

Strategic Emotional Expression among East Asian YouTube Creators: Cross-Regional Patterns in South Korea, Mainland China, and Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how top-ranked, communication-oriented YouTube creators express emotion across three East Asian platform contexts: South Korea, Mainland China, and Taiwan. Drawing on meta-feeling theory, self-construal and display-rule frameworks, and research on digital creator communication, we analyze 1,669 utterances from 60 videos (15 creators $\times$ 4 videos), combining multilingual coding of nine emotion categories by two independent coders with video-level mixed-effects modeling. Affect-bearing expression is highest in the Taiwanese sample, while the Korean and Mainland samples are lower and do not differ significantly from each other (region effect $\chi^2(2) = 14.0$, $p < .001$); the difference is not driven by individual creators ($ICC \approx .00$) and is stable under leave-one-creator re-estimation. The regions also differ in the kind of emotion expressed ($\chi^2(16) = 56.6$, $p < .001$; Cramér's $V = .37$): the Korean sample is Joy-dominant, the Taiwanese sample relational-inquisitive, and the Mainland sample the most evenly distributed. Leave-one-genre-out analyses show that no single content sub-genre produces the regional contrast, although genre, being nested within region, cannot be fully excluded. The findings characterize the sampled top creators rather than wider creator populations, and the study contributes a reproducible procedure for measuring emotional expression across languages.

Keywords:

meta-feeling; emotional expression; YouTube creators; East Asian digital media; cross-regional comparison; parasocial communication; qualitative content analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

Short-form and long-form video platforms have reorganized how public feeling is produced and circulated. On YouTube, individual creators now function as durable communicative institutions: they speak in the first person, appear on screen, and cultivate sustained parasocial relationships with domestic audiences at a scale once reserved for broadcast celebrities [1]–[4]. In several East Asian media systems this shift has become economically and civically consequential. Industry estimates place the contribution of YouTube’s creative ecosystem to South Korea’s gross domestic product in the trillions of won, alongside tens of thousands of full-time-equivalent jobs [5], and roughly half of South Korean news consumers report using the platform for news, a markedly higher share than the international average [6]. Where creators become primary intermediaries of information and affect, the question of how they express emotion, and how that expression differs across culturally proximate but institutionally distinct contexts, acquires both theoretical and practical weight.

East Asia offers an unusually informative site for this question. South Korea, Mainland China, and Taiwan share deep historical and linguistic ties and are frequently grouped as a single ‘Confucian’ or ‘collectivist’ bloc in cross-cultural psychology [7], [8]. Yet they operate under sharply divergent platform environments, media policies, and discursive norms, spanning very different positions on indices of press and personal freedom [9]–[14]. If emotional expression among comparable top creators varied systematically across these three contexts, it would caution against treating East Asia as emotionally homogeneous and would foreground the role of regional platform cultures in shaping how feeling is publicly performed. Prior YouTube research has examined emotional contagion [15], cross-cultural consumption [16], and localized language regions [17], but has rarely compared the emotional-expression repertoires of matched, top-tier creators across these three East Asian contexts using a reproducible, multilingual measurement procedure.

This study addresses that gap. We assemble a balanced corpus of 60 videos from 15 celebrity-level, communication-oriented creators (five per region, four videos each) and classify 1,669 utterances into nine emotion categories plus a non-emotional residual. Our analytic aim is deliberately bounded: we do not attempt to characterize the emotional life of these regions’ populations, nor of their entire creator communities. We ask, instead, how the most-followed communication-oriented creators, matched on their parasocial role, perform emotion to engage domestic audiences, and whether those performances differ across the three regional platform contexts. We frame this through meta-feeling theory [18], which treats the strategic, reflexive management of expressed emotion as a communicative competence, and we interpret the observed differences through an integrated cultural and digital-communication lens rather than reducing them to any single cause.

These questions are, moreover, squarely questions of electronic commerce. The creators studied here are nodes of a fast-growing creator economy in which attention is monetized through advertising, sponsorship, membership, and, increasingly, direct and live commerce [1], [2], [12]. Parasocial attachment is the mechanism that converts a creator’s

expressed feeling into audience trust, and trust into commercial action, from purchase intention to live-commerce conversion. Qualitative analysis of live-streaming commerce in Asian markets similarly locates this conversion in cultural indicators such as identification, parasocialization, and community rather than in technology alone [19]. How top creators in different regional contexts perform emotion is therefore not only a cultural-communication question but a determinant of how value is created and captured on commerce-enabling platforms, which is the concern of this journal.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 From Metacognition to Meta-Feeling

Metacognition, the monitoring and regulation of one's own cognition, has a long lineage in psychology [20], and a parallel literature extends this reflexive stance to affect. Work on metacognitive experience [21], [22], metaemotionality [23], and parental meta-emotion has argued that people do not merely feel; they hold orientations toward feeling and act on those orientations. Meta-feeling theory [18] develops this insight for communicative settings, conceptualizing the deliberate selection, calibration, and display of emotion as a learnable technology of connection and persuasion. For creators whose livelihoods depend on sustaining audience attachment, meta-feeling is not incidental but central: the creator continuously decides which emotions to foreground, how intensely to mark them, and how to align them with audience expectations. Importantly, we treat meta-feeling as an observable communicative practice. Our design measures expressed emotion in speech; it does not access creators' inner metacognitive states. We therefore use meta-feeling to motivate why systematic differences in expressed emotion are theoretically meaningful, while remaining agnostic about the private mechanisms that produce them.

2.2 Culture, Self-Construal, and Display Rules

Cross-cultural research provides strong priors for expecting regional variation in emotional display. The self-construal tradition holds that independent and interdependent self-models organize cognition, motivation, and emotion differently [8], [24], and studies of good feeling document that the valence and social meaning of emotion vary across cultural contexts [25]. The display-rule tradition, from its origins in facial-expression research [26] to large-scale mapping of expressive norms, shows that cultures differ systematically in the amplification and de-amplification of emotional signals, with expressivity covarying with individualism and collectivism [27], [28]. Reviews of culture and emotion [29] converge on the view that emotional expression is norm-governed rather than merely spontaneous, and research on emotion regulation shows that individuals actively manage what they express in anticipation of social context [30]. Language itself encodes affective distinctions differently across communities [31], which is consequential for any multilingual analysis of emotion. These frameworks predict that comparably positioned creators in different regional contexts may deploy different expressive repertoires; they do not, however, specify how platform environments inflect those repertoires, which is where digital-communication research becomes essential. It should

be noted that self-construal and collectivism are not measured in the present design; they are invoked as interpretive priors rather than as variables.

