

# VTubers' transmedia capacity: narrative and content production expansion based on the intersection with fan-culture by the Hololive agency

*Capacidad transmedia de los VTubers: expansión narrativa y de producción de contenidos a partir de la intersección con la cultura fan por parte de la agencia Hololive*

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ARTICLE



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## Abstract

The present article proposes to analyze the transmedia capacity of VTubers, content creators, independent or under agencies, who interact with the audience via a virtual 2D or 3D avatar generated by computer graphics and controlled by human movement capture. For the course of this work, through the perspective of a marketing strategy composed of collective construction, the analysis found an opportunity to prove that, through the use of *moe* sentiments, kawaii aesthetics, and incentives towards the participative culture of other social actors, VTubers have the ability to expand

their media market beyond that of their original live streams in media platforms. To prove such a hypothesis, case studies of the current portfolio of cultural products from Hololive, one of the biggest international VTuber agencies, and of the consumer/fan productions of these content creators under the Hololive brand were promoted. Other than proving the initial hypothesis, the results show that the agency's interface with the consumers/fans, constructed via providing infrastructural and financial incentives by the company, takes it to promising corporate results, indicative that such actions represent the birth of a new transmedia perspective.

## Keywords

VTuber, Hololive, Transmedia, Engagement, Participatory culture

## Resumen

El presente artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la capacidad transmedia de los VTubers, creadores de contenido, ya sean independientes o agenciados, que interactúan con un público a través de un avatar virtual 2D o 3D generado por computadora y controlado por captura de movimiento de un humano. A lo largo del trabajo, desde la perspectiva de una estrategia de marketing orientada a la construcción colectiva, el análisis ha demostrado que, mediante el uso del sentimiento *moe*, la estética *Kawaii* y el fomento de la cultura participativa de otros actores sociales, los VTubers tienen la capacidad de expandir su actuación en el mercado de medios más allá de su origen

en las transmisiones en vivo en plataformas de medios. Para demostrar esta hipótesis, se llevaron a cabo estudios de caso sobre el actual portafolio de productos culturales de *Hololive*, una de las principales agencias mundiales de VTubers, y sobre la producción de los consumidores/fans de estos creadores de contenido, agenciados por *Hololive*. Además de confirmar la hipótesis inicial, los resultados mostraron que la interfaz de la agencia con los consumidores/fans, construida mediante la acogida y el estímulo infraestructural y financiero por parte de la empresa, conduce a resultados corporativos prometedores e indicativos de que tales acciones representan el surgimiento de una nueva perspectiva transmediática.

## Palabras clave

VTuber, Hololive, Transmedia, Compromiso de fan, Cultura participativa.

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## 1. INTRODUCCIÓN

The COVID-19 pandemic and its social isolation have significantly influenced the production and consumption of newer cultural artifacts with greater potential for individual and remote enjoyment, such as the popularization of live streams, online games, and virtual interaction through avatars (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023).

Under these circumstances, the focus here is on a phenomenon originally from Japan on the internet and widely disseminated through live streaming platforms: the “Virtual YouTubers,” commonly referred to as “VTubers,” who are content creators that use software and hardware to represent themselves anonymously as 2D or 3D virtual avatars instead of their real personas (Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Suan, 2021; Turner, 2022; YouTube Culture &

Trends, 2020). The authors highlight that the widespread popularization of VTubers was facilitated by the establishment and operation of talent agencies, which provide structural support for enhancing the skills and capabilities of these content creators, particularly before the widespread adoption of new technology and the subsequent decrease in production costs, which paved the way for more independent VTubers on the platforms.

Just as with other productions in this niche cultural market, identified as part of otaku culture (Azuma, 2009), the engagement of its fanbase leads them to produce their own content, unrelated to the creators and/or agencies, which, on the other hand, adopt the strategy of not fully exerting their property rights. This approach aims to bring fans closer to the production chain and enhance narrative expansion

through the creation of new products, thereby also expanding the possibilities for the use of media platforms.

Despite being a relatively recent phenomenon on the internet, VTubers draw attention due to their high levels of engagement with the audience, which manifests in multiple forms of consumption and brings Jenkins' (2006) idea of participatory culture to another level, not seen in other media products of *otaku* culture (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022).

In the case of VTubers, this fan-culture no longer operates independently. The agencies themselves have begun to invest in this type of narrative expansion through in-house production and collaborative partnerships with fans. More specifically, the agency where this strategy forms a transmedia ecosystem is Hololive, a Japanese company that currently ranks among the largest in the industry, considering its revenue and the number of VTubers it represents (COVER, 2024; Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023).

In seeking to understand the dynamics of such a market and its internal and external impacts, it became necessary to establish a theoretical framework that encompassed the foundational elements of this network. Subsequently, supported by this framework, two case studies were undertaken. The first pertained to the Hololive agency, while the second focused on fan-produced content circulating in the market, which has already adopted the strategy mentioned in the previous paragraphs of narrative expansion to achieve the status of a more diverse company in terms of commercial assets and intellectual properties.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. OTAKU CULTURE

VTuber content can be understood as yet another niche of the Japanese "*Otaku*" culture (お宅 or オタク), which originally meant "your home" (Azuma, 2009). This term emerged in the 1970s to refer to individuals who excessively enjoy anime (animated cartoons), video games, computers, science fiction, special effects films, and action figures (Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2019). Over time, *otaku* culture expanded to encompass a broad community of fans and consumers of cultural products, becoming an important part of the Japanese economy and an essential component of the Cool Japan policy for promoting the country internationally (Galbraith, 2019).

On the other hand, Azuma (2009) describes the nature of *otaku* culture as a phenomenon driven by consumer culture and the fragmentation of identity. *Otakus* are among the biggest consumers of "database," referring to their tendency to selectively use and reinterpret cultural elements, creating a database of references and images.

This idea can be integrated into the discussion about *Otakus'* affection for characters, highlighting how they construct personal identities and emotional relationships based on these fragmented cultural references. Characters become anchor points for the expression of fans' identity and desires as they reinterpret and remix them according to their preferences and experiences (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Diniz

et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019; Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012).

Much of this emotional connection between the character and the consumer is due, in various aspects, to the sentiment of “Moe,” which is a common production strategy through “databases.” “Moe” is a complex and multifaceted concept in Japanese pop culture, describing a specific emotional response often associated with anime characters, manga, games, and other forms of media. “Moe” is typically interpreted as a feeling of tenderness, affection, or emotional attraction, often accompanied by a desire to protect or care for the character in question (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Diniz et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019; Regis et al., 2022).

This sentiment can be evoked by a variety of characteristics, such as adorable physical traits, diverse personalities, and situations that evoke sympathy, along with the use of the *Kawaii* (可愛い) aesthetic. *Kawaii* can be understood as cute, charming, innocent, sweet, gentle, small, lovable, and friendly, but primarily, “adorable.” It’s an aesthetic choice native to Japan that is becoming increasingly globalized. (Galbraith, 2019; Okazaki & Johnson, 2013), illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Video covers from Hololive VTubers, invoking various Moe and Kawaii elements.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJFZiqLMntJufDCHc6bQixg/videos>

Therefore, “Moe” plays a vital role in building emotional bonds between fans and characters, contributing to the popularity and success of many media works and, consequently, in developing licensed products such as collectible figures, clothing, and accessories. These products capitalize on the emotional attraction that fans have for these characters, influencing various industries, including entertainment, fashion, technology, and art (Azuma, 2009; Condry, 2013; Galbraith, 2019), and can be interpreted as yet another facet of the affective economy around Japanese pop culture.

