

# Cross-Media Narratives of City Image: The case of Chongqing, China

Ruiyi Chen<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Advertising, Shanghai University, Shanghai, China

\*Corresponding author: 15030440122@xs.hnit.edu.cn

**Abstract.** In the era of media fragmentation, a story world mode brought about by multiple media platforms is on the rise. Cross-media narratives become the core force of city competition by catering to the audience's preferences while generating rich experiences of different media, promoting the efficient communication of city images to promote city tourism. This case study is based on the cross-media narrative theory, the general narratology theory, the interaction ritual chains theory, etc. It investigates how the contents are produced according to the characteristics of Chongqing city resources and how the image positioning matches different media to complete the common narrative process. Through reviewing previous literature and exploring some cross-media narratives of city image in Chongqing, the main findings of this paper are: 1) demonstrative narratives interpret Chongqing's image artistically and metaphorically to present the contradictions and need in the social space of Chongqing; 2) non-fictional narratives employ multiple combinations of typical city symbols in an enumerative design of narrative symbols to exhibit the superior tourism resources and displays its spirit in the construction and development of the Chongqing city; 3) participatory interactive narratives make the abstract, stereotypical city image that was reflected in traditional film pieces become more modern, urban, and fresh through interaction ritual chains. These results provide great value for the construction of the city image, which can contribute to providing future research a reference.

**Keywords:** City Image, Cross-media Narrative, General Narratology, Interaction Ritual Chains, City Film, City Promotional Video, City Short Video.

## 1. Introduction

In the web 3.0 era characterized by media fragmentation, the narrative platform of city image has changed from a single medium to spans multiple media. The construction of city images has transformed from a government-led-only mode to a mode, in which official departments are macroscopically led while opinion leaders (internet celebrities) and ordinary citizens participate together. Chongqing's image as a "internet-famous city" is popularized not just by distinct, individual media, but also through cross-media narratives. How to modify the types of text and extend the material based on the features of different platforms is an under-researched but practically relevant issue that merits more investigation, as it has the potential to establish new communication relationships and increase the market.

## 2. The Significance of This Study

### 2.1 Research gap

The construction of city image is the most distinctive and competitive strategy in the operation of city construction and operation. In the era of media fragmentation, the environment of media is undergoing great changes. Cross-media narratives enable audiences to generate a rich experience of different media through different content texts, establishing distinctive images for cities and allowing broader communication [1]. A number of research results about the formation of city images are present, but a research gap about how to establish a highly recognizable symbol of commercial value through mature cross-media narratives still exists. This study uses the example of Chongqing to explore the path of city image construction from the perspective of cross-media narratives.

## 2.2 Implication

To capture the audience's attention and satisfaction, limited resources must be used to generate as many distinct municipal goods and services as possible while increasing their added value. Cities need certain strategies and plans, to illustrate, and building their images is an important tool to improve the competitiveness and influence of cities. This study mainly analyzes how to produce city images in different types of media through cross-media story world construction, multi-level cross-media audience, and consumption promotion. In this way, virtual and real experiences could be integrated; the audience's initiative and participation could be fully mobilized; and more input and consumption behavior could be promoted, which provides a useful reference for the construction of city image.

## 3. Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Narratology

General narratology, or symbolic narratology, is the study of all the narrative symbolic texts. Symbols are often combined to make complex expressions; these combinations of the symbols are referred to as texts [2]. Narratives refer to the texts when the meanings expressed by the combinations of symbols exhibit changes in plots. The first step of symbolic narration is establishing a narrator framework that separates narrative texts from the realistic world or the experiential world. The material in this narrator framework is medium-based, with meaningful narrative symbols instead of experiential material [3]. These narrative elements must be selected by the narrative subjects; the selected elements are then processed with respect to space and time to constitute plots involving characters and changes, which is a process referred to as narrators' primary narrativization. Finally, the audience interprets the narrative texts as plots with a time dimensionality and ethnic significance through a process referred to as narratees' secondary narrativization.

## 4. Research Method

This paper mainly adopts the literature research and case study to carry out the research of related propositions.

In the literature research, some theoretical materials on cross-media narratives and city image construction were collected from home and abroad via relevant data platforms (such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure and Wanfang.com) to learn about previous authors' research results and analysis methods. Furthermore, works on narrative theory and aspects (Generalized Narrative, Interaction Ritual Chains, and so on) were collected and compiled in order to extract key concepts from them. The primary goal of the literature review is to provide a theoretical foundation for the case studies that follow.