2.3 Emotional Expression in Digital Creator Communication

The creator has been theorized as a new intersection of entertainment and platform labor [2] and as a form of internet celebrity whose value rests on cultivated intimacy [1]. Bibliometric mapping of two decades of social-media-influencer scholarship confirms the rapid consolidation of this field and its concentration on influencer credibility, parasocial attachment, and commercial value [32]. Emotional expression is a core resource in this economy. Emotional-labor theory [33] frames the commercialized management of feeling as work, and recent scholarship extends such competence to mediated settings through the concepts of digital emotional intelligence [34] and digital emotion regulation [35]. On YouTube specifically, emotion has been examined as an object of media-system dependency [36], as a contagious property that transfers between creators and audiences [15], and as a force in networked narratives and multicultural learning environments [37], [38]. Comparative and cross-cultural YouTube studies show that consumption and circulation are patterned by cultural values [16] and by language-defined cultural regions [17]. Computational approaches increasingly make large-scale, multilingual emotion measurement feasible, including in Sinophone contexts [39], though cross-language validity remains a recognized challenge. What is missing is a design that holds the creator's communicative role constant while varying regional context, so that differences in expressed emotion can be attributed to context rather than to incomparable creator types. Such a design also complements the largely quantitative evaluation of influencers with the qualitative, case-based scrutiny that recent reviews argue is necessary, since follower-count metrics are readily manipulated and cannot capture communicative quality [40].

2.4 Cross-Regional Media in East Asia and the Present Contribution

East Asian media scholarship has richly documented transnational flows, including the Korean Wave and its reception in Taiwan [41], [42], and the governance of online discourse in Mainland China, where campaigns to promote 'positive energy' actively shape the affective register of public communication [14]. High-context communication norms [43] and prestige-variety dynamics in Taiwanese Mandarin [44] further differentiate the three contexts. Yet these literatures rarely place matched, top-tier creators from all three contexts in a single comparative frame measured with a common instrument. The present study contributes on three fronts. Empirically, it provides a balanced, video-level comparison of emotional-expression profiles among celebrity-level communication-oriented creators in South Korea, Mainland China, and Taiwan. Methodologically, it offers a transparent, reproducible, multilingual coding procedure with per-language reliability, addressing the cross-language validity problem directly. Theoretically, it reframes meta-feeling as an observable, context-sensitive communicative practice and shows that culturally proximate contexts can nonetheless exhibit distinct public-emotion repertoires among the creators sampled.

2.5 Research Questions

RQ1: Do top-ranked, communication-oriented creators differ across the three regional contexts in the overall rate at which they express affect-bearing (versus non-emotional) speech?

RQ2: Do the regional samples differ in the profile of emotion categories they foreground when they do express emotion?

RQ3: Are any such differences robust to the influence of individual creators and to the confounding of region with content sub-genre?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

We employ a mixed-methods, most-similar-systems comparative design. Following established procedures for quantitative content analysis of media messages [45], the quantitative strand models emotional expression at the level of the video; the qualitative strand interprets recurrent linguistic realizations of emotion in their discursive context. The unit of analysis for all inferential tests is the video ($N = 60$), nested within creators ($N = 15$), nested within regional contexts ($k = 3$). This design choice directly addresses a central methodological requirement of comparative creator research: because a small number of prolific creators can otherwise dominate a pooled corpus, aggregating all utterances into one regional total would conflate creator-level idiosyncrasy with region-level pattern. Modeling the video as the unit, with creators as a random effect, separates these sources of variation.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Strategy

The study uses criterion-based purposive sampling rather than probability sampling, the standard and appropriate choice for a most-similar-systems comparison in which cases are matched on the dimension the study theorizes and allowed to vary on others. The theorized dimension is the creator's communicative role, the persona-centered, parasocial mode of address through which emotion is performed, not content topic. From each regional context we constructed a sampling frame of top-tier independent creators within the broad lifestyle macro-genre and retained cases meeting all of the following operational criteria: (1) independent, persona-centered channels, that is, individual creators rather than corporate, network, or franchise-owned accounts, so that the on-screen voice belongs to one identifiable person; (2) native-language production oriented to a primarily domestic rather than export-facing audience; (3) celebrity-level domestic reach, ranking among the most-subscribed within the lifestyle umbrella in their context and functioning as public figures at home; (4) an on-screen, direct-address format in which the creator's face appears and they speak to viewers in the first person, sustaining a one-to-one parasocial mode [4]; (5) communication- rather than information-graphic-centered production, built on the creator's talk and presence rather than faceless

voiceover, on-screen data, or screen-capture exposition; and (6) high-cadence output, that is, frequent and regular publication responsive to current domestic interests.

These criteria hold communicative role constant across the three contexts. Content sub-topic, by contrast, was deliberately left free: within the lifestyle umbrella the sample spans food, travel, social commentary, popular science, narrative and mystery, business explanation, language, technology, comedy, prank, and variety content. This topical diversity is a design feature rather than an incidental confound. Because each creator was selected for domestic resonance, the sample reflects the fact that different domestic audiences reward different subject matter; holding topic artificially constant would have selected against the very domestic-resonance criterion that defines the population of interest. The final sample comprises 15 creators, five per regional context, four videos each, for 60 videos. To preserve analytic rigor we nonetheless record sub-genre and creator gender for every creator (Table 1) and probe the influence of sub-genre through the sensitivity analyses described in Section 3.6; gender, being fully confounded with region in the Taiwanese sample, is retained as a boundary condition rather than as an analyzable covariate (Section 6). Purposive sampling of this kind supports analytic, not statistical, generalization: findings speak to communication-role-comparable top creators across the three contexts, not to the full population of each context's creators or residents, and all comparisons are framed accordingly.

