*Globalizing Indonesian Artists: Western Audiences' Perceived Coolness for Breaking Into the Global Popular Music Market*

Adis Maulidina, University of Indonesia, Indonesia

**Abstract**

The 2019 "trigger cities" surge in music streaming from urban Southeast Asian and Latin American users has propelled emerging artists into global recognition. This study examines global popular music power dynamics, once Western-dominated, using cultural hybridity to explore how Indonesian artists maintain global media representation with local-driven music. It examines omnivorous music taste and 'coolness' in hybrid music, focusing on Western perceptions of Indonesian artists. A 2 x 2 experiment with 240 U.S. and U.K. young adults evaluated Indonesian songs and images, highlighting U.S. media's role in shaping perceptions. This research advocates leveraging U.S. media to enhance non-Western artists' image.


Keywords: Cultural Hybridity, Popular Music, Perceived Coolness, Non-Western Artists, U.S. Media

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**Introduction**

In 2019, high streaming numbers found on global music streaming services Spotify and Youtube were reported coming from Southeast Asian and Latin American metropolitan areas by music data analytics platform Chartmetric, naming those the "trigger cities" (Joven, 2019a). These cities contribute to the global popularity of emerging artists (Tompkins et al., 2021) such as Lauv (Joven, 2019a; Leight, 2020), who is based in the U.S. and initially distributed by independent distributor AWAL, with songs in top Spotify playlists of several *trigger-city* countries. However, findings on why non-Western audiences in *trigger-city* countries stream emerging artists more than Western audiences, such as those in the U.S., are understudied, besides the underrepresented non-Western artists marketed in the *trigger cities*. What remains a knowledge gap is the purpose of "trigger cities" marketing in proliferating artists distributed by Western-based labels for audiences described as having a "preference for Western culture" (Stellar Trigger Marketing, n.d.).

Whether algorithms carry the politics (Freeman, 2019) in recommending the emerging Western label artists' songs to users in *trigger cities*, reporting non-Western *fans* as 'eager to consume new music' (Yuen, 2022) raises spirits of inquiry in Western music listeners. It is also vital to understand Western music streaming users' openness to new songs and artists, as countries like the U.S. share larger music streaming revenue worldwide, according to the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry[1] than the *trigger-city* countries do. This study examines how Westerners' music taste can significantly contribute to the global popularity of artists from *trigger-city* countries who, by embracing the Westerners' cultural taste as perceived by urban consumers, are distributed by U.S.-based record labels. Without exalting Western music consumers, this research covers three research questions (RQs): (1) How suitable—mainly likable—are Indonesian artists' music to Western audiences' taste? (2) How do audiences perceive Indonesian artists' image to be popular worldwide? (3) How can Indonesian artists be perceived as *cool* by the global music market's largest revenue contributors?

Indonesia is selected as one of the *trigger-city* countries in this research, where Spotify categorized Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, as a "home to [several] music streaming *trigger cities*, [influencing] the global music streams and trends" (Joven, 2019a; Schwartz, 2019). The experiment survey was assigned to U.S. and U.K. audiences aged 18 to 40, where 240 respondents were randomized to evaluate one of four artist concepts with one of two previewed songs and media illustrations of the artist's image. Using 'perceived coolness' that Warren and Campbell studied for upcoming rock artists (2014, p. 552), the experiment analysis discussed in this study addresses cultural hybridity through established Western media deriving from Guldin (2021)'s 'market-receptive' approach. The significant positive impact of the artist's image on a U.S.-based global mass media, Billboard Music, allows this study to deliver novel standpoints on the perceived coolness associated with whether an artist seems authentic. This study contributes to the literature of power dynamics between popular music and its hybrid nature manifested in the Indonesian artist concepts that adopt the U.S. media, attracting the global music market's largest audiences, and the scholarly research related to the *trigger cities*.

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1 The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI) is a non-governmental entity responsible for collecting global sales data of recorded music (IFPI, n.d.; Laing, 2010)

**Theoretical Framework**

*The U.S. Popular Music Dominance*

Popular music, inherently associated with the United States (U.S.) music industry as an integral aspect of its identity, involves the distribution of recorded sounds or songs to mass audiences (Tagg, 1982), thereby creating value for the records based on widespread appeal. Western popular music has greatly influenced the production and distribution of music into phonorecords—physical objects embodying the sound recording (Bennett, 2017)—as the technology was expanded worldwide in the late sixties by U.S. and U.K. record companies (Manuel, 1988). The mass commodification of music can be comprehended using the logic of Ritzer's McDonaldization on recording companies established in the U.S. and the U.K. (Hesmondhalgh, 1995), where phonorecords are traded through representative companies in many other countries. Essentially, McDonaldization (Ritzer, 2021) refers to the strategy employed by U.S.-based corporations to standardize a product—initially exemplified by the American fast-food chain McDonald's—among American society and others worldwide. In popular music, McDonaldization is evident through the reproduction of recording technology and the distribution and consumption cycle, involving many audiences to listen to the same song(s) facilitated by media institutions like radio, perpetuating familiarity through frequent plays (Russell, 1987).

