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# **Adolescent Identity Construction and Communication Through Music Consumption in Virtual Space**

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**ABSTRACT:** Music consumption in the digital era has turned into "ownership" through digital music collections presented by various streaming music services. Streaming music services, such as Spotify, are services that primarily focus on the experience of listening to music by presenting a large collection of music from various musicians and genres to its users. Consumption by individuals can be interpreted as a behavior that defines identity and self-expression. Young people's music consumption provides them with a medium to construct, negotiate and modify their identities; presenting them with a set of strategies to know themselves and to relate to others. The purpose of this study is to explore and describe adolescents' experiences of using new media that give meaning to their identities and music-related communication in virtual spaces. The method used is qualitative research with a phenomenological approach. The object of this research is teenagers who consume the Spotify application continuously.

KEYWORDS: Identity Construction; Teen; Music; Virtual

#### BACKGROUND

The digitization of entertainment media has changed young people's patterns and habits in using various products including the way they consume and enjoy music. Changes in music consumption are one of the tangible effects of the digitization of young people's consumption in entertainment (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2018). Music consumption itself was initially carried out by buying or collecting physical albums, listening to conventional FM radio stations, and collecting various kinds of merchandise from musicians or bands that they liked.

The digitization of music consumption is also confirmed by the decline in physical album sales since the early 2000s. As reported by The Recording Industry Association of America (2020), CDs, which dominated recorded music revenues in 2000 with 92.3% of total revenues, have steadily declined to only hold 5.5% of total global recorded music revenues in 2013. Also in the report, paid music subscription systems, which held 1.2% of total revenue in 2005, continued to rise to hold 53.4% of total recorded music revenue. With paid subscription streaming music accounting for more than half of total global recorded music revenue, it is a strong indication of the shift in music consumption patterns by listeners.

Music consumption in the digital era has turned into "ownership" through digital music collections presented by various streaming music services. Streaming music services, such as Spotify, are services that primarily focus on the experience of listening to music by presenting a large collection of music from various musicians and genres to its users. Spotify also has a variety of features that allow users to curate music based on their own preferences and tastes. The streaming music service also presents the listening experience as a selling point to its users. The experience offers a wide variety of music content, although, in reality, streaming services work much like cable television, creating tiers of content access for certain scenarios offered to consumers (Morris & Powers, 2015).

The streaming music service allows users to listen to songs from various musicians. According to Business of Apps, by the second quarter of 2022, there will be more than eighty million song collections on Spotify, allowing users to sort and select what they want to listen to on their screens (Iqbal, 2019). This contrasts with physical albums, which only provide a collection of music with a limited number of specific songs and musicians. Streaming music services are also multifunctional. In addition to providing a service to listen to music more easily and practically, the features in Spotify also allow users to get live and on-the-spot information about what songs are being listened to by the people they follow on Spotify through the Friend Activity column.

Russell Belk, (2013) argues that digital consumption, sharing, and control over access can provide a platform for identity construction or at least present a "great opportunity" where identity can be controlled and communicated to more people. In virtual spaces, young people's identities can be classified into two types, namely social/collective identity and personal identity (Bennett & Robards, 2014). Collective identity focuses on the normative expectations and standards of close people and other groups such as family, community, religion, and even the state, while personal identity focuses on personal attributes including personal values,

goals, self-knowledge, and various unique psychological situations (Bennett & Robards, 2014). The concept of identity owned by individuals is very important because it is used as a reference for sustainability and differentiating oneself from others.

Consumption by individuals can be interpreted as a behavior that defines identity and self-expression. An individual will tend to choose products and brands that are relevant to themselves and can communicate a certain identity (Schau & Gilly, 2003). These consumption activities can be used as an important and significant source of symbolic meanings that we implement, maintain, and manage for self-projection. Audiences express different things about themselves by sharing their stories as a reflection of their identity. Individuals often use possessions and consumer goods as symbols to shape their identity, to connect with others, and to take on a larger role in society (Wong, Hogg, & Vanharanta, 2012). This is because possessions carry cultural and symbolic meaning and are often highlighted as a medium of communication to express oneself to others.

