Abstract

Music videos are important cultural texts which offer an insight into the construction of meaning within a social context. This article aims to deconstruct some of these notions to see precisely how meaning is produced and mediated in relation to a text’s cultural context. Taking the music video to *W.W.D* by Japanese idol group Dempagumi.inc (2012) as a case study, this article will analyse the narrative and identity that is constructed around the group. Using thematic analysis as a methodological approach, a particular focus on the musical, lyrical and visual elements of the music video unravels the cleverly scripted and well-developed identity construction of the video and reveals how the text relates to discourses circulated around Japan’s media and creative industries, as well as Japanese society more broadly. This results in an emotionally charged narrative of the band which (re)positions Tokyo’s Akihabara district as an imaginative space of peer-support and guidance between fans and idols. With this article, I hope to outline a helpful approach to the study of music videos, aiming to make this type of analysis accessible particularly, but not limited to researchers in the field of sociology, as well as East Asian and media studies.

**Keywords:** Akihabara, fandom, j-pop, Japan, creative industries, identity construction, idol groups, music videos, thematic analysis
**Introduction**

In January 2013, Japanese all-female idol group Dempagumi.inc (でんぱ組.inc) released their sixth single entitled *W.W.D* in form of a double-track CD in music stores all over Japan. The song was written and composed by Kenichi Maeyamada, an established figure in the Japanese idol industry who has worked with popular domestic artists such as SMAP, Momoiro Clover Z and AKB48. The song ranked higher than any of the band’s previous singles and reached number ten on the Japanese Oricon Single Charts. The release was accompanied by the band’s first solo tour, *World Wide★Dempa Tour*, which marked a significant high point in the group’s career thus far. The band’s second studio album followed shortly after in December 2013, holding the name *WORLD WIDE DEMPA*. The repetitive use of the name points to its significance, and thus establishes an important aspect of the narrative and identity of the all-female idol group: going worldwide.

In the following article, I aim to analyse the underlying narrative and identity that is constructed around Dempagumi.inc. Taking the music video to *W.W.D* (Dempagumi.inc, 2012) as a case study, I will particularly focus on the group’s identity in relation to the individual personas of the six members, the positioning of Tokyo’s Akihabara district as an imaginative space of peer-support and guidance underlining the band’s relationship to their fans, as well as references to Japanese media and culture more broadly. As a result, this analysis will offer an insight into the social and cultural construction of meaning circulated around Japanese idol groups, relating to identity-related parameters such as authenticity and gender. As a big part of contemporary

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6Japan’s official single ranking charts measured by sold CD singles, issued on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis.
Japanese idol studies focuses on popular all-female group AKB48\(^7\) (see Galbraith and Karlin, 2012), this article aims to broaden the field by providing an analysis of a less studied but nevertheless less important idol group, namely Dempagumi.inc.

This article is structured into four main parts. First, I would like to introduce the medium, namely music videos, and elaborate on why I think they occupy a significant place in contemporary culture. Second, I will say a few words on the Japanese media landscape as the context this video is embedded in. Third, after introducing my methodological approach, I will continue to analyse the music video to *W.W.D* focusing on the song’s musical, lyrical and visual components to evaluate how identity and meaning is constructed through these elements. I will then summarise my findings in the conclusion.

**Music videos’ place in contemporary culture**

Music videos form an essential part of contemporary media and popular culture. The historical development from being bound to national television and airing schedules towards streaming services online (Vernallis, 2013; Sibilla, 2010), as well as the inclusion of smartphone technology and portable screens in our everyday lives (Railton and Watson, 2011), means that the possibility to enjoy music videos are now more numerous than ever. The traditional three to four minutes length of pop songs make them ideal products for consumption in everyday situations, with online video sharing websites like YouTube offering viewers a wide range of choices and possibilities. This contemporary importance of the medium is reflected in the academic literature where a

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\(^7\)Since the early 2010s, AKB48 have dominated the Japanese idol and mainstream music market through sales of their CDs and popular appearances on television and other media. Their popularity is regarded as deriving mainly from the passionate support of their very active male-dominated fan base.
variety of studies on different aspects of music videos are being conducted and discussed (i.e. Oh, 2014; Burns and Lafrance, 2013; Hawkins, 2013).

