

From "Running Man" to "Mission X": Variety Shows as Cultural Representation of Local Identities

Nurul Laili Nadhifah, Universitas Brawijaya, Indonesia

The Asian Conference on Media, Communication & Film 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Running Man, as one of Korean successful variety shows, never fails to advertise parts of Korean culture like food, K-Pop, cultural values, traditional games, history, even historical sites. With quite a huge amount of fans not only from South Korea but also from other countries as well, *Running Man* also occasionally encourages interactions between the hosts and their fans in some games, indirectly introducing Korean culture to all over the world, resulting in the increase of consumption on Korean culture's products. This reality show concept is, then, adapted into Indonesian variety show called *Mission X*. Quite different from *Running Man*, *Mission X* has its own ways in introducing Indonesia and its culture. This study aims to analyze the way *Running Man* and *Mission X* represent themselves as the platforms of advertising their local identities by applying Fiske's vertical intertextuality and cultural identity theories. Drawing on data collected from the shows as the main texts and SNS as secondary texts, while data of fans' reactions are gathered by doing random interview online. This research, through comparative studies, intends to explain the similarities and differences of cultural representations shown on those shows. The findings show different aspects of local culture displayed by those variety shows caused different methods of representing them. While *Running Man* introducing different aspects and values of culture like food or history through games and certain themes, *Mission X* tends to introduce cultural aspects more through display of setting.

Keywords: Mission X, Running Man, cultural representation, local identities, vertical intertextuality

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

INTRODUCTION

Along with the spread of Korean Wave, many kinds of Korean variety shows which each has their own uniqueness slowly gain their own fans that form their own fandom. Running Man, which was first aired July 11, 2010, is one of them with the fandom called Runners. Running Man's concept, where the hosts and guests have to do some missions in certain landmarks or locations, is then adopted by some countries as well. Keep Running -- previously known as Running Man China-- is a Chinese variety show first aired on October 10, 2014 which also a spin-off from Running Man. Another one is Mission X from Indonesia, which concept of missions also have similar vibe and patterns of those by Running Man. Nevertheless, it is then explained in some websites that Mission X is a result of cooperation between SBS and TransTV, since many argued that Mission X is illegally copying Running Man. Just like then what Kaligis (2013) clarified in his website, that it was September 9, 2013, where Running Man production Director Cho Hyo Jin came to Indonesia relating with this cooperation.

An important point seen from Running Man is how indirectly Running Man becomes an important platform of advertising other part of Korean culture, aside from Korean Pop Culture, like Korean traditional food, traditional games, even parts of Korean history. In some episodes aired on special occasions like Chuseok, Running Man makes the hosts and guests wear traditional clothes or play traditional games in historical sites or museum. Introducing Korean food also can be done by making places like traditional market as the game spot. The viewers, who mostly at first watch the show because of their favourite idols who become the guests, then are drawn to watch this show because of its uniqueness, who later slowly learn about Korean cultures also.

Questions then emerge when this variety show is adapted into another form of variety show from other countries. Depending on their cultural aspects and values, then how about the ways those new shows modify this function as platform to advertise the local cultures. Mission X, which is an Indonesian show inspired by Running Man, then is taken as the object of this study. One of the main reasons is Indonesia is a country already known for its richness of local cultures and various tourism sites, in a way, its popularity is in a kind of different way and aspects from South Korea.

This paper aims to discuss about the way Running Man promotes Korean local cultures, which is then compared with Mission X to show and explain the similarities and differences of cultural representations shown on those shows analyzed from the shows themselves, the SNS or official sites of the shows, and the result of fans interviews. In the end, it will be shown how the aspects of cultural values and local cultures also impact the way of introducing and representing them.

According to Fiske's vertical intertextuality, it consists of primary texts' relations with other texts which refer specifically to it, like secondary texts, and also the tertiary texts (1987, 117). The shows as the primary texts cannot be interpreted only by themselves. The secondary texts, which are the SNS, act to promote the circulation of meanings of the shows themselves. Viewers, as the ones who hold the social relations, stand as the tertiary texts through the result of random interviews done by the researcher.

