

# Research on the Impetus of *Douyin* to City Tourist Image Construction and Dissemination in China - The Case of Xi'an

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## **Abstract**

This thesis investigated how the short video sharing application *Douyin* produces an effect on city tourist images' construction and dissemination in China, taking the Internet-famous city of Xi'an as a case study. Based on the semiotic theory and "5W" communication theory, the author collected 30 Xi'an-related short videos on *Douyin* as samples and recorded the relevant data manually for analysis. Two opposing trends-diversification and homogenization in the tourist image building and spreading processes were identified. On the one hand, *Douyin* users deploy numerous audiovisual symbols to create related short videos of different genres, which contributes to shaping Xi'an as a wonderful tourist destination with gorgeous landscapes, deep historical and cultural accumulation, and high modernity; then the destination images of Xi'an are disseminated by the communicators (users with diverse identities) through three different channels to the audience, which obtains good effects. On the other hand, the short videos' content is getting homogeneous due to the limited source materials and users' conformist mentality in the image construction process and *Douyin*'s algorithmic mechanism functioning in the image dissemination process.

**Keywords:** City tourist images' construction and dissemination, Semiotic theory, "5W" communication theory, Diversification and homogenization, Destination images of Xi'an

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Research Background and Context of Research Problem

Urban tourism image, as a significant component of city soft power, not only affects the market competitiveness of a city, but also makes a difference to city's sustainable development. Above all, a positive and unique tourist destination image can exert beneficial influence on local tourism, and accelerate social and economic development of destination tremendously. Therefore, most cities attach great importance to city tourist image in the past and present (Zhou 2019).

Before the rise of mobile short videos, the construction and dissemination of city images as tourist destinations in China were dominated by certain state actors in particular the local governments and their tourist offices, mainly through traditional media and “Two *Wei* and One *Duan* (namely *Weibo*, WeChat and mobile News Client)”. The traditional media contribute a lot to building and transmitting destination images, and gradually making a lasting impression of destinations on audience's minds on the one hand; on the other hand, the shortcomings of traditional media, such as one-way communication model, serious communication style, monotonous source materials, have an adverse effect on the construction and dissemination of city tourist images, making it difficult to resonate with the audience and increase their enthusiasm of visiting the cities. Then, as the emergence of “Two *Wei* and One *Duan* (namely *Weibo*, WeChat and mobile News Client)”, the construction and communication of destination images become relatively interactive and entertaining. However, there are also some drawbacks when building and disseminating city tourist images through these channels: on such platforms, relevant information is usually represented by forms of graphics and texts, which leads to the insufficiency of appeal; the interactive mode is comparatively single and the interactive depth is inadequate (Zhou 2019).

In recent years, rapid development of short videos has brought more opportunities to the construction and dissemination of city tourist images. According to *The 51st Statistical Report on China's Internet Development*, by December 2022, the number of short video users in China had reached 1.012 billion, accounting for 94.8 percent of the country's overall online population. Sharing lives on short video platforms has become the most popular way of social communication and interaction because of the characteristics of the platforms. With the largest number of users in China among all the short video platforms, *Douyin* has partly been contributing to the development in every field including city tourist images' construction and communication (Pan 2021).

Founded in September 2016, *Douyin* developed a mighty user base (100 million) in its first year of existence. Owned by Chinese internet giant ByteDance, *Douyin* is generally portrayed as the Chinese version and TikTok (launched in 2017) as the international version of the same short video app. From 2017 to 2018, the impressive number of urban-tourism-related short video views on *Douyin* greatly stimulated the development of relevant cities (Pan 2021). From the perspective of *Douyin* platform, users are able to obtain both spiritual and material satisfaction by making *Douyin* short videos related to travelling, which is instrumental in enhancing user stickiness and achieving sustainable development of *Douyin*. More specifically, for one thing, users can gain a sense of achievement when their videos get positive results (such as a large number of views and likes) and they have more followers on *Douyin*; for another, users can get material interests from *Douyin* platform and from cooperating with other businesses (such as advertising in the videos) (Zhou 2019, p. 18).

In the case of Xi'an city, in January 2018, a recreational activity called "bowl-smashing wine", that is, tourists spent five yuan to drink a bowl of wine and then smash the bowl on the ground, was launched in *Yongxing* Square-a business district in Xi'an, thus making this place a site for "clocking in"-a must-visit site, and making this city an Internet-famous city. There were 8.91 million related short videos and 150 million viewers on *Douyin*, since thousands of people were attracted to

participate in this activity and then shot videos to upload using the hashtag “摔碗酒 (bowl-smashing wine)” (Fan & Lin 2022). In a word, a large number of tourism-related videos such as “bowl-smashing wine” videos attracted interests of netizens, hence many of the “online visitors” becoming the “offline tourists” in Xi’an. In April 2018, the Xi’an municipal government set up a partnership with *Douyin* so as to further facilitate the tourism development and build an international heritage tourism city. In this way, the short videos related to Xi’an on *Douyin* have been recommended to more users, and when users search for great tourist destinations on *Douyin*, Xi’an city has ranked high on the list (Yan 2020, p. 3). Besides, Xi’an municipal party committee secretary Yongkang Wang visited the *Douyin* headquarters and showed his appreciation for the platform because it had brought great economic benefits to Xi’an and enhanced economic vitality of this city. In the year of 2018, the total tourism revenue of Xi’an reached 4.5 billion yuan, rising by 139%, and Xi’an ranked third among the top ten tourism destinations in China (Pan 2021). In September 2018, *Douyin* and Tsinghua University jointly released *The White Paper on Short Video and City Image Research*, which remarked that *Douyin* had played an important part in the process of city image construction and communication. By and large, the short video sharing application *Douyin* has remarkably contributed to shaping and spreading Xi’an city tourist images.

## **1.2 Statement of Purpose and Research Question**

Based on a case study of the ancient city of Xi’an, one of the first batch of Internet-famous cities in China, this research aims to identify how the short video sharing application *Douyin* makes a difference to the city tourism image construction and dissemination in China, which may have some reference value for other cities in reviving tourism after the pandemic.

Research question: How does the short video sharing application *Douyin* produce an

effect on city tourist images' construction and dissemination in China?

### **1.3 Literature Review**

#### **1.3.1 Tourist Destination Image on Diverse Media**

Along with the increasingly rapid development of tourism, more and more researchers point out that tourist destination image is one of the essential factors to attract tourists and makes a difference to the marketing and operating of the tourist destinations. It is generally held that destination image plays a significant role in tourists' decision process and behavior related to traveling (Gallarza, Saura & García 2002; Rezende-Parker, Morrison & Ismail 2003). By utilizing both qualitative methods (text mining and expert judgment) and quantitative methods (correspondence analysis) to analyze the narrative and visual information on the selected travel websites related to a destination (Macau), Choi, Lehto and Morrison (2007) conclude that multiple images of a destination are represented in different online information sources due to their different communication objectives and intended audience. Moreover, Šantić, Bevanda and Bijakšić (2016) use certain statistic techniques to clearly demonstrate that different media have different intensity of influence on creation of tourist destination image. In the tourist sector of fierce competition, because of the destination image's great effect on the possible tourists' perceptions, behavior and destination choices, it is very necessary for tourist destinations to create and maintain their positive and distinct destination images through diverse forms of media.

According to Jacobsen and Munar (2012), such traditional (tourist destination) information provisions as direct word-of-mouth, own experience and web 1.0 sources, are still indispensable and important for people who have well-known tourist destinations, and there is a complementary relationship instead of substitute one between web 1.0 and web 2.0 (web 2.0 has increased interactivity) in the context of



tourism. At the same time, social media are playing a more and more significant part in tourism industry and are increasingly creating tourist cultures online (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier 2009). In recent years, people have been able to express themselves anytime and anywhere through social media with the characteristics of participation, interaction, openness and transparency (Zhou & Wang 2014). Social media users are able to post various information such as users' locations, the time of creation, photos and videos, as well as their real-time feelings and thoughts on social media platforms, which promotes the representations of multi-dimensional city images (Liu et al. 2015). Meanwhile, many researches have demonstrated the importance of constructing tourist destination images by making use of social media (Shao, Wang & Hao 2019; Setiawati & Jasmin 2020). Furthermore, Nieto-Ferrando, Sánchez-Castillo and Gómez-Morales (2021) review the studies on the influence of some particular mass media containing audio-visual language (such as films and televisions) on the creation of tourist destination images, and notice the limitations of theory and methodology in such kind of studies since the majority of researchers study the relationship between the audiovisual media and tourist destination image with the focus of tourism and marketing studies instead of audiovisual studies. They also find that many relevant studies show that the influence of audiovisual fiction on the tourist destination image is greater when the destination is less famous.

### 1.3.2 Tourist Destination Image on Short Video Platforms

With an increasing number of short videos created and shared through social media, more researches on short videos have been conducted. Firstly, many scholars and researches make a definition for short videos according to the attributes and characteristics of the short-form videos. Wang, Bao and Lv (2015) identify the short video as a video with a duration of 5 to 15 seconds shot by a mobile device for further work including rapid editing or beautification and social sharing. Later, according to the *Research Report on the Development of Short Video Industry* (Fu 2019), short videos are the videos with the characteristics of short duration (5 minutes or less), fast

dissemination speed, low creation threshold as well as strong participation. What's more, from the perspectives of some researchers, short video is a new expression form containing words and images; the appearance of short video results from lower internet fee, faster internet speed and more various intelligent devices, and users are able to utilize such media to achieve lots of things such as searching for like-minded people, socializing, learning and expressing themselves (Li 2021). In short, different scholars and researchers usually define the short videos in different ways, and the definitions of short video can be updated continuously along with the constant upgrading of short video applications. However, some common points among the different definitions can be summarized as follows: (1) a certain time limit (usually within 5 minutes and most often 15 seconds to 1 minute); (2) simple courses of production and editing yet vivid and impressive content; (3) convenient means of spreading and sharing primarily on social media; (4) satisfying individual needs and resonating with viewers (Liu, Wang & Chang 2023). Notably, *Douyin*, as an extraordinary and representative social networking application in China, playing an important role in the industry of mobile short video, has attracted widespread attention of academics and become a specific research target of a large number of researchers (Ouyang 2021, p. 2).

In addition to the definition research, there are numerous researches on specific attributes and characteristics of short videos represented by *Douyin*. Chang and Wang (2022) analyze *Douyin* short video application's operation mode which involves intelligence algorithms, UGC content production mode and "short video + e-commerce" mode, and argue that psychological needs (namely users can derive pleasure and fulfillment while using the application), cognitive needs (namely users can get information in multiple fields such as politics, economy and culture while using *Douyin*) and social needs (namely users are able to search for other like-minded users on *Douyin* app and socialize with them thanks to the intelligence algorithm) are the major factors for the continued use of this particular short video application. Further, in terms of the personalized recommendation of *Douyin*, some researchers

argue that multimodal content analysis techniques (including different kinds of information processing techniques) are employed to thoroughly analyze the three elements (that is, text, image and voice information) in *Douyin* short videos so as to realize the best recommendations for users (Li et al. 2022). However, in the meantime, some researchers notice and reveal the dark side of algorithm recommendation of *Douyin*, such as the privacy disclosure and perception narrowing. For instance, while watching the recommended videos based on the interests, the users also miss the videos in other domains; the users are able to search for other like-minded users on *Douyin*, but they also miss the opportunity to exchange ideas with users from other circles (Li et al. 2021; Chen et al. 2023). After discussing some attributive characteristics of *Douyin* such as videos of fragmentation and short duration, easier way to get new videos, distinct labels in the video titles, Liang (2021) explores the revenue model of *Douyin*, such as advertising and flow transaction. And Zheng (2023) points out the interactivity of the short video platforms with social attributes, which can be considered as an information exchange between individuals with no constraints of distance or time. More specifically, information exchange on *Douyin* can be recognized as a range of interactions among video makers and viewers and between users and platforms through search, comment, subscription and other interactive functions on *Douyin* app.

The tourism short videos, as a product of the integration of tourism and short videos, play a more significant role in building and communicating tourist destination images, and thus draw much attention of an increasingly number of researchers (Wang 2021). To begin with, some scholars explore the content of tourism-based short videos. Based on their findings, information-oriented video content, containing the objective information about tourist destinations (such as tourism product attributes, price information, etc.) and real thoughts based on the objective description of facts, is a relatively traditional tourism short video content representation (Chandrasekaran, Srinivasan & Sihi 2018), which has important reference value for potential tourists to make their travel plans (Tellis et al. 2019). While emotion-oriented video content is

comparatively new, which is created to evoke the feelings and emotions of the viewers by using various narrative storylines, so as to achieve the effect of persuasion (Chandrasekaran, Srinivasan & Sihi 2018; Tellis et al. 2019). And the emotion-oriented tourism short videos make a bigger positive difference to potential tourists' travel intentions compared with the information-oriented tourism short videos (Wu & Ding 2023).

Then, more and more researches on the effects of tourism short videos have been conducted. The research on the impact of *Douyin* short food videos on destination image (cognitive image, affective image and conative image) of Chengdu (an Internet-famous city in China) reveals that short food videos with the contents of flavor characteristics and appearance description of food have increased people's attention to the destination image and the local social environment (Li et al. 2020). According to Guo (2021), the "live+short video" app platforms have mighty social functions so that users are in a position to better communicate and interact with each other. In particular, during the period of the pandemic, such platforms become instrumental for tourist destinations to popularize the beauty of scenic spots and the folk customs of destinations. Further, Pan (2021) discusses how to build harmonious relationship between tourism economy development and environment protection in the Internet-famous cities on the basis of short video platforms, and elucidates the significance of tourism-based short videos in developing Internet-famous cities in China. After the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to revive the tourism economy, the official promotion short videos about tourist destinations have been employed by local governments to improve the users' cognition and emotions about the destinations by virtue of the videos' authority, interactivity and interest (Jiang et al. 2022). Additionally, some researchers elaborate on the varying degrees of effect of four use contexts (namely, information acquisition, leisure and entertainment, attention obtainment, and social interaction) on users' psychological satisfaction and then their attitudinal and behavioral involvement in tourism short video platforms by forming an analytical framework of "use contexts-psychological process-behavioral

outcomes” (Qu et al. 2022).

