



Selected Papers of Internet Research 16:
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INTRODUCTION TO PANEL: FAME AND MICROCELEBRITY ON THE WEB

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Objectives

The main objective of the panel is to present cross-cultural case studies (Asia and North America) that discuss developing trends of fame on the Internet and expand on existing theories of microcelebrity. Taking an ethnographic approach, our aim is to broaden the methodological and theoretical approaches to the study of self-made celebrity and self-branding on social media, particularly that of young entrepreneurial women professionalizing their craft. Additionally, young women who are not intentionally pursuing celebrity but through online interactions have the potential for celebrity-like experiences will be discussed. We offer new ways of thinking about microcelebrity, identity, and social media.

The five members of this panel sought each other out through academic circles on social media platforms because of their similar research interests and regularly discuss their projects through email chains, Facebook posts, and Twitter conversations. Our mutual interest in social media, celebrity culture, and commercial use prompted us to come together and create a panel for IR16. Although submitting individual papers is also an option, working within a panel allows us to present a dynamic dialogue founded in mediated collaboration and varying experiences and perspectives.

Themes

Celebrity culture is a discourse that focuses on individualism, identity, and public transformation, and constituted by a real or imagined audience (Marshall, 2006, p. 635). Reality television brought about the average, everyday celebrity, but new media have taken celebrity culture to another level. 'Microcelebrity' was first coined by Theresa Senft in her work on Camgirls (2008) as a burgeoning online trend wherein people attempt to gain popularity by employing digital media technologies - videos, blogs, social media, etc. Microcelebrities are "non-actors as performers" whose narratives take place "without overt manipulation", and who are "more 'real' than television personalities with 'perfect hair, perfect friends and perfect lives'" (2008, p. 16). Unlike mainstream television and cinema celebrities who are public icons with large scale followings,

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microcelebrities are famous only within small, niche networks (Marwick, 2013). Senft also foregrounds microcelebrities' focus on responding to their communities in the ways that maintain open channels of feedback on social media to engage with their audience. In addition, microcelebrity involves the curation of a persona that feels "authentic" to fans (Marwick, 2013, p. 114).

In response to this, our panel offers a discussion on the themes of:

- (re)presentation of the self in the age of social media
- formulaic productions of microcelebrity on social media
- manifestations and experiences of Internet celebrity across different social media platforms
- self-branding techniques by everyday social media users
- case studies of embodied experiential affective work online and offline
- expand existing theories of microcelebrity through cross-cultural case studies
- methodological approaches to studying Internet celebrity
- reifications of microcelebrity status through fan (and anti-fan) texts
- gendered responses to microcelebrity (i.e. "catty" women and hoards of gossip)
- disengagement with internet fame
- accidental celebrity status shaped and influenced by platform affordances
- positive internalization of celebrity experiences

Papers

Our five papers are conscientiously ordered to present the unfolding of a metanarrative of microcelebrity in the age of social media, and the evolution of shared concepts of the internet, following the investigation of magic, myth, accidents, the darkside, and structural guides. We begin with Vimviriya Limkangvanmongkol's paper, **Online red carpet: The magic of instaselfie culture**, which investigates self-made microcelebrities and the deliberate affectual and aesthetic work they engage in, thus illuminating the high glamour of Internet fame through methodological explorations of 'celebrity' imagery. Crystal Abidin's paper, **Internet (in)famous: The mystification and folklore of microcelebrification**, moves away from the more obvious reputation work of microcelebrities to look at those whose origins of fame are shrouded in folklore and myth, exploring alternative discourses of celebrification on the Internet circulating in the popular imaginary. We continue with Megan Lindsay's paper, **Accidental celebrity: Exploration of fame, timing, and response to popularity**, that focuses more on Internet users on the periphery of microcelebrity, and how their accidental stumblings into fame especially at the intersection of Internet imaginaries of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Renee M. Powers' **How does she afford all that?: Rumors, anonymity, and the darkside of being a YouTube microcelebrity** takes us over to the flip side of microcelebrity, in pursuit of narratives of the lesser seen ugly and less glamorous backstage of celebrification, which speaks to Internet ethics and the social imaginary. Finally, we conclude with Angela M. Cirucci's **Identity guides: The implications of Facebook's affordances and tacit celebrification**, that uncovers Internet fact and fiction through the examination of the meta-structures of social media platforms, without which, microcelebrification would not be possible.

Our cross-cultural research material also present comparative examinations of the digital imaginary across cultures. The five papers move from a more traditional South East Asian country (Limkangvanmongkol), to an extremely cosmopolitan South East Asian country (Abidin), to marginal peoples and persons of colour in various parts of North America (Lindsay), to vloggers in the Anglophonic West (Powers), to investigating the material structures of microcelebrification with supporting interviews from emerging adults in a large, East Coast City in the US (Cirucci). Our panel also collectively presents interpretations and operations of microcelebrity across different social media platforms including Blogger, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, YouTube, and social forums.

Short paper abstracts

Online red carpet: The magic of instaselfie culture in Thailand

Vimviriya Limkangvanmongkol, University of Illinois at Chicago

The worldly explosion of selfie culture has occupied the social media landscape in Thailand, shaping the rise of microcelebrity in the attention economy. This research examines the celebrification of the new breed of Thai celebrities driven by the selfie culture and Instagram use. I argue that Thai microcelebrities are *instaselfie*, referring as a subset of instafame (Marwick, 2015) mind-set and online self-presentation practice but focusing on using selfie posts to gain social capital. Using visual and textual analysis methods to unpack the instaselfie mind-set and practice, publicly available selfie photos of twenty Thai Instagram users who have more than 30,000 followers were qualitatively analyzed. Instaselfie celebrities transcends beyond the showcasing of their faces and bodies by embracing the glamour of an envidious “good” life/look, “luxury” lifestyle and “celebrity”-type personality. The final section illustrates three outstanding examples which are selected according to their unique positioning: a selfie queen, a beauty influencer, and a luxury elitist.