According to Jenkins (2006), the concept of affective economy relates to how emotions such as love, enthusiasm, nostalgia, anger and sadness, among others, are incorporated into commercial and cultural practices to engage the audience, build brand loyalty, and encourage specific forms of participation and consumption. It can be cultivated, exploited, and monetized.

In this sense, affective economy, especially based on the construction of socioemotional relationships with characters linked to *otaku* culture, has become an important part of the Japanese economy, driving sectors from services and media to various industrial parks such as cosmetics, electronics, and toys (Condry, 2013; Diniz et al., 2023; Galbraith, 2019). This includes products and services based on VTubers (Regis, 2021; Regis et al., 2023; Tan, 2023; Zhao, 2022).

Finally, according to Regis et al. (2022), Turner (2022) and Tan (2023), the possibility of interacting with VTubers with cheerful appearances, even if anonymous, can attract groups of young men and women by evoking comfort, identifi-

cation, romantic interest, and curiosity. Therefore, being characters portrayed anonymously by real people capable of real-time interaction and dialogue during live streams, VTubers can evoke various feelings that result in engagement from the otaku community (Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Suan, 2021; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022; Zhao, 2022).

## 2.2. PARTICIPATORY CULTURE

The concept of participatory culture is a phenomenon characterized by the active involvement of consumers in the creation, modification, and sharing of cultural content (Jenkins, 2006). In this context, individuals engage in activities such as creating videos, music, art, texts, and other content, often using digital platforms and social networks to share their creations with a wide audience, promoting collaboration among participating fan social circles and generating social affinities and communities (Jenkins, 2006). These diverse fan creations can be understood through User Generated Content (UGC), which is the production of content by users about the products and services of companies (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Santos, 2022).

Furthermore, continuous technological evolution allows more and new cultural niches to become economically viable, developing new communities and creating a new media “Long Tail” (Anderson, 2006), with VTubers being understood as yet another facet of the Japanese cultural industry (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022).

Brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Palusuk *et al.*, 2019) refers to the loyalty and emotional and affective bond consumers develop with a specific brand, usually promoting positive custom-

er engagement. Among other topics related to the construction of brand love are affinity and cultural relevance, which involve alignment with relevant cultural trends and issues for the target audience, a strong brand identity, customer experience in creating positive memories, and finally, emotional engagement by creating campaigns that foster emotional connection. That is to say, tapping into the emotions promoted in the affective economy (Jenkins, 2006).

Finally, UGC becomes the main and initial part of a user generated branding (UGB) strategy, which consists of using UGC to collectively construct brand value and love. In this sense, the user feels invited to create content, which will later be integrated into official marketing. Therefore, the consumer feels they are collaboratively creating the branding, leading to a sense of belonging and importance (Burmann, 2010). In this way, UGC becomes the consumer’s desire for recognition is fulfilled (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Santos, 2022).

## 2.3. VTUBER

Created in 2016, *Kizuna AI* is a pioneer as a VTuber, being owned by *Kizuna AI Inc.* (based in Japan), which offers real-time avatar control technology software through body sensors and a microphone (Regis *et al.*, 2022; YouTube Culture & Trends, 2020). Although it started in Japan, *Kizuna AI* has expanded its influence to other nations and platforms in East Asia (Regis *et al.*, 2023), including customized versions for each country (Figure 2), driving the emergence of VTuber companies worldwide as the technology becomes more accessible (Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023).



**Figure 2**

*Ai-Ge (Chinese sister of Kizuna AI) and Kizuna AI.*



*Source: Regis et al. (2023)*

It is worth noting that the VTubers' phenomenon, besides being a new form of entertainment, fun, and community building in the post-pandemic context (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023), is deeply immersed in the realm of otaku fan-culture. Today, it has evolved into a global cultural industry, enabling the emergence of specialized companies in this product.

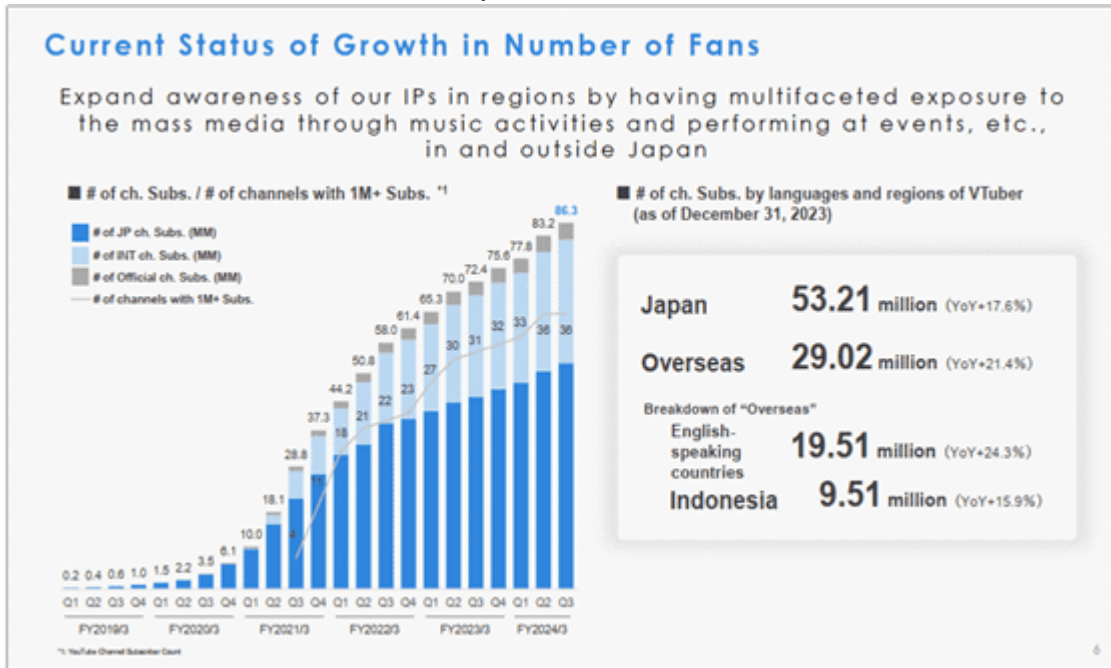
## 2.4. HOLOLIVE

Hololive is a VTuber agency company. It was founded in 2017 with investment from "Tokyo VR Startups", a technology startup incubator. By 2023, the brand already had 492 employees divided into five branches: (i) Hololive, the leading group of Japanese-language talents, (ii) Holostars, to manage male VTuber idols, (iii) Hololive Indonesia, (iv) Hololive English, responsible for global growth, and finally, (v) Hololive Alternative, responsible for the company's transmedia projects, especially manga, games, and anime, for the creation of a shared narrative universe in which all brand idols are inserted and are protagonists (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024; Hololive Alternative, 2024). Currently, all these brands are owned by a holding company called Cover Corp.

