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DIGITAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR SILK ROAD CULTURAL HERITAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF CITY BRANDING

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This study explores innovative pathways for Silk Road cultural heritage dissemination and urban branding in the digital context. It analyses digital communication characteristics and examines three strategic pillars: visual symbol digitisation, immersive experiences, and interactive engagement. The research promotes the synergy between heritage preservation and brand construction, providing practical insights for image shaping in Silk Road cities.

Key words: digital media technology, silk Road culture, cultural heritage dissemination, City branding, Visual communication

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the relentless advancement of globalisation and informatisation, cultural competition among cities has intensified, making urban image construction a vital component of urban development. Concurrently, the rapid evolution of digital technology is transforming cultural dissemination methods, with virtual reality, digital imaging, and online media continually expanding the scope and formats of cultural transmission. The Silk Road, a historically significant corridor for civilisational exchange, possesses rich cultural heritage resources that lay a crucial foundation for shaping urban cultural identities. How to leverage digital media to achieve the preservation and dissemination of Silk Road cultural heritage while simultaneously advancing urban brand development has become a key research topic in contemporary cultural communication and urban branding studies.

PURPOSE

This paper aims to investigate the synergy between Silk Road cultural heritage preservation and urban branding in the digital era. It analyses digital dissemination characteristics and proposes strategies for integrating immersive technologies into urban communication to enhance cultural transmission and city image design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional cultural heritage dissemination often relies on static displays. While this effectively preserves cultural information, in the digital media era, people seek richer cultural experiences and interaction. Static displays clearly no longer



meet these demands. With the advancement of digital technology, the dissemination of cultural heritage has gradually evolved from singular displays to multifaceted approaches. Research indicates that technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality are becoming pivotal tools in cultural heritage presentation, significantly enhancing the immersive quality of cultural communication and fostering greater public engagement [1]. Consequently, digital media has opened new avenues for the dissemination of Silk Road cultural heritage and urban branding, while simultaneously revealing novel developmental characteristics.

Symbolism. Symbolic characteristics manifest as the transformation of cultural elements into visual symbols. Through visual design, cultural elements such as silk patterns, caravan imagery and historical architecture are distilled to form distinctive urban cultural symbols for digital dissemination.

Narrativity. Digital technology not only alters the form of cultural information but also transforms the methods of cultural storytelling. Through digital imagery, interactive media, and virtual environments, cultural heritage can be presented in a narrative format, enabling the public to more readily comprehend the historical context during their experience [2].

Experientiality. With the advancement of virtual reality, augmented reality, and digital imaging technologies, cultural dissemination increasingly exhibits pronounced experiential tendencies. Digital media can immerse audiences in cultural environments through immersive experiences. For instance, showcasing historical sites or ancient cityscapes via virtual reality allows visitors to experience historical and cultural settings through digital technology, thereby amplifying the impact of cultural transmission.

Thus, symbolisation, narrativisation, and experientialisation constitute the defining characteristics of cultural transmission within the digital media environment, forging new pathways for the contemporary dissemination of Silk Road cultural heritage.

Digital Dissemination Strategies for Visual Symbols.

In urban branding, visual symbols serve as vital carriers for cultural dissemination. Research indicates that cultural resources and local symbols are crucial for constructing city brands. Communicating cultural symbols deepens citizens' identification with their city and enriches the cultural heritage of the brand [3]. The Silk Road's cultural heritage possesses abundant representative visual symbol resources, such as silk patterns, camel caravan imagery, and historical architecture (Table 1). Xi'an, a pivotal starting point of the ancient Silk Road, employs 3D scanning and digital modelling techniques to reconstruct cultural heritage sites like city walls, stele monuments, and terracotta warriors.

Immersive Cultural Communication Strategy.

Immersive communication serves as a vital method for cultural dissemination in the digital media era. Through virtual reality, augmented reality, and three-dimensional modelling technologies, culturally immersive experiential spaces can be constructed, enabling the public to engage more intuitively with historical and cultural heritage.



Table 1

Visual symbol types of silk road cultural heritage
(Source: self-drawn by the author)

Type	Representative Content	Visual Characteristics	Cultural Significance
Pattern Symbols	Silk patterns, camel and horse motifs	Decorative patterns, ethnic motifs	Reflect the artistic style of cultural exchanges along the Silk Road
Scene Symbols	City wall ruins, grotto murals	Spatial landscapes, historical environments	Present the historical settings of Silk Road cultural heritage
Narrative Symbols	Historical stories, religious legends	Visual narration, cultural symbolism	Convey the cultural memory and spiritual meaning of the Silk Road

Consequently, digital technology is progressively becoming a crucial medium connecting cultural heritage with the public. The Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes murals, renowned worldwide for their unique artistic value, have seen their cultural dissemination increasingly shift towards digital and immersive experiences in recent years. The Dunhuang Academy has employed digital technology to establish a model of the Mogao Grottoes murals and launched digital experience projects such as 'Virtual Dunhuang'. These initiatives enable users to explore mural artistry and cave structures online via virtual devices (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Digital Dunhuang Immersive Exhibition
(Source: <https://share.google/images/O0Bgoh6MFY3mfZbyw>)

Interactive Brand Communication Strategy.

Within the digital media landscape, urban brand communication has gradually adopted interactive tendencies. Following the emergence of new media platforms, city cultural dissemination has moved beyond one-way information



transmission to foster multi-party engagement. Through social media, short-video platforms, and online cultural events, the public can participate more actively in the dissemination process. Some Uyghur embroidery artisans have leveraged digital platforms to showcase their craftsmanship and engage with users, gradually forging distinctive regional city brands.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper examines the relationship between Silk Road cultural heritage conservation and urban branding from a digital media perspective. Research indicates that within the digital media environment, cultural dissemination is progressively shifting from traditional static displays towards digital, narrative-driven and experiential communication. Digital media technologies not only transcend the spatial constraints of conventional cultural transmission but also enhance urban brand communication effectiveness through visual symbol redesign, immersive experiences and interactive dissemination mechanisms. Looking ahead, as digital technology continues to integrate with the cultural and creative industries, the cultural heritage of the Silk Road will play an increasingly vital role in urban cultural dissemination and brand development. This integration will provide fresh impetus for cities along the Silk Road to forge culturally distinctive brands with global resonance.

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СТРАТЕГІЇ ЦИФРОВОЇ КОМУНІКАЦІЇ КУЛЬТУРНОЇ СПАДЩИНИ ШОВКОВОГО ШЛЯХУ В КОНТЕКСТІ БРЕНДИНГУ МІСТ

Досліджено інноваційні шляхи поширення культурної спадщини Шовкового шляху та формування міських брендів у цифрову епоху. Визначено особливості цифрової комунікації та проаналізовано три стратегічні напрями: диджиталізацію візуальних символів, імерсивний досвід та інтерактивну взаємодію. Робота обґрунтовує синергію збереження спадщини та брендингу, пропонуючи практичні підходи до формування іміджу міст Шовкового шляху.

Ключові слова: технології цифрових медіа, культура Шовкового шляху, поширення культурної спадщини, брендинг міст, візуальна комунікація.