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Comparative Analysis of the Projected and Perceived Images of International Equestrian Events Based on Online Texts: A Case Study of the FEI Jumping World Cup China League

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Abstract: Driven by the integration of sports and tourism under the "Equestrian+" model, equestrian events have become a vital engine for destination cities to build distinctive city brands and unlock sports consumption potential. Taking the 2025 Longines FEI Jumping World Cup China League as a case study, this paper employs the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic model to compare the official projected image and the user perceived image based on official communications and user-generated texts on Douyin The findings reveal that the official projected image emphasizes event progression, competitive outcomes, and the regional characteristics of host cities; in contrast, the user perceived image focuses predominantly on the visual aesthetics of horse-and-rider combinations, emotional engagement, and realistic considerations regarding financial thresholds and socioeconomic class attributes. A three-dimensional misalignment emerges between the projected and perceived images across focus of attention, competition versus emotion, and symbolic interpretation, which attenuates the overall effectiveness of destination image communication.

Keywords: Equestrian Events; Projected Image; Perceived Image

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of integrating sports and tourism under the "Equestrian+" development model, equestrian events have become a vital engine for destination cities to forge distinctive urban identities, cultivate new sports consumption scenarios, and fully unlock sports consumption potential. The *Measures on Further Cultivating New Growth Points to Prosper Culture and Tourism Consumption* proposes building the "Travel with Events" brand[1], while the *National Equine Industry Development Plan (2020–2025)* calls for vigorously developing equestrian competition performances and cultivating professionalized, commercialized equestrian event brands[2], providing an institutional basis for embedding equestrian events into cultural and tourism consumption scenarios. The FEI Jumping World Cup is one of the most authoritative and influential official calendar events of the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) in global equestrian sport. As a key component of the World Cup's 12 global leagues, the China League has been successfully staged in Beijing, Wuhan, and Chengdu. Beyond serving as an international platform for high-level equestrian competition, the tournament injects robust momentum into regional economic development and urban brand enhancement. With the rapid growth of short-video platforms, social media channels represented by Douyin have become the primary arena for tourists and spectators to obtain event information, share viewing experiences, and participate in topic interactions. Nevertheless, whether the positioning of the event image aligns with tourist perceptions-and how to effectively enhance the attractiveness of equestrian events-remains in need of further in-depth investigation.

Tourism destination image refers to the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that an individual holds regarding a particular destination[3]. Analyzed from a supply-and-demand perspective, tourism destination image is jointly determined by the supply-side projected image and the demand-side perceived image[4] The projected image is the tourism image that suppliers seek to disseminate and is shaped by media coverage, news reporting, and marketing campaigns. The perceived image is the overall impression of a destination formed by tourists based on their personal knowledge and travel experiences, combined with their perception and evaluation of projected image content[5]. Existing research indicates that a misalignment frequently

arises between the official projected image and the tourist perceived image, and such incongruence can hinder the effective communication of the destination image[6].

Grounded in the tourism destination "projected–perceived" image comparative analytical framework, this study takes the "FEI Jumping World Cup China League" as its research object and mines textual data from the Douyin platform. By distinguishing officially published texts from general user-generated texts and applying the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic model alongside word frequency analysis, this study examines and compares the differences between the projected image and perceived image of the tournament. It further explores the misalignment and convergence pathways between official discourse and public discourse, providing empirical reference for equestrian event brand image building and cross-cultural communication.

2. Research Design

2.1 Case Study Context

This study investigates the 2025 season of the Longines FEI Jumping World Cup China League. Specifically, the season comprised two leg competitions in Beijing and Wuhan as well as the League Final in Chengdu, where the leg competitions were classified as FEI two-star (CSI2*-W) events and the League Final as an FEI three-star (CSI3*-WLF) event. The tournament was broadcast live via mainstream media outlets such as China Central Television (CCTV) and online platforms, accompanied by public participation activities including equine industry development forums and equestrian carnivals. Combining elite international competition, media dissemination, and public participation, the tournament provides a representative sample for comparatively analyzing the official projected image and tourist perceived image in equestrian event destination development (Table 1).

