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Identity Construction Portrayed from Linguistic Features on Justin Bieber's Instagram Fan Talks

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"Most people are fans of something. If not, they are bound to know someone who is" Grey et al. (2007)

Abstract:

Being a fan is another way of gaining an identity, and the fans' identity can be analyzed from the linguistic features used in fan talks. The present study aims to identify any identities detected from the fans' linguistic repertoires when admiring their idols. This qualitative study is conducted by collecting the fan talks in Justin Bieber fan groups on Instagram. The use of social media promotes the increasing number of fans and encourages them to declare their affection textually. The obtained data is analyzed based on three elements of linguistic units; words, themes, and concepts. After obtaining the analysis from the elements of units, the study then shapes the relevant categories constructing the fans' identities. The result reveals that those fans are identified with sisterhoods, sympathy, and support, for their idol, Justin Bieber, and for each other. Those natures of being fans eventually compose them into dedicated and intimate fans. Furthermore, those fans are also excellent at expressing sympathy and jokes using translingual practice. Translingual practice is also attached in the talks as those fan use varieties of English, Bahasa Indonesia, and heritage languages.

Keywords: fan talk, Identity construction, Justin Bieber, linguistic features

1. INTRODUCTION

It is human nature to be fond of someone to the state that they can be extremely engaged with their idols. Indonesia is reported to have had the biggest K-pop fans on Twitter for two years simultaneously (Kim, 2021). Still, there are 7.5 million tweets on Twitter that are all talking about idols, with Indonesia winning the number of tweets (Kim, 2021). The statistics have demonstrated that the influential power of idols can lead to constructing a certain identity for those fans. For whatever they are addicted to, fans can establish their identity to appreciate that fandom (Booth, 2010). A while ago, the term fans were only characterized as abnormal people that had an equal mental illness (Jensen, 1992). Their attitudes toward their idols were perceived as exaggerated and irrational. With the benefit of the internet and social media, fans, fanbase, and fandom have become a global phenomenon directed to something divergent and tends to be positive (Black, 2008; Booth & Kelly, 2013).

Furthermore, Social media also play a significant role in younger generations eagerly participating in fan activity. Therefore, instead of dying down, fandom will only rise bigger and grow worldwide (Smutradontri & Gadavanij, 2020). Social media as the recent social setting for identity construction from being a fan is also proposed from language and its linguistic features. The language users in fan groups' social media construct and negotiate identities by creating meaning (Jorgensen & Phillip, 2002). Zappavigna (2014) in her study of language identity in microblogging, discovers the fact that people may not interact directly on social media. Instead, they may participate in mass performances such as hashtagging or using internet memes. Thus, such identities appear in interaction among people according to meaning-making in many forms of semiotic modes. Furthermore, Semiotic is also related to language indexing, the creation of semiotic links between linguistic forms and social meanings (Hall, 2013). Regarding the study, the language indexical processes always change over the period of space and time in order to produce social meaning, and therefore (Hall, 2013).

Since media deliver more than just a piece of news to fans, they also bring out the cultural and background knowledge to the audience, which can accommodate the practices and behaviors of fans (Hall,1980). The term behavior also cannot be separated from constructing the identity because the diverse language users can compose different behaviors, and the fans rendering their passion to their idols by using the language is one thing that must be analyzed. Fandom is more than behavior and identity (Grandio, 2016). The influence of social media also carries out a broad range of social stigmas of self-identity as a fan, therefore providing a close attachment between fans and popular media content (Jenkins, 2017). Fans can express their affection and dedication to their idols through the media, and the media contribute to attracting other fans to strengthen their relationship through online posts and talks. However, fan identity and media study have not been quite interesting for researchers to conduct as McDougall (2012) states that the nature of fan media is an eternal aspect of media acquisition that hasn't gotten adequate attention from media studies.

