The Self-Identity Construction of Virtual Idol Hatsune Miku Young Adult Fans

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi identitas diri penggemar dewasa muda idola virtual Jepang Hatsune Miku melalui pendekatan kualitatif siber-fenomenologi dan teori Konstruksi Realitas Sosial Berger & Luckmann. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam semi terstruktur. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan dengan Hatsune Miku berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai hiburan, tetapi juga sebagai sumber dukungan emosional, refleksi diri, dan sarana berafiliasi dalam komunitas digital. Proses eksternalisasi, objektivasi, dan internalisasi mengungkapkan bahwa interaksi virtual membentuk makna identitas diri yang lebih terhubung dengan aspirasi pribadi dan penerimaan sosial. Seluruh informan mengalami stigma terkait stereotip budaya, seperti sebutan wibu atau "nasionalis rendah", yang mendorong peningkatan toleransi terhadap perbedaan budaya dan penerimaan inovasi teknologi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa interaksi dengan idola virtual dapat menjadi arena penting dalam pembentukan identitas dan adaptasi sosial di era digital.

Kata Kunci: *Budaya digital, budaya pop, identitas diri, idola virtual, komunikasi antarbudaya*

Abstract

This study examines the self-identity construction of young adult fans of the Japanese virtual idol Hatsune Miku using a qualitative cyber-phenomenology approach and Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality theory. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Findings reveal that engagement with Hatsune Miku serves not only as entertainment but also as a source of emotional support, self-reflection, and affiliation within digital communities. Through processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, virtual interactions were found to shape a self-identity more closely connected to personal aspirations and social acceptance. All informants reported experiencing stigma linked to cultural stereotypes, such as being labeled wibu or "low nationalist," which in turn fostered greater tolerance for cultural differences and acceptance of technological innovation. This study highlights the role of virtual idol engagement as a meaningful arena for identity formation and social adaptation in the digital era

Keywords: *Digital culture, intercultural communication, pop culture, self-identity, virtual idol*

INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital media, identity is no longer solely constructed through direct social interaction or rooted in physical space. Instead, it is increasingly shaped within virtual environments, mediated by technology, and negotiated through participatory cultural practices. It also transformed the way people interact and learn, evolving new social practices

and creating a cyclical influence that feeds back into evolving technology (Tang & Chan, 2020). McLuhan in 1964 stated that the existence of social and digital media has a significant influence on changes in society and social culture, like a united and close village (Marshall McLuhan & Bruce R. Powers, 1989). The global village concept also creates many challenges in the further discussions of identity tribes (Bastos, 2021), which has a strong identity group. It leads to the phenomenon called a virtual idol.

Within this shifting terrain, the phenomenon of virtual idols, particularly *Hatsune Miku*, offers a compelling lens through which to explore how individuals construct self-identity in digital culture. Hatsune Miku, as a virtual idol herself, is known as the first virtual idol, who sold her voice as a fictional singer character in a character vocal series. First, released by the Crypton Future Media company from Japan, in the Vocaloid Software Voicebank project in 2007. From ('About The Virtual Influencer', 2025) Hatsune Miku is described as an artificial figure, a technological development. Virtual idol Hatsune Miku has posthuman value in her appearance and voice, which can be controlled by anyone with the appropriate software, reflecting the ideal body and controllable voice of Japanese young women.(Rahmi, Rahmat, & Saleha, 2018). This merging of entertainment and information displays how digital technology and media share a realm where it is difficult to distinguish between the two. (Hanna, 2023). A virtual idol aimed at simulating any feature of intelligence by a machine (Sven, Bellman, & Nurdiyanto, 2023) Thus, known as artificial intelligence or AI.

The democratization of technology using AI has led to the usage of community-based digital platforms. Social media, such as YouTube, is known as a tool of independent expression for individuals. This impacts individuals who are more authentic in their self-expression on digital platforms, which will have a greater life satisfaction (Bailey, Matz, Youyou, & Iyengar, 2020). Hence, proven that exposure to the information on digital platforms certainly influences the construction of self-identity, as the self is constructed through the progressive encapsulation of data and their transformation into meaningful information (Durante, 2017). This is a massive phenomenon that opens up space for people to feel closer to the virtual world, particularly idolizing digital entities and constructing them as identity in real life. The rapid development of the virtual world has become *borderless with the real world since it* reshapes and absorbs societal norms in every aspect of human life (Tedjabuwana, Septianita, & Susanto, 2024). The prevalence of change has led to a shift away from traditional continuity models.