As Xi’an city becomes an Internet-famous city in China and a tremendous number of short videos about Xi’an are produced, more researchers pay attention to the Xi’an-related short videos and investigate the Xi’an city images reflected through the related short videos. Gong (2019) studies the construction of Xi’an external and internal images on *Douyin*: in terms of external images, Gong (2019) summarizes the constructing features-emphases of *Douyin* short videos related to Xi’an are put on city cuisine, city scenery (especially the modernized landscape), and city music; as for internal images, the semiotics developed by Roland Barthes is used to analyze the internal image reflections in the Xi’an-related short videos on *Douyin*, such as vitality and liveability. Besides, Gong (2019) also analyzes the Xi’an city image communication process on *Douyin*, and concludes that diverse communicators (mainly including government organizations, mainstream media, residents and tourists), unique image carriers (city cuisine, scenery and music), multiple communication modes (dissemination through algorithm recommendation, vertical dissemination, and dissemination through sharing) and socialized representations (communications among users in the comments section, and personalized subscriptions and interactions among users), contribute greatly to the communication of Xi’an city image. Based on the relevant theories of “5W” communication model, agenda-setting, city brand marketing and audience psychology, Yan (2020) expounds on the Internet-famous Xi’an city image construction through material symbols (including historic attractions and Internet-famous spots), sensory symbols (traditional cuisine and folk music), cultural symbols (Chinese civilization inheritance and customs) as well as film and television symbols (popular films, televisions and short videos related to Xi’an). And the content presentation features and content creation features of short videos related to Xi’an are pointed out in the research. Zou (2021) analyzes the construction and presentation mode of Xi’an city image on *Douyin* according to a certain amount of video samples, from the aspects of time duration, video creators, video picture presentation, and sound in the videos, and also explores

the effect of the constructed and represented Xi'an image on viewers' cognition, attitude and behavior through relevant video comments and face-to-face interviews. Moreover, Wang and Feng (2021) analyze how the short video platform *Douyin* has been utilized by Xi'an Tourism Bureau to construct the city image as both modern metropolis and historical city, by deploying a variety of linguistic and visual resources in multimodal videos. The researched videos demonstrate how the city government has exploited the symbolic resources to promote the city branding on *Douyin*.

All in all, since a short video about "bowl-smashing wine" activity in Xi'an was posted on *Douyin* in January 2018, Xi'an city has become Internet-famous and thus attracted more researchers' attention (Fan & Lin 2022). And a large number of researchers have studied the Xi'an city image which is different from Xi'an city tourist image. According to Lynch (1960), the first scholar to explore the shaping and dissemination of city image in modern times, city image is mainly composed of five visual elements including paths, edges, districts, nodes and landmarks, which contributes to urban planning. Liu (2021) reviews the relevant researches and defines the city image as a relatively stable comprehensive perception and overall evaluation of the internal strength, external appearance, development level, and prospects of a city by the public inside and outside the city, and as a comprehensive reflection of feature of the whole city. The internal strength mainly includes the level of economic development, technology and education, unique spiritual concepts, history and culture, and government public image of the city, and the external appearance refers to external characteristics such as urban landscape architecture, urban cuisine, urban music, urban environment, and natural scenery. When it comes to the city image in the short videos, *The White Paper on Short Video and City Image Research* jointly released by *Douyin* and Tsinghua University in 2018 divides the content related to city image in short videos into nine categories: local food, commercial attractions, urban landscape, local culture, natural landscape, government image, historical attractions, municipal facilities, and municipal services. In other words, the relevant scholars and researchers tend to make a comprehensive study of the Xi'an city as a whole

(studying this city from multiple dimensions of politics, economy, tourism, culture, etc.), exploring how different communicators build and communicate the city image through different approaches. For example, Liu (2021) explores the city image of Xi'an through *Douyin* short videos from five dimensions namely images of government (containing government ruling ideas, official image, policies, development and construction planning, knowledge of law), economy (scientific and technological level, price level, citizen income, commercial attractions and activities), society (civilized image, public security, livelihood security), human culture (local food, leisure activities, historical attractions, traditional culture, festival activities, talent education) and environment (natural scenery, environmental protection, modern architecture, traffic conditions). Thus it can be seen that only part of the research relates to Xi'an city tourism.

However, tourism industry, which has been one of China's pillar industries and boosted the development of national economy in China, suffered great losses owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Sun 2022). After the epidemic, the tourism has been recovering, and an increasing number of short videos related to tourism have been produced and shared because of the rapid growth of short video industry, which contributes significantly to reshaping the tourist destination images and disseminating them to the potential tourists (short video application users), and further accelerating the revival and development of tourism in China. Therefore, this thesis focuses on one dimension of a city, that is tourism, and investigates how the city tourist images are reshaped and disseminated through short videos on *Douyin* (China's most popular short video sharing app). More specifically, by virtue of the particular framework (the semiotic theory and "5W" communication theory as well as the concept of destination image), the thesis studies the related short videos from the perspectives of the specific strategies employed and effects reflected, which play a significant role in constructing and disseminating city tourist images. Besides, two opposite tendencies, namely diversification and homogenization, which are identified in the above-mentioned processes of tourist image construction and dissemination on *Douyin*, can also offer

reference value for the relevant studies. Thus it can be seen that this thesis, taking the Internet-famous city of Xi'an in China as a case study, provides a reference in terms of applied theory and research perspective, for studying the building and communication of other cities' tourist images through short videos.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

The thesis is divided in seven parts. After this introduction, the author elaborates on the applied theoretical framework, including two major theories of the semiotic theory by Roland Barthes and Lasswell's "5W" communication model theory, and one concept of destination image in the second chapter. Thereafter Chapter 3 expounds on the methodology consisting of four sections: data collection methods (the top 30 Xi'an-related short videos with most likes on *Douyin* are collected as samples and the relevant data are recorded manually), data analysis methods (noting the specific aspects while watching the videos and then conducting the data analysis according to the theoretical framework), limitations, as well as ethical considerations. And the data are analyzed and discussed in the subsequent two chapters: construction of Xi'an tourist image on *Douyin* which is further divided in three sections (constructing Xi'an city tourist image by employing varied techniques, the characteristic Xi'an city tourism images constructed by *Douyin* short videos, the emergence of homogenization of the short video content), and dissemination of Xi'an city tourist image on *Douyin* which is further divided in four sections (disseminating Xi'an tourism images by communicators with diverse identities, disseminating Xi'an tourism images to social media users through different channels, disseminating Xi'an tourism images with positive effects, the intensification of homogenization of the short video content). The final chapter draws conclusions based on the findings of this research, answering the research question: the *Douyin* users deploy a variety of audio-visual symbols to create short videos of different genres, contributing to the construction of Xi'an city tourist images, while the content of short videos is getting



homogeneous with the increasing number of the related short videos; the communicators with different identities on *Douyin* play the role in disseminating the destination images of Xi'an via varied channels, while the algorithmic mechanism of *Douyin* functioning in the communication process further intensifies the homogenization of the short videos' content.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 The Semiotic Theory**

According to Lippmann (1922) who identified the phenomenon of media constructing reality very early, often times most of the mass media describe the events not accurately, intentionally portraying dissimilar images and creating multiple realities in our minds; at the same time, people tend to make decisions based on what they perceive from media, what happened in the “real environment” believed by those people, instead of the actual facts or events themselves. Media constructing reality has become a consensus nowadays, because a growing body of research indicates that the reality in the context of media is a constructed reality. In other words, the mediated reality is not a simple copy but a recreation and reproduction of the real world we are actually experiencing (Jiang 2014, p. 288). For instance, it is the publishers or producers who will decide what kinds of city tourist images are going to be represented in the media and step into the limelight.

Jiang (2014, p. 289) concludes that the mediated reality is closely related to both social reality and personal psychology of media activities’ participants. Therefore, while studying the construction of mediated reality, the scholars and researchers generally focus on “media”, “personal” or “society”, and thus three research paradigms including semiotics, social psychology and sociology are formed. Accordingly, the relevant researchers do their researches on the basis of media texts, the recipients’ individual psychology and social structure respectively, developing different research subjects and different research fields. This thesis intends to interpret how the city tourism image is constructed in the media by analyzing the collected short video samples, so the research paradigm of semiotics in the “media construction of reality” theory is the most appropriate for the research in this thesis.

Thanks to a framework supplied by Saussure’s study of the linguistic signs, Roland

Barthes further developed semiotics and applied it in the visual-audio field. Saussure maintained that a sign consisted of two parts, namely, the form (signifier) and the concept (signified), and the connecting process of signifier and signified was called signification, while Barthes believed that the signification was part of a larger model of communication or signification, which was also called the mythical process (Jiang 2013). From the perspective of Barthes, the first order of signification is that of denotation in which signifier (namely language) and signified (namely corresponding object) will produce a sign; the second order of signification (also called "mythical process") will operate at the system of connotation in which the sign produced from previous level will become a signifier and will produce another signified (namely the implied meaning in the specific culture) and will create another sign (Jiang 2013) (see figure below). For example, the name of the rose and the image of the rose as a real flower are respectively the signifier and the signified in the first order of signification, and the romantic love is the signified in the second order of signification.

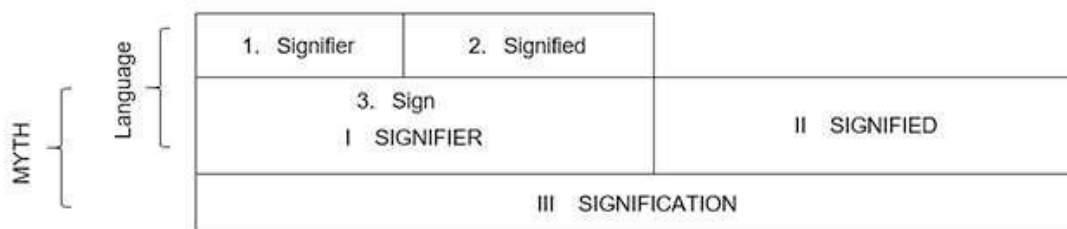


Figure 2.1 (from <https://media-studies.com/barthes/>)

In this thesis, this theory is mainly employed to analyze the city tourist image construction of Xi'an. Its tourist images are constructed based on what the video producers choose to record and how the videos are edited. A variety of audiovisual symbolic elements in the short videos can be considered as the signifier of the first order, and the actual scenic spots or cultural activities are the signified of the first order. Moreover, some inherent attributes or identities of the city, which are reflected through the representations of the short videos (the SIGNIFIER of the second order), can be seen as the SIGNIFIED of the second order. Therefore, the semiotics developed by Barthes will provide theoretical support for the research in the thesis.

With the theoretical basis, the implied meanings of the short video contents are more likely to be dug out.

## **2.2 “5W” Model of Communication**

Lasswell’s “5W” communication model, which is recognized as one of the earliest and the most influential communication models, occupies an important place in the study of communication theory (Shoemaker, Tankard & Lasorsa 2004). In 1948, in an article titled "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society", the American scholar Harold Lasswell first proposed the five basic elements that constitute the process of communication, and arranged them in a certain structural order, forming a process model later known as the “5W” model of communication (Peng 2015). In Lasswell’s view, “convenient way to describe an act of communication is to answer the following questions:

Who

Says What

In Which Channel

To Whom

With What Effect?” (Lyman 1948, p. 216).

This “5W” communication model indicates that the communication process is a purposeful behavioral process with the intention of influencing the audience. Hence from the perspective of Lasswell, the communication process is more like a process of persuasion. It should be noted that the “5W communication model” is a one-way transmission model, lacking the “feedback” link, which cannot reflect the interactivity between the communication subjects and the audience especially in the new media era. Realizing the above limitations, subsequent researchers introduced “feedback” into the communication process and built a mass media communication model (Shao 2005, p. 50). Hence one can see that the dissemination of city tourist image is also

composed of five basic elements, and the close connections between them can promote the city tourist image dissemination.

Therefore, this communication theory will primarily be adopted in the chapter of researching the dissemination of Xi'an city tourism image from these five respects: (1) Who: as the starting point of the communication process, the communicators in mass communication can be both individuals and institutions who are responsible for collecting, sorting, selecting, processing, producing and transmitting city tourist information during the dissemination process of city tourist image; (2) Says what: as the center of the communication process, information here refers to all the information disseminated to the audience through mass media. And the content of communication shares four common characteristics comprising comprehensiveness (social integration by communicators), publicness (facing the whole society), openness (adjusting with the society's development and changes) and popularity (aiming at the masses). During the city tourist image communication process, information from different aspects such as eating, transportation and places of interest in the city, is disseminated through the media; (3) In which channel: communication media is a physical means for achieving communication. Media in communication refers to the material entity that transmits information symbols, and the material entity of information symbols for mass communication can be called mass media. The communication media for disseminating city tourist images specifically refers to the mass media, i.e., the material entities that disseminate information to the public, mainly divided into paper media, electronic media, and network media; (4) To whom: the audience, as one of the motivations of communication activities, not only receive, reprocess and disseminate information, but also influence the communicators through feedback. Especially with the rapid growth of emerging media, the boundary between communicators and audience is becoming increasingly blurred or even disappearing. As a result, in the process of city tourism image dissemination, the audience may have a dual role of receiver and transmitter. (5) With what effect: the research on communication effects investigates the changes in the audience's ideology and

behavioral mode caused by the information transmitted by the communicators to the audience through media. The effectiveness of city image dissemination is influenced by multiple factors such as communicators, information, media and audience. Among these factors, audience's perception and cognition of the city after participating in the city tourist image communication activities, is the most crucial factor (Fan 2022, p. 20).