Therefore, The present study tries to seek the identity constructed from fan talks on Instagram. Fan identity studies help us inspect some of the crucial components of social, political, and cultural identities and realities of the mediated world (Gray et al., 2007). In this multicultural world, the textual construction can also be a genuine source to ellicitate the multiple displays of someone's cultures, identities, and agencies among others (Sugiharto, 2013). The fandom of Justin Bieber is elected to be the subject of the study because the singer will have two-day concerts in Indonesia and the fandom sites on Instagram are now heated again. It is assumed there are a lot of fan talks that can construct certain identities. Instagram fan talk is preferred as the platform for collecting the data since the rise of social media has created fans to be more obvious. Therefore, it gives a more significant and better illustration of language users and cultures. Two research questions are provided to determine the identity construction of fans in the online media platform.

- 1. How are Indonesian fans characterized in fan talks from Instagram fan groups?
- 2. How do the fans' identities are constructed from the linguistic features of Indonesian fan online media users?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Fans and the Influence of Social Media

The term fans have been employed for a long time to declare the active audiences or viewers who appreciate someone's content (Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992). The Oxfords English Dictionary (2022) defines the terms *enjoy* and *admire*. It started to be used in the early 1990s as a bigger understanding for individual fanatics and members of groups with shared values, models, and perceptions of texts in a broad sense (Duffet, 2014). One key point of differentiating a fan from another kind of audience is that fans express their admiration for diverse behaviors (Lozano et al., 2020) and act as the manipulator of meaning (Jenkins, 1992). Those fans actively participate in various fun activities such as concerts, cover dances, and cosplays to express their affection. By participating in such activities, fans gain access to cultural activities, which can be their empowerment to go against disappointing environments or depressing ideologies they used to face daily (Lewis, 1992).

The increasing number of fans and fandoms occurs partly from the influence of technology. The shifting of wire media to internet-based media and phones to online social modes has altered fans' definitions to become more positive (Black, 2008; Booth & Kelly, 2013). Previously, the media was considered the architect of society. They have the power to control people (intentional approach) and reflect people into something they want (reflective practice). Now, media even have the privilege to either include or eliminate certain content for the audience (Hodkinson, 2007). The press can select or fabricate some settings to represent the real world. The strong interest in music, the prominence of star ideology, and the habit of staying close to their idols and the communities make every trace from fans' comments, talks, and discussions on fan base platforms have taken into account for music labels, agencies, marketing, and

advertisings to cultivate the idols or the producers (Duffet, 2014). Owing to social media, the power of fans is more visible and essential for popular culture industries. The relationship between producers and consumers has also moved greatly because of the evolution of technology and social media (Lozano et al., 2020).

Moreover, online talk platforms provide fans with a great collection of information and a pod to communicate with other fans to replace physical meetings. Therefore, online fan talks grow into a daily virtual communication activity for fans. This meeting and talk transformation from real situations to Internet-generated communication, as Jenkins (2006) states, is called 'convergence culture'. It refers to the movement of texts beyond the multiple media platforms, the partnership between various media industries, and the converted behaviors of the audience. The power relation between technology and social media has set specific convergence culture for fans as the media reception (McDougall, 2012).

The present study applies fan talks from social media to investigate fans' values, ideology, and other representations of identity construction. Hills (2013) states that online comments, tweets, and statuses are textual fan production. From the online comments and posts on fandom Instagram, we expect to find how fans show their dedication and passion to their idols, leading to certain behaviors and personal identities. The fan posts and comments on fan sites contain the source of text knowledge to get the whole meaning of the fan identities. Since it gets more difficult to differentiate media users and fans, certain fans and fan communities attempt to distinguish themselves from others through 'fan talks' (Smutrandontri & Gadavanij, 2020). Research on fan talks on Twitter has been conducted by Smutrandontri & Gadavanij (2020) to investigate Thailand fan tweets' specific realities and values. The result shows that fandom tweets and fan arts are mostly humorous. They also hold to the belief of heteronormativity, a particular ideology about binary genders and suitable matching of marriage (Francis, 2012).

2.2 Identity Constructed from Fan Talks

A fan is worth being valued, and it is characterized by marking our sense of taste. And therefore being a fan means having an identity. The analysis of identity from linguistic features has been applied in various identity research. Identity construction studies from linguistic features are commonly based on textual analysis correlated with other forms, including translingual practice. Smutrandontri & Gadavanij (2020) have revealed in their study of identity construction from Thailand fans that the dynamic uses of linguistic features produce multiple co-existing emergent ideologies and are called transtextuallity. Transtextuality is drawn from numerous local practices, including local language and global language practice, individual and communal attitudes, and other relevant factors. Therefore, the diverse use of language, linguistic repertoires, and viewpoints on language use can construct such an identity for those fans. In the point of fan talk, It is through the language and linguistic codes adopted among fan groups that raise the feelings of belonging to their idol. Dedicated fans

habitually learn to read, speak, and write in the language of their idols to maintain their closeness to their idols (Riedel, 2020). Therefore there are a lot of chances for various identities from the fans' texts.

