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"Finally, Me Time!": Korean Middle-Aged Women's Platform Practices

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Abstract

This work builds on the legacy of feminist reception studies by expanding the research focus from mass media to digital platforms, particularly YouTube, and from media use to the practices of consuming and engaging with media in the context of Korean middle-aged women. The research also integrates Hartmut Rosa's theory of resonance with the digital media environment: It suggests that while Rosa may reject digital technology in his view of resonance, digital technology, or YouTube in this case, can contribute to enhancing resonance, but only depending on how people practice it. Furthermore, our analysis highlights the importance of middle-aged women, who are not merely viewers, but rather active participants within the burgeoning YouTube scene. Lastly, we expand the current understanding of how audience groups may potentially exert agency, moving beyond the ideological binaries of submission versus resistance in the process of interpreting media texts. Our emphasis lies in the creativity embedded in Korean middle-aged women's platform practices within their daily lives. This process is fuelled by a deep desire and will to find resonance with themselves, others, and the world.

Keywords

digital platforms; feminist reception studies; middle-aged women; resonance; South Korea; YouTube

1. Introduction

Critiquing the relationship between gender and media has a long history. One key theme within this field involves "feminist reception studies," which focus on women's everyday lives and media use (Cavalcante et al., 2017, p. 1). This field has developed in tandem with historical changes in the media landscape, from radio and magazines to film, television, and contemporary digital media (Bird, 2011; Hermes, 2003). These

studies have explored how ordinary women—whose lives often centre around family and home—engage with popular culture through their domestic use of mass media (romance novels, soap operas, talk shows, etc.). From a feminist reception perspective, mass media offer a wide range of desires, fantasies, and pleasures that are often dismissed as "vulgar clichés" (Modleski, 1982). However, these media can provide rich experiences of "quieter, less heroic and less politically charged forms of media use" (Cavalcante et al., 2017, p. 4) through which women audiences reflect on their own lives, family relationships, society, and the world beyond patriarchal constraints.

This work builds on the legacy of feminist reception studies by expanding the research focus from mass media to digital platforms, particularly YouTube, and from media use to the practices of consuming and engaging with media in the context of Korean middle-aged women. As the Korean government defines "middle age" as encompassing the 40–65 age bracket, this research specifically focuses on the 50–65 age group, a period sometimes referred to as "later middle age" in Korea.

The emergence of online platforms has significantly changed the field of audience studies, with the concept of audiences now often referred to as "interactive audiences" (Livingstone, 2003) and "produsers" (Bird, 2011). This shift is also reflected in women's engagement with platforms, with a notable rise in active and digitally savvy female producers in the emerging field of cultural production on platforms (Jeffries, 2011). As van Zoonen suggests, "feminist internet studies" (van Zoonen, 2001) have evolved from "feminist media studies" (van Zoonen, 1994); these studies will continue to transform alongside media development, as seen with the rise of various social media platforms. They aim to uncover the richness of women's culture, cultivated through diverse forms of voluntary engagement with the digitally mediated space of women's "affective" sphere (Ahmed, 2014; Papacharissi, 2014).

A core value of this online and social media space is the shared experience of "communicative intimacy" among women. This intimacy is co-constructed by female producers and audiences through their collective and horizontal "perceived interconnectedness" on these platforms (Abidin, 2015). In a similar vein, van Cleaf (2020) analyses how the "mamasphere" has developed between mothers' blogs and digital communities. This space fosters a "digital maternal gaze" (van Cleaf, 2020), creating a "pleasure of connectiveness" amongst these communities. It is also argued to differ from the male voyeuristic gaze at female bodies, being actualised instead through women's self-presentation online and reception by female audiences. This, in turn, potentially disrupts the male gaze at female bodies. Built on reciprocal connection and care amongst women, van Cleaf (2020) suggests that the mamasphere embodies maternity in a radical form, contributing to the articulation of new relationships among mothers, their bodies, babies, and blogs.

However, a critical gap exists in how women's platform participation is described. Most studies assume that female platform users are culturally sophisticated, digitally savvy, socially aspiring, and young (Duffy, 2016; Duffy et al., 2021). The prioritisation of young women on these platforms risks marginalising middle-aged and older viewers who remain loyal to their lifelong television habits (and not as produsers). In reality, these middle-aged women tend to remain invisible or are only highlighted for their scarcity (Moon & Abidin, 2020). Otherwise, if they are included, it is primarily within the restrictive framework of binaries such as the stereotypical negative image versus the counter-stereotypical image (Oró-Piqueras & Marques, 2017). Such an approach overlooks the rich diversity and dynamic nature inherent in the digital platform practices of older subjects.

