

Douyin Communication Strategies of Malaysian Tourism Destination Brand Image In the Context of Digital Transformation

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Abstract: - With the continuous advancement of digital transformation, the tourism industry is facing new communication challenges and opportunities. As an emerging social media platform, Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) has become an important platform for tourism brand communication with its short video content form and powerful social interaction function. Taking Malaysia as a case study, this study explores the communication strategy of the Malaysian tourism destination brand image on the Douyin platform under the backdrop of digital transformation. Through descriptive case analysis, combined with brand communication theory, social media marketing theory, and user participation and emotional resonance theory, the research deeply analyzed the brand communication practices of Tourism Malaysia and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) on the Douyin platform. The results show that the brand communication of tourist destinations in Malaysia has achieved a good communication effect through the creative design of short video content, the enhancement of social interaction, and the cooperative communication of KOLs. At the same time, the emotional resonance of users and the establishment of brand identity are also key factors for the success of brand communication. Finally, this paper puts forward suggestions for optimizing communication strategies, with a view to providing strategic insights for tourism destinations, especially in Southeast Asia, to optimize their social media communication in the context of digital transformation.

Key-Words: - Digital transformation, Douyin, Tourist destination, Brand communication, Social media strategy, Emotional resonance

Received: July 2, 2025. Revised: October 21, 2025. Accepted: November 23, 2025. Published: May 22, 2026.

1 Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the rapid development of technology, especially the rise of social media and short video platforms, the travel industry is faced with unprecedented opportunities for digital transformation. Bilgili and Koc pointed out that Douyin, as the world's leading short video platform, has become a new position for brand marketing with its strong social attributes and content dissemination advantages [1]. In addition, the

underlying algorithm mechanism of platforms such as Douyin is actively reshaping the traditional tourism marketing model, giving priority to the development of innovative short video content, and promoting efficient social interaction, which is completely different from the top-down and broadcast marketing method [2]. Researchers also emphasizes the role of Douyin in reshaping tourism marketing [3]. Malaysia has a rich cultural heritage and tourism resources, and faces fierce international

competition in shaping and spreading the brand image of its tourist destinations. According to the data of the Malaysian Tourism Office in July 2024, the statistics of Chinese tourists traveling to Malaysia from 2023 to 2026 (Figure 1) show that the number of Chinese tourists to Malaysia in 2025 is expected to exceed 2024, reaching 5 million, and the total number of people in 2026. The number is also expected to exceed 2025, reaching 7 million.

In this context, it is of great theoretical significance and practical value to study the communication strategies of Malaysia's tourism destination brands on the Douyin platform [4]. According to the Malaysia Tourism Board's statistical forecast released in July 2024, Chinese arrivals to Malaysia are projected to exceed 5 million in 2025 and further increase to around 7 million in 2026 (see Figure 1). Note: The 2025–2026 figures are forecast estimates.

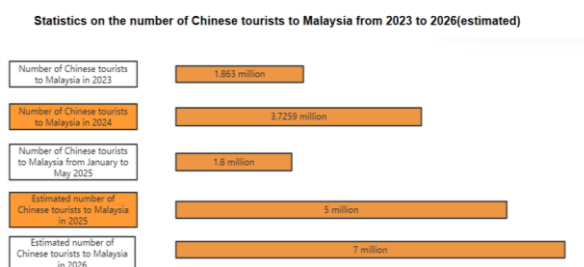


Fig. 1: Statistics on the number of Chinese tourists to Malaysia from 2013 to 2026 (estimated, Malaysia Tourism Board, 2025.7)
(Source: created by the authors)

1.2 Research Questions and Objectives

This study aims to explore how Douyin, as a social media platform, can effectively promote the dissemination of the brand image of Malaysian tourist destinations under the background of digital transformation. Specific research questions include:

- (1) How can the Malaysian Tourism Board and related KOLs carry out brand communication on the Douyin platform?
- (2) How does the communication strategy of the Douyin platform affect the brand image construction of Malaysian tourist destinations?
- (3) How to evaluate the effectiveness of Douyin's communication strategy and make optimisation suggestions?

The main objectives of this study are:

- (1) To analyze the communication status of Malaysian tourist destination brands on Douyin.
- (2) Discuss the implementation process and the effect of its dissemination strategy;

- (3) Put forward strategy optimization suggestions based on research findings to provide a reference for future brand communication.

1.3 Research Methods and Structure

This study adopts the descriptive case analysis method and combines brand communication theory, social media marketing theory, and user participation and emotional resonance theory to conduct an in-depth content analysis and effect evaluation of dissemination. By collecting the relevant data and content on the platform, combining the official account of Tourism Malaysia and the cooperation cases of KOLs of the Douyin account. The structure of the thesis is as follows: The second chapter is a literature review, which reviews the relevant theories and research of digital transformation, short video platform, and tourism brand communication; The third chapter introduces the theoretical framework and research methods; The fourth chapter analyzes the status quo of brand communication in Malaysian tourism destinations; The fifth chapter discusses its dissemination strategy on the Douyin platform in detail; The sixth chapter evaluates the communication effect and puts forward the strategy optimization suggestions; The seventh chapter discusses the suggestions for the continuous optimization of communication strategies; The eighth chapter is the conclusion and prospect, summarizing the research results and looking forward to the future research direction.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Digital Transformation and Tourism Industry Development

Digital transformation refers to changing the operation mode, business model and customer experience of the organisation through the application and innovation of digital technology. For the tourism industry, digital transformation is not only the application of technology, but also means the comprehensive innovation of tourism products, services and brand communication. The tourism industry is undergoing digital transformation to enhance brand communication through big data and social media.

Cuomo, Tortora, Foroudi, Giordano, Festa, and Metallo studied how to use social big data, especially in the field of cultural tourism, to apply digital transformation to the joint design of travel experiences [5]. With the development of Internet technology, especially the application of social media, mobile Internet and big data, the marketing model of tourism has also undergone profound

changes. Madzik, Falát, and Copuš [6] studied how to use social big data, especially in the field of cultural tourism, to apply digital transformation to the co-design travel experience. Based on the machine learning method, some scholars have carried out a literature review and analysed the development trend of the digital transformation of the tourism industry. Kumar, Kumar, Kumari Bhatt, Kumar and Attri further discussed the trend and future direction of the digital transformation of tourism. [7]. According to the Forecast Report on the Development Trend of China's Outbound Tourism Industry in 2024, the main source of travel inspiration for Chinese outbound tourists is social media, accounting for 77.6%; followed by OTA platforms, accounting for 63.4%; and search engines, accounting for 42.9% (as shown in Figure 2). Therefore, digital transformation will enable tourist destinations to break through geographical and time restrictions, realise global dissemination, and improve brand exposure and user participation.

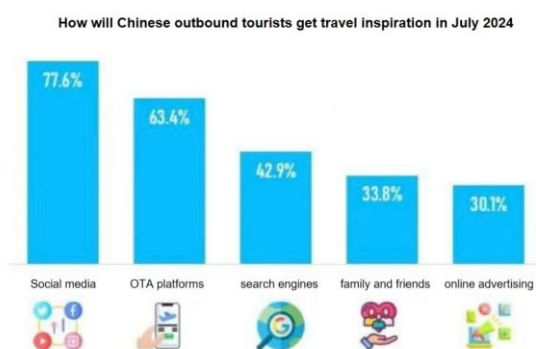


Fig. 2: Channels for Chinese outbound tourists to obtain travel inspiration in July 2024 (forecast report on the development trend of China's outbound tourism industry in 2024)
(Source: created by the authors)

2.2 Communication Characteristics and Advantages of Short Video Platforms

Douyin, Kuaishou, and other short video platforms have become important tools for modern brand marketing because of their short, concise, and easy-to-spread characteristics [8]. Short videos have a strong visual impact and can attract the attention of the audience in a short time. With rich special effects, music, and interactive functions, short videos are not only entertaining but also can stimulate users' emotional resonance. Research by Cheng, Su, Yang, Zarifis, and Mou shows that short videos can promote user interaction and trigger emotional resonance [9]. In addition, research has discussed the communication strategies used in Douyin videos and highlighted the influence of platform-specific

language, presentation style, and engagement tactics on brand communication [10]. The social communication mode makes short videos highly shareable and disseminated. As one of the largest short video platforms in the world, Douyin has become an important channel for enterprises to carry out brand communication. Lee, Harrison, and Lee further emphasized the impact of Douyin's interactivity on brand exposure and user participation [11].

