

## Behind visuals and sounds: A barthesian semiotic analysis of virtual identity representation in the film colourful stage

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**Abstract** - This study explores the construction of virtual identity in the animated film *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) through Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Using a qualitative approach, the analysis focuses on selected visual and auditory signs, including stage design, avatar customization, audience responses, and glitch effects. Each sign is examined at the levels of denotation and connotation, followed by the identification of myths that naturalize particular understandings of digital identity. The findings demonstrate that the film portrays virtual identity as both aspirational and vulnerable: aspirational through the myth of perfection, where avatars appear flawless and empowering, and vulnerable through scenes that reveal emotional fragility and technological disruptions. This duality reflects broader cultural narratives about authenticity, social validation, and the tension between real and virtual selves. By situating the analysis within media semiotics and digital culture, the study highlights how *Colorful Stage* functions as a cultural text that mirrors contemporary discourses on identity in mediated environments.

**Keywords:** semiotics; Barthes; virtual identity; audio-visual representation; digital culture

### 1. Introduction

The way people express, negotiate, and perform their identities has changed dramatically as a result of the quick development of digital technology and networked communication. Identity is now a fluid and performative construct shaped within virtual spaces rather than a fixed entity confined to the physical body in today's digital culture. Users can create different versions of themselves through digital games, online platforms, and animated performances. Some of these versions are experimental, some are aspirational, and some are made to fit social norms. This change calls into question visibility, authenticity, and the cultural myths that shape the representation and consumption of digital identities. Virtual identity has grown in importance as a field of study within communication studies. Identity construction has been studied in the past in settings like online gaming communities, social media platforms, and avatar-based.

Virtual identity has grown in importance as a field of study within communication studies. Identity construction has been studied in the past in settings like online gaming communities, social media platforms, and avatar-based interactions (Turkle, 2011; Nakamura, 2002; Papacharissi, 2011). According to these studies, identity frequently arises in digital environments at the nexus of personal creativity and societal norms, highlighting the conflict between self-expression and social validation.



The representation of virtual identity in narrative audiovisual texts, especially animated films that dramatize the difficulties and possibilities of digital selfhood, has received less attention than the interactive platforms that have been the focus of much of this research.

*Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) presents a particularly relevant case for this discussion. The movie not only shows the main character's struggles in a virtual performance space, but it also puts those struggles in a bigger picture that includes technology, audience reaction, and how the character sees themselves. The movie uses dramatic visual symbols, carefully made soundscapes, and narrative tension to make a multi-layered picture of what it means to have a "virtual identity." Its portrayal underscores the vulnerability that arises when authenticity and perfection are challenged, alongside the empowerment derived from adopting a digital identity.

By using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to examine how *Colorful Stage* conveys concepts of virtual identity, this study fills a research gap in media semiotics. In order to contribute to larger conversations in communication, cultural studies, and digital media scholarship, the research will analyze the denotative and connotative aspects of specific visual and auditory signs and identify the cultural myths that surround digital selfhood.

Semiotics, broadly defined as the study of signs and signification, offers a vital framework for examining the construction and interpretation of meaning within communication processes. Based on the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, semiotics stresses that signs don't just reflect reality; they also shape how people see and understand the world. In communication studies, this viewpoint is essential as media messages be they visual, textual, or auditory are not impartial conduits of information but rather symbolic constructs infused with cultural codes (Chandler, 2017).

Semiotics has been extensively utilized in contemporary media to examine advertising, film, popular culture, and digital platforms. Each of these areas uses signs like pictures, colors, sounds, and gestures that mean more than what they literally mean. Roland Barthes, a prominent figure in semiotic theory, augmented this framework by presenting the notions of denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). Denotation is the literal meaning of a sign, connotation is the meaning that comes from its associations and culture, and myth is the process of making cultural values seem like universal truths. These levels of meaning help researchers find out how media texts subtly support ideologies and change how people see culture.

The theoretical foundation of this study is Roland Barthes' semiotics, which provides a systematic approach for analyzing how signs produce meaning in cultural texts. Barthes (1972) distinguishes three levels of signification: denotation, connotation, and myth. Denotation refers to the literal, descriptive meaning of a sign; connotation captures the associative, cultural, and emotional dimensions; while myth represents broader ideological narratives that naturalize certain values as common sense. This tripartite model is particularly effective for uncovering how media texts communicate meanings that go beyond surface representation.