Nowadays when the researchers and scholars study the mass communication, this "5W" communication theory is still considered as the fundamental frame regardless of the rapid scientific and technological development. In other words, these five parts are still the basic elements in the mass communication research area, and while analyzing mass communication process, one is supposed to comprehend answers to these five basic questions (Peng 2015, p. 248). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that with the social development and technological progress, mass communication in the context of new media is developing and some distinctive characteristics of its own are formed accordingly: in the new media communication process, (1) communicator is becoming more diverse-anyone can be the sender of city tourist information; (2) increasingly massive information such as the information of a tourist destination can be presented by multimedia such as text, image, audio, video, etc.; (3) with the advancement of technology (network, mobile, communication technology...), new media is becoming more interactive; (4) audience is becoming more personalized with more participation and initiative; (5) the communication effect can be demonstrated quickly and evaluated intelligently (Peng 2015, p. 249).

All in all, with the theoretical basis of the "5W" communication model and based on the development of mass communication under new media environment, this thesis takes a deep dive into the dissemination of Xi'an city tourist images through short videos on *Douyin* from certain dimensions.

### **2.3 Destination Image**

The definition of “destination image” is usually on the basis of the definition of the “image” concept, which has been applied to signify people’s knowledge of different kinds of things such as objects, events and behaviors motivated by emotions and opinions in a variety of areas including consumer behavior research, marketing, social and environmental psychology since the 1960s (Crompton 1979). In the context of the tourism destinations’ marketing, image is endowed with a relatively different meaning and is mostly called “destination image” (Chu, Bao & Sun 2022, p.1).

In some researchers’ view, destination image is the general evaluation of the psychological and emotional perception about a place (destination) from the tourists (Josiassen et al. 2016). And such definition is the destination image concept of the one-dimensional structure. With the deepening of research and understanding of the destination image concept, destination image is conceptualized as multidimensional structured, which is gradually accepted by most destination image researchers (Chu, Bao & Sun 2022, p.1). Embacher and Buttle (1989) point out the cognitive and affective two-dimensional structure. And Dann (1996) states that destination images consist of intentional components in addition to cognitive and affective components. According to He and Deng (2021), the cognitive component is the relevant knowledge of a place’s attributes including climate, inhabitants, scenery, food and so on. In terms of the affective component, it is about the tourists’ feelings about the destination so it tends to be a personal emotional response or assessment. And the intentional component (also called “behavioral disposition”) is recognized as the desire or willingness of visitors to visit a place because of their favorable perception of that destination (Chu, Bao & Sun 2022, p.2). Later, a cognitive-affective-whole model of destination images was proposed by Baloglu and McCleary (1999), and the newly added “overall image” is the visitors’ overall impression of the tourist destination (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou & Kaplanidou 2015). By and large, destination image can be defined as a one-dimensional or multidimensional structured concept, and

which definition is used in the study is decided by the purpose of the study (Afshardoost & Eshaghi 2020).

This thesis intends to study the construction and dissemination of Xi'an multi-dimensional tourist image through *Douyin*, so the multidimensional structured concept namely the cognitive-affective-overall model of destination images will be used throughout the main portion of the thesis. Specifically, in the chapter of studying the construction of tourist image, cognitive images are more likely to be constructed in the first order of signification (or denotation signification), while affective images may be built in the second order of signification (or connotation signification). And then the cognitive, affective and overall images are disseminated through the above-mentioned five major links in the mass communication process. In addition, diversification and homogenization are two opposing tendencies in the construction and communication of Xi'an destination images through *Douyin* short videos. The diversification can be reflected in the uses of audio-visual symbols and subsequent significations, as well as the constructed destination images during the image construction process, and can also be demonstrated in the elements of the "5W" communication model during the image dissemination process. At the same time, the homogenization is represented in the content of related short videos due to some motives of video producers in the image construction process and certain steps in the image dissemination process.



### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data Collection Methods

According to Yin (2009), researchers are supposed to answer different types of research questions by employing different kinds of research methods. In terms of answering “How” questions, the method of case study could be utilized. Besides, the goal of case study is to complete a “generalizing” instead of “particularizing” analysis, so as to gain an in-depth insight into a real-life phenomenon. Therefore, the method of case study is applied in this thesis-the case of Xi’an city (which is a representative Internet-famous city in China) is used to investigate how the short videos on *Douyin* contribute to the construction and dissemination of city tourism images. As a matter of fact, in order to study the city tourist images of Xi’an, the author searched for “Xi’an tourism” in the first place, trying to further screen the short videos so as to collect the most related video samples. However, the outcome was not satisfactory: on the one hand, it was found that most videos in the search results were talking about the comprehensive travel guides of Xi’an, and the insufficient diversification of the short video types was certainly adverse to the research; on the other hand, the numbers of short videos in the “Xi’an tourism” search results receiving the likes of more than 100 thousand and 10 thousand, were much less than those in the “Xi’an” search results, which could lead to the inadequacy of collected samples. As a consequence, the author did not choose the videos in the “Xi’an tourism” search results.

For completing the goal of this research, the author thus searched for “Xi’an” in the “Video” category on *Douyin* application (since there are other newly added categories such as live streaming and online shop in this leading ever-evolving social media platform), and then took the top 30 short videos with the most likes in the search results as the samples. The specific methods of selecting the short videos can be seen in Figure 3.1: the first step is to search for “Xi’an” in the search box; the next step is to select the “Video” category; and then to tap the screening icon in the top right-hand

corner; the final step is to select the “most likes” in the sort by list. The reason why the author chose to collect the top 30 videos with the “most likes” instead of the other two screening conditions is that such most popular videos are more likely to reflect the positive feedback from the audience, and demonstrate their important role in the construction and dissemination of Xi’an tourist destination images. Nevertheless, in terms of the first way of sorting-comprehensive sort, the short videos are sorted under the influence of many factors such as users’ personal interests, so the sorted short videos cannot reflect the overall views and feelings of the audience. As for the second way of sorting-time sequence, it obviously takes time for the newly produced short videos to contribute to the building and dissemination of Xi’an destination images. So the author selected and collected the samples based on the third way of sorting. Moreover, after a preview of the samples, all 30 samples were identified as the effective samples because of their varying degrees of connections to Xi’an tourism. And thus the relevant data in the samples were eventually collected and recorded at the end of February (see Appendix). Besides, the data were recorded manually since most sample videos last for less than 5 minutes and the data needed are collected and recorded more appropriately in this way.



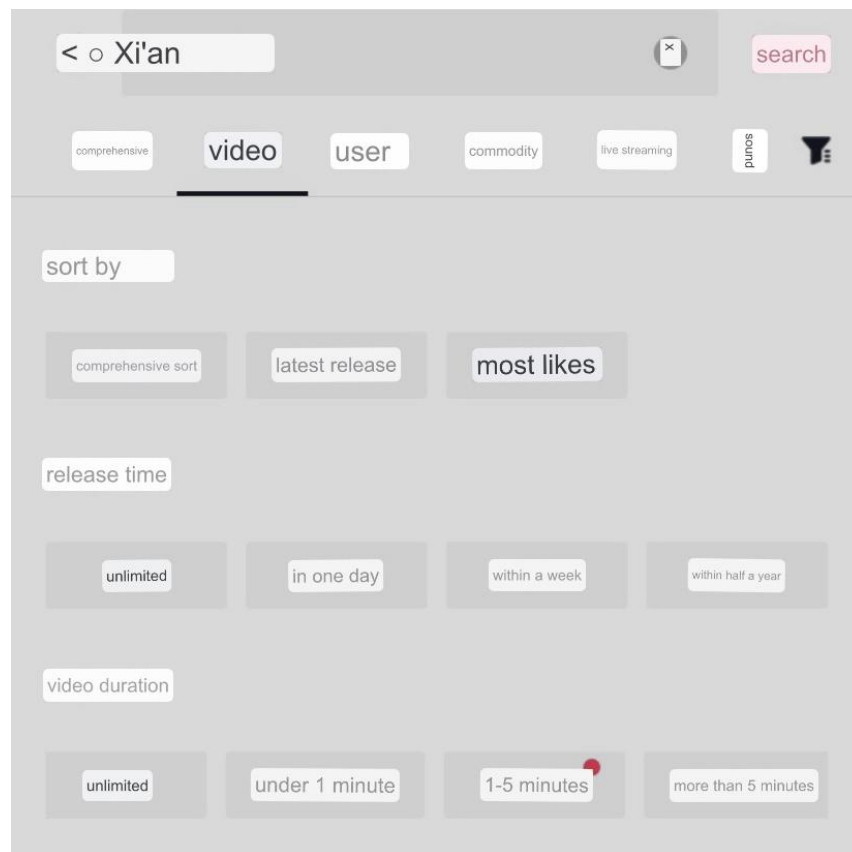


Figure 3.1 (the second figure is the Google translated version of the first one)

Furthermore, the document research method, which refers to the analysis of documents containing information about the scenario or event under consideration (Williams 2015), is also used for data collection in this thesis. Some requisite data such as the number of short video users, the development of city image dissemination through short videos, were collected from the official documents including *the 50th Statistical Report on Internet Development in China and White Paper on Research of Short Video and City Image*. In order to obtain such data from the relevant documents, I went to the official websites of the related departments such as the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), the National Bureau of Statistics of China, the tourism bureau in Xi'an. And to collect certain data through the authoritative documents is instrumental in saving my time and costs. At the same time, the accuracy of data is guaranteed to some degree (Williams 2015).

### **3.2 Data Analysis Methods**

When it comes to the data analysis, since the research objects are the short videos, the author generally analyzes the data by watching the collected videos attentively and noting the information on specific aspects on the basis of the theoretical framework (containing the semiotic theory and “5W” communication theory as well as the destination image concept).

For example, when exploring how the short videos on *Douyin* make a difference in the construction of Xi’an city tourist images, the author mainly applies the semiotic theory, and thus focuses more on the audio-visual symbols and their significations in the short videos; when elaborating on the specific tourist images of Xi’an, the author puts emphasis on the objective attributes of Xi’an city, the personal feelings and the overall impression about this particular city from the video producers, based on the destination image concept (including cognitive, affective and overall image); when investigating how the short videos play the role in disseminating the city tourist images of Xi’an, the author makes use of the “5W” communication theory, paying more attention to the information related to the components of this communication model.

### **3.3 Limitations**

Firstly, the sample size is relatively limited. But the total number of Xi’an-related short videos is so huge that it is impracticable to collect all the short videos. By comprehensive consideration of research purpose and research methods, top 30 short videos seem to be the most suitable sample size for this research.

Secondly, there are limitations in terms of the data collection methods. Although the

author keeps a very careful record of the useful information in the selected short videos on *Douyin*, certain subjective views and feelings might affect part of the recorded data in particular the content attributes of the short videos. For instance, there might be inaccuracies in the titles' recording since it is the translated version, although the author has already tries her best to provide the most appropriate translations by referring to the translations from the Google translation application and the knowledge about China as a Chinese; the summary content of short videos might also vary from person to person, but the author, with a double identity of the research's observer and the short video's audience (or potential tourist), is in a position record the general of the short videos.

Thirdly, there are also limitations when it comes to the data analysis methods. When the author explores the signification processes especially connotation signification of certain audio-visual symbols in the videos, some analysis results might be subjective. However, according to the applied semiotic theory by Roland Barthes (Jiang 2013), the signified in the second order of signification (namely connotation signification) is generally the implied meaning of the signifier, which inevitably involves the perceptual and emotional elements.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

Privacy is only an issue to the extent that it involves the use, disclosure, etc. of personal information, which can be used to uniquely identify an individual. Therefore, when the author inserts the screenshots of short videos in the thesis, the faces of people showing up in the screenshots are blurred. At the same time, informed consent does not seem necessary in this context for the following two major reasons: on the one hand, users of the collected short videos generally use the nicknames (instead of their real names) as their user names to post their videos publicly in order to gain attention; on the other hand, this research does no harm to or cannot cause any

problems for the users.

## **4. CONSTRUCTION OF XI'AN CITY TOURIST IMAGE ON *DOUYIN***

Taking advantage of the features of *Douyin*, the users create numerous short videos related to Xi'an so that a variety of Xi'an city tourism images are constructed. Notably, two distinct trends, namely, diversification and homogenization are reflected in this process of tourist image construction in China. Therefore, in this chapter, the diversification of the techniques deployed by the video producers on *Douyin*, and the diversification of the constructed city tourist images of Xi'an are explored in the first two sections. And the homogenization of the related short video content and the causes are explained in the third section. What's more, the semiotics developed by Barthes is applied throughout this chapter.

### **4.1 Constructing Xi'an City Tourist Image by Employing Varied Techniques**

#### **4.1.1 Constructing Xi'an City Tourist Image by Using Specific Visual-Audio Symbols**

Deploying all kinds of symbols of vision and audition of short videos on *Douyin* in different ways contributes greatly to reflecting Xi'an city tourist images. The destination images of Xi'an are constructed through the audio-visual symbols in the contents of short videos, and viewers are able to perceive the images by "decoding" these symbols. Although short videos on *Douyin* are relatively different from movies in terms of communication platforms and filming rules, the short videos essentially are videos of shorter duration (Luo 2020, p. 20). Saussure's thoughts on linguistic semiotics in *Course in General Linguistics* deeply influenced subsequent research in the field of linguistics and semiotics (Jiang 2013). Since the 1940s, more and more scholars have acknowledged that films have their unique linguistic characteristics and film has gradually become a language which allows artists to express ideas and transmit information as accurately as writings (Pardo Abril 2023). And the knowledge of language and semiotics in the research has been called visual and aural language. In short, film is an audio-visual artistic form jointly constructed by sound and pictures;

in the same way, short videos should also have the basic elements of audio-visual art (Hasio & Chen 2018). Accordingly, by decoding and analyzing the visual and aural language in the short videos about Xi'an, one can understand the video contents more easily so as to better perceive Xi'an city tourist image.