Another issue lies in the narrow scope of research on platform use by the middle-aged population. A great deal of research across various disciplines—including medicine, psychology, information studies, and media studies—has explored how YouTube impacts users' physical and mental health improvement. However, Couldry (2004) argues that these functionalist approaches have limitations: They run the risk of overlooking the broader platform experiences of middle-aged women, the very audience upon which this study is based. Thus, instead of employing the term "use," this study adopts Couldry's (2004) notion of "practice" to incorporate a broader social contextuality, marked by "looseness and openness" (Couldry, 2004, p. 119). This broader perspective allows for a decentring approach to media, questioning "what people are *doing* in relation to media across a whole range of situations and contexts" (emphasis added) beyond the media-centric focus of use (Couldry, 2004, p. 119).

Among various modes of practising media, this study is particularly interested in how middle-aged women, through their YouTube practices, create and develop their relationships with the world—or, as Rosa (2019) terms it, "resonance" with the world, negotiating and perhaps defying the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures. YouTube is a valuable and insightful digital platform for exploring how female audiences practice it through their experiences of resonance. As exemplified by its popular slogan "broadcast yourself," YouTube's unique mode of "homecasting" (van Dijck, 2013) has been highly successful in remediating television as a "cultural form" and its associated audience practices, while simultaneously incorporating the digital potential for connectivity and sharing (van Dijck, 2013). Another advantage of YouTube for middle-aged women is its ease of use and affordability. Engagement with social media by the middle-aged population does not necessarily lead to an increase in their social well-being (encompassing social capital, loneliness, social connectedness, and social provision) in the same way that it does for younger age groups (Quinn, 2021). This discrepancy may potentially be due to a lack of technological proficiency and established online social networks for older individuals. Nevertheless, the role that YouTube plays in the lives of middle-aged women merits investigation, given that YouTube occupies a distinct space, compared to other social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok). Unlike platforms demanding high user interaction, YouTube offers a vast library of professional and user-generated content, bypassing complex technicalities, and with a free basic tier as well as a premium option.

Integrating the rich traditions of feminist reception and media practice studies, this work aims to break new ground by exploring the platform practices of middle-aged women in Korea. Korean society, with its digital advancement and deep-rooted patriarchal culture, offers particular relevance for developing this research. Our research has three key objectives. First, we investigate how middle-aged women integrate platforms into their daily lives and how their platform practice unfolds at the intersection of the dominant digital ecology and their patriarchal-shaped daily lives. Second, we examine how these women's platform practices are associated with their navigation of social connections, including relationships with family, friends, strangers, and, ultimately, themselves. Third, we explore how platform practices contribute to middle-aged women's "resonance" with the world, or "one's relationship to the world," drawing on Rosa's (2019) theorisation. Our study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative survey analysis (related to the *role* of YouTube practices in middle-aged women's resonant lives) with qualitative focus group interviews (related to the *meaning* of YouTube practices in middle-aged women's resonant lives).

2. Contextualisation of Korean Middle-Aged Women's Practices on YouTube

South Korea is one of the most technologically connected countries in the world. According to the International Telecommunication Union, South Korea has the world's leading coverage of LTE, a wireless technology. Also, mobile phone ownership (98%), percentage of households with internet access (100%), and personal internet usage (98%) are also very high (International Telecommunication Union, 2023). Thus, it can be inferred that internet-based platform use is prevalent not only among younger generations but also among middle-aged and older people. With respect to watching video content, 84% of people watch online services, including YouTube, and 60% watch TV (Hankook Research, 2024). While the amount of time spent watching TV increases with age, there is less of an age difference in YouTube viewing patterns (Hankook Research, 2024). These findings indicate that Korean middle-aged and older adults are highly engaged with online video channels, especially YouTube. The primary motivation for YouTube watching for middle-aged people is to "obtain more information" (Lee et al., 2023) while appreciating a relatively wide range of choices (entertainment, informational programs, and music). Additionally, usage behaviour has expanded beyond consumption to include participation, sharing and expressing emotions and opinions, and, to a very limited extent, production (Korea Information Society Development Institute, 2021).

