

## **The Storyteller Who Crosses Boundaries in Korean Reality Television: Transmedia Storytelling in *New Journey to the West***

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The Korean reality TV franchise *New Journey to the West* (*NJW*) is an illustrative case to unpack how the Korean media industry has offered viewers transmedia and intertextual experiences in the realm of reality television. Korean reality show directors, who have acknowledged their profoundly reshaped, collaborative, and interdependent relationship with consumers in an era of convergence culture, attempt to fragment everyday realities throughout multiple media texts. The current article focuses on Young-seok Na, a television director who created *NJW*, revamping characters and episodes from his previous works, coalescing Korean television channels and online streaming sites, and integrating a Chinese classic and its Japanese manga adaptation into the Korean reality show franchise. By analyzing the six seasons of *NJW* and its spin-off series, *Kang's Kitchen* and *Youth Over Flowers—Winner*, this article proposes that the aura of a reality show director as a storyteller is essential in producing a regionally formulated transmedia franchise.

*Keywords: reality TV, transmedia storytelling, New Journey to the West, television director, storyteller*

In September 4, 2015, Korea's cable television provider, tvN, exclusively released its new reality show, *New Journey to the West* (*NJW*; Lee & Na, 2015), via the Web broadcast network Naver TVCast and the mobile application, tvNgo. The five clips of the first episode reached 6.1 million views within one day of its initial release (M.-J. Jin, 2015). The domestic audience's immediate reaction to the Web-based media content was quite unprecedented. The *NJW* series has suggested two focal points in the transformation of the Korean media industry. First, with the recognition that media convergence has liberated audiences from remaining loyal to a specific network in the consumption of media content (Jenkins, 2006), Korea's leading cable television channel attempted to form an unconventional collaboration with an online platform provider. Second, the inroads of media professionals, who had only worked in network television, into the online

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media world have resulted in the creation of a locally bounded transmedia entertainment brand, breaking conventional rituals in reality-based storytelling.<sup>2</sup>

The market success of *NJW*'s first season has come into the spotlight with respect to the television director, Young-seok Na, who took the lead in the production of the reality show franchise. Since directing the Korean Broadcasting System's (KBS's) primetime travel reality show, *2Days and 1Night (2D1N)*; Lee & Na, 2007–2012),<sup>3</sup> he has received critical and public acclaim with several reality TV shows, including *Grandpas Over Flowers* (Lee & Na, 2013–2018), *Sisters Over Flowers* (Lee & Na, 2013–2014), *Youth Over Flowers* (Lee & Na, 2014–2016), *Three Meals a Day* (Lee & Na, 2014–2017), and *Youn's Kitchen* (Lee & Na, 2017–2018). The continued achievement of these television programs has given Na an unchallenged position in the Korean reality television business. He then became the first reality show director who received the Grand Prize in the Television category at the 2015 Baeksang Arts Awards.<sup>4</sup>

Acknowledging that the show director is an essential force in creating the transmedia and intraregional connectivity of storytelling in the form of reality-based television programming, this study attempts to answer two important questions: How is the culturally bounded construction of reality embedded in the creation of characters and narratives in the *NJW* series? In what ways is the aura of a local television director involved in the development of an intraregional transmedia reality show franchise? This study starts from Jenkins' (2006) notion of transmedia storytelling as the impetus of a cross-platform franchise. Benjamin's (1955/1968) articulation of the storyteller is also revisited to better comprehend how the television director guides readers to follow a journey to a transmedia world. By integrating Jenkins' concept of transmedia storytelling into Benjamin's (1955/1968) articulation of the storyteller, this study aims to resonate with the aura that the Korean reality show director has shaped in producing and expanding transmedia storytelling in the East Asian context.

### **Media Convergence, Storyteller, and Transmedia Storytelling**

For better or worse, as Jenkins (2006) pointed out, contemporary societies are passing through an era of convergence culture, where traditional and new media merge, corporate and individual media intersect, and producers and consumers collaborate (p. 2). By convergence, we have witnessed fundamental transformations in media production, circulation, and consumption: the flow of media products across media

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<sup>2</sup> Changes in the narratives and characters of reality television can be made because of the different regulations between the two media channels. Unlike network and cable television, specific brand names can be directly mentioned in Web-based television series in the Korean media industry. When the show host, Ho-dong Kang, who was accustomed to the production culture of network television, revealed his concerns about mentioning the brand names of investing companies, the director Na responded to him that "you should" instead of "you can" (Cho, 2015, para. 3).

<sup>3</sup> *2D1N* increased the nationwide popularity of its hosts and production crews, including the director, Na, and the main writer, Woo-jeong Lee, who have often appeared onscreen (Pyo, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> The Baeksang Arts Awards is one of the major awards ceremonies in the Korean entertainment industry. This annual event is organized by the IS Plus Corporation. The Grand Prize is awarded to the individual who has had outstanding achievements in film and television production.

platforms, the coproduction between traditional and online media companies, and the evolution of participatory consumer culture (Jenkins, 2006). While observing these new media environments, Jenkins underscored "a cultural shift" in which audiences subjectively sew scattered narratives of media content rather than "a technological process" in which multiple media channels and functions are integrated into one device (p. 3). Recognizing the agency of audiences in response to changes in the infrastructures of media and communications (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3), media industries and marketing companies are actively taking "a model of circulation based on the logic of spreadability," which dramatically reshapes the circulation of media materials within a networked media culture (Jenkins, Ford & Green, 2013, p. 44).