Teenager's consumption of music provides them with a medium to construct, negotiate and modify their identities; presenting them with a set of strategies for knowing themselves and for relating to others (Bennett, 2012). Music gives young people the freedom to "be": to be themselves, to be different, to be someone they thought they could not be, to feel comfortable and relaxed in their schools and neighborhoods. Music can lead young people to shape their identity in a broader spectrum of who they are and how they can succeed in the world (Bennett, 2012). Music as an integral part of modern human life can double its role as a medium of communication. In the practice of listening to and consuming music in daily activities, music listeners can freely enjoy music that represents a mood that they cannot express to others. In this case, music is included in interpersonal communication that occurs between individuals and a wide audience through symbols and signs carried by music.

Furthermore, the activity of consuming music is done symbolically where young people use the meaning contained in it to be utilized according to the motive of music consumption itself, such as: (1) to experience music, (2) to achieve certain goals, (3) to socialize, and (4) to form bonds with others (Trocchia, Apps, & McNish, 2011). This shows that music is not just a medium to satisfy audiences. Music consumption was originally intended to fulfill personal needs and even to regulate mood and cope with stress. Music can also be used to socialize and place individuals in their social sphere.

Motives in music consumption allow one to form a personal identity and along with that, they can also find their place in their social sphere. Music attached as a personal attribute, whether we realize it or not, has become an identity construction. Whether it is through the music collection they have or the music they share on social media. The use of music is a means to change and modify self-image in order to change and improve interactions and long-term relationships with others (Bennett, 2012).

Through Spotify's streaming music service, its users can construct their identity. Identity construction can be bridged by a person's set of possessions that they can control even if these possessions take the form of psychological possessions, such as social media accounts or streaming music service profiles. One source of identity construction can be obtained through their association with the music they consume.

The topic of this research then becomes important and interesting for researchers to explore because it is closely related to the study of communication science regarding new media and how the development of products produced by new media can be a tool for young people to communicate and construct their identities through music consumption in the virtual world.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Music Consumption in the New Media Era

The development of streaming service platforms today can affect music consumption. Every song a user plays, every time they search in the search field for a particular music or artist, or every time they choose a playlist to play, is a set of data recorded in the user's profile. Music itself has a long history as an element of life that is seen as a powerful medium. Apart from being a factor that influences one's character in thinking and acting, music is often consumed as a platform to shape reality within the listener.

Mobile music devices, including streaming music service Spotify, make it possible for users to control where, when and how they listen to music. Instead of having to buy and carry digital CDs or wait for desired songs to be released on the radio, individuals can now easily virtually access musicians, albums, and songs from streaming music services directly from their mobile phones. It is this advancement in music mobility through streaming music services that mediates the young people's music consumption. Although streaming music services provide users with more access to their music collections, on the other hand, it is a collections, it also increases dependence on cultural industry products.

The flexibility and freedom to listen to music from anywhere and anytime encourages individuals to anywhere and anytime encourages individuals to become increasingly disconnected from the outside world. the outside world. While this may seem like a nice thing to do, the choice of individuals to stay connected to music services to stay connected to streaming music services increases their dependence on mediated experiences. their dependence on internet-mediated experiences. As Michael Bull (2009) writes "the transformation and subjectivity through the constant use of new communication technology potentially decreases the capacity of subjects to disconnect from their intoxicating use." (Bull, 2009, p. 85). Streaming music services like Spotify that "anytime, anywhere" music listening experience is now further validates the ease and dependency of streaming music consumption by its users.

#### **Teenager and Music Consumption**

In their argument, Schwartz & Fouts (2003) explain that young people who are in their early to mid-20s use music as a medium to help develop their self-identity. In accessing various information and knowledge content in virtual spaces, young people have a tendency to use multiple platforms at once, which ultimately results in a large amount of content. platforms at once, which ultimately results in the amount of content they consume. When consuming music through streaming music services, young people have different ways and habits from previous generations. different from previous generations. Young listeners spend on average 25 hours each week to listen to songs through streaming music services (Roettgers, 2015).