Table 1. Organizational Structure of the 2025 FEI Jumping World Cup China League

Event Venue	Dates	Hosts	Organizers	Co-organizers
Beijing	April 24–27	FEI, Chinese Equestrian Association (CEA), Beijing Municipal Bureau of Sports	Beijing Equestrian Association, Equuleus International Riding Club, China StarEquine Events	Chaoyang District Bureau of Sports of Beijing Municipality, Cuigezhuang Township People's Government of Chaoyang District
Wuhan	May 30–June 2	FEI, CEA, Wuhan Business University, Wuhan Municipal Sports Bureau	Beijing Equestrian Association, Equuleus International Riding Club, China StarEquine International Events	Hubei Equestrian Association, Wuhan Equestrian Association
Chengdu	December 11–14	FEI, CEA	Beijing Equestrian Association, Equuleus International Riding Club, China StarEquine International Events	Sichuan Equestrian Association

1.2 Research Methods

Taking user posts, online comments, and official communication texts on the Douyin platform as the research sample, this study applies content analysis and utilizes the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic model to uncover the latent semantic structure within the online texts. This enables a systematic comparative analysis of the tourist perceived image and the official projected image of the FEI Jumping World Cup, identifying both their commonalities and divergences.

1.3 Data Collection and Preprocessing

Using the Douyin platform as the data source, Python web-crawling techniques were employed to retrieve posts and comments using "FEI Jumping World Cup China League" and related abbreviations such as "Equestrian World Cup" as search keywords. To establish a comparative analysis between the projected image and the perceived image, text sources were manually differentiated during the data cleaning stage. Official texts were sourced from content published by the event hosts, organizers, co-organizers, and supporting institutions-including equestrian associations at various levels and

municipal sports bureaus-representing the projected image. Content published by general netizens, on-site spectators, equestrian enthusiasts, and unofficial self-media accounts was categorized into user texts, representing the perceived image.

During data preprocessing, the jieba Python library was used to perform Chinese word segmentation on both text corpora, removing meaningless auxiliary words, conjunctions, and noise words unrelated to the tournament. On this basis, word frequency statistics were calculated and LDA topic models were constructed separately for the two corpora. Based on topic coherence metrics and perplexity validation, the optimal number of topics was determined to be 3 for the official texts and 5 for the user texts, and iterative computation was performed to derive the word probability distribution under each topic.

2 Results and Analysis

2.1 Comparative Analysis of High-Frequency Words

Word frequency analysis quantifies the occurrence of lexical items within online textual materials and serves as an intuitive method for reflecting core information within the corpus. Table 2 presents the top 10 core high-frequency words in the official texts and user texts, respectively.

Table 2. High-Frequency Word Statistics in Official and User Texts

Rank	Official Texts: High-Frequency Word	Official Texts: Frequency	User Texts: High-Frequency Word	User Texts: Frequency
1	Equestrian	449	Equestrian	398
2	World Cup	240	World Cup	106
3	League	223	Jumping	97
4	FEI	125	Horse riding	96
5	Sport	123	Elegant	85
6	Jumping	119	Competition	83
7	Longines	115	Beautiful	71
8	Show	115	Impressive	70
9	Event	78	FEI	64
10	Exciting	41	Longines	61

In the official texts, the top five high-frequency words are "Equestrian", "World Cup" , "League", "FEI" , and "Sport" This indicates that the projected image crafted by official channels emphasizes the international stature and elite competitive nature of the tournament, leveraging institutional endorsement from authoritative organizations such as the FEI to underscore its professionalism and authority. Moreover, the disseminated content exhibits both technical professionalism and science popularization, with specialized sub-discipline terms such as "Show jumping" appearing frequently. In the user texts, in addition to event- and rule-related high-frequency terms such as "Equestrian" "World Cup" and "Jumping" , subjective evaluative adjectives such as "Elegant", "Beautiful", and "Impressive" feature prominently. This reflects participants' aesthetic perception and visual enjoyment of the elegant and fashionable positioning of equestrian sport, forming a vital component of the user perceived image.

Comparing the two sets of high-frequency words reveals that "Equestrian", "World Cup" , "Jumping ", "Competition" , and the title sponsor "Longines"appear with high frequency in both corpora. This demonstrates that the core event name and sponsor brand embedded in the projected image have successfully established a strong presence in the minds of the audience.

