

Strategies for Image Construction of City Brands—Taking Luoyang City as an Example

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Abstract: *As the cultural soft power of cities, the city image has an important impact on development of cities and attraction of talents. Taking Luoyang City, Henan Province, China as an example, this study firstly investigates status of image construction of brands in Luoyang City and introduces problems existing in image communication of the city. Furthermore, suggestions for promoting strategies of image communication of the city are put forward. Combined with resource endowment of the city, this research accurately masters city positioning. With joint efforts of key opinion leaders (KOLs) and governments, the public are attracted to participate in image construction. By integrating various media resources, it is conducive to break cultural boundaries. The aim of this research is to help image development of brands in Luoyang city and provide a reference for image construction of brands in other cities.*

Keywords: *city brand, image construction, Luoyang City*

1. Introduction

In *City Marketing: The Past, the Present and Some Unresolved Issues*, Dutch scholar Mihalis mentioned that scholar Word divides the life cycle of cities into four stages, namely agricultural colonization, urban function expansion, industrial construction, and urban regeneration. The image construction of city brands discussed in this study mainly focuses on the fourth stage^[1]. Luoyang City, Henan Province, China has always been a shining star in the long river of Chinese history. Sima Guang, a scholar in Song Dynasty, said that if people want to know the law of rise and fall alternation from ancient to modern times, just look at the ancient city of Luoyang City, which is the best interpretation of status of the city. However, with the southward shift of economic center, Luoyang City, which is same as other ancient capitals including Xi'an City (Shaanxi Province) and Kaifeng City (Henan Province) inevitably lose its former glory. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Luoyang City became an important industrial city in the First Five-year Plan, which laid the foundation of an industrial city. In recent years, with the decline of traditional industries, cities all over the country have embarked on the path of transformation. As an ancient capital of thirteen dynasties, Luoyang City has rich cultural landscape and cultural heritage. How to find right position in the increasingly fierce competition among cities is an urgent problem for Luoyang City to be solved.

With the life cycle of cities entering the fourth stage, the city image has become core power of city competition. In *Urban Theory: A Critical Introduction to Power, Cities and Urbanism in the 21st Century*, scholars Alan Harding and Telga Blukland regard the 21st Century as the Century of Cities. They believe that the world witnesses a scene where the vast majority of people have lived in cities or towns for the first time. In recent years, cities, as centers of social networks, are gradually becoming the dominant force in social development^[2].

It has been widely acknowledged that urban competitiveness is not only reflected in economic strength of cities, but also a complex concept that includes many elements, such as cultural, institutional, and government management competitiveness. In general, urban competitiveness can be divided into hard and soft competitiveness (also known as soft power). Urban competitiveness needs more concrete means to be perceived by the public. Among many factors and indicators to evaluate soft power of a city, city brand image occupies a very important position. In the face of the current state pattern of urban competitiveness, if a city wants to upgrade brands, it has to find its own city positioning and use new media to shape and communicate a good brand image.

As a core subject of cultural construction, communication mechanisms of media and cultural production models have broken spatial limitations of city image communication in the past, and

eliminated constraints of effectiveness of local presence. Embedded in real life, new media has become an important path for people to perceive the world and broaden their cognitive field, and also a major way for city image communication and culture formation. The concept of media city proposed by Scott McGuire highlights the core role of media in space manufacturing of modern cities. Photography, film, television and digital media are all involved in urban expression and space construction^[3].

Since 2018, with the rise of flow economy, a number of cities famous on the Internet including Xi'an City, Chongqing City, Chengdu City (Sichuan Province) and even the current hot Zibo City (Shandong Province) have emerged. In the meanwhile, these concepts, like scenic spots and cuisine famous on the Internet that match cities famous on the Internet have not only gained a lot of attention online, but also attracted a large number of tourists to visit offline, successfully achieving the combination of offline and online. In the image construction of image brands, short videos are an important platform.

2. Current Status of image construction of brands in Luoyang City

French scholar Bull Dieu pointed out that cultural, economic and social capitals are three types of capitals, and cultural capital can be transformed into economic capital under certain conditions. The construction and development of a city cannot be separated from the support of economy. A good financial condition is an important foundation to support the development of a city, and culture is the foundation of sustainable development of the city. Luoyang City, as an ancient capital of the Central Plains, has a profound historical and cultural heritage. Since the implementation of China's Five-Year Plan, Luoyang City has always been an important city with industrial development in Henan Province and even the Central Plains, and has made fruitful contributions to China's industrialization and modernization.

