



“This is not the place to bother people about BTS”: Pseudo-synchronicity and interaction in timed comments by Hallyu fans on the video streaming platform *Viki*

Miriam A. Locher^{*}, Thomas C. Messerli

University of Basel, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Video-oriented commenting
Text-based CMC
Timed comments
Pseudo-live comments
Conflict
Interaction
Fandom

ABSTRACT

The community of users on *Viki.com*, a video streaming platform distributing Asian television to an international audience, use the site to engage with streams of television dramas. Rather than just being passive consumers, viewers interact in a range of different ways, among them the use of *Timed Comments (TC)*. TCs are comments viewers post while viewing dramas. Subsequent viewers can read these comments when streaming the same episode. Users can read and respond to comments by previous viewers as if they were written at the time of watching (similar to *Danmaku*). Building on our previous work on *Viki-TCs*, we have framed the community mainly as a harmonious collective engaging with artefacts from a different cultural and linguistic context. In this study, we focus on the creation of pseudo-synchronicity by looking at interactivity between TC writers and in particular on those TCs that construct conflict. Our corpus consists of 320,000 multilingual, but predominantly English comments. We make use of an exhaustively annotated sample of 8,930 comments to extract and formalize patterns of implicit and explicit interaction and locate them in the larger corpus using corpus linguistic methods. Special attention is given to conflictual interaction in connection with plot spoilers, judgments on co-viewers' analytic and experiential skills and inappropriate language usage, negative comments on actor appearance, commenters using the space for fan interaction outside of the drama-scope and the technical use of the platform. These conflictual interactions often function as negotiations of the platform norms, socialize viewers into how the space works and can thus also be linked to community building. Our study contributes to understanding better how online fan community norms are built and behavior is sanctioned or (implicitly) condoned through interaction. In this way we contribute both to the study of interaction in a context that works online and asynchronously and to the study of online fan communities.

1. Introduction and positioning of topic

This paper explores the practice of posting so-called *Timed Comments (TC)* while watching Korean TV drama (K-drama for short) on the streaming platform *Viki.com*, a video streaming platform distributing mostly Asian television to an international audience. Rather than just being passive consumers, viewers can interact in a range of different ways, including the use of TCs, subtitling, rating dramas and episodes, and creating profiles. TCs are comments viewers post while viewing dramas. Subsequent viewers can read these comments as a stream of text messages appearing alongside the video of the episode. Users can then read and respond to comments by previous viewers as if they were written at the time of watching (similar to *danmaku*; e.g. [Yang, 2021](#); [Zhang & Cassany, 2019](#); [Zhou, 2022](#)). We build on our previous work on

Viki-TCs which explored the general functions of comments within the community ([Locher & Messerli, 2020](#); [Messerli & Locher, 2021](#)). So far, we have described the community mainly as a harmonious collective engaged with artefacts from a different cultural and linguistic context. In this study, we focus on interactivity between TC writers in a computer-mediated context where (1) there are no affordances that connect messages, (2) the messages are written at different moments in time, and yet (3) there is a pseudo-synchronous effect ([Johnson, 2013](#); [Messerli & Locher, 2021](#): 410). In order to understand these interactive instances within the overall fan discourses on the platform, we build on our previous findings and explore interactions in a larger dataset. By examining particular TCs as a practice of a largely anonymous fan community, we contribute to understanding how a fan community comes about and shapes itself through discourse practices of video-oriented textual

^{*} Corresponding author.

comments. The study contributes both to our understanding of interaction in a mediated context that works online and asynchronously and to the study of online fan communities.

In [Section 2](#), we will position our case study within the fields of the study of fandom and TCs in computer-mediated context. [Section 3](#) outlines the data and mixed methods, while [Section 4](#) presents the results of the analysis. In [Section 5](#) we offer our discussion and conclusions.

2. Previous work on fandom and discourse practices of video-oriented textual comments

Our project combines interest in the pragmatics of fiction, interpersonal pragmatics and translation studies, by focusing on the different interaction possibilities on the computer-mediated streaming platform [Viki.com](#). For example, we explore the participation structure ([Locher, 2020](#); [Locher & Messerli, 2020](#)), relational work and translation challenges in the subtitles ([Locher, 2020](#)) and the use of TCs (see below and [Section 3.2](#)). This work can also be positioned within the study of fan discourses and fandom (e.g., [Click & Scott, 2017](#); [Hauser & Meier-Vieracker, 2022](#); [Jenkins, 2006](#)). [Bednarek \(2017: 548\)](#) highlights to what extent the spaces in which fandom is negotiated are diverse and multimodal in their form. They include the writing of reviews in different publishing outlets (online and offline), participation in fan conventions, purchase of fan merchandise, the subtitling of lyrics and movie dialogue, the writing of obituaries and expression of grief, etc. (e.g., [Annett, 2014](#); [Booth, 2015](#); [Duffett, 2013](#); [Frick, 2022](#); [Matley, 2020](#); [Song & Feng, 2022](#)). The fandom target is equally diverse, ranging from football clubs, music, movies, anime and individual actors to gamers and influencers ([Valentinsson, 2022: 346](#)). Furthermore, as [Schmidt-Lux \(2022: 18\)](#) points out, the possibilities for fans to convene in online spaces has dramatically increased in the last decade.

In our case, we are interested in the Viki online spaces and affordances and explore how a heterogeneous and international group of individuals convenes there in order to jointly engage with Korean TV dramas, which is part of the pop culture phenomenon of *Hallyu* – the Korean wave (for *Hallyu* studies, see, e.g., [Hong, 2014](#); [Kiaer & Kim, 2022](#); [Kim, 2013](#); [Kim, 2014](#); [Lee, 2015](#)). Research on *Hallyu* complements that on other documented computer-mediated communication channels and platforms that allow fans to engage with each other and to engage in fan identity construction. Among them are the practice of danmu and life tweeting (see [Section 2](#)) but also, for example, engaging in writing fan fiction (e.g., [Leppänen, 2012](#); [Sauro, 2017](#)), fan translating (e.g. [Dwyer, 2019](#); [Jiang, 2020](#); [Locher, 2020](#); [Yang, 2021](#)) and online fan clubs or engaging with artists through online media such as YouTube (e.g. [Dahms, 2022](#); [Meier-Vieracker & Hauser, 2022](#); [Song & Feng, 2022](#); [Valentinsson, 2022](#)). For our purposes and context, we define fan interaction as any self-selected participation on the Viki platform. The mere fact that viewers self-select to translate or comment is taken as an act of active fan participation. We are not in a position to claim that these activities are fundamentally different from other ways of interacting in comparable contexts, but we argue that the unique context for *Hallyu* fan interaction on the Viki platform is worth exploring.