Semiotics has long been applied in communication studies to reveal how cultural codes operate in advertising, photography, literature, and film (Hall, 1997; Chandler, 2017). In audiovisual media, Barthes' framework is especially relevant because multiple sign systems visual, auditory, and narrative interact to construct layered meanings. A color palette, for example, may denote an aesthetic choice but also connote emotional states or social identities, while myth emerges when such associations become framed as universal truths. Similarly, auditory features like voice modulation or sound glitches may not only provide technical information but also signify vulnerability, resilience, or authenticity.

For this study, Barthes' semiotics is applied to selected scenes from *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025). The framework guides the analysis of how visual and auditory signs construct representations of virtual identity. Specifically, the framework enables the researcher to (1) identify literal signs (denotation), (2) interpret their associative meanings (connotation), and (3) uncover cultural myths about digital identity such as perfection, fragility, and authenticity that the film reinforces.

This theoretical orientation is chosen because it bridges micro-level analysis of signs with macro-level cultural critique, making it possible to connect narrative details from the film with broader



discussions in media, communication, and digital culture. As such, Barthes' semiotics provides both the analytical tools and critical perspective needed to understand how virtual identity is symbolically represented and culturally naturalized in contemporary audiovisual texts.

In the field of communication studies, semiotics is both a way to look at the symbolic parts of media and a theory that explains them. For instance, the use of color in a movie might mean something about the way it looks, but it might also mean something about the characters' feelings, identities, or social standing. Similarly, voice modulation or sound effects may not only go with the story but also add to our understanding of the characters' feelings or social standing. By focusing on these ways of signifying, semiotics helps researchers bridge the gap between analyzing texts and criticizing culture. This makes it especially useful for looking at how virtual identities are shown in digital media texts like *Colorful Stage! A Miku That Can't Sing* (2025).

With the rise of digital platforms, identity has become a performative and fluid idea. Traditional ideas of identity as stable and based on social roles have been challenged by scholars who say that digital environments allow people to create multiple selves, try out different personas, and negotiate where they belong in connected spaces (Turkle, 2011; Papacharissi, 2011). Thus, a person's virtual identity is not just a copy of their real-life self; it's also a performance shaped by technology, cultural norms, and what the audience expects.

The studies reviewed demonstrate a growing interest in applying Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to various forms of media, including films and posters. Here's a critical review of the findings, common themes and strengths: (a) Multiple studies successfully applied Barthes' semiotic theory to uncover underlying meanings in film posters and narratives, highlighting the significance of visual elements in communication. (b) Research on the "Parasite" film poster revealed that visual elements convey social inequality, supporting the director's intentions (Arpan et al., 2024). (c) Similarly, studies on "Divergent" and "Turning Red" movies used Barthes' theory to analyse denotative and connotative meanings, providing insights into the films' themes and messages (Arianti et al., 2025; Tanzil & Andriano, 2024).

A detailed examination of how interpersonal meaning is conveyed through both the lyrics and the music video of the song "Zombie" by the South Korean band DAY6 (Antari, 2022) by using Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyse the linguistic features of the song's lyrics, identifying key elements of mood, modality, and interpersonal relationships embedded in the text. One of the strengths of the article lies in its interdisciplinary approach, combining music video analysis with linguistic theory, which allows for a deeper understanding of the song's communicative intentions (Antari, 2022). The study offers insightful observations about how the lyrics of "Zombie" engage with themes of isolation, mental health, and emotional struggle, reflecting the interpersonal dynamics between the singer and the audience (Antari, 2022). However, while the paper effectively links linguistic choices to emotional expression, it does not fully explore the potential socio-cultural context of these emotions in the broader framework of K-pop culture, which would have enriched the analysis (Antari, 2022). The video analysis is another strong aspect of the study, as it highlights the visual narrative and its alignment with the song's lyrical content. Antari (2022) argues that the video's portrayal of a zombie-like existence enhances the song's themes of numbness and alienation. This visual element supports the interpersonal meanings in the lyrics, reinforcing the sense of disconnection between the protagonist and their environment (Antari, 2022). However, the video analysis could have benefited from a more nuanced exploration of how visual elements such as camera angles, colour schemes, and character positioning further contribute to the interpersonal dynamics, particularly in terms of power relations and emotional engagement with the audience (Antari, 2022). Another limitation of the paper is its narrow focus on only one song and video, which restricts its ability to generalize findings to other K-pop songs or music videos. While the focus on "Zombie" provides a deep and rich analysis, it leaves open the question of how typical or unique this song's use of interpersonal meaning is within the genre (Antari, 2022).

