

Introduction

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Abstract

Although the early conversations of microcelebrity centered on Anglo-centric theories and context despite the varied backgrounds and cultural context of microcelebrity, this compilation of chapters seeks to assess and reframe the applications and uptake of microcelebrity around the world. Each of the chapters in this anthology contribute to expand the theoretical concept and contextualize the history and cultural affairs of those who are famous online. The case studies provide examples of how a microcelebrity emerges to fame because of their exposure and interaction within a group of niche users, a specific online community, or a specific cultural and geographical context through the social networks that emerge online. Academic scholarship on microcelebrity has crossed methodologies, disciplines and platforms demonstrating the wide appeal as the influence of these figures are on the rise. As preparation for the reader, this chapter offers a brief history of current scholarship, with an emphasis on shifting knowledge production away from an Anglo and Global North perspective. The introduction chapter serves as a road map for the reader breaking down each of the three sections of the book – norms, labors, and activism. Lastly, the co-editors have outlined different ways to read the text group chapters according to reader interest.

Keywords: Microcelebrity; internet celebrity; influencers

Introduction

The field of microcelebrity studies was pioneered by Global Studies scholar Theresa M. [Senft \(2008\)](#) 10 years ago and prolifically expanded upon by Alice E. [Marwick's \(2013\)](#) work on microcelebrity strategies among Silicon Valley Start-ups. In the last decade, microcelebrity studies have expanded across digital estates, populations and intensities, labor and practices, products, commodifiable entities, and national spheres. However, a vast majority of existing research

looks into instances of microcelebrity in predominantly English-speaking, middle-class, white, Anglo-centric spaces or applies Anglocentric theories to different localized case studies around the world. In this book collection, the editors introduce a ten-year anniversary update to the field of microcelebrity studies by re-theorizing microcelebrity considering the underrepresented diversity in specific ideo-geographical and sociocultural domains. Specifically, this anthology examines the practice and concept of microcelebrity through interdisciplinary in-depth case studies across the globe. Through highly contextualized cultural settings and social histories, the chapters present scholarly accounts of microcelebrity as it has proliferated and diverged in global social media networks.

Together, the chapters argue for new perspectives and theories of microcelebrity that dialogue with colonial geographies within and outside of academia, cross-media networks between Influencers and legacy media, and gendered aggression and political discourses in a social media-saturated age. Specific case studies situated in various ideo-geographical locales seek to revise the concept of microcelebrity to accommodate developments in global internet governance, the evolution of platform politics, the emergence of hybrid forms of celebrity, and the collapsing networks between old and new media.

Microcelebrity Studies to Date

As (at least one account of) the theoretical history from pre-internet to internet celebrity history has been traced in a companion text (see [Abidin, 2018](#)), this section will consider how microcelebrity cultures have been studied to date pertaining to methodologies, sites and types of empirical data, and disciplinary and conceptual standpoints.

Methodologies

The methodologies employed to understand microcelebrity cultures vary, with each offering bearing its own pros and cons. Most often, researchers tend to employ content analysis given that the material produced by public-facing and publicity-seeking microcelebrities and aspirants are most accessible in this manner. They may comprise a visual analysis of the content produced by microcelebrities (i.e., [Fuller & Jeffery, 2016](#)), a discourse analysis of their text (i.e., [Bakke, 2017](#)), and usually focus on a biography of a (few) highly prominent icons as case studies ([Meylinda, 2017](#); [Slater, 2017](#)). However these tend to focus on text in the English language and platforms arising from the Anglo-centric Silicon Valley. Other studies may draw on primary empirical data through interviews with microcelebrities (i.e., [Boxman-Shabtai, 2018](#)) or through in-depth participant observation among groups of microcelebrities as a form of culturally situated ethnography (i.e., [Abidin, 2017c](#); [Hopkins, 2019](#)), while still others sample the experiences of users and followers through surveys (i.e., [Chae, 2017](#)).

