

Ozgur KILINC*
Ali ARICI**
Sadik CALISKAN***

South Korean YouTubers as Cultural Intermediaries: An Analysis within the Framework of Community Relations

Abstract

YouTube has increasingly emerged as a prominent platform for cultural dissemination and community management, offering content creators the capacity to sustain real-time audience interaction and dynamic forms of cultural representation. This study examines the role of South Korean YouTubers as cultural intermediaries and investigates how they manage community relations through their vlog content. Employing a qualitative netnographic framework combined with interpretive content analysis, the study analysed a corpus of 10 videos drawn from five major South Korean daily-life vlog channels: “Jhyun,” “Hamimommy,” “Honeyjubu,” “planD,” and “KitchenStory” each with subscriber bases ranging from 601,000 to over 3 million. The findings reveal that these mega-scale vloggers construct their content around “slow and calm life at home,” centering daily routines, Korean culinary culture, and domestic aesthetics. Rather than relying on direct calls to action, they sustain community engagement through viewer feedback embedded in video content. Operating as “local cultural intermediaries,” these content creators function as digital ambassadors of the Korean Wave (Hallyu), popularizing K-vlog and K-video formats as a distinct pillar of K-culture’s digital dimension.

Keywords: Cultural mediation, community relations, Hallyu, YouTube, South Korean YouTubers

1 Introduction

YouTube, one of the most significant examples of Web 2.0, emerged in 2005 as a platform allowing amateur users to share videos online (Morreale, 2014). Embodying participatory culture (Burgess & Green, 2009) and attracting more than 2.49 billion monthly users in 2024 (Mortensen, 2024), YouTube stands as one of the most prominent content-sharing platforms.

As a space for sharing, creativity, community, and reciprocal dialogue within video content, YouTube occupies a central position in vlog culture (Smith, 2017) and functions as a meeting point for diverse communities involved in the production and distribution of media content (Jenkins, 2007). YouTube, which users engage with for motivations such as leisure, entertainment, in-

* Inonu University, Türkiye, ozgur.kilinc@inonu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0002-8697-162X, corresponding author

** Bilecik Seyh Edebali University, Türkiye, ali.arici@bilecik.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-4027-8288

*** Inonu University, Türkiye, sadik.caliskan@inonu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-6899-0424

formation seeking, and socialization, constitutes a rich site for analyzing self-presentation strategies, cultural representations, and community dynamics. The platform's participatory affordances enable aspiring celebrities to engage in practices of self-branding and self-celebritization, thereby allowing them to cultivate and sustain a fan-based audience (Hou, 2019).

YouTube personalities, commonly known as vloggers or YouTubers, constitute a distinct genre of celebrity (Tolbert & Drogos, 2019). Vloggers embody the authentic and lived realities of „ordinary“ people, foregrounding their daily lives, thoughts, and emotions (Berryman, 2020), while simultaneously undertaking multiple roles as producer, model, and online „friend“ (Choi & Lee, 2019). Celebritization is embedded in YouTube's very structure (Smith, 2016), and such content creators may be described as micro-celebrities – „ordinary individuals who gain substantial followings on social media platforms“ (Driessens, 2016, p. 378). Unlike traditional celebrities who leverage existing fame to launch video channels, YouTubers utilize video channels to attain celebrity status (Berryman & Kavka, 2017), constructing their self-presentation carefully as a platform for a branded personality (Smith, 2014, p. 256). YouTube has emerged as a prominent space for the rise and development of micro-celebrity culture (Grusauskaite, 2025). Thus, digital natives transform into micro-celebrities (Gupta et al., 2025).

Drawing on the concept of “attention capital,” Smith (2017, p. 701) emphasizes that vloggers transform their fame into a commercial resource. For YouTubers, who garner attention through their online personas as a form of cultural capital (Radu, 2021), the primary objective of creating and sharing videos is to attract and influence audiences, enhance their popularity, and generate revenue through advertisements and their reputation (Wu et al., 2024). YouTubers offer a fantasy space in which viewers can escape from reality (Arnesson, 2023). It can be posited that this fantasy space is also reflected in viewer commentary. The aim of this study is to examine the role of South Korean YouTubers in cultural mediation and community relationship management. Within the qualitative framework of the study, YouTubers were positioned as “cultural intermediaries,” and an interpretive content analysis was conducted to examine how they sustain the dynamics of community relations in their videos.

While existing research on Korean YouTubers has largely focused on K-pop, K-beauty, and mukbang content, daily life vloggers as cultural intermediaries and community managers remain underexplored. This study addresses this gap by examining how South Korean daily life vloggers navigate cultural intermediation and community relations within the broader context of Hallyu.

2 Literature review

2.1 YouTubers as Cultural Intermediaries

The term “cultural intermediaries” holds significance in examining the producers of symbolic value (Maguire & Matthews, 2012, p. 551). The starting point for discussions on cultural intermediaries is generally Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), and the concept can be defined by occupations within the cultural industries, including media (Maguire & Matthews, 2010). This term is associated with commentary regarding the “new petite bourgeoisie,” a new segment of middle-class workers that has been growing and expanding its sphere of influence since the mid-20th century (Negus, 2002, p.

502). The “new petite bourgeoisie” refers to a new social class with distinctive tastes and cultural practices (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 226). It can be said that Bourdieu used the term “new cultural agents” to refer to a particular kind of “new petty-bourgeois occupation” associated with cultural interpretations in the mass media (Hesmondhalgh, 2006, p. 226).

Cultural intermediaries manifest themselves in “all occupations involving presentation and representation (sales, marketing, advertising, public relations, fashion, decoration, and so on) and in all institutions providing symbolic goods and services” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 359). Furthermore, producers of cultural programs on television and radio, critics for quality newspapers and magazines, and all writers and journalists can also be termed cultural intermediaries (Bourdieu, 1996). It can be stated that both new and old cultural intermediaries are defined as such because they “mediate” between producers and consumers (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Furthermore, cultural intermediaries can be characterized as: a) individuals or groups acting as mediators between cultures; b) professions expected to transmit cultural values within a society; and c) individuals or groups involved in the transmission process between the creators of creative products and cultural values and their receivers (Stachowiak, 2019, p. 227).

Cultural intermediaries develop their own ways, involving myths, rituals, and norms to make sense of their work (Lee, 2012); defined by their role of mediating between production and consumption, they possess a broad pedagogical function that shapes perceptions and preferences to mobilize consumer actions along desired routes (Maguire & Matthews, 2010). Bourdieu posits that symbolic production lies at the heart of the work of cultural intermediaries; this often entails the use of advertising, marketing, and promotional techniques, whereby they shape both use and exchange values (Negus, 2002). Operating between the moments of production and consumption, cultural intermediaries are concerned not only with the circulation of commodities but also with the discourses regarding their meaning (Woo, 2012). Therefore, operating at the intersection of culture and economy, cultural intermediaries perform significant functions in the production and promotion of consumption (Matthews & Maguire, 2014). On the other hand, intermediaries can be situated at the boundaries of multiple fields, not only between culture and economy but also amongst culture, society, and community (Perry et al., 2015). Lonergan et al. (2018) state that cultural intermediaries are an integral part of value formation in consumer society as a result of their ability to shape collective consciousness by inhabiting and mobilizing legitimized ideal subject positions. Within the global culture industry, cultural intermediaries and their associated values, tastes, and lifestyles exert a significant influence on the shaping of the production and consumption of popular culture (Kobayashi, 2012).

Within the framework of digital intermediation, it appears plausible to position YouTubers, who are also social media influencers, as cultural intermediaries. It is safe to assert that the lifestyles, recommendations, and values of the influencers hold significant influence over their viewers. This effect manifests itself in the shaping of attitudes, just as it does in influencer marketing. Digital intermediation is a process of content production and consumption that incorporates the cultural characteristics of technologies, actors, and automation (Hutchinson, 2023, p. 3289). One of the actors that emerged in digital media ecology through cultural mediation is social media influencers (Hutchinson, 2020). Influencers typically devote substantial time and effort to constructing and maintaining their personal brands, which involve a combination of their expertise, personal narratives, and online presence (Perez & Sokolova, 2023).

While social media functions as an intermediary platform (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2018), social media actors exhibit characteristics like cultural intermediaries (Hutchinson, 2017), and multi-channel networks such as YouTube are designated as intermediaries (Lobato, 2016; Siciliano, 2023). Given that social media is an intermediary platform and social media actors exhibit characteristics like cultural intermediaries, YouTubers qualify as a component of the “new cultural intermediaries” (Lee & Cho, 2021, p. 72). Similarly, bloggers are also designated as intermediaries (Uzunoglu & Misci-Kip, 2014). Influencers act as cultural arbiters deciding on what is deemed fashionable, attractive, and desirable (Hurley, 2024). Consequently, the content itself qualifies as an intermediary since it is generated by influencers, released on platforms, and subsequently consumed and engaged with by users (Locatelli, 2020). In this context, YouTubers, bearing the distinction of “cultural arbiters,” can be positioned as cultural intermediaries who produce content within the framework of various themes such as health, fashion, personal care, travel, food, and daily life and establish communities through this content. Similarly, in a study examining the Hallyu phenomenon, Yoon (2023a) terms Korean YouTubers “local cultural intermediaries.”

The social media ecosystem drives the attention economy, which relies on online visibility (Demelius & Yoshida, 2025). The term “attention economy” is often used to describe the market dynamics of social media influencers (Kubler, 2023). Thus, YouTubers can be positioned within the framework of “attention capital.” Attention capital is understood as a resource that can be converted into economic, social, and symbolic gains (Mears, 2023). A “YouTube personality” draws attention, keeping the platform engaging and dynamic (Rosamond, 2023).

The latest phase of cultural intermediation is shaped by the growing role of platforms, social media influencers, and algorithms (Hutchinson, 2020). Influencers as cultural intermediaries rearticulate the boundaries between production and consumption (Colucci & Pedroni, 2026). Within the context of YouTube, the concept of the cultural intermediary requires more nuanced application, as vloggers perform functions beyond merely connecting culture with audiences. They serve as content creators, curators of everyday life, self-branded figures, micro-celebrities, entrepreneurs, and community managers simultaneously (Hou, 2019; Driessens, 2016; Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Tur-Viñes & González-Río, 2019; Duffy & Hund, 2015).

Their responsibilities extend beyond the transfer of cultural meanings; they actively shape, present, and often commercialize these meanings in alignment with platform-specific dynamics. Thus, vloggers function at the crossroads of various domains, such as the social media landscape, commercial cultural intermediation, and the advertising sector (Hou, 2019). Consequently, YouTube vloggers can be characterized as digital cultural intermediaries, whose activities are closely linked to algorithmic visibility, audience engagement, brand collaborations, and the enactment of authenticity (Bishop, 2019; Berryman, 2020; McRoberts, 2016; Gannon & Prothero, 2018). This perspective underscores that their intermediary role is not neutral, but is shaped by the commercial, affective, and technical structures inherent to digital platforms.

2.2 South Korean YouTubers

The term “Korean Wave” (Hallyu) symbolizes the export of cultural products such as television dramas, popular music, animation, and digital games and the rapid growth of Korea’s cultural industries since 1997 (Yoon & Jin, 2017, p. xi). The concept of the “Korean Wave” emphasizes the intense level of interest Korean culture has garnered in the international are-

na. It can be stated that with the advent of social media platforms, content related to Korean culture has become increasingly prominent. With YouTube's involvement in transnational media consumption, K-drama and K-pop have reached global audiences more extensively (Ju, 2018). YouTube has significantly transformed K-pop's global standing, particularly as a cultural force (Ono & Kwon, 2013). In this context, it can be stated that YouTube has been instrumental in the dissemination of Korean popular culture. In South Korea, YouTube serves as the primary medium for the personal media content market (An et al., 2023) and constitutes the most used social media platform (Statista, 2024). As interest in Korean culture among viewers residing outside Korea increases, the number of South Korean YouTubers providing subtitles in foreign languages has increased correspondingly (Cho & Suh, 2021). In this light, it can be posited that content created by Korean YouTubers captures the attention of international audiences. On the other hand, alongside content generated by South Korean influencers, there also exists content such as *The Korean Englishman* and *Eat Your Kimchi*, produced by non-Korean vloggers interested in Korean culture (Kim et al., 2018; Oh & Oh, 2017).