Relatedly, media practitioners such as Bernardo (2014) and McErlean (2018) have argued that the media industry's reconfiguration of active audiences yields the creation of a transmedia entertainment brand. Put differently, the media industry has made efforts to develop "a transmedia story [which] unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 97–98). As many media players have admitted, in the contemporary media business world, the exploration of potential markets, the discovery of economic opportunities, and the promotion of media franchises across multiple delivery systems are almost impossible without the nomadic consumer's collaboration (Jenkins, 2006, p. 19). Therefore, by taking transmedia storytelling as "an alternative strategy for courting and mobilizing audiences behind media franchises," media professionals aim to deepen the audience's engagement in media texts (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 45).

Although fully admitting the empowerment of active audiences (Jenkins, 1992/2013, 2006, 2010), he did not disregard the notion that corporations and media producers have maintained their initiatives to decide on story continuity and to control consumers' association with a franchise on any media platform and also their loyalty across all different media sectors (Jenkins, 2006, p. 98). As indicated in his analysis of *The Matrix*, a transmedia entertainment franchise, "integrating multiple texts to create a narrative so large" (p. 97) is pivotal in initiating the audience's curiosity and in stimulating their desire for more information about the story world. In other words, the authorship of a transmedia world sustains the media producer's subjectivity in the relationship with the audience because it is impossible for a consumer to "master the franchise totally" by discovering the hidden meanings through connecting all of the characters and narratives across numerous media texts (Jenkins, 2006, p. 101). His claim was reinforced by the Wachowski brothers, who reign over *The Matrix* world as "oracles—hidden from view most of the time, surfacing only to offer cryptic comments, refusing direct answers, and speaking with a single voice" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 101).

Benjamin's (1955/1968) writing on the storyteller is also insightful in comprehending the nature and direction of storytelling in the age of media convergence. His main point is to distinguish storytelling from other literary genres, highlighting the storyteller's "communicability of experience" (Benjamin, 1955/1968, p. 87). By identifying the transition from oral to visual communication and from storytelling to the information industry in a crisis of communicable experience (see J. Kang, 2014, p. 27), Benjamin (1955/1968) claimed that the loss of wisdom has indeed led to the demise of the art of storytelling, interpreting such transformations in communication as a "'modern' symptom" (p. 87). This skeptical view was largely developed in the context of interwar European literature and, therefore, he failed to anticipate the interactivity of the Internet, which offers both storytellers and audiences virtual space to construct a

sense of presence. Similarly, he did not expect that the revolutionary conditions of communication would shrink the boundary between oral and visual communication, and between storytelling and information.

The characteristics of storytelling that Benjamin (1955/1968) articulated, based on an analysis of the Russian writer Nikolai Leskov's works—orality, the value of everyday life, the gravity of space and time, and the shared experience between storytellers and audiences—unveil the importance of investigating the locality of storytelling (see J. Kang, 2014, pp. 28–29). In his view, the longevity of a story considerably depends on the storyteller's capacity to implant a story into the memory of the listener (Benjamin, 1955/1968, p. 91). In other words, storytelling as an art of repetition maintains its vitality only when the listeners of a community retell the storyteller's experiences. Therefore, the circumstances in which the storyteller and listener collectively live are the key to shaping a boundary of retelling a story (p. 92). In this regard, the gravity of geographic and cultural belongings should be more carefully addressed, even when media convergence has fundamentally extended a story world across platforms on a global scale.

Benjamin's (1955/1968) other point—that the storyteller's consultation functions as a compass—helps us understand storyteller–audience companionship (p. 86). In his view, the counsel of the storyteller is key in retaining the power of storytelling among audiences (Benjamin, 1955/1968, p. 87). By doing so, storytellers ultimately obtain the status of mentors, who have the ability to situate their lives in storytelling, and their ability serves as the foundation of “the incomparable aura about the storyteller” (Benjamin, 1955/1968, p. 109). His emphasis on the aura of the storyteller in retaining the power of storytelling coincides with Jenkins' (2006) articulation of storytellers who serve as “oracles” (p. 101) in the audience's construction of the whole story in the transmedia world. The puzzles of transmedia storytelling, which are strategically fragmented by the storyteller, makes the audience's journey irresistible, and their participatory actions to complete the whole story finally solidify the storyteller's symbolic power in their relationship.