In recent years, the research on short video platforms is no longer limited to the description of form, but has turned to an in-depth explanation of the platform mechanism and user psychological effects. Emerging research shows that interactivity, emotional clues, and perceived authenticity - acting through topic tags and recommendation systems - jointly improve destination exposure and user participation [9], [10]. In Southeast Asia, Douyin is particularly effective for the early promotion of local destinations; the case of Penang shows that the discourse-scene-subject quintet structure can promote communication and co-creation [4].

Cross-cultural comparisons further indicate that platform interactivity and influencer collaboration significantly increase brand visibility and user stickiness [11], [12], [13]. Taken together, the coupling of emotion-driven responses and algorithmic distribution has become a decisive mechanism in tourism short-video marketing, supporting our pathway from content to interaction to brand identification [14].

According to the "2024 China Outbound Tourism Industry Development Trend Forecast Report, the proportion of Chinese users using social media for outbound travel on different platforms shows that Douyin has the highest usage rate, at 71.6%; followed by Xiaohongshu, at 60.4%; and third is the WeChat content ecosystem, at 57.2%, as shown in Figure 3.

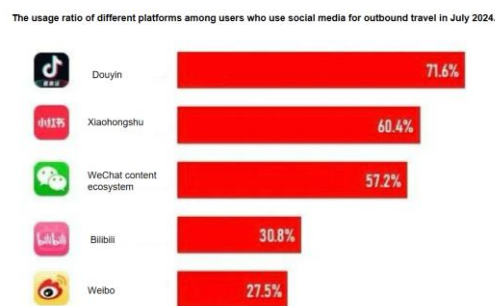


Fig. 3: The usage ratio of different platforms among users who use social media for outbound travel in July 2024 (2024 Forecast Report on the Development Trends of China's Outbound Tourism Industry)
(Source: created by the authors)

2.3 Construction and Communication Strategy of Tourism Brand Image

Tourism brand image refers to the overall impression of tourists on a certain tourist destination, including geographical characteristics, cultural background, service quality, and other aspects. The construction of brand image is established through long-term publicity and communication [15]. Modern tourism brand communication not only relies on traditional forms of advertising but also carries out multi-channel and multi-dimensional communication through social media, word-of-mouth marketing, and KOLs. The application of short video platforms in tourism brand marketing is increasingly extensive. Chen, Wu, and Zhang studied how short video marketing affects perceptions of travel destinations, especially in the post-pandemic era [16]. Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin explored the impact of short video content of tourism vloggers on social media platforms on users' sharing intentions [17]. The core of a brand communication strategy is how to establish a distinct brand image in the minds of consumers and enhance brand awareness and loyalty.

2.4 The Shortcomings of Existing Research and the Innovation of This Research

At present, there is abundant research on tourism brand communication in the context of digital transformation [18], but most of it focuses on traditional media or a single platform. Although some scholars have discussed the impact of short video platforms on the brand communication of tourism destinations, there are few systematic studies on Douyin as a specific platform. In particular, regarding the communication strategies of Malaysian tourism destination brands on Douyin, the existing research has not formed a systematic theoretical framework. Therefore, the innovation of this study is to fill the research gap in this field through case analysis, combined with specific communication strategies and communication effects.

3 Theoretical Framework and Research Methods

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study combines brand communication theory, social media marketing theory, and user engagement and emotional resonance theory to build a multi-dimensional theoretical framework to analyze the strategy and effect of brand communication of Malaysian tourist destinations on the Douyin platform.

3.1.1 Brand Communication Theory

Brand communication theory emphasizes the establishment of a brand identification system and communication system through systematic communication means. Brand communication is not only the transmission of information but also the transmission of emotion and value. In tourism destination brand communication, enhancing the target audience's cognition and emotional connection with the brand through multiple communication channels and interactive means is crucial.

Brand Communication Theory has been proposed and developed by many scholars across different fields. One well-known scholar is Kevin Lane Keller. Kotler and Keller's brand knowledge model emphasizes the cognitive and emotional connection of consumers in brand communication [19]. He believes that brand communication involves not only the transmission of information but also the stimulation of consumers' emotions and their cognitive structure of the brand through communication. In addition, Aaker proposed the brand equity model [20], which introduced communication-related dimensions such as brand associations and loyalty, as shown in Figure 4.

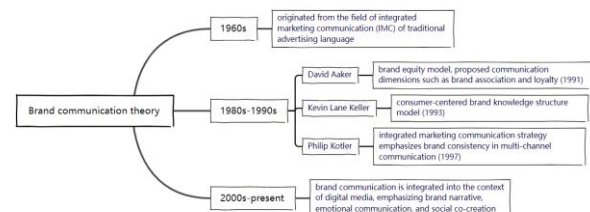


Fig. 4: Brand communication theory development model
(Source: created by the authors)

3.1.2 Social Media Marketing Theory

Social media marketing theory is not a single and unified theory, but a comprehensive field that integrates a variety of theories such as communication, marketing, sociology and psychology. It is a mature research field with a solid and pluralistic theoretical foundation. By drawing on and integrating the core theories of communication, marketing, sociology and psychology, it has formed a knowledge system and theoretical framework that can guide practice. After 2004, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter emerged, and the academic community began to systematically study the interaction between social media and brands. Mangold and Faulds proposed that social media is a hybrid element in the marketing mix [21]. Kaplan and Haenlein defined the concept of social media and classified it into six main types [22].

Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, and Silvestre proposed a seven-function model of social media [23], as shown in Figure 5.

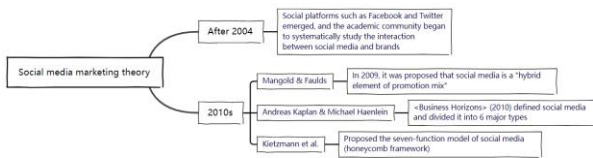


Fig. 5: Social media marketing theory development model
(Source: created by the authors)

3.1.3 User Engagement and Emotional Resonance Theory

In the fields of social media marketing, content marketing, brand communication, and consumer behavior research, "user engagement" and "emotional resonance" are two highly related and widely studied core concepts. Emotional resonance is the catalyst for deep user engagement. Users form a stronger emotional connection with relevant content through social media, thereby generating a willingness to actively participate, thereby deepening the relationship between users and the brand, and repeating this cycle back to the emotional connection stage. The theory of emotional communication and cognitive resonance originates from psychology, while the concepts of "immersion theory" and "audience participation" in communication studies have also gradually developed. Holbrook and Hirschman proposed that in experiential consumption, the emotions triggered by the path between perceived value and emotional resonance have become an important factor influencing consumption choices [24]. Gobe proposed "emotional branding, emphasizing that brands should stimulate users' emotional connections [25], as shown in Figure 6.

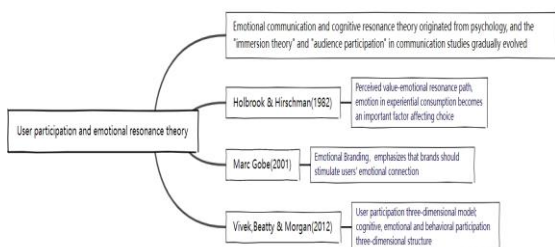


Fig. 6: User participation and emotional resonance theory development model
(Source: created by the authors)

3.1.4 The Integrated B-S-E-O Analytical Framework

Integrating brand communication, social-media marketing, and user engagement—emotional resonance, we advance a staged logic "B→S→E→O": Brand information (B) attains visibility and interaction via platform mechanisms (S), which elicit user psychological responses (E) (participation and emotional resonance), culminating in outcomes (O)—i.e., engagement, intention, and brand identification. Brand communication provides the macro value frame [18], [19], social-media marketing clarifies how recommendation algorithms and hashtag challenges constitute the distributable narrative shell [22], [23]; and engagement-emotion theories explain the path from affective arousal to identification [24], [25]. Accordingly, Figure 7 depicts the integrated framework. To further deconstruct the model, Figure 8 details the platform processes, while Figure 9 renders the psychological mechanism.



Fig. 7: The Integrated B-S-E-O Framework
(Source: created by the authors)

Caption: Brand information (B) attains visibility and interaction via platform mechanisms (S), elicits user psychological responses (E: participation and emotional resonance), and converts to outcomes (O) such as engagement, intention, and brand identification.