A comparative approach, including other popular K-pop songs, could have provided a broader understanding of how interpersonal meanings are commonly constructed in K-pop lyrics and videos. Overall, Antari's (2022) article is an insightful contribution to the study of language in music videos, effectively applying systemic functional linguistics to explore the interpersonal dimensions of the song



"Zombie" by DAY6. While the analysis is strong in its application of theory to text, further expansion into the socio-cultural context of the K-pop industry and a broader sample of songs would enhance the study's applicability and depth.

The articles reviewed showcase a diverse range of topics in language, literature, and cultural studies. The studies demonstrate a strong focus on analysing literary texts and exploring the intersection of language and culture. By examining various genres and authors, the researchers provide valuable insights into the complexities of human experience and the role of literature in shaping our understanding of the world.

The studies reviewed employ a range of methodologies, including qualitative and comparative analyses. While these approaches provide in-depth insights, future studies could benefit from mixed-methods designs to increase generalizability. The reliance on textual analysis, while valuable, might limit the scope of inquiry. Incorporating reader-response theory or audience studies could provide complementary perspectives (Hamdi, 2023; Hasan, 2024; Lestari & Alamsyah, 2024)

Further research is needed to explore the intersection of language, literature, and culture in diverse contexts, including non-Western societies and marginalized communities. Studies could investigate the role of literature in shaping cultural attitudes and promoting social change, highlighting the significance of literary studies in contemporary society. The use of digital humanities and computational methods could also be explored to analyze large datasets and identify patterns in literary texts, Ahmed et al. 2025, Uzma et al. 2025.

In conclusion, the articles reviewed demonstrate the richness and diversity of language, literature, and cultural studies. By exploring different topics and methodologies, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between language, culture, and human experience. Future research can build upon these findings, pushing the boundaries of inquiry and expanding our understanding of the significance of literary studies in contemporary society (Hamdi, 2023; Hasan, 2024; Lestari & Alamsyah, 2024; Ahmed et al., 2025; Uzma et al., 2025).

The studies reviewed showcase a diverse range of topics in language and cultural analysis. Rizqi and Mantiri's 2024 study on metaphors in Katy Perry's song lyrics provides valuable insights into the use of figurative language in popular music. The study identifies various metaphors used by Katy Perry, such as "I went from zero, to my own hero" and "Acceptance is the key to be truly free," which convey themes of empowerment and love (Rizqi & Mantiri, 2024). The study demonstrates a thorough understanding of metaphor theory and its application to song lyrics. Further analysis could explore the cultural context and potential impact of these metaphors on listeners. Additionally, comparing Katy Perry's use of metaphors to other artists could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of metaphors in popular music.

In contrast, a study on autism representation in the Korean drama "Extraordinary Attorney Woo" offers a nuanced analysis of the portrayal of autism in media. The study highlights the importance of accurate representation and its potential impact on societal attitudes towards autism (Wajdi et al. 2025; cf. Wajdi, 2024). By examining the drama's narrative and character development, the study provides insights into the ways in which media can shape cultural perceptions of autism. Both studies demonstrate the significance of language and cultural analysis in understanding the complexities of human experience. While Rizqi and Mantiri's study focuses on the use of metaphors in song lyrics, Wajdi et al.'s study examines the representation of autism in media, highlighting the diversity of topics and approaches in language and cultural studies (Rizqi & Mantiri, 2024; Wajdi et al., 2025; cf. Wajdi, 2024). Overall, these studies contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of language and culture in shaping our perceptions and experiences. Further research could build upon these findings, exploring new topics and methodologies to expand our understanding of the complex relationships between language, culture, and human experience.

Most studies employed a qualitative approach, which is suitable for in-depth analysis of semiotic signs. However, some studies could benefit from mixed-methods approaches to increase generalizability. The reliance on Barthes' semiotic theory, while useful for analysing visual elements, might limit the scope of analysis. Other theoretical frameworks could provide complementary insights.

The reviewed studies demonstrate the value of semiotic analysis in uncovering the underlying meanings in media texts. By applying Barthes' theory, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of



how visual elements convey meaning and shape audience interpretations. Future studies can build upon these findings by exploring new contexts and methodologies.

Lister et al.'s (2009) book on new media provides a comprehensive introduction to the field, covering topics such as digital culture, identity, and media convergence. The authors' critical approach to new media studies encourages readers to think critically about the impact of digital technologies on society. However, some readers might find the book's organization and structure somewhat disjointed, with some chapters feeling like standalone essays rather than part of a cohesive whole.

Media studies researchers have looked at virtual identities in a number of different settings. It has been shown that social media sites like Instagram and TikTok encourage carefully chosen self-presentations that focus on looks, being seen, and getting social approval (Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2018; Xie, 2019). While online games and avatar-based environments let players create identities that can be aspirational or completely made up, this shows how creative digital embodiment can be (Nakamura, 2002; Taylor, 2006). These studies show how virtual identities are negotiated within cultural discourses of authenticity, self-expression, and community. They also show how digital selfhood can be both empowering and vulnerable.