Disciplines

While originally pioneered in the domain of communications (i.e., Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008), microcelebrity cultures are now being studied across a variety of disciplines, including anthropology (i.e., Abidin, 2017c; Hopkins, 2019) and sociology (i.e., Bakke, 2017; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016), cultural studies (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018) and gender studies (i.e., Lovelock, 2016), game studies (i.e., Trice & Potts, 2018) and digital media studies (i.e., Arthurs, Drakopoulou, & Gandini, 2018; Ashton & Patel, 2017), psychology (i.e., Ferchaud, Grzeslo, Orme, & LaGroue, 2018), business and marketing (i.e., Khamis, Lawrence, & Raymond, 2017; Mardon, Molesworth, & Grigore, 2018), and even law (i.e., Slater, 2017) and medicine (i.e., Chandawarkar, Daniel, Stevens, 2018; Mercer, 2018).

Platforms

This diversity in cross-disciplinary interest in microcelebrity cultures has meant that scholars are looking at cultures of use across a variety of platforms. This includes early use devices and platforms such as webcams (i.e., Bailey, 2009; Senft, 2008) and blogs (i.e., Abidin, 2015a; Bakke, 2017; Hopkins, 2019; Mcrae, 2017), and commercial enterprises such as blogshops (i.e., Abidin & Thompson, 2012) and e-commerce websites (i.e., Chen, Benbasat, & Cenfetelli, 2017). Given their vast use around the world, Silicon Valley social networking sites are also popular areas of study and include Facebook (i.e., Jin, 2018; Mota, 2016; Vochocová, 2018), Instagram (i.e., Abidin, 2014a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b; Marwick, 2015; Neal, 2017), Twitter (i.e., Bennett & Thomas, 2014; Chandawarkar et al., 2018; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Trice & Potts, 2018), and YouTube (i.e., Arthurs et al., 2018; Ashton & Patel, 2017; Bakioglu, 2016; Bishop, 2018; Boxman-Shabtai, 2018; Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018; Ferchaud et al., 2018; García-Rapp, 2016; Jerslev, 2016; Johnston, 2016; Lovelock, 2016; Mardon et al., 2018; Meylinda, 2017; Mustonen, 2017; Sedláček, 2016; Smith, 2017; Tolson, 2010).

With the proliferation of live video and livestreaming apps, an emergent crop of research is also focusing on Snapchat (i.e., Gkoní, Edo, Bollen, & Ecott, 2017; Phua & Kim, 2018), Twitch (i.e., Bingham, 2017; Johnson & Woodcock, 2017), and ecologies of livestreaming (i.e., Blight, 2016). Arising from the Chinese digital ecology, a stream of research is also now focused on cultures of internet celebrity specific to Douyu (i.e., Zhang & Hjorth, 2017), musical.ly (i.e., van de Put, 2017), and Weibo (i.e., Li, 2018; Wang, 2017).

Geographical Cultures

This diversity in disciplines and platforms as modes of framing cultures of microcelebrity has also generated a slow but steady stream of research on culturally specific, place-situated, and highly contextual forms of internet celebrity. Shifting away from Anglo-centric, English-speaking, global North platforms, some research is also emerging from national scapes with distinctive internet governance and platform politics. A few examples outside of the US and UK

include Asia: China (i.e., [Li, 2018](#); [Meng, 2014](#); [Wang, 2017](#); [Zhang & Hjorth, 2017](#)), Malaysia (i.e., [Hopkins, 2019](#)), Indonesia (i.e., [Meylinda, 2017](#); [Rahmawan, 2014](#)), Singapore (i.e., [Abidin, 2017c](#)), South Korea (i.e., [Chae, 2017](#)); and in Europe: the Czech Republic (i.e., [Sedláček, 2016](#); [Vochocová, 2018](#)) and Norway (i.e., [Bakke, 2017](#)), to name a few.