### **The Transmediated Construction of Reality**

The contributions of media and communications in constructing social reality have become a major subject of analysis in media sociology. From the phenomenology of the social world, Couldry and Hepp (2017) claimed that everyday reality as “the foundation of the social world” (p. 19) is constructed through human beings' actions and interactions. They further pointed out that the contemporary social world is indispensably interwoven with media and, therefore, it is salient to recognize that our understanding of everyday reality is deeply intersected with “the constraints, affordances and power-relations” that the media have engendered (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 7). The social construction of reality, therefore, should also be discussed in connection with the media's structures and practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

Reality television, as one of the central spaces where the media construct everyday reality, has been rigorously explored by media and communication scholars (Andrejevic, 2004; Friedman, 2002; Murray & Ouellette, 2009). One of their major concerns involves examining how television has addressed viewers' desire to experience a sense of everyday reality (Andrejevic, 2004; Bonner, 2003; Caldwell, 2002; Fetveit, 2002; Friedman, 2002; Murray & Ouellette, 2009). For Friedman (2002), viewers consume reality-based television “as a form of televisual neorealism” (pp. 7–8). What he would state here is that, despite the appearance of ordinary people and the minimization of directing, scripting, and editing in the production

process, no reality-based show represents reality as it occurs. Rather, these programs provide audiences with the opportunity to consume "reality conventions with dramatic structure" (Friedman, 2002, p. 8). Ouellette and Murray (2009) took a critical standpoint with respect to the visibility of "entertaining real" on television (p. 5). In their view, reality television's "self-conscious claim to the discourse of the real" (Ouellette & Murray, 2009, p. 3) is problematic because reality programming "celebrates the real as a selling point" (p. 5) and liberates itself from ethical considerations on human subjects, unlike other reality-based television genres—news programming and television documentaries (Ouellette & Murray, 2009, p. 4). Relatedly, they argued that reality television's devotion to authenticity has become a significant topic of investigation in which the miniaturization of handheld cameras and the absence of narrations have rapidly collided with the boundary of reality television and observational documentaries (p. 7). Andrejevic (2004) focused on technological innovations in the proliferation of reality formats, stating that digital media enable ordinary people to produce their own "reality shows" (p. 61). He further stated that network television and show directors have recognized the potential of this genre in media convergence and have actively used the interactivity of online media in reality show production to deconstruct the barriers "between audience and spectacle, consumer and producer, passive viewing and active participation" (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 89).

The penetration of reality-based programming in primetime television has inspired Korean media and communication scholars to discuss the local specificity of reality television (J. Kim, 2018; Kim & Huang, 2017; S. Kim, 2011; Ryoo & Park, 2012; Yoon, 2011). Yoon (2011) commented on the social construction of reality and the audience's emotional engagement in discussing reality television in the local context. According to Yoon's (2011) argument, Korean viewers care about the authenticity of the process in representing reality (p. 19). Therefore, Korean show directors actively use storytelling, voyeurism, and the producer-entertainer friendship to heighten the audience's emotional immersion (pp. 25–26). The proliferation of competition-based reality shows is thoroughly explored, either as an attachment of neoliberalism to Korean viewers' daily lives (Ryoo & Park, 2012), or as a reflection of collectivism, familism, and affective egalitarianism (S. Kim, 2011). Although previous studies have offered an in-depth understanding of Korean television culture in "the *mediated* construction of reality" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 8), a national focus has failed to address the recent influence of the regional media market in the narratives and characters of Korean reality franchises.

In the early 2010s, the exportation of Korean unscripted formats has engendered additional scholarly investigation in the expansion of an imagined boundary in constructing reality on television. Many media scholars have claimed that the similarity and dissimilarity of the cultural traditions between Korea and China have been immersed in the Chinese localization of Korean reality show formats (Cho & Zhu, 2017; J. Kim, 2018; Kim & Huang, 2017; Zeng & Sparks, 2017). The transnational expansion of Korean reality television has also been discussed in the context of the Korean Wave phenomenon. D. Y. Jin (2017) claimed that the reality format trade with China and the United States has opened up a new phase of media flows, making Korean reality shows a global commodity. Certainly, recent publications have enlightened the visibility of Korean unscripted formats on a global scale. However, the geographic gravity of cultural sensibility needs to be more carefully considered in the transaction of media products and practices.

This study is conducted based on two major considerations. First, because of the domination of U.S./European cases in English-based publications, the transmedia storytelling scholarship has remained

uncharted territory with respect to Korea's transmedia franchise. Second, television scholars have rarely paid attention to the authorship of reality television. This tendency can possibly be attributed to the production culture of U.S./European reality television. By addressing the regionality of Korean reality show production, this study spotlights a Korean show director who has shaped the perceptual closeness between show casts and audiences by blurring the line between reality and fiction, and by promoting the regionalization of transmediated reality in an East Asian context. This study not only fills a gap in the discussion of reality television within the local context but also proposes the intersection of reality-based programming and transmedia storytelling in general.

### Method and Data

The rise of reality-based variety shows invigorated Korean media companies to employ "reality" as a marketing strategy in the mid-2000s. In response, Korean viewers have shown their desire to experience the blurred lines between reality and fiction in reality shows. Moreover, the representation of everyday reality has become the primary objective of Korean reality show production. Therefore, reality show directors primarily manage the production sites and deal with unexpected situations within the Korean television industry. Show hosts play the main roles in shaping the stories by responding to situations that the show directors and writers have established. The situations should be realistic, in that the sense of reality, indeed, determines the audience's engagement with the shows' characters and narratives. The interaction between the show directors and hosts has thus become the major plot of reality-based shows in contemporary Korean reality television.

