THE LANGUAGE OF CYBER GENDER ANONYMITY ON HOLOLIVE VIRTUAL YOUTUBERS

[1]Kusuma Wijaya
[1]Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia
[1]kusuma.wijaya@unitomo.ac.id

[2]Axlinabila Annisa Annasai
[2]Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia
[2]axlinabilaa@gmail.com

[3]Annisa Deby Aulia
[3]Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia
[3]annisadeby1@gmail.com

[4]Rommel Utungga Pasopati*
[4]Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Indonesia
[4]rommel@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract: Hololive Production is a virtual YouTuber agency that accommodates 71 active talents (VTubers) with 65 million subscribers on YouTube. Hololive protects its talents' privacy by the actualizing language of giving them unreal names and avatars. Some viewers intend to find the real identities of the talents, some others ignore the real personalities, while many of them keep secrets although they know the real person behind the unreal avatar. Then, how is the language of cyber gender anonymity characterized on the privacy of Hololive Virtual Youtubers? Using such qualitative method, this article indicates the necessity of language of cyber gender anonymity to keep Hololive's talents' identities safe. This is supported by Judith Butler's posture of gender and Philip Zimbardo's deindividuation. Unreal characters and names for VTubers are for anonymity but some viewers are using the language of doxing and making fun of them. Viewers want the streamers to be open and clear, but Hololive VTubers want to be anonymous and opaque. That contradicts sexual differences and gender anonymities including tensions of being rigid and flexible. In conclusion, Hololive does not live static conditions, but moves through the ambiguous avatars of cyber anonymity. Anonymity could always be endangered; laws protect them but attacks on psychological condition are inevitable.

Keywords: *anonymity, cyber, gender, hololive, vtubers*

INTRODUCTION

Anonymity comes from *anonymos,* a Greek word that means that the real author of a message is not shown (Christie & Dill, 2016). The idea is to hinder personal identities as the purpose is to be more expressive in communicating with others. This is also done as the language to stop others' invasion of some people's privacies. Even though gender anonymity exists, some people are curious about other people's real identities to the point of doxxing. Doxing (also spelled doxxing) is the language of online harassment that involves searching, uncovering, and publishing private information (Avast, 2021). Hololive Production is a virtual Youtuber (VTuber) agency in Japan focusing on Live Streaming that covers 71 talents around the world with more than 65 million subscribers on YouTube. Hololive develops the all-female VTuber group "hololive" and the all-male VTuber group "holostars".

Hololive protects its talent's privacy by giving them unreal names and avatars, but somehow the doxxing keeps coming for them. It is similar to the concept of cyberbullying (Zhao et al., 2022). Then, how is the language of cyber gender anonymity characterized on the privacy of Hololive Virtual YouTubers? The qualitative method is used to show that cyber gender anonymity is needed to keep Hololive's talents' identities safe. As a job in the entertainment sector, VTubers must always work entertainingly, no matter what their emotions are. Their main ideas are focusing on the language of entertainment, not as such victims of intrusion to people's privacy. If they make a mistake, whether intentional or not, the corporation will blame them according to the terms and applicable contract (Zhao et al., 2022). Some people still do doxxing Hololive's talents just for fun, and some of them are curious about VTuber's real identities. Doxxing is a huge issue among VTubers.

Before going deep into the language of being anonymous applied by Hololive Vtubers and the doxxing done by the viewers, some previous studies preceded this article. The first one is done by Mamat, R., Rashid, R. A., Paee, R., & Ahmad, N. on 2022 entitled *VTubers and anime culture: A case study of Japanese learners in two public universities in Malaysia* (Mamat et al., 2022). This study explored Malaysian youth's interest in anime culture and the associated subculture known as Virtual YouTubers (VTubers). While anime and manga have grown in popularity around the world since the 1990s, studies on VTubers, who use computer-generated avatars, are sparse, particularly in Malaysia. The

study included 104 Japanese language students from two Malaysian institutions, some of whom were members of a Japanese Cultural Club. The poll was designed to learn more about the respondents' backgrounds, anime culture interests, and VTuber interests. The findings show that *anime*, *manga*, songs, and voice actors/actresses (*seiyuu*) are Japanese culture's four most popular aspects. Fantasy, humor, romance, and mystery are the respondents' top picks for an anime genre. The majority of responders learned about VTubers from anime, friends, and websites like YouTube. The study emphasizes how VTubers are an important and popular aspect of Japanese culture, especially among *aficionados*, and how this popularity will likely grow.