Compared to a classic Community of Practice, contributors to Viki lack synchronous interaction, and the composition of the group is fluid. However, Viki members constitute an active discourse community ([Watts, 2008](#)), whose members engage with each other over space and time and exhibit mutual engagement as well as the development of ‘ways of doing things’ ([Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992](#)). In fact, the Viki platform would not work without fan engagement since Viki relies on fans to do the subtitling and so make the TV dramas linguistically accessible in the first place ([Dwyer, 2012, 2017, 2019](#); [Locher, 2020](#)). We follow [Zhou \(2022: 2\)](#) in arguing that online writing in such spaces can “generate a strong group sense”. The Viki platform thus provides an affinity space ([Gee, 2004](#)) for *Hallyu* fans to express themselves and

build a sense of community even in the absence of synchronous interaction by engaging in comment writing about K-drama.

In this paper, we foreground the practice of TCs on Viki, which is similar to practices found on Chinese and Japanese streaming platforms that offer its users the possibility to comment on the videos while watching. This practice has been called *danmaku* or *danmu*, which means ‘barrage’, a metaphor derived from video shooting games (e.g. [Chen and Chen, 2019: 2](#); [Chen, 2022](#); [Liu, this article collection](#); [Yang, 2021](#); [Zhang & Cassany, 2019, this article collection](#); [Zhou, 2022](#)). Danmu are anonymous text comments that float over a range of different video streams and can add up over time to cover the video entirely. [Zhang and Cassany \(this article collection\)](#) review the different functions of danmu on the Chinese platform Bilibili and reveal that the users use diverse multimodal indexicals (text, font, color, video art) to comment on the artefact itself and to interact with each other. On Bilibili, the danmu function is only available to users who pass a 100 question quiz ([Chen, 2022](#)) and access is thus regulated by an expertise-based gate-keeping function. On Viki, no formal steps beyond activating the TCs are in place to ensure participation.

Danmu and TCs have in common that they are tied to the video-time and enrich the viewing experience of subsequent viewers, creating a “bonding experience” for the fan community ([Zhou, 2022](#)). As additional meaning-making input, they arguably change the artefact itself (see [Locher & Messerli, 2020: 21](#)). With respect to CMC, the practice has been described as pseudo-synchronous ([Johnson, 2013](#); [Messerli & Locher, 2021: 410](#)) because the TCs and danmu show up during the video as if they were written right at the time of watching. However, the TCs were actually written at different moments in time during previous viewings of different viewers. In the case of Viki, there is no time-stamp (only the posters’ user names are displayed) that would allow to establish which comment was posted first.

To illustrate this, consider [Fig. 1](#), which shows TCs during Episode 2 of the K-drama *Alice*. The view shows the cell phone display of the Viki App at the top with the video frame and the TCs underneath. (Depending on your device choice, TCs can also be shown on the right of the video display screen, or – if viewed in full screen mode – single TCs are displayed as surtitles.) For each TC, you can see the user name (grayed out for anonymity) and the time-stamp which refers to the minute and second in the video and – importantly – not the time at which the comment was posted. TCs are thus synchronized with the streamed episode rather than being a form of synchronous communication with other commenters. This sets them apart from live tweeting on fiction or sports events ([Androutsopoulos & Weidenhöffer, 2015](#); [Schirra et al., 2014](#)).

In order of appearance on the screen, the comments are read from bottom to top. The viewer in comment (1) refers to “Army” at minute 53:45. In the absence of any military activity within the drama and since fans of the K-pop group BTS call themselves *Army*, it is likely that this commenter identifies as a BTS fan and is shouting out to the Viki community to find fellow BTS fans. In what follows, other viewers take up the term *Army* as well and finally viewer 4 reprimands viewer 1 for bringing up the K-pop group in the context of watching a K-drama: “I’m ARMY but this is not the place to bother people about BTS”. Interactions such as these are of interest to this paper because the reprimand shows other viewers what is acceptable commenting practice in this viewing community (see [Section 4.2.5](#)).

As (1) shows, even in the absence of threading affordances, the viewing community appears to engage in dialogue and claims the Viki space as being reserved for discussions of the drama in question rather than outside concerns. The group thus engages in user-generated self-regulative practices, i.e. a type of “meta-discourse” that [Yang \(2021\)](#) reported to appear in connection with danmu translations where the discourses “serve to hold together individual translation contributions, inform and orientate the audience, and externalize the collaborative nature of such a practice”. For our data, it appears that community norms on permissible topics are surfacing in interactions through

