

An Introduction to the Positioning of Kids' Program Hosts of Variety Shows — Take "Crazy Mecca" as an Example

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Abstract: *Children's variety shows are an important window for young children to acquire external knowledge. However, many domestic programs with this kind of theme are adapted from adult variety shows, which leads to the marginalization of the hosts who are supposed to play a key role, the similarity of their styles, and overly adult problems, which significantly impact the overall effectiveness of children's variety shows. This paper takes the popular "Crazy Mecca" as an example to classify and analyze the role positioning of different hosts in the program, and discuss its impact on the show's effectiveness. It then will examine the host's language style, behavioral actions, and emotional expressions, and discuss the professional requirements for hosts' behavior, speech, and emotions under different role positions. The paper aims to provide useful suggestions for the field of children's variety show host role positioning in China.*

Keywords: *Children's variety show; Host role positioning; Language style; Behavioral actions; Emotional expression*

1. Introduction

As a traditional mainstream media, TV programs still have a great influence on children's education in the new media era. Children's variety show, aimed primarily at children and teenagers, serve as an important platform and medium for children to receive information. These shows carry part of the responsibility for children's education, and the quality of the program directly affects the children's cognition. The physical and mental health of minors, as well as the shaping of their values, are often closely related to these television programs to which they are exposed to. In addition, since the mind of minors are not yet mature and they tend to imitate what they see, so host who plays a controlling role in a program easily becomes an object of children's imitation and learning. Therefore, establishing a positive atmosphere in children's programs should be a primary consideration for both the host and the production team.

As a crucial role in a children's TV program, the traditional perception of the program host has to assume the responsibility of linking the content of the entire program. However, adults as hosts inevitably make the younger audience feel preachy and lack of intimacy. Li Huoqui (2017), based on this situation, proposed a "de-adulting" approach for children's programs from the children's point of view and mode of thinking. Li suggested that "in the process of determining hosting style and preparing program content, the staff should fully consider children's psychological characteristics and approach the content from the children's perspective."^[1] This is the only way to ensure that the hosting work is integrated with children's growth and learning, and that the children's programs are truly adapted to children's needs. In children's programs, hosts should get rid of the "stereotypes" of their previous personas and pay more attention to the use of facial expressions and body movements to interact with children. Xu Mintan (2020) argues that "in terms of the tone of communication, it is important to avoid the use of RTHK accents, and not to intentionally imitate the children's accents" A natural, relaxed tone should be used, and the appropriate tone should vary according to the different ages of the children in the program, ensuring it aligns fully with the child's psychology.^[2] Presenters of children's programs need to be more understanding and respectful of children, standing up for the audience rather than indoctrinating them. Li Jingjing (2015) pointed out that hosts should "start from children and synchronize with children", citing famous children's program hosts Jin Guizi, Sister Ju Ping, Uncle Dong Hao as examples, arguing that "the hosts of children's programs should stand from the children's point of view, have the innocence of the children and share more common topics with the young audience."^[3]

Children and teenagers are still in the early stage of life, so children's variety shows must balance entertainment and educational significance, which is a difficult and complex task. Only when the role of the host is clear and their image is clear, can children's program hosts avoid being marginalized, making children's programs more watchable and interesting. Among the current domestic children's variety TV programs, "Crazy Mecca" has been broadcast for eight seasons and has always maintained high and stable ratings. Therefore, the program production team offers valuable reference for other children's variety TV programs, especially regarding program planning, arrangement, and the host's character setting.

"Crazy Mecca" is a reality show introduced from Japan and localized by Hunan Radio and Television Group's Golden Eagle Cartoon Satellite Television, which invites many popular celebrities to participate in the recording of each episode. Guests will be asked all kinds of tricky and weird questions by the channel's cartoon image host "Mecca" in each secret room, and each room also has a penalty for failing to overcome the challenges. The program "Crazy Mecca" tests the guests' individual physical abilities, quick reaction skills and teamwork. This paper takes the Golden Eagle Cartoon TV's original variety show "Crazy Mecca" as an example, analyzing it alongside the program's ratings data, examining the case and the problems prevalent in other programs, and further analyzing the qualities that excellent children's variety show hosts should have, as well as how to grasp the role of the positioning.

2. Analysis of the Role Positioning of the Hosts in "Crazy Mecca"

2.1. The "Sister" type

"Sister" is one of the most common types of female hosts in children's programs, such as "Sister Ju Ping" and "Sister Xiaolu" on CCTV's children's channel. This type of presenter is usually very approachable, leaning more towards sweetness and gentleness in their presenting style, and is therefore be trusted and loved by younger children. One such image is portrayed by Sister Swallow and Sister Dragonfly of the Flying Family host group in Mad Max. Meanwhile, compared to the two of them, Sister Dragonfly is more gentle and Sister Swallow is sweeter. During the break-in process, these two hosts are usually responsible for driving and controlling the emotional direction of the program.

For example, in the "Crazy Mecca" program, when the young guests face the device and feel at a loss, there will inevitably experience some nervousness and anxiety. The two hosts will first appease the emotions of the young guests, and then provide 'science teaching' on how to overcome the obstacles, which achieves the effect of edutainment and fun. The two hosts also use language to underline the emotional intensity of the audience's reaction to the young guest's resilience and perseverance.