Table 1. Sampled creators: channel subscriber counts (millions, at the time of sampling), content sub-genre, and gender

Regional context	Creator	Subscribers (M)	Content sub-genre	Gender
South Korea	Tzuyang	13.40	Food	F
South Korea	ChimChakMan	3.24	Social commentary	M
South Korea	Pani Bottle	2.60	Travel	M
South Korea	Gwaktube	2.14	Travel	M
South Korea	Seungwu Appa	1.35	Food reviews	M
Mainland China	Dianxi Xiaoge	12.40	Rural cuisine	F
Mainland China	Laogao & Xiaomo	6.72	Lifestyle storytelling	M
Mainland China	Dashu Jun	3.18	Food science	M
Mainland China	Xiaolin Shuo	2.81	Business/success	F
Mainland China	Naodong Wutoubang	2.56	Mystery	F
Taiwan	Addy English	2.93	English education	M
Taiwan	Joeman	2.86	Tech reviews	M
Taiwan	Tsai Aga	2.48	Comedy	M
Taiwan	Andy Laoshi	2.43	Prank	M
Taiwan	Huangshi Xiongdi	2.34	Entertainment/variety	M

Note. Subscriber counts were retrieved from public channel pages at the time of sampling and are rounded to two decimal places. Gender is recorded as presented on the channel. Female creators number one of five in the Korean sample and three of five in the Mainland sample; the Taiwanese sample contains none, a composition addressed as a boundary condition in Section 6.

To document the celebrity-level reach criterion concretely, Table 1 reports each creator's channel subscriber count at the time of sampling, together with the content sub-genre and gender recorded for each creator. All fifteen creators command large domestic followings, ranging from 1.35 to 13.40 million subscribers (median 2.81 million; 63.44 million combined), which confirms that the sample consists of top-tier, mass-reach creators rather than mid-market or niche channels and substantiates the comparability of the three regional samples at the level of audience scale.

3.3 Corpus Construction and Data Provenance

Constructing a genuinely comparable multilingual corpus across three platform environments required a transparent, multi-stage provenance process, which we document in full in the interest of reproducibility. Video selection proceeded from each creator's channel by sampling recent, high-view uploads, published largely within the year preceding data collection, that met the persona-centered, direct-address criteria above and were thematically comparable within the lifestyle macro-genre, excluding livestream re-uploads, compilations, and third-party-dominated formats. Transcript acquisition then faced an uneven data-availability landscape that is itself substantively informative about the three platform contexts. For a subset of channels, principally the Korean creators and two Mainland creators, platform-generated caption tracks were available and were retrieved programmatically. For the remaining Mainland creators and all Taiwanese creators, extractable caption tracks were unavailable, because captions were rendered directly into the video image or were not provided, so machine retrieval returned no usable text. In addition, automated large-batch transcript retrieval was subject to platform-side rate limiting that interrupted collection, which we mitigated by distributing acquisition across sessions and by pacing requests rather than by circumventing any access control.

Where caption tracks were unavailable, transcripts were produced from the audio track and verified against the video by native-speaker members of the research team. All transcripts then passed through a uniform normalization pipeline. Mainland Chinese text was standardized to simplified script and Taiwanese text retained in traditional script, consistent with each variety's written standard and with the study's treatment of the two as distinct linguistic contexts [31], [44]. Advertising and sponsored-segment passages were identified and excluded so that commercial read-copy would not contaminate the measurement of spontaneous affect. Continuous transcripts were then segmented into utterance units, defined as intonation- and clause-bounded expressive turns.

Consistent with the research question, which concerns the expression of emotion rather than the exposition of content, candidate utterances within each video were extracted with a bias toward potentially affect-bearing speech, that is, interjections, evaluative reactions, and expressive turns, rather than toward purely descriptive or informational passages. This is a deliberate, disclosed decision aligned with the construct of interest: the study characterizes the emotional-expression repertoire creators deploy to move their audiences, not the base rate of emotion across all speech. Two consequences follow and are stated explicitly. First, because the coding criterion described in Section 3.5 credits only explicitly marked affect, a substantial majority of extracted candidate turns were

nonetheless coded as non-emotional; the emotional-expression rates reported in Section 4 are therefore properties of this candidate set and are not population base rates of emotion in creator speech. Second, because the same extraction rule was applied to every creator in every context, the procedure bears on the absolute level of those rates but not on the between-context comparisons that constitute the findings. The resulting corpus comprises 1,669 utterances across the 60 videos, with region, creator, sub-genre, gender, and source-video identifiers recorded for each utterance.

3.4 Emotion Classification Scheme

Utterances were classified into nine emotion categories, Joy, Pride, Empathy, Curiosity, Surprise, Fear, Denial, Sadness, and Anger, plus a non-emotional residual. The scheme is grounded in dimensional and categorical models of emotion [46]–[48] and adapted to the communicative setting of creator speech, where curiosity-marking and empathic address are salient relational moves alongside the basic affective categories. Each utterance received a single primary label corresponding to its dominant expressed emotion, or the non-emotional label where no affective marking was present.

Two design choices warrant justification. First, the scheme is intermediate in granularity between low-dimensional valence models and the high-resolution taxonomies that recover more than two dozen distinguishable states [46], [47]; we retain categories that are both cross-culturally recurrent [48] and communicatively consequential for creator address. Second, two categories are defined specifically for this communicative setting: Curiosity denotes expressed interest and epistemic engagement, a state that high-resolution taxonomies treat as a distinct emotion [46], rather than mere questioning; and Denial denotes expressed rejection, refusal, or disbelief as an affective stance rather than grammatical negation. Coders were instructed accordingly, and the coding scheme operationalizes this distinction so that ordinary interrogative or negational grammar is not miscoded as emotion.

3.5 Coding Procedure and Reliability

Classification followed a two-phase, reproducible procedure. In the first phase, each utterance was independently coded by two coders working from a documented multilingual codebook of affective cues spanning Korean, simplified Chinese, and traditional Chinese. Coding in each language was carried out by, or verified against the judgment of, a native speaker of that language. The two coders were deliberately paired to differ in coding disposition: one applied a conservative criterion, assigning an emotion only when affect was explicitly marked in the wording, whereas the other applied a more expressive criterion that additionally credited genuine interjections and discourse-level affective markers and, in ambiguous cases, favored the more expressive category. Comparison of their independent codings yielded a Cohen's kappa of .80 overall, with per-language values of .91 for Korean, .93 for Mainland Mandarin, and .68 for Taiwanese Mandarin. Following convention [49], the overall value indicates substantial agreement. The lower Taiwanese value is reported transparently and is itself informative, reflecting the higher frequency of ambiguous interjective speech in that sample, where the boundary between an emotional exclamation and a discourse filler is genuinely less determinate.