Units of Analysis

Following this, the unit of analysis for understanding microcelebrity cultures has also exploded in diversity. While some time-intensive, long-term ethnographies choose to follow the intergenerational development of microcelebrity cultures in a specific place (i.e., [Abidin, 2017c](#); [Hopkins, 2019](#)), still other studies focus on a single icon as a case study, investigating either their brand biographies or the communities built around the microcelebrity. Some microcelebrities who have been studied in such detail include Americans Lonelygirl15 ([Bakioğlu, 2016](#); [Hall, 2015](#)) and Laci Green and Lindsey Doe ([Johnston, 2016](#)), Britons Hello October ([Bruijn, 2016](#)) and Zoella ([Bishop, 2018](#); [Jerslev, 2016](#)), Irish Bubzbeauty ([García-Rapp, 2016](#)), Chinese Hani8 and Nvliu ([Zhang & Hjorth, 2017](#)), and South Korean Han Yoo Ra ([Meylinda, 2017](#)). In addition to the wealth of studies focused on the biographies of female microcelebrities, some studies focus on male microcelebrities, including Swede PewDiePie ([Fägersten, 2017](#)), Australian Zyzz ([Fuller & Jeffery, 2016](#)), and American “Sad Michigan Fan” ([Slater, 2017](#)).

Still other studies choose to focus on networks and small groups of microcelebrities, such as beauty gurus (i.e., [Mardon et al., 2018](#)), commercial bloggers (i.e., [Bakke, 2017](#)), e-commerce livestreamers (i.e., [Chen et al., 2017](#)), political enthusiasts (i.e., [Vochocová, 2018](#)), and Gamergaters (i.e., [Trice & Potts, 2018](#)). Turning from producers to consumers of microcelebrity cultures, an influx of studies are now focusing on users and audience relations, giving attention to inquiries such as feelings of envy (i.e., [Chae, 2017](#)), processes of coming out to fans (i.e., [Mustonen, 2017](#)), Snapchat subcultural groups (i.e., [Gkoni et al., 2017](#)), communities on streaming platforms (i.e., [Blight, 2016](#)), aspirational teen interest around Influencer careers (i.e., [Sedláček, 2016](#)), and fan labor (i.e., [Bakioğlu, 2016](#)).

Conceptual Standpoints

Stemming from this spread of disciplinary frameworks and empirical corpuses, the conceptual standpoints from which scholars are theorizing microcelebrity cultures are also expanding. Perhaps most theorized is microcelebrity cultures in relation to labor, including glamor labor ([Wissinger, 2015](#)), aspirational labor ([Duffy, 2016](#)), visibility labor ([Abidin, 2016b](#)), gendered labor ([Zhang & Hjorth, 2017](#)), esthetic labor ([Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018](#)), emotional labor ([Mardon et al., 2018](#)), and algorithmic labor ([Bishop, 2018](#)). These studies collectively build on the trajectory of research on emotional labor ([Hochschild, 1983](#)), immaterial labor ([Hardt, 1999](#)), and entrepreneurial labor ([Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005](#)).

Cultures of Practice

Various cultural practices and subcultural communities of microcelebrity cultures have also caught the attention of scholars, who have investigated communities around bodybuilding (Fuller & Jeffery, 2016), LGBT activism (Lovelock, 2016; Mustonen, 2017), sexuality education (Abidin, 2017a; Johnston, 2016), politics (Tufeci, 2013; Vochocová, 2018), academia (McMillan Cottom, 2015), and practices around language (Page, 2012), humor and parody (Boxman-Shabtai, 2018), and digital artifacts such as selfies (Abidin, 2016a). A subset of studies has also begun to look at the negative subcultures and consequences of microcelebrity cultures around antagonisms and hating (Mcrae, 2017; Smith, 2017; Trice & Potts, 2018). Conceptually, emergent from this spread of studies are debates over notions of authenticity (i.e., Abidin, 2017b; Abidin & Ots, 2016; Ashton & Patel, 2017; Bruijn, 2016; Hall, 2015; Tolson, 2010), credibility (i.e., Abidin & Ots, 2016), privacy (i.e., Abidin, 2014b; Kane, 2010; Richards, 2015), copyright (i.e., Slater, 2017), and trends (i.e., Ferchaud et al., 2018).