In the case study, this paper takes the typical Chongqing audiovisual as a case study. First, *Douban*, a well-known Chinese movie review platform, was searched for the 10 most popular Chongqing movies, with a total length of about 19 hours. Secondly, the 10 most viewed city promotional videos in *WeChat*, a popular social networking platform in China, with a total duration of 0.9 hours were obtained. Finally, the 30 highest ranked short videos of Chongqing in *Douyin* (China version of *TikTok*) were studied, lasting for about 0.1 hours. By evaluating the city content texts and expressions in each medium channel, the cross-media narrative characteristics of Chongqing's city image were summarized through vertical and horizontal comparisons and correlations.

## 5. Cross-Media Narratives of Chongqing's Image

According to the classification of narrative genres by Yiheng Zhao in his book named *A General Narratology*, this study focuses on the three most typical types of media used in cross-media narratives of urban images: demonstrative narratives (films), non-fictional narratives (city promotional videos), and participatory interactive narratives (short videos) [1].

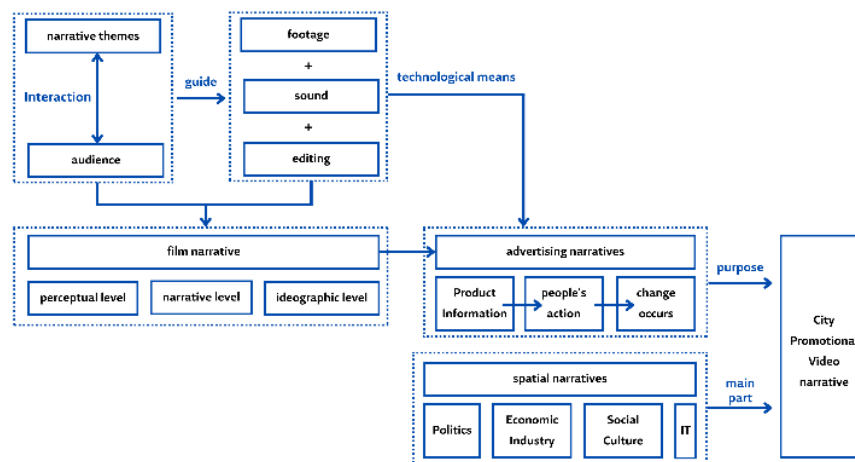
### 5.1 Demonstrative Narratives: film

The city influences films, which represent its culture, historical background, and spirits. Furthermore, the film designer builds character interactions, generates conflict, and stimulates narrative development relating to the city through the arrangement of characters' activities in the film, so that the city is given a humanized meaningful sense [4]. Perceivable plot sequences can induce empathy among the audience, triggering their emotional resonance. For example, although the character Bao Shihong in the movie *Crazy Stone* is a security section chief at the bottom of society, he did his duty without slackening and guards against the criminals when receiving the task of protecting the jadeite. The movie plot about Bao Shihong embodies the lives of various normal Chongqing citizens who are groping and struggling to survive, in line with the brave and optimistic personality of the ancestors in the Basho culture and also with the traditional Chinese chivalry culture. Reviewing the meaning and value of the film can implicitly shape the city's image, spread the city's story, and attract viewers to explore and feel the city's image offline [5].

According to the narrative characteristics of the film medium, Chongqing urban movies interpret the city image artistically and metaphorically. Chongqing's scattered skyscrapers are accompanied by backward low-rise residential buildings, presenting its unique spatial contradictions [6]. In a large number of films, Chongqing's urban space and the mountain city space constantly overlap, jointly constructing symbols that are unique to Chongqing, such as disordered spatial arrangement, wet and dirty streets, confused and lonely white-collar workers, the social underclasses with bright and spicy characters, and the suspenseful atmosphere of dizziness and disorientation. It prompts audiences to understand and recognize the contradictions and need in the social space of Chongqing, presenting the city's social scene in the midst of tradition and change, and enriching the connotation of Chongqing's image [7].

### 5.2 Non-fictional Narrative – City Promotional Video

In the narratology of city promotional videos, film techniques are narrative methods, advertisement narration is the narrative purpose, image narration provides the theoretical basis for the narrative analysis, and spatial narration is the main narrative subject (Figure 1). For one thing, the producers of city promo videos desire to attract scarce resources and people and promote city tourism; for another, they try to propagate the desired ideology via visual expression and make the audience affected mentally and unconsciously [8]. Therefore, city promo videos in nature are a form of advertisement. In the titles of these videos, the word “promotion” is preferred over “advertisement” by city governments and producers of city governments, because propaganda, highlighted by the word “promotion,” is more public and less commercial. In the form of virtual realistic narratives, city promotion videos are non-fictional and conscious, which aims at convincing the audience of a certain saying and encouraging them to practice it [9-10]. Thus, city promo videos should both use imagination-inspiring symbols and express the desired meanings precisely; thereby the expression of city promo videos can overcome the ambiguity in the audience's understanding and lead most audience to think as the ideology given by the communication main bodies [11].



