

# ***The Construction Path of City Image in Douyin Short Videos Based on Grounded Theory: A Case Study of Jingdezhen Tourism Explosion***

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**Abstract.** In the era of digital communication, content generated by social media users has become the core carrier of urban image construction to a certain extent. This study takes Jingdezhen, the "porcelain capital," as the case, follows the research paradigm of the classic grounded theory, and systematically codes and analyzes the city image of Jingdezhen and its construction process in the short video media according to the Jingdezhen themed short videos and their associated texts generated by popular users on Douyin platform. The study finds that the image of Jingdezhen on Douyin is a set of compound image results jointly produced by multiple constructors, based on platform logic and user psychology, through systematic discourse strategies, which deeply reveals how short video media constructs the contemporary image of a city. In the process of research, it further reveals the rules of content production under the influence of platform algorithm and users, and shows the closed-loop process of dynamic circular construction from construction to audience feedback and then to construction.

**Keywords:** City image, Jingdezhen, Short video.

## **1. Introduction**

In the context of the integration of culture and tourism, short videos play a particularly significant role in enabling the image of urban tourism, and have given rise to many phenomena of Internet celebrity cities. On the eve of National Day in 2025, Douyin has brought high popularity to Jingdezhen tourism with its algorithm recommendation and content dissemination characteristics. In Douyin short videos, the communication contents such as Jingdezhen "chicken cutlet Brother", the expression of "Silent Buddha" in the Imperial Kiln Museum, and the experience of intangible cultural heritage pottery making are in the form of short videos that adapt to the aesthetics of young users. Among them, the search volume of the keyword "Jingdezhen ceramics" on Douyin increased by 400% due to the popularity of communication, and the search volume related to China Ceramics Museum increased by more than 284% year on year [1]. Driven by the spread of Douyin, the number of Douyin group purchase orders in Jingdezhen increased by 83% year on year, among which hotel tourism cancellation orders increased by 113%, scenic spot ticket orders increased by

101%, and accommodation orders increased by 111%, which fully verified the transformation of communication heat to consumption power [1].

In the typical case of Jingdezhen fire explosion, the visualization process of hand-made ceramics in short videos and the presentation of personal ceramic works by platform users are different from the traditional logic of city image communication, but relevant studies have not paid full attention to this [2]. Most of the existing research on Jingdezhen focuses on the ceramic industry and its modernization transformation, the historical context of Jingdezhen ceramic culture, material cultural heritage and artistic value, but lacks the cultural tourism communication and urban image expression of Jingdezhen in the context of new media.

Therefore, based on the grounded theory, this paper systematically analyzes how Douyin affects the construction of the city image of Jingdezhen through the platform short video narrative and user participation, and puts forward the problem of the construction of the city image of Jingdezhen in the short video platform, so as to promote the research and analysis of the construction of the city image in the new media era.

## 2. City image construction: from architecture to short video

The theoretical context of urban image construction can be traced back to the research stage of environmental psychology and urban planning in the mid-20th century. In 1960, Kevin Lynch proposed the five elements of "urban image," emphasizing that urban image is a spatial cognitive structure formed by individual perception [3]. This perspective lays the cognitive foundation for the study of city image, making the city no longer just a collection of physical space, but a symbolic existence in people's mental map. Jane Jacobs emphasized that people's activities and exchanges need to be supported in urban infrastructure and environment [4]. Since then, many foreign scholars have expanded their research direction from the fields of architecture, urban design and visual cognition, focusing on the role of buildings, landmarks, visual recognition systems and other elements in image formation [5,6].

In China, the study of urban image was also initially rooted in the field of urban planning. Subsequently, Chinese scholars applied and tested Kevin Lynch's urban image theory in a wide range of localization [7]. Some scholars focused on cities with profound historical background such as Beijing and Shanghai, and deeply discussed the form and spatial structure of China's unique historical and cultural blocks on the basis of urban image theory [8]. At the same time, in the field of tourism research, some scholars have systematically conducted pioneering empirical analysis and theoretical reflection on the image positioning and communication strategies of classic domestic tourism cities [9].

