

A New Frontier for North Korean Human Rights Activism?

A qualitative case study on North Korean defector-activist Park Yeonmi and her use of social media

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Abstract

The present thesis sought to inspect the yet-unexplored digital dimension of North Korean human rights activism, aiming to uncover the strategic digital communication wielded by a selected case study. The research was thus based on an explorative qualitative inquiry of the social media activity of Park Yeonmi, one of the most renowned North Korean defector-activists in the West. A total of 90 elements were consequently collected from the subject's Facebook, Instagram and YouTube official accounts and analyzed through inductive qualitative content analysis. The findings revealed how Park Yeonmi favors YouTube for her activist work, where she assiduously publishes political commentaries and exposés of human rights violations. On Facebook and Instagram, alternatively, the defector-activist prefers to share content related to her private and everyday life, bridging the distance with her followers and establishing a friendly and intimate connection. Nevertheless, in both cases it could be observed how Park Yeonmi makes a strong use of communication strategies commonly employed by microcelebrities (most notably interconnectedness and authenticity), striving to create a strong and affectionate community around her persona in order to strategically garner the attention of the followers and direct it to her activist cause. These findings eventually lead to associate Park Yeonmi's digital work to the one of a Networked Microcelebrity Activist, according to Tufekci's (2013) theorization.

Keywords: Park Yeonmi, North Korea, Human Rights Activism, Microcelebrity, Digital Activism

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Acronyms

COI	Commission of Inquire
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UN	United Nations

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1. Introduction

“As important, in a media culture that feeds on celebrity, no movie star, no pop idol, no Nobel Prize winner stepped forward to demand that outsiders invest emotionally in a distant issue that lacks good video. *“Tibetans have the Dalai Lama and Richard Gere, Burmese have Aung San Suu Kyi, Darfurians have Mia Farrow and George Clooney,”* Suzanne Scholte, a long-time activist who brought camp survivors to Washington, told me. *“North Koreans have no one like that.”*”

Blaine Harden (2015), in:
“Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey
from North Korea to Freedom in the West”.

The year was 2014, the city Dublin. On the One Young World Annual Summit stage, North Korean defector Park Yeonmi makes her first public appearance in the West to tell the tragic story of her life under one of the most repressive regimes in the world. The young girl was already known in South Korea, where she had gained relative fame thanks to the participation in the variety show “Now On My Way to Meet You”. There she starred under the stage name of Park Yeju and recounted her relatively wealthy childhood in North Korea, as the daughter of a family belonging to the top 1% elite (Jolley, 2014; Song, 2020). At the summit, however, Park shares a new, untold side of her life story: the brutal reality of Chinese human traffickers, of which she fell victim of together with her mom during their escape towards China. On that international stage, while wiping the tears with the sleeve of her beautiful *hanbok* (i.e. the traditional Korean dress), Park described the abuses suffered during her childhood: starvation, brainwashing and child slavery, as well as the witness of her mom's rape at the hands of the human traffickers.

The speech is heart-wrenching, and the whole auditorium is moved to tears. Not long after, the recording was published on Facebook and YouTube, and the video became viral (One Young World, 2018). Millions of people from every corner of the world are touched by the emotional account, and Park Yeonmi becomes “a global icon of the fight for North Korean human rights” and selected as one of the BBC’s “100 Women of 2014” (Jeong and Kim, 2016:21). But the summit only marked the start of her prosperous activist career, a career that arguably brought Park to be that “pop icon” that North Koreans need in order to be liberated.

1.1 Background

In March 2013, the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed the Commission of Inquiry (COI) to investigate the human rights violations perpetrated by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereafter, DPRK). One year later, on the 7th of February 2014, the COI released its report and accused the DPRK of crimes against humanity, declaring that “the gravity, scale, duration and nature of the unspeakable atrocities committed in the country reveal a totalitarian state that does not have any parallel in the contemporary world” (UN Human Rights Council, 2014:15). The COI concluded that the North Korean regime systematically violated the human rights of its population, including freedom of movement, expression, thought and religion, as well as the right to food (*ibid*). Based on these findings, the UN General Assembly formally condemned state-sponsored human rights abuses, and urged the UN Security Council to refer the COI report to the International Criminal Court. On the 22nd of December 2014, for the very first time, the Security Council convened to address North Korean human rights: the international community had finally started to give relevance to the human rights violations in the DPRK (Jeong and Kim, 2016).

Before the publication of the 2014 COI's report, the human rights situation in the DPRK had elicited relatively little attention from institutions. As a matter of fact, the issue was often consigned to oblivion and considered secondary to nuclear diplomacy. The report thus marked a breakthrough in North Korean human rights advocacy, and Yeo and Chubb (2018) pointed out how such progress “was made possible on the back of decades of advocacy and research undertaken by a global network of dedicated human rights actors” (p.2). Accordingly, North Korean defectors are not simply an issue of the two Koreas, but a matter of international importance: their testimonies, in fact, were critical for the diffusion of information concerning the human rights situation in the DPRK. Among them, Jeong and Kim (2016) recognize North Korean defector Park Yeonmi as one of the main actors that drew the international community's attention over the human rights situation in the DPRK.

Park Yeonmi was born on the 4th of October 1993 in Hyesan, a frontier city lying on the upper stream of the Yalu River, situated at the border with China. She was raised in a politically connected family, which enjoyed relative wealth until North Korea's economic collapse in the 1990s. After her father's arrest for illegal trading and the subsequent incarceration in a labour camp, Park's family faced starvation and social discrimination. In March 2007, Park Yeonmi and her mother eventually escaped with the aid of human traffickers and reached China by crossing the frozen Yalu River, where they lived for three years at the mercy of Chinese brokers. In April 2009, they succeeded to reach South Korea through Mongolia thanks to the help of Christian missionaries (Park, 2015). There she debuted in the entertainment industry by joining "Now On My Way to Meet You", a variety show which features young female North Korean defectors recounting their escape story to South Korea and anecdotes of their life in the DPRK (Jolley, 2014; Song, 2018).

Park currently resides in the United States, where she first moved in 2014 to complete the writing of her book "In Order to Live" (2015). Other than debuting as memoir author, the relocation to the US likewise marked the start of her activist career: the aforementioned One Young World Annual Summit officially introduced Park Yeonmi to the Western and international audience and consecrated her as the symbol of the North Korean human rights cause (Kim and Jeong, 2016; Martínez García, 2020). In the years that followed, Park has pursued her activist vocation by joining numerous public events and by releasing interviews for some of the most prominent news outlets (Song, 2018), establishing her career in the US. Her emotional narration has moved millions of people across the globe, but, at the same time, it also attracted numerous criticisms from academics and fellow defectors, who questioned the veracity of her accounts. As a matter of fact, the narration of her life story has often been punctuated by inconsistencies and contradictions, which brought Park Yeonmi to be commonly perceived as a controversial defector personality and an unreliable source of information (Jolley, 2014; Power, 2014; Strother, 2015). Nevertheless, her career continues to prosper, and Park registers a remarkable following on her social media accounts, where she currently focuses her activist work.

1.2 Research Aim

Seven years have passed since the release of COI's report, but the situation in the DPRK does not seem to change and the North Korean population still suffers from severe violations of basic human rights (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Human rights advocacy in the country is hindered by the the isolated nature of the regime, which makes the circulation of information and visual evidence nearly impossible, both in and outside the country. Several NGOs based in South Korea commit to the leaking of information in the DPRK through illegal radio broadcasts (Chubb, 2013; Fahy, 2019) or airborne leaflet drops at the South-North Korea border (Sung, 2019). Alternatively, outside of the so-called 'Hermit kingdom' advocacy is mainly pursued by defector-activists, who spread awareness on the violations and crimes perpetrated by the regime by working closely with NGOs and by voicing their testimony, for instance, in institutional contexts or during public events (Chubb, 2013; Fahy, 2019).

Numerous studies investigated both North Korean transnational activism and the activity of some of the most notable defector-activists in order to assess both the human rights situation in the DPRK and the progress made by North Korean human rights advocates (Chubb, 2013; Yeo and Chubb, 2018; Fahy, 2019; Gauthier, 2015; Song, 2018; Song, 2020, Sung, 2019). To my knowledge, however, no research conducted by both English and Korean-speaking scholarship has yet attempted to analyze how North Korean human rights advocacy is carried out online, nor any detailed study has been advanced on the digital presence of defectors-activists. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill this research gap by investigating the unexplored territory of North Korean digital activism, based on the assumption that Internet is an exceptional tool for the spread and visibility of North Korean human rights among the general public. To this end, a qualitative analysis of Park Yeonmi's use of social media is proposed.

As illustrated in the previous section, Park Yeonmi is one of the most renowned defector-activists on the Western scene. She has often been referred to as 'the face' of the fight for North Korean human rights, due to her numerous public speeches and her bestselling memoir. If one also considers her pervasive presence on social media (Martínez García, 2020), it can be explained why she was deemed to be a valuable choice for the present research. Further discussion on the selection of the case study is however provided in the Methodology chapter.

1.2.1 Research Questions and Demarcation

The present thesis is explorative in its nature, and does not intend to prove a given theory or assumption. It instead aims to offer a first assessment of the online dimension of North Korean activism by proposing a case study investigating the social media presence of one of the most notable defector-activists, with a focus on the employed communication strategies. To this end, the first research question of the thesis was formulated as follows:

RQ: What are the main communication strategies that North Korean defector Park Yeonmi deploys in her digital activism?

To answer the research question, the analysis was based on the 60 most popular Facebook and Instagram posts and the 30 most viewed YouTube videos retrieved from Park Yeonmi's official social media accounts. The choice to follow the 'popularity' criteria for the data sampling was dictated by the underling interest to take into account the audience's reception, insofar as a highly 'liked' or 'viewed' content suggests not only the users' appreciation, but also a wider reach. However, this thesis does not claim to determine the impact that Park Yeonmi's digital work effectively has on her followers, instead it attempts to assess the communication strategies that arguably made such posts or videos so popular.

As the aim of this thesis is to explore the Park Yeonmi's human rights advocacy online, it was deemed as necessary to likewise dwell on the way that North Korea is presented and portrayed to the Internet audience. For this purpose, a sub-question question was thus formulated:

SQ: How is North Korea portrayed on Park Yeonmi's social media channels?

I find it necessary to specify that by answering to this question I do not aim to judge the content of the piece of information shared by Park Yeonmi, nor to verify the accuracy and the coherence of the facts (unlike it has often been done in previous investigations focused on Park's accounts). The answer will instead be closely related to the observations made on the communication strategies and is limited to determine how Park addresses the human rights situation in the DPRK.

1.3 Thesis Outline

The thesis is structured into seven main chapters. Following this first and introductory chapter, where the research background, purpose and demarcation were outlined, the second chapter presents a review of the existing literature. Digital activism and the main advocacy tools are there briefly explored and North Korean transnational activism contextualized. Particular focus is given on the academic studies that strived to analyze Park Yeonmi and the many different facets she presented to the public since the start of her career as a defector-activist. The third chapter then clarifies the theoretical framework and introduces the concept of “Networked Microcelebrity Activist” by Tufekci (2013) as a guiding concept of analysis. Considerations on the methodological approach and the criteria of data collection are elucidated in the fourth chapter, whereas all the reflection upon the ethical considerations, positionality and limitations are included in the fifth chapter. After the necessary theoretical and methodological premises, the sixth chapter finally presents the empirical findings and the analysis, where the answer to the two research questions is eventually provided in the sections “Communication strategies” and “The depiction of North Korea”. In the seventh and conclusive chapter, conclusions are drawn on the study’s main findings, and an explanation of why Park Yeonmi can be conceived as a Networked Microcelebrity Activist and the relevance of such outcome is discussed. A detailed overview of future research suggestions is lastly provided at the very closing of the thesis.

2. Literature Review

The present chapter begins with an exploration of the most common practices in human rights advocacy performed on online platforms. Subsequently, the background of human rights advocacy in North Korea will be provided, focusing in particular on the challenges posed by both the ‘impenetrable’ nature of the country and the ethical issues owed to research focused on the defectors’ testimony. Ultimately, the figure of Park Yeonmi will be thoroughly examined through the writings that attempted to describe the woman both as a personality and an activist. The chapter will end by identifying the research gap this thesis seeks to fill.

2.1 Human rights activism takes over online platforms

For the past two decades, the Internet and social media have rapidly become fundamental tools in our globalized society, having a significant impact in every sphere of life, from the private to the political. With the advent of Web 2.0 in the early 2000s, which finally allowed users not only to passively access online content but also to interact with it and with other users (Buffington, 2008), blogs and social networks became pervasive platforms where social activities that once solely existed in a physical space gained a digital dimension, contemporary activism being one of the most notable examples (Falk, 2011; Shirky, 2011). In this regard, countless are the authors that studied and discussed the prominence of the Internet in the evolution of modern-day activism and human rights advocacy, both in positive (Falk, 2011; Shirky, 2011) and in negative terms (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011; Gustafsson and Weinryb, 2020).

Social media is by some recognized as a powerful tool capable to induce political and social change due to its universality, hence potentially everyone with access to the Internet can share information and contribute to a cause. For instance, Shirky (2011) demonstrates how the Internet enhanced political engagement and people’s ability to form a political conscience, building a framework on two fundamental factors: wide access to information and open forum for discussion. Since the Internet is an outreaching platform where any individual can contribute to the production of content that can be read and viewed by users living in every

corner of the world, Shirky (2011) argues that digital activism can more easily penetrate the veils of secrecy thrown up by repressive regimes and vastly divulge unfiltered and “on the ground” content exposing human rights violations to the global audience. Access to information, Shirky (2011) continues, does not hold a significant political impact if conversations do not take place. However, since social media provides the perfect platforms for mass debate, he envisions digital activism as the most effective tool for political and social change. Although Shirky’s study was published before the breakout of the Arab Spring—widely recognized as pivotal example of a new form of activism raising from the Web 2.0—numerous authors gave proof of the accuracy of his examinations with studies highlighting the crucial role played by the Internet in the organization of protests and activist actions in the past decade (Joseph, 2012; Sinpeng, 2017; Foster, 2019; Karakaya and Glazier, 2019; Kim and Lim, 2019; Chowdhury and Fileborn, 2020).

By contrast, others have argued the negligences of the digital platforms, portraying the Internet as a mere entertainment facility that distracts the users with an overwhelming amount of information that quickly loses engagement and relevance (Morozov, 2011). Moreover, digital activism is accused to be a lazier version of traditional advocacy, hence social media is deemed to delude users into thinking that a ‘like’ or ‘retweet’ can lead to a change, consequently distracting them from “real” activism, which entails sacrifices and the strategic organization (Gladwell, 2010). Gustafsson and Weinryb (2020) also pointed out the populist direction taken by some forms of online activism that rely on personalized engagement fueled by digital enthusiasm.

