

Weaving Myths Across Cross-Media: Narrative Features and Their Pathway to Audience Behavior in Mythological Games

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Wang, with a strong interdisciplinary background in computer science and communication studies, specializes in the burgeoning field of computational communication and multimodal narrative strategies. Recent studies have focused on visual storytelling, game narratives, and the communication effects brought about by narrative gamification, exploring how narrative elements in games and visual media influence audience cognition and behavior through multimodal forms. Wang has contributed to this field by presenting research on multimodal narrative strategies at the Chinese Computational Communication Annual Conference and submitting relevant papers to the 75th International Communication Association (ICA).

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Abstract

There are many ways we can experience a fictional world, its events, characters and stories in the present day. We not only consume stories from mono-media such as watching films, playing games and reading books, but we also experience them by traversing multiple media, known as cross-media storytelling (Javanshir, 2020). In recent years, cross-media narrative theory has emerged as a critical framework for analyzing the communication of cultural products and user behavior. By emphasizing media synergy and narrative extension, this theory explains how narrative content achieves coherence and continuity across multiple media platforms. Media synergy highlights how trailers (visuals) (Gonzales, 2020), social media campaigns (interactive discussions), and the game itself (narrative gameplay) leverage their respective strengths to jointly enhance core narrative features. Narrative extension reflects the integration of these forms, enabling continuous user engagement and deeper perceptual immersion (Ryan, 2016).

As an original game inspired by the Chinese mythological classic *Journey to the West*, *Black Myth: Wukong* integrates traditional culture with modern narrative techniques, achieving global acclaim for its immersive narrative experience. The game's narrative features are strategically communicated through multi-media channels, fostering a strong sense of cultural identity and immersion among users. These processes ultimately drive purchase intention (Zong, 2023), aligning with the core mechanisms of cross-media narrative theory. However, systematic empirical studies exploring the specific pathways linking narrative

features to purchase intention remain scarce.

This study adopts cross-media narrative theory as its theoretical framework to address the following research questions: 1) How do the narrative features of *Black Myth: Wukong* reflect media synergy in cross-media communication? 2) How do cultural backgrounds influence user perceptions of these narrative features? 3) What are the mediating mechanisms through which narrative features, as perceived by users, influence purchase intention, and how does cultural context moderate these effects? A mixed-methods approach was employed. In the qualitative phase, content analysis was conducted on social media campaigns, developer interviews, and player reviews to extract five core narrative features of *Black Myth: Wukong*: Cultural Symbol Identification (reflecting the recognition of mythological elements as cultural symbols), Narrative Immersion (capturing the user's engagement in storylines), Character Complexity (showcasing multi-dimensional character development), Mythological Symbol Impact (emphasizing the visual appeal of mythological elements), and **Narrative Interactivity** (interactive game sessions are an important part of narrative integrity). These features illustrate the mechanisms of media synergy and narrative extension while providing theoretical variables for subsequent quantitative analysis.

Preliminary findings indicate significant cultural differences in the perception of these narrative features, reflecting the mechanisms of media synergy and narrative extension. Local players emphasize the cultural belonging and traditional values embedded in mythological elements, which are reinforced through synergistic use of narrative elements in gameplay and social media discussions. In contrast, international players prioritize the visual appeal of mythological symbols, supported by high-quality trailers and dynamic graphics, showcasing

the narrative extension of visual storytelling across media platforms. The quantitative phase will employ a structural equation model to examine how these narrative features influence purchase intention via the mediating effects of immersion and cultural identity, while assessing the moderating role of cultural context on these relationships.

Theoretically, this study introduces a conceptual framework of “narrative features → cultural identity and immersion → purchase intention,” extending the application of cross-media narrative theory to user behavior research and enhancing its explanatory power in narrative-driven decision-making. Practically, the findings provide actionable insights for designing and promoting cross-media cultural products based on mythological narratives, offering specific strategies such as leveraging trailers to highlight visual storytelling for international markets and using social media campaigns to deepen cultural connections with local audiences. These strategies underscore the pivotal roles of media synergy and narrative extension in enhancing user engagement and global market performance.

