Check for updates



Article

new media & society
1–21
© The Author(s) 2021
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/14614448211061829
journals.sagepub.com/home/nms
SAGE

Backdoor advertising scandals, *Yingyeo* culture, and cancel culture among YouTube Influencers in South Korea

Jin Lee and Crystal Abidin
Internet Studies, Curtin University, Australia

Abstract
In tandem with the increasing role of Influencers in culture and commerce, Influencers' advertorial disclosures have become controversial in many countries, including South Korea. In August 2020, under the accusations by tabloids and other YouTubers, several famous Influencers were embroiled in the "backdoor advertising scandal," wherein Influencers deftly advertise products in exchange for a significant amount of money from sponsoring companies, without any notice to followers. This article focuses on two (in)famous Influencers in the scandal: fashion stylist Han Haeyoun and *mukbang*-YouTuber tzuyang. By situating reactions around the scandal within broader Influencer ecologies and Korean cultures, we map out tensions between various actors, and the subsequent embroilments with online hate, call-out cultures, and misogyny. Drawing on a longitudinal digital ethnography on Influencer cultures and industry in East Asia, we highlight how the myth of "hitting the jackpot" in Korea compels people to follow, worship, and debunk Influencers within networked cultures.

Keywords
Backdoor advertising, cancel cultures, Influencers, social media, South Korea, *Yingyeo* culture

Introduction

The growing ability of Influencers to command attention and visibility on social media has meant that their contents have become a locus for companies to advertise goods and

Corresponding author:
Jin Lee, Curtin University, Perth, WA, Australia.
Email: ljin8788@gmail.com

services (Abidin, 2014; Duffy, 2017). Influencers across different platforms and genres are now being paid to promote products through sponsored posts and reviews, and even by serving as ambassadors and spokespersons around the world (e.g. Abidin et al., 2020; Jorge et al., 2018). In this context, advertorial disclosures have become a vernacular norm within Influencer communities (Abidin and Ots, 2015), and even law in some countries, enforced by specific governments (Abidin et al., 2020). Popular accounts from Anglo-centric Global North outlets seem to suggest an uptick in concerns around advertorial disclosures following the 2017 Fyre Festival, where attendees who had purchased expensive tickets promoted by Instagram Influencers for a luxury festival in the Bahamas found themselves stranded in dangerous conditions, after organizers were unable to deliver. At the heart of the matter were concerns over whether Influencers should be responsible for fraudulent advertising (Huddleston, 2019), and how followers and consumers may seek redress (Beaumont-Thomas, 2021).

Influencers' advertorial disclosures have been controversial also in South Korea (hereafter Korea) since the late 2000s, concerning, for example, advertisers and Influencers scamming consumers with false information, and the difficulties with which consumers seek redress against advertisers and Influencers (Ko, 2011). With the expansion of Silicon Valley–based social media platforms into the Korean market—especially YouTube and Instagram in the 2010s (Choi and Cheong, 2017)—Influencers' social responsibilities, including their liability to taxation regulations and the disclosure of their business relationships, have been of particular concern for the general public, policymakers, and the industry (Kwon, 2020; Shin, 2019). The August 2020 YouTube backdoor advertising scandal is a prime example of such controversy, wherein more than 70 YouTube Influencers and some of the biggest multi-channel network (MCN) companies in Korea issued public apologies after being exposed for concealing their business relations with advertisers. Some offenders ended up taking short breaks from YouTube or leaving the Influencer industry altogether.

Following from this prolific national scandal, this article examines the backdoor advertising scandal in the Korean Influencer industry which broke out in August 2020, with a focus on two (in)famous Influencers at the heart of the controversy: Han Haeyoun and tzuyang. By situating reactions around the scandal within broader Influencer ecologies and Korean cultures, we map out tensions between various actors, and the subsequent embroilments with online hate comments, call-out cultures, and online misogyny. Drawing on a longitudinal digital ethnography on Influencer cultures and the industry in the East Asian region, we highlight how the myth of "hitting the jackpot" in Korea compels people to follow, worship, and debunk Influencers within networked cultures.

Advertorial disclosures and the "backdoor advertising" scandal in Korea

The Korean Influencer industry developed through the profuse use of "famous people on the internet" [인터넷유명인, *internet-yumyungin*] via viral marketing, initially with bloggers on local media platforms like Naver in the mid-2000s (Hong et al., 2009: 186–187), and later with content creators on YouTube and Instagram (Choi and Cheong, 2017). Although Influencers, including "star YouTubers" (Kim, 2019), are assumed to be

making a fortune from sponsorship deals, the exact details of these arrangements are generally unknown to the public in Korea. There is little understanding as to how a sponsorship is arranged, what the difference between advertising and "product placements" (known as "PPL" in Korea) is, and what is considered "advertising" on social media to begin with (Ryu, 2020). Due to the ambiguity, social media advertising by Influencers has been infamously stigmatized as "backdoor advertising" [뒷광고, *duit-gwanggo*], implying that the advertising is executed deftly without appearing as an advertisement, as opposed to "frontdoor advertising" [앞광고, *aap-gwanggo*], which laypersons can easily and clearly identify as advertisements (Oh, 2020).

The Korean government has monitored social media marketing through agencies like the Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC)—the ministerial-level institution that makes decisions on consumer protection issues (KFTC, n.d.). The KFTC established the Act on Fair Labelling and Advertising in 2011 to regulate social media marketing practices that can deliberately lead Internet users to (uninformed) consumption, using their "influential power," without proper notification and disclosure, which they call "deceptive advertising" [기만광고, *giman-gwanggo*] (KFTC, 2011). The Act was revised in 2020 to order users to "explicitly" disclose any financial interest between sponsoring companies and sponsored "renowned persons"—such as including celebrities, doctors, and Influencers—to avoid penalties on deceptive advertising, which can include a 2-year imprisonment or KRW 150 million fine (KFTC, 2020a). The KFTC also published a guideline for social media advertising that provides detailed examples such as templates and scripts, including how to clearly disclose financial relationships in social media advertising (KFTC, 2020b). For example, YouTubers must repeatedly indicate their business relationships with advertisers by adding a "Paid Promotion Included" disclaimer in their videos, and including "#광고" [*gwanggo*, "advertising" in Korean] in the title of sponsored content and the first line of content descriptions. They were no longer allowed to: use "unclear wording" like "협찬" [*hyupchan*, "sponsorship" or "promotion" in Korean] and "PPL"; English words and phrases like "AD," "sponsored by," and "thanks to"; or make the information less accessible by including it only in the description box that requires followers to click on the "show more" button for information (KFTC, 2020b).

As a result, attention is quickly being drawn to the social media channels of Influencers and to traditional entertainment celebrities with a prominent following on social media. Most notably, in July 2020 the most infamous tabloid in Korea *Dispatch* exposed a number of sponsorships on celebrity YouTube channels, including those of Jessica, a former member of popular K-pop band Girls' Generation; Korean singer and actress Kang Minkyung; and celebrity-fashion stylist Han Heayoun (Kim and Song, 2020). Shortly after, two famous YouTube Influencers, HongSound and ChamPD, leveraged on this scandal to scrutinize the Korean YouTube industry more closely, revealing that the Korean YouTube Influencer scene was rife with hidden advertising and covert relationships with sponsors.