In this context, the current study looks at how media convergence has rekindled the role of the storyteller as a counselor by positioning reality television as a space to display the value of mundane local lives and to create a sense of intimacy between producers and consumers. By analyzing the narrative of *NJW's* six seasons and its spin-off series, *Kang's Kitchen (KK)* (Lee & Na, 2017a) and *Youth Over Flowers—Winner (YF)* (Lee & Na, 2017b), as well as by looking at the media interviews of the television directors and entertainers who participated in the chosen series, this article focuses on the position of Korean television directors as storytellers in the age of media convergence.

All of the television shows for this study were collected from the U.S.-based video streaming site TBOGO (<http://www.tbogo.com>). The textual analysis of the chosen shows focused on how the television director created characters, events, and dialogues. Particular attention was given to the show's usage of footage and oral history from the director's previous works, as well as the show's adaptation of the Chinese classic, *Journey to the West (JW)*, and the Japanese manga, *Dragon Ball*. After identifying some specific scenes and characters of *NJW* that were related to those of other reality shows, a review was conducted to clarify the transmedia storytelling of these shows. To situate the initial findings in the production context, the media interviews and public speeches of *NJW's* show directors and hosts were gathered from Korea's largest Web portal, Naver. The comments of the director and show hosts about *2D1N*, *NJW*, *YF*, and *KK* production were only included in this study.

### **A Korean Transmedia Reality Show: *New Journey to the West***

The emergence of digitally converged media culture has resulted in the celebration of the real in the media industry; primetime television is filled with reality show formats, whereas online media providers have offered the ordinary individual a revolutionary domain for displaying the self (Andrejevic, 2004). Relatedly, the proliferation of *meokbang* and makeup tutorial videos shows that digital media environments have reshaped the audience's preference for consuming everyday reality (Andrejevic, 2004, p. 38). Nicholas Negroponte and Bill Gates' expectation that online media would take the lead in deconstructing "the top-down model of information delivery" turns out to be right: the potential of Web-based reality shows increasingly drew attention from conventional media sectors (as cited in Andrejevic, 2004, p. 38). Korean media conglomerates then sought out new revenue sources in the convergence of media culture across traditional and online platforms, developing their own multichannel network business models.<sup>5</sup>

In these newly shaped infrastructures of media and communications, reality show directors who had been working in network television have experienced mixed feelings with respect to crises and opportunities. At a public lecture in January 2018, Na described *NJW* as the byproduct of pressures to survive from profoundly reformulated media environments. At the preproduction stage, he established three personal goals to achieve from the *NJW* experiment: (1) checking the potential of Internet content; (2) penetrating the Chinese media market; and (3) positioning entertainers at the center of storytelling (Yoo, 2018). He also mentioned that, by taking an alternative approach to producing and distributing his new reality series, he wanted to attract younger audiences, who prefer to watch short clips of the television series on YouTube rather than watch its full episodes on television (Yoo, 2018).

His testimonies echo recent scholarly discussions regarding the transformations that technological innovation has largely generated in television production. As Clarke (2013) pointed out, major networks have no longer sustained their position within the media market; indeed, they are being forced to work with "alternative organizational and creative forms" (p. 1) in experimental ways. Hence, the creation of a transmedia entertainment brand is a destined direction by which the media industry seeks to expand its properties in the era of media convergence (Bernardo, 2014; Clarke, 2013; Jenkins, 2006). The emergence of "a lean-forward audience" (Staffans, 2014, p. xv), who uses mobile phones, puts tablets on the table, and listens to the television in a room, has also transitioned the media industry's main task, from alluding to the active audience to providing them with "engaging and immersive content" (Staffans, 2014, p. xv).

The reconfiguration of the audience was well reflected in the first season of the *NJW* series. All clips of each episode did not last longer than 10 minutes. Na explained that this reality show franchise aimed to "provide joy to people for at least five minutes per day when commuting on buses and subways" (as quoted in E.-s. Jin, 2015, para 4). Na's comments resonate "a shift from an appointment-based model of television viewing toward an engagement-based paradigm" (Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 116). Such transformations were, as mentioned by Jenkins et al. (2013), happening in the contemporary televisual sphere: Instead of bringing

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<sup>5</sup> As an example, MBC, one of the major networks in Korea, initiated an attempt to integrate webcam-based, single-handed, live performances into television programming in the early 2010s. The cable television provider tvN later advanced that tendency by producing online-exclusive content in the first season of *NJW*.

the audience in the living room at a certain time, television directors offer audiences more channels to consume media content according to their own schedules (Jenkins et al., 2013).