Moreover, online media provide more opportunities to construct identities through fan talks since the internet allows and encourages more communication among fans and offers a great variety of online contexts. Jeewa & Wade (2015), in their study of fan role-playing in online virtual talks, discover that those fans write and speak with a passion to their idol which has very rich and emotional value. From the result, we know that identities can be constructed from the emotional and passionate acts of their idols that make them dedicated fans.

Lozano et al. (2020) also conducted a qualitative study on the identity of fans of Spanish viewers of audiovisual fiction to identify behaviors linked with an identity. The study applied interviews with those viewers regarding their tendency to choose the programs and how they keep watching them routinely. Lozano et al. (2020) found four behaviors derived from their manners in enjoying the programs. Those behaviors are collecting, experiencing, knowledge, and viewing. Some fans liked to order the attributes and everything related to the program. In contrast, several tried to have new and more experiences through the programs. Other fans looked for knowledge from the characters and stories, and the rest of them only like to watch them routinely. We can learn from the study that such behaviors can characterize the fan's identity from how they treat their favorites and eventually create their identities.

All the previous studies have conveyed several behaviors, manners, and linguistic practices obtained from the fan texts. The present study also tries to investigate the language choice used by the fans to express their admiration for their idols. The linguistic repertoires applied in fan talks can contribute to the language indexicality, indicating to certain identity (Lanza & Woldemariam, 2014). Language indexicality also serves as the language choice within the framework of certain access and privilege (Stroud & Wee, 2012), where only loyal fans can use certain language choices in communicating with others. It is expected that there are kinds of characters, behaviors, and unique identities found from the language choice or language indexicality of the fans in this study.

The analysis of the present study is based on three elements of units to be classified; words, themes, and concepts (Berg, 1983). Words are the smallest meaningful units to form a sentence. Themes are units that are linked to determine the meaning or content. One theme can be asserted from words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. Concepts are the units of notional groups of words underlying certain ideas. For example, words like cute, cutie-pie, and sweety are rendered for a conceptual idea of attractiveness to their idols. Those units are taken from the fan talks and posts on the social media platform Instagram. After getting the analysis from elements of units, the study then forms the relevant categories for constructing the significant identities of the fans. Constructing an identity needs to adopt sets of processes and criteria, which are usually

based on lifestyles (Mazur, 2018). Bloommaert and Varis (2013) characterize four schemes for determining the dynamic methods of identity construction:

- 1. Identity addresses and practices can be depicted by spreading the orientation of several features to mark particular identities.
- 2. Those features are often introduced by using certain regulations and structures.
- 3. To be called an identity, someone must fulfill many features to get an original member of identity characters.
- 4. The processes of getting the features always include dynamic conflict and competition.

The features can be accustomed, rearranged, and modified for some notes. In this study, the features are expected to be shaped by the fan talks on the Instagram fan groups. The present study also presents the language indexicality of the fans, which is concerned with the connection between language choice and the metapragmatic meaning it encodes (Montaruli, Bourhis, & Azurmendi, 2011).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study employs a text analysis approach to seek the identity construction of Indonesian fans who mostly talk about their idols on an online media platform. This is a qualitative study adopted to systematically organize and interpret a large amount of text into a concise analysis of essential results (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). The study employs Instagram as the media platform to get the data, and the participants of the survey are Indonesian fans of Justin Bieber. They are following the official Justin Bieber Indonesian fan groups on Instagram. Justin Bieber fans are chosen for the study because the singer will have two concerts in Indonesia in November. Thus, the fan groups are crowded again with posts and talks discussing Justin's activities, songs, wife, and concert tickets. Two official Instagram fan groups are enlisted in this study, and twenty followers' fan talks are appointed to be part of the data. The data are collected for three months, from April to June 2022, with briefly 25 fan talks taken as the data. Several English posts are also selected as additional data for characterizing the fandom's identities, considering the linguistic features used in the standings. The decision to choose music fans as the data subject is because there are many emerging issues involving music fandoms and their behaviors. The music genre is future and youth-oriented (Baker, 2016). Chastagner (2021) admits that music fandom demonstrates a rich and complicated phenomenon that constructs diverse features recognized based on tastes, roles, identities, and practices. In this study, the linguistic elements are put to diagnose the fans' roles and identities acquired from their Instagram talks in the fan groups.

