
AI translation • View original & related papers at
chinaxiv.org/items/chinaxiv-202310.02701

How We Effectively Tell Chinese Stories Through VR Videos — An Interview with Xiang Xin, Deputy Director of the New Media Department, China Intercontinental Communication Center (Postprint)

Authors: Wang Wanyue

Date: 2023-10-08T00:00:00+00:00

Abstract

In 2014, we launched the first VR tourism outreach activity—the “3D Beautiful China Online Tourism Outreach Promotion Campaign” [FIGURE:1]. Through VR technology and online dissemination, we reached 24 countries and regions, including the United States, Finland, India, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates. As an innovative tourism outreach project, “Beautiful China” was named the “Beautiful China Online Tourism Outreach Promotion Campaign” and included in the 2014...

Full Text

Interview: Media Technology Professionals

How We Use VR Video to Tell China’s Story: An Interview with Xiang Xin, Deputy Director of the New Media Department at China Intercontinental Communication Center

China Media Technology: Please briefly introduce the innovative work of China Intercontinental Communication Center in VR tourism outreach products.

Xiang Xin: The innovative work of China Intercontinental Communication Center in VR tourism outreach can be summarized in several key directions. First, “novelty” has always been a crucial factor in capturing public attention. In an era where large-screen displays and live performances have become commonplace, VR content—enabled by this new technology—more readily resonates

with audiences' appetite for novel experiences, attracting their sustained interest. Second, much of the essence of Chinese culture derives from the interplay between heaven, earth, and humanity, or from continuous spiritual traditions spanning long periods of time. Conventional formats such as text, images, and video often fail to provide overseas audiences with a holistic and vivid representation of these concepts. VR technology, with its powerful capacity for creating virtual realities, can better reconstruct these contexts and present such cultural content more effectively. Third, the "sense of presence" and "immersive experience" created by VR technology enable content to fully capture audience attention, leaving deeper impressions. Simultaneously, because realistic experiences better eliminate language and experiential barriers, viewers can more easily comprehend the content. Fourth, VR technology's 360-degree scene recording and CG simulation capabilities can better transcend spatial and temporal limitations, presenting richer Chinese cultural content within limited physical spaces.

The New Media Department of China Intercontinental Communication Center, guided by the principle of "helping the world understand China and China understand the world," aims to pioneer the integration of new media technology with film and television outreach. With "technology + culture" as its hallmark, the department is committed to building new media communication platforms and establishing brands for external publicity. Since 2013, the department has undertaken research and development in virtual reality technology, with the "3D China" project—supported by the Ministry of Finance—as its core initiative. Under the joint guidance of the State Council Information Office and the National Tourism Administration, the department has facilitated the implementation of multiple VR tourism outreach activities.

China Media Technology: Please discuss the achievements of your VR tourism outreach product operations and share your main experiences and insights.

Xiang Xin: According to Goldman Sachs, VR and AR have the potential to become the next major computing platform, much like PCs and smartphones. DigiCapital predicts that by 2020, the global AR and VR market will reach \$150 billion. As a future development direction, virtual reality will replace traditional media such as mobile phones and televisions, emerging as a disruptive experiential medium. Within this trend, China Intercontinental Communication Center entered the 3D new media field as early as 2012 and began VR technology deployment in 2014. By 2015, "Wuzhou" had already achieved world-leading VR technology results and successfully applied them to external publicity, embarking on an innovative path to promote China to the world in sync with global advanced information technology.

In terms of operational achievements:

In 2014, we launched the first VR tourism outreach activity—the "3D Beautiful China Online Tourism Outreach Promotion Campaign" [Figure 1: see original

paper]. Through VR technology and online dissemination, we reached 24 countries and regions, including the United States, Finland, India, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, and the United Arab Emirates. As an innovative tourism outreach project, “Beautiful China” was named the “Beautiful China Online Tourism Outreach Promotion Campaign” and included in the 2014 tourism outreach cooperation action plan of the State Council Information Office and the National Tourism Administration, receiving high-level attention and strong support.

In September 2015, we co-hosted the first offline VR tourism outreach event—the “Beautiful China Experience Day”—with Reuters at its North American headquarters in Times Square, New York [Figure 2: see original paper]. The event achieved complete success [FIGURE:7, FIGURE:8, FIGURE:9]. Major media outlets including Thomson Reuters, Yahoo, NBC, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, CBS, *New York Post*, and *Travel & Leisure* covered the event extensively. The event was published on 694 websites across 41 countries, reaching over 210 million people. Mr. Riordan William, Global President of Thomson Reuters Internet, repeatedly exclaimed “amazing” and “incredible” during his experience, stating that this method of showcasing China would lead future media trends and held great promise. He expressed hope for more cooperation with China in the future. Concurrently, “3D Beautiful China” VR content entered the Chinese Embassy in Japan.