It has become an increasingly prevalent trend for foreign influencers in South Korea to promote Korean culture, particularly through genres such as mukbang, beauty vlogs, and reaction videos (Lee & Abidin, 2022). On the other hand, it can be argued that the content in question is created by both Koreans and those with an interest in Korean culture. Mukbang, one of the popular forms of content on YouTube, is a video format featuring the content creator eating (Sung & Lee, 2024), wherein vloggers consume large quantities of food (Kiaer, 2020). Many YouTubers producing mukbang content rank among the most influential YouTubers in Korea (Yoon, 2023b). Furthermore, Korean beauty influencers or K-beauty vloggers on YouTube play a significant role in the concept of "Korean beauty" becoming a trend across Asia, America, and Europe (Aldilla-Audy & Hapsarani, 2021).

User-generated content related to South Korea spanning themes such as K-pop, celebrities, tourist attractions, and food is extensively produced by both Koreans and non-Koreans (Lee & Cho, 2021). YouTube is effective in promoting K-pop, particularly due to the visual nature of K-pop performances (Oh, 2017). Lee and Abidin (2024, p. 409) posit that for younger generations in Korea, influencers and creative industries are perceived in two ways: as a "cultural object" to be enjoyed, and as an "envy space" where they can channel their dissatisfaction. Park and Chun (2022), on the other hand, state that beauty and fashion YouTubers share mundane themes to build intimacy with viewers, yet they have simultaneously become objects of social comparison and ideal beauty standards in Korea. In-Young (2023) posits that Korean YouTubers creating content on beauty and makeup themes have garnered global acclaim not only for their instant popularity but also for their expertise, thereby creating a ripple effect in the diffusion of K-beauty content to diverse cultural spheres worldwide. Similarly, Ji-hye (2015) notes that Korean YouTubers producing makeup-themed content reach worldwide audiences through their witty commentary, engaging content, and professional makeup skills.

2.3 Community Relations and YouTubers

Influencers play an important role in community formation and development (Shang & Ghriga, 2019). Blogs were initially viewed as a means of being heard, forming communities, and establishing connections (Archer, 2019). Users may join communities within the framework of social media usage motivations such as "social interaction, information seeking, pass time, entertainment, relaxation, communicatory utility, convenience utility, expression of

opinion, information sharing, and surveillance/knowledge about others” (Whiting & Williams, 2013, p. 362). Vlogs, as a form of social media entertainment, appeal to a variety of communities (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). An online community is defined as “a group converging around a shared interest, interacting via a virtual platform, producing user-generated content accessible to all community members, while simultaneously fostering a shared culture and adhering to specific norms” (Rotman & Preece, 2010, p. 320). On the other hand, a community of practice is defined as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002, as cited in Tur-Viñes & González-Río, 2019, pp. 1293-1294). The definition appears to be adaptable to YouTubers. For instance, a YouTuber creating music content can bring together users who possess an interest in music. On the other hand, entertainment and relaxation are also significant factors in community formation. Furthermore, mutual engagement (social interaction, relationships, mutual help, joint activities), a shared repertoire (language, shared resources, styles, and documents), and a comprehensive vision of the joint enterprise (negotiated enterprise, local and shared accountability) hold importance in community relations (Wenger et al., 2002, as cited in Tur-Viñes & González-Río, 2019, p. 1294).

The YouTube network represents a grassroots community engaged in cultural consumption, criticism, and content creation (Xu et al., 2017), and YouTubers, who can be characterized as “creative entrepreneurs” (Duffy & Hund, 2015, p. 1), are effective in sustaining the community dynamic in question. In other words, YouTubers play a role in fostering and maintaining community relationships. The content created is effective in developing a community relationship, and responding to the comments of the audience is effective in making this relationship sustainable. YouTubers not only establish social relationships with viewers but also open a participatory space wherein various forms of interaction with each video can be observed (Lee, 2021). This phenomenon is attributable to YouTube’s structure, which provides a foundation for participation. It appears feasible to elucidate the community relationship management of YouTubers based on the 4C (connectivity, conversations, content creation and collaboration) approach (Ang, 2011, pp. 34-35).

Through the elements designated as the 4Cs, YouTubers can establish connections and engage in conversations with participants. Content creation serves as another effective element in managing community relationships; thus, developing a collaborative communicative strategy with viewers is crucial. For YouTubers who can be positioned as “individual brands”, these elements are as essential for vloggers as they are for institutions in sustaining their personal public relations efforts.

YouTube can be considered a community-building activity that establishes connections between the individual interests and agendas of vloggers and the similar thoughts of viewers (Lee, 2021). Within this framework, vloggers provide a forum for individuals to discuss their lives, articulate their emotions and opinions, and interact with other users (Morris & Anderson, 2015). Interaction serves as the foundation of the vlogger community (Warmbrodt et al., 2008), and YouTubers establish potential communities by producing vlogs (Lee, 2021). Viewer investment in vloggers hinges not only on video content but also on the YouTuber’s ability to combine “natural” self-presentation with “technologies of digital intimacy”; thus, affective relationships can be considered the primary component of their success (Berryman & Kavka, 2017, p. 309).

3 Method

The aim of this study is to examine the role of South Korean YouTubers in cultural mediation and community relationship management. To this end, the study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How do South Korean daily life YouTubers function as cultural intermediaries in the context of the Korean Wave?

RQ2: What strategies do South Korean YouTubers employ to manage community relations through their vlog content?

RQ3: How do the visual, narrative, and spatial characteristics of South Korean daily life vlogs reflect and reinforce Korean culture?

This study employs a netnographic approach, utilizing interpretive content analysis as the data analysis technique, to examine the content generated by South Korean YouTubers. Netnography is defined as ethnography adapted to the study of online communities and cultures. Specifically, it is a novel qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to study the cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications (Kozinets, 2002, pp. 61-62). Furthermore, netnography is grounded in the principle that a human vantage point shaped by anthropological training and situated temporally, historically, and culturally is intended for purposes related to identity, language, ritual, imagery, symbolism, subculture, and many other elements requiring cultural understanding (Kozinets et al., 2018, p. 231). Conducting netnography is like trying to interpret meaning from an expansive written record (Kozinets, 2021, p. 9). In practice, netnography enables the researcher to observe communication within publicly available online forums (Nelson & Otnes, 2005).

There are two important elements of netnographic data collection. The first of these consists of data directly copied by researchers from the computer-mediated communications of online community members, while the second comprises data recorded regarding the researchers' observations (Kozinets, 2002). It can be stated that the data in question are "conversational cultural data" (Hassan & Casaló Ariño, 2016).

Kozinets (2002, p. 63) outlines five stages for netnographic research: *entrée* (identifying research questions and suitable online forums), data collection (observing and recording community interactions), analysis and interpretation (coding and contextualizing communicative acts), research ethics (ensuring transparency and participant anonymity), and member checks (validating findings with participants). Together, these stages guide the systematic and ethical conduct of netnographic inquiry.

Haggerty (2004) states that ethical issues remain unresolved among qualitative researchers conducting online research, noting that some researchers regard online data as public statements. Given that the content is public, or more precisely, that these platforms function as "public communication media" (Langer & Beckman, 2005, p. 197), a decision was made to forego informing the community members. Consequently, this study adopts an observational netnographic approach, characterized by the researchers' non-participation and undisclosed presence within the online community (Kozinets, 2006; Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003).

3.1 Research Corpus

The research corpus comprises content produced by South Korean YouTubers creating daily life-themed vlogs. Given the vast scope of YouTube content produced in South Korea, purposive sampling was employed to define the boundaries of the corpus. In purposive sampling, decisions regarding the individuals to be included in the sample are made by the researcher based on various criteria (Jupp, 2006). In this regard, the first criterion is that the vloggers included in the sample produce content within the framework of the daily life theme.

Daily life vlogs constitute a popular form of vlogging that reflects various activities of vloggers, such as waking up, eating, commuting to work, and non-work activities (Chattopadhyay et al., 2021). These vlogs represent videos in which vloggers present their daily lives in a documentary style, communicating with their audience through subtitles and voiceovers to provide explanations regarding what is transpiring in the video (Choe, 2024a). Serving as public diaries, vlogs enable individuals to publicly share their daily lives with anonymous others (Choe, 2024b). In this vein, Ibrahim (2021, pp. 331-339) posits that vlogs, as cultural artifacts, bear witness to the everyday as a “structure of feeling” from the perspective of others. Furthermore, the “home” comes to the fore as a space within daily life vlogs; specifically, Abidin (2020) states that the home is one of the oldest and most prevalent settings for YouTube vlogs.

The second criterion for determining the study sample was developed based on the definition of the concept of “YouTuber.” In the study, the concept in question is defined based on three elements (Himma-Kadakas et al., 2018, p. 55): (a) regularly uploading videos to YouTube, (b) becoming famous through YouTube, and (c) having a regular group of subscribers. In this context, the criterion that the YouTubers included in the sample must have uploaded a minimum of 24 videos within the last six months was adopted. Furthermore, given that YouTubers are generally termed “micro-celebrities” the criterion that the YouTubers subject to analysis must possess a minimum of 1,000 subscribers was considered (Abidin, 2021).

Based on the criteria, the YouTube channels named “Jhyun”, “Hamimommy”, “Honeyjubu”, “planD”, and “KitchenStory” were subjected to analysis in line with purposive sampling, owing to their status as some of the most followed Korean vloggers (Chin, 2023; StarNgage, 2025; SocialBlade, 2025; HypeAuditor, 2025).

The five channels selected for analysis are all operated by female content creators who joined the platform between 2018 and 2020. At the time of data collection (June 2025), subscriber counts ranged from 601,000 (KitchenStory) to 3 million (Jhyun), with total view counts between approximately 78 million and 366 million. Individual video counts range from 208 to 347 uploads per channel. The average subscriber age falls between 23.7 and 27, with female viewers comprising 85–88% of each channel’s audience. While all five channels are centered on daily life vlogging, their content varies in focus: Jhyun and planD document solo living and everyday routines, Hamimommy and Honeyjubu foreground family life and domestic labor, and KitchenStory centers on Korean culinary culture and home cooking. All five channels offer multilingual subtitles ranging from 7 to 23 languages, reflecting their deliberate orientation toward international audiences.

Initially, a minimum of five videos from each vlogger were screened via random sampling to gain insight into their content strategies; ultimately, the unit of analysis was established as their all-time most popular content and the most viewed videos of 2025, comprising a total of 10 videos. The all-time most popular videos serve to characterize the channel, whereas the most watched vlogs of 2025 facilitate up-to-date monitoring; together, they form the basis of the research. Drawing upon the interpretative content analysis technique, the YouTu-

bers' video content was examined through the observation of visual images, sound, and text (Sofian, 2020, p. 883). On the other hand, viewer comments, along with videos from the YouTubers featuring specific themes (e.g., compilations, travel, education, shopping), were excluded from the analysis.

