

The Role-playing Self: Virtual Ethnography Study of K-Pop Fans' Idol-roleplaying and Self-identity in Twitter

Mashita Phitaloka Fandia Purwaningtyas^{1*} and Tabina Azalia Oktara²

¹²Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

*Corresponding author, ✉ mashita.p.f@mail.ugm.ac.id

Abstract

The phenomenon of K-pop idol-roleplaying is on the rise in social media platform, particularly Twitter, among Indonesian youth. Idol-roleplaying refers to the activity where users or role-players create an account under the name and using the identity of their favorite idol, and then using it to interact with other role-players or other fans based on the image and plot that the role-player has determined. This phenomenon evokes question in regards to the identity performed by users or role-players under the veil of their idol's identity, to the extent of how they interact with fellow role-players using that particular roleplay account. Hence, this research is significant in studying the idol-roleplaying phenomenon and the self-identity performance of fans, particularly in the context of Indonesian youth's culture. This research is conducted with virtual ethnography method, involving eight role-players as informants. Initial findings highlight the performativity and identity play perform by role-players.

Article History:

Received 2022-10-01

Accepted 2023-01-30

Keywords:

*social media, roleplay,
K-pop fans culture, digital
culture, youth culture.*

Introduction

The huge phenomenon of K-pop has become a recognized thing to encounter. The K-pop fans that usually refer to themselves as “K-Popers” or “K-Pop stan” has become enormous the last decade due to the continuous emergence of groups and global activities of K-pop idols (Shin & Kim, 2013). These K-pop fans group themselves in fandoms of certain K-pop groups, for example, ARMY is a specific name for the fans of BTS, Blink for Blackpink, NCTzen for NCT and so on, but regardless of what fandom they are in, K-pop fans do share similarities in terms of fan culture that includes not only the consumption aspects, but also the emotional ones; from purchasing K-Pop albums, attending fan signs, trading and collecting photocards of their favorite idol and so much more to mention. However, the community has been proceeding more on social media platforms due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus early in 2020. Hence, some fan cultures grow in popularity through social media platforms, one of them being the K-pop idol-roleplaying.

Roleplay is the act of playing a certain character or individual. K-pop idol-roleplaying refers to the activity of fans in using and personifying the identity of their idols in the social

media realm (Hapsari, 2019). Commonly, K-pop roleplaying is carried out on Twitter. Even though the usage of other social media platforms, such as TikTok, are also popular among Indonesian youngsters in terms of performing fans activities, there are not many roleplaying activities conducted in those platforms as many as in Twitter. Twitter has the 'auto base' system in which enables fellow roleplayers to find each other and interact with one another easily (Nugraha, 2020; Syafitri et al., 2020). Moreover, Twitter is the first social media platform in which K-pop fans are able to conduct idol-roleplaying publicly; before that, idol-roleplaying activities were happening in Line apps privately (Hapsari, 2019).

K-pop idol-roleplaying proceeds with the role-player making an account under the name and using the identity of their favorite idol then using it to interact with other roleplayers or other fans according to the image and plot that is determined by the role-player (Syawbriyanti, 2021). Although the phenomenon of idol-roleplaying has become huge amongst K-Pop fans, it does not necessarily make the idol-roleplaying less debatable. On one side, K-pop idol-roleplaying can be considered problematic since it is a form of identity theft. The world of roleplaying is completely anonymous therefore role-players' background is usually unknown. Underage people can easily access Twitter and dive into the world of roleplay where the people and community could be menacing. Role-players have responded themselves about the negative impact of being a role-player and are involved in the roleplaying community such as roleplay accounts being not appropriate and can be considered as a bad influence (Hapsari, 2019).

On the other side, since the idol-roleplaying activity enables fans to "hide" behind some personas, apparently it could be a tool for self-esteem boosting among teenagers (Sastra, 2020). Therefore, the idol-roleplaying is not necessarily bringing bad influence for the users. However, previous researches in regards to this matter are still conducted in the field of psychology (Hapsari, 2019; Sastra, 2020) or linguistic (Syawbriyanti, 2021). Hence, these previous researches have not highlighted the significance of social media platforms influenced role-players' activity and identity construction, particularly in Twitter.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the communication process in the activity of roleplaying, as well as the identity constructed by the role-players in their respective role-play account on Twitter. Furthermore, this paper examines how the self-presentation of roleplayers takes place in social media realm, how it differs from their offline persona, and why such differences occur. More importantly, the perspective used in this research is communication science, particularly the media psychology approach, emphasizing on the relationship between user and social media platform.

The discussion of identity in social media has incorporated various fields of social sciences, such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and communication science. However, this paper focuses on the definition of identity as a form of communication that is internalized and acted out by individual as a social behaviour; which emphasizing on the notion that identity is not only a personal matter, but also a form of social act (Cover, 2016, 2019; Seibel, 2019). As a result, the definition of a person's "digital identity" also includes how they present and express themselves in a virtual environment where social norms and technology are combined (Cover, 2016; Gündüz, 2017).