Commerce and Industry

As an increasing number of microcelebrities are turning to parlay their online fame into commercial enterprises, a new string of works are now investigating the process of commercialism in the industry. These include studies on becoming a microcelebrity (i.e., Bakke, 2017; Li, 2018; Meylinda, 2017; van de Put, 2017; Wang, 2017), monetization (i.e., Chen et al., 2017; Hopkins, 2019), branding and self-branding (i.e., Booth & Matic, 2011; Chandawarkar et al., 2018; Khamis et al., 2017; Mercer, 2018), professionalism (i.e., Bingham, 2017), audiencing and follower engagement (i.e., Blight, 2016; Gkoni et al., 2017; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Neal, 2017; Sedláček, 2016), and the expansion of their brands to include romantic partners (i.e., Abidin, 2016c) and their young children (i.e., Abidin, 2015b).

Knowledge Production

Finally, an emergent crop of studies – including several chapters in this collection – have recently turned a critical eye to the cultures of knowledge production by reflexively mapping out or interrogating methodologies of studying microcelebrity cultures (i.e., Marshal et al., 2015; Mavroudis & Milne, 2016). Evidently, the past decade of research on microcelebrity cultures has yielded an expansive array of focal points across methodologies, disciplines, platforms, geographical cultures, units of analysis, conceptual standpoints, cultures of practices, and commerce and industries.

Ever more promising are the steady stream of prepublished/soon-to-be published MA and PhD theses by postgraduates around the world who are studying emergent and cutting-edge practices that are in dire need of being archived and analyzed. Focusing on how commerce and industry are impacting microcelebrity-audience relations are Neal's (2017) thesis on Instagram influencers and

sponsorship, [Mustonen's \(2017\)](#) thesis on YouTubers coming out to fan communities, [Sedláček's \(2016\)](#) thesis on how YouTubers' audiences are shifting away from TV practices, and [Bruijn's \(2016\)](#) thesis on how YouTubers are negotiating a balance between commercialism and authenticity. Considering the cultures of microcelebrity on newer social media platforms are [Gkoni et al.'s \(2017\)](#) thesis on Snapchat and emoji use as “fam” subcultures, [Bingham's \(2017\)](#) thesis on practices of professionalism among Twitch microcelebrities, [Blight's \(2016\)](#) thesis on community building across streaming platforms, and [van de Put's \(2017\)](#) thesis on the process of becoming a celebrity on musical.ly. Finally, looking outside of the Anglo-centric United States and Euro-centric United Kingdom are [Bakke's \(2017\)](#) thesis on commercial bloggers in Norway, [Meng's \(2014\)](#) and [Wang's \(2017\)](#) theses looking at *wanghong* on Weibo in China, [Meylinda's \(2017\)](#) thesis looking at beauty vlogs in South Korea, and [Limkangvanmongkol's \(2018\)](#) thesis looking at beauty bloggers' practices in Thailand. As newer cohorts of post-graduates and early career researchers delve deeper into the cultural and political complexities of microcelebrity practices in their parts of the world, one can be assured of generations of critical works on cultures of internet celebrity from around the globe.

“Around the Globe”

The book aims to shift the current discourse on microcelebrity studies, encouraging scholars to interrogate our citation politics, intellectual biases, personal attention ecologies, and the value of conducting microcelebrity research for public good. We consider some instances of public good as: returning to the community, generating new knowledge emically from the community, conducting translation work (language, literacies, lived experiences) for the wider academic community. We first need to acknowledge that all knowledge production is processual and political. This is especially important because the landscape of celebrity cultures is being shaped by physical and digital social networks, and reliance on such networks as their status quo often results in echo chambers of mutual amplification within in-groups, while perspectives from the margins and fringes, and alternative and subversive discourses are sidelined.

This is also the case as academics are increasingly turning to literature search engines and databases such as Google Scholar, Academia.edu, and Research Gate to keep up-to-date with emergent research, and when prolific academics with extensive social media networks are better able to promote and publicize their newest works to a large-scale readership on platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Furthermore, a smaller group of academics – often those who are based at prestigious American and British universities, and those who are faculty at Departments of Media Studies and Communication Studies that are feeders for the journalism industry – are better connected than others to journalists and writers at traditional and popular media presses, as evidenced by the steady flow of exposure on their works through expert opinions and press mentions.