Reporting reliability separately by language directly addresses the cross-language validity problem that multilingual emotion research must confront [31], [39], and guards against a single language driving the overall reliability estimate.

In the second phase, every disagreement between the two coders was reviewed and adjudicated against a single pre-specified decision rule: where the two codings diverged, the label was resolved to the conservative criterion, so that an emotion was credited only when affect was explicitly marked in the wording. Disagreements arose on 92 of the 1,669 utterances (5.5%). This adjudication rule is the reason the resulting estimates are systematically conservative, and it is applied identically in all three language samples, so it does not differentially advantage any regional sample. The coding scheme and codebook, together with the labeled dataset, are documented so that the procedure can be independently scrutinized and reapplied (see Section 8.1).

3.6 Analytical Approach

For each video we computed the proportion of affect-bearing utterances (the emotional-expression rate) and, among affect-bearing utterances, the proportion falling in each of the nine categories (the emotion profile). RQ1 was tested with a linear mixed-effects model regressing the emotional-expression rate on regional context as a fixed effect with creator as a random intercept, videos nested within creators within contexts. Because there are only three regional contexts, region is modeled as a fixed rather than a random effect. We report fixed-effect estimates with an omnibus likelihood-ratio test for region and, as a direct index of how far individual creators drive regional results, the intraclass correlation attributable to the creator level. As a robustness estimate we also computed creator-weighted regional means, averaging the five creator means per context so that no single prolific creator dominates. To reduce reliance on parametric assumptions given the modest number of clusters, we additionally report 95% confidence intervals for the regional means from a cluster bootstrap that resamples creators (5,000 replications), and we correct pairwise regional contrasts for multiple comparisons using the Holm procedure.

RQ2 was tested by comparing regional emotion profiles with a chi-square test of independence and the associated Cramér's V effect size. RQ3 was addressed through two sensitivity analyses. The first was leave-one-creator-out re-estimation, recomputing regional means with each creator removed in turn. The second was a leave-one-genre-out re-estimation directly targeting the genre confound: because each creator maps onto exactly one content sub-genre in this corpus, genre is perfectly nested within creator and region, so a single genre-adjusted fixed-effects model is not identifiable. We therefore probed genre influence non-parametrically by removing each of the fourteen sub-genres in turn and re-estimating the full mixed-effects region model on the remaining videos, examining whether the regional ordering, the omnibus region effect, and the Taiwan-versus-Korea and Taiwan-versus-Mainland contrasts remained stable across all iterations (reported in Section 4.3 and Table 3). This leave-one-genre-out procedure isolates the influence of any single sub-genre while leaving the perfect nesting of genre within region intact; it can therefore assess, but not fully remove, the region-genre confound, which we

accordingly retain as an acknowledged boundary condition. Analyses were conducted in Python using the statsmodels package.

3.7 Validity and Robustness Provisions

Three provisions guard the validity of the comparison. First, because the coding credits only explicitly marked affect, it provides a conservative, lower-bound estimate of expressed emotion; we therefore interpret the comparative structure of the estimates across contexts rather than their absolute magnitudes. Second, the candidate-extraction protocol described in Section 3.3 was applied uniformly and blind to region: the same rule was used for every creator in every context. Because the protocol was identical across samples, it is unlikely to produce between-region differences by itself; its main consequence is for the absolute level of the emotional-expression rate, which we do not interpret as a population base rate. An interaction between the extraction rule and language-specific frequencies of interjective speech (Section 3.5) cannot be fully excluded. Third, to enable an audit independent of the two coders' agreement, we drew a stratified random validation subsample of 120 utterances (eight per creator; 40 per context, balanced across languages) and documented it separately, so that the coding can be re-examined language by language by parties other than the original coding team.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Emotional Expressiveness across Regional Contexts

The corpus comprises 1,669 coded utterances, distributed as 590 in the Korean sample, 544 in the Mainland sample, and 535 in the Taiwanese sample, of which 210 were coded as affect-bearing (59, 46, and 105 respectively). At the video level ($N = 60$; five creators $\times$ four videos per context), the proportion of affect-bearing utterances differed by regional context. Creator-weighted regional means were highest in the Taiwanese sample ($M = .195$, $SD = .046$) and lower in the Korean ($M = .100$, $SD = .021$) and Mainland ($M = .083$, $SD = .052$) samples. A linear mixed-effects model with region as a fixed effect and creator as a random intercept confirmed a significant regional effect (likelihood-ratio $\chi^2(2) = 14.0$, $p < .001$). Pairwise contrasts showed the Taiwanese sample to be higher than both the Mainland sample ($b = .112$, $p < .001$) and the Korean sample ($b = .095$, $p = .001$), whereas the Korean and Mainland samples did not differ significantly ($b = .017$, $p = .55$). Both Taiwanese contrasts survived Holm correction for multiple comparisons (Taiwan vs. Mainland, $p\text{-Holm} = .001$; Taiwan vs. Korea, $p\text{-Holm} = .002$), whereas the Korea–Mainland contrast did not ($p\text{-Holm} = .55$). A cluster bootstrap resampling creators yielded 95% confidence intervals that separated the Taiwanese mean ($[.169, .238]$) from the Korean ($[.082, .115]$) and Mainland ($[.038, .119]$) means.

Crucially, the creator-level intraclass correlation was negligible ($ICC \approx .00$), indicating that the regional differences were not produced by a small number of high-volume creators but held across creators within each context. This addresses directly the concern that comparative creator findings may be artifacts of a few atypical individuals.

4.2 Emotion-Category Profiles

Beyond overall volume, the kind of emotion foregrounded differed by regional context (region $\times$ category, among affect-bearing utterances: $\chi^2(16) = 56.6$, $p < .001$; Cramér's $V = .37$, a moderate-to-large effect). Because several cells of the region $\times$ category table have small expected frequencies, this test is interpreted together with the effect size and the descriptive profiles in Table 2.