The reality of middle-aged women's lives, however, is complex and multifaceted, defying simple explanation through YouTube usage alone. Significant research suggests that middle-aged women experience "vulnerabilities" specific to their gender (Gunnarsson, 2002; Monteiro et al., 2024; Park et al., 2017; Schröder-Butterfill & Marianti, 2006). While some variations exist among women, this age group is often positioned within a "vulnerable life course" (Gunnarsson, 2002). This vulnerability arises from a confluence of factors: (a) a perceived decline in their roles and responsibilities within family and social life, potentially linked to physical changes associated with menopause, economic insecurity, or poverty; (b) a diminishing social network and support system; and (c) psychological factors such as anxiety and depression related to the perceived threats of these risks and a perceived lack of "coping capacity" with such risks (Schröder-Butterfill & Marianti, 2006). Of particular relevance to middle-aged female YouTube users in Korea is the country's long history of patriarchal norms, where women in middle-class families traditionally assume the role of housewife. Notably, the gender gap in Korea regarding housework division is significant, with men contributing only 16.5%, compared to the OECD average of 33.6%. Furthermore, only 29.4% of married couples with children under 14 have dual incomes, which falls far short of the OECD average of 58.5% (Shin, 2017). A 2023 report by the Korean Ministry of Gender Equality indicates a worsening situation, with 78.3% of women over their 40s dedicating themselves fully to housework (Choi, 2024). In short, many Korean families, especially those with middle-aged parents, remain entrenched in a patriarchal system where men are breadwinners and women are housewives.

Considering the intersection of YouTube's prevalence and patriarchal structures, the current study investigates how these women actually utilise YouTube to create and develop their relationships with the world. We have no intention of dismissing or patronising middle-aged women by portraying them as weak or frustrated. On the contrary, this study aims to uncover and valorise the unheard stories of middle-aged women's experiences of anxiety and vulnerability in Korea. More importantly, it explores how they seek to forge a different relationship with these feelings, and potentially, overcome them. Significantly, YouTube plays a key mediating role in their journeys. In this exploration, Rosa's notion of resonance offers valuable insights.

3. Resonance Around Digital Platforms?

Hartmut Rosa, a well-known German sociologist, elucidates a mode of one's relation to the world from the perspective of "resonance" (Rosa, 2019). With its Latin etymology of *resonare* (to resound), resonance refers to a mutual and reciprocal relationship. Mutuality and reciprocity in resonance encompass both physical and psychical senses and sensibilities (a←ffect and e→motion), communication (calling and responding), and transformative acts (adjustment and transformation; Rosa, 2019). Rosa stipulates the core elements of resonance as affection (being truly touched or moved), the experience of responsive self-efficacy, transformative disposability and intrinsic moments of unpredictability, and uncontrollability (Rosa, 2019).

For Rosa, resonance differs from harmony or echo. Unlike those terms, which connote differences being fused into one, resonance is balanced with the closedness and openness of each body (Rosa, 2019, pp. 165–174). In resonance, the two bodies retain "their own voice." Resonance "requires" difference, even opposition and contradiction, "in order to enable a real encounter" (Rosa, 2018). The antithesis of resonance is alienation; Rosa argues that resonance and alienation exist in a dialectical relationship. Alienation has been a critical theme in modern thought, referring to the inversion of the relationship between the social subject and the social object. Marx, for example, described it in terms of "capital (social object) controlling workers (social subject)" (Haugaard, 2020, p. 330). However, Rosa's theorisation of alienation is notable for its focus on relationality. Rosa describes it as a "relation of relationlessness," where "our relationships no longer speak to us," and the world becomes mute and frozen. Consequently, in alienation, the subject and the world confront each other with indifference and hostility. Here, the subject and the world appear cold, rigid, repulsive, lifeless, and dead (Rosa, 2019, pp. 178–184).

Rosa's concept of resonance offers a pivotal framework for our research. The first point concerns the motivational potentiality embedded in the experience of resonance. Importantly, Rosa emphasises that resonance is "not an emotional state, but a mode of relation" (Rosa, 2019, p. 168). In other words, resonance is synonymous with the individuals' longing for, seeking, and hoping for improved relations between beings-in-the-world (Susen, 2020).

Furthermore, the experience of resonance is less descriptive and more evaluative, purposive, and performative. This is because the desire for resonance persistently stems from its "unavailability" in one's life, leading to a wilful feeling of "nonetheless," meaning that one cannot but pursue resonance nonetheless, or is due to the lack of resonance in one's life. Thus, we can recall the dialectic of resonance and alienation, which suggests that "people's most liberating forms of creative resonance emerge out of profound experiences of alienation, oppression, and repulsion" (Rosa, 2019, as cited in Susen, 2020, p. 320). In other words, the human search for resonance often springs from the experience of alienation and the desire to escape it.

We can consider the experiences of middle-aged women around platforms such as YouTube within the social structures of gender and generation. Many of these women have likely lived their lives confined to domestic duties and the care of family members. Can their current desire for enjoyment from platform use—seeking access, reach, and interaction—be understood as a form of resonance? This question concerns a critical account of digital platforms in relation to Rosa's view of resonance. Rosa critiques modernity's emphasis on "acceleration," arguing that it leads to the "generalisation and habituation of the subject through the escalating compulsion of dynamic stabilization," thereby perpetuating alienation (Rosa, 2019, p. 423).