In the 21st century, with the intensification of globalization and urban competition, the perspective of the discipline has expanded to communication, sociology and marketing. "City image" has also greatly expanded from the theoretical stage to the practical stage, and different scholars have proposed to build a positive image of the city from the aspects of cultural identity, heritage protection, television publicity and so on [10]. At this stage, the city image not only reflects the external perception of the city, but also reflects the city's competitiveness, cultural soft power and residents' identity. With the rise of new media technology and social platforms, represented by the booming development of short video platforms such as Douyin, Instagram and Tiktok, studies on the interactive relationship between short video and urban image construction have emerged in an endless stream. These studies jointly reveal a new communication paradigm with short videos shaping urban image and displaying urban culture as the core, emphasizing the key role of visual and emotional content in activating local charm and shaping contemporary urban image [11].

However, there is still a lack of technical logic such as algorithm recommendation and social communication to systematically promote the evolution of a specific city from a physical space to a phenomenal "Internet celebrity" city.

### 3. Research design

In view of the exploratory nature of the research problem in this paper, standardized qualitative research methods will be adopted to conduct in-depth research on Douyin short video platform, in order to obtain theoretical construction rooted in practice. The grounded theory is considered to be the most suitable qualitative research methodology to generate theories from empirical data. The research process consisted of three core steps, which are explained below.

#### 3.1. Data collection

Purposive sampling was first conducted in this study. The researcher selected short videos with "Jingdezhen" as the theme and high interaction volume (likes, comments and reposts) on Douyin platform as the initial research samples. With the gradual emergence of core categories in the research, the research has moved to the stage of theoretical sampling in order to enrich theoretical attributes and verify category relationships. Based on this, the researcher selected different types of content (such as in-depth humanistic documentary Vlog, local "prose" video, merchants' ceramic art display video, etc.) as comparison samples to ensure the diversity of the samples in terms of content and creative subjects, and meet the requirements of grounded theory for theoretical saturation. The forms of data collection include: video ontology data of public data such as title, copy, duration, number of likes, number of comments, number of reposts and heat rating of sample videos; Record and organize the visual content, video background music (BGM), video dubbing and dubbing emotion in the video; At the same time, in-video texts with human voices or with subtitles were collected to further analyze the discourse strategies of content production. Finally, a total of 41 representative high-popularity video samples were collected and analyzed in this study, and about 310 video content texts were transcribed and sorted out, together with 41 hot review texts, which constituted the core database of this study.

#### 3.2. Data processing

The data processing strictly followed the coding procedures of the classical grounded theory. First, open coding is carried out. The researcher labeled all the text data word by word, conceptualized and summarized the phenomenon with an open attitude, and obtained a total of 351 initial codes (first-level codes). Subsequently, through continuous comparison, the initial codes with similar meanings are clustered to form 33 focusing codes (second-level codes) at a higher level of abstraction, as shown in Table 1. With the emergence of core categories, the research entered the stage of selective coding. At this stage, the researcher systematically analyzed the internal connections between all levels of coding, and finally further summarized and integrated the focused coding into five core categories (three-level coding) that could dominate all other categories, as shown in Table 1. After determining that the core categories have reached theoretical saturation, the research enters the stage of theoretical construction. Since at this stage, the core category had a dialogue with the relevant theories of urban image theory and media theory, a literature review was conducted to provide more solid support for these concepts at the theoretical level and lay a foundation for the final theoretical

construction. When important concepts appear later, the "secondary code name" in the table will be used instead.