In particular, ChamPD conducted his exposé in a drunken state during a live-stream on YouTube, and rattled off a list of top-tier YouTube Influencers and the biggest MCN company in Korea, whom he believed were culprits of backdoor advertising. Several other YouTubers, like investigative YouTuber SamangFox, revealed more deceptive practices of other brands, and further flamed the controversy by exposing more hidden

relationships between advertisers and Influencers. These videos called out the irresponsible behaviors of Influencers who remained silent after the advertisers with whom they had worked were fined for false advertising.

The (hidden) labor of Influencers and *yingyeo* culture

Despite the extensive work that is hidden from view and assumed to be "tacit labor" (Abidin, 2016), the Influencer industry is often romanticized to appear as if it were a "jackpot economy," where "glittering prizes" can be won through one's ability in and passion for their work (Ross, 2009). While the few successful cases of the pleasures and freedoms of doing creative work are heralded, the reality is that the industry is tainted with insecurity, precarity, and voluntary free labor that promises little guarantee of success (Duffy and Wissinger, 2017; McRobbie, 2018). For instance, to become mega-YouTube Influencers with millions of followers, aspirants are encouraged to produce videos for free until they meet the eligibility requirements of the YouTube Partner Program—that is, more than 1000 subscribers and more than 4000 watch hours (YouTube, 2020)—that allows them to monetize their content. In addition, there are various demands placed on YouTube Influencers, including "visibility labor" to strategically posture themselves favorably to specific audiences while hiding unfavorable content (Abidin, 2014, 2016), "emotional labor" to construct impressions of authenticity and forge impressions intimacy with followers (Abidin, 2015), and the "curatorial labor" for portraying sincere selves through their creative production while striving for commercial rewards (Dekavalla, 2020; Jorge et al., 2018). With these various labors of Influencers going largely unnoticed by the general viewership, Influencers are often caught in a dilemma between meeting the followers' expectations of authenticity and the advertisers' pressures to commercialize social media content through the integration of advertorials (Abidin and Ots, 2015; Dekavalla, 2020). Failure to meet these demands may develop into a scandal, wherein the Influencers lose followers' credibility and face criticisms for inauthenticity while being used almost as public-facing shields for unethical advertisers (e.g. Kwon, 2020; Touma and Chamas, 2021).

Indeed in our data, several followers have referred to successful Korean YouTubers as having "hit the jackpot" (Kim, 2019). Cynicism toward Influencers is abundant in the media coverage with Influencers being derogatorily associated with "superficiality" (Yusup, 2017) and being accused of "mak[ing] money for nothing" (Deller and Murphy, 2020). The commerciality of Influencer ecologies reinforces such skeptical views, as news outlets report on the speculated monthly incomes of top YouTube Influencers and their advertising rates (e.g. Berg, 2019). It is thus no surprise that Influencer cultures may incite feelings of deprivation and envy among young people, especially more in Korea as increasing numbers remain unemployed in the its economy (see Chae, 2018).

In Korea, these ambivalent and abrasive sentiments toward Influencers are exacerbated in the context of "*yingyeo* culture." "*Yingyeo*" [잉여, also *yingyŏ*, meaning "surplus"] has been adopted as an Internet vernacular, referring to "a person who has nothing to do or desire to anything" or "a social misfit" who shows socially undesirable cultural tastes while not being interested in a "socially and culturally meaningful life" (Song, 2018: 3). Scholars of Korean Studies posit that *yingyeo* is a unique cultural phenomenon

among Korean youth who have given up on a traditional life trajectory (e.g. stable jobs, marriage, childbirth) in the competitive neoliberal Korean economy (Hong and Park, 2016; Song, 2018). Young Koreans—often unaware or discounting the labor of the industry—cynically view successful Influencers as having "hit the jackpot" (Kim, 2019; Park, 2020). For the young generations in Korea, the Influencer and creative industries are widely perceived in two ways: as a cultural object to enjoy and find pleasure in, and as a site of jealousy to direct their anger about the competitive state of their society and a general dissatisfaction with their life course. To understand the latter, we need to acquaint ourselves with a brief history of *yingyeo* culture as contextualized on social media.

The advent of the local video-streaming platform, AfreecaTV, in the late-2000s played a significant role in associating Influencer culture with *yingyeo* culture. This subsequently impacted the YouTube industry as Korean Influencers mass migrated away from AfreecaTV in the 2010s. Korean Influencers on AfreecaTV (and later some on YouTube) are known for showcasing apparently "unproductive" behaviors and "raw and instinctual" desires (Song, 2018: 7); a popular example is sexually arousing movements (e.g. dancing while scantily clad) and binge-eating (e.g. *mukbang*). Perceived as being "pathetic" or "losers," these AfreecaTV and YouTube Influencers seem to utilize *yingyeo* contents as a temporary space for disgruntled and struggling young people to forget about the competitive economy, and to express their rejection of the middle-class scripts, in tandem with patriarchal and sexist culture (Hong and Park, 2016; Song, 2018). *Yingyeo* also tends to solicit violent and pleasure-centered practices, such as misogyny, online hatred, and trolling. Followers are often observed to verbally harass Influencers through hate comments, and spamming them until their demands (e.g. for more provocative content) are met. Influencers have also been found to sexually assault each other to garner more views in response to followers' demands (Kim, 2017; Song, 2018). Female Influencers, then, become easy targets of *yingyeo* practices. Young people belittle the success of a few female Influencers, aggressively consume their content, and participate in their online networks by sexually harassing them through comments and social media messages (Kwak, 2020).

Notably, any small mistake made by these female Influencers can ignite feelings of deprivation among young people, threaten the networked Influencer–follower relationship, and provide leverage for haters to execute online trolling and "canceling." Canceling refers to not only a single practice of boycotting the content of the Influencers through the acts of unsubscribing and unfollowing, but also a cultural phenomenon wherein users encourage others to join the boycott to deprive Influencers of their reputation and visibility to a larger extent. In social media culture, such practices are exercised in a collective manner in that the networkedness of social media amplifies the accusation of those who violated certain norms, and further mobilizes "networked publics" (boyd, 2010) into moral outrage. This type of "(morally motivated) networked harassment" (Marwick, 2021) is frequently found among male online users, often targeting women and sexual minorities, in that members of social networks or online communities reinforce their beliefs and signal network memberships by joining the collective act of online harassment. This includes sending harassing messages to the called-out individuals, and justifying their acts in reflection of their moral norms (Marwick, 2021). Furthermore, the canceling specifically attracts a segment of misogynist

Internet users who derive pleasure from ridiculing, sexualizing, and assaulting famous women on the Internet. As such, the oft-quoted "cancel culture" should be understood in relation to these contexts, rather than simply being appraised as a call for social justice, or being dismissed as yet another Internet trend.

Cancel culture can be understood as a cultural means to advocate social justice by "withdraw[ing] any kind of support (viewership, social media follows, purchases of products endorsed by the person, etc.) for those who are assessed to have said or done something unacceptable or highly problematic," as evidenced in the #MeToo movements and Black Twitter (Clark, 2020; Ng, 2020: 623). Such behaviors of withdrawing support entail call-outs that "publicly name instances or patterns of oppressive behavior and language use" (Ahmad, 2015). In the Influencer ecologies that thrive on the attention economy and networked relationships, canceling can also be considered a way for consumers to address any immoral transactions by business entities like Influencers. In general, followers claim credit for the circulation, popularity, and visibility of Influencers' contents, measured through subscriptions, likes, and views (Jenkins et al., 2018). When their investments are not properly rewarded, the moral understanding among participants in the relationship is threatened, and followers-as-consumers may exercise their right to call out the situation. When a celebrity in a privileged social status is called out for their immoral behavior, social pleasure can be also derived from acts of hating and gossiping as frivolous attempts to revert the unfair social system (Johansson, 2006). However, at times these behaviors are exacerbated by the toxicity of particular online cultures (Brooks, 2019). In the Korean case, such social pleasure is given much more weight, considering *yingyeo* culture's cynicism toward the myth of meritocracy in the creative industry, and the general rejection of neoliberal self-entrepreneurship.

