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Article

Research on the Dissemination Characteristics of Short Videos for Tourism Promotion in Non-traditional Tourist Cities: A Case Study of Wuhan

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Abstract: Objective: This study aims to systematically examine the dissemination characteristics of short tourism promotion videos featuring Wuhan—a non-traditional tourist city—on the Douyin platform. The goal is to provide a systematic descriptive account of short video-based tourism promotion of short video-based tourism promotion in Wuhan, enhance the city's visibility, and offer a reference point for non-traditional tourist cities with comparable industrial structures and media ecologies, subject to empirical verification. Method: The research adopts a visual grounded theory-informed content analysis, integrated with descriptive statistical methods, to conduct a systematic content analysis of short tourism promotion videos related to Wuhan. A random sample of 496 Wuhan-related tourism promotion short videos, drawn from 48 Douyin accounts and published between 1 January 2023 and 1 December 2024, was coded across four dimensions and thirteen categories. A priori coding methods and reliability testing were employed to ensure the scientific rigor and accuracy of the findings. Results: The findings indicate that short videos promoting Wuhan's culture and tourism exhibit distinct communication characteristics across multiple dimensions. In terms of content attributes, co-created videos account for a small proportion of the sample. Regarding publisher attributes, verified publishers—both individual and enterprise—account for the large majority of sampled videos. In terms of editing and content formats, the videos are highly varied in editing and content format. The use of language, subtitles, and background music follows discernible patterns. Recommendation-oriented videos account for 71% of the sample, 86% include interaction in the comment section, and 61% carry POI cards. Conclusion: The study provides a baseline descriptive profile of tourism promotion short videos in a non-traditional tourist city, and derives evidence-informed strategies for content creation that require further empirical testing.

Keywords: Non-Traditional Tourist Cities, Short Videos, Tourism Promotion, Visual Content Analysis, Uses and Gratifications

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1. Introduction

In recent years, high-quality economic development has been the core goal of economic construction. Xi Jinping pointed out: "High-quality development is the theme of China's economic and social development during the 14th Five-Year Plan period and beyond, and it is related to the overall situation of China's socialist modernization drive". Meanwhile, the National Development and Reform Commission emphasized the importance of actively fostering new drivers of consumption and expanding domestic demand to promote economic growth. Since the implementation of the reform and opening-up policy—particularly after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China—China's tourism industry has gradually developed into a strategic pillar industry, as well as a sector crucial to public welfare and quality of life, characterized by clear contemporary features. The rapid expansion of the tourism sector aligns well with national economic development strategies and plans, providing strong support for

the high-quality growth of the national economy. The role of tourism in economic development has become increasingly prominent, making it a key area that deserves continued attention and in-depth investigation of its potential.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the tourism industry has experienced a major decline. From 2020 to 2022, the number of domestic tourists showed a clear downward trend, with the sharpest drop occurring in 2022—a 58.9% decrease compared to the same period in 2019. In 2023, the stabilization of epidemic control measures supported economic recovery. To encourage this recovery, the government adopted active fiscal policies along with cautious monetary policies. As pandemic restrictions were lifted, both limited supply and demand were quickly released, and consumer behavior showed signs of strong, delayed spending. Domestic travel reached new levels, with 4.891 billion trips recorded in 2023—an increase of 2.361 billion from the previous year, representing a 93.3% year-on-year growth rate. At the same time, consumer behavior became more rational. A 2023 survey on public consumption willingness and expectations, conducted by the National Governance Network, found that people are placing greater importance on quality and value for money. This change is visible in the tourism market, where both lower spending and higher expectations for experiences are happening together.

However, traditional tourist cities are facing several problems, such as overcrowding that reduces the quality of visits, inconsistent service, and frequent rule violations. For example, during the Spring Festival, traffic congestion on Hainan Island was extreme, with some tourists waiting up to 14 hours to board ferries. Similarly, during the Dragon Boat Festival, guides and vendors on Gulangyu Island worked together to overcharge tourists by selling extremely expensive tickets. These events were quickly spread through social media platforms such as short videos, leading to strong public reactions and reduced trust in traditional destinations.

This rise in demand, the overcrowding of traditional tourist cities, and the wide reach of short videos have created new opportunities for non-traditional tourist cities. These cities—such as industrial centers, border towns, transportation hubs, and smaller cities—usually lack well-known attractions and are not key areas in traditional tourism promotion (Guo, 2021). A notable example took place in early 2023, when the trend of college students traveling to Zibo for barbecue gained widespread attention online, making Zibo a popular destination (Sun & Wang, 2024). This showed the strong influence of short videos in promoting tourism in lesser-known cities. In response, official media and private content creators began using short video platforms to support tourism promotion. With their strong engagement and wide reach, short videos have encouraged more people to explore and share the attractions of these cities, helping non-traditional destinations become more widely known (Chen et al., 2022). As a result, using social media and short video content for viral promotion has become an important strategy to support tourism growth in these areas.

Wuhan, located in Hubei Province in central China, serves as a major national center for industry, science and education, and transportation. Although the city benefits from advantageous geographical conditions and possesses some tourism resources, its long-term competitiveness as a tourist destination has remained relatively limited. Most travelers have not traditionally considered Wuhan a major tourist city. However, with the increasing circulation of short video content related to Wuhan on social media platforms, the city's distinctive characteristics have gradually attracted public attention. In particular, the local Han-style lifestyle—centered around the culturally unique "early breakfast culture"—has gained popularity online, contributing to Wuhan's rise as an emerging travel destination. According to data from 2023, Wuhan welcomed 333 million tourists, representing a 62.4% year-on-year increase, while its total tourism revenue reached 376.985 billion yuan, an increase of 69.5%, placing it among the top ten most visited cities in China. This study takes Wuhan as a case of a non-traditional tourist city. By collecting and analyzing short video tourism promotion content related to Wuhan on the Douyin platform, this paper aims to identify the key content characteristics of such videos. The goal is to support the sustained development of Wuhan's tourism promotion through short videos, enhance the city's visibility, and generate insights that may inform the online tourism marketing of non-traditional tourist cities with comparable characteristics, subject to comparative testing.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Travel Short Videos

