

Research on Narrative Strategies in Korean Variety Shows and Youth Self-identification: A Case Study of 'Biong Biong Planet Game Room'

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Abstract. Korean variety shows, with their distinctive entertainment style and gamification, have become a widely disseminated part of Korean pop culture, creating a unique cultural landscape. "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," a variety show produced in South Korea in 2022, combines travel reality shows with competitive games, enriching the emotional expression of variety shows through the construction of multiple spaces. This paper, based on the analysis of the narrative strategies of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," explores the narrative paths of the show. It also examines how contemporary youths seek self-identification within such shows and project their self-awareness into them. Through this analysis, the paper identifies three ways in which young people construct their self-identity: resonating with the narrative subjects, immersing in the narrative space, and being attracted and engaged by the diverse and intertwined narrative structures. This research also provides insights into the development path for Chinese variety shows.

Keywords: Korean variety shows, narrative strategies, Youth Self-Identification.

1. Introduction

"Biong Biong Planet Game Room," produced by South Korean TV producer Roh Young-seok, is an action-adventure variety show that combines the concept of the metaverse with traditional variety elements. Set against the unique backdrops of countries like Thailand and Sweden, the show unfolds various games. After its broadcast, it sparked heated discussions on the Korean internet and attracted a large audience from different regions, creating a significant fanbase. The show features four young female celebrities active in Korea's entertainment and idol circles, connecting with the new generation of young people and linking the current retro trend with audiences of other age groups. The all-female cast adds a warm and delicate tone to the show, quickly drawing a large following and attention. The young guests and novel program settings not only attract viewers but also foster a sense of self-identification among them. Throughout the broadcast, extensive discussions among fans on the internet have strengthened their sense of identity. This paper primarily explores how the show's segments resonate with viewers and how the narrative is conveyed, aiming to offer some thoughts on the development of domestic variety shows in China.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Narrative Strategies

Narrative is the foundation of all human activity. In 1969, Tzvetan Todorov formally introduced the concept of "Narratology" [1]. Since then, originating from the field of literary studies and employing methods such as structuralism and semiotics for textual analysis, this concept has been applied to analyze the intrinsic structure and rules of literature. In the twentieth century, Gérard Genette developed a theoretical system of narrative structure, elements, and style, marking the birth of narrative texts [2]. In the 1980s, with the advent of visual media, narratology theories transitioned towards image storytelling. Television, as a medium, entered the narrative field. The development of television significantly impacted narrative concepts. American scholar Sarah Kozloff stated, American television is filled with stories, as if a sponge has been placed in a swimming pool [3].

In exploring the specific applications of narratology, Arthur Asa Berger meticulously examined and elucidated narratology theories, integrating mass media theory with practice. He analyzed various narratological theories, revealing the essence of narrative theory and applying these theories in practical contexts [4].

Narratology theories have a long history and comprehensive development. From "classical narratology" to "post-classical narratology," the field has evolved continuously with the development of media, adapting to various forms of art. "Post-classical narratology" serves as the theoretical foundation for modern media narratives. Essentially, the analysis of television programs' narratives is an analysis of the story texts presented by these programs. Audiences are attracted to the stories depicted in the programs. Under this theoretical framework, studying the narratives of Korean variety shows is both practically significant and theoretically supported.

2.2. Identity

"Identity" is a psychological concept that refers to the acceptance of oneself and others. Self-identity emphasizes an individual's reflection, recognition, and pursuit of their own self. Anthony Giddens noted that self-identity is the self that individuals reflexively understand based on their personal experiences. Individuals form a reflexive self through inward efforts and an internal reference system. The reflective projection of the self is the result of the individual's reflexivity, without which the self would lack meaning and value [5]. Group identity, on the other hand, refers to an individual's realization that they belong to a specific group and the emotional and value experiences that the group provides to the self. This paper discusses youth identity, which is sought through the formation of group identity, extending from collective group identification to individual self-identification.