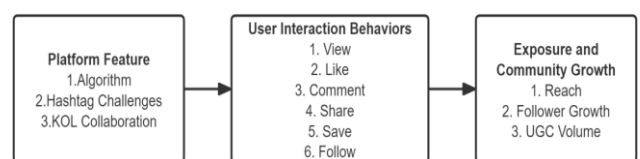


Fig. 8: Platform Process Model
(Source: created by the authors)

Caption: Platform features (algorithm, hashtag challenges, KOL collaboration)→user interaction behaviors (view, like, comment, share, save, follow)→exposure and community growth (reach, follower growth, UGC volume).

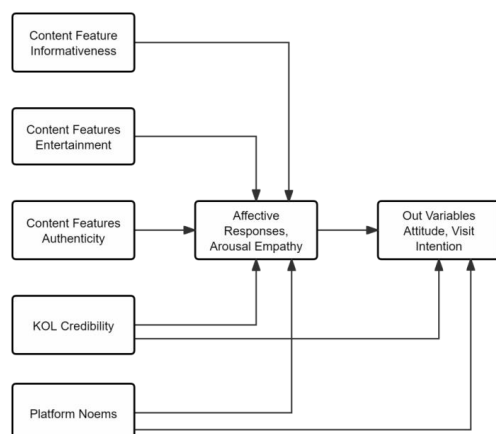


Fig. 9: Psychological Mechanism Model
(Source: created by the authors)

Caption: Content features (informativeness/entertainment/authenticity) → affective responses (arousal, empathy, identification) → outcome variables (attitude, visit intention), moderated by KOL credibility and platform norms.

Specifically, the integrated BSEO framework (Figure 7) is the overall analysis framework of this study. The platform flow model (Figure 8) guides us to investigate the communication mechanism, while the psychological mechanism model (Figure 9) guides us to interpret user participation and emotional response in the research results. The analysis in Sections 8-9 clearly refers to the model.

Therefore, Figure 7 shows the integration framework, Figure 8 describes the platform process in detail (function → interaction → exposure/community growth), and Figure 9 explains the psychological mechanism (information/entertainment/authenticity → attitude and intention). Specifically, the integrated BSEO framework (Figure 7) is the overall analysis perspective of this study. The platform process model (Figure 8) guides us to investigate the communication mechanism, while the psychological mechanism model (Figure 9) guides us to interpret user participation and emotional response in the research results. The analysis in Sections 8-9 clearly refers to the model.

3.2 Research Methods

This study adopts a descriptive case analysis method to make a detailed analysis of the Douyin communication strategy of the brand image of Malaysian tourist destinations in the background of digital transformation. The research explores the specific communication content and strategies [26].

Specific cases include relevant content cases on Douyin, the selection of key opinion leaders (KOLs), and data collection. The study selected the tourism data provided by the Tourism Authority of Malaysia, and collected relevant communication content and user interaction data [27]. Data analysis methods include content analysis (analyzing the communication content, playback volume, and the dissemination effect of the video) and interaction analysis (assessing user participation and emotional response).

In order to ensure the comprehensiveness and relevance of the data, data collection is carried out in two stages. First of all, we collected all 68 videos released by the official Douyin account of the Tourism Authority of Malaysia during the designated research window period (March 1 to July 31, 2024) and comprehensively analyzed their communication activities. Then, we use a multi-step screening program to select representative key opinion leaders (KOL) accounts. First of all, by searching for popular tourism-related topic tags, such as #Malaysia, #KualaLumpur, #Langkawi and #Penang, 50 potential KOLs were preliminarily screened out. To be included in the KOL sample, the following three conditions need to be met: the number of fans exceeds 10,000; at least 3 videos with the theme of Malaysian tourism have been published in the past three months; and the average interaction rate (like + comment + share)/play volume is higher than 3% of the Douyin travel category.. Accurate value. In order to maximize the influence and representativeness of the sample, we have selected the 10 accounts with the highest cumulative views of relevant content in Malaysia from among the key opinion leaders (KOLs) who meet the above criteria. In the end, we purposefully selected 5 videos from these 10 KOLs, which together covered the main tourism topics (i.e., natural scenery, cityscape, food, and culture) outlined in our coding manual, and finally obtained samples containing 50 KOL videos.

3.3 Data Collection and Coding

We combine system sampling and content analysis, focusing on the official Douyin account "Malaysia Tourism Board" and the KOL account related to the Malaysian tourism theme. The data collection period is from March to July 2024. During this period, the official account released a total of 68 videos. We use #Malaysia, #KualaLumpur, #Langkawi, #Penang and other tags to filter out 10 KOL accounts according to the number of plays and interaction rate, and extract 5 representative videos from each account, and finally get 50 KOL videos. The final sample contains a total of 118 short videos. For each

video, we record the number of views, likes, comments and shares, and analyse the themes and emotions of the first 200 comments of each video.

Coding dimensions include: (1) theme type (nature/city/food/holiday, etc.); (2) content characteristics (information, entertainment, emotion, authenticity, these characteristics are not mutually exclusive); (3) interaction characteristics (comment/sharing behaviour); (4) emotion (positive/neutral/negative); and (5) Brand clues (involving countries/cities/scenic spots/slots/activities). Based on the theoretical framework, we have developed a preliminary coding manual. Key operation definitions include: Information: The video provides practical travel information (such as transportation, expenses, itinerary, suggestions). Entertainment: The video uses pop music, special effects, humour or fast-paced editing to entertain the audience. Authenticity: The video presents an unrefined, personalised or behind-the-scenes experience, which makes people feel real and credible. Emotional: Video content or narrative aims to stimulate specific emotions (such as amazement, joy, nostalgia, excitement). The codebook (Appendix A) adapts operational definitions from recent short-video tourism studies on the interaction–emotion–conversion nexus, aligned with platform conventions [4], [9], [11].

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Two trained coders conducted a pilot on 20% of the sample (24 videos; 600 comments). Cohen's indicated good agreement: topic = 0.82; content features = 0.79; sentiment = 0.76; interaction features = 0.84 (all ≥ 0.75). For continuous indicators, Pearson's $r = 0.97$ and ICC(2,1) = 0.95. Discrepancies were adjudicated by a third researcher, after which the codebook was refined for the full coding. Content validity was ensured by deriving categories from recent research; construct validity was supported by PCA (KMO = 0.78; Bartlett's test $p < .001$), confirming the four-dimensional structure; conclusion validity was probed via robust regression of content features on engagement metrics with account fixed effects. Analyses were run in R 4.3.

Two trained coders independently coded a pilot sample of 20% (24 videos and their associated 600 top comments). Any discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved by the two coders. For persistent disagreements, a third researcher made the final adjudication. This process led to a refinement of the codebook definitions and categories to improve clarity before proceeding to code the entire dataset. The final inter-coder reliability, as measured by Cohen's κ , indicated good to excellent agreement.

4 Analysis of the Status Quo of Brand Communication in Tourism Destinations in Malaysia

4 The Background and Challenges of Malaysia's Tourism Industry

Malaysia is a country with a rich cultural heritage, diverse ethnic groups, and beautiful natural landscapes, possessing abundant tourism resources [13]. As a tourist destination for people from various countries, Malaysia attracts a large number of tourists from all over the world [28]. However, in recent years, the competition in the international tourism market has been extremely fierce. Countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam in Southeast Asia, among others, have also intensified their tourism promotion efforts. Therefore, the Malaysian Tourism Board is also facing competitive pressure from neighboring tourism countries [29].

Under the challenge of neighboring countries, Malaysia's entry rate and number of people in Southeast Asia are also facing many pressures [30]. In addition, due to the easing of the epidemic, the tourism industry has experienced a comprehensive recovery. In order to attract more tourists, the Malaysian government and tourism bureau have also realized the need to increase efforts in digital marketing, especially on social media and short video platforms [31]. Therefore, the popularity of Douyin and other platforms, which are the application of facial expression in the Chinese Mainland, also provides a new way for tourism brands to interact with potential tourists and increase brand exposure.

4.1 Status Quo of Tourism Destination Brand Communication

The Malaysian Tourism Board is also aware of the great potential of social media and digital dissemination. It recognizes that these are highly effective forms of communication, as high viewership can enhance Malaysia's brand image in the minds of tourists. The official Douyin account of the Tourism Authority of Malaysia has released a large number of tourism-related videos, covering natural landscapes, food, cultural activities, etc., which are presented creatively, attracting a large number of viewers and interactions. In addition, the Malaysian tourism industry also cooperates with many opinion leaders (KOLs) and travel bloggers to use their influence to improve brand communication. These opinion leaders not only release recommended videos but also interact with fans and share personal travel experiences, thus enhancing brand affinity and credibility. As a channel, social media has a significant impact on tourist destination brands, but

there is still room for improvement, especially in content innovation, interactive participation, and social communication.