Even more critically, a vast majority of these “canon” works and academics tend to research and publish in the English language; survey producers or consumers of microcelebrity culture who are disproportionately middle class or filtered through the sample of an undergraduate class; or focus on social media platforms that originate from Silicon Valley. As such, “celebrity” scholars and the most publicized “canon” works continue to be read and cited as the “bare minimum” while works that generally fall outside of these Anglo-centric legacies tend to be overlooked by the attention economy of algorithmic and personal networks.

However, the co-editors take heart and inspiration from a crop of scholars whose research about online fame have been spearheading a movement toward some diversity and intersectionality within the supposed status quo. [Pham’s work \(2015\)](#) on Asian fashion bloggers, [Lewis’ work \(2015\)](#) on Muslim women and (online) fashion, and [Luvaas’ works \(2012, 2016\)](#) that draw on his fieldwork among Indonesian bloggers evidence the growing desire for understanding microcelebrity within the context of geographical and cultural networks that intersect and create new forms of online fame.

Furthermore, this collection of essays bears a larger intellectual agenda in which we respond to the calls from postcolonial scholars such as [Said \(1978\)](#), [Spivak \(1993\)](#), [Connell \(2007, 2014\)](#), [Thussu \(2006, 2009\)](#), [Iwabuchi \(2002\)](#), and [Yano \(2013\)](#) to reevaluate our processes of knowledge production and the “global” spread of culture. In his theory on production of knowledge, “facts,” and power relations between Orientalism and the Occident, postcolonial philosopher Edward Said argues that “ideas, cultures, and histories cannot seriously be understood or studied without their force, or more precisely their configurations of power, also being studied” (1978: 13), and it is only through the process of “unlearning” the “ideological formations” ([Spivak, 1993: 92](#)) underpinning the socially, culturally, and “legally programmed asymmetry” ([Spivak, 1993: 98](#)) in everyday life that one can acknowledge and undo the “epistemic violence” ([Spivak, 1993: 76](#)) of knowledge production. More specifically, social theorist Raewyn Connell argues through her explication of Southern Theory that such “critical unpacking of mainstream literature in a field of practice – textbooks, established paradigms and bibliographies” is necessary to reveal in this process of knowledge production a “northern dominance of the discourse, and extraversion in the global south” ([Connell, 2014: 218](#)).

Media Studies scholar Daya Thussu has likewise called for scholars to interrogate the “internationalization” of conducting media research beyond “Angloblization” (borrowed from historical Niall Ferguson) ([Thussu, 2009: 2](#)), given the continued importance of the concept, boundary, and unit of “nation states” in dispersing, circulating, receiving, consuming, and shaping media flows (2009: 3). Thussu also cautions readers to not only examine “global flows” but also pay heed to the contraflows in knowledge production given that as “Western theories are tested in non-Western locales and found inadequate, a new kind of thinking is required which values ideas and perspectives emanating from non-metropolitan hubs of global knowledge centres” ([Thussu, 2006: 25](#)). This disruption of the hegemonic global flows from the “core” sites of

production (Anglo- and Eurocentric sites) to “peripheral” ones (rest of the world) is also what anthropologist Christine Yano has termed the “decentering of globalization,” as the “the general direction and status hierarchy of global flows” (Yano, 2013: 9) is reversed.

In his study of Japanese popular culture, Sociologist Koichi Iwabuchi argues that such “recentering of globalization” is usually aided by the fact that many commodities are now “mukokuseki” or culturally odorless and travel on the global commodity market without a hint of their nationality and with their ethnic and cultural characteristics erased (Iwabuchi, 2002: 71). But the nature and variety of internet celebrity culture is fast changing these conceptions: In her study of contemporary internet celebrity cultures, anthropologist Crystal Abidin (co-editor and contributor) has found that one of the reasons that some internet celebrities can gain better international traction than others is exactly because they are “stained” with a distinct cultural odor, to the extent that their fame is founded entirely on feelings of exoticism derived from an incompatibility of cultural capital between celebrity and viewer (Abidin, 2018: 22), reiterating the need to take into account the sociocultural and ideo-geographical specificities of geographically bounded concepts such as nation states (Thussu, 2009: 3).