2.1.1 The strategic tools of human rights advocacy

Still on the subject of digital activism but dwelling more specifically on human rights advocacy practices, McLagan (2006) contributes to the debate conceptualizing two principles that help illustrate the strategies and mechanisms behind the formulation of human rights claims by groups and activists. The first concept is “mobilization of shame”, which rests on the notion that “publicity can induce compliance with human rights norms on the part of states and other violators” (p.192). As seeing is believing, the exposure of concealed abuses through the proliferation of visual evidence (typically photos and videos) on both traditional

and new media is indeed believed to be an essential tool for human rights advocacy, as it raises awareness as well as indignation on an international level. The state or actor accused of violating fundamental human rights is thus internationally condemned, “shamed” for its actions through the diffusion of indisputable visual evidence, which often leads the violators to change their behavior (McLagan 2006, Gregory, 2015).

The second concept, “testimony”, is defined by McLagan as “a pervasive and powerful tool” (2006:193) that first gained prominence in the field of human rights advocacy and research after World War II, when the survivors of the Jewish genocide were called to the courtrooms to testify at the Nuremberg trials. Since then, activists, refugees, survivors and, in general, individuals victims of human rights violations have been called to make a deposition in tribunals and other institutional settings (*ibid*). Testimony can likewise be produced and circulated by organizations and individual activists in the form of data and visual evidence to raise public awareness (*ibid*). In the recent years, testimony has in fact commonly been employed by human rights groups and advocates to sensitize and educate both the international community and the general public over critical human rights concerns, through the employment of visual images to be spread through social networks in the global and far-reaching internet (Aronson, 2016; Gregory, 2015).

In the general run of things, academic research has shown how social media enhanced activist practices and effectively contributed to political and social changes in the past decade, thanks to the pervasive and universal nature of the Internet. That said, a question springs to mind: in a globalized world where the great majority of societies are strongly digitalized, how can human rights advocacy be performed in a repressive regime that successfully censored the Internet?

2.2 Making human rights visible in an invisible country: the case of North Korea

The DPRK is one of the most censored countries in the world, where the exerted control over the media, opinion and self-expression is unparalleled with any other regime. Internal information is drastically surveilled and external information is “embargoed”, which entails

that citizens are denied access to foreign books, newspapers, radio and television broadcasts and the Internet (Fahy, 2019:88). This state of affairs heavily affects human rights advocacy in the DPRK and the regime partly builds its strength on the restrictions that constrain access to information and forums for debates to its population (*ibid*).

Transnational activism against North Korean human rights violations can be strategically mapped out by referring to the two key concepts that McLagan (2006) identifies as driving forces of human rights advocacy. The previously discussed ‘mobilization of shame’ is mainly carried out by both NGOs through public and digital campaigns aimed at educating and sensitizing the general public over the regime’s atrocities; and by the UN through the publication of treaties and reports exposing the violations perpetrated in the country (Fahy, 2019). However, the DPRK customarily denies any allegation and continues to curtail basic human rights despite the international engagement on the national issues and the accusation in 2014 of crimes against humanity by the UN Commission of Inquiry (*ibid*). This state of affairs can be explained by taking into account Neumayer’s (2005) findings on the research over human rights treaties and their effectiveness. The author demonstrated that in countries ruled by autocratic governments with a weak civil society—which in the DPRK is practically nonexistent—treaties have little to no authority and might even worsen the conditions of the affected categories.

Since the diffusion of information through the publication of internal videos or any other kind of evidence is made impossible by the regime’s restrictions, testimony in North Korea most commonly takes form through the depositions of those who succeeded in escaping the country during testimonial hearings in institutional contexts. However, testimony does not limit itself to the courtrooms of governmental and international headquarters, and various are the attempts that have been made in recent years to voice the truth over the violations perpetrated by the regime. Most notably, the personal narrations of those who escaped the regime met the interest of publishing houses, which allowed the international diffusion of the accounts of some notable defectors in the form of books. Kang Cholhwan was the first to give life to his memories in “The Aquariums of Pyongyang” (first published in the US in 2000), where he recounted his life as a prisoner in Yodok labour camp in which he was detained for ten years

together with his family. This first biography was then followed by other memoirs of both ex-prisoners that succeeded in escaping from the North Korean gulags, like Shin Dong Hyuk in “Escape from Camp 14” (2012); and other refugees that narrated the story of their family and daily life as citizens of the DPRK, like Lee Hyeonseo in “The Girl with Seven Names” (2015) and Park Yeonmi in “In Order to Live” (2015). In the last two decades, we have thereby witnessed an increase in the publication of memoirs from North Korean defectors, which catalyzed a change of the public’s perception of the DPRK from being a state of repressive rulers to being a country of repressed people that share the same hopes and ideals of any other citizen of the world (Gauthier, 2015).

2.2.1 Defectors’ testimony and academic research: an assessment of the critical issues

Although the relevance of North Korean defectors is indisputable, as they are an indispensable source of information to gain a deeper understanding of the DPRK, various authors exposed the problematic nature of research based on the testimony of those that succeeded escaping the regime (Bassett, 2015; Song, 2015; Song and Denney, 2019; Strother, 2015). In fact, it has been repeatedly observed that defectors’ accounts often prove to be inconsistent or contradictory, raising ethical questions on the methods used for interviews and doubts on the reliability of these sources.

In this regard, particularly enlightening is the contribution made by Song and Denney (2019), who offer a detailed analysis of all the concerns and challenges inherent to the research using witness accounts as primary sources. The issues identified by the two authors include: (1) the power relation between researcher/journalist and interviewee; (2) the sample biases—as the great majority of North Korean immigrants come from the two provinces on the border with China, thus not being a representative sample of the population; (3) the language barrier—as most of foreign journalists and academics expert on North Korea do not speak fluent Korean and (4) the monetary compensation given to the subjects in exchange of interviews, which often incentivizes the respondents to add more ‘colour’, exaggerate and even fabricate details of their stories. It is no mystery, in fact, that North Korean defectors receive a cash payment in exchange of their witness accounts by both government officials, academics and journalists; a monetary contribution which ranges between 30\$ and 300\$ per hour depending on the quality

of information: the more shocking or exclusive the information, the higher the revenue (Song, 2015; Song and Denney, 2019). Therefore, defectors' testimony proves to be as precious as it is prejudicial to the inquiry of human rights violations in the DPRK, as the lack of visual evidence and the issues identified by Song and Denney (2019) make it difficult to concretely ascertain the trustworthiness of the sources.

2.3 Park Yeonmi: One, No One and One Hundred Thousands

The reader who does not share my same cultural background might not grasp the literary reference included in the headline of this last and conclusive subparagraph, making it necessary for me to indulge in a philosophical digression that would help me clarify the choice of this peculiar title, as well as its conceptual relevance in the study of the figure of Park Yeonmi.

“One, No One and One Hundred Thousands” is the novel of the Italian writer and dramatist Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), Nobel prize for literature in 1936. It narrates the story of Vitangelo Moscarda and of the upheaval of his ordinary life following the seemingly-irrelevant observation that his wife makes on a detail of his physical aspect. On a morning like many others, she indeed defines his nose as tilting towards right and “plain to be seen”, implying that whomever would agree with such statement. Everyone but Vitangelo, evidently, as he had never noticed such a small esthetic defect before that crucial morning. An innocent comment, one might think, but a comment that triggers an excruciating identity crisis which leads the protagonist in a journey to the discovery of the Self; or better: the nonexistence of a unique and unambiguous Self. The poor Vitangelo is thus knocked into a reality in which the ‘one’ he used to identify with does not correspond with the image the others have of him. Therefore, he comes to the conclusion that he is not ‘one’, but his persona is fragmented into ‘one hundred thousands’ selves as a result of all the varying and different images the others perceive of him, and that inexorably shape his identit(ies).

Through his literary work, Luigi Pirandello (1926) contributed to the ongoing philosophical debate over relativism by engaging in an acute reflection tinted with ironic tones. He contended that life is ever-changing, a perennial flux that human beings attempt to oppose, in

vain, through the creation of fixed patterns in which they hope to recognize themselves. They indeed end up creating ‘masks’ in which they are constrained to identify with in order to give sense to their existence, but in which they cannot entirely recognize themselves (Masiello, 1994; Rossi, 2015). Similarly, the ‘deconstruction’, ‘fragmentation’ of the persona likewise involves a crucial observation on interpersonal relationships, which leads to the interesting conclusion that men are incapable of communicating with each other. As reality can only be accessed through its fragmented forms, which vary according to the observer, it is impossible to know its most true essence as every individual perceives and interprets reality in a personal and exclusive way. It is likewise impossible for humans to truly and deeply understand each other, since they live and think through different realities (Rossi, 2015).

Getting back to the core topic of this literature review, it is now time to address the existing literature on Park Yeonmi, which I intend to examine through the exceptional lenses of Pirandellian relativism. I indeed believe that the parallelism with Pirandello’s notion of ‘fragmentation of the Self’ to be particularly appropriate and relevant, in so far as the (albeit limited) academic literature studying the personage of Park Yeonmi has been heavily centralized on the evolution and the ambiguities of her figure as North Korean defector and human rights activist, focusing in particular on the different presentations of the ‘Self’ she has been proposing to the public since the start of her career. Therefore, in the following subsections I will go through each one of the ‘masks’ that previous studies have identified, in order to assess the ‘one hundred thousands’ facets of Park Yeonmi.

2.3.1 The North Korean Paris Hilton

Park Yeonmi’s debut dates back to 2013, when the young woman joins the South Korean variety show “Now On My Way To Meet You”, where she stars under the stage name of ‘Park Yeju’ and presents herself as a privileged North Korean belonging to the top 1% elite (Song, 2020). In the show she is jokingly titled the ‘Paris Hilton’ of North Korea (Jolley, 2014), as Park Yeonmi recounts to have lived a serene childhood where her parents always succeeded to provide with everything she needed due their evidently bigger financial means—a narration that notably distances itself from the one of the other stars of the program, who experienced starvation caused by the Great Famine (Jolley, 2014; Song, 2020).

It is likewise important to note that, in this first stage of her career, the narration of privileged North Korean continued to be endorsed by Park herself out of the spotlights of the South Korean tv show, as pointed out by Basset (2015). In the English speech for Liberty In North Korea (2014), for instance, she describes herself as a North Korean ‘Millennial’ who played Super Mario Bros with her friends and who enjoyed a certain degree of freedom during her childhood years prior to the father’s incarceration in 2004.

2.3.2 The Victim and the (unreliable) Activist

In October 2014, Park’s narration of the Self undergoes a radical change and turns into the image of the ‘Victim’ when she takes the stage of One Young World annual summit and delivers a heartbreaking speech about her escape from North Korea and her appalling experience as child victim of human trafficking in China (Song 2018). This event can reasonably be identified as a real turning point in her career, not only because it made her famous in the West through the viral diffusion of her speech on platforms like YouTube and Facebook that helped her to reach tens of millions of users (One Young World, 2018); but also because it marked her debut as North Korean defector devoted to the human rights cause. As conceptualized by Song (2018:211), from this point on Park Yeonmi “represents the new generation of North Koreans who can speak to an audience with more visual and emotional narratives”, whose activism heavily relies on the narration of her personal life story to sensitize the public on human rights violations. Moreover, the language employed by Park also underwent a visible transformation, becoming strongly emotional, sensationalist and successfully “commercial”, with the underlying aim to strike at the audience’s heart (*ibid*). In this respect, iconic is the already-mentioned One Young World’s speech (2014), in which the whole auditorium is moved to tears by the recount of her mother’s rape by human traffickers and of her life as sexual slave of a Chinese broker when she still was a child.

Moreover, in the delineation of Park Yeonmi’s personage as ‘Activist’, Song (2018) points out how the woman, as compared to other prominent defectors, is the most active in the West and, in particular, in the US. As a matter of fact, she has almost no connection with South Korean human rights groups, and even more singularly, little is her involvement in international and

transnational organizational activism. Instead, for her political activism, Park Yeonmi makes a strong use of social media and prefers to “work as a freelancer” (Song, 2018:217), choosing to maintain a closer relationship with event-based organizations that allow her to meet the audiences through public events and performances, during which she commonly advertises her memoir.

This personal and emotional narration, however, other than moving to tears, it likewise drew numerous criticisms throughout the last years that accused her accounts of being contradictory, associating the figure of Park Yeonmi to the one of an ‘unreliable narrator’. It was indeed noted that her ‘victim’ narration was often punctuated by numerous ambiguities, inconsistencies and mismatches, which were promptly unearthed and criticized by both academics and fellow defectors (Basset, 2015; Jolley, 2014; Strother, 2015; Power 2014).

2.3.2 The Instagirl

Park Yeonmi’s pervasive activity on social networks did not go unnoticed, and Martínez García (2020) dedicated an entire chapter of her book “New Forms of Self-Narration: Young Women, Life Writing and Human Rights” to her story, identifying her as an “Instagram Celebrity”.

Martínez García surely deserves the credit for being the first academic who has dedicated a whole study strictly focused on Park Yeonmi, giving great emphasis to the centrality that social media covers in her activist practices—of which she offers a general overview. However, her study on Park’s use of social networks is in the final instance rather superficial and, in some respects, inaccurate. More specifically, I found particularly unclear the association the author makes between Park Yeonmi’s online personality to the notion of “Instagirl”, developed by Maguire (2018 cited in Martínez García, 2020) as: “a lifestyle blogger and social media influencer who uses her self-brand to advertise products on social media, and she is an increasingly pervasive identity in the media landscape” (p.64). Martínez García (2020) solely supports such a statement based on the increasing number of followers on Park’s Instagram account and on the claimed collaborations with several brands. However, she does not offer any specific example of the relationship Park effectively has with her

audience in order to assess her impact and influence, nor she provides any empirical proof of the alleged collaborations. The author even reaches the conclusion that Park Yeonmi grew to be a celebrity activist thanks to her pervasive use of social media, as she “has arguably become a persona, a public face easily identifiable, an icon in the media across multiple domains” (p.65). This assumption, however, is inaccurate, as it is at odds with the actual definition of ‘celebrity activist’, which instead refers to a well-known individual—famous, for instance, in the entertainment industry—who gets involved into activism, and not the contrary (Choi and Berger 2010; Tsaliki, Frangonikolopoulos and Huliaras, 2011; Kogen, 2015).

Nevertheless, Martínez García’s (2020) contribution is arguably an important step towards the study of Park Yeonmi and her ‘one hundred thousands masks’, as she points out how the subject “presents herself differently depending on the [social media] platform she is deploying” (p.65). This paves the way for the present research direction: to unearth not only the multifaceted personalities of Park, but also her kaleidoscopic activist practice.

