

THE STUDY ON THE REPRESENTATION OF
CARNIVALISM IN YOUTUBE TRAVEL CONTENT.
FOCUSING ON KWAKTUBE'S «UZBEKISTAN» CONTENT

Jeong-won Lee,
Cheju Halla University

Abstract: This study analyzes the ‘Uzbekistan content’ of Korean travel YouTube channel <Kwaktube> through the lens of Carnivalism. The research questions are as follows. 1) What characteristics and effects does the carnival represented in <Kwaktube>'s Uzbekistan videos show? 2) What implications do the Uzbekistan videos represented through Carnivalism provide for the production of YouTube travel content? Kwaktube continuously expands unpredictable events by networking with Uzbek people in a de-authoritative, and de-hierarchical manner. The Uzbek people interacting with Kwaktube horizontally become active participants and creators of the content. This has the effect of bringing the voices of the Uzbek people, buried under hierarchical order, to the forefront of the narrative. This narrative structure transforms Kwaktube's content into a «polyphonic square» where diverse voices coexist. In the polyphonic square, performers seek to expand continuous solidarity based on intimacy. Expanding solidarity based on intimacy is also the goal travel content should aim for.

Key words: Carnivalism, Representation, YouTube, Travel Content, Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Following the end of the global COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a surge in demand for travel in Korean society, which had been suppressed for a long time. Accordingly, the popularity of travel content created by YouTubers has also increased. On YouTube, people can obtain personalized travel information and watch content that allows them to experience local travel indirectly. YouTube travel content serves as a gateway for individuals to encounter unfamiliar cultures and people in foreign countries. Due to their focus on profit expansion, YouTubers may reconstruct other countries' people and cultures from an excessively nationalistic perspective to increase subscribers and views.

This study focuses on how Korean travel YouTube content represents the cultures of other countries. Specifically, it aims to analyze content that depicts other countries' cultures and people through “Carnivalism” rather than excessive nationalism. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnival is a literary form that intentionally subverts traditional order and values through humor and disorder (바흐친, 2001).

In a carnival, anyone can freely create a space for play as equal subjects. Individuals are liberated from oppressive institutions, norms, and authorities and can share laughter. This process sublimates into a relationship of solidarity among different

DOI:

[https://doi.org/
10.62499/ijmcc.vi6.45](https://doi.org/10.62499/ijmcc.vi6.45)

Citation:

Lee, Jeong-won. 2024.
The study on the representation
of carnivalism in youtube
travel content. Focusing on
kwaktube's «Uzbekistan»
content.
International Journal of Media
and Communications in Central
Asia. Tashkent. UzJOKU.
Special issue. 30-36.

people.

This study analyzes the content of the prominent Korean travel YouTube channel <Kwaktube> through the lens of Carnivalism. The creator of Kwaktube, Junbin Kwak, opened the channel on October 24, 2018. Starting in 2020, he traveled to relatively unfamiliar countries for Koreans, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, focusing on showcasing local scenes as they are. As his planning succeeded, the channel continued to grow, reaching 1.96 million subscribers as of May 20, 2024.

Watching Kwaktube's videos brings to mind the carnival. Kwaktube and the locals create a space for free play and share laughter as equals. Notable examples of carnival elements can be seen in the content filmed in Uzbekistan. Popular content includes "A Strange Village Wedding Overflowing with Korean Speakers," released in October 2021, and "The Return of the Strange Uzbek Wedding," released on July 22, 2022. Both videos capture events surrounding the "wedding," reflecting the unique culture and people involved. This study analyzes the carnival elements in Kwaktube's Uzbekistan content and explores the political meanings and effects inherent in content that represents other countries through Carnivalism.

2. Theoretical Background

Carnival is defined as a play culture that allows the consumption of meat and alcohol before Lent, a period of abstinence from meat. It has become a time of indulgence, freedom, and liberation just before Lent (김미성, 2012). The concept of the carnival includes the meaning of "liberation from all prohibitions." The masses who create and participate in the carnival destroy power structures and traditional order. By wearing various masks, the masses criticize the existing order and ruling class and experience temporary subversion.

Carnival has been perceived as a place where play and laughter harmonize, allowing liberation from existing order and norms, revealing another life of the masses. Anti-classism, where resistance, transformation, and subversion occur, dominates the carnival, embodying a kind of utopia. This utopia is an open, enjoyable anarchy where diverse values coexist, and cracks and mockery of authority are allowed (Lachmann & Eshelman & Davis, 1988).

In this space, reconciliation and solidarity with differences are sought when people of different classes, strata, and values share collective and ambivalent laughter. Therefore, during the carnival, the masses acquire a square where they can fulfill the dream of utopia. The source of fun and inspiration is the "dialogue" shared with others. The carnival is filled with "unofficial square language"

such as insults and curses (Bakhtin, 1984).