Although some practices from the past, like consumer boycotts, seem analogous to today's cancel culture, the enactment of the latter is a relatively new phenomenon in Korea's social media spaces. In the early 2010s when the Influencer industry began to emerge locally, a few prominent bloggers were singled out after their hidden relationships with advertisers on their blogs were revealed (see Lee, 2011). Even though they fell from grace, they were not "canceled" in the way we speak of boycotts in the 2020s, as these scandals and the subsequent reactions they garnered were not very much amplified—for one, the architecture of blogs during that period lacked the instantaneous networked connections that social media platforms offer; further, in those early days such prominent bloggers were nowhere nearly as nationally well-known or mainstreamed as social media Influencers of the 2020s. Thus, cultural phenomena around Influencers' scandals today need to be understood through the sociocultural and economic lens of particular geographic contexts and histories, considering the evolving power dynamics of actors in the Influencer ecology. Online gossip, canceling, call-outs, trolling, malicious commenting, and misogynistic hate are social reactions to larger structures and institutions in society, and female YouTube Influencers in Korea happen to be convenient targets at the heart of *yingyeo* culture.

Methodology

This article draws on digital ethnography to study a major national Influencer industry scandal in Korea. Our case studies focus on two prominent Influencers in Korea, who

were at the heart of the August 2020 scandal: celebrity-stylist Han Heayoun and *mukbang*-YouTuber tzuyang. Our first approach includes a systematic participant observation of their social media estates—including YouTube and Instagram—for 2 months in August and September 2020, including comments on their social media posts and their YouTube channel communities. This intensive period of longitudinal participant observation was also informed by a more longitudinal observation of the Korean Influencer industry at large, conducted by the authors since June 2019. Our second approach comprises a review of secondary data centered on both Influencers, including popular media contents located in networks of YouTube videos that recap and discuss the scandal in detail, social media posts about both Influencers on the biggest and the most popular online communities theqoo and dcinside (online forums similar to Reddit), and user-contributed entries about the scandal and both Influencers on a Korean site NamuWiki (wiki similar to Uncyclopedia). Although the scandal itself emerged from YouTube, locating the networked data that were spread across various media platforms and communities was necessary given the networked online environment. For example, not only do Influencers display their online personae across different media platforms—including platforms like Instagram, YouTube, AfreecaTV popular in Korea—but Internet users also share and spread media content about Influencers by posting their commentaries on their blogs, various social media, and a variety of online communities including forums. Thus, amassing an original corpus of empirical data from various platforms enabled us to follow how a few issues on YouTube developed into a nationwide controversial scandal, through the careful corroboration of empirical sources, as users spread the word around Han Heayoun, tzuyang, the scandal, and the Influencer culture in general.

While our larger study also included personal interviews with Korean Influencers, Influencer agencies and incubators, and platform owners to understand the overview of the Korean Influencer industry and culture, we only draw lightly on anecdotes from these data that are directly relevant to the advertorial conventions of the Korean Influencer industry and the backdoor advertising scandal in August 2020. Our interviewees, including micro- and macro-level Influencers and their business partners, often referenced the backdoor ad scandal of Han Heayoun and tzuyang as an instance that revealed the Korean public's general perception and understanding of the Influencer industry. Thus, in analyzing Han Heayoun and tzuyang's cases, we referred to our interview data to situate the specific scandal within the broader Korean Influencer industry and social media culture, where the complexities of the industry, including labor and regulation are overshadowed by the dominant "myth of the jackpot" around a few glamorous Influencers.

By integrating data from the different sources mentioned above, we traced how the commerciality of YouTube Influencers has been talked about and constituted as a media scandal across various media platforms and outlets, and studied the types of tensions that emerged between YouTubers, followers, and industry personnel through reiterative cycles and circuits of such gossip (cf. Bishop, 2019). Our study of theqoo and dcinside, and NamuWiki entries about tzuyang and Han Heayoun's involvement in the scandal were useful to observe changes in the discourse about the scandal across the months. These forums were the sites on which communities of followers were congregating, engaging in discussions, and aggregating their understanding of the scandal as it unfolded. Collectively, these users documented various perspectives and contributed to a

networked history of the scandal. However, given the contentious nature of many of these (often hateful) comments from followers, we have opted to lightly paraphrase some of the wording without sacrificing any critical information or contextual tone. Taken together, we hope that the cross-language translations and light paraphrasing will minimize back-tracing as much as possible. As the landscape of how the Korean government is responding to online hate and cyberbullying is fast evolving (Choi, 2021), public consciousness and awareness about the impact of such actions are also being formed to improve Internet etiquette in Korea at large. As such, we wish to practice some generosity toward these commenters by omitting the names of the forum threads and discussion boards studied, and anonymizing user handles and IDs to reduce any potential backlash. Instead, we attribute the platform on which these comments were founded to provide some context as to the nature of the intended audience.

As a final methodological note, we first collected data that were mostly written in Korean and conducted two modes of reading: a close reading of each datum (e.g. specific social media posts, forum posts, comments on posts), and a comprehensive reading of our data corpus with a focus on interactions between comments to see how each comment shapes a discourse around the scandal. Following the timeline, we situated our data against the larger landscape of Influencer culture in Korea and Influencer advertorial scandals around the world at large, and built our case study as an attempt to understand sociocultural contexts around the tensions in the Influencer industry and culture. Selected data to constitute the case studies were then translated into English. Text posts from social media, forums, and comments sections were paraphrased in the ethos of "ethical fabrication" (Markham, 2012) to reduce the incidence of traceability and identifiability. J. Lee is a native speaker of Korean and bilingual in Korean and English, and C. Abidin utilized a combination of automated translation software (Systran Translate and Duolingo Korean-English dictionary) and native-speaker translators to assist with the project. All translations of the quoted data in this article were done by J. Lee, but we consulted with each other to deliver and retain the nuance of original data and Korean vernacular expressions throughout the study as much as possible by referring to some data that were also available in English (e.g. English news articles).

Han Haeyoun: *NaedonNaesan* lies and angry followers

Han Haeyoun is famous as a first-generation stylist of top stars in Korea. For her straightforward and funny personality, she appeared in many reality TV shows. In 2018, she launched her YouTube channel, 슈스스 TV (*SussTV*, Korean abbreviation of Super Star Stylist's TV), which became popular by recording 866,000 subscribers within 1 year. Her channel provides fashion information and tips for each season, introducing brand-new fashion items often from high-end boutique brands like Gucci, and sometimes from inexpensive clothing brands. She also guest-stars in the YouTube series of Korea's top TV producers (e.g. *MapoHipster*). While she has her roots in the traditional fashion industry, Han Heayoun is generally noted in Korean society as a social media Influencer due to her strong presence on YouTube and Instagram.