The Korean sample was strongly Joy-dominant, with roughly two-thirds of its affective utterances marked as Joy and comparatively little Curiosity or Denial. The Taiwanese sample displayed a more relational-inquisitive profile, combining Curiosity, Joy, and Empathy in substantial and relatively balanced proportions. The Mainland sample was the most evenly distributed of the three, spreading across Joy, Curiosity, Empathy, and Denial without a single dominant category, and recording the highest share of Denial of the three samples. Table 2 summarizes the profiles. Consistent with the conservative basis of the coding, which credits only explicitly marked affect, these figures are best read as lower-bound estimates of expressed emotion; their comparative structure, rather than their absolute magnitude, carries the interpretive weight.

Table 2. Regional emotion-category profiles (percentage of affect-bearing utterances; creator-weighted)

Region	n	Joy	Pride	Empathy	Curiosity	Surprise	Fear	Denial	Sadness	Anger
South Korea	59	66.2	3.2	7.1	1.7	10.6	2.0	4.2	5.0	0.0
Mainland China	46	23.5	7.6	12.2	20.5	8.3	5.2	11.2	6.2	5.2
Taiwan	105	33.3	5.9	19.0	24.0	8.2	4.5	4.2	1.0	0.0

Note. n is the number of affect-bearing utterances in each regional sample (210 in total). Percentages are creator-weighted: for each video with at least one affect-bearing utterance the distribution of categories was computed, these were averaged within creator, and the resulting creator means were then averaged within region. Videos without any affect-bearing utterance have no defined category distribution and were excluded from this weighting. Rows may not sum to exactly 100.0 because of rounding. The chi-square test reported in the text is computed on the raw region $\times$ category frequency table underlying the n column, not on the creator-weighted percentages.

4.3 Robustness and Sensitivity

Two checks establish the robustness of the regional contrast. First, leave-one-creator-out re-estimation left the regional means essentially unchanged: dropping any single creator moved the Taiwanese mean only within the narrow range [.175, .204], and the Taiwanese sample remained highest whichever creator was removed. Second, we conducted a leave-one-genre-out re-estimation that directly addresses content sub-genre as the principal confound. Each creator in the corpus maps onto exactly one sub-genre (Table 1 and Section 3.6), yielding fourteen sub-genres nested within region; a single genre-adjusted fixed-effects model is therefore not identifiable. We instead removed each sub-genre in turn and re-estimated the full mixed-effects region model on the remaining videos. Table 3 reports every iteration, and Appendix A provides the full region-genre structure and the detailed per-iteration statistics. The result is stable across all fourteen: the Taiwanese sample remained highest in every iteration, the omnibus region effect remained significant throughout (likelihood-ratio $\chi^2(2)$ between 11.2 and 15.2, all $p \leq .004$), the Taiwan-versus-Korea difference stayed within [.075, .104] and the Taiwan-versus-

Mainland difference within [.091, .124]. Removing the Korean travel sub-genre, the largest single sub-genre and the one most often suspected of inflating expressiveness, left the Taiwanese lead essentially intact (Taiwan–Korea = .087, $p = .002$). Because sub-genre is perfectly nested within region, this procedure isolates the effect of any one sub-genre but cannot dissolve the region–genre confound entirely; it therefore shows that no single sub-genre drives the regional contrast, while the joint difference in genre mixes across regions remains an acknowledged boundary condition (Section 6). The central regional contrast is thus statistically significant, carries a non-trivial effect size, shows negligible creator clustering, and is stable both to creator removal and to the removal of any single content sub-genre.

Table 3. Leave-one-genre-out re-estimation of the regional emotional-expression effect

Excluded sub-genre	Region	Videos	KR	CN	TW	LR $\chi^2(2)$	p
English education	TW	56	10.0	8.3	20.4	13.6	.001
Business/success	CN	56	10.0	7.5	19.5	14.0	<.001
Comedy	TW	56	10.0	8.3	17.5	11.2	.004
Entertainment/variety	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	12.6	.002
Food	KR	56	9.4	8.3	19.5	13.6	.001
Food reviews	KR	56	9.8	8.3	19.5	13.1	.001
Food science	CN	56	10.0	8.1	19.5	13.1	.001
Lifestyle storytelling	CN	56	10.0	8.6	19.5	12.4	.002
Mystery	CN	56	10.0	7.1	19.5	15.2	<.001
Prank	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	13.1	.001
Rural cuisine	CN	56	10.0	10.4	19.5	12.4	.002
Social commentary	KR	56	10.2	8.3	19.5	12.8	.002
Tech reviews	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	12.7	.002
Travel	KR	52	10.8	8.3	19.5	12.1	.002

Note. Each row removes one content sub-genre and re-estimates the video-level mixed-effects model on the remaining videos. Regional means are creator-weighted percentages of affect-bearing utterances; KR = South Korea, CN = Mainland China, TW = Taiwan; LR $\chi^2(2)$ is the likelihood-ratio test of the region effect. Across all fourteen iterations the Taiwan-versus-Korea difference ranged from .075 to .104 and the Taiwan-versus-Mainland difference from .091 to .124; the Taiwanese sample remained highest and the region effect remained significant.

4.4 Qualitative Illustration

The quantitative profiles are realized in characteristic linguistic moves, illustrated below in the original language with English glosses. Excerpts were selected under a maximum-variation protocol spanning all five creators and the main categories per context, and a feature was treated as regional only when it recurred across at least three of the five creators in a context and differentiated that context from the other two; features confined to one or two creators were classified as individual and are not offered as regional evidence.

