

From ordinary teenager to superstar:

The construction of a micro-celebrity status
using the affordances of social media platforms



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Abstract

The changing technological advances made by contemporary social media platforms have led to a situation where, in theory, everyone can become famous. This thesis explores the role of the affordances of social media platforms and the requirements for achieving such a do-it-yourself celebrity status, also known as micro-celebrity. First, it focuses on the concept of micro-celebrity; the course where individuals market themselves by adopting self-consciously constructed personas, like brands or celebrities, when presenting themselves to an audience or fan base. The analysis focuses on the affordances of the platforms Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram and the notion of micro-celebrity as illustrated by three micro-celebrities: Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray. The relationships between the technical affordances of three social media platforms and the use of self-representation techniques employed in the pursuit of micro-celebrity, viewed from a political economy perspective, are the central focus of this research. The analysis shows that both the platforms and micro-celebrities intelligently exploit the possibilities afford by each other in order to increase their (economic) capital.

Keywords: Micro-celebrity, affordances, social media, political economy

Image on the first page: Loren Gray (2017)

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1. Introduction

Andy Warhol once claimed “in the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes,” which he later changed to “in the future, everyone will be famous *in* fifteen minutes.” Later, musician and blogger Momus observed that “in the future, we will all be famous to fifteen *people*” (1991). People have always had the desire to be famous (Allen 2011, 150), but fame has traditionally only been destined for those with an extraordinary talent. This, however, has changed over the last two decades (Marwick 2015). The era where everyone can be famous in fifteen minutes is here, and it is not only for 15 minutes or to 15 people. Justin Bieber and Shawn Mendes, now well-respected artists, started their careers by recording songs in their bedrooms and uploading them to YouTube and Vine (Martins 2016). These new opportunities for the pursuit of fame have consequences for our online self-representation and, according to media theorist Sherry Turkle, “the Internet has given rise to a new state of the self, itself, split between the screen and the physical real, wired into existence through technology” (2012, 16). In theory, by exploiting the technological advances made by contemporary platforms and devices, everyone can become famous (Marwick en boyd 2011). Such do-it-yourself celebrities are called micro-celebrities. Micro-celebrity is a term that was first coined by Teresa Senft in her research on “webcamgirls” during the early stages of Web 2.0 (2008). This concept can be understood as a self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others (T. M. Senft 2008; Marwick en boyd 2011). This phenomenon is often seen on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and Twitter (Turner 2010; Marshall 2010; Marwick 2013b); the construction of an online identity is usually not limited to one platform, as micro-celebrities often use multiple platforms. Media theorist Elwell (2014) argues that telling stories across multiple media platforms creates an overarching story-world in which each narrative element makes a distinct contribution to the whole. This is often used in fiction story worlds, but it can also be applied to the self and the construction of an identity: the transmediated self.

Media theorist Graeme Turner claims that the cultural logic of celebrity has infiltrated into the media (2016). This celebrification of media is a trend that has been recognized by several academics (Turow 2011; Turner 2016; Marwick 2013a). However, according to Turner (2016), the extent to which this happens and its consequences for the users of social media platforms remain unclear. Therefore, “it is helpful to focus most closely on those areas of our mediated culture where celebrity has become ordinary,” namely social media platforms (Turner 2016, 111). This study investigates the celebrification of society by examining the relationships and interactions between social media platforms and micro-celebrity practices.

This relationship is not neutral. According to media scholar Alice Marwick, with the celebrification of media, capitalistic ideas have infiltrated into everyday social relations. According to Marwick, “the logic of the market is used to both understand human behavior and to regulate it” (2013b, 13). Technologies such as social media platforms transform this form of regulation into self-regulation; they thus function as tools that teach their users how to succeed in “postmodern consumer capitalism” (Marwick 2013b, 14). This corresponds with the views of Jenkins et al., who argue that Web 2.0 has led to the development of new methods of monetizing and commodifying user-generated content (Jenkins, Ford, en Green 2013, 48); this is reflected by the rise of micro-celebrities on social media platforms. In his article “Approaching Celebrity Studies,” Graeme Turner argues that celebrity has been transformed into a commodity and that academics should further investigate the industries that produce these commodities (2010, 16). According to Turner, “there is only a slim academic literature which focuses upon the production, trade, marketing or political economy of the structures which manufacture this commodity” (2010, 15). Social media platforms are partly responsible for the production of this commodity (Marwick 2013a); therefore, political economy is a useful theoretical concept when exploring this interactions between such platforms and their users. According to Marwick, the technical affordances of social media platforms reward the effective use of self-presentation strategies with high social status. Therefore, the relationships between the technical affordances of three social media platforms and the use of self-representation techniques employed in the pursuit of micro-celebrity, viewed from a political economy perspective, are the central focus of this research. Three case studies of micro-celebrities on several platforms serve as examples for the analysis; these micro-celebrities are Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray. All of these individuals gained their celebrity status via Musical.ly, but they are also active on Instagram and YouTube. The research question that guides this study is as follows:

How can the celebrification of social media platforms be understood from a political economy perspective that considers the relationships between the affordances of these platforms and the self-representations that micro-celebrities construct using multiple platforms?

The sub-questions that support this research question are as follows:

- How do the affordances of Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram contribute to the expansion of micro-celebrity practices?
- How are the identities of micro-celebrities Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray constructed online?

- How can the interactions between affordances and micro-celebrity practices be understood from a political economy perspective?

In order to answer this research question, I perform an affordance analysis of the Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram platforms. Three case studies of the online identities constructed by the micro-celebrities Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray provide further insights into micro-celebrity practices and are used to illustrate of the possibilities made available by the affordances of these platforms. The methodology used in this analysis is further discussed in the third chapter.

This research contributes to the academic perspective that the values and discourses of celebrity have infiltrated into social media platforms (Turner 2016; Marwick 2015; Marshall 2010; T. M. Senft 2008). This development can be understood in light of a broader change wherein social media platforms have been transformed, following business and organizational principles (Parker, Van Alstyne, en Choudary 2016). However, according to Turner, the extent to which social media have adopted the discourses and values of celebrity as the default setting for self-fashioning is unclear (Turner 2016, 93). Turner argues that the pervasiveness of celebrity is a significant attribute of the re-invented media but that greater understanding of how this affects the social life of the individual citizen or consumer is required. By exploring the extent to which celebrity practices have infiltrated into our social interactions, my aim is to contribute to this debate.