As the first text, Running Man uses the viewers as the most interesting factors in the show. By inviting the famous idols like members of boy groups and girl groups or famous actor/actress from recent dramas, Running Man definitely succeeds to attract many of viewers attention. Meanwhile, for those guests, this also bring benefit for them since they will be able to promote their new albums or new movies and dramas this way. Those guests are then given some missions to finish, along with the hosts.



Figure 1: the well known actress Yoo In Young as a guest (*Running Man* 213 00:00:45).



Figure 2: The famous Super Junior Lee Dong Hae who became a guest along with other members (*Running Man* 376 00:53:15)

From there, slowly, Running Man then inserts some missions related with the aspects of culture that they want to introduce not only to the Koreans but also to the viewers from all over the world. One of the example is introducing Korean traditional food. Not only does Running Man make the hosts and guests to do some missions in the restaurants or cook the food by themselves, but the show also make the traditional markets as the landscape sometimes. This way, there are two benefits that they gain, introducing Korean culinary culture and “reminding” Korean youngsters about their traditional places since nowadays Young people in Korea would prefer to go to mall and other modern places than places like traditional markets. In this kind of section, the show always makes sure to present the food in the most interesting way to attract the viewers for learning and knowing about Korean culinary more.



Figure 3: Korean dish presented as part of mission (*Running Man* 404. 01:17:37)



Figure 4: Nice presented Korean traditional food for those who win the mission (*Running Man* 404 00:34:54)

Other ways of introducing Korean culture is by including the experts of such culture into the mission. Usually, the hosts and guests need to meet those experts and do some mission given to them by those experts, which are related to the culture. The example of such case can be seen from figure 5, where a host and a guest need to meet an expert of Korean classic music and earn some points by doing some games with her. Traditional music is not really well known among the youth in Korea, since K-Pop through Korean wave is much more dominating. Through this kind of mission, young people in Korea will at least know about their traditional music and culture better. Moreover, once this episode is watched by viewers from other countries, they will also learn about Korean traditional culture bit by bit.



Figure 5: Song So Hee, an expert of Korean Classic Music was invited in Running Man (*Running Man* 257 00:12:45)



Figure 6: The mission that should be done by Kim Jong Kook and his partner along with Song So Hee (*Running Man* 257 00:18:35)

Different strategy is applied by Mission X. Traditional aspects of culture like traditional food or traditional dancers are not mostly directly included in the mission; Instead, like what is pictured in figure 7, it is elegantly shown as welcome dance for the hosts who come to a certain area or island for doing the show, in this case, Bengkulu. Furthermore, since each region in Indonesia has their own dances and other aspects of traditional culture like traditional clothes, songs, food, traditional means of transportation, and any others, then such kind of way in presenting traditional culture will still attract the viewers and still effective for introducing them especially to the youngsters in Indonesia, who mostly do not really know about traditional cultures other than the ones from their own regions.



Figure 7: Traditional Dance as a welcome dance in Bengkulu
(*Mission X: Misi Detective* 00:04:20)



Figure 8: Delman (traditional vehicle/cart pulled by horse), used by the hosts to take them to the mission area (*Mission X: Misi Detective* 00:08:13)

In Mission X, famous singers and actors or actresses are rarely invited to the show, the hosts mostly do the missions by themselves, which then take the role into introducing Indonesian traditional culture for themselves. One of the reasons is because Indonesian pop culture is much different from K-Pop wave, and young people in Indonesia love and know about K-Pop wave more than their own pop culture. That is why the presence of Indonesian singers and actors or actresses will not really affect the fame of this show. Nevertheless, when there are some booming movies that are well known enough among young people in Indonesia, then Mission X will invite the actors and actresses as the guests and set the setting and mission like the ones in the movie. This event itself also does not happen quite often, since mostly Indonesian movies fame is not centered by the actors and actresses, but mostly because of the main issues exposed.



Figure 9: Dilan and Milea as characters from Indonesian movie which is so famous among Indonesian people, especially young ones (Mission X: *Dilan Dan Milea Tetap Romantis Waktu Jalanin Misi* 00:01:55).

Moreover, since the standard of youth culture in Indonesia nowadays is K-Pop, this show will include Korean related things once in a while in the show. Some examples are inviting Korean people --does not need to be famous, as long as they are Koreans-- to appear shortly in the show, or including food like hot samyang noodle --which is quite popular among Indonesian youth nowadays-- in the mission to attract Indonesian young viewers.

