

Research on Short Video and Rural Image Shaping from the Perspective of Media Context Theory – Take TikTok Platform as an Example

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Abstract: With the booming development of short video platforms, the interaction between new media and rural image provides a new perspective for the implementation of rural revitalization strategies. Based on the media context theory, this paper adopts the content analysis method to disassemble and analyze the content of the "Three Rural Issues" short videos and their comment areas on the TikTok platform. It is found that the short video platform effectively conveys farmers' life, rural environment, and agricultural activities with the help of media technology, which to a certain extent shapes the public's positive impression of the countryside. Meanwhile, in the rural media context constructed by short videos, the public's social interaction behavior has also changed, endowing the rural image with new contemporary meanings.

Keywords: media context, short video, rural image, content analysis, TikTok.

1. Introduction

Under the rapid development of Internet technology, short video, as an emerging form of media, has risen rapidly and spread widely in a short period of time. More and more rural residents are involved in the filming and production of short videos related to agriculture, rural areas, and farmers, and they have realized the transformation from viewers to participants, and from the "other" to the "self" speaker [1], and the rural scene has gradually moved from the previous situation of being "invisible" to being "actively seen". In this context, how short videos influence and shape the image of the countryside has become an urgent research topic.

2. Literature review

2.1. The impact of media on social behavior: media context theory as a theoretical perspective

Media context theory, proposed by sociologist Gordon Mead, focuses on the role of the media as a "mediator" in social interaction, and how it constructs and influences reality [2]. The core of media contextualism lies in the logical chain of "new media - new context - new behavior", i.e. changes in the media lead to the reorganization of the context, and the reorganization of the context triggers new modes of behavior. With the development of technology and changes in the media environment, especially the development of network society, the emergence of new forms of media has created a

more complex media context compared to the television media examined by Meyrowitz at that time, which has also led to deeper changes in the pattern of human social behavior.

In existing studies based on media contextualism, researchers have modernized and applied Merowitz's theory. Through the case of government microblogging, Tem Qing explores how the media can change the way the government communicates with the public by reshaping the scene [3]. Xu Chen focuses on the combination of media contextualism and scenario theory, for example, the use of the Internet has not only changed the way middle-aged and elderly people interact with their families, but also narrowed the information gap and facilitated the democratization and equalization of family relations [4]. Duan Peizhao discusses the application of media context theory in the new media environment, especially through the case study of e-commerce platform and live broadcasting scenario, which shows how the media can change the social behaviors by constructing a new mode of information flow [5].

2.2. Rural mirrors in the digital age: short videos and the shaping of rural images

In the digital age, short video platforms such as TikTok have become an important medium for shaping and disseminating the image of the countryside. Through short videos, individuals and groups have been able to reconstruct and present the multiple faces of the countryside in virtual space, thus giving new images and values to rural areas in the context of globalization.

Previous researches on the relationship between short videos and rural image mainly include the following core ideas. From the perspective of the constructive dimension of rural image, existing studies have focused on the classification of genre and narrative mode. Li Youxin and other scholars distinguish rural image into three dimensions of landscape, culture and characters through the analysis of the Shutterstock platform, and this classification method provides a framework to support the understanding of the diversification of the rural image [6]; while Chen Ling, taking Li Ziqi and other representatives of the rural short-video creators as a case study, discusses the unique value of laboring narratives in the construction of the rural image, and emphasizes the role of the display of the fruits of labor, the transmission of values and the sharing of emotions. Emotional sharing. This path innovates the research perspective of rural narrative and provides important reference for deepening the theory [7].

In summary, when studying the relationship between short videos and rural image shaping, media context theory provides a new perspective for understanding how short videos, as an emerging medium, construct and disseminate the image of the countryside, and how this construction influences the interactive behavior of the public about the countryside. Through content analysis of short videos on the TikTok platform, this study aims to reveal how short videos play the role of in rural image shaping and how they influence and shape the public's perceptions and impressions of the countryside, in order to better understand the value of the medium of short videos in the dissemination of rural image and the implementation of the rural revitalization strategy.

3. Research design

3.1. Sample selection

In the video list of DouChacha data platform, select the "Three Rural Issues" category, and then sort the searched short videos of Tiktok in descending order according to the comprehensive ranking, and then select the top 100 videos in the past 90 days as the research samples and set up a sample library (the sample covers the period from December 12, 2024 to March 12, 2025).

3.2. Unit division

The collected 100 TikTok short videos were analyzed for content, and a complete video was regarded as an independent unit of analysis.

3.3. Category construction

According to the three domains of farmers, rural areas and agriculture, this study divides the first-level categories of "Three Rural Issues" short videos into three categories: farmer' s life, rural environment, and agricultural activities, and further divides them into seven second-level categories based on the content of the videos (see Table 1).

