Narrative Analysis of Beauty Standards in Korea: A Study of Sienna Hong's YouTube Content

Erlangga Saputra[1], Anastasya Survina Heni Artini[2], Indri Juliani,[3] Dwi Rahayu[4]

[1]erlanggaaas3@gmail.com
[2]anastasyasurvina2@gmail.com
[3]indrijuliani01@gmail.com
[4]dosen02343@unpam.ac.id

[1,2,3,4] English Department Faculty of Letter, Universitas Pamulang, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
Keywords: Beauty standards, narrative analysis, narrative elements, Sienna Hong, YouTube.	This study explores the perspectives and personal experiences of Sienna Hong, a YouTube content creator, on the societal beauty standards prevalent in South Korea. It offers valuable insights into the complex dynamics surrounding these standards and their broader societal implications. Through qualitative data analysis, this research employs Seymour Chatman's (1978) narrative theory to examine the narrative components that bring these issues to light. The findings reveal an engaging portrayal of Sienna Hong's storytelling, which skillfully balances casual and formal language styles, enhancing the appeal and relatability of her content. This study highlights the importance of narrative elements in digital storytelling, particularly within the context of YouTube vlogs. © 2024 Universitas Pamulang

✉ Corresponding author:

B3 Building, Kampus Viktor, Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan Indonesia 50229

E-mail: anastasyasurvina2@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

YouTube vlogs increasingly integrate narrative elements, as creators share personal stories and day-to-day experiences with their audience. These videos often follow a narrative structure involving a specific setting (the vlogger's environment and context), characters (the vlogger and others in their life), and a storyline (events and actions in the video). Burgess and Green (2009) argue that vlogs use narrative techniques to engage viewers, fostering a sense of authenticity and connection. Examining narrative elements in vlogs reveals how vloggers build their stories, emphasize certain themes, and apply various narrative strategies. Typically, vlogs follow a clear framework, including an introduction, main segment, and conclusion, as vloggers guide viewers through daily routines or significant events. Analyzing these components can uncover strategies vloggers use to maintain audience engagement, convey personal and social identities, and reflect broader social trends.

Bhatia (2018) suggests that analyzing vlog narratives offers insight into how digital storytelling evolves with platform functionalities and audience expectations. Through this lens, we can explore how Sienna Hong's vlogs navigate and express beauty standards, revealing broader social implications. This approach is essential, as narratives not only reflect reality but also actively shape perceptions and ideologies within a community (Polletta, 2006). In discourse analysis, narrative elements include the storyline, characters, setting, and themes, which together create a cohesive story. The plot outlines the sequence of events, characters embody those involved in the story, the setting provides the background, and themes capture core ideas communicated through the narrative. By examining these elements in YouTube vlogs, researchers can understand how vloggers construct personal and social identities and influence audience perceptions and behaviors (Riessman, 2008).

This analysis will investigate both the explicit content of Sienna Hong's videos and the implicit messages conveyed through her narrative style, visual elements, and audience engagement, exploring digital platforms' role in shaping beauty standards. This study will contribute to discussions on media influence and cultural identity, offering a nuanced perspective on how digital media both influences and reflects cultural values related to beauty by breaking down its narrative components.

Numerous studies have explored how beauty standards shape individual and societal perceptions, particularly in South Korea, where media and advertising frequently promote a narrow ideal of beauty. This ideal emphasizes physical attributes such as pale skin, slim bodies, and facial features that align with Western standards. The rise of the South Korean cosmetic surgery industry reflects these pressures, with procedures like double eyelid surgery, jaw contouring, and rhinoplasty becoming more widespread. However, these rigid beauty standards can have negative effects, especially on women, influencing mental and physical well-being. Social pressures to conform often lead to extreme dieting, excessive exercise, and early acceptance of cosmetic interventions. Researchers have examined the complex interactions between personal experience, societal influences, and beauty ideals using diverse approaches.

The first study, *"Unraveling the Narrative Structures in YouTube Vlogs: A Qualitative Content Analysis"* by Andrea Vlahović (2023), investigates narrative techniques in YouTube vlogs to understand how these elements engage viewers across genres. Through qualitative content analysis and quantitative metrics, the study highlights the use of personal stories, conflict resolution, and cliffhangers to enhance engagement, noting the role of imagery, tone, and semantics in conveying meaning. Techniques like direct viewer engagement are particularly effective, underscoring storytelling's impact in digital media.