McDonaldization is often associated with cultural imperialism (Ritzer & Malone, 2000) as the U.S. pop culture streams homogenous products with a particular system or custom to consume to developed nations as well, such as France, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Shuker, 2001). Since the music industry history started in the U.S., followed by the U.K. making a "significant artistic contribution to an Anglo-American popular music hegemony" (Shuker, 2001, p. 30), big record labels had commercialized artists in the international market (Hesmondhalgh, 1996). Essentially, the *global* circuit in globalization disseminates a culture originating in the West to the rest of the world for consumption within the local cultural context (Bennett, 2015; Tomlinson, 1991). While popular music involves a two-way appropriation process where artists and fans adapt to each other's cultures and generate a new one (Touzani et al., 2016), consisting of hybrid global-local identities, it tends to exert greater influence on non-U.S. markets.

In Indonesia, national popular music encompasses diverse genres of rock, rap, jazz, disco, pop Indonesia, *keroncong*, *dangdut*, and *qasidah* spoken in Bahasa and sometimes English (Barendregt & van Zanten, 2002), blending Western and Eastern influences to create a *fusion* of modern and traditional elements. In a distinct case, rising Indonesian rappers Ramengvrl and Rich Brian are identified as 'hybrid' (Taylor, 1997), as the two are distributed by U.S. record labels EMPIRE (Yannuar et al., 2023) and 88rising (Xilin, 2021) respectively for Western-standard hip-hop music to represent Asians. Familiar or mainstream music is typically likable (Dai et al., 2022) to many audiences from diverse social and geographical backgrounds, yet it is not the case with Indonesian popular genres to Westerners, despite Indonesia's high population globally (Wallach, 2003). Furthermore, expecting authenticity from non-Western artists implicates a double standard, as likable music is "a successful imitation that listeners find similar to something likable" (Dai et al., 2022, p. 72), wherein this case is Western music influences in most Indonesian popular genres.

In investigating the role of hybridity within the McDonaldization of popular music, this study seeks to address (RQ1) how well non-Western artists' music, particularly from Indonesia,

aligns with the Western audiences' taste in terms of being likable. To assess whether hybridity suits familiarity better in listening to Indonesian popular music,

>   *Hypothesis 1: Indonesian artists are likable if their song's theme is relevant to global pop culture.*

Conversely, to assess whether sounding native is expected from Indonesian popular music,

>   *Hypothesis 2: Indonesian artists are likable if their music features their native culture.*

**Cultural Hybridity as a Response to the Trigger Cities Marketing**

Music data analytics platform Chartmetric published a report on the high music streaming numbers from users in large Southeast Asian and Latin American cities called the *trigger cities* (Joven, 2019a; Keegan, 2022; Leight, 2020; Tompkins et al., 2021). Record labels or independent digital music aggregators mostly based in the U.S. distribute emerging artists, such as Lauv (Joven, 2019a), Joji (Stellar Trigger Marketing, n.d.), Gatton (Keegan, 2022), and many more whose genres are of popular music. Chartmetric emphasized a significant observation in one of its findings that popular genres continue to be exceptionally liked by these non-Western audiences, especially in Southeast Asia (Joven, 2019b; Kanwal, 2021). Furthermore, these non-Western audiences' likeness to popular genres leads to high Spotify monthly listeners of popstars distributed by Western labels, with Jakarta leading among eight out of ten artists in Chartmetric's June 2019 data, reflecting recent Spotify statistics of emerging global artists (see **Table 1)**. Despite the lack of research on whether Spotify recommends *trigger-city* users particular artists or the 'Western-savvy' audiences (Joven, 2019b) initiatively explore those artists, the non-West positions Western music higher than local music consumption for global pop culture (Li, 2020).