2.4 Research positioning & Academic contribution

The literature review addressed in this chapter aimed to contextualize the yet unexplored dimension of North Korean digital activism. Firstly, a general overview of political activism performed online and of human rights advocacy’s tools was offered, to be then followed by an assessment of the background of transnational activism in North Korea, of the great relevance of defector-activists’ testimony, and at the same time of the issues that an inquiry based on such testimonies entails. In the final section, the attention was shifted to the studies that investigated the figure of Park Yeonmi, who garnered the attention of researchers for her inconsistent account of the DPRK and the narrative shifts detected throughout the years of her defector-activist career. It was thus pointed out how scholarship has so far strived to unveil the many different personalities and narratives that Park displayed on the public stage, an academic trend that has been recounted by borrowing Pirandello’s notion of “fragmentation of the Self”.

Overall, the literature review showed how no academic inquiry has yet attempted to conduct an in-depth analysis of North Korean human rights activism performed online. Martínez

García's (2020) study on Park Yeonmi's testimonial life writing could definitely be pointed out as one initial contribution towards this uncharted field; however the derived observations resulted to be rather superficial, as the study was not based on a detailed and systematic analysis of the published content, but simply on a very marginal overview of the the social media accounts. This thesis thus intends to fill the reported academic gap by proposing a qualitative case study aimed at uncovering the communication strategies employed by Park Yeonmi on her social media channels, in order to contribute to the broader literature on North Korean transnational activism and digital activism. Moreover, this research likewise takes after the studies focused on the "one hundred thousands" facets of Park Yeonmi, by suggesting a new "mask" that can describe the new, digital direction that Park's human rights advocacy has taken in the past year.

3. Theoretical Framework

The present chapter aims to contextualize the theoretical tools of analysis. More specifically, the concept of “Networked Microcelebrity Activism” by Tufekci (2013) was deployed as guiding theory during the analysis of the collected posts and videos, combined with further and complementary concepts elaborated by other authors in their theorization of microcelebrities’ practices.

3.1 Networked Microcelebrity Activism

Scholarship exploring the characteristics and the evolution of digital activism rarely seeks to conceptualize those forms of advocacy that rely on individual practitioners instead of collective movements. The sociologist Zeynep Tufekci (2013), in her study focused on the production and distribution of the attention and its relevance in the occurrences of social movements, significantly fills this academic gap by developing the concept of “Networked Microcelebrity Activism”:

“Networked microcelebrity activism refers to politically motivated noninstitutional actors who use affordances of social media to engage in presentation of their political and personal selves to garner public attention to their cause, usually through a combination of testimony, advocacy, and citizen journalism.” (p.850)

The label of “microcelebrity” derives from a parallel that the author makes between digital activists and microcelebrities (i.e., internet-famous people) based on their capacity to direct the attention towards themselves and their online activity through a strategic use of participatory media. The author claims that both activists and non-activist microcelebrities are highly committed to the construction of their online identity and the development of a communication strategy aimed to maintain the attention of the audience, and thus their popularity. However, if in the case of non activist microcelebrities the audience is a fanbase of the person, for activist microcelebrities the audience instead includes “political allies, supporters, political opponents, and mediators to broader publics such as journalists” (*ibid*:

850); which means that, contrary to the former, activist microcelebrities use their social media to drive the attention primarily on the cause and not on the person.

Tufekci (2013) further elaborates the concept by providing a short list of features that characterize networked microcelebrity activists: mostly young, not affiliated to bigger organizations and committed to citizen journalism and/or the promulgation of “on the ground” testimony. In addition, one of their most distinctive traits is the mixed content shared on their social networks, as they often combine political commentaries and testimonies with updates related to their personal life. Therefore, in networked microcelebrity activism social media is not simply an activist tool, but is likewise used to frame both the political and the personal identity of these personalities.

Taking into account how Tufekci (2013) herself established an explicit parallel between online activists and microcelebrities, I suggest that the theoretical framework of Networked Microcelebrity Activism could be expanded by including further categories identified by other authors theorizing microcelebrities. Such categories aided the coding process of the thesis, in so far as they allowed to assess and contextualize the ‘microcelebrity dimension’ of Park Yeonmi’s digital presence.

3.1.1 Mapping out microcelebrities

The term ‘microcelebrity’ is a relatively new notion, as it was first coined in 2008 by Theresa Senft to describe a brand new phenomenon envisioning the “celebrification” of ordinary people that “amp up their popularity over the Web using technologies like videos, blogs and social networking sites” (p.25), catching both the attention and the affection of their audience by offering glimpses of their private lives. As further elaborated by Senft (2013) and Marwick and Boyd (2011), microcelebrities owe their fame to the Internet and the possibility it gives to shorten the distance between the performers and the followers, thus establishing a more or less fictitious relationship with the public. The authors likewise paved the way to the research of microcelebrities as personal brands, highlighting the ever-growing economic impact of this new way to be a celebrity that allows individuals to brand themselves to create a revenue out of their online popularity.

Scholarship contributing to the study of this phenomenon often refers to microcelebrities with many alternative names, such as YouTube celebrities (Lange 2007, Gamson 2011, Marwick 2013), Internet Famous (Tanz, 2008) or Internet Celebrities (Gamson, 2011; Abidin 2018) and has committed to advance various frameworks to classify this new kind of celebrities. Based on the assumption that a microcelebrity “is something ones does, rather than something one is” (Marwick, 2015:337), the theorizations that have been conducted so far all focus on the the way microcelebrities present themselves to the audience in order to boost their popularity online, that is to say on their communication strategies. In this regard, scholars tend to agree to identify *interconnectedness* and *authenticity* as the two main key elements for the understanding of microcelebrities:

- *Interconnectedness* is a term used by Abidin (2013; 2015) to refer to the intimacy that internet celebrities commonly build with their audience through first-hand interaction. Microcelebrities, in fact, significantly distinguish themselves from traditional celebrities as they actively bridge the distance and commit to engage with their fans, facilitated by the interactive and non hierarchical nature of the Internet, which allows both parties to equally take part in a conversation (Senft, 2008; Marwick 2013; Abidin, 2013; Abidin 2015; Raun, 2018).
- *Authenticity* refers, instead, on the primary quality a microcelebrity must have. Public grows fond to microcelebrities not only for the perceived closeness, but also for the perceived ‘realness’ of the internet personalities. The audience likes to see ‘real’ people with ‘real lives’, and the informal and colloquial tones of social networks help build such an image (Senft, 2008; Marwick 2013; Abidin 2018; Raun, 2018).

Academic research has also advanced various frameworks to classify this new kind of celebrities according to their trademarks, and in the volume “Internet Celebrity: Understanding Fame Online”, Abidin (2018) offers a detailed framework to help identify and label microcelebrities according to four distinctive features. Although each one emerged as characterizing a specific kind of microcelebrity, they were not envisioned as mutually exclusive:

- *Exclusivity* entails a specific kind of fame achieved through the showcase of wealth, of everything that is “so elite in access or rare in occurrence” (p.20) that ordinary people can hardly own or experience—but that can dream of by scrolling the profiles of these “exclusive” online personalities;
- *Exoticism* defines any characteristic that can make a person stand out on the internet for being outside of the audience’s comfort-zone, consequently generating a cultural friction between the performer and his/her public;
- *Exceptionalism* is a trait that refers to the conventional concept of talent, therefore inherent to microcelebrities that reach notoriety thanks to “unusual abilities, astounding qualities”(p.28) or their expertise in a given field;
- and finally *Everydayness*, which includes all those people that became popular online by sharing the most mundane and ordinary aspects of their daily lives. Abidin (2018) points out that the strong point of “everyday internet celebrities” is the “feelings of affect and connectedness” (p.36) that they succeed creating with audience. This is due to a sense of familiarity and authenticity that they successfully transmit through the regular and consistent publication of their content, as well as through the perceived ‘realness’ of the life they share—a relatable life, which does not differ much from the one conducted by the audience.

4. Methodology

The present chapter discusses the methodology of the thesis, which is based upon a qualitative case study. The choice of the methods and of the case study will be explained in the first section of the chapter. To follow, every question concerned with ‘what, why and how’ the data was collected will be answered in “Data collection and sampling”. The concluding section elaborates on the methods used for the analysis of the data.

4.1 Research design

In order to thoroughly investigate the online activist practice of North Korean defector Park Yeonmi, this thesis relies on a qualitative approach, which was assessed to be the most appropriate method since the study is explorative and non-numeric in its nature (Stebbins, 2001; Pierce, 2008; Bryman, 2012). By taking a qualitative approach, data was thus inductively collected and analyzed, and a theoretical framework was consequently extrapolated (Pierce, 2008; Bryman, 2012).

A case study approach was then chosen as research design because it allows in-depth examination of a given phenomenon and explores it in its complexities (Stake, 1995; Flyvbjerg, 2006). Borrowing the words of Yin (2009:18), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident”. Given how this thesis sets out to thoroughly examine Park Yeonmi’s social media activity in order to determine the unexplored dimension of North Korean digital activism, I therefore find the case study approach to be the most suitable research design.

As earnestly discussed in the Positionality section of the thesis, the choice to dedicate an academic research on Park Yeonmi was influenced by preexisting knowledge of the subject of inquiry, which allowed me to priorly assess the scope of the academic project. To avoid research biases, during the preliminary stage of my research I delved into a comprehensive

investigation that allowed me to consciously exclude other cases from my inquiry, as well as to factually assess the exceptionality and the relevance of Park Yeonmi as a case study.

4.1.1 Selection of case study

Since this thesis aims to shine a light over the evolution of human rights advocacy in North Korea, the prospect to include more than one North Korean activist in the project was taken into account during the preliminary stage of the inquiry. A detailed evaluation of other prominent defectors was thus carried out, following two guiding criteria: to be renowned in the West and to have an established online presence, which both are two distinctive traits of Park Yeonmi's activism. These two factors allowed me to narrow the investigation down to only two possible further activists: Lee Hyeonseo and Jeong Suyon, or better known to the public with the English name of Evelyn.

As also noted by other authors (Song, 2018; Martinez Garcia, 2020), Lee Hyeonseo shares an impressive amount of similarities with Park Yeonmi: they both come from Hyesan, travelled a very similar route and eventually started an activist career following the publishing of a bestselling memoir. However, their social media presence clearly differs in terms of themes and constancy. My preliminary investigation allowed me to observe that Lee Hyeonseo is active on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, but does not use such platforms in a constant way. She mostly posts content related to her activist work and public appearances, but rarely shares details of her private life. Evelyn Jeong, alternatively, did not write a memoir nor has any involvement with institutional activism, however has a pretty remarkable online presence very similar to Park's. She indeed assiduously updates her Facebook, Instagram and YouTube accounts, which she uses to share her daily life "as a North Korean girl living in the United States".

Despite the observed similarities, I eventually reached the conclusion to maintain Park Yeonmi as the only case study of my research due to her markably higher number of followers, content produced and overall engagement, which all are decisive factors to assess the outreach of the account, and thus its relevance (Simonsen, 2011; Table 1). The decision to focus the study solely on Park Yeonmi was thereby justified by her relevance as compared to

that of the other activists. It was further motivated by a strategic preference for an “atypical” case that, although not necessarily representative of the broad and general context—namely human rights advocacy in North Korea— is appropriate for explorative research. As explained by Flyvbjerg (2006:229), “atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied”. Since my intention is to dig deep down on North Korean digital activism, an inquiry that engages with an atypical case study research is preferable as allows me to acquire more in-depth and richer information.

[Table 1] Comparison of Park Yeonmi, Lee Hyeonseo and Evelyn Jeong’s

	Park Yeonmi	Lee Hyeonseo	Evelyn Jeong
Facebook followers	245,000	26,700	150
Twitter followers	32,700	5,700	—
Instagram followers	81,000	11,600	7,000
YouTube subscriptions	308,000	—	24,300

The table reports the number of followers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube recorded in the first week of December 2020, start date of the preliminary inquiry of the thesis.

4.2 Data collection and sampling

Park Yeonmi is active on four of the largest social media platforms currently online, namely Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube, where she respectively counts 246K, 35K, 106K followers and 533K subscribers as of the 20th of May 2021.

Considering the significant amount of posts and videos Park Yeonmi has shared on her channels since the start of her online political activism (dating back to 2015, publication year of her memoir), the choice of appropriate selection criteria for the existing data was crucial. After taking into account innumerable solutions and alternatives that caused no little headaches, it was eventually decided to opt for a selection based on popularity, which in the social media sphere translates in the higher amount of likes and comments that a digital content receives. The number of collected “views”, “comments” or “hearts” are not only indicators of audience appreciation, but also of audience reception; thus meaning that a more

“liked” post or “viewed” video must have reached a wider audience and most likely obtained a bigger impact.

In the first stage of the data collection, it was decided to completely exclude Park Yeonmi’s Twitter account from the content analysis of her online activity, as it registers a substantially lower following and engagement. The content produced on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube was subsequently selected following the ‘popularity’ criteria, opting to base the analysis on the 30 most popular posts or videos per each social media platform—for a total of 90 elements: 60 posts and 30 videos. I further set a timeframe for the data collection, a solution which Stake (1995) considers to be ideal when dealing with a case study research, as cases are time and activity bound. Consequently, the data was selected among online contents published in a timeframe that goes from the 24th of August 2020 (publication date of the first YouTube video after a long period of inactivity) till the 24th of February 2021 (end-date of the data collection process), thus covering exactly 6 months of activity. The choice to set the start of the timeframe on that specific date is determined by the new turn taken by Park’s political activism on social media, which is now heavily relying on her YouTube project.

Due to the lack of success to find a reliable website that would examine and detect the most popular posts of all the three selected social media platforms (both for a period longer than one month and with the inclusion of more than 10 entries), I found myself bound to manually create the list by sorting through each video and post shared by Park Yeonmi and subsequently create a list in a Microsoft Excel file [Appendix I, Appendix II, Appendix III].

4.3 Data analysis

As exemplified by Marshall and Rossman (1999:150), “data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data”, which in the case of a qualitative research entails the establishment of a clear relationship between the different categories of data (*ibid*). Bearing in mind the explorative nature of the study, I judged inductive qualitative content analysis to be the most appropriate method, as it allows themes to emerge directly from the data (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

4.3.1 Inductive Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis has been prevalently applied in quantitative studies, as it permits researchers to breakdown the data into quantifiable units by pinpointing the number of appearances of a theoretical classification (Pierce, 2008). However, over the years this method has been often criticized for failing to offer an encompassing view of the material analyzed, and content analysis was thereby further developed and introduced in the qualitative research dimension (*ibid*).

