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Designing Identity in VTuber Era

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1. Introduction

- Virtual characters provide access points in the creation of identity and social life [1]
- Virtual YouTubers (VTuber) are streamers and vloggers who use 2D and 3D computer generated virtual characters and engage in creative activities on platforms such as Twitter, YouTube and Twitch
- VTubers first appeared in 2017 in Japan and adopted anime-like visual characteristics. VTubers cannot be analyzed as “avatars” [2] since their existence depends on their creative activities
- Differences and similarities exist between English (En), French (Fr) and Japanese (J) VTubers because they formulate and put into practice different criteria based on individual self-expression [3], gender performance and community interactions [4]

2. Methodology

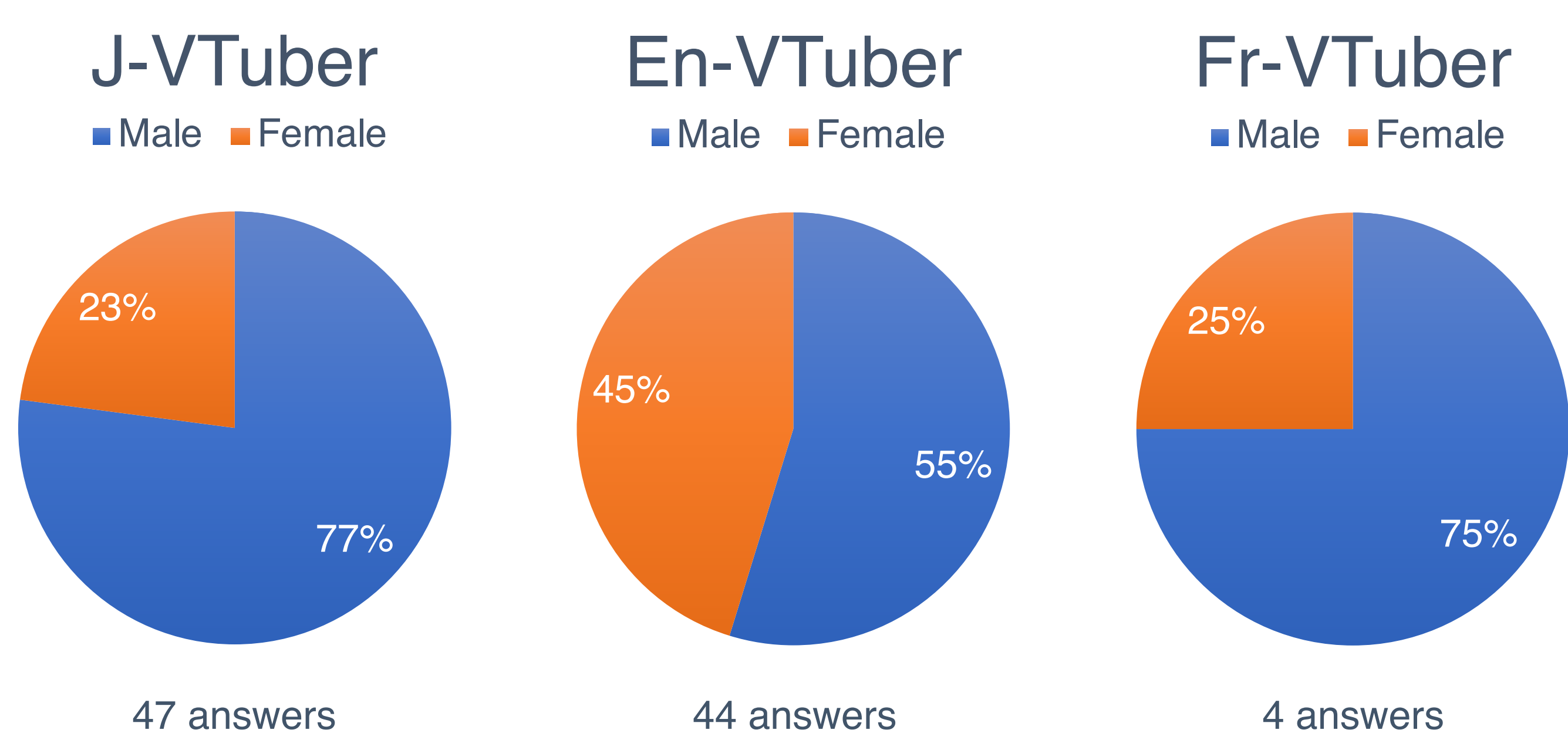
- Survey was conducted between 07.01.2020 – 20.03.2020 in Japanese, French and English by e-mail, direct Twitter messenger and Google Form
- 95 answers were submitted by majority coming from independent and amateur VTubers and some from small companies
- Results were based on spontaneous answers
- Only main answers to each question were provided