Na's other experiment through the second season of *NJW* series, however, suggests that audiences' loyalty to the specific media franchise can be more complicated in the post-television era (Cho, 2015). Put simply, the promise of spreadability does not guarantee audiences' adherence to a specific media brand. For example, CJ E&M chose a windowing strategy for the second season of *NJW* instead of holding its exclusive distribution through the online platform. A new episode was first released on the Internet; two days later, that episode was broadcast on the cable network tvN. The company not only released clips of each episode broadcast on cable television but also uploaded unabridged editions to the Web-based media platform, Naver TV Cast. Although the media company expected this combined distribution strategy to attract more consumers, it ended up distracting the audience, as was reflected in lower viewership compared with its first season (Yoo, 2018). Na admitted the failure of the strategy in a statement outlining that "the viewers who had missed the Internet broadcasting thought that they would watch the episode on television two days later, while others did not watch the show on television due to the fact that they could watch the episode on the Internet anytime later" (as quoted in Yoo, 2018, para. 2). As he pointed out, the increasing availability of the reality series on multiple platforms discouraged viewers from prioritizing consumption of the show.

In addition, the *NJW* case proposes the possibility that the imagined boundary of everyday reality can be regionally constructed in an era of media convergence. What to point out is that *NJW* contains the Chinese folktale's basic storyline and characters: the main protagonist, Tang Sanzang (a monk), who was assigned by Gautama Buddha to the Western regions (such as Central Asia and India) to obtain sacred Buddhist texts (sutras), and three companions—Sun Wukong (a monkey), Sha Wusing (a celestial), and Zhu Bajie (a pig)—who supported the monk to atone for their sins (Wu, Jenner, & Shi, 2003). Each season of *NJW* begins with a game that assigns the fictional characters to the show hosts. In *NJW*'s earlier seasons, any celebrity who had won the game became the monk, Tang Sanzang, and assigned other roles to his colleagues. By revitalizing the classic Chinese story, the director attempted to heighten a sense of intimacy about the show among Chinese audiences (Yoo, 2018). Moreover, by adding the main plot of a Japanese manga, *Dragon Ball*, to the show, gathering the seven wish-granting balls to make a wish, Na raised affinity among audiences who have consumed the Japanese transmedia franchise. The deployment of regionally renowned storylines and characters yielded a meaningful outcome from the neighboring market.<sup>6</sup> For instance, an official of the company viewed the success of its second season as attributable to the active application of Chinese folklore and the employment of Chengdu, a historical city in China, as the main production site in the episodes (Jeong 2016).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> When Tencent—a major provider of value-added Internet services in China—released the latest episode of *NJW* to Chinese audiences the day after the episode had been broadcast on Korean television, with subtitles, each clip reached approximately 30 to 40 million views (Yoo 2018). According to the company, tvN, the show's second season had significantly increased its popularity in China, surpassing a total of 120 million hits with the season's first four episodes (Jeong, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> The intra-regional expansion of Korean reality franchises can be discussed in "the market logic of territoriality" (Zhao, 2018, para. 22). Although the Chinese government has actively employed its



The adaptation of *JW* and *Dragon Ball* led the show directors to film the series in multiple cities in China and Japan; the main hosts and the production crew traveled to major cities in the East and Southeast Asian region, including Xian, Chengdu, Lijiang, Guilin, Xiamen, and Hong Kong in China; Hanoi, Cat Ba, Hai Phong, and Sa Pa in Vietnam; and Hokkaido in Japan. By visiting these locations, the transmedia reality franchise embodied the story world on a regional scale; more importantly, the mediated spectacle of the regionally constructed stories and characters allows the audience to experience the regional specificity of a constructed reality world across media platforms. The mixture of reality and constructed reality in the *NJW* franchise resonates with Jenkin's (2007) notion of world building, in which transmedia stories are "based not on individual characters or specific plots but rather a complex fictional world that can sustain multiple interrelated characters and their stories" (Jenkins, 2007, para. 3).

Finally, the director centralized the entertainers and production crew in the storytelling, which was key to making the show's storyline interactive, unpredictable, and expandable. During the show, viewers have often seen the director break his planned storylines and ignore preset events.<sup>8</sup> The reactions of the celebrities and the production crew convinced audiences that the situations were "real" rather than scripted or planned. Similarly, in the first and last episodes of the *NJW* series, viewers were watching scenes where the director, writer, and celebrity went to have dinner and drink beer in private settings. The assistant directors and production associates either used their mobile phones or set up camcorders on the wall to film their ad hoc gatherings. The director actively used the footage of conversations among the entertainers and production staff behind the scenes as a source of presenting "the real" in the reality show franchise. In other words, the unexpected situations, shot by handheld camcorders and mobile phones, guide the audience to experience "relatively authentic" reality in the transmediated story world.

### **Reality Show Director as a Storyteller**

Before the release of the *NJW* series, at the media conference, show hosts collectively described their trips as amazing experiences of reuniting with former colleagues (E.-s. Jin, 2015). Such emotions were developed because the four members of *2D1N*'s first season—Seung-gi Lee, Ho-dong Kang, Ji-won Eun, and Su-geun Lee—appeared on the first season of *NJW* (Cho, 2015). Their comeback was possible because the director and main writer of *2D1N Season 1* created the *NJW* series. At the media conference, Na also confessed that he had decided to produce *NJW* when the youngest host, Seung-gi Lee, had talked about another trip with the old members (as quoted in E.-s. Jin, 2015).

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sovereignty in regulating the online media world, market players have established their own logic of territorialization to boost revenue (Zhao, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> On the shooting day of the show's Season 2.5, after having lunch, the director and writer had friendly chats with the show's hosts. Then, the director made an impromptu suggestion about whether the three younger hosts—Kyuhyun, Jae-hyun Ahn, and Minho—could bounce a ball with a bat more than 20 times without it dropping on the ground; if they could do so, the director would cancel the shooting schedule for the day. When the three hosts successfully completed this suggested mission, the director ordered the assistant directors to leave the production location.

In fact, the reunion of the old members had little chance of success, given that some of them—Ho-dong Kang and Su-geun Lee—had been left out of television shows because of scandals.<sup>9</sup> Despite their damaged reputation, Na invited them to the *NJW* franchise. At a certain level, Na's decision gave these controversial figures a chance to resume their professional careers in the entertainment industry. Their joining the reality show reiterates Andrejevic's (2004) argument that reality television provides faded stars with space for a comeback (p. 3). It is important to mention, though, that their return to show business is possible only when the show director not only gives them an opportunity to appear on television but also shapes their images in a positive way. According to Benjamin (1955/1968), the storyteller has the capacity to employ his life as the basis for creating a story. This view assists us in understanding why Na employed his unscripted interactions with the celebrities in the narrative of the *NJW* series. By doing so, he built up his position as a storyteller who talks to reality show viewers about his long-standing friendships. That approach seemed to be successful in reducing the audiences' complaints about Na's decision to bring the controversial individuals back to the televisual sphere. By taking the role of the storyteller in the show, Na guided the audience to experience Kang and Lee's regret and repentance as seen in his eyes. Because the intimate relationship between celebrities and audiences is key to producing a successful reality show, Na wisely employed his social credibility to restore the audience's fondness for the celebrities. As a result, the success of this reality franchise has been ongoing after its migration from online broadcasts to a cable channel; according to AGB Nielsen Korea, the show's viewership had gradually increased from the first episode of its second season (2.7%) to the eighth episode of its sixth season (6.6%);<sup>10</sup> moreover, *NJW* ranked at the top of Gallup's survey of favorite Korean television shows in November 2018 (Gallup Report, 2018).

It is notable that Na never explicitly mentioned on the program that *NJW* is a sequel to *2D1N*. Instead, he let the show hosts and production crew members talk about their memories of *2D1N* in a natural setting. This strategy echoes Benjamin's (1955/1968) understanding of the storyteller as a counselor: "Counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (p. 86). A particular example is a relatively flattering relationship between the oldest and the youngest hosts. Many Korean viewers observed how Ho-dong Kang strictly taught Seung-gi Lee about his reaction techniques during the first season of *2D1N* in the late-2000s. However, in the first season of *NJW*, the tables appear to have turned. Because the show's first season was targeting online users, the youngest host, Seung-gi Lee, played a leading role in meeting the target audience's expectations.<sup>11</sup> The main host,

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<sup>9</sup> Ho-dong Kang announced his temporary leave from the entertainment industry because of his involvement in a tax evasion scandal on September 9, 2011. At a media conference, he stated, "I am sorry for causing the public to worry. From this moment, I will temporarily retire from the entertainment industry" ("Kang Ho Dong," 2011, para. 1). Lee Soo-geun was investigated for online gambling in 2013, which is illegal in Korea, with some exceptions. That scandal prevented him from appearing on television programs for years ("Why Celebrities," 2013).

<sup>10</sup> The data were retrieved from AGB Nielsen Korea (<https://www.nielsenkorea.co.kr>).

<sup>11</sup> Therefore, he directly mentioned the legal and socially problematic behaviors in which the other older hosts had been previously involved; he referred to Su-geun Lee as "a betting man who lives in Sangam-dong" (*Sangam-dong betingnam*) and Ji-won Eun as "a divorced man who lives in Yeoido" (*Yeoido singlenam*) (Lee & Na, 2015, ep. 1, as cited in Kwon, 2015, para. 4).

Ho-dong Kang, was frustrated with Lee's bold expressions because such Internet slang terms were not allowed within the realm of reality shows, broadcast on major networks. Indeed, the knowledge gap between Kang and Lee regarding online media cultures became a main source of humor in the first season of the *NJW* series. A symbolic connection between the two franchises was made in the description of the host's continued but changed relationships, which guided viewers to consume the two franchises as a whole story.

The ways of creating characters and managing unexpected events in *NJW* echo Friedman's (2002) emphasis on postmodernism in constructing reality on television. Importantly, the fundamental deconstruction of the boundaries between realities and constructed realities is made within "the modernist conviction that there is still a reality 'out there'" (p. 2). He underscored that celebrities have produced intimacy, based on their naturalistic acting skills, in helping audiences experience a different level of reality about the characters and events on television (Friedman, 2002, p. 13). His claim is helpful in understanding what the director has done in the *NJW* series. Na perceived the similarity between the celebrity of *NJW* and the fictional characters of *JW* and adopted the main plot of *NJW*, where the sinners go on a journey to pay for their sins. Then, he invited the audience to observe the celebrity's genuine effort to recover their social reputation. This was only possible in the reality format because people believe that what they watch is real, even though the celebrities were playing fictional characters in the mediated world of everyday reality.