4.2 Global Communication Trends and Influence of Douyin Platforms

As one of the world's leading short video platforms, Douyin has more than one billion monthly active users, especially among young users. Its unique recommendation algorithm can help brands accurately reach potential consumers according to user interests. The communication advantage of Douyin lies in its high degree of interactivity. Users can interact with the content through likes, comments, and sharing, thus strengthening the connection between brands and consumers.

According to the data of Douyin Engine City Research Institute, as of March 31, 2023, the number of tourism influencers on the Douyin platform has exceeded 38,000, an increase of 30% year-on-year.

The types of influencers are diverse, including travel scenery, global travel, travel agencies, travel guides, etc. (Note: Douyin travel influencers refer to creators who post travel-related content and have a follower count of 10,000 or more). Among them, the fastest-growing type of influencer is global travel, with a growth rate of 93.5%, followed by travel professionals, and then self-driving travel, with growth rates of 46.9% and 44.8%, respectively. In the first quarter of 2023, Douyin travel influencers posted 1.75 million videos, generating 135 billion views and receiving 2.7 billion likes. In terms of their ability to promote products, in the first quarter of 2023, the order volume of Douyin travel influencers exceeded 5.832 million orders, with a year-on-year growth of 56.6%.

4.3 Analysis of Existing Challenges in Douyin Promotion of Malaysian Tourism Destinations

Although the Tourism Authority of Malaysia initially used the Douyin platform for brand promotion, there are still major shortcomings in content strategy, user interaction, and resource integration, which limit the maximization of its promotion effect.

4.3.1 Homogenization of Content and Lack of Innovation

The videos released by the official account mainly focus on traditional tourism elements (such as islands, twin towers, and food), lacking differentiated narratives. Compared with competitors such as Thailand (immersive cultural experience) and Singapore (developed cityscape), Malaysia failed to

highlight its unique selling points of multicultural integration (such as Malay culture and the primitive tribes of Sabah). The content format is mainly traditional documentary style, lacking "storytelling" and "challenge competitions" - popular features on Douyin - which are highly transmissible and can attract young users to actively participate in creation.

4.3.2 Low Interaction Activity and Weak Community Management

The account's fan interaction rate is generally lower than that of its Southeast Asian counterparts. For instance, official responses are rarely seen in popular video comments, and user questions (such as visa policies, niche routes) remain unanswered for a long time, which weakens audience loyalty. Additionally, a UGC (user-generated content) incentive ecosystem has not been established, such as launching theme tag challenges (#MyMalaysiaAdventure), travel material collection activities, etc., missing the opportunity to expand publicity by leveraging tourists' spontaneous content [29].

4.3.3 Data-Driven and Cross-Platform Integration lag

The dissemination of Douyin has not formed a synergy with other platforms (WeChat, Weibo, Xiaohongshu), and the repetitive distribution of content lacks adaptive adjustments [32]. The insufficient utilization of backend data analysis is observed, such as not pushing differentiated content based on user profiles (e.g., young people in first-tier cities vs. families in underdeveloped markets), nor effectively directing Douyin traffic to the official website or booking platforms [30].

5 Analysis of Douyin Dissemination Strategy for Brand Image Promotion of Tourist Destinations in Malaysia

5.1 The Communication Strategy of the Official Douyin Account of Tourism Malaysia

5.1.1 Content Form and Communication Method

The content of the official Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism Board is rich and interesting, and the dissemination methods are diverse. For instance, in June 2025, the video content was to promote the "Malaysia Tourism Year 2026" and explore various provinces in China. Such content and dissemination methods will directly affect the dissemination effect of the Malaysian national brand. Thayer pointed out that case content analysis is one of the best practices in technology communication research [33]. The official Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism

Board has been committed to attracting global users through creative short-video content. The Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism Board uses various content formats, such as holding the "Malaysia Tourism Year 2026" event, recommending attractions, food, travel guides, and festival celebrations. These videos have a strong visual impact and appeal, and together with the popular music and special effects in Douyin, make the content look more lively and interesting. These videos generally last between 30 seconds and 2 minutes, meeting the consumption demands of Douyin users for quick and convenient content. Additionally, in terms of dissemination forms, the official Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism Board combines the social communication attributes of the platform, through topic participation, topic forwarding challenges, and topic sharing, to encourage users to participate in the dissemination of the content and distribute it across multiple platforms for simultaneous dissemination. For example, when the Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism Board publishes tourist attraction videos, it will attach corresponding challenging topic tags, inviting users to imitate or share their travel experiences, so as to expand the scope of content dissemination. Table 1 in Appendix is based on the official statistics of the Tourism Board of Malaysia, which covers information on cities, scenic spots, shopping, food, and festivals in Malaysia. For a detailed list of cities and scenic spots, please refer to Table 1 in Appendix. The data set covers various types of tourist attractions and cultural activities, ensuring the representativeness and diversity of Malaysian tourism brands on Douyin, and providing a reliable basis for subsequent theme and interaction analysis.

5.1.2 Audience Analysis and Interactive Effect

Audience interaction has a significant impact on the effect of brand communication. Lachner, Hoogerheide, van Gog, and Renkl studied the effect of the learning process when there is no audience presence or interaction, pointing out the importance of interaction in audience engagement [34]. Tourism Malaysia assesses the communication effectiveness of its Douyin account by looking at the user interaction data of the account. As shown in Table 2 in Appendix, a statistical table of video content, tags, and views on the top ten most popular tourist attractions in Malaysia from Douyin. Through the analysis of user interactions, it was found that the audience's interest in Malaysian tourist attractions mainly lies in natural landscapes, urban features, seaside activities, and cultural presentations. Moreover, the social nature of the Douyin platform is

very strong. Users not only watch the content but also actively participate in discussions and reposts of the content. The Malaysian Tourism Bureau has achieved higher user interaction data by strengthening content planning and output, establishing stronger brand loyalty and stickiness. Table 2 in Appendix summarizes the top 10 tourism-related hashtags on Douyin, illustrating the distribution of content types, tag popularity, and user engagement from March to July 2024. As shown in Table 2 in Appendix, Kuala Lumpur, Semporna, and Penang dominate the top-tier attractions, with over 110 million cumulative views.

High participation indicators of topics such as food and natural scenery (see Table A2) can be effectively interpreted through the BSEO framework, which clarifies the dynamic process from content exposure to user action. For example, brand information (B), such as Kuala Lumpur's modern skyline or Malaysia's diverse cuisine, is strengthened through platform strategy (S), including location-based labels and personalized recommendations of algorithms. This precise exposure will trigger the user's psychological response (E), such as saving videos for itinerary planning (participation) or commenting to express amazement and desire (emotional resonance). These reactions will eventually bring positive results (O), including a high share rate and, most importantly, a stronger willingness to visit, which can be directly reflected in the strong participation indicators and user sentiment of the analysis.

5.2 Expanding the Scope and Effectiveness of Dissemination Through the Influence of Tourism KOL

5.2.1 KOL's Influence and Cooperation Mode

To enhance the recognition of Malaysian tourism in the minds of tourists, it is advisable to make good use of numerous tourism KOLs and collaborate with them to jointly promote the Malaysian tourism brand. This is also an important part of the communication strategy, such as the Douyin accounts KOL "Rika-Huahua" and "UU in Malaysia", etc. Through cooperation with KOLs in areas such as brand endorsement, sharing of travel experiences, and challenge activities, the cultural and natural landscapes of Malaysia will be systematically and significantly disseminated, thereby enhancing its brand influence. Huang studied the behaviors of professional KOLs in Chinese live streaming and explored their impact on consumer behavior [35]. It was found that the influence of KOLs on consumers is gradually increasing. KOLs showcase their real experiences by filming their travels in Malaysia,

covering everything from food and accommodation to transportation and daily life, thereby increasing consumers' awareness of the Malaysian brand and expanding the credibility of the dissemination.

5.2.2 KOL Promotion Content and User Response

Consumers trust KOL's video content because KOLs pay attention to authenticity and personalization when releasing videos. For example, KOL will share their travel and diving experiences, beach vacations, and food tastings in Kuala Lumpur, Sabah and Langkawi, Malaysia. These contents are important references for consumers to choose tourist destinations. The content selected by KOL is crucial to the promotion and dissemination of Malaysia's national brand.