Table 1. Second-level coding and third-level coding

Third-level coding	Number	Second-level coding	Third-level coding	Number	Second-level coding
Subject of construction	A	Young customers and identity	Strategy of discourse	R	Low threshold and high sense of achievement
	B	Cultural confidence and identity		S	Aestheticized commercial space
	C	Clear identification of tourist destinations		T	Warmth and life narrative
	D	Romanticized urban identity		U	Food experience and social currency
	E	Character IP and emotional value		V	Achievement display and consumption satisfaction
	F	A sense of exploration and expectation		W	Intense emotional experience
	G	Goal-driven tourism behavior		X	Leisure and slow lifestyle
Preset cognition	H	High loyalty and willingness to revisit	Image results	Y	Convenient and friendly service facilities
	I	A mindset of acceptance and inclusion		Z	Convenient and friendly service facilities
	J	Simplicity and anti-Internet celebrity		A1	Dynamic update and trend sense
	K	The attraction of ceramic art		B1	Traditional crafts and modern aesthetic integration
	L	Hierarchy and critique of consumption space		C1	Beautiful natural and urban environment
Strategy of discourse	M	Personalized artistic creation	Feedback from the Audience	D1	Marveling at the craftsmanship
	N	Cost-effective and immersive experience		E1	The emotional connection and healing of art
	O	The joy of the creative process		F1	The irresistible pull of consumption
	P	Flow states and deep immersion		G1	The infiltration of urban cultural symbols
	Q	Community sense and collective creative atmosphere			

### 3.3. Theoretical construction

In this final stage, the researcher conducted theoretical coding according to the five core categories and their internal correlations identified in the selective coding. Based on the three-level coding

results of grounded theory and combined with specific video cases, the complete logical chain of the interaction of the five core links in the construction of the city image of Jingdezhen in the Douyin short video platform is sorted out, as shown in Figure 1. This chain reveals the dynamic construction process of the city image of Jingdezhen from production to consumption and then to reproduction, which is specifically reflected in the fact that the construction subject forms the image construction result of Jingdezhen city in Douyin through the adoption of discourse strategy based on preset cognition, triggering audience feedback and further influencing the construction subject. After the construction of the theoretical model, the author once again puts it in the academic literature related to city brand and city image for dialogue and test, so that the theoretical model can be positioned in the academic context and become saturated.

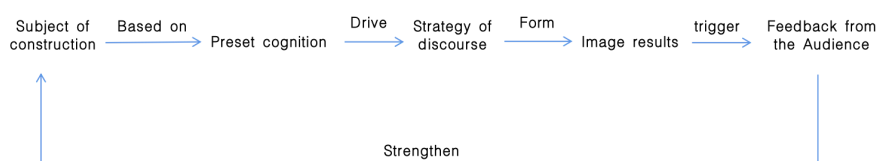


Figure 1. Construction chain of Jingdezhen's city image on Douyin platform

## 4. Construction of Jingdezhen city image under Douyin short videos

### 4.1. Diversified construction subjects

The construction of the city image of Jingdezhen is not driven by a single subject, but a production process completed by the cooperation of multiple subjects. According to their identity and motivation, these subjects can be roughly divided into the following categories. The first category is professional content producers, which mainly include tourism guide bloggers and food bloggers. They provide comprehensive detailed strategies of Jingdezhen city from tourism travel, hotel sharing, ceramic purchase, ceramic experience and Jingdezhen food as the core content. With professional shooting and narrative ability, they are the main force of Jingdezhen city image construction. The second type is the local industry representatives of Jingdezhen, including local craftsmen, pottery studios and merchants ("Fengwu Pottery Workshop" and "Jingdezhen Zhen Porcelain"). They provide the core cultural basis for the city image by showing their exquisite skills and Jingdezhen characteristic pottery products. Their works often attract audiences with novel and exquisite ceramic works. It is the main force that makes the audience admire the ceramic culture of Jingdezhen. The third category is ordinary tourists and consumers, whose content, such as shopping sharing, Vlog of ceramic works creation, and video of ceramic works before and after firing, constitutes the level of "user-generated content" of the city image with a high degree of authenticity and sense of inclusion, and is the main body of building a cured and cost-effective image of Jingdezhen, whose content authenticity is often more convincing. The fourth category is the media organizations and the official cultural and tourism accounts of Jingdezhen, such as the reports of CCTV News on "Brother Chicken" and the existence of "Brother Chicken chicken" himself as a local Internet celebrity. They either subitize the topic from a macro perspective or inject humanistic care and broader discussion space into the construction of Jingdezhen's urban image through vivid character stories. These multiple subjects jointly form a dense content production network, weaving the media picture of Jingdezhen from different dimensions.