The second research is entitled *Streaming as a Virtual Being: The Complex Relationship between VTubers and Identity* written by Anna Birna Turner in 2022 (Turner, 2022). This paper explained the growth of Virtual YouTubers (VTubers) alongside with brand-new phenomena in Twitch streaming. Unlike traditional streamers who use webcams, VTubers portray themselves through fictional characters built using facial tracking, motion capture, and software technologies. While the past study has focused on why people watch video game streaming and audience expectations, there is currently limited information available particularly on VTubers. Existing research is disjointed and lacks in-depth analysis of VTubers' motives and ideas. The statement of the problems are how live streaming as a VTuber allows people to explore and/or express their identity? and What makes VTubing unique when compared to standard face cam streaming?. About ten different VTubers were interviewed using semi-structured interviews, and their responses were analyzed by a framework centering on Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation. Theories of online identity, imagined audience, online disinhibition, and parasocial interaction were also utilized to support the analysis. The results suggest that VTubing is a unique form of live streaming that allows its users to overcome personal insecurities, explore different methods of self-presentation, and to affirm the identities of members of queer and ostracized communities.

The third paper was done by Liudmila Bredikhina entitled *Designing Identity in VTuber Era* on 2020 (Liudmila, 2020)**.** This study supports the initial idea that, unlike avatars, VTubers are intimately tied to their activity as entertainers and producers through engaging in creative activities such as game streaming, singing, dancing, knowledge sharing, video, and image production. Individuals engage in VTuber activities to express

themselves (creative expression with content publication), as a communication tool (knowledge sharing, business communication, or research), or as a way of life (constant engagement in the production of creative content and communication). VTubers allow individuals to express themselves and play with anime-style facial expressions; they are not constrained by the rules of physics.

From the previous researches above, there is such a research gap that needs to be underlined, especially on the language of anonymity itself. Hololive VTubers are anonymous as their main condition, but those are not enough for them. Various attacks on identities of anonymity are shown through the language of doxxing. This research also coins understanding to what extent anonymity may work and stop regarding today's understandings on live streaming. This is also in line with perceptions of entertainment that no longer static at all but demand more consumption of identities. In this case, language of being anonymous is contested and this is the main gap that is explained in this article.

Moreover, from the research gap above, the following objectives are pursued in this study to gain a better understanding of how cyber gender anonymity affects the privacy of Hololive Virtual YouTubers. The first one is to analyze the role of cyber gender anonymity in doxing incidents among Hololive Virtual YouTubers. Doxxing is not something that comes instantly but is constructed by the growing demands of entertainment itself. Language of identities then are not solely enough on being anonymous since viewers demand more transparent perspectives on anything to their idols. The second one is to understand the effect of doxing incidents on the mental health and well-being of Hololive Virtual YouTubers. In many cases, the language of being anonymous is not enough to defend the live streamers from the attackers. The consequences are severe either since attacking on identities will undermine the personal conditions of VTubers. Some of them also face depression since their privacies are already destroyed by the doxxing.

