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"Our Korea": transcultural affinity as negotiated through YouTube encounters

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Introduction. *We examine a particular genre of YouTube videos, those produced by individuals who act as cultural translators and the work that such videos do to enable and facilitate cross-cultural communication and cultural literacy for their viewers.*
Method. *We selected eight videos from two popular YouTube channels dealing with Korean culture and operated by non-Koreans (The Korean Englishman and Simon and Martina). The videos and comments section were analysed to assess the nature of the online interactions and engagement.*
Analysis. *YouTube comments following each of the videos selected were coded using Madden, Ruthven and McMenemy (2013)'s comment classification scheme. Our analysis generated four main types of interaction.*
Findings. *Our findings indicate variations in the audiences and the languages used in the comment sections, and the kind of engagement taking place on the platform. Our findings also support the idea that cultural literacy is shaped through interactions in the forms of information sharing, Q/A, reflecting about one's own culture, and co-creating culture together.*
Conclusion. *YouTube content creators can act as effective cultural bridges. The YouTube platform is uniquely suited for cross-cultural communication and for facilitating transcultural affinities and cultural literacy in this increasingly globalized world.*

Background

Since Google's acquisition in 2005, YouTube has rapidly grown and is now the 2nd most visited Website after Google.com (Alexa, 2018). As people watch millions of hours of videos daily, YouTube is quickly morphing into a lively space where viewers do more than just consume videos: they share their experiences, opinions, and interact with others from all over the world (Burgess and Green, 2018; Burke and Snyder, 2008). The popularity of YouTube as a social media platform is also evident in the rise of a new class of content creators, the *YouTuber*(YouTube statistics, 2017), an actual term registered in the Oxford English Dictionary that describes people who upload videos to YouTube (YouTuber). The status of (some) content creators is now akin to that of modern Internet celebrities, or what Jerslev (2016) termed *micro-celebrity* vloggers (i.e., YouTube video bloggers). Indeed, thousands of YouTube channels earn their producers six-figure earnings annually, which further reinforces the idea that YouTube content creators can no longer be portrayed solely as mere amateurs posting cat videos (O'Neil, 2012). In fact, the majority of active YouTubers have agencies and operate as miniature production companies replete with professional content development, recording and editing, as well as ads and sponsorships

(Jerslev, 2016). With their high quality videos, YouTubers create a virtuous circle that attracts even more viewers, generates more revenue, and expands the online community. As the YouTube platform is closely linked to everyday life information practices (Savolainen, 1995), information and media scholars are starting to pay attention to it for insights into affective dimensions, audience engagement, authenticity, and digital labour (Burgess and Green, 2018; Madden, Ruthven and McMenemy, 2013; Schultes, Dorner and Lehner, 2013).

In this research, we focus on a particular genre of YouTube videos: those that explicitly promote intercultural encounters. The global dispersion of audiences enabled by our digital networked world makes it more likely that people will encounter other cultures, mores and values online. The videos examined in this study introduce the viewer to other cultures (in our case, the Korean culture) in an entertaining and informative manner, and are produced by non-natives of the cultures represented (thus raising potential issues of authenticity). We ask: How do these videos operate and what makes them popular? What kinds of informational behaviour occur in these spaces? What is the nature of the engagements that take place around the videos and in the comments section? What can we infer about the medium's capacity to foster some form of cultural literacy?

Theoretical framework

This paper draws upon various concepts in information studies and cultural studies to make sense of the nature of the engagements taking place on YouTube (YT). Specifically, we seek to broaden established information frameworks (such as ELIS or information grounds) and incorporate other useful notions such as that of the encounter (Ahmed, 2000), transcultural affinity (Eze, 2015), and cultural literacy (Hirsch, Kett and Trefil, 1988; Heyward, 2002) to enrich our understanding of information practices occurring in online information environments.

The concept of *encounter* as theorized by Ahmed (2000) accounts for the relational and contextual factors that shape engagement and the cross-cultural dynamics at play in a setting like the one examined in this article. Ahmed understands the encounter to be not just between people (in this case, content producers, viewers, commenters), but also between texts (here, videos, captions, comments), readers/contributors, and even nations and cultures. Following Ahmed, we inscribe the encounter, rather than the Korean identity itself, as the point of departure for our examination. Ahmed's conceptualization of the encounter as a method allows us to consider '*the production of meaning as a form of sociality. That is, meanings are produced precisely in the intimacy of the* ***more than one…*** *by* ***coming together*** *at a particular time and place*' (p. 15). In using encounters as the lens and space through which we examine the YT channels and the interactions stemming from them, we start unpacking the social relationships and power dynamics brought into the encounter through the participants, the texts/videos, and stories shared on the platform.

