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# TRANSFORMATION OF CHINESE TOURISM MEDIA IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA ERA

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**Introduction.** In today's globalized world, social media has become an integral part of daily life, with most people being active on at least one platform. It is no surprise that media companies have recognized the value of social media as a powerful tool for information dissemination and audience engagement. In particular, social media platforms are actively used by media outlets that disseminate tourism-related information. Thanks to their large audience, quick access to information, and lightning-fast speed of dissemination, social media is becoming an indispensable platform for promoting tourist attractions, popularizing cultural heritage, and attracting tourists.

**Relevance of the study.** Understanding how tourism media can effectively operate within digital platforms is essential for increasing the country's tourism competitiveness. *The aim of the article* is to determine the features of the transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the era of social media, assess their achievements and challenges on domestic and international platforms, and analyze the publicity effects and challenges these traditional tourism media face in the context of globalization.

**Methodology.** A critical analysis of existing literature was conducted to assess the level of understanding of the issue within global journalism studies. Through comparative analysis, we examined the distinct characteristics of various platforms and their influence on the transformation strategies of traditional Chinese tourism media. Additionally, by analyzing several representative cases of Chinese travel media, we explored the key factors contributing to successful transformation as well as the major challenges encountered in the process.

**Results.** Given the specifics of the national policy that applies to China's media system, it is worth distinguishing between domestic and global social media platforms. For example, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok are outside the Chinese media market. In China, the platforms WeChat, Weibo, RED, Bilibili, and Douyin are widespread. An analysis of traditional Chinese media pages revealed that some actively use international digital platforms to distribute content in addition to domestic Chinese social media. For example, media iPanda. By consistently delivering high-quality panda-related content on various digital platforms, including international social media, iPanda creates a strong emotional connection with its audience.

**Conclusions.** This study offers a new perspective on the transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the era of social media by conducting a cross-platform comparative analysis and combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Unlike previous research, it specifically examines the adaptation of tourism media materials to global digital platforms, identifying key challenges, opportunities, and best practices. The findings provide practical recommendations for optimizing content dissemination through AI, big data, and multilingual strategies, offering valuable insights for media organizations and researchers.

***Keywords:*** *social media, social media platforms, tourism topics, media materials, Chinese media.*

**Introduction.** In today's globalized world, social media has become an integral part of daily life, with most people being active on at least one platform. Across the globe, these platforms serve as essential tools for communication, sharing, and spreading news, opinions, and experiences. According to the Digital 2024 report, an annual study on global media and digital trends released by We Are Social and Meltwater on January 31, 2024, the number of active social media users has exceeded 5 billion, representing approximately 62.3% of the world's population [1].

It is no surprise that media companies have recognized the value of social media as a powerful tool for information dissemination and audience engagement. Tourism-focused media actively leverage these platforms to expand their reach. A notable example is National Geographic, a global media giant that has been publishing print editions since its founding in October 1888. Despite its long history in traditional publishing, the magazine has successfully adapted to the digital era, strengthening its presence on social media and achieving remarkable results. By December 2018, National Geographic had amassed 420 million followers across all social media platforms, generating over 7.9 billion monthly engagements, including 86 million followers on Instagram [2].

Specifically in China, social media platforms represented by WeChat began to sprout in 2010. 2015 social media platforms/tools with promotional functions, such as Weibo and WeChat Public Accounts, appeared. Bilibili, RED and Douyin were also born at this time. By 2020, WeChat, Weibo, RED, Bilibili and Douyin have become representative social media platforms in pictures and texts and videos and have profoundly affected the development path of the media industry. With the development of the information space, China's traditional travel media, whether TV channels, newspapers and periodicals, or websites, are facing unprecedented opportunities and challenges.

*This article aims* to determine the features of the transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the era of social media, assess their achievements and challenges on domestic and international platforms, and analyze the publicity effects and challenges these traditional tourism media face in the context of globalization.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks need to be accomplished: to conduct a critical analysis of scientific sources to determine the depth of understanding of the problem in journalism and related fields; to outline the features of the Chinese media system; features of the functioning of social networks in China; to identify the characteristic features of the transformation of the distribution of tourism media materials in the era of social media, challenges and prospects for development; to provide our own recommendations on the prospects for using the potential of social media to disseminate tourism-related media materials.