### **Spin-Offs: The Longevity of Transmedia Storytelling**

The success of the *NJW* series has led to two spin-off series—*Kang's Kitchen* (Lee & Na, 2017a) and *Youth Over Flowers—Winner* (Lee & Na, 2017b). These spin-off series display not only the active application of transmedia storytelling strategies to reality television production but also the aura of media players in the expansion of real stories across program formats, titles, and time slots. The production of supplementary stories was initiated from the director's inside joke during the second episode of *NJW*'s fourth season. In that episode, the television director asked the show's hosts to complete five difficult missions within a limited time frame, granting prizes when they were completed.<sup>12</sup> At the end of the season, Minho finally got his wish by completing the missions. He then used the opportunity to go on *YF* with the remaining members of his boy band, *Winner*, and the other members of *NJW* decided to shoot their version of *Youn's Kitchen* (Lee & Na, 2017–2018).<sup>13</sup> By actively integrating the two reality show formats that Na had produced,

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<sup>12</sup> After completing the missions successfully, the show hosts would spin on the spot for 15 rounds, and then touch a dart board with their fingers, which showed various gifts and benefits. The outcome of that game went against the director and writer's expectations: Minho, the youngest member of *NJW*'s Season 4, touched very tiny areas for a Porsche and a Lamborghini with his forefinger. The director and the writer, who could not afford to give the hosts such expensive presents, tried negotiating with them.

<sup>13</sup> Another spinoff series, *KK* (Lee & Na, 2017a), was developed based on the reality cooking show, *Youn's Kitchen* (Lee & Na, 2017–2018). The main narrative of the reality show was to open a Korean restaurant in foreign countries. The veteran actress Yuh-jung Youn played the role of the rookie cook who offered foreign guests Korean dishes, such as bulgogi rice and bibimbap. Some actors and actresses—Seo-jin Lee, Yu-mi Jung, Gu Shin, and Seo-joon Park—participated in the show's production, playing the role of the cook's assistant. The show's franchise has become one of the most successful programs that Na has produced for tvN.

*NJW* demonstrated that Na's filmography had become a foundation of transmedia and intertextual storytelling.

Na's excellent skills in developing transmedia and intertextual characters and stories are apparent in his earlier works. His travel reality show, *YF*, which originally premiered in 2014, is a good example.<sup>14</sup> In this programming, Na strategically extended the fictional characters and relationships to real-life situations by casting some rising and renowned actors who had previously appeared on tvN's original series, such as *Reply 1988* (Lee & Shin, 2015) and *Reply 1994* (Lee & Shin, 2013). Therefore, the loyal viewing communities of these television dramas could discover the symbolic connections between the dramas and reality shows on tvN channels. Notably, these television drama series were directed by Won-ho Shin, a former show director who worked with Na in the division of entertainment program production for KBS. Their comradeship was an important source of intertextual storytelling, in which Na played a cameo role in the television series, *Response 1994*, and Shin appeared in the *YF* series to assist in disguising actors who had worked with him.

*YF—Winner*, a spin-off of *NJW*, has offered loyal viewers the experience of interconnecting constructed reality with everyday reality across media platforms. The original plot of the *YF* series was to invite rising stars on overseas trips by surprise. However, the production of the *YF—Winner* was already announced in the fourth season of *NJW*, and therefore the production team had difficulties in taking the members of *Winner* to the airport without recognition. That situation certainly attracted the fans of the *NJW* series, and the show director and hosts actively promoted the spin-off series through the extension of the media narrative to the domain of social media; after the show's director expressed her embarrassment at a media interview, the members of *Winner* teased the director via Instagram (Park, 2017). The interactions between the celebrities and the production crew were later included in the episode of *YF—Winner*.

Another spinoff series, *KK*, was developed based on the reality cooking show, *Youn's Kitchen*. The main narrative of the reality show was to open a Korean restaurant in foreign countries. The show's franchise has become one of the most successful programs that Na has produced for tvN (Woo, 2018). Similarly, in *KK*, Na gave Ho-dong Kang the mission of being a rookie who served pork cutlets and omelet rice to the guests of 10 teams during the day. The marriage of *NJW* with *Youn's Kitchen* drew the public's attention, and *KK* received high viewer ratings. During an interesting moment in *KK*'s promotional video, Kang filmed himself and other guests in a car using his mobile phone, saying that the footage could possibly be used for the show. It seemed natural for the show's hosts to play any role behind the scenes, as well as the director, who shot the gathering scene with the show's hosts of *NJW*, in which he had called Kang an older brother (*hyeong*) informally. Kang and Na's actions showed that the boundary between hosts and production associates, and onstage and offstage were often deconstructed in the programs, which ultimately guided viewers to immerse themselves in the transmediated reality world that Na had created.