Qualitative content analysis is a flexible research strategy which envisions not simply the manifest content of the text, but satisfies the researcher's ambition to 'dig down' the topic of inquiry by including contextual and latent content, thus allowing to identify themes and core ideas inherent to the text in analysis (Drisko and Maschi, 2015). Formal aspects of the text may also be included as object of analysis, intended as the elements of the text that help ascertain how the narratives are formatted and delivered (*ibidem*). Drisko and Maschi (2015) point out how qualitative content analysis permits a descriptive analysis of the inherent meanings of the collected data, but it likewise represents a preferential method of analysis for exploratory researches, as it permits "to identify new ways of looking at events and communications" (p.94). Accordingly, the researcher first explores a new and unstudied territory of inquiry, and then proceeds with the description of the findings. As the present thesis explores the topic of human rights advocacy in North Korea from a new perspective, namely focusing on the exceptional social media repertoire of Park Yeonmi; qualitative content analysis is an appropriate method of analysis insofar as it allows to examine and identify deeper and contextual meanings of the collected data, and likewise fulfills the explorative ambitions of the research.

Pierce (2008) describes qualitative content analysis as a "highly interpretative" approach; a quality that, as pointed out by some critics, opens to the risk of misinterpretation and may thus induce the qualitative researcher to present the findings in an unrepresentative way (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Moreover, the reliability of the study could likewise be jeopardized by the potential influence of the researcher's prior knowledge of the subject, which can possibly lead

to the creation of biased categories and, consequently, prejudiced observations (Graneheim, Lindgren and Lundman, 2017).

To mitigate these potential issues, I reflected upon my prior knowledge and I later approached the data with an open mind in order to avoid my previous understanding of the topic to affect too much my observations. Moreover, during the writing of my observations, I made sure to use a considerable number of examples and citations from the collected data, in order to support my deliberations (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005).

Generally speaking, the data analysis process was executed following a number of steps. In the initial stage, the material collected was read and watched multiple times in order to gain a general and comprehensive understanding of the data. In a second step, the posts and videos were meticulously examined one by one in order to identify categories and establish a connection between the data through inductive coding. As described by Drisko and Maschi (2015:104), such an approach allows “to create data-grounded categories and to ensure that the views and voices of research participants are given priority over the ideas and theories of the researchers”. It thereby grants an additional preventive measure to avoid research biases, as well as guarantees the development of relevant categories strictly based on the empirical material in analysis. Since inductive qualitative content analysis does not stem from the necessity to test a theory (Drisko and Masci, 2015; Hsieh and Shannon, 2005), categories were created regardless of the theoretical framework—which was eventually included only in the final stage of the analysis, during the discussion of the findings. An example of the coding process and the subsequent application of theory is presented in [Table 2].

Before proceeding to the next chapter, where the ethical considerations will thoroughly be discussed, it is important to mention that this thesis is epistemologically grounded in interpretivism. This entails that the analyzed data was not viewed as ultimate truths leading to an objective understanding of the studied phenomenon, but rather as subjective meanings of a multiple and relative reality. (Bryman, 2012). Accordingly, the research likewise embraces a constructivist ontological position, as it assumes that reality is a social construction shaped by the individuals’ subjective and contextual understanding of the world (*ibid*).

[Table 2] Example of coded Instagram posts

Instagram post details	Caption	Inductive coding	Theoretical categorization
<p>Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CJcr2ObnZAM/</p> <p>Date: 31.12.2020</p> <p>Likes: 10,947</p>	<p>Photo credit to my beautiful talented mom 💕 Hope your holidays are filled with love and joy!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mom • Established connection with the followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everydayness • Interconnectedness • Authenticity
<p>Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CHFbWpvnXZm/</p> <p>Date: 02.11.2020</p> <p>Likes: 8,939</p>	<p>Belated Happy Halloween everyone 🎃 How could I have ever imagined I could be this free. I couldn't even choose what I wear when I was living under Kim dictatorship in #northkorea. Let's not take this precious freedom for granted. Let us cherish and guard our freedom at all costs because without it, our life means nothing!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North Korea's life story (Testimony) • Established connection with the followers • Freedom • Motivational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interconnectedness
<p>Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CFzKdOQnirZ/</p> <p>Date: 01.10.2020</p> <p>Likes: 7,275</p>	<p>We have come a long way and mere words cannot describe how beyond grateful we are for this freedom. Already missing this beautiful part of America 💕 #napavalley #usa #freedom #northkorean #nordertolive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mom • Gratitude • Freedom • Travelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everydayness • Testimony
<p>Link: https://www.instagram.com/p/CJPU2eSHEri/</p> <p>Date: 26.12.2020</p> <p>Likes: 6,637</p>	<p>What a joy to spend Christmas with people I love 💕 The one thing we all learned this year was how precious the people we have in our lives. I love you with all my heart everyone! Each one of you mean more than words can describe!</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private life • Strong connection established with the followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everydayness • Interconnectedness • Authenticity

This table offers an example of how Instagram data was coded and theoretically classified during the analysis process.

5. Ethical Dilemmas

The chapter seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the concerns which needed to be reflected upon in order to ensure the thesis to be ethically sound. In particular, since the present study is based upon the examination of Park Yeonmi's social media accounts, great emphasis was given to ethics in digital research and how to safeguard it. The chapter likewise entails reflections on positionality and limitations.

5.1 Ethics in Digital Research

While carrying out my research, I made sure to comply with the ethical guidelines provided by the Swedish Research Council (2017), as required by all students of the Master's course in Asian studies at Lund University. However, despite the close reading given to the document, a few ethical dilemmas arose given my decision to conduct a research based on the analysis of the social media personal accounts of Park Yeonmi. As a matter of fact, the guidelines offered by The Swedish Research Council do not include any specifics concerning digital research, and how a fledging researcher shall interface with the data collected from social media platforms that include personal content produced by other individuals.

Eventually, a solution to the ethical dilemma of privacy and whether the use of social media accounts as primary data sources can be considered legitimate was given by Townsend and Wallace (2017), who offer a useful framework aiming to help academics extricate themselves from the knotty ethical challenge posed by digital research. According to Townsend and Wallace, the first step that a researcher must take is to read the Terms and Conditions of the Internet space the inquiry is based upon, in order to avoid violations that could bear legal consequences. Secondly, a simple yet crucial question must be posed: "is the data private or public?". This ensures the protection of privacy, since the researcher assesses whether the data is really public, and in case it reveals itself to be private, then has to evaluate how to proceed. Finally, the possibility to reuse and republish social media data is one last factor that needs to be assessed, still in view of the privacy protection of the subjects.

Following the guidelines offered by Townsend and Wallace (2017) it can reasonably be argued that the academic inquiry of Park Yeonmi's social media activities presents no critical ethical complications. The research was based on the collection of data through the public platforms where Park is the most active on, namely her official Facebook page, Instagram account and YouTube channel. All three profiles are public and accessible by any Internet user, meaning that the data can safely be defined as fully-fledged public. Moreover, since Park Yeonmi is a renowned political activist, the challenges posed by privacy and republication issues do not present. In fact, the data posted by public figures "is intended to reach as wide an audience as possible" (Townsend and Wallace, 2017:199), and thus their identity does not need to be protected through data anonymization, nor is it unethical to share the collected data set. Finally, the research complies with the Terms and Conditions of all three social media under investigation, as they do not contain any prohibitions for the use of material for 2021.

5.2 Positionality

This academic study on Park Yeonmi emanates from my longstanding interest in human rights violations in North Korea, which already back in 2015 motivated me to read Park's newly-published memoir "In Order To Live". The book drew me to follow Park Yeonmi on social media to keep myself updated with her activist work, and throughout the past 5 years I could firsthand experience a significant shift in her communication strategy, which inevitably raised my academic interest in her social media profiles. Therefore, the selection of this specific case study was undeniably influenced by my prior knowledge of the topic.

Aware of the possibility that my previous understandings of the case study could affect the results of my research, I constantly reflected upon my own positionality in order to assess whether my observations were influenced by my prior knowledge or neutrally deduced from the data. Therefore, to mitigate the risk of bias, I approached the research material with an open mind and I went through the collected data several times in order to grasp every single detail useful for the analysis.

A second ethical dilemma that followed from the decision to focus the thesis on Park Yeonmi's social media activity is related to the personal and intimate approach she employs in her online presence. Since her political activity is intertwined with her personal life and characterized by a fervid use of emotive language, it was necessary for me to constantly reflect upon my own positionality, in order to engage with the dataset in the most objective and bias-free way as possible. By acknowledging my position of a Western white researcher who never lived under a repressive regime nor experienced any form of severe violation of human rights, I thus needed to be extremely scrupulous in the analysis of the data containing Park Yeonmi's personal opinions and emotional expressions, committing to present the dataset in the most neutral way by avoiding both individual judgements of the content and possible empathic externalizations.

5.3 Limitations

Park Yeonmi engages with her Internet audience exclusively in English, which excludes the issue of a language barrier as a possible shortcoming of the research. Nevertheless, my previously mentioned position as a Western student examining the online accounts of a North Korean refugee might entail a certain degree of misinterpretation of the analyzed content. Given that I do not share any cultural code with the subject of the study, I might have interpreted themes differently compared to a researcher sharing a more similar cultural and social background—for instance a North Korean observer or researcher coming from South Korea, a Communist country or from any nation under the rule of a nondemocratic government.

6. Empirical Findings & Analysis

This chapter reports the main findings of the research, organized into three main sections. The first two sections are dedicated to Park Yeonmi's use of the three social networks under investigation. Both the first and second research questions are addressed in these sections, through a detailed discussion on Park's communication strategies and the way North Korea is portrayed to the audience. The third and final section examines Park Yeonmi's Patreon account, one extra and unexpected platform encountered during the data collection process that allowed further observations to address the first research question.

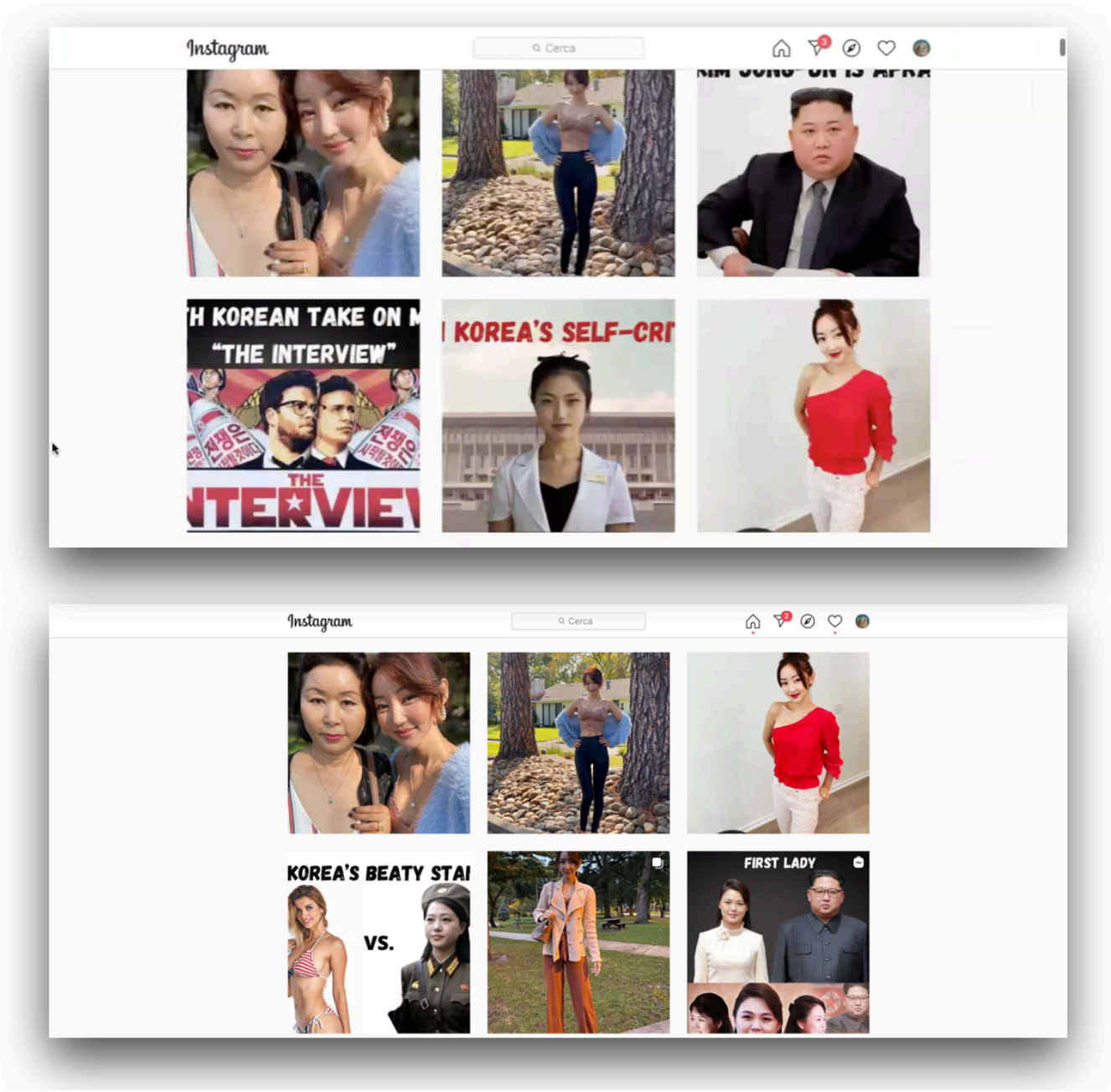
6.1 Facebook and Instagram

The findings from the analysis of Facebook and Instagram posts are presented in the same section, due to the profound similarities between them. Park Yeonmi uses both accounts for the same intents and purposes, and the great majority of posts published on one platform are also present in the other. As a matter of fact, 14 out of the 30 collected Facebook posts turned out to contain the same exact content acquired from Instagram.

It is important to specify, however, that the audience reception and the variety of format differ in the two platforms. More specifically, Park's Instagram account displays more variety in terms of content, as she also publishes short entertaining videos (Instagram reels) and longer informative videos (IGTV) which are not present on the Facebook page. Moreover, the Instagram account shows a higher engagement in terms of likes and comments, whereby the same post published on Facebook would on average receive half the amount of likes. When one looks at the promotion of her YouTube videos, however, the situation inverts: Facebook posts promoting YouTube videos receive a much bigger engagement, while the Instagram posts promoting the same YouTube videos were observed to be the least successful of the account. This suggests that, as compared to the Instagram followers, the Facebook audience shows greater interest in the YouTube project. Perhaps because of this, Park Yeonmi stopped promoting YouTube videos in Instagram posts, as well as deleted all the promotional posts from the profile during the writing of this thesis [Figure 1]. Consequently, Park currently

shares her newly-released videos uniquely on Facebook or in the Instagram stories, as of May 2021. This suggests Park's acknowledgement of the audience's preferences and her interest to publish content according to its speculative popularity.