In 2016, we jointly organized the first “Encounter China” Youth VR Video Competition with the Beijing Film Academy [Figure 3: see original paper]. The event showcased Chinese VR content creativity from a youth perspective and, in conjunction with the China-US Tourism Year, held screenings at Yale University and American University [Figure 4: see original paper]. In January 2016, the “Beautiful China Experience Day” was invited to the “2016 China Festival” in Tokyo, Japan, where “3D Beautiful China” became a highlight of the event, attracting numerous Japanese audiences who queued in the cold wind to experience “Beautiful China” firsthand [Figure 10: see original paper]. In August 2016, the “VR Beautiful China” activity participated in the State Council Information Office’s “Experience China • Mongolia Tour” event [Figure 11: see original paper]. At this event, Ms. Cui Yuying, Deputy Director of the State Council Information Office, noted that this format was easily accepted by foreigners and could attract more people to understand Chinese culture through this approach.

Meanwhile, in 2016, we also established the “Wuzhou VR/AR New Media International Joint Laboratory” in partnership with the National Press and Publication Research Institute, the American Advanced Imaging Society, Dell, AMD, and other international institutions to further advance our VR tourism outreach innovation [FIGURE:5, FIGURE:6].

China Media Technology: What was the greatest difficulty encountered in VR project operations, and how was it overcome?

Xiang Xin: VR technology is still in its initial stages. Although market enthusiasm is high, practical operations face considerable difficulties in both business models and content production.

First, regarding business models, VR currently lacks To C capabilities, with a small user base, fragmented platform technical standards, and no clear user scenarios. Second, regarding content production, the direction for content creation remains unclear, and user behavior patterns are not well-defined. Most content design patterns still reference early simulation software or Web-era virtual display product design formats. Identifying true VR behavior patterns and designing content and products according to VR thinking will be a crucial part of future product design and content creation.

China Media Technology: Please discuss the operation of the new media laboratory established in cooperation with Dell, as well as achievements in technology incubation and innovation.

Xiang Xin: Wuzhou is one of the earliest institutions in China to operate VR technology and among the earliest cultural communication institutions globally to apply VR technology. As an external publicity unit rather than a pure technology company, how to fully utilize VR as a new media platform for both content and technological innovation has always been a key focus for us. Therefore, at the end of 2016, we jointly established the “Wuzhou VR/AR New Media International Joint Laboratory” with the National Press and Publication Research Institute, the American Advanced Imaging Society, Dell, AMD, and others to promote the application and dissemination of VR technology in Chinese-themed content. Under the combination of cutting-edge technology and content advantages, we conduct in-depth exploration of innovative integration between VR and different themes and fields, ensuring that Wuzhou remains at the forefront of VR new media integration development worldwide.

The laboratory’s primary mission is to explore new “VR+” series applications and innovative models using new technologies, and to build new business formats. It explores the deep integration of content, channels, platforms, operations, and management, closely monitors new technology frontiers and development trends, actively draws on and makes good use of advanced technologies and channels, and explores the sharing and integration of information content, technology applications, platform terminals, and talent teams to form an integrated organizational structure, communication system, and management system.

The significance of establishing the new media laboratory lies in leveraging the advanced technologies of co-building units in industry applications to accelerate the comprehensive R&D capabilities of the VR technology team, developing new project outcomes with “technology + content” that lead the industry, and providing leading technical support for innovative media operation models. It also conducts market promotion and project co-construction for R&D achievements in the “VR+” series application fields. Through VR+ industry applications, it explores the market value of experimental results and project co-construction,

adding strong technical support and R&D direction to traditional media work driven by administrative promotion. Through laboratory co-construction, it builds a VR experience center at an internationally advanced technical level, conducts extensive technical training for domestic VR industry practitioners, and while training, identifies comprehensive VR industry talents, providing an excellent experimental platform and exchange platform for VR industry talent cultivation and reserves.

Simultaneously, based on laboratory research results, it designs a project incubation mechanism that meets current market needs, attracting and supporting innovative entrepreneurial teams to integrate with the laboratory in experimental results and market applications. It innovates traditional operation models, effectively integrates market resources, and achieves market promotion of the experimental results' profit model.

Since its establishment last December, the new media laboratory has conducted multiple training sessions and forums [FIGURE:12, FIGURE:13]. In terms of incubation projects, multiple initiatives are currently underway, including VR + museums, interactive entertainment, and the “Belt and Road” VR Innovation Alliance. As the relevant content is still confidential, we cannot disclose too much at this stage, but we believe these incubation projects will be presented to everyone within the next 6 to 9 months.