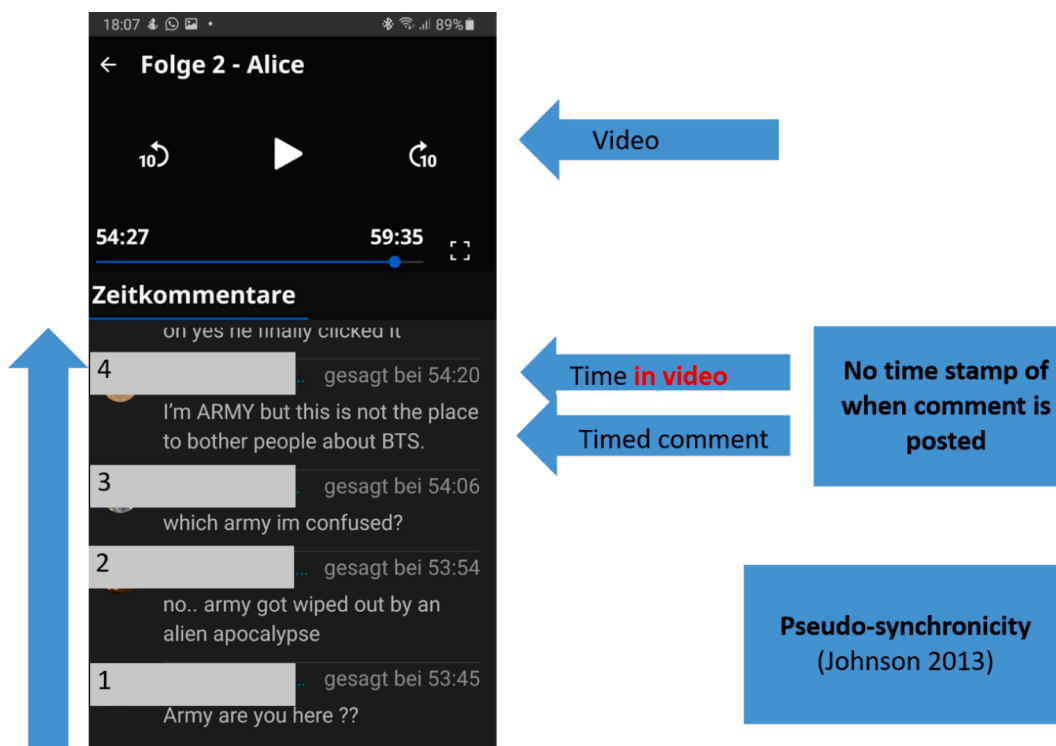


Fig. 1. Viki App display of timed comments (option that displays the comments below the video).

negotiation. In order to better understand these practices that shape the Viki fandom, we will explore consensual and conflictual interaction, which appear despite the absence of technical affordances that would make interaction easily detectable.

3. Data and methodology

3.1. Data

Our data consists of two sources. On the one hand, we work with the detailed qualitative coding of the 8,930 TCs posted during four episodes of the drama *Meloholic* and *You Are All Surrounded*. The dramas were chosen for their comparable number of TCs at the time of data collection in 2018. Eighty-one percent of the TCs are written in English, while other languages included, e.g., Portuguese, Spanish, French (all TCs were coded). Overall 2,585 different viewers contribute TCs.

In addition, we compiled the K-TACC (Korean-Time Aligned Comments Corpus), which consists of 320,118 comments in 80 episodes of five entire dramas (collected in October 2018; Table 1). This corpus also includes the four episodes of the case study. Our selection criterion was genre (romantic-comedy and crime drama with a romantic sub-plot). English TCs make up half of the corpus.

The TCs are publicly accessible without any subscription to the platform so that we believe it to be permissible to study them with respect to research ethics. Nevertheless, all user information was removed to maintain anonymity of commenters.

3.2. Previous findings about TC functions in the Viki community and research questions

Two previous studies on the discourse practices of video-oriented textual comments in Viki serve as a springboard for our current exploration. We studied the TC functions by doing an exhaustive qualitative analysis of all 5,919 comments made during two entire 60 min episodes of two different Korean dramas (*Meloholic* and *You Are All Surrounded*; Locher & Messerli, 2020) and explored in particular how a humorous

Table 1
Overview of K-drama Time Aligned Comment Corpus (K-TACC) (Messerli & Locher 2021: 414).

TV dramas	<i>Meloholic</i> (MH); <i>One More Happy Ending</i> (OMHE); <i>Twenty Again</i> (TA); <i>W; You're All Surrounded</i> (YAAS)	
Episodes	80	
Comments	320,118	
Languages	36	
Users	33,309	
Words	2,910,258	
Languages	English	160,036 comments (50 %)
(based on automatic language detection)	Portuguese	34,826 comments (11 %)
	Spanish	19,057 comments (6 %)
	German	15,724 comments (5 %)
	French	11,148 comments (3 %)
	Other/unclear	76,761 comments (24 %)
	No words	6,566 comments (2 %)

stance is conveyed within the comments (Messerli & Locher, 2021).

The code book was developed bottom up in several cycles until 75 per cent coder agreement was reached for each code individually by two independent coders (MacQueen et al. 2008). TCs could be coded with more than one code to account for the multi-functionality of the comments (Locher & Messerli, 2020). This data set has now been complemented with the two final episodes of the same dramas in order to make sure that no functions were missed, amounting to 8,930 comments in total. This expansion confirmed the representativeness of the four episodes for TC functions in general and the robustness of our code-book.

Our content analysis of TC functions shows that the viewers engage extensively in drama-oriented commenting (such as comments on plot, intertextuality, character and actor performance) as well as community-oriented comments (such as comments on sharing when and from where posts are written, responding to each other's comments) (see Table 2).

Table 2
Coding overview, multiple coding possible (reproduced from Messerli & Locher 2021: 413).

Artefact-oriented categories	Community-oriented categories	Artefact- and community-oriented
- Anticipation <i>Ayyyyyeee I've been waiting for this</i>	- Time/place of watching <i>09,2018 hello from Vancouver</i>	- Emotive stance <i>Ohhhh shit</i>
- Genre <i>So is this gonna be a mystery crime drama too?</i>	- Nationality <i>I'm Jamaican JM</i>	- Culture <i>Every male is required to serve in the military for 2 years</i>
- Plot <i>perp is a woman?</i>	- Number of watching experience <i>First time watching</i>	
- Intertextuality <i>He's like Charlie Brown, OMG</i>	- Knowledge of actors/groups <i>He looks like BTS Jin 🥰</i>	
- Character/actor <i>He's sooo hot 🥵🥵🥵🥵</i>	- General wisdom <i>Lol this is gonna be fun girls thoughts are sometimes more savage than u think</i>	
- Diegetic technique <i>Love the sound effects</i>	- (Further) self-disclosure <i>Omg!! My birthday too!</i>	
- Criticism of artefact <i>Terrible make up and editing for that scene</i>	- Interaction with commenter <i>Hi other people watching this 😊</i>	
	- Viki (subtitles, ads, etc.) <i>The subtitles are late</i>	

The three most important functions are comments on ‘sharing emotive stance’ (n = 6,299, 71 % of 8,930 comments), ‘plot’ (n = 4,086, 46 % of 8,930 comments) and ‘interaction with commenter’ (n = 1,760, 20 % of 8,930 comments).¹

Going beyond this statement of functional distribution, in this paper we explore the effects of pseudo-synchronicity on interaction and the relation of this interaction to community norm negotiations. This means that we will revisit the code ‘interaction with commenter’ in the case study and, inspired by example (1), also give special attention to conflictual interchanges in K-TACC, in the hope of arriving at negotiations of platform norms. Our sub-questions are:

- What evidence of interactivity can we find in the comments?
- What is the role of conflictual exchanges in the fan community?