| Emerging Global Artists | Area of Listeners |
|---|---|
| Stacey Ryan<br>*Canadian pop singer*<br>Island Records (North America) | 1. Jakarta, ID (1,060,831 listeners)<br>2. Bandung, ID (389,064 listeners)<br>3. Surabaya, ID (316,752 listeners) |
| Lauv<br>*American pop singer*<br>Virgin Music Group (United States) | 1. Jakarta, ID (541,428 listeners)<br>2. Quezon City, PH (299,172 listeners)<br>3. Kuala Lumpur, MY (269,526 listeners) |
| Joji<br>*Japanese-Australian singer/rapper*<br>88rising (United States) | 1. Jakarta, ID (1,061,872 listeners)<br>2. Los Angeles, US (426,911 listeners)<br>3. Mexico City, MX (417,286 listeners) |

**Table 1.** Area of listeners of emerging global artists from Spotify – March, 2023

Weiss (2014) studied how her students, familiar to Western music standard, misunderstood authenticity in world music, while the viral song of Indonesian music group Weird Genius on social media TikTok emphasized traditional Indonesian music modification (Pramana & Aryesta, 2022). In Weird Genius' song, "Lathi", the electronic dance music (EDM) song distributed by American electronic music label Astralwerks (Ritchie, 2020) incorporated the traditional Indonesian music elements as 'authentic' in the popular music production. Global artists often utilize popular music influences and the English language to reach worldwide audience, aside from being distributed by Western labels, while also leveraging image and

engaging in 'trans-media endeavors' (Guldin, 2021, p. 946) to be on various entertainment media. Therefore, when non-U.S. artists receive coverage from established media, such as Billboard, which has been reporting on the U.S. entertainment industry since the 1890s (Anand, 2005; Dowd, 2013), it elevates their reputations. Today, TikTok allows local artists to reach global exposure by making their music go viral, and "Lathi" was a case of enhancing Indonesian identity branding (Pramana & Aryesta, 2022) by hybridizing EDM and pop music with Indonesia's *gamelan* (Anggraheni et al., 2022).

As new identities, things, and ideas from the interaction of two or more cultures challenges the state of authenticity in any popular music, Guldin (2021) highlighted the 'market-receptive hybridity' and 'market-resistant hybridity' (p. 941) in promoting hybridity in popular music. While the 'market-receptive' approach uplifts Western influences, the 'market-resistant' approach does not imply that non-Western artists are presented more authentically, as they can benefit from global media and U.S. record labels in maintaining image with the music of their native cultures. TikTok's algorithms can propel artists to become viral when their songs are liked by many users, with this 'organic' growth often regarded as a marketing approach (Coulter, 2022, p. 145). Practically, established artists have been strategizing for TikTok videos to seem accidental, as having industry 'intermediaries' (Corciolani et al., 2020, p. 478) on global media makes those artists' image seem less authentic (Corciolani et al., 2020). Therefore, this study analyzes (RQ2) how audiences perceive non-Western artists' image, particularly from Indonesia, that can be popular worldwide, as learning from the emerging Western label artists popular from social media because of *trigger-city* audiences,

> *Hypothesis 3: Indonesian artists can be popular worldwide if they are viral on TikTok.*

To demonstrate whether reputable mass media can boost Indonesian artists' image fairly,

> *Hypothesis 4: Indonesian artists can be popular worldwide if featured on U.S.-based global music media.*

### Omnivorous Music Taste in the Digital Realm

One of the approaches to see cultural hybridity more critically in this phenomenon is understanding the taste of Indonesian audiences, including artists, adjusted to the dominant foreign music influences (Seneviratne, 2012; Wallach, 2003), especially from the West. The study of omnivorousness (Rossman & Peterson, 2015) has been explored on the shifting elite Americans' music taste towards a wide range of popular genres (Peterson & Kern, 1996; Peterson & Simkus, 1992), attributing a sense of higher social status to consuming various genres. Meanwhile, middle-class Indonesians in the New Order embodied a capitalism image termed *gedongan*—the urban-progressive and higher-socioeconomic people (Barendregt, 2014; Weintraub, 2010)—as they were 'culturally elevated' with Western rock and pop (Baulch, 2016, p. 99). Several non-Western artists, including Joji in **Table 1**, who gained global recognition through U.S. media, such as Billboard (Kim, 2021), are acculturated with Western music, as shown by Joji's shift from a Japanese *Youtuber* after moving to the U.S. (Eames, 2022) to becoming a U.S. artist. Non-Western artists often categorize the varying degrees of foreign influence to produce commercial music (Hill-Cantey, 2013), such as K-pop artists relying on global streaming services for primary music revenue and being influenced by the dominant American popular music production (Hajji, 2021).