The key difference lies in the fact that official texts construct the event image primarily from a macro perspective of event organization, competition systems, and industry development, whereas high-frequency words in the user texts carry strong sensory experiences and emotional evaluations. This indicates that users view equestrian tournaments primarily as ornamental, aesthetically pleasing visual experiences while paying comparatively less attention to technical competitive dimensions. This distinction is also evident in the use of evaluative terms: the official high-frequency word "Exciting" focuses on the holistic image of high-level athletic competition, whereas users extract perceptual labels such as "Elegant" and "Beautiful" from specific details including the horses, riders, and movements.

2.2 Comparative Analysis of Topic Characteristics

2.2.1 Topic analysis of official texts

The communication content of the official texts is divided into three main themes (Table 3).

Theme 1 centers on Event Progression and Panoramic Coverage, anchored by temporally explicit terms such as "Final" and "Conclusion" alongside competition descriptors such as "Arena" and "Speed" . This reflects a clear chronological narrative framework constructed by official texts from the opening of the event to its conclusion, emphasizing the ceremonial sense and completeness of the competition schedule.

Theme 2 focuses on Athletic Performance and Regional Characteristics. In addition to words closely tied to competition results including "Teamwork", "Competitor" "Result", core geographical identifiers represented by host cities such as "Wuhan"also appear prominently. Its salient feature is the blending of athletic competition with local characteristics, reflecting how official texts link the tournament with its host cities in constructing the projected image and embodying the narrative orientation of "entering a city, understanding a city, and falling in love with a city through a competition."

Theme 3 addresses Pre-Event Promotion and Core Element Presentation, composed of keywords such as "Horse", "Countdown" "Tour", "Competition" "Rider". This demonstrates how official channels showcase core competitive elements-such as top-tier sport horses and star riders-combined with marketing designs like countdowns and previews to build suspense prior to the tournament and project strong viewing expectations for an elite international equestrian event.

Table 3. Topic Classification and Characteristic Words of Official Texts

Topic No.	Theme	Characteristic Words (Probability Weight)
1	Event Progression and Panoramic Coverage	Final (0.0135), Arena (0.0113), Show jumping (0.0111), Speed (0.0111), Conclusion (0.0103), Integration (0.0096)
2	Athletic Performance and Regional Characteristics	Teamwork (0.0261), Competitor (0.0202), Result (0.0193), Record (0.0193), Wuhan (0.0166), Chinese nationality (0.0154)
3	Pre-Event Promotion and Core Element Presentation	Horse (0.0210), Countdown (0.0196), Preview (0.0167), Competition (0.0153), Rider (0.0134), Individual event(0.0132)

2.2.2 Topic analysis of user texts

The user texts are categorized into five themes (Table 4). Theme 1 represents Visual Aesthetics and Exterior Appreciation. Words such as "So handsome" "Elegant""So beautiful" reflect that users' attention to the physical appearance, poise, and movement aesthetics of riders and horses constitutes the primary component of the perceived image. Compared with the technical competitiveness of the event, the visual impact presented by the horse-and-rider combination is the true focal point for users.

Theme 2 (Entertainment Interaction and Pre-Event Anticipation) and Theme 3 (On-Site Empathy and Emotional Engagement) reflect the pan-entertainment orientation and affective projection from the user perspective. In Theme 2, words such as "Fun" "Anticipation" indicate that users follow behind-the-scenes sidelights and human–horse interactions in and around the arena with a relaxed, leisure-oriented mindset. In Theme 3, words such as "Impressive", "Cheer on" , "Naughty" "Fault" and "Brave"demonstrate users' emotional investment and empathy during the competition.

Theme 4 encompasses Humanistic Inquiry and Brand Awareness, reflecting deeper reflection and commercial symbol reception among core segments of the audience. High-frequency words such as "Equestrian" and "Human nature" show that beyond admiring the competition itself, core spectators begin to explore the human–horse relationship underlying equestrian sport. Meanwhile, the keyword "Longines" indicates that the event's sponsor brand has been received and recognized by the audience to a meaningful extent.