Internet (in)famous: The mystification and folklore of microcelebrification

Crystal Abidin, University of Western Australia

The attainment of microcelebrity has been theorized as being ‘achieved’ and ‘ascribed’. However, microcelebrification is seldom as neatly categorized, as demonstrated by folkloric speculations of celebrification in Singapore. To demystify fame on social media, a more nuanced nomenclature for the formulaic geneses of microcelebrity is required. In response, this paper reports on long-term online and offline ethnographic fieldwork among cohorts of social media microcelebrities in Singapore and East Asia. It investigates the folkloric imaginaries of celebrification in the vernacular of everyday users and the press, and introduces the notion of ‘systemic’ and ‘diffuse’ microcelebrification; the former being more constituted with a firm indication of one’s crossover into microcelebrity, and the latter being less organized and contingent on a more organic accumulation of attention before attaining microcelebrity.

Accidental celebrity: Exploration of fame, timing, and response to popularity

Megan Lindsay, Arizona State University

Celebrity is often thought of as a person, or individual identity. Within the literature, scholars provide examples of individuals adapting online lives to enhance their popularity and pursue an achievement of status. According to Marwick (2011), celebrity may also come through cultural phenomena. A study of young adult women in the US provides examples of the daily lived experiences when individuals are exposed to some form of internet fame or popularity, because they identified and capitalized on an ongoing cultural phenomenon. However, the narratives, motives, and intentions of these heterogeneous (e.g. race/ethnicity, age, sexuality, and socioeconomic status) users varied, and the daily lived experiences of certain women complicate the idea of celebrity as a pursuit. I will examine four case examples of young women who happened to gain traction online and elaborate on the ways they chose to (dis)engage, further pursue, and interact with their online presence, post-fame.

How does she afford all that?: Rumors, anonymity, and the darkside of being a YouTube microcelebrity

Renee M. Powers, University of Illinois at Chicago

This paper explores the world of YouTube beauty vloggers and the people who love to hate them. Using discourse analysis, I focus on a forum created specifically for discussing the content and lives of popular YouTube beauty vloggers. The forum participants hide behind anonymity to discuss and dissect the lives of the most popular vloggers in the beauty industry. These forum discussions point to a darkside of microcelebrity unique to online spaces and to the darkside of boyd's (2007) characteristics of networked publics. When a microcelebrity's communication is persistent, searchable, and replicable to an invisible audience, it can easily be aggregated to be used against him or her (Solove, 2006). The invisible audience uses this aggregated information to create or support rumors about the vlogger. All digital footprints have the potential to become proof of feminine transgressions. This includes not conforming to an appropriate economic class performance, not policing one's body in correct ways through postfeminist consumption practices, and violating the trust of the audiences. Ultimately, forum participants 'hate-watch' these popular beauty vloggers to find more apparent evidence to support the rumors and opinions that the other forum participants have perpetuated.

Identity guides: The implications of Facebook's affordances and tacit celebrification

Angela M. Cirucci, PhD, Temple University

In defining microcelebrity, media technologies are often described as integral to the self-branding process. This paper argues that social networking platforms are not social utilities, but, in fact, *celebrification* utilities. That is, they are programmed to necessarily brand users by extracting and filtering identifications to be easily consumed by advertisers, just as celebrities and microcelebrities promote specific, "authentic" aspects of self that can be easily consumed by fans. Through a discourse analysis of Facebook's affordances and in depth interviews with emerging adult women (n=30), I present a meta-analysis of celebrity culture through the narratives of everyday women who are not *actively* involved in self-branding but are instead compelled by the site's

inherent design to tacitly brand — they unknowingly align with corporation-like mission statements, ignore multiple, dynamic selves, and discard their right to anonymity.

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ONLINE RED CARPET: THE MAGIC OF INSTASELFIE CULTURE IN THAILAND

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Introduction

The worldly explosion of selfie culture has also occupied the social media landscape in Thailand. *Time Magazine* reported in 'Is This Woman the World's Selfie Queen?' that a Thai woman under the pseudonym, Mortao Maotar, posted over 12,000 selfies (Luscombe, 2014), outcompeting the world's most prolific selfie-taker, Kim Kardashian. Mortao Maotar, with 20,000 Instagram followers, epitomizes the status of microcelebrity defined by Marwick (2013) as "a state of being famous to a niche group of people" (p. 3).

This research examines the celebrification of the new breed of Thai celebrities driven by selfie culture and Instagram use. Marwick (2015) conceptualizes the phenomenon of Instagram use to gain online status as "instafame". The term refers to a form of microcelebrity which is "a mind-set and a collection of [online] presentation practice" but centering on having a relatively great number of Instagram followers by "emulating the visual iconography of mainstream celebrity culture" (p.139). Focusing on the self-made fame by regular Instagram users, microcelebrities like Mortao Maotar craft their own persona (Goffman, 1959) through selfie posts in the attention economy. I argue that they are *instaselfie*, referring to a subset of the "instafame" mindset and practice but focusing on using selfie posts to gain social capital (Ellison et al., 2007). Thus, instaselfie is not a selfie itself but is a method involving Instagram users' production of the selfie. This research is one of the first academic works that unpacks the instaselfie practice by Thai self-made microcelebrities and illustrates three outstanding examples which are selected according to their unique positioning: a selfie queen, a beauty influencer, and a luxury elitist.