3.3. Methodology

In a mixed method approach, we combine qualitative function analysis with quantitative corpus linguistics methods. In Section 4.1 on the question “What evidence of interactivity can we find in the comments?”, we will revisit the coding of the functions of TCs presented in Locher and Messerli’s (2020) case study to explore the novel focus on interactivity. We will establish how commenters explicitly and implicitly engage in interactivity in the absence of threading affordances and the challenge of non-synchronicity.

In contrast to other computer-mediated contexts where trolling, flaming and in general conflictual interaction abound (cf. Graham, 2019 for an overview), commenters on Viki appear to be a consensus-oriented fan community interested in engaging with the Korean cultural ‘other’ and a ‘co-viewing’ experience (Locher & Messerli, 2020, in press). However, conflict does occur, and we asked ourselves what viewers get into conflict about and how they manage it. In Section 4.2, we therefore turn to the question “What is the role of conflictual exchanges in the fan community?” Due to the incremental building up of the comments and the absence of threading affordances, we encounter a somewhat different situation to what might generally be expected of conflictual exchanges, i.e. that conflict develops between the same parties and that these parties are part of the conflict development and resolution. In the absence of long dyadic stretches of interaction, conflict for our purposes is defined as an interchange of at least two comments for which we have evidence that they are interlinked and which are not mere disagreements but contain a negative assessment and/or incensing content. In order to arrive at such conflictual exchanges, we will draw on the

insights of the case study on TC functions and our qualitative viewing experience. In addition, we explore evidence from the entire K-TACC using collocation and keyword-in-context searches. This corpus-linguistic approach allows us to find evidence of further conflictual clusters of TCs that we can peruse with a qualitative perspective.

The discussion and conclusion section will revisit the insights gained in light of the research interest on how pseudo-synchronicity affects the commenting practices. This process constitutes a qualitative, interpretative effort.

4. Results

4.1. Focus on interaction: Explicit and implicit markers of interactivity

Broadly speaking, the mere act of choosing to post any type of comment is an act of communication with the viewer community as well as a potential invitation to get a response from the viewer community. However, this signaling of interactivity can be rendered in more or less explicit or implicit ways, which are explored in this section.

We first turn to the code ‘interaction with commenter’ (one of the most important functions established in our case study; see Section 3.2), which was assigned on the basis of explicit markers, such as the use of address terms that point to fellow commenters. Such address terms are displayed in bold in the selection of comments presented in (1)–(5). They could take the form of generic address terms such as “hi other people”, “guys”, “you all”, mention names of commenters or the term “@lc”, which means “at last comment”. The latter is the community’s way to create cohesion between comments in the absence of threading affordances. We assume that at the time of posting, @lc-comments are generally directly adjacent to the comment they react to. However, given the fact that further comments can be posted between the two, it is not possible to unambiguously identify the referent of @lc in our data (or on Viki itself). While we cannot take immediate adjacency for granted, explicit address terms allow us to claim that these comments address a fellow-commenter and we interpret them therefore as interactive.

- (1) **Hi other people** watching this (MH1)
- (2) December 14, 2016 merry Christmas **guys** (YAAS1)
- (3) Nice to meet **you all**, i feel like were going to be getting along for the next lot of episodes! (YAAS1)
- (4) **@NAME** lmao sorry that he’s not physically attractive to me??? (OMHE1)
- (5) **@LC** me too I’ve been waiting for this and doctor stranger so much (YAAS1)

¹ The expansion of the corpus to four episodes yielded the same ranking and a comparable distribution for the three main codes.

We also identified commenters' questions and requests for information as interactive, as in (6)–(8). Even if these comments might have been meant rhetorically, we still tagged them as explicitly targeted at fellow-commenters.

- (6) **Why** are they learning about this tho? (MH1)
- (7) **Can someone tell me** I'm the only one not crying (YAAS1)
- (8) **Why** isn't the corrupted Prosecutor Han charged?? (YAAS20)

Such questions could also receive responses. If a response could be clearly tied to a previous comment through lexical and content cohesion, we understood it as interactive as well, as in (9)–(11).

- (9) Omg **same** [in response to "Can I slap him...", plus] (MH2)
- (10) How long you stay depends on what you do while in the **military**. If it's the easier "pathway" it can go up to **3 years** [in response to "Hmm.. why three years and not two?", which is in turn is related to the drama content which refers to the duration of military service in the Republic of Korea] (MH1)
- (11) **Nope**, not Go Ara. The nurse is Gong Seung-yeon. She was just in the drama Circle [in response to "It's Go Ara!!! Right?"] (MH1)

Table 3 shows that we coded interaction in combination with different functions in 93 per cent of all comments and in particular together with the sharing of emotive stance and with plot.

To illustrate such co-occurrences, consider (12) which is about the appearance of a white truck in the video. The commenters here refer to the white trucks that often cause accidents for the main characters of the dramas. This happens so often that the fan community gets nervous for the main characters as soon as a white truck appears on screen, and viewers call out this trope to each other.

- (12) Sequence of comments on "White truck of death" trope (source only available as screenshot without mention of the drama title; bold and time stamp added)
 - Commenter 1 nooo! white truck of death! (56:12)
 - Commenter 2 yup. yup. now somebody will steal the card. You Know Who (56:16)
 - Commenter 3 Not again!!! The white truck of death!!! (56:17)
 - Commenter 4 **I had to replay it 3 times before I saw it. Indeed—the White Truck of Death.** (56.20)

With respect to interactivity, the text in bold by Commenter 4 contains information that this viewer read previous comments and reacts to them. All comments together create a joint response to the artefact and pass on in-group knowledge about the genre.

Within the code 'interaction with commenters', we also specifically annotated acts of criticism. Out of 1,760 comments with interactivity only 73 contained explicit criticism (amounting to only 1 % of 8,930 comments, Table 3). Looking at these further, we can identify a number of themes, from criticism of viewer stance to criticizing complaints about how the Viki platform works. We will explore this further in Section 4.2.