Departing from Rossman and Peterson's (2015) taste study, this research focuses on the interaction between non-Western popular music artists and the global music market through digital platforms with Western audiences' taste reflected on their perception of being 'cool' (Barna, 2018). Being *cool* has been linked to authentic taste (Abolhasani et al., 2017; Michael, 2015), especially for the 'Other' artists (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2006), as illustrated by Barna (2018) how elite Westerners regard hip-hop or ethnic music 'cool' for "articulating subaltern voices" (p. 257). Xilin's (2021) analysis of the Asian representation on the U.S.-centric global media highlighted *coolness* as "Asians have always been considered uncool in Western society" (2021, p. 3); thus, 88rising's approach towards hip-hop, the most-streamed genre on Spotify U.S. (Ingham, 2021). Rich Brian entered the global music industry through 88rising, which positions him as the premier Indonesian artist to represent Asian-American culture on American media outlets, while other Indonesian artists attracted international audiences by Indonesia's cultural elements (Hendiawan & Barlian, 2021; Novak, 2018). This study's last inquiry assesses (RQ3) how the global music market can perceive Indonesian artists as *cool*, building on the notion of eclectic or omnivorous taste that Barna (2018) identified among people of higher social status. Understanding that elements of Western culture, including music, remain largely perceived as cool by worldwide audiences,

> *Hypothesis 5: Indonesian artists highly adapted to Western music production and marketing are perceived as 'cool' by others.*

To demonstrate whether being authentic to one's culture makes artists seem cool,

> *Hypothesis 6: Indonesian artists with native music style and persona are perceived as 'cool' by others.*

**Methodology**

Understanding the resonance of Indonesian artists' songs with Western audiences bridges the gap between familiarity with Western music and the expectation of authentic non-Western music, with the artists' image influencing audience considerations of diverse identities through Western media or organic social media trends. In this study, an experiment was conducted to evaluate artist concepts with different indicators and the relationships between a concept and each indicator (Bryman, 2016; Coleman, 2019; Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). While the experimental design is known to discover causation (Coleman, 2019), the correlations between artist concepts and the indicators are strengthened by analyzing the changes in perceiving the song separately from the artist's image on either global mass media or social media. Essentially, the experiment explored the intersection between Western influences and non-Western traits on Indonesian artists' songs—distributed and possibly produced by Western-based labels—and media representations of the artists' image in approaching authenticity on publications.

The evaluation started with the song by assessing its likable quality, measured using the five-star likeability rating by Lynn et al. (2016), followed by the artist's image on a particular media and ultimately, the overall coolness of the song and its artist. As for the perception of the artist's image on a particular media, the experiment utilized the firm-created and user-generated social media communication measures from Schivinski and Dabrowski (2014) on the U.S.-based Billboard Music and social media TikTok. This study primarily focuses on the perceived coolness from Warren and Campbell's (2014) 7-point scales of cool/uncool evaluation on the upcoming bands' autonomy, adjusted to a song and the artist separately for

audiences and other people according to them. As experimental research "involves the manipulation of one or more independent variables" (Rogers & Révész, 2020, p. 133), each existing song preview and the artist's image edited as if on Billboard Music or TikTok are the independent variables (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). An overarching conceptual model of this experiment builds up to being perceived as cool as follows:
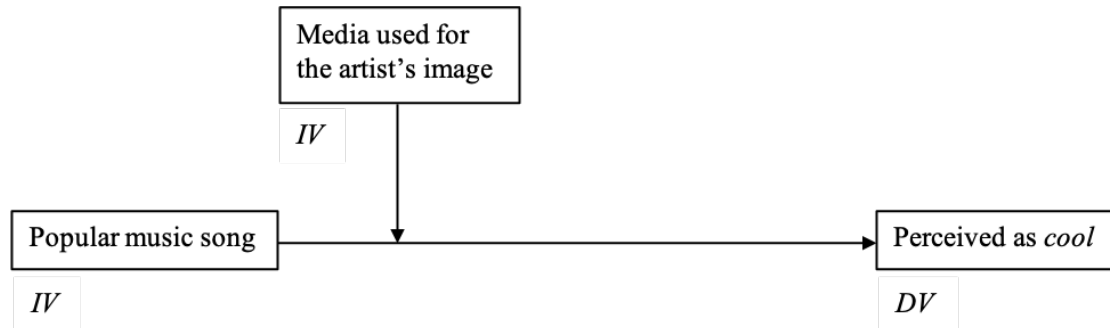


**Figure 1.** Overarching model of the methodology

Perceived coolness has been measured for its level in prior different context (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2012; Rahman, 2013; Sundar et al., 2014), and aligning with Warren and Campbell's (2014) study, this experiment focuses on the quality of perceived coolness for a music artist.