Understanding identity formation in young adult individuals among digital fandom is increasingly urgent, particularly as a part of digital-native generations form relationships, construct values, and find community through interactions with virtual entities. In the case of Hatsune Miku, her "existence" makes her a uniquely participatory and symbolic figure for self-reflection for a generation that grows up with technology. As artificial intelligence, algorithmic personalities, and digital avatars become more integrated into everyday life, the lines between real and virtual, human and non-human, self and other continue to blur.

Existing studies have explored online fandom, virtual idols, and digital identity in isolation, there is limited scholarly attention on how self-identity is constructed through interactions with virtual idols. Most research on fandom emphasizes collective behavior, media practices (Onishi et al., 2024), (Zhao et al., 2023), (J. Liu, 2023),or fan production and purchase intentions (Huang et al., 2022) (Li et al., 2022). These studies often approach fandom from macro perspectives, highlighting sociocultural dynamics, industry impacts, or participatory trends, rather than examining the deeply personal, subjective processes by which individuals construct meaning and identity through digital fan experiences. There is a lack of integration between classic identity frameworks and contemporary digital phenomena. This study bridges that gap by employing the Social Construction of Reality in the context of digital media that remains underexplored in current literature. The focus of this paper is to discover and interpret individual virtual experiences of young adult Hatsune Miku fans as individuals in constructing their self-identity.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this research is qualitative with a cyber-phenomenology approach. Cyber-phenomenology is the study of human experience, or people's lived experiences in communities, including what they experience and how they experience it in cybercommunities. The life cycle of civilization is determined by whether the communication media technology utilized by humans is turned on or off. The two lives of phenomenology (community) and cyber-phenomenology (cybercommunity) are distinct, but share similar characteristics.(Bungin, 2023). This method aims to examine how digital communication media technology influences people's perceptions, awareness, and embodiment.(Bungin, 2023) This meaning is directly tied to the knowledge (frame of reference) and experience (field of experience) that each individual has.

The qualitative approach emphasizes meaning and understanding from within (understanding in a deep way), reasoning, definition of a particular situation (in a specific context), and more research into things related to everyday life. The process is prioritized over the final result. Therefore, the sequence of activities can change depending on the conditions and the number of symptoms discovered. (Mulyadi, 2013). This method aims to examine how digital communication media technology influences people's perceptions, awareness, and embodiment.(Bungin, 2023) This meaning is directly tied to the knowledge (frame of reference) and experience (field of experience) that each individual has. This study was obtained from in-depth semi-structured interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to cover the main content areas involving identity declarations while giving the interviewer the option to focus on their unique narrative. (Heaton, 2022) (Itzik & Walsh, 2023).

Five (5) people residing in Indonesia's urban areas who are a part of the community in their early adulthood phase or young adults, who are 22 to 34 years old (Medley, 1980) were chosen as informants. As Creswell notes, qualitative studies aim for rich descriptions, and participants can yield significant insights when data collection is detailed and rigorous. A small number of participants was deemed appropriate to allow for in-depth, rich descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).Informants utilize pseudonyms since their identities are not permitted to be disclosed. The resulting data are commonly referred to as "pseudonymized" or "pseudonymous" data.(Heaton, 2022) will be presented as "I" for the acronym of informant as follows:

Table 1. Informants Profile

	Code	Age	City	Gender
Informant 1	I-1	28	Jakarta	Female
Informant 2	I-2	25	Bandung	Male
Informant 3	I-3	31	Yogyakarta	Female
Informant 4	I-4	30	Bekasi	Male
Informant 5	I-5	25	Surabaya	Female

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The Informants were selected through purposive sampling, with particular attention to parameters such as fan diversity, gender balance, and recruitment techniques. Selection focused on individuals who live in Indonesia's urban areas with long-term engagement in the Hatsune Miku fan community and the capacity to reflect on their identity formation processes. Recruitment combined targeted outreach within online and offline fan spaces to ensure variation in demographic backgrounds and fandom experiences, particularly their capacity for

reflecting on their identity formation processes. Pre-research data observations were conducted to identify community members who had been fans for at least five years. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was recorded, transcribed, and manually coded using a targeted coding approach, allowing for the construction and refinement of concepts through detailed analysis of the data. (Biber N. & P., 2011; Gorea, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Constructing Self-Identity Experiences as an Externalization Process

The factors that influence perception in the process of constructing individual identity are internal factors and external factors (Rohman, 2019) (Miftah Thoha, 2019). It proved that identity is created and reconstructed through identification with various things and attributes in life, to the point where identification with favored star pictures may be seen as aiding in the construction of identity (Horowitz, 2012) The more someone's involvement with their idol increases, the more they imagine their intimacy with that idol increases. (Darfiyanti & Ani Putra, 2012).