Method

This research primarily relies on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as an entry point to qualitatively analyzed publicly available selfie photos of twenty Thai Instagram users, who each have more than 30,000 followers. I included Mortao Maotar who has approximately 20,000 followers because *Time Magazine* named her as "the world's selfie queen". I collected fifty photos posted between 2014 and 2015. By looking at

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photos from the Instagram web viewer, www.iconography.com, I aim to code themes across photos in the dataset. Adapted from Oxford Dictionaries (2013), I define the term “selfie” as “a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or [handheld devices or selfie sticks]” and posted on Instagram. This definition includes a photograph of the half or whole body as well as specific parts of the body. Thus, this research incorporates visual and textual analysis methods as ways to explore cultural meaning as a part of instaselfie practice. Particularly, I record users’ account names, usernames, biographies, number of followers, as well as the number of “likes” and comments, geotag, hashtags, and emoticons on each photograph (adapted from Marwick, 2015). I analyzed why each account seems to attract a lot of followers so as to unpack instaselfie mind-set and practice in Thailand.

Instaselfie Mindset and Practice in Thailand

Instaselfie celebrities use selfie posts to represent the way they want to be perceived from their Instagram fans in a niche community. Mostly taken by front-camera smartphones and selfie sticks, instaselfie celebrities transcend beyond the representation of self through the showcasing of specific parts of the body. Facial expression, gestures, clothing, accessories, make-up, background scenes and anything as a part of selfie posts’ composition symbolically reinforce concepts of the good life/look, luxury lifestyle, and celebrity-type personality. This type of aspirational persona is perceived as distinctive from regular Instagram users with fewer followers. As a form of instafame, instaselfie also rarely responds to followers’ comments and “likes.” However, I found that they interact with those whom were tagged on the post, such as users whom they know or have met at events or received gifts from, but not with stranger followers. Interestingly, instaselfie celebrities who have 20,000 followers or fewer still interact with followers’ comments. It may be due to the fact that they want to increase their popularity. The next section illustrates three outstanding instaselfie examples that are selected according to their unique positioning: a selfie queen, a beauty influencer, and a luxury elitist.

The World’s (Insta)Selfie Queen: Mortao Maotar

Named by *Time Magazine* as the world’s selfie queen, Mortao Maotar, known as @mortao on Instagram, has reportedly posted over 200 selfies every week on social media sites. She has approximately 20,000 followers. Her selfies are taken in various postures: sitting on the floor or in the bathtub, standing, laying on her stomach on the bed, and raising her legs with sexy tights. @mortao usually wears short shorts and takes selfie photos in front of a bathroom mirror, showing off her face with or without make-up on and her slim legs. Her selfies receive up to 278 likes and 60 comments, including “very seductive and hot, love” comment from user, @devilstar13. @mortao usually uses an emoji or the emoticon ‘<3’ as her photo captions but bombards it with more than 10 hashtags: #beautiful, #eyes, and #cute. Interestingly, she usually tries to increase the number of comments by responding to her commenters in the form of “Thnx @username” or “@username [emoji].” This instaselfie queen differs from the other two instaselfie examples used in this research because she does not have as many followers as they do.

Beauty Influencer: Amata Chittasenee

Self-claimed as a beauty influencer on her Instagram biography, Amaya Chittasenee, known as @pearypie, has 965,106 followers. The self-taught makeup artist is presently one of the most popular Thai beauty gurus. She uses Instagram to strengthen her positioning as a unique beauty influencer, in addition to her blog, Facebook page, and YouTube channel. She usually posts her selfies showcasing her upper half of the body aiming to show her creative makeup experiments on her own face, hair colors, hairdos, and accessories in different themed looks: glamorous (fake eyelashes), street (purple lipstick), neon (green eyeshadow), and theatrical themes (ghost). She also zooms in on her selfies to show only her nail colors and hands holding some suggested must-try beauty products or shoes. Crucially, @pearypie likes to use emoji in her captions and includes more than two hashtags, with #pearypieAroundtheWorld as the primary personalized hashtag. @pearypie is a typical Instagram famous showcasing her consistent persona as a beautiful, talented and glamorous beauty guru. She sets herself apart from followers as she rarely responds to their “likes” and comments.

Luxury Elitist: Maesa Wanwilai Techasomboon

Born into a wealthy family, Maesa Wanwilai Techasomboon, known as @maesaa, has 104,982 followers. Her selfie posts showcase herself usually in full makeup with fake eyelashes and colored hair in various stylish dresses and accessories. She informs followers about brands of her shoes and bags, and events that she attends by using hashtags, such as “#christianlouboutin shoes”, “#burberry clothes”, and “#SamsungGalaxyAlpha event”. Her selfies taken with her baby, usually with the personalized #BabyBhupha hashtag, also hint at the family’s extravagant lifestyle as he wears Gucci kids clothing. Her Chanel swim towel is always in the selfies taken in her swimming suit with her husband. Geotagged posts at places like “The Peninsula Hong Kong” also become a part of using instaselfie practice to influence aspirational consumption. Like @pearypie, @maesaa rarely responds to her followers’ “likes” and comments but only to her friends.

Conclusion

Instaselfie is a subset of the “instafame” mindset and practice but focuses on using selfie posts to gain to gain social capital. In the ‘immaterial and attention economy’, instaselfie celebrities use visual representation as well as captions, hashtags, and geotags to post self into being possessing an envidious “good” life, “good” look, “luxury” lifestyle and “celebrity”-type personality, marking themselves off as distinctive from other Instagram users. They transcend beyond the showcasing of specific parts of their bodies and develop celebrity-type charisma through their unique looks, clothing, cuisine, travel as well as socializing with their circles of friends.

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INTERNET (IN)FAMOUS: THE MYSTIFICATION AND FOLKLORE OF MICROCELEBRIFICATION

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Introduction

YouTube sensations *ala* Zoella, popular Instagrammers *ala* Tanner Zagarino, and celebrity bloggers *ala* Tavi Gevinson have been occupying the media imaginary for their social influence, earning power, and potential usurp of the mainstream entertainment industry. Analytically, they are microcelebrities. Theresa Senft defines microcelebrity as “a new style of online performance that involves people ‘amping up’ their popularity over the Web using technologies like video, blogs and social networking sites” (2008, p. 25). Unlike mainstream entertainment industry celebrity who are public icons with large-scale followings, microcelebrity “is a state of being famous to a niche group of people” and involves the curation of a persona that feels “authentic” to readers (Marwick, 2013, p. 114).

