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# **Exploratory Study of Promotional Videos in the 10 Major Tourist Destinations in China: A Content Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Since the mid 1990s, both domestic and international tourism in China has grown rapidly evidenced in many destinations. In particular, tourism plays an important role as a major destination in regional economic development. This article reviews promotional videos of the main destinations in China as research data, analyzes the common content elements, orientations, presentation methods, persuasion methods, time patterns, and the use of sound, music and volume in Beijing, Nanjing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Xi'an, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Xiamen, and Hangzhou. Finally, the authors make suggestions regarding the images of promotional videos, reflecting on the subjects, contents and techniques of shooting the videos, and study the content and techniques of the photographers. Moreover, the authors put forward suggestions on improving promotional videos of destinations from the perspective of the subjects, contents and techniques of shooting.

**Key Words:** destination; tourist image; tour promotional video; content analysis

## **Introduction**

With its rapid development, tourism plays increasingly important roles in the progress of China's major cities and has become their new economic growth tool. Understanding the decision making process of tourists will be a main task for marketers in city destinations since tourists have many destination options to choose from. A key destination selection factor is the tourist's perceived image of destinations in China. Therefore many city destinations use a promotional video/video clip via TV, the Internet and YouTube as a way to improve and create their image in tourists' mind as the efforts are directly related to the success of city tourism promotion efforts. These promotional videos, as the most visual description and most vivid illustration, have become one of the most important means to influence the images of tourist destinations.

This paper presents a content analysis of promotional videos from 10 major tourist destinations in China. The purpose of this study is to document the common content elements, orientations, presentation methods, persuasion methods, time patterns, and the use of sound, music and volume in Beijing, Nanjing, Chengdu, Chongqing, Xi'an, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Xiamen, and Hangzhou. Finally, the authors make suggestions regarding the images of promotional videos, reflecting on the subjects, contents and techniques of shooting the videos.

## Literature

### *Content analysis*

Content analysis (CA) is arguably one of the fastest growing methods in social research (Neuendorf, 2002). Krippendorff (1980: 21) defined content analysis as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context”. Neuendorf (2002: 1) extended this definition further by describing content analysis as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics”.

The use of CA in tourism has a widely range, from examining tourism policy issues to the analysis of definitions published in academic journals. Some examples of CA studies in the literature include Malloy and Fennell (1998) who investigated the content of a number of codes of ethics from the tourism industry, while Swain, Brent and Long (1999) identified the main research areas of *Annals of Tourism Research* over a 30-year period and provide a history of the journal’s content. Padgett and Hall (2001) sought to identify the significance of tourism as a political issue in the 1999 New Zealand General Election through an analysis of four major newspapers. Choi, Lehto, and Morrison (2007) content-analyzed to identify the most frequently used words or phrases on Macau travel related websites, compare them across the different online information sources, and examine the effectiveness of visual images. Yan and Zhang (2010) examined the factors that lay behind the development of the Golden Week holiday system in China in 1999 and 2007.

### *Destination image*

Destination image research abroad started in the early 1970s. The analyses stressed the behavior responses based on the subjective perception by tourists and potential tourists of their tourism destination. Abstraction of influencing elements of destination image was made using statistics and computer aided techniques. The market positioning strategies of destination were analyzed and the theory of competition and marketing management as well as the basic theoretical exploration based on consumer preferences were developed. Chon (1991) used the traveler behavior model presented by Gunn in conjunction with an empirical analysis of American tourists travelling overseas to examine how the tourist destination image and tourist perceptions are modified and enhanced through travel to that destination. Echtner and Ritchie (1993) examined the concept of destination image with the goal of designing more appropriate and rigorous techniques for its measurement. Pike (2002) reviewed 142 destination image papers published in the literature during the period 1973–2000, and provided destination image researchers with a reference guide to the context, method and focus of previous studies. Hankinson (2005) identified brand images from a business tourist perspective (people visiting destinations for business meetings, incentive events, conferences and exhibitions) and tested their relationship with perceived quality and commercial criteria. Campelo, Aitken, and Gnoth (2011) researched the marketing of destinations from communication between the place and people, and discussed how visual rhetoric has been used as an instrument for creating meaning and representing the symbolic and social capital of a place and to provide ethics in place branding communication.