In recent years, the digital economy has expanded rapidly and has become a key driver of resilient growth in the tourism sector (Tang, 2024). Research on digital tourism has primarily focused on the relationship between digital media and tourism. For instance, digital tourism services can partially compensate for the limitations of physical travel experiences (Tuomi et al., 2023), and the incorporation of virtual reality (VR) into the tourism process can effectively elicit positive emotional responses from tourists (Yung et al., 2021). Among various forms of digital media, short-video platforms have emerged as a prominent area of study. Tourism short videos are user-generated or marketer-produced content intended for travelers, showcasing destinations, travel experiences, product reviews, and local services. These videos typically involve three main stakeholders—content creators, viewers, and destination marketers—and serve four primary functions: information gathering, entertainment, visibility enhancement, and social engagement (Dewantara et al., 2023; Perez-Vega et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2022).

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The dissemination effects of tourism short videos can be broadly categorized into two dimensions: their impact on user behavior and their overall communication effectiveness. Regarding user behavior, Mao et al. conducted a 2 × 2 factorial experiment to explore how content novelty and camera angle influence users' behavioral intentions toward visiting a destination. The study found that perceived novelty and first-person perspectives significantly enhance users' intention to visit (Mao et al., 2023). Shu et al. integrated the concepts of spatial and social presence into goal-oriented emotional pathways, concluding that both forms of presence are critical determinants of tourists' willingness to visit in person (Shu et al., 2023). Positive emotions and travel desire mediate this relationship, while optimism bias amplifies visit intentions. Han et al. developed a structural equation model incorporating destination image and psychological distance, showing that user engagement positively influences both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of destination image, thereby affecting travel intention (Han et al., 2022).

In terms of dissemination effectiveness, Yang et al. analyzed the role of endorsers in tourism short videos, finding that emotional resonance between endorsers and destinations, along with sustained parasocial interactions with followers, significantly improve endorsement outcomes (Yang et al., 2022). Zhang analyzed short videos from local tourism authorities on Douyin alongside tourism traffic data and concluded that government-endorsed content using official symbols enhanced city visibility and stimulated tourism growth (Zhang, 2024).

Despite their rapid development, tourism short videos face several production and dissemination challenges that require systematic and professional strategic guidance. Ye & Wu suggested that local tourism accounts could improve promotion effectiveness by applying strategies of representation, leveraging, and empowerment to support sustainable tourism development (Ye & Wu, 2023). Drawing on Granovetter's theory of embeddedness, Zhang proposed that high-quality original content and authenticity should be core elements in content design. They also recommended leveraging big data for operational planning and maintaining proactive risk management (Zhang, 2022). Chen & Liu used text, sentiment, and semantic network analyses to examine audience cognitive biases in tourism short video dissemination. Their findings indicated the need to enhance content quality, reduce discrepancies between video representations and real-world experiences, mitigate negative portrayals of destinations, and promote more authentic tourist narratives (Chen & Liu, 2024).

Existing studies on tourism short videos mainly focus on their formal characteristics, development models, and socioeconomic benefits, such as poverty alleviation. Su & Luo explored the "short video +" model as a tool for localized poverty reduction, highlighting its role in strengthening the self-sufficiency of underdeveloped areas (Su & Luo, 2021). Han proposed a "one-core, multi-element" communication model tailored for rural tourism short videos (Han, 2019). Zhao & Bao systematically analyzed the audiovisual transformation of tourism landscapes and the diversification of tourism resources in the context of short videos. They identified key content types, narrative features, and development pathways for the tourism industry in the digital age (Zhao & Bao, 2023).

However, the number of comprehensive studies on the current characteristics of tourism short videos remains limited. Most existing research only addresses surface-level aspects such as content themes and visual styles, lacking depth and scope. Additionally, the scholarly focus has been predominantly on rural revitalization, with limited attention paid to other regions or tourism categories.

Across this body of work there is broad agreement that short-video platforms have become a primary channel for destination exposure, and that content features rather than promotional budgets increasingly determine circulation. Studies diverge, however, on which features matter most: some emphasise narrative and emotional appeal, others the informational utility of the content, and others the credibility of the publisher. These differences are compounded by methodological divergence, as findings drawn from self-reported survey data and from platform behavioural data are not directly comparable. What remains unresolved is which content features actually characterise destination promotion at the level of the video itself, since most studies infer content properties from audience responses rather than coding the videos directly.

2.2. Non-Traditional Tourist Cities

The concept of non-traditional tourist cities has only emerged in China within the past two years and is not yet widely recognized in international academic literature. In foreign research, similar areas are often referred to as new tourism destinations or newly developed tourism regions. Scholars have identified four main factors driving interest in these emerging destinations. First, the continued expansion of the tourism industry has exacerbated issues of overtourism in traditional destinations (Su, 2022). Second, in the early stages following the COVID-19 pandemic, the surge in travel due to retaliatory consumption heightened demand for alternative travel options. Third, the pandemic increased travelers' risk aversion, leading many to avoid crowded destinations in favor of lesser-known locations (Miao et al., 2022). Finally, non-traditional tourist cities play a crucial role in tourist dispersion and product diversification and are therefore actively supported by both enterprises and government entities (King et al., 2024).

As tourist numbers in non-traditional destinations continue to grow, the urban tourism model is undergoing transformation. These cities must now manage tourism development based on principles of sustainability and cultural authenticity preservation

(Matoga & Pawłowska, 2018). In this context, numerous scholars have proposed diverse governance and development strategies. Guo provided a definition of non-traditional tourist cities and identified key challenges in their tourism development through a case study of Tangshan, Bengbu, Dandong, and Linyi (Guo, 2021). Ma et al. employed SWOT analysis and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) to quantitatively examine Mianyang's urban tourism strategy, concluding that an "aggressive and high-intensity diversification strategy" is appropriate (Ma et al., 2019). Pan conducted a comparative study of Zibo and Taizhou, recommending optimization strategies such as leveraging landscape aesthetics, emphasizing local distinctiveness, and fostering overall urban appeal to revitalize tourism (Pan, 2023). Sun & Wang used brand ecosystem theory to analyze the "Zibo Barbecue" phenomenon and proposed a four-stage model for building a tourism brand ecosystem, offering a replicable framework for other non-traditional destinations (Sun & Wang, 2024).

