Parasocial Interaction Analysis Of Virtual Youtuber Kobo Kanaeru With Fans In Indonesia

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Abstrak
Studi ini menganalisis interaksi parasosial antara Virtual YouTuber Kobo Kanaeru dan penggemarnya di Indonesia, membahas bagaimana hubungan satu sisi ini terbentuk melalui YouTube. Dengan menggunakan studi kualitatif, data dari wawancara mendalam dengan tujuh penggemar diperiksa melalui kerangka kerja PSI-Process Schramm dan Hartmann (2008). Temuan menunjukkan ikatan multidimensional yang dibangun secara berurutan melalui respons kognitif, afektif, dan perilaku. Secara kognitif, penggemar membingkai Kobo Kanaeru dalam peran yang intim secara budaya sebagai "adik perempuan", menumbuhkan keakraban dan keterkaitan. Secara afektif, hal ini menyebabkan penularan emosi dan empati yang mendalam, di mana penggemar menyinkronkan perasaan mereka dengan persona di layar. Secara perilaku, proses internal ini bermanifestasi sebagai peniruan, partisipasi aktif dalam obrolan langsung, dan dukungan finansial, yang mensimulasikan interaksi timbal balik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kombinasi kedekatan budaya-linguistik, otentisitas yang dirasakan, dan interaktivitas langsung YouTube memfasilitasi keterikatan parasosial yang unik, kuat, dan secara subyektif tulus. Studi ini berkontribusi pada kajian media digital dengan memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang keterlibatan penggemar dalam industri VTuber yang sedang berkembang, menawarkan wawasan bagi para kreator konten dan peneliti masa depan yang mengeksplorasi komunitas selebriti virtual.

Kata kunci: *Interaksi Parasosial, YouTuber Virtual (VTuber), Kobo Kanaeru, Fandom Digital, Fenomenologi.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Parasocial interaction (PSI) is a one-sided relationship between audiences and media figures, a concept first introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956). With the rise of digital media, these perceived relationships have expanded, playing a significant role in shaping audience engagement, loyalty, and emotional attachment. The emergence of Virtual YouTubers (VTubers) represents a new dimension in parasocial relationships. VTubers are content creators who use motion-capture technology to animate a digital avatar, creating the illusion of a lifelike virtual character. Indonesia sits as the top South-East Asian country with the most VTuber viewers. Kobo Kanaeru, a VTuber from the Hololive Production agency based in Indonesia, has experienced significant growth, gaining over 2.63 million subscribers on YouTube. Her unique persona as a rain shaman, combined with her chaotic, humorous, and spontaneous streaming style, has cultivated a large and dedicated fanbase known as "Kobokers." Despite the growing popularity of VTubers, research on how fans perceive and experience parasocial interactions with figures like Kobo Kanaeru remains limited. Previous studies have focused on parasocial interactions with K-Pop idols or traditional celebrities, leaving a gap in understanding the dynamics within the VTuber community. This study aims to bridge that gap by providing an in-depth analysis of the parasocial interactions between Kobo Kanaeru and her Indonesian fans on YouTube.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Schramm and Hartmann (2008) further conceptualized PSI into a processing model with three sequential responses: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive response involves processes like attention allocation, comprehension, and evaluation of the persona. The affective response relates to feelings such as sympathy, empathy,

and emotional contagion. The behavioral response includes non-verbal mimicry, (para-)verbal communication (e.g., live chat), and behavioral intentions.

III. RESEARCH METHODOOGY

This study implements a qualitative research approach with a phenomenology case study design to allow an in-depth exploration of fans' lived experiences. The research subjects were seven key informants, selected via purposive sampling, who are active Indonesian fans of Kobo Kanaeru. Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted online in June 2025. The interview guide was structured according to Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) PSI-Process scales, covering cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses.