3. Narrative Strategies

3.1. Narrative Subject

3.1.1 The Narrative Architect Behind the Scenes

In variety shows, the production team, including the chief director, technical crew, and costume and props teams, controls the creation and dissemination of the show, operating behind the scenes yet steering and influencing the narrative text. Directors play a crucial role in structuring the entire variety show, planning it comprehensively. As the core of the show, the director significantly impacts its narrative, with the final presentation to the audience being a manifestation of the director's conceptual blueprint. Roh Young-seok, the director of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," not only serves as the creator behind the scenes but also steps in front of the camera to become an actor in his own show. By issuing game rules to guests either through voice or on-screen appearances, Roh Young-seok overturns the traditional role of directors as off-screen commanders, thus satisfying viewers' curiosity about the production process. His direct communication with guests regarding rules adjustments or the introduction of new game segments has attracted a large audience, becoming a highlight of the show. This arrangement increases the show's entertainment value for viewers.

3.1.2 Distinctive Guests Enhance Relatability

For a variety show to present a personalized narrative, it first needs to feature characters with distinct personalities. The guests' images serve as crucial windows to the show's outward identity. Guests attract a large audience by showcasing their unique traits, sparking discussions among viewers that deepen the show's thematic exploration [6].

The four female guests on "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" each possess unique characteristics and charm. Lee Eun-ji, a comedian, brings humor; Kim Mi-hyun, a sweet girl group member since 2015, shows a significant contrast to her stage persona, attracting fans with her adorable awkwardness. Lee Yong-ji, Korea's youngest champion rapper, adds interest with her strong skills, high emotional intelligence, and humor. Ahn Yu-jin, the 19-year-old leader of a trending girl group, reveals a

different, intriguing side, adding various points of interest to the show. The guests do not force a persona but instead behave as they would in everyday interactions with friends, creating relatable and potentially real-life humorous situations. This setup allows viewers to project themselves onto the guests, fostering a sense of identification.

The concept of projective identification, first introduced in psychoanalytic theory, describes the process of transferring one's desires, emotions, and ideas onto another as a "defense mechanism," according to Freud. Viewers of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" project the guests' on-screen personas onto themselves, fostering a sense of youth resonance and self-identity through interactive viewing experiences, such as commenting and engaging with others' comments during the show.

3.2. Narrative Space

Narratology has been rooted in the concept of "space" since its inception, just as time serves as the base for narrative. The creation of any narrative work unfolds within specific temporal and spatial dimensions [7].

In film narrative, "space" refers to the setting or environment chosen by the filmmakers where the story or events take place [8]. Applying this theory to variety shows, the narrative space of a variety show is the location or environment where the program's events occur, essentially the "scene of action." Given the uniqueness of variety shows, narrative spaces can be categorized into two types: the overarching background space where the variety show takes place, which is a basic component of the show, forming a complete narrative plot and setting the stage for where the events originate. "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" sets its background in the tropical ambiance of Thailand. The second type is the cultural landscape space within the show, created by the local culture where the program takes place. The show not only captures the guests but also intersperses shots of Thailand's environment and local people, documenting and presenting Thai social environment and culture through the lens. In such spaces, social forms are conveyed through the landscape, enhancing cultural dissemination and elevating the narrative space's thematic essence. The coexistence of these two narrative spaces constructs the overall narrative space of the variety show. In today's media environment, variety shows blur the lines between "stage" and "reality," narrowing the space between viewers and participants, offering an immersive experience and showcasing celebrities in a light no different from ordinary people.

Anthony Giddens suggests that self-identity is realized through two pathways: "individual reflective activity" and "referencing others." The core of "individual reflective activity" lies in constructing the "ideal self," shaping oneself into the ideal image, or portraying a socially perfect image in the foreground. In contrast, "referencing others" involves gaining a sense of identity through feedback from others [9].