In the second study, *"A Content Analysis on Siargao Island from the Perspective of YouTube Vloggers"* by Pagtalunan et al. (2022), the researchers analyze YouTube travel vlogs on Siargao Island, applying the 4A model (acceptability, affordability, accessibility, and awareness) to examine perspectives on the island's appeal. The findings reveal vloggers' emphasis on affordability, accessibility, and unique local experiences, suggesting that vlogs can generate viewer interest in travel destinations. The study suggests infrastructural improvements and collaborations with vloggers to support sustainable tourism.

The third study, *"A Qualitative Content Analysis of Breast Cancer Narratives Hosted Through the Medium of Social Media"* by Foley et al. (2015), analyzes breast cancer survivor narratives on YouTube, identifying themes such as coping, living with uncertainty, and reaching out for support. This research underscores the value of social media in providing peer support and fostering connection during health crises, suggesting these narratives could be integrated into formal support systems.

The fourth study, *"Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the Automedial Identities and Narratives of Australian Mummy Vlogging"* by Ümit Kennedy (2019), examines identity formation within the "mummy vlogging" community through virtual ethnography. Findings reveal that authenticity, community-driven identities, and evolving self-narratives shape these vloggers' online personas, contributing to understanding networked identities and digital life writing.

The fifth study, *"Hola followers! Content Analysis of YouTube Channels of Female Fashion Influencers in Spain and Ecuador"* by Castillo et al. (2021), analyzes the narrative and promotional strategies of fashion influencers in Spain and Ecuador. The study highlights their use of relatable language, amateur-style visuals, and advertising techniques to engage audiences and promote brands, offering insights into the effectiveness of these methods within the fashion community.

The sixth study, *"Savoring Stereotypes: Exploring Orientalized Narratives Through American Reactions to East Asian Foods on YouTube"* by Chan (2024), examines how Buzzfeed's food reaction videos reinforce stereotypes about East Asian culture. Using social semiotic theory and Orientalism, the study discusses the "us vs. them" narrative and the decontextualization of East Asian food, urging media producers to consider cultural sensitivity to avoid othering narratives.

The seventh study, *"Uses and Gratifications of YouTube: A Comparative Analysis of Users and Content Creators"* by Buf & Stefanita (2020), examines YouTube's role for both viewers and creators. Viewers use the platform for entertainment and learning, while creators value it for self-expression and social validation, illustrating YouTube's
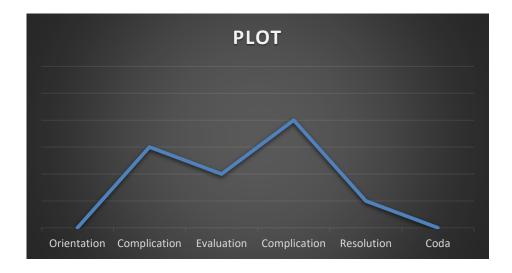
ability to fulfill diverse user needs.

This study draws upon these works by examining how YouTube creators, particularly vloggers, use narrative structures, identity expressions, and viewer interactions to address social themes such as beauty standards. By employing similar qualitative content analysis methods, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how narratives on YouTube both reflect and shape individual and cultural identities. It also highlights the importance of authenticity, cultural sensitivity, and targeted engagement in digital storytelling, providing a foundation for understanding the complexities of online identity and social norms, particularly around beauty.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative content analysis approach to examine narrative structures within YouTube vlogs across various genres. An inductive method will be employed to allow themes and patterns to naturally emerge from the data. To ensure a well-rounded dataset, a selection of 45 vlogs will be chosen based on genre diversity, recency, popularity, and creator influence. These vlogs will span genres such as lifestyle, gaming, beauty, and others, providing a manageable yet diverse sample. Data collection involves viewing and transcribing each vlog, followed by applying a coding scheme that focuses on narrative elements like orientation, complication, climax, resolution, and conclusion. Through coded segments, the analysis will uncover themes and patterns, examining relationships, trends, and frequencies to gain insight into narrative structures, semiotics, semantics, and audience engagement. Inter-coder reliability will be assessed to maintain rigor, and findings will be triangulated with quantitative metrics to strengthen the analysis. Ethical considerations include protecting content creators' rights and anonymizing data. This method aims to offer a comprehensive view of how narrative structures in vlogs shape audience engagement and perception, enriching our understanding of digital storytelling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sienna Hong's video transcript provides a detailed exploration of her personal experiences and societal observations regarding beauty standards in Korea. Due to the object of this study presented in oral narrative, the sequence of the events that being told was disorganized. Labov (2016) states that oral narratives often follow a natural sequence of events but can be disorganized when recounting personal experiences (p. 15). This disorganization can reveal how individuals process and prioritize different aspects of their experiences. Thus, this analysis will delve into the narrative structure, language patterns, and the social issues she highlights, offering a comprehensive understanding of her narrative and its broader implications.