4 Data Analysis

YouTube vlogs constitute a rich source of data (Fullenkamp, 2019); within the scope of this research, YouTubers' visual content was treated as data (Nassauer & Legewie, 2021) and analyzed using the interpretative content analysis technique. Content analysis presupposes the need to look behind surface appearances to discover real meanings (Rose, 2002); in this vein, the objective of qualitative content analysis technique is to uncover diverse forms of "meaning" (Preiser et al., 2022, p. 272). Drawing upon an inductive framework, interpretative content analysis moves beyond literal coding (Hodge et al., 2021). Content analysis can also be utilized to evaluate visual data such as videos and images (Pennington, 2017). YouTube is a platform where visuality comes to the fore. Since visuality occupies a central place in everyday life and social media platforms (Highfield & Leaver, 2016), the study utilized interpretive content analysis of both textual and visual materials. The videos of the YouTubers were examined holistically, while each vlog created by each vlogger was considered an individual unit of analysis (Sui et al., 2022). Accordingly, the researchers followed a process wherein they: a) watched each video to acquire a first impression; b) scrutinized the video to reflect on this impression and determine which elements supported or refuted their initial readings; and c) returned to the video to consider how it could be engaged with (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018, pp. 81–82), thereby attempting to interpret it based on content analysis categories. During the application of interpretative content analysis, various categories found in the relevant literature were utilized. The main rationale for selecting these categories is that they serve as a guide for researchers when conducting interpretive content analysis. The categories in question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories of Interpretative Content Analysis

Spatial Context Abidin (2020)	• Slow living at home: Staying indoors and spending time for leisure • Narrating daily routines through visual rhythms: Rhythms of daily life (waking up, preparing breakfast, etc.) • Aestheticizing the home setting: Home-based recreational activities • Slow home life as a process of relaxation • The implicit means of monetization: Brand collaborations • Home as a café: Home cafés, a subgenre of slow living at home, where one can recreate a café-style ambience and food in the comfort of their own home. • Quality solo dining • Slow cooking and eating • Highlighting the dishwasher • Spending time at home as a lifestyle
Engagement and interaction Fuente-Cobo et al. (2023) Vlahovic et al. (2023)	• The number of views, likes, and comments of the analyzed content; total number of videos on the channel, and total number of subscribers, etc. • Calls for likes/subscriptions: Requests for viewers to like the video or subscribe to the channel • Calls for comments: Requests for viewers to leave comments • Responding to comments • Gifts or Q&A sessions
Vlog activity Choe (2024a)	• Commuting to work, meeting friends, shopping, dining in or out, running errands, cooking at home, cleaning the house, and exercising, etc.
Visual narrative del Río Carral et al. (2021)	• Characters: The YouTuber as the main character; the presence of other people or a pet; physical appearance, makeup, and attire, etc. • Logos and brands: Presence of specific logos and brands
Signs and symbols Vlahovic et al. (2023)	• Visual motifs: Repeating visual elements or styles. For instance, specific camera angles, color palettes/schemes, relevant product placements, and the spatial arrangement of the setting based on the topic or genre.
Camera angles and shot scales Zhang (2018)	• Video Editing: Rapid cuts, slow-motion sequences, and musical scoring. Camera Angles: Overhead shot, high angle, eye-level, low angle, and oblique angle (Giannetti, 2014, p. 13, as cited in Zhang, 2018). • Shot Scales: Extreme Close-Up (ECU), Close-Up (CU), Medium Close-Up (MCU), Medium Shot (MS), Medium Long Shot (MLS), and Long Shot (LS). (Smith, 2013, p. 53, as cited in Zhang, 2018).
Setting del Río Carral et al. (2021)	• Setting: Color palette, objects and belongings, spatial arrangement, furniture, and decor/decoration (del Río Carral et al., 2021).
Narrative Vlahovic et al. (2023)	• Personal narrative: The vlogger sharing personal experiences or stories • Everyday Life: The vlogger sharing a regular or special day • Travel Adventure: The vlogger documenting their travel experiences • Product/Service Review: Provision of commentary on a product or service • Do It Yourself (DIY): The vlogger explaining how to do something • Education: The vlogger providing knowledge and expertise in a specific domain • Expert Advice: The vlogger providing recommendations on topics such as healthy eating/nutrition, hair care, etc.
Cultural References Vlahovic et al. (2023)	• Popular culture: Vlogger refers to movies, music, TV shows • Traditional culture: Vlogger's reference to traditional or cultural practices
Posture & Glance Ferchaud et al. (2018)	• Posture: Primarily seated, primarily standing, primarily in motion • Gaze Direction/Eye-line: Towards the camera (Direct Address), away from the camera (Off-camera gaze)

Source: Abidin, 2020; Choe, 2024a; del Río Carral et al., 2021; Ferchaud et al., (2018); Fuente-Cobo et al., (2023); Vlahovic et al., (2023); Zhang, (2018).

Table 1 outlines the categories utilized when conducting the interpretative content analysis. Within this framework, the YouTubers’ videos were primarily analyzed based on eight categories: spatial context; engagement and interaction; vlogging activity; visual narrative / signs and symbols / camera angles and shot scales; setting; narrative; cultural references; and posture and gaze.

5 Findings

In accordance with the rationales articulated in the methodology section, the five Korean YouTubers subjected to analysis were initially examined from a descriptive perspective. The analysis of YouTubers’ features of “engagement and interaction” in Table 2 illustrates the power of YouTube’s (global) algorithm, which operates as an extension of “attention capital.” The South Korean YouTubers, categorized as “macro and mega influencers”, stand out by virtue of their large subscriber base, content productivity, potential for international reach, and high viewing statistics. The vloggers, who predominantly joined the YouTube platform around 2019 and achieved the metrics in question within approximately six years, appear to represent the digital dimension of the Korean Wave (Hallyu). Channels with one million or more subscribers, excluding “KitchenStory,” enact the role of new-generation cultural intermediation by leveraging their extensive foreign language support. YouTubers who design their channels with Korean and English narration and expand subtitle options over time subtly demonstrate their conceptualization of participation and engagement. In the context of the analyzed videos, vloggers sustain engagement not through conventional/cliché calls (e.g., “subscribe to my channel”, “don’t forget to like”), but via pinned comments, viewer requests embedded into the content, and thematic videos exclusive to subscribers.

Table 2. Characteristics of YouTubers’ Participation and Engagement I¹

YouTuber	Participation	Subscriber Count	Video Count and Subtitle Support	Total View Count
지현쥬 jhyun_u	26 May 2019	3 million	208, 7 languages	344.199.198
Hamimommy	20 Aug. 2019	2.74 million	256, 22 languages	323.705.839
꿀주부 Honeyjubu	23 Dec. 2019	2.65 million	254, 23 languages	305.052.099
planD 플랜디	26 Dec 2018	2.28 million	268, 17 languages	366.648.115
천재소녀 KitchenStory	19 Apr. 2020	601 thousand	347, 21 languages	78.618.185

¹ Data are valid as of the first week of June (2025).

YouTubers, primarily addressing a young and female target audience, – excluding the “KitchenStory” channel – stand out due to lifestyle characteristics that mirror the young, new-generation user like themselves (Table 3). Influencers, who also share their official Instagram accounts on their YouTube channels, greet their viewers with channel art that frames and underscores their content priorities and themes. Vloggers with channel art largely depicting kitchen utensils, food imagery, and household items are characterized by intimacy-focused representation. Excluding the Jhyun channel, the channel art, which encapsulates the video stream content and theme, is also apparent in the video thumbnails. Operating as the screen face of the digital media ecology, YouTubers reinforce their visual identity and online persona by integrating their Instagram accounts. Moreover, the engagement of vloggers with companies such as Naver and Sandbox underscores the professional dimension and signifi-

cance of content production. The practice of only two vloggers (Jhyun and Honeyjubu) sharing their personal Gmail accounts and conducting community relations through these emails illustrates the transformation of the YouTuber profession.

Table 3. Characteristics of YouTubers' Participation and Engagement II²

YouTuber	Average Subscriber Age	Subscriber Gender	Channel Visual	Social media and email
지현쥬 jhyun_u	23.7 (The 18–24 age bracket is the most predominant.)	85 percent female		Instagram, Gmail
Hamimommy	27 (The 18–24 age bracket is the most predominant.)	88 percent female		Instagram, *Naver
꿀주부 Honeyjubu	26.8 (The 18–24 age bracket is the most predominant.)	88 percent female		Instagram, Gmail
planD 플랜디	24.2 (The 18–24 age bracket is the most predominant.)	88 percent female		Instagram, *Sandbox
천재소녀 KitchenStory	26.3 (The 18–24 age bracket is the most predominant.)	88 percent female		Instagram, *Naver

² *“influencer-hero.com” data. Naver Corporation is a technology, internet and search engine company based in South Korea. Sandbox is an entertainment and media company based in South Korea.

Vloggers gain prominence through content focused on tranquil domesticity and slow living, evidenced by channel descriptions that emphasize phrases such as: “small daily life” (Jhyun), “loving the home and cleaning the home” (Hamimommy), “comfortable daily life created in my small space” (Honeyjubu), “recording ordinary moments” (planD), and “warm home cooking and an orderly life” (KitchenStory). This finding, also reflected in the influencers’ most popular videos, results in millions of views and thousands of likes (Table 4). The videos in question grounded in the popularity of South Korean culture and defined by a focus on calm, routine, and slow living along with their effortless style and relaxing/motivational language, warrant a reconsideration of the digital components of the Hallyu wave.

Table 4. Data on YouTubers’ Most Popular Videos³

YouTuber	View and Like Counts	Titles	Durations	Upload Date
지현쥬 jhyun_u	11,760,380 views and 239,000 likes	„The story of a college student living alone“	18 min 52 Sec.	24 Sep 2020
Hamimommy	13,255,480 views and no likes stats	“Daily cleaning routine to keep the house clean. Housework motivation VLOG. Home-cooked recipes“	26 min 11 sec.	14 Aug 2021
꿀주부 Honeyjubu	12,908,942 views and 261,000 likes	„An energetic daily life that starts at 5a.m.“	13 min. 26 sec.	10 Mar 2022
planD 플랜디	7,560,257 views and 140,000 likes	“Solo camping, making a cat friend, going backpacking, a relaxing home-solo vlog, squid radish stew, grilled clams, an ordinary day. therapeutic VLOG.”	45 min. 50 sec.	23 Jul 2023
천재소녀 KitchenStory	6,670,477 views and 106,000 likes	„7 types of breakfast for the week“	15 min.	15 Jun 2021

³ Data are valid as of the first week of June (2025).

5.1 Jhyun and Her Small Daily Life

Defining herself as a food enthusiast, “jhyun_u stands out with video series that begin with a concise introduction and rhythmic, characterized music (melodic and wordless).” Conceptualizing her vlogger/Ylogger journey through metaphors such as “memory book”, “memoir”, “virtual diary”, and “life journey” she engages subscribers with the title “jhyun vlog” and a stylized font. Offering a stream akin to a new generation/digital serialized narrative, the YouTuber can create a visually appetizing style with domestic and culinary focused content that promotes eating and stimulates appetite. Jhyun, exhibiting a content strategy tailored to her main target demographic (mean age 23.7 and 85% female), commands attention with a subscriber base exceeding 3 million and approximately 345 million cumulative views obtained over six years. The vlogger, promoting her channel with the motto, “Contains the small things of daily life (and two emojis, a bear and a heart)”, articulates her bare reality through intimacy-focused sharing, evidenced by visual codes such as face-less, food/counter-level angle shots.

The YouTuber, whose spatial context is grounded in the “slow living at home” approach, predominantly produces content focused on home and kitchen decor. Jhyun, who conveys daily routines such as grocery shopping, meal preparation, gift wrapping, and birthday celebrations with visual rhythms, is able to create an intimate construction utilizing an ordinary, standard domestic setting. The vlogger, typically appearing on screen in everyday attire including casual home wear (e.g., pajamas, sweatpants) and context-appropriate outfits (e.g., work, restaurant, café) can construct the language of empathy and the pursuit of emotional engagement through these mundane elements. Thereby, Jhyun can seamlessly integrate brand collaborations or sponsorship relationships (e.g., De Marigny café or Busan restaurant) into the content, thereby executing more authentic promotions (e.g., native advertising). Such promotions, interpretable through the lens of digital literacy, can aid in concealing the artifice of reality (e.g., camera/lighting/sound setup, professional agreements with brands, use of editing software) through the perception of intimacy and daily routine.

The YouTube account, which lacks an explicit and repetitive call to action (CTA) but includes an implicit solicitation for engagement and feedback, is notable for viewer comments responded to personally by Jhyun in the videos. The vlogger, addressing contextually the viewers' questions, critiques, and requests over time (e.g., childhood memories, relationship with spouse, questions about cats), also makes use of "pinned comments." Jhyun, who utilizes concluding formulas (e.g., "I hope you like this video, see you again in the next video! Goodbye!" [heart emoji]) and pinned comments, mobilizes interaction practices through the prompts she offers (e.g., user recipes, suggestions to add lemon/coriander, etc.). As another interaction mechanism, the use of empathetic remarks on the channel (e.g., "I'm sorry for those watching this recipe at midnight" or "this recipe can certainly have different versions") is crucial for articulating the audience's voice. Jhyun, who provides weekly updates in almost every content (e.g., stating, "I have both bitter and sweet news for you next week") and shares her life trajectory with viewers over the six years she has been on YouTube, concludes her videos with phrases generating anticipation and engagement. The vlogger, who cultivates a conversational language (e.g., "I think spring has arrived when I see naengi", "I have a good appetite, but I'm not pregnant", "I can eat this every day") and offers health cues (reminders on protein content, immune benefits, nutritional value), is able to actualize the "influencer" identity through this approach. On the other hand, self-reflexive commentary by the vlogger such as "the food is shapeless, yes or it looks ugly, but it tasted good" attributes value to the interaction mechanics in the context of articulating the voice of the passively situated audience.