Nowadays, many individuals use more than just one social media platform. Moreover, it's a common practice among youth to own more than one account in each social media platform (Purwaningtyas & Alicya, 2020). This practice enables users to perform many versions of their "self", creating the concept of "fragmented self", where users are being used to split the presentation of their self in accordance to their preferences (Prajarito & Purwaningtyas, 2022; Purwaningtyas & Alicya, 2020). Therefore, in different accounts,

users are able to express themselves differently according to their preferences (Prajarto & Purwaningtyas, 2022), including in the role-play account they create specifically on Twitter.

In social media, users are able to establish interaction with another user by creating a certain identity, whether only showing some parts they want to show, hiding, or even changing their gender or social status (Gündüz, 2017; Purwaningtyas & Alicya, 2020). This paper explores digital identity through performative approach, as people perform their identities in accordance with cultural demands for recognizable, unified, and coherent norms of identity as a tendency that responds to the broad cultural demands for intelligible selves necessary for social participation and belonging (Cover, 2016). This concept of digital identity as performativity is developed from Judith Butler's concept of identity performativity, that identity is the process of "becoming" instead of "being" (Butler, 2017, 2020).

Cover (2016) argued that it would be incorrect to think of social networking behavior as being only a disembodied representation, biographical statement, or set of conscious and voluntary choices in this theoretical framework. Hence, performativity is identity produced through the citation of culturally given identity categories or norms in a reiterative process (Butler, 2020; Cover, 2016). Actions such as "liking" a fan page, adding a friend, or selecting a gender category in the context of social networking, are not merely voluntary, self-conscious decisions but rather, when examined more closely, can be seen to construct the identity or self perception of the person performing them (Butler, 2020; Cover, 2016).

Early study on a role-play account by Turkle (2011) showed that people are able to perform identity play and identity fluidity by embodying certain public figures (Cover, 2016; Turkle, 2011). Even though at that time the practice of using celebrity's persona on social media was not explicitly referred as "role-play", this study contributed in giving insight of how platforms are significant in constructing identity. However, Cover (2016) argued that even though Turkle's study showed the example of identity fluidity, the online performance is rather theatrical and maintain consistency and coherence of offline embodied identity, instead of being a genuine challenge to prevail the everyday concepts of unitary and essentialist identity (Cover, 2016, 2019).

Hence, this paper utilizes the framework developed by Cover (2016) in order to: (1) increase the fundamental frameworks for contextualizing social networking within the larger cultural practices of identification and selfhood, and (2) further undermine the problematic distinction between a person's offline "actual identity" and their online "virtual identity" as it is reflected in digital, networked communication (Cover, 2016). Additionally, Butler's ideas of identity performativity is able to be used to examine social networking in order to demonstrate how these behaviors and activities can both perform and stabilize subjectivity while also increasing its complexity and ambivalence (Butler, 2020; Cover, 2016). This is due to the fact that social networking is not a singular activity but rather a collection of interrelated, and occasionally incompatible, interactivities that include changing statuses, receiving responses to one's own updates, friending, liking fan pages, tagging, and being tagged; those that together create a set of identity performances (Cover, 2016, 2019; Davis, 2014; Stokes & Price, 2017). That is, a spectrum of behaviors that need users to "effort" to carry out a coherent, understandable selfhood that spans both offline and online actions.

Therefore, this paper examines the phenomenon of K-pop idol-roleplaying with the frameworks of identity as performativity in the virtual space, as developed by Cover (2016, 2019). In addition to that, this paper elaborates the phenomenon of K-pop idol-roleplaying with the frameworks of computer mediated communication (CMC) theory, focusing on the interpersonal relationship between human (user) and the gadget they use

to perform identity in the communication process within the virtual realm. In the CMC, the 'hyperpersonal perspective' occurred when the CMC became more intimate than face-to-face communication (Purwaningtyas, 2020; J. Walther, 2019; J. B. Walther & Whitty, 2021). Hence, individuals' shared information played a significant role in shaping impressions in this mode of communication, as users perform the selective self-presentation in online platform (J. B. Walther & Whitty, 2021); in this case, in the form of roleplaying as the K-pop idols.

Methodology

Research for this paper is conducted with qualitative approach by virtual ethnography method (Hine, 2015, 2017). The method is chosen because it enables researcher to capture the complex social nature of internet-based interactions and enabling us to explore the new cultural formations that emerge online. Virtual ethnography is utilized in order to observe not only interactivity, but also content, that lies in the cyberspace. Through this method, content and interaction are seen as both culture and cultural artefact. In regards to this research, virtual ethnography is needed to approach the identity construction in the cyberspace, while not missing out the opportunity to observe the role of virtual space in structuring social relations.