## 4.2. Preset cognition of the constructor

The content production of the construction subject is not random, but based on its accurate grasp of the algorithm rules of Douyin short video platform and the deep psychological needs of users. This preset cognition constitutes the potential framework for the construction of Jingdezhen's urban image. Among them, the constructor presupposes the needs of users who pursue emotional value, highly surf the Internet and are interested in Chinese culture.

Observing a number of short videos, it can be found that many creators deliberately emphasize the characteristics of "leisure and slow lifestyle" in Jingdezhen in terms of content strategy, and provide users with a spiritual refuge to escape from reality for a short time by showing the "flow state and deep immersion" devoted to pottery creation. Here, the creators anticipate that users seek healing and relaxation from a fast-paced life. Secondly, creators are well aware of the driving force of "meme" culture for community communication in the Internet era. Therefore, creators take the initiative to create and repeat the interesting dubbing template such as "No one can go out of Jingdezhen empty-handed" or build the interesting dubbing template of "What is the Emperor going to Jingdezhen this time?" to make it the iconic slogan of Jingdezhen city, so as to reduce the communication cost. Strengthen user memory points. In addition, the creator also has insight into the contemporary young people, especially young college students, who are more eager to obtain aesthetic improvement and cultural identity in addition to consumption. Therefore, the content of the video is no longer limited to the display of ceramic objects, but to dig deeply into the spirit of ceramic craftsmen, the historical inheritance of "porcelain capital" and the cultural stories behind it, so that the consumption behavior itself is endowed with the significance of acquiring cultural capital.

## 4.3. Compound discourse strategies

Under the guidance of specific preset cognition, the constructors systematically build the multi-characteristic city image of Jingdezhen through three sets of different discourse strategies. Based on the multi-modal coding of video vocabulary, audio-visual language, dubbing emotion and narrative content, this study classifies the discourse strategies of Jingdezhen short videos into three categories (see Table 2). The first type is the video that shows that Jingdezhen is suitable for ceramic creation and can bring people a relaxed and healing feeling. The second category is videos showing Jingdezhen suitable for shopping and cost-effective. The third type is the video that focuses on the communication of Jingdezhen ceramic culture and tells the story of ceramic culture and ceramic craftsmen.

Table 2. Discourse strategies of short videos in Jingdezhen

	Choice of vocabulary	Audio-visual language	Voice over	Content of narrative
The first category: ceramic creation, experience video	High-frequency use of "healing", "relaxation", "sense of accomplishment" and "immersion"	The combination of soothing and quiet pure music, gentle and peaceful pure music, and natural environmental sound "bird sound, rain sound"	Often dubbed by human voices, and their emotions are labeled as calm and healing	Focusing on depicting the transformation process from plain embryo to finished product and the state of the creator's devotion to self

Table 2. (continued)

The second category: Jingdezhen shopping, food introduction video	Create and repeat "MVP settlement screen," "Holy Land," "ceramic ceiling," "Critical Hit," and other powerful and playful words	Match exciting, lively, stuck point BGM, as well as a quick clip of the purchase of low-cost ceramic cups, ceramic strings, ceramic plates	Most of the use of simultaneous sound occasionally adds AI hot dubbing and explosion, lightning sound effects, very impact	Try to play up the extreme cost-performance of goods (such as "10 yuan for 5 strings") and the infinite richness of choices, and compare the purchase behavior to an adventure full of surprises that is bound to win
The third category: in-depth videos about Jingdezhen ceramic culture and ceramic craftsmen	It calls for words with depth and sense of value, such as "ingenuity", "inheritance", "real Jingdezhen" and "love in the heart"	Use ancient style, thick, ethereal BGM, with texture, professional shooting and editing of beautiful shots	Use more human voice dubbing, dubbing is mostly composed, magnetic, calm voice, to create a sense of cultural atmosphere	By telling about the persistence of ordinary craftsmen for decades or showing their ultimate skills, the image of the city is promoted from the material level to the height of cultural identity

#### 4.4. Achievements of city image construction

With the continuous operation of the above discourse strategies, the city image of Jingdezhen in Douyin short videos presents three interwoven image types: "the city of artistic healing," "the city of cost-effective" and "the city of cultural heritage." The following are carried out respectively.