	Description	Example
1. Orientation	The introduction of the narrative	Sienna greetings her audience
2. Complication	The problem of the story	Sienna introduces the issue of beauty standard in Korea
3. Evaluation	The reflections of characters about what and why the problem happened	Sienna gives her insights on societal pressures of beauty standard in Korea
4. Complication	The re-rising problem of the story	Sienna recount her experience dealing with beauty standard
5. Resolution	The outcome of the problems	Sienna shares her experiences on navigate the society pressures on beauty standard
6. Coda	The final sentences that conclude the narrative	Sienna giving her gratitude toward her audience and saying goodbye

Orientation

The orientation of the narrative is established in the opening lines where Sienna greets her audiences and explains her recent absence from creating long-form content on YouTube.

"*Hey guys it's Sienna welcome back to my YouTube channel it has been such a long time since I uploaded my last sitdown video.*" (Hong, 2024)

This introduction has numerous functions. It re-establishes her connection with her audience, which is critical after a hiatus, and it serves as the foundation for the personal and thoughtful content that follows. The familiar greeting establishes a warm, welcoming atmosphere, which is necessary for engaging her audience. It adds depth to the conversation and presents her thoughts in a personal and sympathetic way. Sienna's

return to YouTube, as well as her frank admission of worry about recording longer videos, creates a sense of anticipation and engagement, leaving her audience eager to hear about her journey and observations. This orientation effectively establishes a sense of familiarity and anticipation, which sets the tone for the story.

Complication

The complication arises as Sienna introduces the issue of beauty standard in Korea. "*I want to talk about how important beauty is in Korea and pretty privilege because that is very much a thing here.*" (Hong, 2024)

The quotation complicates narrative aspects by providing a major societal issue that the protagonists must navigate. This phrase highlights the strong emphasis on physical beauty in Korean culture, which can lead to a variety of personal and social issues. It emphasizes the tension and struggle caused by cultural beauty standards and the concept of "pretty privilege," both of which can have an impact on characters' self-esteem, relationships, and chances. These issues complicate the narrative as the character grapple with the consequences of beauty standards and their impact on their lives, propelling the narrative forward and contributing to character development. This section sets the tone for the deeper exploration of societal pressures and personal growth that follows.

Evaluation

The evaluation segment of the narrative involves Sienna's critical examination of societal pressures and beauty standards in Korea. She provides insights into the cultural significance of physical appearance and its pervasive impact on various aspects of life. According to Sienna Hong's Vlogs (2024),

"*In Korean Society being attractive is definitely going to help boost you in whatever field you want to work on in the entertainment industry of course that's going to be very helpful but even in service industry and even at a 9 to 5 job.*" (Hong, 2024)

This section critically examines the common effect of beauty standards, focusing on the societal norms and expectations imposed on individuals, particularly women in Korea. Sienna's views highlight her sincerely held conviction in the power of physical appearance to open doors and generate chances. This critical viewpoint enables viewers to see the systemic nature of beauty biases and their far-reaching implications. Her comments on society's concern with physical appearance sheds insight on the cultural influences that maintain these standards, as well as the impact they have on people's self-esteem and employment opportunities. The evaluation phase is critical for contextualizing her personal experiences within larger societal trends, highlighting the importance of beauty standards in creating professional and social interactions.