Informants in this research were eight youngsters who have been a user of Twitter for idol-roleplaying, selected through snowballing sampling method. Their ages were ranging from 19 to 24, considering that they started using Twitter and other social media platforms since their adolescence or/and for at least three to five years. All informants are college students who currently live in Indonesia's urban cities (Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and Bali), in which makes them having proper internet access. Moreover, all informants are in the middle to upper socio-economic status, hence they have enough technological resources to access information regarding K-pop, as well as to conduct their activities as fans.

Data collection process is conducted with in-depth interview and digital observation. In-depth interviews took place separately for each informant. It is carried out in order to elicit deeper personal stories and to investigate their personal experiences. Furthermore, digital observation is conducted by observing informants' roleplaying account, as well as other social media accounts that they own. This technique is significant in obtaining informants' self-presentation on the virtual world. Applying the logic of virtual ethnography, the process of data collection and data analysis in this research were conducted in non-linear steps. It enables researcher to check and confirm the data gained through both techniques.

Cross-checking and double-cross-checking the results and the analysis were done during the data analysis phase. The highlight of the analysis is shown in the dialectic of data gained from informants. Instead of only disagreeing or supporting one another, the logic of virtual ethnography allows researchers to present the data results as a conversation that completes one another (Hine, 2017; Snee et al., 2017). Hence, this paper fulfills the purpose of not making a judgmental socio-psychological result, but rather phenomenological in which is approaching the phenomenon in a humanistic perspective. This approach is significant in building the understanding towards how informants make sense of their reality in the usage of social media. Lastly, in order to protect the personal data of informants, all informants' name mentioned in this paper are in initials.

Results and Discussion

Roleplaying is a fan activity in which someone pretends to be a character they admire; in other words, they play a role (Hapsari, 2019; Nugraha, 2020). In the world of fandom, celebrity roleplaying can be done not only on a theatrical stage (live performance), but also on the internet, through a social networking website account (Nugraha, 2020; Ramadhanti & Mahestu, 2021). One of the most significant differences between K-Pop idol-roleplaying and other types of roleplaying (such as Western celebrities roleplay) is its distinct community that is divided into two types generally: the OOC (out-of-character) and the non-OOC roleplayers. The OOC or out-of-character roleplaying is the activity of roleplaying where roleplayers basically still use the identity of their chosen idol, but are allowed to act out of character of the idol. This means that they are allowed to reveal bits of their (roleplayer's) personal life. On the other hand, the non-OOC roleplaying requires roleplayers to act accurately and replicate idol activities. The non-OOC roleplaying activity is also referred as the IC (in-character) roleplay. This type of roleplayer usually updates the latest information about the roles (idol) they play, from photos to the latest schedules.

However, in the practice of idol-roleplaying, it is found that roleplayers are not always strictly fit into the binary of roleplaying types, but rather in a spectrum of roleplaying. Many roleplayers are combining the two previous types; sometimes they play based on the chosen role and sometimes they do not play based on the chosen role. They are often referred as "semi in-character" or "less out-of-character". Besides, in the idol-roleplaying realm, there is also a thing known as "virtual lover", in which refers to a romantic relationship that exists between fellow roleplayers; it's often also referred to as a couple (Ramadhanti & Mahestu, 2021). Aside from the division by character that roleplayers play, informants in this research also divide the categories of local roleplaying and international roleplaying. Local roleplaying is identified as a type of roleplaying and a community where roleplayers communicate with their native language and socialize with roleplayers from the same country.

Informants in this research admit that the essence of putting K-Pop roleplaying in social media is for roleplayers to connect with fellow roleplayers. At this stage, the community built on Twitter has given roleplayers access to communicate and socialize in a more comforting way. It is possible because of Twitter's mediality as a social media platform. Mediality refers to the special characteristics of a platform that construct the culture of users (Bruhn, 2016; Fandia, 2021). Communities on Twitter are not exclusive; everyone is allowed to join in and become part of the community, regardless of the age and gender. In Twitter, hiding behind the mask of anonymity has always made proceeding everything easier (Sipahutar et al., 2020). Users are not chased by the fear of people in their offline environment (such as school or workplace) disliking them because of their opinion and preferences. They don't need to feel concealed for the things they like because there is always a safe place in Twitter for them to gush about their favourite idols or fanfiction without being labelled negatively as a "Weeb" or "Korea Boo".