In the early days, Luoyang City had a relatively single perspective on constructing its city image, which could not even be called construction. Instead, it focused more on the communication of city development data or the promotion of tourist attractions. The official reports on the achievements of municipal construction occupy most of the content about its own communication in Luoyang City, and are relatively limited to communication channels of local newspapers and other media in the city. Luoyang Daily is the most widely circulated and subscribed newspaper among residents of Luoyang City. Its content mainly focuses on reporting municipal planning and political achievements, and there is no special topic for reporting and promoting the image of the city. However, its content itself is also a display of the economic development and industrial progress of Luoyang City. Instead, the image of the city is communicated only through figures and chart information, which is not only limited in a perspective, but also difficult to show a more complete style and image of the city to the public.

On the other hand, the problem lies in the lack of more intrinsic urban values beyond the surface image, making it difficult to construct a city image with spiritual inner core in the public's mind. The utilization of numbers and charts to depict political achievements is relatively blunt and intuitive, but requires a certain understanding process, which may cause some audiences to selectively ignore the results of such information. The common problem with early communication of newspapers and magazines in Luoyang City on the construction of city image is that they are only limited to the local public in the city, and there are few channels for audiences in other regions within and outside Henan province. The communication of information related to the city image mainly aims to deepen understanding of the local public on their hometown, so as to establish a sense of urban belonging among the people of Luoyang City. However, the effect of the external communication of the city image is not obvious, which can not make the public outside Luoyang City have a clear and definite cognition, and the communication content does not have a unified and clear spiritual core.

In the past, in promotional videos of the city image based on mass media, the perspective of viewing the cities was often centered around a top-down view and panoramic shots of geographical landscape of cities were taken. Moreover, iconic urban spatial symbols were repeatedly displayed to highlight the unique landscape elements of cities themselves. The content of the camera was mostly a spectacle style image detached from daily life, and the production of promotional videos was completed through grand narratives. In the production of early promotional videos of Luoyang City, the visuals are generally stacked with grand and spectacular scenic spots or picturesque landscapes, with less use of simultaneous sound and often using grand music arranged by classical instruments as a single background sound. For example, a promotional video of the city image in Luoyang City produced in 2008 lasts for 2 minutes and 32 seconds. At the beginning, there is the scene of the Lusena

Buddha in the Longmen Grottoes, the historical relics of Luoyang City, followed by the scene of cultural sites including Han and Wei ruins, the tomb of Emperor Guangwu of Han and White-Horse Temple. The video can only promote scenic spots of the city, but does not involve natural conditions and social customs and urban spirits accumulated from history.

In the current context of all media, the emergence of short video platforms has made social interaction and sharing a norm, which makes user interaction more convenient and multidimensional. The strong sociality of short videos provides a powerful environment for the construction of the city image. Shots with short duration, concise content and distinct personal style can show the content of the city to the greatest extent and improve recognition of the city. The life-oriented and three-dimensional city symbols have gained large-scale online attention through the deconstruction and reshaping of new media, endowing the city image with new meanings^[4].

3. Problems in the image construction of brands in Luoyang City

3.1 The city brand lacks uniqueness and has strong homogeneity

In the 1950s, American scholar Rosser Reeves proposed the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) theory, which requires presenting consumers with a unique selling proposition, abbreviated as the USP theory, also known as the creative theory. Its characteristic is that it is necessary to state the selling point of products to audiences, and this selling point is bound to be unique and able to bring sales. This theory is also applicable in shaping city brands of cities. The so-called city positioning refers to full exploitation of various resources of the city, so as to find personality, soul and concept of cities according to the principles of uniqueness, exclusivity and authority. Positioning is the soul of building a brand, and the essence of city brand positioning is to enable the city to occupy the most advantageous position among target audiences, which is unique, thus forming a distinctive brand personality of the city.

At present, the city brand positioning in Luoyang City lacks a clear sense of positioning, and there is a serious homogenization problem with Xi'an City. Both the marketing of Tang Dynasty culture and the emphasis on Hanfu economy coincide with city positioning and distinctive services of Xi'an City. Xi'an City has the Datang Everbright City, while Luoyang City has the Lijing Gate and the Luoyi Ancient City. Xi'an City has HuaFu Day, while Luoyang City has Hanfu Festival. As twin stars of Han and Tang culture, Xi'an City and Luoyang City have significant similarities in their urban resource endowments. How to achieve differentiated positioning, leverage strengths and avoid weaknesses, give full play to their own advantages and develop in a staggered manner with Xi'an City is a problem that Luoyang City needs to solve in its subsequent development.