China Media Technology: During operations, how do you achieve a quantitative leap in traffic and user numbers?

Xiang Xin: As mentioned previously, VR projects are constrained by the small overall user base of VR devices, making it very difficult to achieve a quantitative leap in user numbers and traffic. Taking the “Third Planet” project mentioned earlier as an example, as a VR tourism project, it focuses on establishing a VR user closed loop in the vertical fields of tourism and external publicity. In these vertical fields, we are building a closed loop of Chinese-themed content creation, overseas distribution, and hardware coverage, hoping to promote a quantitative leap in user numbers within these vertical domains.

China Media Technology: Your company's products shoulder the dual tasks of national image outreach and economic revenue generation. How do you balance the economic and social benefits of content operations?

Xiang Xin: Wuzhou is an international communication institution with 20 years of external communication experience. Our long experience tells us that national image outreach and economic revenue generation are not contradictory. Creating high-quality Chinese content and telling China's story in a language that others can understand has been our consistent pursuit for 20 years. The same applies to innovation in VR content and products. The New Media Department of Wuzhou has always regarded VR as a new medium for external publicity, continuously developing and launching high-quality Chinese content.

In fact, based on our years of experience implementing overseas VR activi-

ties, we have found that this new media format is still very popular overseas. Wuzhou possesses innovative VR technical capabilities and 20 years of accumulated Chinese-themed content resources, giving it unique advantages and barriers in overseas dissemination of Chinese-themed VR content. I believe that as technology, content, and dissemination continue to improve, we will also achieve substantial economic benefits.

“Third Planet,” a subsidiary of China Intercontinental Communication Center, is a market-oriented VR virtual tourism project whose future goal is to create a truly meaningful virtual tourism platform. In terms of current business models, we have set a more pragmatic and stable BBC (B to B to C) model. In the first B-to-B stage, “Third Planet” is fully leveraging Wuzhou’s external communication advantages and 20-year content advantages in Chinese-themed outreach, steadily growing through “VR + marketing” and “VR + external publicity” approaches. Since 2013, “Third Planet” has produced CG VR tourism content for over 100 domestic and international attractions, making it the largest team in the world in terms of CG virtual tourism project volume, with annual revenue approaching ten million RMB and basically achieving a balance between income and expenditure.

In the next stage, “Third Planet” will accelerate content construction. On the basis of advancing the construction of two “Hundred World Wonders” attractions, it will partner with well-known OTA companies, travel agencies, and digital TV operators to focus on developing user channels for VR tourism.

China Media Technology: What do you believe is the future product model for VR tourism outreach products?

Xiang Xin: The VR experience is quite fascinating; everyone has a strong visual experience when they put on the headset, and this distinctive experience is obvious. However, the exploration of VR product models still has a long way to go. The fundamental reason, I believe, is that VR user behavior habits have not yet been cultivated, or there is not yet a clear VR product thinking path. For example, when we originally created VR tourism products, we had a simple intention: to allow foreigners to walk into the Forbidden City and the Great Wall like in a game, to experience and feel China. But after we built the Forbidden City and the Great Wall through modeling, we found users were somewhat confused and at a loss. This led to the next design 思路 for most VR products—“lacking interaction, add interaction.” But what kind of interaction should be added? Adding information points, adding explanations, or popping up background introductions when entering each hall? Currently, most VR product models are designed for interaction’s sake.

We often say VR is a virtual society, a parallel space. A virtual society or parallel space should have behavior patterns and thinking models. Just as in real life, we would never feel lost at the entrance of the Forbidden City simply because there are no information points. VR is the same. How to form behavior habits within the VR environment and how to create VR content according to VR

thinking patterns will be a process requiring exploration and experimentation. I believe what the future VR product model should look like will be revealed by the next successful product team.

China Media Technology: Some say that IP and ecosystem are the next trend in internet culture and entertainment. Does your company have IP plans, and what future initiatives are planned?

Xiang Xin: In content creation, Wuzhou will continue to focus on Chinese themes and create Chinese content. In different projects, we will also develop IP creation around relevant themes and topics, such as “3D Beautiful China” and the “Belt and Road” initiative. For the future of VR, we are more focused on building a VR external publicity user closed loop, concentrating on how VR tourism projects can help Chinese tourism go global and boost inbound tourism. In terms of industrial layout, we will leverage Wuzhou’s external communication advantages, seize the opportunity of VR new media, tell China’s story well externally, develop mature business models internally, build complete VR communication channels, and create an innovative new media format for cultural outreach.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

Source: ChinaXiv — Machine translation. Verify with original.