Related to *encounter*, the concept of *transcultural affinity* is useful in helping us understand how viewers make sense of, and negotiate, cultural differences online. The concept of transcultural affinity has been applied to diverse fields from cultural studies to fandom studies (Chen, 2001; Chin and Morimoto, 2013M; Forcier, 2017; Yoon, 2017). Eze (2015) emphasizes the flexibility of the concept, as transculturality acknowledges '*the presence of other cultural idioms in one's own cultural realm' and thus provides 'some form of flexibility and affinity*' (p. 219). Transculturality, in essence, is '*the act of bonding with people of other cultural or racial backgrounds by being open to their humanity*' (Eze, 2015, p.219). Thus, we use the concept of transcultural affinity to explain the negotiation between and across cultures, and the possibility of a bridge or common ground between them. In his examination of the Korean (Pop) Wave among young Canadians with Asian backgrounds, Yoon (2017) uses two dimensions of transcultural affinity (racial and affective affinities) to make sense of young Asian-Canadians' consumption of transcultural media. These media, he states, contribute to a form of empowerment by not only '*exploring and positively reaffirming their race'* but also by*'obfuscat[ing] the social structures imposed on minority audiences*' (p. 2361). In other words, it is through their engagement that global viewers integrate these artefacts into their everyday repertoire, and thus grant the videos the power to do identity work. As *foreigners* who have resided in Korea, the authors of the YT channels examined in this article position themselves as insiders/outsiders, and from that vantage point share their lived experiences and subjective take on Korean culture. In turn, the global viewers develop positive (or not) emotions toward the videos by negotiating with other viewers the narratives produced, and by undertaking the cultural translations necessary (Yoon talks about '*cultural translation from below*' (ibid, p.2352)). The concept of transcultural affinity thus unearths the cultural media consumption among transnational YT audiences, as well as the engagement and grassroots cultural translation by the fans/viewers of YT videos.

Finally, cultural literacy as a concept that gets at '*the competencies, understandings, attitudes, language proficiencies, participation and identities necessary for effective cross-cultural engagement*' (Heyward, 2002) completes our framework. We use the concept of cultural literacy to explore the informational competencies that people gain as a result of their involvement in online communications such as YouTube (Gonglewski and Helm, 2017; Johnson, Lenartowicz and Apud, 2006). Existing research has already started to make a case for the development of cultural literacy and competencies within online environments. Komlodi and Caidi (2016) and Komlodi, Caidi, Martin-Hammond, Reyes and Sundin (2016) examine internationally-educated health professionals (often non-English native speakers) and their information practices (seeking, using and sharing information) in a second language. The authors' findings point to the importance of searching as learning, and the need to develop appropriate support tools to promote the transcultural learning that often takes place through the searching process. This form of culturally-situated active learning is increasingly been emphasized as a critical form of literacy, as evidenced by UNESCO's work in the area of global media and information literacy assessment (Hicks and Lloyd, 2016). Similarly, Diehl and Prins (2008)'s study of a Second Life online game exposed the development of elements of intercultural literacy

among participants. Wang (2012) also reported evidence of people being able to build cultural literacy by actively maintaining cross-cultural friendships on Facebook. Our study contributes to this line of inquiry.

Methods

To explore how YouTube videos are serving audiences as a potential cultural information bridge, we analysed two YouTube channels that are popular among people who are interested in Korean culture: *Korean Englishman* and *Simon and Martina*, both prolific YouTubers who have created numerous videos introducing Korean culture to their (diverse) audiences by sharing their experiences of Korean culture. The two YouTube channels were selected based on their popularity and high video content quality, in addition to their topical relevance. At the onset, it seems that the target audiences are different for each of these YouTube channels. *Korean Englishman* (KE) is aimed at both English and Korean viewers, using both English and Korean language on the videos with their own captions, whereas the *Simon and Martina* (SM) video series focus primarily on English-speaking audiences. It must be noted that *Simon and Martina*'s videos are translated in up to eight different languages thanks to the subtitles uploaded voluntarily by the fans (an example of grassroots cultural translation). As a means of gaining insights into the nature of the viewers' engagement with these two channels, we selected four videos from each YouTube channel based on their popularity and topical relevance.

