of China's Internet" pointed out that as of June 2023, the number of Internet users in China had reached 1.079 billion. Among them, the number of short video users reached 1.026 billion, and the user utilization rate was as high as 95.2%.[4] The short video itself is concise, fragmented, and entertaining. A series of communication characteristics have greatly promoted the rapid dissemination of the city's image.[5] The new media represented by short video has also become one of the important channels of city image communication.

The spread of urban image based on media changes with the development of social media. The arrival of the new media era has brought about earth-shaking changes in the subject and form of communication, and the construction and dissemination of the city's image has also undergone tremendous innovation. With the development of new media, the Internet has gradually entered the era of user-generated content (UGC). Everyone has a microphone, and everyone can become a part of the city image communication on the new media platform. The main body of the city's image communication has expanded from a single official institution to a civil subject including citizens and enterprises. At the same time, intuitive and vivid short videos are easier to spread, attracting more people's attention and praise, and gaining a large amount of traffic, which has become an important carrier of urban image dissemination. The form of communication has evolved from the "heavy" mode of communication dominated by traditional media to the "light" mode of communication dominated by new media. In this process, the advantages of openness and interactivity of new media channels have emerged, and the communication path has changed from single to multiple. The content of communication has also changed from integrity to fragmentation, from the overall planning of urban landscape to rich and colorful urban life.

All in all, under the empowerment of new media, the construction and dissemination of urban image has undergone tremendous changes, and at the same time, a series of new phenomena such as "online star city" have emerged.

2.2 The emergence of "online star city" in the new media environment

"Online star city" refers to a city that has become popular in a short period of time due to the promotion of short video social media. The emergence of "online star city" is a unique phenomenon in the process of urban image communication with the help of new media. It is also a marketing method to improve the city's popularity in the Internet era and a new way to spread the city's image.

The rapid development of new media has provided a broad communication platform for the emergence of the phenomenon of "online star city". In the new media environment, user-generated content has become more convenient. User-generated content related to the city can be quickly disseminated to the public through new media, and then precise marketing is pushed to the target audience through big data, thus contributing to the "popularity" of the city in a short period of time.[6] At the same time, in the case of accelerating urbanization and increasingly fierce urban competition, urban marketing has risen again. "Online star city" can not only drive urban development through the Internet celebrity economy, but also help to establish a unique city image. Therefore, creating an "online star city" has become a marketing method favored by urban managers, which further promotes the emergence of more "online star cities".

In the winter of 2023, Harbin quickly became popular on the Internet because of its unique ice and snow landscape and urban culture, and became another high-profile "online star city" after Zibo, Shandong, which became popular for "Zibo barbecue", and southeast Guizhou, which became popular for "Village Basketball Association". On December 18, 2023, the afternoon of the second day of the opening of the Ice and Snow World, the number of reservations exceeded 40,000, which was nearly 6 times the number of 7000 tourists on the day of the opening of the park in 2019. After experiencing the storm of "ticket refund" in the Ice and Snow World, the city authorities immediately apologized for the rectification and gained a batch of "goodwill" on the network. Subsequently, the popularity of Harbin on the new media platform is also rising. On December 28, "Southern Small
Potato "rushed to Weibo for hot searches. So far, the number of Weibo related topics has exceeded 30 million, and the number of Tik Tok related topics has exceeded 5 billion times. After network fermentation, there have been a series of hot topics such as "Erbin, you make me feel strange", "small granulated sugar orange brave Harbin", "not Europe can not afford to go, Harbin is more cost-effective", creating a huge traffic and heat. According to the "Tik Tok Ice and Snow Big Data" released by the Huge Engine City Research Institute, in December 2023 alone, "Harbin" had more than 53.35 million searches on the Tik Tok platform, an increase of 308% year-on-year. The hot discussion and rapid dissemination of Harbin's city image on various new media platforms have promoted Harbin to become a "top" city in winter. According to the data provided by the Harbin Municipal Bureau of Culture, Radio, Television and Tourism, within the three days of the New Year's Day holiday in 2024, Harbin received a total of 3.0479 million tourists, and the total tourism income reached 5.914 billion yuan. The number of tourists and the total tourism income have reached a record high.[7]

