

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

Celebrification used to appear exclusive and directed by industrial purpose. Turner defines celebrification as transformation process of ordinary people into celebrity (Turner 2004). The requirements to define a person as celebrity have evolved in recent years, especially with the emergence of online media. This resulted in celebrity no longer become a prestigious title as many people nowadays able to self-construct themselves to achieve the status of celebrity. Formerly, to be called as celebrity, one must be acknowledged and well known in public to bring influence to people. Therefore, celebrification process used to be exclusively done by certain people. However, in the era of the Internet, processes of celebrification are no longer solely entitled to large media corporations; by contrast, “we see the process of celebrification trickling down” (Marwick dan Boyd, *To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter* 2011).

Along with the existing traditional or mainstream celebrity, the advent of digital media also gave rise to new forms of celebrity that led us upon the term micro-celebrity. Micro-celebrity can be understood as a strategy practiced by people to attract audience by using video, blogs, social media, and online streaming platforms (Marwick dan Boyd, *To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter* 2011). It is argued that a person who has secured his/her presence on the internet through posting seemed authentic contents managed to create a buzz and gathered fan following. Initially introduced by Terri Senft in her 2008 book

“Camgirls: Celebrity & Community in the Age of Social Networks”, ‘microcelebrity’ was used to describe ordinary people that seized social media to construct fame (Senft 2008). Senft’s clear perception was to identify the significance of new patterns of technologically mediated visibility by placing its study within persistent and sometimes intractable debates about the public sphere (Senft 2008). Several examples of this type of celebrity can be commonly spotted as beauty vloggers, Youtubers, Twitch streamers, as well as the currently gaining-attention TikTokers.

Following the enhanced technology these days, virtual celebrities also rise to fame and able to place itself as one of mainstream culture hyped by many. Undoubtedly, the virtual celebrity is a body which subsists in the state of virtuality. Black explains that virtual idol is a new kind of automation that crafted the advances from industrial to post-industrial age whereas in the machine age, the body was imagined to be machine; in the information age, the body is envisioned to be information (Black 2006). Virtual celebrity able to perform real life activities and earn money from the practices, where in most cases, the creators are the ones who get the money instead of the virtual celebrities themselves (Hoang dan Su 2019). The fact that virtual celebrity is presented only in digital format and can be advertised, not simply as a product capable of being manipulated, but as the encoded potential which allows creators to animate these stars in the first instance proposes a further level of complexity in the relationship between digital information and body (Black 2006). In addition, rather than merely consuming audio-visual representation of the virtual celebrity, audiences

can actually experience instances of the virtual celebrity's stage-managed body itself, which is no less real and original than those used to produce movies or songs (Black 2006).

More popular term *VTuber* (Virtual Youtuber) initially refers to certain non-human of fame who are known mainly in specific platform, in this case, is YouTube, to entertain their audiences. Frank Davey on his study titled "The 'Virtual Youtuber' Phenomenon in Japan" refers to VTuber as content creators who use motion-capture technology to record and map their own movements in 2D or 3D illustration or computer-generated model in order to create the illusion of a lifelike virtual character that moves like real person (Davey 2021). The images of stars, people that are famous for being famous are all circulated and consumed daily across the globe. These figures secured their own platforms where they can express and influence others by appealing their charms using a 2D or 3D body. This trend might aim to reshape the relationship and interactions between human and machine with the help of today's promising and elevated technologies such as AI and real-time graphics.

These non-human figures tend to build their communities by sharing their daily lives, hobbies, skills to engage audience from real world. Certain activities that are commonly done or produced by real-life celebrities were done by virtual characters that made it seems like those characters also live the life of commoners. Observing the uniqueness of these virtual stars, it's fascinating how the audiences actually relate and sympathize with them; even go as far as 'worshipping' their unreal existences. Known by the name CodeMiko, this rising virtual streamer as

well as VTuber mainly operated on a live streaming platform known as Twitch. Nonetheless, despite of her already-established community and audience on the platform, CodeMiko strikes to pertain and expand her celebrification strategy on platforms outside Twitch, which in this circumstance, fall on YouTube.