Rural tourism shares several characteristics with tourism in non-traditional cities, and its governance models are also relevant. Priatmoko et al. emphasized the importance of enhancing destination visibility and proposed linking lesser-known cities with popular ones through structured itineraries to allow time for infrastructure improvement and the development of creative tourism spaces (Priatmoko et al., 2021). In addition to macro-level planning, micro-level guidance for local tourism stakeholders and city developers is essential. Wang et al. proposed eight strategic dimensions for high-end destination development: economic growth, environmental enhancement, living standard improvement, civic engagement, communication development, social environment promotion, cultural appreciation, and personal development (Wang et al., 2022).

Even before the pandemic, scholars noted that sudden tourist influxes to non-traditional cities could overwhelm local accommodation capacity and disrupt the residential housing market (Füller & Michel, 2014). Post-pandemic, this issue has regained scholarly attention. Stors examined the role of Airbnb hosts and listing frameworks in the social construction of emerging tourist attractions, proposing place-making strategies tailored for short-term rental hosts (Stors, 2022). Furthermore, the rise of tourism in non-traditional cities has opened up new industrial opportunities. Wu et al. explored the concept of reverse entrepreneurship—returning to one's hometown to start tourism-related ventures—by reviewing literature from three perspectives (Wu et al., 2022). Sykes & Kelly investigated the potential and practical implications of developing motorcycle tourism in non-traditional tourist cities (Sykes & Kelly, 2016).

Research on non-traditional tourist cities remains in its infancy. While a few scholars have acknowledged the role of new media, particularly short videos, in enhancing destination visibility, there is a lack of focused research on short video content specifically related to non-traditional tourist cities. In particular, the current characteristics and strategic development of tourism short videos in these cities remain significantly underexplored.

It should be noted that the international literature on emerging tourism destinations is not directly transferable to the Chinese context. China's non-traditional tourist cities differ in developmental trajectory, institutional environment, and market structure, which limits the applicability of findings generated in other settings.

Two positions can be distinguished in this literature. One treats the rise of non-traditional destinations as an opportunity to be amplified through marketing and platform visibility; the other treats it as a governance problem in which sudden popularity outpaces infrastructure and erodes local authenticity. Both positions rest largely on conceptual argument or single-case narrative accounts, and neither has been tested against systematic evidence on what promotional content for such cities actually contains. This gap motivates the descriptive mapping undertaken here.

2.3. Visual and Video Content Analysis Methods

Text analysis methods have been widely applied across disciplines to systematically extract and interpret meaningful patterns from various data types. With the rapid rise of video-based media, researchers have begun adapting text analysis methods—particularly grounded theory—to analyze visual data such as videos and images. Many scholars advocate for the use of grounded theory to interpret visual materials. Clarke was among the first to apply grounded theory to visual data within situational analysis, proposing a four-step approach: identifying, locating, collecting, and tracking relevant visual materials (Clarke, 2003). This process involves three key stages: identifying image data and its contextual background; generating narrative descriptions of the visual content by segmenting it into detailed components; and systematically observing and analyzing the imagery to derive interpretive insights. Building on Clarke's work, Konecki introduced the concept of visual grounded theory, proposing a comprehensive analytical framework based on "multi-slice imagination" (Konecki, 2011).

Drawing from these foundations, researchers have pursued two main directions: methodological innovation and video data mining. In the former, Fazeli et al. proposed the Visual-Language Video Analysis (VVVA) method, which extends multimodal and visual grounded theory by evaluating video materials across five dimensions: general attributes, multimodal features, visual elements, characterization, and content-structural features (Fazeli et al., 2023). Wilkinson et al. examined the subjective nature of video interpretation, the routine characteristics of video data, and the limitations of visual information, systematically discussing the challenges and opportunities of video-based analysis (Wilkinson et al., 2020).

In the area of video data mining, Chen et al. conducted a content analysis of 222 TikTok videos to identify rural landscape elements, summarizing 32 basic and 12 core categories (Chen et al., 2022). These were ultimately organized into three primary landscape types: rural ecological, vital, and productive landscapes. Gholamhosseinzadeh applied constructivist grounded theory to analyze 35 YouTube video blogs, identifying two main analytical trajectories—content/goals and influencer dynamics—and investigating the interrelationships among them (Gholamhosseinzadeh, 2023).

This study draws upon the above methodologies to extract and analyze features from short tourism videos of non-traditional tourist cities, thereby facilitating a statistical understanding of the visual and narrative patterns embedded in such content.

Taken together, three limitations emerge from this body of work. Research on short-video persuasion has largely examined engagement outcomes without characterizing the content features that produce them; research on non-traditional tourist cities has remained largely conceptual or single-case descriptive; and visual content-analysis methods have been applied mainly to established destinations. The present study addresses this intersection by producing a systematic feature-level mapping of tourism promotion short videos in a non-traditional tourist city.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Methodological Approach: Visual Grounded Theory-Informed Content Analysis

The theory of visual grounded analysis was proposed by Konecki K.T. In response to the rapid development of short video media, the application of visual grounded theory has continuously evolved to accommodate the characteristics of emerging research objects. This study adopts Clarke A.E.'s framework for visual data analysis and integrates it with statistical methods to examine the content of cultural and tourism-related short videos. The analytical procedure consists of three main steps: First, the relevant video data are identified, and their production context and intended purpose are clarified. Second, a narrative description of each video is developed, followed by the summarization and coding of key features. Finally, statistical analysis is conducted on the coded data to observe patterns and draw meaningful conclusions. It should be noted that this study draws upon the analytical logic of visual grounded theory as a guiding framework, rather than strictly adhering to all procedural requirements of classical grounded theory (e.g., theoretical saturation, memo writing, and multi-round theoretical sampling). Specifically, the study integrates Clarke's (2003) visual data analysis procedure with a priori content coding, in which coding categories were pre-established based on existing literature and then applied systematically to the video samples. This hybrid approach is consistent with recent adaptations of grounded theory in quantitative-oriented content analysis studies (Fazeli et al., 2023), and is appropriate for exploratory research aimed at descriptive mapping of an emerging phenomenon.