The Korean Englishman and the *Simon and Martina* channels share many characteristics in their explorations of Korean culture. Both the *Korean Englishman* and *Simon and Martina* YouTube channels are operated by non-Korean Westerners, from England and Canada respectively, who have lived in South Korea for several months or even years at a time. Both channels produce videos prolifically, with each one garnering upwards of millions of views and attracting thousands of comments. Both channels approach the exploration of Korean culture with great humour, respect, and informality throughout the many videos. It must be noted that the two YouTube channels we selected constitute full-time ventures for their creators. Although the early videos started in an amateur manner, they quickly garnered a sufficient following that the content creators invested time and resources into their production. This fact is important to note given our focus on cultural bridging, as it begs the question of authenticity vs. catering to an audience that wants to see a winning concept repeatedly reproduced (e.g., *The Korean Englishman*'s foray into British people trying Korean foods).

The videos from these two channels (see Table 1) were selected based on their intra-channel popularity, according to the video view count (as of March 1, 2018), and their content matter.

Video No.	Video Title	Video Link	Length	Views
43101	English people try Korean	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srXsCRnSgBA	0,296527777777778	8,456,643

	chicken and beer!!			
43102	English priest in Korea 1 (Visiting Korea for the first time)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NN0U1lGygFo	0,240972222222222	2,685,509
43103	English priest in Korea 2 (Delivery culture)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SYQcJpEjIY	0,298611111111111	3,601,690
43104	English priest in Korea 3 (Medicine clinic)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoRYHHqupfI	0,493055555555556	1,825,836
43132	Korean vs. North American beauty standards	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7zW9KjSzOQ	0,231944444444444	1,438,012
43133	Korean stereotypes on foreigners	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYQwaQDEM1s	0,35625	1,037,553
43134	Five things you should not do in Korea	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWYzAi-qSU0	0,190277777777778	999,998
43135	Are you a Fat and ugly foreigner?	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27qGeVtq-Go	0,254861111111111	973,315

Table 1. Selection of YouTube videos for analysis (as of March 1, 2018)

Channels

Korean Englishman

The Korean Englishman (KE) YouTube channel was started in June 2013. As of March 1, 2018, the channel had over 2.4 million subscribers (doubling since January 2017) and 500 million views in total. The channel is operated by two Londoners, Josh Carrott and Ollie Kendal. As a fluent Korean speaker, Josh introduces various topics, such as traditional Korean food or the Korean SAT English exam to British friends or guests featured in the videos. Ollie, the person in charge of filming and editing, records the friends/guests' reactions. Videos are uploaded to the channel every Wednesday. In an interview given to BBC Radio, Josh explained that his motivation for creating the videos was '*to link the two*

cultures (Korean and English) while having fun along the way' (Korean Englishman, 2015).

The KE channel has several topics, such as *English people try Korean [food]* or [*Person X] goes to Korea*. For this project, we selected the channel's most popular videos, namely *English people try Korean chicken and beer*, and three videos from the series *English priest goes to Korea*. The first video features reactions from English people with little or no exposure to Korean food until that point. The other videos feature a recurring character, Father Chris, who experiences various facets of Korean culture on his first accompanied visit to South Korea.

Simon and Martina

Simon and Martina (SM) is a YouTube channel operated by a married Canadian couple. As of March 1, 2018, the channel had over 1.3 million subscribers and over 400 million views in total. Their videos often deal with everyday life issues as they experience them (as residents of a foreign country). They first moved to South Korea in 2008 and have been making videos since February 2008 under the channel's former name Eat Your Kimchi (EYK). The channel was later renamed Simon and Martina as they subsequently moved to Japan (and started producing videos under the name Eat Your Sushi) and are increasingly exploring diverse content from all around the world. They are currently based in Japan.

Four videos from the SM channel were analysed. We selected the TL;DR Thursday category because of the in-depth discussion of cultural topics in these videos. TL;DR Thursday is a Q&A video session in which Simon and Martina attempt to answer different questions asked by their subscribers. Most of the questions are related to cultural experiences in Korea, and can range from questions asking about weddings in Korea to the threat posed by North Korea. Table 1 lists the most popular videos selected from the two channels (KE or SM) and the topics tackled.

Data collection and coding

The YouTube comments for the eight selected videos were obtained using a Python computer program that queried the official YouTube Data Application Programming Interface. The data collection scripts were written to be easily modifiable to query other interesting resources and scale for future iterations of this research. Of the many API resource endpoints that could be queried, we were most interested in the endpoint that returned comments data. As a result, the Python script sent requests with a parameter set to *relevance* (rather than *time*) so that up to 100 of the top comments were returned according to YouTube's internal algorithm for relevance. The output data were structured so that a single view would contain all relevant information. Furthermore, the CSV files could easily be loaded into a database for further processing as needed.