As mentioned earlier, based on Saussure's thoughts, Roland Barthes developed semiotics and pointed out two orders of significance including denotation and connotation levels (Jiang 2013). The theory is often used in audiovisual art where the "signifier" refers to sounds and images of the work, while the "signified" refers to certain artistic conceptions and subtexts of the sounds and images (Hasio & Chen 2018). As one of the audio-visual artistic forms, short videos on *Douyin* are composed of video and audio components, and thus the "signifier" and "signified" can be investigated through visual symbols, auditory symbols or both (Luo 2020, p. 21).

#### (1) Constructing Xi'an City Tourist Image by Using Visual Symbols

The visual symbols of *Douyin* short videos are mainly represented by pictures, which are the most important part of *Douyin* short videos and also the main channel for short videos to convey information. Users of *Douyin* can easily perceive information through the pictures and transform it into their personal impressions at the same time. The short videos on *Douyin* generally consist of three components-the video pictures as main bodies, and the title and the caption as supplements (sometimes there is no caption when there is no texts in videos). Besides, just as film genres with different complexity to understand, short videos on *Douyin* can also be relatively straightforward and complex when building Xi'an city tourist image (Luo 2020).

The first type of short video comparatively directly constructs the city tourist image of Xi'an and is normally used to build the cognitive image of Xi'an. In other words, what you see through the pictures of this kind of short video is basically what the video producer intends to express. Because the video producer simply records what



one sees and hears without using complicated video recording techniques or the means of montage.

Figure 4.1 is a screenshot of a *Douyin* short video taken by a *Douyin* user in Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City in Xi'an, with a title “终于来到了这个地方，此地比当时更加繁华，千年之后的你又在哪里？(Finally, I have arrived at this place, which is even more bustling than before. Where are you after a thousand years?)”. The short video shows a night scene of the Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City, by using a long shot of 15 seconds. Through this short video on *Douyin*, the scenes of the antique-style buildings and the trees with light decorations sparkling at night, and the crowd surging forward, are visually presented, with the apposite title as a supplement (there is no caption since there is no any narratives or explanations in the video), emphasizing the feature of magnificent and flourishing Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City.



Figure 4.1

Most times no complex audio-visual language is used in this type of short videos to

communicate ideas and disseminate information, or rather, the video producers are less likely to employ complex visual elements in film and television screen just for expressing a simple idea. The first order of signification namely the denotation signification is applied in this kind of short video, because the transition of the visual symbols in the video (usually with a distinct and clear theme and one or two shots) from the signifier to the signified is relatively straightforward. For example, the scene of “the brightly lit distinctive buildings and the large stream of visitors” simply indicates “a spectacular and bustling Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City at night”, which is relatively easy for the video producer to create and for the watchers to understand. In brief, this type of short video only requires one element of Xi’an city tourism to complete the construction of Xi’an city tourist image, and the elements could be Xi’an’s unique cuisine, scenic spots and so on, which can even be visualized as pictures without the movement because the viewers often times can perceive the tourist image of Xi’an through particular images and scenes in the *Douyin* short videos.

The second type of short video is different from the first one when it comes to using the more advanced audio-visual language since the second type of short video contains more montage techniques (a montage is short sequence of clipped images or actions shown in fast motion, accompanied by sound effects), although the two types of short video are similar in terms of image selection and topic presentation (Vania & Nélio 2022).

The short video shown in Figure 4.2 is a typical representative of the second type of short video. Figure 4.2 is a partial screenshot of a short video shot by a *Douyin* user in Xi’an. The short video is 9 seconds in length and has 5 shots in total, showing scenes of five different landmarks in Xi’an including the railway station, the Ming Dynasty City Wall, Grand Tang Mall, the Bell and Drum Tower, with the title “总要来趟西安吧 (You have got to come to Xi’an someday)” and the caption of voice-over which describes the wonderful and unique experiences one can have in these tourist places.

This type of short video is similar in expression to the first type, conveying a distinct theme through the display of tourist destination elements, but the signified of the visual symbols is more abstract-both the first order of denotation signification and the second order of connotation signification can be employed in the analysis of this type of short video on *Douyin*. Viewers are able to perceive the cognitive image of Xi'an from the scenic elements in this video, that is a tourist destination where there are magnificent historic sites and ancient buildings. At the same time, viewers can also perceive the affective image of Xi'an from the title and the caption in the video, that is a must-see historic city (or tourist destination) with a long history.

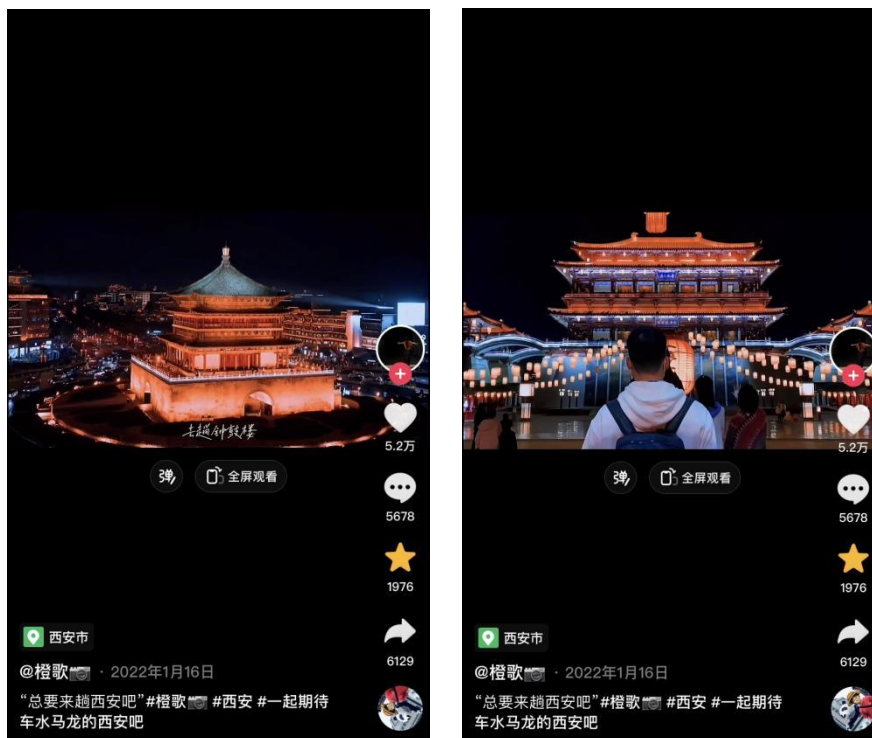


Figure 4.2

What's more, unlike the first type of short video that simply contains one or two long shots of a scene, this type of short video contains multiple shots, which enhances the diversification of screen elements and brings the effect of montage. Taking the short video in Figure 4.2 as an example, the duration of this short video is shorter than that of the short video in Figure 4.1 yet it presents more scenes, which means that the visual symbols in the short video of Figure 4.2 have more diverse signifiers and more

complex signifieds, and such type of short video is more likely to give the viewers a deeper immersive feeling or association by editing the multiple scenes and creating a montage effect. All in all, this type of short video usually has the same distinct theme as the first type, but the theme is not that simple or clear, but more abstract and complicated. In addition, such type of short video normally has a more advanced movie and television skills, which contributes to conveying more ideas and information.

## (2) Constructing Xi'an City Tourist Image by Using Aural Symbols

The aural symbols of *Douyin* short videos refer to the sounds from the short videos, which basically come from two sources including the background music and the original sounds. *Douyin* users can choose the copyrighted music from the *Douyin* music library as the background music of their videos, while the original sounds in the videos can be recorded live or be dubbed in the post production (Luo 2020, p. 24). Among the collected 30 video samples, around 83.3 percent of the short videos have both background music and original sounds, and the rest of the videos have only background music or original sounds. In general, the original sounds refer to the voices of the video producers who normally give commentaries on the scenes in the short videos or give advice and recommendations for the viewers (the potential tourists online), and thus it is the original sounds (especially the voices of the video producers) that contribute a lot to the construction of Xi'an city tourist images in most cases.

Take a short video which has both the original sounds and the background music shot by the *Douyin* user “佳在西安” as the first example. In this video, only some scenes of six tourist spots in Xi'an are presented, and the video producer does not show up in the video. However, she introduces the name of these particular tourist destinations and describes certain romantic things the couples can do when they come to the places shown in the video, with her voice. For instance, when presenting scenes of the

Catholic Church in the Five Star Street (see Figure 4.3 below), the video producer says that “去五星街天主教堂 就这样静静地坐着 想象我们神圣的婚礼 (you can visit the Catholic Church in the Five Star Street with your partner, and sit quietly together, imaging your future holy wedding)”. Without her voices, the scenes of these six tourist destinations are just some places you can visit in Xi’an, and it seems that there is nothing special about these places. In this way, the viewers barely feel the desire to visit Xi’an. On the contrary, when hearing her descriptions of so many romantic and unique things they can do with their partner in these tourist spots of this city, the viewers start to visualize doing those romantic and sweet things with their partner, and then they may associate this city with romance and intend to visit this great city someday. In the meanwhile, the video producer uses a piece of pleasing light music as the background music, which further conveys emotion and creates atmosphere of relaxation.



Figure 4.3

Take a short video which has only the original sounds shot by the *Douyin* user “我是大琪琪” as the second example. This video producer takes a video of herself talking about travel guides to Xi’an for 2 minutes and 41 seconds, and the video title is “去西

安最实用的攻略，一定要听我说完 (This is the most practical travel guides to Xi'an so you better hear me out)" (see Figure 4.4 below). There is basically no any scenes of Xi'an throughout the video, so the original sounds play a key role in building Xi'an city tourist images. For example, in the video, the video producer mentions several famous tourist attractions of Xi'an such as the Great Wild Goose Pagoda and gives positive evaluations on the tourist spots and the activities with the words like "popular", "beautiful night scenes", "gorgeous actors", "well worth seeing" and so on. As a result, the aural symbols of this short video including her introductions of the attractions' names and her descriptions of her feelings and emotions about the attractions promotes the construction of Xi'an city tourist images including the cognitive, affective and overall images. And in this respect, the first order of signification, namely denotation signification, is obviously applied because she just means what she is saying. Additionally, the video producer also says "young people can visit...and... are better destinations for those who have kids coming together..." in the video, which can actually reflect the diversity of Xi'an tourism since it is suitable for all ages to visit. Hence the second order of signification, namely connotation signification, is employed in this situation.



Figure 4.4

Take a short video with only background music shot by the *Douyin* user “钉子不会飞「VR 全景」” as the third example. This short video is a 15-second video of the night scene of Grand Tang Ever-bright City (see Figure 4.5 below), using a piece of music from the song “无尽的爱 (Endless Love)” as the background music. The song is the theme song of a time-travel film *The Myth* which tells a touching love story that transcends time and space. And the film is set in Xi’an. Therefore, using music from this song as background music may offer room for the viewers to imagine this magical place with a feeling of traversing the tunnel of time and space. Thus it can be seen that the video content is more abstract when the background music becomes the main aural symbol of the short video. *Douyin* users cannot upload their own music to *Douyin*’s music library, which means that users can only use music from a limited collection of music resources. As is well known, music is generally used to convey feeling and emotions, and it seems that all the emotions cannot be fully expressed by only a piece of music. However, as a fast food culture, the videos on *Douyin* are so short that appreciating the music in a superficial way will suffice for the viewers to understand the content of the videos. Moreover, the connotation signification is used to analyze the signified of emotions expressed by the music, which is conducive to building the affective images of Xi’an.

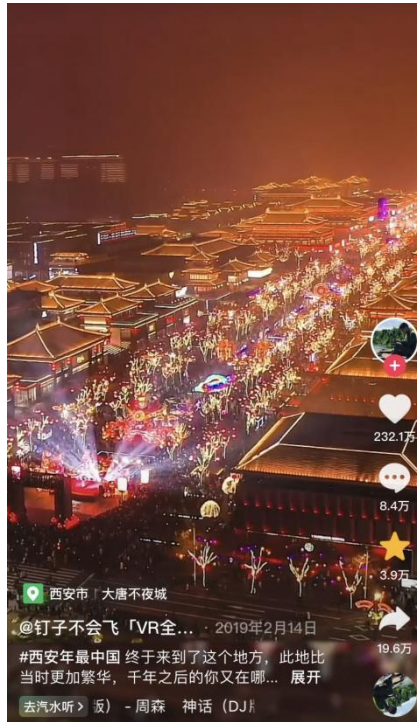


Figure 4.5

Based on the above discussion, both visual symbols and auditory symbols are beneficial for conveying thoughts and transmitting information. Consequently, the *Douyin* users normally make use of both visual and aural symbols in their videos, which contributes remarkably to the construction of Xi'an city tourist cognitive and affective as well as overall images. Besides, both denotation signification and connotation signification are used to analyze the symbols of vision and audition.

#### 4.1.2 Constructing Xi'an City Tourist Image by Creating Particular Genres

According to the school of Media Ecology, different communication technology and media tools may lead to different results of communication in terms of psychology, society, economy, politics and culture (Lin 2007, p. 30). As a highly entertaining and decentralized mobile application that represents popular culture, *Douyin* has a tendency to demonstrate popular culture, enhance entertainment and adhere to decentralization (Kaye, Zeng & Wikström 2022). Therefore, unique Xi'an city tourism images are very likely to be constructed in this media environment with such



characteristics.

In the domain of film, people tend to classify the films on the basis of the genres of films. When some movies have apparent similarities in theme, plot, character types, film scenes, and film techniques, they are usually classified as one category and are referred to as certain genre films. The emergence of the concept of genre films not only makes the audience have a rough understanding of the film in the first stage of its promotion more easily, but also provides technical reference and norms for film producers. In fact, the essence of genre films is a standard for the film production, since the creator of a film must strictly abide by the basic regulations of the film genre designated by the producer, namely, the formulaic plot, stereotypical characters, and graphical visual images. And typical genre films contain comedy film, musical film, Western films and so on (Scheurer 2008).

