The Idol that You Can Dress Up

Investigating the Idol-Making Practices in
Shining Nikki

Yiqing Chen

Dr. René Glas
New Media & Digital Culture
Student no. 7597444
Referencing format: MLA 9th edition

Abstract

Ever since its birth, the Chinese mobile dress-up game *Shining Nikki* has been famous for molding and spreading an idealized female figure: Nikki, the beautiful heroine who imbues players with infinite fantasies around styling aesthetics. As the game trespasses the online media boundaries to bring her image into paratextual marketing materials, she reaches a wide audience base and becomes an iconic figure. This thesis argues that the 3D animation and the transmedia characterization of Nikki vivify her clean femininity to satisfy fans' pursuit of ideal feminine attributes. Meanwhile, she is essentially an empty digital dataset controllable and modifiable by fans, which creates an exceedingly intimate fans-star relationship to fulfill their personal desires projected onto her body. Using textual analysis of the game and the paratextual analysis of the marketing materials, this thesis dissects the idolization of Nikki in both the game context and the transmedia context, thus carving out the logics behind the idol marketing of a virtual feminine ideal.

Key words: virtual idol; transmedia marketing; game analysis; dress-up game; digital femininity

Table of Contents

I.　Introduction

Shining Nikki (Paper Games/2019) is a 3D dress-up game where users are responsible for styling the main character, Nikki, and using her as a model through styling battles. This well-received game has obtained more than 0.7 billion yuan in revenue in 2021 and 8 million users in total (*yxrb.net*). The game's incredible popularity is contributed mainly by the high visibility of Nikki, who has been active on different media platforms, including social forums and fashion magazines, and attracted thousands of fans to write fiction and draw illustrations for her. As a 3D anime character, Nikki has an artificial appearance and can move and talk as a real female. The animation technology also idealizes Nikki with a golden ratio face, unrealistically long legs, and wide and round eyes, providing her an ideal feminine image.
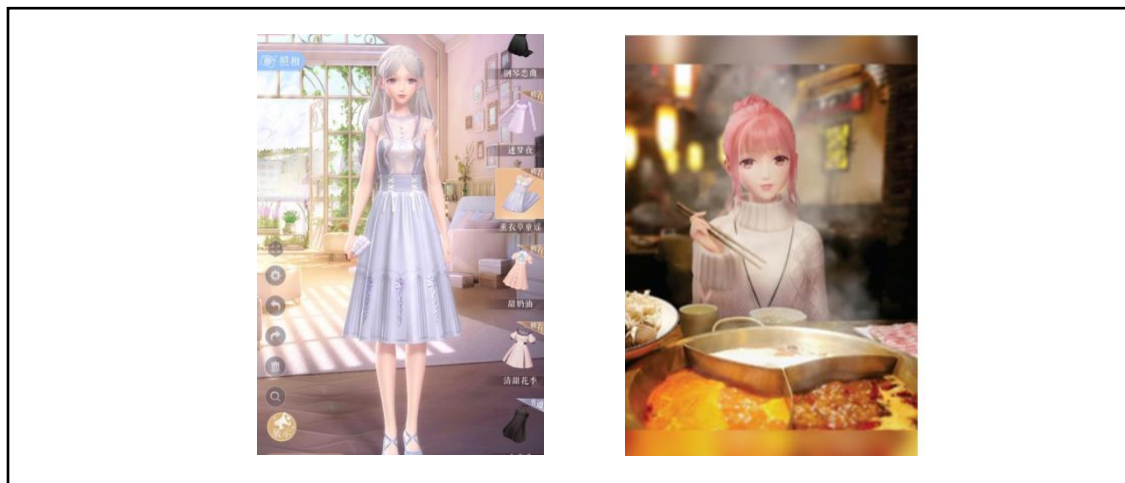

Figure 1. Nikki in the game (left) and on the social media forum Weibo (right).

The game is the center ground where Nikki presents her charm directly to players, and the media channels unfolded around the game create multiple narratives that allow players' fantasies or idealizations of her virtual image. In the game context, Nikki is

romantic and bubbly, preferring to snack the internet and collect different outfits. Her overall sweetness extends to the transmedia narratives around her, as she posts her lively travel diary, daily inspirations, and music videos on social media. However, researches on this game dip merely into its market potential (Lee 44) and social functions (Zeng 164). As this thesis is going to discuss below, the question of how Nikki becomes an icon, which uncovers the game's key to success, is open for answers.

From a historical perspective of the dress-up game genre, Nikki's popularity is no accident. The Barbie series, the world-renowned pioneer of the doll dress-up, has carved a way for the idolization of feminine dolls. Cultural studies scholar Kristin Noelle Weissman argues that Barbie's core charm lies in her image as an "ultimate woman, and to look like her is the ultimate power" (13). This idea of imitating and fetishizing Barbie transforms her into a representation of beauty norms (Urla, Swedlund 127). And fans collect Barbies with different figures to customize their versions of feminine ideals (Godwin 217). This customizable doll format, as communication scholar Kelsey Cummings alleges, encourages customers to create doll images using the design options, guiding them to "view female bodies as objects to be manipulated." The "design," "dress up," and "showcase" mechanics train customers to "act simultaneously as entrepreneurs whose creativity shapes the products on display" (29, 38). Barbie fans thereby become both consumers and producers in their pursuit of beauty ideals. *Shining Nikki* adopts the similar playful mechanics. Game researcher Lee Ya notes that Nikki's cute appearance and endless outfit sets fulfill players' lust for beauty with minimum effort in that ludic world (44-45, 46). Like the Barbie series, the

game appropriates the desire for the power of femininity.

Nonetheless, the dress-up games' potential in idol-making in the digital age is under-explored. Current literature focuses on the games' affordability of individual "expression," "alternative worlds," and "transformative play" to players (Fron et al. 1) yet neglects these features' parts in relating players intimately with the game character. With the help of 3D animation technology and transmedia marketing, *Shining Nikki* has brought the dress-up game world authentically to players, providing them an immersive environment to produce and consume digital femininity. Communications and performance studies scholar Daniel Black defines digital femininity as a certain beauty that "results from its conforming to the aesthetic of anime and computer games." This beauty is ideal and even surreal—on the borderland between simulation and a living body, it integrates the optimal female attributes—and can be owned by users as datasets ("The Virtual Idol" 216-218). Digital femininity lays a foundation for the idolization of Nikki, given her uncanny proximity to humanity and cute representations of a female body. Her omnipresence contributes to shaping her as a virtual idol, which showcases how a feminine doll blends in the idol culture.

This study integrates both game texts and paratexts to analyze the game's idol-making practices in light of the marketing of digital femininity. For the significance of paratextual analysis, the transmedia marketing scholar Steven E. Jones introduces the idea of "cross-platform intermediation" that enables the joint linkage of materials on different media platforms. Its allure is the audiences' pleasure at following the derivatives of the main media text to explore the great and ludic narratives (74). As

Nikki has been marketed in multiple media materials ranging from posters to video clips, it is, therefore, important to look at the marketing activities adopted in and outside the game that promote her idol-like digital femininity. And the game components relevant to her feminine attributes become the virtual goods marketed to players. Ultimately, this thesis examines the game text and paratexts developed around Nikki's digital femininity and illustrates how they shape her as an idol representing a digitalized feminine ideal to show the appeal of a virtual relationship with a doll. The main research question is: how do the game's idol-making practices achieve the production, spreading, and influence of Nikki's digital femininity both within the game and the marketing materials? The sub-questions are as follows: (i) How does the characterization of Nikki make her an "ideal" female? (ii) How does the dress-up game context spur the expression of the pursuit of such a feminine beauty? (iii) How do the transmedia marketing practices contribute to such an idol-making? This thesis is going to look at game texts and paratexts surrounding the transmedia marketing of the game character, the steps of which will be explained in-depth in the methodology chapter. In general, first, drawing from the game environment and characterization, this thesis explores how Nikki's figure in the game tempts collective production and consumption of digital femininity. Second, this thesis analyzes how Nikki's presence in other media forms accommodates different narratives that satisfy audiences' fetish and fantasies. This thesis will supplement the current research on virtual idol culture with the examples of in-game idol-making practices as well as blog and video posts by game marketers that contribute to the idolization of Nikki on different media platforms.

II.   Theoretical Framework

This thesis views Nikki as a hyperreal representation of modern feminine ideal, and players' worship of her as their fervid fantasy of the female shape. How her emptiness and reproductivity of female attributes allow fans' personal narratives remains a fundamental question that this thesis tackles. In addition, this thesis furthers the exploration into the role of dress-up in the idol marketing, in order to discover how players' ownership and customization of her programmed body engages them in a loyal and intimate relationship with her. Thus, by situating the discussions on digital femininity within the idol culture, this thesis unravels the causation, strategies, and potential of virtual idolization that *Shining Nikki* has realized.