Entertainment Experiences as an Externalization Process

Idol, a person or figure who is deliberately created to have many advantages. Following the term, idol is something that is coveted, liked, or used as an example, which comes from the word 'ideal'. It is a depiction or symbol of an object of worship.(Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Hatsune Miku is constructed in a figure that is created by various interested parties behind its creation. Idols often commercialize their unique goods and services as merchandise, as well as collaborations with third parties by attaching predetermined rate cards to promote third-party goods and services as endorsements. Hatsune Miku is known as a 16-year-old female virtual idol with a height of 158 centimetres and a weight of 42 kilograms. She has turquoise hair and dresses like a typical teenage girl in a Japanese high school uniform. On her arm there is a red tattoo that reads "01" which means a character that was first developed and marketed by Crypton Future Media in a voice character series project.(Vocaloid Wiki, 2025).

Figure 1. Hatsune Miku's Official Art and First-Generation Software
Source: Vocaloid Wiki, 2025

Informants are interested in Miku because her songs are easy to listen to while remaining authentic. I-1 revealed her passion for Miku, as evidenced by the distinctiveness of Miku fan art and appreciation of Miku's style, even though Miku is a virtual idol, which is a figure created by humans. I-1 and I-4 acknowledged the significant influence of Miku's original character attributes on their personal engagement. I-1 reported collecting Miku's action figures and merchandise, framing these practices both as expressions of worship within the community and as a form of personal companionship. This suggests that the act of collecting extends beyond material acquisition, functioning as both a communal expression of fandom and an intimate, individualized connection to the character.

It is studied that Vocaloid's fan base is diverse, and a big portion of their loyalty originates from their confirmed expectations of gender and ethnic identity in the Vocaloid characters (Stark, 2018). Fans' appreciation for Hatsune Miku extended beyond her music, encompassing a broader admiration for Japanese culture, anime, and games. They explained that the Miku application integrates these interests into a single platform, fulfilling multiple aspects of their hobbies simultaneously. I-4 characterized the search for rare Miku merchandise as an enjoyable and purposeful challenge, framing it as a leisure activity that simultaneously serves to alleviate occupational stress. He further acknowledged that his attraction to Miku is primarily influenced by her character design and musical repertoire, indicating that aesthetic appreciation and musical enjoyment jointly shape his engagement with the character.

One of the male informants considers Miku as one of their *waifu*, a term derived from the English word "wife," widely used in anime fandom culture to refer to a fictional female character toward whom one feels affection or emotional attachment. This attachment is grounded in admiration rather than mere fantasy. Another male informant elaborated that their interest in Miku stems from an enjoyment of her songs and distinctive character design.

It is believed that body commodification and idol identity can influence consumers' interest in goods and services in the same way as consumers' high interest in purchasing these goods.(Bungin, 2021). However, male informants emphasized that their fandom is not primarily driven by sexual attraction, as is sometimes assumed by society when labeling them as "male fans of Miku" which related to the "male gaze" industry. Instead, they stressed that their engagement with the character is rooted in genuine enjoyment and entertainment value. In addition, I-4 described the pursuit of rare Miku merchandise as an enjoyable challenge that serves as a means of alleviating work-related stress. He admitted he gets attracted to Miku because of her design character and songs, confirmed that Vocaloid's fan base is diverse, and a big portion of their loyalty originates from their confirmed expectations of gender and ethnic identity in the Vocaloid characters (Stark, 2018).

> *"Personally, I enjoy Miku's songs and character design. It is more than sexual appeal that sometimes people perceive us as, why we become "Male fans of Miku". It is genuinely just entertaining." (Informant 4, 30, Male, Bekasi; Interview January 19, 2025)*

Audiences on digital platforms are encouraged to participate due to technological advancements. This is also related to the audience's perception of the material that occurs throughout a structured cognition process; in certain situations, it appears quite expressive (Nasrullah, 2018) (Rosyidah & Nurwati, 2019). This perception can shift over time since identity is a fluid, not static, construction. Thus, the essence of communication is perception, while the essence of perception is interpretation. During the communication process, interpretation encompasses sensation, attention, and interpretation (Mulyana, 2023). From (Erich Fromm, 1990) self-identity can be distinguished but cannot be separated from a person's social identity in the context of their community.