Marwick distinguishes between two types of microcelebrity: ‘ascribed microcelebrity’ where the online personality is made recognizable through the “production of celebrity media” such as paparazzi shots and online memes (2013, p. 116), or ‘achieved microcelebrity’ where users engage in “self-presentation strateg[ies]” such as fostering the illusion of intimacy with fans, maintaining a persona, and selective disclosure about oneself (2013, p. 117). However, personal narratives of microcelebrification are rarely clean-cut and intersect across achieved, ascribed, and other ambiguous origins of fame. This paper aims to offer a more nuanced nomenclature for formulaic geneses of microcelebrity, in response to folkloric vernacular imaginaries of celebrification, as one node of demystifying fame on social media.

Being ‘Internet famous’ in Singapore

Although they are prominent across various social media platforms, Singaporean microcelebrities first debut on blogs in the mid-2000s, and are referred to as ‘bloggers’ in the native nomenclature circulating in the wider public imaginary. They are perceived as thought leaders and influential opinionators across a wide East Asian demographic, mostly pitching to readers between the ages of 13 and 35. Their extreme influence and success is manifested in their inclusion into industries including entertainment,

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education, healthcare, and politics that wish to leverage on their clout. Reading blogs was reported to be the third most popular online activity in Singapore (iDA, 2012). The draw factor of such microcelebrities in the 'lifestyle' genre is that their persona is premised upon sharing the personal, usually publically inaccessible aspects of their lives. Therefore, their celebrification unfolds in a narrative of the traditionally 'private' self archived on their social media enterprises. In response, this paper aims to demystify Internet celebrification from the emic perspective.

The data were collected during anthropological fieldwork between December 2011 and June 2013, including participant observation, web archaeology, and personal interviews. A grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was adopted in the thematic coding of all content. The analysis features 10 young women microcelebrities evenly spread across the ages of 16 to 25. 9 are full-time bloggers, and 1 works a second job. 5 of the full-time bloggers also own their own blogshops. Pseudonyms are used.

Folkloric imaginaries of celebrification

The origins of microcelebrification are often cloaked in vernacular folklore perpetuated by netizens. Interviews and archival research on the comments on microcelebrities' social media platforms and speculations on popular local forums were analyzed in conceptualizing folkloric imaginaries of celebrification.

The four most popular tropes speculating the very beginnings of microcelebrity fame are overnight prominence, blogshop eminence, beauty, and proximate fame. Firstly, microcelebrities are believed to have become "suddenly famous overnight" for controversial social media posts that achieve virality. Secondly, microcelebrities are thought to have developed from owners and models of blogshops whose youth and relative commercial success have incited envy, and whose pervasiveness across websites and blogs iconized them as 'feminine' role models. Thirdly, microcelebrities are known for their unusually good looks, including "parallel double eyelids" or "mixed blood" (a colloquial phrase for people of mixed heritage). Others become renown for undergoing plastic surgery or their cosmetic skills. Lastly, microcelebrities inherit peripheral popularity from their proximity to mainstream celebrity, such as cinema and television stars or established microcelebrities who have crossed over to mainstream media.

Press fascination on these self-made entrepreneurs has highlighted their earning power, generated fictives of their 'accidental' celebrity, and speculated their usurp of the mainstream entertainment industry. Headlines such as "From blog to riches", "Net worth", "Model owners", and "Plastic fantastic" speak to speculations of their apparent commercial success coupled with relative youth and extreme beauty. Such news coverage has constructed what Boorstin (1961) terms 'pseudo-events' around the microcelebrity, in that the 'news' generated is but a "synthetic novelty" (1961, p. 9) that is not spontaneous but staged, executed for the mere purpose of creating 'newsworthy' content, bears an ambiguous representation of the reality of events, and most crucially, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (1961, p. 11-12). While such news coverage has further compounded the celebrification of these young women, it has also inevitably obscured

their esoteric discourses of their labour and their vernacular interpretations of conspicuous fame.

Systemic geneses of microcelebrity

The geneses of microcelebrification can be largely categorized into two structures, systemic and diffuse. In the systemic structure, celebrification is constituted with a more firm indication of one's crossover into microcelebrity. There are four collectives in systemic microcelebrification: blogshops, brands, talent firms, and mainstream media.

Blogshops are a sister economy to commercial blogging and social media in Singapore. They began in 2005 on LiveJournal where young women hawked used apparel. As the industry matured, they shifted to more personalized web hosts such as Blogspot and Wordpress, before graduating into dotcoms. Owners and models of blogshops garner a following and fame for their entrepreneurial success or distinctive looks. Many microcelebrities today began as blogshop models, or continue to run blogshops for supplementary income.

Secondly, some brands poach everyday users on social media or run contests seeking brand ambassadors. Ordinary netizens and Internet microcelebrities are believed to be more accessible than mainstream entertainment industry celebrities, and thus perceived as more relatable and emulatable in marketing products. Brands also sponsor public events for users to network or develop their microcelebrity, in exchange for 'shout-outs' on their social media feeds.

Thirdly, social media advertising firms across the Asia-Pacific poach and groom microcelebrities for whom they broker engagements with brands. They firms operate similarly to talent agencies who send personalities for casting. Blogger specialists or talent managers spot potential microcelebrities for grooming or vye to sign on established independent microcelebrities, or those between contracts.