Born from the animation technology and artificial bodies, digital femininity articulates what differs a virtual feminine idol from the real-life one: the digital commodity can be morphed to simulate a perfect doll body, and owned and controlled by audiences (Black, "The Virtual Idol" 216-217). Digital femininity has been key to the virtual celebrity formation and presentation, fed by the obsessions with technologies manufacturing the ideal female bodies. Although the translation of feminine attributes into databases is prevalent in games, the combination of digital femininity and virtual idolization in this industry is scant, as there lacks an example for an idol constructed upon a game resource (Kim, Han 69). Except that the idolization of Nikki showcases the role of a digital female in the virtual idol area originated from the game setting. An academic framework outlining the relationships between the idol culture and the femininity that crosses virtual and reality in a game context, therefore, is integral to

elucidating the success of *Shining Nikki* in building a well-received icon.

Idols are defined by international communication scholar Patrick W. Galbraith and information studies researcher Jason G. Karlin as "the currency of exchange in the promotion and advertising of all manner of other products and services" (2). Japanese popular culture researcher Kazumi Nagaike asserts that fans' "individual narratives or fantasies" are the main benefits of idols. Taking Johnny's idols, the idols from Johnny & Associates, one of the most iconic talent agencies in East Asia, as an example, she finds that their "transcendent emptiness" to all sorts of narratives is the source of their core charm (99). The absence of autonomous personality and principles spurs fans' fictionalization of idols' characters. As cultural studies scholar Graeme Turner argues, part of the appeal of idolization stems from fans' ignorance over his or her authentic self (121), which echoes the flexible character molding derived from their emptiness.

This idea of emptiness in idols is pervasive in virtual idol-making practices. According to Daniel Black, the virtual idol "becomes unequivocally dependent upon the consumer and under his control" as a piece of manipulable technology, as the software allows fans to "work out of the constraints of physical or biological reality" ("The Virtual Idol" 220-221). The emptiness of digitally formulated idols offers fans full ownership and control, thereby tying them tightly together. Feminist literary researcher Ka Yan Lam also believes that, in the case of Hatsune Miku, the electronic coding of the human voice replaces the value of the human actor with the value of simulation. She maintains that the virtual idol is "a product of reproduction, the copy possesses no aura of the original," which leads to the misrecognition of "what looks

like the real as the real" (1110-1114). Virtual idols are reproductive due to their programmability to copy and simultaneously recreate the human prototype. Thus, as for the fandom of virtual female idols, Daniel Black concludes that their ability to replicate certain female qualities "while losing others and replacing them with new attributes" is key to their attractiveness ("The Virtual Idol" 218). Nikki, with a body in line with the golden ratio, appeals to audiences for being idealized and fantasized. Her lack of biological flaws is a bodily improvement that approaches audiences' fantasy of a perfect female figure.

Digital communication researcher Sidney Eve Matrix regards virtual female idols as "computer-generated images of digital women who are young, fair-skinned, wide-eyes, and often scantily clad" (8). The translation of female biology into the pixels on screens constructs the digital femininity that confounds a natural female body with a programmed modality. While Sidney Eve Matrix argues that exaggerating the digitality in the feminine icon will push it away from authenticity (111), Ka Yan Lam points out that "the add-on cybernetic qualities are the appeal of the digital artifice" (1114). These qualities provoke the fantasy which living idols lack in the limited realm of authenticity. In this way, artificial bodies possess a sense of hyperreality that blends the real and the virtual, catering to the affections for cuteness, elegance, and innocence from ultimate imaginaries. These attributes constitute Nikki's particular femininity that draw on the blurred division of authenticity and fantasy. She comes clean out of the contaminants from physical reality and remains open for any kind of individual customization of a feminine ideal. In this vein, she becomes dependent upon fans' fantasies or idealizations

of her figure which turns the package of her into marketable commodities.

Idol marketing employs what transmedia marketing scholar Marc Steinberg calls "anime media mix" to translate a single work across multiple platforms and sell such works within the same franchise (142). As media strategist Anne Zeiser informs, this transmedia marketing can engage audiences "in an immersive environment" and result in high attendance. Furthermore, to market a brand requires publicizing its unique persona (14, 97). Virtual idols as brands hold the distinct charisma of their emptiness. Patrick W. Galbraith explains that the idol's lack of self makes her "an interchangeable and disposable image commodity" that substitutes any illusion of women. The idol's appearance on numerous media platforms is dissected to audiences, thereby giving rise to "fragmented, multiple, and shifting gazes" directed to the target parts (194-195). This dissection offers consumers intimate perspectives of the idol's body and their romantic or even erotic illusions. Based on this argument, Daniel Black's finding that the virtual idol is "a form of merchandise" for fans to "produce their traces of her" extends the idol marketing into an individualized level ("The Virtual Idol" 216). Fans diversify their fantasies by collecting dispersed narratives for the virtual idol and feel control over her body by purchasing raw digital materials. In other words, the enjoyment of consuming and customizing the originally unobtainable femininity is elementary to market the virtual idol. Therefore, in order to understand the relationships between the idolization of Nikki and fans' desire for producing a personal version of the feminine ideal, this thesis looks at how Nikki's existence as digital data allows fan audiences to customize and orchestrate the digital traces of her. Since current research fails to approach the idol

world nourished from the game texts, this thesis attempts to bridge the research gap through the analysis of both the idol-making practices in the game itself and the idol marketing materials outside the game.

To sum up, this thesis integrates the research on digital femininity and investigates its relevance to the marketing journey of a virtual idol. This research trajectory serves to discover the idol-making practices thoroughly and the potential for the game character to be massively commercialized through conventional consumer products. Game texts and paratexts are thereby the main research corpus for the analysis of the marketing of Nikki's idol-like figure.

III. Methodology

This thesis adopted (para-)textual analysis in a combination with digital femininity theories and transmedia marketing knowledge to examine the virtual idol phenomenon in *Shining Nikki*. The research corpus was divided into two parts: i) the in-game components that guide players' pursuits of the feminine ideal; ii) the character design in the transmedia context. The former focused on the ludic complexities, the cradle for idolization, and the latter on the characterization of Nikki in different media forms, the digital representation of ideal femininity. An account on the mobile version of *Shining Nikki* had been created for a walk-through of game texts. By closely analyzing the game, I investigated the interface of customization, the gacha mechanics, and the character design based on Nikki's appearance on the homepage and her personality shown from

the storyline by jumping in between the homepage and different chapter pages. Subsequently, by closely investigating the marketing materials, I integrated and analyzed Nikki's presence across such online media platforms as Bilibili, Weibo, and Wechat to see how her charm was extended into different narratives. Both these two steps will be discussed in-depth in this chapter.

As game studies scholar Clara Fernández-Vara asserts, textual analysis of the game deals with "the system of the game and its components, as well as how the system is presented to players." According to this principle, the game's "rules, control system, interactive design, and visual style" are the formal aspects that showcase the composition of the game text (17). This thesis thereby narrowed the research corpus down to the storyline, the theme(s) of the game, the visuals of the dressing room and wardrobe, the mechanics of styling battles, and the gacha mechanic. The research unfolded around how they spurred players' collective production and fetish of digital femininity. For the characterization of Nikki, this study pinpointed her 3D-molded appearance, dubbing voice, and verbal messages for players, so as to examine the presentation of her feminine attributes to players. The textual analyses focused on meaning derivations and were interconnected, with an ultimate communal purpose to locate the practices that aim to shape Nikki as a virtual idol.

Besides, the transmedia marketing practices add a paratextual perspective to this study. As marketing researcher Steven E. Jones notes, the cross-platform mediation echoes the game text and diversifies it through "media re-proposing", which utilizes the properties of different media platforms to complete the narratives (74). In order to

investigate this attractiveness of frame-breaking, it is essential to look at how the marketing campaigns reappropriate the game. The paratextual corpus focused on a case study of Nikki's birthday celebration event in the year 2021. It consists of the fan art contest, music video, birthday song, vlog, and posts on Nikki's own Weibo account during the event period from November 30th to December 12th. These research objects were connected to the game textual corpus with the goal to look for the differences between the game text and paratexts and recurring patterns in their designs, topic, and aesthetics (Fernández-Vara 11). The main research question for this part is how Nikki's digital femininity is put across different platforms and monetized in the meantime. Specifically, this research analyzed the tone, style, and contents of the Weibo posts under Nikki's name during the event period to uncover how they bring her image authentically to the audience. The birthday song, the accompanying music video, and the vlog released on Bilibili, one of the most popular online video streaming platforms in the mainland China, were considered as the visual and aural texts that vivify her feminine appearance and personality.