For a funny and barrier-based children's variety show, finding the emotional touchpoints and controlling the emotional direction of the scene is not easy. This task is especially challenging for the host, as the tone of voice with the words need to be appropriate, or it may be counterproductive, making the audience feel the reality show too staged, which reduces the program's effectiveness.

To sum up, the 'Sister of Knowledge' type of host faces very strict professional requirements. The host must create a positive program atmosphere and effectively engage the audience through their hosting style, which is also a test of the host's personal image temperament and how well they align with the intended role."

2.2. The "Growth partner" type

In the program "Crazy Mecca", one of the host's role setting is very different from the style and form of other programs, the virtual mascot host "Mecca" is designed to bridge the gap between the show and the young audience, bringing them closer.

Cartoon image "Mecca" role is embodying the image of a child around their age. During the challenges, "Mecca" is sometimes naughty, sometimes sweet, portraying a good partner on the road to growth. Unlike other children's variety shows, the presence of the "Mecca" allows the young guests to better immerse themselves in the program. Given that "Crazy Mecca" is aimed at children in the age range of 5-8 years old, children are very trusting of a virtual host of their own age who is able to communicate interactively and understandably.

Instead of letting the adult hosts adopt a younger style to connect with the audience, "Mecca" is more likely to make the whole program look more childlike and beautiful. In the program, "Mecca"'s language

is more engaging than other adult hosts and mimics the children's expressions. During the hosting process, "Mecca" often uses exaggerated like "wow" and "ah" which to create a close connection to the audience. During the hosting process, "Mecca" often uses "wow" and "ah" to make the image close to the audience. The lively tone makes the audience feels that the host is communicating and exchanging with the guests as a good friend, reducing the age gap compared to the 'sisters' mentioned earlier.

At the same time, the novel and unique identity of "Mecca" also adds a distinctive element to the program. In addition to the traditional adult host, there is an additional partner on the way of children's growth, helping to pass on the correct values to the children, which is loved by children's viewers and appreciated by parents at the same time.

2.3. The "King of Children" type

As a children's variety show, "Crazy Mecca" must effectively engage with children of the right age. In addition to the interesting content and education value, it is also necessary to create a happy experience for the small audience. Similar to other children's programs, 'Crazy Mecca' needs both a 'Sister of Knowledge' type of host and a 'King of Children' type of host. The 'King of Children' host brings a relaxed and lively style, which is popular with kids and helps to create a cheerful atmosphere. Thus, having both types of hosts allows the program to effectively engage and entertain its young viewers while driving the overall program atmosphere.

In this program, the host "E" plays such a role. During the script design phase, the "King of Children" type of host is typically paired with a "Sister of Knowledge" to enhance the overall atmosphere of the program. Their complementary styles create a harmonious balance on stage. When the game is played, the "King of Children" type host adds more fun to the game through direct interaction with the young guests, allowing the show to fully capitalize on its entertaining and engaging qualities.

In the program, hosts usually need strong stage presence and control. Many famous hosts on Hunan TV, such as He Jiong and Xie Na, exemplify this 'stage-type' hosting, where they adapt their responses and behavior based on the live situation.

In the children's variety program, the "King of Children" must excel in communication with the younger audience, understand their psychology and cognition, and view situations from the children's perspective. This approach fosters a stronger sense of participation and engagement among the young audience, contributing to the program's success.

2.4. The "Atmosphere bearer" type

Children's variety shows involve more competitive elements, and "Crazy Mecca" regards challenge as the main content and form of the program.

As a result, the different roles of hosts in the program can significantly impact how the program is perceived by the audience.

In the process of children's variety show production, the program team aims to minimize early exposure to the 'elimination' system to protect children's mental health and foster a sense of effort. To achieve this, the program team often downplays the concept of 'competition' and advocate for 'de-adultization.' In the program, a host needs to "atmosphere bearer". This type of host drives the atmosphere of the program, and encouraging guests participating in the challenge, which enhances the excitement of the program.

In the program "Crazy Mecca", the hosts are usually "Sister Meow" and "Sister Bunny", who are lively, cute, cheerful, outgoing, and full of vigor and vitality. In critical moments, the two "atmosphere bearer" type hosts will enthusiastically cheer and shout, using their own emotional expressiveness to encourage the guests. This helps to boost the guests' self-confidence and motivation, allowing the audience to empathize with the excitement and tension of the challenges.

3. Children's variety show hosts how to grasp the role of positioning

To excel as hosts of children's variety shows, it is crucial to master the role of the host of the positioning, and detailed division of labor. While some programs have a single host, most are managed by a 'host group.' Therefore, during the initial design phase, the program team should plan the host group according to the desired program effects. Throughout the entire program or season, various forms of

content will be presented. The direction of the hosts should be determined based on different program themes and content, creating a well-coordinated host group that effectively fulfills various roles within the show.