Theme 5 revolves around Experiential Aspiration and Realistic Considerations. Words such as "Beautiful" , "Enjoyment", and "Horse riding" express users' aspiration toward participating in equestrian sport. At the same time, the emergence of the term "Expensive" reflects spectators' intuitive perception and amazement regarding the economic value of high-performance competition horses while watching the show. This facet of the perceived image mirrors the socioeconomic class label of equestrian sport in the public mind as a "high-investment, high-threshold, elite" activity.

Table 4. Topic Classification and Characteristic Words of User Texts

Topic No.	Theme	Characteristic Words (Probability Weight)
1	Visual Aesthetics and Exterior Appreciation	So handsome (0.0758), Elegant(0.0708), Very handsome, Steed (0.0470), So beautiful (0.0344), Fine horse (0.0164)
2	Entertainment Interaction and Pre-Event Anticipation	Fun (0.0478), Anticipation (0.0337), Level (0.0194), Rhythm (0.0172), Pony (0.0165), Dashing (0.0154)
3	On-Site Empathy and Emotional Engagement	Impressive (0.0496), Truly handsome (0.0245), Cheer on, Naughty(0.0153), Mistake (0.0131), Brave (0.0130)
4	Humanistic Inquiry and Brand Awareness	Equestrian (0.0529), Human nature (0.0417), Competition (0.0186), Longines (0.0173), World Cup (0.0170), Dressage(0.0147)
5	Experiential Aspiration and Realistic Considerations	Beautiful (0.0717), Enjoyment (0.0568), Horse riding (0.0285), Comfort (0.0247), Expensive (0.0171), Noble steed (0.0138)

2.2.3 Comparative analysis of themes

Through thematic analysis, three dimensions of misalignment are identified between the official projected image and the user perceived image.

First is the misalignment in focus of attention. Official communications emphasize macro-level introductions of competition progression and reporting of athletic outcomes, whereas users focus more intently on sensory experiences such as the movement aesthetics and exterior poise of riders and horses, exhibiting characteristics of visual and aesthetic appreciation. Second is the misalignment between competition and emotion. Official texts emphasize the athletic competitiveness and technical professionalism of the event with a strong outcome orientation, whereas user texts display substantial emotional investment and empathetic responses, establishing an affective connection with the event. Third is the misalignment in symbolic interpretation. Official texts intend to project the high-end quality and professional image of sponsor brands; although audiences perceive and accept this commercial symbol to a certain degree, it simultaneously triggers realistic considerations regarding the financial threshold of equestrian sport, forming an interpretation of meaning that diverges from official expectations.

3. Conclusions and Implications

3.1 Conclusions

Grounded in the tourism destination "projected–perceived" image analytical framework and combining text mining with the LDA topic model, this study conducted a comparative word frequency and thematic analysis of official and user texts for the "FEI Jumping World Cup™ China League" on the Douyin platform. The findings reveal that the projected image derived from official texts emphasizes the professionalism and authority of the tournament, focusing on elements such as event progression, competitive achievements, host cities, and commercial sponsorship. Conversely, the public perceived image focuses on visual and sensory experiences, including the physical poise and movement aesthetics of horse-and-rider combinations. Furthermore, users inject substantial emotional engagement and empathetic responses into their texts, prompting realistic reflections on human–horse relationships and the socioeconomic thresholds of equestrian participation. The misalignment between the projected image and perceived image manifests primarily across three dimensions-focus of attention, competition versus emotion, and symbolic interpretation-which may prevent the tournament's professionalism and city brand communication from fully and effectively reaching the public, thereby weakening the overall efficacy of event image dissemination.

3.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, because equestrian events in China remain in a developmental cultivation stage, the total volume of relevant online text data is relatively limited. Second, the text data processing procedure relied primarily on manual researcher judgment, which may involve minor omissions or subjective bias. Third, the study examined only online texts and did not incorporate multimodal content such as online photographs and short videos into the analysis.

To address these limitations, future research can expand the scope and temporal span of data collection to include more tournament legs and communication platforms; introduce machine

learning techniques in text classification to reduce subjective bias; and simultaneously incorporate multimodal content such as images and short videos to thoroughly investigate the formation mechanisms of image misalignment, thereby providing richer insights for event communication and destination image optimization.

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