*The relevance* of this research lies in addressing a gap in English-language research on the transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the era of social media. By examining this specific segment, the study not only contributes to the broader understanding of media evolution in the tourism sector but also offers valuable insights for policymakers, industry professionals, and other stakeholders.

Furthermore, this study aligns with China's recent policy direction, particularly the progressive relaxation of entry restrictions through 2024, reflecting the government's efforts to boost international tourism. It also responds to the growing academic interest in the role of social media in shaping tourist decision-making behavior. Understanding how traditional tourism media can effectively operate within digital platforms is essential for enhancing China's global tourism competitiveness. It also demonstrates the best practices of using social media platforms to distribute tourism-related media materials on the example of Chinese media.

*The object* of the study is Chinese travel media and their social media pages. *The subject* is the strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of utilizing social media for tourism media content dissemination in China.

**Research methods.** A critical literature analysis was used to determine the degree of understanding of the problem in world journalism studies. Using comparative analysis, we have studied the differences in characteristics between different platforms and their impact on the transformation strategy of traditional Chinese tourism media. In particular, we identified which social media platforms are used to disseminate information by Chinese media, such as CCTV INTERNATIONAL, Chinese National Geography, People's Daily, China Xinhua News, iPanda, Visit Xinjiang, IN XI'AN, and cnliziqi, and compared the number of subscribers of each media on different social media platforms. We specifically analyzed audience reach on domestic and international social media platforms. Next, we examined the content features and methods of presenting tourism-related materials of the mentioned media on different platforms, outlined the specific mechanisms of information dissemination and audience interaction used by each media, and selected and analyzed several of the most successful cases of the promotion of individual tourism-related media materials on different social media. These cases include the successful promotion of the Harbin Ice and Snow Festival, the construction of the overseas city account system of "IN XI'AN" in Xi'an, the global selection activities carried out by the Hainan Provincial Department of Tourism and Culture, and the extensive international influence of the iPanda platform. Based on several typical cases of Chinese travel media, we have analyzed in depth the key factors of successful transformation and the main difficulties they faced.

**Results and discussion.** During the years of its existence the number of social media platforms and users has increased significantly, and they have been fully integrated into and affected people's daily lives. Social media represented by Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok have swept the world. Due to the scale effect of the Internet, after decades of development, social media worldwide has shown a trend of convergence.

The development of social media in China is very different from the spread of social media platforms around the world. Because of China's independent Internet control policy outside the mainstream world, in the past nearly 30 years, Chinese local Internet companies have taken their path in a series of fields, including search engines, e-commerce, mobile payments, and information security, including the field of social media, and have given birth to social media applications with similar functions to international social media platforms such as WeChat, Weibo, RED, Bilibili, and Douyin.

Chinese social media constitute a specific digital ecosystem, but their main task, like a number of global social media, remains the dissemination of information and the exchange of experience. In particular, social media platforms are actively used by media outlets that disseminate tourism-related information. Thanks to their large audience, quick access to information, and lightning-fast speed of dissemination, social media is becoming an indispensable platform for promoting tourist attractions, popularizing cultural heritage, and attracting tourists.

From the user's end, users are accustomed to searching, following, and sharing tourism-related information on social media. Although social media is not the top information communication channel, its role in tourism has attracted much attention [3]. Studies have shown that when tourists use search engines to search for information online, they are likely to be directed to social media sites because of the high interconnectivity of these sites [4]. Social media technology allows users to create and communicate various content on the website, including text, graphics, audio and video. Scholars Tung & Ritchie [5], Munar & Jacobsen [3], believe that social media has fundamentally changed personal travel plans and consumption patterns. Yuan, Chan and others also talk about the influence of information from social networks on the formation of travel plans [6].

According to Arival's research, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook are the most popular social media platforms among tourists. Since visual content such as videos and pictures on these platforms are naturally compatible with travel content, tourists are more willing to collect travel destination information or share travel experiences [8]. According to

Statista data, 75% of international tourists are inspired by social media to travel to a specific destination, and 48% of tourists will share their travels on social media [7].

