

## INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized world, youths are exposed to the digital revolution. Their identities are constantly evolving within a complex landscape of online influences (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). While the concept of identity itself is complex (Hall & Du Gay, 1996), youths navigate this complexity through constant interaction with their environment and the feedback they receive from others (Barton & Lee, 2013; Luyckx et al., 2011; Soldatova & Pogorelov, 2018). The relative anonymity within digital spaces allows for freedom of self-expression, potentially creating a platform for identity exploration (Baym, 2015).

Virtual environments offer the opportunity to inhabit possible selves, testing different identities and characteristics (Gabarnet et al., 2022). This concept is particularly relevant to VTubers (Virtual YouTubers), who construct online personas through the online space (Gwillim-Thomas, 2023). The VTuber phenomenon, particularly popular among young audiences in East Asia, draws inspiration from Japanese pop culture (Byron, 2023; Chen & Hu, 2024). VTubing has become a platform for identity exploration and expression, with language choices playing an important role in shaping these crafted identities (Turner, 2022).

In the Western context, Amanda Lee, also known as AmaLee, stands out through her career in the evolving realm of VTubers. Known for her English covers of Japanese songs, AmaLee is a renowned singer, voice actress, and YouTuber with over 1 billion views and 2 million subscribers. In 2021, AmaLee took a captivating step by creating a new VTuber identity called Monarch while also releasing an entire album, *Rise of the Monarch*, to express it. This album's lyrics explored the freedom of expression for youth in the virtual world. This innovative strategy highlights the diverse ways VTubers express themselves, and AmaLee's journey exemplifies the dynamism of online entertainment and the ability for established artists to embrace new forms of self-expression in the virtual world.

Song lyrics function as a means for conveying messages and emotions (Bertoli-Dutra & Bissaco, 2006; Cahyaningrum, 2021). In particular, figurative language in song lyrics allows songwriters to go beyond the literal meaning of words, offering glimpses into their personalities and experiences while conveying complex ideas in an imaginative way (Abrams & Harpham, 2014). This use of figurative language can also be a form of self-discovery that leads to innovative expression (Soldatova & Pogorelov, 2018).

Research has explored the complex phenomenon of VTubing where creators use technology, language, and fan interaction to express themselves in the online world (Erbenraut, 2022; Gwillim-Thomas, 2023). Similarly, studies on lyrics have explored the meanings conveyed through figurative language (Swarniti, 2022) and the power of language to express complex emotions (Milana & Ardi, 2021).

Despite existing research on VTuber identity construction through various elements and the analysis of figurative language in song lyrics, a gap remains in understanding how VTubers specifically utilize figurative language within their song lyrics to shape their virtual identities. Examining the use of figurative language within song lyrics offers valuable insights into VTuber's constructed identity and their interaction within the online world.

This study not only offers a nuanced understanding of AmaLee's specific persona but also establishes a novel approach to VTuber identity analysis, paving the way for future research into virtual identities expressed through song lyrics. This paper provides valuable insights to both VTuber studies and virtual identity research through the analysis of the album *Rise of the Monarch* by AmaLee. This specific album was chosen due to its role in establishing AmaLee's VTuber identity, serving as a foundation for understanding her virtual persona. Building upon Barton and Lee's (2013) virtual identity through language online as well as Abrams and Harpham's (2014) literary theories of figurative language, this research addresses the research question of: What

kind of virtual identity is depicted through VTuber AmaLee's utilization of metaphors and symbols within her song lyrics?