Jin, Ning, Liu, Zhao, Gao, and Li studied the uncertainty and multiple constraints of KOL selection, focusing on how to balance multiple factors in KOL promotion to improve advertising effect [36]. Data feedback shows that users respond positively to these contents, especially in the comment section and private messages, when users express strong interest and share their travel ideas. Through KOL promotion, Malaysian tourism brands have established a good reputation among their target audiences and have further improved brand awareness through social interaction. Table 3 in Appendix shows the video statistics related to Malaysian tourism on Douyin and compares the performance of representative tourism KOLs. Data shows that medium-sized creators (such as "UU in Malaysia") usually get a higher interaction rate than top KOLs, which shows that real storytelling and localized content are more resonant with the audience.

As shown in Table 3 in Appendix, the participation rate ($> 50\%$) of medium-sized KOLs (such as UU in Malaysia) is higher than that of top influencers, which indicates that real storytelling and localized content are effective in inspiring audience resonance. The BSEO model can be used to deconstruct this phenomenon, so as to reveal its potential psychological and platform mechanisms.

The higher interaction rate of medium-scale KOLs (such as UU in Malaysia) highlights the connection between E (emotion) and O (result) in the BSEO model. Their content usually has higher perceived authenticity (content characteristics), which directly promotes the audience's stronger emotional resonance and identity (E). This profound psychological response is due to the platform's priority of real interaction S (social) strategies, and is transformed into more concrete results. For example,

the audience is more likely to pay attention to creators and find more information than just liking posts carefully produced by top Internet celebrities, but they lack resonance.

5.3 Social Interaction Strategies for Tourism Brand Engagement

On the Douyin platform, social interaction is one of the key factors for the success of brand communication. The following are the social interaction strategies in the brand communication of Malaysian tourist destinations.

5.3.1 The Role of User-Generated Content

User-generated content has a profound impact on brand communication. Du, Liechty, Santos, and Park updated the definition of user-generated content (UGC) and explored its role in the social media era [37]. User-generated content (UGC) refers to the content created and shared by users themselves. On the Douyin platform, UGC has become a force that cannot be ignored in brand communication. The Tourism Authority of Malaysia has successfully improved the social communication effect of the brand by encouraging users to create content related to Malaysian tourism, such as travel diaries and travel tips. With the help of UGC, the brands under the Malaysian Tourism Board can reach the target audience more directly and enhance users' sense of brand identity. At the same time, the authenticity and affinity of UGC content also help to improve the trust of the brand.

5.3.2 Stimulation of Interactivity and Emotional Resonance

The interactive function of the Douyin platform enables brands to interact with the audience in real time. The impact of emotional resonance and interactivity on brand communication cannot be ignored. Chen and Ibrahim studied the emotional response in artificial intelligence-enhanced interactive installation art and explored how interaction stimulates emotional resonance [38]. The Tourism Authority of Malaysia aims to have deeper interaction with fans through comment areas, private messages, and live broadcasts. This kind of interaction is not only the exchange of information, but also the transmission of emotions. In the process of interaction, the emotional needs of users are fully met, and the emotional resonance between the brand and users is also stimulated.

6 Communication Effect Analysis and Strategy Evaluation

6.1 Audience Response to Content Dissemination

The audience's response to content communication is an important indicator for evaluating the effectiveness of brand communication strategies. The interaction and participation of the audience have an important impact on the effect of content dissemination. Jiang, Basnyat, Tay, and Ngien pointed [39] out that in the healthy promotion of social media, information dissemination and interaction between organizations and audiences help to enhance the audience's trust and confidence in action, thus improving the communication effect. Through the data analysis tool of the Douyin platform, detailed analysis can be made on the content published by the Douyin account Tourism Malaysia and related KOLs, including video interaction, user engagement, and brand identity.

6.1.1 Video Interaction

Video interactions (such as likes, comments, shares) have an important impact on brand communication. According to the data from the Douyin platform, videos related to tourism in Malaysia received tens of thousands or even hundreds of thousands of likes, along with a high number of comments and shares. For example, short videos about the urban landscape of Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, as well as the scenery of Apia and Lankawihai Beach, which were well-produced, could receive over 100,000 likes within a short period of time. At the same time, users would also make comments and share the videos. Therefore, the interaction data of a video reflects the degree of consumers' recognition of the video brand content. The level of recognition determines the possibility of communication, and the level of recognition also determines the interaction situation in the comment section. When there are many interaction comments, it indicates that users are interested in the video content and agree with the expression style of the video.

Meanwhile, some short videos have also stimulated users' creativity. Users began to record their travel experiences and re-distributed the video content about tourist destinations in Malaysia, forming a favorable video dissemination ecosystem. The number of retweets is also a key indicator to measure the effect of content dissemination. The video of the "2026 Malaysia Tourism Festival" recently released by the Tourism Board of Malaysia has been forwarded by users. They share the video with friends, family members, or personal

homepages, thus expanding the influence of the video and reaching a wider audience. This forwarding effect not only improves the exposure of the video but also helps the brand expand its influence through users' social networks.

6.1.2 User Engagement and Brand Identity

When users watch short videos, they will engage in interactive behaviors such as liking, commenting, and sharing. These behaviors reflect the degree of participation of users. The more likes and comments, the higher the user's participation and the higher the recognition of the video. The role of user participation in brand interaction cannot be ignored. Akram, Malhotra, Goraya, Shareef and Malik [40] found that users' participation in social networks can not only enhance the brand image but also enhance global brand awareness, thus enhancing brand loyalty and influence. The Malaysian Tourism Board has successfully used the interactive functions of the Douyin platform (such as challenge activities, topic tags, etc.) to attract a large number of users to participate. For example, in some travel challenge activities, users were encouraged to share their travel experiences in Malaysia, and many users responded positively and shared their stories and travel photos.

This form of participation not only enhances the dissemination of brand content but also improves the credibility and affinity of the brand. Through the real experience of users, the emotional resonance between the brand and the user is strengthened, and the brand image is gradually established. At the same time, through the analysis of user reviews and private messages, it was found that the popularity of Malaysian tourism brands was particularly prominent among some specific audience groups. For example, food and cultural events in Malaysia have attracted the attention of a large number of food lovers and cultural experiencers. Through these in-depth interactions, users' sense of identity with the brand was enhanced, and some users expressed their willingness to choose Malaysia as a destination for their future trips.

6.2 Emotional Resonance and Brand Identification

Emotional resonance is a key psychological factor in brand communication, especially in social media environments such as short video platforms. Emotional resonance is closely related to brand communication. The degree of the user's identification determines the extent of emotional resonance and, thereby, determines the effectiveness of communication. Previous studies suggest that emotional resonance encourages users to engage in

interactive behaviors and facilitates broader content dissemination through ongoing social sharing [41], [42]. Therefore, as one of the strategies to increase influence, videos showing the theme of Malaysian tourism should emphasize the key factor of evoking emotional resonance. They should create content that users can resonate with and establish a deep emotional connection with them.

6.2.1 Trigger Factors and Effects of Emotional Resonance

User comment analysis confirms the key role of emotional resonance ("E" in the BSEO model) in brand communication. For example, videos showing multicultural festivals in Malaysia often trigger comments related to "cultural charm", "inclusiveness", and "want to experience it in person", which shows how content characteristics directly stimulate emotional responses, thus paving the way for brand identity.

By analyzing the interactive data of various short videos on Douyin, we find that the factors that can trigger users' emotional resonance include scripts, music, storylines, and emotional expressions in the videos. For example, in some videos showing the beautiful scenery of Malaysia, users can feel the visual impact and the pleasant atmosphere of the journey. By adding music and sound effects, the scene of showing local food is also more attractive. In addition, the inclusiveness and multiculturalism of Malaysia can also touch the emotions of users, which is reflected in the high interaction data of the video. These videos enhance the audience's sense of identity and interest in Malaysian culture by showing the lifestyles, festivals, and cultural heritage of different ethnic groups [43]. When watching these videos, users will not only be attracted by the beautiful scenery but also be moved by the unique cultural charm of Malaysia, thus generating deep emotional resonance.

