

AR Game Narrative: A Hybrid of Audio-Visual New Media and Cutting-Edge AR Technology—A Case Study of the Korean Drama “Memories of the Alhambra” (Postprint)

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Abstract

The AR game narrative employed in the Korean drama *Memories of the Alhambra* achieves a seamless connection and interactive mode between the virtual game world and the real world, representing a vision for the integration of virtual and real, augmented reality, and real-time interaction effects that AR technology pursues and may truly realize in the future. Compared with current two-dimensional video or image narratives, AR game narrative does not require ‘entering’ any separate realm, but rather transforms everyday familiar places into interactive and narrative spaces. It can be said that, for audiovisual new media, this multi-dimensional, non-linear, ‘field’-based storytelling will provide a referential and integrative path for the innovation and development of future audiovisual new media.

Full Text

2. Specific Applications and Effects of AR Game Narrative in the Korean Drama *Memories of the Alhambra*

2.1 The “Four Spacetimes” Created by AR Game Narrative

Television drama narrative spacetime primarily falls into three categories: chronological, reverse chronological, and cross-cutting narration. Cross-cutting can be further divided into single-thread, double-thread, multi-thread, and even radial or nested structures. Unlike the common past-present dichotomy in historical dramas or the parallel universes in science fiction, *Memories of the Alhambra* (hereafter referred to as *Alhambra*) constructs multiple narrative spacetimes by overlaying game and reality through AR technology. When

virtuality meets reality, the world becomes intriguingly difficult to distinguish between true and false, which constitutes the drama's central appeal.

The series features at least four distinct spacetimes. To clarify their characteristics, we analyze each in sequence (1-4), examining the conditions under which players enter each world and how the AR game narrative advances through these four interconnected realms.

World 1 is the pure real world—the foundation from which the game world emerges, and relatively straightforward to comprehend. **World 2** represents the normal AR game world, combining reality and virtual elements. Players entering World 2 must wear special game contact lenses. In this space, players and NPCs coexist; players simultaneously inhabit Worlds 1 and 2, while NPCs exist only in World 2 and cannot enter World 1. Together, they form a fully functional game world.

World 3 is the bug-ridden game world, typically signaled by virtual thunderstorms. In the normal game world, losing a battle does not result in real-world death. However, in World 3, due to system bugs, a player's in-game death translates to actual death. Deceased players, though physically absent, can enter the real world at any moment to attack other players. In this world, attacked players can still see and be harmed by the players they've killed in the game even after removing their contact lenses, while others in the real world remain unaffected. This signifies that the virtual world in World 3 has begun to partially impact reality.

World 4 is the pure virtual world, capable of existing independently from the real world. Living players who enter this world become trapped in the virtual realm unless rescued by another player of sufficient level. The game's developer who initially disappeared in the series had entered this world. Deceased players, meanwhile, become NPCs here, capable of traveling freely across all four worlds to seek revenge in the real world.

To more clearly summarize the characteristics of these four worlds, Table 1 lists the conditions for player entry into each world.

These four overlapping worlds correspond to four distinct narrative threads that intersect and converge. World 1 centers on the real-world love story between protagonist Liu Zhenyu and heroine Zheng Xizhu, as well as Liu's professional progress—defeating competitors, locating the game developer, and successfully developing the game. World 2 follows Liu Zhenyu's journey of leveling up and battling monsters in the AR game world, where he gradually discovers the game's novel mechanics, defeats his real-world rival Cha Hengzhuo in the game, and uncovers clues connecting game progression to finding the developer. In World 3, Liu Zhenyu is hunted in the bug world by the deceased Cha Hengzhuo; simultaneously, as his game level increases, he gains the ability to identify and eliminate bugs, including those within himself, bringing this world to preliminary resolution. World 4 functions as the NPC world, where corresponding NPC functions unlock as player levels increase, gradually revealing key clues

that drive the entire plot forward. Because certain NPCs possess the ability to travel across all four worlds under specific conditions, the finale leaves audiences in suspense regarding Liu Zhenyu' s ultimate fate.