The way informants befriend or being mutuals with fellow roleplayers is usually through an 'auto base'. There are auto bases specially dedicated to roleplayers where that auto base serves as a function for people to send *menfess* (message confession) or a request asking the followers of that auto base whether they want to be mutuals or not (mutuals means a request to follow each other), there is even an auto base for roleplayers to find partners. Auto bases have become a culture in Indonesian Twitter. There are auto bases not only for the K-Pop or K-Pop roleplay communities but there are also auto bases for the anime fans community and even one for a community of a certain college/university

(Dwiwina & Putri, 2021). An auto base is usually a place for these roleplayers to socialize and communicate, these are exclusively for Twitter (Riauan & Salsabila, 2022; Syafitri et al., 2020). At the level where the mediality of Twitter has allowed roleplayers to perform various activities, it becomes significant to explore how roleplayer's selective self-presentation build their identity.

Self-presentation in Idol Roleplaying as Performativity

Self-presentation is an integral part of identity (Cover, 2016; Prajarto & Purwaningtyas, 2022). In virtual platform, selective self-presentation becomes the fundamental aspect of mediated interpersonal communication users conduct with fellow users (Purwaningtyas & Alicya, 2020; J. B. Walther & Whitty, 2021). In the case of K-pop idol roleplayers, though, the issue of identity becomes more complicated as it is intertwined with the fans culture of K-pop. The Korean Wave has such a big impact on the fans' identity, where it has constructed a "beauty standard"; hence making the fans normalizing the desire to be (or at least to look like) the person that they look up to (Elfving-Hwang, 2018; Venters & Rothenberg, 2022). K-pop idols are portrayed as "perfect" characters; having unreal visuals with doll-like make-up that is heavily desired by the fans, as well as having a nice, talented and caring image.

In the self-presentation conducted by K-pop idol roleplayers in this research, there are two forms of performativity found. First, performativity manifests in the choice of celebrity they play. All informants in this research agree that they choose the idol for their roleplay account based on fondness. Moreover, one of the main reasons they love the chosen idol is because of the physical looks. Krystal Jung of girl group f(x) (whom was chosen by Informant A as the character) is famous as the visual representative of her group, for her looks is deemed as the ideal beauty by the Korean entertainment industry and society. Besides, Jihyo of girl group Twice (whom was chosen by Informant G as the character) is also well-known as not only a good main vocalist but also as an impeccable visual. At some point to some extent, this "beautiful" presentation of the self has encouraged roleplayers' self-esteem in building connection and relation with fellow roleplayers.

"I don't need to worry about my looks because when I roleplay, I became the prettiest idol I can be. As someone who's quite reserved, social media is an introvert's heaven." -Informant A

Another main reason for choosing the idol for the roleplay character is the idol's personality or image. In its essence, roleplaying is all about taking the identity of someone, in the case of K-pop idol, roleplayers act as if they were the idols, or at least trying to mimic the idols well. Particularly, for the IC or non-OOC roleplayers, they need to match their self-presentation in the roleplay account with the image or personality of the idols that they adopt. Every idol owns their special images that differentiate them from other idols. For example, Mina of girl group Twice is famous for being a soft-hearted and calm personality, thus when people roleplay as Mina, then they tend to be viewed exactly as Mina's image. Another example, Haechan of boy group NCT is famous for being a playful idol who like to tease others and is often sarcastic, hence when they use Haechan as their roleplay character, they tend to be viewed similarly as he is.

Some informants stated that they become the best version of themselves on social media. As someone reserved and introverted, informants A said that she can adopt a more cheerful and outgoing personality when she adopted the identity of an idol with that personality. She added that this has made her easier to socialize and approach people when she has that artificial personality. She thought that she's very well-liked when they're roleplaying, which makes her feel happy with herself. Besides, Informant N also admitted

that she feels fulfilled when roleplaying and mimicking the chic personality of Yeri of girl group Red Velvet.

On the other hand, as the OOC roleplayers, Informant J and Informant G stated that they adopted a personality that is not similar to the idol's actual personality. However, they found out that being out-of-character from the idol's personality or image is not big of a problem, because they thought that they don't have any problem in making connection or relationship with fellow roleplayers. Furthermore, Informant G pointed out that indeed having the profile picture and name of an idol on her account makes her comfortable, but she rather not copying idol's image and personality when presenting her self or interacting with fellow roleplayers.

At this stage, the way informants choose certain idols for their character on roleplay account is a significant identity performance. Whether they choose to present in-character or out-of-character, there is a certain persona, particularly in terms of physical looks, that they want to embody in their roleplay account. Not only it raises their self-esteem (Sastra, 2020), but also gives them a sense of comforts and confidence in expressing their self; whether it is by copying idol's personality or by showing their own true colors. One significant finding is that whether they are an IC or OOC roleplayers, informants in this research tend to choose idol with image or personality that they consider as different from theirs in daily life. This finding indicates that besides comforts and confidence, roleplayers also seek for a sense of escapism through their roleplay activity. Furthermore, this sense of escapism is what may has brought comforts and confidence in the first place. This discussion leads to the finding about second form of identity performativity.