Lastly, mainstream media exposure elevates the status of everyday users into microcelebrity, and propels the fame of established microcelebrities through press interviews, newspaper features, or magazine cover shots. Microcelebrities have been cast in advertisements or been given cameo or supporting roles in cinema and television, in a bid to harness their fanbase's consumer power. In fact, recent local movie productions are exclusively casting social media microcelebrities to pander to the youth dollar.

Diffuse geneses of microcelebrity

The second category of microcelebrification has a diffuse structure. In the diffuse structure, celebrification is less organized and depends on a more organic accumulation of attention before attaining microcelebrity. However, the genealogy and progress of microcelebrification can still largely be traced. There are three collectives in diffuse microcelebrification: organic readers, proximate celebrity, and controversy.

Many microcelebrities start out as everyday users with no commercial intent. For a variety of reasons, they attract a strong following of readers who are passing strangers, or those accumulated from personal networks and friends of friends. Readers usually engage with them on three levels; aspirationally, in seeking advice on issues including beauty, fashion, and relationships; critically, in imposing judgement or jealousy as manifested in ‘hate mail’; and curiously, in voyeuristically observing their private lives on display like spectacles.

Secondly, some users attain microcelebrity from their proximity to mainstream celebrities whose fame rubs off onto those around them (Marwick, 2015, p. 151). In Singapore, these proximate microcelebrities include goddaughters of Hollywood celebrities, personal friends of Korean pop stars, partnerships and friendships with local television actors, and personal friends of other established microcelebrities who now inhabit mainstream media. They leverage on these relations by publishing photographs and word snippets ‘exposing’ behind-the-scenes of these mainstream celebrities’ lives.

Lastly, some users gain microcelebrity from controversial ‘shame’ acts directed upon themselves, or imposed upon by others. Borrowing from Twitchell (1997), I term the first form of strategic self-shame ‘shamelebrity’, wherein the deliberate construction of scandal around the self is a means to incite provocative reactions from the public and increase one’s visibility and infamy. These include staged ‘leaked’ sex tapes and high profile plastic surgeries. The second form of infamy is imposed upon by others, and takes the form of ‘blog wars’ or ‘tweet wars’ where users and microcelebrities break into camps and voice support for either party. These include ‘hate’ campaigns, defamatory allegations, or organized bullying tactics.

Demystifying fame on social media

The following table presents the microcelebrification processes for four young women, formulated through personal interviews, prolonged participant observation in their daily affairs, and web archival research. Through cases studies juxtaposed against folkloric imaginaries of how these four women attained their fame, my presentation will demonstrate the genesis and genealogy of microcelebrification and the productive impact of such nuanced nomenclatures.

Structure	Collective	Subgroup	Bonnie’s genealogy	Michelle’s genealogy	Tania’s genealogy	Nicole’s genealogy
Systemic	Blogshops	Model	3		2	5
		Owner	6	6	2	
	Brands	Poached				3
		Approached			1	
	Talent firms	Poached	5	5	4	4
	Mainstream	Press	4	8		6

	media	coverage				
		Entertainment industry	2	7		7
Diffuse	Organic readers	Strangers	1	4		2
		Friends of friends		1		1
	Proximate celebrity	Peers		2	5	
		Partners		3		9
	Controversy	Shamelebrity				8
		Blogwar			3	

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ACCIDENTAL CELEBRITY: EXPLORATION OF FAME, TIMING, AND RESPONSE TO POPULARITY

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Introduction

The perceptions, motivations, and experiences that happen through the online world are based on subjectivity, and a “break” from the natural world (Floridi, 2010). For that reason, people may have experiences and interactions that resemble online celebrity, but their interpretations remain central to defining the experience. Specifically, the practice of microcelebrity, may or may not have direct links to the original intentions of the individual who becomes popular. Experiences of online presence are internalized only based on the perception of self, in turn they may remain distant from experiences of popularity or for different reasons connect positively to popularity. This study examined how these random encounters with potential fame are impacting individuals’ based on their interpretation of the experience. Within the literature, scholars provide examples of individuals adapting online lives to enhance their popularity and help to further pursue an achievement of status. According to Marwick (2011), celebrity may also come through cultural phenomena. Furthermore, our online presence is co-created with interaction from any given platform, designing an online self that interweaves with algorithms of a site (Markham, 2013). Five individual cases demonstrate how the combination of site design, cultural phenomenon, timing, proximity, and perhaps some serendipity lead to encounters with microcelebrity status. For various reasons, some individual participants described these encounters as a moment in time, or an event, rather than thinking of these as opportunities; they (dis)engaged with the experiences and enforced boundaries between the online self and their embodied day-to-day living. Alternatively, some participants stumbled into the opportunity, but decided to take full advantage of the moment and sustain a network and internalize the experience as a part of their personal identity (Archer, 2012).

Methods

The individual case examples in this study came from a larger phenomenological study about young adult women and ICT use in the United States. Themes and patterns in regard to celebrity experiences emerged from the data, and were not the direct subject

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throughout interviews. Therefore, these emergent themes may shed light on the shared experiences surrounding microcelebrity, but for various reasons produced trajectories outside expectations of celebrity culture. All participants were interviewed two times. The first interview asked for in-depth descriptions of their lived experiences and online routines during their transition to adulthood. The second interview was an informal conversation, led by the participant. In addition to the interviews, participants were offered ongoing contact with the researcher and it was suggested they share certain online experiences or content that was meaningful to them (Markham, 2013). To triangulate the interview data, digital content was collected from different social media sites where they interact on a regular basis. Data were analyzed using a two-step process. First, narrative summaries describing individual participants online experiences were constructed. The narrative methodology stresses the use of story to conceive how a sequence of events becomes a part of an individual's personal identity through reflexivity. By allowing different stories from the view of the participant, the researcher has an opportunity to see how the events are edited, altered, and emphasized based on personal perspectives. Lastly, all transcripts were reviewed using an open-axial coding method; individual cases relevant to the topic of microcelebrity were compared looking for convergence and divergence. Common themes among all participants included exclusive networks/niche audience, timing, emotional expression, and controversy. Many issues of divergence intersect with specific identity politics, specifically the experiences varied based on socio-economic class, race, and social support networks offline.