Although less researched, virtual identity in audiovisual texts offers another significant viewpoint. Digital performances, music videos, and animated movies all provide representational spaces where audiences can dramatize issues of performance and authenticity. These stories frequently emphasize the conflict between the need for perfection and the identity's vulnerability to social or technological pressures. By incorporating these dynamics into visual and aural formats, media texts influence public perceptions of digital selfhood in addition to reflecting them.

*Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) is a useful case study in this respect. The movie places virtual identity in the context of performance and reception, showing how a character balances their identity with the expectations of an imagined audience and the demands of a digital stage. A semiotic analysis of these relationships sheds light on how media creates, validates, and mythologizes virtual identities in modern society.

The semiotic theory of Roland Barthes offers a critical framework for examining the ways in which audiovisual texts convey cultural meanings. Researchers can study how seemingly commonplace sounds and images carry layered significations that normalize specific worldviews thanks to his distinction between denotation, connotation, and myth (Barthes, 1972). The literal content of a scene, like a character's appearance or spoken dialogue, is frequently referred to as denotation in film and other media. Myth functions at a higher level, portraying those cultural meanings as if they were inherent, universal, and unavoidable, whereas connotation expands these meanings by connecting them to cultural codes, feelings, and values.

Due to its simultaneous integration of multiple sign systems, audiovisual representation provides a rich environment for semiotic investigation. A multi-layered signifying system is created by the interaction of auditory components like voice modulation, music, and sound effects with visual components like colour, framing, gestures, and *mise-en-scène* (Kyriakides, 2024). A bright spotlight on a character, for instance, not only indicates stage lighting but also suggests exposure and celebrity ideals, which may contribute to the perpetuation of performance culture myths about perfection and success. Similar to this, a change in vocal tone can indicate technical modulation while also suggesting emotional vulnerability, which feeds into larger misconceptions about the authenticity of mediated self-expression.

By applying Barthes' framework to a variety of audiovisual media, such as television, movies, and advertisements, academics have shown how symbolic codes support national identity, gender, and consumerism ideologies (Hall, 1997; Bignell, 2002). Because identity is performed and consumed through multimedia platforms that combine visual and aural elements, audiovisual semiotics becomes especially pertinent in the context of digital culture. Because of this, Barthesian analysis is a useful method for dissecting the representation, contestation, and mythologizing of digital identities in modern media.

Using *Colorful Stage with this framework! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) enables a thorough investigation of the ways in which auditory elements (voice modulation and audience responses) and visual cues (avatar design and stage aesthetics) represent various levels of meaning. The film creates



and propagates cultural myths about virtual identities, such as those of authenticity, perfection, and emotional fragility, which are exposed by Barthes' semiotics by going beyond surface description.

Virtual identity research has emerged in a number of fields, including digital embodiment, online gaming, and social media studies. While some scholars, like Nakamura (2002) and Taylor (2006), have studied how avatars and online personas offer spaces for identity experimentation and negotiation, others, like Turkle (2011) and Papacharissi (2010), have highlighted the fluidity and performativity of digital selfhood. According to more recent research, platforms like Instagram and TikTok help create curated identities that strike a balance between the desire for visibility and social validation and individual expression (Marwick, 2013; Abidin, 2018). Although these contributions provide a strong basis for comprehending identity in mediated spaces, user-generated contexts—rather than representational texts like animation or film—remain largely the focus.

In a similar vein, semiotic research has yielded important insights into film, television, and advertising (Bignell, 2002; Chandler, 2017). However, rather than focusing on the semiotics of virtual identity, these applications frequently give priority to concerns about consumerism, ideology, and cultural representation in general media. Few studies have looked at how animation's audiovisual narratives create and spread myths about digital selfhood, especially in ways that speak to current concerns about perfection, authenticity, and technological mediation.

This discrepancy is significant because, in addition to reflecting cultural attitudes toward virtual identities, audiovisual materials such as animated films also affect how viewers imagine and internalize virtual identities. The combination of visual and auditory sign systems creates a powerful medium that normalizes myths about digital selfhood. By using Barthes' semiotic theory on Colorful Stage, the current study fills this gap! *A Miku Without the Ability to Sing* (2025). The study emphasizes how the movie dramatizes the hopes and weaknesses of virtual identity by concentrating on both visual and aural cues. By doing this, it advances the field of study to encompass narrative audiovisual representations of identity in virtual environments and adds to ongoing discussions in media semiotics and digital culture..