The second manifestation of identity performativity found in this research is through the social environment roleplayers build in their roleplay account. In social media realm, self-presentation is not only performed through the profile page, but also from online interaction, such as friending, following, tweeting/updating status, liking, direct messaging, commenting, and many more (Davis, 2014; Gardner & Davis, 2013; Stokes & Price, 2017). In K-pop idol roleplay account, Informant J stated that making friends is really easier. Moreover, Informant A stated that hiding behind the face of the idol's character certainly helps make friends easier. Informants in this research stated that their type of roleplaying is more to Tweeting something that could lead any interaction with their followers, whether they are a fellow roleplayer or not, just like what idols did in their official social media account and message subscription platform such as Lysn Bubble. They would ask the followers something along the lines of *"What do you guys think of our comeback?"*, *"How are you (fandom name)?"*, and many more questions that could start a conversation with their followers.

Informants in this research admitted that when they interact with fellow roleplayers through Twitter's private message feature, they often disclose their offline persona at some point to some extent. Informant G, for example, reveal her real age and name to several fellow roleplayers whom she corresponded with. She also shared her personal stories in regards to family issues, romantic relationship, friendship issues, and other personal experiences even though she almost never mentioned real names when she shared those stories. This is the reason why she felt comfortable befriending with fellow roleplayer who are older in real life; because they are able to give her some insights and perspective about life that are helpful for her.

Informant G admitted that almost all roleplayers who interacted with her are actually older than her. She stated that she didn't find any problems with that, and she even found it more amusing to converse with older people rather than same age or younger friends. The K-pop fans community itself is very wide and diverse, and the roleplaying community

is a place for K-pop fans with different interests, from teenagers to adults, even elementary school kids, have joined the roleplaying community. Informant A and N shared about delving into the roleplaying community at a young age and how it impacts them. As children who have the technology privilege, these roleplayers managed to mingle with people older than them. In fact, Informant A stated that during her roleplaying time when he was in the third year of middle school, he befriended people much older than him; some of those people even already had attended university or had to work a nine-to-five job.

"I befriended people that are so much older than me, even those (who are) ten years older (than me), and knowing that I was surrounded by these mature people forced me to be mature as well." -Informant A

On one side, the K-pop fans community on social media has become a place for these roleplayers to grow (Hapsari, 2019). On the other side, they are being encompassed by people older than them, which indicates that they have access and knowledge of things that are reserved specifically for adults. Based on Informant G's experience, this is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as they are able to filter the information; which are beneficial for them and which are not. At this stage, all informants admitted that the digital literacy is one significant aspect in the roleplaying activity, because there is flood of information, including misleading information and pornography.

One important finding that intertwining social environment and identity performativity is the numbers of audience (or followers, in terms of Twitter) gained by roleplayers. In their five years of roleplaying, Informant N gained around five-thousand followers on their Twitter roleplay account when they were roleplaying as Krystal Jung (f(x)) and Yeri (Red Velvet). Informant G also admitted that she focused on gaining followers when she roleplayed as Kyla of girl group Pristin. Moreover, Informant A and J tend to participate in the international roleplayer community rather than the local (Indonesian) ones. They thought that the discussion in the international community is broader and more challenging since they must use English as the language to converse with fellow roleplayers. These findings indicate that no matter how roleplayers present their self in the platform, it will not mean a thing when there is no audience. At this stage, they build the platform in their roleplay account and purposely create the audience for their identity performance.

From the perspective of interpersonal computer-mediated communication, there are two aspects that build the intention of why users present their self: exchange and reciprocity (Purwaningtyas et al., 2020; J. B. Walther & Whitty, 2021). In the case of K-pop idol roleplaying activity by the fans, the exchange tends to be indicated from the motivation of getting audience for their identity performance. Hence, they present certain self in order to gain certain audience. As for the reciprocity, roleplayers present certain self in order to feel comforts and confidence that they receive from the interaction from fellow roleplayers, by knowing that they are surrounded by people who are similar to them. These lead to further discussion in regards to how roleplayers' self-identity is embodied in the roleplay activity.

Identity Play, Identity Fluidity, or Identity Crisis?

For K-pop fans, idolizing and actively participating in the craze of Korean Wave has become a lifestyle. At some point to some extent, as admiring K-pop idols has become embodied in their life in daily basis, idols' physical qualities are deemed as "perfect". Moreover, it has become the ideal image that they perceive from a human being. Some informants admit that having K-pop idol roleplay account is like building a new identity;

an ideal one. At this stage, the activity of roleplaying has surpassed regular fans activity, since it's heavily intertwined with roleplayer's personality. In a platform where people look for connection and relations as well as finding a new identity, they are able to build their image and identity as they pleased, taking in pleasing characteristics of their self and creating a profile from it. Furthermore, they communicate in their desired way, as well as communicating the way their idols communicate.