The host's language style, behavioral actions and emotional expression are essential qualities for correctly positioning the host's role. These qualities ensure that the program's content, purpose, and audience are aligned and coordinated. By effectively fulfilling their roles, hosts can enhance the program and avoid the marginalization often experienced by traditional program hosts, ensuring they remain indispensable to the show's success."

3.1. Shape the language style according to the characterization

Children's variety show hosts should tailor their language style to match program and the host's personal qualities. This approach helps to establish their unique presence, making them indispensable to the show.

For example, in the case of the "king of the children" type of host mentioned earlier, this type of host should pay more attention to the degree of humor and fun in their language, as well as creating a unique and distinctive personality that brings joy to the children. Fun and witty language is one of the most important ways to get children's attention, and can help alleviate children's nervousness about the challenges set up, allowing children to enjoy participating in the program. For many children, participation in a television program is their first exposure to television, and this initiation should be given more emphasis. At the same time, the host should also pay attention to its language, reflecting personality. This helps the audience differentiate between the roles of different hosts, and addresses the issue of the same style of hosts with other similar or the same type of program.

The above requirements for the host's language style are not only aimed at meeting the expectations of the audience of children's variety TV programs, but also at avoiding homogenization of children's variety TV programs. By shaping the corresponding language style according to the role of the children's variety show hosts, a distinctive personality can be crafted for the host. This not only adds more fun to the program but also helps to improve its ratings.

3.2. Apply behavioral actions based on characterization

The audience age range of children's variety TV programs is wide. The "Crazy Mecca" program officially targets children aged 5-8 years old. However, in China's current market of children's variety TV programs, audiences often span a broader age range, including around 10 years old. This age group is particularly prone to imitating the behaviors and phenomena of idols due to their psychological development.

Therefore, it is very likely that the audience will imitate the host's behaviors. Consequently, when hosting the program, the host needs to be very clear about his role position, and perform actions that align with the program's intended effects, providing the audience with appropriate behavioral guidance.

For example, the "atmosphere bearer" type of hosts, as mentioned above, must display clear smiles and positive attitudes to show their expectation and encouragement when young guests take on challenges, which boosts the young guests' confidence for the next challenge. However, it should be noted that if this process is performed in a uniform manner, it will make the audience feel the insincere.

Therefore, it is necessary to react to different guests and make adjustments to the behavior, such as high-five encouragement and other actions. For more introverted young guests, the hosts need to respect the psychological needs of the children, rather than pushing them to open up. Engaging in 'whispering' communication or making slightly exaggerated expressions can help build trust and eliminate barriers, creating a closer connection with the young guests.

The host of the children's variety show should give the young guests confidence and encouragement through their behavior and demeanor, strengthen the special nature of their roles, increase the recognition of the younger audience and their parents, and give positive energy guidance to enhance the program's effect.

3.3. Grasp emotional expression according to characterization

In the children's variety show, the host's emotional expressions vary depending on their role, and these

different expressions can significantly impact the program's overall effect.

For example, the "heart sister" type of hosts mentioned above usually play a role in the program to guide the emotional flow of the program, helping the audience to quickly engage and concentrate.

Therefore, this type of presenter is characterized by gentleness and sensibility that clearly differentiate them from other types of presenters.

In the children's variety TV program, where the children's guests often experience strong emotions during challenges, hosts need to be adept at perceiving and capturing these feelings. In the process of recording the program, through their language and emotional expressions, they can convey and interpret the guests' deeper emotions. Rather than allowing raw emotions to directly impact the audience, the 'Heart Sister' hosts channel these feelings through a touching and empathetic approach. Unlike other types of hosts who might be more exuberant, the 'Heart Sister' hosts aim to create a more profound and nuanced effect, enhancing the program's overall depth and emotional resonance.

Children's variety show hosts should prepare for the expression of emotions. They need to understand not only the overall emotional state of the guests, especially children's emotional tendencies, but also act as an "amplifier". Through their own emotional expression in a timely manner, they can enhance the atmosphere of the scene and increase the impact of the stage for the audience at home."

4. Conclusions

Combined with the internal ratings data of the "Crazy Mecca" program group of Hunan Radio and Television's Golden Eagle Cartoon TV, the program's market share reached 3.42% in the second period of the seventh season on the national network, 2.74% in the fourth period, 2.33% in the fifth period, 2.46% in the 10th period and ranked the first place in the provincial satellite TV rankings.

The children's variety show achieved such considerable ratings largely due to the pre-planning by the program staff, allowing participants to present themselves, helping to dispel the audience's perception of traditional variety shows as merely scripted performances, thereby enhancing the program's viewability. The guests' natural behavior breaks away from the traditional "acting" perception, improving the overall watchability of the show.

In the planning process, the "public welfare principle" of children's programs should still remain the first place, so that the content of the program is entertaining and educational, providing viewers with a positive spiritual orientation.

The staff adheres to the principle of "matching roles with tasks", designing the hosts' language style, behavioral actions, and emotional expressions to fit the current program's needs. This ensures both guests and hosts have their own space for performance, with a clear role positioning and distinctive image, addressing the marginalization of the children's program, and making the children's program more engaging, interesting and educational.

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