**Fig. 1** Narrative framework of city promotional film

Given the need to communicate massive information to the audience within limited lengths of media, the Chongqing city promo video usually employs multiple combinations of typical city symbols in an enumerative design of narrative symbols, highlights macroscopic narration, and attracts the audience using a creation route full of spectacles. Gorgeous expression in visual scenes and popular, recapitulative language in the narrative style allows the city promo video to transcend geographic limitations and achieve the broadest communication. The contents of the video exhibit the superior tourism resources of Chongqing city, embodying the city spirit of “City of Mountains and Rivers and Wonderland” and highlighting the appealing landscape, abundant food and folk culture, and a hospitable, welcoming city image. It also displays the spirit of “Climbing High and Traveling Far, Bearing Stress and Improving Self” in the construction and development of Chongqing city.

### 5.3 Participatory Interactive Narrative – Short Videos

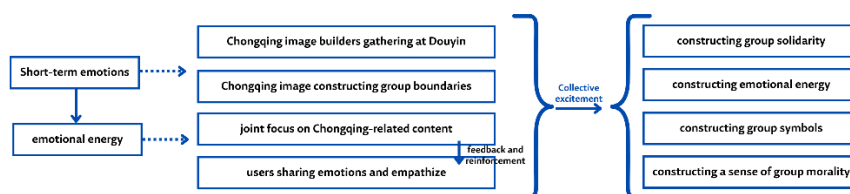
Collins’ interaction ritual chain theory provides theoretical support for characterizing the participatory interactive narrative media of short videos [12]. From the perspective of the interaction ritual chain theory, 3 steps in order are involved in establishing the city image of Chongqing on short video platforms: virtual presence, group symbol formation, and emotional resonance (Figure 2).

Short movies, in the first stage, give a virtual presence space for the construction of the Chongqing city image. Among all media properties, the narrative mode of short videos provides conditions for real-time synchronization and emotional presence of interpersonal interaction because it is short (short time length), cheap (affordable art and convenience of watching terminal devices), and quick (fast food aesthetic value, which is convenient for shallow reading) [13]. The play mode in portrait and full screen of short videos also highlights the major subjects and objects in the videos, better impressing the audience in an entertainment-oriented narrative style [14]. Therefore, the virtual presence establishes the one-to-one communication effects and strengthens the emotional engagement of the audience.

In the second step, the group symbols in the short videos are favored by the grouped young people who aspire to the peer culture. Due to the fragmentation of the narrative strategies of short video platforms, planarized image depth, and entertaining narrative mode, the narration of the city image on short video platforms exhibits concise, vivid narrative characteristics, describing stories in a jumping, discontinuous style and reflecting the shallow meanings that are close to the real life and individual stories.

The third step, emotional resonance, is the last step of the interactive ritual chain. Decentralized, civilianized, and socialized production and communication characteristics of short video platforms enable the autonomy of the audience to be engaged in narration, further generating complicated narrative structures and story forms. Short video makers are video creators, video information recipients on short video platforms, and video transmitters who cause interactive and activity behaviors before and after viewing short videos. This innovative audience form of "producer-user" alliance encourages short video users to share their own lives and behave like, remark on, and share the lives of others, finally realizing interaction and social activities and further thrilling the audience's shared emotional experience [15].

Under the influence of short videos' interaction ritual chain, the abstract, stereotypical city image reflected in traditional film pieces become more modern, urban, and fresh. Hotpots, light rails that run through buildings, night scenes of the Hongya Cave, and many other city symbols are infinitely magnified on new medium platforms. This forms the Chongqing city image characterized by Chongqing music, Chongqing food, Chongqing landscape, and Chongqing tech facilities, making Chongqing a more prosperous, fashionable, hot, and individualized modern city. As a result, Chongqing gets new city names such as film city, magical city, and internet-popular city, representing its passionate, open, entrepreneurial, inventive, and trendy city image.



**Fig. 2** Flow chart of interactive ritual chain of Chongqing image

In all, the cross-media narrative of Chongqing's city image takes its spiritual connotations "City of Mountains and Rivers and Wonderland" and "Climbing High and Traveling Far, Bearing Stress and Improving Self" as the prototype, refining it through different narrative media to form new interpretations. Multiple texts produce inter-related story contents according to the narrative characteristics of different media platforms, finally presenting the extensions of Chongqing's image, as summarized in Table 1. The cross-media narrative of Chongqing's city image provides Chongqing citizens and people from other cities an opportunity to have a more concrete and comprehensive impression of the city's inner strength, city vitality, and development prospects.