The rise of social media has fundamentally transformed the way tourist attractions are promoted, particularly in terms of content production. Platforms like Weibo and Douyin facilitate the rapid dissemination of information while enhancing audience engagement through user-generated content (UGC). Many tourism bureaus and media organizations leverage social media to share real-time updates and interactive content about Chinese tourist destinations, significantly increasing global awareness and interest in these attractions [9].

From a communication perspective, social media has extended the reach and duration of tourism promotion, allowing tourist destinations to be showcased in a more dynamic and immersive way. This has contributed to the creation of a multi-dimensional representation of travel experiences, enhancing audience engagement and destination appeal. The most intuitive effect of social media in the tourism industry is to increase the number of visits to the destination, which benefits the brand-building of tourist destinations [10].

The influence of social media on travel decision-making has attracted much attention from scholars. In particular, there are several studies aimed at determining the role of social media in making decisions about future travel [11], [12], [13]. Research by Cox et al. [11] took a deductive approach using an online survey that explored only the roles of social media outlined in the existing literature without offering much enlightenment on new roles or an extended discussion of the existing ones. Likewise, Schroeder and Pennington-Gray [12] followed a deductive approach to investigate social media's role in international tourists' decision-making, especially during a crisis. At the same time, Tse [13] employed a case-study method to explore the marketing role of social media in the hotel industry, emphasizing online communication and distribution. Although these studies have highlighted the importance of social media in tourists' decision-making and in tourism management and marketing, research with an inductive approach focusing on identifying the different roles social media plays has been limited.

China has a rich cultural heritage and natural landscapes. According to data from the Chinese government website, China currently has 57 world heritage sites, ranking second in the world. Among them are 14 world natural heritage sites and 4 cultural and natural dual heritage sites, ranking first globally [14]. According to the introduction of the Ministry of Commerce of China on August 30, 2024, China's tourism industry has formed the world's largest domestic tourism market, and China has become the most significant source country and primary destination for international tourism. In 2023, China's import and export of travel services ranked second globally. In the first half of 2024, China's travel services' total imports and exports reached 961.7 billion yuan [15].

China is home to numerous world-renowned tourist attractions, including the Great Wall, the Forbidden City in Beijing, the Terracotta Warriors of Qin Shihuang, Zhangjiajie in Hunan, the scenic landscapes of Guilin, and the Wolong Panda Base in Chengdu. Additionally, major tourist destination cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu, Chongqing, Dali, and Sanya attract visitors from around the globe. These sites not only showcase China's natural beauty and historical heritage but also reflect its rich cultural legacy.

For instance, the Forbidden City represents ancient Chinese imperial architecture and stands as a symbol of Chinese culture and history. When promoting these attractions, traditional media should go beyond highlighting their touristic appeal and instead emphasize their deep cultural and historical significance, fostering a stronger sense of cultural appreciation and identity among audiences.

Under the influence of China's national system, all tourism resources, including natural scenery and historical and cultural tourist attractions, have long been under the management of the state. The state naturally operates traditional tourism media in China. Its management rights are concentrated in the local cultural and tourism departments or radio and television departments (belonging to administrative agencies rather than media agencies). In terms of types, it covers TV channels, newspaper media, magazine media and travel websites.

Given the specifics of the national policy that applies to China's media system, it is worth distinguishing between domestic and global social media platforms. For example, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok are outside the Chinese media market. In China itself, the platforms WeChat, Weibo, RED, Bilibili and Douyin are widespread. These social media are very popular and have hundreds of millions of users.

Each social media platform has different functional features, attracting different user groups, and different user groups, in turn, promote the platform characteristics of each social media to be more prominent. For example, Facebook, because of a long history of development and older user age, is more favored by corporate customers in terms of promotional features. At the same time, Millennials and Generation Z young people pay more attention to new-generation social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. These platforms are popular among young users because of their exquisite pictures and short videos.

Similar to traditional media in other industries, the transition of Chinese traditional tourism media to social media is an ongoing process, evolving alongside the various stages of Internet development. This transformation has progressed through several key phases, each marked by distinct characteristics and significant milestones that highlight the efforts and achievements of Chinese tourism media in adapting to the digital media landscape.