In this research, discussing identity in the practice of K-pop idol roleplaying involves highlighting the relationship building and the perception of self-identity. A part of socializing and communicating in K-pop idol roleplaying leads to the establishment of relationships, both platonic and romantic ones. All informants admitted that they have built a romantic relationship in the course of their roleplaying activities. According to roleplayers in this research, it is found that apparently dating as a roleplayer is similar to using dating apps such as Tinder. Informant A mentioned that they are more comfortable with dating online through a roleplayer account than the traditional dating apps, since they are hiding behind the face of an idol and they do not need to worry about being judged for their physical appearance.

In the usage of dating apps, users are exchanging and reciprocating their self-disclosure with relationship (Purwaningtyas, 2020). At this stage, dating through roleplaying account is similar to that. However, the difference lies in user's form of self-presentation, where in roleplaying account users are presenting their self as idols; hence, it could lead to certain first impression based on the idol's persona. Moreover, dating apps work in the way of gamification, where users' activity is highly affected by the algorithm of the apps (Homnack, 2015; Schwartz & Velotta, 2018). At this stage, the spectrum of gamification in roleplaying account is less intense than the dating apps.

"The way things are done in the roleplaying community is essentially similar with what we are doing in normal accounts, especially when it comes to dating or searching for friends. The only difference is we literally only hide behind the idol's identity, but that doesn't really affect how the relationship progresses, especially when it's between non-OOC players." -Informant N

The construction of identity in the era of digital and social media is a challenging matter to discuss, particularly in regards to youth. Social media enables users to explore their identity, as well as present the exploration onto the identity expression (Briandana et al., 2021; Gündüz, 2017). Besides, social media enables users to conduct identity play, where they can express two or more different identities rather than the one they presume their self in the first place (Cover, 2016; Turkle, 2011). In regards to self-identity, idol roleplayers in this research show the practice of identity play, in which they "borrow" their idol's identity yet at the same time they incorporate it with their own identity to some degree. However, the practice of K-pop idol roleplaying in this research shows that in regards to the perception of self-identity, informants also show the tendency of identity crisis amidst the identity play they conduct.

All informants spent most of their childhood and teenage years admiring over K-pop idols, even to the point that K-pop idols have become a "friend" to them. When they dive into the roleplaying world, they are required to follow the way their idols are, even if they are a part of the OOC roleplaying. Some informants admitted that when they adopt their idol's personality in their roleplaying activity, they sometimes confuse it with the personality they assume to have in real life (their life outside the roleplaying activity), from the people who they are surrounded with (parents, friends, siblings).

"I think I faced an identity crisis when I roleplay, I guess. My roleplay character is so much more fun and liked than my actual personality and I longed to be the person I am in that account. When I roleplay, I become the best version of myself and I don't get to make as many mistakes as in real life." -Informant A

On one side, being an idol roleplayers give informants opportunities to freely explore their identity. On the other side, they feel this sense of "burden" by the freedom. This sense of burden apparently comes from the previous cognition of their perceived-self. Informant N, for example, they admitted that they feel wrong for roleplaying someone who is quiet and shy, in which they consider as not the traits of their original self. Even though they feel the burden, Informant A also admitted that they feel more comfortable with their roleplay character's personality. This finding is parallel with Cover's argument that users deliver the liked characteristic of their self online and create a profile from it (Cover, 2016), as well as previous research findings in which stated that users only present their selected self online (Kertamukti et al., 2019; Prajarto & Purwaningtyas, 2022).

At some point to some extent, idol roleplaying activity affects self-esteem (Sastra, 2020). When informants created a desirable personality online but they cannot make it true in real life, they tend to feel guilty and insecure. When they act as nice as the idols and showcasing their best qualities to their followers, they tend to get a boost of confidence, knowing that they are well-liked and are similar to their idol. However, when they got out of the roleplaying space, they tend to feel the self-esteem drop because they are not like what everyone expects them to be. Informant A discussed the feeling of inferiority towards the character and personality they crafted online and wished they are more like what they are online. This leads to an identity crisis for them, making them feel as if their actual self is wrong and that they should act like their idol and online personality when in reality they are far from that.

In a similar spectrum, some informants already have a strong perception of their initial personality, despite being a part of the idol roleplaying community for a long time. Informant N is one of them, and they admitted being uncomfortable roleplaying a character that is quiet and reserved as it does not reflect their initial personality. The way they deal with that inconvenience was by changing their character to an idol that they think most similar to them in terms of persona. Though they joined a non-OOC roleplaying community, informants admitted that using an idol that is pretty similar to them makes it easier to roleplay, in the case for Informant N, for example, because they have the same nature of playfulness and sarcasm.