To study music videos in contemporary culture, an understanding of the medium’s functionality is necessary. Within academic discussions, music videos are regarded as complex cultural products which operate on different levels. Gabrielli (2010, p.91) for instance defines music videos as audio-visual texts made up of the union between a musical and a visual component which are always “experienced as connected parts of an entity” in its final form. Peverini (2010) argues in a similar way, but breaks down the audio even further into its two sub-categories: the musical, so the music itself, and verbal, the lyrics. The scholar consequently defines the special characteristic of the medium in its ability of expression in these three different languages of lyrical, musical and visual.

These three different components of music videos are often employed to construct and establish an identity and image of a performer. This is usually done by creating a reliable narrative through the music, lyrics and, most importantly, visuals surrounding the artists (Ono and Kwon, 2013; Gabrielli, 2010). This narrative needs to be unique and original, but also connected to the overall genre the artists find themselves in. This is commonly done by playing along the established rules of the genre, at least to a certain extent (Fenster, 2000). The artists additionally need to appear authentic to be perceived original and believable in the eyes of their supporters and the wider audience (Railton and Watson, 2011; Taylor and Barker, 2007). This authenticity usually gets conceptualised by a perceived match between the performer’s on-stage and off-stage selves (Moore, 2002). All of these expectations and requirements position music videos as significant sites for personality and identity constructions of the musical performers.
For my analysis of Dempagumi.inc’s *W.W.D.*, I have taken the above into account and am consequently interested in how the three different components – musical, lyrical and visual – create, communicate and mediate the identity and image of the band. Before starting with the analysis however, let me first say a few words on the Japanese media landscape to get a clearer understanding of the music video’s cultural context.

**Japanese media and creative industries**

Japan’s media and creative industries are recognised as very active producers of diverse media content and popular cultural products. Since the 1990s, Japanese animation, manga and video games have made a significant impact on audiences worldwide (Ito, 2005; Tobin, 2004), which led to a heightened interest in the culture and language of the country ever since. The Japanese government aimed to benefit from this interest, with the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry launching the Creative Industries Promotion Office in 2010 (Oyama, 2015). The office, through the so-called ‘Cool Japan’ initiative, aims to actively promote Japanese goods and services on a worldwide scale, including popular anime and manga products, as well as non-animation movies, television shows, and musical entertainment (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 2015). Within this initiative, the district of Akihabara, located in Japan’s capital Tokyo, has been identified as one of the main places of interest for fans of Japanese popular culture.

Akihabara has long been a place popular with Japanese fans of manga, anime, and electronic goods. These types of fans are referred to, and often refer to themselves, as *otaku* which loosely translates as ‘geeks’ or ‘nerds’. *Otaku* are conceptualised more often as male than female (i.e. Condry, 2013; Kumagai, 2012; Stevens, 2010) and Akihabara is regarded as a place that caters to the needs of this subcultural group
through, for example, the continued establishment of specific venues such as maid cafés\(^8\) or the main concert venue, café and shop of AKB48. This notion resulted in a discourse of Akihabara essentially as a place for male customers consuming images of young, or at least young-looking, girls (Galbraith, 2010; Nobuoka, 2010), further leading to associations and accusations of sexualisation and fetishisation of young females by the dominantly male *otaku* audience. One idol group that is positioned within this discourse is Dempagumi.inc.

Dempagumi.inc is an all-female idol group consisting of Mirin Furukawa, Risa Aizawa, Nemu Yumemi, Eimi Naruse, Moga Mogami and Ayane Fujisaki (http://dempagumi.dearstage.com). The band debuted in 2008 in the intimate setting of bar and live music club Dear Stage located in Akihabara. Dear Stage is also the name of the band’s production company which runs the live house and supports the band in its promotional activities (Shiba, 2015). All six members identify as *otaku* with a particular interest in anime, manga, video games, cosplay, fashion, and art (Kobayashi, 2013). The band holds regular meetings and concerts in Japan, but has also attended Japanese popular culture events in other Asian countries, as well as Europe and the USA in the past.