Resolution

The resolution of the narrative is found in Sienna's personal journey and the coping

mechanisms she has developed to navigate these societal pressures. She shares her experiences with cosmetic procedures and how she has learned to balance societal expectations with her self-worth.

According to Sienna Hong's Vlogs (2024),

"I believe I was made in God's image, and I really learned to take care of myself... I don't regret anything that I did get done but I do find it a little sad sometimes that I kind of felt pressured into it." (Hong, 2024)

Sienna's reflections on her encounters with beauty standards, including her decision to get cosmetic treatments, demonstrate a complicated interplay of personal choice and cultural pressure. She acknowledges the advantages and disadvantages of different options, offering a balanced viewpoint on the pursuit of beauty. This resolve highlights the value of self-acceptance and personal growth in the face of external pressures. Sienna promotes a balanced approach to beauty by discussing her journey to self-acceptance, prioritizing self-care and personal value over complying to society ideals. The resolution brings the fundamental conflict to a close by demonstrating Sienna's personal development and fortitude in the face of societal constraints.

Coda

The narrative concludes with Sienna's final thoughts and a preview of future content she plans to create, emphasizing the importance of mental health and personal development.

"Thank you, guys, so much for watching and I will be back next time bye." (Hong, 2024)

This coda completes the story, confirming her dedication to generating content that represents her own improvement while also encouraging her viewers to prioritize their mental health and self-development. Sienna's final statements establish a sense of continuity and anticipation for her upcoming videos, leaving her audience with a good and introspective message. This final comment not only sums up herself journey, but also encourages her audience to continue her path to self-improvement and mental health. The coda effectively concludes the narrative while remaining connected to her audience, promising more informative information in the future.

Language and Patterns

Sienna's use of language throughout the video is characterized by its informal and conversational tone, making her narrative accessible and relatable to her audience. This style helps to convey her personal experiences and emotions effectively.

Informal Language

The language throughout Sienna's video is informal and conversational, making her narrative accessible and relatable to her audience. This style helps to convey her personal experiences and emotions effectively.

"I feel like you need to put in hours of effort, you need to put in money for you to fit into the beauty standard." (Hong, 2024)

The use of everyday language and expressions creates a sense of intimacy and authenticity, allowing viewers to connect with Sienna's experiences on a personal level. This informal tone helps to humanize her narrative, making her struggles and reflections more relatable to her audience.

Formal Language

Despite the predominantly informal tone, there are moments where Sienna uses more formal language to discuss broader societal issues and norms. This shift helps to underscore the seriousness of the topics she addresses.

"*Discrimination based on looks is highly discouraged and banned in a lot of countries but in Korea there's more focus on your looks that is still highly practiced in a lot of workplaces.*" (Hong, 2024)

The use of formal language in discussing systemic issues like discrimination adds gravity to her narrative, highlighting the significant impact of beauty standards on professional and social dynamics. This contrast between informal and formal language enhances the depth of her analysis, providing a well-rounded exploration of the topic.

Social Issues Addressed

Sienna's narrative addresses several critical social issues, including the impact of beauty standards on self-perception, cultural homogenization, and discrimination in professional settings.

Beauty Standards and Self-Perception

The narrative delves into the impact of societal beauty standards on personal confidence and self-perception, illustrating how these norms shape individual behaviours and attitudes.

"*I was considered ugly...I didn't fit into the beauty standards in Korea.*" (Hong, 2024)

Sienna's experiences highlight the psychological toll of not meeting societal expectations of beauty, including experiences of bullying and low self-esteem. Her reflections underscore the harmful effects of rigid beauty standards on mental health and self-worth, emphasizing the need for more inclusive and diverse representations of beauty.

Cultural Homogenization

Sienna discusses how beauty standards lead to cultural homogenization, where individuals strive to meet a uniform standard of attractiveness, often at the expense of personal expression and uniqueness.

"*I feel like you need to put in hours of effort, you need to put in money for you to fit into the beauty standard.*" (Hong, 2024)

This reflects the societal pressure to conform to specific beauty ideals, which can suppress individuality and diversity. Sienna's observations highlight the loss of personal and cultural identity that can result from the pursuit of homogenized beauty standards, advocating for greater acceptance of diverse appearances.