It has become a topic of contention; there are many generative AI technologies available today that may make high-quality artistic media, possibly disrupting creative processes and redesigning societal sectors. (Epstein et al., 2023). I-2 recognized that there are numerous AI technology applications that can synthesize sounds, beyond her entertainment

value, Miku has served as a medium through which he has gained meaningful life lessons, indicating a perceived pedagogical dimension to his engagement with the character.

"Living" Emotional Supporter Experiences as an Externalization Process

Young adults' self-identity still positively correlates with peer social support. Low peer social support correlates with poorer self-identity levels. When it doesn't fulfill the need for support, they tend to seek another place or figure to accept and support them.(Stark, 2018) Meanwhile, (Fuchs, 2021) stated that "social" is defined as the social reality in which an individual performs an action that has a genuine impact on society. This perspective highlights that the media and its instruments are the result or product of social activities carried out by society.

I-1 first became acquainted with Hatsune Miku during her high school years, approximately a decade ago, through exposure to Miku's music. Despite this early interest, she reported a reluctance to disclose her fandom to peers, a decision shaped by prior negative experiences, Miku labeled as a "fake idol." Comparisons were drawn to popular human performers of the time, such as AKB48, JKT48, Girls' Generation, and Super Junior, who were widely celebrated in mainstream youth culture. These reactions elicited feelings of frustration and prompted to adopt a cautious approach in discussing fandom, particularly with individuals she perceived as unlikely to share the equal enthusiasm.

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Three-dimensional (3D) virtual environments keep users' interest by offering rich interactivity in a setting akin to the real world (Ramírez, Martín-Domínguez, Orgaz, & Cañedo, 2015). User engagement time is known to increase in contexts with high interaction. It is proven that experience and spatial skills affect interaction. I-2 and I-5 refer to the virtual world as a 2-Dimensional world, while real life is a 3-Dimensional world. Informant I-2 articulated a preference for the two-dimensional (2D) world over the three-dimensional (3D) world, explaining that Hatsune Miku is fundamentally a 2D character. However, he acknowledged that advancements in digital technology, particularly in dimensional

manipulation, have enabled Miku to be projected as a hologram, thereby allowing her to inhabit a 3D environment shared with human beings. This technological fluidity blurs the distinction between virtual and physical realms.

In contrast, Informant I-5 expressed indifference toward the boundaries separating physical and virtual dimensions. For her, the meaningful aspect of the relationship lies in the capacity to offer and receive companionship, rather than in the ontological status of the entity. She emphasized that the value of a companion is determined by emotional and relational fulfillment rather than by whether the companion exists in a 2D or 3D form.

> *" I don't mind how society puts an entity in boxes, living or not living, 2-dimensional or 3-dimensional. There are no boundaries for someone who can support you, as long as she can support me as a nice companion, that's enough, and Miku is someone."*
> *(Informant 5, 25, Female, Surabaya; Interview January 20, 2025)*

A study also stated that higher peer social support correlates with a stronger sense of self.(Stark, 2018) . I-2 admitted that he doesn't care that he is surrounded by a society that can easily stereotype him. He has friends from many communities, which also has diverse perspectives regarding his hobbies. He feels accepted by the communities emotionally, since identity encompasses both a person's sense of self and their social status. Depending on the culture, individuals may experience feelings of pride or shame based on whether they are viewed positively or negatively (Horowitz, 2012). This proved that during the young adulthood period, young adults experience fast changes as they gain autonomy and develop a sense of self. Social support and social psychological resources are more crucial than ever in assisting young people's transition to maturity, which now extends into their 30s.(Scales et al., 2016).

I-3 emphasizes the emotional support derived from engagement with Hatsune Miku has played a formative role in shaping her current sense of self. It is proven that self-identities are mental representations of oneself that comprise autobiographical memories, self-attributions, beliefs, motivations, recurring thoughts, emotions, and self-perception (Verplanken & Sui, 2019). Thus, she is fascinated by Hatsune Miku because her songs can communicate a lot of messages. The emotional support derived from a person's engagement with Hatsune Miku has been instrumental in shaping the present sense of identity. She recounted that she has been watching Miku's music videos (MVs) on YouTube for several years, drawn to their narrative qualities, which likened to watching films or reading storybooks. The storytelling, resonated deeply with I-3 personal experiences, creating a sense

of continuity between younger self and current life as a working professional. This further connected to Miku's musical repertoire encompasses a wide variety of genres and is distinguished by lyrically intricate compositions. The audience spans multiple age groups, with the perceived depth and relevance of the lyrical messages increasing as listeners mature.