Following from these postcolonial scholars, this book pays attention to the “around” aspect of *Microcelebrity Around the Globe*, bringing in studies on microcelebrity cultures from the geographical, cultural, economic, and linguistic margins, and highlighting case studies from different regions, using localized and international scholarship, and expanding on existing theoretical framings on the online celebrity experience. It is hoped that our collection of essays will serve as a humble intrusion into the normative academic attention economies with which we struggle.

Overview of This Book

This book and each of the chapters provides a direct response to the ongoing geopolitics and the existing significant gaps in scholarship about online celebrity. The case studies give examples of how norms, labor, and activism manifest as culturally specific practices and how microcelebrities embed their contextual knowledge to connect with niche networks online. The chapters feature geographies and populations in Asia such as China (East Asia), India (South Asia), Pakistan (South Asia), Singapore (Developed Southeast Asia), and Thailand (Developing Southeast Asia); in Turkey (Eastern Europe); Brazil (Latin America); predominantly English-speaking non-American countries such as Australia and England; and nominally marginalized populations in the US such as African-Americans and Blacks.

The platforms considered include blogs, Facebook, Instagram, musical.ly, Snapchat, Tumblr, Twitter, Vine, Weibo, and YouTube, with theorizations focused on race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, popular culture and entertainment, commerce and power, and politics and activism. In addition, the case studies consider a spectrum of microcelebrity at every stage, from everyday users

and beginners who engage as a part of leisure, to veteran microcelebrities and Influencers that make a living from their online status.

The 11 chapters in this book are grouped into three sections: Norms, Labor, and Activism. While the three linear sections of the book divide content based on common patterns and theoretical discussion building from one another, readers can also take individual case studies out of sequence based on interest. Below is a brief description of each section and chapter to guide the reader.

Section One: Norms

Section one of the book highlights the ways in which microcelebrity practices are informed by cultural norms, language, platform, and desires of the users. Chapters 1 and 4 pay attention to the ways specific language indicate ways to cultivate and consume online celebrity, while Chapters 2 and 3 highlight the ways in which platform norms influence certain social behaviors, with the sites themselves becoming a pedagogical tool for how to present oneself in a socially attractive way. Celebrity practices are shaped by culturally specific language and narrow Anglo-centric frameworks currently overlooking existing phenomena through algorithms and social norms taken in the status quo. Together, these chapters show the varied social norms that arise as specific to contextual interest and the ongoing loops of behavior between online celebrity practice and user habits.

“Vlogging Parlance: Strategic Talking in Beauty Vlogs” (Chapter 1) by Sophie Bishop highlights ethical dilemmas for users creating content, working toward visibility, and dealing with cultural bias as they work to optimize their videos. The chapter explores the experience and exposure of beauty vloggers in the UK. Bishop offers examples of how cultural bias becomes a barrier as video captioning, search algorithms, and other site functions dismiss and bury the content of those users with regional accents.

“Facebook and Unintentional Celebrification” (Chapter 2) by Angela M. Cirucci examines how young middle-class people in the United States eventually learn to engage in self-branding because social media platforms compel personal branding by design. Users may unknowingly align with corporation-like mission statements, ignore multiple, dynamic selves, and discard their right to anonymity as participation as the typical competition of visibility becomes more and more expected over time.

“musical.ly and Microcelebrity Among Girls” (Chapter 3) by Burcu Şimşek, Crystal Abidin, and Megan Lindsay Brown investigates the dynamics of teenage girls’ musical.ly productions in relation to microcelebrity inspirations and (non-) aspirations in Turkey. Using a mixed methods approach, the analysis focuses on the flow of the musical.ly app as evidenced through the walk-through method, and young girls’ engagements with the platform as solicited through personal observations and two small focus group discussions.

“Being ‘Red’ on the Internet: The Craft of Popularity on Chinese Social Media Platforms” (Chapter 4) by Ge Zhang and Gabriele de Seta studies the history of “*wanghong*” in China, framing online celebrity through the peculiar lexical

domain of a grassroots popularity. Drawing on interviews with *wanghong* and discussions with their audiences, the chapter offers an up-to-date portrayal of the various forms of *wanghong* on Chinese social media platforms, illustrating how popularity is crafted along with narratives of professionalism and economic aspirations in the sociotechnical contexts of contemporary China.