The key attributes of Han Heayoun's swift popularity on YouTube were her approachable character, how she related to followers intimately, and how she practiced transparency. Han

Heayoun attempted to convey transparency through her take on the fashion industry and her specific use of lingu (e.g. Korean vernacular "*NaedonNaesan*," see later). For instance, although her job as a star-stylist usually pertains to upper-middle-class luxuries, on YouTube, she gives the impression of being a mediator of gated fashion knowledge by providing tips such as "How to purchase designer bags 101." She also appears approachable by tailor-making fashion tips that are pocket-friendly and can be achieved by accessible fashion brands, such as "How to wear one Zara sweater differently for a week." In her exposition, Han Heayoun comes across as humble and caring by narrating her desire to support those who may not be affluent enough to purchase high-end clothes, or those who are too busy to care for themselves, such as college students and working moms. By using informal language[1] and calling her subscribers "babies"—adopted from the original English word often used as a term of endearment between couples and also to refer to someone one cares about—she presents herself as a big sister [언니, *unnie*] who cares for the younger sisters in her follower base. As her channel is focused on "women's issues" relating to physical femininity, her channel functions as a female community where women gather and forge homosocial friendships. This gendered community is evidenced by Han Heayoun, a postfeminist figure, who has achieved success in her career and obtained a high socioeconomic status, while never being married (McRobbie, 2009).

Her Heayoun's persona as a caring big sister and star celebrity with transparency is best presented in her *NaedonNaesan* videos. *NaedonNaesan* [내돈내산, Korean abbreviation and Internet neologism, describing "items that I purchased with my money" or such practices] has been used to mark Influencers' transparency and authenticity in their contents of introducing commercial products. As followers find it annoying and inauthentic when they find out the recommended items in Influencers' content are sponsorships, Influencers employ various markers for transparency and tactics to forge intimacy with followers, such as an emphasis of "I'm not being sponsored to say this" (Dekavalla, 2020; Jorge et al., 2018; see also the Yan Kay example in Abidin, 2016). Korean Influencers use the similar language *NaedonNaesan* to indicate their independence from sponsorships and authenticity in their recommendations of products. Han Heayoun also used the *NaedonNaesan* marker in the titles, subtitles, hashtags, and through her voice in her videos where she introduced and reviewed high-end purses and shoes:

> Items here in this video today are all *NaedonNaesan.* There aren't any ads at all. So my babies, browse the items in this video, and think of my channel as a pure, ad-free space. (SussTV, 2020)

By highlighting that she had spent money on luxury brands, she presented herself as a transparent, relatable, and "ordinary" person who understood the discomfort of parting with large sums of money to purchase designer fashion items.

Prior to the August scandal, Internet users and journalists raised the suspicion that YouTubers were being secretly paid to advertise brands and products (Kwon, 2020; Shin, 2019). Han Heayoun was also rumored to be involved as she named brands unequivocally and introduced their products on her YouTube channel. In April 2019, in her YouTube video on high-end wallets, Han Heayoun clarified her transparent stance by defining the concept of *hyupchan* [협찬, sponsorship] as something that "I borrow to show you and return after filming," "not as PPL or something that I show products in

exchange for money" and by explaining that she has received *hyupchan* as a professional stylist to introduce more items to her followers and to provide the best independent editorial tips to them (SussTV, 2019). As she was "clear" and "transparent" about her relationships with sponsoring companies in this manner, many followers and her fans endorsed her professionalism and supported her working with advertising companies, with YouTube comments stating: "Even if I were a company's [PR] person, I'd thank her if she asks for sponsorships, because she's the top in the industry."

However, Han Heayoun's increasing popularity was suddenly halted when *Dispatch* revealed that most of her YouTube contents were sponsored by fashion companies, despite her public declarations of *NaedonNaesan*. The exclusive coverage continued that Han Heayoun's asking price for branded content on her YouTube channel was around KRW 30 million–70 million (Kim and Song, 2020). After *Dispatch's* coverage, rage against Han Heayoun surged on the Internet. On her YouTube channel, many comments called her a "con artist" [사기꾼, *sagiggun*], criticized her "hypocritical" attitude, and accused her of having "used" and "deceived" people for greed. In the female-dominant online community theqoo, many users who identified themselves as fans of Han expressed their anger and disappointment in her for deceiving people:

> As Han Heayoun's fan, I used to watch every video and TV show in which she appeared. But now, I've fallen out of love with her. Even before the scandal, when she had many sponsored ad contents with the "paid promotion" disclaimer, I didn't care and felt it's okay for her to do these commercial posts. But this is a whole different story. She knew that she was deceiving people. (theqoo comment about the *Dispatch* article)

Eventually, Han Heayoun posted an apology video on YouTube on 17 July 2020, saying that "[she] was also disappointed in [her]self and will make the channel more beneficial to people." However, criticisms of Han Heayoun became harsher, fuelled by her ambiguous attitude in the video, where followers felt that "she had apologized as if it was someone else's fault." Lengthy backlash called out her lies:

> Just deception and fraud. You did wrong because you lied and deceived your fans. It's not that you confused us. You should apologize to all the consumers who have been deceived so far, and thus feel betrayed. When you said *NaedonNaesan*, I'm sure you knew that this excludes contents with backdoor advertising. So contemptible that you shamelessly told us to believe you, that there's no advertising on your channel, and that you called us "babies" so intimately while deceiving us. (theqoo comment about the *Dispatch* article)

Han Heayoun's *NaedonNaesan* was particularly criticized as a technique to deceive "ordinary people" who do not have as much capital as she does, by using the strategies of (apparent) intimacy and (supposed) transparency. Many people pointed out the amount of money that Han Heayoun had earned from her *NaedonNaesan* content, which made them feel deceived and betrayed, in relation to their current social position and status:

> Got shocked with reality after seeing the amount of money that she received from sponsorships. Everything was just pretence, and a means for money. Have been fooled and feel bad about it. (Comment posted on Han's YouTube video)

Since her last apology video, Han Heayoun has been silent on her regular social media platforms and absent from the reality TV show circuits she had frequented. In early 2021, she completely removed her presence on YouTube and deleted her YouTube videos. Meanwhile, *Dispatch*'s coverage on Han was circulated and reproduced in many other news outlets, birthing a second wave of the scandal, in which tzuyang and other *mukbang* YouTubers were similarly accused of engaging in backdoor advertising.

tzuyang: "good girl" fiber and confused followers

tzuyang is a female *mukbang YouTuber* who eats a copious amount of food in her live-streaming content. Having launched her video channel on YouTube and AfreecaTV in October 2018, she became a mega-Influencer recording 2.7 million subscribers (as of August 2020, before the scandal) and appeared in various media, including popular TV shows. She became popular for being the "good girl" archetype in the "female *mukbang*" genre.

Female *mukbang* YouTubers are a popular genre of social media cultures in Korea, in which various personae of women, from a "good girl" to a "butch girl," conform to or challenge conventional norms of femininity, including having a slim female body and holding submissive attitudes (Kim, 2018b; Schwegler-Castañer, 2018). Among the varied personae in the genre, the "good girl" archetype is constructed through the tropes of physical femininity, including having a slender body and feminine attractive face, and non-physical femininity, including showing well-domesticated personality through being responsive to comments and good demeanor of eating (eating not too loudly and not too quietly) (Kim, 2018b). tzuyang's physical and moral femininity is anchored in her performing the good-girl *mukbanger*, as evident in her size 0 figure, despite her binge-eating, and her polite and kind attitudes. This is well documented in her feminine make-up and her responsive attitude, responding to each comment, saying "Thank you. I'll eat well."