YouTube can also be seen as a «carnival square». The square is a polyphonic space where hidden voices are revealed and coexist. On YouTube, different people freely use square language from an equal position to express personal and collective issues. Through dialogue, they discover subjectivity and expand the space for interaction and solidarity. The key characters appearing in the carnival are the «fool» and the «clown». The fool and the clown liberate themselves from external shackles such as class, status, occupation, and environment by making themselves ridiculous.

3. Research Subject and Method

Searching for «Uzbekistan» on the Kwaktube channel yields a total of 16 videos, excluding Shorts. This study analyzes the narrative structure of these 16 videos from the perspective of the carnival to explore the methods of image representation and their effects. Through this, it seeks ways to create travel content and represent images that interact equally with different ethnic groups.

To analyze the narrative structure of <Kwaktube>'s content, this paper applies Seymour Chatman's story structure theory. It was determined to be a useful methodology for analyzing the regular structure and discourse themes appearing in the narrative of travel content and Carnivalism. By analyzing the plot, characters, and scenes, it is possible to more appropriately understand the overall frame and narrative effects of the story (귀신이종한, 2023).

4. Research Results

4.1. Plot of Disordered Meals and Conversations

The most significant events in the videos are "meals and conversations." Meal scenes evoke the image of a disorderly carnival where freedom and play are mixed. This is because "alcohol" appears as the core food of the meal. Kwaktube and the Uzbek people break the awkwardness by drinking alcohol. As they get tipsy, they start using square language freely, engaging in unrestrained conversations, and producing and sharing play.

Especially, the Uzbek people share their experiences of working in Korea using square language. In this scene, Kwaktube is also portrayed as a YouTuber laboring in a foreign country. Through this, Koreans and Uzbeks are confirmed to be connected by the common survival condition of «labor», despite their different nationalities. This allows them to experience a temporary liberation from the modern oppressive structure of «nation». It creates a shift in perception, viewing Uzbek people not from the perspective of nationality and ethnicity but as members of a community living in the same era.

4.2. *Characters of the «Fool-Clown»*

Kwaktube appears as a fool who cannot adapt to Uzbek culture, institutions, and people. Watching the fool, the masses laugh and feel superior. For Uzbeks, their everyday life is familiar, but for Kwaktube, it is an unfamiliar world. Despite this, he passionately tries to adapt to the unfamiliar world. The fool, armed with a lack of knowledge, information, and clumsy practical methods, provides laughter to the masses and makes the normal world seem strange.

The Uzbeks closely interacting with Kwaktube appear as clown characters, turning the narrative videos into carnival spaces. The crucial task of the clown is to become a “rebel” who violates the solemn norms of the existing world. Through deviant acts, the clown breaks the order of the existing world and gives it a negative meaning. The deviant acts of clown characters are reproduced through spontaneous play, such as dancing, singing, playing games, and making bets.

The protagonists' deviations provide viewers with an opportunity for catharsis, allowing them to break free from oppressive order(이연혜, 2022). The Uzbek people engage in deviant acts that disrupt order at weddings and sports events. Viewers feel strangeness and unfamiliar emotions watching the content but also experience liberation from the order-breaking scenes.

4.3. *Representation of Strange Time-Space through Movement Narratives*

An essential episode in Kwaktube's content narrative is «movement». Analyzing Kwaktube's plot structure, the process of movement inevitably appears at the beginning and end of the narrative. In the narrative of movement, viewers see Uzbekistan's unique time-space, which may feel strange and unusual. Experiencing this strange time-space introduces an unofficial, non-daily space that contrasts and conflicts with everyday space. This serves as a crucial narrative reflecting the attributes of the carnival. Carnival festivals present an unofficial, non-daily, and subversive time-space, offering a decentered worldview and deconstructing dominant ideologies (김선옥, 2019).

In Carnivalism, space is filled with chaos and disorder generated from unrestrained freedom. In carnival space, one can experience the unofficial culture of the dominated class, evoking laughter among the masses. This laughter acts as a force of resistance against the solemn official culture of the ruling class. To construct carnival space, negative attributes must be manifested in the form of chaos and disorder. Through this, one can enjoy the liberation of freedom, laughter, and the subversion of existing

order. Viewers project themselves onto Kwaktube and Uzbek people enduring hard journeys and labor. In the carnival space of “travel content,” viewers share laughter and comfort with the performers, enjoying the pleasure of escaping from everyday life.