Table 1: Classification of "Three Rural Issues" short video content and subject matter

General category	Subcategories	Subject matter
Farmer' s life	Daily life category	Food preparation, food tasting, daily news, skill sharing, etc.
	Drama and emotion category	Sitcoms, funny bits, emotional chicken soup, etc.
	Folk culture category	Folk handicrafts, ethnic costumes, non-heritage cultural heritage, acrobatic stunts, etc.
Rural environment	Rural environment category	Rural dwellings, countryside scenery, tourist attractions, etc.
Agricultural activities	Agricultural science popularization category	Agricultural policy promotion and popularization of agricultural knowledge
	Agricultural production category	Scenes of farmers' labour, agricultural science and technology demonstrations
	E-commerce for agriculture category	Promotion of agricultural products

Referring to the coding methods of related researchers for "Three Rural Issues" short videos, a complete coding table was established as follows (see Table 2).

Table 2: Coding categories of "Three Rural Issues" short videos on Tiktok platform

Serial number	First category	Secondary category	Definition	Encodings
1	Scene Themes	Daily life	Food preparation, food tasting, daily news, skill sharing, etc.	A1
		Drama and emotion	Sitcoms, funny bits, emotional chicken soup, etc.	A2
		Folk culture	Folk handicrafts, ethnic costumes, non-heritage cultural heritage, acrobatic stunts, etc.	A3
		Rural environment	Rural dwellings, countryside scenery, tourist attractions, etc.	A4
		Agricultural science popularization	Agricultural policy promotion and popularization of agricultural knowledge	A5
		Agricultural production	Scenes of farmers' labour, agricultural science and technology demonstrations	A6
		E-commerce for agriculture	Promotion of agricultural products	A7
2	Presentation method	On-site filming	True recordings of rural life scenes	B1
		Material editing	Editing and collage of existing materials	B2
		Storytelling	Fictional stories enacted through parody or script writing	B3
3	Sentimentality color	Positively	Reflecting the strengths of the countryside image and highlighting the countryside's character	C1
		Neutral	Content without obvious semantic bias	C2
		Negative	Contents that vilify and negate the image of the countryside, such as backward customs, etc.	C3

3.4. Reliability testing

During the study, two coders, including the author, worked together to complete the coding of the 100 samples. In order to ensure the uniformity and reliability of the coding results, the two coders in this study reached an agreement on the communication of the relevant category classification and clarified the criteria for defining specific categories before the coding work began.

The two coders jointly conducted a coding confidence pre-test on the top 20% of the sample pool. The consistency of the results was tested according to the Holsti Coefficient (HCR) formula, $\text{reliability} = 2m/(m1+m2)$, where m is the number of categories that were identical for both coders, and $m1$ and $m2$ are the number of categories coded by each of the two coders, respectively, which measured a composite reliability of 0.87 for this study.

4. Construction of media context for rural short videos

4.1. Encoding results

4.1.1. Scene theme

The content of "Three Rural Issues" short videos is rich and varied, covering natural scenery, cultural activities, production and life in the countryside. These contents not only show the blend of traditional and modern culture in the countryside, but also reflect the changes and development of the countryside in the context of the new era. From the distribution of scene themes, the videos about farmers' life under the primary category are the most numerous, accounting for 73%, followed by agricultural activities, with relatively few short videos showing the rural environment. Among the secondary themes, short videos on daily life account for the largest proportion, and short videos on e-commerce for agricultures, folk culture and agricultural science popularization account for a relatively small proportion (see Table 3).

Table 3: Scene theme coding statistics

First category	Secondary category	Quantity	Percentage of secondary categories	Percentage of first categories
Farmer's life	Dail life	59	59%	73%
	Drama and emotion	10	10%	
	Folk culture	4	4%	
Rural environment	Rural environment	8	8%	8%
Agricultural activities	Agricultural science popularization	4	4%	19%
	Agricultural production	13	13%	
	E-commerce for agriculture	2	2%	

4.1.2. Presentation method

From the perspective of presentation mode, the short videos that use on-site shooting to present the image of the countryside are the most, accounting for 77% of the total, and most of them are the creators' "casual shooting". On-site filming is simple to operate and realistically restores the rural scene, making the short video more on-site and experiential, which is more conducive to presenting a real image of the countryside. There are also some short videos that show the image of the countryside through the way of story interpretation, and fewer short videos are spliced with materials (see Table 4).