#### **Identity Theory in Identity Formation through Music**

Identities formed through music depend on a broad and diverse understanding between music and each individual. Identity in music is often linked to gender, age, social class, peer group, personality and level of understanding of music (Hargreaves, Miell, & Macdonald, 2023). It is not just limited to musical preferences, identity in music is formed in deeper and more significant ways that musical engagement which consists of the dynamic process of thinking, choosing, collecting, discarding, and creating (Mans, 2005). Hargreaves et al., (2023) argue that there are two types of musical identity: music in identity and identity in music.

Music in identity is built through the implementation of social and cultural aspects in music. aspects in the music. The output of this results in certain expectations, such as the emergence of certain behaviors and satisfactions (musician, composer, orchestra conductor, musician, composer, orchestra conductor, and so on), which allows individuals to convey their self represent themselves through music (Hargreaves et al., 2023). In contrast, identity in music emphasizes the use of music as a tool for creating, developing, and even maintain aspects of personal and social identity in a narrower and more limited.

#### **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach and has descriptive characteristics. The data collected is first directly from the source, the researcher becomes part of the main instrument of analysis, secondly the data is in the form of words in sentences or pictures that have meaning (Sutopo, 2006). The type of research used in this study is phenomenology. Phenomenology explains the structure of consciousness in human experience. The phenomenological approach seeks to let reality reveal itself naturally. Through "stimulating questions", the research subject is allowed to tell all kinds of dimensions of his experience related to a phenomenon/event (Aspers, 2009).

Data collection techniques were carried out by observation and interview. Interviews are used as a data collection technique if the researcher wants to conduct a preliminary study to find problems that must be researched, but also if the researcher wants to know things from respondents that are more in-depth (Sugiyono, 2016). The criteria for informants that have been determined by researchers related to the objectives of the research conducted are as follows:

- 1. Is a student who lives in Surakarta, Yogyakarta, and Jakarta
- 2. Have a Spotify account

## **RESULTS**

Through the following presentation, the researcher will discuss the findings that the researcher managed to collect as the core part of the research. To answer how teenagers' experiences of using new media give them meaning to identity and music in virtual spaces and how the dynamics of teenagers when communicating and constructing their identities through Spotify, the researcher has divided the discussion into four systematic sections, namely:

## 1. Teenagers' Exposure to New Media Products

The findings indicate that all four informants have early exposure to new media products. New media is defined by Lev Menovich (in Logan, 2010), as media that relies on computing to distribute web virtual worlds, virtual reality, multimedia, video games, animation, digital video, and so on. Early exposure to new media products experienced by the four informants then led to the internalization of the values and characteristics of new media products. As Martin Lister mentioned (in Hastasari, Tommy, & Sari, 2014), one of the characteristics of new media is the existence of a new identity in interacting in space and time. This can later be highlighted through the identity of teenagers who are constructed through their music activities on Spotify. New media, which is also an upgrade of conventional media, also gives users flexibility and freedom of action and often users can act as prosumers, which means users are active consumers who simultaneously consume, produce, and distribute media (Voigt, Buliga, & Michl, 2017).

Audience differences also differentiate conventional media from new media. In new media, audiences are active as media participants and the interactivity between them will be very strong (Hastasari et al., 2014). Teenagers, represented by six informants in this study, also adopt the characteristics brought by new media. The four informants are active users of new media products and are free to determine the ecosystem of use and interaction they do through new media products.

The existence of new media products then triggers young people to have choices of participation in their use. Social media, which is the most massive new media product, is the main place for young people to carry out their mobility in virtual space. The

motives and preferences for using social media (active users, posting photos or making tweets; passive users, reading comments on other people's photo uploads, simply visiting other people's account profiles) lead to user participation in virtual space (Ozimek, Brailovskaia, & Bierhoff, 2023).