Figure 2. The music video released on Bilibili for Nikki's birthday celebration.

Overall, this research approached the idol-making of Nikki from a textual

perspective and borrowed the academic thoughts within the doll-play idolization area. The literature regarding digital femininity was central to discovering the relationships between Nikki's ideal feminine attributes and the idolization of her throughout the analyses. The analysis of the game theme and mechanics involved relevant research on dress-up games. Transmedia marketing studies were also integral to the paratextual analysis to investigate how Nikki was marketed as an idol-like representation to a large audience base across platforms. With a circumspect look at both the game text and the paratext, this particular study integrated the signs of the idol-making practices behind *Shining Nikki*'s commercial success.

IV.   The gamified birth of a virtual feminine ideal

The mobile game *Shining Nikki* has presented to players with a styling fantasy where the heroine Nikki travels around the beautiful Miraland, the game world that values styling as a peacekeeping token and maintains a simple lifestyle. The lifestyle includes gaining diverse sets of clothing and enjoying the dress-up process. Most of the gameplay takes place within (customizable) living quarters where Nikki stands, and the player can style her looks. This area, which we could call her closet can provide endless styling options allows her to try different elegant outfits. And the self-applied hairstyle and makeup schemes serve to fit her into different looks. In this fantasy there is no external threat to her living situations; styling while traveling constitutes her life theme, making her a girly romantic focused on the pursuit of fashion. Players enter the game as her personal stylist who takes care of her in a third-person perspective and is

responsible for helping her win all the styling battles, supporting her romantic journey in this innocent fantasy world. Players can not merely manipulate Nikki's appearance but talk with her in an in-game forum, observe her routine on the subpage activated by the "home" button at the homepage, and interact with her directly by poking her face or shaking the phone. Most of the gameplay proceeds within an intimate and immersive context where players can appreciate, modify, and consume her beauty. The game, overall, takes looking cute and clean as the focus to players, which, to a certain extent, echoes the current Chinese beauty aesthetics.

With the rampant development of China's beauty economy, two terms cover the ideal femininity on trend: "nennu" and "shunu." They both associate femininity with "youth, beauty, fitness, and slimness" to emphasize the regulatory for females to look young and delicate and act decently and meekly (Yang 334-336). This impression of an ideal female is pervasive in Chinese game industry as well. *Shining Nikki* presents to audiences a feminine figure constructed by the 3D animation technologies that bring it away from physical reality. Nikki appears as a young girl with pink hair, porcelain white skin, wide and innocent eyes, and always a faint smile that conveys her constant friendliness and sweetness. The game texts situate Nikki into a girly romantic, where her figure is yoked to meekness, youth, and innocence, consistent to the standard femininity in China. She performs a particular form of femininity born of the digital translation of a female body in a conjunction with beauty and sexuality specific to technologies and fantasies. This is what Daniel Black defines as "digital femininity." For virtual idols, digital femininity is the locus of their potential for being massively

objectified by audiences ("The Virtual Idol" 218). Though there is only one Nikki in the game, she can be morphed to cater to players' fetish, reproduced through the individual customization, and commodified through the gacha mechanic where players trade real-world money for the in-game goods for advance customization. She satisfies audiences' obsession with the standard and even idealized femininity that is brought to life from fantasies based on 3D animation technologies. She is reproducible and consumable to audiences with her digital feminine attributes being the source of her appeal.

4.1 Nikki as the representation of a clean feminine body

The characterization of Nikki starts from the shaping of her appearance that conveys the particular cuteness that she represents. According to Daniel Black, female idols are performing the endearingly nonthreatening femininity, and the translation of the female biology into digital entities can preserve the cleanliness of such femininity ("The Virtual Idol" 219). The digitalized female body exceeds biological limits, idealizing feminine attributes in a bodily aspect. The exaggeration of bodily golden ratio and facial feminine characteristics are pervasive in this digital translation. Adopting child-like features, such as huge eyes, round chins, and narrow torso, to make the character look young and innocent, and conforming to the canon of eight heads— present by the Greek sculptor Praxiteles—which is famous for defining an ideal figure as a figure that can be divided into eight equal parts based on the size of the head, are what the anime technologies propose to create a visually appealing female model (Horno-López 42). For Nikki, she has a body that is perfectly slim, with legs slightly

longer than the ideal figure and eyes wide enough to express directly her mood and feelings. Her skin, smooth and unblemished from top to toe, unrealistically resembles an infantile skin to maintain her young and flawless look. Small breasts and slender limbs allow her to fit into any clothing style and look properly non-aggressive. As Aoyagi Hiroshi points out that idols are required to be cute and sweet to be protected by those who idolize them (14), Nikki's slim and even child-like body also makes her visually fragile and meek, therefore seeming like a safe object of love to audiences. In short, this design of her body emphasizes her association with innocence and apolitical youth. She is infantilized, with the body seemingly under-grown delivering an impression of needing protection, which blurs the boundary of youth and adulthood; her body is portrayed in this way to set her in contrast to the mature masculinity.
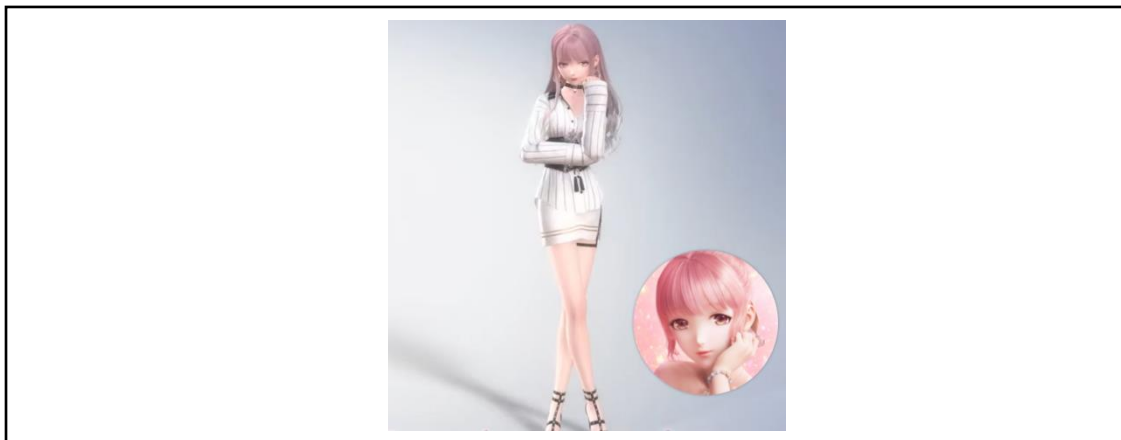

Figure 3. The iconic image of Nikki: a slim and tall girl with unblemished white skin, long pink hair, and wide, innocent eyes.

On the other hand, the young, tidy, and glabrous body suggests her nature of being impervious to biological uncleanness. Daniel Black alleges that the anime character's body is "entirely lacking in orifices and appendages of any kind," thus unable to "exude anything" or contaminate the world ("Cute Technology and Unclean Body" 40). This

is essentially true for the figure of Nikki: she is free from living biology, never constricted by the biological uncleanness. And to maintain this cleanliness, the animation drives towards the lack of biology and endows Nikki with such small and vague mouth and nose that can emanate nothing, suggesting her body as a pure exteriority different from the permeable living one. Ka Ya Lam indicates that "nonhuman components are crucial to retaining the charm of the cybernetic figure" (1114). The cleanliness of Nikki's body is non-organic and therefore nonhuman, which fosters any fantasy about her hygienic cuteness that need not to be biologically limited. Nikki's body can be seen as of no threat and always child-like, for disavowing biological processes or damages; such an abiotic gentleness and cuteness is where her charm dwells.