After having introduced the band, I will now continue with the analysis of Dempagumi.inc’s music video to their sixth single *W.W.D* which was released in December 2012.

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\(^8\)Maid cafés are cafés where the predominantly female staff dress in maid costumes. Besides serving food and drinks, the waitresses usually also entertain the customers through playing board games or performing sketches, dances and songs (see Galbraith 2013).
Analysis of Dempagumi.inc’s W.W.D: Methodology

For the analysis of Dempagumi.inc’s W.W.D, I have decided to follow a thematic analytical approach based on Clarke’s and Braun’s work (2013). Clarke and Braun developed this once rarely defined method of analysis into a useful approach for the study of qualitative content and data. Thematic analysis is thus helpful in the identification of patterns of meaning within content and consequently highly relevant to this study. A particularly strong point of the method is its flexibility and adaptability to different research contexts and questions (Clarke and Braun, 2017), which I wish to demonstrate in the application to the study of music videos.

Breaking down the data into smaller parts is fundamental and usually the first step of conducting a thematic analysis. Consequently, following Peverini’s (2010) argument mentioned earlier, I initially divided the music video to W.W.D into its three substantive elements of musical score, lyrical text and visual images. This decision was based on the assumption that all three elements add to the construction of meaning in different ways. I then analysed all three elements individually to identify reoccurring themes and topics within them. During this process, I decided to break down the song and with it the three elements even further. This division was mainly based on the musical structure of the song, but I have additionally taken the lyrics and visuals into account. This breaking down proved at first quite challenging but made it easier to detect links and connections, as well as differences between the various parts. Table 1 shows my division with the musical, lyrical and visual details I have found noteworthy.

I am aware of my own position in regard to the content of this article and, inspired by Finlay’s (2002) notion of reflexivity and ‘outing the researcher’, would
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Musical Narrative</th>
<th>Lyric Narrative</th>
<th>Visual Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>Audio feedback dictates beginning of song.</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Traditional stage setup with single curtain. Name of band is single, and members of audience disappear with song starting. Footage includes various images of audience on video-style television with sound. Light and shadow effects are highlighted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Introduction melody plays over music-like instrumentation. Repeated several times.</td>
<td>All members are actively involved in introducing the song. Members are visually identified by their positions within the band. Some members are shown close-up, while others are shown in full.</td>
<td>Footage includes close-ups and shots of the band members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Separate versions of the main melody in different tempo, instrumentation, and tempo variations.</td>
<td>Each member individually narrates their story, focusing on their positions within the band. Members visually identify themselves further. CUT. Playing side games, during group video and animal products.</td>
<td>Group shots continue with members visually identifying themselves as characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-chorus 1</td>
<td>Building in tension through music and instrumentation, tempo increases throughout.</td>
<td>Lyrically directed towards a stronger, confrontational position, expressing a mix of development and criticism and negative comments.</td>
<td>Similar to introduction, but the camera shot is on an individual's group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus 1</td>
<td>Tension musically released, building in tempo further increases. References to disadvantaged last, towa's safe. Acknowledgment of language barrier which heightening the sense of unease, which is heightened when another member's question is answered.</td>
<td>Choreography continues, introducing shots that were different before, member's eyes go to resolution.</td>
<td>Continuation of pre-chorus, and one member's standing is rehearsed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>Temporarilys, returns to open synths, bass breakdown. Concepts of pre-chorus and being introduced and explained in English.</td>
<td>Footage includes shots of the camera and the audience.</td>
<td>Footage includes shots of the camera and the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-chorus 2</td>
<td>Building in tension through music and instrumentation, duration of effects.</td>
<td>Lyrically directed towards a stronger, confrontational position, expressing a mix of development and criticism and negative comments.</td>
<td>Similar to introduction, but the camera shot is on an individual's group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortened Chorus</td>
<td>Tension musically released, building in tempo further increases. References to disadvantaged last, towa's safe. Acknowledgment of language barrier which heightening the sense of unease, which is heightened when another member's question is answered.</td>
<td>Choreography continues, introducing shots that were different before, member's eyes go to resolution.</td>
<td>Continuation of pre-chorus, and one member's standing is rehearsed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude 2</td>
<td>Extended piano instrumental version of main melody, branching and like ring added in between, piano instrumental effect.</td>
<td>Focus on the support of the individual, members complete hanging out setting, outside with nature lightning effects, shining brightly and shadows. Members are shown in different locations within, within thin line wandering around sound crossing paths with another, giving moment, physical, and music effects.</td>
<td>Members continue to hanging out setting, thin line wandering around sound crossing paths with another, giving moment, physical, and music effects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-chorus 3</td>
<td>Building in tension through music and instrumentation, fading out.</td>
<td>Lyrically directed towards a stronger, confrontational position.</td>
<td>Footage includes shots of the group forming on stage including audience dancing and cheering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chorus 2</td>
<td>Main melody returns, building in tension through instrumentation, duration of effects. &quot;From this small stage, waving for the world.&quot; Members begin singing for chorus, building in tension through instrumentation, duration of effects. Singing into the camera, building in tension through instrumentation, duration of effects.</td>
<td>Ality of shots in the group forming on stage including audience dancing and cheering.</td>
<td>Footage includes shots of the group forming on stage including audience dancing and cheering.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postlude</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Returning set-up of prelude, television continues, and spotlight turns off, fade out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
like to disclose it to the reader at this point. I have been drawn to Japanese manga and anime from a young age, which resulted in me studying Japanese and living in Japan for a period of twelve months. Besides anime and manga, Japanese popular music, and with it, music videos, formed an important part of my interest in the country’s popular culture. I cannot remember the first time I came across Dempagumi.inc but it must have been around 2012, facilitated by my interest in the back then relatively new phenomenon of Japanese record companies uploading music videos to YouTube. Intrigued by the band’s aesthetics, I have watched the video to *W.W.D*, as well as the other videos by the band, numerous times since. The idea for this article developed out of this interest, aiming to contribute to the on-going academic discussion surrounding Japanese idol groups.