When behaviors are associated with feelings of identification, it leads to better cognitive self-integration, higher self-esteem, and a desire to be an ideal self. Linking habits to identity may sustain newly developed behaviors, resulting in improved change treatments.(Verplanken & Sui, 2019). A similar observation was made by Informant I-4, who remarked that Miku's songs tend to acquire greater philosophical significance upon repeated listening. Both accounts suggest that habitual engagement with Miku's music contributes to the ongoing construction of personal identity, particularly when the content aligns with self-related goals, enduring values, or formative life experiences.

Motive in Being Hatsune Miku's Fan as an Objectification Process

The motive in being a Hatsune Miku fan as an objectification process, wherein the character serves as a tangible representation of an aspirational ideal self. Humans, as individuals, construct self-identity based on the concept of an ideal self that is consciously and freely chosen. However, as social beings, they remain embedded within and constrained by societal norms and the roles assigned to them within their environment. Within this tension between personal aspiration and social expectation, Hatsune Miku functions as both a personal projection of the ideal self and a culturally mediated object through which fans negotiate, express, and affirm their identities.

Hatsune Miku, rather than solely marketing her synthesized voice, the character is designed to simultaneously embody a distinctive physical identity and an imaginative persona. This multidimensional construction integrates visual aesthetics, personality traits, and narrative potential, aligning with established strategies in the Japanese pop culture industry that prioritize the creation of highly appealing idol figures. Such a design enables users to envision and produce music that resonates with, and is inspired by, the specific attributes of the virtual idol, thereby fostering deeper creative engagement to the users.

To be Connected with Self as an Objectification Process

Communicating with idols in many ways increases their emotional safety and sense of belonging to some extent, so encouraging personal investment (You, Peck, Stuart, Gomes de Siqueira, & Lok, 2024).(Yujia Gao, 2022). I-1, I-3, and I-4 claimed that their motivation for being a Miku fan and following Miku's YouTube is not to interact with other people, even if

they have the same interests. There is a more personal connection with the idols. Instead, one of the informants framed her fandom as a deeply personal connection with the idol, prioritizing individual emotional fulfillment over community participation, even though the broader fan community offers opportunities for collaboration, such as producing original songs, working with other members, or even engaging with the official Vocaloid characters for potential income. Three informants experience a deeper sense of personal connection with themselves and with their favorite virtual idol, Hatsune Miku, rather than with other fans. This sense of exclusivity underlies their reluctance to disclose their real identities on digital platforms or to actively interact with other members of the Hatsune Miku fan community.

Hatsune Miku's developer, Vocaloid software creates an opportunity for users to change and adapt the voice bank sample to fit their own needs and goals as well as to match their own vision of Miku."(Sabo, 2019). This software includes a bank of sounds that may be customized based on the user's preferences and objectives. Users can match them based on their musical choices, feelings, and interests. Thus, this also contributed to Hatsune Miku's uncertain image, since she is shaped by networks of fans acting as cultural producers, with profit channeled back to the company behind the image, Crypton Future Media (Jørgensen, Vitting-Seerup, & Wallevik, 2017). The democratization creates a purpose is to build their own dialogue within as well as leads them to a bigger community connection.

Additionally, Informant I-3 expressed apprehension about potential harassment, recalling a prior negative experience with an individual encountered online while searching for Miku-related content. According to the study, Virtual communication, such as Second Life, blurs boundaries between real and virtual worlds, leading to noise in communication and alienation.

> *"Well, I don't keep in touch with other members whom I don't know in real life. I know how healthy this community is, but there are still a lot of crazy people out there. You can do criminals easier here, I once got harassed by receiving an unknown message with sexual content. I still have boundaries, both in reality or virtually". (Informant 3, 25, Female, Bandung; Interview May 3, 2024)*

To be Affiliated as an Objectification Process

To gather the fans, Hatsune Miku is always present on the concert stage using hologram projection, having her own event called Miku Expo tours to several countries, and starring in product advertisements (Vocaloid Wiki, 2025). Recently, Miku was even involved in Tokyo Olympic 2020 with Pocari Sweat. (Pocari Sweat., n.d; MikuFan., 2025) even appointed Covid-19 countermeasure spokesperson by the Japanese Government (Japan Today., 2021). She

engages with fans through personal and business collaborations with multiple stakeholders, including major music corporations such as Yamaha, as well as various other industry partners, to facilitate the production and dissemination of related content and merchandise, solely for making fans with different backgrounds gathered.