Moreover, animation vivifies the movements of this feminine body. When Nikki smiles as players click on the "smiling" button on the customization page, for example, her lips pucker up, eyes sparkle with stars, and cheek blushes and hunches up a bit, all of which contribute to the lively embodiment of her feminine attributes. She has multiple poses to express her feelings when interacting with players and taking the snapshoot after styling battle: eyes drooping and face turning away shyly means that she has secrets to withhold; heart-shaped gesture and winks convey her joy; hands cupping gills and eyes staring at somewhere distant suggests that she is daydreaming. All these poses for camera are designed to simulate young girls' movements. They can be activated by the corresponding pose buttons or shown randomly on the homepage when certain interactive actions from players is detected, or at her home when players

are conversing with Nikki. Poses bring Nikki to life because they suggest to players that she represents a young girl who has her own feelings and worries. She is not a living body, but the 3D anime technologies attempt to personalize her, which leads to "various musings on the possibility of replacing living entertainers with digital simulations" (Black, "The Virtual Idol" 213). Although her appearance amplifies her technical characteristics, her movements, in turn, draw these characteristics to the animated dimension where her femininity is vivid and lively, although unrealistic, humanizing her overall image. Thus, she appeals to audiences through their tenuous connection with such inapproachable but humanoid feminine ideal—the clean body that can exist in a specific range of reality and not act upon the world.
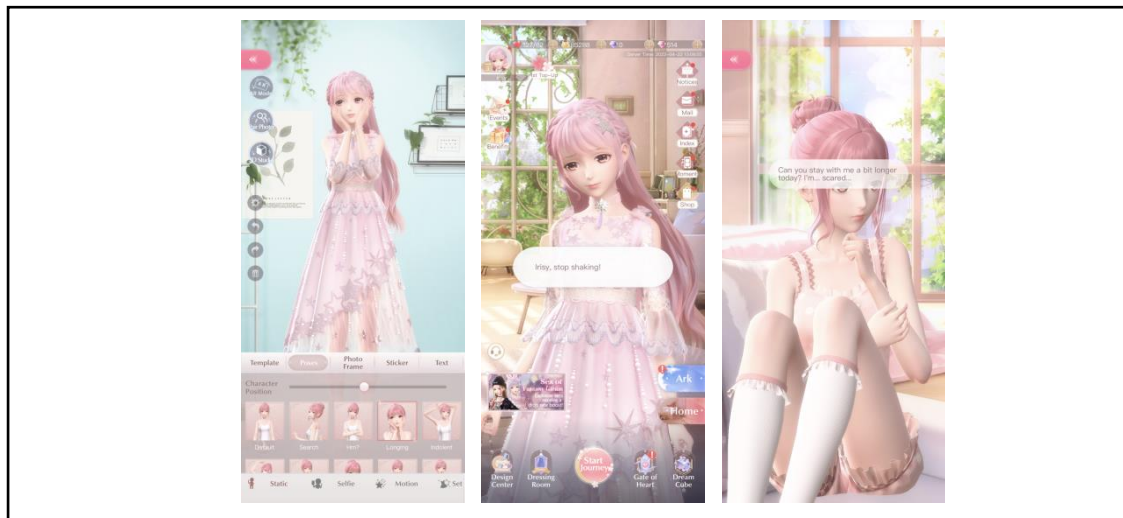

Figure 4. The menu for Nikki's poses (left), her interactive reactions on the homepage to players shaking the phone (middle), her reaction to the horror movie when watching it together with players at "home" (right), the subpage that opens when players click on the "home" button at the right end of the homepage.

Established upon the youthful female shape, the characterization of Nikki seeks to form a tie that draws her close to the audiences. While being idealized, she is largely

resembling human characters to persuade the audiences of her human individuality. As Patrick W. Galbraith states, a star "oscillates between an unreachable ideal and infinitely available material" (199). A concrete prototype that outlines the star's image but also accommodates diverse narratives constitutes the balance of this dynamic. Likewise, the idolization unfolds around a personal keynote of the idol herself. And audiences' affective identification with an identifiable and familiar prototype cultivates their intimacy with the star (Karlin 81). Thus, in order to stabilize idolization, the idol's original role positioning is the key. As a virtual girl, the formation of a seemly authentic prototype is key to distinguishing Nikki herself from those characters that are viewed as false and featureless for lacking an actual personality. In this case, her background story provides the sign to knit together her image and authenticity. To make the point about her own aesthetic taste in fashion, she sets up the styling topic for every dress-up which affects the outfit grading. If players add clothing and accessories that deviate from the styling topic, the grading decreases, and the possibility of restarting the dress-up increases. players also learn about Nikki's styling advice and her fear of not obtaining enough beautiful outfits from their conversations. The storytelling imbues Nikki with rich personal meaning: she is not a passive receiver, who remains utterly subjective to players' interventions; rather, as her poor reactions to players' teasing and actions against her advice attest, she has an independent persona, persisting her own fashion aesthetics. This personality justifies her behaviors, as they revolve around her qualities of being strong-minded and obsessed with styling. To relate herself to players, she rattles on her appreciation of players' proper options of her outfits in a dubbed voice

that mimics the vocality and tone of a young girl, building an impression of a living character. Meanwhile, she posts regularly on the "moments" (the in-game forum where players can browse, like, and comment on the images and messages that she shares) displaying her disciplined daily life. If players leave one comment chosen from the three default options on her post, Nikki will reply in a while rather than instantly as a robot. They all maintain a cohesive and unified representation of a subject that makes sense to players, which offers Nikki a certain kind of authenticity for character development. As a result, players can build an intimate relationship with her and initiate personal narratives upon the concrete image of her.
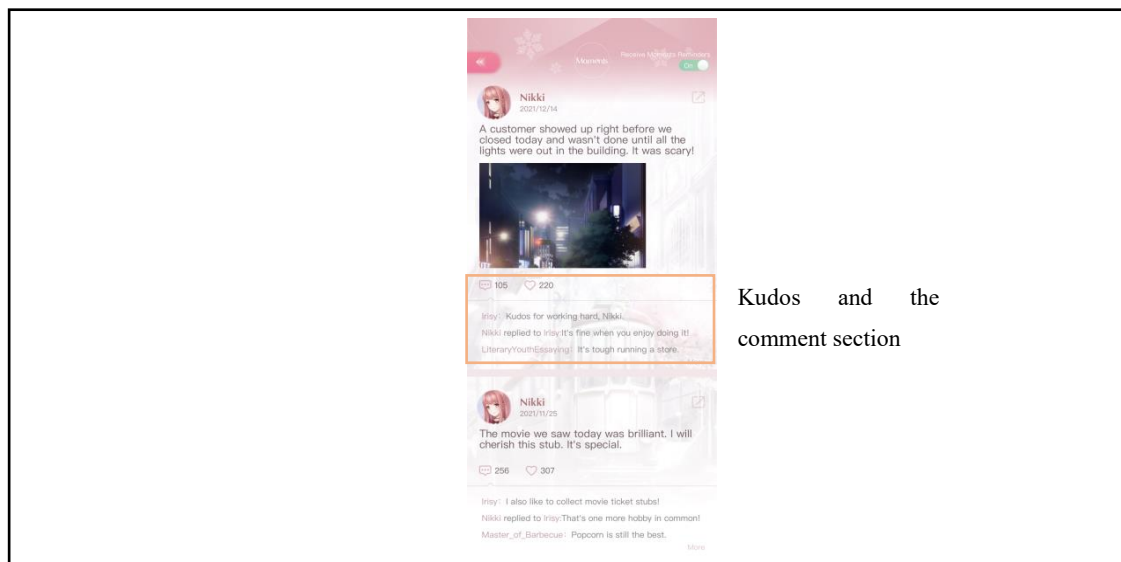
Figure 5. The "moments" forum in the game where players interact with Nikki through the simulated social media mechanic.

Besides adding a sense of authenticity to the character, constructing the impression of Nikki as a simple and stubborn fashion icon is key to the preservation of her cleanliness. That is because the simplicity of her persona is hardly related with the behaviors that can be considered as unclean or impure. In other words, any narratives

of her doing unclean deeds related with pornography, delinquency and immorality deviate from her character narratives. She always comes as a clean doll, who can neither be undressed to naked with a white sleep shirt being her last unremovable clothing, nor do or speak something inappropriate that sets her against the conventional impression of an innocent girl-next-door. Her cleanliness is also tied with the idolization of her virtual figure. From the observation of the idol industry in East Asia, Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin state that female idols "cannot drink, smoke, or be seen in the company of men" in order to manage their public figures (8). The idol industry in the mainland China, South Korea, and Japan has this shared obsession with "sexual innocence," and the loss of it leads to the loss of idol power (Xie 88). Staying pure, virgin, and innocent against the mature and glossy adult world are the qualities that a public female idol should attain to attract audiences. Similarly in this context, Nikki's wholehearted indulgence into fashion dispels the chances of her losing sexual innocence, since outfits, cosmetics, and hairstyles constitute her life theme, and male characters merely appear as opponents in styling battles. Her personal life being simple and empty, she can be sexually and romantically personalized and fantisized by audiences without the concerns of her breaking such fantasies. She comes as a clean slate optimal for merchandising girls' innocence.