##### 4.4.1. Art healing city

In the media narrative of Douyin short videos, Jingdezhen is systematically constructed as an "artistic healing city" that can provide deep spiritual comfort and emotional value. This image is mainly realized by creating an immersive ceramic experience, emphasizing emotional connection and a sense of achievement with a low threshold, and its construction logic is embodied in the following two levels.

Through detailed and specific discourse strategies, short videos highlight the immersive experience and psychological healing value in the process of ceramic art creation. By recording the complete creation process from the bare embryo to the finished product, the creator vividly shows the process of "cost-effective and immersive experience", strives to shape the "low threshold and high sense of achievement" of pottery practice, and strengthens the "emotional connection and healing of art". In the short video presentation, pottery creation is not an unattainable professional skill, but a leisure activity that ordinary people can obtain satisfaction through simple learning. This low threshold, high return experience mode effectively reduces the psychological barriers to participation of viewing users. For example, video bloggers "Fan Fan has a Meal" and "Rotten Egg" show a complete flow path from focus to achievement by continuously recording the challenge process of painting dishes.

At the same time, short videos systematically shape the urban image of Jingdezhen as a "leisure and slow lifestyle" through specific audio-visual language and copy. Blogger "Miss Cauliflower" creates a comfortable atmosphere away from the hustle and bustle of the city by combining content such as "tasting tea, pinching mud and eating food". His popular comment "I feel like reading a prose with video pictures" shows that this discursive and de-commercialized discourse strategy has successfully constructed an image space for spiritual habitation at the end of the audience, further

elevating the experience of Jingdezhen to the height of philosophy and aesthetics, and giving deeper spiritual belonging value to this "art-healing city".

#### 4.4.2. A cost-effective shopping city

In Douyin short videos, Jingdezhen is systematically portrayed as a "cost-effective shopping city" with symbolic consumption significance. The construction of this image mainly subsumes the secular pottery purchase behavior into an experience with ritual and emotional value. By creating and repeating the Internet meme of "no one leaves Jingdezhen empty-hand", the short video highlights the extreme cost performance of goods and the infinite abundance of choices, and successfully constructs Jingdezhen as an ideal city of modern consumerism. The viral spread of this meme, such as the hashtag "Jingdezhen mvp settlement screen" used by several bloggers, the repeated price promotion of "ten yuan and five string", and the repeated display of relevant pottery purchase in hot reviews, constantly strengthen the collective psychological suggestion that "you must buy when you come to Jingdezhen". This discourse strategy reshapes the ordinary shopping behavior into a ritual that must be participated in, and with the exciting card point BGM, it simulates the psychological process of consumption impulse at the audio-visual level, completely ignites users' consumption desire, and makes the consumption behavior itself gain a significance beyond practical value. In the narrative, "anyone can obtain aesthetic pleasure and satisfaction through relatively low-cost purchase" is repeatedly emphasized, thus constituting "irresistible consumption attraction."

Short videos guide users from material consumption to emotional and value consumption by assigning specific values to goods. In the video of the blogger "Yuan Qiai", through the copy of "buy a ceramic vase first, get eternal flowers", a valuable meaning is set for the purchase behavior, subsuming the ordinary purchase into an emotional commitment to obtain eternal romance. Similarly, couple blogger Big Beauty and Ugly created a video titled "Hug ceramics to get unique works in the world" with a video copy titled "The temperature of the hug is only clear to you", which sublimates the ceramic experience into a symbol of commitment and intimacy between couples, transforming the ordinary experience into a more advanced marketing. What users consume is not only the utensils and experience itself, but also the aesthetic taste, lifestyle and symbol symbolized behind it.

#### 4.4.3. Cities with strong ceramic culture

In the short video of Douyin, the city image of Jingdezhen has been upgraded from the traditional "porcelain capital" to the source and flow of the Chinese civilization spirit, and is systematically constructed as a city with strong cultural deposits carrying thousands of years of kiln fire and national collective memory.