To provide theoretical grounding for interpreting the dissemination characteristics identified, this study additionally draws on the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which posits that audiences actively select media content to satisfy specific needs such as information-seeking, entertainment, and social interaction (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). This perspective is used as an interpretive lens for the observed content patterns. Because this study analysed video content rather than audience responses, no claims are made about the actual motivations of viewers.

3.2. Samples

A large number of accounts on the Douyin platform publish short videos promoting tourism in Wuhan. These accounts can be broadly categorized into three types: general users, enterprise-verified users, and individually verified users. To facilitate the collection of video samples and efficiently retrieve Wuhan-related tourism short videos—while also considering account influence and content quality—this study conducted a search for all Douyin accounts containing the keyword "Wuhan" and having more than 100,000 followers. From these accounts, videos that were posted between January 1, 2023, and December 1, 2024, and received over 1,000 likes were identified as eligible for inclusion in the study. Based on these criteria, a total of 48 accounts were found to meet the requirements, contributing a combined total of 4968 short videos. A simple random sampling method was then applied: all 4968 video links were assigned unique identification numbers, and 496 videos (representing 10% of the total) were randomly selected as the final sample for analysis. The inclusion thresholds were set as follows. The 100,000-follower criterion restricted the frame to accounts whose content reaches the platform's recommendation flows; the 1000-like criterion excluded videos with negligible circulation; and the observation window covers the period following the full relaxation of pandemic-related travel restrictions in China, during which Wuhan's inbound tourism recovered and short-video destination promotion intensified. These criteria necessarily construct a high-visibility sampling frame. Videos posted by ordinary users, by accounts with smaller followings, or by accounts whose names do not contain "Wuhan" are systematically underrepresented. The distributions reported below therefore describe this high-visibility segment and should not be generalized to Wuhan-related tourism content on Douyin as a whole.

3.3. Coding

Research on tourism promotional short videos in non-traditional tourist cities is still in an early stage, and there are few well-established coding frameworks available for direct reference. Therefore, the coding framework was developed in two stages. First, four analytical dimensions and their initial categories were derived deductively by synthesizing coding schemes from three bodies of existing literature. Second, these a priori categories were refined inductively through open coding of a preliminary subset of videos, during which category labels were clarified and boundary rules established. The subject attribute dimension, covering publisher type and co-creation status, was adapted from Fazeli et al.'s (2023) general attributes category in their Visual-Language Video Analysis framework. The editing attribute dimension, encompassing video type, human voice form, and subtitle form, drew upon Chen et al.'s (2022) audiovisual coding scheme for TikTok rural landscape videos. The content attribute dimension, including character image, publicity form, and promotional focus, was informed by studies on tourism short video content characteristics (Ye & Wu, 2023; Zhang, 2022; Han, 2019). The interactive attribute dimension, covering comment section interaction and POI card usage, was grounded in research on user engagement and dissemination effectiveness in short video platforms (Qu et al., 2022; Han et al., 2022). These four dimensions were selected because they collectively capture the full production-to-reception chain of short video dissemination: who creates the content, how it is produced, what it communicates, and how audiences respond. This scheme was then revised based on existing research related to tourism promotion, official new media platforms, and rural short video content. The coding system was organized into four dimensions: subject attributes, editing attributes, content attributes, and interactive attributes. These were further divided into thirteen subcategories: co-created videos, publisher, video type, human voice form, subtitle form, character image, form of publicity, video introduction, background music, promotional focus, directional intent, interaction in the comment section, and POI card (Table 1). It should be noted that no formal content-validity assessment or expert review of the operational categories was conducted. The scheme is therefore presented as an exploratory, literature-informed descriptive framework rather than a validated measurement instrument. Where categories could plausibly overlap, the following decision rules were applied. Videos combining on-site footage with edited material were coded as mixed editing only when edited segments occupied the majority of the running time. Videos containing both narration subtitles and verbatim subtitles were coded as "both types present" regardless of the relative duration of each. Store-visit content was assigned to "local cuisine" where food was the primary subject and to "the playability of the city" where the venue was presented as an activity or experience. The category "appearance-focused influencer" refers to creators whose on-screen presence is foregrounded primarily through personal appearance rather than through local knowledge or lived experience of the city.

Table 1. Short Video Feature Coding Table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Third-Level Category	Category Explanation
Subject attribute	Co-created videos	co-created video = 1 Not co-created = 2	The reflection of the number of video creators
	Publisher	Individual verified user = 1 Enterprise verified user = 2 Ordinary users = 3	The identity of the publisher reflected in short videos
Editing attribute	Video type	Real scene shooting = 1 Mixed editing = 2 Photo collection = 3 Slice re-posting = 4	The use of materials and corresponding editing methods in the process of short video production
	Human voice form	Non-local dialect speech = 1 Local dialect speech = 2 voice-modulated speech = 3 No human voice = 4	The human voice forms that appear and are added during the process of short video recording and editing
	Subtitle form	Explanatory subtitles = 1 Simultaneous subtitles = 2 Both types present = 3 No subtitles = 4	The uses and functions of subtitles in short videos
Content attribute	Character image	Ordinary people = 1 The content creator = 2 Celebrities = 3 Appearance-focused influencer = 4 No characters = 5	The images and identities of the characters that appear in short videos