## 2. Method

### 2.1 Research Design

With an emphasis on textual and audiovisual analysis, this study uses a qualitative research design. Since the goal of the study is to interpret meanings encoded in signs rather than measure variables, the qualitative approach is thought to be appropriate. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework of denotation, connotation, and myth, the analysis aims to reveal how *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) uses visual and aural components to create representations of virtual identity.

The movie is regarded as a cultural text that incorporates meanings into its sound design, visual composition, and story. Scenes such as performance moments, technological disruption, audience interaction, and self-customization were picked because they were relevant to the representation of identity. Because they distill important symbolic elements that show how identity is portrayed and normalized in the movie, these scenes function as analytical units. The analysis was arranged in tables that map particular signs, their connotative and denotative meanings, and the cultural myths they represent in order to guarantee methodical interpretation (see Tables 1 and 2 in the Results section). Transparency and consistency are made possible by this methodical procedure, which establishes a direct connection between theoretical interpretation and empirical observations.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on naturalistic inquiry provides a foundational understanding of qualitative research methodologies. Their emphasis on contextualizing research within natural settings highlights the importance of understanding the complexities of real-world phenomena. However, the book's focus on qualitative approaches might limit its applicability to studies requiring mixed-methods or quantitative designs.

Through triangulation of interpretation, the research design also takes validity into account. Subjective bias is reduced by comparing the results of textual analysis with theoretical literature in semiotics and digital identity. At every level of Barthes' semiotic model, meanings were explicitly documented and signs were clearly categorized, which lends credibility to the model. Contributing to



academic discussions on media, communication, and digital culture, this design allows for a thorough examination of the symbolic and cultural aspects of virtual identity as depicted in *Colorful Stage*.

## 2.2 Object of Study

The object of this study is the animated film *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025), which is part of the broader *Colorful Stage* multimedia franchise featuring the virtual idol Hatsune Miku. Unlike conventional narratives centered solely on performance success, this film portrays the struggles of a virtual performer who confronts both technological disruptions and emotional vulnerabilities. By dramatizing the tension between aspiration and imperfection, the film offers a nuanced representation of virtual identity in digital performance spaces.

This text was chosen as the object of study for three main reasons. First, it explicitly engages with questions of authenticity and identity in a digitally mediated environment, making it directly relevant to contemporary debates in communication and cultural studies. Second, the film integrates both visual and auditory sign systems—such as stage aesthetics, avatar customization, voice modulation, and audience reactions—thus providing rich semiotic material for analysis. Third, as a cultural product linked to the global phenomenon of Vocaloid and virtual idol culture, *Colorful Stage* resonates with broader discourses about the role of technology in shaping human expression and social belonging.

The film's narrative centers on a virtual singer who aspires to perform perfectly but encounters obstacles that reveal the fragility of mediated identity. Scenes such as the avatar's flawless stage appearance, the disruption of her voice through glitches, and the customization of her digital self highlight the complexity of negotiating identity in digital spaces. These elements serve as key units of analysis because they encapsulate the dual nature of virtual identity as both empowering and vulnerable.

By examining *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* as a cultural text, the study situates audiovisual representation as a site where myths of digital selfhood are constructed and circulated. This makes the film not only an artistic narrative but also a meaningful entry point into understanding how virtual identity is imagined, legitimized, and contested in contemporary media culture.

## 2.3 Data Collection

The data collection process in this study involved three key stages: scene selection, audiovisual transcription, and categorization of signs. The unit of analysis was not the entire film but specific scenes that contained explicit representations of virtual identity. This focus was necessary to ensure depth in the semiotic analysis, rather than breadth of coverage.

**Scene Selection.** Scenes were selected based on their relevance to the representation of virtual identity through both visual and auditory signs. Criteria included (1) moments where the protagonist's avatar is shown in performance settings, (2) instances of technological disruption such as voice glitches or system errors, and (3) symbolic scenes where customization, audience interaction, or stage design reflects cultural myths about perfection and digital identity. For example, the stage performance sequence where Miku's voice falters due to system errors was chosen because it reveals the fragility of mediated performance and its dependence on technology.

**Audiovisual Transcription.** Selected scenes were transcribed into descriptive text that captured both the visual and auditory dimensions. Visual transcription documented character expressions, color schemes, stage design, and avatar gestures. Auditory transcription recorded voice quality, background music, glitches, and audience sounds. These transcriptions served as raw data that could later be coded into semiotic units.