Key events representing the transformation of Chinese tourism media since 2010 include such as: Sina Travel Channel Launched an official Weibo. As one of the early trials, Sina Travel released much travel information through the Weibo platform, attracting many fans. Ctrip Travel First Weibo marketing campaign. They used Weibo to launch a "most beautiful scenery" voting campaign, which successfully increased brand awareness and user engagement.

Mafengwo and other travel communities have emerged. Through the UGC model, users are encouraged to share their travel experiences, forming an active communication platform for travel enthusiasts and becoming one of the most popular online travel communities. Ctrip launched the "Micro Team Leader" service, using WeChat public accounts to provide users with instant consultation and support, enhancing the user experience, especially providing great convenience for tourists traveling abroad.

"Beautiful China Tour" series of promotional activities. In 2014, the China National Tourism Administration launched this activity, using multiple platforms such as Facebook and X to promote China's tourism resources worldwide.

Qunar.com. Cooperation with KOL (Key Opinion Leader) promotion. They invited well-known bloggers and Internet celebrities to experience and promote specific travel routes to expand brand influence, especially among young groups.

Fliggy Travel Launched AR guide function. Combined with virtual reality technology, users can experience the beauty of the destination at home, improve marketing effects, and provide reference for actual travel.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism of China launched a series of live broadcast activities called "Visit China Online,": an innovative measure launched during the epidemic, which led viewers to visit famous domestic attractions through live broadcasts, which not only met people's travel needs but also promoted the recovery of the tourism industry.

This transformation is not only a change in technology and content but also reflects the deepening of Chinese tourism media's understanding of the domestic and international markets and improving service quality. Through continuous innovation and development, Chinese tourism media will continue to tell moving Chinese stories on the global stage and attract more domestic and foreign tourists to experience this ancient and magical land.

Although Chinese traditional tourism media have undergone a few stages of transformation on social media platforms, not all traditional tourism media can successfully "transform" in the social media era because the Internet has a scale effect. Few traditional tourism media can successfully preserve their original brands in the social media era.

This work selects some successful Chinese media accounts on international social media. Some of them are mainstream media accounts, but they have taken on promoting China, while others are emerging tourism accounts that have shifted their fields. In addition, we also noticed that local integrated media also performed well on overseas social media accounts. For example, "People's Daily" has a large number of followers on Facebook (84.67 M), Instagram (1.327 M), X (6.5 M). More narrowly focused platforms are also popular: iPanda – Facebook (27.41 M), Instagram (2.43 M), YouTube (4.06 M), TikTok (3.4M); Visit Xinjiang – Facebook (350K), Instagram (23K), TikTok (145K), IN XI'AN (Facebook), X (23.2K), Instagram (92K), TikTok (90.4K).

Summarizing the activities of Chinese tourism media on social media, the following characteristics can be identified.

Cross-Platform Integration: From Single-Channel to Multi-Platform Collaboration. Cross-platform integration signifies a shift in traditional tourism media from reliance on domestic media formats to actively embracing the Internet and mobile platforms. This transformation has led to the development of a comprehensive content distribution network, spanning domestic social media such as WeChat, Weibo, Douyin, Bilibili, and RED, as well as global platforms like Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok.

Expanding across multiple platforms not only broadens the reach of tourism content but also enhances audience engagement and interactivity. Media outlets such as CCTV INTERNATIONAL, along with major comprehensive platforms like People's Daily and China Xinhua News, have successfully implemented a "one source, multiple terminals" strategy, enabling one-time content production with distribution across various Chinese and international social media platforms through official accounts and dedicated sections.

Insufficient operation of overseas social media accounts: limitations of international vision. Still, their performance on overseas social media platforms is mediocre, and some even have no overseas social media platform accounts. The Global Travel Channel and China Tourism News we selected all have such problems. This reflects that many traditional Chinese tourism media lack international vision or international talents, which makes it impossible to overcome language barriers, cultural differences and international platform rules to spread the charm of Chinese tourist attractions to the world.