He further calls digitalisation a "monster," delivering "unlimited acceleration" or a "new, radical form of uncontrollability" (Rosa, 2020, pp. 112, 115). He argues that in the "uncontrollable dynamism of media and social networks," or digitalisation, we cannot hear, reach, or transform the world at all; rather, we are abandoned in a world of radical aggression, alienation, fear, anger, and despair.

Given this premise, it is worth questioning whether there is a certain path for middle-aged housewives to find some novel opportunity for resonance through platform practices. While Rosa critiques digital technology as a central factor reinforcing alienation in the contemporary era, we propose an alternative interpretation. In Terranova's critical study of the corporate platform complex's control over the online "attention economy," she identifies a potential silver lining (Terranova, 2022). Terranova argues that users' combined cognitive and affective labour can contribute to the construction of a new "technosociality," or "commons" as she terms it, from which alternative forms of subjectivities and social co-operation may emerge. In articulating her argument with the current study, the YouTube platform experience offers a potential avenue toward a new technosocial commons, or resonance as our focus, for those alienated in the contemporary world but who wish to feel connected, to communicate, and to engage with the world in pursuit of a good life.

4. Method

4.1. Sampling

To answer the research question, this study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. We used online surveys and focus group interviews with a population of women aged 45–64 living in Seoul and Gyeonggi Province who had watched YouTube within the previous month. The sample size for the online survey was 800, drawn from a national Ipsos South Korea panel and allocated by gender, age (45–64), and region. The survey was conducted between 20 and 27 February 2023. As this study examines the relationship between Korean middle-aged women's use of YouTube and their resonant lives, only the responses of women were selected from the total data for analysis ($n = 401$).

Of the 401 total participants, 99 were aged 45–49 (24.7%), 110 were aged 50–54 (27.4%), 95 were aged 55–59 (23.7%), and 97 were aged 60–64 (24.2%). In terms of media platform usage, most participants watched and visited a variety of platforms, but usage varied by platform. Respondents watched an average of more than 2 and a half hours of TV per day ($M = 159.7$ minutes, $SD = 122.8$) and 1 hour and 20 minutes of YouTube per day ($M = 81.9$ minutes, $SD = 122.8$). Over-the-top services such as Netflix were watched an average of 69.3 minutes per day ($SD = 69.8$); the internet was used an average of 23.2 minutes per day ($SD = 21.4$); and social media were visited an average of 23.4 minutes per day ($SD = 31.7$).

For the qualitative research, five focus group interviews were conducted during February 2023. The focus group interview is particularly regarded as a useful methodology for audience reception studies because focus group discussions function as a form of "socially situated communication" (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996, p. 79). In such discussions, diverse personal, social, and political experiences, relations, and opinions are explored and intertwined, ultimately shaping the research directions and potentially enhancing their validity (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). The interviewees were recruited through email invitations sent to a panel of Ipsos South Korea members. Each group consisted of eight people, and five focus group interviews were conducted. The selected participants were all frequent YouTube users in their 50s (24 females) and 60s

(16 females). Each group participated in separate focus group interviews. With informed consent, we recorded all interviews, which were then transcribed by professionals. The length of each interview was approximately two hours, and produced an average transcript length of 60 pages.

4.2. Measurement for Quantitative Survey

Drawing on Rosa's concept of resonance, we identified four key variables encompassing the idea of resonance, and one variable related to YouTube practices. In relation to the notion of resonance, life satisfaction, referring to how an individual feels about their life and their relationship with themselves, is one of these. The other three variables capture the relational and communicative trajectory (bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline), leading to resonance.

Life satisfaction was measured with two statements anchored by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, including "I am satisfied with my overall life" and "I feel satisfied with my daily life and the circumstances surrounding it" (Diener & Suh, 1997; Veenhoven, 2000).

Respondents were asked three statements about bonding with others, answering on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*): "I feel psychologically close to people in this age group," "I am influenced by the lifestyle of this age group," and "I am usually interested in content that this age group likes" ($\alpha = .90$). The items were presented by age group; respondents rated how close they felt to each age group, which we averaged across age groups for analysis.

Two items were used to assess encounters with others online, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*: "I tend to encounter this age group a lot online" and "I encounter and interact with this age group online" ($\alpha = .76$). The concept of encountering others online was also measured by having respondents answer questions for each age group and using the average value.