Like films, the short videos on *Douyin* are also created with audiovisual symbols, and some film creation techniques are also applicable to *Douyin* short videos (Luo 2020, pp. 54-55). Some features of genre films (including formulaic plots, stereotyped characters, graphic visual images) can also be found in *Douyin* short videos, which promotes the construction of Xi'an tourist images in different ways. Admittedly, the typification of short videos on *Douyin* is very different from that of films, because the short videos can never be classified that precisely with the content of so much shorter duration. However, some obvious similarities from the perspective of themes and creating techniques, can still be found in the short videos on *Douyin*. Based on the collected video samples, three main types of short videos are created and they can facilitate the construction of Xi'an city tourist images in different ways.

#### (1) Vlogs

The first short video genre is the vlogs, that is, the highlights of recordings of the video producers' experiences or trips in Xi'an. According to the collected data, vlogs

account for a large proportion of the video samples, and the majority of vlog producers can be regarded as the opinion leaders because of their legions of followers on *Douyin*. They generally record their experiences (they are in front of the camera in most cases) and choose the most representative and unique parts to stitch together to create vlogs. Most importantly, in addition to recording their travel experiences in Xi'an, they mostly also introduce and describe the things they meet and experience, express their thoughts and feelings, give assessments, and provide travel guides about many respects such as eating, accommodation, transportation and tourist attractions in the short videos. Due to time limitations, they have to create vlogs of several seconds to a few minutes, so one shot usually changes very quickly to another one so that more scenes of different aspects can be presented and more ideas can be expressed in the videos. In this way, the fullness and colorfulness of the videos can be enhanced to great extent, and the videos can become more convincing and appealing. Besides, in order to arrest more attention from the viewers, the video producers tend to use a title with certain "rhetorical" words and phrases like "最全攻略 (the most comprehensive travel guides)", "保姆级攻略 (travel guides at babysitter's level, which is a trendy online slang term and means the travel guides are exceedingly practical and detailed). As for the auditory symbols, in addition to the original sounds, the producers often use joyful music as the background music of the videos, creating an enjoyable atmosphere. And all the elements employed in such genre of short videos are instrumental in building Xi'an city tourist images.

Take a short video posted by the *Douyin* user "旅行小游侠" who has over a million followers as an example. Some screenshots of certain scenes in the video are shown in Figure 4.6. The user stitches together a variety of representative scenes (including eating, transportation, tourist spots, etc.) from his recording of his experiences in Xi'an to create this 4-minute-and-43-second short video. In order to attract viewers, the video producer sets the title "十三朝古都西安，最全游玩攻略，吃喝玩乐拍照打卡 (The most comprehensive travel guides for the ancient capital of thirteen

dynasties-Xi'an; having fun), and says “如果你想去西安旅行,那么这份保姆级攻略你可得收藏好 (If you want to travel to Xi'an, you better save this travel guides at babysitter's level)” at the beginning of the video. In the video, he introduces and presents various specialties and tourist destinations including both modern and historic spots such as Asia's largest indoor waterfall in a popular mall, and the Museum of Steles Forest in Xi'an and so on (see the figure below); in the meanwhile, he conveys his feelings and emotions, and gives positive evaluations with the words like “so delicious” and “gorgeous”. And the tourist images of Xi'an are constructed accordingly. Besides, the cheerful background music in the video also contributes to the construction of Xi'an tourist images in terms of affective images.

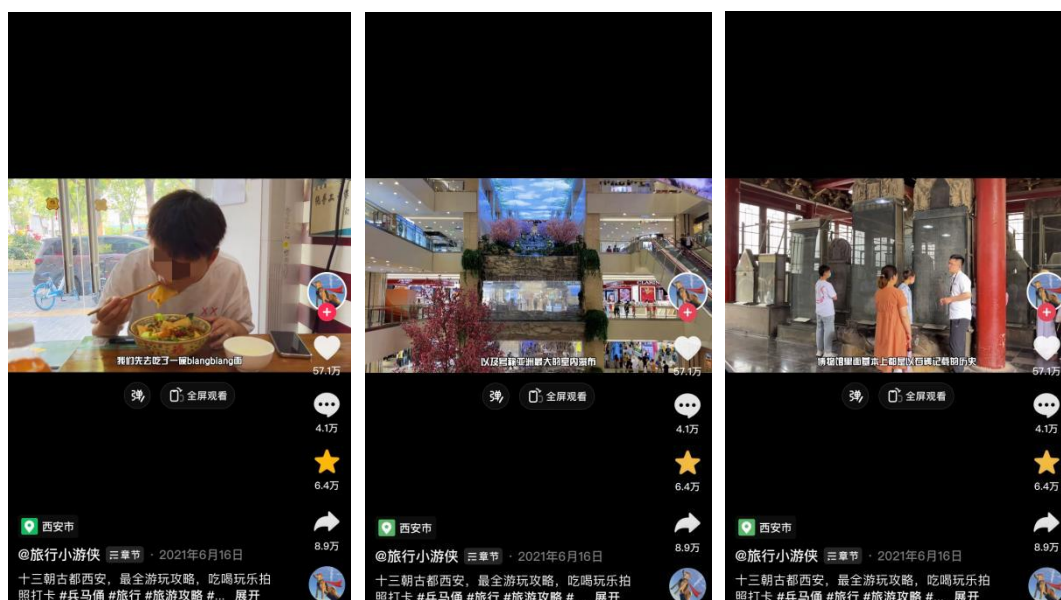


Figure 4.6

## (2) The Explanatory Videos

The second short video genre is the explanatory videos. The video producers are usually provide interpretations on one specific target, such as unique facts and history of certain tourist spot. Thus the video producers of this kind of videos are mostly the professional guides and opinion leaders in other fields such as history, diet culture, etc., and offer explanations in decent, approachable or humorous ways. Moreover, the

scenes of the targets are shown in the videos in a multi-angle mode. Since the explanatory videos are well targeted, the constructed tourist images of Xi'an thanks to these videos are also relatively limited. For example, in a short video posted by the professional tourist guide “冰蛋”, he elaborates on the history, structure and functions of the City Wall of Xi'an, and the City Wall is presented from different angles in the video (see Figure 4.7 below). And in another short video posted by the opinion leader in the field of history and culture “小璐歌”, he mainly tells a unique history of the Small Wild Goose Pagoda cracking three times and self-recovering three times in the six times of earthquakes in the past, and the Small Wild Goose Pagoda is displayed from different angles in the video (see Figure 4.8 below). All in all, although the viewers may have a deeper and better understanding of the particular elements in Xi'an, it is difficult for them to have an overall perception towards Xi'an. In other words, the overall images of Xi'an can barely be constructed through the explanatory videos on *Douyin*.

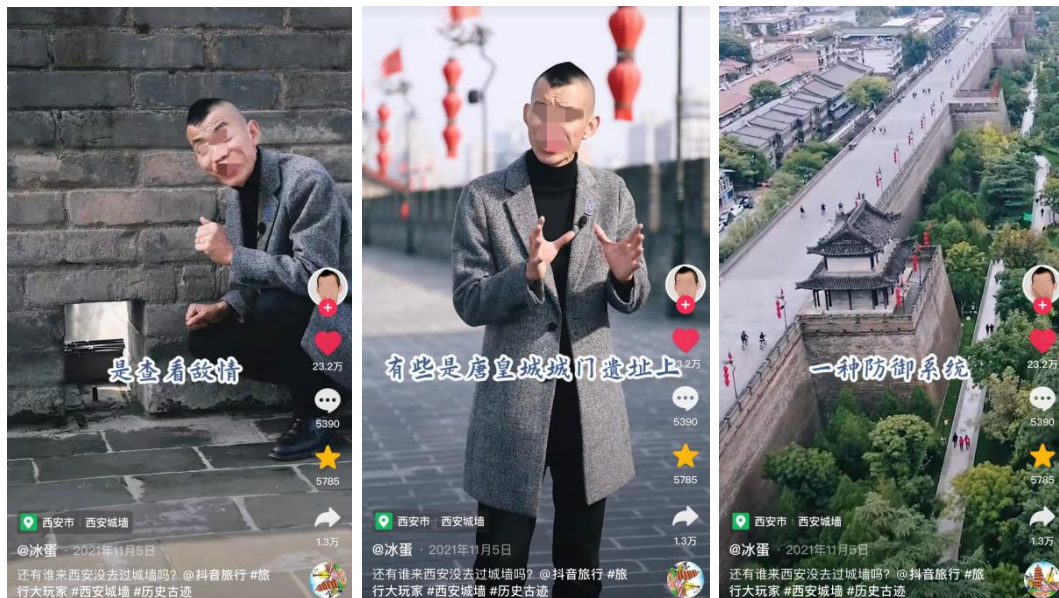


Figure 4.7

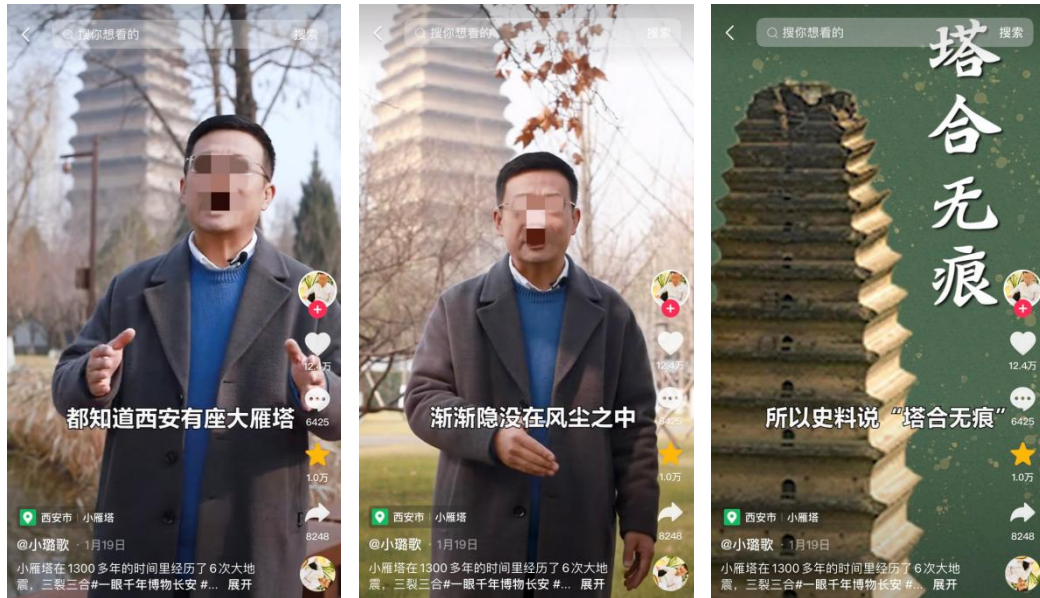


Figure 4.8

### (3) The Documentary Videos

The third short video genre is the documentary videos. The most important feature of this type of short videos on *Douyin* is the objectivity since the video producers just truly and objectively record a scenic spot or an unusual event, with no explanations or other involvements in the videos. For instance, in the short video shown in Figure 4.1, the video producer just uses a 15-second long shot to complete the shooting of this short video, but excellently demonstrates the magnificent and bustling Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City in Xi'an. This short video is a typical documentary short videos: there is no any interventions or interpretations from the video producer, simply recording the subject; the video producer does not appear in the video. Therefore, the transitions between the signifiers and the signifieds in documentary short videos are comparatively direct. And the Xi'an city tourist images constructed by such short videos are relatively authentic and objective. However, owing to the limited amount of information in the documentary short videos, the destination images reflected through the videos cannot be comprehensive.

To sum up, different genres of short videos contribute to building different tourist

images of Xi'an. The vlogs can promote the construction of Xi'an city tourist images including cognitive, affective and overall images to a greater degree mostly because of the fullness and colorfulness of the vlogs, while both explanatory and documentary short videos are instrumental in building destination images of certain aspects due to the relatively limited information in the videos.

#### **4.2 The Characteristic Xi'an City Tourism Images Constructed by *Douyin* Short Videos**

Based on the above discussion and analysis, the Xi'an city tourist images containing cognitive, affective and overall images, as abstract concepts, are represented through concrete forms-the particular short videos on *Douyin*; different audiovisual symbols in different genres of short videos on *Douyin* contribute to building various and unique Xi'an tourist images. According to the definitions and descriptions of destination images, cognitive images refer to the objective embodiments and physical carriers that can be perceived by tourists, while affective images refer to the emotional responses to the objects in the tourist destinations from the tourists (Baloglu & McCleary 1999). And overall images are generally the combination of cognitive and affective images (Papadimitriou, Apostolopoulou & Kaplanidou 2015). Therefore, perceiving the destination images of Xi'an through *Douyin* short videos is on the basis of the objective audiovisual symbols of different genres of short videos as well as the subjective feelings of the viewers namely the potential tourists. Besides, when recording relevant information from the 30 video samples, the most prominent cognitive images and affective images are recorded. For example, when a video producer intends to show certain tourist attraction, there are inevitably some other elements (like the irrelevant buildings behind the attraction) apart from the targeted attraction in the scenes recorded by the producer. In this situation, only this particular attraction is identified and recorded as one of the concrete carriers of cognitive images in this thesis. As for the affective images, the author of this thesis grasps and

understands the emotions of the video producers mainly according to both the objective audio-visual symbols in different types of video samples and the subjective personal perceptions of the author herself because of her dual identities of the research observer and the potential tourist. And only the primary emotions will be identified and recorded as the positive, neutral or negative affective images in this thesis. The main findings are as follows.

#### 4.2.1 Cognitive Images of Xi'an

According to the “*Classification, investigation and evaluation of tourism resources*” of China’s national standard published in the year of 2017, concrete carriers of cognitive images in the short videos are classified into 8 main categories (including 110 basic types), namely, land landscape (including mountains, etc.), waters landscape (including rivers, lakes, etc.), biological landscape (including forest lands, habitats, etc.), astronomical and climatic landscape (including sunsets, etc.), constructions and facilities (including characteristic blocks, train stations, etc.), historical sites (including historic building relics, etc.), tourism shopping (including produce, ceramics, etc.), cultural activities (including local special events, etc.). The numbers of times that the concrete carriers of cognitive images shown in all the video samples are presented in Figure 4.9.