Another example comes from Informant J, who admitted that roleplaying as someone that is polar opposites of her is not enjoyable, as well which made them get tired of crafting that idol personality and becomes the reason behind them to stop roleplaying for a while. The identity of the character and the roleplayer is therefore important when it comes to roleplaying. From these findings, it can be assumed that informants tend to utilize identity play with the intention to avoid identity crisis, as well as to construct the self-identity that they are most comfortable to play with.

Conclusion

In social media, users are able to build a new personality, one that is more desirable or admirable than their actual one. They are given the space and privilege to meddle with their words and alter their image on social media. The K-pop idol roleplaying activity has given them that space as well. Roleplayers transform their selves into people they idolize; people who are looked up to by tons of people, always praised for their ethereal beauty,

angelic voice, and their attitude. Roleplayers type their words and arrange them as pretty as possible so people will praise them for being someone lovely.

From the cases of some informants in this research, apparently the identity fluidity in the K-pop idol roleplaying activity could lead to the sense of identity crisis; moreover, when the roleplayers take up idols with polar opposite personality from roleplayer's perceived-self. However, the identity play in social media realm allows roleplayers to conform their self-identity and enable them to craft one self-presentation that is convenient to them. In the end, even though they borrow the identity of their idol in the first place, they gradually become their own self during the process.

Since this research was conducted by the virtual ethnography method, it provides an indepth overview of how the self-identity is displayed through the K-pop idol roleplaying activity in Twitter. However, this research still lacks on details and more comprehensive aspects in human's identity, such as gender and sexuality. In building a mediated interpersonal communication, particularly online, gender and sexuality plays significant role; moreover, with many cybersex practices found in roleplaying community. Hence, the future research should address this matter, as well as other social phenomenon emerges from the roleplaying activity.

Acknowledgements

This research is supported and funded by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

References

- Briandana, R., Fasta, F., Miwardja, E. J., & Qasem, A. (2021). Exploring Self Identity: An Analysis of Audience Reception of Vlogs. *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 6(2), 303. <https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v6i2.921>
- Bruhn, J. (2016). *The intermediality of narrative literature: medialities matter*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Butler, J. (2017). Bodily inscriptions, performative subversions. In *Feminist theory and the body* (pp. 416–422). Routledge.
- Butler, J. (2020). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. In *Feminist theory reader* (pp. 353–361). Routledge.
- Cover, R. (2016). *Digital Identities: Creating and Communicating the Online Self*. Elsevier Inc.
- Cover, R. (2019). *Emergent Identities: New Sexualities, Genders and Relationships in a Digital Era*. Routledge.
- Davis, K. (2014). Youth Identities in a Digital Age: The Anchoring Role of Friends in Young People's Approaches to Online Identity Expression. In A. Bennett & B. Robards (Eds.), *Mediated Youth Cultures: The Internet, Belonging and New Cultural Configurations* (pp. 11–25). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137287021>
- Dwiwina, R. H., & Putri, K. Y. S. (2021). The Use of the Auto Base Accounts on Twitter as A Media for Sharing Opinions. *UltimaComm: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 13(1), 123–144. <https://doi.org/10.31937/ultimaComm.v13i1.1603>
- Elfving-Hwang, J. (2018). K-pop idols, artificial beauty and affective fan relationships in South Korea. In A. Elliott (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Celebrity Studies* (pp. 190–201). Routledge.