Encountering others offline was also measured with two statements anchored by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, including "I encounter and interact with this age group in person" and "I have the opportunity to actually observe people in this age group on a daily basis" ($\alpha = .83$). The average of the in-person encounter levels by age group was used in the analysis.

Respondents were asked about their perceptions of the motivations and effects of watching YouTube in their lives. Three statements were used to measure YouTube practice: "I watch YouTube for my future growth," "watching YouTube is important for my personal progress," and "watching YouTube teaches me about the world, people, facts, and information I didn't know." Respondents answered *yes* or *no* to each statement. The sum of the *yes* responses was used for analysis.

5. Result

5.1. The Role of YouTube in One's Trajectory to Resonance

In this analysis, the study employed a partial correlation methodology. Partial correlation analysis aims to isolate the effect of a new variable on the existing correlation between two other variables. For instance,

partial correlation controls for the influence of a third variable C on the correlation between the two variables, A and B. This allows researchers to identify the true association between A and B, independent of C's influence. It means that we can also speculate on the influence of variable C on the correlation of the two variables A and B by controlling for variable C. If the partial correlation coefficient becomes lower than the original coefficient or statistically insignificant, this suggests a significant role played by the variable C on the correlation between A and B. This analytical approach underpins the current study, which examines the influence of YouTube practice on the correlation among the four variables of resonance (life satisfaction, bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline).

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for the variables and partial correlation results indicating the relationships among the key variables, along with the effects of the YouTube practice by middle-aged women in their relation to the world. To begin with, we examine the correlation among the four variables of resonance (zero-order correlations). The correlations among the variables—life satisfaction, bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline—ranged from .13 to .68, indicating that significant positive relationships exist (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2000).

Next, to explore the influence of YouTube practice on the four variables of resonance (i.e., life satisfaction, bonding with others, encountering others online, encountering others offline), we incorporated this factor into our analysis as part of the partial correlation. As shown in Table 1, a partial correlation analysis was conducted to assess the influence of the third variable (i.e., YouTube practice) on the relationship among the other variables (i.e., life satisfaction, bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering

Table 1. Partial correlations with YouTube practice held constant (*n* = 401).

		Life satisfaction	Bonding with others	Encountering others online	Encountering others offline	*M*	*SD*
Zero-order correlations	Life satisfaction	—				3.34	.86
	Bonding with others	.20**	—			3.03	.62
	Encountering others online	.13**	.59**	—		2.81	.75
	Encountering others offline	.15**	.68**	.60**	—	3.15	.69
Partial correlations: YouTube practice controlled	Life satisfaction	—					
	Bonding with others	.16**	—				
	Encountering others online	.08	.52**	—			
	Encountering others offline	.10*	.63**	.53**	—		

Note: * *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01.

others offline). In our study, controlling for YouTube practice resulted in lower or statistically insignificant correlation coefficients than the initial correlation among the four variables of resonance, particularly between life satisfaction (as their relation to their own lives), and the other three variables of bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline (as their relation to others).

These results empirically demonstrate that, first, for middle-aged women, life satisfaction (their relation to their own lives) is contingent on their relation to others (bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline). Moreover, it turns out that this interconnectedness would be weakened significantly without consistent YouTube practice. In other words, YouTube seems to actively contribute to the women's resonance with themselves (life satisfaction) and others (bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline) in balance.

This study further explores how specific aspects of YouTube practice contribute to the perceived connection between life satisfaction (their relation to their own lives) and relational and communicative activities (one's relation to others, including bonding with others, encountering others online, and encountering others offline)—all aspects of resonance—in the daily lives of middle-aged women in Korea.

5.2. The Meaning of YouTube Practice in One's Trajectory of Resonance

On the surface, middle-aged women in Korea seemingly navigate YouTube within a strong patriarchal context, pursuing the creation of prosperous families. They mostly enjoy specific genres of YouTube contents for various reasons such as exploring new recipes or skills to save money, finding pride in existing culinary or financial investment techniques, and even multitasking by listening while cooking for the family. This tendency is reflected in their most popular content choices, with cooking shows and the management of household assets standing out. In contrast to Radway's seminal study on the female romance reading culture (Radway, 1991), where pleasure is experienced as an "escape" from patriarchal constraints, the middle-aged women in our interviews primarily find satisfaction and pride in utilising YouTube content to further develop their housekeeping skills.