Main Category	Concrete Carriers of Xi'an Cognitive Images	The Number of Times
land landscape	Mount Hua, Mount Li, etc.	7
waters landscape	Xi'an moat, Kunming Pond, Furong Lake, etc.	6
biological landscape	N/A	N/A
astronomical and climatic landscape	evening glow, the hot sun, etc.	6

constructions and facilities	high-speed rail station, the Shaanxi History Museum, bar street, musical fountain, etc.	124
historical sites	the Bell and Drum Tower, Xi'an city wall, the terracotta army of the first emperor of Qin, etc.	83
tourism shopping	specialties like the marinated meat in baked bun, etc.	24
cultural activities	the first large realistic-scene historical stage play in China- "A Song of Everlasting Sorrow", etc.	28

Figure 4.9

On the whole, it can be found that the cognitive images of Xi'an are rich and various: Xi'an cognitive images of every category but "biological landscape" are shown in the short video samples, and the cognitive images of "constructions and facilities" and "historical sites" categories are presented much more times compared with those of other categories. Furthermore, there are usually more than one category's cognitive images recorded in one short video on *Douyin*.

#### 4.2.2 Affective Images of Xi'an

The affective images of Xi'an can be recognized as positive, neutral and negative affective images (Luo 2020, p. 33). As mentioned before, this thesis mainly focuses



on the most prominent emotions and feelings. And the affective orientations are identified in the light of both the audiovisual symbols of the videos (such as certain subjective emotional words in the texts and titles of the short videos, tones, facial expressions and body languages of the video producers, and even the BGM in the videos) as well as the author's personal feelings. Based on the collected data, 25 short videos have positive emotional tendencies, which accounts for around 83.3 percent of the 30 video samples; 3 short videos and 2 short videos show neutral and negative emotional tendencies respectively, occupying 10 percent and about 6.67 percent of the total video samples respectively. Thus it can be seen that the majority of the *Douyin* users who have actually been to Xi'an have a good opinion of Xi'an, which is instrumental in constructing positive affective images of Xi'an and accelerating the transformations of the viewers from potential tourists online to offline tourists.

#### 4.2.3 Overall Images of Xi'an

Based on the collected data, it can be concluded that Xi'an is a wonderful city with beautiful landscapes, a deep historical and cultural foundation, high modernity. And all the characteristics (namely overall images of Xi'an) are identified and perceived by decoding and analyzing audiovisual symbols of the short videos through denotation and connotation significations, with details as follows:

Firstly, the characteristic of the city with beautiful landscapes can be easily understood by employing denotation significations to understand the audiovisual symbols of physical land, waters, astronomical and climatic landscapes in Xi'an. Some representative screenshots of landscapes are shown in Figure 4.10.

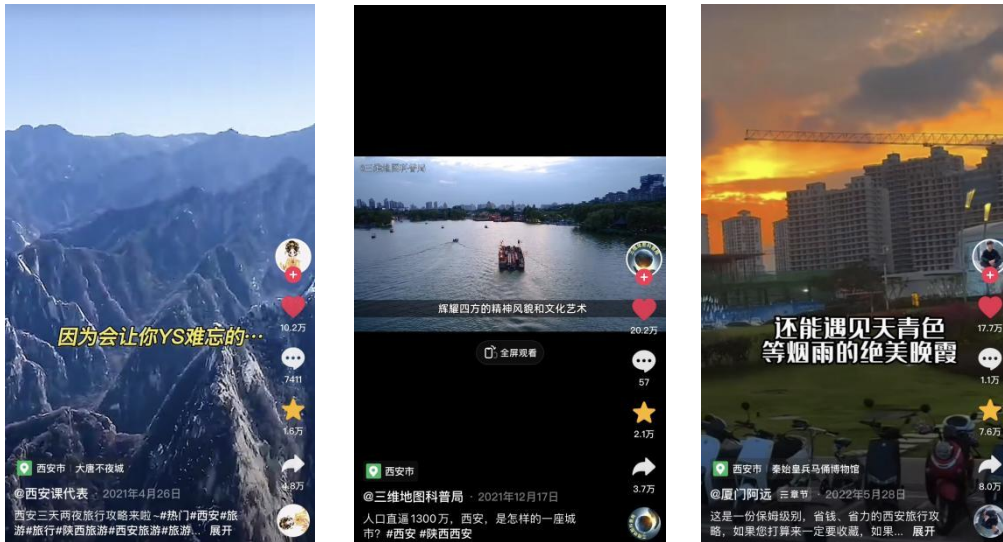
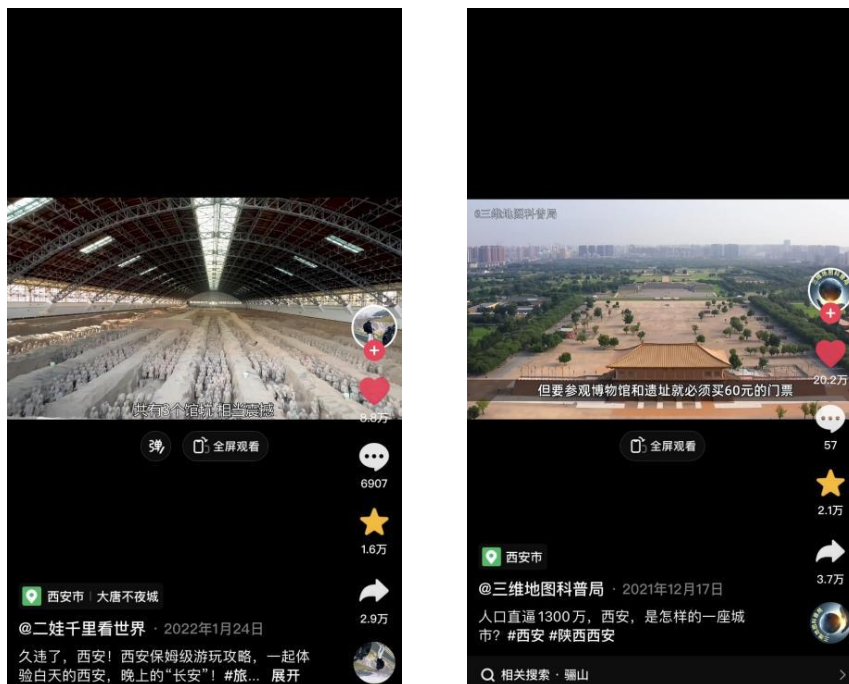


Figure 4.10 (Mount Hua, Furong Lake, sunset glow)

Secondly, the characteristic of the city with a deep historical and cultural foundation can be understood by using denotation and connotation significations to decode audiovisual symbols in the videos. The best proofs of deep historical accumulation are abundant and various historical relics and buildings (Zhao 2015). Take the Qinshihuang's Terracotta Army and Daming Palace site as examples (see Figure 4.11).



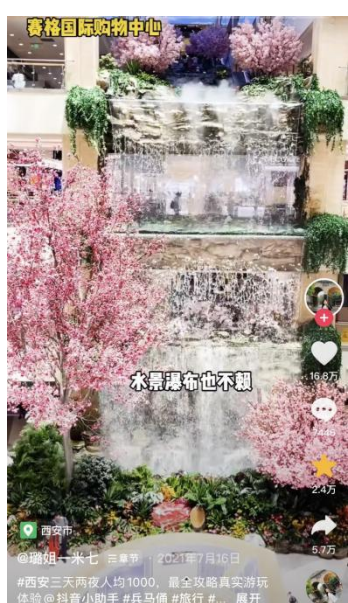
Denotation Signification	Connotation Signification
the Terra Cotta Warriors and Horses of the first emperor of Qin	Xi'an has a long history since the Terracotta Army was built in Qin Dynasty and called "the eighth wonder of the world"...
Daming Palace site	Xi'an has a long history since the Daming Palace was built in Tang Dynasty and was the political center and national symbol of Tang Dynasty...

Figure 4.11

In a word, such historical sites recorded in the videos are perceived as some physical relics and ancient constructions though denotation significations, while the rich cultural connotations behind them need greater attention.

Thirdly, the characteristic of the highly modern city can also be perceived by using denotation and connotation significations to decode audiovisual symbols in the videos. Take four sets of screenshots of some videos as examples (see Figure 4.12).





Denotation Signification	Connotation Signification
many metro lines, buses, high-speed rail station...	Xi'an is highly modern because of convenient traffic conditions in Xi'an.
many bar streets, shopping malls...	Xi'an is highly modern because of a rich variety of entertaining and leisure places in Xi'an.
traditional Han Chinese clothing, modern clothing...	Xi'an is highly modern because of its openness and inclusiveness towards subculture.
escalator, indoor waterfall, stage play...	Xi'an is highly modern because of its innovativeness: the Asia's longest escalator, the world's largest indoor waterfall, and the China's first large realistic-scene historical stage play are in Xi'an.

Figure 4.12

In brief, Xi'an is a highly modernized city thanks to convenient traffic conditions in Xi'an, various recreational and leisure sites in Xi'an, openness and inclusiveness of Xi'an, as well as innovativeness of Xi'an.

### 4.3 The Emergence of Homogenization of the Short Video Content

Since Xi'an city became an internet-famous city, an increasingly number of short videos related to Xi'an have been created. Although a variety of Xi'an city tourist images are constructed by *Douyin* users deploying varied techniques, the trend of homogenization in the process of destination image construction cannot be neglected,

which can be explored from the perspectives of the limited source materials and the users' conformist mentality.

#### 4.3.1 Limited Source Materials Leading to the Homogenization

In terms of the application of audio-visual symbols in the short videos, despite the fact that the *Douyin* users employ the symbols in different ways to create the short videos, the source materials available are relatively limited, which brings about the homogenization of the Xi'an-tourism-related short video content with the number of the related short videos growing so fast. As for the visual symbols, the number of tourism resources is obviously much less than the number of the related short videos on *Douyin*. As a consequence, some scenic spots especially certain Internet-famous tourist attractions, specialties and activities in Xi'an, can be seen in the Xi'an-related short videos made by different *Douyin* users too many times. When it comes to the aural symbols, since the users mostly choose the copyrighted music in the *Douyin* music library as the background music of their newly created videos, their choices of the background music are comparatively limited. Moreover, the users, generally speaking, prefer to choose certain Internet-famous songs as the background music in order to attract more viewers. For instance, the Internet-famous song- “西安人的歌 (The Song of Xi'an People)” appears in four short videos among the thirty collected videos. In short, the limited usable source materials for creating related short videos give rise to the homogenization of *Douyin* short videos related to Xi'an city tourist image building.

#### 4.3.2 Conformist Mentality of *Douyin* Users Leading to Homogenization

In order to gain the same amount of attention as the short videos receiving a lot of “likes”, many users choose to follow suit, so the style and content of some extremely popular short videos can be often imitated by many other *Douyin* users (Zhang 2022).

For example, in the collected sample videos, the video shot by “厦门阿远” is highly similar to the video shot by “旅行小游侠” from the aspects of narrative mode (that is, the same short video genre- vlog) and the specific elements (including some recommended tourist spots and activities, and the order they are presented in the videos) contained in the videos. Thus it can be seen that the conformist mentality of the video producers intensifies the homogenization of the short video content on *Douyin*.

## **5. DISSEMINATION OF XI'AN CITY TOURIST IMAGE ON *DOUYIN***

In order to let more potential tourists watch these videos and perceive the tourist destination images, the dissemination process of the images is also an indispensable stage in addition to the construction process. Therefore, this chapter looks into the dissemination of Xi'an tourism images on *Douyin* based on Lasswell's "5W" theory of communication, namely, "Who says What in Which channel to Whom with What effect" (Lyman 1948, p. 216). And the tendencies of diversification and homogenization are also seen in this process.

### **5.1 Disseminating Xi'an Tourism Images by Communicators with Diverse Identities**

In Lasswell's view, the communicators are accountable for collecting, sorting, selecting, processing, producing and transmitting information in the first phase of information communication process (Lyman 1948). Hence in the dissemination process of Xi'an city tourism images on *Douyin*, the communicators are obviously the users who create and post all the short videos about Xi'an. According to the collected data, the users can be generally divided into two groups: ordinary users and high-level users. The high-level users contain the ones with a yellow or blue tick (the authenticated marks) under the user names in their own homepages (users with the yellow mark are those who have more than 10 thousand followers and submit the certificates in the field of specialization, while users with the blue mark are the institutions that have more than 10 thousand followers and submit certain institution-related materials) (two examples can be seen in Figure 5.1). Moreover, the short videos from the users with authenticated marks are more likely to be spread quickly to more audience. At the same time, some users don't have the marks yet have a large number of followers, such as the user "西安课代表" (who has no marks yet has 400 thousand followers). And the *Douyin* users who have produced the videos of going viral basically have more than 100 thousand followers (Liu 2021, p. 65), so the



users with more than 100 thousand followers are also identified as the high-level users on *Douyin* in this thesis.



Figure 5.1 (the yellow authenticated mark of we media in travel field and the blue authenticated mark of this particular travel company)

In the light of the sample data, there are a total of 27 different users, consisting of 5 ordinary users (the ones having no authenticated marks or more than 100 thousand followers) and 22 high-level users. And among the high-level users, different identities are demonstrated by the authenticated marks, such as the aerial photographer, the tourist guide, we media in the field of finance and economics, etc. Besides, in addition to the authenticated marks, other information shown in the homepages of their own accounts, including their IP addresses (across the country), ages (various age groups) and brief self-introductions (relating to different domains), also represents the diversified identities of communicators.