Characterized by the prominence of everyday practices such as cooking, working, shopping, celebrating birthdays, and eating (with audible smacking sounds, akin to mukbang) Jhyun's YouTube account reinforces the digital diary attribution through special content documenting life milestones (e.g., proposal video, university years, pajama launch). This narrative flow, which makes the viewer feel they are bearing witness to a life, capitalizes on the appeal of the mundane / appeal of everydayness. Considering that 85% of the channel's audience are women aged 18–24, this situation can express an insightful resonance and serve as a source of motivation for those who feel their own lives are insignificant.

The Jhyun YouTube channel, featuring a presentation characterized by visual narrative, signs, and camera angles, appears to possess a distinct visual flow. The video narrative, which possesses a chronological progression "summary", "recipe", "drink recipe", "dining table", and "act of eating" facilitates viewing due to its immersive flow, characterized by rapid cuts and transitions to the preparation of the next meal. The channel, which facilitates viewing through this narrative choice, stands out due to its sequential flow (e.g., 'day1, day2, day3'). This flow is interspersed with "cat footage" (featuring Kane and Huchu) and "working moments" and concludes with sequences of expressing goodwill and thanking the audience. The content repertoire, organized around Jhyun and her cats, increases audience engagement by interweaving a parallel narrative that includes the cats' playful moments and their everyday lives. Leveraging the popularity of cat content, the YouTuber depicts her affection for cats situated within the context of her own life, thereby framing the daily lives of her cats as a „parallel narrative“. This strategy, exemplified by the YouTuber speeding up extended working moments, can maximize the content's watchability and narrative momentum.

Jhyun, who records the prepared meal and the moment of plating using close-up shots, appears as if hosting a guest (the viewer), a strategy which is reinforced by directly showcasing her favored products and brands to the camera during shopping. Beyond brand collaborations or sponsorship relationships, the camera angle and editing in question, serv-

ing as a response to viewer queries, hold significance in the sense that the vlogger conveys the products she uses authentically (e.g., daily grocery shopping, the juices/flour used). This phenomenon, which underscores the reality that every single product or service, large or small, used by every consumer over 24 hours has an underlying brand, presents a *mise-en-scène* of preference. Because the vlogger provides a disclaimer in videos featuring product placement, promotion, and/or collaboration, she also offers a more detailed presentation of the product or service. The vlogger, who consistently frames the camera angle toward the countertop and production sequences, can characterize her style through self-replicating visual style, music, angle, and scale. Jhyun, by positioning the camera as an extension of the countertop, is able to reinforce her intimate, friendly, and contemporary language that breaks the fourth wall, utilizing witty and emoji-laden captions that speak directly to the viewer (e.g., “sorry if you are watching this at night” or “I must leave the kitchen now” statements, and the generally positive use of emojis like onion, cat paw, face, and heart).

The channel’s content flow themed around traditional Korean cuisine and prioritizing scripted recipes (e.g., cutting/preparation visuals, ingredient lists, time-lapsed cooking), focuses on a first-person perspective (FPS) angle. The camera angles, concentrating on close-up and detail shots of the food and table setting alongside the medium shot (waist level) scale, sustain the core content stream based on a paradigm of intimacy where faces are absent, virtual dialogue predominates via subtitles, and sound focuses primarily on ambient noise or atmospheric effects. The content flow features experimental shots such as the „soup bowl perspective“ (low angle) and First-Person Perspective (FPS) moments of petting cats or holding a plush toy and predominantly utilizes the medium (medium and/or medium long shot) scale, with the vlogger maintaining an averted gaze (not looking directly at the camera). The vlogger, who avoids eye-level angles, conveys her sensitivity regarding personal life privacy through the scale preferences.

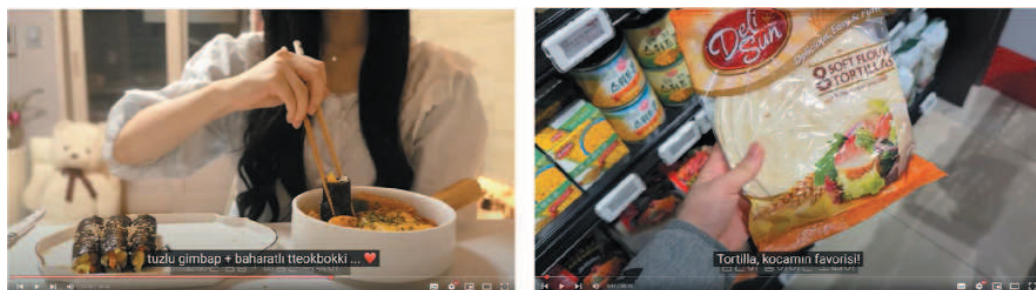
Jhyun, who produces content commensurate with traditional “gender roles” in a manner that caters to her primary target audience, regards serving her spouse as one of the cultural behavior codes. The YouTuber, who enacts traditional domestic labor by making her husband’s favorite meals, fulfilling his requests, praising him, and regularly preparing a “bento box” (home-packed meal) for him, engages in self-disclosure about their relationship but excludes both him and her own face from the frame. Jhyun, who projects an image consistent with ideal behavior patterns in line with her role model or influencer identity (e.g., use of gloves, hygiene emphasis, appropriate equipment), also frequently offers subjective commentary based on her own palate preference (e.g., “the seasoning is perfect”, “it goes very well together”). The vlogger, notable for the consistent use of similarly styled and popular cookware and equipment, actualizes a characterized and familiar content philosophy through this practice. The content creator, expressing enjoyment of the food with vocalizations and smacking sounds in a manner aligned with Korean culture, meticulously shares the moments of consumption following food preparation and cooking.

Jhyun, who utilizes „daily life“ dynamics as both the setting and narrative, primarily films in a domestic environment decorated with a white and minimal color palette. The creator, who produces content in a domestic atmosphere with a pastel-toned minimal aesthetic where only a TV and a couch are visible in the background, maintains this standardized framing by typically utilizing the medium / waist shot scale in the external locations she visits (work environment, cafes, markets, and restaurants). Jhyun, who supports her personal narrative with cooking and recipe cues, integrates the natural sounds of the home (e.g., cats and their vocal-

izations, washing, water sounds, boiling, and mixing sounds) into her vlogs. The YouTuber, who does not shy away from product/service reviews, showcases her education, marriage process, and changing life over a six-year longitudinal period, accompanied by routine anecdotes (e.g., her eating schedule, preferred spices, intermittent fasting), all presented using a mobile phone camera scale.

Jhyun frequently makes popular culture allusions (e.g., movies and series watched) and engages in self-reflexivity regarding herself and her YouTuber identity and does not shy away from cultural references (e.g., Korean food, traditional cuisine, and the genealogical narrative via memories of mother and grandmother). The vlogger, whose posture is generally standing but adopts a seated pose while eating and working, fills the narrative gaps between sequences with interstitial scenes of shopping, dialogue with cats, and brief walking moments, thereby ensuring flow continuity. This mechanism, which cultivates the perception of a seamless daily summary, does not neglect to incorporate the traditional codes of Korean culture (e.g., wrapping in perilla leaf, kimbap recipes, preparing bento boxes, kimchi, mukbang, and eating with smacking sounds). In this context, the YouTuber, who synthesizes her global validity with local values, enriches her subtitle-based interaction through channel content published in seven languages and kinesic practices serving as universal body language cues (e.g., giving a thumbs-up or making the “delicious” sign). Jhyun, who presents Korean cuisine as easy and practical and meticulously prepares diverse meals for every sitting, can be perceived akin to other Korean vloggers as a new generation magazine content creator. Such content, which caters to users’ appetite for watching the lives of others, can function as a form of digital catharsis by enabling cultural exploration and providing relaxation. For some users, watching the mundane life of another, witnessing their eating accompanied by smacking sounds, or watching them talk to their cats can seem nonsensical. However, this does not seem to be the case for Jhyun, as with the other YouTubers studied, with billions of views pointing to the opposite reality.

Figure 1. Screenshots of Jhyun’s YouTube account



5.2 Hamimommy, House and Family

Hamimommy, who presents her daily life in a documentary style, appears to possess a vlog mechanism that conveys her domestic life through her daughter and husband. The YouTuber, whose shares can be summarized by keywords such as hygienic, mundane, routine, and meticulous presentation, translates the daily life theme into practice accompanied by Korean culture. The vlogger, defining her public digital diary through roles and duties such as being a mother, a spouse, and domestic labor, possesses a content flow focused on cleaning and cooking. The influencer, framing her vlog as a “cultural artefact” within a domestic setting,

invites her audience to witness the reality of her family life. Hamimommy, who initiates her videos with a summary introduction and a specific/melodious musical cue like Jhyun, diverges from that pattern by focusing on “family life” and “child” visuals.

The YouTuber, framing the “slow living at home” context with a kitchen and garden backdrop, documents her daily routines (preparing breakfast, washing dishes, house cleaning, cooking, gardening, hosting guests, etc.) via a digital journal. The influencer, who aestheticizes the home environment and produces hygiene-prioritized content, adopts a content strategy centered on key themes: hospitality, child rearing, culinary preparation, house cleaning, and family relationships. The videos, which feature background dialogues with the child, spouse, and guests, alongside cooking and garden sounds, appear more technically professional compared to Jhyun, offering 4K support, subtitles in 22 languages, and sophisticated shooting techniques and angles. The YouTuber, who employs a wide and varied array of camera angles, mirrors the daily yet high quality life of a middle-upper class Korean family, a position contextualized by her Naver agreement.

Hamimommy, who regularly shares her life milestones on her channel (building a new home, moving, travels, trainings received, daughter’s education, etc.), also produces content themed around sustainability (e.g., recycled product catalogue, eco-friendly kitchen cleaning, sustainable living tips, household waste). The YouTuber, who presents her influencer responsibility alongside Korean culture, frames her focus on home, food, daily routines, recipes, and cues, in line with the motto of high quality and slow living. The creator, who transforms every meal into an elegant presentation akin to a café or restaurant setting, also maintains her privacy sensitivity. Hamimommy, who rarely shows faces apart from the children’s and primarily uses medium and detail shots, utilizes her home furnished with natural products and decorated in minimal/pastel tones as a studio.

The YouTuber, who frequently resorts to blurred backgrounds (shallow depth of field), FPS, and rear shots, scaffolds her happy modern family diary through themes such as the child, Korean cuisine, cleaning, garden landscape, spending quality time, neighborly relations, travels, and elegant presentation. The vlogger, who presents prepared meals and table settings using close-up shots, executes presentations like the “bowl food” movement (aesthetic and gastronomic delights in stylish bowls with harmonious colors) by participating in culinary training and workshops. The influencer, who incorporates diverse camera angles and musical transitions from an editing perspective (e.g., garden or coffee preparation sequences), meticulously employs scenes of shared dining around a table (especially dinner). These sequences can facilitate the assumption that the content plays on the appeal of “emotional security” through the theme of intimate, safe, and routine family life.

Hamimommy, recontextualizing the home decor sometimes as a café, sometimes as an entertainment area, and sometimes as a restaurant, depicts the typical weekend of a Korean family including snack culture, entertainment practices, and New Year’s or birthday celebrations through „parallel narratives“. The YouTuber, who articulates the inner voice (or insight) of every “mother” or “homemaker”, is able to cultivate a sense of familiarity through such references (e.g., “my husband’s favorite meal”, “Koreans love this very much” or “domestic anxieties over what to cook today”). The vlogger, who manages her chronological narrative (e.g., transition to the next day / Sunday morning / breakfast preparation / children waking up, yawning / eating / playing / evening falls / seeing off guests / bedtime, etc.) with an “accompanying” perspective (third-person rear camera angle), is capable of generating a feeling

of “telepresence” for the viewer. The sequential narrative is interspersed with visuals of relaxing nature including tree, sky, garden, and flower sequences serving as aesthetic fillers.