Sampling does not represent the entire population, as it was allocated to young adults aged 18-40 who grew up in the U.S. and U.K., as these are the Western audiences primarily targeted by the global music industry. In maintaining randomization to avoid homogenous social background, such as students with a particular educational level, the data collection used Prolific, an online platform known for academic research, especially experiments (McEwan, 2020; Peer et al., 2017). Randomizing 240 respondents to choose one of four quotas for one of two different songs and images assesses hypotheses more unbiasedly; hence, a factorial design (Abbuhl et al., 2013; Coleman, 2019) was applied for two independent variables—song and image—each in two levels. Samples were distributed into four quotas in **Table 2** to suffice respective treatment representations of one song and media that portrays an image of the artist.

| $N_{Total}= 240$ | | **Popular music song** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Strong Western music influences | Appropriated native-sounding music |
| **Media used for the artist's image** | Featured on Billboard Music | *Western\*Billboard: n= 60* | *Native\*Billboard: n= 60* |
| | Viral on TikTok | *Western\*TikTok: n= 60* | *Native\*TikTok: n= 60* |

**Table 2.** Sample distribution

### Design

Each of the two factors, a song and its artist, has two levels—the strength of Western influences in both songs and the media of the artist's image, whether on Billboard Music or more organically viral on TikTok—hence, the '2 x 2 design' (Abbuhl et al., 2013, p. 121).

Respondents randomly chose one out of four cells, whether previewing a song with stronger Western influences and whether seeing the artist on Billboard Music, making the study a *between-subjects* 2 x 2 design that prevents experiencing both levels of each factor (Coleman, 2019). Half of the respondents previewed a 20-second chorus of a rap song in English, and other 120 respondents previewed a 25-second transition of an electronic dance music (EDM) song to *sinden*, a female Javanese singing in Indonesia's *gamelan* music. Respondents might have heard the songs, "Ming Ling" by Indonesian rapper Ramengvrl and "Lathi" by Indonesian EDM group Weird Genius, respectively distributed by U.S. record labels Empire Distribution (Spinelli, 2019) and Astralwerks (Ritchie, 2020). For the artist's "media", 120 respondents were shown a photoshoot of an Indonesian woman as if on Billboard Music, and the remaining respondents were shown a screenshot of the woman's TikTok video as if viral on the *For You* page with high likes, comments, and shares (Mak, 2020).

Using survey platform Qualtrics, assignments were created by replicating each question as tasks or assignments (Weber, 2021), taking advantage of Qualtrics' feature that enables the setting of a quota of 60 respondents assigned to each of the four cells. Respondents previewed one of the songs as they were asked about their perceived coolness of the song from 1= very not cool to 7= very cool, and on the following page, respondents were asked about their likeability of the song from 1= "I hate it" to 5= "I love it". In the following task, respondents were shown one of the pictures of the artist and asked their perceived coolness of the artist on either Billboard Music or TikTok, followed by four statements about the artist's image on the shown media with 7-point agreement/disagreement scales. To compare the perceived coolness between a song and its artist, both were shown altogether in the last section, followed by 7-point scales of perceived coolness for other people according to respondents. Essentially, respondents evaluated a song and its artist's media imagery like a Qualtrics survey on Prolific, the online research platform for data collection.

**Results and Discussions**

*Data Analysis*

This experiment study assigned a task with five main questions originally completed with 296 responses using Prolific from May 29 – 31, 2023, with 56 responses were excluded due to missing demographic information, resulting in 240 analyzed responses. The average age of respondents is $\mu$= 29.54 with a standard deviation of $\sigma$= 6.37, indicating that 68% or two-thirds of respondents fall within the age range of 23.17 to 35.91 years old. Performing the Chi-square test, the p-value (0.302) of the difference between the U.S. and U.K. sample sizes is greater than a significance level of 0.05, implying no significant difference between the two sample sizes, despite the U.S. sample is 6.66% higher than the U.K. sample. Therefore, in "isolating the effect of personality" (Gutiérrez et al., 2005, p. 1568) among diverse respondents in the regression analysis, it is necessary to control for age, residence base, and gender constantly.

|  | **Total** *N= 240* | **U.S.** *N= 128* | **U.K.** *N= 112* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Age** | | | |
| 18-25 | 29.58 *71* | 17.08 *41* | 12.5 *30* |
| 26-35 | 48.33 *116* | 23.75 *57* | 24.58 *59* |
| 36-45 | 21.67 *52* | 12.5 *30* | 9.17 *22* |
| 46-above | 0.42 *1* | 0 *0* | 0.42 *1* |
|  | 100 | 53.33 | 46.67 |
| **Gender** | | | |
| Female | 50.42 *121* | 24.58 *59* | 25.83 *62* |
| Male | 46.67 *112* | 26.67 *64* | 20 *48* |
| Non-binary | 2.5 *6* | 2.08 *5* | 0.42 *1* |
| Rather not say | 0.42 *1* | 0 *0* | 0.42 *1* |
|  | 100 | 53.33 | 46.67 |