**Table 1.** Construction of Chongqing's image

Dimensions of City Image	Content Interpretation
Landscape	Layered 3D buildings, technological transportation facilities, visual wonders between mountains and waters, and misty climate
Society	The contrast between old and new spaces, the space of desire for emotional flow, elite culture, and urban atmosphere
Character portrayal	The hospitable citizens, the marginalized groups at the bottom of the society, the foreigners, the young people pursuing their dreams, the beautiful women
Culture and Spirituality	Bayu culture, dock culture, anti-Japanese war culture, red rock culture, spicy food culture, Chongqing songs and dialects, the culture of beauty

## 6. Conclusion

In the setting of increasingly fragmented and culturally varied cultures, cross-media narratives of urban pictures provide textual material that is highly compatible with the media and intertextual, generating a more emotionally rich and complex tale world through extended narratives. People in Chongqing, for example, can now see more interesting urban imagery through various media channels, while the audience's passion and engagement in the city's construction has earned Chongqing unparalleled prominence and notoriety. The change in media and the development of the city have kept pace with each other in Chongqing, and the communication of Chongqing's diverse city image has been spread through different cultural circles. Additionally, the relationship between the city and the media has become closer here, and along with the joint influence of market and policy, much attention should be paid to the problem of homogenization and pan-entertainment of the narrative content so that the city image could continuously innovate and develop, and its soft power could be improved, promoting the city's brand image establishment and overall prosperous development.

## References

- [1] Zhao Yiheng. A General Narratology, [M]. Sichuan University Press: Chinese Semiotics Series, 2013:11.341.
- [2] Miao Jing. Creating the interesting soul of the city by means of omni media: The excavation of regional culture value in Internet and new media communication [J]. China local newspaper information , 2021(07):45-46.DOI:10.16763/j.cnki.1007-4643.2021.07.015.
- [3] Duan Feng, Chen Xing, Xu Ya, Li Rongrui. A discussion of contemporary Western cross-media narratology research [J]. Journal of the PLA Foreign Language Institute,2020,43(01):59-67.
- [4] Lin Xiaolin. The regeneration of urban aesthetic imagery in film narratives[J]. Film Literature,2021(22):36-41.
- [5] Rao Shuguang, Qin Liyuan. City Image and Urban Impressions: Imagery Representation in Chongqing City film[J]. Ethnic Art Research, 2020,33(04):45-51.DOI:10.14003/j.cnki.mzysyj.2020.04.05.
- [6] Lu Chunxiao, Sun Li. Spatial practices and cultural representations of urban film in Chongqing in recent years[J]. Film Review,2020(03):29-33. doi:10.16583/j.cnki.52-1014/j.2020.03.007.
- [7] Yin Qiaoyan, Yu Ji. The Aesthetic Transmutation of Film in Chongqing's Urban Space in the 21st Century [J]. Contemporary Literature, 2022(02):194-198.DOI:10.19290/j.cnki.51-1076/i.2022.02.025.
- [8] Luo Hua. Evolution and innovation of documentary narrative strategy in the context of multimedia [J]. Contemporary Television,2020(10):70-73.DOI:10.16531/j.cnki.1000-8977.2020.10.015.
- [9] Xie Yushan. Research on the spatial narrative of urban tourism promotional film[D]. South China University of Technology, 2019.DOI:10.27151/d.cnki.ghnlu.2019.002356.
- [10] Yuan Yi, Li Shangran. Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Tianjin City Image Construction in the New Era: the example of This is Tianjin[J]. Science and Technology Communication,2022,14(12):60-66.DOI:10.16607/j.cnki.1674-6708.2022.12.029.
- [11] Li Mei, Chen Sihua. Research on brand narrative awareness of city image promotional film[J]. Contemporary Communication,2021(06):97-99.
- [12] Collins. Interaction Ritual Chains [M]. The Commercial Press, 2009.
- [13] Bai Jing. Study on the construction of Xi'an's media image by Douyin short video from the perspective of interactive ritual chain[D]. Northwestern University,2019.
- [14] Liang Yuanyuan. Research on IP operation mode under the cross-media narrative perspective[D]. Huazhong University of Science and Technology,2017.
- [15] Lu Juan, Fu Lile. The short video narrative of social media influencer cities: the paradox of visibility in image reconstruction in the third space[J]. Journalism and Writing,2021(08):59-67.