**Categorization of Signs.** Following Barthes' framework, each sign was categorized into denotative and connotative levels of meaning, after which cultural myths were identified. For organizational clarity, a tabular format was used to present the analysis. Each row included: (1) the scene description, (2) the denotative meaning, (3) the connotative meaning, and (4) the associated myth about virtual identity.

This systematic process ensured that the data collected was both manageable and analytically rich. The integration of visual and auditory transcription allowed for a more holistic reading of the film, preventing the analysis from privileging one sign system over the other. By triangulating these three



stages selection, transcription, and categorization the study maintained both validity and reliability in its semiotic interpretation.

## 2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study followed Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which emphasizes two levels of signification: denotation and connotation, along with the identification of cultural myths. The process unfolded in several steps:

- (1) Descriptive Coding, each transcribed scene was coded by identifying specific visual and auditory elements such as character gestures, stage lighting, voice modulation, and background music.
- (2) Denotative Reading, the literal meaning of each sign was established, focusing on what is directly observable in the audiovisual text. For example, a glitch in Miku's voice was first read simply as a technical disruption.
- (3) Connotative Interpretation, each sign was then analysed for its connotative meaning, which draws from cultural associations, symbolic values, and emotional resonance. In the example above, the voice glitch suggests vulnerability and instability in virtual performance.
- (4) Myth Identification, finally, broader cultural myths embedded in the audiovisual representation were identified. These myths reveal ideological assumptions about virtual identity, such as the myth of perfection, the myth of self-construction, and the myth of recognition.
- (5) Triangulation, to strengthen validity, the analysis was cross-checked with existing literature on media semiotics and digital identity. This ensured that interpretations were not purely subjective but grounded in established theoretical debates.

Through this analytical procedure, the study not only interpreted individual signs but also situated them within the broader cultural narratives of digital identity in contemporary mediated environments. The works by Couldry and Hepp (2017) and Creswell and Poth (2018) offer valuable insights into media studies and qualitative research methodology. Couldry and Hepp's exploration of the mediated construction of reality highlights the significance of understanding the role of media in shaping our perceptions of the world. Their analysis provides a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between media, power, and reality.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

This section presents the findings of the semiotic analysis of *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025). The analysis focuses on how selected visual and auditory signs construct the representation of virtual identity, interpreted through Barthes' two levels of signification denotation and connotation and the myths that naturalize certain cultural understandings of identity in digital spaces.

Table 1 Visual Signs

Visual Scene	Denotation (Literal Meaning)	Connotation (Cultural / Emotional Meaning)	Myth (Underlying Ideology)
Miku stands on stage under bright spotlights with flawless digital costume	A virtual idol performing in a visually perfect stage environment	Emphasizes beauty, mastery, and control	Myth of digital perfection: virtual identity is flawless and superior to reality
Miku customizes her avatar appearance before a concert	The process of altering digital self-representation	Symbolizes user agency and fluidity of online identity	Myth of self-construction: identity is endlessly customizable
Audience cheers and emoticons flood the screen	Positive feedback from virtual spectators	Shows collective approval and validation	Myth of recognition: virtual identity gains legitimacy through audience validation

One of the most recurring visual symbols is the shift in characters' facial expressions during virtual performances. For example, when a character transitions from a neutral to an exaggerated smile, the **denotative meaning** is the character's emotional response to the performance. The



**connotative meaning**, however, suggests an effort to project an idealized version of the self, masking insecurity behind digital personas. This reflects the **myth** of virtual spaces as domains where authenticity can be both performed and concealed.

The film frequently employs contrasting color schemes to reflect identity struggles. Scenes of self-doubt are often accompanied by cooler hues such as blue and grey, which **denote** sadness or isolation. On the connotative level, these colors symbolize the fragmentation of self between real and virtual identities. Conversely, vibrant tones like pink and yellow appear during collective performances, **denoting** joy and unity, while **connoting** the cultural ideal of harmony within digital communities.

Background settings in virtual spaces often contain abstract or fantastical designs. For instance, fragmented geometric patterns **denote** digital aesthetics but **connote** instability and disorientation, symbolizing the uncertainty of identity in mediated environments. Conversely, fluid and symmetrical designs in climactic moments **denote** balance and order, while **connoting** self-acceptance and integration of the fragmented self.

