

***Eva Krásová***  
***Do Stories Matter?***  
***Narrativity in***  
***YouTUBE Videos***  
***Targeted at***  
***Pre-schoolers***

## ***About the author***

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## ***Abstract***

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This paper examines narrativity in videos that are targeted at children who are 3-6 years old, using the channel “CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs” as the focus of the research. We argue that narrativity plays an essential role in the success of Internet content. The paper attempts to test this thesis via qualitative analysis and by reflecting upon the responses of several respondents in a preliminary survey. First, we exclude factors such as SEO factors, mise-en-scène and characters to analyse the two most famous videos that have been produced by the CoComelon channel. We have found that because these videos are characterised by repetitiveness, narrativity should be sought at the level of a single episode, not at the macro-level. In this sense, the videos contain a high degree of innovation and realism. Next, we consider the construction of the characters to be a purposeful blend of stereotypes and individuation. The videos do not introduce narrativity into the material, instead depicting processes that are as such already narrative – bathing, eating, going to school, etc. These are fundamental processes which compose the everyday experience of the target audience, and thus they are “stories which matter.”

## ***Keywords***

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YouTube, *CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs*, pre-schoolers, narrativity

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Do stories matter?

The global Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences heavily transformed many aspects of everyday life in Western civilisation. Over the past two years, everyone, including researchers in the area of narratology, wondered about the impact of an increased amount of screentime on the population and particularly on children. Many Internet platforms and social networks, particularly YouTube and reddit, have seen a

2017, it has been among the most popular channels on YouTube, with 122 million subscribers and more than 114 billion views as of December 2021. This makes CoComelon the most subscribed and viewed channel in the category “education” [4], also being in eighth place in absolute rankings related to viewership rise [5], and third in absolute subscriber numbers after the Indian music and film channel *T-series*, and the *YouTube Movies* channel [6]. Other channels are targeted at children, notably *PinkFong* *BabyShark – Kids Songs & Stories* [7], or, more recently a copycat of *CoComelon*, *Super Jojo* –

## *An examination of the structure and inner nature of the most popular Internet content can provide new insights into how we created, process and consume stories.*

rise in viewership [1]. In the case of YouTube, a significant amount of top-viewed content is obviously targeted at children [2]. This begs the question of whether YouTube videos became the main source of entertainment for children during the pandemic, also taking on the role of babysitting and providing relief for parents who were in the trap of having to work and also to take care of their kids. An examination of the structure and inner nature of the most popular Internet content can provide new insights into how we created, process and consume stories. We can also sketch out a preliminary evaluation of the fallout of pandemic restrictions.

The central subject in this paper is the YouTube channel CoComelon. An informative survey was conducted in the summer of 2021, and this allows us to reflect on some of the dimensions of narrativity which our research has put into the spotlight.

### 1.2 The CoComelon channel

The *CoComelon Nursery Rhymes & Kids Songs* was launched in 2006 as *ABC Kids TV* and re-branded in 2017. It is produced by the Treasure Studio company which was established by California resident Jay Jeon and his wife [3]. Since

*Nursery Rhymes* [8]. These are also very popular with between 20 and 50 million subscribers, but they are different from their predecessor. This leads to the question of the uniqueness or special nature of content which is produced and published on the CoComelon channel.

Since 2017, it has been noted that videos targeted at children are a significant and, therefore, visible part of YouTube [9], although YouTube has always claimed that it was never meant for children [10]. The scandal known as “Elsagate” [11] revolved around channels such as “Toy Freaks” and “Webs and Tiaras,” and this attracted attention to the problem late in 2017. The resulting public debate eventually resulted in YouTube creating the YouTube Kids platform, thus hoping to create a safer environment for underaged users [12].

That same year, 2017, CoComelon hit the magic target of one billion views, and that put it right at the top of the list in terms of popularity on YouTube. It may be no coincidence that the breakthrough video for the channel was called “No, no” Bedtime Song [13], which featured a toddler who was refusing to go to sleep and was persuaded by his older sister to do so. This coincided with the infamous popularity of

the “Toy Freaks” channel, for which a key tag phrase was “bad baby” [14].

### 1.3 Methodology

Our goal in this paper is to review the content of a set of videos which were posted around the first peak of popularity during the summer and autumn of 2017, seeking to establish those features which ensured or accelerated their success.