In addition to the boost of the new media platform, Harbin's popularity is also inseparable from the marketing preparation of the city authorities. First of all, at the supply level, Harbin Ice and Snow World is a seasonal and phased artificial landscape. This investment construction is far more than the past and the most over the years, so it has produced better results. Secondly, in terms of public opinion and marketing, Harbin learned the experience of successful drainage in Zibo and other places, and actively used the Internet and major new media platforms for marketing communication. In the face of the initial Ice and Snow World "ticket refund" storm, the city authorities have carried out exemplary crisis public relations to restore the people's hearts and minds. The various service measures taken to take care of foreign tourists are in contrast to the traditional impression left by the northeast to the public. These have made up for the previous loopholes in the poor management of the ice and snow world, and achieved the ideal marketing effect by fostering strengths and avoiding weaknesses, further boosting Harbin's popularity.

3. Popular: the dissemination path of the image of "Internet celebrity city" in the new media era

3.1 The presentation of Harbin's city image

Based on the unique ice and snow scenery, architecture, food and citizen style of Harbin, coupled with the dissemination and promotion of many social media and short videos, Harbin has shaped and presented a comprehensive and three-dimensional image of the city on the new media platform in the process of becoming popular in the network.

3.1.1 City scenery—the pearl on the crown of ice and snow

The unique climate and scenery are often the most unique signs and images of a city. Heilongjiang enjoys the reputation of China's "ice and snow crown", and Harbin is a bright pearl in the "ice and snow crown". Harbin is famous for its unique ice and snow scenery, known as "Ice City", and has become a famous ice and snow tourism city in China by virtue of this image. In addition to the world of ice and snow tourism, Harbin also has a central street, Saint Sofia church, Yabuli ski resort and other well-known architectural and cultural tourist attractions. As the birthplace of China's ice and snow culture, Harbin is the earliest city in China to develop and operate ice and snow. After the Beijing Winter Olympics, the country set off a wave of ice and snow tourism. Taking advantage of the spring breeze of the first complete snow season after the epidemic, Harbin's ice city scenery and ice and snow tourism have undoubtedly become a signboard city image.

3.1.2 Cuisine culture - the second hometown that you have never met before

The cultural heritage is the foundation for the development of cultural tourism in the city, and the food condenses the local customs and human feelings. It is the representative of urban culture and the carrier of urban image. Creating a city image can start with food, lead tourists to feel the unique local
flavor, and explore the cultural origins behind the food.[8] In the era of mobile Internet, food attracts the attention of netizens all over the world with its unique appeal. Harbin's food is numerous and has local characteristics, such as frozen pears, red sausage, Ma Dier ice hockey, iron pot stew... Harbin cuisine is delicious and cheap. Hotel owners are often hospitable, honest and generous, which is also an important part of Northeast food culture. These all reflect the northeast cultural spirit of " honesty", " generous " and " simplicity ", so that many netizens call Harbin " the second hometown they have never met. " From the diversity of cuisine, the style of treating people, to the convergence of cultural spirit, the spread of Harbin cuisine shows the cultural style of Northeast China, and also shapes the city image of Harbin invisibly.

3.1.3 enthusiastic style-ingratiating city style

The connection between a person and a city, in the final analysis, is the connection between people. The most touching core of the city image is the human touch of the city. A city with " temperature " can truly shape a thick and three-dimensional city image and truly realize widespread dissemination. In order to meet the needs of tourists as much as possible, Harbin cultural and tourism department has launched artificial moon, Pegasus ice and other popular " southern small potato " net red card points in a number of net red attractions in a short period of time, and added heating lounges, laying non-slip carpets in a number of scenic spots. Harbin citizens also show a warm and hospitable side, for the southern guests to take the initiative to provide free pick-up service, while the introduction of frozen pears, radish slices, sweet bean curd and other food in line with the habits of the south...