Regarding media size and expansion, as of February 2024, Hololive had 86 VTubers, 36 of whom had more than 1 million subscribers, totaling 86.25 million subscribers on YouTube across all brand channels (Figure 3). In its financial results report, Hololive highlights the significant contribution of its Hololive English VTubers to the brand's globalization (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024). Finally, the average revenue per VTuber in 2023 for Hololive reached 312 million yen (approximately 2.1 million dollars) (COVER, 2024).

**Figure 3**

*Growth in the number of subscribers to Hololive brand channels.x*



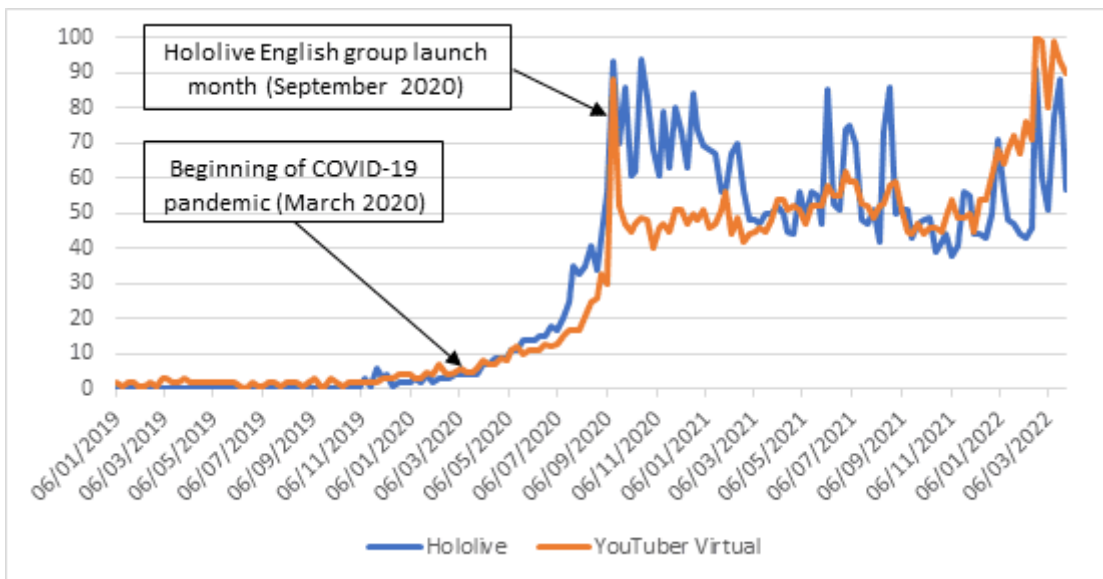
Fuente: COVER (2024)

The popularity of Hololive in the West is partly explained by the COVID-19 pandemic, which opened up new opportunities for online content consumption. This is due to both the audience's increased availability of time and their

greater openness to new types of digital cultural content, as evidenced by Figure 4 (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022). The role of Hololive English in popularizing the brand in the United States is also highlighted (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2022).

**Figure 4**

*Frequency of the term "Hololive" and "VTuber" (Virtual YouTuber) on Google Trends in the United States between 01/01/2019 and 31/03/2022 (DD/MM/YYYY).*



Source: Regis *et al.* (2022)

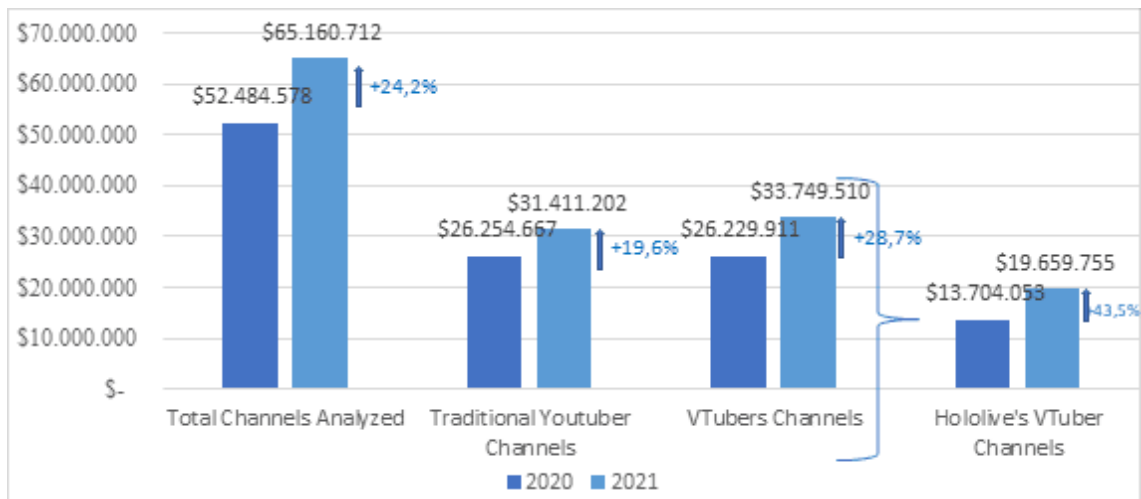


Another essential data point supporting this observation is related to audience donations to streamers (producers of live videos on the internet), one of the most important indicators of audience engagement (Hilvert-Bruce *et al.*, 2018). In this regard, VTubers had higher audience donation rates than “traditional” content creators on YouTube. These donations are even more substantial when considering VTubers from the Hololive company. For example, Hololive received by fan’s donations 36.9 million dollars between 2019 and 2021 (Regis *et al.*, 2022).

Based on the data, as described by Diniz *et al.* (2022) and Regis *et al.* (2022), and by the YouTube Culture & Trends Report (YouTube Culture & Trends, 2020), it can be affirmed that VTubers are already an essential part of the YouTube ecosystem, especially when considering engagement through special audience donations (Super Chat) (Figure 5). This proves great reciprocity between the audience watching this type of content creator and the VTuber themselves, which is also reflected in the various parallel works created by fans in homage to their favorite VTubers, expanding their respective narratives.

**Figure 5**

*Evolution of total revenue from public donations via Super Chat to the 300 channels that received the most donations on YouTube.*



Source: Diniz *et al.* (2022)

## 2.5 TRANSMEDIA

Transmedia is the use of various types of media strategically employed to create various complementary and interconnected content within the ecosystem of otaku culture, as discussed in this article.

As a tool for narrative expansion, the term transmedia was proposed by Kinder (1991), who approaches it by expanding the formats of intertextual signs made possible by digital media artifacts. Later, Laurel (2000) elevated transmedia to a conceptual level by stating the necessity of it being a guiding principle in content production for the concreteness of narrative expansion, no longer producing content for a specific media and then generating derivatives for other media afterward.

This framework provided Jenkins (2006) with the establishment of transmedia within the convergence of media, identifying it as a flow of content across various media platforms, which is also permeable to cooperation between markets and the audience (established in the field presented in this article through participatory culture, a fundamental otaku element). As a result, consumption becomes a collective process with actors in this sociotechnical system occupying multiple positions simultaneously, whether as creators, producers, receivers, or distributors.

Lastly, it's worth noting that Jenkins (2006) emphasizes that such a culture of convergence in transmedia production occurs not only in the mediation between technological artifacts but primarily in the processes of socialization among the social actors of the sociotechnical system.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

To accomplish this article, initially, a theoretical framework was established based on the scrutinized references in the work by Regis *et al.* (2022), where a narrative review was conducted on the VTuber topic to establish conceptual landmarks about this manifestation of otaku culture, complemented by theoretical contributions on the same topic published by Regis *et al.* (2023).