Microcelebrity through proximation: Casey

On an everyday basis, Casey uses multiple social media platforms, and cultivates multiple profiles intended for different purposes. She uses Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube. During her early twenties, Casey struggled with self-esteem and accepting her own body. She started to film online fitness videos to stay in shape and appreciate her own body. In order to keep up with specific YouTube personalities who produced these videos she created her own fitness Instagram. Based on proximity to the YouTube fitness personalities, her fitness account grew to over 700 people. Also, she has a YouTube channel where she gives tips about shopping, nutritious meals, and discusses her personal goals. While the channel is steadily growing, her audience remains relatively modest and believes the YouTube is just a hobby or an outlet. Based on her own descriptions, she does not want, need, or seek any type of popularity. However, with proximity to other online personalities, and the benefit of fitting traditional beauty standards, her online presence had certain potential for growth and commercial exploit.

Microcelebrity through sociality: Bethany

When Bethany was an adolescent she experienced a great deal of hardship, including the loss of her mother. The social situation eventually took a toll, and was the catalyst for intensive therapeutic treatment throughout high school. Afterward, she turned to online groups that focused on positive thinking to provide her the extra support she would need during transition. Bethany is doing very well; she works part time, and attends school full time. Her mannerisms, and social presentation come across as

reserved and introverted. Despite what could be considered obstacles to social popularity, she experienced an outpouring of support and popularity through participation in her positive thinking group. After writing a personal essay about how she works to stay positive the essay became extremely popular amongst the users, and at one time had generated 41,000 views. Although she did not gain popularity from people recognizing her as a figure, or knowing details about her personal identity, one of her favorite essays gained significant traction. For her, the experience was meaningful, not because she saw herself as a celebrity, but because she felt valued.

Microcelebrity through critical analysis: Holly & Tina

Holly is a 19-year-old woman living in the south. She has risen to a coveted status among youth — she is ‘Tumblr famous’. During a popular media event, Holly wrote a passionate blog about a White woman pop star appropriating Black culture and exploiting Black women’s bodies for show. The next morning when she awoke she had gained 9,000 followers. Her blog about the pop star had become extraordinarily popular, and in turn she gained an audience. Although, as she describes the events, there was nothing intentional or purposeful about gaining her following, she does take full advantage. She uses her popular online presence to weigh in on current events and challenge institutions that promote sexism and racism. As a young Black woman, having an online presence derives a certain power she has yet to experience in her life offline. Specifically, Tumblr provided her a space to voice opinions to a broad audience, find a community receptive to deconstructing influences of White supremacy culture, and experiment with her identity as a cultural activist.

Tina is a 23-year-old PhD student living in Los Angeles, during her undergraduate she was a passionate writer for her school's newspaper. During her first two years of college she was intrigued and invested in queer theory, and gender deconstruction. Even before she would outwardly use the label of feminist, that was how her close friends would describe her to other people. Her writing gig at the newspaper was influential for how she saw herself because her articles were widely circulated. In particular, one article she wrote about the media’s treatment of trans children and their bodies was gaining popularity including being picked up by the Huffington Post, and Laverne Cox, a famous trans activist and actress who shared the article to her fans. Later, Janet Mock interviewed her later about the article for a TV show, that unfortunately never aired. Part of her interest in trans issues came from being with a partner who is trans, eventually she stopped writing about this topic because she thought her position as an outsider to the community would become a problem down the road. While appreciative and pleased with the attention the issue received, she did not want to continue down this particular path despite her skill in critical analysis and the popularity that she was unintentionally building.

Microcelebrity through transgression: Stephanie

Stephanie recently filed a lawsuit that garnered attention from political blogs, both conservative and liberal. Because the lawsuit involved public records, several blogs revealed her personal identity and talked at length about how her choice was a part of the political climate. The blogs that were written about her led to trolling, bullying, and

harassment. Ultimately, she wanted nothing to do with the fame that was thrust upon her and she took several measures to conceal her identity, including deleting certain social media accounts. Understandably, Stephanie had something to lose online. She had worked hard to complete a graduate degree and pursue a professional career. Although she became a talking point and object of fame, her life outside of the events were already relatively stable. Being middle-class, white, and educated contributed to the leverage for day-to-day life enough that her focus remained on career, family, and private life.

Conclusion

Celebrity culture is considered an important and dominant force in contemporary culture, but that does not mean that all people respond to the opportunities for niche audience in the same way. Some individuals stumble into fame and enjoy the experience but do nothing to capitalize on the opportunity. Other people will identify their niche audience and work to sustain the gains, but not at the risk of losing their message or purpose for passion that brought them to the audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Many people receive the experience of celebrity as positive, feeling accomplished and acknowledged because of the attention. The intersectional identities of these women- specifically race, socioeconomic status, and age, influenced how the experiences were internalized.

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HOW DOES SHE AFFORD ALL THAT?: RUMORS, ANONYMITY, AND THE DARKSIDE OF BEING A YOUTUBE MICROCELEBRITY

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Introduction

This paper uses discourse analysis to explore the world of YouTube beauty vloggers and the darkside of their microcelebrity status. I focus on a forum created specifically for discussing the content and lives of many YouTube beauty vloggers, with analysis centered on six of the most discussed English-speaking beauty vloggers. Drawing from boyd's (2007) characteristics of networked publics, these forum discussions highlight the ways in which a microcelebrity's communication is persistent, searchable, and replicable to an invisible audience. These features contribute to the ways in which sharing personal information can be used against the vloggers as "proof" of their feminine transgressions. The invisible audience ultimately uses aggregated information shared by the vlogger against the vlogger to support or create rumors. The insults hurled at the vloggers on these forums also illuminate a very specific femininity and authenticity required to be a successful YouTube beauty vlogger and microcelebrity.