In the second chapter of this thesis, I discuss the theoretical framework that forms the basis of this research. In the third chapter, I explain the methodology used in this study. The characteristics of the concept of micro-celebrity, which are explored in the second chapter, form the guideline for the analysis performed in the chapter four, in which I discuss which affordances specifically enable the development of a transmediated identity. Such specific use is illustrated by means of examples drawn from the three case studies. Finally, I answer the sub- and main questions and provide suggestions for further research.

2. Micro-celebrity as a commodity

In this chapter, I explore the theory relevant to the concept of micro-celebrity by examining the development of this concept; I also provide a definition of micro-celebrity suitable for its current status. Thereafter, I discuss how the identity of a micro-celebrity can be understood as a form of transmediated self; the definition of micro-celebrity is used to demonstrate that they market themselves as branded goods. Therefore, political economy is used as a lens through which to examine the interactions between the chosen social media platforms and micro-celebrities. The roles of these social media platforms are also discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Micro-celebrity

Social media platforms enable individuals to construct a profile and connect with others, providing a stage for self-representation. According to media theorist Sherry Turkle, communicating online enables us to present ourselves in ways that we can control (Turkle 2012, 24). Media scholar danah boyd, who performed research on online self-representation among teenagers, argues that self-representation is affected by a combination of “what [teenagers] provide, through what their friends share and how other people respond to them” (2014, 49). This research focuses on a specific self-representation technique, namely micro-celebrity. Media scholar Theresa Senft first coined the concept of “micro-celebrity”:

Micro-celebrity is best understood 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. Micro-celebrity sometimes looks like conventional celebrity, but the two aren’t the same (2008, 25).

While Senft made this statement in 2008, the concept of micro-celebrity has been further developed since then. In later work, Senft formulates a new definition: “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (2013, 346). This later definition focuses more specifically on the manner in which micro-celebrities transform themselves into commodities and is therefore more appropriate for use in this research.

In order to fully grasp the concept of micro-celebrity, it is helpful to identify the distinction between a traditional celebrity and a micro-celebrity. According to Rein et al., “a celebrity is a person whose name has attention-getting, interest-riveting, and profit-generating value” (2006, 15). Although micro-celebrities take the principles of celebrity culture and apply them

to online interactions, micro-celebrities are not traditional celebrities (Marwick 2013a, 123). Micro-celebrity is something that someone *does*, rather than *is*: to achieve micro-celebrity status, individuals must conform to a particular set of criteria. One of those criteria is that they are expected to be more authentic than traditional celebrities, and to be available to their fans (Marwick 2013a, 119). What I will show in this analysis is that being authentic is a means by which micro-celebrities can market themselves. According to feminist media scholar Jessalynn Keller, while authenticity has historically been a significant issue when attempting to understand stardom and celebrity, this concept has become even more important (and complex) in the new media environment (2014). Traditional celebrities are required to constantly engage in complex identity performances, as their public personas and authentic selves differ (Marwick en boyd 2011, 144). This is even more complex for micro-celebrities, as their public personas must be authentic. This creates interesting interactions between the micro-celebrity, who is forced to take his or her carefully constructed identity into account when performing when engaging with his or her audience, who expect the micro-celebrity to be authentic, honest and real (Keller 2014, 153). Based on the literature research and case studies I have conducted, the assumptions underlying micro-celebrity can be summarized as follows: individuals (1) market themselves by (2) adopting self-consciously constructed personas, (3) in a manner similar to those of brands or celebrities, (4) when presenting themselves to an audience or fan base. These four characteristics are used to structure the analysis in which I discuss how the three case studies exploited the affordances of social media platforms in order to achieve micro-celebrity status.

Micro-celebrities use different social media platforms to construct their identities. Therefore, I argue that the concept of micro-celebrity can be understood as transmediated. Media theorist J. Sage Elwell argues that telling stories across multiple media platforms creates an overarching story-world in which each narrative element makes a distinct contribution to the whole; this theory can be applied to the construction of an identity. Elwell sees the narrative as a complex story of selfhood, which can be considered a transmedia production:

...the transmedia model of storytelling and story-world construction is (generally) characterized by the integration of multiple story elements that are dispersed across multiple media platforms in an episodic format that allows for co-creative audience interaction (Elwell 2014, 240).

These four characteristics—Integration, dispersed, episodic and interaction—define the framework of the transmediated self. First, Elwell describes the integrated self: the core plotlines and themes that underlie the activities and preferences of the individual. Second, the various media platforms used to create the networked “story-world” allow the narrative to

be dispersed. The analysis explores the methods used by micro-celebrities to construct their identities, revealing the coherence of the identities constructed over these various platforms. The third element is the episodic element: the present self is connected to both the past and the future. The final element, the interactive self, focuses on interactions with others. In the analysis, I demonstrate that the notion of micro-celebrity encompasses a number of distinct platforms, as every photo or video that a micro-celebrity posts contributes to an overarching story.

According to Marwick, the identities that micro-celebrities present online are idealized. She discusses the relationship between our idealized selves and the political and economic philosophies that underlie the technologies that we use. She also argues that becoming a micro-celebrity requires a high degree of self-commodification, which emphasizes the notion of identity as a branded good per the definition offered by Senft (Marwick 2013a, 117). However, she does not discuss how this process of self-commodification is facilitated by the use of social media platforms. Hence, this area of inquiry is the core focus of this research; an appropriate approach to such an investigation is through a political economy lens.

2.2 Power of the Platform

Media scholar Graeme Turner argues that “celebrity,” whether traditional or micro-, is (almost) always a commercial interest (2010). According to him, when investigating how a (micro-)celebrity is perceived as a commodity, it is important to understand the industries that produce these commodities (2010, 2). In the case of micro-celebrities, these industries are the social media platforms, as established by Alice Marwick (Marwick 2013a). Political economy, which is used as a lens through which this topic is investigated in this thesis, focuses on the features of capitalism in social relations (Fuchs 2014, 97). Sociologist Vincent Mosco provides a definition of this term: “Political economy is the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources” (2009, 24). In this research, the resources are represented by three micro-celebrities, namely Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray, who transform themselves into commodities and distribute their identities as brands, using multiple platforms, to be consumed by their fans.