Moreover, when reviewing the relevant literature, the author also notices another group of communicators on *Douyin*, that is, the official institutions such as the local governments, their tourism bureaus and the administrations of some tourist spots who not only have more tremendous fund strength and technology strength, but also master the latest, the most comprehensive and the most authoritative information about Xi'an tourism. And the author does some searching on *Douyin*, and finds that although their short videos are not on the list of top 30 most popular short videos related to Xi'an tourism due to the insufficient entertaining and interactive aspects, a few official institutions do have an account and upload some short videos made by themselves on *Douyin* (Li 2020). In other words, the official institutions also partly

contribute to the dissemination of Xi'an tourist images by virtue of their solid financial strength and authoritative identity.

## **5.2 Disseminating Xi'an Tourism Images to Social Media Users Through Different Channels**

After completing the production of the short videos, most users tend to post the videos directly on the *Douyin* platform. Then these short videos that can reflect the destination images of Xi'an are disseminated through three different channels to the audience. Firstly, these Xi'an related short videos are pushed to other *Douyin* users by the algorithmic mechanism of *Douyin*. Then, by virtue of the characteristics of *Douyin* as a social media platform, these short videos demonstrating Xi'an tourist images are transmitted to the users of other social media platforms. Finally, after watching the related short videos, some viewers transform their identities from the audience (the viewers) to the communicators (the video producers), and then further disseminate the new short videos that can represent the tourism images of Xi'an to another batch of users on *Douyin*.

To be more specific, first and foremost, the algorithmic mechanism of *Douyin* plays a significant part in the dissemination process of Xi'an tourism images inside the *Douyin* platform. Mainly relying on the algorithmic mechanism, the short videos about Xi'an are pushed to other users. To put it another way, these short videos can reach certain audience to be watched thanks to the algorithmic mechanism of *Douyin*, including three main stages. In the first stage, a newly produced and uploaded short video is pushed to other *Douyin* users who have in part connections with the video producer, such as the users nearby (searched because of the location search function of *Douyin*), their real-life acquaintances (searched from the video producer's phone contacts), and the video producer's followers. In this way, this short video gets a certain amount of referral traffic. And in the second stage if this video is becoming

more popular (like receiving more views, likes, comments and shares) and meeting the standards, the video will get more referral traffic and be watched by more users. In the third stage, the video is manually reviewed more carefully and when it is identified as a video with high quality, it will get much more referral traffic and become a viral video. In addition, thanks to the “DOU+” function on *Douyin*, the short videos can also be pushed to different number of users (from 1500 to 25900 more users) by paying different amount of money (from 30 to 518 yuan) (see Figure 5.2) (Yin 2022). All in all, because of the algorithmic mechanism, the short videos that can show the Xi’an tourism images, are recommended to a different number of users, and the feedback data from the short videos determine the amount of referral traffic that the videos can receive during the interior communication of Xi’an destination images inside the platform.

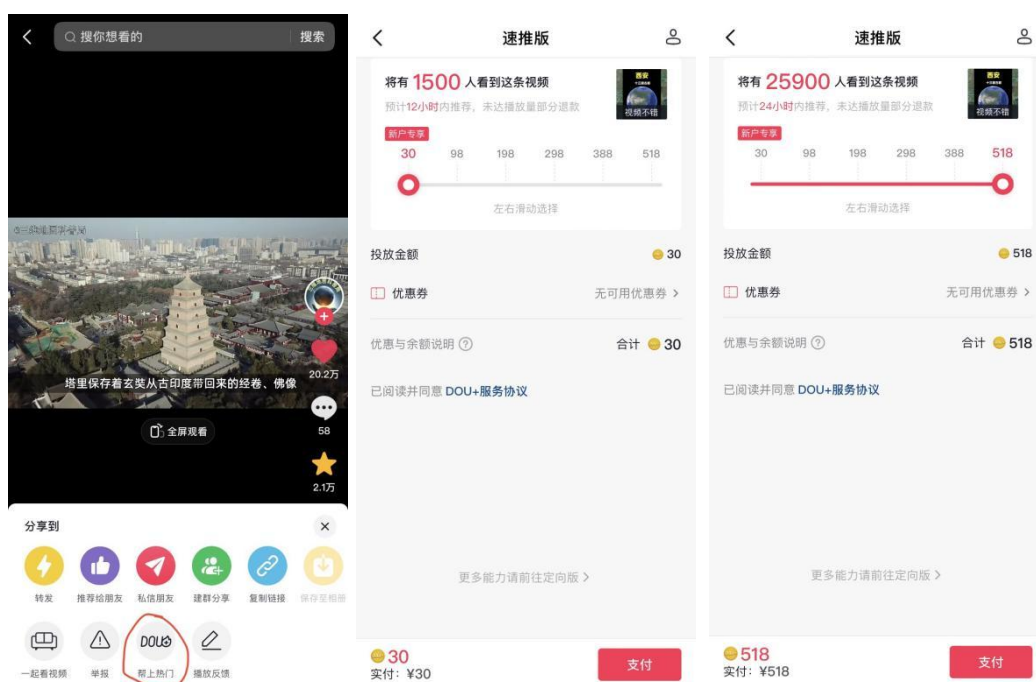


Figure 5.2

In addition to the dissemination inside *Douyin*, the Xi’an city tourism images can be transmitted to people of other social media, which refers to the web 2.0 technology-based online platforms where the users can express their opinions and establish relationships with other users. And text, images, audios, videos and so on are

used to disseminate information on social media. In the context of well-developed Internet and social media, an increasing number of people have multiple identities as the users of various social media. For example, social media users can be video producers and viewers on *Douyin*, daily active users of WeChat and *Weibo*, and the loyal users of *Youku* video websites at the same time. Accordingly, they are in a position to share and transmit what they create or approve of to other social media usually by sharing the video links or the downloaded short videos (see Figure 5.3). And thus the *Douyin* short videos representing Xi'an tourist images are generally shared to social platforms such as WeChat and *Weibo*, and video websites including *Youku* and *iQiyi*. There are three major groups of people who promote the external communication of Xi'an city tourism images. The first group of people are the *Douyin* video producers themselves: they tend to share the short videos created by themselves to other commonly used social platforms in order to realize self-fulfillment and get more attention. The second group of people are the viewers on *Douyin*: when they watch the useful and interesting short videos, they are likely to share those short videos to their friends of other social media. Additionally, there are also some people who intentionally repost the short videos on other social media platforms after removing the information of the original video producer and *Douyin* platform, so as to pretend that the short videos are originally made videos and then get more benefits from them (Gong 2019). In a word, the Xi'an-related short videos on *Douyin* may be shared to many other social media platforms outside of the *Douyin* in three different ways, which is markedly conducive to the further dissemination of Xi'an destination images.

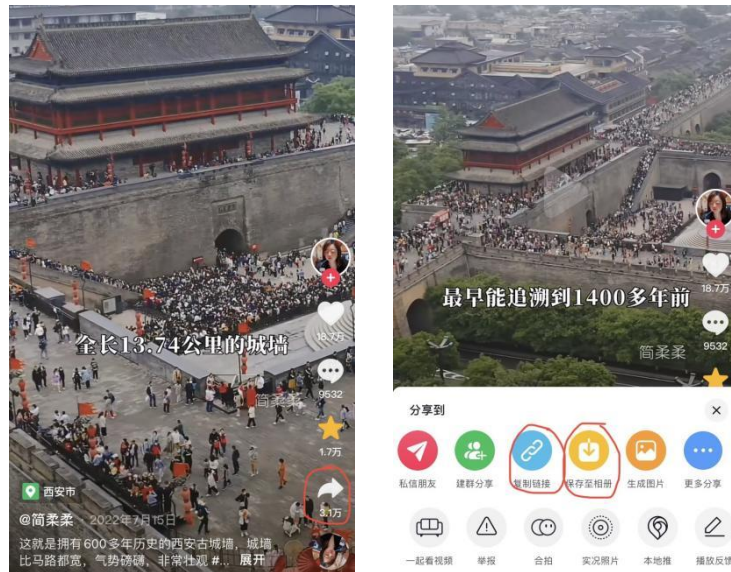


Figure 5.3

After the interior and exterior dissemination of the Xi'an-related short videos on *Douyin*, the Xi'an city tourism images are perceived to a great extent by a lot of audience. However, after watching these short videos one time or a few times, some viewers also have a desire to shoot the relevant videos and participate in the dissemination of Xi'an tourism images. As a result, these people travel to Xi'an in person and then make the short videos showing tourist images of Xi'an, which contributes to a new round of images communication. Take a short video made by “宗冉冉” as an example. The title of this short video is “来西安不要扎堆人多的地方，游玩的正确打开方式请收好 (Do not simply cluster in the most popular and crowded tourist attractions in Xi'an; please save this different travel guide and visit Xi'an in better ways)”, so this short video presents a new travel guide which is different from the previous travel guides in *Douyin* short videos. In this particular video, the video producer shows numerous unusual yet well worth visiting places in Xi'an. Thus it can be seen that the numerous *Douyin* short videos about travel guides of Xi'an arouse the interest of this video producer, so that he has a desire to make this relevant but distinctive travel guide short video and then upload it to *Douyin*, which is pushed to another batch of viewers on *Douyin* and other social media platforms. In this way, the dissemination of Xi'an tourism images is further facilitated.

To sum up, the city tourism images of Xi'an can be disseminated through three different channels. In the first place, based on the algorithmic mechanism of *Douyin*, the Xi'an-related short videos are pushed to a certain amount of *Douyin* users, so that the Xi'an city tourism images are perceived by the viewers on *Douyin* and thus the internal dissemination of the images is achieved. Besides, the destination images of Xi'an can also be transmitted to the users of other social media since three groups of people (the video producers and the viewers on *Douyin*, and those who take the short videos as their own originally-made videos in order to get more benefits) are likely to share the *Douyin* short videos reflecting Xi'an tourist images to other social media including some popular social platforms such as WeChat and video websites such as *Youku*. In other words, the external communication of the images is accomplished. Eventually, after these short videos being watched by more social media users and the Xi'an tourism images being perceived by more audience, some people may get inspired by the videos to participate in the images communication. Hence they travel to Xi'an to collect the relevant source material, and then make their own short videos; when these new short videos are uploaded to *Douyin*, a new round of images dissemination process starts and the Xi'an tourism images are further disseminated.

### **5.3 Disseminating Xi'an Tourism Images with Positive Effects**

In Lasswell's view, communication effects refer to the psychological, attitudinal and behavioral changes of the audience after the communication activities (Lyman 1948). In terms of the dissemination of Xi'an city tourism images through *Douyin* short videos, the effects are thus the viewers' perception of Xi'an tourism images and their psychological, attitudinal and behavioral changes after watching the related short videos, which can be manifested more easily in the comments section on *Douyin* short videos. According to the collected sample data, the comments of these short videos can be principally divided into three types.

The first kind of comments can be considered as commendatory comments which convey the viewers' appreciation and endorsement of the content of particular short videos, such as "Following Bingdan (a video producer), I have learned so much history", and "I, as a local person, also think this travel guide is amazing" (see Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4

The next kind of comments are attitudinal comments which express the viewers' intentions to visit Xi'an someday, such as "The first city that I am keen to visit after the pandemic is Xi'an", and "I must go to Xi'an someday" (see Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5

And the last kind of comments are informational comments which include the specific questions from the potential tourists and suggestions from users who have already been to Xi'an, such as “How much is the guide fee for the Terracotta Army?”, and “People from other cities must go visit the Forest of Steles and the Shuyuan Gate in Xi'an; I, as a local person, strongly recommend these two wonderful places”. And obviously, there are more communications and interactions between the users under such kind of comments (see Figure 5.6).



Figure 5.6



On the whole, the dissemination of Xi'an city tourist images on *Douyin* demonstrates positive effects according to the three major kinds of comments containing the commendatory comments, the attitudinal comments as well as the informational comments, which can indicate that the Xi'an-related short videos on *Douyin* do contribute significantly to the dissemination of Xi'an destination images.

#### **5.4 The Intensification of Homogenization of the Short Video Content**

During the dissemination process of Xi'an city tourist images, *Douyin's* algorithmic mechanism of giving referral traffic to the videos based on their popularity, is the reason why the content of short videos tends to be homogeneous. Because of the algorithmic mechanism, the videos uploaded by the high-level users are more likely to be pushed to more users and then get more attention, while the videos shot by many other ordinary users who may have different narrative modes and content, can only get less attention (Yin 2022). As a result, the enthusiasm and motivation of these ordinary users are gradually reduced, which also exacerbates the homogeneity of the videos' content.

Additionally, owing to *Douyin's* algorithmic mechanism of "personalized recommendation", the system will keep pushing the short videos in the same fields that the users are seemingly interested in to the users. More specifically, the short videos are usually assigned distinct labels of relevant specific topics by *Douyin*. At the same time, *Douyin* also records the data of users behaviors on *Douyin* such as searching, liking and sharing, and then collects and stores the data in its database, so as to find out their interests and preferences. Eventually, *Douyin* is in a position to recommend more relevant short videos to the users (Wang 2021, p. 50). In this way, the aesthetic fatigue of Xi'an-related short videos on *Douyin* is easily produced (Zhang 2022). In other words, after watching the videos with homogeneous content

about Xi'an tourism for a long time, the viewers may be no longer willing to watch such short videos or even get sick of Xi'an-related short videos, which is certainly adverse to the dissemination of Xi'an city tourism images.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This thesis investigates how short videos on the short-video sharing application *Douyin* make a difference to the construction and dissemination of city tourism images, taking the Internet-famous city in China-Xi'an city as a case study. Two opposing trends are reflected in the image construction and dissemination processes: diversification and homogenization. In terms of diversification, the important findings are as follows: (1) different kinds of visual symbols (that is, very few shots and more shots-adopting montage technique) and auditory symbols (that is, original sounds and background music) are deployed to create the related short videos of three different genres (namely, vlogs, explanatory videos and documentary videos) so as to promote the construction of Xi'an city tourist images, which represents Xi'an city as a wonderful tourist destination city because of its gorgeous landscapes, deep historical and cultural accumulation, and high modernity; (2) the communicators with diverse identities (individuals, enterprises, official institutions, etc.) are in a position to disseminate the Xi'an city tourism images represented on *Douyin*, through three channels including the dissemination inside *Douyin* relying on *Douyin*'s algorithmic mechanism, the dissemination outside of *Douyin* to other social media (mostly by sharing), further dissemination by viewers who intend to make distinctive videos and upload to *Douyin* so that they can also get involved in the dissemination process, with positive effects on *Douyin* according to the positive comments in the comments section of the collected short videos.