We have used the methods of narrative analysis of the content, combined with the findings of a survey focused on observations at home. This approach took into account two important factors – the specifically heterogeneous nature of the subject matter and the nature of our own interest. The content of the CoComelon channel is composed of videos that have a very diverse nature from many perspectives:

1. Authorship: CoComelon contains original content, but also works consider to be in the public domain such as “Wheels on the bus” or “Jack be nimble.”
2. Content: Some of the videos are animations which teach children about shapes and colours, others contain well-known kids’ songs, and still others offer highly original stories with various characters. We found that all of the videos involved music.
3. Animation techniques: Until January 2017, the CoComelon channel had 2D animation with crayon texture surfaces. Since then, most of its videos, with a few exceptions, have used 3D animation with basic colour materials and textures.
4. Publication strategies: Each type of video has its own publication strategy. Original content was usually posted on another day than were the compilation and the derivative content. The frequency of publication varied depending on the popularity of the channel.
5. Popularity: CoComelon videos usually attracted millions of views, while others had hundreds of millions of views (see the list below). This is not the case for single videos (such as “No, No Baby,” which is discussed below) but it is the trend throughout the history of the channel (see below for a further discussion of the factor of SEO algorithms).

This means that it was necessary to adjust the selection of videos so as to create a representative and coherent set of objects of inquiry. Given that our main concern was the narrative of the videos depending on their viewership, we decided that we would only take original content into account, also using content which has attracted a certain level of popularity. This mostly applied to videos with more than one billion views, except for one video that we are using as a counter-example. We selected three videos:

1. “Bath Song,” posted on May 2, 2018, with 4,500,172,620 views;
2. “Mum and Baby Blue Whale Lullaby,” posted on April 26, 2017, 5,023,305 views;
3. “Yes, Yes Vegetable Song,” posted on August 10, 2018, 2,692,480,380 views.

Also taken into account were videos which were sources or previous versions thereof. The three videos underwent partial qualitative analysis, isolating pieces of narrative and determining their place in the basic narrative structure. After this, a home observation study was conducted with children aged 3-6, the aim being to verify the hypothesis which related to the analysis of the narrative. The survey was a paper-assisted personal interview administered by a parent who was trained by the examiner. The survey involved seven Czech families living in our near Prague, and the process was conducted during the summer of 2021. Children watched each video and then were asked five questions which the parent has written down as precisely as possible (for all answers, see Table 1).

When it comes to the general methodology of child-related research, we relied on a research project conducted by David Smahel, et al., “EU Kids Online” [15, pp. 13-15]. We also used the work of Patti M. Valkenburgh and Jessica Taylor Piotrowski in terms of defining a pre-schooler [16, pp. 44-58], because the “EU Kids Online” study was focused on youngsters between the age of 9 and 17. We also used observations from other case studies of similar issues [17].

Analysis of the narrative involved methods of basic interpretation analysis of visual media. This strategy was first described by David

Bordwell and Kristin Thompson [18, p. 76]. Segmentation was elaborated for each video so as to define the main elements of the plot and the element of cinematic features such as a single take, a chance of perspective, etc. A verbal paraphrase or a quote from the lyrics was used in most cases<sup>1</sup>. The segmentation was a point of reference in analysing the answers which children gave during the survey. By comparing the answer to the relevant segment, we could judge the answer's correctness or narrativity.

### Discussion

The purpose of the research was to develop an initial sense of the topics which emerged in the reception of a YouTube channel. It was necessary to limit the selection to a single channel and to narrow the content so that it could be compared to a different sample. Because the issue of popularity was the driving force for our research, we chose two very popular videos and one that was relatively unsuccessful. We opted to examine original content because our focus was on narrative, not on SEO or factors

perceptions were analysed. This despite the fact that most of the popularity of the CoComelon channel is probably based on the number of views by English-speaking children.

We also had to ignore the musical component of the videos, because all of the “stories” that are discussed here are actually songs. It would require a different kind of research project to determine how the musical component influences the rest of the work.

Furthermore, we dealt only marginally with the issue of parental control and the general matter of videos that are simultaneously targeted to parents and kids. As we shall see below, this must have been of fairly great significance in the reception of CoComelon.