Image research studies in China have developed relatively recently since the mid 1990s. They showed interest in the plan and design of tourist images, emphasized practical theoretical research and followed the rules of pragmatism (Li, 1999). At present, studies in China mainly focus on applied research into the tourist destination’s image – a model referred to as “Corporate Identity System” (CIS). Cees and John(1997) referred to three main developments in the area which variously equate corporate identity with graphic design, with integrated corporate communication and with a multidisciplinary approach which draws heavily on organizational behaviour. The most serious weakness of this kind of research is that it is largely based on qualitative information with little quantitative data underpinning it. Li (1999) developed the general method of image communication, including leading positioning, imitate positioning, reverse positioning, gap positioning and update positioning.

Based on the perspective that tourists and potential tourists gain from the assessment of images of tour destinations, Wang (2008) put forward innovative ways of promoting images of destinations such as shaping media focus, arousing public interest and spreading messages subconsciously.

*Research into promotional videos*

Using media effects research as a theoretical framework, Mercille (2005) examined empirically the impact of media representations—such as movies, guidebooks, and magazines—on destination image. Meaney and Robb (2006) explored the interplay of romantic and nostalgic images of Ireland with the opening of the Irish tourist market to a wider audience through the medium of film. Kay (2006) researched media in its many forms and showed that media has been instrumental in popularizing tourist venues by introducing tourism to these places or boosting tourism numbers. A suggestion is that such techniques could be used to promote tourist attractions/venues. Pan (2011) thinks Tourism TV Commercials (TVCs) are one of the channels (or agents) used to form destination images that is rarely researched, and set out to identify the relations among visual elements, TVC effects, and destination image formation.

Thus, this article takes promotional videos of key tourist destinations in China as subjects and building on the above mentioned techniques and theories, applies content analysis to the analysis of the promotional videos in China.

**Method**

The Internet, as the forth media besides television, broadcasting, magazines and periodicals, plays an increasingly important and indispensable tool in people’s life, work and study. Moreover, cyberspace holds a very large virtual capacity and rich resources. It is more convenient and cheaper to download data through the internet, and files can be stored indefinitely. Therefore, this article obtained research data through the internet. <http://u.cctv.com> and [www.chinacity.org.cn](http://www.chinacity.org.cn) are chosen as fundamental websites on the basis of their authority and reference value. The major tourist destinations of Chongqing, Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, Xi’an, Qingdao, Hangzhou, Nanjing and Xiamen are chosen as the study target of promotional videos.

Table1. The Study Sites

City	Population (in millions)	Number of Tourists (million)			Foreign Exchange (billion dollars)	Domestic income (billion dollars)	Tourist Expenditure (in dollars)
		International		Domestic			
		Arrivals	Nights				
Chongqing	32.76	1.05	2.97	121.91	0.45	10.16	87.97
Shanghai	19.21	5.33	19.08	123.61	4.80	29.18	236.09
Beijing	17.55	4.13	1.73	162.57	4.36	32.71	201.17
Chengdu	11.40	0.59	1.17	55.06	0.29	4.83	138.85
Shenzhen	8.91	8.96	18.00	19.44	2.76	5.48	320.26
Xi’an	8.44	0.70	1.95	39.29	0.40	4.80	115.44
Qingdao	7.63	1.00	2.80	39.03	0.55	6.88	176.38
Hangzhou	6.83	2.30	6.62	50.48	1.38	10.81	242.62
Nanjing	6.30	1.13	5.17	55.20	0.84	11.67	227.09
Xiamen	2.52	0.94	4.63	23.70	0.84	4.11	209.42

This article uses content analysis to categorize the common content elements. According to the categories of visual elements, the indicators of content analysis can be divided into content

indicators and form indicators. Content indicators mainly refer to the content of promotional videos, essentially categorized according to the six key elements of tourism such as food, accommodation, transportation, sightseeing, shopping and entertainment. Form indicators are the performance practices of promotional videos including orientation analysis, presentation method, persuasion method, time patterns, and the analysis of sound, music and volume. The following analysis is going on according to the above mentioned standard.



Figure 1. Location of the 10 Tourist Destinations in China

*Common content element analysis*

Whether in terms of number of times featured the percentage of time given to it in the video or the sequence, “sightseeing” and “entertainment” hold the top spots among the six elements and play leading roles in telling the stories of the destinations and advocating themes. “Accommodation” comes last, has the shortest duration or may not even be featured at all. “Shopping” and “transportation” are in the middle. While they are featured of necessity, transportation ranges from first to sixth position in terms of sequence, and can be peripheral or central in terms of number of times featured. Shopping never holds the first two spots in sequence and has neither much airtime nor is it featured extensively.