I-2 and I-5 admitted that they are quite active in interacting with other members they met virtually. They frequently listened to songs by Miku, and typically refrains from leaving comments on related platforms. She explained that her primary motivation for attending Miku-related events stemmed from a desire to build friendships with individuals who share similar interests. A strong sense of commonality with other fans, which encouraged individuals to participate in these gatherings despite limited online engagement. He was comfortable with the idea of connecting with fellow Miku enthusiasts in offline settings. They emphasized the difficulty of finding companions who were willing to accompany her to cultural events such as Japan-themed festivals or Miku-specific gatherings, highlighting the social challenges faced by fans seeking community within niche interest groups.

It is stated that Digital virtual leisure blurs boundaries between digital and physical worlds. (Susilo et al., 2024). Ultimately, an individual's identity is shaped by the ways in which they construct their thoughts in relation to their surrounding environment. In virtual contexts, identity construction remains intertwined with the cultural frameworks of both the physical and digital worlds, as virtual cultures often emerge in dynamic interaction with existing human cultures.

Communication with both real and virtual entities contributes to this process, influencing self-concept through ongoing social interactions. These processes, encompassing perception, differentiation, and interpretation, are embedded within an individual's lived experiences. Therefore, identity can be understood as the manner in which individuals and groups define and negotiate their perceived similarities to, and differences from others.

Meaning of being Hatsune Miku's Fans as a Part of Self-Identity as an Internalization Process

In social construction of reality, the internalization process refers to the stage in which individuals absorb and integrate socially objectivated meanings into their subjective consciousness. For Hatsune Miku's fans, this process entails transforming virtual engagements from mere entertainment into a significant part of their lived identity. Through repeated interactions, such as consuming Miku-related media, participating in fan communities, and

engaging with fan-generated content, individuals begin to perceive these practices as extensions of their authentic selves.

The meanings attached to Miku's persona, including ideals of creativity, emotional resonance, and cultural hybridity, become embedded in informants' self-concept. Consequently, the identity of "being a Miku fan" is not experienced as a superficial hobby but as a personal and social marker, influencing informants' worldview, social relationships, and openness toward diverse cultural and technological expressions. This internalization reflects the reciprocal relationship between digital culture and personal identity formation in the virtual age.

Stigmatized as 'Wibu' in terms of Negative Stereotypes

All informants agreed that Miku creates influence on how people perceive them. I-1 stated that there are many negative stereotypes about people who celebrate Japanese culture in Indonesia, particularly the term of 'wibu'. Wibu is stigmatized through bad preconceptions (Wardhana, 2023). I-3 noted that many of her acquaintances, who do not share her interest in Japanese popular culture, often label her and her like-minded peers as *wibu*, a term that, in the Indonesian context, carries pejorative connotations.

Research found that YouTube reinforces stereotypes about Wibu in Indonesia through confusing depictions.(Junianto & Tambunan, 2024). Wibu comes from a loanword taken from English, Weeaboo. (Saputra et al, 2023), while in Indonesia it is already officialized in KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), which has the meaning of people who are obsessed with Japanese culture and lifestyle. It is proved that informants stated that most individuals frequently adopt the term without a clear understanding of its meaning, relying instead on the portrayal of *wibu* in social media, which tends to associate the label with ridicule and social deviance. I-3 expressed frustration over this trend, stating that such portrayals are not only inaccurate but also emotionally distressing. She emphasized that many individuals who are categorized as *wibu* are, in fact, ordinary people with hobbies, who maintain personal hygiene and lead socially functional lives. She urged the public not to generalize or stigmatize fans of Japanese culture based on superficial or sensationalized representations. In fact, informants stated that society mostly adopting the Wibu stereotype from trending social media contents.

Beyond the physical stereotypes, to acknowledged the existence of behavioral prejudices, particularly toward fans who exhibit intense devotion to idols. Nevertheless, she asserted that, based on her interactions within both online and offline Hatsune Miku

communities, most fans are introverted yet respectful individuals who uphold ethical standards and mutual consideration.

The criticism also raised as Wibu stereotyped to sexualize women frequently directed at Miku's character design wearing short skirt and sleeveless top, which some detractors deem culturally inappropriate within the Indonesian context. Vocaloid's young, attractive, and completely incorruptible pop princesses, one of them is Miku has widespread appeal, particularly among males (from all over the world) living in countries that are renegotiating male-female interactions. Miku was created for business purposes, commodification that can reap profits and satisfaction for the company. I-4 echoed this sentiment, noting that such critiques often lead to the moral stigmatization of Miku's fans, who are unfairly perceived as culturally deviant. All informants admitted that what idols sell are the way they look as a part of commodification(Choi, 2020), although it is unfair to accuse Miku is sexualized(Sabo, 2019) her fans are labeled as sexually deviant solely on the basis of Miku's attire, despite the fact that similar or even more revealing costumes are commonly worn by contemporary idols, including those in the Indonesian entertainment industry.