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<sup>14</sup> In the programming, three singer-songwriters—Sang Yoon, Hee-yeol You, and Juck Lee—went to Peru. As a surprise, they were informed that they would be taking the trip in a couple of hours before the flight, and they had to get on board without their personal items. Their unprepared travel with lifelong colleagues and friends gave viewers an escape from daily life. Since then, three more seasons were produced, making it another hit franchise for tvN.

Notably, the addition of storylines and characters through the production of the spin-off series did not ruin the singularity of the transmedia brand. *YF—Winner* offers the audience a context in which it is a part of the *NJW* series by inserting shots of the *NJW* members gathering in the first episode, and by releasing a promotional video for *KK* in the finale of the series. Similarly, the narratives of these two spin-off series were combined, in which the four members of *Winner* abruptly appeared in the ending scene of *KK*. After closing the restaurant, all of the hosts of *KK* went to karaoke with the production crew, and *Winner* entered the room by singing a song. The encounter of these two spin-off series helped the director promote another season of *NJW*.

Na's remarks in a public lecture resonate with the different contributions of the two spin-off series in developing his transmedia entertainment franchise. In his view, there are two ways of guaranteeing the survival of a new show from the stiff competition at large: attract a mass audience, or draw solid support from targeted audiences (Yoo, 2018). The latter was helpful in explaining why he could continue to produce six seasons of *NJW*, as well as extend the original series in the past three years. Certainly the construction of media fandom is not the primary objective for traditional television production. Therefore, he attempted to produce the spin-off series, *KK* and *YK* (Yoo, 2018). He claimed that although media fandom can prevent the early termination of a television show, the show's longevity still depends on the mass audience's attention (Yoo, 2018). This market logic is greatly influential in the creation of reality television storytelling as well as in the temporal connection between media platforms. At the same time, he fully admitted that media fandom was necessary to bring television programming to life in the era of multimedia environments. This recognition was reflected in another spinoff series, *YF—Winner*. This spin-off series had relatively low viewership compared with other *YF* series, as well as *NJW*'s spin-off series *KK*. However, this spin-off series is clearly helpful in strengthening the *NJW* series as a transmedia entertainment franchise.

### **Conclusion: An East Asian Context**

Jenkins' (2006) articulation of transmedia storytelling raises a fundamental question regarding the mission of media industries in creating a new type of storytelling in the interactive and interconnected condition of media and communication. As he pointed out, the spread-out media culture complicates the flow of media content, and therefore the circuit of media products and services is hardly predictable or regulated. In these new media circumstances, consumers' empowerment has been increasingly acknowledged in media production, and the media industry attempts to improve consumer engagement at a deeper level through the fragmentation of media content across platforms (Jenkins, 2006, p. 17). More to the point, although media fandom has been deeply involved in the proliferation of transmedia contexts, media producers have never lost their prestigious position in the game of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins, 2006).

This study applies Jenkins' notion of transmedia storytelling to the realm of Korean reality television, examining how a Korean show director has shaped the audience's consumption of everyday reality through the deployment of transmedia storytelling strategies. Jenkins (2006) focused on how transmedia storytelling encourages audiences to play "the role of hunters" (p. 21), collecting parts of a whole story across media platforms in the fictional world. This study, instead, applies his conception of transmedia storytelling to exploring the Korean media industry's production of a transmedia reality show

franchise, *NJW*, by illuminating the role of storytellers who spread pieces of the entire story on multiple media texts and channels. By doing so, this study identified the following characteristics of the East Asian-based transmedia reality franchise. First, *NJW* takes viewers into a space where the boundary between reality and constructed reality is consistently shrinking, and where celebrities' genuine personalities and their characters in the original story, *JW* and *Dragon Ball*, and its prequel, *2D1N*, are consistently intermixed. The mobility and continuity of storylines and characters across space and time motivate viewers to immerse themselves in grasping the transmedia franchise as a whole. Their knowledge about the original stories and their memories of regularly watching the show's prequel then becomes the major engine of mapping out fragmented stories as a whole world. Second, the third season of *NJW* contains a cast of new characters, expanding its storytelling and moving beyond its image as a sequel of the reality show *2D1N*. It brings the original cast members back to the show in the next season, and it also extends the storytelling without a recap. In its fifth season, *NJW* broke the audiences' perception that the series was limited to the realm of *NJW* and *Dragon Ball* by borrowing new characters from horror movies. Third, the show's director also dissolves the conventional boundary between onscreen and offscreen. When the show director negotiates with celebrities about the direction of upcoming episodes, it helps audiences believe the authenticity of the reality, but also helps them stay tuned to the expansion of the franchise with another spin-off series. Fourth, the director adopted the classic Chinese novel and Japanese manga because of the familiarity of these regional stories to Korean audiences. This transmedia storytelling strategy echoes Benjamin's (1955/1968) view on the impetus of a local community's traditions in the story world. Finally, it is necessary to mention that *NJW*'s show director, employing his personal relationships with entertainers, established his own transmedia storytelling. By deconstructing the line between objective reality and the subjective consumption of reality, he has developed his aura as the storyteller in the realm of reality television, revealing the regional gravity of cultural experiences and arousing the regional audience's sense of belonging in the transmedia story-craft world.

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