Table.2 Content Elements of Promotional Videos

Content City	Sightseeing			Entertainment			Food			Transportation			Accommodation			Shopping		
	#	%	S	#	%	S	#	%	S	#	%	S	#	%	S	#	%	S
Beijing	61	57.6	1	33	31.1	4	3	2.8	5	3	2.8	6	3	2.8	2	3	2.8	3
Shanghai	63	20.0	1	152	48.3	2	21	6.3	5	44	14.0	3	4	3.5	6	31	9.8	4
Chongqing	115	22.0	1	40	7.7	2	33	6.3	5	202	38.7	3	18	3.5	6	114	21.8	4
Xi'an	260	51.4	1	198	39.1	2	10	2.0	4	30	5.9	5	0	0	6	8	1.6	3
Qingdao	288	46.5	1	169	27.3	3	29	4.7	5	79	12.8	2	14	2.2	4	40	6.5	6
Chengdu	365	42.3	3	224	26.0	2	134	15.6	4	70	8.1	1	5	0.6	6	64	7.4	5
Hangzhou	9	30.0	3	10	33.3	2	5	16.7	1	3	10.0	5	0	0	6	3	10.0	4

Nanjing	275	64.9	1	75	17.7	2	8	1.9	4	48	11.3	3	3	0.7	6	15	3.5	5
Shenzhen	103	25.8	1	217	54.4	3	13	3.3	6	28	7.0	2	18	4.5	5	20	5.0	4
Xiamen	367	40.5	1	333	36.8	2	74	8.2	3	34	3.8	4	47	5.2	5	51	5.6	6

Note: S indicates order sequence.

In these videos, cultural elements constitute 60% of the samples, economic elements and human elements are both 40%, environmental elements 30% while geographical elements only have 20%. In addition, all videos try to convey a certain feeling, such as “happiness” or “relaxation”. Except for Hangzhou and Nanjing, all the videos also include more generic information about the city’s economy, geography, society, culture and environment, which support the feeling that is being conveyed. For example, by talking about the special elements, such as location and the islands, that describe Xiamen, the slogan “warm Xiamen, garden on the sea” is brought to life.

*Sightseeing.* 50% of the videos introduce historical scenic spots, 70% display overall outlook of the cities. Shape the overall image of the city is the most commonly used promotional techniques, objectively reflects the advocacy role of tourism destinations. Only 20% of the videos feature museums; the same holds true for recreation and leisure resorts. This is a reflection of the current demand trends of the domestic tourism market. 50% of the promotional videos describe special interest program, such as Beijing’s Hutong Tour, Chongqing’s Red Tourism, Sichuan Panda and Folk Tour, Xiamen’s Island Tour and Strait Tour.

*Entertainment.* Science and education are involved in 3/5 of the videos :Beijing, Shanghai, Chongqing, Xi’an, Qingdao and Xiamen are all famous for their advancement of high education and have renowned universities and scientific research institutions. All videos focus on the introduction of culture. That means culture is the core of tour city images. 40% of the videos introduce festivals and events, which shows the interaction between a city’s economy and tourism. Amusing oneself is the direct expression of entertainment that is why more than 90% of video are talking about festivals and events.

*Food.* Most promotional videos introduce local specialties, but just 30% show the specialties and people enjoying them but not the production process. This is the universality of specialty performance in the video. Stories of tea are involved in 50% of the promotional videos, while cuisine is featured comparatively less often with a proportion of 30%. There are dining places in about 40% of the video.

*Transportation.* There are four kinds of transportation in promotional videos, among which water transportation (70%), land transportation (80%), air transportation (80%) and others (70%). They mainly reflect the information of how people travel, the means and facilities. It shows the influence of accessibility for tourists. Meanwhile, Peda cab in Beijing, motor bikes and bikes in Xi’an and Chongqing, cable car in Chengdu, painted pleasure boats in Hangzhou, bicycles in Xiamen, as the special transportation ways both advocate the regional characteristics and increase the interest of tour transportation.

*Accommodation.* 80% of the videos show star hotels, indicating that star hotels are commonly accepted. Budget hotels and residential homes are mentioned in the film of Xiamen. It shows that cities are paying more attention to the diversified development of accommodation and enhance the promotion of special accommodation services to meet requirements of different socio-economic levels of customers.