In contrast, a few successful cases show that those media that can overcome the above obstacles and know how to use the commonality of human aesthetics or localized content to attract target audiences can often get better responses on international social media platforms. For example, the self-media account "Li Ziqi" has gained more than 100 million fans on Chinese domestic social media platforms in 9 years with its beautiful Chinese rural environment, mysterious traditional Chinese food and skills, and exquisite production, and has gained more than 17.8 million followers on YouTube.

Tourism accounts that specialize in a specific niche are more likely to succeed in the social media landscape. Traditional tourism media typically cover a broad range of attractions with diverse content styles, which was advantageous in the pre-digital era when information sources were limited. However, in the age of social media, this diversity can be a drawback, as it prevents accounts from developing a distinct identity that appeals to a targeted audience.

In contrast, successful tourism accounts, such as iPanda, thrive by focusing on a single, globally appealing theme – pandas. By consistently delivering high-quality panda-related content, including photos, videos, and live streams, iPanda creates a strong emotional connection with its audience. This targeted approach not only secures a loyal following but also contributes to the growth of tourism in Sichuan Province and China.

The transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the social media era has faced significant challenges, often struggling to achieve success. Key obstacles include cultural misunderstandings, content creation limitations, and internationalization challenges.

Cross-cultural communication can lead to misinterpretations of Chinese tourism content, as international audiences have varying cultural backgrounds and perspectives. For instance,

oversimplified portrayals of traditional festivals may cause misconceptions, reinforcing stereotypes rather than fostering appreciation. To avoid this, media outlets must localize content, ensuring it aligns with regional values and cultural nuances.

Balancing authenticity with entertainment is a major challenge. Traditional tourism media often rely on text-heavy content, which fails to engage audiences accustomed to interactive and visually appealing formats. Overly academic material can cause disengagement, while excessively entertaining content risks diluting cultural depth. A solution lies in storytelling, immersive visuals, and interactive elements that make learning about Chinese attractions both engaging and informative.

Cultural preferences and consumption habits vary across regions, requiring tailored marketing strategies. Content that resonates in Southeast Asia may fail to engage European or American audiences. Localized campaigns and collaborations with foreign media and cultural institutions can bridge this gap. A notable example is Zhangjiajie Scenic Area in Hunan, which successfully marketed itself in South Korea by associating visits with the cultural value of filial piety, resulting in a massive increase in Korean tourists.

To thrive in the global digital space, Chinese tourism media must embrace adaptive content strategies, leveraging artificial intelligence, big data, and localized storytelling to enhance engagement and cross-cultural appeal.

With artificial intelligence and big data advancement, Chinese tourism media can refine their content strategies, ensuring precision, engagement, and global reach.

By analyzing user behavior on social media, tourism media can identify popular trends and tailor content accordingly. Platform-specific insights help optimize formats – videos, articles, or interactive posts – to enhance engagement.

AI-driven content recommendations increase audience engagement by delivering personalized experiences. Additionally, multilingual content removes language barriers, making Chinese attractions more accessible. Beyond translation, cultural localization ensures deeper audience resonance by incorporating regional traditions and storytelling techniques.

To maximize impact, tourism media should combine short videos, live streams, and immersive experiences like VR tours to integrate multimedia storytelling. Inviting cultural experts to live discussions enhances authenticity, while user-generated content (UGC) fosters credibility and community interaction.

By leveraging technology, interactive formats, and cultural adaptation, Chinese tourism media can strengthen global engagement and position Chinese destinations as compelling travel experiences in the digital era.

**Conclusions.** This paper comprehensively examines the transformation of traditional Chinese tourism media in the era of social media, revealing both the challenges and opportunities they face. The research highlights that while traditional tourism media, such as "National Geographic China" and "China Tourism News," have struggled to adapt to the digital landscape, self-media and local convergent media have effectively utilized social platforms to enhance content dissemination. Comprehensive media, like People's Daily, achieve greater audience engagement due to their diverse content strategies, while user-generated content creators, such as Li Ziqi, have successfully promoted Chinese tourism and culture, often surpassing traditional media in influence.