YouTube is a vast and convenient platform to carry on the process of celebrification. Not limited on game-streaming services, YouTube also mainly known for its convenience in publishing various contents, be it vlogs, music-related, education, movies, and many more. Even though platforms like Facebook/Facebook Live, Twitter, or Instagram also provide almost similar services, YouTube is considered as way more enhanced. Taking an example of Instagram where many micro-celebrities practice celebrification, for CodeMiko who depends on posting re-capped videos, the strategy might not apply the same. Instagram is limiting duration of video or reel only up to 60 second. Thus, Miko's way of manifesting on her edited 15-30 minutes videos to expand her celebrification might not work. Hou agrees that YouTube channels could become an alternative environment for in manufacturing industrialized celebrity (Hou 2019). The audience can press like, leave comments, and subscribe to their desired channels. For micro-celebrities, these features apply as a measure of success. The number of subscribers on YouTube befitted popular marker indicating one's ability to appeal connected and repeatedly returning audiences (Hou 2019). Noting the range, impact, and supporting features of YouTube, it is appraised that this website is complementary to be explored in this study.

Born with the name Youna Kang, CodeMiko has successfully earned her fame as a 3D Vtuber persona, living her internet life as a game streamer on platform called *Twitch*. With the enormous growth of interests in live gaming and live streaming space, Twitch appeared as an eye-candy after being acquired by Amazon in 2014 and was able to steadily establish as one of biggest video game streaming platforms. CodeMiko is recognized publicly as Twitch streamer that attracts her audience through her gaming skills as well as her funny antics where she often accepts certain requests directly sent to her and reacts to them attentively. Instead of pursuing her micro-celebrity career by appealing her real self to the audience, Kang designed a brand/image that promotes her “other self”, separated from her real self/persona. By becoming a public figure, Miko also owns social media used to interact and engage with her followers as if the virtual figure is real and alive.

Different from many virtual characters that existed before CodeMiko where their creators usually remained anonymous, Kang decided to break the mainstream concept. Detached from the virtual character, there is a real person Youna Kang, who refers to herself as The Technician, who works behind the screen. Becoming the creator of her own brand CodeMiko, Kang did not hide herself from Miko’s audience and often appeared as the spin-off character that separated herself from Miko, but is still part of Miko’s life. Kang as CodeMiko’s creator often shifts between her two personas where she plays the role of digital human CodeMiko (image) as well as The Technician, the person (personality) behind the 3D character. The Technician is behind the entire process of

developing, engineering, and mapping Miko's body to fluently mirror her movements. To spice things, Kang as The Technician often exhibits a mirrored split-screen during the stream to demonstrate her interactive features. As a South Korean-American streamer and YouTuber, CodeMiko has a physical appearance that resembles Asians yet mostly styled as American teenage girl. Miko is a young, beautiful, a hot streamer popular among youth. She has approximate height of 165 cm, a slim built with her attractive big eyes in green, and long, silky blonde hair completing her beauty (see Figure 1.1). Built as brand in 2020, CodeMiko does not necessarily stuck in her early appearance. Just like other female influencers, Miko also likes to experiment with her screen looks. That includes changing outfits, make-up and hair-styles, as well as dressing for specific events (Christmas, Halloween, etc.). Carefully aware of this combination of Korean-American features, Youna Kang seems to put her focus in structuring character CodeMiko to represent her real life background, with an image of CodeMiko nearly imitates other well-known virtual celebrities such as Hatsune Miku and Kizuna AI.



*Figure 1.1 CodeMiko ahead of her debut as VTuber*

Discussing about virtual celebrity isn't complete without understanding where and when this phenomenon began to embark. The name Hatsune Miku might be more familiar to people, especially to those who are entitled as *otaku*, a Japanese term applied for people who are obsessive with computers or particular interests of popular culture such as *anime* and *manga*. Hatsune Miku, mainly known as the trend-setter for other virtual celebrities, exists up to this day. The virtual-dol is one of the characters that brought the term VTuber to gain attention publicly. Miku is a humanoid character created by Crypton Future Media on August 2007. She can be described as a teenage female with the height of 158 cm and aged 16 years old eternally. The teenage virtual-dol is seen as an everlasting entertainer that will never grow up, get sick, get bored, and will never stop becoming idol unless the program that support the character is discontinued. This kind of idol is seen as ideal for idol market in which fans typically demand a

perfect idol in which her/his image will never scratch in the Japanese entertainment industry (Le 2013).