Our case study also reveals that the code 'Viki', which we used to identify meta-comments about the usage of the platform, has a core

Table 3
The code 'Interaction with commenters' in four episodes.

	Total comments in 4 episodes	% in 8,930 comments	% in 1,760 comments
<i>Interaction with commenter</i>	1,760	20	100
on its own	127	1	7
co-occurrence overall	1,633	18	93
containing criticism	73	1	4
<i>Co-occurrence with</i>			
emotive stance	969	11	55
plot	868	10	49
criticism of artefact	149	2	8
character/actor	85	1	5

interactive element (n = 200, 2 % of 8,930 comments). For example, it contains requests for subtitles (13), thanking the fan subtitlers (14) but also complaining about late subtitles or ads (15). These activities explicitly or implicitly address members of the fan community and are thus to be seen as interactive, a point corroborated by the fact that viewers often self-select to explain how the platform works and/or to reprimand co-viewers for being impatient (see Section 4.2.6).

- (13) subtitle please!!!! Jebalyo!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! (OMHE14)
- (14) Thank you subberss ♥♥♥ (MH10)
- (15) SUBTITLES WHERRE ARE YOUUUUU???? (TA8)

While the code 'interaction with commenter' is always interactive and the code 'Viki' can be argued to often be explicitly interactive, we also have evidence of implicit interaction in the other codes. For example, even comments on plot or sharing details about oneself might trigger a reaction and thus result in interactivity. If we do a search of the term "@lc" in the K-TACC (n = 3,994), we see that commenters indeed respond to previous statements, such as shown in (16)–(18).

- (16) @lc i was thinking the same thing (W9)
- (17) @LC - the comments are killing me and I'm laughing when the show isn't even very funny. Thank you! (MH3)
- (18) @lc it gets even weirder dont worry, you will love it lol (MH3)

(16) is an alignment with another commenter's point of view. (17) is a comment about the enjoyment of reading other comments and (18) comments on a viewer's assessment of the drama as "weird".

To illustrate the possibility that codes other than 'interaction with commenter' and 'Viki' can constitute interactivity, consider the code 'time/place of watching' as displayed in (19).

- (19) Sharing time and place of watching (MH10)
 - Commenter 1 I'm surprised I don't see any dates like most other dramas where people do 12/4/17
 - [comments omitted]
 - Commenter 2 Cause this drama just got released lol. Everyone so far is watching it December 2017
 - [comments omitted]
 - Commenter 3 12/06/17 Miami Florida
 - [comment omitted]
 - Commenter 4 12/26/17
 - Commenter 5 1/4/18 Houston Texas
 - Commenter 6 11:15 pm 12/31/17

Comments 1 and 2 in (19) are explicitly connected and are meta-comments about this sharing practice, while the later comments align with the sharing. We observed that this activity is often clustered, in the sense that once a commenter has shared when or where they watch, others select to reveal this, too, also over considerable time. These types of rounds of sharing create a sense of time (and disrupt the illusion of co-viewing) as well as a sense of the international viewership.

The interactions observed construct a generally consensual environment. As shown in Locher & Messerli (2020), this is achieved through the combination of emotive sharing, plot hypothesis sharing, sharing of

personal information, engaging in questions and answers and a general orientation towards an interest in Korean culture and K-drama (e.g. indicated by means of adopting Korean loanwords). We also have evidence of this positive assessment in meta-comments about how the viewers value the commenting exchanges, illustrated in (20)–(24).

- (20) well thank y'all for watching this with me (YAAS20)
 (21) Thank you for subbing this for me. Being able to watch these quality Korean Dramas means the World to me! (YAAS20)
 (22) I need to turn of my comment section I can't stop laughing Bc of these comments lmao 😊 (MH10)
 (23) can I just say how much I love the comments...it's so boring now to watch shows on dramafever or etc (without comments) (W1)
 (24) I missed viki, ep11 didn't have subtitles, I watched episode 11–14 on dramafire, got depressed coz of no funny comments (W15)

Further evidence of this appreciation of the fan community and the consensual orientation can be found in collocations with “@lc”. The top twenty collocations in a window 10 to the right of “@lc” are: *ikr, same, agree, exactly, IKR, true, too, thinking, yeah, you, yes, SAME, right, was, it LMAO, lol, agreed, same, lmao*. The viewers thus orient towards agreement in K-TACC. Collocations for “subber” in K-TACC show that positive speech acts such as thanking and encouraging (“fighting”) appear to be typical activities.

The four episodes that were explored in the case study were not conflictual and the evidence for interactivity from K-TACC presented so far points to a consensual community. Only 1 percent of the comments contained explicit criticism of other commenters (Table 3). In the next section, we will explore these further and draw on our own viewing experience in combination with the explorations of the entire K-TACC, which points to a number of recurring patterns of conflict.

4.2. Focus on conflictual interaction

Having established that commenting on Viki is generally consensual, we now address the question: What is the role of conflictual exchanges in the fan community? Despite the small number of conflictual TCs identified in Section 4.1, we believe that it is worthwhile looking at conflict exactly because it is so noticeable when it does occur as it breaks the usual consensual norm. The conflictual TCs are marked and therefore of potential interest for the community. Conflict for our purposes is defined as an interchange of at least two comments for which we have evidence of being interlinked (as illustrated in Section 4.1) and that are not mere disagreements but that contain a negative assessment and/or incensing content. Vetting the 73 comments that contained criticism from the qualitative case study and based on our viewing experience, we noted that critical and potentially conflictual interaction arises especially in connection with.

- plot spoilers
- judgments on co-viewers' analytic and experiential skills
- judgments on co-viewers' language
- negative comments on actor appearance
- commenters using the space for fan interaction outside of the drama-scope
- the technical use of the platform (missing subtitles, ads).

We argue that these interactions can be perceived as exchanges that contain reprimands that make community norms about expected conduct visible. Any new member observing the conflictual TCs can learn from them about appreciated and non-appreciated practices within the online community, while seasoned viewers are reminded of these norms. In this sense, the enacted conflicts contribute to the socialization of viewers into Viki norms. We will illustrate each category (without quantification).