In addition, she accrued popularity for her humble, relatable, and caring personality by posting videos of herself doing volunteer work (e.g. cooking for firefighters during holiday seasons) and engaging in charity donations (e.g. KRW 20 million donation for COVID-19 relief). This sense of righteousness and performance of "morality" distinguished her from other similar *mukbang* YouTubers. Her moral fiber was emphasized in her disinterest in money and her philanthropic behavior, despite her mega-Influencer status, as she once stated in an interview:

> When I first made lots of money from *mukbang*, I never once felt that it was my own money, or that it's the price of my labor. I earned it because people liked me and donated money to me. So naturally, I came to think, I should give money back to society . . . There's not so much one person can do to help others, so I recruited people who wanted to join me to visit orphanages or shelters, by leveraging on my popularity . . . I hope that my charity donations make people interested in volunteer activities. (Bin, 2019)

Not only did tzuyang publicly state how much she has donated to charities in her YouTube videos, but she also emphasized her moral fiber by attempting to be transparent

about her relationships with advertisers. There have been rumors that she had been substantially sponsored by beauty and diet supplement companies since late-2019. However, she clarified in her several videos that she has never received, and had no intention to receive, any sponsorships from companies that are not related to her *mukbang*, and that she has been clearly stating, on her video descriptions, her financial relationships with food advertisers in cases where she was indeed sponsored. In this manner, her moral fiber was constructed around her integrity and professionalism, which was emphasized by her conformity to the "good girl" trope.

Despite her public persona, rumors around tzuyang's backdoor advertising re-emerged in August 2020 as YouTuber ChamPD named her during his live-stream exposé. Immediately after, tzuyang encountered a barrage of hate comments and criticisms on her YouTube channel, and TV news networks also covered her case as the epitome of deceptive YouTube culture (Shin, 2020). A few hours after the first TV news reports, tzuyang posted an apology video on her YouTube channel for making "a few mistakes" by not disclosing the financial interest at the beginning of her YouTube career, and for not having been aware of relevant policies. However, in the video she clarified again that she had used the "paid promotion" disclaimer in every piece of sponsored content since the mistakes in the past and has been always transparent on her conscience throughout her career (tzuyang, 2020a).

Unlike Han Heayoun who received harsh criticisms for her blatant lies, reactions to tzuyang's case were mixed, including rage, disappointment, and neutral stances:

> So disappointing. tzuyang, you, too, were full of hypocrisies and have treated us as a means for money. (Comment on tzuyang's AfreecaTV page)

> She made a mistake, but she explained why she forgot to note "paid promotion" and apologized. She's been doing a lot of good things. So I guess this case can just be lived down? (Comment on tzuyang's AfreecaTV page)

By referring to tzuyang's due diligence of marking advertising disclosures as "*sukje*" [숙제, meaning "homework"], audiences demonstrated an awareness that Influencers engage in labor and effort to fulfill advertising tasks for sponsors and earn their keep. Thus, the backdoor advertising controversy did not stem from a sudden realization of Influencers being paid to advertise brands and products, but rather, evolved from intense emotions of rage and betrayal from feeling that Influencers had not genuinely been transparent, and they had merely performed the illusion of transparency (see Dekavalla, 2020). Since tzuyang was known for her "good influence" as a good-girl figure, many followers were slower to judge whether her faults were genuine mistakes or intentional deceit. Some followers exhibited more fence-sitting stances by engaging in rhetorical debate and hypothetical imaginings to absolve tzuyang of some blame:

> How about contents where she was offered free food and a place to film by local governments, as a way of promoting local regions, but didn't receive any money? There are a few contents like that. (Comment on tzuyang's AfreecaTV page)

> I think sponsorship and advertising are two different things. Aren't sponsorships okay? (Comment on a theqoo thread about tzuyang)

While many fans showed mixed reactions on AfreecaTV and theqoo, harsh comments were often posted on her YouTube videos and dcinside. Many of them joked about her greed for money like Han Heayoun, pointing out her high economic status as a mega-Influencer. On 5 August, she announced that she would permanently leave YouTube after being exhausted by "hate comments culture where fake information is shared and believed" (tzuyang, 2020b). She also explained that she has been paying off some debt on behalf of her family and is not as rich as others think.

As soon as it was made public that tzuyang was the sole breadwinner of the family and that her family was struggling financially, reactions to her scandal pivoted drastically on almost all platforms, with users apologizing to her and asking for her to make a "comeback." tzuyang deleted every video on her channel on 11 August 2020 but made a short appearance on 18 August 2020 by uploading a video to thank her fans, to apologize for her sudden leave, and to request that followers not criticize ChamPD for his false accusation, as she felt sorry that he was trolled after the exposé. tzuyang's good-girl image was further crystallized in this video, displaying compliance with norms of the female *mukbang* YouTubers (Kim, 2018b: 233), and many fans apologized to her for "being fooled by others" (comment on tzuyang's YouTube video).

While audiences were shocked by the scandal, realizing how much money mega-Influencers have easily made, news outlets covered the scandals by repeating and reciting their tabloidesque coverage from each other to garner clickbait for news. On the dates when tzuyang was mentioned in ChamPD's video and when Han Heayoun's backdoor advertising was covered in *Dispatch*, more than 40 news articles were produced online, highlighting their "hidden" revenue from backdoor advertising. The tabloids' repeated focus on the enormous sums of money made only served to further fuel the scandal. Both followers and other Internet users began to wallow in their rage against Han Heayoun and tzuyang, which culminated in a series of boycotts and online slander akin to "cancel culture," with online trolling spiraling on dcinside in particular. Such reactions need to be contextualized in relation to the larger Influencer ecology.

Yingyeo rage: canceling for social justice and misogyny for toxic pleasure

Feeling betrayed by Han Heayoun and tzuyang, many followers canceled their subscription of Han and tzuyang's channels:

> Han Heayoun *unnie*, I enjoyed your channel, thought you really bought them. The reason why you became so popular was that we believed you're sharing the pleasure with us to buy expensive items, assuming you almost got bankrupt after purchasing those expensive purses like we do. Thought that's real. But everything was PPL . . . I'm canceling my subscription and withdrawing my affection to support you. (theqoo comment about the *Dispatch* article)

Given the contexts and meanings around canceling in the Influencer–follower relationship as discussed earlier in this article, canceling in the backdoor advertising scandal appeared as a sociocultural practice that criticized the (female) Influencers who have risen to fame thanks to the unfair and untransparent jackpot economy of the Influencer

industry. The accusation of their "immorality" (i.e. *NaedonNaesan* lies and tzuyang's previous mistakes) was amplified through the networked circuit of members in online communities and on social media, triggering moral outrage of *yingyeos* and leading to canceling:

> These Influencers treated followers as dogs and pigs while taking millions of dark money. (dcinside comment in a thread about the scandal)

> They go, "since dogs and pigs are barking, okay, I'll pretend to apologize lol" (dcinside comment in a thread about the scandal)

> They are all doing the "I'm sorry" challenge lol (dcinside comment in a thread about the scandal)

The expression "dogs and pigs" is an old Korean idiom that derogatorily refers to lower-classed people who are treated as animals. There were a few incidents in which high-ranking officers and congressmen publicly apologized for calling the general Korean public "dogs and pigs" (e.g. Choe, 2016). By criticizing the classed system in the Influencer industry through irate comments, followers of Han Heayoun and tzuyang and other Internet users expressed their anger, but also wanted to remind Influencers of the fact that the Influencer–follower relationships are the networked ones, based on equality. Canceling is, thus, a practice to demonstrate that followers are not passive and gullible "dogs and pigs" in a class system, but active players in the networked relationships.