**Table 3.** The demographics of 240 respondents

The strength of relationships between the three measures and each independent variable was tested, starting with the likeability among 'Song 1' (M= 3.03, SD= 0.907) for those previewed Ramengvrl's "Ming Ling" and 'Song 2' (M= 3.27, SD= 0.867) for those previewed Weird Genius' "Lathi", which is notably low. The four perceived media communication statements show a significant mean difference (p-value= 8.891e-05), where Billboard Music (M= 5.079, SD= 0.921) is higher than TikTok (M= 4.542, SD= 1.153). While the perceived coolness of 'Song 1' and 'Song 2', as well as Billboard Music and TikTok indicates insignificant mean differences, the perceived coolness of both song and media for other people according to respondents significantly differs from each concept. 'Concept 3', a combination of being exposed to 'Song 2' (M= 4.458, SD= 0.747) and the artist's image on Billboard Music (M= 4.917, SD= 0.892), has a higher mean (M= 5.183) and a significant difference from other concepts' means (p-value= 1.856123e-38). This analysis aligns with the perceived coolness of 'Song 2' and Billboard Music respectively with higher mean scores than 'Song 1' (M= 4.283, SD= 0.634) and TikTok (M= 4.425, SD= 0.893), indicating the need for regression analysis (see **Table 4**) to elaborate which artist concept works.

|  | **Likeability** | **Image** | **Coolness: song** | **Coolness: image** | **Coolness: for others** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | 3.037 *** (0.167) | 4.337 *** (0.195) | 4.035 *** (0.275) | 3.885 *** (0.25) | 4.289 *** (0.242) |
| *native* | 0.15 (0.173) | 0.026 (0.202) | 0.259 (0.285) | 0.205 (0.259) | 0.379 (0.25) |
| *billboard* | -0.131 (0.169) | 0.517 ** (0.198) | -0.061 (0.279) | 0.685 ** (0.254) | 0.561 * (0.245) |
| *native*billboard* | 0.167 (0.262) | -0.02 (0.307) | -0.174 (0.432) | -0.423 (0.393) | -0.261 (0.38) |
| Gender(Female) | 0.096 (0.116) | 0.224 (0.136) | 0.253 (0.192) | 0.363 * (0.174) | 0.273 (0.168) |
| Age(18-25) | 0.082 (0.128) | 0.012 (0.15) | 0.091 (0.212) | 0.165 (0.192) | -0.16 (0.186) |
| Residence(U.S.) | -0.02 (0.132) | 0.17 (0.155) | 0.234 (0.218) | 0.364 . (0.198) | 0.17 (0.192) |
| $R^2$ | 0.025 | 0.078 | 0.017 | 0.069 | 0.057 |

Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1
(): Std. error

**Table 4.** Artist concept(s) regression analysis

In testing the previewed songs and illustrated media for the artist's exposure, 'Concept 3' and 'Concept 4' are coded as a reference category for both concepts using 'Song 2' (*native*), meanwhile 'Concept 1' and 'Concept 3' are also a reference category for Billboard Music (*billboard*). Gender, age groups, and residence base are the independent variables considered covariates that account for potential influences on the relationship between *native* and *billboard* as the predictors and the five measures as the dependent variables (Menard, 2010; Schumacker, 2016). Identified as female, age 18-25, and the U.S. are also set as the reference category of each covariate, where the three are the base level in each category compared to the other levels (Menard, 2010), such as the U.K. in the residence base. Understanding how independent variables construct each dependent variable,

$$Y = \beta_0 + (\beta_1 * native) + (\beta_2 * billboard) + (\beta_3 * \text{gender female}) + (\beta_4 * \text{age 18-25}) + (\beta_5 * \text{residence base in the U.S.}) + (\beta_6 * (native * billboard)) + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

This data assesses the representation of each song and media illustrated for the artist's image, although none of these independent variables significantly affect the perceived coolness and likeability of the songs, even with *native*, as a song was the first treatment rated by respondents. Interestingly, *billboard* (β= 0.685, p-value= 0.007), gender (β= 0.363, p-value= 0.038), and residence base (β= 0.364, p-value= 0.067) have statistically significant positive effects on the perceived coolness rated for the illustrated media. *Billboard* has a significant positive effect on the perceived coolness of the artist (β= 0.685, p-value= 0.007), the media communication for the artist's image (β= 0.517, p-value= 0.01), and the perceived coolness for other people according to respondents (β= 0.561, p-value= 0.023). While the interaction between *native* and *billboard* lacks a statistically significant effect on the dependent

variables, *billboard* consistently shows significance on the three artist's image-related ratings, indicating that between song and image, the latter is viable in this setting.