4.2.1. Plot spoilers

Next to sharing emotive stance, the main function of the comments in the case study is to share ideas, comments and hypotheses about the plot. It therefore comes as no surprise that the community disapproves of spoilers, the revelation of aspects of the plot before they appear. The negative assessment of this practice is exemplified in (25)–(28).

- (25) No freakin SPOILERS PEOPLE! Will report (W1)
 (26) NO SPOILERSSSSS (YAAS1)
 (27) gonna turn comments off. full of spoilers -_- (YAAS1)
 (28) Please don't say any spoilers thank youuu (W10)

The word *spoiler* shows up 535 times in the corpus. In some cases, commenters preface their input by adding “spoiler”, which means that they do not refrain from posting spoilers, but are aware that the community treats such comments as marked. While there is a reporting function for comments which might potentially result in the deletion of spoilers (the use and efficiency cannot be judged in this paper), the community also resorts to other ways of exploiting the affordances of the platform to eliminate or mitigate the effect of spoilers, which we call *covering* and *alerting*: Commenters place “spoiler alert” before a spoiler to warn other viewers against reading the upcoming comment. “Covering a spoiler” is posted immediately after a spoiler comment, which results in limiting the screen time of the spoiler comment. The reason for this is that a comment remains on display only until a new comment appears. In terms of Austin's (1962) speech act theory, alerting is thus a directive that helps others to circumvent a dispreferred event. Covering, on the other hand is a declarative, which performs the action of covering by stating that it covers. Interestingly, covering as declarative is a typographic act whose perlocutionary force does not lie in the performative power of the utterance and the norms and conventions that enable it, but in the technological workings of the affordance.

Looking for comments that contain the word “spoiler” can lead us to more conflictual exchanges as is exemplified in (29), which contains a spoiler made by Commenter 6 (in italics). Commenter 1 marks their comment as “spo[il]er alert” and humorously refers to the fact that people are likely to still read on. Overall, other commenters negatively assess the spoiler practice (Commenters 1, 3, 8, 9, 11).

- (29) Sequence around spoilers (W4, bold added to alerting reference to spoiler, italics for the actual spoiler)
- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Commenter 1 | SPOILER ALERT: (don't read this).
What did I tell u? People never listen... |
| Commenter 2 | he has no organs thats the only way |
| Commenter 3 | genta da uns spoiler ai PFV |
| Commenter 4 | the killer was donald trump guys |
| Commenter 5 | LC I Agree!! |
| Commenter 6 | <i>Poor guy gets stabbed like 20 times</i> |
| Commenter 6 | <i>Dnt worry about the stabbing at the front u will c it later lmao</i> |
| Commenter 7 | Oml |
| Commenter 8 | @lc That's exactly what I said. These spoiling jerks. |
| Commenter 9 | WTF KEEP SPOILERS TO YOURSELF OMG |
| Commenter 10 | that shirt was white smh |
| Commenter 11 | YOU CANT JUST WRITE A FUCKING SPOILER AND THEN APOLOGIZE WTF IS YOUR LOGIC PEOPLE |

4.2.2. Judgments on co-viewers' analytic and experiential skills

In some cases, commenters negatively judge other people's display of being bored, confused or not paying attention. These negative judgments can be accompanied by ad hominem attacks through name calling and insults. Consider (30) in which two commenters in the first episode of *You Are All Surrounded* share that they have been bored so far. Commenter 3 criticizes these assessments as being too premature and, hedged with a smiley and “please”, invites these viewers to leave. Commenter 5 encourages the bored viewers to keep watching, while Commenter 4 snaps at the bored viewers by using short sentences in

imperative form (“get out”) and additional capital letters for emphasis.

- (30) Judgements on assessment statements (YAAS1, bold added)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | So far this is BORING |
| Commenter 2 | im bored af help |
| Commenter 3 | So far it’s setting the PLOT. Now if you want to watch a plotless drama then, please, go on your way: |
| Commenter 4 | Get out. Just get out, it’s boring PLEASE LEAVE |
| Commenter 5 | if you’re confused just keep watching. not everything is gonna be spelled out right now..... |

In general, the community appears to believe that, if you keep watching, you like the drama and therefore at times negatively assesses criticism and complaints. This idea is expressed in (31).

- (31) Judgements on complaining (MH10)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | People just love to complain but still continue to watch. I’ll never understand. |
| Commenter 2 | While you’re doing that, fill up the holes in this drama too |
| Commenter 3 | right? when ppl say “I don’t wanna watch anymore” but they continue to watch |
| Commenter 4 | @lc.....lollllll |

In (32), Commenter 1 wonders why the main character does not reveal important background information on the plot to a co-character (“tell him the truth”). This triggers a response (“@lc”) which considers revealing the truth an unlikely solution, accompanied with insults (“are you stupid”; “ugh get brain”).

- (32) Judgments and insults, W3
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | WHY DON’T SHE TELL HIM THE TRUTH!!! |
| Commenter 2 | @LC WTF ARE U STUPID?! WOULD YOU BELIEVE IF SOMEONE CAME TO YOU AND TOLD U THAT U ARE LIVING IN A WEBTOON? UGH GET BRAIN |

In (33), we see a discussion of a flashback, which apparently managed to confuse some commenters. We see direct questions about the plot (e.g. 1; 5), a request for help (“ayuda”, l. 3) and indirect questions (statements of confusion, e.g. 1, 3, 11). There are also corresponding answers, including insults (4, 8) and swearing (9).

- (33) Judgments and insults (YAAS1, bold added)
- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | i’m confused. are we still in the past? |
| Commenter 2 | I think some of the live comments before the subs came out are out of place |
| Commenter 3 | esto es realmente confusoo ayuda |
| Commenter 4 | Some people are just stupid |
| Commenter 5 | Esa no es la casa de oh cho rim de la chica que ve olores? |
| Commenter 6 | THERE’S NO PAST PEOPLE. IT’S ALL HAPPENING IN THE PRESENT! |
| Commenter 7 | @LC no it’s a flashback |
| Commenter 8 | Are u stupid? Its past |
| Commenter 9 | christ. this is a flashback to the year 2003! it’s been like that since the fight scene. |
| Commenter 10 | theres no direct advantage to her testifying but danger to her child if she does.. i would be the same way.. |
| Commenter 11 | Wth I’m confused |
| Commenter 12 | but at the beggining of the episode it said 11 years or something like that |

While the interchanges shown above read fairly coherently from the point of view of today (which reflects the data collection in 2018), we need to recall that this interaction actually built up incrementally in different viewing sessions by different people. We therefore do not know whether a person who asked a question, such as Commenter 1, actually returned to the video stream later to find out whether they received a response. What we do know is that a viewer in 2018 has the present interchange available for additional meaning making and witnesses light conflict as well as receives explanations.