*Shopping.* The fact that 4/5 of the videos are presenting souvenirs shows that these are widely recognized by tourists. In addition, the videos show commercial districts (30%), characteristic lanes and streets (40%) shopping malls (40%) and non-department store shopping places (30%). It indicates that these different types of tourist areas are

*complementary and mutually reinforcing. However, shopping is not seen as an important component of image promotion, and appears to be at the discretion of the photographers*

### *Orientation analysis*

Orientation analysis refers to the perspective from which the story is told, whether it is from the point of view of tourists, local residents, the government, etc. Almost all videos are produced by government. Xi'an and Chongqing are no exception and portray the government perspective. Yet there are some aspects that are shot from the tourist perspective. For example, in the video of Chongqing the story starts with the heroine returning to her hometown and describing Chongqing through her eyes and ears. The film of Chengdu uses the activities of tourists to tell its story, whereas the videos of Shanghai and Shenzhen portray the interesting stories of foreign tourists while sightseeing. In the Shenzhen film, the feelings of foreign tourists are used as a finishing touch, by ending the story with the tourist engraving the theme slogan “wonderful Shenzhen, happy city” on a ceramic tile. In the Shanghai film, some foreign tourists take photos of citizens’ life.

Table.3 Orientation Comparison of the Promotional Videos

City	Chongqing	Shanghai	Beijing	Chengdu	Qingdao	Shenzhen	Xi'an	Hangzhou	Nanjing	Xiamen
Tourists	√	√	√	√		√				
Local residents				√	√					√
Government	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

### *Presentation method*

The presentation method refers to the structure of the videos: how tourism in these cities is portrayed in its component parts (e.g. food, accommodation, etc.), the sequence in which these components appear. While most of the time the components are presented sequentially, at times the videos will backtrack. For instance, “sightseeing” may be featured for one second, then the video cuts quickly to “entertainment”, and returns to “sightseeing” within 3 seconds. This can be confusing. The Xiamen video presents factual information about the component parts that make up tourism in this city under the slogan “warm Xiamen, garden on the sea”, and then provides explanation to elaborate on the facts. The Shanghai video uses a sequential approach to show residents’ life by depicting getting married, giving birth, children growing and going to university in coherent frames.

### *Persuasion method*

Moyer and Nabi (2010) defined narrative as a literary term for a text that presents a true story written in a style more closely associated with fiction. Escalas (2004) researched whether the ad has a beginning, middle, and end using the chronology of narrative.

In these videos, those of Chongqing and Chengdu belong to the narrative style, while those of Shanghai and Shenzhen are comprehensive videos with plots. The other six are non-narrative videos.

### *Time patterns*

The time patterns used in the videos mainly consist of transformation of night and day, seasons, and age. All videos with urban night scenery and nightlife include a change of day and night. Besides, there are other forms of day and night transformation, such as that of the Shanghai film, where the transformation is a scene from dusk to early morning. In the Xi'an film, there is a rapid transformation of the same scene from night to morning to night. In the Chengdu video, the hero goes from day to night for his one day tour. In the Chongqing film, the time changes from the night when the heroine comes back to her hometown to day the next day. Seasonal transitions can be

gleaned from the costumes people are wearing and the landscape changes. Age changes are mainly expressed through recalling stories and children growing up. In the Chongqing film, the heroine recalls the scene when family sat together to enjoy hotpot.

#### *The use of sound, music and volume*

About half the videos are with voice-over and half without. The former is usually implemented as sound combined with pictures, narrated or as a monologue; the latter is music combined with pictures, is synchronous and can change rhythm and tempo as appropriate. Sometimes voiceover can be combined with music, as in the Xiamen video. Music helps heighten the atmosphere, adds images, and deepens the role of the theme. It helps to express inner feelings, creates the screen image and benefits movie reviews. For example, Lang Lang's piano accompaniment in the Shanghai video not only sets off the solemn and elegant atmosphere, but also gives tips and guidance while the music goes up and down.

Before playing, we set the volume of each film to 60% of its level and found out that the volume of the Chongqing film is comparatively lower, while Xi'an and Shenzhen videos are louder, and the remainders are "normal", that is to say average volume.