Another kernel of Nikki's story lies in its context where Miraland, her homeland destroyed by the flood of ocean water, can only be reconstructed with the styling power, and the desire to changing the world's destiny prompts Nikki to partake in styling battles. Under the game rules that set the style and rarity of clothing as the core standard

to winning, her beauty comes to the center stage. The goal is to present her charm in different chapters, and players assists to reinforce her beauty, because only by being fashionable and beautiful can she win styling battles and gain the strength to rebuild her hometown. All the clothing, accessories, and makeups of different styles are designed in her size, and all the stylists she meets support her through her journey. The focus never leaves her: she is the star. Nikki's body, which must stay tidy, graceful, and stylish throughout the game, occupies players' attention, thus strengthening the impression of her being clean and feminine.

In short, the design of Nikki hinges on the dynamic between the technological proximity to human characteristics and the animated deviation from the physical embodiment. The blending of her fantasy figure and the authenticity of her behaviors and character forges a clean femininity that effaces biological flaws and adheres to girly romantic. The cleanliness exists only in the digital form as the consequence of breaking her away from the biological law. This intersection of simulacra and hyperreality provides the fascination with virtual beauty, thus laying a foundation for the idolization of her feminine image.

4.2 Players' part in the commodification of clean femininity

Game researchers Holopainen and Meyers describe dress-up games as the cradle for "somatic displacement," the ability for players to project himself into an entity a doll to an automobile (25). As the pioneer of the dress-up genre, the barbie doll series has established a "role model inviting women to identify with feminine spectacle" (Toffoletti 84). Although Barbie is a lifeless replica, she emulates the sensibility of a

modern woman. Under her influence, women use the styling goods in order to appear as modern as Barbie (Conor 108). Barbie's body provides a particular vessel for the female consumers to experience the simulated femininity and modernity and shed themselves temporarily. This particular somatic displacement is pervasive in dress-up games as they engage players in "the design and construction of their own costume" (Brownie 48), projecting their pursuit of the feminine ideal into the desire to creating and appreciating the doll body. Following the development of dress-up games, *Shining Nikki* has situated Nikki as a vessel for players to own, customize, and consume her clean femininity. And the game organics, as a whole, are integral to building up their fetish of Nikki.

Nikki's property of being owned and controlled by players individually is mostly based on the game's do-it-yourself culture of customizing her style and looks. players can selectively add different outfits, accessories, hairstyles, and makeup from the wardrobe on her appearance. By applying different styles on Nikki, players can customize her image and explore the potential of styling. In this way, Nikki can be dressed up as a tomboy, a princess, or a girl next door; she can be whatever that caters to players' aesthetic preference. Daniel Black points out that the individual customization of a virtual character encourages "fantasies of ownership over idols" ("The Virtual Idol" 220), in which fans indulges the joy of creating their versions of the idol. Many scholars have also mentioned that the avatar is used to "experience physical appearances match or exceed a society's norms about attractiveness" (Ducheneaut et al. 1159). A body that can fit into any style and present different types of beauty offers the

vehicle for exploring the attractiveness that is suitable for different aesthetics and beyond the constraints of physical reality. Nikki is the avatar through which players experiences the bodily perfection and a limitless number of styles and looks. This experience is accompanied with the mastery over Nikki's body. While Nikki is equipped with a library of apparels, accessories, and physical appearances, it is players that commands the morphs of her body. And by assembling these fragments players can personalize a perfect amalgam that can be generated and changed according to his or her preferences. This fantasy is further supported by the girlish visuals of Nikki's dressing room where players morphs and dresses her up from the obtained outfits. By default, the dressing room is a bright glasshouse with a floor-to-ceiling window facing a garden that is always filled with gentle sunshine. Everything is placed in order, and Nikki stands in a casual white sleep shirt with a paintbrush in hand, suggesting a clean and artistic lifestyle that she leads. There is not much color in the dressing room, as the light wood brown, the pale sunshine gold, and the fresh green in the garden constitute the main palette of the room. The other available backgrounds are colored with light and warm tone as well: from the mint green wallpaper to the all-pink live room, the backgrounds are mostly monotonous and light to emphasize the sense of cleanliness of Nikki's dressing environment. This cleanliness pins her into a girly romantic that has no entanglements with stress or trivial but a simple life in a warm tone. The game texts that circulate around the cleanliness portray her as a clean vessel for the fantasy of the feminine attractiveness free from the turbulence of reality.
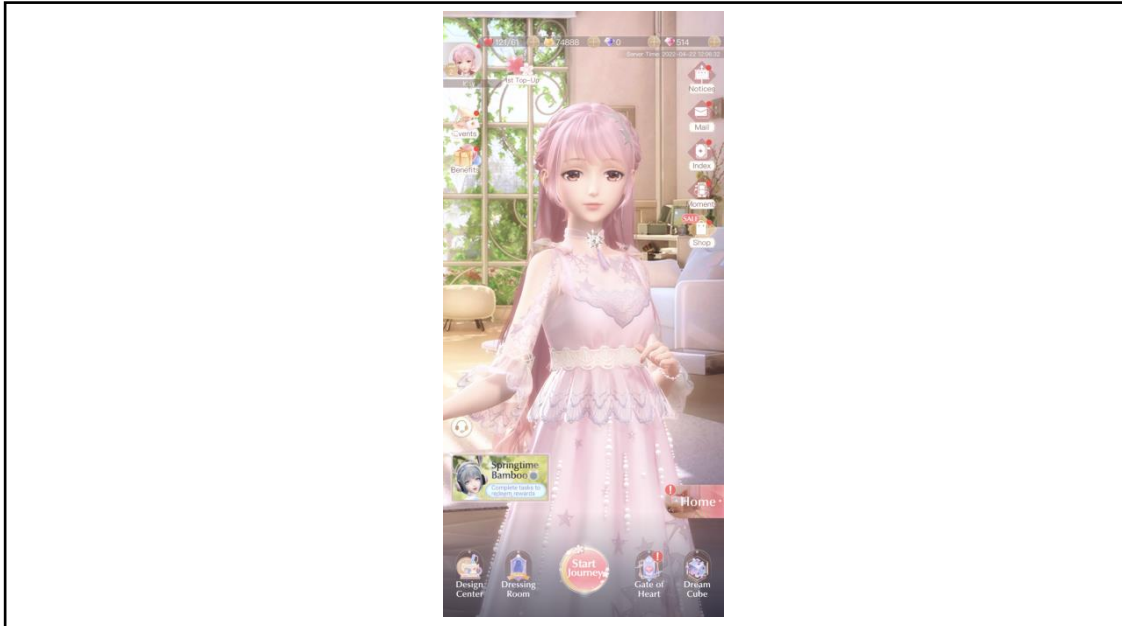
Figure 6. The default game homepage where Nikki stands elegantly in a sun-bathed glasshouse.

The gacha mechanic of the outfit poll is the game's another major tool for the objectification and consumption of Nikki's clean femininity. The gacha mechanic is associated with the gambling-like behaviors that draw on the chance to receive a random item or open a loot box. This mechanic is deployed to shape gaming behaviors in general and incentive players to spend on in-game purchases (Ash 10-12). It embeds the emotional pull over players within the game, which emerges from the aporia that navigates them through the gaming worlds (Wetherell 125). Taking the advantage of affective embedding, gacha encourages players to "act in seemingly irrational way," in which players are required to complete hectic and mindless tasks to gain the in-game currency, or invest real-world money in the game. In return, the gambling outcomes are completely virtual and random and mostly used to increase the appeal of the game (Woods 6). The gacha mechanic in *Shining Nikki* aims to solidify players' connection with the game. By rules, players can obtain the wanted outfits by winning styling battles,

unlocking chapters, and spending money. A plenty of rare outfits, such as the event exclusive clothing and accompanying ornaments, the hit makeups and accessories, and some delicately designed dresses, can only be bought from a loot box with a fixed amount of the in-game currency. There are multiple ways to gain the currency: by trading the real-world money for it, gaining the highest "S" rating in styling battles, inviting friends to play the game, and completing daily sign-in and dress-up tasks. Among these means, the investment of the real-world money is the shortcut to obtain the currency and thereof the wanted outfits promptly but also the most emotionally driven means, because it is this players' desire to changing Nikki's look that contributes to the monetization of the virtual items. And in order to obtain the target clothing, it is likely that players continue trading real-world money for in-game currency and investing in the random unboxing. The value of gacha lies in, therefore, its capability of driving players to invest in the game and become attached to the game through their investments. By spending money on Nikki, players build a material link with her, which renders her as a commodity open to different physical alterations suiting their consumption desires. This relationship is asymmetrical sustained upon players' material cost of gambling. As Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin argues, the monetization of fans' supports for the idol is concealed in the idea that love can be bought and sold, which in-turn reinforces the "commodified nature of human relations" (22).The gacha mechanic is folded into the rhetoric of love as well, with its ultimate aim to capitalize players' will to beautify and alter Nikki's image lurking in its inducement to players' engagement with the game. Costly and gambling-like as gacha is, it offers players a

concrete right for the monetized and individual customization, thus materializing their

sense of ownership and control over Nikki's body. In this vein, Nikki is "a crucial

modality of human integration into the nonhuman circuitry of new technology" in this

game (Apperley, Clemens 44). Not only does gacha encourage the enormous purchases

of merchandises for Nikki, but it settles players into an asymmetrical relationship with