Canceling in the backdoor advertising scandal, however, often appeared in an aggressive form entailing misogyny, fat-shaming, and insults:

> Han Heayoun has protruding facial bones! She's just an ugly fat liar grandma. (theqoo comment posted on the *Dispatch* article)

> Hated to see the fucking tzuyang or gayang or whatever that bitch whose name even looks like *jjangkkae*, [짱깨, a derogatory expression referring to Chinese people for being dirty and poor]. Hope the bitch to be kicked out. (dcinside comment in a thread about the scandal)

Cancel culture can be misused in the marrying of online toxicity and online surveillance that police and punish individuals (Brooks, 2019). While rich contexts around the practices are now simplified and framed as the "reductive and malignant label 'cancel culture'" (Clark, 2020: 88), many people who commit small mistakes are almost ripped apart on the Internet where online toxicity and moral panics coalesce and give rise to networked harassment as a new form of play (Ingraham and Reeves, 2016; Marwick, 2021). In Korea, *yingyeos* who persistently remain as "social misfits" take their behavior as a praxis to demonstrate anger and resentment toward society (Kim, 2017). This can also include the pursuit of hedonistic pleasures from sexualizing and assaulting specific individuals who are deemed to have violated the norms of their online communities and networks, including male dominant communities like dcinside but also the overall social media imbued with the *yingyeo* discourse.

Noticeably, although it first emerged as a vernacular culture mostly from male-dominant online communities like dcinside and video-streaming platform AfreecaTV, *yingyeo* culture now constitutes a big part of social media culture in Korea, and defines some youth-led norms in society (Hong and Park, 2016; Song, 2018). Within this context, misogynistic characteristics of *yingyeo* culture have given rise to online misogyny as a digital discursive practice that prevails across the various social media platforms and online communities (Kim, 2018a). Indeed, a majority of the data corpus we collected contained harsh comments that sexualized Han Heayoun and tzuyang and insulted their physical appearance, regardless of the platforms and communities that the comments were posted on:

> Han Heayoun has protruding facial bones! If you're so ugly then you should speak in a feminine way to get people's likes. But she is not that case and her ability as a stylist also sucks. She's just an ugly fat liar grandma. (theqoo comment about the *Dispatch* article)

> tzuyang is just a fat bitch, and what she can do is just eating like a pig. Bitch you are nothing but a mercenary, doing backdoor ad and deceiving people. (dcinside comment in a thread about the scandal)

This collective act of public shaming and canceling based on moral outrage across the various social media must be understood in line with the norms and values that *yingyeo* culture are based on. Media scholars argue that the toxicity of online culture arises as a way to deprive economic resources (i.e. visibility, attention) from those with high visibility and attention (i.e. Influencers) (see Banet-Weiser, 2018; Phillips, 2015). By problematizing the success and high visibility of Influencers who appear to have achieved upward social mobility from nothing but being on media, online trolls attempt to take back Influencers "unfairly accrued" scores and capital. Thus, the idea of "social pleasure" from canceling these Influencers appears attractive to the youth in *yingyeo* culture, considering their unstable and precarious social status. The public shaming and canceling of Han Heayoun and tzuyang generates an illusion of reverting the competitive neoliberal system, since they appear to be threatening figures who take advantage of the unfair classed system of the Influencer industry. In the misogynistic *yingyeo* culture, the canceling of Han Heayoun and tzuyang for their lies and inauthenticity is thus justified as an act of social justice, regardless of how aggressive, violent, and threatening the mob is.

The *yingyeo* rage toward the backdoor advertising scandal is well encapsulated in the drastic change of public sentiments toward tzuyang, whose financial status was revealed to be not as high as many have assumed, as opposed to the case of the well-off Han Heayoun. tzuyang's confession helped online users distinguish her from other Influencers who hit the jackpot "immorally." tzuyang's humble background appeared to be relatable to the enraged public, and her Influencer status was then read not as the mere "luck" of hitting the jackpot, but as a result of her work and emotional labor in bearing the toxic online environment. As it was proven that she *was* not like other money-centered superficial Influencers, but had instead worked hard and sacrificed herself for her family, her imagined morality was recuperated and her "good girl" persona was reconstructed, eventually winding down the *yingyeo* rage.

As the mythic jackpot of and the skepticism toward Influencers were highlighted in the backdoor advertising scandal, the invisible labor that is imposed upon Influencers was dismissed as their taken-for-granted duty in the exchange for an enormous amount of their incomes. The prevalent toxic practices were considered as something that Influencers must bear to maintain their fame and media visibility, while their emotional labor was dismissed as trivial or overshadowed by the lucrative profits over backdoor advertising:

> tzuyang has a weak mentality. She apparently doesn't know how to handle hate comments. [Being a] YouTuber is not good for her. (dcinside comment on a post about tzuyang leaving YouTube)

> You are liking the comments that support you now. What a great mentality you have as an Influencer. Yeah, just hang in there like that. No matter what people say, money is the best right? (Comment on one of Han Heayoun's Instagram posts)

While female Influencers were assaulted by online toxicity in the scandal, the advertisers were rarely mentioned or criticized. Being guarded with professional legal teams, advertisers were able to structure the Influencer industry with hidden advertorial sponsorships at first, and then to avoid criticisms by putting individual Influencers to the front for criticisms. As one of our interviewees in the Influencer advertising industry mentioned, the "Influencer marketing business [in Korea] itself lacks any foundation," and is chiefly held together by social media virality and popularity. Without any proper structures and guidelines to run the industry transparently and fairly, it is those Influencers who receive criticisms about the unfair economic structure of the industry and who should figure out how to satisfy all different stakeholders—advertisers, government, and followers—while juggling their tensions.

Without such structures, Influencers are led to abide by social and industrial norms, such as exhibiting femininity and practicing emotional labor to bear criticisms they encounter however hurtful the criticisms are. After the scandal, some Influencers, including tzuyang, have returned to continue their business, or re-started it from scratch. In November 2020, soon after tzuyang returned and promised to be "better," to be "more mature to hate comments," and to be "more appreciative of her fans' love," which reinforces her performance of the "good girl" character (tzuyang, 2020b), she regained her lost followers and recorded a new count of 4.5 million (as of September 2021), which is the highest number since the launching of her channel in 2018. Her "good girl" fiber seemed to calm down *yingyeo* misogynistic rage, as many followers welcome her return, and endorse her still-cute physical appearance. On the contrary, Han Heayoun, whose persona as an Influencer was far from the good girl trope but instead drew more on a "strong woman" trope with less physical capital of femininity, disappeared from the media scene, while fat-shaming hate comments continued to accumulate online (e.g. IssueSunsaengTV, 2021).

Conclusion

The Influencer industry has developed as a part of a networked culture where various actors, producers, audiences, companies, and advertisers are interconnected, interact

with, and count on each other, by speaking the language of intimacy (Abidin, 2015). Based on a belief of a moral economy that fairly rewards participants for their contributions to the network (Jenkins et al., 2018)—for instance, providing emotional support, pleasure, and monetary rewards—audiences follow Influencers, and support and circulate their contents. In return, Influencers produce creative content and perform communicative intimacies through endearment and impressions of homosocial female friendships (Abidin, 2015).

However, as evidenced in the August 2020 backdoor advertising scandal in Korea, such social contracts are susceptible to breaking down when followers find Influencers to be violating the core principles of transparency and authenticity. In the context of Korean *yingyeo* culture, violations by Influencers are perceived as an abuse of privilege, of simultaneously "hitting the jackpot," and also exploiting the ordinary masses. When these offending Influencers are women who tend to utilize their appearance, charisma, and carefully cultivated homosocial intimacies and approachable persona online to sustain a following in the first place, the infraction feels more personal as the "moral understandings between the participating parties" (Jenkins et al., 2018: 48), that is, Influencers and followers, are shattered.