The results above determine how each measure works in this study, starting with likeability, implying that the Indonesian artist's song, whether with more music elements from their native culture (H2) or themes related to the global pop culture (H1), cannot be justified as likable. Even when respondents rated the perceived coolness for song before the likeability rating, not only is 'Song 2' unable to be perceived as cool with a higher mean score than 'Song 1', but both songs are also not skewed to the *not cool* (scale 1-3). Consequently, H1 and H2 cannot suffice to prove whether a song strongly influenced by Western popular music or more hybrid with the artist's native culture is likable/unlikable. On the media illustrated for the artist's image, rating the four-statement leads to how Indonesian artists can be seen as accepted by respondents' perception of the media, which U.S. music media Billboard Music (H4) is perceived to be more effective than going viral on TikTok (H3). The two mean scores also significantly differ as the p-value is less than 0.001 level, which in other words, most 'Concept 1' and 'Concept 3' respondents perceived the artist's image more positively on Billboard Music. With H4 statistically supporting the artist of getting featured on the U.S. music media, the perceived coolness and media communication measures result in compatibility to the context of the artist's image on Billboard Music.

Evaluating the perceived coolness of other people according to respondents has more components due to the direct interaction between the two treatments, each treatment, and comparison to other perceived coolness measures, affirming its complexity as the ultimate measure. Based on the interaction between *billboard* and the non-*native* (reversed reference category) and *native* and the non-*billboard*, there is no significant effect on the dependent variable. This implies that whether adapting to Western music production and marketing well (H5) or having native music style and persona (H6), cannot be proven to be perceived as cool, despite 'Concept 3' combining traditional Indonesian music in 'Song 2' with Western marketing *via* Billboard Music. However, embracing Western marketing—using Billboard Music to illustrate the artist's image—has a significant positive effect on the perceived coolness rating for other people according to respondents, aligning with the perceived coolness of the artist's image on Billboard Music. This analysis concludes that, although H6 cannot be measured with the perceived coolness, H5 gives a partial opportunity for Indonesian artists to be perceived as cool by implementing Western-based marketing, such as getting featured on Billboard Music.

### *General Discussion*

Being likable for particular segments' music taste is challenged by various context, such as individual *versus* public preferences (Russell, 1987), familiarity (Dai et al., 2022; Russell, 1987), which can be based on song similarities, play frequencies, or other relevancies, and many others. While liking music involves subjective personal introspection (Larsen et al., 2012; Shankar, 2000), music taste is mainly formed by cultural and social factors (Hird & North, 2021; Lonsdale, 2021; Persson, 2021), indicating that audiences can unintentionally compromise their honest likeability for an assumed collective consideration to evaluate the song neither good nor bad. Whether the Western-based respondents avoid cultural conflict from disliking the song, most respondents consistently rated 4 out of 7 for perceived coolness and 3 out of 5 ("It's OK") for likeability. This neutral state challenges familiarity, being irrelevant to whether both songs are likable or unlikable, which opposes to how previously unknown music is enjoyable to play back (Lepa et al., 2020) and the overplay of a song that

can satiate interest (Rolison & Edworthy, 2012). With no prevailing explanation for the insignificant liking towards a rap song with Asian context in global pop culture and an EDM pop song infused with traditional Indonesian music, Indonesian artists can be likable for other facets of popular music beyond their songs.

Perceiving an artist's image based on the media involves authenticity, with non-Western artists are often expected to embody the "happy native" image (Taylor, 1997, p. 19), although the market-resistant hybridity does not define being authentic for promoting domicile ties (Guldin, 2021). H4 has shown that the "highly regulated star image created by traditional media" (Click et al., 2013, p. 366) boosts Indonesian artists' global popularity *via* Billboard Music, while H3 has proven TikTok's insignificance despite its association with *authenticity* for music promotions (CD Baby, 2022). Most respondents rated 5 out of 7 for the artist's appearance on Billboard Music through four statements on how it is satisfying, meeting expectations, attractive, and better than going viral on TikTok, confirming the social media ineffective despite its more organic approach (Coulter, 2022). This state redefines our perception of media irrelevant to artist's authenticity, as selecting any media to deliver artists' authentic value is intentional for their brand identity (Gouitcheche, 2018), while confirming that media presence matters for popularity (Budzinski & Pannicke, 2022). Therefore, the non-Western Indonesian artists can enhance their popularity worldwide by cultivating their image through global mass/traditional media, aside from social media, that suits their personality in strategizing any ways to present their authentic selves.