### 2 Narrativity as the recipe for success?

In an interview in *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*, the creator of the CoComelon channel, Jay Jeon, had this to say about the source of its success: “I

## *The purpose of the research was to develop an initial sense of the topics which emerged in the reception of a YouTube channel.*

of clickbait. Last but not least, our research was limited because it was a pre-study, the aim of which was to test the success and effectiveness of the proposed questionnaire, its appropriateness and clarity, and its relevance to the narratological issues that were at hand. This, therefore, cannot be taken as a source of systematic answers to the question. Instead, it is more of an incentive to encourage other lines of research.

There were some factors, of course, which we had to ignore. One was the substantial role of the English language on the Internet. In order to ensure homogeneity, children with substantial foreign language skills were excluded from the research, which means that only visual

never look up the reason why something is popular or how I can please the YouTube algorithm. I know what matters. Stories matter.” This begs the important question that should be of interest for general narratology: does the narrativity of content play an essential role in its success? To put it more simply, do stories matter?

### 2.1 Objections

First of all, several objections need to be addressed. Despite Jeon's experience as a creator, the popularity of his channel may be attributable to:

1. The algorithms or tags of YouTube, or just a coincidence;

<sup>1</sup>

Example of segmentation, see Table 1.

2. The child-pleasing *mise-en-scène* (the basic colour scheme, roundness, cute elements, the head-to-body ratio, the “Disney eyes,” etc.);
3. The characters, as opposed to the story lines.

### The power of tags and a good moment

As we have already mentioned, YouTube algorithms probably have played a crucial role in the success of the CoComelon Channel. Events related to “Elsagate” may have created hype which brought new viewers to the channel. After the first wave of bloggers pointed out the general oddness and suspiciousness of some child-targeted content [10], the mainstream media took over, spreading the news about a “weird” channel for kids among new groups of potential subscribers, particularly from middle and upper-class families. We may suppose that the scandalous nature of the issue attracted reader curiosity as much as the attempt to search for the infamous “bad baby” tag that was mentioned in the incriminating article [19]. This search, at the end of the day, affected the selection of videos and their specific presentation on YouTube. The tag “bad baby” simply coincided with the description of the CoComelon video “No, No Bedtime Song,” which was released in July 2017. This was a clear breakthrough for the channel, because the video attracted up to 1.3 billion views<sup>2</sup>.

Although it is clear that these search factors are coincidental in terms of the reason for the first big CoComelon success, it is necessary also to take into account the quality of the content. The aforementioned video remained on YouTube for five months even before hype about it began. Even after that, CoComelon managed to stay in the Top 10. The amount of dummy or copy channels (*Super Jojo – Nursery Rhymes* [20]), and the real life re-enactments (as those created by

the Milana Family Show [21]), serve to suggest that the content itself has features which ensure success apart from search engine conditions.

### The specifics of animation

CoComelon has animation which makes use of all of the trick that appeal to children, including basic colour schemes, accentuation of the roundness of objects and figures [16, p. 48], changes in the ratio of the head and body, as well as “Disney” eyes<sup>3</sup>.

Another interesting question relates to the role of 3D animation. The rise in viewership in 2017 also responded to a massive change in overall graphics from two-dimensional graphics. In their place, there were draw-alike textures and videogame kinetics for life-like 3D animation in a more stylish and polished environment. We suppose that the textures and surfaces of objects are the most significant issues, because children are notably attracted toward unstructured blocks of colour [16, p. 52].

### Characters

In the spirit of E.M. Forster [22, p. 38], we could state that the soul of tragedy is the character, not the plot, and there may be reasons to make that statement. A typical CoComelon video features a toddler named J.J. He is slightly younger than the target audience. Just as is the case with current heroic epic cycles from DC and Marvel, it may seem that the audience doesn’t care about the story that is being told, just as long as the main hero is visible. That said, there are a few outstanding features which should be considered.

First of all, not all CoComelon stories feature J.J. Many episodes are focused on one of his signals, and as of this writing, a new spin-off line is being presented, featuring Cody as the

## 2

The coincidence was suggested in a Czech article on the phenomenon (Veselý, K.: Populárnější než PewDiePie. Kanál Cocomelon je trhákem dětského internetu. Radio Wave, 3. 7. 2020, <https://wave.rozhlas.cz/popularnejsi-nez-pewdiepie-kanal-cocomelon-je-trhakem-detskeho-internetu-8231307>, last accessed 2021/9/14.), but is not stated in other literature on the problem. The pure analysis of code shows that the video in question does include the tag “no no baby”, while the infamous video of ToyFreaks carried a tag “bad baby”.