The blogger "Jingdezhen Zhen Porcelain" promoted the ceramic art from the technical level to the height of cultural practice by showing the contents of the diamond sutra written by the ceramic craftsmen on the ceramic vases. The hot comment "for the first time, I have a concept of the small letters" reflects the audience's collective marvel at the ceramic art. These contents not only show the possibility of "integration of traditional technology and modern aesthetics", but also consolidate the cultural status of Jingdezhen as the "porcelain capital" of Oriental ceramic aesthetics at the symbolic level, and awaken the users' deep "cultural confidence and identity identification".

In the narration of Douyin short videos, Jingdezhen has been upgraded from a single "tourist destination" to an urban image carrying thousand-year craftsman spirit, cultural confidence and warm community atmosphere. Represented by the video of "The real Jingdezhen should not be

criticized" by the blogger Zhang Xianzhen, this paper interviews and shows the skills and works of many ceramic intangible cultural heritage craftsmen, and points out that most ceramic craftsmen sometimes have to cater to the cultural inheritance of mainstream aesthetic. Through the narrative of "simplicity and anti-internet celebrity" and over-commercialization, combination of the "deep love" of contemporary Jingdezhen ceramic craftsmen and the spirit of craftsmen who kiln day and night recorded in the ancient "Tao Ji" strengthens the spiritual appeal of Jingdezhen as a pure cultural land, and makes viewers admire and cherish the ceramic culture of Jingdezhen. This combination of communication from the traditional "porcelain capital" to the contemporary aesthetic not only reshaped the city image of Jingdezhen on the Douyin platform, but also revealed an excellent renewal ability of the traditional ceramic culture of Jingdezhen to gain new life in the digital era.

#### 4.5. Audience feedback

The success of the image construction needs to be verified by the audience's feedback. Some of the highly popular sample videos have received millions of likes and close to or more than 100,000 reposts, indicating that their content has aroused wide resonance. There are a large number of expressions in the hot reviews, such as "I want to go," "I have gone," "I have been cured," and "this is the real Jingdezhen," which not only affirms the content of the video, but also generates a deep emotional identification of the audience on the constructed city image. The creation of the Internet meme "no one leaves empty hand" has a direct impact on tourists' travel patterns, becoming an unspoken code among them and guiding their consumption and purchase practices. This proves that the urban image constructed by short videos has successfully sunk into the tourism experience and economic activities of Jingdezhen in reality.

Finally, as a powerful positive incentive, the audience's positive feedback acts on the constructor in the opposite direction, strengthening his/her original preset cognition, and urging him/her to continue to use and optimize successful discourse strategies. As a result, a circular closed loop from construction to feedback and then to reconstruction has been formed, making the city image of Jingdezhen as the city of artistic healing, the city of cost-effective and the city with rich ceramic culture continuously consolidated and strengthened in the Douyin short video ecology, and continuously having a strong influence in real life.

#### 5. Conclusion

Following the research paradigm of the classic grounded theory, this study systematically codes and analyzes the popular short videos and related texts of Jingdezhen on Douyin platform, and takes Jingdezhen as an example to deeply reveal how the short video media constructs the contemporary image of a city. It further constructs the rules of content production under the influence of platform algorithm and users, forming a closed loop of dynamic circular construction from construction to audience feedback and then to construction.

However, there are some limitations in this study. The research data all come from Douyin platform, although Douyin is currently the most influential short video platform, its characteristics of young, fast pace and strong entertainment may magnify some city image dimensions, such as Jingdezhen as a cost-effective shopping city, while weakening other possible image characteristics.

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, it is suggested that future research can compare the differences in image construction of the same city on different platforms such as Douyin, Xiaohongshu, wechat video account and Kuaishou. Through cross-platform comparison, we can more comprehensively reveal how the characteristics of digital platforms affect the presentation

of urban image, and deepen the understanding of the construction of urban image on digital platforms in the era of digital communication.

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