The results were obtained from two case studies, one regarding fan transmedia production and the other about the Hololive agency. They were conceived from the perspective described by Yin (2017), who argues that the case study is the technique with the greatest eligibility capacity when three questions are combined in research: (i) the investigation proposes the questions "how" or "why"; (ii) the reduced control over events, and (iii) the focus placed on a contemporary phenomenon, with reduced data synthesis. Also based on Yin (2017), the discussion was guided by triangulating the data obtained from corporate reports, observation of marketplaces with products inspired by VTubers, analysis of content consumption data on social networks such as YouTube, Spotify, Pixiv, and MyAnimeList, and journalistic articles on the implementation of transmedia products, supported by the author's experience in this work, reflected in their previous publications.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. HOLOLIVE'S TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION

Hololive's transmedia production is diverse and strategically positioned. In its official financial report (COVER, 2024), the company presents its VTubers in various means of communication, not only in search of new sources of income but also demonstrating that its talents can be present in multiple aspects of daily life (COVER, 2022; COVER, 2024). This positioning corroborates what Galbraith (2019) has said, which points towards the fact that many otaku fans accept that the fictional universe overlaps with the real universe, their favorite characters being another extension of reality. This company vision can be observed in its marketing, as seen in Tokyo in 2023 (Figure 6), with the company's VTubers being present in various aspects of the city's daily life (Baseel, 2023). Another example is the recent selection of VTubers Gawr Gura, Mori Calliope, and Sakura Miko as ambassadors of tourism for the Tokyo Prefecture, illustrated in Figure 7 (Harding, 2023).

One of Hololive's first experiences with transmedia production launched in 2018 on YouTube: the anime *Miko no Tsutome!*, which focused on the VTuber character Sakura Miko. Considered experimental, it finished its course with only ten episodes. However, it was an important test and experiment for its more robust subsequent project: *Holo no Graffiti*.

Anime *Holo no Graffiti* (Figure 8) launched in 2019 to tell stories about the VTuber's fictional

daily lives in the office and unusual situations. It was distributed by and featured on YouTube for free. It had short episodes (no more than 6 minutes), which added layers of interconnected narratives for fan consumption as well as thickening the plots and personalities of each of the company's VTuber characters, revealing friendships, interactions, personality traits, and romantic interests.

Dubbed in Japanese, English, and Indonesian by the very same anonymous actresses who interpret the brand's VTubers, the episodes are also available in Japanese, Mandarin, English, Spanish, Korean, and Indonesian to reach audiences beyond Japan. As of now, the series has over 250 episodes.

Regarding its popularity, *Holo no Graffiti* has a view rate of around 500 thousand and 5.2 million views per episode on YouTube, expressive numbers for a niche product. Another metric, "MyAnimeList" (MAL), has been adopted to indicate insertion into the occidental market. It's a North American website intending to group up and catalog anime, as well as gather information on user evaluations from the public that accesses it, allowing to analyze the profile of the anime consumer and anime technical data (Ferreira *et al.*, 2023). According to MyAnimeList (2024), in March 2024, anime *Holo no Graffiti* occupied rank #378 in quality, with a score of 8.19 by the public, and ranked #2780 in popularity, with 54,619 following members, demonstrating that it's still a niche, restricted anime, but with growth potential. For comparison's sake, we list MyAnimeList's popularity rank data

Figure 6

Hololive publicity in Tokyo representing VTubers in daily life.



Source: Basel (2023)



Figur 7

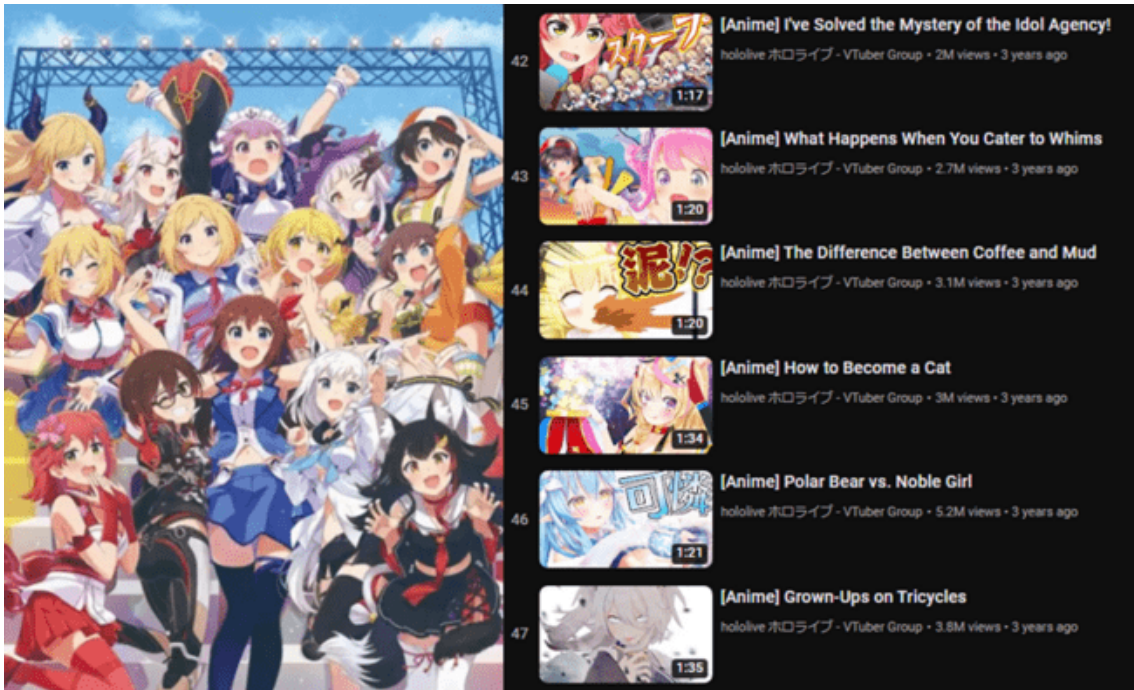
Hololive VTubers selected as ambassadors of tourism for Tokyo.



Source: Harding (2023)

Figure 8

Videos of the anime Holo no Graffiti in free distribution on YouTube.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJFZiqLMntJufDCHc6bQixg>

**Table 1**

List of the most popular animes on My Anime List.

Anime	Grades (0-10)	Followers (Popularity)	Popularity Rank
Shingeki no Kyojin	8,54	3,909,915	#1
Death Note	8,62	3,866,121	#2
Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood	9,09	3,313,403	#3
Naruto	7,99	2,828,124	#8
Dragon Ball Z	8,17	1,216,476	#112
Bishoujo Senshi Sailor Moon	7,73	380,141	#604
Girls & Panzer	7,52	300,029	#788
(...)			
Holo no Graffiti	8,19	54,619	#2,941
Miko no Tsutome!	6,09	2,348	#10,649

Source: MyAnimeList (2024)

in conjunction with the quality rank data (Table 1):

Parallel to the anime project, music production was being implemented, and various items related to the phonographic industry were being added to the catalog of narratives for consumption, the expansion into the musical market being a central part of the growth and diversification strategy (COVER, 2024). Many of the company's VTubers are professional singers and release music, albums, and music videos for original songs and covers of popular songs, with distribution on platforms like YouTube Music, Spotify, and Apple Music. For example, the success among the public, as demonstrated by Figure 9, VTuber Mori Calliope, was on the cover of the special edition of the Rolling

**Figure 9**

VTuber Mori Calliope on the cover of Rolling Stone magazine.