3.2 The city image is dominated by self shaping and lacks public participation

The common problem in the communication of image construction of Luoyang City is that most of the promotion is limited to official promotion and lacks broad participation from multiple subjects. The image and travel experience of Luoyang City are mostly from the official sources, making it difficult to resonate with audiences. In modern cities, the relationship among city, media and people is closely connected. Currently, the application of media technologies, such as big data and artificial intelligence, as well as the expansion of news communication channels, have made communication subjects of the city brand more diversified. The diversification of communication subjects can change the binary relationship between communicators and audiences in the previous communication of city brands, so that everyone can participate in the construction and communication of city brands. For instance, in short videos, communicators often lead users to enjoy cultural features and natural landscapes of the city from a personalized perspective and in an experiential way, which is conducive to shaping city brands.

The dance show Dragon Gate King Kong on Qixi Evening party displayed on Henan Satellite TV in 2021 was filmed at the Longmen Grottoes in Luoyang City, and recorded using Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) enhancement technology, thus receiving hot discussion and praise from audiences all over the country. The original intention of program production may not be primarily to promote the city image. However, in the communication, the profound and enduring city image of historical and cultural cities in Henan Province has been deeply rooted in people's hearts, achieving good communication effects of city image. By innovating television program production and forming an innovation-diffusion trend on smart mobile terminal social platforms, public discussion and program

production resonate, thus shaping and communicating the city image. This is a communication strategy for the city image that can be further studied and applied. In making the city known outside of fixed circle, the city is mainly introduced by audiences to a large extent. The continuous discussion and forwarding of we-media has triggered explosive popularity of the program.

3.3 The communication channels are relatively simple and communication skills lack innovation

The image communication of brands in Luoyang City shows narrow channels and incomplete operation mechanisms and lacks sustainability and systematicness. With the continuous development and reform of new media technology, the image communication channels of city brands have been broadened, and the communication content has become more refined. The image of city brands needs to be guided by systematic communication strategy, jointly planned by multiple subjects and cooperated by a variety of communication media, so as to convey unique natural landscape, geographical environment, urban spirit, and urban culture of the city to the public.

However, in the image communication of brands in Luoyang City, traditional and new media are not integrated enough. The communication channels mainly rely on mainstream media and traditional media, such as TV, newspaper and magazines, without making full use of Internet technology to effectively integrate media resources. Moreover, the new and traditional media fail to form a publicity force in the image construction and communication of brands in Luoyang City. The communication audiences only radiate to Luoyang citizens, and the communication media has not yet formed linkage mechanisms of image communication of city brands, which weakens communication effects. At the same time, in the image communication of city brands, it is still limited to old communication skills and lacks innovation of communication means through short videos, photos and scenery ^[5].

4. Breakthrough path of image construction of brands in Luoyang City

4.1 Combining urban resource endowments to accurately master city positioning

The communication of the city image should not only reflect innovation and a sense of the times, but also demonstrate the environmental resource advantages of Luoyang City in addition to historical and cultural resources. Luoyang City recently rebuilt seven buildings, like Tianjie and Tianjin Bridge, which is a good starting point. Through the reconstruction, the old culture and modern architecture will be connected, gathering points to form a plane. All-out efforts will be made to build the New three pieces represented by the Museum City, the Erlitou Site Museum of Xia Capital and the Luoyang National Historical and Cultural Park in Sui and Tang Dynasties. Relying on the Yellow River, the Luo River and the Yi River, three ecological civilization display belts will be built. The historical and cultural elements along the three display belts, such as canal culture, village culture, city defense pass culture, Anti-Japanese War culture, Yellow River governance culture, traffic and post road culture, cemetery and burial culture are integrated. On this basis, the Yellow River civilization and Chinese civilization are mainly displayed, and a new business card of Luoyang city image is created ^[6].

Luoyang City has been awarded the title of Peony Capital of China, and the China Peony Culture Festival has become a nationally renowned cultural event both domestically and internationally. As an important platform for expanding opening-up and showcasing the city image, it has been selected into the National Intangible Cultural Heritage List. The influence of Peony Culture Festival in the city should be enhanced and innovative thinking should be injected into cultural inheritance. Moreover, the Peony Culture Festival is integrated with the performance of traditional culture and Peony cultural brand in Luoyang City is refreshed, so as to let more and more people visit and understand the city.