3. Results

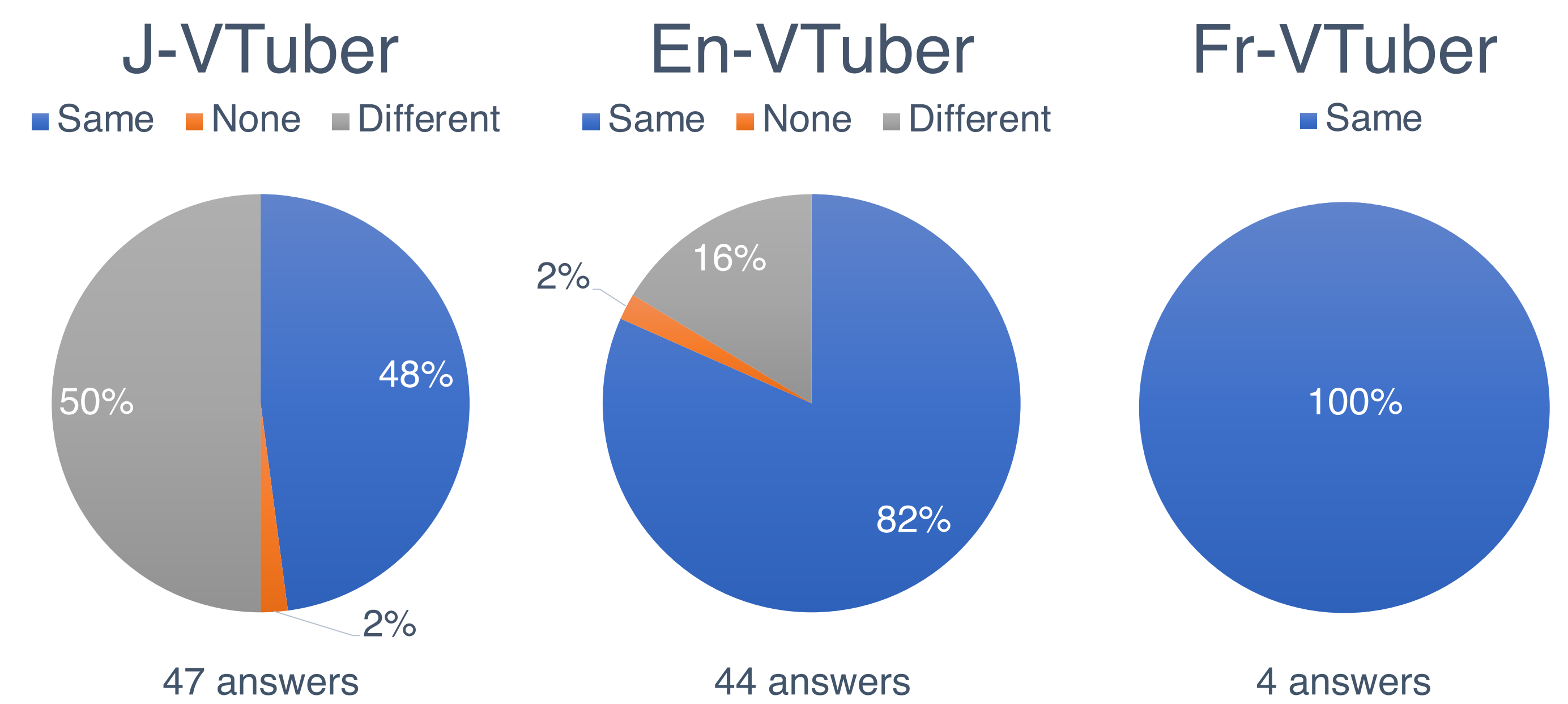
A. Reasons, interactions, capabilities, platforms

- Fr, En, and J-VTubers found the appeal of being an animated character, not having to show their physical face for reasons such as privacy, being anyone and anything, enjoyment, community interactions and content creation
- Specific to J-VTubers included performing in an ideal form and being released from the physical body after which virtual freedom could have been acquired, becoming a 美少女 (bishōjo “beautiful girl”), being likeable for approval needs
- The majority of all VTubers had a clear idea of what and how they wanted to perform their VTuber identity, some En-VTubers required time before making a decision or their initial idea evolved over time
- Some J-VTubers conducted their activity without any specific thought process
- Goals and purposes of Fr-VTubers and En-VTubers were to build and help grow a community, to be social and enjoy themselves, to bring positivity by creating a safe space where people could be entertained
- Other answers of J-VTubers included knowledge transmission, business related, spreading awareness of cyberspace
- En, Fr and J-VTubers characters played games, sang, drew, talked with viewers or told stories. J-VTubers also focused on handcrafts, reading and transmitting knowledge
- En and Fr V-Tubers were mostly active on Twitch and Twitter
- J-VTubers were mostly active on YouTube and Twitter