## 3

It is noteworthy that the „Disney eyes” can be successfully used also to raise interest in content for adults; for example, the movie enthusiast channel “Pitch Meeting” highlights Marvel characters by the “Disney eyes” solely to attract viewership. This trick, currently made massive by TikTok and Snapchat filter “Disney Eyes”, was, to my knowledge, first used by Lady Gaga in her music video “Bad Romance” (not in the thumbnail, but inside the video, 0:53), the first video on YouTube to cross 100 million views.



Fig. 1: Child-pleasing mise-en-scène in CoComelon content



Fig. 2. Characters on the CoComelon channel

main character along with his family. Many of the most successful CoComelon videos have no family at all. Instead they feature repetitive “zipper” songs.

Second, the CoComelon channel is specific in its method of characterisation. The level of individualisation in each character is surprising. Two examples are “Mom” and “TomTom,” who is J.J.’s older brother.

“Mom” (Fig. 2) is, at first glance, not a typical other who wears dresses, but she is characterised by what has elsewhere been described as “mum clothes” [23] – a shirt, trousers and comfortable shoes. This “presentation” combines mild realism in the depiction of the body and the clothes (wider hips, perceptible breasts, a practical outfit and hairstyle), with traditional idealisation or stereotype about motherhood

CoComelon seems to use a type of realism when dealing with the individualisation of characters. It apparently is trying to present a typical family which audiences will recognise while continuing to adhere to idealised stereotypes. A very similar combination can be seen in the stories as such.

When it comes to the individualisation of characters, CoComelon seems to be trying to use a type of realism, trying to meet a current and typical family for its audience while sticking to the idealised stereotypes. A very similar combination can be seen in the stories as such.

## 2.2 Plots

The central issue in our inquiry is whether stories matter. More precisely, we wonder whether CoComelon videos offer stories that

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(a pink and white outfit, big eyes, a permanent smile, a kind expression, and loving interaction with the children).

The same can be said about TomTom. He is a standard and stereotyped boy, but J.J.’s brother also has features which differentiate him from others – swimming goggles and overalls, which suggest certain interests and favourite activities.

are distinctly different from other film products that are targeted at children. Having discussed the three significant objections and taken away some of the insights about parts of the story, we must now focus on the most important part: the plots.

We will use the theory of narrativity and terminology that was first proposed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thomson so as to theorise

the cinematic work of art. They argued that the story consists of what is explicitly stated or inferred by the viewer, while the plot represents “everything visibly and audibly present in the film before us” [18, p. 76].

According to this terminology, the “plot” is the object of our interest. This applies to what is explicitly stated in the film along with its presentation, i.e., the form that the narrative can take in the film if it exists at all.

### Classical structure

CoComelon videos have a classical narrative structure in terms of parts of the story. J.J. usually experiences everyday experiences at home, including eating, bathing, going to a day-care centre or making popsicles with his siblings. The video always has a solid beginning that involves classic cinematic procedures (an establishing shot of a kitchen, bathroom or the sea, with the main characters arranged

when she points out that a stuffed animal wants to eat the vegetables. In the last segment, the dialogue is switched, and J.J. speaks to his mom with the same exact words that she spoke so as to persuade her to eat the broccoli. From a macro perspective, possible plots can be the drama of a mother who tries to feed her child and eventually succeeds by eating the broccoli, or a drama of J.J. overcoming his unwillingness to eat vegetables, eventually ensuring a small, but important victory of his mother. These stories may seem to be interesting, but they are more focused on adults, because in both cases, there are general prejudices and tropes such as “broccoli is disgusting.” It also, however, has the perspective of adult interests (the child needs to eat his vegetables).

Instead of accepting these plots as the only narrative, we would also like to consider smaller-scale features specifically because of the video’s repetitive nature.

## *Most videos are repetitive, tediously depicting the same activities again and again.*

in accordance with their role in the story line). There are also classical endings (an establishment shot of vegetables being eaten or both kids being clean and posing victoriously).