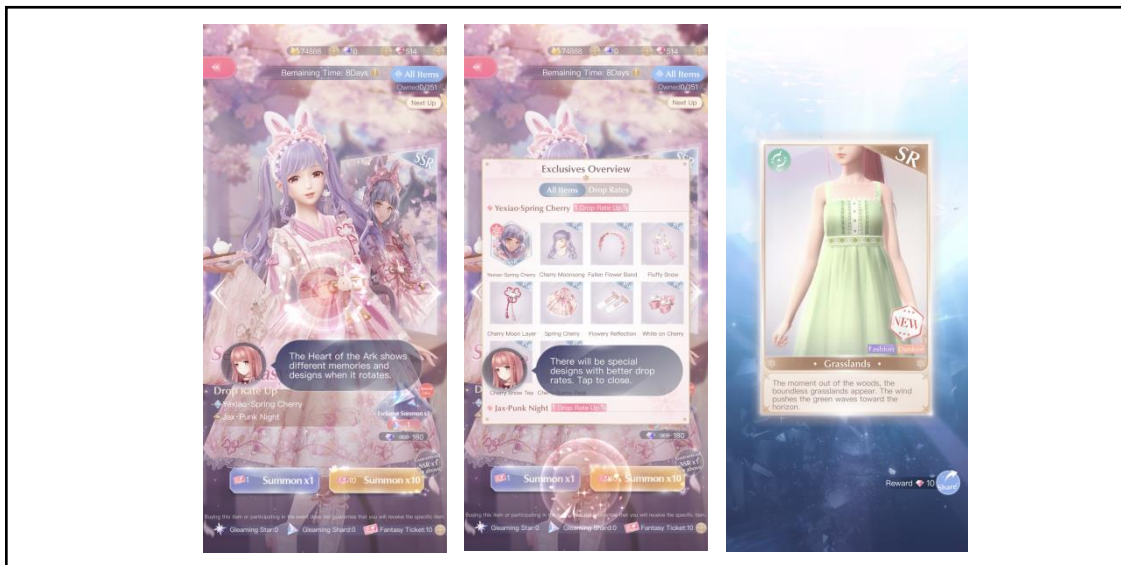her for the fulfillment of their fantasies of her image.

Figure 7. The gacha menu "The Gate of the Heart" where players have one chance to obtain a

dress-up item for free and another unlimited number of chances to obtain items with gems, the in-

game currency. The rarity of all items is marked from S to SSR.

Beneath the phenomenon that Nikki becomes the object of players' fetish, her

cleanliness isolated from the physical reality is her particular appeal. This cleanliness

dwells in not merely her technologically perfected body and sexual innocence, but her

availability of manipulation, appropriation, and ownership by players. As a digital entity,

a limitless number of the instances of Nikki's image can be reproduced through

individual customization. From the change of outfits to the commodification of the

morphing goods, these customization functions translate Nikki into a blank space that

can accommodate different fantasies and desires. She can be designed as any version of femininity and, in the meantime, always remain clean for between versions. Spontaneously, players take the role of a controller and an owner of Nikki and gain satisfaction from the materialization of their pursuit of the feminine ideal. The commodification of the rights to alter Nikki's image, in its essence, is the commodification of clean femininity in digital formats.

V.   Up intimate and identifiable: enmeshing fans in the transmedia presence of Nikki

The marketing of Nikki held out a mode of consumption specific to the digital female. Outside the game texts, the digital marketers of *Shining Nikki* have created and been operating the social accounts under her name on Sina's Weibo, the second largest social media site in China (Fung 1003), and a video account on Bilibili, the biggest video sharing website targeted at the Generation Z in China. Up to the April of 2022, her Weibo account has over 5.8 million followers and Bilibili account 280 thousand followers. The official social media accounts of the game itself spread on Weibo, Bilibili, and Wechat, the contents of which focus on the recent updates about Nikki and the in-game events. Besides, she is commercialized through conventional consumer products, such as posters, music videos, singles, and goods derived from the in-game cloths, being sold as the package of her reproducible feminine attributes. Apart from spurring fan purchases, another application of those merchandises is that they can be

embedded into the game simultaneously for players to interact with Nikki. For example, in Nikki's birthday music video *Blessing Every Day For You*, she delves into the memory while appreciating the fireworks in a balcony. This scenario was brought into the homepage of the game. Players were in the same image with Nikki and could edit it using the background customization tools and change Nikki's outfits. It is also an annual tradition for the game's official Weibo account to collect fan arts in Nikki's birthday month as a celebration event, and the fan arts collected would be circulated through the official media channels as a constituent to the character building of Nikki. Consumers of Nikki, therefore, do not only obtain a fixed celebrity image; instead, they can reproduce and acquire their own versions of her figure with the digital traces of her. They are both the consumers and producers in the transmedia marketing context who participate in the mash-up and remix of Nikki.
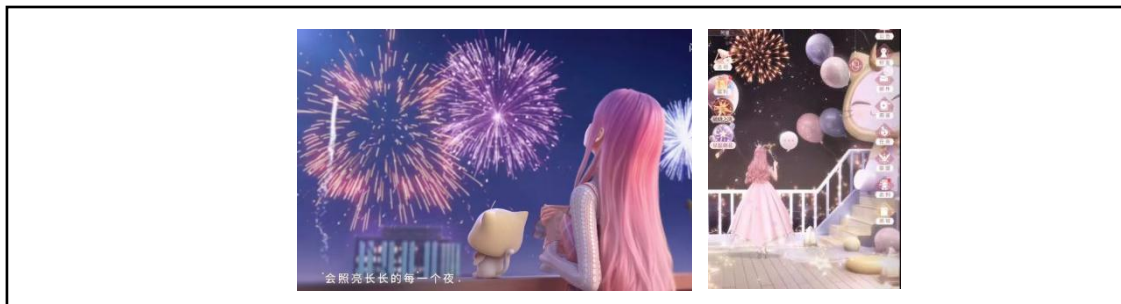

Figure 8. The scenes from the music video *Blessing Every Day For You* (left) echo the game homepage exclusive for Nikki's birthday event (right).

The transmedia marketing of Nikki presents the whole package of her outside the game, from her singing and dancing to the sharing of her daily routine. There are images of her being in either real-life backgrounds or 2D painted scenarios on her own Weibo account, the content of which unfolds her off-screen life. Fans can see her doing

exercises, having meals, sharing selfies, and enjoying national holidays as a living person does from her Weibo posts. Fans can view her in a visual-audio form in the meantime from her video recordings posted on her own Bilibili account and the other one operated by the game studio. The comprehensive exposure of her daily moments increases fans' knowledge of her. They can learn about her favorite fashion items, recent activities, and looks and styles by checking out her posts. She also replies occasionally to the fan comments with the most likes and creates giveaway activities based on the in-game events to interact with fans. Through photo-editing and animation technologies as well as the operation of a human agency, her image is taken into a form of reality that simulates the physical reality but exists merely in the digital world. The multifaceted presentation of her life and her seemly autonomous interactions with fan audiences provide a sense of authenticity of her being. She is more than a work of art, but an illusion of life "substituting the signs of real for real" (Baudrillard 2). This intersection of the real and the virtual makes her a perfect simulacrum that tries to convince the audience of her existence in another dimension of the world. Her humanized identity is reinforced by fans' belief in her authenticity through their viewership and accumulated knowledge of her off-screen life. Hence, it is fans' persistent "passion and participation" that fabricates the virtual idol's being (Lam 1112). She is an empty signifier, so she rambles in virtual reality without a physical embodiment yet is not entirely limited within the digital realm. As a result, her presence on social media constructs a basis for fans to project diverse imaginaries into her figure that is presented as both real and fictional.

Figure 9. Nikki sharing the first petal she found in spring (left), selfies (middle), and her recent mood for taking exercise (right) on her own Weibo account.