With the textual data collected, an analysis was conducted through an iterative process. Specifically, we adapted the YouTube comment classification scheme by Madden *et*

al. (2013) which consists of over 50 sub-categories each pertaining to 10 high-level categories, ranging from *information* to *opinio*n. In the coding stage, and to ensure intercoder reliability, two of the authors worked separately coding each comment. In the few cases where the two coders disagreed on a comment's category, the discrepancy was resolved through further discussion. In addition, the researchers' different cultural backgrounds (one was a Canadian of Korean origins, and one was a Korean student newly arrived in Canada) were helpful in exploring the nuances and tone of some of the comments made about various topics.

Results and findings

We report here on the following three dimensions of our findings: linguistic distribution, specific types of interactions (observed in the comments section), and intercultural negotiations.

Linguistic distribution of comments

While both channels address Korean culture from the creators' perspectives (as insiders/outsiders), they differ in that one (SM) features the hosts as talking heads mostly, while the format of the KE videos consists of immersing predominantly English guests into a Korean setting and getting their feedback on the experience (culinary practice or otherwise). Our analysis indicates clear variations between the two channels. For KE, comments were predominantly in Korean (79.4%) vs. in English (20.6%). By contrast, 98% of the comments for SM videos were in English (vs. 2% in Korean). SM's audience seems to prefer English for their interactions with other viewers, and for their exchanges about the videos. In the KE case, the overwhelming use of the Korean language suggests that South Korean viewers were engaged heavily in the consumption of the content, and in debating how their culture and practices were seen through the eyes of the non-Korean content producers.

The nature of interactions as depicted in the comments

The eight videos seem to serve as a platform for greater discussion and community-building about the *making* of the videos as much as about the cultural experiences themselves. Beyond liking a video, we observed a continuum of engagement by the audiences with the videos and their subject matter, which included: information sharing, storytelling, reflections about the video itself, references/comparisons to other videos in the series, and side conversations among viewers about a related topic. The videos themselves become triggers for a broader conversation (the *encounter* in Ahmed's sense) and a departure point for meaning making and relationship- building.

Table 2 shows the top four high-level categories that describe the types of comments from each channel's videos: these are Opinion, Information, General conversation, and Impression, in descending order of frequency. The combination of these four categories accounts for 80% of all of the categorized comments, which represents a significant portion of the kinds of interactions that take place around the videos selected. The

remaining 20% of the comments are distributed among the six other categories at much lower rates of 5.2%, 4.7%, 3.3%, 3.3%, 2.7% and 1% (see Appendix).

In Madden *et al.* (2013)'s taxonomy, *opinion*comments are those where '*commenters request or give their points-of-view on a video, person, object or topic*' and are often longer in length than *impression* comments (p. 706). As a kind of interaction that makes up 28% of all comments, the frequent sharing of personal opinions, which are more often positive than negative (or mixed opinions), indicates the degree of openness and affinity-building that seems to take place on these channels.

The *information* category describes comments that '*request or provide facts about something in the video content, video context or a completely unrelated topic*'. (p. 704). The frequent appearance of comments that convey factual information on aspects of the Korean culture (or how it compares with other cultures) accounts for over 25% of the total comments, indicating that the viewers are actively exchanging information. Most of the comments focus on providing comparisons between different cultures (cultural translation through comparing contexts), and on contextualizing the materials presented in the video (another form of cultural translation, in effect).

General conversation comments are identifiable by their role in '*initiating and maintaining conversations*' (Madden *et al.*, 2013, p.708). At a rate of 15.4%, there is a sizeable portion of the comments that focus on generating a conversation between viewers, or between the viewers and the creators of the videos. The specific subcategories include interactions ranging from *requesting personal information* to *random off-topic exclamation* responses. These diverse interactions are placed under the umbrella of *general conversation* because they are commonly concerned with achieving a conversational dialogue among the community of viewers. This focus on initiating and sustaining the conversation makes *general conversation* a distinct category from providing opinions or information, and can be interpreted as the social glue necessary for enabling the encounter.

Impression comments '*express people's immediate reactions to what they have watched in a video or read in comments*' (ibid, p.706) and are often short in length. These short responses are slightly more positive than negative in numbers. Although they may not be geared towards extended conversations, these short interactions contribute to the development of transcultural affinities amongst viewers. The relatively low rank of *impression* comments in relation to the three larger categories is also a positive sign that interactions are, on the whole, more intimate and sustained.