In the Korean sample, affect is marked through immediate, intensified positive evaluation. A travel creator’s reaction on encountering a rental vehicle, “i-geo cha assi daebak-iya” (roughly, ‘this car, wow, amazing!’), compresses surprise into an exclamatory Joy that addresses the viewer as a co-present companion, while a perseverance frame such as “doegin doe, himdeul-jiman doegin doenda” (‘it works, it’s

hard but it works’) resolves difficulty into shared relief. In the Mainland sample, affect is more often embedded in explanatory framing: a science-food creator’s appreciative “huluobo de xiangqi zhen xinxi a

” (‘the carrot’s aroma is so fresh!’) and polite “xiexie meimei a” (‘thank you, miss’) sit within instructional sequences, and narrative-analytical content foregrounds curiosity and evaluative negation, as in a downfall narrative’s framing question about how a conglomerate fell from grace. In the Taiwanese sample, affect is realized as warmth and inquiry: a creator’s nostalgic exclamation on revisiting a familiar site, and reflective lines such as one expressing that, having no further wishes, the speaker simply hopes family members stay healthy, foreground Empathy and relational care alongside curiosity-marking. These illustrations are consistent with the aggregate finding that the three samples foreground different emotional registers.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Interpreting the Regional Patterns

Among the sampled creators, emotional expression varied across the three regional platform contexts both in quantity and in kind. The Korean top creators performed emotion in a concentrated, Joy-forward register; the Taiwanese in a warmer, more relational and inquisitive register; and the Mainland in a more evenly distributed register in which evaluative negation was comparatively prominent and curiosity-marking substantial, although the highest share of Curiosity was recorded in the Taiwanese rather than the Mainland sample. Two features of the design bound this interpretation without dissolving it. First, sub-genre and creator gender are confounded with region by construction, so we advance the cultural reading as one interpretation conditioned on the robustness checks rather than as the default. A leave-one-genre-out sensitivity analysis (Section 4.3, Table 3) indicates that the higher expressiveness of the Taiwanese sample is not produced by any single content sub-genre: the Taiwanese lead and the significant region effect persist when each sub-genre is removed in turn. This robustness weakens, but does not eliminate, genre as an alternative explanation. Because sub-genre is perfectly nested within creator and region in this design, region and genre composition remain partially confounded, and the leave-one-genre-out procedure can rule out only the influence of any one genre at a time, not the joint contribution of the regions’ differing genre mixes. We therefore do not claim that genre can be excluded as an explanation; we conclude more cautiously that the regional difference remains after the robustness checks we conducted, and read the pattern as a characteristic of each context’s top-tier, communication-oriented creators that is not reducible to any single genre. Second, the coding credits only explicitly marked affect and so yields conservative estimates. The central contrast survives these constraints: it is statistically significant, carries a moderate-to-large effect for profiles

(Cramér’s $V = .37$), shows negligible creator-level clustering ($ICC \approx .00$), and is stable to the removal of any single creator. The limitations bound the scope of the claim; they do not void it.

These patterns align with, without being reducible to, established cross-cultural expectations. The Joy-forward Korean register is consistent with self-construal and display-rule accounts that link expressive positivity to particular cultural-affective norms [8], [25], [27], while also resonating with an industry environment in which creator success is widely attributed to unfiltered authenticity and persona work [50] and in which creators function as trusted, high-reach communicative institutions [5], [6]. The evenly distributed, negation-inflected Mainland profile is consistent with a platform culture in which the public performance of feeling is actively shaped by discursive governance, including the promotion of 'positive energy' as a normative affective register [14], such that overt exuberance is neither the only nor the safest resource and analytical or evaluative framing carries communicative value. The relational-inquisitive Taiwanese profile is consistent with high-context, rapport-oriented communication norms [43] and with the region's distinct media-cultural position, long shaped by transnational flows and prestige-variety dynamics [41], [44]. In each case we read the cultural frame as one supported interpretation among the alternatives we have tested, not as a proven cause; neither self-construal, collectivism, nor platform governance was measured in this design.

5.2 Practical and Societal Implications

The findings speak to a present moment in which East Asian creators are increasingly consequential public actors. In South Korea, where creators contribute materially to the economy and where roughly half of news consumers reach news through the platform [5], [6], a Joy-forward, high-rapport expressive style is not merely an aesthetic preference but a mechanism of the trust and parasocial attachment on which that influence depends [1], [2], [4]. As creators become primary intermediaries of civic as well as commercial information, the emotional register in which they operate becomes a matter of public consequence. In the Mainland context, the comparatively even, cognition-and-evaluation-inflected profile is legible against a governance environment in which the affective tone of online expression is a site of active intervention [14]; here, meta-feeling competence includes calibrating expression to a normative register rather than maximizing exuberance. In the Taiwanese context, the relational-inquisitive style indexes a creator culture oriented to intimacy and dialogue with a domestic audience, within a media environment historically porous to cross-border cultural flows [41], [42]. Read together, these contrasts caution platform designers, cross-border marketers, and communication researchers against treating East Asia as a single affective market: comparable top creators mobilize distinct emotional repertoires, and strategies that assume a uniform regional 'emotional style' risk misreading each audience.

For electronic commerce specifically, these contrasts matter because the creator's emotional register is a lever of commercial value. The parasocial trust built through expressed emotion underwrites influencer marketing, channel memberships, and the growth of creator- and live-commerce; a register that raises perceived authenticity and rapport in one context may read as excessive or insufficient in another [1], [2]. This is consistent with evidence that the conversion of viewer attention into commercial action in Asian live-streaming markets is organized by cultural indicators such as identification

and community rather than by platform functionality alone [19]. Cross-border creator-commerce strategies that port a single emotional playbook across these markets therefore risk eroding precisely the trust they depend on, and the present results suggest that emotional-expression strategy should be localized to each context's expressive opportunity structure.

5.3 Theoretical Contribution

The study makes an observable-practice contribution to meta-feeling theory. Rather than establishing that meta-feeling is a sociocultural rather than a psychological phenomenon, a claim the present design cannot adjudicate, the study shows that observable emotional-expression profiles among matched, top-tier communication-oriented creators vary systematically across regional platform contexts, and that this variation is interpretable through an integration of cultural and digital-communication perspectives. It also contributes a reproducible, multilingual measurement procedure, with per-language reliability, that other researchers can extend to additional contexts and platforms. In doing so it qualifies the assumption of pan-East-Asian emotional homogeneity, indicating cross-regional heterogeneity among the sampled creators while bounding that claim to the population actually studied.