The success of Hatsune Miku could inspire other creators to produce similar products to maintain the existence of virtual idol to speckle more. The Hatsune Miku phenomenon, specifically the processes that contributed to the rise of this virtual idol illustrate several important points. It presents a different solution to the currently existing system where Miku provide the third option, a promising future to embrace new community, and one that offers to balance the relationship between consumer and corporations. If anything, the Hatsune Miku phenomenon demonstrates that a bottom-up, grass-root approach toward protecting intellectual property while promoting individual creativity is one worthy of consideration (Le 2013). Other than Miku, Kizuna AI also secured her fame by becoming a Virtual YouTuber. Both Miku and Kizuna are originated from Japanese culture and inspired many other existing virtual celebrities to also present their values and stand side-to-side with mainstream celebrities.

Virtual celebrities, or in this case operated as VTubers (Virtual YouTubers) are expected to appear in a form of non-human. They share contents based on hobbies, interests, as well as unlimited or funny information on platform such as YouTube in order to gain audience that later commit to them through online engagement. In 2021, YouTube has successfully generated around \$28.8 billion revenue with over 2.5 billion people access this platform once a month (Iqbal 2022). Engagement built between these VTubers and audiences provide mutual benefits for each party where audiences achieve emotional satisfaction by

relating and supporting their favorite content creators. While audience could gain pleasure through this process, VTubers or content creators earned subscription, fame, and community focusing on them as the main interest (Davey 2021). The numbers of subscribers, viewers, likes, as well as comments indicate their position to stardom.

If Miku and Kizuna AI are considered as the ones dominating Asia, there is also the name Maya Kodes to be introduced. Nearly similar with Miku, Maya Kodes is another example of virtual celebrity, claimed as the world's first interactive holographic recording artist and real-time virtual pop star. Maya Kodes is not the first holographic production that provides the experience of having virtual singer as an idol. Way before Hatsune Miku and Maya Kodes happened, the existence of Ananova also created a buzz for being the world's first virtual news anchor that provided reading news to audiences 24 hour a day. According to CNN, Ananova is a virtual broadcaster that reads news, sports, weather and more, with a personality designed to rival flesh-and-blood anchors (Hopper 2000). Ananova was launched on April 2000 and developed by one of the division of Press Association, a United Kingdom news agency. Ananova was active until 2004. These days, people can no longer watch her anchoring the news. Instead, the audience of Ananova can access the website (<https://ananova.news/>) to read up-to-date news which include general news, lifestyle, and regional news.

Not necessarily limiting their influence on certain platforms like Twitch or YouTube, these virtual celebrities are also spread on social media. On Instagram, Lil Miquela has become a huge phenomenon due her fame as virtual model that

appear as stylish model and is popular among the youth. Miquela “Lil Miquela” Sousa is identified as 19-year-old Brazilian-American virtual influencer with an audience of over 3 million followers on Instagram (@lilmiquela) as of July 2022. Miquela is fabricated through computer-generated imagery (CGI)—a realistically animated simulacra of the “authentic” micro-celebrity archetype (Marwick, Status Update. *Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age* 2013). Her image and its mediagenic transmit gets valued at 125 USD million USD (Jonathan Shieber 2019). Jenna Derren and Gilian Brooks on their article titled “Celebrity 2.0: Lil Miquela and the rise of virtual star system” (Drenten dan Brooks 2020) investigate the case of Lil Miquela and argue that her celebrification reviews a reimagined virtual star system, defined by techno-human cultural intermediaries and the non-agentic persona as property. Hence, they stated that virtual star system calls to oppositions between the real and the artificial, thus questions the significance of authenticity in celebrity practice. CodeMiko, compared to all previously mentioned-virtual stars, present herself not only as CodeMiko, but also plays an extra role as The Technician, which concerns celebrification process of the image and the struggles of identity shifting between two roles. This makes the scrutiny of CodeMiko becomes significant to be explored further.