Table 4: Presentation coding statistics

Category	Quantity	Percentage
On-site filming	77	77%
Material editing	7	7%
Storytelling	16	16%

4.1.3. Emotional colour

Based on the content analysis of emotional colours, the "Three Rural Issues" short videos are mainly neutral in emotional colours, with 72% of the short videos having no obvious emotional tendency. Positive videos accounted for 25% of the total, and most of them showed the emotion of "nostalgia" through the record of the beautiful life in the countryside and the memories of the happy life in childhood, for example, the creator with the ID of "Love in the North Wind" shared the scenes of countryside life such as pulling weeds, catching tadpoles, and going down to the river to feel the fish in the short video, with the caption "The old home is the place where the tiredness is. For example, the creator of the short video with the ID "Love in the North Wind" shares scenes of rural life such as pulling weeds, catching tadpoles, and going down to the river to touch fish, with the caption "The antidote to a weary life is the old home", which demonstrates the creator's attachment and nostalgia for rural life. Although the core theme of the only three short videos showing a negative image of the countryside is love and relief, they reveal the poverty and backwardness of the countryside in the process of transmitting positive social energy. Therefore, for shaping the image of the countryside, their emotional colour is classified as negative (see Table 5).

Table 5: Affective colour coding statistics

Category	Quantity	Percentage
Positively	25	25%
Neutral	72	72%
Negative	3	3%

4.2. Analysis of the media context in which short videos construct the image of the countryside

Creators use short video platforms to build media situations about the countryside, so that viewers can immerse themselves in them and feel the charm of the countryside and the life of the "Three Rural Issues". In this process, media technology plays an important role. Firstly, advanced filming and post-production technologies enable netizens to experience real farmers' lives, rural environments and agricultural activities. At the same time, creators can use AI, VR and other technologies to create a virtual imagination of the countryside. Second, short video platforms provide more resources and support for creators, as well as better viewing experience for viewers, such as technical support in terms of algorithmic priority push mechanism and providing more interactive methods.

4.2.1. Lively and vivid farmer's life

Farmers have been transformed from the "spoken" object in traditional media to the subject of self-expression, and have constructed an embodied picture of their lives in digital space. In the process of shaping the image of the countryside, short videos focus on presenting vivid scenes of farmers' lives, which can trigger viewers' emotional resonance and dissolve the psychological and cognitive gaps between urban and rural areas and regions. For example, on 24 January 2025, the creator with the ID "Xiao He Bao Bei" posted a video with the caption "The wax flower tree is so beautiful", recording

the process of making a wax flower tree with her mother in a rural courtyard, interspersed with chatting and amusing mom and daughter clips. The whole video has a relaxed and happy atmosphere, showing the fun of daily life in the countryside.

4.2.2. Intuitive and three-dimensional rural environment

Short video technology empowers the rural space to break through the flat expression of traditional images and construct a three-dimensional rural landscape through the superimposition of multi-dimensional audio-visual symbols. From the smallest interior scene of a house to the largest countryside and mountain scenery, viewers can enjoy the natural and humanistic landscape of the countryside through short videos. For example, the creator ID "ycl" used a drone to take aerial photos to show the twists and turns of mountain roads and the magnificence of mountains; and the creator "Rosebud Ranch Life" filmed scenes such as a small river gorge, a pond, and a vegetable garden to show the freshness of the fields after a rainy day, which confirms the value of digital technology to the aesthetics of the countryside. Digital technology has revalued the aesthetic value of the countryside.

4.2.3. Rich and diversified agricultural activities

Under the decentralised communication mechanism of short video platforms, rural creators have reconstructed the spatial and temporal dimensions of traditional agricultural production through the language of the camera. Vertical topics represented by #Fishing and Hunting Daily, #Orchard Diary, etc., construct a dynamic map of agricultural knowledge by visually presenting real farming activities. The creators use technical means such as first-perspective follow-up and time-lapse photography to transform production processes such as sowing, irrigation and harvesting into audiovisual symbols with aesthetic value, such as macro close-ups of wheat tasseling and aerial images of pesticide spraying by unmanned aerial vehicles, which deconstructs the intensity of agricultural labour and at the same time reconfigures people's imaginations of the modern idyll.

5. Social interaction behaviours in the new media context

In the rural media context constructed by short videos, the social interaction behaviour of the public has also changed. Under the trend of the short video era, creators have a stronger sense of self-expression, and more and more rural people have joined the self-media creation army, consciously operating accounts and trying different creative styles; the public's understanding of the countryside has become more comprehensive and three-dimensional, renewing and reconstructing the traditional impression of the countryside, and they are even attracted by the pictures depicted by the short videos, and have an interest in the countryside and a good feeling about rural life.