Source: Regis et al. (2022)

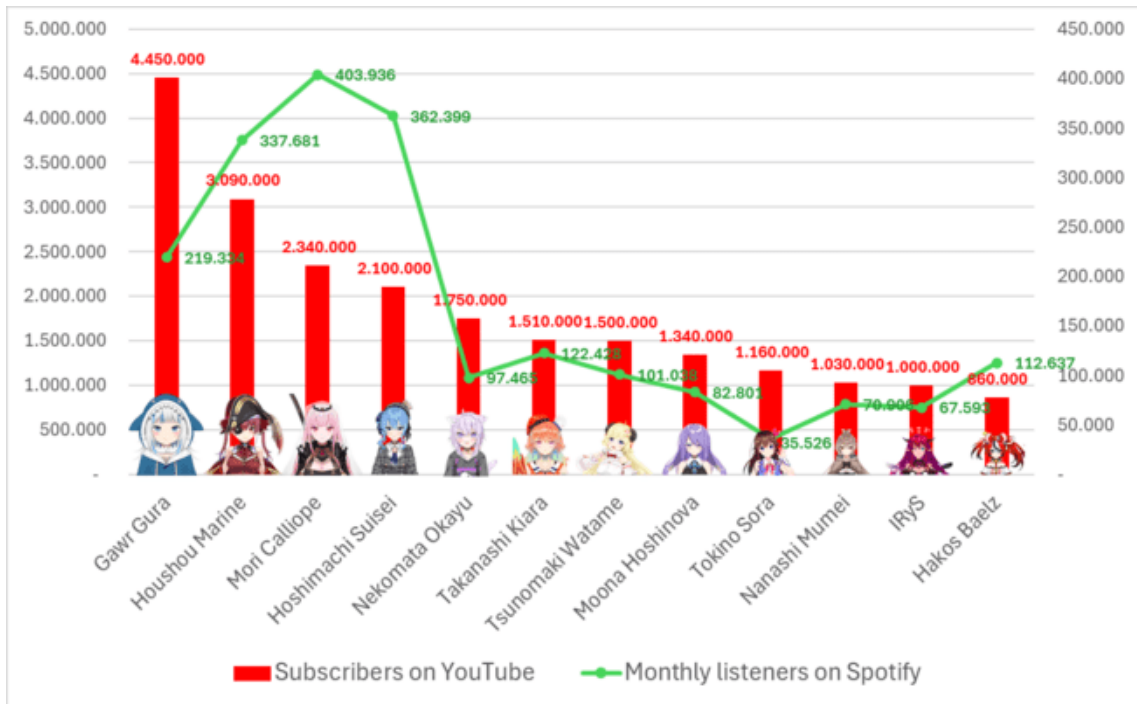
Stone Magazine for Anime Expo 2022 (Regis et al., 2022).

Another piece of data that corroborates the company's VTuber success is illustrated in Figure 10, which shows that the leading singers in the agency already reached millions of month-



Figure 10

Monthly listeners on Spotify and total subscribers on YouTube in March 2024 of some Hololive's VTubers.



Source: Spotify y YouTube

ly listeners on Spotify and total subscribers on YouTube in March 2024.

With the end of the more acute period of the pandemic, a new captivated consumer market has been established (Diniz *et al.*, 2022; Regis, 2021; Regis *et al.*, 2022; Regis *et al.*, 2023; Tan, 2023; Turner, 2022). Through technological advancements that made resources like holography, body mapping, and real-time processing more accessible, the company initiated holographic live concerts in real-life stadiums in 2022. That is to say, it starts making musical

performances on stages with a live audience where, through optical illusions, holographic technology, 3D mapping of movements, and real-time processing, the VTuber interpreters can transmit their actions and voices onto the stage. The audience can experience the sense that these same characters are present on stage and performing in real-time. Exemplifying this type of spectacle, Figure 11 depicts one of

**Figure 11**

*Hololive 4th fes live concert.*



*Source: Hololive Super Expo (2023)*

the Holo 4th Fes concerts, taken place in Tokyo in March 2023 (Hololive Super Expo, 2023).

*Holo no Graffiti* and the musical productions were essential products in introducing transmedia content in Hololive. These initiatives were the first of their kind in the company's transmedia project, Hololive Alternative (Figure 12).

Hololive Alternative was announced in February 2021 as a project consolidating the narratives created around the Hololive VTubers, synthesizing them into a single shared universe containing other original official works such as manga (Figure 13), anime and the game *HoloEarth* (Figure 14) (COVER; 2022; COVER, 2024; Hololive Alternative, 2021; Hololive Alternative, 2024), expanding the story and narrative of all of the company's characters into diverse transmedia stories, amply meeting the consumer demands for new narratives, typical of otaku

Figure 12

Hololive Alternative project, "In supplying projects like manga, anime, etc., we are supplying different forms of entertainment from live streams and idols" (author's translation).  
[漫画やアニメPV等を展開することで、「ライブ配信」や「アイドル」以外でのコンテンツの楽しみ方を提供] (original)



Source: COVER (2022)

Figure 13

Manga Yamato Phantasia



Source: <https://alt.hololive.tv/holonometria-en/manga/yamatophantasia-chapter9/>



**Figure 14**

*Commands screen for the game HoloEarth.*



*Source: Regis et al. (2022)*

fans (Azuma, 2009; Galbraith, 2019; Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012).

Hololive Alternative aims to consolidate the company's VTubers not only as streamers or content creators on the internet but also as characters with IPs (Intellectual Property) capable of being consumed and licensed in various ways (Figure 15). It's prudent to mention that commercialization and licensing of VTubers are already important sources of income for the company, representing 38,9% and 18,1% of their income, respectively, as indicated by Figure 15 (COVER, 2024).

## **4.2. FAN TRANSMEDIA PRODUCTION**

On Hololive's website, there's a clear description, in English, Indonesian, and Japanese, of its free usage policies for the brand and images of their virtual idols in fan works, which can be understood as UGC, with its precautions and

warnings. Consider writing in the active voice: The company identifies these derivative work policies as a crucial part of its success with the public. Here is the complete passage available in the Hololive Derivative Works Guide (Hololive, 2024):

We consider derivative works to be creations born of fans' ideas and creativity based on content created by us.