4.2.3. Judgments on co-viewers’ language

Crude language use appears to be negatively judged only in rare

cases, such as in (34), where Commenter 1 reprimands the behavior of a character who puts blame on her former boyfriend for their break-up. Commenter 2 interprets the character more neutrally (“just trying to explain”) and then proceeds to tell Commenter 1 off for using the “b word”.

- (34) Reprimand on language use (MH1, bold added)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | she’s trying to blame him? bitch wtf?! |
| Commenter 2 | she is just trying to explain her perspective, no need to call her the b word |

The only extensive comment sequence on inappropriate language we could find (not reproduced here) was around the use of the N-word, which was heavily criticized by many viewers and aptly summarized by one viewer stating “The N word is offensive in any form. Very base.” (OMHE10). The sequence is of interest in so far as it is entirely plot-unrelated and discusses language use on a meta-level. The fact that the exchanges were available in the data collection in 2018 shows that although they might have been reported to the administrators, they were not deleted in 2018 and a check in 2022 shows that these comments have not been removed. This demonstrates that the community largely regulates itself rather than relying on administrators to do so.

4.2.4. Negative comments on actor appearance and language

Positive assessments of actor appearance are abundant and usually come in clusters (for example, when a new character enters the scene). Explicitly negative assessments are rarer and also often reprimanded. In (35), we see a three-part interaction where Commenter 1 uses the adjective “ugly”, which triggers a reprimand by Commenter 2. However, Commenter 1 reasserts their verdict in this case. The triple question mark might indicate that the reprimand was considered negatively.

- (35) Negative assessments of actor appearance (OMHE1)
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Commenter 1 | Oooo he’s ugly |
| Commenter 2 | @lc can you not call pple ugly pls |
| Commenter 1 | @Commenter2 lmao sorry that he’s not physically attractive to me??? |

Generally, the topic of plastic surgery is a recurrent theme in connection with judging the looks of characters. While some viewers point to the easy access to plastic surgery in Korea, many viewers react negatively when actors are alleged to have had it. Consider (36) and (37), which both display conflictual exchanges around comments on actor appearance. As can be seen in (36), viewers make statements about appearance, can get agreement and disagreement towards their stance and also receive mild rebuke (“obsessed” in comment 4).

- (36) Comments on plastic surgery (W3)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | His nose is weird |
| Commenter 2 | whoever said his nose is weird, fuck you his nose is fucking beautiful |
| Commenter 3 | Yeah his nose looks like plastic surgery... I have yet to find him attractive...Hopefully soon! |
| Commenter 4 | yall think his lips were plastic and now his NOSE? omg yall are too obsessed. sis he is all natural, get used to it. |

In (37), the exchange is somewhat more conflictual (rather than just pointing out different points of view) in that Commenter 3 intensifies their rejection that the actress Jang Nara might have had plastic surgery with capitals and negative assessments (“useless”, “false accusation”).

- (37) Comments on plastic surgery (OMHE1, bold added)
- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Commenter 1 | I’m pretty sure nara has had a lot of surgery where Dara hasnt |
| [comments omitted] | |
| Commenter 2 | She looks the same as 10 yrs ago, no nose job |
| [comment omitted] | |
| Commenter 2 | No nose job for Dara |
| Commenter 3 | JANG NARA HAS NOT HAD SURGERY!!! who are these useless commenters??? calling someone ugly and make false accusation! |
| [comment omitted] | |

(continued on next page)

(continued)

Commenter 4	Jang Nara is gorgeous
Commenter 5	They're all pretty in their own ways. And btw, Jang Nara had not has surgery, stop making false accusation
[comment omitted]	
Commenter 4	Nara didn't have plastic surgery either
Commenter 6	We don't care if you think they're ugly, just let us watch the goddamn show

4.2.5. Commenters using the space for fan interaction outside of the drama

A recurrent bone of contention is to use the TCs space for interactions that are not drama- or Viki-community oriented. Viewers who shout out to other fan communities are often reprimanded for doing so. We already showed such an extract in Fig. 1 about the fan club Army of the K-pop group BTS, and viewers often condemn the practice as exemplified in the selection of comments in (38)–(40).

- (38) I LOVE BTS AND ARMY ETC BUT THIS IS A KDRAMA, WHICH THEY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH 😞 (W12)
- (39) istfg if I see ONE MORE FUCKING BTS COMMENT IM GONNA BE PISSSED (W13)
- (40) eHEM...can y'all shut up bout BTS?I'M AN ARMY TOO BUT WHY TO WATCH A DRAMA IF YOU KEEP COMENTING ABOUT MUSIC?nonsense... (W13)

TCs in Viki can be rendered impossible to read when fan communities appropriate the space in too large numbers. This happened to the drama *Hwarang*, in which one of the characters was played by one of the BTS band members. The drama accumulated so many BTS fan viewers who commented that the sheer number of TCs make it impossible to read them while watching.

4.2.6. The technical use of the platform (missing subtitles, ads)

Conflictual exchanges occur also around the use of the platform itself. Videos on Viki can be watched free of charge with advertisements. A Viki subscription gives access to advertisement-free viewing but has no influence on whether subtitles are available. New viewers often mistakenly believe that any newly available drama episode will also immediately be available in translated form. However, subtitles are only available once the translations have been added by volunteer teams of fans. As far as we could observe, English subtitles are typically added within one or two days, but at times, viewers have to wait longer. Experienced viewers cheer the fan subtitling teams on and thank them for having given access to the drama's dialogue, as shown in example (14) above. In contrast, other, presumably inexperienced, viewers complain about missing subtitles or ask for faster subtitling. Such comments often receive either benevolent explanations of how the platform works (41)² or impatient reprimands or ridicule as in (42).