In acts of "calling out" and "canceling" as a weapon of the weak in networked relationships, followers exercise their agency to absolve themselves as passive audiences and consumers, and make active choices as consumers to discern where to place their social and financial support. By reversing the hierarchical fan/audience-Influencer relationship, and demonstrating their networked power, followers also find schadenfreude within the existing online culture of trolling, hate, misogyny, and *yingyeo*, as seen in our case studies of Han Heayoun and tzuyang. In such cancel cultures and Influencer ecologies, female Influencers often find themselves vulnerable in juggling tensions and complicated relationships between the industry, regulations, followers, and haters. Chaerim, one of the female Influencers in our interview study, expressed that she found it frustrating to be judged by double standards which are generous toward traditional celebrities who are getting sponsored in TV shows, but harsher for female Influencers in advertorial contents: "Did they [Influencers in the scandal] really lie? I feel sorry for them." In the unclearly-structured industry, these female Influencers are left out without any measures to protect themselves from physical appearance-related insults, sexist demands, and public shaming.

Despite years of backdoor advertising having been accepted as the status quo, the August 2020 national scandal became a milestone pivot in the Korean Influencer industry, as some of the most established and reputable Influencers underwent public call-outs and humiliation, and suffered significant backlash and penalties for their dishonesty. Sponsoring companies and MCNs were also among the punished offenders, resulting in an industry-wide scrutiny of poor advertising disclosure practices and a subsequent inquiry into the structure and regulation of the Influencer industry at large. While this closer observation of income, tax, and advertising disclosure issues by the state are a welcome move, the toxic fallout from the widespread cancel culture call-outs in misogynistic and abusive tones suggest that the regulation of the Influencer industry needs to mature with the times. Interventions into the regulation of hate comment cultures, online trolling, cyberbullying and the like ought to be addressed in the next iteration of Influencer

regulations. This is especially critical considering the recent state of prolific cyberbullying cases in the K-pop industry, resulting in a spate of suicides and instances of self-harm, especially of young women (Smith, 2021). As we regulate the Korean Influencer industry for its commercial liabilities, it is equally important to consider the welfare and ethos of care toward Influencers as worked in the creative industry, despite cultural assumptions of their "jackpot" luck and *yingyeo* fame.

Acknowledgement

We thank our informants for their participation in our project. Jin is particularly grateful to Yoo Seulah and Park Joonhyung at Cheil Worldwide, and Jihyun Kim for sharing their expereinces.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: A/Prof Crystal Abidin's portion of the project was supported by an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DE190100789).

ORCID iD

Jin Lee https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5698-5561

Note

1. In Korean, informal language is used by friends or when speakers are older than listeners.

References

Abidin C (2014) #In$tagLam: Instagram as a repository of taste, a burgeoning marketplace, a war of eyeballs. In: Berry M and Schleser M (eds) *Mobile Media Making in an Age of Smartphones*. New York: Palgrave, pp. 119–128.

Abidin C (2015) Communicative❤ intimacies: influencers and perceived interconnectedness. *Ada: Journal of Gender, New Media & Technology*. Available at: https://adanewmedia.org/2015/11/issue8-abidin/

Abidin C (2016) Visibility labour: engaging with Influencers' fashion brands and# OOTD advertorial campaigns on Instagram. *Media International Australia* 161: 86–100.

Abidin C and Ots M (2015) The Influencer's dilemma: the shaping of new brand professions between credibility and commerce. In: *AEJMC 2015, annual conference*. Available at: https://wishcrys.files.wordpress.com/2019/03/abidin-ots-2015-the-influencere28099s-dilemma-the-shaping-of-new-brand-professions-between-credibility-and-commerce.pdf

Abidin C, Hansen K, Hogsnes M, et al. (2020) A review of formal and informal regulations in the Nordic influencer industry. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies* 2: 71–83.

Ahmad A (2015) A note on call-out culture. *Briarpatch Magazine*, 2 March. Available at: https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/a-note-on-call-out-culture

Banet-Weiser S (2018) *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Beaumont-Thomas B (2021) Fyre festival attendees to receive $7,000 each in settlement. *The Guardian*, 16 April. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/music/2021/apr/16/fyre-festival-attendees-settlement

Berg M (2019) The highest-paid YouTube stars of 2019: the kids are killing it. *Forbes*. Available at: https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2019/12/18/the-highest-paid-youtube-stars-of-2019-the-kids-are-killing-it/?sh=a66c87638cd4

Bin J (2019) [쯔양 인터뷰] "제가 기부를 하는 이유는요. . ."[tzuyang: "Reason why I donate to charity is. . ."]. *Wikitree*. Available at: https://www.wikitree.co.kr/articles/441317

Bishop S (2019) Managing visibility on YouTube through algorithmic gossip. *New Media & Society* 21: 2589–2606.

boyd d (2010) Social network sites as networked publics: affordances, dynamics, and implications. In: Papacharissi Z (ed) *Networked Self: Identity, Community, and Culture on Social Network Sites*. London: Routledge, pp. 47–66.

Brooks D (2019) The cruelty of call-out culture. *The New York Times*. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/14/opinion/call-out-social-justice.html

Chae J (2018) Explaining females' envy toward social media influencers. *Media Psychology* 21: 246–262.

Choe S-H (2016) Korean official, calling for class system, hears woofs, oinks and outrage. *The New York Times*. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/13/world/asia/south-korea-education-ministry.html

Choi J and Cheong Y (2017) The study on the strategies of beauty influencer marketing: mass media vs. social media. *Korean Journal of Advertising* 28: 47–72.

Choi Y (2021) 류호정 "성범죄 기사 댓글 폐지, 국민청원 동참해달라" [Congresswoman Ryu Hojung "Join the national shut down comments in sex crime articles]. *Hankyoreh*. Available at: https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/society/women/994840.html#csidx9047b12c3e56aef9107e2cf10295cdb

Clark M (2020) DRAG THEM: a brief etymology of so-called "cancel culture." *Communication and the Public* 5: 88–92.

Dekavalla M (2020) Gaining trust: the articulation of transparency by You Tube fashion and beauty content creators. *Media, Culture & Society* 42: 75–92.

Deller RA and Murphy K (2020) 'Zoella hasn't really written a book, she's written a cheque': mainstream media representations of YouTube celebrities. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23: 112–132.

Duffy BE (2017) *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, Social Media, and Aspirational Work*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Duffy BE and Wissinger E (2017) Mythologies of creative work in the social media age: fun, free, and "just being me." *International Journal of Communication* 11: 20.

Hong J, Park S and Chung S (2009) A study on the effects of technology acceptance and economic factors on the loyalty of power bloggers. *Korean Management Science Review* 26(3): 185–204.

Hong S-K and Park S (2016) Emergence of internet mukbang(Foodcasting) and its hegemonic process in media culture. *Media & Society* 24: 105–150.

Huddleston T Jr (2019) Fyre festival: how a 25-year-old scammed investors out of $26 million. *CNBC*. Available at: https://www.cnbc.com/2019/08/18/how-fyre-festivals-organizer-scammed-investors-out-of-26-million.html

Ingraham C and Reeves J (2016) New media, new panics. *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33: 455–467.