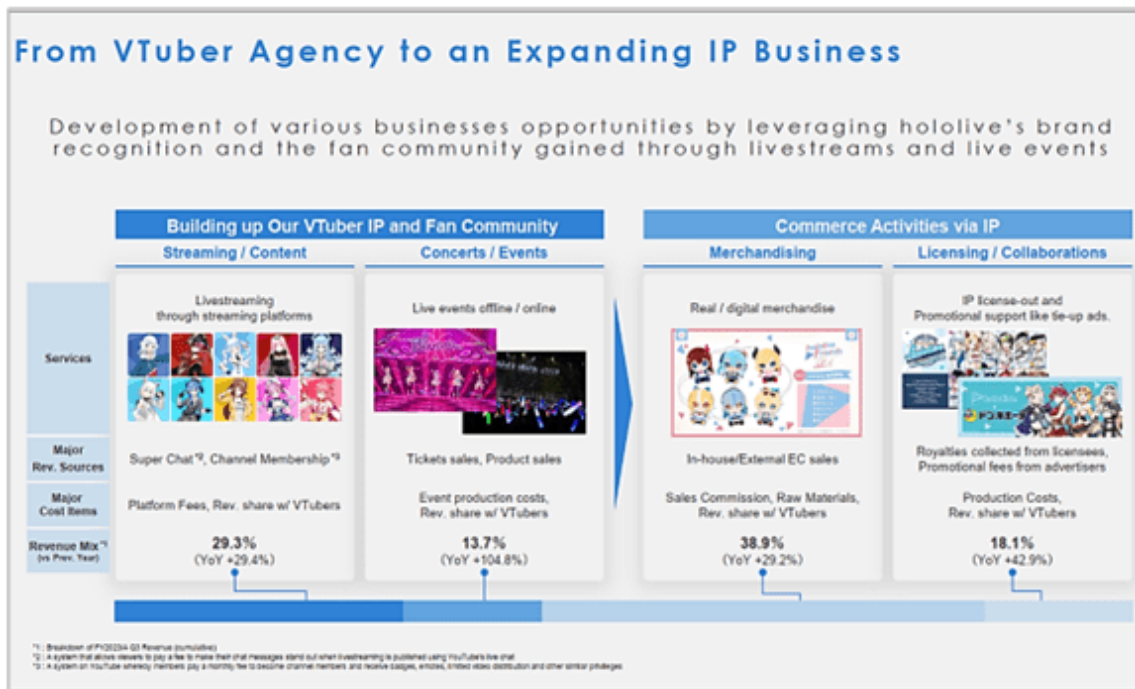
We will not exercise our rights regarding works that we deem to be derivative works as long as they comply with these overall guidelines.

Please note that we may use any derivative works you create as stream thumbnails on social media, etc.

\* We do not consider the use of our content as is, or with modifications lacking creative input to be classified as derivative works. Such use does not fall within the scope of these guidelines.

Figure 15

Hololive's strategy in constructing their IP Business.



Source: COVER (2024, p. 28)

Amongst the alerts described for the use of the brand and images of its VTuber idols are (Hololive, 2024):

- 1) Please be mindful of our talents and refrain from creating derivative works that they may find unpleasant.
- 2) Please limit your creation of derivative works to a fan or hobby level. Do not use our content for business purposes (including, but not limited to, cases where a business bears the production costs, etc., even if it is under the name of an individual) or for purposes that can be deemed as for-profit.
- 3) Please comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including the terms and rules of any relevant platforms.

Please refrain from creating derivative works that fall under the following categories:

- 4) Content that is falsely represented as official or can be misinterpreted or mistaken as official
- 5) Content that is contradictory to public order and morality or exceeds what is socially acceptable
- 6) Content that includes matters pertaining to any particular ideology, belief, religion, or politics
- 7) Content that damages our image, or that of our talents or our content
- 8) Content that damages a third party's image or violates their rights
- 9) Other content that we deem unsuitable

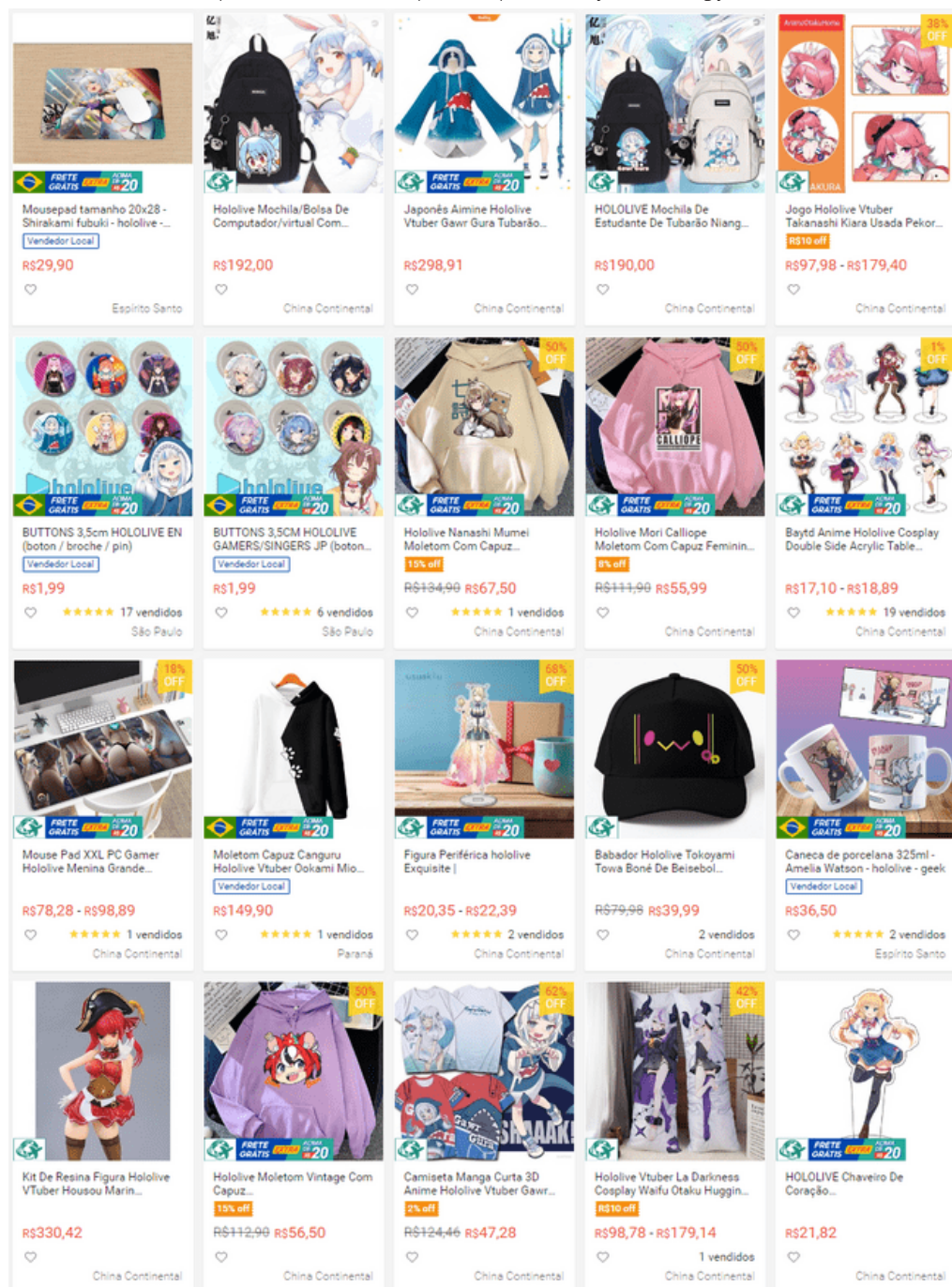
However, fans and businesses, with the perception of this demand in expansion for more content derived from this Hololive transmedia ecosystem, ignore part of the brand's terms of

use, even though they were significantly frank, to produce and sell various unofficial derivative contents such as cosplay outfits, fames, fan-arts, backpacks, shirts, caps, mugs, pillows, dolls, action figures, manga and pornographic content related to these VTuber idols. These

ensembles produced by fans are made available for purchase online in marketplaces like Shopee, AliExpress, and Taobao (Regis *et al.*, 2023; Zhao, 2022), as shown in Figure 16.