The Hamimommy channel, where repeated emphasis is placed on key components of Korean culture including children’s gimbap, Korean side dishes, kimchi, May 5 Children’s Day, perilla leaves, tteokbokki, sesame oil, bulgogi, and brands such as LG and Samsung, possesses a serialized loop where videos follow one another, akin to a „to be continued“ serial structure. The vlogger, who consumes the chocolate purchased in Switzerland in a previous video and references that trip in the subsequent video, can address the requirement of commitment in community management. This interconnected flow also manifests itself in the personal development stories of the family members. Information concerning the family such as Hami’s current lack of English proficiency, the vlogger’s educational pursuits, and the spouse’s work life is disclosed to the audience via subtitles as deemed appropriate. Broadcasting in a wide range of languages makes it easier to follow such updates globally and in the eyes of viewers from different cultures. The fundamental and repetitive content stream that eases viewer follow-up is accompanied by light melodic music and concludes with expressions of goodwill (e.g., wishing you a good time, thank you for watching).

Similar to Jhyun, the Hamimommy YouTube channel, which also references various social roles, produces content suited to its primary target audience through videos focused on childcare; duties toward a spouse (preparing preferred meals, dividing household tasks, etc.); repetitive cleaning routines (unloading the dishwasher, cleaning the kettle and kitchen, etc.); cleaning hacks (washing cutting boards with baking soda, cleaning with vinegar, wooden table maintenance, dryer and mattress cleaning, etc.); anecdotes from everyday family life (Hami’s homework, favorite characters, a pasta recipe taught by a sibling, meals prepared by the grandmother, etc.); and personal lifestyle preferences (practicing Pilates twice a week, growing houseplants, and sharing books she enjoys or is currently reading, etc.). The vlogger, who does not shy away from showcasing a modern, happy, and high-quality family life accompanied by the brands she utilizes (LG, Samsung, Crocs, De’Longhi, Ikea, Philips, etc.), projects onto the screen the pleasure derived from small moments and cleaning through the use of emoticons and emojis (smiling face, heart, wave, laughter, etc.).

Figure 2. Screenshots from Hamimommy’s Vlog Posts



5.3 Honeyjubu: My Family, Lucy and My Comfortable Daily Life

Honeyjubu, who initiates her content with a video summary, signature music, and a greeting as is common among other vloggers, centers on the daily life of a South Korean family and a housewife who is a mother, like the Hamimommy channel. Distinguished from the former by the presence of a pet (a dog named Lucy), the vlogger chronicles the days spent with

her family and the dog. Sharing posts in alignment with YouTube's slogan „Broadcast Yourself,“ the YouTuber produces content while excluding family members' faces from the frame. In this respect, the content creator, depicting the importance she attaches to privacy much like other Korean vloggers, engages in sharing content focusing on her social roles. Honeyjubu, who routinely wakes up at 5 AM, commences her day with breakfast and a bento box prepared for her spouse; she then shares the meal with him before seeing him off to work. Honeyjubu, who frequently utilizes the seeing-off sequence, achieves standardized and characterized imagery by showcasing the bento box and bag prepared for her spouse. In this respect, the creator, depicting and affirming the roles of mother and housewife, mirrors Korean family culture – as observed in other YouTubers. The influencer, notable for her consistent use of kitchenware and traditional Korean delicacies, stands out with her brand collaborations (Costco, LG, Ikea, Daiso, etc.) and social responsibility themed content (donations to disabled children, recycling, aid to impoverished families, etc.). The vlogger, who maintains her meticulously executed daily routines with consistency, reinforces the charming and warm domestic atmosphere through a flow where her dog, Lucy, is constantly present. After seeing her husband off, Honeyjubu feeds Lucy with a meticulously prepared meal and subsequently narrates her daily routines, such as house cleaning, dog care, and daily exercise. The YouTuber, who conveys the exercise moments in question via subtitles set against her home decor without visually depicting them, situates almost her entire narrative within her home. The influencer, aiming to inspire her audience regarding seemingly “tedious” domestic chores through such sequences, reinforces her language of influence and interaction via behavioral patterns tailored to her target audience and presentational nuances.

Honeyjubu, who constructs her spatial context based on the home, specifically the kitchen, living room, and bathroom, bears a resemblance to other Korean YouTubers in this respect. The video content, revolving around herself, her dog, and her spouse, proceeds with „colorful“ scenes where she arranges her purchases on the table, followed by a sequence of organizing them into the refrigerator. The YouTuber, who opts not to display the act of shopping but makes product/brand selections within the framework of a Costco collaboration, meticulously details the items she favors and utilizes to her viewers. The influencer, featuring foundational and signature videos and sequences such as cleaning hacks, recipes, and dog care (grooming, feeding, walking, etc.), showcases a stylized home life defined by minimal yet high-quality home furnishings. The home decor, while evolving based on brand collaborations, fundamentally consists of simple and light toned furnishings crafted from natural materials (e.g., wooden tables and chairs, leather sofas, wicker rugs). The vlogger distinguishes herself through her impeccable home and food visuals, routine flow, technical proficiency (e.g., 4K content, support for 23 languages, angle techniques, use of color/lighting, and editing rhythm), and signature, relaxing channel music. This point has value for discussing Korean society's technical proficiency and its adaptability to digital language.

Honeyjubu, who aestheticizes her home organization and utilizes it with the elegance of a café or restaurant, produces content akin to other Korean vloggers by employing medium and close-up camera angles. The influencer, presenting prepared dishes and bento boxes with a meticulous sensitivity toward symmetry, color harmony, and vibrancy, enacts her role model status characterized by acts such as waking up at 5 AM, caring for the household (spouse, dog, children), exercising regularly, and prioritizing home economics by consistently sharing her lifestyle. On the other hand, the YouTuber, who provides the music used in the channel within the video descriptions, can extend her reach to non-Korean societies through her localized content. The vlogger, who generally maintains a standing posture except for dining

sequences, never reveals her face, and persists in the domestic bustle, is thereby able to establish „empathy“ with her millions of predominantly female viewers. The broadcaster, who presents her social roles in an iconic manner through the apron she wears, represents Korean culture in the digital arena via her routine content flow, cultivated house plants, and simple yet meticulous slow living style.

Figure 3. Screenshots from Honeyjubu's vlogs



5.4 planD, Ordinary Days

„planD“, who initiates her videos with a content summary and melodic music as is common among other vloggers, distinguishes herself through her more individual lifestyle and the DIY (do-it-yourself) aspect. The YouTuber, who lives alone and engages in solo shopping, travel, and camping, transforms the contemporary theme of solitary living into a fundamental element of attraction. Centering on the theme of ‘living alone in Korea,’ the vlogger shares content aligned with the “solo and slow living” movement, featuring activities such as camping preparations, local market visits, and birthday celebrations. The influencer, who predominantly transforms the “home” decor into a studio consistent with other Korean YouTubers, integrates experiences such as camping, grocery shopping, and visiting local markets into the content using a mobile phone angle. The YouTuber, employing waist (medium), close-up, and detail camera angles, produces content as if performing a demonstration through a viewer-centric approach. The vlogger, who presents purchases to the camera with a „look what I bought“ narrative, mirrors Korean culinary culture through “unboxing” content and the preparation of traditional recipes (e.g., bulgogi, kimbab, dakgalbi).

In addition to the “home” setting, the influencer also uses places she visits such as campsites, markets, and grocery stores as spatial contexts, and shares content that aestheticizes home organization, including closet décor, kitchen arrangement, plug repair and replacement sequences, sewing machine maintenance, and DIY-style furniture assembly. Developing content grounded in the acts of cooking and eating within the context of solitary living, planD aims to convey the reality of her personal “appetite” to her viewers. Broadcasting a small, intimate, and ordinary daily routine from her solitary and modest home, the YouTuber appeals to the insight of an audience that shares a similar reality. Alongside the empathy, the “influencer”, who solicits participation in the channel via pinned comments and personal evaluations (e.g., Stanley thermos, recipes, camping gear), develops inspiring small ideas (such as creative closet hangers, efficient use of small spaces, and camping preparations).

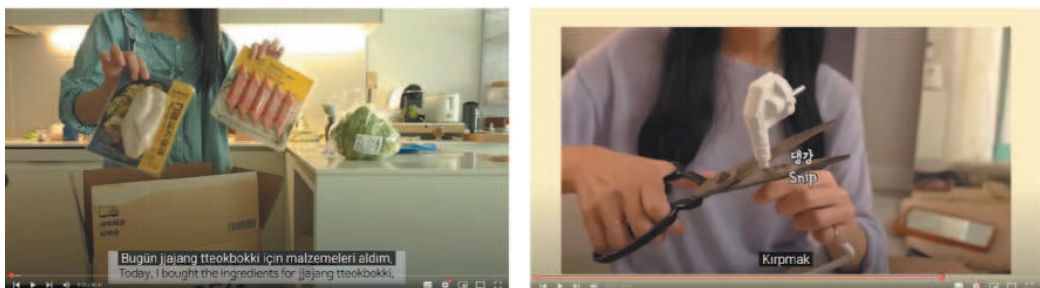
Compared to other Korean YouTubers -especially Hamimommy and Honeyjubu- planD, who utilizes more amateur and repetitive angles and scales in her video editing, incorporates the “contact map” of Korean culture (fish and luck gifts, Korean cuisine, New Year celebrations, the K-pop group Blackpink, cute local presentations, etc.) into almost every video. The

influencer, who anchors her daily life in Korean culture and conveys it in the style of a digital life documentary, increases the “interaction” coefficient by unboxing and commenting on gifts sent by subscribers. The vlogger, creating the impression of employing a psychological magnet to attract solitary individuals, constructs her narrative as though accompanied by a virtual companion. planD, who consumes media while eating, records outfit combinations in the mirror, and undertakes solo backpacking and camping preparations, appears to align with the empathy expectations of her audience. The YouTuber, who presents mishaps (e.g., spilling food, burning a dish, camera slips) as integral parts of the natural flow rather than editing them out, is thereby able to invest in both engagement and the sense of authenticity.

planD, who conceals her face in her content and frames her everyday reality through a mobile phone camera perspective, engages in verbal communication only during very brief intervals she deems necessary (e.g., unboxing gifts, promoting sponsored content, pre-editing sequences, or dialogue with a market vendor). Mirroring her solitary lifestyle by self-editing her content, the YouTuber issues a disclaimer both before and after videos featuring branded or sponsored content. Adopting the role of an “influencer” particularly for individuals living alone, planD aims to exert influence on her target audience across various contexts, such as reading pop-up books, home decoration, diverse methods of cooking and eating, and spending enjoyable and productive time in solitude. In this context, the influencer, advocating “self-sufficiency” to her audience, sustains the digital identity and social role in question by issuing directives. The YouTuber, who concludes her videos with expressions of gratitude, enriches her solitary and slow lifestyle within the framework of home-grown plants and exploratory, solitary journeys.

By performing tasks that the audience may be reluctant to pursue, such as solo camping, traveling far for errands, or complex DIY, planD enriches her content via “cute” interstitial scenes (e.g., squirrel mukbangs, feeding cats, bird visuals). The YouTuber, who engages in asymmetrical dialogues with her audience and answers their questions over time (e.g., reasons for not buying a car, favorite flavors), is able to reinforce her empathy and narrative power by recounting her individual story (including her brother’s childhood accident, his coma, and lived traumas). Furthermore, the YouTuber, who reiterates her cyclical and chronological flow (summary, breakfast, daily activity, meal, skincare, sleep, and thanks), appears to possess a characterized content management style defined by her standard background melody and ASMR-style ambient sounds (e.g., cracking eggs, bird sounds, boiling/frying noises, package opening, applying cream). The vlogger, reinforcing her observations and narrative via subtitles, can motivate her audience to embrace their own individual lives through personal stories, daily life, travel adventures, product-service reviews, DIY sequences, and body language in motion.

Figure 4. Screenshots from the YouTuber planD.