IssueSunsaengTV (2021) 슈스스TV한혜연 빤스런 [Han from SussTV runs away]. *YouTube*. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1kZeDGdIDQM

Jenkins H, Ford S and Green J (2018) *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*. New York: NYU Press.

Johansson S (2006) Sometimes you wanna hate celebrities. In: Holmes M and Redmond S (eds) *Framing Celebrity: New Directions in Celebrity Culture*. London: Routledge, pp. 343–358.
Jorge A, Marôpo L and Nunes T (2018) I am not being sponsored to say this: a teen youtuber and her audience negotiate branded content. *Observatorio (OBS*)* 12: 76–96.
Kwak Z (2020, 7 October) "너희엄마 계단에서 밀었어야. . ." "You should have pushed mom down the stairs. . ." Hate commenters pervade on YouTube and SNS ["너희 엄마 계단에서 밀었어야. . ." 유튜브·SNS 파고든 악플러들]. *Hankook Ilbo*. Retrieved from https://www.hankookilbo.com/News/Read/A2020100400360005771
Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) (2011) *2011 Act on Fair Labelling and Advertising*.
Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) (2020a) *2020 Act on Fair Labelling and Advertising*.
Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) (2020b) *Guidelines for Examination of Labelling and Advertising of Recommendations, Guarantees: A Guide to Disclose Economic Interests*.
Korea Fair Trade Commission (KFTC) (n.d.) *Korea Fair Trade Commission*.
Kim J (2018a) Misogyny for male solidarity: online hate discourse against women in South Korea. In: Vickery JR and Everbach T (eds) *Mediating Misogyny*. Cham: Springer, pp. 151–169.
Kim J and Song S (2020) [단독] "내돈내산? 남돈내산!". . .강민경·한혜연, 유튜브 장사의 실체 ["Bought with my money? Bought with other's money!". . .Kang Minkyung·Han Heayoun, Truth of YouTube commerce]. *Dispatch*. Available at: https://www.dispatch.co.kr/2091447
Kim K (2019) 연 수익이 32억? 유튜버 수익의 진실. . .대박? 빛 좋은 개살구! [3.2billion earning? Reality of YouTubers' earning. . .Jackpot? Fool's gold]. *Dong-a Ilbo*. Available at: https://www.donga.com/news/Society/article/all/20190124/93847392/1
Kim S (2017) 'The monsters born in AfreecaTV': research of concurrent dualities in Internet live-streaming. *Cross-Cultural Studies* 23: 79–124.
Kim Y (2018b) Sell your loneliness: Mukbang culture and multisensorial capitalism in South Korea. In: Lim L and Lee H-K (eds) *Routledge Handbook of Cultural and Creative Industries in Asia*. London: Routledge, pp. 225–238.
Ko H-S (2011) Consumer's damages by power bloggers and redress. *The Justice* 126: 93–127.
Kwon H (2020) 5조원대 국내 유튜브 시장. . .어쩌다 '탈세 온상' 오명 [5 trillion-sized YouTube market becomes infamous as 'hotbed of tax evasion']. *MoneyToday*. Available at: https://news.mt.co.kr/mtview.php?no=2020052416365660201
Lee H-j (2011) FTC slams 5 million won fines on 4 "power blogs." *JoongAng Daily*, 13 November. Available at: https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2011/11/13/socialAffairs/FTC-slams-5-million-won-fines-on-4-power-blogs/2944095.html
McRobbie A (2009) *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. London: SAGE.
McRobbie A (2018) *Be Creative: Making a Living in the New Culture Industries*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Markham A (2012) Fabrication as ethical practice: qualitative inquiry in ambiguous internet contexts. *Information, Communication & Society* 15: 334–353.
Marwick AE (2021) Morally motivated networked harassment as normative reinforcement. *Social Media + Society* 7(2). DOI: 10.1177/20563051211021378.
Ng E (2020) No grand pronouncements here. . .: reflections on cancel culture and digital media participation. *Television & New Media* 21: 621–627.
Oh W (2020) 앞광고? 뒷광고? 우리는 진정성을 원했다. [Frontdoor ad? Backdoor ad? We wanted authenticity]. *Cosmopolitan*. Available at: https://www.cosmopolitan.co.kr/article/49098
Park Y (2020) 인기 유튜버 월평균 수입 934만원. . .직장인의 3배 [Popular YouTubers make KRW 9.34 million monthly in average. . .three times more than office workers]. *ChosunBiz*. Available at: https://biz.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2020/10/06/2020100602684.html

Phillips W (2015) *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ross A (2009) *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times*. New York: NYU Press.

Ryu M (2020) 내돈내산인 척 유튜버 '뒷광고'...기만당한 시청자들 분노. [YouTubers' backdoor ad pretending *NaedonNaesan*. . .Deceived audiences get furious]. *SobijaPyunga*. Available at: http://www.iconsumer.or.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=12784

Schwegler-Castañer A (2018) At the intersection of thinness and overconsumption: the ambivalence of munching, crunching, and slurping on camera. *Feminist Media Studies* 18: 782–785.

Shin J-e (2020) '267만 구독' 쯔양 돌연 은퇴. . .'뒷광고' 논란 뭐길래? [tzuyang with 2.67M followers suddenly leaves . . . what is 'backdoor ad scandal'?]. *SBS News*. Available at: https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1005918631&plink=COPYPASTE&cooper=SBSNEWSEND

Shin J-h (2019) South Korea strengthening taxation of YouTubers. *Korea Herald*. Available at: http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20190930000816

Smith F (2021) South Korea celebrity suicides put spotlight on gender inequality. *DW*. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/south-korea-celebrity-suicides-gender-inequality/a-56532739

Song H (2018) The making of microcelebrity: AfreecaTV and the younger generation in neoliberal South Korea. *Social Media + Society* 4. DOI: 10.1177/2056305118814906.

SussTV (2019) 2019 S/S 슈즈 트렌드, 그리고 명품 슈즈 슈스스와 한 눈에 모아 보기! [2019 S/S Shoes Trend, and see the luxury shoes all at once with Suss]. You*T*ube (Video Deleted).

SussTV (2020) 슈스스 TV 이달의 픽-크, 3월, 봄맞이, 내돈내산 아이템! [SussTV, Monthly pick, March, Spring, *NaedonNaesan* Item!]. *YouTube* (Video Deleted).

Touma R and Chamas Z (2021) 'A freebie is enough': influencer gift posts trigger breaches in Australian ad standards. *The Guardian*. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/media/2021/sep/20/a-freebie-is-enough-influencer-gift-posts-trigger-breaches-in-australian-ad-standards

tzuyang (2020a) Thank You. You*T*ube. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdS4G6-TsKc

tzuyang (2020b) 유튜브 방송을 끝마치도록 하겠습니다. [I'm leaving YouTube]. *YouTube*. (Video Deleted).

YouTube (2020) *Youtube Partner Program Overview & Eligibility*. Available at: https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72851?hl=en

Yusup ARM (2017) The influencer game, story of new-age fame and fortune. *New Straits Times*. Available at: https://www.nst.com.my/lifestyle/flair/2017/12/316849/influencer-game-story-new-age-fame-and-fortune

Author biographies

Dr. Jin Lee is a communication media scholar, focusing on media intimacies in social media pop cultures. She is Research Fellow in Internet Studies at Curtin University.

Dr. Crystal Abidin is a socio-cultural anthropologist of vernacular Internet cultures, particularly young people's relationships with Internet celebrity, online visibility, and social media pop cultures. She is Associate Professor, Principal Research Fellow, and ARC DECRA Fellow in Internet Studies at Curtin University.