Keywords: Cross-Media Narrative, Mythological Narrative, Purchase Intention, Interactive Cultural Communication

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Wukong Across Borders: Transmedia Adaptations and Global Perceptions of the Chinese Superhero

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Abstract

This article analyzes Wukong — the protagonist of the Chinese video game *Black Myth: Wukong* (Game Science, 2024) — and its role in shaping the construction of a Chinese superhero in the international media landscape. Appearing in the 16th-century novel *Xi You Ji* (or *Journey to the West*), Sun Wukong (or the Monkey King) was originally a monkey, born from a heavenly stone, who later gained supernatural powers under the guidance of Master Puti. He led a rebellion against the celestial court and was imprisoned by Buddha for five hundred years. After his release, he accompanied the monk Master Tang Sanzang on a journey to the West to obtain Buddhist scriptures in India, overcoming eighty-one challenges, and finally was granted Dou Zhan Sheng Fo (Victorious Fighting Buddha). Since then, Wukong's story has been adapted from mythological fiction into various media including cartoons, TV dramas, films and video games, gradually shaping Wukong as a superhero-like figure in Chinese artworks. Against this backdrop, *Black Myth: Wukong* has attracted international attention by becoming the second most-played game in history on Steam, bringing this mythological figure to global audiences. But what is a Chinese superhero, or how do we define one? This article attempts to answer this question using Sun Wukong as an example.

Unlike in the old superhero films where the superheroes go back in time and bring their loved ones back to life (McSweeney, 2020, p.4), new superhero films are those that “could happen in the same world in which we live.” (quoted in McSweeney, 2020, p.4) The change in the content of superhero films signifies a shift in focus: No longer are these films solely about characters with supernatural powers whose stories are distant from the lives of ordinary people, rather, they emphasise that these heroes can act, feel, and even fail just like the audiences watching them. This is to inspire viewers with the notion that they, too, can embody the qualities of a superhero in some way. This approach mirrors the adaptation of myths in films and other transmedia storytelling forms, whether from Greek or Chinese mythology, where deities are portrayed with human-like emotions and sometimes limited magical abilities. This transformation is reminiscent of the Renaissance cultural movement, which emphasised humanism by portraying life and characters realistically and freely expressing human emotions.

Deities serve as perfect prototypes for superheroes for their enchanting looks and magical powers. When adapting these ancient stories, creators sometimes infuse their interpretations, reimagining the characters from a contemporary perspective. Drawing on Claude Lévi-Strauss's work in *Structural Anthropology* (1963), Dai (2007, p. 92) argues that ancient Greek mythology, through its narratives, functions to resolve the conflicts deeply embedded in Greek society at that time. Dai further claims that Lévi-Strauss's research extends beyond the study of mythology or ancient Greece. It demonstrates that human narratives, or the way that people tell stories, possess a "social function." This means that

analysing the way that people tell stories can reveal the conflicts underlying social and cultural superficialities and provide balanced or imaginative solutions.

Characterised by his rebellious nature and heroic spirit, Wukong's pilgrimage to the West and his aim to become a Buddha has a lasting impact on the Chinese people. This paper will first examine some of the most representative transmedia adaptations of the Monkey King chronologically over the years to analyse how these adaptations have shaped him as a Chinese superhero on screen while examining the transmedia strategies used to do so. This will provide a basis for understanding why viewers and scholars are drawn to this character each time his image returns to the screen. Second, building on the previous investigation, this article will analyse how these transmedia adaptations have shaped the Monkey King as a Chinese superhero in three ways - as a superhero to save the world, as a metaphor for freedom and an icon who dares to challenge the social norm, and as a pilgrimage to a perfect self. Finally, the article utilises discourse analysis to explore how international players have received *Black Myth* across two platforms: Quora, for insights into the game's cultural background, and Steam, for experiences related to gameplay and artistic interpretations, to investigate the imagery of Wukong that these players have perceived.