Table 3.1 Parasocial Response Classification

Response	Process	Behaviour Example
Cognitive	1. Attention Allocation	Carefully followed the persona's behaviour
	2. Comprehension of Persona's action and situation	Knowing the persona's routine and activities
	3. Activation of Prior Media and Life Experiences	Wondering if there's a similar person to the persona
	4. Evaluations of Persona and Persona's Actions	Aware of the aspects liked and disliked by the persona
	5. Anticipatory Observation	Kept asking how things would evolve around the persona
	6. Construction of Relations Between Persona and Self	Imagining having a personal relationship with the persona in real life
Affective	1. Sympathy/Antipathy	Felt a deep feeling by the actions of the persona
	2. Empathy/Counter Empathy	Felt the same emotions as the persona
	3. Emotion Contagion	Emotions controlled by the persona
Behavioral	1. Non-verbal Behaviour	Mimicking persona's actions, style of clothing, singing style, even selfie pose
	2. (Para-)verbal Behaviour	Communicating to the persona on impulse
	3. Behavioural Intentions	Having a desire to speaking out directly to the persona

Source : Schramm & Hartmann (2008)

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings reveal that the parasocial interaction between fans and Kobo Kanaeru is constructed through a sequential, multidimensional process.

4.1 Cognitive Responses: Fans actively build a mental model of Kobo Kanaeru. They selectively allocate attention to her authentic, chaotic, and humorous traits. They comprehend her narrative through continuous, passive monitoring of her social media updates. A key finding was the cognitive construction of Kobo within the culturally intimate role of a "little sister" (adik). This framework fosters a sense of familial familiarity and relatability, making the one-sided relationship feel intuitive and safe. Fans also demonstrated a conscious separation between the curated VTuber persona and the real person behind the avatar.

4.2 Affective Responses: Emotional connection forms the core of the bond. Fans experience emotional contagion, synchronizing their moods with Kobo's on-screen emotions—feeling happy during her playful streams and frustrated during her gaming challenges. This deepens into empathy, where fans internalize and co-experience her feelings, particularly during moments of vulnerability or artistic sincerity. Climactic emotional moments, such as her birthday stream or the public "Flower Bouquet" incident, serve as cornerstone memories that significantly deepen loyalty and the subjective sense of a shared experience.

4.3 Behavioral Responses: Internal processes translate into tangible actions. This includes non-verbal mimicry, such as unconsciously adopting her catchphrases and humor. Para-verbal behavior is prominent in active live chat participation and financial support via Super Chats and Memberships, simulating a reciprocal dialogue. The intensity of behavioral intentions—the desire for direct communication—varied among fans, correlating with their level of PSI intensity.

Discussion: The findings align with and validate Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) PSI-Process model. The study confirms that fans are not passive consumers but active constructors of a parasocial relationship. The unique potency of the bond with Kobo Kanaeru stems from the intersection of her culturally proximate "little sister" persona, her perceived authenticity, and the real-time, interactive affordances of YouTube live streaming. This combination fosters a parasocial experience that is deeply engaging yet remains within culturally resonant and psychologically safe boundaries, showing no signs of the pathological tendencies found in some other intense fan communities.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

5.1 Conclusion

The parasocial interaction between Kobo Kanaeru and her Indonesian fans is a sophisticated simulation of a social relationship, sequentially built through cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses. Cognitively, fans frame her as a knowable "little sister." Affectively, they connect through shared emotion and empathy. Behaviorally, they enact the relationship through mimicry and active participation. The unique blend of Kobo's localized Indonesian appeal, authenticity, and YouTube's interactivity facilitates a potent and subjectively genuine parasocial attachment.

5.2 Suggestion

5.2.1 Academic: Future research should include a larger, more diverse sample and employ mixed-methods approaches to generalize findings and explore correlations with demographic factors.

5.2.2 Practical: For VTubers, understanding the "little sister" framing can guide authentic persona development that encourages positive, protective fandom while maintaining clear boundaries. For fans and communities, practicing conscious support, respecting the persona-person boundary, and channeling engagement into creative and positive community actions is encouraged.

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