4.2 Joint efforts of KOLs and governments to attract the public to participate in image construction

By analyzing cities, like Xi'an City and Chengdu City, it can be concluded that key opinion leaders (KOLs) play a large role in shaping cities famous on the Internet. These KOLs have a professional video production team and a certain number of fans and they have a great influence and coverage in city communication. Compared with short videos of the city image produced by ordinary users, the video theme of KOLs is novel and has a very personal style and characteristics. For example, travel blogger Bingdan on Tiktok, who has 8.36 million fans, has received 76 million likes for his videos. Bingdan, who works as a tour guide for the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an City, has been posting short videos of himself explaining historical and cultural attractions in the city on the platform since 2019.

The videos quickly become popular on the platform due to his humorous and easy-to-understand explanation style. His videos promote tourist attractions, dialects and traditional food in Xi'an City, making the ancient capital of Xi'an City more popular.^[7]

The short videos of the city image produced by KOLs can more accurately convey the meaning of the city, because there is a clear subdivision of audiences. Bloggers in different regions can show multiple scenes in the city in detail, so as to meet the information, entertainment and psychological needs of audiences. In addition to KOLs, government departments also play a leading role in the shaping of cities famous on the Internet. For example, Xi'an City famous on the Internet was the first to cooperate with the Tiktok official in 2018, launching the Four-one plan. By customizing challenges of city themes, shooting short videos of the city on Tiktok, arranging offline experience of KOLs and promoting cultural city, Xi'an City is promoted from multi-dimensional perspective. In the meanwhile, blind boxes to show the flourishing Tang Dynasty launched by Xi'an Qujiang Cultural Tourism has also sparked a new round of popularity on short video platforms. Tourists from all over the country have come to Xi'an City one after another, just to participate in the Q&A activities of Mr. Fang and Mr. Du.

4.3 Integrating multi-media resources to break cultural boundaries

In recent years, urban folk songs have gradually been known by the public, such as Chengdu, Lanzhou, Song of Xi'an People, Kill a Shijiazhuang people and Write to Huanghuai, which have a high playback volume on the Tiktok short-video platform. Many regions are relying on the boost of urban folk songs to develop into cities famous on the Internet. Furthermore, dialect, as the cultural inheritance of a region, is closely related to the cultural traditions, values, customs and habits of the region where it is located. It is the external representation of regional originality and regional culture, as well as the living fossil of regional culture. Originally, dialects are only concerned by scholars in the fields of literature and sociology. However, with the development of information communication technology, dialects have become the most intuitive way to construct the city image.

For cities, recording daily lives of citizens through dialects is also an important part of showcasing the differences and uniqueness of cities. Users can gain a deeper understanding of temperament and culture of cities through short videos with dialects, and the city's characteristics and people's personalities corresponding to dialects will also leave a deep impression. However, it should be noted that both dialects and urban folk songs have a relatively single form of application in short videos of the city image. They only serve as background music to complement the video content and lack systematic communication of dialect symbols in the music. In addition, although urban folk songs and dialects are different in forms of cultural expression, they are both cultural symbols of the city in essence and should not be separated. Therefore, in the concrete construction of the city image, city managers should enrich the application forms of dialects and urban folk songs on short video platforms, and spread and promote the two in a planned and organized way. For instance, they should design topics related to urban folk songs and dialects on Tiktok, collect Tiktok users' self-created urban folk songs and carry out voting activities, and regularly organize online and offline dialect culture publicity activities. In general, city managers should link dialect symbols of music with the spread of city culture to create a new cultural carrier of the city image.^[8]

5. Conclusions

In today's era of globalization and informatization, the speed of city transformation and upgrading is also accelerating, and competition between cities is becoming increasingly fierce. The image construction of city brands plays an increasingly important role in enhancing city competitiveness and promoting city development. City brand is not an isolated existence, but reflects the common will of subjects of the city and the stakeholders. The construction and communication of city brands requires a comprehensive understanding of the preexisting structural relationship between the existing material strength of the city, and the recognition that people's ideas, social culture, consumption habits will have an impact on the actions of social actors. Therefore, in the communication of city brands, communication subjects need to recognize and grasp city brands and relationship between subjects and objects of the city and understand and apply communication channels. This determines the effectiveness of the communication and the possibility of sustainable communication of city brands being communicated.

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