Moreover, the media culture that is involved also represents how everyday life should be based on the dominance of entertainment projects in the media. This shapes political opinion and social behavior, even providing a material supply of what an "ideal" identity should be as an individual. (Kellner, 1996). I-3 and I-5 strongly advocated for the importance of self-authenticity over conformity to societal expectations, particularly when such expectations are rooted in fear of difference or the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. They suggested that embracing an anti-mainstream identity can serve as a form of resistance to the dominant influence of the Korean Wave in contemporary popular culture. It is confirmed that excessive obsession with any interest could be indicative of psychological imbalance, but cautioned against the tendency to stigmatize fans of Japanese culture as *wibu nolep* (a derogatory term implying a person has "no life").

Stigmatized as Low-Nationalists

Psychological and social implications of prevailing stereotypes directed toward individuals who engage with Japanese popular culture. One informant disclosed that such negative perceptions had led to a decline in self-confidence and a sense of discomfort in expressing interests publicly, despite the fact that pursuing hobbies is a normative and healthy aspect of everyday life. Accused of lacking nationalistic sentiment due to admiration for Hatsune Miku, a virtual idol, even though one of the informants is a part of her senior high

school's ceremonial flag-raising troop, which served a role traditionally associated with patriotic commitment. The informant also emphasized the term of "nationalists" is bias. A good Indonesian citizen's proven by dedication to civic responsibilities, such as timely tax payment and reporting, and appreciation for Indonesian cultural heritage could be classified as good citizen who is nationalist. Over time, I-3 reported a shift in her perspective, choosing to prioritize personal happiness and self-fulfillment over external judgments. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that adulthood is a critical period for the development of public and professional identities (Fitzgerald, 2020), while adolescence remains a foundational phase in identity formation (Branje et al, 2021).

Similarly addressed issues of stigmatization particularly in relation to one of the informants identity as a Chinese Indonesian (*Chindo*). It is influenced that societal perceptions often associate Chinese Indonesians with diminished nationalism, a stereotype that is further reinforced when individuals express interest in Japanese cultural products such as anime, games, or virtual idols. It reflects a broader tension between cultural consumption and national identity, wherein engagement with transnational media forms is frequently misinterpreted as a rejection of local values. Two informants challenge this narrative, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of identity that accommodates diverse cultural interests without compromising civic loyalty or ethical integrity.

Embracing Cultural Differences & Technology Innovation

Personal interests in the engagement with Japanese popular culture often diverge from mainstream Indonesian norms. This cultural difference becomes occasionally a source of social tension, has contributed to the development of a more defined sense of self. Individuals who occupy minority positions, whether based on cultural affiliation or personal opinion, tend to cultivate greater self-concept clarity and exhibit more tolerant attitudes toward difference. Three informants also suggested that marginality can foster introspection and resilience, enabling individuals to navigate social judgment with a stronger internal compass.

Informants I-1 and I-3 similarly reported experiencing heightened self-concept clarity, particularly when their views and interests authentically reflected their core values and were reinforced by strong group identification. This aligns with the previous literature mentioned which posits that identity development is shaped not only by social belonging but also by the capacity to maintain personal integrity in the face of external pressures.

Meanwhile, Informants I-2 and I-5 described their acceptance of cultural difference as a defining aspect of their identity. Although they acknowledged that such differences posed

challenges during adolescence, they now regard their uniqueness as a source of strength. Artificial intelligence has become increasingly integrated into everyday life, contributing to a broader societal acceptance of relationships with two-dimensional or virtual entities. It is suggested that this technological shift has fostered a more open-minded cultural climate, one that may eventually normalize AI-mediated affinities and virtual companionships as legitimate forms of emotional and social engagement.