Some participants reported expanding their economic knowledge and financial management techniques through YouTube. For example, YH, a woman in her 60s who lives alone due to her husband and son working in other cities, was able to begin investing in stocks after dedicating several hours daily to watching and learning from a YouTube channel specialising in stock market knowledge. MS, another participant interviewed at the same location, echoed YH's experience, expressing her own interest in learning about the stock market. She revealed that she not only followed the recommendations of a specific YouTube channel but also encouraged her daughters to invest in the same stocks. Notably, YH and MS confirmed that they had both purchased stocks based on the advice of the same YouTube content, unanimously agreeing that "YouTube is a valuable teacher for [them], consistently collecting and delivering useful information, and ensuring [their] success" (MS, YH). The statements from this participant group appear to resonate with the findings of Ouellette and Wilson (2011) regarding women's daily engagement with self-help content in multimedia environments. The authors argued that, within the contemporary neoliberal context, women are pressured to achieve a form of "neoliberal citizenship" through the cultivation of an "enterprising-self" capable of "successful self-management and family governance" (Ouellette & Wilson, 2011, pp. 549–550).

Following Ouellette and Wilson's study, this seemingly conventional way of using YouTube could perpetuate patriarchal boundaries by channelling Korean middle-aged women toward domestic roles. Their use of YouTube in their mundane lives may simply contribute to reproducing the neoliberal subject who is complicit with a "second shift of domestic and affective labour," created in the environment of advanced digital platforms, which leads them to "holding families together and makes strategic individualism possible" (Ouellette & Wilson, 2011, pp. 556–559). However, under this surface, might middle-aged women negotiate or challenge their roles as wives and mothers, carving out new subtle directions in their lives toward the experience of resonance through their YouTube practices?

To delve deeper into this question of resonance, the current study analyses the focus group interviews on how middle-aged housewives engage with YouTube in their daily lives. The analysis, consistent with the variables identified in the quantitative analysis, draws on Rosa's theorisation of resonance (Rosa, 2019, 2020) to explore four key areas related to the possibility of middle-aged women creating alternative relational modes of resonance. These areas are: (a) intrinsic moments of embracing YouTube as a desire to encounter others, and as the trajectorial points toward resonance; (b) the experience of self-efficacy gained through YouTube practice; (c) transformative disposability in their relationships with others fostered by YouTube practice; and (d) the (re)creation of selfhood and its relationship to the world.

Regarding the intrinsic moments of embracing YouTube as a desire to encounter others, and as the trajectorial points toward resonance, the daily lives of middle-aged women are explored, focusing on their emotional states and social experiences. A recurring term in the interviews is "climacteric," highlighting the physical and psychological difficulties associated with menopause and ageing. Interviewees reported that they commonly experienced "anxiety, depression, and ennui," often accompanied by a sense of resentment toward their family members. These volatile emotions were intertwined with physical changes, as some women described reaching a "red light" in their health around their 60s (AL). This physical weakness manifested as sleep problems, reduced agility (*bbarit bbarit*, meaning precise and quick in Korean, according to the participant transcript, CT), and emotional instability, described by JH as "puberty in emotion," which she experienced in her 50s concurrently with her own children undergoing "real" puberty. These experiences are, as CT, a woman in her 50s who works in an office, confesses, naturally linked to feelings of loss and emptiness that accompany the thought that "her life is nearing its end."

For these women, YouTube serves as an unexpected refuge from the depression, weakness, and loneliness that overwhelm them at home. YM, in her 60s, for instance, recalled learning about YouTube from a friend who seemed well-informed about cultural trends. As she aged and her children grew up, she felt her role in her family and society had shrunk, and she herself had become less needed. YM had felt a diminishing sense of social connection, missing out on events such as school friend meetings. Upon discovering YouTube, she exclaimed, "Oh, is there such a world existing?" Watching YouTube content quickly became a cherished habit, allowing her to "shut [her] bedroom door from 10:30 p.m. and enjoy YouTube comfortably in [her] bed alone" (YM). Despite the challenges in their lives, YouTube presents the possibility of a new world, fostering a sense of opportunities for "happiness" (HK).

Concerning the second point regarding the experience of self-efficacy, middle-aged women's YouTube habits diverged from the typical expectations for social network services. Social network service platforms are generally understood as being social and collaborative, with users sharing topics, links, and posts at both the

interpersonal and broader societal levels (French & Read, 2013). In contrast, all the middle-aged women interviewed emphasised the pleasure of simply "being themselves" while using YouTube. Regarding the physical condition of watching or listening to YouTube, these women prefer spending time alone watching YouTube to social interactions. It connotes the freedom to choose, decide, and pursue what they want, on their own terms, and from the comfort of their own rooms. They find peace and relaxation (referred to as "*mung*" in Korean) with their headphones on, enjoying their favourite YouTube content. Another advantage of YouTube is that it helps them sleep as a companion during those most personal moments, when sleeping difficulties arise due to their physical age. Specific playlists of music for sleep, such as audiobooks, religious speeches, and even "raining sounds" are popular for this purpose. These users find that YouTube allows them to "listen even while drifting off to sleep," as HJ confesses (in her 60s, housewife).