## **Result**

#### *Content orientation of the video*

As for the content of the promotional video, photographers focalized the image of the tourist destination by way of emphasizing two aspects of the six tourism elements, sightseeing and entertainment, supplemented with another three aspects food, shopping and transportation, and only seldom conveying information about accommodation. Moreover, the videos tend to highlight some generic aspects of the city's development such as its culture, economy, society, environment and geography.

#### *Performance techniques orientation of the photographers*

As for the technique of the promotional videos, the styles show great variety. Most photographers build the framework of the video by using a non-narrative structure to depict concise tourist destination images. However, the diversity and similarity of narrative structure is also the major point that cannot be ignored. The perspective of the narrator is mainly from the government's point of view, they want give tourists or potential tourists whole image of destinations. As a result, the interior logical relation tends to be parallel, paratactic. While most of the time the components are presented sequentially, at times the videos will backtrack. The richness of internal relations and logic should be increased so as to avoid confusion or rigidity. While the photographers often show the same place at different times, e.g, during the day and at night, they are less likely to show different places at different times during the day and night. Whether analyzed from the perspective of sequential order frequency or duration, it is obvious that the photographers show great interest in "sightseeing" and "entertainment", and ignore "accommodation". Also, photographers show a clear preference for voiceover. They choose either voiceover or music, or sometimes combine these two, a trend that has become quite popular especially in combination with multi-media. As for volume, most are average.

## **Implication**

#### *On shooting promotional videos for image of destinations*

On subject: To realize diversity of the subject. At present, most subjects are limited to government institutes such as Tourism Bureau, News Office, etc. More subjects such as citizens, tourists and press should be encouraged to take part in to shoot more creative and more appealing films.

On content: Six elements are unevenly distributed, "sightseeing" and "entertainment" reach as much as 2/3, while there are little information on "accommodation" or even deleted. Other three elements are with randomness. Elements of culture, economy, human, environment and geography

tend to occupy more and more proportion. As a result, the six elements need to be distributed evenly. When certain element needs to be promoted, proportion of it can be added to it. Pay more attention to the information of “accommodation”. The promotional video will be perfect if adding features under the premise of keeping integrity of six elements.

On techniques of the photographers. To use diversity of style as overall idea. It is better to involve around the theme under the precondition of combining non-narrative and narrative structure, view of innovation as a starting point, making clear inner logical relationship, space transformation as special feature, and clever use of voice as decoration.

#### *On promoting tour city image*

On the basis of above mentioned example research, and referring to some other image promotional video in the course of research, the following suggestions are put forward:

All sidedness and diversity of propagating contents. In addition to the traditional six elements of tourism, elements as cultural, economic, humane, environmental and geographical need to be taken into consideration so as to enhance the overall image of city tourism.

Special results of image promotional video. Special result is usually made through special effects such as celebrity, branding and implied effects. The promotional video of the famous land of rivers and lakes ---Wuzhen is a example of star effect by inviting “Milktea”---Liu Ruoying (famous Taiwan singer and film star).

Diversification in forms. Some promotional video acquire form of TV series to analyse image by chapters, such as landscape, humanity, ect.

Diversification in methods. Besides making use of promotional video, it is also good choice to combine net advertisement, TV advertisement, publicity materials, newspaper and magazines and outdoor advertising signs.

Emotional communication. It is the ultimate goal of image propaganda by adding emotion to the process of propaganda, through which the public can interact affectively with the city and create emotional consensus.

Public-oriented. It is the direct intention of image propaganda to have public segmentation and acquire different methods and content to different people, in this way to reach consensus to the target city

Times. The obvious characteristics of times of images are to keep up with the time and constantly bring forth new ideas. Only by keeping the pace of times and practice can the propaganda works remain invisible. The images of Shanghai Expo with the them: City, Better Life, and Beijing Olympic with the them: Experience Beijing, Experience Olympic, are highly contemporary examples of image promotion.

From the process of analysis, we can see that the shooting subjects have obvious intention to propaganda while shooting image films. No matter it is the diversity of content or the complex of performance techniques, the purpose is to achieve best image propaganda of the tour city. Researches nowadays are mainly based on the method of movie reviews. Therefore, they are, to some extent, subjective. It order to get more objective, convincing data and conclusion, we need to study further. Audience and media analysis must be taken into consideration in the further study. Promotional media make improvements after combining audience perception and getting feedback from audience. Or draw conclusion and general strategies from massive films combining with other media forms. All these are valuable to academic research.

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