In order to understand the power that these platforms have to regulate the processes by which micro-celebrities construct their identities, media scholar Christian Fuchs argues that it is necessary to take into account both the ideologies and the political economy of social media platforms. It is often the case that ideology and political economy are dissimilar. A concept that is frequently associated with social media is participation (van Dijck 2013b, 12). Several scholars, including Henry Jenkins and Mark Deuze, who are associated with convergence theory, have investigated social media and participation (2008; 2012).

However, according to Fuchs, social media does not constitute a participatory space; as he points out, “social media are rather colonized by corporations, especially by multimedia companies that dominate attention and visibility” (Fuchs 2014, 102). Fuchs argues that “participation” is only an ideology, a claim regarding reality that does not correspond with actual reality, that “celebrates capitalism and does not see how capitalist interests predominantly shape the Internet” (Fuchs 2014, 102). This research focuses not only on the interactions that occur between users and platforms during the process of pursuing micro-celebrity status but also on the shaping role of technology and how business models and corporate structures are involved in this process. Therefore, political economy represents a useful perspective for the purposes of this research.

3. Methodology

This chapter discusses the methods used to answer the central research question. In order to address this question, an affordance analysis of the platforms Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram is conducted. Musical.ly (2014) is a social networking site that is relatively new when compared to YouTube (2005) and Instagram (2010). In the following analysis, I show that the affordances of Musical.ly provide a greater number of opportunities for achieving micro-celebrity status than YouTube and Instagram; however, in order to maintain and expand such micro-celebrity status, the affordances of YouTube and Instagram are necessary. While the three case studies all use these social media platforms in slightly different ways, together, the case studies provide insight into how micro-celebrities use these platforms when constructing their transmediated selves. I have selected Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram because the three micro-celebrities all gained their celebrity status on Musical.ly and subsequently used these other platforms to maintain it. On a Musical.ly profile, users can add buttons to link to their Instagram and YouTube accounts, which indicates the dispersion, one of the characteristics of the transmediated self, between the platforms. To illustrate how micro-celebrities use the affordances of these platforms to construct their identities across multiple platforms, I examine three case studies. The micro-celebrities I have selected are Ariel Martin, better known as Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray. They are the three most popular users of Musical.ly, with over 17 million followers each (Deutsche Welle 2016); these numbers suggest that they have successfully employed the strategies required to become a micro-celebrity. In the analysis, I discuss the results of the affordance analysis and what the case studies indicated; this analysis is structured with reference to the four characteristics of micro-celebrity identified in the previous chapter, namely that individuals (1) market themselves by (2) adopting self-

consciously constructed personas, (3) in a manner similar to those of brands or celebrities, (4) when presenting themselves to an audience or fan base. First, I elaborate further on affordances and the methods used in the analysis.

3.1 Affordances

When investigating technology, media scholar Ian Hutchby recognizes a vacuum between the meaning and the technical possibilities of a platform. He suggests a third method for approaching technologies such as social media platforms: he focuses on technologies “neither in terms of their ‘interpretive textual’ properties nor of their ‘essential technical’ properties, but in terms of their affordances” (Hutchby 2001, 444). According to Donald Norman, an emphasis on affordances means specifically focusing on the relationship between an object or technology and its users (2013, 11). Therefore, affordances are a useful lens through which to explore if and how a platform shapes the behavior of its users and steers them towards micro-celebrity practices. Both Turner (2016) and Marwick (2013a) state that, over the last two decades, the changing technical affordances of social media platforms have contributed to the celebrification of these platforms. This means that ordinary people are now also given the opportunity to achieve celebrity status on social media platforms, which these platforms encourage. With this statement, these authors indicate a fairly technological determinist position, in which they largely focus on the agency of the technology. However, “micro-celebrity” is defined as a technique for self-representation, which implies that users have agency and influence the process (Marwick 2013a). Thus, for the purposes of this research, I think it is important to ascribe more agency to the users of the platform than Turner and Marwick did.

As the analysis shows, the micro-celebrities studied in thesis are all well aware of their acquired celebrity status and use these social media platforms to expand, or at least maintain, this status. Based on the many ways in which these celebrities use social media platforms, a more nuanced approach of affordances is needed. According to media scholar Nancy Baym, “users and technology mutually affect each other in technological shaping of sociality and connectivity: social network sites engineer predetermined sets of categories through which users supposedly build identities and communities” (2010, 110). This is emphasized by van Dijck, who argues that “technology shapes sociality as much as sociality shapes technology” (2013a, 146). Andrew Richard Schrock offers an apt summary of this tendency: “An affordances perspective negotiates between poles of technological determinism and social constructivism and evaluates technologies used in real-world contexts” (2015, 1230). Hutchby defines affordances as “functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object” (Hutchby 2001, 444). This definition leaves room for the agency of the user and is

therefore used in this research, which means that I specifically discuss the social media platform affordances that are relevant to micro-celebrity practices.

Affordance method

For the purposes of this analysis, I use a framework provided by Sheila O’Riordan et al., which is specifically intended for the analysis of the affordances of social media platforms (2012). Their basic assumption is that affordances provide strong clues about the functionality of such sites and offer a variety of capabilities; however, people may not necessarily use the possibilities of the platforms for their intended purposes (O’Riordan, Feller, en Nagle 2012, 4). Thus, it is necessary to consider the relationship between the platform and the user; therefore, when using Hutchby’s definition of affordances, the framework that O’Riordan et al. provide is useful.

O’Riordan et al. distinguish between two families of affordances: social affordances and content affordances. Social affordances focus on linking the users of the platform, which is a crucial aspect of micro-celebrity practices. The content affordances focus on the possibilities that a platform offers with regard to content. Both families consist of three types of affordances: the social family is characterized by social connectivity, social interaction and profile management, while the three characteristics of the content family are content discovery, content sharing and content aggregation (O’Riordan, Feller, en Nagle 2012, 4–5).