Furthermore, they prioritise loving their own time over the stress of shallow interactions as an active form of liberation. As EA, an office worker in her 50s, puts it, YouTube (which she jokingly calls an "addiction") infuses her life with fun and useful information. This "addiction" is more accurately described as a sense of liberation *toward* a new world of knowledge and pleasure, unlike the "escape" *from* patriarchal reality that Radway (1991) emphasises. Focusing on the self is thus associated with a sense of vitality and empowerment, emerging as a key takeaway across various disciplines, ranging from music to the humanities and literature. MS, a freelancer in her 50s, had developed a habit of listening to various genres of music and "a taste for knowledge" on YouTube. For her, listening to these "good sounds and words" soothed her feelings of depression. While she found it difficult to concentrate on reading books and had grown to avoid them in her later years as she physically aged, YouTube allowed her to gain new insights that she had not recognised before.

As for the third point of transformative disposability in their relationships with others, fostered by YouTube practice, middle-aged women's desire for autonomy, freedom, and happiness is not necessarily silenced or rendered mute, which Rosa warns can be a symptom of "alienation" (Rosa, 2019). Their experiences suggest that these newfound joys of engaging with YouTube motivate them to connect with others and develop new ways of relating to the world. This ultimately leads to a reshaping of their sense of self, distinct from their previous identities.

For example, HS, in her 60s, after enduring caregiver fatigue, chose to create separate living spaces for her husband (coined "Mr. Second Floor"). However, after listening to the teachings of Buprul Monk on YouTube, her family noticed a significant improvement in her ability to understand others. This newfound empathy fostered improved family relationships. She credited this positive change to the self-assurance and self-awareness she cultivated through reflection on spiritual content such as Buprul's teachings. Interestingly, she did not pinpoint the exact lesson that Buprul delivered, nor did she detail how she had actively applied his words to her life. Instead, it seemed that she had used his teachings as an opportunity to reflect on herself and her relationships with others. Accordingly, the significance lies less in Buprul's teaching itself and more in HS' creative act of using the offered content and propelling her toward a transformative shift in her relationships with herself and others. YouTube has become a catalyst for self-reflection, fostering stronger relationships, and even prompting a renewed sense of purpose in connecting with others—a concept akin to "resonance" (Rosa, 2019).

Regarding the fourth point of the (re)creation of selfhood and its relationship to the world, middle-aged women's YouTube practices are deeply intertwined with their journeys involving the rediscovery of their selves and personal growth. The interviews revealed self-recognition and empowerment emerging in the

process of YouTube practices: "Through YouTube, I've discovered many aspects of myself I never knew existed—a new me, in a way" (DP). YouTube may even spark a sense of adventurous courage, prompting visions of a potential "second life" in their 60s (TK). One interviewee exclaimed, "Oh, there are so many things I could try! I never realised there were so many things I would like to do. I will definitely do at least one of them before I die!" (DJ). This newfound inspiration even included a dream of becoming a YouTube creator herself (PN). At its heart, their enjoyment of YouTube stems from the autonomy, freedom, and happiness it mediates—values that these women have long felt alienated from in their lives. These values are now discovered or created through their active YouTube practices.

Participants in their 60s reported near-unanimous agreement that the most important relationship in their lives currently is the one with themselves. This finding also holds true within the context of their YouTube practices:

> Researcher: What relationship is most important to you these days?
>
> YH: Making myself strong. After all, it's fundamental to my happiness. When I met my daughter today, I realised I could only chat with her because I'm healthy.
>
> SM: It's a cliché, but a healthy and peaceful family often relies on a healthy mother. That is why I think my hobbies are important. I enjoy travelling, thanks to the information I find on YouTube. Therefore, the relationship with myself is paramount; I come first.
>
> YH: Exactly. Let's live for ourselves. Just for ourselves. In the past, I used to think I was doing things to help my family, that my children would appreciate it. But I don't think that way anymore. Now, I only do what I enjoy.
>
> SM: For me, too. Fulfilling myself is most meaningful.

The kinds of popular YouTube content among middle-aged women appear to be more in a "hegemonic relationship" (Seiter, 1999, as cited in Hermes, 2003, p. 391) within the social patriarchy than a critical or resistant nature. However, as Hermes argues, it is necessary to "delve beneath the surface of interviews or observation material" and across the "mixture of highly conservative and progressive elements" made up of their "shared discourses and cultural resources" (Hermes, 2003, pp. 384–389) to explore how middle-aged women constantly engage with YouTube through "performing and audiencing" in their daily lives (Cavalcante et al., 2017, p. 5). Consequently, the current study prioritises an examination of the diversity, complexity, and dynamics embedded in middle-aged women's YouTube practices. In particular, we focus on middle-aged women's newfound desire, will, and capability to actively create and cultivate resonant experiences through their YouTube practices.