For the purpose of this paper, I will now primarily focus on the themes of identity construction, both of the group and its individual members, as well as the positioning of Tokyo’s Akihabara as a place of supportive encounter between the band and its fans throughout the music video’s musical, lyrical and visual components.

**Analysis of Dempagumi.inc’s *W.W.D*: Findings**

The construction and development of the group’s overarching identity is one of the main intentions of *W.W.D*. The lyrics of the song start with a general introduction of Dempagumi.inc, referencing the band’s name and positioning them as a Japanese idol group throughout the song’s introduction (0:16-0:37):

Bonjour! Nous sommes Dempagumi.inc  
Grupo del idolo japones.  
是中文電波  
Akihabara to all over the world!!!  
Per favore ci ricordi.  
Sind Sie bereit?
(Furukawa) Hi there! We are Dempagumi.inc
(Fujisaki) We are a Japanese idol group.
(Aizawa) Translating denpa into Chinese
(Yumemi) Akihabara to all over the world!!!
(Naruse) Very nice to meet you.
(Mogami) Are you ready?
(All members) Ok, here we go⁹

W.W.D consequently follows a coherent trope within Japanese idol culture, namely to use songs as devices for (self-)introductions with the aim to explore a band’s identity and image. Examples of these type of songs are numerous and include SMAP’s FIVE RESPECT (2002), Morning Musume’s Joshi Kashimashi Monogatari (2004), Kanjani8’s ∞o’clock 08 (2008), and Momoiro Clover Z’s Z Densetsu ~Owari Naki Unmei~ (2011). Common characteristics are the introduction of the group and its encompassing identity and narrative in some form, as well as a focus on each individual member’s persona, which is precisely what W.W.D aims to accomplish.

Throughout the first part of the lyrics the band is further positioned, through a word play in Chinese, as a producer of ‘denpa music’, which is a music style originating in the otaku subculture surrounding manga and anime products. The word denpa (電波) literally means electromagnetic waves, but can also be used to describe something that is nonsensical. Denpa music is linked to anime fandom (Ideguchi, 2006), as well as Vocaloid music software (Wicoff, 2013), and with it the subcultural creation and production of music, as well as other artworks, by fans for fans. Characteristics of denpa songs include intentionally out-of-tone and off-key vocals mixed with unusual sound effects. The music and vocals of W.W.D fulfil these characteristics and the song can

All translations were made by the researcher.
therefore be considered a *denpa* song, creating an audible connection to the subcultural domain of Japanese manga and anime.