#### 2. Teenagers' Identity Interpretation through Music

In Identity Theory, individuals are reflexive and can position themselves as objects and can categorize, classify, and name themselves into certain aspects related to social categories and classifications, this process is called self-categorization (Burke, 2022). Through music, adolescents can act as objects that categorize, classify and name themselves into a wide and varied spectrum of music.

According to Identity Theory, identification with oneself is crucial in forming a self-image (Clark & Lonsdale, 2023). In this section, researchers found how teenagers represented by the four informants have their own meanings of identity in virtual spaces. Virtual worlds provide a platform for individuals to build collective constructions of virtual identities through symbols and signs to represent and express concepts within themselves (Schau & Gilly, 2003).

In addition, there are some individuals who consider that their identities in the real world and in the virtual space are two different things. They differentiate identities in the real world and virtual space based on a sense of comfort and freedom of action and expression. This is in accordance with the statement of Hargreaves, Miell, & MacDonald which states that a person can have a variety of identities that are formed based on interactions that occur with other people, rather than just a core and single identity (Hargreaves et al., 2023).

In terms of music, adolescents have various interpretations of how music and identity are interrelated. There are various assumptions and ideas that attempt to explain the correlation between music and identity. For example, one study suggests that people who like heavy metal

and alternative rock have lower self-confidence than those who like hip-hop or rap music (Clark & Lonsdale, 2023).

Music is part of every individual's identity. Music, like other cultural products, has the power to carry and communicate symbolic cultural meanings that are used by individuals to build/construct their identity (Larsen, Lawson, & Todd, 2010). At this point, the researcher found how the majority of informants have consistent answers stating that identity and music are two things that are interrelated.

Through informants' interpretations of music and identity and their correlations, the researcher found that the majority of informants agreed and considered that the two things were interrelated. Music can be used as a medium to modify and express one's personal identity (Hargreaves et al., 2023). Music preferences and tastes can also be an important sign of the values and attitudes one holds.

## 3. Teenagers' Music Consumption in the New Media Era

Music consumption has become both common and crucial in human life. Music is used by humans both out of self-motivation and for collective purposes. Music is also related to a person's memories will then consciously or unconsciously become part of a person's identity. Listening to music can bring up a sense of nostalgia for certain memories or memories through the presentation of instruments, vocals, and lyrics (Barrett et al., 2010). The music consumed by each individual can have a variety of different backgrounds considering that each individual has a variety of self-concepts that are summarized in a unified identity. The notion of consumption is often associated with people who are the main part of a certain community in which there are structured and open social relationships that surround the ownership of shared products (Ahuvia, 2005).

In this section, the researcher found how teenagers have a large presence in streaming music consumption. All four informants involve music in their daily routines. The four informants' status as teenagers then impacts how they consume music. When consuming streaming music, teenagers, who in this case are represented by four informants, have various motivations and goals to achieve. Spotify as the focus of the research plays an important role as a medium where teenagers seek and fulfill certain needs that they want to achieve through music. Teenagers' motives for consuming music also vary. In their research, Trocchia, Apps, and McNish tested music consumption motivations which resulted in the following motive findings: 1) Feeling, 2) Achieving a specific goal, 3) Socializing, and 4) Forming bonds with others (Trocchia et al., 2011). The four motives for consumption were also found in the music consumption by the informants in this study.

The informants have various motives in consuming music streaming through Spotify. Motives to set the mood, to get practicality through streaming, to monitor friends' music listening activities in the Friend Activity column, to explore musicians and songs, to add musical insights, to feel nostalgic, and to prepare for exams are most of the motives that researchers collected from four informants. As stated by Barrett et al., (2010) who emphasized that listening to music can bring up a sense of nostalgia for certain memories or memories through the presentation of instruments, vocals, and lyrics.