[Figure 1] Omission of YouTube promotional posts from the Instagram feed

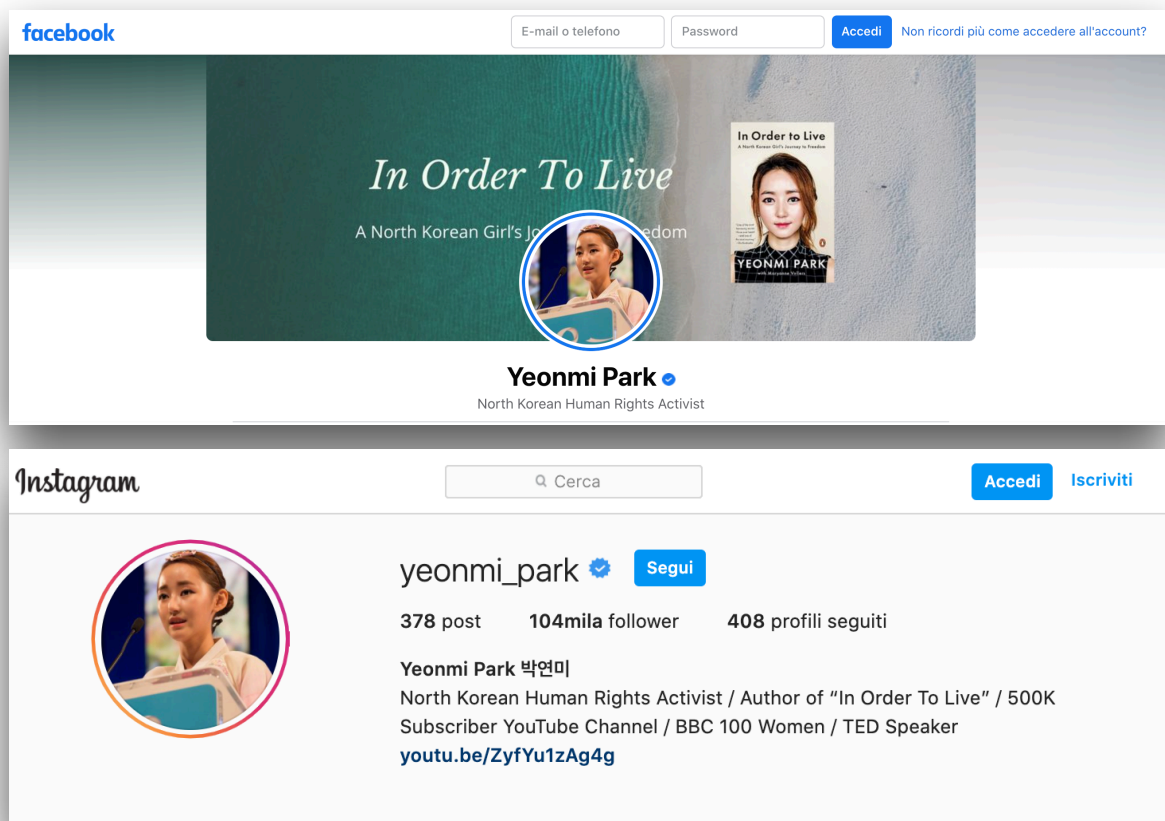


On top, Park Yeonmi's Instagram feed in December 2020. Below, Park Yeonmi's Instagram feed in April 2021 (close up on the same posts in order to show the omission). Screenshots by the author.

6.1.1 Communication strategies

The main finding of the analysis conducted on Facebook and Instagram revealed a strong use of communication strategies commonly deployed by microcelebrities: first among others the so-called “everydayness”. Park Yeonmi can arguably be defined an “everyday internet celebrity” (Abidin, 2018) insofar as she almost-exclusively shares content regarding her everyday life: personal photographs (mostly selfies) followed by short captions in which she shares a quote, personal thoughts about her day or interacts with her followers with a simple greeting. Although Park Yeonmi presents herself as a North Korean human rights activist in both the bios [Figure 2], excluding the posts in which she advertises her YouTube videos, she does not use her Facebook and Instagram channels to keep her followers updated on her activist work. Bearing in mind the data collection (which includes the 60 most popular Facebook and Instagram posts) it can be plausibly hypothesized that Park Yeonmi’s followers highly appreciate—if not prefer—the everyday content shared by the woman, and may be following her more for her persona than for her activist work.

[Figure 2] Park Yeonmi’s Facebook and Instagram bios



Screenshots by the author (May 2021).

Abidin (2018) affirms that the powerful impact of everyday content resides in the creation of a familiar and connected relationship with the audience. The sustained and regular production of content (an average of one post every two days) indeed allows Park Yeonmi to offer a perception of closeness, by posing herself as a constant presence in her followers' lives, and therefore make them feel part of her daily activities. The sharing of her personal life likewise allows Park Yeonmi to show herself as "authentic" (Abidin, 2018), a regular woman that shares the same hopes and struggles as her followers, and to whom they can easily relate to. This strategy is made evident especially by the considerable number of posts showing the affectionate relationship with her mom [Appendix I: posts 1,8,11,12,13; Appendix II: posts: 1,2,6,10,15,18,23], as well as her by the sharing of her life during the pandemic [Appendix I: post 9,28; Appendix II: posts 4,9,17].

Park Yeonmi successfully creates the perception of intimacy by performing the so-called "interconnectedness", a strategy that highly characterizes microcelebrities' online presence. She does so by encouraging continuous interaction with her followers and by showing interest towards their well-being, such as by asking direct questions or by wishing them to spend a nice day [Appendix I: posts 5, 8, 9, 11, 16, 26, 28; Appendix II: posts 2, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24]. She likewise commits to create a strong sense of community around her activist project. Park indeed attempts to recreate a 'family' environment on her social media profiles by strategically deploying strong statements of affection that attempt to establish an affective relationship with her audience, who are told they have an important role in her life [Appendix I: posts 10, 18, 25, 30; Appendix II: posts 7, 16, 20, 29]. More specifically, she expresses appreciation for her followers by writing strong love declarations—"I love you with all my heart everyone! Each one of you mean more than words can describe!" [Appendix II: post 29]; and by making her followers feel special for their involvement in her digital project—"I am grateful that I had you in my life to go through this year. You brought abundant joy and meaning with your kind words and encouragement." [Appendix I, post 30; Appendix II, post 20].

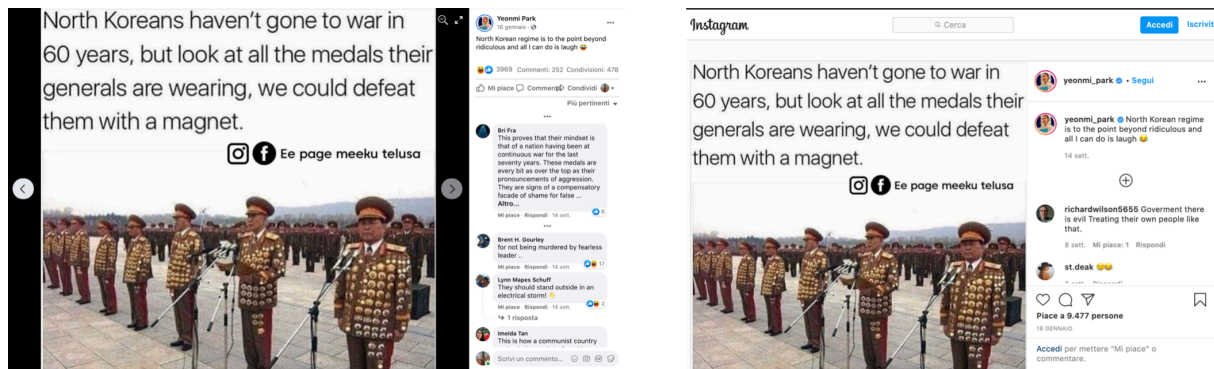
Ultimately, it can plausibly be argued that the majority of the data collected from both Facebook and Instagram shows little connection with Parks' activist advocacy, as she mostly shares content regarding her everyday life. However, despite this interesting tendency that showed a stronger connection with microcelebrity strategies rather than to the 'typical' activist practices, the data collection yet presented a sufficient amount of posts that allowed to make observations on Park Yeonmi's portrayal of North Korea.

6.1.2 The depiction of North Korea

To the audience of Facebook and Instagram, North Korea is generally presented as a country that suppresses any sort of freedom, even the most trivial, and where its population is oblivious of the many rights and opportunities granted in the West. Park Yeonmi's accounts of North Korea are mostly told in the form of first-hand testimonies, in which she takes inspiration from her daily life in the US to go back in time and retrace her life story in North Korea, where those freedoms that are now part of her ordinariness were not granted, or she did not even know about their existence. The followers can thus learn that something as simple going for a night out [Appendix II, post 24], eating a dessert [Appendix I, post 15] or enjoying a hobby [Appendix II, post 22] are not activities to be contemplated in North Korea. Such use of references to situations and elements 'typical' of the everyday life of people living in the US (or more generally in the West) definitely helps Park to offer a powerful emotional dimension to her account. In fact, by contextualizing the rights denied to the North Korean population with circumstances that the audience can easily relate to, the message is delivered in a more impactful way. The follower, in fact, would more easily empathize with the narrated account if it involves something that belongs to his or her ordinariness, such as the granted possibility to wear a Halloween costume [Appendix I, post 19; Appendix II, post 14] or a simple pair of jeans [Appendix I, post 4].

While Park's posts generally focus on the suffering of the North Korean population, one post stands out for its singularity. On the 18th of January 2021, the activist shared a meme on both her pages, which interestingly suggests an image of North Korea that is in sharp contrast with Park Yeonmi's predominant narrative [Figure 3; Appendix I, post 16; Appendix II, post 8].

[Figure 3] North Korea Meme



Meme published by Park Yeonmi on the 18th of January 2021 on Park's Facebook and Instagram accounts.

Screenshots by the author.

North Korea is here reduced to a laughing stock, as the post is clearly humorous in intent and tone. Park herself comments the meme by using a laughing emoji, and explicitly mocks the regime by defining it as “beyond ridiculous”. North Korea is thus interestingly dehumanized, a narrative choice that stands out for its singularity since Park Yeonmi’s accounts are usually based on the violations suffered by the North Korean population, and it is not in her fashion to deride the regime for its ‘oddity’. The post, however, can be interpreted as a communication strategy aiming to garner the attention and the consent of the audience through easy-to-read content. Memes, in fact, have often been described as a “lingua franca” of the Internet, thanks to their inclusion of universal clichés that allow users to comprehend the content easily and laugh at its message (Milner, 2013).

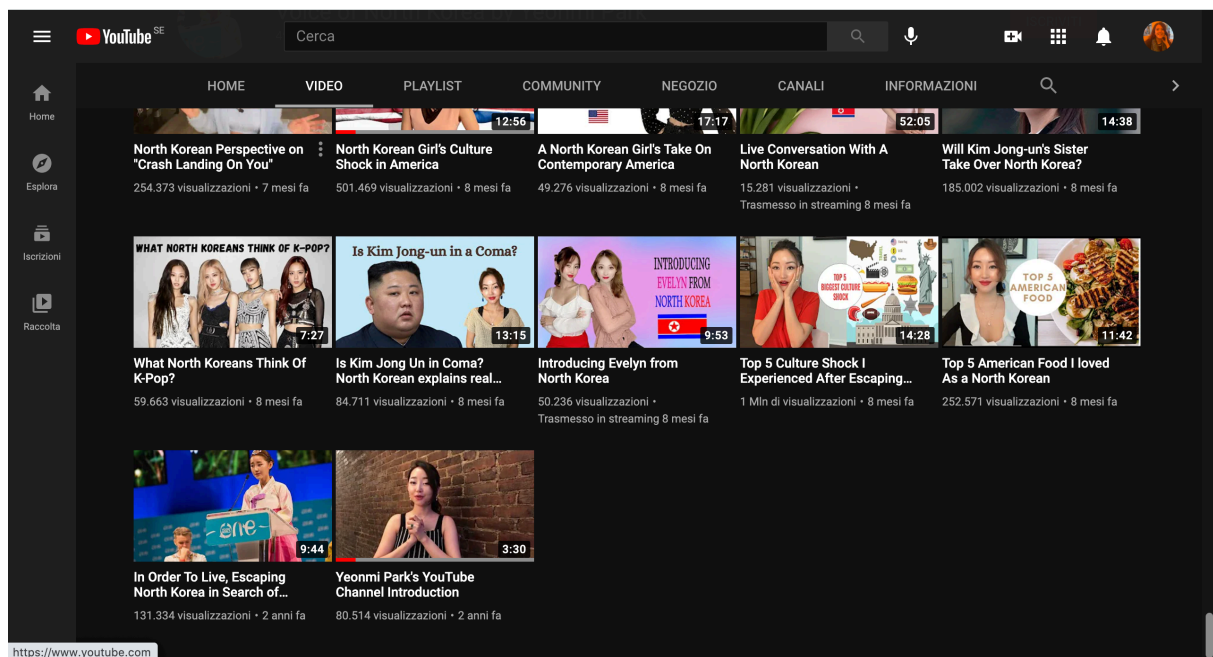
6.2 YouTube

Park Yeonmi can reasonably be dubbed a rising YouTube star. Since the publication of her first video on the 24th of August 2020, the activist has indeed registered a drastic increase of subscribers: from the initial 8K back in August 2020 (Social Blade, 2021), in the first week of May 2021 Park Yeonmi reached 500K subscriptions. The achievement of such a milestone is undoubtedly owed to the great effort put in the YouTube project. Park is extremely prolific on the platform, publishing an average of one video every two days.

Park Yeonmi, however, was not new to the video sharing platform before August 2020. In fact, the creation of her YouTube Channel dates back to December 2017 and, as reported by

Martín García (2020), Park published her very first video in June 2018, in which she critically commented on the North Korea-United States Singapore summit on livestream. When Martín García's (2020) book was published in March 2020, Park's YouTube channel had been inactive for 2 years and counted only 5K subscribers, which lead the author to assume that the activist had abandoned the project due to the lack of public reception—which was hypothesized to be due to her critical position towards Trump's government. The video is no longer available, however, and as to May 2021 one can only access two videos published prior to the 'revamping' of the YouTube channel [Figure 4]. This suggests once again how Park Yeonmi pays close attention to the audience's preferences for the publication of her online content.

[Figure 4] The least recent videos on Park Yeonmi's YouTube channel



The least recent videos in Park Yeonmi's YouTube channel. Screenshot by the author (3rd of May 2021).

6.2.1 Communication strategies

Generally speaking, Park Yeonmi strives to produce captivating videos that can easily grab the attention of the users, such as by riding the wave of recent news [Appendix III: video 23], by touching taboo topics [Appendix III: video 8] or by producing content that she labels as 'exclusive' [Appendix III: video 23]. To successfully draw the attention of the internet

audience, Park Yeonmi also makes a strategic use of words in the title of her videos. It was indeed observed that almost one-third of the collected data presented the word “shocking” in the title [Appendix III: videos 3,7,10,12,16,17,19,29], highlighting her explicit intent to capture the attention of the viewers through the promise of eye-opening content. The adjective “shocking”, in fact, holds a sensationalistic connotation, and it is commonly used to elicit a reaction of surprise in the users, who are thereby prompted to click on the video to satisfy their curiosity.