Bearing in mind the distinction between social affordances and content affordances is useful when investigating the characteristics of micro-celebrity on social media platforms. Micro-celebrity can be understood as a technique for self-representation that considers the audience as a fan base (Marwick en boyd 2011). How people represent themselves is determined by several factors. danah boyd notes that an individual’s “self-representation is constructed through what they explicitly provide, through what their friends share, and as a product of how other people respond to them” (boyd 2016, 49). Thus, distinguishing between content and social affordances is a feasible choice for the purposes of this research.

This framework was used during the affordance analysis, which took place between February 25th and March 5th 2017. Over this period, I extensively used, evaluated and tested all three platforms. I was already familiar with YouTube and Instagram, so I mainly focused on the possibilities offered by Musical.ly. Finally, I used the framework of O’Riordan et al. to describe the different affordances (see Appendix 1: *Affordances of Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram.*)

3.2 Case Studies

To illustrate how micro-celebrities can employ the affordances of a platform for their own specific purposes, three case studies are conducted. The three micro-celebrities in question, Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray, initially achieved their celebrity status on Musical.ly, but also actively use YouTube and Instagram. I performed a textual analysis on the content posted on their social media accounts; from every micro-celebrity, I selected 10 Musical.ly videos, 10 YouTube videos and 20 Instagram photos. These items were posted in either 2016 or 2017. I selected as diverse a range of photos and videos in order to explore micro-celebrity practices as thoroughly as possible (see Appendix 2: *The material used for the case studies*). I used the framework of the transmediated self provided by Elwell (2014) to break down the identities of the micro-celebrities when viewing the photos and videos. This framework identifies four characteristics that respectively focus on content, the relationships between the different platforms used, how posted content relates to events in either the future or past and interactions with the audience. My intention when it comes to the case studies was to reveal how micro-celebrities construct a transmediated self-using the affordances of the platforms.

In the following four chapters, I take a closer look at the interactions between the affordances offered by these platforms and their users, in this case micro-celebrities. Based on the definition of micro-celebrity provided previously, I consider four key aspects of micro-celebrity: individuals (1) market themselves by (2) adopting self-consciously constructed personas, (3) in a manner similar to those of brands or celebrities, (4) when presenting themselves to an audience or fan base. These four factors guide the analysis. For each point, I discuss the possibilities offered by the platform in question and the ways in which the micro-celebrities exploit those possibilities. To develop a better grasp of the concept of “micro-celebrity,” I carry out three case studies. The transmediated selves of these micro-celebrities show how they construct their identities using the affordances offered by each social media platform. By means of this analysis, I show that micro-celebrities construct transmediated identities, using their activities on social media platforms, in order to maximize their chances of economic success.

4. Becoming a micro-celebrity

The first requirement of micro-celebrity is that individuals must market themselves. To achieve (micro-)celebrity status, one must be discovered by a broad audience. Micro-celebrities use different methods to achieve their status. First, I discuss the possibilities that each platform offers individuals to promote themselves and to discover new content or users. Thereafter, I take a closer look at the ways in which micro-celebrities promote themselves, in a transmediated fashion, using the different platforms. Finally, I consider the other efforts that micro-celebrities make to enhance their status, such as collaborating with other micro-celebrities.

All three platforms offer the possibilities of discovering new users and content, which is crucial for micro-celebrities. Musical.ly has a number of possibilities for the self-promotion of new talent. The homepage of the app is divided in two sections: the “following” section and the “featured” section. The “following” section displays content from Musical.ly users (musers) that the user follows. The “featured” section, however, shows videos selected by the staff of Musical.ly and are shown to all users of the app. To become featured, which provides a great deal of exposure, one must create a video that is “creative, original and entertaining”; to improve one’s chances, it is necessary to post on a regular basis and to use hashtags (Musical.ly 2017). Even though it seems as if users have a great deal of freedom to express themselves, the only way to become successful on Musical.ly is to conform to the site’s norms. Musical.ly uses different categories to classify its videos, such as comedy, talent, sport and dancing. These categories can be used to discover new videos and users and for musers to promote themselves. Videos can also be associated with a hashtag, meaning that the video will be shown when musers search for that particular hashtag. The possibilities offered by this site are shown in Image 1, below.

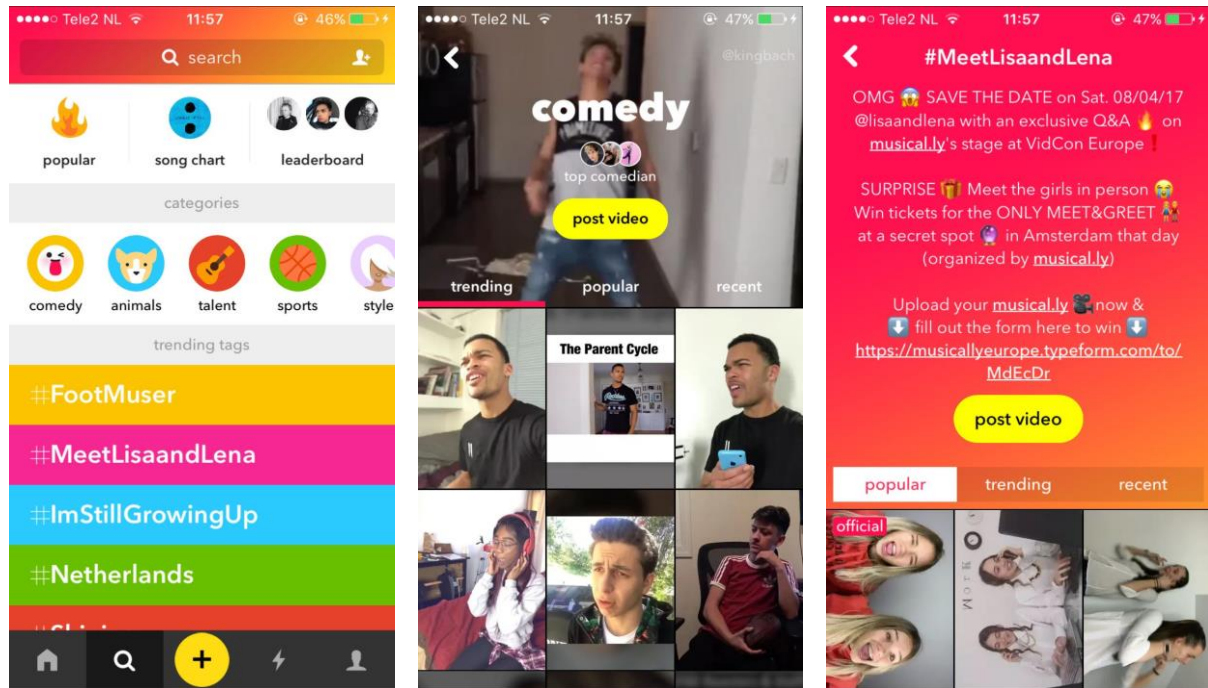


Image 1 – Possibilities for discovering new content on Musical.ly

Even though Musical.ly offers the possibility of being discovered, the app’s algorithms ensure that the most popular/trending videos are shown first when it displays the results of a search; this essentially means that it is extremely hard for an unknown musers to claim a spot on the “trending” section because it is dominated by those musers who are already famous. Thus, whether it is as a result of the site’s algorithms or the people behind it, the platform partly determines who can achieve micro-celebrity status.

The possibilities for micro-celebrities to promote themselves on YouTube are less extensive. Based on subscriptions and history, YouTube provides users with suggestions of videos and channels that they may enjoy. YouTube also automatically creates a playlist that will continue to play unless the user intervenes. On the YouTube homepage, there is a “Trending” section, which shows recommendations regarding popular videos. However, according to van Dijck, positions on the “trending” section are auctioned off to the highest bidder (2013b, 125). This, combined with the personalized nature of YouTube, makes it extremely challenging for micro-celebrities, also referred to as do-it-yourself celebrities, to promote themselves to a broad audience. Instagram’s affordances for discovering new users and content are, similarly to those of YouTube, based on users’ preferences. Instagram gives recommendations for users one can follow, or, when a user visits someone’s Instagram profile, the site will provide suggestions regarding users who post similar content. When a user hits the search button, Instagram shows a selection of recommended photos, videos and stories.

All three of the micro-celebrities addressed in this thesis to some extent owe their celebrity status to the “feature” function of Musical.ly. As mentioned before, when added to this section, a video is shown to all the users of the platform. Both Baby Ariel and Loren Gray state that it was never their intention to become famous; it simply occurred due to the “featured” function (Martin 2016b; Gray 2016a). While Ariel and Loren, according to themselves, were not actively attempting to become famous, being featured is an explicit goal for other Musical.ly users. Many video descriptions include the tag #featureme, which, according to Musical.ly (2017), “increases your chances of getting featured.” To become featured on Musical.ly, a video must be creative, original and entertaining (Musical.ly 2017); a Musical.ly team is responsible for the selection process. In order to get discovered on Musical.ly, individuals need to conform to the norms and standards of the platform; the same applies to YouTube and Instagram. YouTube does not attempt to identify artists in order to cultivate their craft; rather, the site focuses on searching for individuals who can create new markets (Banet-Weiser 2017, 279). Partnering with micro-celebrities represents a means by which YouTube can maintain control over its content. On Instagram, micro-celebrities must conform to certain expectations concerning their appearances. (I elaborate on these expectations in Chapter 5.) Thus, essentially, the creative freedom of micro-celebrities to express themselves online is limited by the platforms that they use to construct their identities.

As the previous section has shown, achieving micro-celebrity status on a particular platform is not easy. The affordances of all three platforms allow users to promote themselves through the content they share but also force them to abide by the platforms’ policies and requirements. By using the affordances offered by multiple social media platforms, users can create micro-celebrity identities. While these social media platforms allow users to share content, photos and videos, on other platforms, be it by the micro-celebrities themselves or by others, every platform has its own interests and attempts to secure the loyalty of its users. This creates an interesting web of platforms that micro-celebrities must navigate. In this section, I discuss the ways in which micro-celebrities create transmediated selves using Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram. This is partly facilitated by the affordances of the platforms and partly by how micro-celebrities use creative methods for circumventing each platform’s restrictions.

Besides sharing content on other platforms, Musical.ly allows its users to add two buttons on their profile that link directly to their YouTube and Instagram accounts, respectively. On Instagram and YouTube, users cannot add buttons to other platforms; however, they can share a link to other platforms. Instagram does not allow users to place a link to a website or a YouTube video in the description of a photo; instead, they can only

place a link in their biography, which has led to an oft-used comment among micro-celebrities: “link in bio.” The affordances of each platform allow micro-celebrities to share a certain type of content: on Musical.ly, users can create a 15-second videoclip, on Instagram users can share photos and short video clips and longer videos can be shared on YouTube. However, in order to promote themselves or their content, micro-celebrities may post content that may not seem appropriate for a particular platform. By doing so, micro-celebrities can reach those fans who may not be active on every social media platform that the micro-celebrity uses. In these posts, they can announce new content in the description of a photo or video, or they can mention that a new vlog or music video has been posted to YouTube or a video to Musical.ly. Image 2 shows Baby Ariel thanking her fans for the 18 million followers she has amassed and Jacob Sartorius promoting his new music video.

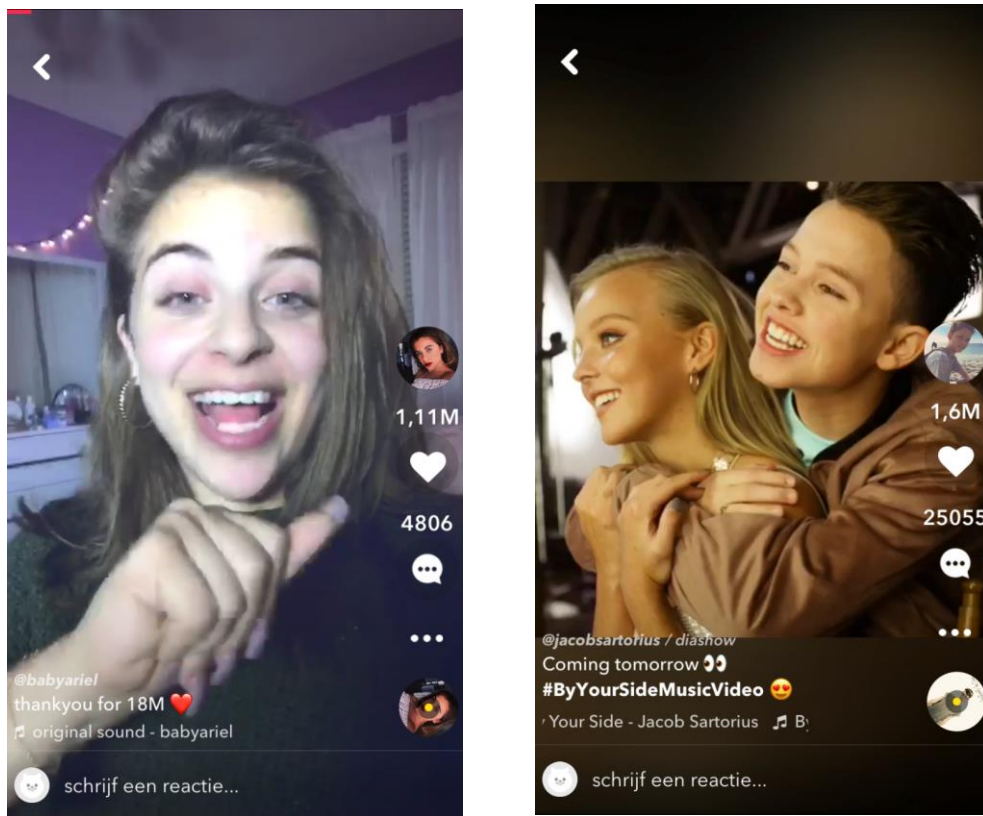


Image 2 – Baby Ariel (2017) thanks her fans, and Jacob Sartorius (2017) promotes his new single

When micro-celebrities create transmediated identities, they are able to use the possibilities offered by each platform to market themselves as a branded good to their fan base. In the following chapters, I elaborate on this practice.

Another technique that micro-celebrities frequently use to promote themselves is collaboration with other micro-celebrities, in which they draw on the fan bases of other users and attempt to expand their own. The three platforms discussed in this paper offer different

possibilities when it comes to such partnerships. With Musical.ly, users can perform a duet: they record a clip with the same song and Musical.ly then generates a new video that combines the two videos. Users can only perform a duet when they are each other's "BFF," meaning "best fan forever"; to achieve this status, both users must follow each other and mark each other as a BFF. Users can also make a video together when they are physically together in the same room; in such a case, they can add the username of the other individual in the description. Instagram offers the ability to "tag" faces in a photo when multiple faces appear in it. YouTube also has no tag function, but the other user can be mentioned in a video's description, in an annotation or in a text balloon within the video.

Micro-celebrities exploit the possibilities offered for collaboration in creative ways. Baby Ariel and Loren Gray share, together with five other famous musers, a YouTube channel called "Our Journey." Every day, a different micro-celebrity posts a vlog to the channel. Baby Ariel posted a tutorial video on her YouTube channel that used the music of a song by one of her friends, which exposed her fans to his music. Jacob Sartorius posted a number of videos together with the famous German twins Lisa and Lena (2017); they posted the same videos on their own channels. In this manner, micro-celebrities can support each other. Successful micro-celebrities with huge fan bases offer interesting opportunities for collaboration. Image 3 shows Baby Ariel appearing in a Musical.ly video with Flo Rida in order to promote his new song:

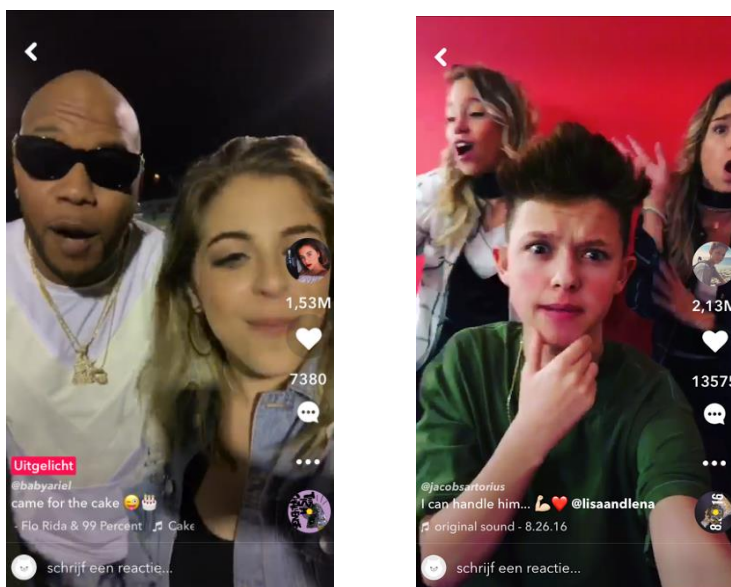


Image 3 – Baby Ariel (2017) and Jacob Sartorius (2017) collaborating

Such collaborations are rewarding for both parties, as they can tap into each other's fan bases and strengthen their own celebrity statuses.

This chapter highlighted some of the techniques that micro-celebrities use to increase the number of fans that they have. In the next chapter, I discuss how micro-celebrities construct their identities in order to increase the likelihood of achieving new followers..

5. Performance

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the first characteristic of micro-celebrity: how individuals market themselves. In this chapter, I discuss the second element: individuals market themselves by self-consciously constructing personas. In this analysis, I demonstrate that the “self-conscious” aspect of “self-consciously constructing a persona” is largely determined by the policies and patterns of social media platforms and the norms that have arisen regarding the notion of micro-celebrity and online self-representation in general. Micro-celebrities need to engage in a complex identity performance where they show the best sides of themselves, yet they are also expected to be authentic (2011, 144). In this section, I explore this paradox by considering the ways in which micro-celebrities express themselves in their posts and the affordances offered by the chosen social media platforms. Finally, I argue that both the idealized and authentic selves represent forms of self-commodification. In the next chapter, I further elaborate on this argument.

5.1 The idealized self

In this section, I discuss the self-representation techniques that micro-celebrities use to represent themselves and how the affordances of social media facilitate such representation. According to Marwick, micro-celebrities are “highly edited, controlled, and monitored, conforming to commercial ideals that dictate ‘safe-for-work’ self-presentation. The technical mechanisms of social media reflect the values of where they were produced: a culture dominated by commercial interest” (2013a, 5). The micro-celebrities that this thesis focuses on are well aware of the fact they present monitored versions of themselves. Baby Ariel mentions this in one of her videos: “You only see what I show you guys; if I say something stupid to my brother, or if I act weird, I cut it out” (Martin 2016b). All three platforms have different affordances that contribute to making such practices possible. One affordance shared by all three platforms is that content can be edited before it is shared with a user’s followers. YouTube allows its users to upload files that have been altered using external software, meaning the user can precisely select that which is included in a video and that which is not. Musical.ly allows some editing while recording a video; thereafter, saturation can be tweaked, the video can be lightened and other minor changes can be made, but the video cannot be edited to the extent that shots can be removed. On Instagram, a filter can be placed on a photo and its lightening and saturation can be edited. While, on one hand, these

affordances allow users the freedom to express themselves in creative ways, on the other hand, they also determine certain standards that uploaded content must conform to.

Beyond sharing content, these platforms also allow their users to delete content after it has been posted. When it appears that a particular piece of uploaded content is incompatible with a micro-celebrity's image, a photo or video in question can easily be removed, meaning that it will not influence that person's narrative as a whole. This can be understood as the episodic element of the transmediated self: the present self is connected to both the future and the past (Elwell 2014). The analysis shows that this is an important concern for the micro-celebrities that this research focuses on. For instance, Loren Gray deleted all of the photos and videos she uploaded between July and November 2016 that featured her former boyfriend from her Musical.ly, Instagram and YouTube accounts. As of January 2017, she has been dating another person; thus, the content that she shared in the past no longer suits her present persona. This episodic element is also connected to the future. On March 14th, 2017 Jacob Sartorius posted a photo on his Instagram account that depicted his world tour schedule, showing where he would be in the upcoming months. Referring to and being able to edit both the past and the future allows micro-celebrities to stay in control of their overarching narratives.

Another aspect of the transmediated self that is associated with the online performances of micro-celebrities is the integrated element, which refers to the themes and plotlines that appear within their narratives (Elwell 2014). Even though the overarching themes of these micro-celebrities are similar, their individual stories and sub-themes vary slightly. Jacob Sartorius mainly promotes his own music album on all three of the platforms discussed in this thesis, while Baby Ariel and Loren Gray show their fans a variety of aspects of their lives, including clothes, make-up and their daily activities. When depicting themselves in the content that they upload, these micro-celebrities use several self-representation techniques intended to contribute to the portrayal of an idealized self. The first self-representation technique that can be identified is "developing a certain appearance." In their book *Aesthetic Labour*, Elias et al. argue that certain expectations regarding how people should look exist nowadays:

We must decorate and transform ourselves but look as though this is neither a time, money or labour cost. We are to appear "natural" and "professional" and "sexy" and "nonchalant" and "available" and "desirable" and "cute" and "fun" and "capable" and "healthy" all at the same time.

This is not specifically connected to micro-celebrity practices, but, since micro-celebrities are often the center of attention, they are basically forced to conform to these expectations. For

example, Baby Ariel mentions that, every day, she receives thousands of comments about the way she looks (Martin 2016b). This contributes to a certain beauty standard that dominates social media platforms. Since these micro-celebrities can function as role models, the emphasis they place on appearance and looks can easily influence their younger fans. The definition provided by Theresa Senft states that being a micro-celebrity involves “the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good, with the expectation that others do the same” (2013, 346). The convincing manner in which these micro-celebrities represent an idealized version of themselves, especially when it comes to appearance, contributes to “the expectation that others will do the same.” In her book *Status Update*, Alice Marwick argues that neoliberal ideas infiltrate into our everyday activities through the use of social media platforms (2013a). In this example, the micro-celebrities give their fans the impression that, in order to be successful, one must be flawless and purchase all kinds of cosmetic products. The affordances of these platforms that allow micro-celebrities to edit content are partly responsible for the maintenance of these expectations. Elias et al. also observe that “bodies are ever younger and ever older: as age compression demands that 6-year-olds look like 12-year-olds and 70-year-olds like 40-year-olds” (2017, viii). This can be recognized in the fact that these micro-celebrities all pretend to be older than they actually are: Baby Ariel (2000), Jacob Sartorius (2002) and Loren Gray (2002) all present themselves as being older than their actual ages. This is reflected in their appearances and in how they attempt to act in a mature and responsible manner, as shown in Image 4.



Image 4 – Baby Ariel (2017), Jacob Sartorius (2017) and Loren Gray (2017)

The way in which these micro-celebrities pose in these pictures shows that their bodies and (online) identities are “available for modification, for fixing and fussing with, in short to be produced” (Elias, Gill, en Scharff 2017, viii); this reflects how the logic of the market has infiltrated into everyday life.

The second technique for self-representation that can be identified is “positivity,” a technique which is also encouraged by fans’ expectations. The manner in which these micro-celebrities present themselves online is almost always happy. Even when the lyrics of a song on Musical.ly suggest that its intended theme is probably heavy, the hand motions, gestures and facial expressions that the micro-celebrities use imply that they are completely fine. Also, Instagram filters allow users to give a sunny and, thus positive, tone to a photo. Instagram filters also contribute to the construction of an idealized self. While all three of these micro-celebrities have stated that making their fans happy is the reason why they do what they do (Sartorius 2016b; Martin 2017b; Gray 2016a), the following section demonstrates that this supposed “love for the fans” actually masks the effort and rewards associated with being a micro-celebrity

5. 2 The authentic self

As Alice Marwick describes in her book *Status Update*, micro-celebrities are expected to be authentic and available to their fans. Being authentic can prove challenging for micro-celebrities because it can conflict with the idealized selves that they attempt to present. Authenticity can be shown in multiple ways, with the first being through the content that micro-celebrities share with their fans.

Micro-celebrities utilize authenticity in an number of ways, from the “naked” (make-up free) faces shown after they have just woken up to the positioning of themselves as close friends of the fan base by means of recording in private spaces, such as in fitting rooms (see Image 5).