User comment analysis confirms the key role of emotional resonance (E in the BSEO model) as a catalyst. For example, videos showing multicultural festivals in Malaysia often attract comments related to "cultural charm", "inclusiveness", and "want to experience it in person". This shows how the fascinating brand narrative (B) directly stimulates positive emotional responses (E) through the Douyin immersive short video strategy (S), thus ultimately promoting brand identity and willingness to visit.

6.2.2 The Formation Process of Brand Identity

Brand identity is the process of consumers internalizing the core values, culture, and concepts represented by the brand. The establishment of brand

identity is a long-term process. Ianencko pointed out that brands gradually shape their unique brand identity through multi-dimensional communication and interaction, thus establishing a deep sense of identity among users [44]. On the Douyin platform, Malaysian tourist destination brands gradually build users' brand identity by stimulating emotional resonance. This process usually goes through the following stages:

(1) First contact: Users are exposed to the Malaysian tourism brand for the first time through the short video platform, which may be through friend sharing, social circle forwarding, or platform recommendation.

(2) Emotional identification: Through expressing emotions, telling true stories, or displaying scenic spots in videos, users begin to resonate with Malaysia and think that Malaysia is a tourist destination worth experiencing.

Brand identity: On the Douyin platform, tourism-related "search" behavior also shows a rapid growth trend. Data shows that in the first quarter of 2023, the travel searches on the Douyin platform exceeded 230 million, an increase of 265.7% year-on-year [45]. Users search for travel information on Douyin, find short videos with emotional resonance and practical value, and participate in commenting, liking, sharing, or following the social interaction of creators. In the process, they gradually identified with the brand image of Malaysia. Eventually, through data-driven recommendations, they browse more similar content and gradually form brand loyalty.

6.3 Long-term Communication Effect and User Stickiness

As users continue to pay attention and interact with their accounts, their brand loyalty will gradually increase. Continuous interest will strengthen the psychological connection between users and brands, thus improving the frequency of interaction and communication efficiency. Cultivating this long-term user stickiness depends on two key dimensions of collaborative strategies: continuous content innovation and proactive interactive participation.

In the content strategy, maintaining user participation needs to take into account the consistency and diversity of the content. Creators should maintain a stable frequency of publication (for example, at least twice a week) and integrate diversified perspectives into tourism content - covering natural scenery, culture, food, and festivals - to avoid content homogenization and aesthetic fatigue. The cooperation between multiple creators can further enrich the content ecosystem of the

account and ensure the freshness of the content and the coherence of the theme.

In the interactive strategy, it is crucial to establish an effective feedback mechanism. The official brand account should actively maintain the community, reply to highly interactive comments in time (within 24 hours), provide user rewards, and launch topic challenges. Making full use of the platform's social sharing function can not only quickly improve brand exposure but also attract new users to participate, thus enhancing the long-term communication effect.

Ultimately, user stickiness does not only depend on the frequency of posting, but also comes from the strong synergy between creative content and interactive community participation. This continuous mechanism consolidates brand identity, promotes the continuous dissemination of information, and provides continuous impetus for cross-platform communication strategies.

6.4 Cross-Platform Synergy and Brand Diffusion Mechanism

The long-term value of tourism brand communication is based on the user stickiness mechanism and depends on cross-platform synergy. Douyin's high-frequency interaction can effectively attract users' attention, but the deepening of brand image and the accumulation of trust need to be disseminated through YouTube, Instagram, and other platforms. Cross-platform communication can extend the content life cycle, expand brand coverage, and enrich audience interaction.

At the operational level, brands should build a closed loop of "short video attraction - long video deep mining - visual enhancement". Douyin is used to trigger instant interaction and emotional resonance; YouTube strengthens brand stories and cultural symbolism through in-depth behind-the-scenes content; and Instagram maintains brand exposure and community vitality through visual tags and continuous interaction. These platforms have jointly built an integrated media ecosystem, raising the recognition of the destination brand from simple "cognition" to "identification".

The model shows the multi-platform communication path of the Malaysian tourism brand ecosystem and its complementary functions. Through the three-layer linkage mechanism of "short video attraction-long video in-depth interpretation-visual enhancement", the mechanism transforms the audience's instant attention into continuous brand recognition. Douyin inspires attention and emotional resonance; YouTube deepens brand stories and cultural symbolism; Instagram maintains continuous exposure and community interaction. These

platforms have jointly built an interactive feedback loop between content, audience, and data, promoting the international dissemination of the destination brand image (see Figure 10).

In addition, cross-platform data coordination and optimized content distribution algorithms can achieve accurate audience positioning and secondary dissemination. For Malaysian tourism brands, this integrated communication mechanism not only enhances their international popularity but also strengthens Malaysia's friendly, safe, and worthy image of exploration.

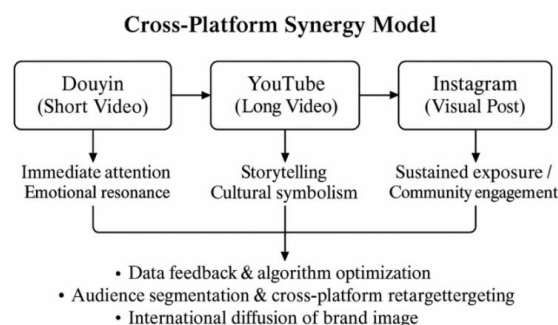


Fig. 10: Cross-Platform Synergy Model for Destination Brand Communication (Source: created by the authors)

6.5 Discussion and Limitations

Although this study proves the effectiveness of Douyin in promoting the Malaysian tourism brand, it must be admitted that it has certain limitations and broader background challenges.

6.5.1 Limitations of the Study

First of all, due to the limitations of the sampling strategy, the universal applicability of the research results is limited to a certain extent. Although the choice of KOL and video is systematic, this choice is a purposeful sampling, which aims to capture content that is influential and attractive in a specific time range. Although this method ensures the analysis of high-impact cases and provides in-depth insight into effective communication strategies, it may not fully represent the entire ecosystem of Malaysian tourism-related content on Douyin, which includes a large number of less influential creators and diverse content styles. Therefore, the research results focus more on revealing potential best practices and major trends than on having universal applicability. Future studies using random sampling or larger and more comprehensive data sets can verify and extend these findings.

Secondly, the results of this study are based on a case study of a single platform (Douyin) in a specific period of time. Future research can use a comparative

method to examine the synergy and differentiation results between many other platforms in the Chinese market (such as Xiaohongshu, which is famous for its in-depth travel guide, and WeChat, which has a strong official account ecosystem). For example, Douyin is good at attracting users' attention and stimulating their initial interest through sensory stimulation, while Xiaohongshu may be better at promoting in-depth planning and building trust through detailed comments generated by users.

Third, our research mainly focuses on successful cases. However, destination marketing on short video platforms also faces inherent risks. These risks include the instability of algorithm recommendations, which may lead to unpredictable continuous exposure, and damage that may be caused by negative user-generated content (UGC) or public relations crises, which spread rapidly on these platforms. Future research should explore crisis communication strategies suitable for the short video environment.

Finally, this study focuses on content and user interaction indicators. Although the high intent index strongly suggests the direct link between these online behaviors and actual travel conversion, it still needs to be further verified through traceable data (such as website clicks or visa application statistics associated with the source of marketing activities).

6.5.2 Theoretical Implications

In addition to practical insights, this study also puts forward several theoretical revelations. First of all, the application and verification of the BSEO framework in the context of destination marketing based on short videos helps us to have a deeper understanding of the micro-mechanism of brand communication in an algorithm-driven environment, as shown in our empirical research results in Sections 5.1.2 and 5.2.2. Our research results show that on platforms such as Douyin, the platform mechanism (S) is not only a channel, but also a participant who actively participates in and jointly builds the user's psychological journey (E). Secondly, this study emphasizes the potential limitations of the traditional brand model. For example, we observe that authenticity is often more effective than fine carving. This discovery is strongly supported by the higher participation of medium-sized KOLs such as "UU of Malaysia", who pay more attention to true storytelling than high production standards (see Table 3 in Appendix). This shows that the existing theory that emphasizes high production standards may need to be readjusted for native social media content. This shows that there is a paradox of "high participation and low conversion rate", which can be

explored in future studies: content designed purely for viral transmission (for example, certain challenges) may obtain high indicators (participation is O), but it may not necessarily strengthen brand identity or promote travel conversion. This disconnection phenomenon can be further incorporated into the BSEO model in future research.