Key Words

Black Myth; Wukong; Transmedia Adaptation; Chinese Myth; Film Studies; Video Game; Audience Studies

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About the Author

Shuhao Chen is a PhD researcher at the Academy of Film, Hong Kong Baptist University. He is currently researching the adaptations of traditional Chinese mythologies in creative media to examine the change in social values in contemporary China. Chen holds a B.A. in Translation Studies, an M.A. in Translation & Interpretation Studies, and an M.Sc. in Film Studies. He was awarded distinction for his master's thesis exploring the concept of doppelgänger and identity in Krzysztof Kieślowski's films from the University of Edinburgh.

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Two Mythological Birds with One Stone: How *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror* Blends the Pamali Myth and Indonesian Ghosts into One Frightening yet Educating Package

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Abstract

Mythologies are integral to human cultures. In this modern era, they sometimes serve as the basis of pop-culture products, including games, two recent and high-profile ones being *Hades* (Arthimalla, 2024) and *Black Myth Wukong* (Mao, 2024). Another notable mythology-based game is *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror* (Trattner, 2020), which, besides being a competent horror game, also aims to (1) educate the player on “pamali,” which are supernaturally nuanced taboos that help maintain ethical behaviors and social cohesion, and (2) promote various Indonesian ghosts like Kuntilanak, i.e., “the White Lady.” Although pamali and the ghosts are distinct elements of Indonesian mythology, the game manages to not only adapt them but also blend them into one convincing package. While blending between game elements is not a new topic in game studies (Kankainen et al., 2017), such blends of myths have so far received

little attention from scholars, as reflected in recent research on mythology-based games (Vandewalle, 2024), which focuses on adaptations of mythologies that are already a narrative whole. This lack of attention represents a glaring research gap, given the primacy of blending in creative endeavors (Fauconnier & Turner, 1998), including game design (Atmakuri et al., 2023) and narrative writing (de Lima et al., 2021). In light of this gap, we study *Pamali: Indonesian Folklore Horror* to build some preliminary yet detailed understanding of how games can seamlessly conduct such blending.

Figure 1 shows our model of interactive narratives (Atmaja et al., 2024), which we used to precisely understand how the game blended pamali and Indonesian ghosts across its storyworld, storytelling, assets, and UI aspects through the combined lens of conceptual blending (Epe et al., 2018) and the cognitive, affective, and sensorimotor learning domains (Atmaja & Sugiarto, 2022). We then reviewed the literature to identify elements of each aspect's blend, which, besides including pamali rules and myths of Indonesian ghosts, also comprised the branching storyline pattern, the horror adventure genre, and other game and interactive narrative design templates. To support our analysis, we further classified the blending processes among these elements according to three basic blending procedures: *composition* of a blend from the elements, *completion* of the blend by inferring its missing elements, and *elaboration* of the elements' joint dynamics (Epe et al., 2018).

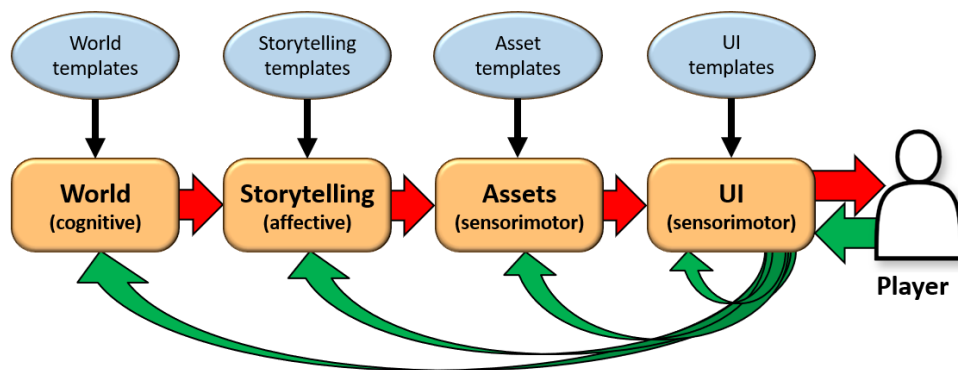


Figure 1. Our learning domains- and blending-based model of interactive narratives