However, the interesting part of this show is the fusion of culture that is shown in some episodes. One of the examples is when at first the hosts need to consume Korean spicy food fast to complete a mission. To really gets the feel of Korean culture, they do it at Korean restaurant while wearing hanbok --Korean traditional clothes--, while using Korean words or phrases here and there.

Nevertheless, the introduction of the members of the teams is done by putting their picture while wearing Kebaya and Sinjang Bundel for the women and Salontreng for men, which are ones of many traditional clothes from Indonesia. The missions given to them is also written in Sundanese language, one of 652 dialects exist in Indonesia, since the mission is located in Bandung. This fusion serves two meaning, for attracting viewers' attention along with introducing local cultures to them.



Figure 10: The hosts are wearing hanbok in the opening for a show (*Mission X: Tantangan Makan Pedas Khas Korea 00:00:57*).



Figure 11: the hosts are wearing hanbok while consuming Korean spicy food at a Korean food restaurant to complete the mission (*Mission X: Tantangan Makan Pedas Khas Korea 00:03:57*).



Figure 12: The introduction where the host wear Sundanese traditional clothes (*Mission X: Tantangan Makan Pedas Khas Korea 00:02:21*).



Figure 13: The hosts read the mission given in Sundanese dialect while wearing hanbok (*Mission X: Tantangan Makan Pedas Khas Korea 00:07:57*).

The next one is SNS and websites as secondary texts, which according to Fiske (1987, 117) has a mean to promote the circulation of selected meanings of the primary text. SNS and websites could play its role as secondary text for a reason that they penetrate our cultural life really well, especially nowadays. Through its twitter account, Running Man tries to give teasers of their upcoming shows, attracting viewers with the pictures of the hosts and guests together. They also do “real” interactions with the viewers through their SNS and official website in programs.sbs.co.kr, for example asking the viewers to do some votes for special occasions. Other social event happened for instance in episode 280 where the viewers determined what the hosts and guests should do. In those episodes, the hosts were required to create temporary personal SNS, where the hosts’ challenge was to follow what viewers told them to do through the comments on those SNS accounts.



Figure 14: Running Man members try to earn more points by doing mission given by viewers through their temporary SNS accounts (*Running Man 280 01:14:39*)

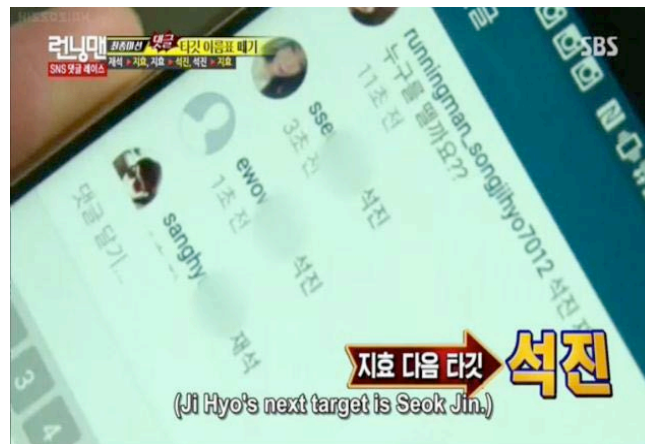


Figure 15: The mission given by viewers through SNS account for Song Ji Hyo (*Running Man* 280 01:14:52)

Different method is applied by Mission X for their social media account, for they do not use the twitter account @missionxttv exclusively for their own program. As a program issued by Trans TV, Mission X's twitter account then positioned itself as a platform of introducing and advertising other programs of Trans TV. It might helps other programs to be known by the viewers, but as the consequences, it is quite difficult for Mission X to gain its own fanbase in a large numbers. There are some fanbase accounts for Mission X's fans, but they are not quite active since the enthusiast of the fans in not that high and there are no real interactions between the hosts and the fans.

The third one, the tertiary text, is the viewers as the ones that hold the social function. As it is understood, viewers are not only textual subjects who are inactive. viewers are social subjects, who according to Morley (1980b), Willeman (1978), and Neale (1977) cited in Fiske (1987, 61) live in particular social formation and are established by a complex cultural history, both social and textual. It is also stated by Fiske (1987, 124) that tertiary text can be public --in this case are comments by fans in both SNS and website-- and can be private --which are responses by the viewers gathered from random interview.