Our findings point to several functions played by the examined videos: from informing to entertaining, creating a space for sustained communication, and developing transcultural affinities through information sharing and reflecting about another (and one's own) culture.

Category or sub-category	Korean Englishman	Simon and	Total

Opinion	112 (28.2%)	76 (19.3%)	221 (27.9%)
Opinion - request	12 (9.2%, 3%)	13 (14.4%, 3.3%)	25 (11.3%, 3.2%)
Opinion - give (general)	15 (11.5%, 3.8%)	11 (12.2%, 2.8%)	26 (11.8%, 3.3%)
Opinion - give (positive)	53 (40.5%, 13.4%)	42 (46.7%, 10.7%)	95 (43%, 12%)
Opinion - give (negative)	9 (6.9%, 2.3%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	10 (4.5%, 1.3%)
Opinion - give (mixed)	9 (6.9%, 2.3%)	12 (13.3%, 3%)	21 (9.5%, 2.7%)
Opinion - insult	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	1 (0.5%, 0.1%)
Opinion - compliment	8 (6.1%, 2%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	9 (4.1%, 1.1%)
Opinion - criticism	8 (6.1%, 2%)	7 (7.8%, 1.8%)	15 (6.8%, 1.9%)
Opinion - tribute	17 (13%, 4.3%)	2 (2.2%, 0.5%)	19 (8.6%, 2.4%)
Information	82 (20.7%)	112 (28.4%)	194 (24.5%)
Information - make comparison	59 (73.8%, 14.9%)	63 (55.3%, 16%)	122 (62.9%, 15.4%)
Information - give (video content)	6 (7.5%, 1.5%)	29 (25.4%, 7.4%)	35 (18%, 4.4%)
Information - give (video context)	7 (8.8%, 1.8%)	22 (19.3%, 5.6%)	29 (14.9%, 3.7%)
Information - request	8 (10%, 2%)	0 (0%, 0%)	8 (4.1%, 1%)
General conversation	31 (7.8%)	85 (21.6%)	122 (15.4%)
General conversation - greetings	0 (0%, 0%)	6 (6.7%, 1.5%)	6 (4.9%, 0.8%)
General conversation - thanking	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	1 (0.8%, 0.1%)
General conversation -	1 (3.1%, 0.3%)	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (0.8%,

joke			0.1%)
General conversation - apology	5 (15.6%, 1.3%)	5 (5.6%, 1.3%)	10 (8.2%, 1.3%)
General conversation - status description	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	1 (0.8%, 0.1%)
General conversation - anecdote	1 (3.1%, 0.3%)	2 (2.2%, 0.5%)	3 (2.5%, 0.4%)
General conversation - random off-topic exclamation	5 (15.6%, 1.3%)	18 (20%, 4.6%)	23 (18.9%, 2.9%)
General conversation - request personal information	8 (25%, 2%)	6 (6.7%, 1.5%)	14 (11.5%, 1.8%)
Impression	77 (19.4%)	47 (11.9%)	95 (12%)
Impression – positive	37 (59.7%, 9.3%)	17 (51.5%, 4.3%)	54 (56.8%, 6.8%)
Impression – negative	24 (38.7%, 6%)	16 (48.5%, 4.1%)	40 (42.1%, 5.1%)
Impression – general	1 (1.6%, 0.3%)	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.1%)

Table 2. Frequent comment categories for KE and SM, with counts (intra-category %, inter-category%)

Intercultural encounters and negotiations

Our analysis of the comments sections of the videos selected seems to suggest a high level of engagement by the audience(s) around the videos per se (e.g., discussing at length the treatment of specific topics depicted in the videos) as well as more generally about positionality vis a vis one's culture and cultural practices. The audience comes together not only by watching the videos but more significantly by complementing this encounter with the ability to read through the (significant) postings by others. Indeed, some videos have upward of 17,018 comments (e.g., KE's *Korean standardized test for college admission*); and many have 5000 comments on average. Our analysis shows that comments usually revolve around the following themes: a) sharing of experiences, b) question and answering, c) reflecting on one's own cultural practices, and d) co-creating culture together. We examine these below.

Sharing of experiences (offering ideas, suggestions, personal anecdotes)

As the YouTube videos are specifically designed to present information regarding Korean culture, the viewers are gaining cultural knowledge from watching the videos per se (although filtered through the creator's unique lens). In addition to the information directly gained from the YouTube videos, the viewers also volunteer and share information about their own experience in Korea as well as comparative aspects from familiar cultures. The audience also freely shares their sentiment about the work of the content generated: gratitude at obtaining information that can prove helpful for one's travel plans, awe or curiosity about an unfamiliar culture, mindful awareness and introspection about one's own practices, as the excerpts below illustrate.