**Figure 16**

*Holive derivative products on the marketplace Shopee Brazil after searching for the term “Hololive”.*



Source: Shopee Brasil, <https://shopee.com.br/search?keyword=hololive>



Other fan-created transmedia products include fan-art, animation, music, and manga (Figures 17 and 18). For comparison's sake, in the digital fan-art sharing website Pixiv, there are over 448,800 Hololive fan-arts (Pixiv, 2024). All of these items add more consumable parallel narratives to the ones already established

by the brand, simulating situations, events, social interactions, outfits, and art styles, therefore feeding into the otaku community related to the Hololive content. It's worth noting that Azuma (2009), Condry (2013), Galbraith (2019),

**Figure 17**

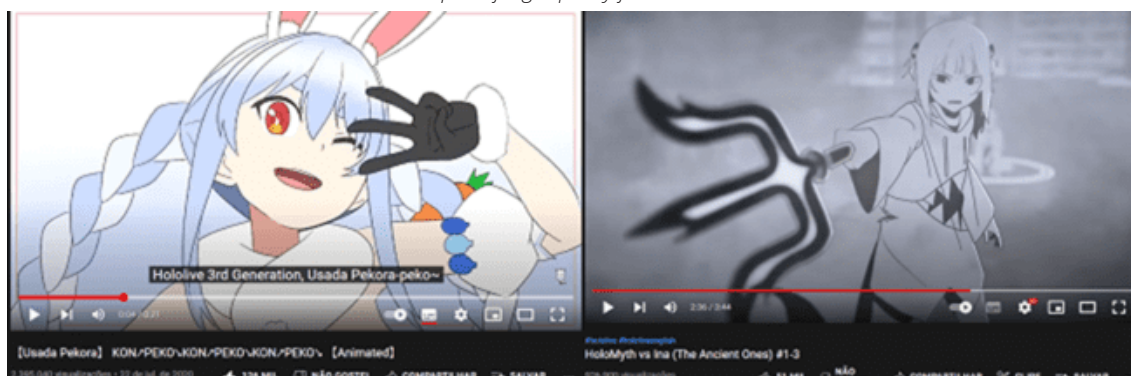
A scene of a doujinshi about Hololive's Korone and Miko (left). Fan-art of Houshou Marine from Hololive (right).



Source: Dynasty Reader, [https://dynasty-scans.com/chapters/yohanes\\_hololive\\_twitter\\_shorts\\_ch75](https://dynasty-scans.com/chapters/yohanes_hololive_twitter_shorts_ch75); Pixiv, <https://www.pixiv.net/en/artworks/97839952>

**Figure 18**

Examples of high-quality fan-animation.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQYNaxRkaWs>; [https://youtu.be/vWLBfdj\\_ss0](https://youtu.be/vWLBfdj_ss0)

Otsuka and Steinberg (2010), and Steinberg (2012) point out that derivative works by fans are positioned as hallmarks of otaku culture.

It is common for the company's VTubers to record content of themselves consuming these fan productions live, like the manga, games, memes, and artwork, in a show of mutual recognition and interaction with the community around them, incentivizing even more this parallel production. In fact, many narratives created by fans are incorporated by the VTubers and their company, for example, certain romantic interests, tastes, eccentricities and even new group formations.

Considering these interfaces, Azuma (2009) discusses that otaku culture is governed by the consumption of narratives formed by these derivative works, being that technological advancement has allowed an increase in the production and dissemination of otaku content by fans, simplifying processes (Regis *et al.*, 2022), corroborating with the formation of new consumption niches on the long-term (Anderson, 2006). With this, the lines between official content from the company and those produced by fans are blurred, bringing with it a new concept of the existence of several simulacra, slightly different from the one conceptualized by Baudrillard (1981), as well as erasing the differences between producer and consumer, where the latter both produces and consumes the works (Otsuka & Steinberg, 2010; Steinberg, 2012), questioning, then, the concept of au-

thorship, added on by the fact that consumers rarely remember the origins of the authors of subsequent narratives (Azuma, 2009).

### **4.3. TRANSMEDIA INTERSECTIONS MEDIATED BY HOLOLIVE**

Considering the continuous and prolific fan production, it becomes essential for VTuber businesses like Hololive to unilaterally let go of specific terms in the copyright laws of the countries where their products circulate and ignore particular commercialization of non-official products, like manga, cosplay costumes, and games, etc., intending to feed and maintain these vibrant, growing *otaku* communities that manifest around them and its talents, even incentivizing its VTubers to produce content consuming and analyzing such derivative works, interacting with and incentivizing fans to consume and even make more works, then paving the way to new forms of transmedia mediation between the IP holders and fans who produce new narratives and cultural artifacts, in a way expanding on the UGB strategy.

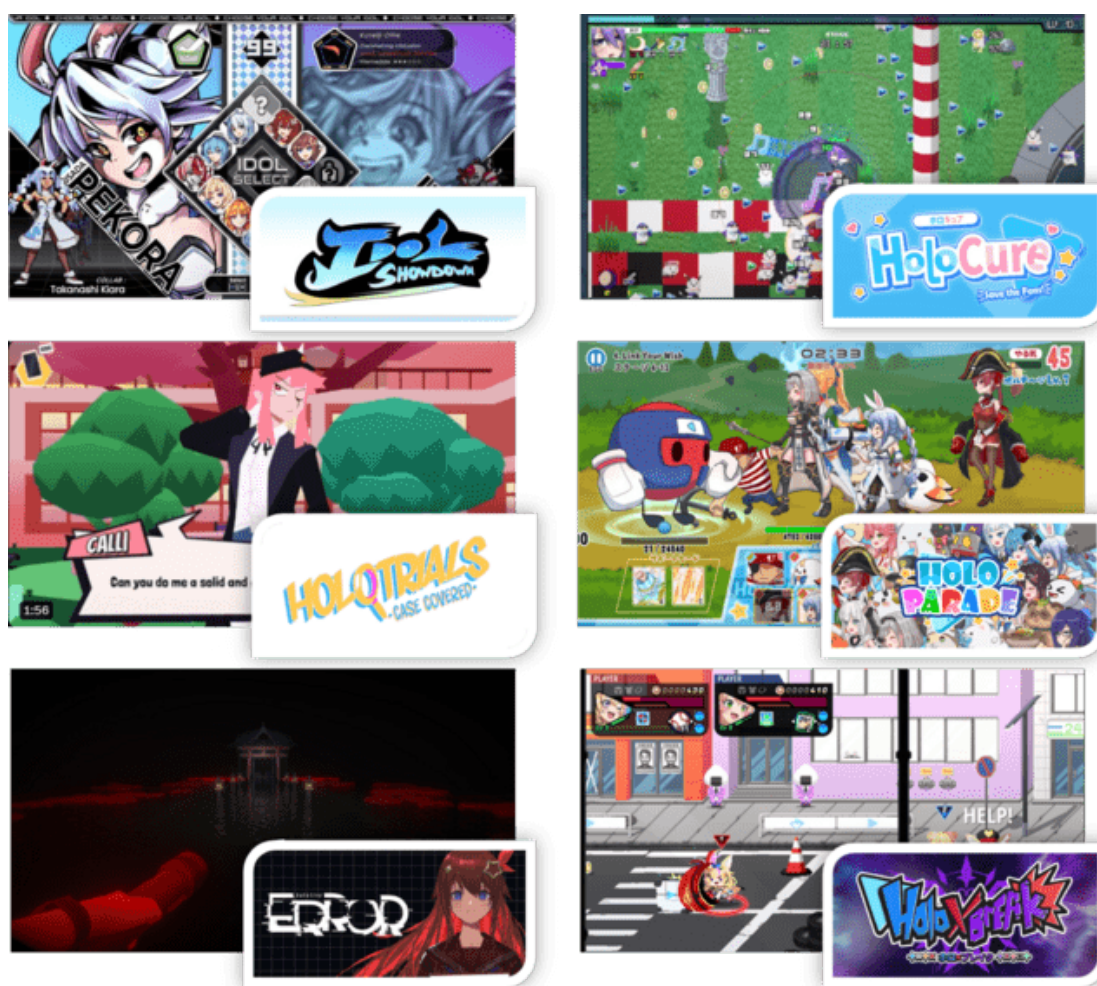
One of the most complex artifacts produced by fans that garner the most public attention is the fan-games. Fan-games about Hololive and its VTubers are many, with varying degrees of complexity and effort put into them, and they are constantly shared and played by VTubers on stream.