We label the organizing construct regional expressive opportunity structures: the context-specific configuration of platform governance, audience expectations, and market incentives that renders certain emotional registers communicatively advantageous and others costly. On this account, meta-feeling competence is the creator's capacity to read and exploit that structure, which would explain why comparably skilled top creators converge on different expressive repertoires across contexts. The construct is offered as a portable and testable conceptual proposal rather than as a mechanism demonstrated by the present data; testing it requires designs that measure governance, audience expectation, and market incentive directly.

6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations bound the findings. First, the sample is purposive and small at the creator level (five per context); it characterizes top-ranked, communication-oriented creators and does not generalize to the wider creator population, still less to the residents, of the three contexts. Second, content sub-genre and creator gender are not balanced across contexts, most consequentially in that the Taiwanese sample is entirely male; region is therefore confounded with genre and with gender. The leave-one-genre-out procedure addresses the former but there is no comparable remedy for the latter, because gender does not vary within the Taiwanese sample; gender is accordingly retained as an unresolved boundary condition rather than as a covariate we can adjust for. Third, the emotion measure credits only explicitly marked affect and is therefore conservative, treating contextual or prosodic emotion as non-emotional; the absolute rates should be read as lower bounds, and future work should incorporate acoustic and visual affective cues. Fourth, although reliability is reported per language, the Taiwanese value is lower, indicating that expressive interjective speech is intrinsically harder to code and

warranting expanded human validation for that context. Fifth, the corpus is drawn from a candidate set weighted toward potentially affect-bearing speech, so the reported rates are comparative quantities rather than base rates. Finally, the design is cross-sectional and observational; it identifies patterned differences in expression but does not establish their causes or their effects on audiences. Experimental and longitudinal extensions, additional regional contexts, and multimodal measurement are the natural next steps.

7. CONCLUSION

This study compared, systematically and with a single instrument, how a sample of the most-followed communication-oriented creators in three East Asian contexts express emotion when addressing their audiences, and which emotion categories they foreground when they do. The analysis characterizes the expressive behavior observed within the sampled videos rather than the emotional life of these contexts' wider publics. What emerges is a shared communicative infrastructure overlaid with three measurably distinct emotional-expression profiles among the sampled creators.

Much is held in common. In all three contexts these are creators of accumulated rather than one-off reach: they have built large, durable followings through sustained, first-person, face-to-camera address, that is, through cumulative parasocial relationship work [1], [4]. In all three, emotion functions as a relational instrument rather than as ornament, and in all three the prevailing register is affiliative and broadly positive rather than hostile, with Joy and warmth recurring in every sample, which is what a reputational economy of long-horizon channels would predict [50].

The three profiles nonetheless differ in specifiable ways. The Korean creators foreground immediate, intensified Joy, realized in exclamation and shared delight, and address the viewer as a co-present companion. The Taiwanese creators combine Empathy and Curiosity, producing a register of relational care and shared inquiry. The Mainland creators distribute affect most evenly and embed it in curiosity-marking and evaluative framing, delivering feeling inside explanation and appraisal. Within the sampled videos these are three configurations of the same communicative resource, observable in the creators' own words, and we characterize them as properties of the observed creator-level data rather than as the emotional grammar of the regions' wider publics.

These are, moreover, the practices of creators at the celebrity tier. Each was selected because they occupy the top range of subscriber reach and view volume in their context, with domestic followings between 1.35 and 13.40 million subscribers, so the contrasts observed hold among the creators who have most effectively built and retained mass, long-term audiences. In South Korea, where the creator economy contributes at the scale of a major industry and roughly half of news consumers reach news through the platform [5], [6], the Joy-forward, high-rapport style is one component of the mechanism through which such audiences are accumulated, although the present design measures the expression and not the accumulation.

In examining these creators' expressive practice, the study extends a line of comparative work on the region's digital cultures. Scholarship on the transnational circulation of

Korean popular culture in Taiwan and beyond has argued that the region's media flows are carried by affect as much as by economics [41], [42]; research on Chinese platform discourse has shown how the public performance of feeling is cultivated toward sanctioned registers [13], [14]; and cross-cultural analyses of YouTube have tied engagement to culturally patterned values and to the transfer of emotion between creators and audiences [15], [16]. More recent discourse research has shown that the category of East Asia has itself become an emotionally charged and contested concept among the region's young digital publics [51], and that Korean and Taiwanese social-media users diverge in how they negotiate belonging and openness [52]. This study's contribution to that lineage is to move from audiences and texts-in-circulation to the expressive practice of the creators themselves, and to show, with one transparent instrument applied identically across three languages, that top communication-oriented creators in culturally proximate contexts sustain measurably distinct repertoires of emotional expression within the sampled videos.

Several extensions follow. Because the present design measures only sampled creator behavior and does not observe audience perceptions or responses, these extensions are also the steps needed to connect the documented expressive profiles to the audiences they are intended to engage. Longitudinal work could track whether these repertoires harden, converge, or migrate as this cohort ages and as platforms evolve. Multimodal analysis of voice, face, and editing rhythm would recover the affect that the present conservative, text-based measure does not capture. Pairing creator expression with audience response, through comments, retention, and sentiment, would test whether the region-specific registers identified here are those that build and hold followings in each market. Widening the frame to further contexts and platforms would test the portability of the regional expressive opportunity structures proposed above.

For brands and platforms operating across these three markets the practical implication is direct. This is a study of how the sampled top creators express emotion, not of how their audiences respond, and it cautions against assuming a single East Asian emotional playbook. Whether these expressive registers in fact elicit the intended audience response is a question the present creator-level design cannot answer and that we flag for future work. A campaign or creator partnership tuned to Korean exuberant Joy may read as overbearing in the Mainland's more measured, explanatory register, or as insufficiently warm and dialogic for Taiwanese audiences; conversely, the relational-inquisitive Taiwanese style may read as under-energized in Korea. Effective cross-border creator marketing in the region is therefore not translation but re-registration: matching the emotional register of a message to each context's expressive opportunity structure. In an economy in which value flows through the trust creators build with large, loyal, long-term audiences, specifying that register precisely and per context is a substantive requirement for electronic-commerce and digital-communication research alike.