- (41) Missing subtitles and explanation (OMHE3)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | THE SUBTITLE IS OFF AND DIFFICULT TO FOLLOW SO COULD YOU FIX IT PLEASE |
| Commenter 2 | Come back later when it's about 75 % then. Or switch the subs on. |
- (42) Missing subtitles and ridicule (YAAS16)
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Commenter 1 | I am a premium member ~ subtitles please |
| Commenter 2 | I am Too! but it won't make the subtitles come sooner!! LOL this up to the hardworking Freeze Team! thanks team!! |
| Commenter 3 | @lc sorry i'm laughing |
| Commenter 4 | @LC sammeeee bwahahaha thanks for ur input "premium member" |

² However, in this case the complaint was not about missing subtitles but subtitles that are misaligned.

The same kind of exchanges about how the platform works can also be observed in connection with complaints about frequent advertisements. In (43), Commenter 2 advises to pay the subscription fee and exacerbates the imperative with “freakin” but downtones the reprimand by opening the addressee not just to the original complainer but to all complainers (“most of you”).

- (43) Complaints about advertisements (YAAS1)
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Commenter 1 | omg these freakins ads... sooooo many per section..... |
| Commenter 2 | Pay the 4 freakin dollars a month. Its probably a coffee for most of you |

5. Discussion and conclusions

In Section 4, we presented evidence on explicit and implicit interactivity and showcased the themes around which we could see negotiations of community norms by means of conflictual exchanges. In what follows, we explore our main interest in light of these results: What are the effects of pseudo-synchronicity on interactive commenting practices?

We will start by discussing the marked case of conflictual exchanges. While typical studies on conflict are usually interested in the development of a conflictual exchange from its starting point to its resolution (e.g. Bousfield 2006), our data does not easily give us access to this type of extended data. In fact, we demonstrated in Section 4.1 that establishing explicit interactivity is challenging in the first place. While it is easier to find clusters of comments that appear to talk about the same issue, the nature of the TCs means that there is hardly ever extensive discussion among commenters and we cannot speak of witnessing conflict cycles from start to resolution. Instead, we often witness abrupt and fragmentary conflictual events. This is because the video to which TCs are tied is the primary ordering principle. The TV drama has precedence and, if viewers wanted to engage in discussions with each other to extend and/or resolve a conflict, they would have to return to the minute and second in time of the video, since the comments are only available *within* the streamed video. The same is of course true for asking content questions (e.g. about a cultural practice, the name of a sound track, etc.) since askers have to return to the video at a later time to see whether they received an answer. Engaging with the video content and orienting towards the video is thus the primary practice of Viki commenters. The reprimands directed at other members of other fandoms (such as K-pop fans) who also use the Viki TCs space is another piece of evidence that the Viki community constructs itself as primarily fans of Korean TV drama.

We wondered whether the conflictual exchanges can be seen as moments of socializing viewers into community norms, similar to what Graham (2008) reported for the members of a Church mailing list, who used a conflict about one member's opinions to rewrite the community guidelines in the FAQs. We posit that the reprimands on conduct that were sometimes phrased with conflictual language and personal attacks can indeed fulfil the function of showing what the community considers unacceptable or inappropriate behavior. Instead of resulting in externally phrased norms of conduct, these performed regulatory exchanges are available upon each new viewing of the video stream.

Importantly, this socializing function can also be fulfilled through non-conflictual means. For example, by way of example setting commenters ‘teach’ newbies how the subtitling works – they thank subtitlers and segmenters (thus bringing to the forefront the very act of the subtitling process on the platform) and refer to the subtitling teams by name (thus highlighting the fact that there are individuals of the fan community involved). The clustering of such acts of thanking and encouraging showcases the fandom's involvement with the community as well as the artefact. In addition, there are also commenters who self-select to respond to complaints about missing subtitles and ads by explaining

how the platform works and thus eradicate misunderstanding of new viewers who are continuously joining. We thus argue that conflictual and non-conflictual interactions combined can function as negotiations of the platform norms, socialize newbies into how the space works and can thus also be linked to community building. In this way, our study contributes to the understanding of how online community norms are built and behavior is sanctioned or (implicitly) condoned through interaction – and this even in a community that *interacts* non-synchronously and incrementally.

Our study has demonstrated that the community shows awareness of the pseudo-synchronicity of the timed-comment affordance. The sharing rounds of time and place of watching has become a practice that at the same time disrupts the illusion of co-watching while bolstering the group's self-understanding of being an international viewership. The response to plot spoilers by either posting before or after a comment containing a spoiler, alerting and covering, shows how the commenters exploit the platform affordance to ensure other viewers' enjoyment of the artefact. At the same time, these acts can also be interpreted as mitigators of potential conflict that can arise because of the presence of a spoiler.

This orientation to the needs of the fan community can also be observed in the subtitles. There we see evidence of this in borrowing Korean terms and comments on Korean language and culture shown in brackets (Locher & Messerli 2020, *in press*; Messerli & Locher, *in press*), thus orienting to the assumed common interest in Korean culture (rather than using the translation strategy of domestication). In the case of commenters, we also see the use of borrowings, but also question-answer sequences, displaying knowledge of K-drama genre (e.g. the White Truck of Death trope), Korean actors, etc. Furthermore, the emotive sharing of individual viewing experience is crucial for the enjoyment of the artefact and contributes to a joint or at least shared emotional response to the artefact.

This paper focused on the role of interactivity in Viki TCs, which are characterised by their pseudo-synchronicity. Our discussion of the platform's affordances and practices demonstrated how interaction works in a context that is asynchronous while maintaining the illusion of synchronicity. Conflict was shown to be rare in frequency but important in its function to negotiate and demonstrate community norms, and it has to be understood in combination with more consensually oriented comments. From a methodological point of view, it thus paid to first establish what commenters do in general in order to then assess better the function of the consensual and conflictual interaction that occurs in the larger K-TACC. The Viki platform is only one space where Korean TV drama fans can interact with each other, further research can benefit from comparing different Hallyu fandom spaces and how they construct their purpose and cohesion.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgments

We thank Andrea Wuest, who co-coded the timed comments in the Locher & Messerli (2020) study together with the first author, and Daria Dayter for feedback on a draft of this paper.

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