Comprehensive facilities, services in line with the characteristics of the South, so that locals amused with feelings: " Erbin, you make me feel strange. " Also let many netizens ridicule Harbin has a " ingratiating style" . On the last day of 2023, a number of media in Heilongjiang issued a " New Year ’s thank you letter from Heilongjiang Province to tourists at home and abroad. " Letter a " this winter, your spread, a lot of Longjiang people are ' the whole will not ' " , again get the favor of countless netizens. Harbin, with its sincere and enthusiastic city style, has successfully shaped the city image of " ingratiating city " in the hearts of netizens all over the country.

3.2 The spread of Harbin city image

3.2.1 Short video channel communication and media recommendation to attract attention

At present, we are in a deep media society, and the media has shaped our cognition of society by virtue of its own characteristics and logic. The short video 's own short and refined characteristics, as well as its entertaining and fragmented communication methods, have a high degree of media contact with contemporary audiences.[9] The new media represented by short video has played an important role in the dissemination of urban image and has become an important channel to " enlarge " the charm of urban image. The short video content recorded by users on the major social platforms to record the image of the city has attracted the attention of netizens, won the praise and forwarding of netizens, and promoted the further dissemination of the image of the city in the media.[10]

In the short video platform, the city image communication effect has a fission reaction, and finally realizes the media effect of " recommendation ". First of all, users share and forward short videos of city image dissemination of interest, so that they can spread on the social platform, expand the relationship network, and achieve virus-like dissemination effect. Secondly, the short video platform accurately pushes relevant content according to user preferences, expands content relevance, and enhances user stickiness.[11] The platform accurately understands the user’s preferences, accurately disseminates the city image, stimulates the user’s interest in the city, deepens the impression, triggers the user’s desire to travel to the city, and then enhances the city’s goodwill, gives the city image a strong appeal, and finally realizes the user’s " recommendation " effect. On social platforms such as Tik Tok and Little Red Book, many netizens share Harbin’s ice city scenery and ice and snow tourism experience. These short videos have attracted great attention on the Internet. Most of them are from the south, interested in ice and snow. After browsing these videos, they naturally left a deep
impression on Harbin. It is inevitable that they are "recommended" and have the impulse to go to Harbin to travel.

3.2.2 Participatory cultural communication and multiple subjects to enhance the heat

"Participatory culture", proposed by American scholar Henry Jenkins, believes that every ordinary individual in the Internet era has the opportunity to participate in media creation. [12] The production of information content in the Internet environment has entered a decentralized stage, and the roles of information producers and communicators have become more diversified. In the new media environment, the participants of the city image communication are increasingly diversified, and users are actively involved. Through forwarding and discussing, the people of the whole country can see the image of the city, obtain more emotional resonance and identity, and make the city image communication more diversified and three-dimensional. The interactive communication network between users forms a synergy, gathering traffic on major new media platforms, and ultimately enhancing the popularity of the city's image.

In the current urban image communication, people living in urban space use new media platforms such as Little Red Book and Tik Tok to express and share their cognition and feelings of scenery, food and culture in the city, and actively participate in the shaping and promotion of urban image. The popularity of Harbin is inseparable from the participatory communication of social media platform users. From a large number of tourists posting vlogs and plogs to share the experience of playing, to netizens giving "little sugar orange", "little wild fungus" and other intimate nicknames to different provinces, these participatory communication contents form a joint force of communication, create topics, continue the heat, and attract more people to participate in the media practice of city image.

3.2.3 Interactive communication between the government and the public and online and offline cooperation

In the era dominated by traditional mass media, the shaping and dissemination of city image emphasizes the authority of the subject. The power to build the city image is in the hands of the government and the mainstream media. The government often plays a decisive role in the planning of the city image. The mainstream media carries out the dissemination of the city image, and presents the city image blueprint planned by the government through image filming, major event reporting and other forms. [13] But only the official planning and propaganda of the city image communication, often lack of attraction and appeal, only to mobilize the city to participate, the city image of the propaganda can be vivid and infectious. With the rapid development of new media, the power of communication has been dispersed, and the citizens closely related to the image of the city have more right to speak and participate, which has become an indispensable force in the process of shaping and disseminating the image of the city.