With regard to homogenization, the limited tourist resources in Xi'an city and the limited BGM choices in *Douyin* music library, as well as the conformity and imitation of psychology of the users, cause the homogenization of the related short videos' content; from the angle of algorithmic mechanism in the image dissemination process, the constant recommendation of the short videos made by certain group of users can discourage more users from creating videos in other different ways, and thus aggravate the homogenization of short video content.

By and large, this study provides some implications in terms of the employed theories and study perspectives for future studies relating to the construction and dissemination of city tourist images through short videos. And future researchers could replicate this study in different contexts, collecting richer data and employing certain analytical software to gain more objective analysis.

**Appendix: 30 collected video samples**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Subject Attributes</b> (user name; Douyin ID number; authenticated mark; the number of followers)	<b>Content Attributes</b> (title; summary content)	<b>Presentation Form</b> (screen mode; duration; background music; language; captions)	<b>Feedback</b> (the number of liking times; the number of commenting times; the number of adding to favorites times; the number of sharing times)
1	钉子不会飞「VR全景」; dingzi2022; yellow authenticated mark of the aerial photographer; 433k	“终于来到了这个地方，此地比当时更加繁华，千年之后的你又在哪儿？ (Finally, I have arrived at this place, which is even more bustling than before. Where are you after a thousand years?)”; showing Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City’s night scene	portrait mode; 15s; Endless Love; N/A; N/A	2321k; 84k; 39k; 196k
2	旅行小游侠; lxxiaoyouxia; yellow	“十三朝古都西安，最全游玩攻略，吃喝玩乐拍照打卡 (The most comprehensive travel	landscape mode; 4min43s;	570k; 41k; 64k;

	authenticated of we media in travel field; 1369k	guides for the ancient capital of thirteen dynasties-Xi'an; having fun"); introducing and presenting various Internet-famous specialties and tourist destinations	absolute music & Endless Love; Mandarin Chinese; available	89k
3	阿跪的幸福生活; guigeguige; yellow authenticated mark of we media in financial field; 5521k	“西安除了旅游别的还有啥? (What else does Xi'an city have?)”; introducing resources of military, aerospace, technology and education in Xi'an apart from abundant tourism resources	portrait mode; 1min5s; N/A; Mandarin Chinese; available	325k; 19k; 12k; 23k
4	洪同学放假不写题; 68222878568; N/A; 39k	“请大数据推送给想去西安旅游的同学, 这条保姆级避雷攻略能帮你避大坑 (Please recommend this video to those who want to travel to Xi'an, because the travel guides at babysitter's level in this video are super helpful)”; presenting eight useful travel guides from aspects of attractions, specialties, transportation, etc.	landscape mode; 1min50s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	249k; 22k; 122k; 72k
5	小贝饿了;	“凌晨 2 点吃回民街宵夜, 麻	landscape	247k;

	xiaobeiele; yellow authenticated mark of fashionable recommender; 18450k	酱焖豆皮, 孜然炒肉夹馍, 西红柿鸡蛋汤, 3 绝! (Eating the midnight snacks, such as braised tofu skin with sesame paste, buns stuffed with minced fried meat with cumin, tomato and egg soup, at the Muslim Snack Street at 2am, I feel so good!); showing specialties of Xi'an	mode; 4min59s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese & Shaanxi dialect; available	14k; 2.714k; 42k
6	小黑诸鸣; hangzhoudaoyou; yellow authenticated mark of tourist guide; 12659k	“西安旅游攻略来了! (Here comes the travel guide of Xi'an!); talking about the practical and detailed travel guides of Xi'an	portrait mode; 4min14s; N/A; Mandarin Chinese; available	232k; 14k; 22k; 47k
7	冰蛋; bingdan88888; yellow authenticated mark of we media in travel field; 8364k	“还有谁来西安没去过城墙吗? (Is there anyone who didn't visit the City Wall when traveling to Xi'an?); introducing the construction history and various functions in the past and nowadays of the City Wall in Xi'an	portrait mode; 5min13s; Song of Xi'an People; Mandarin Chinese & Shaanxi dialect; available	232k; 5.38k; 5.725k; 13k
8	三维地图科普 局;	“人口直逼 1300 万, 西安, 是怎样的一座城市? (What	landscape mode;	202k; 0.056k;

	dyibyaavgbyj; N/A; 2323k	kind of city is Xi'an with a population of nearly 13 million?); presenting Xi'an city's drainage map, traffic distribution of freeway and subway, urban layout, landmark buildings, etc.	6min40s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	21k; 37k
9	西安课代表; xakedaibiao; N/A; 400k	“西安满大街都是穿汉服的人吗？ (Are there people wearing Han costumes all over the Xi'an city?); reflecting the openness and inclusiveness towards subculture in Xi'an	portrait mode; 51s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	196k; 10k; 1.038k; 4.13k
10	宗冉冉 Mos; FridayFighting; N/A; 225k	“来西安不要扎堆人多的地方，游玩的正确打开方式请收好 (Do not simply cluster in the most popular and crowded tourist attractions in Xi'an; please save this different travel guide and visit Xi'an in better ways); showing numerous unusual yet well worth visiting places in Xi'an	landscape mode; 47s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	189k; 9.277k; 19k; 29k
11	简柔柔; sycfilm; N/A; 1001k	"这就是拥有 600 多年历史的西安古城墙，城墙比马路都宽，气势磅礴，非常壮观 (This is the Xi'an ancient City Wall	portrait mode; 31s; absolute music;	187k; 9.523k; 17k; 30k



		with a history of more than 600 years; the City Wall is magnificent, and even wider than the road); introducing the history, construction and meaning of the City Wall in Xi'an	Mandarin Chinese; available	
12	厦门阿远; GLY20218888; yellow authenticated of we media in travel field; 3391K	“这是一份保姆级别，省钱、省力的西安旅行攻略，如果您打算来一定要收藏，如果您来不了，看完这个视频也相当于来过西安了。(This is a money- and energy-saving travel guide of Xi'an at babysitter's level; please save it if you plan on visiting Xi'an; if you cannot come here, this video will impress you.)”; explaining the guides about specialties, tourist attractions, malls, cultural activities, etc.	portrait mode; 4min17s; Song of Xi'an People; Mandarin Chinese; available	172k; 10k; 73k; 77k
13	璐姐一米七; lylujie001; N/A; 580k	“西安三天两夜人均 1000，最全攻略真实游玩体验 (The three-day-two-night journey in Xi'an costs 1000 yuan per head; the most comprehensive travel guide with real experience)”; showing local food, tourist attractions, transportation... in	portrait mode; 4min21s; absolute music & Song of Xi'an People; Mandarin Chinese; available	166k; 7.346k; 23k; 56k

		Xi'an		
14	我是大琪琪; Gurnee; N/A; 18k	“去西安最实用的攻略，一定要听我说完 (This is the most practical travel guides to Xi'an so you better hear me out)”; introducing the attractions worth visiting and offering relevant tips about traveling to Xi'an	portrait mode; 2min41s; N/A; Mandarin Chinese; available	166k; 18k; 92k; 79k
15	西安大乔; my063; N/A; 1763k	“来西安，这四个夜景值得打卡! (These four night scenes of Xi'an are well worth visiting!)”; introducing four great places worth visiting at night	portrait mode; 59s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	136k; 0.101k; 28k; 35k
16	小黑诸鸣; hangzhoudaoyo u; yellow authenticated mark of tourist guide; 12659k	“同样是古都，杭州和西安的区别 (Both Hangzhou and Xi'an being the ancient capital, what is the difference between them)”; talking about the fact that Xi'an sometimes destroys the historical sites for subway construction	portrait mode; 51s; N/A; Mandarin Chinese; available	135k; 21k; 0.681k; 1.157k
17	小璐歌; xiaoluge_ttkx; N/A; 5492k	“小雁塔在 1300 多年的时间里经历了 6 次大地震，三裂三合 (The Small Wild Goose Pagoda cracked three times and	portrait mode; 6min45s; absolute music;	122k; 6.338k; 9.84k; 8.136k

		self-recovered three times in the six times of earthquakes during the period of more than 1300 years”); telling a unique history of the Small Wild Goose Pagoda cracking three times and self-recovering three times in the six times of earthquakes in the past	Mandarin Chinese; available	
18	西安课代表; xakedaibiao; N/A; 400k	“西安三天两夜旅行攻略来啦~ (Here comes the travel guide for the three-day-two-night journey in Xi’an~)”; showing local cuisine, scenic spots, cultural activities, transportation... in Xi’an	portrait mode; 1min55s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	102k; 7.377k; 16k; 48k
19	二娃千里看世界; 2133061286; yellow authenticated of we media in travel field; 4008k	“久违了，西安！西安保姆级游玩攻略，一起体验白天的西安，晚上的“长安”！ (Having not seen Xi’an for so long! Here comes the travel guide at babysitter’s level; let us experience different kinds of scenery during the day and night in this amazing city together!)”; showing a variety of places during the day and night	landscape mode; 1min25s; Song of Xi’an People; Mandarin Chinese; available	88k; 6.89k; 16k; 29k

20	陈平商业智慧; 75786181726; N/A; 21K	“真的忍不住要赞美西安，它干的这四件事，你不得不服！(I could not help praising Xi’an, because of the four things it has done!)”; talking about four strategies Xi’an has employed, related to new energy resources, <i>Douyin</i> (which is utilized to build and communicate Xi’an city image), cultural resources, heavy manufacturing industry	portrait mode; 2min35s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	70k; 6.386k; 9.565k; 22k
21	西安课代表; xakedaibiao; N/A; 400k	“西安的商场，您去过几个？那个可以排进前三呢？(How many shopping malls have you been to? Which ones are the top three?)”; introducing several popular shopping malls in Xi’an city	portrait mode; 1min4s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	69k; 4.134k; 5.792k; 5.616k
22	西安生活宝典; xian2021108; N/A; 30k	“西安到底有多大？没对比就没有(.....)自行填充 (How big is the city of Xi’an? The contrasts with other cities are so distinct)”; making contrast of Xi’an city area with other cities and finding Xi’an city is very big	landscape mode; 28s; Song of Xi’an People; Mandarin Chinese; available	67k; 2.516k; 4.852k; 18k
23	西安康辉总社 (旅游攻略);	“来西安旅游，本地人告诉你应该如何玩，这些免费景点你	portrait mode; 26s;	67k; 2.783k;

	Xiankanghui; blue authenticated mark of China Kanghui Xi'an International Travel Agency LLC; 62k	一定要打卡，不去一定后悔，这篇攻略一定要保存好 (As local people, we strongly recommend these free tourist attractions in Xi'an to you; you must go visit these places so make sure you save this travel guide)”; recommending five free attractions in Xi'an that local people love to visit	absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	46k; 36k
24	老聂拍陕西(每晚 7 点直播); laoniepaixian; N/A; 3683k	“西安连降大雨，温度从 42°暴跌至 18°，能把人冻死! (The heavy rain keeps falling in Xi'an, and the temperature decreases from 42°to 18°; people feel hard to adapt to such kind of climate these days in Xi'an!)”; complaining about the unstable climate of Xi'an in summer days in a dramatic way	portrait mode; 1min1s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	67k; 7.61k; 5.702k; 38k
25	娱圈小星星; 42704022042; N/A; 318k	“西安算是把旅游玩明白了，春晚没你俩我可不看 (Xi'an is now really good at dealing with tourism resources; these two actors' performance is absolutely superb)”; presenting the quiz show of two	landscape mode; 3min45s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese;	67k; 6.942k; 6.108k; 48k

		actors (taking place at the Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City in Xi'an) of talking about China's traditional culture in a humorous and interactive way	available	
26	长安范儿—— 人文地理; CHANGANFA NER; N/A; 8060k	“过年去哪里玩？来西安，感受纯正的年味！（Where are you going during the Spring Festival? Come to Xi'an to feel the strong flavour of the Spring Festival!）”; recommending the places to live, eat, visit and have fun, and offering tips about many aspects of traveling to Xi'an	landscape mode; 3min57s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	65k; 6.086k; 23k; 35k
27	娱乐拌饭酱; Liyz1689; yellow authenticated mark of we media of entertainment video; 1346k	“西安大唐不夜城这个节目我能听一晚上，真漫才再就业！（This particular programme at Xi'an Grand Tang Dynasty Ever-bright City is wonderful!）”; presenting the quiz show of talking about China's traditional culture in a humorous and interactive way	landscape mode; 2min38s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	65k; 7.585k; 3.536k; 66k
28	佳在西安; joageha; N/A;	“带 TA 来西安，收货甜甜的爱情，然后就结婚吧 (Bring your girlfriend or boyfriend to Xi'an,	portrait mode; 27s; absolute	64k; 4.575k; 3.267k;

	1060k	feeling the sweet love and getting ready for the marriage)”; introducing some tourist destinations suitable for couples visiting, and then describing certain romantic things the couples can do when they come to those places	music; Mandarin Chinese; available	6.756k
29	这里最中国; 80688153799; N/A; 190k	“西安最值得去的十三个景区, 打卡十个以上才算没白来西安 ..... (Top thirteen scenic spots in Xi’an; you better visit at least ten of them when visiting Xi’an...)”; introducing 13 tourist destinations well worth visiting in Xi’an	portrait mode; 34s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	63k; 4.592k; 34k; 34k
30	橙歌; Cgfacai; N/A; 13k	“总要来趟西安吧 (You have got to come to Xi’an someday)”; presenting the wonderful and unique experiences one can have in several tourist places in Xi’an	landscape mode; 9s; absolute music; Mandarin Chinese; available	52k; 5.681k; 1.973k; 6.125k

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