Method

For this project, I focus on a selection of six of the most active subforums on a gossip forum. Each subforum is dedicated to a specific YouTube beauty vlogger. These vloggers were chosen to represent specific characteristics of Anglophonic Western beauty experts and also to represent specific lifestyles and choices for women. All six vloggers are white women in their 20s[1]. Two are from the United States, one is from New Zealand, one is from England, one splits her time between Canada and the US, another splits her time between Canada and England, and all of them are native English speakers. All six are partnered with men, three are married, one has a child, and two live with their significant others. One is a transgendered woman and two openly discuss their plastic surgery procedures. All six rely on YouTube for their primary income, though three have makeup-related products tied to their names. Pseudonyms are used.

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Within each subforum are threads. At a point determined by the moderators, threads are closed and new threads are created. Threads are divided into pages, with 25 comments on each page. Very few subforums have content-specific threads. Instead, threads are intended for general gossip and are titled with some variation of “[vlogger’s name] – Thread 3,” depending on how long the forum participants have been discussing the vlogger. Additional threads were included in the study if they were relevant to the project themes. For example, a thread focused on one vlogger’s spending habits was included. Thirty pages of recent discussion were collected from each selected subforum, for a total of 180 pages and 4700 comments. Close reading of the discussions determined common themes for each vlogger’s subforum, which contribute to constructions of YouTube beauty vlogging reality.

Discourse analysis is an approach to knowledge construction that focuses on how people or groups of people construct their reality (Philips & Hardy, 2002). This study follows Fairclough’s approach to discourse analysis, that is it analyzes texts “with a view to their social effects... [dependent] upon processes of meaning-making” (2003, p. 11). Like Fairclough, I acknowledge that this mode of analysis is not the only way to interpret these forum postings as texts, rather it is only one of many ways to approach the dataset. I apply grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) as a way of acknowledging the nuances of the emerging discourse. Fairclough writes, “[w]e cannot assume that a text in its full actuality can be made transparent through applying the categories of a pre-existing analytical framework” (p. 16). In other words, the meaning of the text can change depending upon the perspective from which we choose to draw. In this project, I draw from a lens informed by feminist theory, celebrity studies, and internet studies to interrogate how rumors, anonymity, and ‘hate-watching’ can contribute to expectations of femininity in microcelebrity.

An Obsession with Class

The most salient component of the discussions on these forum revolve around the class of the vlogger. Sometimes class discussions are veiled through insults, like “hick”, “snooty”, “trash”, and “yuppie”. Other insults are more directly related to the vlogger’s consumption practices, such as “label-obsessed” and “bougie skank.” Vloggers perceived as lower class are deemed “trashy” and photographs taken from the vlogger’s Instagram feed serve as proof of her trashy life (e.g. tacky high heels, unclean home, and sexy outfits worn to more formal events). However, for the vloggers perceived as wealthy, participants enjoy detailed discussions of their income and spending habits. One participant worries, “She only spends money. Is she saving anything for her baby’s future?” Another participant reminds the forum that the vlogger owns two homes and her husband has a high-earning career, so their baby will probably want for nothing. Nevertheless, forum participants worry that the baby will grow up wearing luxurious brands like its mother, scoffing at Walmart clothing.

Body Policing

Because YouTube beauty vloggers spend so much time in front of a camera, filming videos and posting selfies, it seems unavoidable to hide body changes from their audiences. This includes aging. Again, Instagram photos and screenshots from old

videos are displayed on the forums as proof of a vlogger's weight gain or wrinkling skin. These discussions often include remarks such as "She looked so much better in 2013," and "She uses those lights to wash out her wrinkles." From a post-feminist perspective, aging is distasteful but women can combat it through a variety of consumer choices (Negra, 2009). When the vloggers do not acknowledge their aging or weight gain or do not consume the correct products to maintain their youth or weight, they violate the trust of their audiences. In other words, the forum participants expect the vloggers to adhere to specific boundaries of femininity or, at the very least, apologize for violating them.

Disclosure, Trust, and Authenticity

Another common thread in these forums involves levels of disclosure and trust. In the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) requires bloggers and vloggers to disclose if they have been sent an item for free or have been compensated for a product in any way. Forum participants are skeptical of some vloggers' vague (or absent) disclosures and many feel misled. This shatters trust. There are a lot of references on the forum to vloggers "selling out" for free products or to make more money. All six in this paper accept sponsors and the forum participants discuss this for all six vloggers. Most participants argue that sponsorships are not inherently bad, but honesty is highly valued. When forum participants suspect a vlogger was sent an item for free, discussions turn to the vlogger's history with the company and with monetary decisions, often pointing to past videos, tweets, or Instagram posts as "proof."

Conclusion

YouTube beauty vloggers are microcelebrities whose lives have become fair game for discussion. In this networked public, all digital footprints have the potential to become proof of feminine transgressions. This includes not conforming to an appropriate economic class performance, not policing one's body in correct ways through postfeminist consumption practices, and violating the trust of the audiences. Success of a microcelebrity is determined by the audiences, but violating specific guidelines of femininity and authenticity leads to a darkside of fame. As one gossip forum participant writes, "What else is the point of this forum but to be nit-picky. What did she expect putting her life on social media?"

[1] No women of color or men have top subforums on this site, though some are discussed in a section called "Less Popular Gurus."