The study also identifies key content features that contribute to successful tourism promotion on social media. Engaging and interactive content, including short videos, high-quality visuals, and user participation, plays a crucial role in attracting international audiences. Elements such as cultural storytelling, immersive imagery, and interactive experiences foster deeper engagement and enhance the visibility of Chinese tourist attractions. A notable example is the iPanda account, which leverages universally appealing themes to gain widespread recognition.

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the transformation of Chinese tourism media, emphasizing the need for adaptive content strategies and technological

innovations. By refining digital approaches and leveraging social media trends, Chinese tourism media can strengthen their international presence and increase global recognition of China's cultural and natural heritage.

Despite these insights, the study has certain limitations, primarily focusing on traditional tourism media that have struggled with digital transformation. Future research should broaden the scope by analyzing more diverse cases, conducting cross-cultural content comparisons, and applying quantitative methods to assess audience engagement and dissemination effectiveness. Additionally, integrating emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual reality, and augmented reality could provide new strategies for enhancing the global presence of Chinese tourism media.

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# ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ КИТАЙСЬКИХ ТУРИСТИЧНИХ МЕДІА В ЕПОХУ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ

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**Вступ.** У сучасному глобалізованому світі соціальні мережі стали невід'ємною частиною повсякденного життя – більшість людей у світі є активними користувачами принаймні однієї платформи. Не дивно, що медіакомпанії визнали цінність соціальних мереж як потужного інструменту поширення інформації та залучення аудиторії. Зокрема, світові медіа активно використовують соціальні мережі для поширення інформації туристичної тематики. Завдяки великій аудиторії, швидкому доступу до інформації та блискавичній швидкості її поширення, соціальні мережі стають незамінним майданчиком для просування туристичних об'єктів, популяризації культурної спадщини та залучення туристів.

**Актуальність і мета дослідження.** Розуміння того, як туристичні медіа можуть ефективно працювати в межах цифрових платформ, є важливим для підвищення туристичної конкурентоспроможності країни. Метою статті є визначення особливостей трансформації китайських туристичних медіа в епоху соціальних мереж, оцінка їхньої активності на внутрішньокитайських і міжнародних платформах, а також викликів, із якими стикаються ці традиційні туристичні медіа в умовах глобалізації.

**Методологія.** Критичний аналіз наявної літератури допоміг оцінити рівень розуміння визначеної проблеми у світовому журналістикознавстві. За допомогою порівняльного аналізу ми дослідили відмінні характеристики різних медіаплатформ і їхній вплив на стратегії трансформації китайських туристичних медіа. Крім того, проаналізувавши кілька репрезентативних кейсів, ми дослідили ключові фактори, що сприяли успішній трансформації медіа, а також основні виклики, з якими вони зіштовхнулися в цьому процесі.

**Результати.** З огляду на специфіку національної політики, яка застосовується до медіасистеми Китаю, варто розрізняти внутрішні та глобальні соціальні медіаплатформи. Наприклад, Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube і TikTok перебувають за межами китайського медіаринку. У Китаї поширені платформи WeChat, Weibo, RED, Bilibili та Douyin. Аналіз сторінок китайських туристичних медіа показав, що деякі з них на додаток до внутрішніх китайських соціальних мереж активно використовують міжнародні цифрові платформи для поширення контенту. Наприклад, медіа iPanda. Постійно розміщуючи високоякісний контент про панд на різних цифрових платформах, зокрема – міжнародних соціальних мережах, iPanda створює міцний емоційний зв'язок зі своєю аудиторією.

**Висновки.** Це дослідження пропонує новий погляд на трансформацію традиційних китайських туристичних ЗМІ в епоху соціальних медіа шляхом проведення міжплатформного порівняльного аналізу та поєднання кількісних і якісних методів. На відміну від попередніх досліджень, у ньому спеціально розглядається адаптація медіаматеріалів туристичної тематики до глобальних цифрових платформ, визначено ключові проблеми, можливості та найкращі практики. Отримані результати містять практичні рекомендації щодо оптимізації розповсюдження контенту за допомогою штучного інтелекту, великих даних і багатомовних стратегій, пропонують інформацію, що буде корисною для медіаорганізацій і дослідників.

***Ключові слова:*** *соціальні мережі, соціальні медіаплатформи, туристична тематика, медіаматеріали, китайські медіа.*