Some fans of Running Man and Mission X are interviewed randomly, related with the reasons of their liking toward the show and how they see both introduction and penetration of cultural aspects in those shows. Some viewers reveal that they watched Running Man for the idols at first. Nevertheless, slowly they learn about Korean culture and since the games are mostly interesting and fun, they then watch it regularly regardless of who the guests are. This then becomes one of the reasons why lately Korean local culture is quite well known among Indonesian young people nowadays.

Different case happens for those who claim themselves as loyal viewers of Mission X. They watch it because the missions done by the hosts seems fun and most of the hosts are already well known as Indonesian comedians, which makes them host the show in quite funny way. They like the way it still has the taste of Indonesia culture without introducing it rigidly, and yet still showing its modern and creative parts through the games and settings. However, some state that they do not really like how Mission X

adapt some Korean shows' style because it is not really suitable to be applied in different culture like Indonesia.

CONCLUSIONS

Differences between Running Man and Mission X exist because of so many reasons. South Korea introduces itself to the world through K-Pop wave, where then idols and actors or actresses hold important role in gaining attention of viewers. By inviting the famous idols for being Running Man's guests, the attracted viewers then will learn about South Korea's cultural aspects through the games, missions, and challenges given. This way, Running Man positioned itself as a representation of Korean culture, by introducing it not only to the Korean youth but also the viewers from other countries.

For Indonesia, this country is already known for its cultural aspects far before these television programs were created. Visitors often visits Indonesia solely because of these reasons. Boosting the show's popularity while introducing Indonesian culture aspects is done by mixing it with something popular among Indonesian youth today, that is Korean culture. Basically, while Running Man is using its K-Pop wave to introduce its traditional culture, Mission X is adding Korean culture to introduce Indonesian traditional culture.

Moreover, by using and exploiting the secondary text well, that is SNS and websites, Running Man could gain its fame, which then help itself to spread Korean culture, while Mission X do not really use its websites and SNS to promote the show itself. It is used to promote other shows instead, which actually is not a bad strategy applied by the television channel. Nevertheless, Mission X might exploit social media more to gain greater audiences It is related with the third aspect, where fans as the tertiary text also hold important roles in spreading and interpreting the culture. By communicating with the fans through SNS and websites, Running Man could gain more popularity, with many fans abroad creating their own fans accounts and creating videos or posting many things to support the show. Some fans even gather by themselves and reenact some episodes of the games. Adopting the same strategy, Mission X may also gains more fans who will then help this program introducing Indonesia culture to the world.

References

- Fiske, John. (1987). *Television Culture: Popular Pleasures and Politics*. London: Routledge.
- Hyung Taek, Im. (Director). (2015). *Running Man ep.257*. Seoul, South Korea: SBS.
- Hyung Taek, Im. (Director). (2016). *Running Man ep.280*. Seoul, South Korea: SBS.
- Joo Hyung, Kim. (Director). (2017). *Running Man ep.376*. Seoul, South Korea: SBS.
- Joo Hyung, Kim. (Director). (2018). *Running Man ep.404*. Seoul, South Korea: SBS.
- Kaligis, Aldo. (2013). *Mission X dan Running Man : Strategi (Perusahaan) Indonesia Demi Mencapai Progresivitas Ekonomi*. Retrieved from <http://sett.com/suigeneris/mission-x-dan-running-man-strategi-perusahaan-indonesia-demi-mencapai-progresivitas-ekonomi>
- Official, TRANS TV. (2018, February 11). *MISSION X - Dilan Dan Milea Tetap Romantis Waktu Jalanin Misi*. [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGLy7WPTSzY&t=12s>
- Official, TRANS TV. (2017, May 6). *MISSION X - Misi Detective*. [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QnDH5EKPvU&t=19s>
- Official, TRANS TV. (2018, January 20). *MISSION X - Tantangan Makan Pedas Khas Korea*. [video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SMdqCDnArvc&t=34s>
- The Best Episodes of Running Man. (2018). Retrieved from <https://episode.ninja/series/running-man>