The marketing practices from the game's official media accounts center the value of audiences' engagement to drive traffic to the in-game events. This marketing mode situates the communication between audiences and marketers as "immersive," leading to high attendance (Zeiser 14), which increases fan audiences' loyalty to the brand, Nikki, that they engage zealously. The game's Weibo account and Bilibili account are oftentimes independent, the contents on Bilibili being in videos and those on Weibo and Video mostly in the forms of image and copy. Oftentimes the two accounts post contents in tandem revolving around the same theme of publicizing the recent in-game events to audiences. In the case of Nikki's birthday event in 2021, when her birthday music video was launched on Bilibili, a poster extracted from the background scenario in the video was posted on Weibo and Wechat concurrently with a fan giveaway activity, and followers could leave a wish for Nikki under the post and repost it to participate in the giveaway. During that birthday period, the game's Bilibili account had posted two teaser videos regarding the in-game birthday events and one music video featuring Nikki, and its Weibo and Wechat accounts released serial fan giveaway activities and teaser posters with copy highlighting the context and rules of the events. Audiences can engage in the discursive and interactive promotions and the audio-visual contents in the

meantime to follow up the celebratory event updates. The different content perspectives that the online media platforms offer has covered a wide audience base, creating a participatory environment for them to join the celebration. Additionally, the high frequency of the posts helps the contents be reached to as many fan audiences as possible. The game's Weibo account had averagely three posts per day, respectively two in daytime and one in nighttime, and Wechat account had 13 posts per week. Such high media frequency with which an idol is presented to fan audiences makes her "not only identifiable but familiar" (Galbraith, Karlin 9). Seeing Nikki on posters and in copy and videos repeatedly strengthens fans' familiarity of her. Nikki being in any form anywhere, fans keep frequent contacts with her even more than with their family, which gives birth to the affective ties in their relationship. Fans of Nikki do not need to perform emotional labor as voting, comment control, and strike back anti-fans that those fan groups of living idols do; rather, they perform another form of labor, in which they reposted the teaser posts to attract non-fans' attention on Nikki's birthday celebration, commented under any Nikki-related posts revealing their excitement, and invited their non-fans friends to the fan giveaway activities so as to increase their own chances of winning the prize. The high visibility, frequency, and interactivity of the promotional posts results in high engagement. For example, the game's Weibo posts during that period gained 2.1 thousand comments and 10.8 thousand likes on average, and roughly 150 thousand view counts and more than one thousand comments for per Bilibili video. Moreover, fans themselves had created giveaways on their own Weibo accounts and produced and circulated tons of fan fictions, drawings and videos on multiple social media platforms,

as a way to express their own birthday wishes for Nikki. There were chances for some

fan arts to be liked and reposted by the game's Weibo account, and Nikki herself

sometimes appeared in the fan community and left a comment on the artworks as well.

This star-fans interactive pattern encourages fans to produce artworks, which, in turn,

spurs high attendance in celebrating Nikki's birthday. Their active participation

circulates Nikki in a media landscape to produce promotional discourses. Transmedia

marketing behaves like "the information spreader" (Yang, Zisiadis 4), immersing fan

audiences into the integrated celebratory atmosphere. Through Nikki's sustained

exposure, fans are intimately tied with her to release their personal feelings in this

highly immersive environment.

Figure 10. Some arts that were selected and prized by the game's official Weibo account during Nikki's birthday event period.

For living idols, the potential of them activating audiences lies in their "media

intertextuality" (Galbraith, Karlin 10), which exists in "the space between texts" (Fiske

109). Idols can perform themselves across genres and platforms to form an axis around

which the media texts unfold and bring them into the focus of audiences' identification. The case of Nikki's 2021 birthday celebration reflects the same. The promotional activities for her birthday conducted on other media platforms all trace back to the game subject, since they revolve around the same birthday theme and use the same figure of Nikki as she is in the game for promotions. For instance, on December 6th, her exact birthday, a game task for players to make a cake for Nikki was released and sent to all players on priority once they logged in. Subsequently, Nikki posted on her Weibo account a thank-you note and a selfie of her with the cake to respond to players. The social media platform becomes a continuum of the game, with Nikki being the organizer of the digital traces of her. When Nikki appears in other media forms, fans' knowledge of her role in the game is essential to their cognitive process. The rejection of the disjunction of Nikki's in-game figure and off-screen figure is pervasive in the fan community on Weibo. As an instance here, the poster in which Nikki's iconic pink hair was dyed black and her dropping eyes straightened received over 200 comments criticizing the out-of-character depiction. In response, Nikki always appears as her classic image in long pink hair and a light-colored dress; the tone of her Weibo posts is as girly and cute as that in the game, and her dancing moves are the extension of her limited posture movements in game; her singing voice in the music video, though is not the same as her dubbing voice, possesses the similar vocality that conveys her sweet feminine touch. In this vein, the boundaries between the online media texts and the game texts have fallen apart. She moves freely between genres with a uniform figure, thereby making herself identifiable to fan audiences in different media narratives. And

the intertextual pleasure arises from the moments of "mediated voyeurism" (Karlin 79), based on fans' familiarity of Nikki's consistent and sustained presence. Not only the game is a medium through which players contact with Nikki, the other online media platforms are audiences' windows to look into the fragments of her life. She can be controlled and morphed in the game and offer the experience of her persona outside the game. Thus is how an intimate and affective star-fans relationship constructed: the presence of Nikki is translated into a personal and routine experience, so fan audiences can embroider her figure into their fantasies in accordance with their familiarity and knowledge of herself. Although Nikki, by her nature, is a fictional character without flesh and blood, the transmedia marketing of her figure blends authenticity and fantasy, which eventually shatters the sense of remoteness of her to fan audiences.

While she is never embroiled in a physical three-dimensional world, she represents a feminine ideal tolerant with any kind of personal narratives. The emptiness of her, which emerges from her lack of a physical embodiment as well as identifiable and fictive presence on online media platforms that initiates endless narratives, facilitates fans to fantasize about her through fan arts and transmedia circulation. Her encompassing presence across media channels embellishes her with authenticity, and her intertextuality allows fans to live in the aura of the unity of her figure. Her existence allows an intimate star-fans relationship where fans personalize and reproduce the traces of her in different media forms to fit her into their desires.

VI.   Conclusion

The joint analysis of the game texts and the relevant marketing materials shows that idolizing Nikki is closely bound up with the fetishization of a girly sexual innocence and the emulation of a living human model that endows Nikki with an uncanny approximation humanity. As I have shown throughout the analysis of Nikki's appearance and the customization mechanics of her body, she is idealized physically with her body in a golden ratio and porcelainlike smooth skin controllable and ownable by fan audiences. The transmedia marketing of her figure consistent with what she is presented as in the game places her on the border between the virtual and the real; in that world sustained by animation technologies and media communications, she is idealized as a girly romantic proceeding a clean, simple, and vogue life in a world that allows limitless wardrobe options and styling inspirations. By looking into her look, moves, and personality depicted both in the game and on online media platforms, we can see that her body, in its essence, embodies the iconic representations of exaggerated cuteness, cleanliness, and innocence. Compared to those game characters that merely dwell in game texts, Nikki strives to perform a certain degree of realism through the extension of her presence into online media channels, which creates an illusion of life and, therefore, brings her intimately to fans. In different media forms she keeps a uniform figure who acts out a girly romantic and remains non-threatening. The presentation of her figure from different media perspectives in-turn facilitates fan audiences to situate her into different narratives. She can be re-depicted and adapted along the way of personal fantasies within the realm of her character setting. Her

characterization stays fixed yet the personalization of the narratives around her is flexible, which encourages the manufacturing of fan arts to explore and reveal her charm in different forms. However, the flexibility for fans to re-create her is limited because those productions that deviate from the prototype are considered as out-of-character. Fan arts, if not observing the original character settings, cannot "ossify" a character but transfer his/her belonging from the creators to "the community of fans" (Malluhi 24). Therefore, it is also interesting for future research to analyze the transgressive properties of fandoms and why some out-of-character productions are thriving and gaining popularity among the fan community. In Nikki's case, transmedia storytelling gives her an identity coherent with her figure in the game, thus strengthening the authenticity of her presence to fans. Technologies not only animate an idealized female body but also seek to simulate a female identity to replace the real, or, more specifically, blur the distinction between the real and the virtual for fans to assimilate themselves into such fantasies of a feminine ideal.

The junction of real-life fantasy of a female idol and the gamified idol world, as well as that of paratextual character narratives and the in-game characterization, allow Nikki to convincingly simulate the clean femininity. Those two junctions are useful to the marketing of games because they recognize the potential of 3D animation technologies and transmedia marketing for idolizing a game character and engaging players in the process of fandomization. As Daniel Black argues, the appeal of the relationships between the virtual idol and fans is that fans can "produce an endless series of texts for further consumption" of the idol herself ("The Virtual Idol" 225).