The question is how middle parts are structured, i.e., how is the narrative arch of the narrative transformation between the beginning and the end of achieved. We will demonstrate our observations on the basis of the lyrics of the song “Yes, Yes Vegetables,” although the same structure can be found in all of the other videos that we have surveyed. This is true in most of CoComelon productions.

It seems that at first there is a real crisis in terms of an element of plotting that would result in the denouement is missing. Most videos are repetitive, tediously depicting the same activities again and again. Adults have to wonder about the easy job of producers of videos that are targeted toward children. J.J. is offered peas, carrots, squash, beans and broccoli, refuses to eat them, but it is then persuaded by his mother

Much of YouTube content for children is repetitive or at least segmented (e.g., countless adaptations of “Wheels on the Bus” or “Finger Family”). This is familiar in the culture of children and is usually attributed to the need of young kids to encounter things that are familiar, but slightly varied. Small children have a limited attention span and need to overcome distraction [16, pp. 57-58]. When we focus on a single segment (44 seconds on average), we encounter a quite classic narrative structure involving a crisis, an attempt to resolve it, an emphasis on how it is overcome, and then a triumphant resolution. This can be seen in the segment which has to do with peas, with the original version of “Yum, Yum Vegetables.”

**M:** Peas, peas, it’s time to eat your peas!  
exposition

**JJ:** No, no, no, I don’t want to eat the peas!  
problem (collision)

**M:** Please, please! The peas are good for you!  
effort for a solution

**JJ:** No, no, no, I don’t like them, ew! crisis

**M:** See, see, Teddy likes the peas!



**M:** Peas, peas, it's time to eat your peas!  
**JJ:** Yes, yes, yes, I want to eat my peas! [< No, no, no, I don't want to eat the peas!]  
**M:** Good, good! The peas are good for you!  
**JJ:** Yay, yay, yay, I love them, oooh! [< No, no, no, I don't like them, ew!]  
**M:** See, see, Teddy likes them too!  
 One, two, three! He ate them up, you see!  
**JJ:** Ha! Ha! Ha! The peas are all gone now! [< No, no, no, they're mine! I'll eat them now!!]  
 Yum, yum, yum, we like them, wow! [< ... I like them...]

The structure of the plot is the same, and we believe that by keeping it while eliminating the conflict helped the video to achieve the necessary epic solidness, creating an odd mixture of assurance and uncertainty. The shivering of the narrative conflict remains evident in the texture, but on the surface, the external manifestation of the video is entirely unconflicted.

### Slight variations

When we carefully observe the singular stories in the segment, we discover minor variations in each episode, which Raphaël Baroni has called narrative tension or the dynamic of what is

and it is once again presented with the repetitive scheme at the microlevel of each segment. "Yes, Yes Vegetables" has a fairly sophisticated plot at the macrolevel, but at the microlevel there are small and innovative stories. We understand that this is not an attempt to appeal to various target groups such as adults, older children, preschool children and toddlers, instead being a feature of a semantically rich and engaging plot. Here we can recall that this feature was described by Jay Jeon as "stories matter."

### Realism

The described innovativeness of the narrative can be distinguished from other interesting features in CoComelon videos [25]. We can spot individual actions which the characters perform despite their stereotypical nature. Mom eats the peas instead of the stuffed animal. JJ throws away his sponge after he sees his brother doing the same. In both cases, we can say that these are "human" reactions which might even evoke or empathy and our interest.

This shows that CoComelon is a very clever blend of the familiar and the new. The story is not particularly innovative at the macrolevel,

## *It can be said, indeed, that these "stories," or, more precisely, these "plots do matter."*

known and unknown [24, p. 55]. The drama this time involved proper cutlery that is to be used for each type of vegetable, as well as JJ's ability to understand this:

**Peas:** The peas fall from the folk, and Mom recommends a spoon  
**Carrots:** JJ eats carrots with his hands, and Mom recommends a fork  
**Squash:** JJ is using a spoon, the squash is dropping, and mom recommends a fork  
**Beans:** JJ eats beans with his hands, and Mom recommends a spoon  
**Broccoli:** Mom eats broccoli with her hands, JJ recommends a fork

What initially seems to be the story of a mother who is feeling her child is actually a drama related to a toddler learning how to use cutlery. This plot is more appropriate for the target audience,

but it is fanatically innovative at the microlevel of each segment. The characters are obviously "animated" in that they move around in a very stereotypical manner, but they are truly brought to life through small and individualized actions than would be the case, e.g., with a realistic mapping of their clothes or careful work on the texture of their hair and skin. CoComelon does not represent any excessive quality in animation, but we can perceive that the correct elaboration of the individual narrative actions can ensure more popularity than is the case with cinematic qualities. It can be said, indeed, that these "stories," or, more precisely, these "plots do matter." In the sense that dealing with the behaviour of the characters and the links between the behaviour and the plot represents a better investment of the filmmaker's time than is the case with working on the animation as such.