Social Construction of Reality Theory in Hatsune Miku's Young Adults Fan Self-Identity

Berger's theory of reality construction consists of three stages: externalization, objectification, and internalization.(Dharma, 2018) (Marinkovic, 2019). The interplay between the stages is crucial for understanding both individual behaviors and societal dynamics. These processes are deeply interconnected, influencing how individuals perceive and interact with their environment and how societal norms are established and internalized (Achenbach et al, 2016), as shown below:
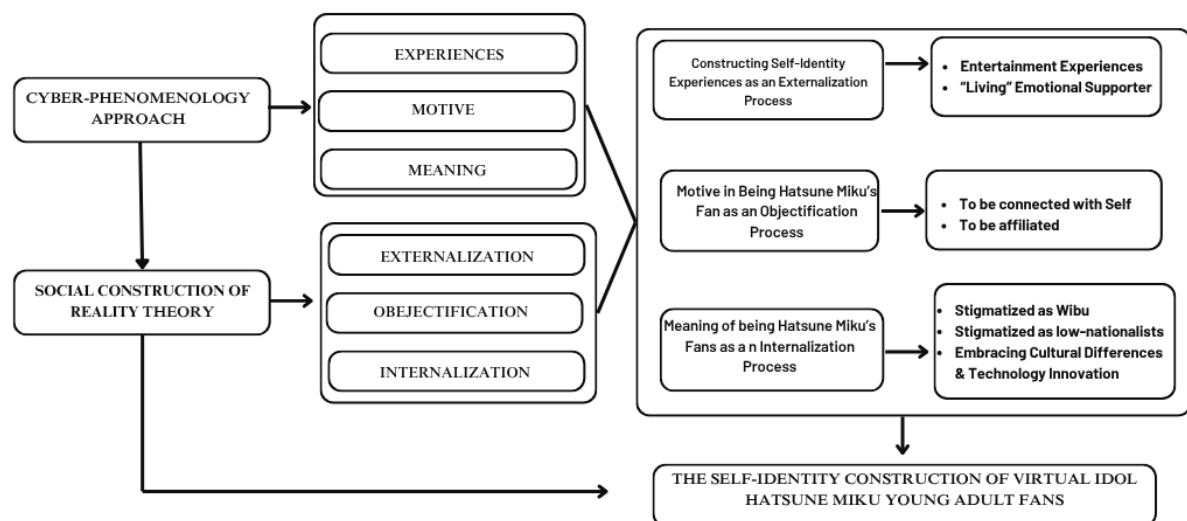

Figure 2. Research Model Result

Berger and Luckmann stated that reality is not inherent but is created and maintained through social interactions and shared understandings, which individuals then internalize (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The gap between existence and non-existence is filled by the freedom of each person to construct an ideal identity in their thoughts through the figure of a

virtual idol (Fiedler et al., 2023) and how they perceive themselves. It is shown that humans are organisms that have certain tendencies in society and are interpretive.

As what Hatsune Miku means in English, *"the sound of the future"* (Crypton Future Media, n.d.). She and her company try to sell hope for the future of technology by creating a digital entity. To reinforce her character identity as "ideal", multiple digital platforms have been developed, alongside the cultivation of an active fan community within these spaces, particularly fans in young adult stage. Through such expansive transmedia engagement, Vocaloid transcends its original function as a mere software application, emerging as a cultural phenomenon embedded within participatory fan networks. It turns to become "she" and "he" which allows for fluid and reversible configurations between voices, bodies, and technologies, transforming the protagonist, including virtual pop star Hatsune Miku, into a 'humanless opera'.(Hui, 2022). The informants' experiences underscore the importance of authenticity, community, and technological mediation in shaping contemporary identity within culturally diverse and digitally connected societies.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored how young adult fans of the virtual idol Hatsune Miku construct the meaning of their self-identity through real, meaningful interactions within digital platforms. Using a cyber-phenomenological approach and Social Construction of Reality theory, the findings reveal that these fans engage in deep emotional relationships with Hatsune Miku, which extend into their everyday self-perceptions and lived realities, as well as identity.

Through processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, participants demonstrate how their digital engagements, for solely entertainment experiences or even emotional support experiences, are also engaged to be more connected with self and participate to be affiliated in community. However, society constructs meaning in stigmatizing the informants with the cultural attachment from the virtual idol's origin, such as the term of 'wibu' and 'low nationalist'. These interactions, mediated through screens, are experienced as emotionally authentic and socially validating, challenging traditional boundaries between virtual and real-life experiences. Ultimately, the study affirms that virtual idols like Hatsune Miku serve not merely as entertainment figures but as meaningful symbols through which young adults articulate identity, belonging, and purpose. This highlights the importance of recognizing mediated fandom as a legitimate and influential space for identity formation in contemporary digital culture.

The research opportunity for the future is to have a more vast population with different methods, such as netnography, to comprehend a deeper understanding of the cultural dimension among Indonesian fans of Japanese pop culture based on AI or social media platforms. It is intended that this research will serve as a reference for similar studies in the future, as well as open up further discussion opportunities regarding real and virtual world phenomena at the same time.

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