Likewise, *Shining Nikki* is the game that revolves around players manipulating and modifying Nikki, and it even extends the narratives surrounding her into different media forms for further personalization. This maneuvering hinges the virtual idol culture on the quasi-authentic simulation of a certain feminine ideal and the syncing of storytelling in and outside the game texts. Paratextual analysis, in this sense, weighs heavily in this study as it introduces a perspective of transmedia marketing of Nikki's figure into the analysis of the idol-making practices. By relating the characterization of Nikki in the marketing materials to that in the game, we can see that players turn from mere players into fans for investing their personal fantasies into the character to reap deep entertainment from their pursuit of an iconic figure. However, since this research approaches only the birth of a female virtual idol from a dress-up game, the results reflect the idolizing practices for this particular game genre. Future research should proceed to investigate game characters in other genres, and especially the potential of male characters being a mass-influencing idol, which can be radically different than the idolization of digital females. In Nikki's case, what she reveals are the dreams and concerns of her fans for an ideal woman in her world of styling. So long as the public desires for the idealization of human bodies exist, idolizing can continue to be meaningful, flourishing, and fulfilling.

Acknowledgement

I would like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor Dr. René Glas for his invaluable patience and feedback. Without his expertise and instructions, I would have not been able to undertake this long journey. His support also helped me in doing the research proposal which laid a solid foundation of my thesis writing.

My gratitude also goes to my study participants and friends from the university, who inspired and impacted me during the whole journey. Their warm comforts pulsed me to move forward every time I felt despondent.

Lastly, I would be remiss in not mentioning my family whose strong belief in me has kept my spirit high during this academic year. Their emotional support is one thing that I must cherish in this memorable journey.

Works Cited

Apperley, Thomas., Clemens, Justin. "Flipping Out: Avatars and Identity."

  Boundaries of Self and Reality Online, edited by Jayne Gackenbach and

  Johnathan Bown, Massachusetts: Academic Press, 2017, pp. 41-56.

Ash, James. "Attention, Videogames, and the Retentional Economies of Affective

  Amplification." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 29, no. 6, 2012, pp. 3-26.

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Michigan: University of Michigan

  Press, 1994.

Black, Daniel. "The Virtual Ideal: Virtual Idols, Cute Technology and Unclean

  Biology." *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2008, pp. 37-

  50.

----. "The Virtual Idol: Producing and Consuming Digital Femininity." *Idols and

  Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and

  Jason G. Karlin, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 209-225.

Brownie, Barbara. "Dressing Down: Costume, Disguise and the Performance of

  Ordinariness." *Clothing Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2013, pp. 45-57.

Conor, Liz. *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s*.

  Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004.

Cummings, Kelsey. "Gendered Choices: Examining the Mechanics of Mobile and

Online Girl Games." *Television & New Media*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2018, pp. 24-41.

Ducheneaut, Nicolas., Wen, Ming-Hui., Yee, Nicolas., and Wadley, Greg. "Body and Mind: A Study of Avatar Personalization in Three Virtual Worlds." *New Media Experiences*, vol. 1, no. 7, 2009, pp. 1151-1160.

Fernández-Vara, Clara. *Introduction to Game Analysis*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Fiske, John. "Moments of Television: Neither the Text nor the Audience." *Remote Control: Television, Audiences, and Cultural Power*, edited by Ellen Seiter, Hans, Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner, and Eva-Maria Warth, 1989, pp. 56-78.

Fron, Janine., Fullerton, Tracy., Morie, Jacquelyn Ford., and Pearce, Celia. "Playing Dress-Up: Costumes, Roleplay, and Imagination." *Woman in Games*, 19-21 April, 2007, pp. 1-19.

Fung, Anthony YH. "Fandomization of Online Video or Television in China." *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 41, no. 7, 2019, pp. 995-1010.

Galbraith, Patrick W., Karlin, Jason G. "Introduction: The Mirror of Idols and Celebrity." *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 1-32.

Galbraith, Patrick W. "Idols: The Image of Desire in Japanese Consumer Capitalism." *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by

Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 185-208.

Godwin, Victoria. "Customizations, Collections and Corporations: Mass Production and Self-Expression." *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2018, pp. 211-224.

Hiroshi, Aoyagi. *Islands of Eight Million Smiles: Idol Performance and Symbolic Production in Contemporary Japan*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Holopainen, J., Meyers, S. "Neuropsychology and Game Design." *Consciousness Reframed III*, August 2000, pp. 24-27. http://stephan.com/NeuroBio.html.

Horno-López, Antonio. "The Particular Visual Language of Anime: Design, Colour, and Selection of Resources." *Process & Production*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, pp. 39-56.

Jones, Steven E. "Dickens on 'Lost': Text, Paratext, Fan-based Media." *Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 71-77.

Karlin, Jason G. "Through a Looking Glass Darkly: Television Advertising, Idols, and the Making of Fan Audiences." *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture*, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 72-96.

Kim, Cho-Yang., Han, Hye-Won. "Analysis on Pataphysics of Virtual Idol Based

on Game Character: Focus on K/DA." *The Journal of the Korea Contents*

Association, vol. 20, no. 5, 2020, pp. 69-78.

Lee, Ya. *Market Analysis and Marketing Strategy Research on Female Oriented*

Mobile Game. 2017. University of International Business and Economics,

Master dissertation.

Lam, Ka Yan. "The Hatsune Miku Phenomenon: More Than a Virtual J-Pop Diva."

The Journal of Popular Culture, vol. 49, no. 5, 2016, pp. 1106-1124.

Malluhi, Layanne. *Fanfiction and The Transgression of Fandom Communities*.

Bachelor's Thesis, Georgetown University, 2016.

Matrix, Sidney Eve. *Cyberpop: Digital Lifestyles and Commodity Culture*. New

York: Routledge, 2006.

Nagaike, Kazumi. "Johnny's Idols as Icons: Female Desires to Fantasize and

Consume Male Idol Images." *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media*

Culture, edited by Patrick W. Galbraith and Jason G. Karlin, New York:

Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 97-112.

Shining Nikki. Paper Games, Vers. 1.12.10, 2019. *Apple App Store*,

https://apps.apple.com/us/app/shining-

nikki/id1537074957?platform=iphone

Steinberg, Marc. *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*.

University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

"The Motherly Gaze in *Shining Nikki*." *yxrb.net*, 09 Jul. 2021,

    http://news.yxrb.net/202107/09222291.html

Toffoletti, Kim. Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls: Feminism, Popular Culture and the

    Posthuman Body. New York: Bloomsberry Publishing, 2007.

Tuominen, Henna. I*dol World in Mobile Games: A Look into Japanese Idol Games*

    and the World Built in Them. 2021. Tampere University, Master

    dissertation.

Turner, Graeme. *Understanding Celebrity*. London: SAGE Publications, 2014.

Urla, Jacqueline., Swedlund, Alan C. "The Anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling

    Ideals of the Feminine Body in Popular Culture." *A Reader in Promoting*

    Public Health: Challenge and Controversy, edited by Jenny Douglas et al.,

    Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 123-132.

Weissman, Kristin Noelle. *Barbie: The Icon, The Image, The Ideal.* California:

    Universal-Publishers, 1999.

Wetherell, Margaret. *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*.

    California: SAGE Publications, 2012.

Willett, Rebekah. "'What You Wear Tells A Lot about You': Girls Dress up

    Online." *Gender and Education*, vol. 20, no. 5, 2008, pp. 421-434.

Woods, Orlando. "The Affective Embeddings of *Gacha* Games: Aesthetic

    Assemblages and the Mediated Expression of the Self." *New Media &*

Society, 2022, pp. 1-16.

Xie, Wendy. "Japanese 'Idols' in Trans-Cultural Reception: The Case of AKB48."

Virginia Review of Asian Studies, vol. 16, 2014, pp. 74-101.

Yang, Binbin., Zisiadis, Miltiadis. *Transmedia Marketing: Strengthening*

Multiplatform User Participation Through Storytelling. 2014. Umea

Universiteit, Master thesis.

Yang, Jie. "*Nennu* and *Shunu*: Gender, Body Politics, and the Beauty Economy in

China." *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2011, pp.

333-357.

Zeiser, Anne. *Transmedia Marketing: From Film and TV to Games and Digital*

Media. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Zeng, Yi Chao. "The Effect of Virtual Community on User Engagement in Mobile

Games." *Radio & TV Journal*, vol. 6, 2018, pp. 164-165.