5.5 KitchenStory: Warm Home Cooked Meals and an Organized Lifestyle

The KitchenStory channel, distinguished by its presentation elegance, an upper-class lifestyle reflecting the Korean bourgeoisie, agency collaborations, and a pool of colorful and high-quality materials, presents a more elite representation, despite possessing content and format similar to other Korean YouTubers. The channel, which welcomes its audience with distinctive music and a summary preview, exhibits a perspective centered on the “kitchen.” The account, which adopts a corporate style resembling a program or channel name rather than personal naming, takes as its subject the kitchen-oriented life of a Korean family when its content is examined. The YouTube channel, employing lyrical music in the background, reinforces its narrative through subtitles written in a conversational, daily language. KitchenStory, introducing Korean traditional cuisine and menus with a class-based aesthetic, centers on the daily recipes and cooking tips of a mother who is a homemaker. The influencer, who does not conceal her passion and addiction regarding the traditional Korean “palate”, invites the viewer to bear witness to this specific conception of taste. In this respect, the YouTuber, making no secret of having assumed the mission of promoting and disseminating Korean culinary culture, presents the pursuit of a chic and slow lifestyle from the perspective of a Korean family.

The influencer, who predominantly utilizes her home decor as a studio, as observed in the other analysed Korean YouTubers, appears to exhibit an image akin to a “contemporary and digital South Korean Martha Stewart” (the American businessperson, author, and television personality prominent for her culinary content). The YouTuber, who shares colorful, impeccable, trendy, and popular menus prepared using high-quality ingredients, expresses her fondness for traditional Korean cuisine in virtually every video (exemplified by her transporting ingredients from Korea during her US trip to cook Korean dishes). The “influencer,” who visits traditional Korean restaurants even during her travels or cooks Korean dishes at home, creates the impression of being a voluntary (honorary) ambassador of Korean culture. On the other hand, the vlogger, who records the stages of the flow (waking up, going to the airport, baggage drop, take off, arrival, hotel room, dining, etc.) in her thematic videos (Paris trip, US journey, birthday celebration, Korean cooking class, Italy travel) and thereby bolsters her narrative with sequences, crafts subtitles using an intimate and conversational language (e.g., comparing clouds to Toy Story, admitting disagreements with her spouse, personal health tips, and well-wishing closing remarks).

The YouTube channel, featuring the high-quality daily lives of the main character “mother” and other family members (her husband, two children, and their dog Mochi), pays close attention to privacy. The account, which never shows the faces of the main character and secondary characters, is notable for its imagery of a calm, planned, and elite lifestyle. The channel content, centered on food/beverage preparation, shared dining at the table, outings with the dog, trips to various countries, thematic videos (e.g., Korean summer noodles, Korean breakfast, side dishes, preparing kimchi for the year, Korean-style camping, picnics, and home parties), and daily activities (reading, feeding/spending time with the dog), provides narrative depth accompanied by personal moments and family memories. The vlogger, crafting presentations and menus of chef-quality, mirrors the developed facet of Korean society, while concluding her videos with expressions of goodwill.

Positioning the home within her content as a space for rest, a café, and a restaurant, the YouTuber strives to enhance interaction value through compilation and thematic videos, pinned comments, subtitles responsive to viewer inquiries (e.g., cookware used, favorite

brands), and expressions of goodwill devoid of direct calls for comments. The influencer, whose vlogging activity predominantly revolves around food preparation, presentation, and communal dining with family members, utilizes medium, close-up, and detail camera angles. The influencer, focusing on close-up and detail shots during food preparation and medium shots while eating, transforms recurring channel staples into a distinct visual and aural style (e.g., background music, use of specific brand cookware/plates, standard table/tray design, consistent filming angles of the kitchen, and presentation bowls/ingredients). The vlogger, presenting cultural references within the framework of food and the kitchen, emphasizes the importance of a diet consisting of healthy, seasonal, high-quality, and homemade foods, a message reinforced by her fit physique.

Figure 5. Screenshots of KitchenStory Channel

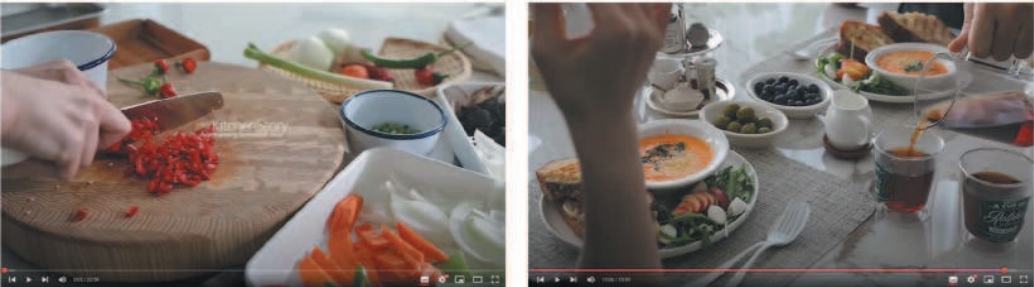


Table 5 synthesizes the key findings by organizing them into overarching themes and analytical categories, providing a structured overview of the patterns identified in the data.

Table 5. Categorization of Findings Across Analytical Themes

Shared Theme	Analytical Category	Empirical Observations (Findings)	Example Channels
Slow living & everyday aesthetics	Spatial context / narrative	“Slow living at home”, daily routines (cooking, cleaning, self-care), aestheticization of domestic space	Jhyun, Hamimommy, Honeyjubu
	Visual narrative	Pastel tones, minimalist décor, close-up food shots, rhythmic editing	All channels
	Cultural references	Traditional Korean cuisine, domestic practices, home-centered culture	KitchenStory, Honeyjubu
Digital intimacy & authenticity	Posture & gaze	Concealing the face, indirect gaze, first-person perspective (FPS) angles	Jhyun, planD
	Narrative	Diary-like storytelling, personal experiences, inclusion of imperfections and emotional moments	planD, Jhyun
	Signs & symbols	Ambient sounds (ASMR), natural household sounds, everyday objects	All channels
Community relations & engagement	Engagement & interaction	Absence of explicit calls-to-action; use of pinned comments and embedded feedback	All channels
	Community practices	Content shaped by viewer requests; integration of audience feedback into videos	Jhyun, planD
	Platform metrics	High view counts and subscriber numbers as indicators of attention capital	All channels
Cultural mediation	Cultural references	Representation of Korean cuisine, family structures, traditions, and daily practices	All channels
	Narrative	Aestheticization of the “Korean lifestyle”	KitchenStory
	Symbolic production	Integration of brands into everyday life narratives	Honeyjubu
Micro-celebrity & personal branding	Visual identity	Consistent channel aesthetics, recurring formats, music, and editing styles	All channels
	Self-presentation	Presentation of an “ordinary yet idealized life”	planD, Jhyun
	Platform integration	Use of Instagram, email, and agency collaborations	Hamimommy
Digital labor & commercialization	Monetization	Native advertising and seamless brand integration	Jhyun, Honeyjubu
	Production logic	High production quality, regular uploads, algorithm-driven visibility	All channels
Digitalization of Hallyu	Transnational reach	Multilingual subtitles and global audience targeting	All channels
	Cultural export	K-vlog formats, Korean cuisine, and lifestyle content	KitchenStory
	Hybrid identity	Combination of local content with global presentation	planD

The table shows that content creators combine slow living aesthetics with strategies of digital intimacy and authenticity to build a strong connection with viewers. The aestheticization of everyday life mediates and globalizes representations of Korean culture. At the same time, micro-celebrity practices and personal branding become central, while content is shaped by audience feedback. Moreover, high production quality and subtle brand integration highlight the role of digital labor and commercialization.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

YouTube, elevating the vlogger practice to a new level, appears to function as a more micro, compact, and controlled version of the “video on demand” (VOD) strategy (exemplified by services like Netflix, Hulu, Disney+, and Prime Video). Content creators, who craft their material in line with viewer feedback, consolidate the culture of interaction through a meta-reality that transcends the platform. In this way, content creators, able to construct a more intimate and dynamic persona, can manage the supply-and-demand balance in accordance with the “Uses and Gratifications” model. The routine sharing of daily life by vloggers reinforces their roles as opinion leaders, role models, and community ambassadors, while holding a mirror to viewer insights through slices of “real life.” In this respect, content that transcends the perception of staged videos can facilitate the perception of influencers (or their partner agencies) as “online friends” rather than professional identities such as editors, producers, or models. Such digital illusions and/or conscious digital gratifications (or numbness) appear to align with the “post-truth” society and the “FOMO” (Fear of Missing Out) generation.

The role of YouTubers as cultural intermediaries can bring to the fore discussions regarding the reflection of their own sociology regardless of their intent. Influencers, standing at the threshold within the context of the “two-step flow” and strengthening the communication between producer and consumer, also bring their own cultural stances and representations to the surface during this interaction. This process, fueled by factors such as societal expectations, social perceptions, stereotypes, and the halo effect, can position influencers as cultural carriers. In this context, social media celebrities, who possess a pedagogical function, operate as cultural educators and/or inculcators within the specific case of Korean YouTubers. YouTubers, transforming cultural values through their role as trendsetters and functioning as cultural intermediaries, produce labor in symbolic and digital forms by attributing meaning to commodities. The “digital labor” in question can legitimize fabricated postmodern needs – purchased solely due to their popularity – by triggering the “Diderot Effect” (a phenomenon where purchasing a new commodity leads to further acquisitions, thereby creating a spiral of consumption). These new types of “pseudo-needs”, which are culturally contingent, can be propagated through influencers.

Social media platforms such as YouTube and the “influencers” serving as the faces of these platforms can popularize the values and cultures they represent, just as they achieve personal fame. In this context, it is possible to conceptualize a distinct K-Vlog, K-Video, or K-YouTuber format and culture, parallel to the phenomena of K-Pop and K-Drama. This is because, in the context of the analyzed Korean YouTubers, a characterized, stylized, and unique mode of community management, vlog mechanism, flow, and content design appears to be evident. This phenomenon may render Korea and its non-material (ideological) cultural substance a popular subject of debate, particularly under headings like intellectual capital, cultural hegemony, and cultural transfer. In this context, Korean YouTubers can serve as a source of inspiration for other vloggers; being perceived as trendsetters, they can be regarded as role models concerning the standards of the profession.

YouTube, which makes a difference on behalf of influencers due to its „digital intimacy technology“, promises the opportunity to catch the digital generation in the dimension of culture transfer. This situation constitutes one of the fundamental reasons why many journalists, TV programmers, and traditional media members are turning to digital media. As a commodified version of cultural capital, the platform contributes to the fictional fabric of every real-

ity and/or cult seeking to spread and proliferate – a dynamic that also applies to Korean YouTubers. In this context, parallel to McLuhan's dictum "the medium is the message," Korean YouTubers, creating a "home media/medium" rather than a "home office", execute this profession with professional diligence while maintaining certain standards in a digital age where anyone can become a publisher or content creator (UGC; prosumer). Within the framework of the analyzed examples, mega-scale Korean vloggers transform "YouTuber-ship", which presents a kind of stakeholder relationship, into a trendsetting practice within the cultural fabric and network they belong to and embrace.

Korean YouTubers construct their spatial context primarily around priorities such as "slow/quiet living at home", "daily routines", "aestheticizing home organization", "cooking and eating", and "the home as a café and restaurant" while shaping the dimension of participation and interaction in line with viewer feedback mentioned in videos rather than direct calls to action. Performing vlog activities such as preparing meals at home, dining in or out, cleaning the house, shopping, camping, and traveling, these influencers present their narrative grounded in the main character and her family members (the female/mother influencer, spouse, children, and pet). They structure their audio-visual composition accompanied by channel theme music, a standard flow rhythm, consistent and repetitive use of brands/materials, consistent and immersive camera angles (medium/close-up/detail/FPS scale), relaxing transition sequences (nature, garden, flowers, etc.), characterized, channel-specific fonts and dialogue-style subtitles, and a final section containing well-wishes and thanks. Presenting their pastel-toned minimal homes with a focus on blurred backgrounds and privacy, the influencers gravitate towards content themes such as daily life, personal story, product-service reviews, travel, and DIY. Touching upon Korean cultural components (Blackpink, Korean dramas, TV content, etc.) as cultural references, the content creators adopt specific postures: standing (while preparing food) and seated (while eating).