METHOD

This journal uses qualitative research method. To conduct the triangulation for this study, several data sources are combined with the theories of Judith Butler's Posture of Gender (Butler, 1988) and Philip Zimbardo's Deindividuation (Zimbardo, 1970). All

research activities take place through online research platforms and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and YouTube. These data sources are taken from several articles that have been summarized into one. The data obtained from social media sources were analyzed in light of these theoretical viewpoints to gain a full picture of the relationship between cyber gender anonymity, doxing occurrences, and the experiences of Hololive Virtual YouTubers. Through the data analysis using Judith Butler's Posture of Gender and Philip Zimbardo's Deindividuation, it shows that the anonymity used by Hololive Virtual YouTuber is insufficient to provide appropriate protection from doxing.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Hololive, Doxxing, and Matter of Cyber Anonymity

In this day, Youtuber is known as a promising job. For example, according to playboard.co, the first and second most super chatted on YouTube are Hololive's talents (Playboard.co, 2020). Uruha Rushia, the first rank, earned 50 billion rupiahs from Super Chat while Kiryu Coco as the second rank earned 45 billion rupiahs. However, the big money is without no risk at all. Hololive talents are often getting doxed by people online. Kureiji Ollie, a VTuber from Hololive Indonesia 2nd generation, was opening a package on her stream, and without realizing it, there was a plastic glass on the cover of the package. Without her knowing it, Kureiji Ollie's real face was reflected from the plastic glass. Ollie realized and immediately got rid of the package. One of the harassment is many people spread Kureiji Ollie's real face on social media and denounced her because Ollie's face was not what some people expected. The surprising event destroys the anonymity of Hololive, then Hololive Indonesia made an official announcement to take further legal action regarding that defamation (Hololive, 2020).

The second talent that got doxed is Kiryu Coco. Kiryu Coco, was a female Virtual YouTuber from Hololive Japan 4th generation and was known for her fluency in Japanese and English in her AsaCoco Live News and Reddit Meme Review shows. She also has been the #1 super chat donation earner in the world for around over $200.000 USD net earnings (VirtualYoutuberFandom, 2020). Before Kiryu Coco graduated, a lot of people doxed her and she had been continuously harassed online. In her previous livestream, Kiryu Coco and Akai Haato from Hololive Japan discussed their YouTube analytics and

led them to talk about what countries has the most viewership. They mentioned that 7 percent of their viewers were from "the country of Taiwan" (Gamerant.com, 2020). Because of that, they were suspended from live streaming since they offended viewers from China who regard Taiwan as a part of its territory. As public figures, VTubers must appear perfectly to the public and their audience. If they make a mistake in front of their audience, be prepared to be blasphemed, berated, and given death threats (TheCinemaholic.com, 2020). Another harassment is Coco received death threats for being considered a provocateur. She decided to take a break from any Hololive activity and she got whole support from the fans (HololiveIDFans, 2020; Reddit, 2020b). There are sympathies given by many people, but the most prominent idea is that Vtubers must remain perfect for all viewers. If the rule is violated, doxxing will come to her or him instantly, and this also invades to any privacy that someone has.

The third talent is Mano Aloe from 5th generation of Hololive Japan. Mano Aloe debuted on 15 August 2020 with 100.000 subscribers on her first day of debut stream on YouTube (Hololive, 2020). Two days after her debut, she posted a video on her YouTube channel apologizing for the accidental leak of her Live2D model before her official debut. It was considered a breach of contract and given a 2-week suspension (HololiveOfficialTwitter, 2020). Further harassments are some people found her personal account and managed to get her personal identity from this incident, which leads to doxing attempts on her. According to Mano Aloe, she claimed that she had been the victim of doxing (Reddit, 2020a). She had been getting calls, and even someone found a man identified as her ex-boyfriend. Mano Aloe stated that she and her ex-boyfriend ended the relationship before she joined Hololive. She pleaded with viewers in an apology stream to judge her solely on the truth and not on rumors and lies (Reddit, 2020a). Many people were worried about her because of the two-week suspension. She did not deserve any of the dox and harassment since everyone makes mistakes (Reddit, 2020b). However, on 30 August 2020, Hololive Twitter announced the retirement of Mano Aloe as she was not physically or mentally prepared to continue with her activities (HololiveOfficialTwitter, 2020).