> *your videos are really helpful.. made me feel more confident to travel alone in Korea..more power to both of u!*
> *(Source: Video 2-4 Are you a fat and ugly foreigner?)*

> *hi simon and martina..u two.. i should say very intelligent!! u make my visit to korea moreexciting.. and yeah feed me alot of info not only just abt traveling but almost everything aboutKorea.. thumbs up to u guys.*
> *(Source: Video 2-2 Korean stereotypes on foreigners)*

Question/answers (asking, agreeing, disagreeing, contextualizing)

Based on the YouTubers' depiction and representation of aspects of the Korean culture, the audience responds in different ways. On the *Simon and Martina* channel, the viewers tend to expand on the YouTubers' perspective by asking questions, agreeing/disagreeing or offering new insights. In discussing the various cultural practices, the contributors are afforded the possibility of reflecting on their own assumptions and sometimes even challenging these. Notably, sensitive issues, such as racism or stereotypes, were openly discussed and responded to in the comments section. Even when some of the questions could have been considered rude or inappropriate in certain situations, the audience was able to maintain a respectful level of discussion and even to pose candid questions on different cultures in an unrestrained manner. Through the encounter, it was possible for some stereotypes to be discussed further and at times challenged (a critical aspect of cultural literacy).

> *"ahhhh those precious, precious stereotypes... all polish people steal (esp cars), all italiens are in the mafia and are small, russians have no manners and no one likes them, all asian men have tiny dicks, germans just wear lederhosen/dirndl and eat sauerkraut with bratwurst and drink beer all day, americans are stupid and learn nothing in school, all africans have aids... the list goes on andon. maybe one day humanity will learn that we are in fact all the same!*
> *(Source: Video 2-2 Korean stereotypes on foreigners).*

Reflecting on one's own culture

Even though the YouTube videos selected were created by non-Koreans, the examination of the comments show that, in fact, some Korean viewers themselves reported that they had learnt something about their own culture by watching the videos and following the

postings by other viewers. Indeed, it seems that in the process of watching how their own culture was perceived by outsiders, the Korean audience members were able to *put themselves in the shoes* of non- Koreans and see the practices through their eyes. This process allows not only non-Korean audiences to develop cultural literacy, but Koreans themselves get a deeper understanding of their practices and how these might be perceived from the outside.

> *The priest is so open minded. It's not easy to try strange food in a different country. How would itfeel eat Kimchi for the first time in their life? I try to imagine that feeling as a Korean.*
> *(Source: Video 1-2 English priest in Korea 1: English priest's first impression of Korea!)*

> *I'm Korean but why, i'm realizing this culture watching this video.*
> *(Source: Video 1-3 EnglishPriest in Korea 2: English priest AMAZED by Korean PIZZA!!!)*

Co-creating culture together

The popularity of the YouTube channels selected seems to stem from a certain intimacy between the content creators and their audiences, sometimes leading to the production of something new altogether. The viewers would often quote excerpts from the YouTube videos (thus giving it legitimacy and authority as a source of information). We also noted several instances where the non-Korean viewers started making use of the Korean terms in their postings; and we found at least one instance (in the KE video) where a new term (*chimaeking*) that was initially coined humorously by the video creator started having a life of its own as it was taken over by the audience, and even reprised in subsequent videos. It became an inside joke and a co-creation of the KE community. In that instance, the viewers found the new term to be a propos and started applying the expression in their own (offline) life.

> *You guys are so influential! We are saying **chimaeking!** when my friends and I go to have somechicken now. 'Hey! Let's chimaeking today!'*
> *(Source: Video 1-1 English people try Korean chicken and beer!!)*

It is this form of engagement that contributes to generating a tightly knit subculture among a segment of the audience in both the KE and the SM YouTube channels.

Discussion and implications

In this study, we examined a particular genre of YouTube videos, those produced by individuals who act as cultural bridges, and the work that such videos do in terms of enabling an encounter among globally dispersed audiences, facilitating transcultural affinity, and possibly leading to enhanced cultural literacy for their viewers. In our study, the encounter takes place around the many representations of Korea, thus begging the question of whose Korea is actually being depicted. Ahmed's notion of encounter is fitting in the way in which it captures the idea of the nation as something that '*becomes imagined*

and embodied as a space, not simply by being defined against other spaces, but by being defined as close to some others (friends), and further away from other others (strangers)'. (2000, p. 100).