Our results reveal (1) how the blended elements of the game’s storyworld, storytelling, assets, and UI engagingly represent the myths of pamali and Indonesian ghosts, and (2) how they sometimes are less successful and how to mitigate this weakness. One example is the completion-oriented blend between each ghost and specific pamali rules in the game’s storyworld, which exaggerates the rules’ role in Indonesian society by making their violations trigger the ghost’s game-ending appearance. While such blends can cognitively teach a new player to respect pamali, they also, for a knowledgeable player, lead to a ghost-free experience, which is less exciting and may even interfere with the game’s goal of promoting Indonesian ghosts. One way to improve this situation is by adapting new pamali rules as *storylets*, i.e., triggerable events with flexible placements within the storyline (Kreminski & Wardrip-Fruin, 2018), that summon ghosts without severe consequences. Altogether, our results open the door for such detailed analyses in the future on both mythology-based games and games that adapt and blend real-world elements for other

purposes, such as promoting a product through an engaging and interactive narrative (Kinard & Hartman, 2013).

Keywords

Mythology, adaptation, pamali, Indonesian ghosts, conceptual blending

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“No Bugs, No Games” : The “spectral narrative” haunting video game’s “bug”

Author’s statement

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Description of selected research, publications, and presentations: paper essay,

The research presented in the paper titled “No Bugs, No Games” : The “spectral narrative” haunting video game’s “bug” by Xu Yaoyi, delves into the application of Derrida's hauntology within the domain of video games, particularly focusing on the concept of "bugs" as spectral entities. The study explores the shared characteristics between "bugs" and Derrida's notion of "ghosts," and how these digital anomalies create "ligne de fuite" deviating from the original intentions of game design. The research also investigates the potential of "bugs" to inspire creativity and narrative reconstruction within gaming culture, using case studies from games like "Jian Wang San" and "Minecraft" to discuss the transformation of player subjectivity and posture in the context of these "spectral narratives."

Abstract:

This paper explores the phenomenon of "bug" in video games, examining their role beyond mere technical glitches to that of cultural and narrative significance. It identifies "bug" as spectral entities that inhabit the digital space of video games, influencing player experiences and shaping game narratives in unforeseen ways. The study focuses on how "bug" are perceived and utilized within the gaming community, and how they contribute to the broader discourse of game studies. Mark Fisher distinguishes between two types of "hauntology", pointing to the "compulsion to repeat" that has ended in the past but is still occurring, and the expectation of potential that has not yet occurred in the future(19). The many qualities that bug shares with Derrida's "specter" qualities have allowed it to be considered a "specter" in video games.

By employing a theoretical framework grounded in Derrida's hauntology, which provides a lens through which to view "bug" as spectral presences within the medium of video games, this paper examines how "bug" as "specter" influence players' experiences and games' narratives. As Derrida said, "One cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back."(11)The research contextualizes the "bug" phenomenon within the existing academic discussions on gaming culture and media technology criticism by analyzing fan creations from "Jian Wang San" and "Minecraft."

Fallout: The implications of this research are significant for

understanding the complex relationship between game developers, players, and the games themselves. It challenges the traditional view of "Bug" as undesirable elements, arguing instead for a recognition of their potential to enhance the gaming experience and contribute to the richness of game narratives. "Bug" are not merely technical glitches but also integral components of gaming culture and narrative. It provides new perspectives on how players interact with and reconstruct game narratives, offering profound insights into the future development of game design and player experiences.

"Bug" possess polysemy in video games, triggering various narrative modes, including metagaming, glitch art, player fan creations, bug exploitation experiences, and fan creations. Alexander R. Galloway saw glitch art as "countergaming", "countergaming replaces play with aesthetics, or perhaps something like the play of signification" (115-118). The five narrative modes caused by the "bug" corresponding to the "loophole" in Chinese context reflect the "compound meaning" of "bug" and the potential of "spectral narrative" contained in it. Player's status and subjectivity was changed in such "spectral narrative". These "spectral narratives" include both "uncanny" emotional experience in the face of out-of-control rules, and cross-media imagination construction of "métalepse".

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Author statement

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