- Fandia, M. (2021). Mencari Privasi: Ruang Personal di Media Sosial. In R. Noviani & W. Udasmoro (Eds.), *Politik Ruang: Spasialitas dalam Konsumerisme, Media dan Governmentalitas* (pp. 139–164). PT Kanisius.
- Gardner, H., & Davis, K. (2013). *The App Generation: How Today's Youth Navigate Identity, Intimacy, and Imagination in a Digital World*. Yale University Press.
- Gündüz, U. (2017). The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(5), 85–92. <https://doi.org/10.1515/mjss-2017-0026>
- Hapsari, D. (2019). *Korean roleplayer dan dampaknya terhadap kepribadian di dunia nyata (studi kasus pada remaja)*. <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/2txrk>
- Hine, C. (2015). *Ethnography for the Internet: Embedded, Embodied and Everyday*. Bloomsbury.
- Hine, C. (2017). Ethnographies of Online Communities and Social Media: Modes, Varieties, Affordances. In N. Fielding, R. Lee, & G. Blank (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (2nd ed., pp. 401–415). SAGE Publications.
- Homnack, A. (2015). Online dating technology effects on interpersonal relationships. *Advanced Writing: Pop Culture Intersections*.
- Kertamukti, R., Nugroho, H., & Wahyono, S. B. (2019). Kontruksi Identitas Melalui Stories Highlight Instagram Kalangan Kelas Menengah. *Jurnal ASPIKOM*, 4(1), 26. <https://doi.org/10.24329/aspikom.v4i1.502>
- Nugraha, R. P. (2020). Establishment of Role-Player as a Virtual Identity in Twitter Social Media. *B-SPACE 2019: Proceedings of the First Brawijaya International Conference on Social and Political Sciences*, 469. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.26-11-2019.2295161>
- Prajarto, Y. A. N., & Purwaningtyas, M. P. F. (2022). My personal showroom: Indonesian youths' identity and space construction in Instagram. *SEARCH (Malaysia)*, 1(ICEMC 2021 Special Issue), 35–47.
- Purwaningtyas, M. P. F. (2020). Searching for Relationship in Digital Era: Online Dating Apps and Mediated Interpersonal Human Communication. *Symposium on Social Science 2020: Rethinking the Social World in the 21st Century*, 482–489.
- Purwaningtyas, M. P. F., & Alicya, D. A. (2020). The Fragmented Self: Having Multiple Accounts in Instagram Usage Practice among Indonesian Youth. *Jurnal Media Dan Komunikasi Indonesia*, 1(2), 171–182.
- Purwaningtyas, M. P. F., Maharani, S. N., & Dian, A. (2020). The commoditized self: Interpersonal communication in Tinder online dating apps. *I-Pop: International Journal of Indonesian Popular Culture and Communication*, 1(2), 84–95. <https://doi.org/10.36782/i-pop.v1i2.68>
- Ramadhanti, N., & Mahestu, G. (2021). Social Interaction Process Virtual Lover Player Role Player in Squad Kaden via Media Social Twitter. *Randau @UPMKB: International Conference of Social Sciences and Management (IRandau 2021)*, 49–61.
- Riauan, M. A. I., & Salsabila, Z. F. (2022). *Virtual Communication Pattern Of Twitter Autobase Management (Study Of Sharing Real Life Things Media On @ bertanyarl Account) Pola Komunikasi Virtual Pengelolaan Autobase Twitter (Studi Media Sharing Real Life Things Pada Akun @ bertanyarl)*. 192–203.
- Sastra, G. (2020). *Gambaran Self-esteem remaja pemain role play di aplikasi Line*. Universitas Pelita Harapan.
- Schwartz, P., & Velotta, N. (2018). Online Dating: Changing Intimacy One Swipe at a

- Time? In J. Van Hook, S. McHale, & V. King (Eds.), *Families and Technology: National Symposium on Family Issues Vol. 9*. Springer.
- Seibel, B. (2019). *Insta-Identity: the Construction of Identity Through Instagram* [Portland State University]. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.764>
- Shin, S. I., & Kim, L. (2013). Organizing K-Pop: Emergence and Market Making of Large Korean Entertainment Houses, 1980–2010. *East Asia*, 30, 255–272. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-013-9200-0>
- Sipahutar, C. M., Poerana, A. F., & Nurkinan, N. (2020). PENGALAMAN KOMUNIKASI CURHAT ANONIM BAGI FOLLOWERS@18AUTOBASE DI TWITTER. *Jurnal Lensa Mutiara Komunikasi*, 4(2), 56–74.
- Snee, H., Hine, C., Morey, Y., Roberts, S., & Watson, H. (2017). *Digital Methods for Social Science: An Interdisciplinary Guide to Research Innovation* (1st ed.). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137453662>
- Stokes, J., & Price, B. (2017). Social media, visual culture and contemporary identity. *IMSCI 2017 - 11th International Multi-Conference on Society, Cybernetics and Informatics, Proceedings, Imsci*, 159–163.
- Syafitri, N. K., Rullyana, G., & Ardiansah, A. (2020). autobase@collegemenfess, A Twitter Account Used as Information Retrieval Tool. *Khazanah Al-Hikmah: Jurnal Ilmu Perpustakaan, Informasi Dan Kearsipan*, 8(2), 161–172. <https://doi.org/10.24252/kah.v8i2a6>
- Syawbriyanti, F. (2021). Ideologi Bahasa dan Diskursus Identitas dalam Permainan Roleplay Bilingual di Twitter. *Antropologi Indonesia*, 42(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.7454/ai.v42i1.12417>
- Turkle, S. (2011). *Alone together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Basic Books.
- Venters, L., & Rothenberg, A. (2022). Trammelled stars: the non-autonomy of female K-pop idols. *Celebrity Studies*, 00(00), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2022.2083521>
- Walther, J. (2019). Social Information Processing Theory. In E. Griffin, A. Ledbetter, & G. Sparks (Eds.), *A First Look at Communication Theory* (Tenth Ed, pp. 117–128). McGraw-Hill.
- Walther, J. B., & Whitty, M. T. (2021). Language, Psychology, and New New Media: The Hyperpersonal Model of Mediated Communication at Twenty-Five Years. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 40(1), 120–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X20967703>

Copyright holder :

© Mashita Phitaloka Fandia Purwaningtyas and Tabina Azalia Oktara

First publication right :

Jurnal ASPIKOM

This article is licensed under:



