

# INTERNET CELEBRITY

Understanding Fame  
Online

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*Graeme Turner,*  
University of Queensland

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# INTERNET CELEBRITY

## Understanding Fame Online

BY

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United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India  
Malaysia – China

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Carissa:

For growing up with me on the internet,  
And growing old with me in my heart.

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I wrote this text in the months during which I was a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Media Management and Transformation Centre (MMTC) at Jönköping University, and Adjunct

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## PREFACE

It has been ten years since the first scholarly book on celebrity on the internet was published. Global studies scholar Theresa Senft's *Camgirls* (2008) was a groundbreaking ethnography that traced the practices of young American women who acquired internet fame by broadcasting their personal lives via webcams in their bedrooms. Since then, the structure, nature, and culture of internet celebrity has evolved drastically around the world.

As digital technology has advanced, and social media platforms have instituted new forms of interpersonal communication, internet fame appears to have become increasingly accessible and practiced by or bestowed upon ordinary people from all walks of life. In tandem with this, developments among traditional celebrities and public figures, such as the proliferation of traditional Hollywood-esque celebrities turning to social media to communicate with fans, or politicians taking to social media to cultivate a willing citizenry, also evidence the enduring importance of social media as a mainstream communication tool. Further, amidst the rush for legacy media to move into digital estates to wrestle against their dwindling print media readership, and the rise of the gig economy in which young people are turning to web-based publishing and self-curated content for an income, newer forms of internet celebrity are entangling with and innovating away from older media formats.

In response, this book presents an updated, bird's-eye view of what contemporary internet celebrity and fame online look like. Case studies survey how internet fame is facilitated by the most popular English-language social media platforms today, such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Tumblr, Twitter, and YouTube. However, given that much of the academic research on celebrity culture has thus far been focused on the Global North, and drawing on my research focus on East Asian internet cultures, the case studies discussed were intentionally sampled to include key examples from China, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan, alongside examples from Australia, England, Sweden, and the USA.

A brief note on terminology: While there exists decades of research into the evolution of media industries, from the earliest days of broadcast radio and television, to cross-media formats such as newspapers and print magazines, to contemporary digital formats such as websites and social media, throughout this book I use “traditional media” as a shorthand for these legacy media formats that are generally highly institutionalized, gatekept, hierarchical, and authoritative in the production and circulation of content, as opposed to the more accessible, reciprocal, interactive, open, and democratic uses of “social media.”

The accessible language and diverse array of case studies in this book cater to a variety of readers. Students and scholars will find the review of current literature and concepts useful; keen followers of the Influencer scene and people who work in the industry will enjoy the spread of key issues highlighted for discussion; and casual readers who might just like to learn a bit more about internet celebrity will understand how this culture has impacted our contemporary society.

It is my hope that everyone who picks up this book will acquire a valuable insight into internet celebrity culture, beyond the populist claim that these are merely frivolous,

vain, or meaningless practices on the internet. Indeed, one of my key scholarly ethics is the belief in “subversive frivolity,” wherein practices or objects that are usually brushed off or discarded as marginal, inconsequential, and unproductive hold generative power that is underestimated and under-visualized because they thrive just under the radar.

In fact, while the notions of “internet” and “celebrity” may immediately bring to mind visualizations of being loud and proud, the impacts of internet celebrity culture are often counterintuitively taking root deeply, slowly but surely, and in quiet confidence, in all aspects of society such as economics, legality, culture, and social issues. As cultures of internet celebrity continue to bloom around the world, the ideas and frameworks in this book will provide provocations and insights for understanding how fame is generated, circulated, sustained, consumed, or rejected on the internet on a global scale.

Finally, a humble request: If you have enjoyed this book, I would love to hear from you. It is always an anxious exercise putting ideas into words, words onto paper, and paper into book form for the world to see. It would be a romantic experiment to watch this little book roam across places akin to the folklore of the traveling garden gnome, so please allow me to trace this journey through digital postcards, i.e. photographs of this text “in the wild.” Are you a curious passerby reading it from the comfort of a cosy couch? Are you a student reading it for a class? Are you an internet celebrity reading it between social media updates? Send me photographs from where you are reading this book (plus points for selfies); drop me a message about what you felt (I’m not difficult to locate on the internet); and enchant me with stories about your favorite internet celebrities and artifacts from your part of the world (links!) – I would love to learn more

about the quirky rabbit hole of internet celebrity from your part of the internet.

Alternatively, feel free to drop me falling penguin GIFs, Pusheen stickers, or videos of babies tasting lemons for the first time, now that you know where I live on the internet.

Yours,  
Crystal Abidin aka wishcrys.

## WHAT IS AN INTERNET CELEBRITY ANYWAY?

In the 2010s, dominant press coverage and conversations around internet celebrity have focused on just one particular type of celebrity: The Influencer. Influencers are the epitome of internet celebrities, given that they make a living from being celebrities native to and on the internet. Several news reports have been celebrating the success and promise of young Influencers, such as Australian Troye Sivan whose home videos on YouTube eventually grew into a singing contract with EMI Australia, an acting career in Hollywood, and being named by *Time Magazine* as one of the world's 25 most influential teenagers of 2014. Still other reports focus on the shortcomings and scandals of the relatively new Influencer industry, such as when British YouTuber Zoe Sugg, who broke records for being the fastest selling debut novelist, shifting over 78,000 copies in a week in 2014, was exposed for having used a ghostwriter. But internet celebrity is a far broader concept with a much longer history than that of Influencers.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERNET CELEBRITY

There are many theoretical and vernacular accounts of the history of internet fame. But how internet celebrity has come to emerge in various parts of the world varies, depending on the cultural norms of the people, the social practices around media devices and personalities, and the structure of technological capabilities that mediate a population's access to content. While every effort has been made to consider the diverse cultural variety of internet celebrity around the globe, through in-depth case studies throughout the book, this section focuses on a brief history of internet celebrity that happens to be primarily Anglocentric. This is a result of key scholarship in celebrity studies having been published in the English language and focused on media formats that have been popularized in North America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. As such, the conversation does not comprehensively cover the various cultural and platformed histories of internet celebrities.

For instance, the system of celebrity media in Japan distinguishes “mainstream celebrities” in the traditional media industries, such as actors, musicians, and models, from “idols” who are systemically manufactured to serve as cute icons and role models, and from “*tarento*” (タレント) who are recurring personalities on various media and are literally “famous for being famous” without having any other attributes of the entertainment industry. This means that the broad English translation of “internet celebrity” cannot accurately account for the historical, structural, and cultural nuances of distinct types of celebrity in Japan alone. In another instance, in China the vernacular term for internet celebrities is “*wanghong*” (网红), which translates to “red on the internet” with the color red signifying popularity, and broadly refers to highly prolific internet users who are effective conduits for



channeling online retail businesses or social media advertising. In other words, these users are assigned celebrity status not for any variety of demonstrable talent, but for their specific ability to attract attention on the internet within the vast ecology of Chinese users. Unlike the connotations of being a “content creator” in the Anglocentric parts of the world, a *wanghong* is premised on the acute ability to convert internet viewer traffic to money, relying less on content production than the ability to hold an audience’s attention visually. This means that even where the brushstrokes of internet celebrity translations may heed to some cultural specificities, the benchmark and characteristics of being an internet celebrity can also vary drastically across ecologies. As such, given that it is impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of the *cultural* and *structural* histories of internet celebrity around the world, this section will instead focus on a *theoretical* history of internet celebrity. Giving a brief overview of some of the most important scholarship on celebrity culture, we will go through key ideas that have informed the emergence of celebrities in the age of the internet.

### Traditional Celebrities

For most people, the mere mention of the word “celebrity” invokes a visual image of a glamorous Hollywood actor, probably strutting down the red carpet at award ceremonies. Or perhaps you imagine a pop singer performing live on stage to thousands of enthusiastic fans raving in a mosh pit. For others, celebrities can also be internationally known public figures who are prolific for their social status, such as the former President of the USA Barack Obama. Regardless, in the traditional or legacy media industries of cinema, television, radio, music, and print, we have tended to associate the idea

of celebrity to an achievement, talent, or position. But being a celebrity in the sense of having fame or being well known is not always tied to these rational and tangible sources.

Research by eminent celebrity studies scholar Graeme Turner<sup>1</sup> shows us that even if some celebrities are first parachuted into the limelight through their achievements, talents, or positions, many of them continue to attract public attention for durations way past the initial instigation, even if they do not continue to commit to or demonstrate their initial sources of fame. This occurs, for instance, when the media starts to report on the private lives of cinema and television actors, musicians, or politicians, even if these affairs are not directly connected to the skills or positions that first made them publicly famous.<sup>2</sup> Considering this, Turner<sup>3</sup> argues that when the public begins to take an interest in a person for their personal lives and identities per se, rather than for what they have done, they are no longer merely public figures but have become bona fide celebrities with public personae. This tells us that although celebrity is traditionally thought of as an innate quality gifted to extraordinary people, contemporary celebrity culture has shifted to focus on people and things that are usually constructed, can be transient, are usually sensational, and often visually based, in tandem with tabloid culture. In other words, the quality of celebrity does not naturally attach to or arise from specific people but is constructed through a process.<sup>4</sup>

The construction of celebrity is supported by intentional media coverage on a person, that turns them into a commodity, where the public is massaged to take interest in them continually. Cultural studies scholars like Chris Rojek<sup>5</sup> have also theorized about celebrity and fame as products of the mass media that specifically highlight a person, attribute special qualities to them, and frame them as being worthy of our attention. Scholars who have studied the industry of

creating celebrities have found that it is a networked business comprising entertainment, communications, publicity, representation, appearance, coaching, and endorsement specialists,<sup>6</sup> and it is facilitated with specialized jobs such as managers, agents, publicists, promoters, and magazine editors.<sup>7</sup>

### Ordinary People as Celebrities

Since celebrities can be groomed by experts in the traditional media industry, logically speaking, any ordinary, everyday person can be groomed into celebritydom irrespective of whether they have extraordinary achievements, talented skills, or prominent positions in society. As media formats evolved and television genres diversified, ordinary people were increasingly attaining flash fame as guests on talk shows. Specifically, confessional formats like *The Jerry Springer Show* and intervention formats like *Dr. Phil*, where ordinary people are thrust into the spotlight to have their private lives and personal issues turned into public spectacles and commercial subjects, saw the proliferation of fame being attached to the “lived experience of ‘the ordinary’”<sup>8</sup>, which Turner terms the “demotic turn.”

However, what is an “ordinary” life anyway? Sociologist of popular culture Laura Grindstaff<sup>9</sup> contends that “ordinary” does not signpost content as being “average,” “typical,” or “representative of the population in general,” but rather merely conveys that they are not experts or celebrities and are famous for assorted reasons. This includes having first-hand experience of a significant incident or being willing to divulge something attention-worthy from their private lives. Furthermore, as ordinary people are less filtered and orchestrated than traditional celebrities who have been trained

in deportment and impression management, it is expected that ordinary people on television are more likely to display intense human emotions in response to specific incidents. This is a moment that Grindstaff<sup>10</sup> terms “the money shot.” These highly lifelike displays of emotions range across the spectrum, from happiness and grief to anger and regret, and the audience’s ability to identify with these emotions on-screen contributes to feelings that ordinary celebrities are more real and authentic than traditional celebrities.

However, just because there has been an increasing presence of ordinary lives on display does not mean that any ordinary person can be famous for merely publicizing their everyday lives. Fame only attaches to particular forms of everyday life that captivate an audience. Thus, despite the demotic turn, the traditional celebrity industry is not necessarily more democratic because not everyone has an equal opportunity to attain fame<sup>11</sup>. Ultimately, the television industry, like all media industries, relies on public interest and viewership for sustainability, and what attracts attention is entertainment value. In the demotic turn, seemingly authentic and dedicated representations of everyday life “as lived” are but a calculated production of entertainment in the guise of democratic access, and celebrity in the traditional media industries remains hierarchical, exclusive, and gatekept.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, are there any benefits to the rise of ordinary people and their lives being broadcast on traditional media formats as new forms of celebrity? Scholars argue that there may be several useful outcomes. Broadcasting and celebritizing ordinary lives in traditional media allow viewers to learn and critically assess what is real and what is constructed in the media.<sup>13</sup> It can teach viewers to self-brand<sup>14</sup> and can persuade viewers to practice more reflection and empathy by identifying with other people’s stories in a practice that visual media

scholar Craig Batty<sup>15</sup> has called “emotioneer.” However, despite these apparent benefits, putting ordinary people and their lives on display to reap commercial profits for television stations in exchange for short-lived fame is not a fair game. Such commodification of private lives disproportionately benefits producers and traditional media.

### Reality TV Celebrities

As ordinary people and their ordinary lives become increasingly proliferated and lucrative in the traditional media industry, the genre that profits the most from this demotic turn is reality TV. Media scholar Annette Hill<sup>16</sup> writes that reality TV is a form of “popular factual television” where real people perform in (at least) partially staged settings. However, viewers are not passively absorbing and accepting reality TV content just because of its promise of legitimacy derived from having ordinary people as actors. Instead, they hold the expectation that reality TV programming involves a degree of dramatization, sensationalism, and editing of actual experiences, in exchange for being more entertaining. In other words, Hill argues that viewers engage in different forms of viewing strategies to gauge the authenticity of these narratives against their contextual knowledge that popular factual television is particularly performative. Some audiences are more critical toward the truth claims of such programs, while others rely on the belief that all artifice will eventually be exposed.

But what is so special about the format of reality television? Will reality cinema bear the same fruits and expectations? Media scholars Laurie Ouellette and James Hay<sup>17</sup> argue that as a medium, television is “more in sync with the rhythms of everyday life than other media,” especially since

it is a constantly accessible and consistent mode of entertainment that is available for both “casual observation” and “appointment viewing.” As such, television has more power to normalize some social practices and identities as being more accessible, common, and traditional. It is for this reason that the products and services embedded into reality TV programs, especially those of the body makeover genre, tend to be more persuasive forms of advertising for the viewer, since they blur the boundaries between what is merely entertaining content and what is a commercial message.

### Celebrity–Audience Relations

In the earlier sections, we learnt that celebrities do not exist as a matter of fact but are constructed through strategic practices, often with the help of expertise from the traditional media industry. We also learnt that both traditional celebrities and ordinary celebrities on talk shows and reality TV have some sort of captivating power that secures the attention and interest of an audience, at least for a period of time. Clearly, there are relationships being fostered between celebrities and their audiences.

One of the most studied relationships between celebrities and their audiences is that of “parasocial relations,” a concept cultivated by psychologists Donald Horton and R.Richard Wohl<sup>18</sup> to describe how popular characters on television and radio can instigate the development of one-sided interpersonal relationships with individual members of their audience based on an illusion of intimacy. In the early days of mass media formats, pre-internet and pre-social media, these feelings of intimacy were fostered through television and radio hosts’ informal conversational styles of casualness and responsive small talk, the projection of supporting cast

members as close friends, mingling with the audience, and the use of technical devices such as close-ups or voice control to appear more friendly, close, and intimate with audiences. The result of such broadcasts is that the audience accumulates extensive knowledge of the television or radio personality, feels as if they are intimate friends, and continues to invest in following their media productions.

Yet the audience never actually experiences any reciprocity from the hosts, who know nothing of their idiosyncrasies. In other words, communication and content only flow from the traditional media hosts to their audience, and there is little opportunity for the latter to respond or personally interact with their hosts across the communication barrier. To understand these mediated forms of intimacy better, Rojek<sup>19</sup> differentiates between “first order intimacy” where feelings of closeness are cultivated through direct meetings and first-hand experiences, and “second order intimacy” where feelings of closeness are artificially stimulated by techniques of the mass media. However, these celebrity–audience relations have changed drastically in the age of digital media.

### DIY Celebrity

In tandem with the increasing use of digital technology and social media platforms as sites for circulating personal content, users—whether celebrities, celebrity-wannabes, or audiences—were able to bypass typical corporate layers and structures previously pertinent to manufacturing fame and celebrity. The ability to produce and post “homemade content,” so to speak, and the likelihood of this content circulating widely on the internet, independent of the traditional media industries ushered in a new form of ordinary person celebrity that Turner<sup>20</sup> calls the “DIY celebrity.” With the new

democratizing tools of digital media, celebrity aspirants could earn public attention by publicizing themselves to various interest communities. The DIY celebrity template was comprehensible to and approachable for everyday users with little technical knowledge about attaining fame, because all that they had to do was emulate traditional modes of celebrity production in social media-based adaptations.

Focusing specifically on this new ability for internet users to self-brand and learn to promote themselves to a public, new media scholar P. David Marshall<sup>21</sup> identifies a transition from “representational” to “presentational” media and culture. Before the age of digital media and self-curated content, users could only hope to have their identities and cultures characterized by traditional media actors in broadcast media as “representations.” In the age of digital media and DIY content, users are now able to broadcast, control, and negotiate how they would like their identities and cultures to be perceived as intentional “presentations” of the self.

As self-presentation on digital media became more accessible, professor of television and digital culture James Bennett<sup>22</sup> observed that such DIY celebrities and aspirants increasingly pursued fame that more resembled the old-school, traditional media models of celebrity, based on achievements, skills, or positions as discussed earlier. The chief implication of this is that despite the new possibilities and promises of emerging types of celebrity in the age of digital media, many DIY celebrities still tended to borrow from the practices of traditional entertainment industries.<sup>23</sup> As a result, several digital media scholars—such as Jean Burgess and Joshua Green who studied early YouTube culture,<sup>24</sup> and Alice Marwick and danah boyd who studied celebrity culture on Twitter<sup>25</sup>—have argued that ordinary people’s success at attaining fame and celebrity still becomes subject to the benchmarks and logics



of traditional media. In the earliest days of Web 2.0, blogs were the primary platform on which DIY celebrities on the internet could fashion themselves. However, when webcams became popular for everyday use in the late 1990s, the era of “camgirls” that mirrored reality TV celebrities ushered in a new form of celebrity.

### Microcelebrity

One of the earliest extended academic studies of bedroom webcamming behavior was conducted by global studies scholar Theresa Senft,<sup>26</sup> who investigated a generation of camgirls and their audiences between 2000 and 2004. These camgirls were knowingly broadcasting themselves to the public on the internet while attempting to accumulate fame. Senft describes this form of celebrity pursuit as “micro-celebrity,” where users employ digital media technologies and platforms to garner popularity by performing on the internet.<sup>27</sup> Their main strategies include cultivating a public image of themselves as a brand and interacting with viewers through emotional labor.<sup>28</sup>

Using camgirls as a vehicle for understanding this new form of celebrity, Senft argued that microcelebrities on the internet were unlike celebrities in the traditional entertainment industries on several counts<sup>29</sup>—where traditional celebrities practice a sense of separation and distance from their audiences, microcelebrities have their popularity premised on feelings of connection and interactive responsiveness with their audiences; where traditional celebrities may be known for their performance craft and skills, microcelebrities are expected to display themselves unedited as “real” people with “real” issues; and where traditional celebrities may have extensive fame among a large global audience, microcelebrities

exercise a popularity that while narrower in breadth is far deeper. Further, microcelebrities hold a stronger obligation to their audiences than traditional celebrities, as the fame of the former is co-constructed through a community of interested viewers on the internet rather than by the mere mechanisms of the traditional entertainment industry.

While Senft introduced the concept of microcelebrity through camgirls who videocammed as a hobby, the theory of microcelebrity was further developed through a second major study conducted by communication scholar Alice Marwick<sup>30</sup> who studied San Francisco tech industry workers using social media as a networking tool in the early 2000s. Marwick argues that for microcelebrity to be successfully enacted, performers must curate a persona that continuously feels authentic, interactive, and celebrity-like regardless of the size or state of one's audience.<sup>31</sup> This perpetual livestream of the branded self requires the cultivation of a mindset that all friends and followers on the internet are prospective audiences and fans,<sup>32</sup> which Marwick asserts, drawing upon the work by Rojek, can result in two forms of microcelebrity. Where "ascribed" microcelebrities must constantly posit themselves as being of a higher status than their followers to garner celebrity treatment,<sup>33</sup> "achieved" microcelebrities build their fame by selectively revealing confidential information to viewers to cultivate feelings of intimacy with them.<sup>34</sup>

Studies in microcelebrity have since expanded across various demographics of internet users. For instance, microcelebrity has been theorized as labor,<sup>35,36,37</sup> branding,<sup>38</sup> and linguistic practice.<sup>39</sup> It has been practiced among academics,<sup>40</sup> activists,<sup>41</sup> and professional gamers and artists,<sup>42</sup> and in specific cultural locales outside of the dominant Anglocentric, English-speaking, Global North platforms such as China<sup>43,44</sup> and Indonesia.<sup>45</sup> The ways that researchers have been thinking

about microcelebrity have also been progressing. Instead of focusing only on specific practices or groups of people, more studies are looking at community norms among specific types of microcelebrities,<sup>46</sup> whether each social media platform tends to promote its own set of preferred practices among users,<sup>47</sup> and how the value of celebrity can be dispersed across different platforms.<sup>48</sup>

However, in the ten years since microcelebrity studies were first launched, social media platforms, internet norms, and the sociocultural uses and impacts of generating celebrity on the internet have developed rapidly. In the U.S., microcelebrities may have begun as hobbyists<sup>49</sup> and adapted into networkers with professional businesses.<sup>50</sup> In other parts of the world, like Singapore, they began as home-based fashion entrepreneurs through a makeshift online sales format known as “blogshops”.<sup>51</sup> But today, being a microcelebrity has become a full-time vocational job for some as Influencers (see Chapter 4). Moreover, this era of the most commercialized form of microcelebrity has ushered in a variety of internet celebrity innovations. For instance, as an anthropologist, I have studied how Influencers who were the earliest adopters of social media regularly subvert the intended uses of apps like Instagram by strategizing their content into a commercial endeavor,<sup>52, 53</sup> often at the expense of the free labor offered by their loyal followers.<sup>54</sup> Further, as the earliest cohorts of Influencers progress in their lives to become romantic partners and parents, many of them are also grooming and growing (literally) their children into second-generation microcelebrities known as “micro-microcelebrities”,<sup>55</sup> while other ordinary families are becoming internet celebrities by branding themselves as “family Influencers”.<sup>56</sup> These structural shifts in microcelebrity thus warrant a new theorizing for a broader, more comprehensive theory of internet celebrity.

## Internet celebrity

From fashion Instagrammers in Australia, YouTube gamers in Sweden, and beauty bloggers in the UK, to *mukbang* eaters in South Korea, *zhibowanghong* in China, and parody Tweeters in India, the face of internet celebrity is rapidly diversifying and evolving. Different forms of internet celebrity have emerged in the last decade, such as memes, transient virality, trending social media posts, accidental celebrity from controversy and bad publicity, and intentional self-branded social media influencers. Digital culture on social media, and celebrity culture on traditional media are also weaving into each other, such that breakout stars from one-hit viral videos can parlay their transient fame into a full-time career, while ailing legacy media formats learn to capitalize upon vernacular participatory cultures to sustain their businesses. But what has changed between the era of microcelebrity and the current climate of internet celebrity?

With a basic knowledge of how social media platforms work, anyone has the potential to become a microcelebrity, but not everyone may successfully groom their microcelebrity into a vocation like Influencers, or on the scale of internet celebrities. As the in-depth case studies in the later chapters will evidence, internet celebrities can be assessed based on six measures:

- (1) Whereas the *scale* of microcelebrities used to be small and positioned in opposition to traditional celebrities of the entertainment industry, today it is not uncommon for internet celebrities to rival or surpass traditional celebrities in terms of global popularity or reach;
- (2) Whereas the *platform* of microcelebrities used to be confined to internet technologies such as webcams, or social media such as Twitter, internet celebrities are increasingly crossing between various estates on social

and traditional media platforms to maintain their following<sup>57</sup>;

- (3) Whereas the *audiences* of microcelebrities used to be a niche of dedicated internet users, internet users are building audiences on a global scale made up of loyal followers, casual viewers, and chance watchers alike with the help of social media algorithms and traditional media mechanisms that intentionally amplify some forms of internet celebrity (see Chapter 3);
- (4) Whereas the *nature* of microcelebrities used to be premised as a hobby or a complementary networking tool to support a formal business endeavor, many internet celebrities are presently pursuing fame professionally as a vocation;
- (5) Whereas the *practice* of microcelebrity used to depend largely on interactive intimacies and selective disclosure of privacy, internet celebrities are fronting both “anchor” thematic content in which they demonstrate their talents and skills, and “filler” emotional content in which they display snippets of everyday life to maintain a sense of ordinariness<sup>58</sup>; and
- (6) Whereas the *impact* of microcelebrities used to be confined to the bedroom for identity-making or in the locale of an office for networking purposes, internet celebrities are making waves from blogsites in bedrooms to broadcasts on traditional media, and even setting up sizable businesses where they wield influence in boardrooms.

Now that we have established the architecture of internet celebrity and the extent of their fame, we can turn to establish what an internet celebrity really is. Internet celebrity refers to all media formats (people, products, icons, figures, etc.) that attain prominence and popularity native to the internet, although the

**Table 1.1. Structural differences between microcelebrity and internet celebrity**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Microcelebrity</b>	<b>Internet celebrity</b>
<b>Scale</b>	Opposing traditional media	Exceeding traditional media
<b>Platform</b>	Internet, social media	Multi-platform, social and traditional media
<b>Audience Nature</b>	Niche, online Hobby, networking	Global, online and offline By chance, hobby, networking, vocation
<b>Practice</b>	Disclosure	Anchor talents/skills, filler everyday life
<b>Impact</b>	Bedrooms	Boardrooms

spillover effects and afterlives may include cross-border flows outside of the internet. Internet celebrities are mainly known for their high visibility, whether this be attributed to fame or infamy, positive or negative attention, talent and skill or otherwise, and whether it be sustained or transient, intentional or by happenstance, monetized or not. More crucially, internet celebrity has to be received, watched, and acknowledged by an audience—someone who expends great effort to put out quality content on the internet but is not watched and validated by anyone will not become an internet celebrity. As such, the success and extent of an internet celebrity's high visibility can vary depending on the platforms they use and the cultural ideologies and tastes of their intended audience.

What about traditional celebrities on the internet?

As internet celebrities accumulate extensive fame across social and traditional media platforms, and as the use of social media becomes more mainstream among bona fide celebrities from the traditional entertainment industries, it is

sometimes difficult to distinguish between internet(-native) celebrities and (traditional) celebrities on the internet. After all, traditional celebrities are increasingly duplicating their content from traditional media to social media to engage with a wider (and often younger) audience.

British talk show host James Corden runs a popular segment on television in which he carools and sings with notable musicians.<sup>59</sup> These clips are then uploaded onto YouTube, where his videos often go viral. Armenian-American reality TV family, the Kardashian-Jenners, profit from social media through sponsored advertisements; they use the internet to promote their cosmetic and fashion brands and selectively post self-branded content to catch their followers' attention in a feedback loop that channels viewership back to their traditional media estates.<sup>60</sup> Black American Hollywood actress Chrissy Teigen is prolific for live-tweeting about her personal life and marriage to singer-songwriter John Legend, breaking down the long-established boundaries and distance between fans and traditional celebrities, and even calling upon social media followers for highly documented personal favors.<sup>61</sup> But public figures outside the entertainment industry are doing it too. Singaporean Member of Parliament Baey Yam Keng has been branded by the press as a "selfie king" for using his highly curated Instagram selfies to engage with his younger populace,<sup>62</sup> and French presidential candidates in the 2017 elections have used Snapchat and its comedic filters to portray a lighter side of their public personae while campaigning.<sup>63</sup>

Although these traditional celebrities and public figures are adopting social media strategies originally generated by internet celebrities to reach a wider audience, we are reminded by scholars like Marwick<sup>64</sup> that the self-preservation strategies and defensive structures at the disposal of the former are not always available to the latter, and by scholars like Senft<sup>65</sup> that internet fame that was co-constructed with a watchful

audience remains dependent and vulnerable to their preferences. Furthermore, where traditional celebrities and public figures generally acquire fame for their achievements, talents, or positions, and where their private lives are subject to the shadow economy of tabloid media, internet celebrities who choose to hone their public fame are continually required to indulge in greater disclosures of the self to maintain follower interest as the market becomes saturated.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we reviewed a theoretical history of internet celebrities, tracing how they have evolved from older celebrity formats, including traditional celebrities, ordinary people as celebrities, reality TV celebrities, celebrity–audience relations, DIY celebrities, and microcelebrities. We also discussed how traditional celebrities are increasingly borrowing from the strategies of internet celebrities in their self-branding on social media. In the next chapter, we transit from theoretical histories to performative cultures of internet celebrity, focusing on their four main qualities in relation to forms of capital and value.