The three examples above show that VTuber must be seen as perfect in any condition. She or he must be bold enough to fight any doxing that may come. Great invasions to privacy matters could always exist when a little mistake is done. The streamer

is covered in his or her anonymity but the attacks go to their own private meanings. They have to bear the battles from doxing by themselves. Besides, each streamer much obey the strict rules of the company. They have to perform well and following orders must be intact every time. They are not merely streamers, but role models of the company so that they have to show further submissions. Gender cyber anonymity is actually wider than it seems since it covers both internal and external aspects of online streamers.

Cyber Gender Anonymity and Its Further Extensions

Cyber gender anonymity relates to three kinds of layers of analysis. Starting from being anonymous, gender matter, and cyber aspect, that concept is known for showing recent unknown identity that is intentional (Khan & Ingenhoff, 2018; Reagle, 2013). The language of that concept indicates the opaque condition of identity that covers the matter of gender roles in the digital realm. On a hand, those three aspects are out of normalcy since it is natural for people to show their identities without any hindrance. People practice their identities as they embrace them well either (Reagle, 2013; Zhao et al., 2022). On the other hand, having cyber gender anonymity is quite intentional and it is also an application of the identity of language. The hidden identity is cultural as its purpose is to protect its own real identity.

Here, identity is not in line with identification. While modern idea underlines clarity of identification easily results to identity, recent culture may vary (Khan & Ingenhoff, 2018; Reagle, 2013). People in the digital realm often use avatars to represent, to hide, and even to deny their real identities. It is legal and widely known as people live different life between real and virtual one. Moreover, the identification is only related to digital matter (Chang, 2008; Leavitt, 2015). It stops in that virtual understanding since it reflects the blunt choice of people to go online or offline as well. Somehow, the idea of the internet world is the same from the philosophical point of technology as an extension of the human body (Chang, 2008; Leavitt, 2015). The body stays the same, but its extensions could move everywhere including the digital realm.

People can write, voice their thoughts, and work freely thanks to anonymity because they do not want anyone to know who they are. Many people prefer to remain anonymous so that they can communicate with others freely (Leavitt, 2015; Svensson et al., 2013). People are liberated to accomplish many valuable things without feeling

constrained by their anonymity in daily life. In order to maintain their public image professionally, most of the Virtual YouTubers often seek anonymity and wished to separate and protect their identities in real life and online. Even though gender anonymity exists, many people are still curious in discovering others' true identities to the extent of doxxing. It is difficult to express thoughts when they are not in a state of anonymity (Annasai et al., 2023; Svensson et al., 2013; Vilanova et al., 2017). People can recognize they face with technology. When people behave badly, others or audiences can easily make a post on social media and harass them. Other people can take pictures using their smartphones, take a screenshot, then upload it to the internet to dox them (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011; Vilanova et al., 2017). There are many people that doxed and harass the Virtual YouTubers when their real identities are not what they expected.

According to Philip Zimbardo's deindividuation theory, anonymity is defined as the inability of others to identify or single out an individual such that the individual cannot be evaluated, criticized, judged or punished (Perfumi et al., 2019; Svensson et al., 2013; Zimbardo, 1970) . Deindividuation is a complicated, postulated process in which a number of prior social circumstances result in altered self and other perceptions and, as a result, in a lowered threshold for typically restricted conduct (Kang et al., 2013). What happens is that inappropriate behavior that deviates from accepted standards of appropriateness is released under the right circumstances (Asenbaum, 2018; Dąbrowska, 2014). Such circumstances enable excessive antisocial behavior, which is characterized as egotistical, avaricious, power-seeking, hostile, lusty, and destructive. Nevertheless, they also allow a variety of positive behaviors that we ordinarily do not publicly express, such as strong emotions of joy or grief and outward displays of love for others (Asenbaum, 2018; Dąbrowska, 2014; Kang et al., 2013). The theory then could be applied to this article as anonymity is believed to protect people from online harassment and dox.