## 4. Constructing Teenage Identity through Spotify

Through Spotify's features, users have the flexibility and control to create a music experience that suits their personalization and preferences. With Spotify, users can collect, sort, and enjoy music within the scope of Spotify's streaming music service (Sterne,

2006). McCourt (2005) says that in virtual spaces, people will prefer to collect lists rather than objects, and the collected lists will act as individualized personal expressions that replace collections of records (McCourt, 2005).

Spotify's interface is also an attraction that makes some informants stay and use Spotify as a streaming music service for their music consumption. The various features that Spotify has were also highlighted by the informants. Streaming music services like Spotify are highly functional due to their sophisticated recommendation systems, varied payment plan options, and interactive social media sharing features (Kinnally & Bolduc, 2020).

The personalized playlist that Spotify provides to each user then becomes one of the features that young people like because through it they can find new musicians and songs more easily by matching their music preference criteria. Morris & Powers, (2015) mentioned that through "liking" or "favoriting" music and playlists based on mood, playlists created based on time chronology, personalized recommendation algorithms; streaming music services aim to collect, understand, and translate users' preferences and musicality.

Teenagers and the playlists they curate then become keywords to the projected identities they want to display in virtual spaces. Identity construction can be facilitated by music, and in the context of this study, young people apparently use their playlist collections as a tool to show and communicate their identities. The strong correlation between identity and the collection of playlists that users create and display in their Spotify profiles is also validated by the answers of the informants in this study.

The association between music and identity expressed by informants will then lead to an assessment of what they consider good and not good as a representation of teenage musicality in the virtual space. This indicates that certain music genres have their own stereotypes for their listeners and genres describe a distinctive characteristic. Stereotypes and genre preferences are said by Frith (2017) to be a medium for teenagers to show their "badges of identification" through the music they perform to later be used as a medium of communication of values and certain attitudes and opinions towards others. Teenagers represented by the four informants in this study also have stereotypes, preferences, and even sentiments towards certain genres that they associate with specific characteristics.

These inherent stereotypes and preferences are what motivate them to create representations of identity through the music they share on social media. Sinclair & Tinson, (2017) mentioned that users internalize an interface and a set of navigation that connects friends through Spotify and builds social presence through Spotify. Spotify's features allow users to share their music activities to social media. The integration of music sharing into various social media such as Twitter and Instagram, and instant messaging services such as Line and WhatsApp allows users to directly share their music activities.

## CONCLUSION

Communication and identity construction can be characterized by an individual's sense of self-awareness of the identification and characteristics possessed by the individual through a complex and regular process. Communication and construction of individual self-identity through virtual space can then occur by several background factors, both internal from within the individual himself, and external from outside the individual. Through a phenomenological approach, this research seeks to understand and interpret how teenagers (represented by four informants) interpret, communicate, and construct their self-identity in virtual space through the medium of Spotify. As a streaming music service that is popular among young people, Spotify makes it possible for its users, especially young people in the context of this research, to construct the self that is displayed in virtual space. The manifestation of music consumption activities, creativity, and control in producing and distributing content such as playlists is not new. However, the presence of Spotify provides a platform and a set of "tools" for teenager to manage and communicate their musical identity. The self-image they present through Spotify will then lead to the construction of their identity in virtual space. Teenager are influenced by various factors in communicating and constructing their identity in virtual space. This can be drawn through the internalization of their values and habits in using new media products. New media products, which are an upgrade of conventional media, give young people the space to act participatory and more expressive because the boundaries previously imposed in conventional media have faded.

Teenagers' attachment to new media products then triggers them to create the participation they want to present in the virtual space. Through this participation, teenager will then have various motives and desires to be achieved through new media products, including music. Spotify, which is the leading new media product in terms of music, then provides teenager with a platform for them to display and communicate their musical identity through their music consumption activities. The process of identity construction that occurs on Spotify begins with teenager's full understanding and awareness of the interrelated concepts of identity and music. This then motivates young people to optimize Spotify as a medium for them to construct the identity they want to display through music.

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