Additionally, connections to popular culture and technology are made through the music of the song itself. An example for this is the referencing of audio produced for early video games, such as 8-bit or 16-bit era games\(^\text{10}\). This type of sound is audible within all pre-choruses, for example. The reference to Nintendo’s well-known *Super Mario* franchise through the inclusion of the coin pick-up sound effect at 5:17 is also worth mentioning at this point. These elements create a musical text that heavily references popular culture and technology, underlined with a bit of a nostalgic touch; the days of 8-bit and 16-bit video games are, after all, long gone. They have however reached an iconic status in certain spheres of video game fandom (see, for example, Tonelli, 2014; Garda, 2013), providing the song with musical references to early video games and the technology and culture surrounding it, possibly aiming to evoke positive feelings of nostalgia and longing for these times.

Let us return to the first part of the lyrics however. An interesting aspect is the use of different languages to introduce the band. The use of several languages originating in Europe, mixed with Chinese and Japanese language, are expressing a sense of transnationality, aiming to address an audience which is imagined to be located in different parts of the world. What is worth noting at this point is that although English is used commonly within Japanese pop songs (Moody, 2006), the inclusion of such a variety of languages is rather unusual. Dempagumi.inc are therefore positioned as a Japanese idol band which wishes to overcome national borders, spreading and distributing their music to different locations all over the world. Whether this is a

\(^{10}\)Collins (2008) locates the 8-bit era for video games in the years from the 1930s to 1985, and the 16-bit era from 1985 to 1995. The name refers to the amount of bits a computer was able to process at that time. Many of the games produced during that timeframe are now considered classics.
genuine intention of the band is not relevant here in my opinion; the importance rather
lies in the future-orientation of this goal, which, as a result, implies that all members
are working hard in the present to one day reach this dream.

This notion is made clearer through the lyrics sung in pre-chorus 1.1 (1:43-1:56)
through which the group is located, somewhat symbolically, on a small stage at the
moment, but with the wish to go global in the future:

今 ちっちゃいちっちゃいちっちゃいちっちゃいステージだけど
いつか でっかいでっかいでっかい世界はばたいて

We are now performing on this small stage
[but] one day, we will fly out into the world!

This symbolism of the small stage, the boundaries of which the band wants to overcome
one day, and with it the time-related aspect of this wish, is further emphasised by the
visuals. The members of Dempagumi.inc are depicted throughout most of the music
video performing on two different stage settings. Figures 1 and 2 show the first, more
traditional stage set-up with a characteristic heavy red curtain and floor lights. Figures
3 and 4 show parts of the live concert footage which is used throughout the music video
and which, I assume, was filmed in the band’s own concert venue Dear Stage in
Akihabara. This consequently leads to a visual linking of the band in the actual time
and space of the video when it is being watched by the viewer, resulting in a steady
placement of present and future in the band’s narrative.

Throughout the live concert footage, another interesting element is the
positioning of the camera; throughout these scenes, the camera is located in different
FIGURES 1 & 2: STILLS FROM CHORUS 1 (1:56-2:37) AND CHORUS 2 (4:57-5:51)

FIGURES 3 & 4: STILLS FROM PRE-CHORUS 1.2 (4:45-4:57) AND CHORUS 2 (4:57-5:51)

FIGURES 5 & 6: STILLS FROM INTRODUCTION (0:16-0:37) AND CHORUS 1 (1:56-2:37)

FIGURES 7 & 8: STILLS FROM INTRODUCTION (0:16-0:37) AND INTERLUDE 1 (0:37-1:43)
FIGURES 9 & 10: STILLS FROM INTRODUCTION (0:16-0:37) AND CHORUS 1 (1:56-2:37)

FIGURES 11 & 12: BOTH STILLS FROM INTERLUDE 2 (3:31-4:45)

places within the supporting and cheering audience. This leads to a visual positioning of the viewer among the concertgoers and supporters, slightly looking up to watch Dempagumi.inc, through the screens of their smartphones and computers, perform live on stage. The experience of going to an actual concert is therefore simulated through the use of these frames, creating a personal connection between the band and the viewers of the music video.