The videos examined stem from two popular English-language YouTube channels produced by non-Koreans (*The Korean Englishman* and *Martina and Simon*), which both purport (to a certain degree) to introduce viewers to their readings of Korean culture. But, as has been made clear in this article, a more nuanced and complex picture of Korea emerges through the interactions and discursive engagement of readers/viewers/comment contributors on the YT platform. As Eze puts it, transcultural affinity '*seeks to break down artificial boundaries created by centuries of racist, classic ideologies by considering as normal, or ordinary the relations between people from different racial backgrounds*'. (2015, p.219). Our findings seem to support the idea that transcultural affinity and cultural literacy are shaped through affective attachments (to the content producers and to fellow viewers consuming the content – a fandom, in effect), as well as through practices that include information sharing, Q/A, reflecting about one's own culture, and co-creating culture together. This study seems to suggest that YouTube content creators can indeed act as cultural bridges, and that the very design of the YouTube platform is uniquely suited to enable transcultural affinity to form, and cultural literacy to occur among geographically dispersed individuals.

Indeed, in both of the YouTube channels selected, a major ingredient of the success of the videos produced seems to be the ability of the vloggers to capitalize on their lived experiences in Korea and their role as subjective yet authentic cultural bridges/cultural translators for others. Their performance has wide reaching appeal, from the tourist planning to travel to Korea, to the business person vying to understand the Korean public, the schoolteacher researching a project, and so on. Their positionality as outsiders and/or allies (British and Canadians) along with their lived experiences in (and declared affection for) Korea are key elements that allow them to function as credible cultural bridges (Hicks and Lloyd, 2016). Nevertheless, we argue that future work should build on Ahmed (2000)'s feminist, post-colonial framework to provide a nuanced analysis of power and (national) representation, and to refine our understanding of the dynamics of othering at play in online environments.

The YouTubers examined seem to have a keen knowledge of what their viewers want to learn about, and the most effective ways to share such information. Their status as foreigners/outsiders is an attractive point for Korean audiences, too, as they bring fresh insights and perspectives to these viewers' culture. Through the process of creating, watching, and interacting with the videos, both the creators and the audiences are building transcultural affinity and cultural competence together. Chin and Morimoto put it eloquently: '*fans become fans not (necessarily) because of any cultural or national differences or similarities, but because of a moment of affinity between the fan and transcultural object*'. (2013, p.104-105). When viewers tune in who are from cultures other than Korea (and England or Canada), the cultural bridging among the members of this much larger audience can also take place, with the videos playing a central role.

It must be noted that the videos are only a part of the design. Their fast pace, humorous references, and relevant information delivered with sincerity and good faith enable the Vloggers to secure a strong following as "micro-celebrities" of modern social media (Jerslev, 2016). However, we argue that it is not the videos alone that create this space for cultural understanding and growth. The very design of the YouTube platform, with its comments section, its video series, its data analytics, and ability to customize for the needs of the audiences is equally important. The socio-technical apparatus is thus critical to the process of cultural translation and associated literacies. The candid conversations about topics ranging from casual travel information to the more serious discussions on racism, and everything in between, occur within this space between the light, snappy, and entertaining mode of the produced YouTube videos, and the deeper and more nuanced understandings of complex issues that are debated in the comments section (Forcier, 2017; Oh and Syn, 2015; Thomson, 2017). Moreover, the fact that these debates can occur in whichever language is deemed appropriate is a powerful mechanism to create intercultural understanding above and beyond the video itself.

Lastly, given the fact that many of the comments that contain controversial questions about stereotypes may not be welcome in offline settings, YouTube is perhaps better able than most platforms to provide a setting to discuss and develop greater understanding about cultural practices. In this respect, the ways in which the YouTube creators frame and present their narratives significantly shapes the audience's responses. The creators of the two YouTube channels examined in this article consistently preface their interventions by stating that the segments represent only *their* views, based on *their* lived experiences and with no pretence of being impartial or authoritative. They also publicly address the difficulties of dealing with specific cultural topics despite the demands for such topics. It is important to keep in mind that full-time YouTubers make a living of these productions and associated analytics and engagement, and therefore have to tread cautiously. The issue of YouTubers' ongoing authority and legitimacy as naïve cultural representatives (vs. cultural bridges or even provocateurs) begs attention, and needs to be discussed further, particularly in light of the literature on authenticity and gatekeeping in the information fields.