The fan talks and posts collected as the data are then analyzed based on the three elements of units to be classified; words, themes, and concepts (Berg, 1983). The elements of the unit from Berg (1983) are used to encode the data based on the unit analysis to categorize the fans' characters from their linguistic repertoires. After

characterizing the language used from the data, those characters are then identified based on Bloommaert and Varis (2013) four schemes of identity construction.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 The characteristics of Indonesian fans

After identifying the posts and comments from two Justin Bieber fan clubs on Instagram, the researcher finds four main characteristics of the fans, considering the linguistic features of the posts, the comments, and other non-linguistic features from the pictures.

4.1.1 Sisterhood with no religious boundaries



Picture 1. Instagram post (courtesy of @ justinbieberids)

This post shows the posters of the community gathering event for Iftar (breaking the fast for Muslims) on Ramadhan. In that post, Justin Bieber is photo-shopped with a head cap (a hat used for Muslims to pray *Shalat*), while we know that Justin Bieber is not a Muslim. The poster invites the community to join the party though some are not celebrating the fast-breaking. The picture implies that religion does not restrain fans from being together despite the specific time, like Ramadhan, and that becoming a fan of Justin is not restricted to certain religions and beliefs. Below is a slice of comments from the post

Excerpt 1

Thndrs: Sedih banget ga bisa ikut

(It is saddening that I cannot come)

Nadhila: Kuy ga?

(Shall we go?)

Yosi: See you guys

Nvllyd: Harus pake kaftan emang nya?

(Do we have to wear Kaftan?)

Habibi: Yang dari Tangsel sini bareng

(Those who are from South Tangerang, let's ride with me)

Various comments have answered the invitation, some of them could not make it to the party, and the rest invited others to go together, and one person asked about the rules of wearing Kaftan. This dress is usually used in Islamic ceremonies. The excerpt shows that they are happy to be together, yet they still respect the speciality of the event, wearing a certain wardrobe. The post and the comment conclude that there is no relation between fans' identity, religion, and beliefs. However, the fans also honor the fans' religious practices, such as wearing Kaftan. Moreover, they also embrace the habit of togetherness by inviting them to ride together to the event.

4.1.2 The never-ending sympathy



Picture 2. Instagram post (courtesy of @ justinbieberids)

The post displays Justin Bieber strolling with his Chiropractor specialist. It has been reported that Justin has a problem with his neck, and now he is recovering using chiropractic treatment. The post shows that Justin Bieber now can smile and get better at that time. The post demonstrates how the fans are curious about Justin's illness and how happy they are seeing Justin can go for a walk after the news of Justin's disease spreading in the media. The comment below further describes the fans' behaviors toward Justin's recovery.

Excerpt 2

Hanapra: yangku udah bisa senyum

(My darling is able to smile now)

Andiniy: The smile, *Alhamdulillah* he's getting so much better Utammi: *Ini baru kan? Ihh abang ntin udah bisa senyum lagi*

(Is this post new? My brother Justin can smile again)

Dwiayu11: 2 Juni beb

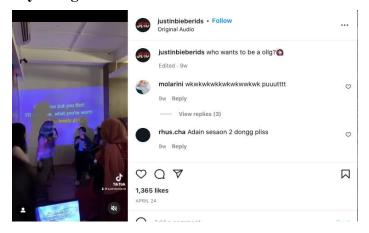
(2nd of June, Baby)

Utammi: oh iya2, thank you Liviat: is it today? Yeay

Itssonxb: is this recent? aack im so happy

The excerpt shows how relieves the fans of Justin's health progress. They sense a little smile from Justin in the picture, and for that, they feel happy to see Justin's smile. From that excerpt, several replies asked about the novelty of the image since they still could not believe that Justin could have a very fast recovery. The question is answered in the responses from other fans. Those fans are willing to answer every question asked in the comment, implying that the fans are close enough to have a common conversation. However, they are not personal chat room like Whatsapp or Direct messages on Instagram.