Discrimination and Professional Implications

The YouTube video addresses the issue of discrimination based on looks, particularly in professional settings, where appearance can significantly influence hiring decisions and career opportunities.

"In Korea, in some companies, they require for you to put your ID picture in your resume...The more handsome or the more beautiful your ID picture is the higher your chances are in getting the job." (Hong, 2024)

Sienna's observations reveal systemic biases in the job market, highlighting the intersection of appearance and professional success. Her discussion of the measures being taken to combat these biases, such as proposed legislation to ban ID photos on resumes, underscores the ongoing struggle for more equitable hiring practices.

CONCLUSION

This study, by focusing on YouTube vlogs—particularly in the beauty and lifestyle genre—reveals how narrative structures not only engage viewers but also reflect and shape contemporary beauty standards. By examining Sienna Hong's narratives about beauty standards in Korea, this research highlights the societal pressures placed on individuals to conform to idealized beauty norms, revealing how these standards influence self-perception and mental health. Hong's narrative journey of self-acceptance, self-care, and resilience against societal pressures provides a personal perspective on the broader cultural dynamics at play, underscoring the psychological and social toll that rigid beauty standards can impose. Furthermore, Hong's discussions of cultural homogenization and professional discrimination based on appearance bring attention to the pervasive impacts of beauty ideals on individual identity and societal structures. Her advocacy for more inclusive and diverse representations of beauty—and her reflections on the push for unbiased hiring practices in Korea—highlight the potential of digital platforms like YouTube as spaces for challenging entrenched norms and promoting social change. Through a qualitative content analysis that explores narrative elements, semiotics, and audience engagement, this study emphasizes the value of digital storytelling in shaping cultural understanding. The findings underscore the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in examining beauty standards, combining narrative analysis with contemporary digital research methodologies to gain nuanced insights into the complex relationship between personal experiences, societal expectations, and media influence. This research ultimately advocates for broader representations of beauty that embrace diversity, paving the way for a more inclusive and empathetic cultural landscape.

REFERENCES

Buf, D. M., & Ștefăniță, O. (2020). Uses and gratifications of YouTube: A comparative analysis of users and content creators. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, *22*(2), 75-89.

Burgess, J., & Green, J. (2018). YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture. Polity Press.

Castillo-Abdul, B., Romero-Rodríguez, L. M., & Balseca, J. (2021). Hola followers! Content analysis of YouTube channels of female fashion influencers in Spain and Ecuador. *Sage Open*, *11*(4), 21582440211056609.

Chan, T. (2024). *Savoring stereotypes: Exploring orientalized narratives through American reactions to East Asian foods on YouTube* (Doctoral dissertation, Purdue University Graduate School).

Foley, N. M., O'Mahony, M., Lehane, E. A., Cil, T., & Corrigan, M. A. (2015). A qualitative content analysis of breast cancer narratives hosted through the medium of social media.

Holliday, R., & Elfving-Hwang, J. (2012). Gender, globalization and aesthetic surgery in South Korea. Body & Society, 18(2), 58-81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1357034X12440828

Kennedy, U. (2019). Becoming on YouTube: Exploring the automedial identities and narratives of Australian mummy vlogging.

Labov, W. (2016). Narrative pre-construction. In B. Johnstone (Ed.), Labov: On narrative pre-construction (pp. 15-30). University of Bern. Retrieved from https://www.morrissey.unibe.ch/lecture/05_Johnstone_2016_On_Labov.pdf

Li, J., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Influencers as cultural intermediaries: The role of social media influencers in shaping cultural consumption. Journal of Consumer Culture, 20(4), 29-49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540518822048

PAGTALUNAN, P. A. H., BORJA, N. L., HERNANDEZ, J. U., & ESPLANADA, D. E. (2022). A content analysis on Siargao island from the perspective of YouTube vloggers. *Quantum Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, *3*(4), 83-99.

Polletta, F. (2006). *It Was Like a Fever: Storytelling in Protest and Politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Riessman, C. K. (2008). *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*. Sage Publications.

Vlahović, A., Ercegovac, I., & Tankosić, M. (2023). Unraveling the Narrative Structures in YouTube Vlogs: A Qualitative Content Analysis. *Media Studies and Applied Ethics*, *4*(2), 25-42.