Specific camera shots are further employed to shape the band’s group identity in relation to the individual personas of the six members. This is achieved by the use of different types of camera shots, such as long and medium shots featuring all six members, contrasted with close-up shots of each individual member. Within this context, the medium and long shots give somewhat equal attention to all six members, who are acting in a unified way (see Figures 5 and 6). This is either achieved through the following of a rehearsed choreography or the striking of a specific pose. These scenes are contrasted with another kind of group shot which shows all members
positioned somewhere within the frame, but focuses on one individual member who sings and acts towards the camera, creating a connection between herself and the viewer (see Figures 7 and 8). The remaining members usually interact with the individual member in some way, either through appearance in the background or by surrounding the member in a supportive and comforting way.

The third type of camera shot employed are close-up shots of which there are also two types of within the music video. The first is filmed in a very bright, soft light environment with a clear focus on the members’ eyes, which look into the camera most of the time and, again, directly address the viewer that way. Figures 9 and 10 show examples of these. The second shots, shown in figures 11 and 12, are heavily contrasted with the ones before through the use of a natural environment as the background of these scenes which were possibly filmed during sunset, creating a dramatic and somewhat nostalgic mood. All members are wearing a casual version of the clothing, make-up and hairstyles they are presented in during the studio scenes, thus establishing a visual link to their on-stage selves. Consequently, although this appears to be a more candid and natural depiction of the members’ off-stage lives, their off-stage personalities are clearly linked to their on-stage ones. The aim therefore is not to establish a difference between the two, but rather express continuity of personality and character, showing different sides of the same overall self-identity.

Through the use of these three types of images, the viewer is made acquainted with all six individual members one by one, as well as their position within the group, and further the group as a whole. While the choreography and the similar positioning of the members within certain shots aim to unify all members momentarily, elements such as the contrasting costumes, with the focus on a main colour for each member, enhance the importance of the personality and character of each individual.
This interplay of group identity and individual identity gets enhanced by the sound of the song as well. The song’s musical structure is very fragmented and divided into numerous musical sub-parts, featuring abrupt pauses which unexpectedly break the melody and flow of the song at different times for example. This discontinuity makes it initially quite challenging to identify a clear and coherent verse and chorus structure. However, although being differentiated through various factors, a continued structure does exist with several overarching elements holding the music together; as noted in Table 1, this structure includes an overall framing by a prelude (0:00-0:16) and postlude (5:51-6:00), marking the start and end points of the song, as well as the use of repetition and clearly defined entities such as pre-chorus and chorus. Another significant element of this is the main melody which most musical parts of the song are based on, introduced to the listener in the introduction (0:16-0:37). This melody gets repeated and is used within most parts of the song. What is unusual here is the use of different instrumentations and tempi which the melody is played at, resulting in the impression of different musical styles and genres being mixed together. This consequently creates a musical text which aims to give equal importance to individual elements, but is held together by an overarching structure, musically illustrating the relationship between the band and its members.

Besides the wish to bridge national borders which I mentioned earlier, another significant theme within the lyrics is the overcoming of self-limitations and personal struggles. For example, throughout the first interlude (0:37-1:43) each member narrates her past, describing hardships she previously had to face in her life. These include specific examples of being bullied, or an extreme version of bullying which gets conceptualised as *ijime* in Japan (i.e. Akiba, 2004), or the practice known as being a *hikikomori* or a social recluse (Furlong, 2008). These notions are all clearly located in
the members’ pasts however, emphasised by the use of the grammatical past simple form within all six narratives. This is contrasted with the pre-chorus (1:43-1:56) where the members take a confrontational stance through the lyrics directly addressing the listener or, more figuratively, anyone that stands in their way now:

We literally had nothing to lose,
[so] we were aiming for the stars!
Come on, make fun of us!
We are used to it by now!