Park Yeonmi also gives great importance to the incorporation of visual elements to make her videos as appealing as possible. In fact, she commonly includes eye-catching graphics in her videos, both in the form of popup subtitles (used to highlight and fixate important words and phrases), and in the form of pictures. Notably, it was observed that Park makes an interesting use of emojis to help the expression of her emotions—thus further establishing interconnectedness with her audience [Appendix IV]; as well as a strong use of images to accompany her speech and provide visual ‘substance’ to her narration [Appendix V]. Park herself claims that “pictures are worth more than thousands words” [Appendix III, video 12: 0:53~0:57], and in all her videos she attempts to include a great number of photographs and videos of North Korea. However, due to the difficulty to obtain visual evidence from the DPRK, it was noted that the same photos were used in multiple videos [Appendix V, Group 1], and sometimes substituted with drawings [Appendix V, Group 2]. It was also observed that many of the visual elements present in the YouTube videos are not strictly related to North Korea. Park Yeonmi indeed uses a great number of illustrations to enrich the visual representation of her oral account, which not only help to fixate concepts but also entertain the audience [Appendix V, Group 3].

As to the content, the videos were observed to be very diverse both in terms of topics coverage (ranging from politics to culture) and in the terms of format, which may include political commentaries, exposés and interviews with fellow defectors¹. The majority of Park Yeonmi’s collected YouTube videos could be categorized into two main formats: first-hand

¹ Interviews with fellow North Korean defectors were not part of the data collection, as they did not fall within the 30 most popular videos of the YouTube channel. I however considered necessary to mention the presence of such video format as it shows Park’s intention to build a network around her digital activism on YouTube.

testimonies—which include both videos recounting her life in the DPRK and her personal experiences as a North Korean defector living in the US; and commentaries of the news and of general topics. In both cases the narration reveals to be highly personal, as Park puts herself at the centre of the narration. In the case of first-hand testimonies this does not constitute an element of surprise—as they are personal accounts by definition. Park’s personal narration is, however, an unusual component in the case of commentaries. Park Yeonmi, in fact, poses herself as a primary source of information to her audience, using her experience of North Korean defector and activist to validate her stances and justify her expertise. Accordingly, she commonly starts her commentary videos by saying “I am going to explain to you” and only rarely references the pieces of news or the books from where she retrieved the information—and when she does, she only shows a partial screenshot, and she does not provide the link to the source in her video description [Appendix VI]. In view of this, it may be argued that Park Yeonmi presents herself as a an “exceptional” YouTube microcelebrity (Abidin, 2018), insofar as she distinguishes herself for her expertise in North Korean human rights. Her “exceptionalism” is thereby derived by the exclusive knowledge she possess being a defector of the regime, and therefore users are drawn to watch her videos due to the ‘exceptional’ nature of the information that Park can offer (*ibid*).

The analysis lastly highlighted a similar use of communication strategies that Park also deploys on her Facebook and Instagram pages. In particular, Park Yeonmi encourages community building by asking the viewer to leave a comment under the video, promising she will read each one of them and that she will try to reply to as many people as possible [i.e., Appendix III, video 3]. Moreover, she always concludes her videos by thanking the audience for helping her spread awareness on the brutalities of the regime, making the viewer feel personally engaged in her activist practice. Such an approach was interpreted as a clear attempt to fortify the community around her channel (i.e., interconnectedness), by giving the impression to the followers that they are not just simply watching a video, but they are also actively participating to the liberation of North Korea by supporting Park Yeonmi in her YouTube project.

6.2.2 The depiction of North Korea

The DPRK is generally portrayed as a “living hell”: great emphasis is in fact posed on the suffering of the North Koreans and on the lack of basic human rights. The regime is commonly described as evil, greedy and indifferent to the well-being of its population. Although it could be observed that Park mostly attempts to highlight its most brutal aspects, sometimes she also interestingly reiterates common views of the regime among the Western audience; for instance, by defining the dictators as “crazy guys” [Appendix III, video 24, 11:40~11:42]. North Korea, however, is not simply presented to the audience as a nation of dictators and suffering people. The YouTube channel actually offers access to the cultural dimension of North Korea, as Park Yeonmi sometimes publishes videos where she describes the customs and traditions of the country, often compared to American culture.

Just as in the case of Facebook and Instagram, Park Yeonmi makes great use of Western cultural references, which are strategically deployed to enforce her message and make the audience more deeply sympathize with the suffering of the North Korean population. One of the most notable examples was found in the video “North Korea’s Secret “Pleasure Squad” Parties”, in which the activist makes a spot-on parallelism between the sexual parties organised by Kim Jong Il and a scene of Margaret Atwood’s popular book *The Handmaid’s Tale*, which in the last years reached great popularity thanks to the homonymous TV adaptation:

“[...] getting to know about this [the pleasure squads’ parties] reminds me of the *Handmaid’s Tale*, where there is this owner that takes [the protagonist] to this nightclub and where these officials would drink and have all sorts of pleasure, but normal people would be stoned and executed for the same thing”

[Transcription of the video “North Korea’s Secret “Pleasure Squad” Parties”: 5:47 ~ 6:07]

Another relevant example is offered in the video “Top 6 Things You Cannot Buy In North Korea” [Appendix III, Video 2], where the activist attempts to highlight political and social issues by providing a list of objects which are inaccessible, or even forbidden to the North Korean population. Interestingly enough, the Christmas tree is included in the list:

“ If you have a Christmas tree of course you are going to be sent to prison camp or die, and [because of this reason] I have never seen a Christmas tree in North Korea. [...] There is something about Christmas that makes me feel so restored, to make me believe in humanity again, and it’s such a beautiful and wonderful time. I really hope some day North Koreans can join and celebrate Christmas with us.”

[Transcription of the video "Top 6 Things You Cannot Buy In North Korea": 11:43 ~ 12:34]

Both the samples give proof of a successful communication strategy that Park Yeonmi is deploying to convey her message in the most powerful way, aiming to reach the hearts of her audience. However, what makes these two examples particularly interesting is the common implicit message that Park intends to transmit: the horrors of the North Korean regime are beyond imagination. By citing the *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Park Yeonmi suggests that the appalling situations described in Margaret Atwood’s pages were actually brought to reality by the North Korean regime, a jaw-dropping case in which reality exceeds imagination and to which it is impossible to remain indifferent. Furthermore, by mentioning the ban on Christmas trees (emblematic of Western culture) she intends to prove to her audience that North Korea is a country where all kinds of freedoms are repressed—even the ‘inviolable’ joys of Christmas.

6.3 Patreon

On the 9th of October 2020, Park Yeonmi announced the opening of a Patreon account [Appendix I, Post 10; Appendix III, Video 1]. Patreon is the biggest crowdfunding platform currently online, which allows content creators to earn a monthly income from subscribers (called ‘patrons’) in exchange of extra and original content (Regner, 2021). Park roundly explained the reasoning behind her decision to open a Patreon account at the closing of her YouTube video “Daily Life of a North Korean”:

“[...] I have been recently talking about my libertarian or limited government side [i.e., critical position towards Trump’s government]. [Because of this] YouTube really has been restricting my ability to monetize, so I have started a Patreon account. It really just helps me to do what I am passionate about, which is spreading words of democracy, freedom and human rights. Your support really means so much to me to continue this work, so please help me and come find me on Patreon. If you don’t, don’t worry about it, this is what I care about even if YouTube doesn’t [monetize my content]. It’s okay for me, I expected this to happen, there is no surprise in any part”

[Transcription of the video "Daily Life of a North Korean" minutes: 12:42 ~ 13:34]

The creation of the Patreon channel thus stemmed from the necessity to secure an income from her digital work, in response to the reported limitations applied to the monetization of her YouTube videos. If on the one hand Park makes clear that she would continue her YouTube project regardless of the possibility of a revenue; on the other hand her interest to increase the number of patrons is made evident by both her help request and by the inclusion of her Patreon info at the end of her videos and in the description of every YouTube video on her channel, both those published before and after the opening of the account.

The move to the Patreon membership platform has been a remarkable success for Park. As of the 20th of May 2021, Park Yeonmi's account registers 402 patrons, subscribed to four different levels of subscription: Freedom Lovers (5 USD), Monthly Hangout (10 USD), Super Patreon (20 USD) and Inner Circle (100 USD). It is difficult to assess, however, the monthly income deriving from the platform, as Patreon's privacy measures do not allow to obtain any information concerning the number of subscription for each level. Therefore, it can only be estimated that Park Yeonmi earns a minimum of 2.010 USD on a monthly basis, if one assumes that all patrons are subscribed to the cheapest level. Moreover, the money earned from Patreon is claimed to be devolved to “support production costs and connecting with and supporting other defectors” (Voice of North Korea by Park Yeonmi, n.d.), although it is not specified in what way Park Yeonmi concretely assists fellow defectors.

Regardless, what really catches the attention of the observer are the bonuses offered to the patrons of Park Yeonmi, which all allow an increasing level of personal interaction with Park. The so-called “Freedom Lovers” can thus ask questions through private messages, while those belonging to the second level are rewarded with a monthly group meeting with the activist. In addition to these benefits, the “Super Patron” can receive a signed copy of the memoir “In Order To Live” for free, but only after renewing the submission for five months. The long wait can instead be avoided if one joins the “Inner Circle”, which allows to immediately receive not only the book, but also Park Yeonmi’s personal phone number to interact with her through SMS and phone calls (Voice of North Korea by Park Yeonmi, n.d.).

The Patreon profile is yet another example of how Park Yeonmi makes use of the interconnectedness strategy, insofar as she structured the account as an exclusive platform where people interested in her digital work can interact and build a personal relationship with her through the payment of a fee. However, no further observations could be made, as Park Yeonmi does not use Patreon to share exclusive content and videos—except for a few posts where she connects with her patrons with a greeting and a selfie, similar to what she publishes on Facebook and Instagram. Moreover, as I did not join any subscription level, I could not analyze the content that Park shares during the monthly livestreams and the way she relates to her patrons. Such a choice was dictated by the scope of my thesis. Patreon, in fact, is not a public social network like Facebook, Instagram or YouTube, but an exclusive platform to which only subscribers have access. Therefore, the livestreams cannot be analyzed as representative data for a broad understanding of how Park Yeonmi presents herself on the internet, as such content is restricted to a ‘privileged’ audience and crafted according to its tastes and requests (Regner, 2021). In view of this, the thesis section dedicated to Patreon does not include the two subsections for observations concerning the communication strategies and the portrayal of North Korea.

7. Conclusions

The present thesis has aimed to critically examine Park Yeonmi's use of social media in order to offer a first assessment of the unexplored digital dimension of North Korean human rights activism. The research was first contextualized through a review of the existing literature, which offered the background of digital activism and human rights advocacy in the DPRK. Previous research focused on Park Yeonmi has likewise been critically evaluated, in order to assess how the selected case study had been analyzed both as a personality and a human rights activist. The review revealed how the existing literature has so far strived to disclose Park's "one hundred thousands masks" and, in continuity with such academic trend, this thesis attempted to contribute to the unveiling of a new 'mask' of Park's multifaceted personality. To do so, the case study was analyzed by conducting an explorative research that led to the collection of a total of 90 elements from Park's Facebook, Instagram and YouTube accounts, which were consequently analyzed through inductive qualitative content analysis. This final chapter will thus summarize the key findings obtained during the analysis process, and state how Park Yeonmi shall be identified as a "Networked Microcelebrity Activist". The conclusions will end with a detailed overview of how this thesis' findings can be strengthened and expanded, with suggestions for future studies.

7.1 Park Yeonmi as Networked Microcelebrity Activist

The analysis conducted on Park Yeonmi's use of social media revealed her commitment to creating an affectionate community of supporting followers around her online project. Park does not limit herself to share information about the DPRK and raise awareness of the pursued human rights violations, but she likewise employs a set of strategies that would allow her to closely connect and interact with her followers by sharing personal content. The investigation of such communication strategies has eventually led to the theoretical association of Park Yeonmi's digital presence to Tufekci's (2013) concept of "Networked Microcelebrity Activist".

Corresponding to Tufekci's (2013) definition of a networked microcelebrity activist, Park Yeonmi is effectively a young, "politically motivated noninstitutional actor" who uses social media "to garner public attention to [her] cause" by sharing both political and personal content. Park Yeonmi, in fact, is not closely affiliated with any international or transnational activist group (Song, 2018), and it could be observed that she currently concentrates her political advocacy almost exclusively on her social media channels. In particular, she mostly carries out her activist work on YouTube, where she publishes political commentaries and exposés of human rights violations, as well as builds networks with fellow defectors in order to collaborate for the production of extra content to publish on her channel. On the video-sharing platform she appears as an "exceptional" microcelebrity (Abidin, 2018), insofar as she puts herself at the center of her digital activism by raising as an expert of the human rights situation in the DPRK, justifying her expertise on her "exceptional" first-hand experiences.

On Facebook and Instagram, alternatively, Park Yeonmi can be identified as an "everyday" online personality (*ibid*) as she uses these platform to assiduously share her private and everyday life. She bridges the distance with her followers and successfully establishes a connection with them through communication strategies typically employed by microcelebrities to build a strong and supportive community around their social media accounts, namely interconnectedness and authenticity. Park Yeonmi's ambition to build an affectionate community of followers around her activist project online was likewise proved by the opening of a Patreon account, where she promises a higher degree of intimacy and personal interaction to the followers that choose to support her online project through the payment of a monthly fee. It is necessary to specify, however, that Park's highly personal approach on Facebook and Instagram does not make her 'less of an activist' by any mean. The findings, in fact, simply showed the strategies she deploys in order to boost the appeal of her digital content, but did not question her role as an activist. Borrowing once again the words of Marwick (2015), a microcelebrity "is something one does, rather than something one is" (p.337). Therefore, Park Yeonmi shall not be confused to be a microcelebrity, or an "Instagirl" as Martínez Garcia (2020) had previously conceptualized. Park Yeonmi shall instead be viewed as an activist that avails herself of microcelebrities' communication strategies in order to successfully grab the attention (and the affection) of the Internet

audience and direct it towards her activist work on YouTube. This is why I consider the theorization of Park Yeonmi as “Networked Microcelebrity Activist” to be the most appropriate, as it embraces both dimensions without excluding one or the other.

In the final analysis, this research project offers new points of discussion for the future of transnational activism in the DPRK. The conducted analysis on Park Yeonmi’s use of social media has indeed revealed a meaningful use of microcelebrity communication strategies, which arguably enhanced the visibility of the North Korean cause online. As a matter of fact, if one considers the extraordinary growth of Park’s YouTube channel achieved in only nine months (from 8K subscribers in August 2020 to the surpassing of 500K in May 2021), the success of such strategies can feasibly be assessed. Accordingly, it would not be too ventured to argue that Park Yeonmi’s networked microcelebrity activism might represent a new frontier of North Korean human rights advocacy, insofar as it compensates the shortage of visual evidence with an “interconnected” narration of her testimony, which successfully draws both the interest and the sympathy of the public.