In this sense, in 2023, the company has instilled a new policy in regard to these works, the creation of an official distributor called “Holo Indie”, where these game producers could distribute their work officially under the Hololive brand, even with the potential of being monetized, in platforms like Steam and Xbox, creating even more stimuli for these developers, which directly helps in promoting the brand (COVER,

2024; Hololive, 2024). The success of a portion of these games has already reached the general public, no longer restricted to the captivated Hololive consumer, and it stimulates the production of denser, more complex games with bigger budgets, as represented in Figure 19. So, Hololive configures an experimental laboratory for digital game development, diversifying and

**Figure 19**

*Hololive fan-games being officially distributed or in developmental partnership.*



Source: Steam



potentializing its transmedia capacity and long-term engagement with audiences, creating new narratives for consumption.

The company also absorbs other UGC elements like art and comic products. An example is the group *Holo Tori*, created by Hololive VTuber fans whose designs are based on birds ("tori" means bird in Japanese) (Figure 20). In this case, the intersection mediated by Hololive

**Figure 20**

*HOLOTORI DANCE! music video.*



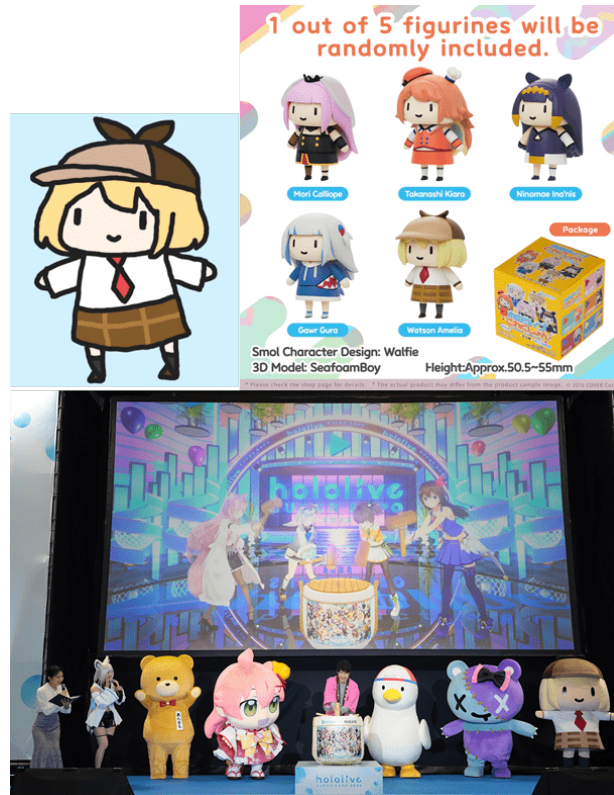
Fuente: Hololive Español, <https://youtu.be/BcO9bZavHRg>

advanced to the point where the company financed a music video that is currently available on the official Hololive YouTube channel.

Another result of this intersection is Smol Ame, a cartoon version of the VTuber Amelia Watson, created by the digital artist @walfiee. *Smol Ame* has become so popular amongst fans that other VTubers have been converted into the

**Figure 21**

*Smol” version created by @walfjeee (left). “Smol” merchandising and official appearance in Holo Fest 2022 (right). Hololive mascots in Hololive Super Expo, including Smol Ame (below).*



Source: @walfjeee <https://twitter.com/walfjeee/status/1505753371914997760/photo/1>; Hololive Official Shop [https://shop.hololivepro.com/en/products/hololivecollection\\_vol1](https://shop.hololivepro.com/en/products/hololivecollection_vol1); Hololive Super Expo (2023)

same “Smol” design in their avatars, as well as “Smol” versions of official Hololive products already being commercialized by the company, as observed in Figure 21.

In this way, analysis of these results points to these intersectional actions with fan productions as being part of an ample UGB strategy, incrementing engagement with and recognition of the audience in their collaborative process of construction of the brand as well as brand love, with the consumer-producer fan recognizing

themselves as a participative actor with agency in influencing the path of their favorite VTubers in Hololive.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

The internet has increased the flow of media production and exchanges. By aligning with participatory culture, a social scenario that blurs the roles of media sender and receiver. In the case of VTubers, the engagement generated by such culture is enhanced, as the archetype of the sender is an avatar. Although there is a human behind this construct, receivers are

consuming and/or producing content from a virtual entity, which brings all actors in this sociotechnical network closer to the idea of a collaborative construction process.

By producing artifacts with content based on their virtual idols, users increase their engagement in a cultural product of affinity and add another layer to the official content. This addition occurs through the capitalization of positive social experiences during interaction with VTuber content, which allows for the continuous redesign of aspects presented by these avatars.

Given this panorama, Hololive's commercial strategy is centered on the consumers' emotional connection with their VTuber characters and promoting participatory culture. In this context, the concept of brand love is operated with the aim of the company creating deeper bonds with its audience. By exploring cultural affinity and stimulating physical and emotional engagement, the company strengthens its fan base and fosters consumer loyalty, a fundamental capability to transform media companies into intellectual property corporations.

By identifying the potential for fan participation of VTubers managed by Hololive, the company stimulates this production to popularize the brand and leverage the feedback loop present in *otaku* fan-culture. Such stimuli go beyond simply allowing the use of corporate content, extending to the embrace of this product in its official channels and providing funds and infrastructure for the realization of fan products.

The results presented by Hololive are promising and indicative that such actions represent the emergence of a new transmedia perspective, which involves increasing levels of intertwining between companies and consumers in the production and distribution of content, which, due to the different means and expedients that each actor possesses, allows us to affirm that this whole will be a set of productions of different hues and disseminated across different media platforms.



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