5.1. Contextual Shift: from "life in the background" to "presentation in the centre"

The process of the rise of short videos is also the process of the countryside going from "invisible" to "visible". In the era of traditional media, as a disadvantaged party in the sense of economy, technology and resources, the countryside in most cases has low visibility, and is in a narrative structure of "being gazed at", forming an awkward situation in which the events are in the countryside but the aesthetics are in the hands of the viewing subject elsewhere [8]. Goffman's theory of mimesis argues that society is a stage, and people's social interactions are like theatre performances, with public acts in the foreground and private acts in the background. The short video platform makes the traditional social situation break through the geographical limitations, and the information system generates a new way of information flow, in which rural creators hold the right to autonomous discourse, and are given a

"front-stage" platform for public display, so that their "invisible" image is fully displayed in the traditional media. The "invisible" image of rural creators in the traditional media has been fully displayed.

The self-presentation of rural creators on short-video platforms is not "front-stage behaviour" in the sense of the print era, but rather the presentation of a new hybrid scenario, known as "presentation in the middle zone". While short videos contain original records of rural life, they also retain traces of fictionalisation and performance for the sake of traffic, personality and other interests, making them neither as extremely formal as the original front-stage behaviour, nor as easy and casual as the traditional back-stage behaviour [9].

5.2. Cognitive transformation: from "stereotypes" to "image remodelling"

In the past, the print media and electronic media tended to show the "foreground image" of the countryside, and through the media's selection, processing and other gate-keeping activities, the countryside that people see often has a one-sided perception and is in fact "distorted", which makes some people who have never experienced the countryside and the new urban population who have grown up in the countryside have a stereotypical image of the countryside as "poor" and "backward". As a result, some of the urban population who have never experienced rural life and the new urban population who grew up in the countryside have a stereotypical image of the countryside as "poor" and "backward".

Through the window of short videos of the countryside, the public senses the changes in the countryside and begins to re-examine the countryside from a new perspective, abandoning the traditional and backward stereotypes of the countryside. "The filming is too good-looking," "It looks delicious," "I'm really curious, don't they wear socks and sandals in winter in Yunnan?" and "I've never eaten pea tips. I've never eaten pea tips, I don't know if they're any good", "I heard that dumpling skins in the north are rolled out by themselves, is that true?". As the "fast pace" of the city and the "slow pace" of the countryside exist in opposition to each other, most people have beautiful fantasies about the idyllic life in the countryside and become curious and exploratory. According to the ShakeYin 2024 Countryside Literature and Tourism Data Report released by Tiktok Life Service, in 2023, ShakeYin will add 1.09 billion pieces of countryside content, with a play volume of nearly 2.8 trillion. There are more than 170,000 rural cultural tourism punching points (POI, geographic locations) on ShakeYin, corresponding to more than 72.86 million punches, a year-on-year increase of 21%.

5.3. Attitudinal change: from "rural shame" to "self-identification"

In the media presentation of traditional media, the countryside is subjected to a third-party perspective, and its endogenous cultural qualities are neglected, usually portrayed as a flat image of poverty, feudalism and backwardness [10]. As a result, people from rural areas, especially the young generation who have easier access to the media, tend to have an inferiority complex because of their association with the countryside, and tend to intentionally avoid their own rural roots in certain situations and occasions. In the era of short videos, part of the discourse power of rural content and image has returned to rural subjects. At this stage, the image of the countryside is not limited to the traditional and rigid expressions in the official media, but has been diversified by different creators, and the label of "countryside" has been given a richer connotation, and has become the "slow pace" and "peach blossom garden" of people in the context of accelerated social development. The label "rural" has been given richer connotations, and has become an object of support for people's "slow-paced" and "peach blossom" ideal life in the context of accelerated social development.

As a social medium, the social attributes of short video platforms also provide new possibilities for shaping the image of the countryside. Apart from the creation of "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers" short videos, which is an embodiment of identity recognition, the discussions about rural topics in the comment section and bullet comments also imply a kind of self-identity. "I used to eat it when I was a kid, and I miss the wild fruits of that era" "Listening to this sound fills me with memories" "Now I'm one of the main pig killers back in my village." Observing the comments and bullet comments, more and more rural users "see themselves in their childhood" in the "agriculture, rural areas, and farmers" short videos. In this process, rural shame is actually being diluted under the veil of "homesickness".

6. Conclusion

Short video platforms such as Tiktok provide a visual and interactive communication platform for the public, making the shaping of rural image no longer limited to the one-way communication of traditional media. The characteristics of user-generated content (UGC) make every viewer have the opportunity to become a co-shaper of the rural image. This multi-voiced narrative not only enriches the expression of rural image, but also makes the rural storytelling more diversified and three-dimensional. The interaction between short video content and economic activities such as rural tourism and local brand building makes the rural image complete the change in a wider social and cultural context. The positive interaction between short videos and rural image provides a new path for rural revitalisation strategy, and also provides a new perspective for understanding the interaction between digital media and local development practices.

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