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	Form of publicity	Introduction and guided tour = 1 Store visit record = 2 Life record = 3 Landscape display = 4 Character performance = 5 Other = 6	The form types of videos reflected by short video content
	Video introduction	No introduction = 1 Explanation introduction = 2 Text introduction = 3 Spectacle introduction = 4 Interactive scene introduction = 5	The way to introduce the theme at the beginning of a short video
	Background music	Pure music = 1 Non-pure music = 2 No background music = 3	The components that constitute the "background sound" of short video works
	Promotional Focus	Local cuisine = 1 The playability of the city = 2 Urban scenery = 3 Urban spirit and style = 4	The focus of short video promotion
	Directional Intent	Recommendation = 1 Guided tour = 2 Entertainment =3 Others = 4	The guiding direction of short video works on the emotions and behaviors of the audience
Interactive attribute	Interaction in the comment section	Interaction = 1 No interaction = 2	The interaction behavior between the video operation entity and the audience in the comment section is reflected
	POI card	POI card present = 1 POI card absent = 2	A link card showing the specific location of the video content can be displayed below the short video

3.4. Reliability Test

To assess inter-coder reliability, 20% of the sample (distinct from the initial coding sample) was selected as a test set for inter-coder reliability assessment. A total of 100 short video samples—20.2% of the 496-video analytic sample—were randomly selected using simple random sampling in SPSS. Subsequently, an undergraduate student who was not informed of the research objectives was trained as a secondary coder to independently code each video. The training process consisted of two sessions. In the first session, the secondary coder was introduced to the coding manual, which included detailed definitions and illustrative examples for each coding category. In the second session, the coder independently practiced on a set of ten videos not included in the final sample, and discrepancies between the primary and secondary coder's responses were discussed and resolved through consensus before formal coding commenced. During the formal reliability phase, the two coders coded all 100 videos independently, without consultation. Cohen's kappa was calculated in SPSS from these independent, pre-consensus codes; coefficients for all thirteen categories exceeded 0.75, indicating a high level of agreement (see Table 2). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion only afterwards, in order to establish the final analytic code for each video. For five of the thirteen categories—co-created videos, publisher, background music, interaction in the comment section, and POI card—kappa values of 1.000 correspond to complete agreement between the two coders.

Table 2. The reliability test result of the coding table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Kappa Coefficient
Subject attribute	Co-created videos	1
	Publisher	1
Editing attribute	Video type	0.897
	Human voice form	0.871
	Subtitle form	0.854
Content attribute	Character image	0.876
	Form of publicity	0.823
	Video introduction	0.837
	Background music	1
	Promotional Focus	0.940
	Directional Intent	0.834
Interactive attribute	Interaction in the comment section	1
	POI card	1

Note: Kappa coefficients were calculated from the two coders' independent codes prior to consensus discussion. Values of 1.000 correspond to complete agreement between coders.

4. Results

This study reports frequencies and proportions across coding categories. As the analysis was designed to produce a descriptive profile of content features rather than to test relationships among them, no inferential tests were performed; the patterns reported below are described rather than tested. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not sum to 100.

4.1. Analysis of the Subject Attributes

4.1.1. Co-Created Videos

A co-created video refers to content jointly produced by two or more accounts, with the participating accounts' information displayed beneath the video. As shown in Table 3, only 2% of the tourism promotion videos related to Wuhan fall under this category. In the context of tourism promotion, co-created videos are typically collaborations between official media accounts and high-impact independent media accounts. Compared to independently produced content, co-creation requires greater investment in terms of time and effort. Consequently, most accounts adopt co-created videos as a means of increasing exposure or traffic, rather than as a standard or frequently utilized content format.

Table 3. Subject Attribute Analysis table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Third-Level Category	Proportion
Subject attribute	Co-created videos	co-created video = 1	2%
		Not co-created = 2	98%
	Publisher	Individual verified user = 1	49.0%
		Enterprise verified user = 2	49.0%
		Ordinary users = 3	2.0%

4.1.2. Publisher

According to the sample statistics, among the publishers of Wuhan tourism promotion short videos with more than 1,000 likes on the Douyin platform, individual verified users and enterprise verified users account for comparable proportions (both at 49%), whereas ordinary users constitute only 2%. Within the high-visibility sample defined by the inclusion criteria, verified publishers account for the large majority of videos. Because the sampling frame required accounts with more than 100,000 followers, this composition describes the sampled set and cannot be interpreted as evidence that verified publishers' videos attract greater engagement than those of ordinary users. Individual verified users typically publish content with distinctive perspectives and personalized production styles, while enterprise verified users publish information drawing on institutional sources. Whether these publisher types differ in audience response was not examined in this study.

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4.2. Analysis of Editing Attributes

4.2.1. Video Type

As shown in Table 4, the video types are categorized into real scene shooting, mixed editing, photo collections, and slice re-posting. Among these, real scene shooting accounts for 69%, while mixed editing comprises 30%, indicating that these two formats dominate. Real scene shooting emphasizes the authenticity and spontaneity of the content. Prior research on destination marketing associates unreconstructed on-site footage with perceived authenticity (Ye & Wu, 2023), although this study did not measure viewer responses. Mixed editing, on the other hand, mitigates visual monotony by introducing diverse visual elements, introducing visual variety. This format enables the integration of substantial information in a creative and concise manner, providing audiences with both an aesthetically appealing viewing experience and practical travel guidance.

Table 4. Editing Attributes Analysis table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Third-Level Category	Proportion
Editing attribute	Video type	Real scene shooting = 1	69%
		Mixed editing = 2	30%
		Photo collection = 3	0%
		Slice re-posting = 4	1%
	Human voice form	Non-local dialect speech = 1	34%
		Local dialect speech = 2	32%
		voice-modulated speech = 3	21%
		No human voice = 4	13%
	Subtitle form	Explanatory subtitles = 1	6%
		Simultaneous subtitles = 2	65%
		Both types present = 3	21%
		No subtitles = 4	8%

4.2.2. Human Voice Form

In short videos, vocal forms can be categorized into non-local dialect speech, local dialect speech, voice-modulated speech, and videos without human voice. According to the sample statistics, non-local dialect speech accounts for the highest proportion (34%), followed by local dialect speech (32%) and voice-modulated speech (21%), while videos without human voice constitute a smaller proportion (13%). The Wuhan dialect is rich in local cultural flavor and is widely spoken in Wuhan and its surrounding areas. However, in Wuhan's cultural and tourism short videos, creators more frequently adopt non-local dialect (i.e., Mandarin) speech. This is primarily because Mandarin, as the national standard language, appeals to a broader audience, facilitating wider dissemination. Mandarin is intelligible to audiences outside the local dialect area, which may account for its predominance in the sample; whether language choice affects reach was not tested in this study.