A truly successful strategy for promoting urban image is far from enough to rely solely on the individual efforts of the government and the public. As the saying goes, "the government sets the stage and the people sing the opera." In the era of new media, the government is the shaper of the city's image, while the people are the vivid interpreters of the city's image. Only with official and private cooperation and online and offline linkage can the shaping of urban image become popular on the internet and spread more deeply into people's hearts. In the face of the phenomenon level tourism trend in Harbin brought about by the internet meme of "Southern Little Potatoes bravely venturing into Harbin!", the Harbin government and citizens seized this opportunity tightly. The Harbin Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism has opened accounts on multiple social media platforms, updating real-time information on ice and snow tourism. Citizens also promote Harbin's urban cultural characteristics online and actively interact with netizens. Offline efforts have been made to meet the various requirements of tourists and improve service guarantees. The government has taken a series of measures to enhance the tourist experience, such as releasing tourist maps and travel guides, extending public transportation operation time, strengthening tourism price management, and laying anti slip carpets in scenic areas. Enthusiastic citizens have also joined forces,
and warm-hearted volunteers provide free brown sugar ginger tea to safeguard the "Southern Little Potatoes" who come to Harbin. The government and the public can work together to make the city's image more authentic and three-dimensional, truly impress netizens, and achieve comprehensive dissemination of the city's image on the internet.

### 3.2.4 Internet marketing communication and Internet memes help launch circle

The use of Internet thinking, the use of Internet rules, and the use of legitimate marketing methods to gain popularity on the Internet have also become one of the means of urban image dissemination. In today's Internet environment, network culture has become an important part of the current network culture. Because of the characteristics of "simple, easy to remember and easy to transmit", "meme" can realize the fission propagation across the circle. [14] In addition, Internet memes also have strong interactivity and topicality. By participating in the discussion, sharing and creation of the hot topic, people can interact and communicate with other netizens, thereby enhancing the topic heat. Knowing and making good use of the Internet memes can effectively carry out Internet city marketing, and then promote the city image to spread out of the circle.

Harbin skillfully uses the law of Internet communication to further enhance the city's popularity and goodwill by playing and connecting the memes. Starting from "Little Potato in the South", various popular and interesting Internet memes continue to emerge, such as "Pleasant City", "Little Sugar Orange", "Little Wild Mushroom" and other vivid images, not only showcasing the unique charm of Harbin, but also bringing it closer to netizens. Moreover, these memes have a strong online dissemination effect. Many tourists who come to Harbin for tourism want to use online hot memes to post their travel experiences on social media. After a series of social media word-of-mouth dissemination, Harbin began a rapid viral fission, and even triggered a quantitative to qualitative dissemination effect, ultimately achieving a rapid rise in the city's image.

### 4. Sustain: The future thinking of building city brand in the new media era

In the new media era, the iteration speed of network content update is fast, and the "web celebrity effect" is occasionally short. The traffic obtained by the city's popularity is temporary. How to make good use of the network popularity, convert the "traffic" into "retention", and move from "online star city" to "long-term famous city" is the key.

In her speech at the "2023 City Image New Media Communication Report Release Seminar", Hong Fan said that the city's transition from online celebrity to long red is a process of transition from city image to city brand. The city brand is an identifiable symbol determined by the government-led urban managers on the basis of in-depth excavation of urban history, development background, characteristic resources and other factors. This symbol integrates the characteristics of the city, reflects the city manager's cognition and concept of the city, and highlights the spirit and personality of the city. [15] On the basis of the construction and dissemination of the city image, it is the ultimate goal of the city to create a city brand with differences and uniqueness. After the heat of traffic in winter has faded, how to transform "online star city" into "long-term famous city" and create a unique city brand in the future is worthy of Harbin's consideration and all cities' reference.

#### 4.1 Create a unique brand to activate long-term drive

The city brand has always emphasized that the city is rooted in the regional characteristics and regional differences formed in the historical development. [16] Every city has its unique characteristics and image, and "differentiation" is the key to breaking through the encirclement of a city. It is necessary to explore the characteristics of a city and create a unique urban brand. To effectively position a city's brand, it is necessary to deeply explore its unique resources. Comprehensively understand the historical background of the city, deeply explore the unique local resources, and scientifically determine the positioning of the city's brand image. Only on this basis can urban brand communication truly showcase the personality of the city and showcase
comprehensive and diverse content. [17]Only in this way can we activate the long-term driving effect and promote the long-term development of cities.