Several studies related to the issue are referred in order to support this study. The first study was conducted by Anne Jerslev entitled “In the Time of the Microcelebrity: Celebrification and the YouTuber Zoella” discovered that Zoella’s strategies for her celebrification process appeared to be by performing authenticity and connectedness that were constructed through temporality of

nowness and permanent upload. Next is study conducted by Anisah Fathiroh and Nurul Fitri Hapsari entitled “The Celebrification of a Politician on Instagram: A Case Study of @Ridwankamil” stated that celebrification process of Ridwan Kamil was driven by himself through online self-presentation technique where the mayor of Bandung acquired celebrity status through his “peasantness” to possibly gain long-term support that benefit his future political career. Two other related-studies done by Xin Zhou entitled “Virtual Youtuber Kizuna AI: Co-creating human-non-human interaction and celebrity audience relationship” as well as “Virtual Celebrities and Consumers: A Blended Reality” conducted by Thuy Duong Hoang and Yidan Su were considered great references as both studies reveal deeper analysis of virtual celebrities practice instead of merely cultural phenomenon. Last but not least, the author also quoted several terms and explanations from Alice E. Marwick and Danah Boyd’s work of “To see and to be seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter”, thus found out that even traditional celebrity who earned their fame still uses micro-celebrity technique of DIY celebrity to keep the popularity and attention centered around them.

As types of celebrity and celebrification dynamically branch out and vary along with the support of digital media, the author believes that this study covers similar or related issue and is important to be explored as it also contributes to the influence of celebrity culture. This study is deemed necessary to be specifically examined considering that the celebrification process of CodeMiko as Vtuber or Twitch Vstreamer previously has never been investigated in any work.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

With the interesting and unique background where CodeMiko and The Technician engage with one another, this study seeks to investigate how celebrification process of CodeMiko is achieved and depicted throughout her expansion on YouTube, and how this portrayal contributes a value in CodeMiko's existence.

Three aspects of research aim are covered and answered through the following research questions:

1. How does CodeMiko expand her celebrification process on YouTube?
2. How does CodeMiko's online self-presentation depicted on her Youtube channel?
3. How does The Technician's existence influence CodeMiko celebrification process on YouTube?

## 1.3 Objectives of the Study

In this research, author splits the aims in three parts where each considers different aspect toward CodeMiko. The following are unfolded as the purposes of study:

1. To examine CodeMiko's way of expanding celebrification on YouTube is being represented.
2. To inspect the way CodeMiko's online self-presentation is depicted on her YouTube channel.
3. To look at how the existence of The Technician influence CodeMiko's celebrification process on YouTube.

#### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study proposes to investigate more about the celebrification process, in this case, of CodeMiko by focusing on CodeMiko's online self-presentation depicted on her YouTube channel. Establishing her brand as interactive virtual streamer who does live game-streaming on Twitch, CodeMiko, in contrast, often get banned from her own platform for breaking regulated policies. Contrary to most streamers that pursue their branding using common strategies of authenticity and connectedness to please their audience, CodeMiko often ditch her audience and is not afraid of saying inappropriate comments or personal opinions which are usually avoided by creators of virtual character in case it would ruin the virtual characters themselves. Therefore, this study seeks to uncover CodeMiko's way of expanding celebrification and online self-presentation process that might be dispatched from the usual pattern that put CodeMiko as a captivating issue to be studied further. As the discussion regarding virtual celebrity especially VTuber is still considered new, the author also expected that this study could be used as references for future researches.

#### 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Celebrification : Transformation process of ordinary people into celebrity (Turner 2004).

Digital Human : Human-like character with expressive AI entities embodied who often strikes a resemblance with real people , both in behavior and appearance, a

- given face and personality to relate to (Weiss 2022).
- Micro-celebrity : A self-presentation technique where certain people allow themselves to be recognised as public persona consumed by others with the appeal of strategic intimacy in order to gather their audience. (Marwick dan Boyd, To See and Be Seen: Celebrity Practice on Twitter 2011)
- Twitch : An interactive live-streaming service for content spanning gaming, entertainment, sports, music, and more. (Twitch.tv 2011)
- Virtual Celebrity : New type of celebrity in a form of 2D or 3D body with the capability of performing ‘real life’ celebrity practices and earn money and fame through that (Le 2013) .
- Virtual YouTuber : Usually called as VTuber, form of previously mentioned Virtual Celebrity that entertain audience by streaming/posting contents on YouTube and other online streaming and sharing platforms (Davey 2021).
- YouTube : A video sharing-platform where users can watch, like, share, comment, and upload their own videos (Sugihartati and Egalita 2019).