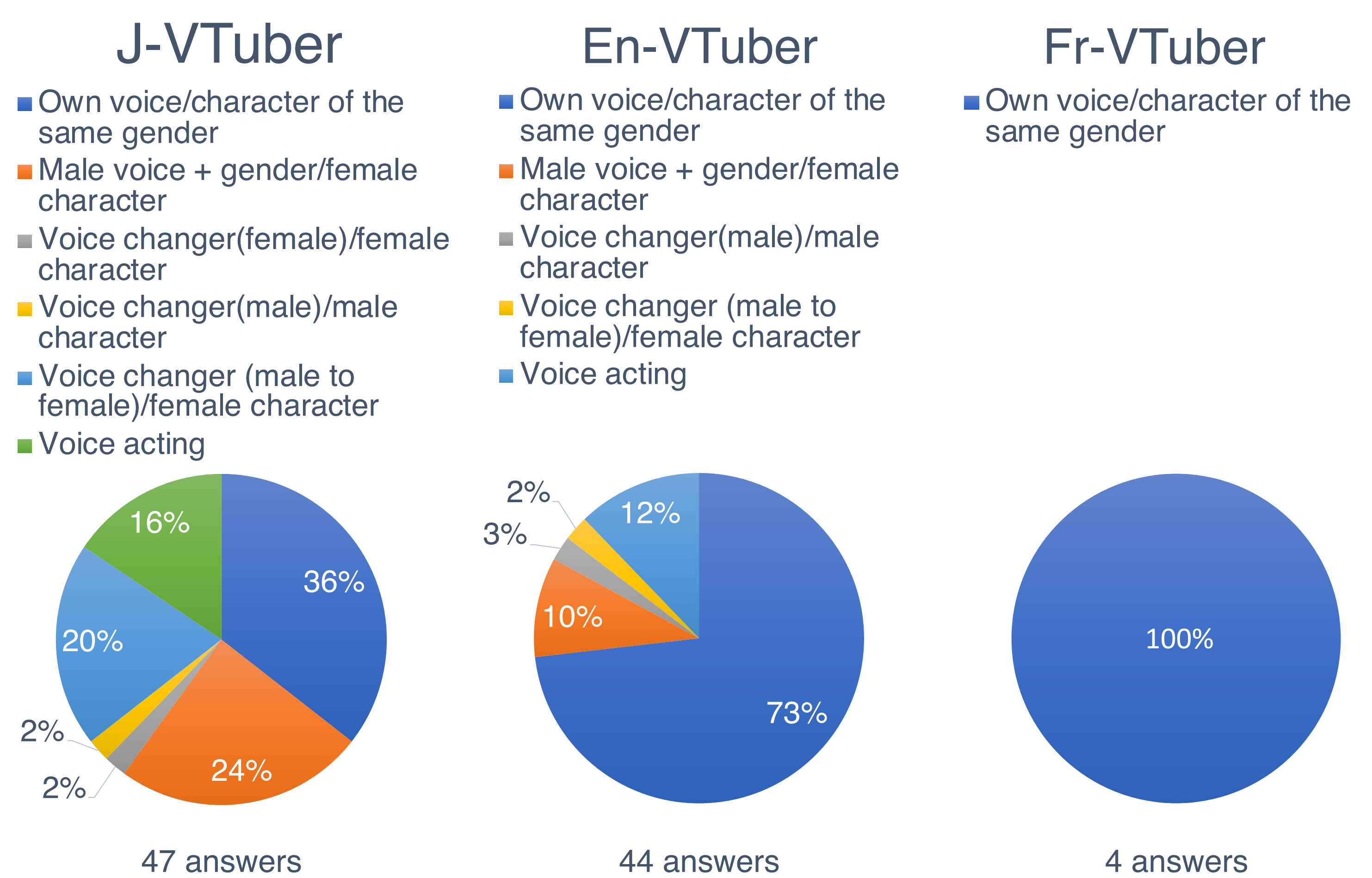
B. Physical gender of participants



C. VTuber's gender: same or different from physical gender



D. VTuber's voice



4. Conclusion

- VTubers, unlike avatars, are directly linked to their activity as entertainers and creators
- Individuals engage in VTuber activities as a way to express themselves (creative expression with content publication), use VTuber as a communication tool (knowledge sharing, business communication or research) or as a way of living (constant engagement in production of creative content and communication)
- By being part of a community, En and Fr-VTubers construct their identity accordingly: they create family-like relations between each other, often collaborate together on Twitch and their communal interactions lead them to adopting friendly and not distant personalities
- J-VTubers are more interested in “idol” activities of VTubers, the majority interacts with their viewers in the comment sections on YouTube or Twitter
- In Japan, バ美肉 babiniku (virtual, bishōjo, incarnation) is the act of using a bishōjo character and being virtually reborn as a bishōjo
- Majority of J-VTubers are male and 50% choose characters of a different gender with bishōjo characteristics, they become bishōjo by playing with visual and social codes of a bishōjo
- With VTubers we are possibly witnessing creation of new virtual beings, a revolution in the entertainment industry on individual and professional levels

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