Deindividuation indicates that real self is not eroded or even lost, but only altered by another self in a different realm (Asenbaum, 2018; Perfumi et al., 2019). People could live double or even triple identities in the real and unreal life as language is so widely applied to them. In this part, real individual is suspended to show another reality comes to life. It could also show a process in which anonymity is always becoming (Christie & Dill, 2016; Saha & Srivastava, 2014). As one identity is practiced, it should focus on that thing without considering the real one. It is different from the usual identity which

involves a natural being. This deindividuation shapes a new identity that could be totally different from the real one. The gender is flexible either as people could choose anything to be (Christie & Dill, 2016; Hamidah et al., 2023; Saha & Srivastava, 2014).

Gender, according to Butler, is by no means tied to material bodily facts but is solely and completely a social construction (Butler, 2010; Pujimahanani et al., 2022). It is a fiction that is always open to change and contestation. There is no ideal objective in a gander as it is differentiated from sex. Acts of gender shapes matter of the further application of gender in the human's conscience (Borgerson, 2007; Ibrahim et al., 2023). Therefore, gender is a matter of becoming since it does not easily nod to fixations dealt in sexual differences. It moves towards various postures where human beings enable to move.

There are crucial differences between sex and gender that accentuate matter of identities out any natural condition. This is critical for anonymity to escape old identity to go to a new one (Hidayat et al., 2022; Pujimahanani et al., 2022). It applies to gender as well since being anonymity means someone could take another gender or even no gender at all. Gender is cultural while sex is biological (Attamimi et al., 2023; Butler, 1988). It is supported by idea that gender is quite perceptual than sex that is so determined. Gender moves outside of any alienation to bring freedom to human beings. That idea could infiltrate any kind of matter in everyday life as seen in its gender-ness (Bagtayan & Lantowa, 2022; Pujimahanani et al., 2022). Gender also works as a verb that is so existential in how outer aspects define inner ones. It follows identification in a never ending process, an understanding that celebrate differences in every breath it takes (Butler, 1988; Hidayat et al., 2022). It includes more flexibilities to be reached than any binary opposition that bind human beings tightly.

Discussion

The Ambiguity in Opaqueness of Cyber Gender Anonymity

By giving their talents fictitious names and avatars, Hololive protects the identities of their talents. Hololive supports language of anonymity and will give serious sanctions to people who have doxed and harassed Virtual YouTubers from Hololive (HololiveOfficial, 2020). Hololive's VTubers work to entertain their fans by using an unreal identity. Their authentic identity and true nature have no bearing on their job (Chen

& Wu, 2015; Sarmi et al., 2023). Kureiji Ollie, without anyone knowing her real identity, can entertain a lot of people from all over the world through streaming which she always does. But still, there are many people that hates Ollie so they did anything to dox and harass her. Some of Ollie's antis even compared her real face to a boy and made fun of it. Kiryu Coco graduated because of her antis doxed and harassed which she did not deserve at all.

Just like the deindividuation theory by Zimbardo, anonymity is believed to protect the users from online harassment and dox (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012; Zimbardo, 1970). Somehow, any effort to shadow the real identity only happens in internal aspects. People are having new identities as VTubers to entertain others as its sole purpose. The idea is to shape the freedom to share something out any bad indication (Saha & Srivastava, 2014). In external aspects, any kind of personal attack could always come to destroy any kind of anonymity. It starts from curiosity to know the real people behind every avatar to crime effort to dox and then to harass and to threaten them (Chen & Wu, 2015; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). Anonymity could always be endangered for Vtubers. Language of Hololive Productions could protect them by laws but attacks that go directly to psychological condition is inevitable.