### 3 Narrative Features

In order Our next question is whether and to what extent our survey supported our hypothesis. Figure 1 shows a complete list of survey an-

swers. Given the minimal nature of this process, we only take it as grounds to point out three noticeable features which concert narrativity: the pleasure of retardation, the importance of characters, and the nature of the underlying process.

<b>Section A</b>					
Video	Have you seen it?	Did you enjoy it? Why?	Who was it about?	What happened?	How did it end?
Bath Song (a)	No	Yes, because it is nice	Baby and boy	They bathed	Well
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, it is nice	Two whales	They were playing	Well
Vegetables (c)	No	Yes, it is nice	Mom and baby	Baby ate	Well
<b>Subject B</b>					
Bath Song (a)	Yes, on a tablet	Yes, because it is beautiful	I don't know - me and my brother, both of us	They bathed with sponges	They did this (final pose)
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, because it was beautiful	Fish, I was there, the baby, the big fish was the mom	A boy was sleeping, nothing, they sang	Well
Vegetables (c)	Yes, on a tablet	Yes, because it was very beautiful	Me and mommy	He ate	Well
<b>Subject C</b>					
Bath Song (a)	First time	Yes, don't know	Baby and boy	Bathing and adding more toys	Don't know
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, they did somersaults	Whales	Spinning and splashing water	They continued to somersault
Vegetables (c)	NO	Yes, don't know	Baby and mom	He couldn't pick up the spoon	Mommy gave him a stuffed animal and they pretended
<b>Subject D</b>					
Bath Song (a)	Yes	Yes, it seemed odd that the boat floated	Baby and big boy	Washed themselves	They were moving
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, because it was twice	Small whale, big whale	Swimming, spinning and then straight to the other side	They continued to swim
Vegetables (c)	I don't think so	Yes, I liked how they fed each other (many times for the boy, once for mom)	Boy and mom	They ate	Mom ate last
<b>Subject E</b>					
Bath Song (a)	No	Yes, because they put foam on their hair	Baby and his brother	Foam everywhere - hands feet	The same
Blue whale (b)	No	Yes, daddy held the club, they spun, water splashed out of their holes, they looked at fish	Whales	Nothing	They both splashed and smiled at each other
Vegetables (c)	I guess not	Yes, mommy showed him how to eat properly, then baby would show some to mommy	Mommy and baby	Nothing some broccoli	Baby gave mommy

**Table 2.** Fig. 3. Results of the survey

### Retardation

On the basis of Shklovskij's theory of prose, we can see a source of aesthetic pleasure first and foremost as a pleasure about retardation. Just as we rejoice at Roland blowing the Olifant three times [26, pp.27-28], children enjoy the typical mommy, the cute baby and the brightly coloured environment in which the same things are done all over again.

Some answers to the second question (*Did you like it? Why?*) seem to confirm the hypothesis. The most common answer (6 of 15, but only from two subjects) was *"Because it was beautiful/nice."* One striking answer touched upon the nature of Shklovskij's notion of retardation as the nucleus of art: *"Because it happened twice"* (D2b). There were also common answers about the content as such (6 of 15): *"It seemed odd that*

*and boy"* (A3a), *"Whales"* (a3b), *"Baby and mom"* (A3c), *"Fish, I was there, the baby, the big fish was the mom"* (B3b). This also applied to all answers from subjects C, D and E. Subject B's answers were also correct if we take into account self-identification with the main characters: *"Me and mommy"* (B3c), *"I don't know – me and my brother, both of us"* (B3a). This shows that the characters do play an important role in terms of how children respond to the videos.

The creators of the relevant merchandising strategies surely know about this, and it is supported by another statement from Jeon in his interview in *The Independent*:

*"We've tried to create characters that are adorable, likeable and universally relatable. We began to think of JJ, YoYo and TomTom as our*

## ***The familiarity of the action, however, is not the only element of a successful story. The other is a processual and sequential nature.***

*the boat floated"* (D2a), *"Yes, they did somersaults"* (C2b), and *"Yes, because they put foam in their hair"* (E2a). Some subjects even took the question as an incentive to repeat the whole plot: *"Yes, I liked how they fed each other (many times for the boy, once for mom)"* (D2c). The same was true with all of the answers from Subject E.

We understand this as an ability to determine elements of the plot. The subjects determine the activities (putting foam, feeding, doing somersaults, floating) and the agents (they, the boat, the mom, the boy), then attributing an emotional assessment to them (weird, funny, I liked...). We believe that this shows that at least in some cases, children do pay attention to plots and their basic components.

### The characters once again

Second, it seems that the focus on the character is very real. The third question, *"Who was it about?"* had to be added, because children were constantly discussing the plot by naming characters. Answers to the third question are appropriate for the reference segmentation: *"Baby*

*imaginary kids, and over time, we built a family around them – parents, grandparents, animal friends and school classmates"* [3].

As is the case with Batman and Sheldon Cooper, however, some episodes are enjoyed more than others. As we keep the importance of characters in mind, let us now move toward the third feature.

### Familiar processes

Our content analysis showed that CoComelon videos do not tell real stories. They all depict very familiar processes which the children who took part in the survey had no problem in understanding. In 12 of 15 cases, the respondents identified the main plot correctly: *"They were playing"* (A4b), *"The baby ate"* (A4c), *"They bathed with sponges"* (B4c), *"They were bathing and adding more toys"* (D4a). Our assumption is that this is exactly the familiarity of the process which enables the viewer to understand the plot. This is adequate to the media preferences of pre-schoolers which are well known [16, p. 57].

The familiarity of the action, however, is not the only element of a successful story. The other is a processual and sequential nature. Pre-schoolers know about bathing and eating, and they are sure about the order in which those take place. The child's lifetime experience allows his or her to arrange things in the proper order. First the bathtub is filled with water, then toys are put into it, etc. Small variations in this succession and even innovations are no obstacle as long as the general sequence is not abandoned. Processes such as bathing and eating offer the advantage of having precise and distinctive beginnings and endings.

The point is that these videos do not construct a story as a narrative sequence which is above the child's unformed experience. On the contrary, the narrative sequences are present in the experience of kids, the observation which reminds us of the foundational statements about the nature of narrative configuration [27, p. 53]. The filmmaker's job is to find the right story which his target audience will know already so that the audience can follow it and appreciate it. Repetition plays such a crucial role in children's videos, and it should be seen as a repetition of familiar processes featuring popular characters and well-liked media features.

Last but not least, let us emphasise the fact that this familiar process is responsible for the story's narrative energy. Apart from dynamism which relates to the conditions of the film medium, there is a considerable lack of agency in these videos. JJ is moved by his mother from

one kind of vegetable to another. His brother fills the tub and then throws toys. Were it not for the inexorable order of these processes, such acts would be seen as shifting the narrative, and JJ would become noting more than a secondary character in the story. Precisely because the subject matter is as regular as a natural process, the roles of mom and the brother can be pushed back a bit so that the little dramas of JJ can unfold (what cutlery he should use, whether he should throw away the sponge, etc.).

#### 4 Conclusion

We have sought to provide an overview of the CoComelon channel, and with the help of a very limited study of reception, we have outlined why narrativity might be its core feature. We concluded that among other actors, the videos exhibit narrativity as their main element. It is narrativity, however, which is somewhat non-standard. First of all, it occurs on a very small scale of one segment that lasts for 40 seconds. Second, it is brought to life by striking a careful balance between innovation and familiarity in the construction of the characters and of the "plots." In thinking about the dynamism of what is known and unknown, we must distinguish between the macrolevel of the story and the microlevel of its individual segments. One observation is that innovation at the macrolevel is not desirable and that familiar processes of very good sequential nature must stand as a foundation. Therefore, we assume that this underlying process is in fact Jay Jeon's *story that matters*.

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### Pictures:

Fig 1: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCbCmjCuTUZos6Inko4u57UQ>

Fig 2: <https://cocomelon.com/pages/about>



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