The expansion of media technology and the invasion of virtual social space structures into the daily lives of most young people have made programs with high-dimensional, complex, and diverse settings more appealing to the audience. Such complex and diverse settings bring guests closer together, stripping away their onstage persona and making them indistinguishable from ordinary people. The evolving relationships among guests, between guests and the production team, and between guests and locals, from initial detachment to eventual closeness, mirror the social experiences young people undergo in society. The narrative space created in the program significantly resonates with viewers, achieving a sense of self-identification.

3.3. Narrative Structure

3.3.1 Constructing a Multi-Temporal and Spatial Narrative Structure

In the creation of literary works, time and space are inseparable and interdependent components. This principle is also essential in the production of variety shows. To achieve the theme of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" a show that connects with Generation Z, the production team set the program against the backdrop of time-traveling to capture runaway moon rabbits on Earth. Thus, the temporal and spatial setting of the show becomes diverse. The program is set against the backdrop of

a limited urban space, with human activities serving as the pivot for time changes, creating a narrative flow. These ordinary survival behaviors become the core strategy for lending authenticity to the plot.

This form of temporal composition not only maintains the authenticity of the program but also ends with a "realizable ideal," adding a romantic aspect to space and transforming the shooting into an achievable utopia. Despite some elements of unattainability, the presence of failed organization details compensates for the generally thin content of variety shows. The cross-narrative of multiple spaces broadens the audience's exposure, thereby increasing viewer engagement.

The primary audience of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" is Generation Z. Compared to previous generations, today's young people in Generation Z often exhibit a "contradictory" image in the process of self-identity construction [10]. Young individuals oscillate between self-identity affirmation and denial. The diverse narrative structure of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room" serves as an outlet for young people seeking to construct their self-identity. The program's settings mix truth and fiction, and the guests present a variety of personas. Viewers find resonance through their observations of the guests' performances, forming their self-identity. Moreover, the multi-temporal and spatial narrative structure sparks group discussions among viewers, creating a unique imaginative space for Generation Z.

3.3.2 Highlighting the Main Thread through a Networked Narrative Structure

In film narratives, a networked narrative structure is often used to engage the audience's interest, with scholars suggesting that such a structure allows interwoven stories to reveal direct connections between characters, highlighting commonalities of humanity [11]. This arrangement enables characters to intersect repeatedly. In the variety show "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," the production team combines scattered minor tasks with the main task, making the plot development reasonable and smooth. The setting of the overarching background causes the activities of the guests to become grid-like over time. This arrangement adds interest to the show and captures the audience's attention. In producing "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," the directorial team designed the narrative's driving nodes as challenges within the show, providing a more interactive arrangement for a real-life experience and presenting the close relationships between people to the audience.

The networked narrative structure has attracted a large audience and sparked extensive discussion. The continuous development of social media has given everyone a platform to speak. People post comments or bullet chats on various platforms, discussing with the production team or other viewers. Such continuous exchanges form a social circle centered on the show, a virtual mini-society. Some viewers edit interesting parts of the show for secondary creation and upload them to short video platforms, attracting more viewers. The interaction generated during the dissemination of these secondary creations is also an important way for individuals to find self-identification.

The rise of big data technology has allowed these contents to be precisely pushed to people with similar interests. Such targeting connects individuals with similar aesthetics and interests, forming viewer groups. Individuals, in their quest for self-identity, find group belonging, leading to group identification.

4. Conclusion

As a form of popular culture, variety shows rapidly popularize and update through modernized communication means across various channels, reflecting the audience's demand for new stimuli and subjects, as well as the development and transformation of variety show technology and formats. The content accessed by viewers through cameras and screens and the demand for more viewing satisfaction, require changes in the production environment and the interplay of socio-cultural contexts, whether real or fictional, to be conveyed as realistically as possible. This commercially-oriented variety show, centered on mainstream cultural development, has opened new vistas for the variety show market. By analyzing the narrative structure of "Biong Biong Planet Game Room," this study aims to explore a path suitable for local variety show creation. In today's explosive development

of variety shows, what is needed more is the integration of culture into the narrative, using space as a medium, and through more forms of integration, to further develop the brand value of variety shows.

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