7 Suggestions for Continuous Optimization of Communication Strategies

To further improve the communication effect of Malaysian tourist destination brands on the Douyin platform, this study puts forward the following optimization suggestions:

7.1 Content Innovation and Differentiation

In order to solve the problem of content homogenization indicated in Section 4.4.1, the Malaysian Tourism Authority should constantly innovate content to maintain the attractiveness and vitality of brand communication. For example, you can try to launch a series of travel and adventure content, such as "Malaysian Food Exploration Tour" and "Malaysia Cultural Heritage Experience" to continuously attract users' attention. In addition, breaking through the traditional documentary expression and integrating the popular forms of "storytelling" and "challenge" on Douyin can significantly improve the sharing of content and its attractiveness to young users.

7.2 Enhance Social Interaction and Personalized Recommendations

Based on the findings of low interaction activity and weak community management in Section 4.4.2, strengthening personalized recommendations and social interaction can significantly improve user experience. Through more accurate user analysis, the Malaysian Tourism Board can provide personalized content recommendations according to the interests and needs of different users. This not only helps to improve the click rate and interaction rate, but also enhances the connection between the brand and users. In order to improve user interaction, it is recommended to establish a quick response feedback mechanism, such as replying to highly interactive comments within 24 hours, and building a user-generated content (UGC) incentive ecology by launching thematic challenges (such as #MyMalaysiaAdventure).

7.3 Create the Linkage Effect of Multi-Platform Communication

In view of the lag in cross-platform integration discussed in Section 4.4.3, the Malaysian Tourism Board can expand its brand influence through the linkage effect of multiple social platforms. Multi-platform communication can significantly improve the communication effect of the brand. For example, through joint promotion with Instagram, Facebook, and other platforms, the cross-platform dissemination of brand content can be realized, thus further improving brand exposure and user interaction. At the operational level, a cycle of "short video attraction - detailed explanation of long content - visual enhancement" can be built: use Douyin to improve brand awareness, YouTube for in-depth storytelling, and Instagram for continuous community interaction.

7.4 Strengthen KOL Cooperation and Deep Brand Building

Combined with the analysis of Section 5.2 (which emphasizes the effectiveness of real KOL storytelling and the higher participation of medium-sized creators), the cooperation with KOL should not be limited to short-term promotion activities. The Malaysian Tourism Board should consider in-depth cooperation with KOL to establish a long-term brand endorsement relationship. Through the long-term promotion and in-depth participation of KOL, the credibility and market competitiveness of the brand can be improved. This means switching from a one-time event to establishing a long-term cooperative relationship with KOL, making it a real brand ambassador and building a continuous brand narrative around Malaysian tourism.

7.5 User Participation and Deep Mining of UGC

In order to further give full play to the potential of user-generated content (UGC) (see Sections 5.3.1 and 6.1.2 for details), in addition to encouraging users to publish content, the Douyin account of the Malaysian Tourism Board can also explore more innovative ways to motivate users to participate. In-depth exploration of UGC is crucial to brand communication. For example, the quality and quantity of UGC content can be improved by holding online activities and setting up reward mechanisms, so as to further enhance the social communication effect of the brand. Analysing the dynamic needs of users through data mining of UGC can also provide

valuable insights for the optimisation of future communication strategies.

8 Conclusions and Prospects

8.1 Main Conclusions

This study proves that Douyin has remarkable effectiveness as a powerful platform for brand communication in Malaysian tourist destinations. Analysis shows that the platform's unique content recommendation mechanism and social interaction function provide an accurate channel to reach the target audience. The Malaysian Tourism Board has successfully attracted the attention of users around the world by releasing creative short video content. More importantly, this study uses the brand optimization (BSEO) framework to clarify how brand information is amplified through platform strategies (such as topic tags and algorithms), how to trigger psychological responses such as user participation and emotional resonance, and ultimately bring positive results, including high participation and increased willingness to visit.

The results of the study further highlight the important role of key opinion leaders (KOL) and user-generated content (UGC) in improving the effectiveness of communication. Cooperation with KOL, especially with middle-level creators who are good at telling true stories, can significantly improve brand credibility and audience participation. At the same time, the active sharing and participation of users have also injected a strong impetus into brand communication, creating a participatory culture around destination brands.

In short, this study confirms that the adoption of collaborative strategies on the Douyin platform - combined with innovative content, strategic KOL cooperation, and active community participation - can successfully improve brand exposure, shape an eye-catching destination image, and cultivate brand identity in the target audience, to promote tourism marketing in the digital age. Provide replicable patterns.

8.2 Limitations and Future Prospects of the Study

This research is mainly based on the data and content analysis of the Douyin platform. Although it provides some insights into the communication strategy of the Malaysian tourism brand, the conclusion may be limited due to the limitations of data and samples. Future research can be extended to other short video platforms (such as Instagram, YouTube, etc.), or explore the effect of multi-platform joint

communication for more comprehensive comparison and analysis. In addition, future research can also deeply explore the psychological factors of users in brand communication, such as user motivation, the formation process of brand loyalty, and the long-term impact of emotional resonance on the communication effect. Through these more in-depth studies, we can formulate more accurate and effective communication strategies for tourism brands, and provide further theoretical support and practical guidance for related industries.

8.3 Implications for Tourism Brand Communication in Malaysia

For Malaysian tourism brands, the future communication strategy should be customised according to the interests and needs of different audiences, and customised tourism content covering food, culture, exploration and other themes should be launched to meet diversified tourism needs. In addition, through deeper social interaction, the emotional connection can be further strengthened by stimulating users' emotional resonance. User comments, private messages and other interactive methods can enhance the interaction between brands and users, thus improving brand loyalty. Establishing a long-term cooperative relationship with key opinion leaders (KOL) can also bring continuous exposure to the brand. In addition, through cross-platform communication, more potential audiences can be reached and a broader communication network can be established. Encouraging users to generate content and implement effective incentives will help the brand expand the scope of communication and improve the authenticity and credibility of the content. By creating more opportunities for user interaction and encouraging users to share and participate, brands can promote spontaneous dissemination. Finally, using big data analysis on the platform, you can accurately locate the audience and push content that better meets the interests and needs of users, so as to improve the efficiency of content communication and the brand conversion rate.

8.4 Prospects for Future Research on Tourism Brand Communication

With the continuous development of social media platforms and the evolution of short video content forms, the strategies and methods of tourism brand communication will also continue to innovate. In the future, brand communication research will no longer be limited to a single platform, but should consider the correlation effect between different platforms and

the impact of cross-platform communication. At the same time, with the application of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and virtual reality, tourism brand communication will enter a more diversified and personalised era, and brands will also pay more attention to deep interaction and emotional connection with users. Future studies can also consider using vertical research design to observe the changes of brand communication effect over time and understand the long-term impact of communication strategies. In addition, with the gradual recovery of the global tourism market, future research should pay more attention to the effect of cross-cultural communication, especially for target markets with different cultural backgrounds, and explore how to adjust the communication strategy to better promote the internationalisation of brand communication.

This study comprehensively analyses the communication strategy of Malaysian tourist destination brands on Douyin, discusses the application of short video platforms in tourism brand communication, and puts forward some optimisation suggestions. With more in-depth research and strategy optimisation, Malaysian tourism brands are expected to achieve wider dissemination in the global tourism market and further enhance their brand value.

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Contribution of Individual Authors to the Creation of a Scientific Article (Ghostwriting Policy)

The authors equally contributed to the present research, at all stages from the formulation of the problem to the final findings and solution.