While the U.S. and U.K. are the top two markets with the highest global music streaming revenues in 2021, especially the U.S. (43%) (IFPI, 2022), this study cannot rely on Westerners' perceived coolness based on how the elites view the 'subaltern voices' as *cool* (Barna, 2018, p. 257). This study does not capture social status from respondent demographics and non-Western popular music such as K-pop has become a global consumption (Jin & Yi, 2020; Yoon et al., 2020), parallel to *trigger-city* audiences boosting the popularity of emerging Western-based artists. However, perceived coolness approaches the intention-behavior gap in adopting apps (Chan-Olmsted et al., 2022) without purchase—hence the willingness to try (Cesareo & Pastore, 2014) that does not guarantee likings—and the similarity of the word 'cool' with "I like it" (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Most respondents exposed to the artist illustration on Billboard Music consistently rated 5 out of 7 for the perceived coolness for others according to respondents, reflecting the similarly high rating on the perceived coolness of the artist, especially for U.S.-based female respondents. Therefore, the Western (music) marketing is the only effective factor of H5, as Western media largely propagates things about non-Western music (Chou, 2020) and the global reach of Billboard Music makes it a kind of 'cosmopolitan cool' (Elkins, 2019, p. 380) for multicultural audiences. The significantly positive results on Billboard Music highlight the logic of Western media—rather than markets—that holds the power to cultivate audiences in multicultural countries and other nations influenced by its dominating values in the global flow.

The discussion concludes that artists' image is vital in popular music and established media becomes the vessel to deliver their popularity to global attention, hence the presence of hybridity through U.S.-based global media that uplifts Indonesian artists as seen as most Western artists. Cultural hybridity in the aspect of trans-media endeavors only amplifies Guldin (2021)'s 'market-receptive' approach that involves global media to attract mass markets, contrasting the state of selling out, which contributes to the loss of artists' non-ubiquitous image (Bridson et al., 2017). Being featured on U.S.-based global media, such as

Billboard Music, illustrates how artists from *trigger-city* countries, wherein this study is Indonesia, can gain interests from the main target of the publications to gradually attract broader markets beyond the artists' origin countries. While commercial products are often considered antithetical to authenticity (Anthony & Joshi, 2017) and lifestyle brands linked to independent music—including artists—obtain the 'cool' vibe (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015), Indonesian artists should tap into global media coverages. Ultimately, this study re-establishes the non-Western Indonesian artists' image that does not need to be culturally authentic to develop popularity and perceived coolness, as global commercial or mass media would rather help achieve the desired level of publicity for most popular music artists.

## Conclusion

### *Implications*

This study adds to scholarly research on the *trigger cities* phenomenon after Tompkins et al. (2021)'s cross-national comparative experiment and artist concepts related to selling out as opposed to authenticity (Bridson et al., 2017), music for self-representation (Larsen et al., 2009), and self-management (Hughes et al., 2013). Popular music studies still need more non-Western context that challenges the state of cultural hybridity, as authenticity is not expected to determine marketability when artists' image on global media publications, such as Billboard Music, is perceived as cool. Indonesian artists, especially those distributed by multinational record labels and independent aggregators, can try strategize media marketing on global brands by partnering with U.S.-based publicity agencies or Asia Pacific publications to reach neighboring *trigger-city* markets. While any *trigger-city* artists can practice this approach and/or other global 'platforms' including social media, the key of this study is leveraging the culturally hybrid popular music with the influential Western framework without diminishing artists' native or local identities.

### *Further Research Directions*

Future study designs should randomize samples to audiences in *trigger-city* countries and other Western countries for a more inclusive cross-cultural comparative analysis, evaluate other aspects of popular music besides song and media of the artist's image, and devise marketability-related measures beyond perceived coolness. Two alternatives for the song and media of the artist's image treatments are either adding song and media options or asking respondents their awareness of the previewed song and its artist and perceived authenticity before and after the exposure to the artist's media imagery. Overall, this research requires a different method to strengthen the perceived coolness scales and other reliable measures to reflect audiences' taste in their actual behavior when streaming and engaging with non-Western artists online. Therefore, a follow-up qualitative research (Morgan, 2013) with interviews will suffice the overarching conceptual model of Indonesian artist concept evaluation and interview results can improve each measure to mitigate respondents' avoidance towards culturally sensitive matters. The next study investigates popular music aspects to engage audiences in *trigger cities*, Western markets, and other regions, and how being culturally authentic and leveraging Western influences globalize artists.

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