4.4. Implications of Travel Content: Polyphonic Square and Expansion of Solidarity

Kwaktube continuously expands unpredictable events by networking with Uzbek people in a decentered, de-authoritative, and de-hierarchical manner. The Uzbek people interacting with Kwaktube horizontally become active participants and creators of the content. This has the effect of bringing the voices of the Uzbek people, buried under hierarchical order, to the forefront of the narrative. This narrative structure transforms Kwaktube's content into a “polyphonic square” where diverse voices coexist. In the polyphonic square, multiple consciousnesses or voices exist as completely independent entities. Performers become active subjects coexisting with the creators, not passive objects controlled by the creators (김옥동, 1988).

In the polyphonic square, performers seek to expand continuous solidarity based on intimacy. Expanding solidarity based on intimacy is also the goal travel content should aim for. According to Bakhtin, intimacy in the carnival arises from horizontal interactions, not vertical hierarchies (Lachmann, 1989). Intimacy is created in familiar play and games where people can comfortably approach each other. Kwaktube and Uzbek people expand intimacy based on free conversation and close interaction from a horizontal position. Through this, they break down the boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and culture, creating a new framework of solidarity. Solidarity formed through intimacy evolves to include “economic solidarity,” solving each other's livelihood issues. Economic solidarity extends beyond YouTube to terrestrial TV programs. <Kwak Taxitrip 2>, co-produced by EBS 1TV and ENA, will premiere on June 15, 2024, with the main promotional poster and video centered on Kwaktube, Umong, and Oripo.

5. Conclusion

Kwaktube's content, which breaks down the boundaries between nations, ethnicities, and individuals to build intimacy and expand it to economic solidarity, embodies another worldview of the carnival, a temporary yet possible “utopian world.” The utopian truth of the carnival is realized by liberating humans from hierarchy, order, norms, etiquette, and institutions, during which non-daily inversion phenomena occur. Inversion refers to “life turned upside down,” meaning the coexistence of dramatically

opposing elements. It provides moments for overcoming crises, resurrection from death, and regeneration from transformation (이덕형 외, 2001; 송영민·강준수, 2016).

Viewers dream of a hopeful future provided by the freedom, joy, and economic solidarity in Kwaktube's content. However, they are well aware that content cannot replace reality. The more they immerse themselves, the more they feel gap between the world within content and reality, leading to a greater sense of emptiness.

Nevertheless, the practical meaning and value of travel content created from the carnival perspective cannot be underestimated. If content is made focusing on efficiency and profit increase, polyphony can be lost. The possibility of more potent and insidious involvement of dominant ideologies toward other countries also exists. Kwaktube's content is a meaningful example of how intimacy and solidarity can be built horizontally with people from other countries from a carnival perspective. In this sense, it provides significant implications for the intention and method of producing travel content. Most of all, it offers a special achievement as it serves as a clear rebuke to content production attempts based on excessive nationalism and confirmation bias, which aim to increase views by fostering hatred and distortion towards other countries.

References

- 귀산·이종한 2023. 게임 메커니즘이 영화 서사에 미치는 영향 연구
<레디플레이어 원>을 중심으로. <애니메이션연구>. 19:4. 24.
- 김미성 2012. 축제와 전통의 발명-니스카니발과 강릉단오제의 근대성 탐구. <유럽사회문화>. 9. 119-145.
- 김선욱 2019. 카니발리즘으로 읽는 보헤미아의 빛. <이베로아메리카>,
21:2. 31-43.
- 김옥동 1988. 『대화적 상상력: 바흐친의 문학이론』. 서울: 문학과 지성사. 163-256.
- 바흐친, 이덕형·최건영 (역) 2001. 『프랑수아 라블레의 작품과 중세 및 르네상스시대의 민중문화』. 파주: 아카넷. 31-44.
- 송영민·강준수 2016. 바흐친 카니발리즘을 통한 축제 속 공연 분석: 2014년 춘천마임축제의 공연을 중심으로. <글로벌문화콘텐츠>. 24.
159-166.
- 이덕형 외 2001. 『프랑수아 라블레의 작품과 중세 및 르네상스의 민중 문화』. 서울: 아카넷. 31.
- 이연혜 2022. 웹예능 콘텐츠에 재현된 카니발리즘 (Carnivalism)에 관한
연구-스튜디오 '룰루랄라'(JTBC)의 <워크맨>과 <와셋맨>을
중심으로. <한양대학교 대학원 석사학위논문>. 27-29.

Bakhtin, M. 1984. Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Caryl Emerson Ed. and Trans. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. 10-155.

Lachmann, R. & Eshelman, R. & Davis, M. 1988. Bakhtin and carnival: Culture as counter-culture. Cultural Critique. 11. 118-130.

Lachmann, R. 1989. Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-culture. Cultural Critique. 11. 132-133.

About the authors:

LEE Jeong-won — Professor, Cheju Halla University (38 Halladaehang-ro, Nohyeong-dong, Cheju, Jeju-do, South Korea), yunia1979@gmail.com