2.2 Effects: Creating a New Content Ecosystem for Genre-Specific Dramas

TVN, a dominant cable network competing with Korea' s three major broadcasters (KBS, SBS, MBC), operates under CJ E&M, known as the “aircraft carrier of Korea' s entertainment industry.” *Alhambra* represents one of TVN' s premium productions in 2018, with a budget of 20 billion won (120 million RMB). As a subscription-based channel, TVN enjoys considerable advantages in programming scope and regulatory flexibility compared to free-to-air networks, enabling breakthroughs in subject matter, casting, and set design. While previous productions like the *Reply* series boldly employed new actors to elevate Korea' s period dramas to new heights, and *Signal* and *Misaeng* became benchmarks for crime thrillers and workplace dramas respectively, *Alhambra* pioneers the AR game concept in its storyline. By cleverly employing multi-world AR game narrative that blends virtual and real elements, the drama attracted a large audience including gaming fans. At the production level, it continuously drives the typification of Korean dramas, creating a new content ecosystem for genre-specific series and establishing strong word-of-mouth.

3. Extension and Outlook: Trends of AR Game Narrative in New Audio-Visual Media

3.1 Transcending Spatiotemporal Limitations

The trend of AR game narrative in new audio-visual media is evident in *Alhambra*. What audiences watch is simultaneously a television drama and a live broadcast of an AR game. Plot advancement is closely tied to AR game mechanics and development, allowing the protagonist to battle 15th-century cavalry in Granada reconstructed through AR technology while viewers worldwide watch this Korean-drama-ified AR game livestream on televisions and mobile screens. It is foreseeable that information acquisition transcending spatiotemporal limitations will be key to future AR+ audio-visual media. In the future, when encountering a location or object, individuals will be able to access rich relevant information via mobile devices or even implanted systems—historical events, news, maps presented in preferred formats, with the option to experience them from different perspectives, achieving true spatiotemporal transcendence based on current capabilities.

3.2 Creating Immersive Experiences

First-person perspective enables audiences to experience historical events as if “present on site,” fully “immersed” in scenes created by AR technology, thereby establishing deeper emotional connections and profound experiences. This makes

it easier to convey experienced emotions to others, achieving “empathy.” Precisely because augmented reality possesses exceptional communicative power and immersive qualities, European publications *Esquire* and *Wallpaper* have already launched their AR-enhanced editions. In China, viewing news through VR/AR perspectives has become an innovative reporting method in recent years. Xinhua News Agency’s VR News Team, China’s first VR news division established under its Convergence Media Product Center, oversees four functional areas: news gathering, video shooting, post-production, and market operations, managing the entire network’s VR business and the “VR/AR” channel’s operation, organization, and management.

Indeed, compared to current flat video or image narratives, AR game narrative tends toward multidimensional storytelling. Linear narrative threads become less important, replaced by “spaces” for storytelling, emphasizing audience experience within a “space.” This multi-layered, multi-dimensional narrative enhances interactive experiences, satisfying diverse socialization needs.

3.3 Meeting Audience Socialization Needs

Zuckerberg believes virtual and augmented reality will become part of daily life, with virtual reality having the potential to become the most social platform. It is foreseeable that future AR and VR will be not merely technologies but social platforms. With the development of AR, VR, artificial intelligence, and big data, future social scenarios may involve pointing a mobile device or built-in biological recognition system at a person to instantly access their basic information: accounts and homepages across platforms, past 履历, photos and videos. AR technology has already been developed and applied across numerous fields including film, television, gaming, real estate, education, healthcare, and tourism, receiving significant attention in the media sector. As the hottest trend in media development, new audio-visual media currently stands at a critical evolutionary stage. The application of AR technology and AR game narrative undoubtedly provides new directions and prospects for new audio-visual media development. Their effective combination will deliver unique advantages in transcending spatiotemporal limitations, enhancing experiential effects, and meeting audience needs.

Therefore, regarding the question of “how to play the next generation of audio-visual media based on AR technology,” AR game narrative—as a product of the fusion between new audio-visual media and AR black technology—offers a referencable and integrable path for future innovation and development through its multidimensional, non-linear, “space” -based storytelling characteristics.

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