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IDENTITY GUIDES: THE IMPLICATIONS OF FACEBOOK'S AFFORDANCES AND TACIT CELEBRIFICATION

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Introduction

It is no secret that digital media technologies are integral to the self-branding process. Users create, maintain, and broadcast the self in ever-evolving ways. What is not often investigated, however, are the ways in which the affordances of these spaces compel users, who have no desire to become microcelebrities, to craft the self through a celebrified identification template. This paper argues that social networking platforms are not social utilities, but *celebrification* utilities. Social networking sites are programmed to necessarily brand users by extracting and filtering identifications to be easily consumed by advertisers, just as celebrities and microcelebrities promote specific, “authentic” aspects of the self that can be easily consumed by fans.

Toward a More Nuanced Definition of Celebrity Culture

Microcelebrity is defined as a set of practices wherein a user's audience is viewed as a fan-base with whom she constantly engages to ensure continued popularity. Presenting the self must be specially constructed and managed for consumption. Success then is promoting an illusion of backstage behavior, recognizing a power differential, intimacy, and public acknowledgment (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Thus, identification online becomes a branded good (Senft, 2013). As with any product to be sold and consumed, microcelebrities extract core features of the self that can then be easily branded and maintained. While the core features of an object may be easy to obtain, the process becomes problematic when people are viewed as objects with some core, essential characteristics that easily fit into marketing schema. Because they lack PR teams, Marwick (2013) explains that microcelebrities, following the strategies proven successful for celebrities, work to brand themselves, taking on corporation-like characteristics — honesty and transparency.

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As the celebrified culture increases, identification practices more closely follow this celebrity structure. As such, social media structures are celebrified themselves. In other words, identification structures in these spaces parallel celebrity structures — they extract and summarize the self, valuing and focusing on characteristics that are important for celebrity status. The Facebook self, as the definitive example, is boiled down for mass consumption. Affordances granted for identification are crafted in ways that deem marketing algorithms most efficient. Thus, just as branding a product means extracting and simplifying its core qualities, I argue that instead of supporting socialization, Facebook affords identification guides that support celebrification — templates that work to extract some core, foundational self through drop-box affiliations, limited choices, and privileged identifications that are aligned with increasingly fragmented markets.

Method

Employing a structural discourse analysis of Facebook's affordances and in-depth interviews with emerging adult women (n=30), I present a meta-analysis of celebrity culture through the narratives of everyday women who are not *actively* involved in self-branding but are instead compelled by the site's inherent design to tacitly brand — they unknowingly align with corporation-like mission statements, ignore dynamic selves, and discard their right to anonymity.

Findings

Like microcelebrities, my informants worry about filtering their identities, interacting with followers, and remaining highly visible. Unlike microcelebrities, my informants are forced to collapse their multiple, dynamic identifications. They do not view their performances as some illusionary backstage. Instead, they describe the space as requiring an **accurate** portrayal of one, authentic self that remains consistent through time and space. The following four sections briefly summarize my findings.

Structural discourse analysis

Through seven architectural subcategories: Sign Up, About, Timeline, Friends, Likes, Photographs, and Cookies, Facebook guides users to present canonical selves that are visible and aligned with celebrity goals. For example, users (1) must adhere to Facebook's real name policy and enter legal names, (2) compete for likes, comments, and shares, to ensure they will appear on the News Feed, and (3) are consistently reminded to validate their collapsed selves through photograph uploads and GPS check-ins. These identification affordances (among many others) are not commonly linked with socialization, but instead with celebrification.

Interviews – Filtered self

What it means to be **real** on Facebook is inextricably tied to what the site affords in the self-presentation process. My informants explained that their profiles present a shallow, sweeping version of the self that encapsulates many of their identifications through attempting to extract core qualities of the self. This method was referred to as *filtering*.

Often skirting questions regarding authenticity, informants noted that they are *accurate* in their presentation strategies.

Leah, 21-year-old white female: I'm thinking of it [her personal profile]...like business. If you can prove that it's real, [if] you can talk with someone that runs it...

Fans and likes

Facebook's structure is designed to complement marketing algorithms. In turn, users necessarily sculpt their identities to this structure. Facebook gains a majority of their information not from the personal information that users input, but through interactions. Users who interact with their networks more often are favored — the more a post is liked, commented on, or shared, the closer it moves to the top of the News Feed. Thus, Facebook compels users to collect as many friends as possible and then perform in a way that garners attention.

Jane, 18-year-old African-American female: I feel pressured to have people comment on my Facebook statuses...

The visible self

Facebook defines authenticity as broadcasting an honest self and collecting validation from others. Because it is the goal to be known, the site compels users to discard their right to anonymity and instead promote the corporeal self. In doing so, the site favors those who are comfortable with connecting their online life to their offline lives. In particular, it privileges those who are able to present their corporeal selves. Indeed, when a profile picture does not link the user to her offline self, my informants noted that they will ostracize her, even when they know her offline and know that she is controls the faceless profile.

Hilari, 21-year-old Asian female: Facebook in general, it's not about being anonymous, it's about being known.

Discussion

As social networking sites are increasingly programmed in parallel with microcelebrity identification guidelines, everyday users are unknowingly adopting a self that is based in these ideals — to be authentic is to perform an honest, corporate self; to be social is to compete in gaining more friends, likes, comments, and shares; and to be accepted is to sacrifice privacy and anonymity and to become increasingly visible. Marwick (2013) writes that the self-presentation strategies of microcelebrities are not real life, but illusions of backstage life to garner attention. Conversely, the women I spoke with consider sites like Facebook to be real and important spaces for socialization. Instead, however, the sites are programmed to assist with celebrification in an attempt to turn users into simple lists of core, marketable qualities.

It is important to note that this is not a technologically deterministic discussion. We must first and foremost remember that Facebook, like all websites, are built, maintained, and defined by a specific group of people. Thus, we should strive to analyze both users and the spaces' affordances that they rely on for identification, and we should attempt to more closely investigate celebrity culture and its implications.

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