This narrative is repeated within all pre-choruses and choruses, sending a strong emotionally charged message of not giving up on one’s dream, no matter how far and out of reach it seems at the moment. A sense of meaningfulness is therefore given to the struggles and hardships individuals might be experiencing at different times in their lives, with the band making them remember to never give up and keep on going. This consequently results in a mutual relationship of encouragement between the band and their fans who, symbolically and actually, are taking care of one another; while *Dempagumi.inc* are supporting their audience with a narrative of overcoming personal struggles and finding greater meaning in life, the fans are supporting the band in their artistic and commercial endeavours by attending concerts and purchasing CDs and other merchandise.

This notion of companionship is elevated by the lyrics and further extended to the more specific location of Akihabara, as well as to products of popular culture linked
to the district more generally. During the second interlude (3:31-4:45), two members are paired up, taking turns in narrating the story of how they met:

(Yumemi) I despaired in my hopelessness.

I don’t know why, but somehow I ended up in Akihabara…

(Naruse) At the maid café I was working at, there was a girl!

She was very cute! But also looked incredibly lonely…

(Yumemi) She just smiled at my injured self with her whole face brightening up.

(Naruse) Even if it’s not much, but I somehow wanted to help and support her!

(Yumemi & Naruse) And that’s the story of how the two of us met.

The lyrics support the notion of Akihabara being an almost spiritual place where people meet and find assistance and support in one another, creating strong bonds that help them overcome difficulties and hardships. As a result, Akihabara’s well-known maid cafés are slightly (re)positioned not just as a place where girls entertain predominantly male customers, but rather as places for unexpected meetings and encounters that have a positive impact on one’s life. The lyrics of the song are therefore contesting some of the narratives that are circulated within the public domain, positioning Akihabara as a safe and supportive space, not just for men, but also for women, and where, more widely, fans and idols, supporters and supported, can encounter, comfort and assist each other.
Conclusion

By analysing the music video to *W.W.D* of Japanese idol group Dempagumi.inc, I hope to have contributed to the on-going discussion surrounding the medium of music videos, as well as the study of Japanese idol culture. I aimed to illustrate how sound, lyrics and visuals are employed to create, on the one hand, a strong narrative and identity of a band, as well as, on the other hand, being reflective of wider social and cultural discourses. I found it particularly interesting how each artistic element contributes to the narrative and identity surrounding the idol group in a different way, resulting in a cleverly scripted and well-developed identity constructed through the music video.

The sound of *W.W.D* references media and popular culture and thus creates a strong link to the subcultural domain surrounding Japanese manga and anime products, with feelings of nostalgia and longing being evoked through the use of early video game audio. The musical aspects further illustrate the relationship between the individual members and the band by placing equal emphasis on individual and group. The lyrics establish a clear sense of past, present and future of the band’s and member’s narratives by using grammatical structures to support this formulation. The members’ disadvantaged pasts, their position on a symbolically small stage in the present, as well as their goal of going worldwide for the future are all stated within the lyrics. The lyrical elements are further referencing discourses circulated within Japanese society on media and popular culture and Tokyo’s Akihabara district. The visuals of the video support notions of individuality and group identity through the use of specific camera shots, and also visually position the band in the perceived present of the viewer when watching the video online.
All three elements therefore establish the narrative of Dempagumi.inc as a group of female *otaku* who had to fight and overcome personal difficulties to be able to perform in front of an audience today. This narrative creates a strong emotional bond to fans and supporters who might have encountered or are experiencing similar situations at the moment. The song, and the practice of becoming an active supporter of the band, might therefore empower individuals and help them overcome difficulties in their daily lives. The narrative of being able to reach a worldwide audience, an ambition which few Japanese musical artists have achieved up to this point, supports this encouragement of chasing one’s dream, no matter how far out of reach it seems at the moment. As a result, the band and its members are supporting their fan base emotionally, while the fan base supports the band in their artistic and commercial endeavours. This creation of a mutual relationship of support and assistance is, I believe, one of, if not *the* most important aspect of the fascination between fans and idol groups in Japan today.

References