4.2.3. Subtitle Form

Subtitles refer to the textual content added by short video creators during the editing process. According to the statistical analysis of subtitle formats, simultaneous subtitles constitute the largest proportion (65%), followed by videos containing both subtitle types (21%), while explanatory subtitles alone (6%) and videos without subtitles (8%) are comparatively rare. Simultaneous subtitles, which transcribe spoken content into on-screen text in real time, are the most prevalent form in short videos. They facilitate rapid comprehension of the content and align with the common "silent viewing" behavior observed among users of short video platforms. In contrast, although explanatory subtitles can offer additional context and interpretive information, their dependence on accompanying voiceover narration may lead to a high cognitive load, potentially diminishing the viewing experience. Consequently, their usage remains relatively limited in Wuhan's cultural and tourism short videos.

4.3. Analysis of Content Attribute

4.3.1. Character Image

The term character image refers to the primary individual featured in a short video. As shown in the sample statistics in Table 5, short videos featuring ordinary people as the main characters account for 37%, followed by the content creators themselves at 31%. Videos without any characters (13%) and those featuring celebrities (11%) occur at comparable rates, while appearance-focused influencers account for 8%. Ordinary people tend to possess relatability and authenticity, making it easier for viewers to establish emotional resonance. In the context of cultural and tourism short videos, these individuals often represent the lived experiences of tourists or local residents, a pattern consistent with the prominence of first-person, on-site content in the sample. When

content creators appear in their own videos, it reflects the personalized nature of the content. Content creators who appear in their own videos may draw on an established follower base; whether this affects engagement was not examined here.

Table 5. Content Attribute Analysis table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Third-Level Category	Proportion
Content attribute	Character image	Ordinary people = 1	37%
		The content creator = 2	31%
		Celebrities = 3	11%
		Appearance-focused influencer = 4	8%
		No characters = 5	13%
	Form of publicity	Introduction and guided tour = 1	13%
		Store visit record = 2	35%
		Life record = 3	9%
		Landscape display = 4	35%
		Character performance = 5	7%
		Other = 6	1%
	Video introduction	No introduction = 1	56%
		Explanation introduction = 2	12%
		Text introduction = 3	6%
		Spectacle introduction = 4	13%
		Interactive scene introduction = 5	13%
	Background music	Pure music = 1	61%
		Non-pure music = 2	36%
		No background music = 3	3%
	Promotional Focus	Local cuisine = 1	38%
		The playability of the city = 2	38%
		Urban scenery = 3	11%
		Urban spirit and style = 4	12%
	Directional Intent	Recommendation = 1	71%
		Guided tour = 2	12%
		Entertainment = 3	12%
		Other = 4	5%

4.3.2. Publicity Forms

The form of presentation refers to the structural type conveyed by short video content. Sample statistics indicate that among short videos promoting Wuhan's culture and tourism, store visit records and landscape displays are the two dominant formats, each accounting for 35% of the sample, while character performance videos account for a smaller proportion (7%). Store visit videos typically focus on specific shops, restaurants, or featured local products, offering practical information for viewers. In the context of Wuhan's cultural and tourism promotion, such videos introduce local specialty restaurants, craft shops, and regional products. The city is well known for its diverse local cuisine, such as hot dry noodles and spicy duck neck. Store visit videos reflect the city's distinctive urban lifestyle, meeting audiences' interest in local food and consumption culture. Store visit videos present venues through first-person on-site experience and typically include location details in the form of POI cards.

The relatively high proportion of videos showcasing scenic spots suggests that natural landscapes, urban scenery, and historical landmarks continue to serve as key attractions. These videos foreground Wuhan's landscapes, urban scenery, and historical landmarks through dynamic visuals and audio-visual elements. In contrast, videos featuring character performances are less common, due to their demanding requirements in terms of planning, performance execution, production costs, and technical complexity.

4.3.3. Video Introduction

As shown in Table 5, sample statistics indicate that the non-introductory format holds the highest proportion (56%). In this type of short video, the content begins directly with visual presentation, showcasing the unique charm of Wuhan through natural

landscapes, urban features, and cultural elements without explicit contextual framing. The explanation introduction format (12%) provides brief background information, such as the thematic focus, key characteristics of the destination, or aspects of cultural heritage. This method presents the core message at the outset, framed through the creator's personal perspective.

4.3.4. Background Music

Background music in the selected short videos is categorized into three types: pure music, non-pure music, and no background music. The data show that pure music (61%) is used most frequently, followed by non-pure music (36%). Instrumental tracks, which lack lyrics or vocals, are widely employed to create an emotional atmosphere conducive to the display of scenic environments and cultural elements. In contrast, non-pure music—defined as tracks with lyrics or human voices—is typically used in videos that require narration or thematic storytelling. In such cases, lyrics or vocal cues accompany the narration rather than functioning as background atmosphere.

4.3.5. Promotional Focus

The primary thematic emphases of short videos promoting Wuhan's culture and tourism can be classified into four categories: local cuisine, the playability of the city, urban scenery, and urban spirit and style. The data indicate that local cuisine (38%) and the playability of the city (38%) are the two most frequently emphasized themes. As a city renowned for its distinctive culinary culture, Wuhan is home to a variety of iconic traditional dishes, such as hot-dry noodles, spicy duck necks, and tri-colored tofu sheets. Food features prominently as a subject of cultural and tourism promotion content. Meanwhile, the playability of the city refers to the richness of local experiences in tourism, leisure, shopping, and entertainment. Wuhan's cultural and recreational offerings are frequently presented in terms of participatory experience. These two dimensions are particularly significant in content creation aimed at expanding reach and resonance.