4.1.3 Going crazy in togetherness



Picture 3. Instagram post (courtesy of @ justinbieberids)

The post exposes the situation of Justin's fan gathering event. The community is singing one Justin Bieber song called One Less Lonely Girl (OLLG). Those fans, mostly women, are dissolved in the joyful atmosphere obtained from the song. They are not feeling shy and tend to be much more energetic when singing the song together. The excerpt below also shows the comments on how crazy the situation is.

Excerpt 3

Operator: Who wants to be an OLLG?

Molarini: wkwkwk Puut

(Hahaha, Put)

Ptrviaani: parah kan aktifnya kek sinyal 5G

(It is severe, isn't it? Their energy is like 5G signal)

Ryn.ryan: lu ma kesurupan JC nya langsung

(You look like possessed directly by the JC)

Ptrviaani: wkwkw sutt ah

(Haha, shut up)

Rhus.cha: Adain session 2 dong pliss

(Please, arrange the second session)

The comments are mostly expressing the happiness of singing a song. The giggling is also filling the comments responding to the post. One person, probably one of the singers in the post, tells a joke that all fans there are very energetic, just like a speedy internet signal. The comment is replied to with another hilarious joke, telling the fans are like being possessed by something. The excerpt implies that commenting on a post is not limited to certain languages or expressions. The fans are free to talk about anything, including a joke, and no one feels offended by any joking. It also indicates the closeness among the fans in the community. Everyone can do even the craziness in the community as long as they are together.

4.1.4 Supporting the whole family.



Picture 4. Instagram post (courtesy of @ dagelanbeliber)

The post shows Justin Bieber walking with his family, including his little sisters and wife. The picture is posted a couple of days after recovering from the neck problem. The comments below explain how the fans support Justin Bieber's family.

Event	1
Excerpt	4

Operator: Family time in Canada

Waunur17: Tapi Hailey selalu ada buat Justin yang lagi sakit, meski dia

pemotretan untuk majalah juga

(But Hailey is always there for the sick Justin, though she has a

photoshoot for magazine too)

Teepottree: Jazy Jaxon, enggak sabaran banget jadi bocah, udah remaja aja

sekarang

(Jazzy Jaxon, she is impatient to grow up, she is now a real

teenager)

whyxyuu: ko gw kangen ya

(Why I miss this?)

rahmiha: in kapan min?

(When is it, admin?)

Operator: baru-baru ini

(Recently)

All the comments in the excerpt above mention all the people surrounding Justin in the post, the sisters and the wife. One comment shows the feeling of surprise because of the abrupt growth of Justin' siblings, Jazzy and Jaxon. Another comment admits Justin's wife's devotion, Hailey, during his recovery process. The excerpt signifies that the fans not only love their idol but also support the presence of the family of the idol. They know the occupation of the wife and the growth of the siblings. Supporting the family of their icon becomes another identity of these fans.

4.2 Indonesian fans' identity construction

The Instagram fan communities are usually filled with posts and comments related to updating news of their idols and the invitation to the community gathering. In Justin Bieber fan communities, many fans live outside Jakarta, where the communities often hold gathering events. But it does not mean they cannot express their support to the community. The fans living far from Jakarta commonly show their support through comments. From investigating the posts and the comments from the fan accounts on Instagram, the researcher finds a new sight about fan identity, that the fans are those who support not only their idol but also the people surrounding the idol, including supporting each other among the fans. Therefore, supporting each other is one of the identities of the fans.

Another phenomenon in the study is that those fans, who are all Indonesians, can talk in Bahasa Indonesia and English. They can even tell a joke in English; surprisingly, others can understand and laugh at it. Those fans can reply to the joke with another joke.



Picture 5. Instagram post (courtesy of @ justinbieberids)

Excerpt 5

Ragil.t: Like they attend for a different event, still look good though.

Raliviass: Outfit kedodoran (*too big*) on point.