7.2 Future Research

The findings unearthed by this thesis project will hopefully serve to draw more attention to the online dimension of North Korean human rights advocacy, as well as inspire future research to expand the knowledge of the adoption of microcelebrities’ strategies in digital activism. This research in fact revealed Park Yeonmi’s strategic use of social media, but its findings did not comprehensively assess the magnitude of her media influence on the audience, nor can be considered as representative of the whole phenomenon of North Korean digital activism.

First of all, to further evaluate the success of the employment of microcelebrities’ communication strategies and the effective impact Park Yeonmi has on her audience, it is necessary to expand the results of this thesis with further studies strictly focused on Park’s followers. I thereby suggest a research focused on the audience’s reception of the content that Park shares online by analyzing the comments under Facebook/Instagram posts and YouTube videos. In order to assess the activist-audience relationship and the effectiveness of the

communication strategies, this kind of study shall likewise be complemented by interviews and surveys investigating the qualities that the followers attribute to Park Yeonmi and the type of interaction they have with her. Interesting would also be to assess the knowledge that they obtained of the DPRK by following Park on social media, and compare such knowledge to their prior understanding of the North Korean human rights situation.

Secondly, I suggest conducting comparative studies with other North Korean defector-activists in order to offer a broader scope of North Korean human rights activism online. This could be done both in the Western context, thus including other defectors that talk to an English-speaking audience (namely Lee Hyeonseo and Evelyn Jeong) or by offering a comparison with those that instead address their testimony to the South Korean public. In particular, I highly suggest a comparative study with Kang Nara (@kang_naraa on Instagram and 놀새나라TV on YouTube), who enjoys great popularity among the South Korean public thanks to her engaging and entertaining online content. The comparative study between Park Yeonmi and Kang Nara would not simply unearth further communication strategies and the potential differences, but would likewise allow to compare the reception of the Western and South Korean audience of North Korean digital activism.

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APPENDIX I: List of collected Facebook data

	Publication date	Visual content	Textual content (caption)	Likes	Link
1	2020.09.26	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	With my beautiful mama 🥰❤️	7.372	https://bit.ly/3a9avfe
2	2021.02.08	YouTube video	New North Korean Girl Group performance! https://youtu.be/tzdY1eLQePQ	7.069	https://bit.ly/3bAPqy5
3	2020.11.10	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Hi from my studio 📸	6.493	https://bit.ly/3a4I3v2
4	2020.10.10	Personal Photographs (Selfie) + Screenshot personal YouTube Channel	The simple freedom my friends and I were longing for in North Korea were as simple as wearing jeans and wearing dresses the way we wanted. I've fought for this freedom with my life and I will savor every moment of it. This is the only revenge I can give to Kim Jong-un and will inspire millions of North Koreans to do the same, fight for freedom with their life. Thank you everyone for supporting me on my mission to free North Korea, and I wish you all the happiness in the world 💖 Please follow me at: https://www.YouTube.com/c/YeonmiParkOfficial	5.360	https://bit.ly/33YWhKz
5	2020.08.28	Personal Photographs	Even though North Korean regime claims that we had nothing to envy in this world as children of Socialist Paradise, but I've never seen this kind of safe and cool playground as a child. I feel so fortunate to experience this prosperity and new normal even at age 26! It is never too late to play in the playground 🥰	5.315	https://bit.ly/33YWYDF
6	2020.11.23	Personal Photograph	What are your plans during this holiday season? I miss my family like everyone else. Hope the pandemic ends soon so we all can start living again 💖	4.855	https://bit.ly/32amvBU
7	2020.08.31	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Grateful for life, grateful for nature, grateful for today and grateful for freedom. Thank you life for treating me so well ❤️	4.732	https://bit.ly/3fuTMVC
8	2021.01.10	Personal Photograph	Photo credit to my wonderful mom! Hope you all have a blessed Sunday ❤️	4.512	https://bit.ly/3mHzHia
9	2020.12.09	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	My schedule in a day during the lockdown: Bedroom → Bathroom → Living Room → Kitchen. After visiting these places for like 100 times, my day is over then I repeat this schedule faithfully every single day. It is amazing how people don't go crazy staying at home for this long. Hope you all staying strong everyone 💖	4.382	https://bit.ly/3yyw97x
10	2020.10.05	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	Hi everyone, Today is my birthday and I have been spending time with my dear family. However, my people in North Korea don't even know what birthday cake is and suffering from man-made famine and oppression. I recently have set up a Patreon account to continue my activism to raise awareness about the Chinese Communist Party's role in supporting the Kim dictatorship in North Korea and the value of individual liberty in the West. Any amount or just kind encouragement will mean the world to me and thank you for your continuous support in my mission to free North Korea. Patreon: https://www.patreon.com/yeonmipark Ps. Proceeds from your support will go to , among other things. : Production costs, connecting with and supporting other defectors. With love, Yeonmi	4.219	https://bit.ly/2SaPhaE
11	2020.12.31	Personal Photographs	Photo credit to my beautiful talented mom 💖 Hope your holidays are filled with love and joy!	4.188	https://bit.ly/329m0yP
12	2020.10.01	Personal Photograph	We have come a long way and mere words cannot describe how beyond grateful we are for this freedom. Already missing this beautiful part of America 💖 #napavalley #usa #freedom #northkorean #inordertoive	4.180	https://bit.ly/3wTv4q0
13	2020.09.29	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	With my best friend 💖	4.082	https://bit.ly/3wmJDBo
14	2021.02.24	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Spa day 🧖💆	4.079	https://bit.ly/2BBR1yt
15	2020.08.24	Personal Photographs	When I was in North Korea, there was no such a concept as "dessert". Now I cannot imagine the world without these goodies. So much to be grateful for despite everything that is happening in the world 🥰 What are you thankful for today? @ Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams	4.073	https://bit.ly/3yi3oLV
16	2021.01.18	Meme	North Korean regime is to the point beyond ridiculous and all I can do is laugh 🤔	3.969	https://bit.ly/3uLrpZk
17	2021.01.08	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	"The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace." -Mahatma Gandhi	3.965	https://bit.ly/3q8EA2w
18	2020.11.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	In the world where there is so much darkness, I still see abundance light despite everything that is happening in our world. I am hopeful that our future is bright because we have each other. Let us choose love over hate especially upcoming this week. Let us conspire the universe to get us through peacefully this uncertain time. I love all of you with every fiber in my being 💖 #presidentialelection #election2020 #love #peace #hope #northkorea	3.938	https://bit.ly/2PZ9G1P
19	2020.11.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Belated Happy Halloween everyone 🎃 How could I have ever imagined I could be this free. I couldn't even choose what I wear when I was living under Kim dictatorship in #northkorea. Let's not take this precious freedom for granted. Let us cherish and guard our freedom at all costs because without it, our life means nothing!	3.886	https://bit.ly/3df3P10
20	2020.10.21	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	"We answer not to the false god of government, but to the one true God of our faith. Socialism is the gospel of envy and the sharing of misery, and our time within the pages of its history is coming to an end." @realcandaceowens #blackout	3.881	https://bit.ly/3hFwE9y
21	2021.02.19	Promotional Photograph (aiming at introducing Park Yeonmi's YouTube media project)	Hi everyone, I just started a new YouTube channel on Skin-care, beauty, diet and healthy living. Please subscribe and share it for me. https://www.YouTube.com/channel/UcZsznaHmMwrgzIP3-g31g Always grateful for your support! After taking literally 100 photos, finally my mom didn't cut my legs, arms or head. - Photo credit to my beautiful mom 📸	3.857	https://bit.ly/3t1fwd9
22	2020.09.05	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Hi👋	3.792	https://bit.ly/2Q3wFZE

	Publication date	Visual content	Textual content (caption)	Likes	Link
23	2020.12.11	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	Happy Friday 🥰	3.650	https://bit.ly/2S9LZVc
24	2021.01.23	Personal Photograph	Wishing you all a happy weekend ❤️	3.611	https://bit.ly/3deUttb
25	2020.09.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Ohh how much I love you all 🥰	3.528	https://bit.ly/3g8NeOr
26	2020.12.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie) + photos of food	What a blessing to live in a country where I don't have to worry about whether I will be able to feed my child next meal or not. Hope you all enjoy your dinner tonight 💜	3.519	https://bit.ly/3wJBa9y
27	2020.09.07	Personal Photographs	Today's sky was especially beautiful 💜	3.500	https://bit.ly/33XQYuG
28	2020.11.17	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Happy Monday everyone!! Hope you are all holding up okay during this isolating time. I send lots and lots of love to you tonight 💜	3.475	https://bit.ly/2BBPvx
29	2020.08.30	Personal Photograph	Hope you are all subscribing our YouTube Channel ❤️	3.312	https://bit.ly/2SnaXjX
30	2020.10.21	Personal Photographs	What a year we had everyone! This year I personally learned so much about myself and the world. Even though, the countless unexpected challenges were thrown at us, I saw the resilience and kindness in all of us. I am grateful that I had you in my life to go through this year. You brought abundant joy and meaning with your kind words and encouragement. Thank you for being there for me and supporting me in my journey to free North Koreans. I will be so grateful if you could share with me what you have learned in 2020 💜	3.306	https://bit.ly/3bFybJb

Table 3 presents the list of the 30 collected posts from Park Yeonmi's official Facebook page, in order of popularity (i.e., from the most to the least liked).

APPENDIX II: List of collected Instagram data

	Publication date	Visual content	Textual content (caption)	Likes	Link
1	2020.12.31	Personal Photograph	Photo credit to my beautiful talented mom 💖 Hope your holidays are filled with love and joy!	10.954	https://bit.ly/3mLLNqH
2	2021.02.19	Personal Photograph	After taking literally 100 photos, finally my mom didn't cut my legs, arms or head. - Photo credit to my beautiful mom 📸	10.664	https://bit.ly/2PRXS1t
3	2020.12.25	Personal Photograph	Merry Christmas everyone and a Happy New Year! I am so blessed to eat delicious Italian food cooked by super model @danielecaretoni 🍝 He isn't only good looking, but has a gigantic heart for humanity and loves freedom! Please follow him on his Instagram xoxo	10.407	https://bit.ly/32ptcY6
4	2020.12.09	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	My schedule in a day during the lockdown: Bedroom → Bathroom → Living Room → Kitchen. After visiting these places for like 100 times, my day is over then I repeat this schedule faithfully every single day. It is amazing how people don't go crazy staying at home for this long. Hope you all staying strong everyone 💖	10.402	https://bit.ly/3uK9QOU
5	2021.02.24	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Spa day 🧖💆	10.393	https://bit.ly/3dbweFj
6	2021.01.10	Personal Photograph	Photo credit to my wonderful mom! Hope you all have a blessed Sunday ❤️	10.392	https://bit.ly/3uOv6gK
7	2021.02.20	Promotional Photograph (aiming at introducing Park Yeonmi's YouTube media project)	I am starting a new YouTube channel on skin-care, fashion, diet and life style. Please check the bio for link: https://www.YouTube.com/channel/UJZsznaHmMlWgrzIP3-g31g Thank you for supporting me and encouraging me to try new things to push my limits constantly!	10.086	https://bit.ly/3uQVsyC
8	2021.01.18	Meme	North Korean regime is to the point beyond ridiculous and all I can do is laugh 😂	9.429	https://bit.ly/3mHC70f
9	2020.11.23	Personal Photograph	What are your plans during this holiday season? I miss my family like everyone else. Hope the pandemic ends soon so we all can start living again 💖	9.428	https://bit.ly/3si5jvT
10	2021.02.11	Personal Photographs	My mom reminded me tonight that happiness is never far away. It is right here in everyday small things. Hope you all have a blessed evening 🥰	9.421	https://bit.ly/3uOGppu
11	2020.09.20	Personal Photograph	I dreamt of visiting this place for a very long time, and finally had a chance to visit. There are still so much beauty in this world ❤️	9.355	https://bit.ly/3g9uXfR
12	2020.12.17	Personal Photograph	Life is an endless learning process. It taught me that some days life is easy. And some days life is hard. Managing the balance between Yin and Yang requires some discipline and resilience. Hope I will master this art of life someday. Best of luck to you all figuring out this thing called life on earth 💜	9.207	https://bit.ly/3g8XxSs
13	2021.01.23	Personal Photograph	Wishing you all a happy weekend ❤️	9.110	https://bit.ly/3uOA7WJ
14	2020.11.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Belated Happy Halloween everyone 🎃 How could I have ever imagined I could be this free. I couldn't even choose what I wear when I was living under Kim dictatorship in #northkorea. Let's not take this precious freedom for granted. Let us cherish and guard our freedom at all costs because without it, our life means nothing!	8.940	https://bit.ly/32dPR9E
15	2020.09.20	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Traveling with mom is the best ❤️	8.572	https://bit.ly/3wShMtJ
16	2020.11.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	In the world where there is so much darkness, I still see abundance light despite everything that is happening in our world. I am hopeful that our future is bright because we have each other. Let us choose love over hate especially upcoming this week. Let us conspire the universe to get us through peacefully this uncertain time. I love all of you with every fiber in my being 💖 #presidentialelection #election2020 #love #peace #hope #northkorea	8.270	https://bit.ly/32ca2jy
17	2020.11.28	Short mute video	Dancing alone on Friday night. When can we go back to normal life again? 🥰 Hope you all enjoy Black Friday 🛍️	8.239	https://bit.ly/3wMcnUW
18	2021.02.19	Personal Photograph	Who feels my frustration? 🤔 Teaching my mom how to take pictures and this is how I looked at the time. Loving my mom 💖	8.088	https://bit.ly/3tiYATH
19	2021.01.08	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	"The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace." -Mahatma Gandhi	8.058	https://bit.ly/3sk8JQG
20	2020.12.21	Personal Photographs (Selfie)	What a year we had everyone! This year I personally learned so much about myself and the world. Even though, the countless unexpected challenges were thrown at us, I saw the resilience and kindness in all of us. I am grateful that I had you in my life to go through this year. You brought abundant joy and meaning with your kind words and encouragement. Thank you for being there for me and supporting me in my journey to free North Koreans. I will be so grateful if you could share with me what you have learned in 2020 💖	7.985	https://bit.ly/3a5irht
21	2020.12.02	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	What a blessing to live in a country where I don't have to worry about whether I will be able to feed my child next meal or not. Hope you all enjoy your dinner tonight 💜	7.798	https://bit.ly/3uJRmbN