Section Two: Labor

The second section of the book highlights the forms of labor involved in studying, assessing, becoming, and understanding forms of microcelebrity practices that are entangled with commerce. Chapters 5 and 6 document a trajectory of effort and strategies in studying and becoming Influencers, and Chapters 7 and 8 delve into forms of commercial internet celebrity that if accounting for cultural histories, cannot otherwise be conceptualized as microcelebrity or Influencers. These chapters question the assumption of Anglo-centric origins of microcelebrity culture, further perpetuating the exclusive prominence of social media platforms arising from Silicon Valley. The case studies provide rich examples of the ways in which an internet celebrity may be widely discussed as effortless or coincidental, when they are in earnest systematic practices and routines of labor and work.

“Origin Stories: An Ethnographic Account of Researching Microcelebrity” (Chapter 5) by Crystal Abidin reflexively catalogs one anthropologist’s research trajectory on microcelebrity cultures in Singapore and East Asia between 2009 and 2018. The chapter draws on theoretical trajectories, material cultures, and oral histories of microcelebrity phenomena to demonstrate how microcelebrity is an evolving concept in need of further theorization.

“Fame Labor: A Critical Autoethnography of Australian Digital Influencers” (Chapter 6) by Jonathan Mavroudis uses critical autoethnography to explore a media scholar’s own experiences as a male microcelebrity from Australia. Mavroudis’ position granted him insider access to a cohort of other male microcelebrities. The study gives an intimate account of the pressures, responsibilities, and benefits as an individual strives to maintain the status.

“Net Idols and Beauty Bloggers’ Negotiations of Race, Commerce, and Cultural Customs: Emergent Microcelebrity Genres in Thailand” (Chapter 7) by Vimviriya (Vim) Limkangvanmongkol and Crystal Abidin review the conceptual history of net idols and a subset of influencers known as “beauty bloggers” in Thailand. Drawing on press reports, popular media, social media posts, and personal interviews, the chapter discusses a Thai history of localized practices and labor enacted by microcelebrity aspirants.

“Catarina, a Virgin for Auction: Microcelebrity in Brazilian Media” (Chapter 8) by Lígia Lana demonstrates how an orchestration of an online spectacle can be parlayed most effectively when an individual seizes a cultural moment. The chapter studies the auction of Brazilian Catarina Migliorini’s virginity in 2012, as part of Australian filmmaker Justin Sisely’s project “*Virgins Wanted*,” in which the coherent labor of mainstream media appearances and engagement with fans online led to good momentum of (inter)national internet fame.

Section Three: Activism

The final section of the book examines marginal and minority microcelebrities who leveraged their platform to weigh in on social issues. Specifically, Chapter 9 weighs in on the ethical dilemmas of online activism as free labor and exploitation for users that maintain moderate audiences, Chapter 10 assesses how popular activism as channeled through a microcelebrity persona online can lead to far-reaching consequence in the flesh, and Chapter 11 examines how activism through subversive comedy on social media can maximize impact by working with a network of actors online and in traditional media outlets. Collectively, the chapters focus on how microcelebrity as a practice can lend itself to activism and, while imperfect, online platforms can provide opportunity to share transgressive ideas.

“The Rise of Belle from Tumblr” (Chapter 9) by Megan Lindsay Brown and Hanna Phifer (Belle) traces the story of Black American Hanna Phifer and how she embraced her status as “Tumblr Famous.” The chapter discusses how Belle’s prolific blog, “Belle from Tumblr”, demonstrates an astute ability to read an audience and embody a persona that feels intimate while disseminating feminist ideas and challenging oppressive institutions, people, and ideas.