4.3.6. Directional Intent

Directional intent refers to the behavioral or emotional orientation encouraged by short video content. Statistical analysis shows that recommendation-oriented videos account for the highest proportion (71%), followed by tour-guide and entertainment-oriented videos, each accounting for 12%. Recommendation-oriented videos showcase Wuhan's cultural and tourism resources and are oriented towards encouraging travel behavior; whether they affect viewer interest or actual visitation was not measured in this study. Tour-guide videos provide practical information, including destination highlights, travel routes, and transport tips, thereby supporting informed decision-making among potential tourists. Although entertainment-oriented videos comprise a smaller share, they introduce lighthearted elements into the city's representation and add to the diversity of promotional content. These formats help compensate for the comparatively rigid structure of purely promotional or informative content, contributing to a more dynamic and accessible media environment.

4.4. Analysis of Interactive Attributes

4.4.1. Interaction in the Comment Section

As shown in Table 6, 86% of the short videos promoting tourism in Wuhan include interaction in the comment section. The comment section provides viewers with a space to express opinions, emotional responses, and communicate. For short videos about Wuhan's culture and tourism, whether comment interaction affects emotional connection or onward sharing was not tested in this study. Additionally, when viewers share their experiences, thoughts, and travel impressions related to Wuhan, it may create a shared response among other viewers and support further circulation of the content.

Table 6. Interactive Attributes Analysis table. Source: Authors.

First-Level Category	Second-Level Category	Third-Level Category	Proportion
Interactive attribute	Interaction in the comment section	Interaction = 1	86%
		No interaction = 2	14%
	POI card	POI card present = 1	61%
		POI card absent = 2	39%

4.4.2. POI Cards

The percentage of videos with POI (Point of Interest) cards is 61%, while 39% do not use them. POI cards contain important information about locations, including names, categories, coordinates, and other details. They often include pictures of landmarks, scenic spots, travel routes, store hours, discount offers, and similar content. Located below the short video, POI cards allow viewers to retrieve location information directly from the video The use of POI cards has become a common practice in short video production. POI cards provide location information that audiences may find useful; whether their presence affects reach was not tested in this study.

5. Discussion

The creation of short videos about Wuhan's culture and tourism shows considerable variety and innovation, especially in the use of co-created videos. Co-created videos remain rare in the sample, and whether collaboration confers a dissemination advantage was not assessed in this study. Verified publishers—both enterprise and individual—account for most of the sampled videos. Regarding video editing and presentation styles, real scene shooting and mixed editing have become the main methods. Real scene shooting presents the city's landscapes and on-site tourism experiences without post-production reconstruction, while mixed editing compresses a larger volume of tourism information into a short format.

Language choice, subtitle format, and background music show consistent patterns across the sample. Wuhan's cultural and tourism short videos mainly use Mandarin instead of the Wuhan dialect, which is intelligible beyond the local dialect area. The common use of simultaneous subtitles allows clear communication even when videos are watched without sound, matching the viewing habits on short video platforms. Among background music types, pure music is the most used, matched to the video's rhythm and pacing. In addition, interaction in the comment section and the use of POI cards are present in the majority of sampled videos.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study can be interpreted through the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory. The predominance of recommendation-oriented videos (71%) and the high rate of comment section interaction (86%) indicate that the content supply is oriented towards informational and social functions. These patterns are consistent with an informational and social-gratification interpretation; because audience motivations were not measured, this reading is offered as an interpretive framing rather than an empirical finding. This aligns with prior research indicating that user engagement is driven by the perceived utility and emotional resonance of content (Han et al., 2022; Shu et al., 2023). Furthermore, the near-equal contribution of individual-verified and enterprise-verified publishers reflects a diversified content ecosystem, consistent with the co-creation paradigm increasingly recognized in digital tourism scholarship (Dewantara et al., 2023).

In terms of methodological contribution, this study extends the application of visual grounded theory-informed content analysis to the context of non-traditional tourist cities, offering an exploratory four-dimensional coding framework that may be adapted for future validation (subject, editing, content, and interactive attributes) that future researchers may adapt for comparative studies across different cities or platforms.

It is important to acknowledge that the present discussion is grounded in descriptive statistical patterns rather than inferential findings. While the proportional distributions reported across the four dimensions reveal meaningful tendencies in Wuhan's cultural tourism short video landscape, causal claims or definitive associations between variables should be interpreted with caution. For instance, although individual-verified and enterprise-verified publishers contribute equally in terms of volume, whether this equality extends to dissemination reach or audience engagement cannot be confirmed without access to complete platform metrics. These analytical boundaries are further elaborated in the limitations section. In conclusion, Wuhan's cultural and tourism short videos exhibit a consistent set of content characteristics across the four dimensions examined. The relationship between these characteristics and Wuhan's tourism outcomes was not examined in this study and remains a question for future research.

6. Conclusions

6.1. Suggestions for Creating Short Promotional Videos for Non-Traditional Tourist Cities

The following recommendations are evidence-informed strategies derived from the observed content distribution rather than empirically validated interventions. Their effectiveness has not been tested in this study and should be evaluated through pilot implementation, using indicators such as pre- and post-campaign changes in comment volume, POI card click-through rate, and reported visitation. Transfer to other non-traditional tourist cities depends on similarity to Wuhan and should be tested rather than assumed.

6.1.1. Strengthen the Co-creation and Collaboration Mechanism

1. Deepen collaboration with influential bloggers and self-media

The municipal government can collaborate with travel bloggers and prominent self-media accounts to promote co-creation of cultural and tourism short videos, an approach that could be piloted to test whether it broadens dissemination reach. Introduce local

Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) as well as those from other regions, and develop "cross-cultural" content by integrating Wuhan culture with external perspectives to attract a wider audience.