	Publication date	Visual content	Textual content (caption)	Likes	Link
22	2021.02.07	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	I woke up to this beauty today. Complete serene and it reminded me of my homeland, North Korea. 80 percent of North Korea lands are mountains and has lots of snows in the winter. However, there was no such a thing called ski for the common people and we were just busy surviving. I still remember the shock I felt after I escaped to South Korea when people started to ask me what my hobbies were. I had no clue what hobbies were back then because that kind of luxury wasn't allowed for North Korean people and therefore, we didn't even have a word for it. I hope I don't take this freedom and prosperity for granted even after I live in America for 10 years. I wish you all a beautiful weekend everyone 💜	7.778	https://bit.ly/3dkdOCB
23	2021.01.15	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Wishing you all a wonderful weekend everyone! My mom and I are sending lots of love to you today 💜	7.557	https://bit.ly/3aarVbr
24	2021.02.18	Short mute video	Thursday, but it feels like already a weekend. Never knew what "going out" was growing up in North Korea and I feel so grateful to have this freedom! Hope you all stay warm and safe and most of all, have a happy weekend everyone 💜	7.538	https://bit.ly/3g9y5fB
25	2021.01.21	Personal Photograph	I am grateful to this place that I called home for the last 7 months. It was scary in the beginning to be alone again, but I have found myself again in this place. I found joy, contentment and meaning to be alone and I am looking forward to the next chapter of my life. I am determined to live life without regrets since I will get to do this life thing only once. Thank you, life for treating me well 💜	7502	https://bit.ly/2Qhv4PE
26	2020.10.01	Personal Photograph	We have come a long way and mere words cannot describe how beyond grateful we are for this freedom. Already missing this beautiful part of America 💜 #napavalley #usa #freedom #northkorean #inordertolive	7.277	https://bit.ly/3ttanIB
27	2020.10.28	Photographs of North Korean women (from Asiapress)	If I didn't escape and succeeded at it, this would've been me in the best scenario, or most likely I wouldn't be even alive on this earth today. I would have been dead a decade ago from starvation or disease. In North Korea, 27 years old is not considered to be young. I have passed my prime age already. That is how quickly a person's potential gets crushed. Let us not take life for granted. Let us not take this freedom for granted. We all must pursue meaningful life that is beyond ourselves. Grateful you are in this journey with me to spread the words of freedom and human rights. I am more and more convinced everyday that we can liberate North Korea when we raise our voices together for the voiceless people of North Korea. Thank you for your humanity!	7.000	https://bit.ly/3g6oLcD
28	2020.11.10	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	Hi from my studio 📸	6.750	https://bit.ly/2QmKH0Q
29	2020.12.26	Personal Photographs	What a joy to spend Christmas with people I love 💜 The one thing we all learned this year was how precious the people we have in our lives. I love you with all my heart everyone! Each one of you mean more than words can describe!	6.642	https://bit.ly/3tkhtWg
30	2020.11.24	Personal Photograph (Selfie)	5 years ago today in @tokyo. I remember how thrilled I was receiving this letter of acceptance to @columbia. Dreams come true and life happens. Let's keep dreaming and stay hopeful no m	6.629	https://bit.ly/3gbP0ye

Table 4 presents the list of the 30 collected posts from Park Yeonmi's official Instagram account, in order of popularity (i.e. from the most to the least liked).

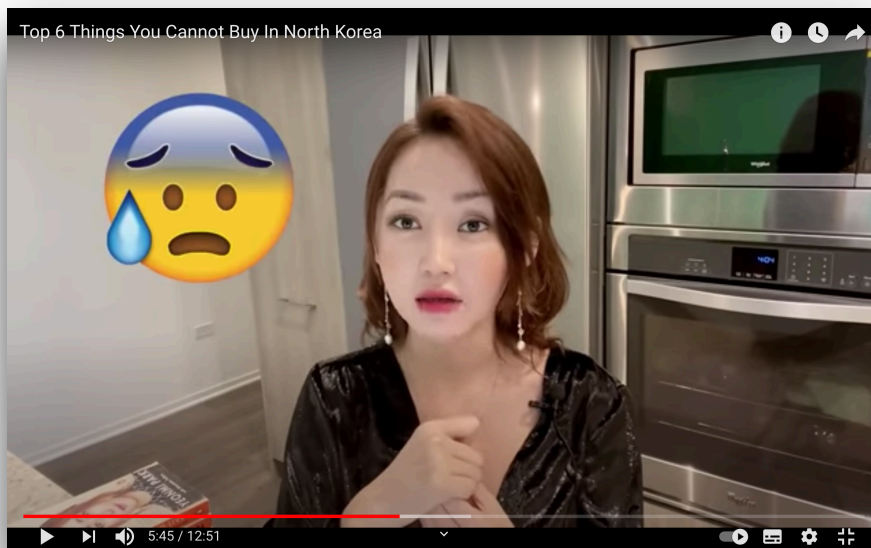
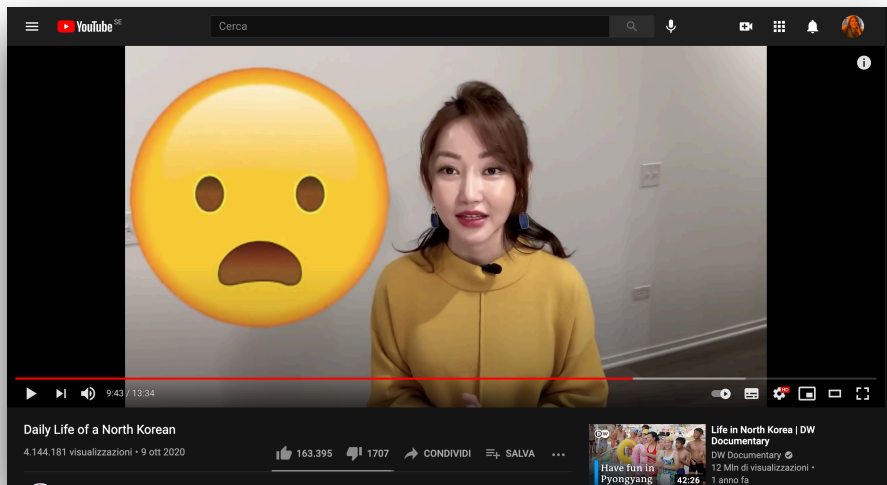
APPENDIX III: List of collected YouTube data

	Date of publication	Title of the video	Views	Likes	Link
1	2020.10.09	Daily Life of a North Korean	4.057.060	160.351	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=afqaRpYPkFw
2	2020.10.22	Top 6 Things You Cannot Buy In North Korea	3.140.596	87.484	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=A1isUaa3-00
3	2020.09.12	Shocking Facts About North Korea's First Lady - Defector Explains	1.992.789	42.669	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=W6q8Kik5vhQ
4	2020.12.17	North Korea's Secret "Pleasure Squad" Parties	1.849.374	33.759	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=w7c9haf9xWE
5	2021.01.31	The End of Kim Jong-un	1.755.948	42.557	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=e4lGqjBjvoA
6	2020.09.10	North Korea's Pleasure Squad	1.447.935	36.898	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=u2cbHeBzFIM
7	2020.09.25	Shocking Facts About North Korea's Sexuality	1.094.969	34.313	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=25h0sE_IK-o
8	2020.08.27	Top 5 Culture Shock I Experienced After Escaping from North Korea	1.004.452	54.049	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=B0hKjDpPnDU
9	2020.09.14	North Korea's Beauty Standards	951.248	33.173	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=u_LpKEyhRnk
10	2020.12.15	Shocking Sexual Abuse of North Korean Female Soldiers	834.190	15.225	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ZNNWrZZmBp8
11	2020.11.06	Did Kim Jong-un Kill his wife?	825.854	18.937	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=vfQIEUD3jk
12	2020.12.16	Shocking Photos That Reveal the Truth about North Korea	715.986	22.611	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=6wFcoByyIbM
13	2020.12.08	Updated - New Facts About the Disappearance of Kim Jong-Un's Wife	558.229	14.554	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=L9_8-Xr1pw
14	2020.09.29	North Korea's Dating Culture	503.239	18.252	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=7whXuHj5csU
15	2020.09.03	North Korean Girl's Culture Shock in America	497.693	20.270	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=Jbt2uXcu6U
16	2020.10.26	Top 7 Most Shocking things North Koreans Eat to Survive	474.342	18.506	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=JGcxa6hFIRM
17	2020.11.04	7 Shocking Things North Korean Women are Not Allowed to do	440.482	19.801	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=orgQ7EwPU6U
18	2020.12.03	Kim Jong-Un's Mistress	410.405	8.773	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=EMzBwOxqiW0
19	2020.10.28	5 Shocking Things North Koreans Must Endure	403.283	17.745	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=tAD3MYy37iM
20	2020.10.30	An Average Meal for a North Korean	399.508	16.756	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ToJ-DFRiYzU
21	2020.12.20	North Korea Executes People for Breaking Covid-19 Restrictions	388.020	9.706	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=k2OT07bvubU
22	2020.12.23	Exclusive: New Photos of Kim Jong Un's Pleasure Squad	381.987	10.156	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=h_3NnK242_s
23	2020.11.10	7 Ways to Escape from North Korea	367.852	19.470	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=M8lfj6neHc
24	2020.12.20	Who May Replace Kim Jong-Un? Introducing- Kim Han-Sol	353.035	10.445	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=SiRL1x_8f9I

	Date of publication	Title of the video	Views	Likes	Link
25	2020.12.01	Why did Kim Jong-Un Kill his Uncle?	324.565	8.631	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=k_3HfoYsQ1A
26	2020.09.06	Defector Explains Kim Jong-un's Gulag System	319.113	9994	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=inSNWiQcUJHE
27	2021.01.11	Tragic Fate of Kim Jong-Un's First Love	301.529	9.054	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=dfd2B3oNgGE
28	2021.01.26	Daily Life of A North Korean 2021 - This video was recorded on Jan 24th, 2021	299.847	8.532	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=IFB91wNvJmY
29	2020.10.18	Facts About North Korea's Healthcare System	285.514	14.667	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=zRzO-4HY5f8
30	2020.12.09	Kim Jong-Un's Body Double	261.180	9.814	https://www.YouTube.com/watch?v=ccEUX2J7PE0

Table 5 presents the list of the 30 collected videos from Park Yeonmi's official YouTube channel, in order of popularity (i.e., from the most to the least viewed).

APPENDIX IV: Examples of use of emojis in Park Yeonmi's YouTube videos



APPENDIX V: Examples of use of images in Park Yeonmi's YouTube videos

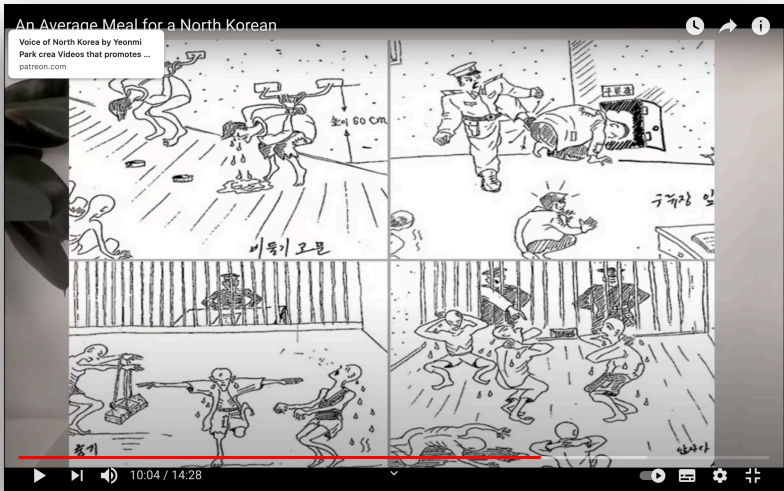
GROUP 1

Three examples where the same evidence picture is used in three different videos.



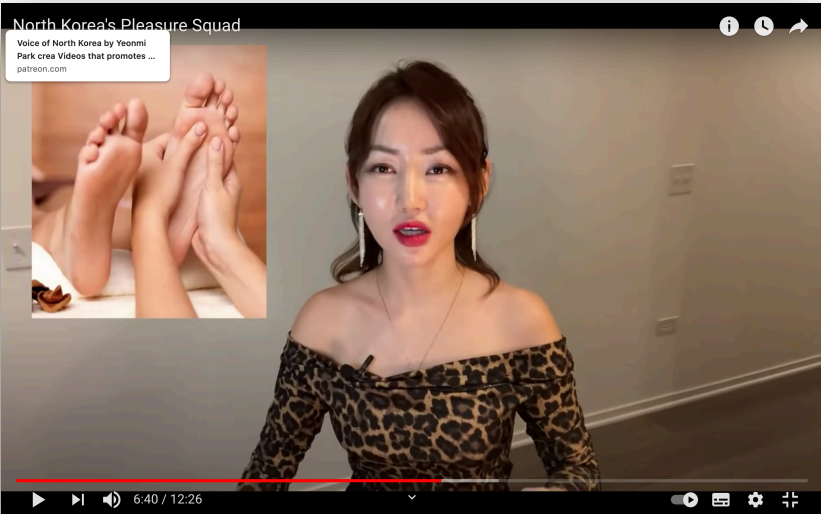
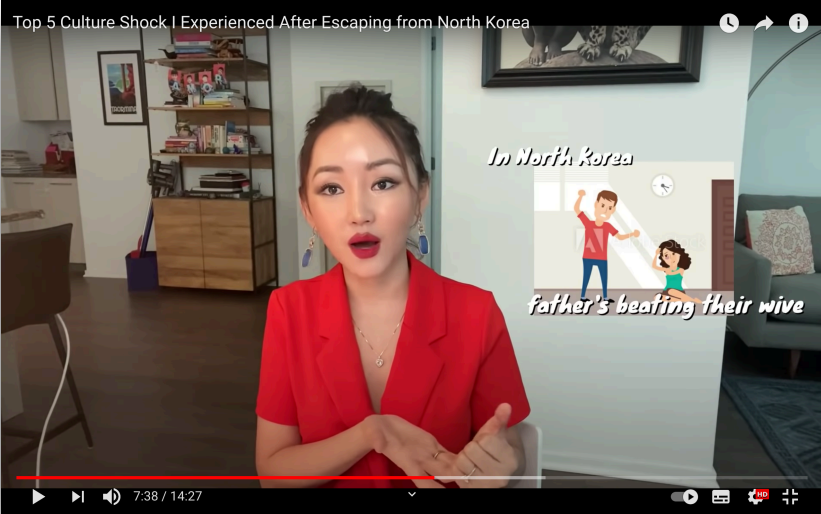
GROUP 2

Three examples where Park Yeonmi uses graphic representations as substitutes of photographic evidence.



GROUP 3

Three examples where Park Yeonmi uses general graphics during the video.



APPENDIX VI: Examples of source citation in Park Yeonmi's YouTube videos