Table 2 Auditory Signs

Auditory Scene	Denotation (Literal Meaning)	Connotation (Cultural/Emotional Meaning)	Myth (Underlying Ideology)
Miku's voice glitches and becomes distorted during performance	A technical disruption in vocal output	Conveys vulnerability of virtual systems and fragility of performance	Myth of fragility: digital identities, though idealized, remain unstable and dependent on technology
Clear, melodic singing voice in successful scenes	Stable and harmonious vocal output	Suggests confidence, professionalism, and emotional authenticity	Myth of authenticity-through-performance: voice symbolizes identity validation
Background music intensifies during climax performance	Musical arrangement builds tension and resolution	Adds emotional depth and dramatizes identity struggles	Myth of emotional amplification: technology enhances identity expression

Characters' voices are often digitally modulated in the film, creating echoes or layered tones. At the **denotative level**, this represents the technical mediation of sound within virtual spaces. At the **connotative level**, the effect symbolizes the multiplicity of self the idea that one's voice is not singular but fragmented into multiple identities. This reinforces the myth of the virtual self as fluid and adaptable.

The soundtrack plays a central role in constructing emotional and symbolic layers of identity. Solo performances are often accompanied by minimalistic arrangements, which **denote** individuality and focus. Connotatively, these arrangements highlight themes of loneliness or self-exploration. In contrast, ensemble performances feature complex, layered orchestration, **denoting** collectivity while **connoting** the myth of belonging and shared identity within digital communities.

Subtle auditory cues, such as glitches, reverb, or sudden silences, also carry semiotic weight. A glitch sound **denotes** technical error but **connotes** the instability of self when mediated by technology. Silence, meanwhile, **denotes** the absence of sound but **connotes** moments of reflection, vulnerability, or the search for authentic identity beyond mediated performance.

Taken together, the visual and auditory signs in *Colorful Stage* construct a cultural **myth** of virtual identity. This myth portrays digital environments as both liberating and constraining: liberating because they allow for experimentation with new selves, yet constraining because they impose cultural expectations of perfection, harmony, and belonging. The interplay between denotation and connotation reveals that virtual identity is not fixed but constantly negotiated between authenticity and performance, individuality and collectivity, self-expression and conformity.

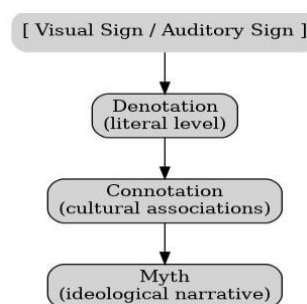
Table 3 Myth Category



Myth Category	Description
Myth of Digital Perfection	Virtual identity is portrayed as flawless, idealized, and superior to physical reality.
Myth of Fragility	Virtual performances, though polished, are unstable and dependent on technology, revealing vulnerability.
Myth of Self-Construction	Identity in digital culture is fluid and customizable through avatars and performance choices.
Myth of Recognition	Validation of virtual identity depends on audience approval and collective online response.
Myth of Authenticity-through-Performance	Clear, melodic voice serves as a marker of legitimacy and emotional sincerity in virtual identity.
Myth of Emotional Amplification	Background music and sound design intensify identity struggles, dramatizing emotional expression.

### 3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that *Colorful Stage! A Miku Who Can't Sing* (2025) constructs virtual identity through a nuanced interplay of visual and auditory semiotic signs, which can be interpreted using Barthes' model of denotation, connotation, and myth. At the denotative level, the film presents clear audiovisual markers such as stage lighting, avatar customization, voice modulation, and background music. At the connotative level, these signs extend beyond literal meaning, symbolizing themes such as perfection, vulnerability, fluidity, and recognition. Ultimately, at the level of myth, these representations crystallize into cultural ideologies that naturalize the idea of digital identity as both aspirational and fragile.



These findings resonate with Barthes' (1972) notion of myth as a form of depoliticized speech that transforms cultural constructions into naturalized truths. For instance, the myth of digital perfection, embodied in the flawless virtual stage and idealized avatar, mirrors what Barthes describes as the "illusion of nature" where constructed images are perceived as inherently true. Similarly, the myth of recognition aligns with cultural studies perspectives that highlight the dependence of identity formation on external validation, particularly in digital environments where visibility equates to legitimacy (Turkle, 2011; Boyd, 2014).

The analysis also contributes to ongoing debates in media studies about the fluidity of identity in virtual spaces. Previous research has shown that avatars in online games and platforms allow individuals to experiment with multiple versions of selfhood (Taylor, 2003; Nakamura, 2008). The scenes in *Colorful Stage* where Miku customizes her digital appearance exemplify this process, highlighting identity as a malleable construct. Yet, the moments of vocal glitches remind viewers of the fragility of these constructs, echoing Bolter and Grusin's (2000) argument that digital media simultaneously amplify and expose the limits of representation.

To further contextualize these findings, comparisons can be drawn with other forms of media. In massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) such as *Final Fantasy XIV* or *Second Life*, users similarly construct virtual identities through avatars that represent idealized or



alternative selves. However, unlike *Colorful Stage*, where identity is tied to performance success and audience approval, MMORPGs emphasize identity through social interaction, collaboration, and immersion. This suggests a variation in how myths of recognition and authenticity are articulated across different digital media.

Likewise, parallels can be seen in social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok. Here, identity construction relies on visual curation, algorithmic visibility, and audience engagement. The myth of digital perfection is reinforced by filters, editing tools, and performance metrics that reward polished and “authentic” expressions of self (Abidin, 2018). *Colorful Stage* dramatizes these same dynamics by showing how Miku’s identity is validated or challenged depending on her ability to perform seamlessly. This aligns with Couldry and Hepp’s (2017) argument that digital media no longer merely represent reality but actively construct it, shaping how individuals understand themselves and others.

In addition, Miller (2020) emphasizes that digital culture is built upon recurring myths of freedom, creativity, and connection, which simultaneously mask the technological and social constraints shaping online practices. Similarly, Jenkins (2006) notes that convergence culture fosters transmedia myths that circulate across platforms, making identity narratives portable and recognizable. In the case of *Colorful Stage*, the myths of perfection, recognition, and authenticity extend beyond the film itself and resonate with wider cultural narratives found in social networks and gaming environments.

By situating the findings in this broader theoretical and empirical context, this study extends the understanding of how audiovisual media participate in shaping collective myths of digital life. *Colorful Stage* illustrates that virtual identities are not merely products of individual choice but are deeply embedded within cultural logics that transcend platforms, reinforcing a transmedia mythology of digital identity in contemporary society (Hine, 2015; Papacharissi, 2015).

The results show that exaggerated facial expressions and digitally modulated voices convey the tension between authenticity and performance. This reflects Stuart Hall’s (1996) notion that identity is not a fixed essence but a continuous process of becoming. In *Colorful Stage*, authenticity is staged through carefully curated expressions and sound designs, suggesting that even “true selves” in virtual environments are mediated performances rather than pure revelations.

The recurrent use of glitches, echoes, and fragmented imagery points to the instability of identity within virtual spaces. Sherry Turkle (1995) emphasizes that online environments allow for the exploration of multiple selves, each shaped by different contexts and interactions. The film reinforces this perspective, portraying identity not as singular and stable, but as fragmented, layered, and fluid. Voice modulations and background distortions highlight how digital technology amplifies this multiplicity.

The vibrant colors and layered orchestration in ensemble performances symbolize unity and shared identity within digital communities. This resonates with Nancy Baym’s (2010) observation that online platforms often serve as spaces of collective belonging, where individuals negotiate personal identity through community participation. In *Colorful Stage*, collective performances reinforce the myth of harmony and shared purpose, illustrating how digital platforms construct both individuality and community as co-dependent.

Through Barthes’ lens, the film encodes a cultural myth: that virtual identity offers liberation and authenticity while simultaneously imposing expectations of perfection. Nakamura (2002) argues that digital environments often reproduce cultural stereotypes and ideals rather than subvert them. Similarly, the bright color palettes and harmonious group performances in *Colorful Stage* connote ideals of unity and perfection that conceal underlying struggles of individuality and alienation.

By decoding both visual and auditory signs, this study reveals that *Colorful Stage* portrays virtual identity as a paradox: it enables experimentation and self-expression while embedding individuals within cultural myths of authenticity, belonging, and perfection. This paradox reflects broader issues in digital culture, where social media, online games, and virtual platforms both empower and constrain identity formation (Boyd, 2014).



#### 4. Conclusion

This study examined how Colorful Stage uses visual and aural cues to represent virtual identity using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. According to the analysis, musical motifs, colour schemes, voice modulation, and facial expressions all serve both denotative and connotative purposes in digital environments, creating cultural myths of perfection, authenticity, and belonging. The findings illustrate the performative, fluid, and fragmented portrayal of virtual identity that is impacted by both individuality and community. While digital platforms offer opportunities for self-expression and self-discovery, they also impose cultural norms that maintain standards of perfection and harmony. Larger dynamics in digital culture, where identity is both free and constrained, are reflected in this dichotomy.

Theoretically, by showing how audiovisual symbolism encodes myths about digital selfhood, this study adds to conversations about identity construction in media studies. In a practical sense, it provides information for academics, educators, and media producers who are curious about how cultural products such as Colorful Stage influence and reflect perceptions of virtual identity in modern society. Future research could build on this analysis by contrasting virtual identity representations in various cultural texts or platforms, which would help us better understand how local and global narratives interact in the digital age.

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