Ribkadel: Overdress girlfriend underdress boyfriend is back

The excerpt shows how the fans are commenting on the outfit of Justin Bieber and his wife in the Grammys Award. They exchange jokes about how Justin and Hailey dress at the event. Those are some jokes which are not addressed to disfigure their idols. Instead, that is the way they strengthen their relationship with fans and with their idol. Therefore, the excerpt can conclude that there are no language boundaries among those fans who communicate with each other on social media.

The last identity constructed from the study is that the fans usually feel the same as their idol. Such feelings occur when the fans express their sadness to Justin, who fell into illness. Otherwise, the fans show off their relief when Justin gets better and can go for a walk after getting the treatments. Similar feelings indeed cannot occur if they are not Justin's fans. Therefore, the same feeling and moods of the fans are put as another identity constructed in the study.

5. DISCUSSION

Technology and social media truly promote the relationship between the fans and the idol to a new stage. Moreover, the present findings encourage the study from Lozano et al. (2020); Black (2008); & Booth & Kelly (2013) that online social media becomes the platform for characterizing the fan's identity to be more positive. It is revealed from the study that, maintaining togetherness, sympathy, relief, and happiness are several fan identities constructed from social media. The fans' attitudes and feelings through language practices are also several features to produce the identity construction Smutrandontri & Gadavanij, 2020). The study reveals another interesting phenomenon from analyzing the data, that is the characters of those fans when they gather in one place. The closeness and the craziness occur during the community gathering events, and they share their intimate and crazy moments via posting on Instagram. Jenkins (2017) stated that popular media content provides platforms for fans to attract other fans and strengthen their relationship through posts. Showing off the togetherness and the craziness of the community has proven other fans to go wild and have fun while affirming their close relationship. The sharing post can also invite those who see the post to be part of their fan club.

The study also discovers the value of language and identity from the fan talks. As Grandio (2016) mentioned that fandom is more than behavior and identity, the fan talks display the norm value established as the nature of human beings. Passion, sympathy, happiness, healing, and sisterhood are the values created by being a fan. The study agrees with Jeewa & Wade (2015), who define dedicated fans are made from how they write and speak about their idol, which has an emotional value. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with being a fan of someone or something because bonding with idols and other fans has always created positive value.

The last phenomenon discussed in the study is a significant outcome concerning the linguistic features of the fans. Indonesian fans on social media are, in fact, fluent in talking in two languages, Bahasa Indonesia and English. There are a lot of translingual practices applied in the posts and comments from them. They sometimes code switch

and code mesh their language varieties to make the chat atmosphere more relaxed. The result corresponds to what Smutrandontri & Gadavanij (2020) have stated about transtextuality where various language practices become another factor in constructing fan identities. The translingual practice in this study comes from the comments and the post written on Instagram.

6. CONCLUSION

We have seen from the study that investigating fan talks can construct a fan's identity. The study examines the identity construction of Justin Bieber fans from their Instagram fan talks. Several characteristics in the study contribute to the construction of the identity of fans. First, the fans are closely related to the sisterhood among fans. Only in this study, the sisterhood is not bound to certain religious restrictions. The fans know how to celebrate certain sacred memorials without offending other religions. Second, the fans are best at showing sympathy. Those fans commonly have the same moods and feelings as their idol and are excellent at expressing them. Third, when an icon loves the family, the fans automatically love them more. They are not hesitant to support their idol families, including siblings, spouses, and girlfriends or boyfriends. Last, when the fans gather up, the fans commonly go wild and insane. They talk about their idol passionately, they sing the song excitedly, and those who cannot come are dying to have another gathering event very soon. These natures of being fans eventually construct the fans into those dedicated to the idols, intimate with other fans, crazy about meeting and gathering, and excellent at expressing sympathy and jokes using translingual practice. Translingual practices cannot be separated from fan talks. Creese & Blackledge (2015) states that translingual practice and translanguaging constitute identity repertoire for language users to adapt the social life. Since Indonesian fans fluently communicate in English and Bahasa Indonesia, the translingual practice occurs most commonly in their talk in order to smoothen their communication. Further research can include the modes and codes of translingual practice from the research in constructing the identity of fan talks.

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