In a globalized society where intercultural misunderstanding and conflicts keep occurring at great costs, considering the possibility of a platform where transcultural affinity and cultural literacy can occur *by design* is an important consideration for an emergent class of global citizens. Given the short history of YouTube as a social media video-sharing site, it is truly exciting for information science scholars to examine its potential to contribute to the creation of a space where people can develop some level of understanding and appreciation toward one another and toward other cultures.

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Appendix

Opinion - criticism	8 (6.1%, 2%)	7 (7.8%, 1.8%)	15 (6.8%, 1.9%)
Opinion - tribute	17 (13%, 4.3%)	2 (2.2%, 0.5%)	19 (8.6%, 2.4%)
Opinion - speculate	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Responses	31 (7.8%)	21 (5.3%)	41 (5.2%)
Responses - agree	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Responses - confirm	0 (0%, 0%)	7 (36.8%, 1.8%)	7 (17.1%, 0.9%)
Responses - disagree	1 (4.5%, 0.3%)	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (2.4%, 0.1%)
Responses - challenge	21 (95.5%, 5.3%)	12 (63.2%, 3%)	33 (80.5%, 4.2%)
Personal feelings	16 (4%)	17 (4.3%)	37 (4.7%)
Personal feelings - general	10 (38.5%, 2.5%)	1 (9.1%, 0.3%)	11 (29.7%, 1.4%)
Personal feelings - positive	7 (26.9%, 1.8%)	2 (18.2%, 0.5%)	9 (24.3%, 1.1%)
Personal feelings - negative	9 (34.6%, 2.3%)	8 (72.7%, 2%)	17 (45.9%, 2.1%)
General conversation	31 (7.8%)	85 (21.6%)	122 (15.4%)
General conversation - greetings	0 (0%, 0%)	6 (6.7%, 1.5%)	6 (4.9%, 0.8%)
General conversation - thanking	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	1 (0.8%, 0.1%)
General	1	0 (0%,	1

conversation - joke	(3.1%, 0.3%)	0%)	(0.8%, 0.1%)
General conversation - apology	5 (15.6%, 1.3%)	5 (5.6%, 1.3%)	10 (8.2%, 1.3%)
General conversation - reference to offsite communication	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
General conversation - status description	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (1.1%, 0.3%)	1 (0.8%, 0.1%)
General conversation - anecdote	1 (3.1%, 0.3%)	2 (2.2%, 0.5%)	3 (2.5%, 0.4%)
General conversation - random off-topic exclamation	5 (15.6%, 1.3%)	18 (20%, 4.6%)	23 (18.9%, 2.9%)
General conversation - request personal information	8 (25%, 2%)	6 (6.7%, 1.5%)	14 (11.5%, 1.8%)
General conversation - give personal information	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
General conversation - express plans/ desires/wishes	9 (28.1%, 2.3%)	43 (47.8%, 10.9%)	52 (42.6%, 6.6%)
General conversation - anticipate	3 (9.4%, 0.8%)	8 (8.9%, 2%)	11 (9%, 1.4%)
Site processes	19 (4.8%)	8 (2%)	26 (3.3%)
Site processes - posting videos	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (11.1%, 0.3%)	1 (3.8%, 0.1%)
Site processes - suggest content for a future video	8 (47.1%, 2%)	0 (0%, 0%)	8 (30.8%, 1%)
Site processes - request posting of another video	6 (35.3%, 1.5%)	3 (33.3%, 0.8%)	9 (34.6%, 1.1%)
Site processes - watching videos	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (11.1%, 0.3%)	1 (3.8%, 0.1%)
Site processes	0 (0%,	3	3

- commenting process	0%)	(33.3%, 0.8%)	(11.5%, 0.4%)
Site processes - rating features	2 (11.8%, 0.5%)	1 (11.1%, 0.3%)	3 (11.5%, 0.4%)
Site processes - sharing videos	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Site processes - profiles and subscription	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Site processes - site policy	1 (5.9%, 0.3%)	0 (0%, 0%)	1 (3.8%, 0.1%)
Site processes - site design	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Video content description	13 (3.3%)	21 (5.3%)	8 (1%)
Video content description - summary (paraphrase)	0 (0%, 01%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Video content description - summary (direct quote)	8 (100%, 2%)	0 (0%, 0%)	8 (100%, 1%)
Non-response comments	1 (0.3%)	0 (0%)	26 (3.3%)
Non-response comments - unclassifiable	5 (100%, 1.3%)	21 (100%, 5.3%)	26 (100%, 3.3%)
Non-response comments - spam	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Non-response comments - removed comments	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Non-response comments - repetition	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)
Non-response comments - nonsense words/ punctuation	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)	0 (0%, 0%)