Through the analysis of three Hololive Virtual YouTubers from different countries, there are three points to highlight the value of the language of anonymity. First, Kureiji Ollie's incident demonstrates that plenty of people still disrespect others' privacy to the extent of harassing and making fun of her face by saying it resembles a boy's face. Second, after the tragedy, Kiryu Coco is the most doxed and harassed member in Hololive (TheCinemaholic.com, 2020). She intends to speak openly about her ideas while maintaining her anonymity to prevent anyone from using her real identity to threaten and dox her. Last, Mano Aloe has apologized for what she has done, has gone through a two-week suspension and moved on (Reddit, 2020a). However, some people still dig into Aloe's personal life and found out about her house and landline, and even called an acquaintance that may or may not have been her boyfriend. Mano Aloe desires anonymity, like Kiryu Coco and Kureiji Ollie, so she can speak her mind without fear of being doxed and stalked.

The three aspects above show that cyber gender anonymity is not absolute at all. Langauge of it is not forever and actually quite unable to cover all things. Hololive

Vtubers must face the viewers every time and they have always to be careful not to make mistakes in showing their true identities. Therefore, being anonymous is always a process to be reviewed and lived every day (Asenbaum, 2018; Lee & Sanchez, 2018). The streamers also have to embrace tensions between themselves and the viewers. Viewers want the streamers to be open and clear, but Hololive VTubers want to be anonymous and opaque. The language in reality is not static at all. Other sides want them to be wider in showing everything without any limitation at all (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011; Smith et al., 2023). However, the main characteristic of Hololive Vtubers is the opaqueness itself. Viewers also require certain gender that is real and rigid but the Vtubers choose to remain flexible in its identities. Its idea is to go out from any rigidity into freedom of showing what the streamers could do worldwide (Lee & Sanchez, 2018; Wright, 2013). The above tensions will always come along in matter of Hololive Vtubers's language of anonymity. Moreover, any anonymity will never evade idea of being in clarity and being anonymous (Halder & Jaishankar, 2011; Wright, 2013). However, any threat is never needed to reveal any kind of identity and even to spread it worldwide.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
Conclusion

Anonymity is essential to protect people's real identities. Without anonymity, Virtual YouTubers cannot express what they want freely. Their primary responsibility is to entertain the audience while gender is not a standard for entertaining. The fact that they could not be personally identified gave them the freedom to speak their mind openly. The audience can enjoy their favorite VTubers and interact with them nicely. Anonymity is crucial to avoid sexual abuse, minority issues, harassment, and many others. Hololive does not live in static conditions, but moves through ambiguities in which gender is protected through the avatar of cyber anonymity. However, the cases of Kureiji Ollie, Kiryu Coco, and Mano Aloe show that any kind of doxing could be an inevitable problem for the streamers. They have to face danger by being harassed and even threatened. The streamers are free to perform their artistic thoughts in their anonymities but they always need to be careful not to reveal their own faces to the viewers.

Suggestion

The result of this study lead to several recommendations for additional research. To begin, future research should go deeper into the language of Hololive followers, evaluating their lexicon, slang, and community-specific terminology. The research would provide information about shared values and cultural references within the community. It is recommended to look into the language Vtubers use, seeing how they create their online personalities and use language to interact with their viewers.

In addition, future researchers may consider the broader impacts of an increasingly anonymous world. Beyond the world of VTubers, this may entail exploring the social, psychological, and ethical elements of anonymity in online communities. Understanding how anonymity affects behavior, privacy, and online interactions would give us a complete picture of the benefits and problems of an anonymous digital environment.

Furthermore, it is essential for future studies to analyze the current study's limitations and weaknesses. Future research may improve and expand existing knowledge on this topic by resolving methodological or conceptual flaws. This would help us better understand the dynamics of modern fandom and the difficulties of a society that has become more anonymous.

In brief, additional research is recommended to focus on the language of Hololive fans, the language of Vtubers, the value of a world where individuals are becoming more anonymous and the need to talk about fandom in nowadays, and an understanding of this study's limitations. These directions for research seek to improve our awareness of the current digital environment and enhance the utilization of knowledge in this field.

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