2. Establish a support platform for cultural and tourism creators

Create the "Wuhan Cultural and Tourism Creator Support Program," providing financial, venue, and equipment assistance to encourage more local creators to produce high-quality cultural and tourism short videos. Regularly organize short video creation competitions to engage more creators in content production and strengthen the construction of Wuhan's city image.

6.1.2. Diversify Creative Content and Expression Formats

1. Emphasize real scene shooting and mixed editing

Continue to prioritize real scene shooting and mixed editing as key creative approaches. By showcasing natural landscapes, landmark scenic spots, and cultural activities, this could be tested for its effect on perceived immersion and authenticity. Incorporate more historical, cultural, and contemporary elements into mixed editing to enrich content diversity.

2. Optimize language and subtitle design

Maintain Mandarin as the primary language in short videos, while designing subtitles that incorporate local cultural symbols; their effect on viewer experience could be evaluated. Additionally, appropriately integrate the Wuhan dialect or distinctive expressions (with subtitles) to highlight local characteristics.

3. Integrate creative background music

Encourage the use of local music, traditional folk songs, or original compositions inspired by Wuhan culture in short videos. These should be well-synchronized with the video narrative and rhythm whether this strengthens the conveyance of the city's cultural identity could be tested.

6.1.3. Enhance Interactive Features and Emotional Engagement

1. Maximize interaction in the comment section

Design interactive themes such as "What is your favorite scenic spot in Wuhan?" or events like the "Wuhan Snack Challenge" to encourage audiences to share their travel experiences. Highlight and reward high-quality comments; the effect on audience engagement and secondary dissemination could be evaluated against the indicators proposed above.

2. Strengthen the functionality of POI cards

Include accurate POI cards for scenic spots, restaurants, accommodations, etc., in short videos whether POI cards link video browsing to booking behavior could be tested using click-through data. Develop a "cultural and tourism map" reflecting Wuhan's characteristics and recommend "one-stop tour routes" aligned with short video content.

3. Foster urban identity through emotional engagement

Produce a series of short videos themed "Wuhan Stories" that present Wuhan's cultural heritage, daily life, and city spirit through storytelling. Whether such formats produce emotional resonance and audience identification could be tested.

6.1.4. Managing the Risks of Short-Video-Driven Popularity

Short-video promotion also carries risks that warrant attention. First, the prominence of store-visit and food-oriented content blurs the boundary between commercial placement and genuine recommendation, which may erode content credibility over time; platforms and official accounts should require clear disclosure of commercial partnerships. Second, the substantial share of mixed-editing content raises the risk of authenticity erosion, in which filtered or heavily edited visuals create expectations that on-site experiences cannot meet. Third, the widespread use of POI cards channels traffic toward a small number of locations, which can produce local overcrowding, queueing, and disruption to residents' daily routines; destination managers should pair POI promotion with off-peak guidance and the development of secondary sites. Fourth, the low share of content addressing urban spirit and civic character risks narrowing the city's image to cuisine and entertainment, obscuring Wuhan's industrial, educational, and historical dimensions. Anticipating these effects is as important for non-traditional tourist cities as amplifying visibility. These risks are inferred from the observed content distribution and from prior research on destination marketing. They were not measured in this study and require empirical evaluation before being treated as established effects.

6.2. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, due to restrictions of the Douyin platform, the sampling method involved searching for accounts containing the keyword "Wuhan" and conducting statistical sampling on short videos meeting the criteria within those accounts. Therefore, the sample may not fully represent the characteristics of all tourism promotion short videos related to Wuhan. In particular, because eligibility required accounts with more than 100,000 followers and videos with more than 1,000 likes, the proportion of institutional and verified publishers in the sample is likely to be overestimated relative to the full population of Wuhan-related tourism content. Second, this study focuses specifically on Wuhan City and cannot comprehensively represent or reflect the

features of tourism promotion short videos from all non-traditional tourist cities. Consequently, the conclusions and recommendations may not be generalizable to all such cities, but rather may serve as hypotheses for comparative testing in non-traditional tourist cities with similar characteristics. Third, as the study centers on Wuhan and uses short videos created by Chinese content producers, it does not include data from other countries. Whether tourism promotion short videos in non-traditional tourist cities internationally share similar characteristics requires further investigation. Fourth, the study relied on independently coded video features, and many potential feature dimensions were not included, which may limit the comprehensiveness and introduce some bias to the findings. Fifth, as stated in Section 3.3, the coding scheme did not undergo formal content-validity assessment or expert review. It is therefore an exploratory, literature-informed framework rather than a validated instrument, and the category boundaries should be regarded as provisional and open to refinement in future work. Sixth, the analytical approach in this study is limited to descriptive statistics, reporting frequencies and proportions across coding categories. The study was designed to establish a baseline descriptive profile of content features in a context where no such mapping previously existed, rather than to test associations among them; accordingly, no inferential tests were conducted. Differences between categories should therefore be read as descriptive patterns within this sample, and whether they reflect statistically reliable associations remains an open question. Separately, platform constraints prevented retrieval of continuous engagement metrics such as total view counts, completion rates, or follower growth, which would be required to link content features to dissemination outcomes. Future research should apply categorical inferential tests—such as chi-square or Fisher's exact tests—to the coded variables, and, where platform access permits, examine the relationship between content features and actual engagement.

Based on these limitations, future research can deepen exploration in several directions. First, the characteristics of tourism promotion short videos in other individual or broader samples of non-traditional tourist cities in China can be summarized and analyzed to develop more comprehensive and macro-level content creation strategies. Second, additional dimensions of tourism promotion short videos can be investigated, such as their impact on audience travel intentions and collaborative strategies between short videos and other promotional methods. Third, future studies could examine the characteristics and dissemination effects of tourism promotion short videos in non-traditional tourist cities across different national and cultural contexts, allowing for comparative analysis between countries to identify differences. Furthermore, the sampling methods and feature coding frameworks can be refined to enable more thorough and representative research outcomes.

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