Sources of Funding for Research Presented in a Scientific Article or the Scientific Article Itself

No funding was received for conducting this study.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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APPENDIX

List of Cities, Attractions, Cuisine, and Festivals

Table 1 Statistics of urban attractions, shopping, cuisine, and festivals in Malaysia

Regions	Cities	Attractions	Shopping	Food	Celebrations and Eve
Central Region	Kuala Lumpur	Petronas Twin Towers/ National Museum Damansara/ Kuala Lumpur Tower	Pavillon/ Buklt Bintang	Malay, Chinese, and Indian snacks;	Colorful Malaysia ; The National Contemporary Art Tourism Exhibition;
	Selangor	Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Mosque/ Firefly Parks/ Forest Research Institute of Malaysia	1 Utama/ Sunway Pyramid Shopping Mall	Satay; Seafood;	Hindu Thaipusam Festival; Sunway Lagoon;
	Putra Jaya	Seri Perdana/ Putrajaya International Convention	Alamanda	Selera Putra/ Medan Selera	Flower Festival; Equestrian Park
Southern Region	Nereri Sembilan	Port Dickson/ The Royal Museum of Seri Menanti/	Nilai 3 Wholesale Center	Masak Lemak Cili Api	Bird Watching Convention; Port Dickson Water Sports Festival
	Melaka	Porta De Santiago/ Stadthuys	Quayside Samudera	Nyonya	St. Peter's Day; Malacca International Tourism Fair
	Johor	Endau Rompin National Park/ Mersing Group of Islands	ZON Johor Outlet in Johor Bahru;	Johor Fried Noodles; Turmeric Rice	Sega Durian Festival; International Kite Festival
Northern Region	Perak	Pulau Pangkor/ Royal Belum	Ngo and Tiga Island Handicraft Center;	Sahe Fun, Nga Lai Chicken, Hainanese Chicken Rice;	Ipoh International Open Long-distance Running; Pangkor Floating Carnival;
	Penang	UNESCO World Heritage City/ Penang Bridge	Jining Wansan Market	Fried Kway Teow, Assam Laksa;	Penang International Food Festival; Penang International Dragon Boat Race;
	Kedah	Langkawi/ Bujang Valley Archaeological Museum	Langkawi and Bukit Kayu Hitam Duty Free Shop	Curry Banana Stem; Sauce Lake Fish;	Langkawi Royal International Windsurfing Race
Eastern Region	Pahang	Taman Negara/ Tioman Island	Handicrafts made from dyed Pandan Bark;	Braised Vegetable Noodles; Pahang Laksa; Pahang Roasted Chicken;	Kuantan Cycling BMX Race, Tioman Island International Challenge;
	Terengganu	Terengganu State Museum Complex/ Islamic Civilisation Park	Hand-embroidered Brocade; Hand-painted Batik;	Nasi Dagang; Satar; Otak-Otak	Terengganu Carnival; Global Javanese Musical Instruments Carnival;

	Kelantan	Kuala Koh National Park/ Gunung Stong	Hand-made Batik and Brocade;	Coconut Milk Roast Chicken; Green Leaf Rice; Fish Sauce Paste;	Rice Carnival; Kite Festival.
Eastern Malaysia	Sabah	Mount Kinabalu/ Tunku Abdul Rahman Park	Kota Bailu open-air market	Ambuyat; Tuhau; glutinous rice cake;	Mount Kinabalu International Climbing Competition; Sabah Dragon Boat Race;
	Sarawak	Gunung Mulu National Park/ Bako National Park	Big Market; Kuching Riverside Bazaar;	Sarawak Laksa; Kolo Mee; spicy mixed vegetables;	Balleh Kapit Safari
	Labuan	World War 2 Memorial/ Surrender Point Memorial Monument	OKK Awang Roa; Duty Free Shop	Steamed Coconut Water and Jelly Desserts; Seafood	Labuan International Marine Sports Center holds a sea crossing competition

Source: Douyin public data; timeframe: March–July 2024; scope: aggregated view counts and tag frequencies related to tourism content.

Table 2 Top 10 Tourism Hashtags and Engagement Metrics on Douyin (March–July 2024)

Attractions	Popular content	Core tags	Douyin playback volume	#Videos	Avg. engagement rate (%)
Kuala Lumpur	Night view of the city skyline, Petronas Twin Towers light show, multicultural cuisine (nasi lemak, bak kut teh), internet-famous infinity pool hotel.	#Kuala Lumpur Twin Towers	110 million times	8500	4.2%
		#KLCC	28.993 million times	2200	3.8%
		#Petronas	28.763 million times	1950	3.9%
		#Independence Square	6.659 million times	620	3.5%
Semporna	Dreamy water house experience, crystal clear jelly sea, diving/snorkeling (turtles, fish), water Bajau tribe.	#Semporna Glass Sea	3.309 million times	480	5.1%

		#Kapalai Water House	25.60 million times	1800	4.8%
		#Mataking Island	22.816 million times	1550	4.9%
		#Tun Sakaran Marine Park	314,000 times	45	4.0%
Penang	Street art check-in (sister and brother riding together), rich snacks (fried kway teow, laksa, cendol), Nyonya culture, Kek Lok Si Temple.	#Penang Mural Street	939,000 times	180	4.5%
		#George Town	1.289 million times	240	4.3%
		#Penang Food	60.151 million times	4200	5.2%
		#Penang Hill	7.078 million times	680	3.7%
Langkawi	Sky Bridge thrilling experience, sunset dinner cruise, Giant Eagle Square, duty-free chocolate/liquor shopping.	#Langkawi Sky Bridge	597,000 times	110	4.0%
		#Cenang Beach	802,000 times	150	3.8%
		#Duty Free Shopping	7918 times	25	2.5%
		#Island Hopping	368,000 times	85	3.6%
Malacca	Dutch Red House Square, colorful tricycle floats, historical sites (Fort Santiago), weekend night market, and authentic Nyonya food.	#Malacca Red House	399,000 times	95	3.9%
		#Jonker Street	1477. 50,000 times	320	4.4%
		#Malacca Straits	980 million times	12500	4.1%

		#Nyonya Cuisine	79,978,000 times	3800	4.7%
Kota Kinabalu	“Top Three”: beautiful sunset in the world, hiking/paragliding on Mount Kinabalu, floating mosque (University Sabah), watching proboscis monkeys/fireflies in the mangroves.	#Kota Kinabalu Sunset	290 million times	5200	4.3%
		#Kinabalu Park	19,928,000 times	1200	3.8%
		#Tanjong Aru Beach	3,679,000 times	550	3.5%
		#Sabah University	2,583,000 times	380	3.2%
Johor Bahru	Legoland Malaysia (family first choice), discount shopping for famous brands (JPO/JBCC), geographical location close to Singapore, and authentic and affordable food.	#Legoland	187,000 times	60	3.0%
		#JB Outlets	43,000 times	25	2.8%
		#JPO	89,000 times	40	3.1%
		#Guankou Food	22,000 times	15	2.5%
Kuching	Sarawak Cultural Village experience, check-in for cat statues, tropical rainforest adventure (proboscis monkeys, Rafflesia), riverside night view.	#Sarawak	52,567,000 times	2800	4.0%
		#Cat City	1,195,000 times	220	3.7%
		#Bako National Park	36,000 times	12	3.2%
Redang Island	Classic movie shooting location, white sand and blue sea (especially the open season from May to September), snorkeling to see small sharks/corals, and resort experience.	#Summer Momo Tea	15,183,000 times	980	4.6%
		#Laguna Hotel	599,000 times	120	3.9%

		#Marine Park	26,000 times	10	3.0%
Perhentian Island	Relatively primitive and quiet island, high probability of encountering turtles, cost-effective diving/accommodation, and a long beach sunset.	#Perhentian Island Snorkeling	107,000 times	35	3.8%
		#Perhentian Island	2,444,000 times	420	4.2%

Data source: Douyin platform, March–July 2024; metrics derived from the total view counts and engagement indicators (likes, comments, and shares). Engagement rate = (likes + comments + shares) / total views × 100%. Note: Data collected from the Douyin platform (March–July 2024). The number of views reflects the total number of views of the video with the topic tag. The number of videos and the interaction rate are calculated based on manual tracking and the average from the sample posts of each topic tag.

Table 3 Comparison of the performance of Douyin KOL in Malaysian tourism content (March to July 2024)

KOL name	Follower count (10 k)	Average views (10 k)	Average likes (10 k)	Engagement rate (%)	Representative content them
Wu Er goes	80.3	95	17	17.9	Accommodation, transportation, and Kuala Lumpur food culture
I am losing weight	36.7	68	15.2	22.4	6-day travel guide to Kuala Lumpur and Semporna
Rika-Huahua	573.1	430	81	18.8	Kota Kinabalu sunset, snorkeling, food, and local culture
Xinxin is happy every day	105.8	220	69	31.4	Detailed 9-day tour across Malaysia
Mingming can't stay idle	109.5	160	53	33.1	Local food content in Kuala Lumpur
Qin Peng doesn't know how to play	607.1	550	43	7.8	Travel and lifestyle sharing
UU in Malaysia	1.6	48	36	75.0	Multi-city itinerary (KL + Semporna + Kota Kinabalu)
Once in a lifetime	2.1	53	31	58.5	Practical travel tips and transport guides

Note: The data comes from the public statistics of Douyin accounts (March to July 2024). Interaction rate = (number of likes + number of comments + number of shares) / number of views. The number of fans and views is estimated based on the manual tracking of KOL travel videos.