Although the accepted angle in vlog production is typically face- and eye-based due to sensory elements and an empathetic perspective (Zhang, 2018, p. 15), Korean YouTubers avoid direct eye contact, focusing instead on medium, medium long-shot, and close medium long-shot angles. Conversely, close-up and extreme close-up angles are generally reserved for shots of detailed objects (food plates, kitchenware, cooking processes, etc.). Therefore, it can be posited that the primary factor and preference is to make the viewer feel like a "witness." Feeling like a witness to the setting and reality due to the selected angles, the viewer can experience the third-person perspective without feeling excluded; this facilitates a more intimate, natural, immersive, and effortless following of the content flow. Technically flawless in appearance, the videos are predominantly shaped around the "home" decor and the focus on the main character. Ultimately, the content produced by these Korean vloggers – all of whom are women – which conveys, introduces, disseminates, and promotes Korean cuisine and food culture, further substantiates the cultural significance of influencers as "carriers" and "intermediaries."

The potential for every user to become innate YouTube content or a celebrity stimulates the desire among ordinary users to establish channels and broadcast their personal diaries. This desire appears equally valid for societal necessities and cultural competition, shedding light on the contemporary state of the "Hallyu" reality, which boasts a history of approximately 30 years. Content harboring Korea's ideological substance – such as food, beverages, tourist sites, traditions, and beliefs – is disseminated like "modern cultural pollen" via YouTube and similar platforms, which serve as repositories of branded and viewer-driven content. Practices such as K-video, K-vlog, or K-YouTube – constituting one of the most critical components

of K-culture's digital dimension – pave the way for the cultural ambassadors of the digital age. YouTube, gaining popularity due to its advantage in managing community relations in an instantaneous and innovative manner while presenting cultural representations, stands out as a new-generation tool for “cultivating culture.” Furthermore, YouTube, which creates its own celebrities and thereby redefines the concepts of “fame” and “stardom” at micro and macro levels, facilitates community management through “voluntary gatekeepers” (e.g., channel moderators, members, badges, or custom emojis). This implies recruiting voluntary ambassadors for movements like “Hallyu” and imparts momentum to cultural mobility.

Adapting to the era of multi-screen and multi-tasking, YouTube (and consequently Google and its services) manifests and asserts itself on every device, thereby implementing a model of compulsory exposure. Google pays millions of dollars annually to brands like Apple and Samsung to ensure this, rendering YouTube even more permanent and popular through default embedded services. In this context, akin to the maxim “everywhere is media” for a skilled communicator, it can be said for YouTube that “every screen is a YouTube.” This is because the platform utilizes the social aspect of the Google algorithm and serves as the screen interface for the brand giant's global contracts. Consequently, YouTubers become part of Google's discovery dynamic, which has become increasingly pronounced with the “hype” feature. This situation normalizes the habit of Google – essentially an advertising company – of mobilizing big data to dominate the “galactic network.” This landscape facilitates the dissemination of cultural elements and enhances the importance of new generation digital roles.

From a psychographic perspective, the YouTuber prototype – representing a meta-value – consecrates its status as a “digital intermediary” through the lifestyle, values, rituals, and components it idealizes. This consecration is validated both culturally and financially as the subscriber count increases; a validation that may occur via “slow living” themes or, at times, through more radical or trendy content. Symbolic language, serving as a unifying factor in community relations, emerges alongside this process. Practices such as assigning special names to viewers, representing in-group memories with unique tags, and granting badges or avatars based on member seniority can illustrate the esoteric aspect of this process. On the other hand, YouTubers who achieve media visibility through a single platform and remain dependent on it produce content in compliance with the platform's unwritten rules, in addition to its contractual clauses. Content creators, conforming to trends in line with the “click competition”, may mimic one another within the context of the “Bandwagon effect.” Consequently, this phenomenon periodically transforms certain brands, products, specific behavioral patterns, or cultural movements like Hallyu into trends.

Author contributions

Ozgur Kilinc: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing-Original Draft, Writing-Review & Editing

Ali Arici: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing-Original Draft, Writing-Review & Editing

Sadik Caliskan: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing-Original Draft, Writing-Review & Editing

AI authorship and AI use

No AI tools were used in the development of this manuscript, including in research, planning, or writing.

Ethics declarations

Ethical approval was not required as no human participants were involved in this research.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The data used in this study are publicly available YouTube videos and related content.

Funding

No funding was received for this study.

References

- Abidin, C. (2020). Hanging out at home as a lifestyle: YouTube home tour vlogs in East Asia. In E. Polson, L. S. Clark, & R. Gajjala (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to media and class* (pp. 122-131). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Abidin, C. (2021). From “networked publics” to “refracted publics”: A companion framework for researching “below the radar” studies. *Social Media + Society*, 7(1), 1-13.
- Aldilla Audy, S., & Hapsarani, D. (2021). The Impact of Black female influencers on transnational Korean beauty: a case study of two Black beauty vloggers. *International Review of Humanities Studies*, 6(2), 951-962.
- An, J., Lee, C. C., & Kwak, N. (2023). A study on content creator competencies influencing YouTube channel loyalty and viewing satisfaction. *Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, 33(1-2), 70-95.
- Ang, L. (2011). Community relationship management and social media. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 18(1), 31-38.
- Archer, C. (2019). Social media influencers, post-feminism and neoliberalism: How mum bloggers’ ‘playbour’ is reshaping public relations. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 8(2), 149-166.
- Arnesson, J. (2023). Influencers as ideological intermediaries: Promotional politics and authenticity labour in influencer collaborations. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(3), 528-544.
- Berryman, R. (2020). Vloggers. In K. Ross, I. Bachmann, V. Cardo, S. Moorti, C. M. Scarcelli (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of gender, media, and communication* (pp.1-5). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell.

- Berryman, R., & Kavka, M. (2017). 'I guess a lot of people see me as a big sister or a friend': The role of intimacy in the celebrification of beauty vloggers. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(3), 307-320.
- Bishop, S. (2019). Managing visibility on YouTube through algorithmic gossip. *New Media & Society*, 21(11-12), 2589-2606.
- Bourdieu, P. (1996). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Burgess, J. & Green, J. (2009). *YouTube – online video and participatory culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chattopadhyay, S., Zimmermann, T., & Ford, D. (2021). Reel life vs. real life: How software developers share their daily life through vlogs. In *Proceedings of the 29th ACM Joint European Software Engineering Conference and Symposium on the Foundations of Software Engineering (ESEC/FSE '21)*, August 23–28, 2021, Athens, Greece. ACM, New York, NY.
- Chin, M. (2023). *12 best South-Korean slow living vloggers to follow and relax to*. Accessed 13 May 2025. <https://www.buro247.my/culture/life/south-korean-slow-living-vloggers.html>
- Cho, S. E., & Suh, J. (2021). Translating Korean beauty YouTube channels for a global audience. In R. Desjardins, C. Larssonneur and P. Lacour (Eds.), *When translation goes digital: Case studies and critical reflections* (pp. 173-197). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Choe, H. (2024a). The presentation of self via everyday vlogging: Analyzing everyday vlogs of Korean expatriates. *Discourse, Context & Media*, 59, 100784.
- Choe, H. (2024b). Doing being ordinary, doing being expatriate: A frame analysis of food activities in everyday vlogs of Korean expatriates. *Language & Communication*, 99, 244-258.
- Choi, W., & Lee, Y. (2019). Effects of fashion vlogger attributes on product attitude and content sharing. *Fashion and Textiles*, 6(1), 1-18.
- Colucci, M., & Pedroni, M. (2026). New frontiers of cultural intermediation: How social media practitioners (re) intermediate the relationship between production and consumption. In J. S. Maguire (Ed.), *Research handbook on the sociology of consumption* (pp. 117-127). UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Cunningham, S., & Craig, D. (2017). Being 'really real' on YouTube: authenticity, community and brand culture in social media entertainment. *Media International Australia*, 164(1), 71-81.
- del Río Carral, M., Volpato, L., Michoud, C., Phan, T. T., & Gatica-Perez, D. (2021). Professional YouTubers' health videos as research material: Formulating a multi-method design in health psychology. *Methods in Psychology*, 5, 100051.
- Demelius, Y., & Yoshida, Y. (2025). Technologies of the YouTuber self: digital vigilantism, masculinities and attention economy in neoliberal Japan. *Global Crime*, 26(2), 120-147.
- Driessens, O. (2016). The democratization of celebrity. Mediatization, promotion, and the body. In P. D. Marshall & S. Redmond (Eds.), *A companion to celebrity* (pp. 371-384). Chichester: Wiley.
- Duffy, B. E., & Hund, E. (2015). "Having it all" on social media: Entrepreneurial femininity and self-branding among fashion bloggers. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 1-11.
- Elliott, R., & Jankel-Elliott, N. (2003). Using ethnography in strategic consumer research. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 6(4), 215-223.
- Ferchaud, A., Grzeslo, J., Orme, S., & LaGroue, J. (2018). Parasocial attributes and YouTube personalities: Exploring content trends across the most subscribed YouTube channels. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 80, 88-96.
- Fuente-Cobo, C., Gutiérrez-de-Cabiedes, L., & Visiers Elizaincin, A. (2023). Using YouTube as a digital pulpit. The most influential Catholic YouTubers in Spanish speaking countries: Who they are and how they communicate. *Church, Communication and Culture*, 8(1), 59-83.
- Fullenkamp, N. K. (2019). YouTube vlogs as illness narratives: Methodological consideration. In N. Boero and K. Mason (Eds.) *The Oxford handbook of the sociology of body and embodiment* (pp. 87-104). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gannon, V., & Prothero, A. (2018). Beauty bloggers and YouTubers as a community of practice. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(7-8), 592-619.
- Grusauskaite, K. (2025). Broadcasting together. The biographical trajectories of YouTube conspiracy theory micro-celebrities. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 1-18.

- Gupta, R., Nair, K., Bhardwaj, S., & Paul, J. (2025). Micro-celebrities' interactive impact on brand attitude and purchase intentions. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 43(8), 1724-1749.
- Haggerty, K. D. (2004). Ethics creep: governing social science research in the name of ethics. *Qualitative Sociology*, 27, 391-414.
- Hassan, M., & Casaló Ariño, L. V. (2016). Consumer devotion to a different height: How consumers are defending the brand within Facebook brand communities. *Internet Research*, 26(4), 963-981.
- Hesmondhalgh, D. (2006). Bourdieu, the media and cultural production. *Media, Culture & Society*, 28(2), 211-231.
- Highfield, T., & Leaver, T. (2016). Instagrammatics and digital methods: Studying visual social media, from selfies and GIFs to memes and emoji. *Communication Research and Practice*, 2(1), 47-62.
- Himma-Kadakas, M., Rajavee, A., Orgmets, M. L., Eensaar, L., & Kõuts-Klemm, R. (2018). The food chain of YouTubers: engaging audiences with formats and genres. *Observatorio*, 54-75.
- Hodge, D. R., Carpenter, B. M., Yopez, R. A., & Lietz, B. C. (2021). Spirituality and religion in leading social work journals: A 10-year content analysis. *Social Work Research*, 45(1), 43-50.
- Hou, M. (2019). Social media celebrity and the institutionalization of YouTube. *Convergence*, 25(3), 534-553.
- Hurley, Z. (2024). Understanding social media marketing managers' intermediary role: A Middle Eastern case study. In L. Edwards, C. Bourne, J. V. A. Cabañes and G. Castro (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of promotional culture and society* (pp. 151-164). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hutchinson, J. (2017). *Cultural intermediation and audience participation in media organisations*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hutchinson, J. (2020). Digital first personality: Automation and influence within evolving media ecologies. *Convergence*, 26(5-6), 1284-1300.
- Hutchinson, J. (2023). Digital intermediation: Unseen infrastructures for cultural production. *New Media & Society*, 25(12), 3289-3307.
- HypeAuditor. (2025). *Top YouTube channels in South Korea*. Accessed 13 May 2025. <https://hypeauditor.com/top-youtube-all-south-korea/>
- Ibrahim, Y. (2021). Accounting the 'self': From diarization to life vlogs. *Convergence*, 27(2), 330-342.
- In-Young, O. (2023). Influence of sociocultural backgrounds in the 2010s and 2020s on the cosmetics industry and makeup trend. *Journal of the Korean Society of Cosmetology*, 29(6), 1601-1611.
- Jenkins, H. (2007). *Nine propositions towards a cultural theory of YouTube*. Available at: http://henryjenkins.org/2007/05/9_propositions_towards_a_cultu.html Accessed 10 March 2025.
- Ji-hye, S. (2015). *Korean beauty YouTubers reach out to global viewers*. <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/676791> Accessed 14 March 2025.
- Ju, H. (2018). The Korean wave and Korean dramas. *Oxford research encyclopaedia of communication*. <https://oxfordre.com/communication/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-715> Accessed 14 March 2025.
- Jupp, V. (2006). *The Sage dictionary of social research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kiaer, J. (2020). *Delicious words: East Asian food words in English*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Kim, A., Caidi, N., & Chah, N. (2018). Our Korea: Transcultural affinity as negotiated through YouTube encounters. In *Proceedings of ISIC: The Information Behaviour Conference*, Krakow, Poland, 9-11 October.
- Kleis Nielsen, R., & Ganter, S. A. (2018). Dealing with digital intermediaries: A case study of the relations between publishers and platforms. *New Media & Society*, 20(4), 1600-1617.
- Kobayashi, K. (2012). Globalization, corporate nationalism and Japanese cultural intermediaries: Representation of bukatsu through Nike advertising at the global-local nexus. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47(6), 724-742.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39(1), 61-72.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2006). Netnography 2.0. In Russell W. Belk (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research methods in marketing* (129-142). Cheltenham, UK : Edward Elgar.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2021). Netnography today: A call to evolve, embrace, energize, and electrify. In R. V. Kozinets and R. Gambetti (Eds.), *Netnography unlimited: Understanding technoculture using qualitative social media research* (pp. 3-23). New York: Routledge.