While Rosa describes resonance as an "oasis," it is not a pre-existing haven offered by YouTube. For the middle-aged female interviewees, this oasis was not provided by the YouTube platform itself. Rather, it was actively and arduously created through their unique and personal engagement with YouTube. Their lived experiences, often marked by alienation and suppression, served as the "desert" landscape from which they cultivated this self-made "oasis," a refuge found through their YouTube practices (Rosa, 2019). These practices emerge *despite* the realities of a digitally saturated world and their alienation from the patriarchal

structure. Thus, the power of gendering and un-gendering is not predetermined by YouTube, the dominant platform. Instead, middle-aged women, through their daily YouTube practices, use and turn this platform into an oasis where they can subtly challenge gender and age norms, thereby redefining the self. The YouTube oasis that Korean women create through their YouTube practices is unique. They preserve the patriarchal surface of their daily lives within this space yet venture toward a new resonant world where they discover, transform, and re-tune their relationship with themselves and others.

6. Conclusion

This study explored how middle-aged women's YouTube practices influence their newfound ability to create resonance in pursuit of building a better life based on this resonant relationship with the world.

The findings suggest that, firstly, YouTube practices play a significant mediating role in their resonant relationships in balance with others (bonding and encountering others) and their own lives and themselves (life satisfaction). Secondly, our analysis of the interviews revealed that middle-aged women's YouTube practices (rather than the content itself) are meaningful—partly due to its nature of platformisation (i.e., the interrelational and dynamic structures available through ubiquitous and mobile networks; van Dijck et al., 2019)—as both a temporal-spatial condition and socio-cultural resource for resonance. This allows middle-aged women to discover themselves, develop their self-esteem and efficacy, and transform their relationships with themselves, others, and the world. Challenging the notion of YouTube as a platform for social interaction, our research indicates that middle-aged women prioritise cultivating resonant relationships—*both* with themselves and others—through their YouTube practices, which they view, in alignment with Rosa's perspective, as indispensable for their good lives.

Our analysis suggests that middle-aged women do not entirely resist the content, partly because they actively choose what they need and want on YouTube. This differs from the traditional "active audience" model, in which individuals negotiate or resist messages presented by the mass media (Morley, 1992). However, middle-aged women may be considered active in terms of how they creatively engage with YouTube within their lives. By encountering new and different worlds through YouTube, they generate a desire, will, and capability to create different relationships with others, the world, and themselves. They are less like the traditionally studied "active audiences" in relation to ideological structures, and more like reflexive and creative subjects in relation to resonance, or a good life.

This study contributes to developing the valuable tradition of feminist reception studies in the platform-based media environment, in particular within the context of YouTube practice. The research also integrates Rosa's theory of resonance with the digital media environment: It suggests that while Rosa may reject digital technology in his view of resonance, digital technology (or YouTube in this case) can contribute to enhancing resonance, but only depending on how people *practice* it. Furthermore, our analysis highlights the importance of middle-aged women, who are not merely viewers, but rather active participants within the burgeoning YouTube scene. This middle-aged group's YouTube practices have been unfairly overlooked, as social and academic discussions of YouTube often prioritise creators and influencers, most of whom are young, framing them as the platform's emerging produsers. Lastly, we expand the current understanding of how audience groups may potentially exert agency, moving beyond the ideological binaries of submission versus resistance in the process of interpreting media texts. Our emphasis lies in the creativity embedded in

Korean middle-aged women's platform practices within their daily lives, the creativity through which they generate resonant relationships with themselves, others, and the world. Through this creative trajectory, these women engage in diverse YouTube practices as they continually pursue good lives, finding solace and renewal much like an oasis in a desert.

The current study has limitations. It does not fully explore the diversity of middle-aged women in terms of economic, social, or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984), all of which are crucial factors influencing cultural consumption, including YouTube practices. Additionally, this study focused on the immediate experiences of YouTube users and did not sufficiently examine the long-term consequences of such experiences, particularly in relation to the concept of resonance. These questions are certainly worth further investigation, rebuilding the tradition of feminist reception studies in the media environment of platformisation.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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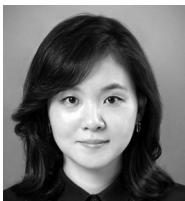
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