“Performing as a Transgressive Authentic Microcelebrity: The Qandeel Baloch Case” (Chapter 10) by Fatima Aziz examines the concept of authenticity in relation to audience connection through the biography of Pakistani microcelebrity, Qandeel Baloch. By explaining how Pakistani broadcast celebrity performances continue to be evaluated by religious and moral standards, this analysis finds how a transgressive performance reconceptualized ideas around authenticity when situated in a highly religious and patriarchal space.

Finally, “It’s Just a Joke! The Payoffs and Perils of Microcelebrity in India” (Chapter 11) by Rukmini Pande sheds light on the complex political and ideological landscape in India by studying comedy group ALB who are popular on Facebook. Through the standard fare of YouTube mischief to explicitly socially provocative skits, the group produces content for viewers to rethink hot button issues like gay rights and women’s rights via the vehicle of activism through entertainment.

Suggested Reading Route

We hope that this text can be used by expert scholars, postgraduates, and undergraduate students alike. Given the collection’s in-depth theory, interdisciplinary methodologies, and diverse case studies, the book will be useful to scholars of microcelebrity studies, celebrity studies, social media studies, digital labor, creative industries, and internet culture more generally. The authors draw on a range of academic fields and theories from cultural studies, media studies, communications, celebrity studies, persona studies, feminist theory, and branding and marketing. Additionally, given the short chapters written in an accessible manner, the text is ideal for large introductory courses and has the potential to be adopted as a key text in introduction to celebrity studies, introduction to communications, introduction to media studies, social media and digital labor, and branding and marketing.

Individual case studies could be assigned as a reading, to supplement topic material. The book's collection of diverse case studies from around the globe will also be of interest to several academic disciplines. Schools of business and marketing may take specific interest in the Influencer and microcelebrity industry as academic expertise, market research, and whitepapers. In our various fieldwork, many authors have been consulting for and conversing with Influencer and advertising agencies. Selections on activism may speak to sociology, anthropology, and justice studies departments. We envision that Influencers and microcelebrities themselves will also take interest in one of the first scholarly research texts that considers their labor seriously, amid a recent surge of self-authored "how to" and self-help books authored by Influencers and microcelebrities themselves.

Given the strong international following of Influencers and the success of microcelebrity-authored books, we hope that our text will also be well received by followers, fans, and the general population of internet users who are curious about the recent mainstream popularity of Influencers and microcelebrities.

In addition to chapters nestled under the sections on "norms," "labor," and "activism," we provide below a few suggested routes to reading the text for your consideration:

Read by Methodology

Content analysis (Chapters 1, 7, 11), Media archives (Chapters 8, 10), Surveys (Chapter 2), Focus groups (Chapter 3), Interviews (Chapters 6, 9), Platform history and Walkthrough method (Chapters 3, 4), Autoethnography (Chapter 6), and Participant observation (Chapter 5).

Read by Discipline

Anthropology (Chapters 4, 5), Sociology (Chapter 6), Business and Marketing (Chapter 7), Cultural Studies (Chapter 8), Feminist Linguistics (Chapter 3), Media and Communications (Chapters 1, 2, 11), Social Work (Chapter 9), and Visual Studies (Chapter 10).

Read by Platform

Blogs and blogshops (Chapter 5), broadcast media (Chapters 8, 10), bulletin boards and forums (Chapter 4), Facebook (Chapters 2, 6, 11), Instagram (Chapters 6, 7), musical.ly (Chapter 3), Tumblr (Chapter 9), and YouTube (Chapter 1).

Read by Celebrity Type

Ordinary users (Chapters 2, 3, 8, 9), Content creators (Chapter 11), Entrepreneurs and Influencers (Chapters 1, 4, 5, 7), Traditional entertainment industry workers (Chapter 10), and Researchers (Chapter 6).

Read by Culturally Specific Internet Celebrity Phenomena

“Blogshop” owners and models (Chapter 5), “net idols” (Chapter 7), and “*wan-g hong*” (Chapter 4).

Read by Geographical Region

China (Chapter 4), Singapore (Chapter 5), Thailand (Chapter 7); India (Chapter 11), Pakistan (Chapter 10); Turkey (Chapter 3); Brazil (Chapter 8); Australia (Chapter 6), the UK (Chapter 1), and the US (Chapter 2, 9).

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