- Kozinets, R. V., Scaraboto, D., & Parmentier, M. A. (2018). Evolving netnography: How brand auto-netnography, a netnographic sensibility, and more-than-human netnography can transform your research. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34(3-4), 231-242.
- Kubler, K. (2023). Influencers and the attention economy: The meaning and management of attention on Instagram. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 39(11-12), 965-981.
- Langer, R., & Beckman, S. C. (2005). Sensitive research topics: netnography revisited. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8(2), 189-203.
- Lee, H. K. (2012). Cultural consumers as “new cultural intermediaries”: manga scanlators. *Arts marketing: an International Journal*, 2(2), 131-143.
- Lee, J., & Abidin, C. (2022). Oegugin influencers and pop nationalism through government campaigns: Regulating foreign nationals in the South Korean YouTube ecology. *Policy & Internet*, 14(3), 541-557.
- Lee, J., & Abidin, C. (2024). Backdoor advertising scandals, Yingyeo culture, and cancel culture among YouTube Influencers in South Korea. *New Media & Society*, 26(1), 405-425.
- Lee, M., & Cho, Y. (2021). Banal Orientalism on YouTube: “Eat Your Kimchi” as a New Cultural Intermediary and its Representation of South Korea. *Asian Communication Research*, 18(2), 69-88.
- Lee, S. (2021). Translating YouTube vlogs for a global audience: Innovative subtitling and community-building. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 24(5), 767-790.
- Lobato, R. (2016). The cultural logic of digital intermediaries: YouTube multichannel networks. *Convergence*, 22(4), 348-360.
- Locatelli, E. (2020). Influencers as socio-technical actors: mapping the paths of influence and the traces of the digital influencers’ system in Italy. *Journal of Sociocybernetics*, 17(1), 1-18.
- Loneragan, P. P., Patterson, M., & Lichrou, M. (2018). More than clothes hangers: cultural intermediaries in the field of fashion. *European Journal of Marketing*, 52(9/10), 2052-2074.
- Maguire, J. S., & Matthews, J. (2010). Cultural intermediaries and the media. *Sociology Compass*, 4(7), 405-416.
- Maguire, J. S., & Matthews, J. (2012). Are we all cultural intermediaries now? An introduction to cultural intermediaries in context. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(5), 551-562.
- Matthews, J., & Maguire, J. S. (2014). Introduction: Thinking with cultural intermediaries. In J. S. Maguire and J. Matthews (Eds.), *The cultural intermediaries reader* (pp. 1-12). London: Sage.
- McRoberts, S., Bonsignore, E., Peyton, T., Yarosh, S. (2016). “Do it for the viewers!” Audience engagement behaviours of young YouTubers. In *Proceedings of the 15th International Conference on Interaction Design and Children* (pp. 334-343). New York, NY: ACM.
- Mears, A. (2023). Bringing Bourdieu to a content farm: Social media production fields and the cultural economy of attention. *Social Media+ Society*, 9(3), 20563051231193027.
- Morreale, J. (2014). From homemade to store bought: Annoying Orange and the professionalization of YouTube. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14(1), 113-128.
- Morris, M., & Anderson, E. (2015). ‘Charlie is so cool like’: Authenticity, popularity and inclusive masculinity on YouTube. *Sociology*, 49(6), 1200-1217.
- Mortensen, O. (2024). *How many people use YouTube? Statistics & facts (2025)* Accessed 10 March 2025. <https://seo.ai/blog/how-many-people-use-youtube#:~:text=With%20over%202.49%20billion%20monthly%20active%20users%20as%20of%20March,available%20in%20over%20100%20countries>.
- Nassauer, A., & Legewie, N. M. (2021). Video data analysis: A methodological frame for a novel research trend. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(1), 135-174.
- Negus, K. (2002). The work of cultural intermediaries and the enduring distance between production and consumption. *Cultural Studies*, 16(4), 501-515.
- Nelson, M. R., & Otnes, C. C. (2005). Exploring cross-cultural ambivalence: A netnography of intercultural wedding message boards. *Journal of Business Research*, 58(1), 89-95.
- Oh, D. C. (2017). Korean wave K-pop fans react: Hybridity and the white celebrity-fan on YouTube. *International Journal of Communication*, 11, 2270-2287.
- Oh, D. C., & Oh, C. (2017). Vlogging white privilege abroad: Eat your kimchi’s eating and spitting out of the Korean other on YouTube. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 10(4), 696-711.
- Ono, K. A., & Kwon, J. (2013). Re-worlding culture? In Y. Kim (Ed.) *The Korean wave: Korean media go global* (pp. 199-214). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Park, J., & Chun, J. (2022). Expressing lookism on YouTube fashion channels: Perceptions of young Korean women. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 9(1), 87-107.
- Pennington, D. R. (2017). Coding of non-text data. In L. Sloan and A. Quan-Haase (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of social media research methods* (pp. 232-250). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Perez, C., & Sokolova, K. (2023). Is there a community of French fitness influencers on YouTube? A social network analysis approach to YouTube engagement. *Proceedings of the 10th Multidisciplinary International Social Networks Conference*, 13-19.
- Perry, B., Smith, K., & Warren, S. (2015). Revealing and re-valuing cultural intermediaries in the 'real' creative city: Insights from a diary-keeping exercise. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(6), 724-740.
- Preiser, R., García, M. M., Hill, L., & Klein, L. (2022). Qualitative content analysis. In R. Biggs, A. de Vos, R. Preiser, H. Clements, K. Maciejewski and M. Schlüter (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of research methods for social-ecological systems* (pp. 270-281). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Radu, E. I. (2021). Cultural capital in the digital age. The YouTuber online persona. *Culture. Society. Economy. Politics*, 1(1), 9-20.
- Rosamond, E. (2023). YouTube personalities as infrastructure: assets, attention choreographies and cohortification processes. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*, 24(2), 254-282.
- Rose, G. (2022). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. London: Sage.
- Rotman, D. & Preece, J. (2010). The 'WeTube' in YouTube—creating an online community through video sharing. *International Journal of Web Based Communities*, 6(3), 317-333.
- Saldaña, J., & Omasta, M. (2018). *Qualitative research: Analyzing life*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Shang, D., & Ghriga, M. (2019). Examining the impacts of key influencers on community development. *Computers, Materials & Continua*, 61(1), 1-10.
- Siciliano, M. L. (2023). Intermediaries in the age of platformized gatekeeping: The case of YouTube "creators" and MCNs in the US. *Poetics*, 97, 101748.
- Smith, D. (2014). Charlie is so 'English'-like: nationality and the branded celebrity person in the age of YouTube. *Celebrity Studies*, 5(3), 256-274.
- Smith, D. R. (2016). Imagining others more complexly': celebrity and the ideology of fame among YouTube's 'Nerdfighteria'. *Celebrity Studies*, 7(3), 339-353.
- Smith, D. R. (2017). The tragedy of self in digitised popular culture: The existential consequences of digital fame on YouTube. *Qualitative Research*, 17(6), 699-714.
- SocialBlade. (2025). *Top 50 YouTube creators in South Korea by subscribers*. Accessed 13 May 2025. <https://socialblade.com/youtube/top/country/kr/mostsubscribed>
- Sofian, F. A. (2020). YouTubers creativity in creating public awareness of Covid-19 in Indonesia: A YouTube content analysis. *International Conference on Information Management and Technology (ICIMTech)*, pp. 881-886.
- Stachowiak, K. (2019). Cultural intermediaries and their role in creative economy. *Cultural Studies Appendix*. Special Edition—English Issue 2019/2, 225-244.
- StarNgage. (2025). *Top 1,000 YouTube influencers in South Korea*. Accessed 13 May 2025. <https://starnage.com/plus/en-us/influencer/ranking/youtube/south-korea>
- Statista. (2024). *Most accessed social media and messaging apps used for news in South Korea* as of February 2024. Accessed 14 March 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/981944/south-korea-social-media-messaging-apps-for-news/>
- Sui, W., Sui, A., & Rhodes, R. E. (2022). What to watch: Practical considerations and strategies for using YouTube for research. *Digital Health*, 8, 1-13.
- Sung, B., & Lee, J. Y. (2024). The influence of YouTube binge eating vlog viewing on perception and behavior among South Korean women, aged 20s to 30s, with binge eating tendencies: a qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Mental Health*, 1-27.
- Tolbert, A. N., & Drogos, K. L. (2019). Tweens' wishful identification and parasocial relationships with YouTubers. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 2781.
- Tur-Viñes, V. & González-Río, M. (2019). YouTubers and community management strategies. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 74, 1291-1307.

- Uzunoglu, E., & Kip, S. M. (2014). Brand communication through digital influencers: Leveraging blogger engagement. *International Journal of Information Management*, 34(5), 592-602.
- Vlahovic, A., Ercegovac, I., & Tankosic, M. (2023). Unraveling the Narrative Structures in YouTube Vlogs: A Qualitative Content Analysis. *Media Studies and Applied Ethics*, 4(2), 25-42.
- Warmbrodt, J., Sheng, H., & Hall, R. (2008). Social Network Analysis of Video Bloggers' Community. *Proceedings of the 41st Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 1-9), Waikoloa, HI.
- Whiting, A., & Williams, D. (2013). Why people use social media: a uses and gratifications approach. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 16(4), 362-369.
- Woo, B. (2012). Alpha nerds: Cultural intermediaries in a subcultural scene. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 15(5), 659-676.
- Wu, C., Kao, S. C., & Chen, J. C. (2024). Why dropping intention of attention to YouTuber channels? *Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics*, 36(5), 1190-1210.
- Xu, W. W., Park, J. Y., & Park, H. W. (2017). Longitudinal dynamics of the cultural diffusion of Kpop on YouTube. *Quality & Quantity*, 51, 1859-1875.
- Yoon, K. (2023a). De/Constructing the soft power discourse in Hallyu. *Communication Research and Practice*, 9(3), 341-357.
- Yoon, K. (2023b). Precarious eating: Young Koreans' digital practice of mukbang. In Y. Kim (Ed.), *Introducing Korean popular culture* (pp. 254-264). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Yoon, T. J., & Jin, D. Y. (2017). Introduction. The Korean Wave: Twenty years, retrospect and prospect. In T-J. Yoon and D. Y. Jin (Eds.), *The Korean wave: Evolution, fandom, and transnationality* (pp. xi-xix). London: Lexington Books.
- Zhang, H. (2018). Evoking presence in vlogging: A case study of UK beauty blogger Zoe Sugg. *First Monday*, 23(1), 1-21.