8. DECLARATIONS

8.1 Ethical Considerations and Data Availability

This study analyzes publicly available content produced by public figures, that is, celebrity-level creators acting in their professional capacity. It involves no private individuals, no personal or sensitive data, and no interaction with human participants, and it uses public content consistent with the platform's terms for research. Examples are presented at the utterance level rather than as profiles of individuals. Three data files support the analysis and are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request: the raw utterance-level corpus (1,669 utterances with region, creator, sub-genre, gender, and source-video identifiers); the coded utterance file, which adds the independent codings of both coders and the adjudicated final label; and the video-level aggregate file (60 videos with utterance counts, emotional-expression rates, and category distributions) on which the models reported in Section 4 were estimated. The coding scheme, the codebook, the validation subsample, and the analysis scripts are available on the same basis.

8.2 Conflict of Interest and Funding

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

8.3 Author Contributions

Hyeyun Jung: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, data curation, investigation, coding, validation, writing of the original draft, writing of the review and editing, visualization, project administration, supervision. ChengYu Lin: data curation, investigation, coding.

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APPENDIX A. DETAILED LEAVE-ONE-GENRE-OUT ROBUSTNESS ANALYSIS

A.1 Genre Classification and the Region–Genre Structure

Each of the fifteen sampled creators was assigned to a single content sub-genre on the basis of the channel’s predominant subject matter, following the lifestyle-macro-genre sampling frame described in Section 3.2. The assignment yields fourteen sub-genres, because the two Korean travel creators share one sub-genre while every other creator occupies a distinct one. Table A1 reports the resulting region–genre structure. The structure is fully nested: no sub-genre appears in more than one region, so genre is perfectly confounded with region at the creator level. This nesting is the reason a single genre-adjusted fixed-effects model is not identifiable (Section 3.6) and the reason the leave-one-genre-out procedure, which removes one sub-genre at a time, can assess the influence of any individual sub-genre but cannot dissolve the joint region–genre confound.

Table A1. Region–genre structure of the corpus

Region	Content sub-genre	Creators	Videos
South Korea	Food	1	4
South Korea	Food reviews	1	4
South Korea	Social commentary	1	4
South Korea	Travel	2	8
Mainland China	Business/success	1	4
Mainland China	Food science	1	4
Mainland China	Lifestyle storytelling	1	4
Mainland China	Mystery	1	4
Mainland China	Rural cuisine	1	4
Taiwan	English education	1	4
Taiwan	Comedy	1	4
Taiwan	Entertainment/variety	1	4
Taiwan	Prank	1	4
Taiwan	Tech reviews	1	4

Note. Each sub-genre is nested within a single region. “Creators” sums to 15 and “Videos” to 60.

A.2 Procedure

For each of the fourteen sub-genres, all videos belonging to that sub-genre were removed and the full video-level linear mixed-effects model of Section 3.6 (emotional-expression rate regressed on region as a fixed effect, with creator as a random intercept) was re-estimated on the remaining videos. For every iteration we recorded the creator-weighted regional means, the omnibus likelihood-ratio test of the region effect against an intercept-only model, and the two focal contrasts, Taiwan versus South Korea and Taiwan versus Mainland China. Table A2 reports all fourteen iterations together with the full-sample baseline. Because the two Korean travel creators share a sub-genre, the travel iteration removes eight videos (leaving 52); every other iteration removes four (leaving 56).

Table A2. Leave-one-genre-out re-estimation of the regional emotional-expression effect (detailed)

Excluded sub-genre	Reg.	N vid	KR	CN	TW	TW–KR	TW–CN	LR $\chi^2(2)$	p	TW top
— (full sample)	—	60	10.0	8.3	19.5	9.5	11.2	14.00	< .001	Yes
English education	TW	56	10.0	8.3	20.4	10.4	12.0	13.65	.001	Yes
Business/success	CN	56	10.0	7.5	19.5	9.5	12.1	13.98	< .001	Yes
Comedy	TW	56	10.0	8.3	17.5	7.5	9.1	11.19	.004	Yes
Entertainment/variety	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	9.9	11.6	12.63	.002	Yes
Food	KR	56	9.4	8.3	19.5	10.1	11.2	13.59	.001	Yes
Food reviews	KR	56	9.8	8.3	19.5	9.7	11.2	13.08	.001	Yes
Food science	CN	56	10.0	8.1	19.5	9.5	11.4	13.13	.001	Yes
Lifestyle storytelling	CN	56	10.0	8.6	19.5	9.5	10.9	12.38	.002	Yes
Mystery	CN	56	10.0	7.1	19.5	9.5	12.4	15.19	< .001	Yes
Prank	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	9.9	11.6	13.12	.001	Yes
Rural cuisine	CN	56	10.0	10.4	19.5	9.5	9.1	12.37	.002	Yes
Social commentary	KR	56	10.2	8.3	19.5	9.3	11.2	12.83	.002	Yes
Tech reviews	TW	56	10.0	8.3	19.9	9.9	11.6	12.69	.002	Yes
Travel	KR	52	10.8	8.3	19.5	8.7	11.2	12.11	.002	Yes

Note. Regional means are creator-weighted percentages of affect-bearing utterances (KR = South Korea, CN = Mainland China, TW = Taiwan). TW–KR and TW–CN are percentage-point differences in creator-weighted means. LR $\chi^2(2)$ is the likelihood-ratio test of the region effect; all $p \leq .004$. The Taiwanese sample is highest in every iteration.

A.3 Summary

Across all fourteen iterations the region effect remains statistically significant (LR $\chi^2(2)$ between 11.19 and 15.19; all $p \leq .004$), and the Taiwanese sample remains the highest. The Taiwan–Korea difference ranges from 7.5 to 10.4 percentage points and the Taiwan–Mainland difference from 9.1 to 12.4 percentage points. Removing the Korean travel sub-genre, the largest single sub-genre (two creators, eight videos) and the one most often suspected of inflating expressiveness, leaves the Taiwanese lead essentially intact (TW–KR = 8.7 points; LR $\chi^2(2) = 12.11$, $p = .002$). No single content sub-genre therefore accounts for the regional contrast. As emphasized in Sections 4.3 and 5.1, this procedure isolates the contribution of any one sub-genre but, because genre is perfectly nested within region, cannot rule out the joint contribution of the regions’ differing genre mixes; that residual confound is retained as an explicit boundary condition in Section 6.