Harbin is famous for its ice and snow tourism, and there are also many ice and snow tourism cities around it, such as Zhangjiakou, Shenyang, Yanji, etc. After Harbin became popular this time, it also attracted nearby tourist cities to learn and imitate. In the future, if Harbin wants to achieve continuous fame, it must deeply explore urban cultural resources and establish differentiated brand characteristics. In addition to ice and snow resources, Harbin should deeply explore historical and cultural resources, such as patriotic culture, ethnic culture, Northeast culture, and cultural integration between China and foreign countries, innovate and transform, enhance urban recognition, and create a unique urban cultural IP for Harbin.

4.2 The government carries out top-level design to optimize service supply

In the process of building a city brand, we should pay attention to the basic role of the government. When planning the development direction of urban brands, the government needs to evaluate the value of urban culture, combined with media technology and platform communication, to lay the foundation for the spread of urban brands. At the same time, as the main participants in the process of urban brand communication, government departments often have first-hand resources and information, which can have more advantages in urban brand communication.

High quality service is the guarantee of urban brand communication. In addition to doing a good job in top-level design planning, the government also needs to effectively optimize service supply and enhance the public service capacity of urban tourism. Firstly, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of tourism public service infrastructure and enhance the city's public service capacity. Only with complete facilities, high-quality services, and novel experiences can a good city brand image be maintained in the minds of the public for a long time, attracting a large number of netizens to travel and consume. Secondly, strengthen supervision of various industries and immediately rectify any tourism related issues. In this tourism trend, the Harbin Municipal Government also conducted price monitoring on the 15 accommodation companies included in the monitoring to ensure stable price order during holidays. Supervise key scenic spots to implement limit and peak shifting requirements, guide the establishment of daily reporting systems for key scenic spots and hotel accommodations, and keep abreast of market conditions in real time. Finally, respond correctly to online public opinion and actively absorb online suggestions. The public opinion on the internet to a certain extent represents the true opinions of the public on urban services. In this regard, urban departments should enhance their discernment, view online public opinion reasonably, and carry out targeted rectification. For example, in the " ticket refund " controversy of the Ice and Snow World, the Harbin Municipal Government actively utilized public opinion and quickly carried out correct and targeted service improvements, winning unanimous praise from netizens. So, it is necessary to carefully analyze and think, and apply the reasonable parts of online public opinion and suggestions to the improvement of service level.[18]

4.3 Rational use of flow to adhere to the original nature of the heart

The traffic of short video can bring heat to a city in a short time on the network, and it can also bring negative effects. The heat brought by the flow will guide netizens to pursue excessive entertainment for the public eye. The negative effects of excessive entertainment may cause people to misunderstand the image of the city, pay too much attention to the entertainment of the city's image, ignore the high-quality cultural content of the city, and only focus on data such as praise and forwarding, which is not conducive to the establishment and dissemination of the city brand. [19]Therefore, in the future, in order to develop for a long time, Harbin needs to reasonably understand and use the traffic flow to carry out the cooling-off period of " de-internetization ".

The most touching thing in Harbin is sincerity and humanity. Healing is the unique charm of Harbin people. They warmly and warmly expressed the " Northeast welcome you ", with real action to hold out their greatest sincerity. This is the password of Harbin’s popularity, and it should also be
the true color of the continuous fame. In the future, Harbin should stick to the original intention and sincerity of the city, show the city temperature to people all over the country and even the world, try to tell the city story well, and create a real and moving city brand.

5. Conclusion

The essence of "online star city" is to establish a city image that conforms to the current aesthetics, and to transform online traffic into offline passenger flow, so as to promote urban tourism and economic growth. Harbin's out of the circle not only presents a diverse image of the city for people, but also provides a reference case for the dissemination of urban image for many cities. After the winter's traffic is dispersed, how to change Harbin from "online star city" to "long-term famous city" and build a characteristic city brand needs to be explored and advanced in the future.

References