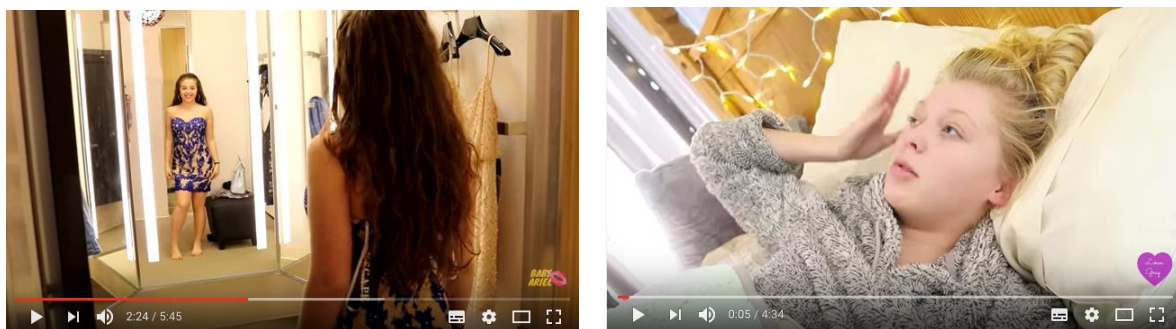


Image 5 – Baby Ariel (2016a) in a fitting room and Loren Gray (2016d) in bed

Another way in which micro-celebrities utilize authenticity is by giving their fans personal information about themselves. Jacob Sartorius informed his fans that he is adopted, as his birthparents were unable to take care of him (2016b), while Baby Ariel went through her 2016 diary and told her fans that, in September, her mother had had a miscarriage (2016). The comments on this video are supportive: “That’s sad about the baby I’m so sorry” (Gilaj 2016) and “I was crying with her I felt bad” (Velazquez 2016) and “I feel so bad 4 u all prayers 4u”

(Njoya 2016). Besides expressing their sympathy for Baby Ariel, fans also apparently felt the need to share their own stories:

2016 was the worst year in the world for me, my dad proposed to his girlfriend and didn't tell me and my family was just really upset. This whole year I cried so much in 2016 and I'm happy it's over and I'm really hoping that 2017 will be a better year (Platinum 2016).

This shows that sharing personal and intimate information with fans contributes to the image of micro-celebrities in a positive way. Loren Gray recorded a video in which she told her fans that she left high school because she could no longer cope with people's expectations regarding how she should behave:

Now that I look back at my old videos I can see what a mess I was. I wore so much make-up and did things that were completely inappropriate for my age. So I took down a lot of old videos. But my attitude started changing and I stopped being hard on myself, because I felt the need to conform myself to the opinions of others. So I lost a lot of friends from school. Eventually I left school because I couldn't deal with all their opinions. I didn't stop making videos; I changed the content and try to suit them more to me and not trying to be older and more mature, even though people view me as someone that is older and more mature. But this is honestly who I am (Gray 2016a).

This fragment shows how the episodic aspect of the transmediated self, as discussed in Chapter 5, is constructed: some old videos did not contribute to the overarching narrative, so this micro-celebrity removed them. Being honest led to supportive reactions, even from people who were previously negative:

I used to dislike you and the worst part is when I first saw you I judged you and assumed you were just a fake mean girl. And let me just say, I was VERY wrong. Loren, you are very kind, wise, and beautiful (Harambe 2016).

Such comments show how fans support Baby Ariel and Loren Gray, which suggests that sharing very personal and intimate details about one's life contributes to how people perceive a micro-celebrity. Feminist media scholar Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that micro-celebrities trade on their authenticity as ordinary teenagers who simply loved to make videos and then found lucrative careers. According to her, this focus on the love of producing content and being authentic obscures the mechanisms used in the production of these videos, such as access to products and technology (2017, 276). Besides camouflaging the effort invested in production using the concept of authenticity, I would argue that the

appearance of being authentic also distracts from the money paid by sponsoring brands or by platforms such as YouTube, who pay per view.

Even though it seems that micro-celebrities demonstrating authenticity is opposed to the concept of the idealized self, I would argue that authenticity is a powerful component of the self-consciously constructed persona, as sharing personal information allows a micro-celebrity to strengthen his or her relationship with fans. In the following chapter, I elaborate on these constructed personas and discuss how micro-celebrities use them to earn money.

6. Branded goods

In the previous chapters, I explored how individuals market themselves by self-consciously constructing personas. An important aspect of micro-celebrity is self-commodification (Marwick 2013a). The self-conscious personas that individuals create to market themselves are similar to branded goods. While this phenomenon was already established in the preceding chapters, in this chapter I elaborate on this facet of micro-celebrity. Self-commodification occurs when “performers...intentionally compose their persona for the market” (Marwick 2013a, 117). To understand the process of self-commodification, I take a closer look at the ways in which micro-celebrities “market themselves” and how the affordances of social media platforms facilitate this development. Thereafter, I discuss how micro-celebrities convert their social prestige into actual economic capital.

In the previous chapter, I cited Marwick, who argues that micro-celebrities are highly edited, controlled and monitored, conforming to commercial ideals that dictate “safe-for-work” modes of self-presentation (2013a, 5). The analysis showed that this leads to a specific focus on content that emphasizes appearance, positivity and authenticity. The first two aspects can be identified in Image 6, below:



Image 6 – Instagram photos of Loren Gray (2017a), Jacob Sartorius (2017) and Baby Ariel (2017a)

The belief that everything can always get better or become more pleasant shines through in the posts of these micro-celebrities. Baby Ariel gives advice regarding friendship and bullying; her advice is to block all negativity out of one's life and to only focus on people that give the viewer positive feelings (Martin 2017b). This shows how the logic of the market has infiltrated into our social relations: a person can replace his or her friends with better ones. Loren Gray posted a video in which she gets ready for prom; her preparations included a manicure, pedicure, getting a spray tan, bleaching her teeth, getting her hair and make-up done and, of course, buying a dress (Gray 2017b). As already discussed in Chapter 5, this implies that beauty is for sale. This perspective is emphasized by Elias et al., who argue that global capitalism, and particularly the industries that profit from these practices, create a view of life in which "the body" is commercialized, resulting in greater profits for the style, beauty and fashion industries (2017).

Beyond fame and prestige, a micro-celebrity can derive actual economic capital from his or her status. Each platform handles financial compensation differently: YouTube pays users with large audiences sums of money per every 1,000 views (Edwards 2014). While Musical.ly does not pay users directly, they can make money from the app. In May 2016, Musical.ly launched the app Live.ly, which allows users to broadcast through a livestream. These livestreams can be viewed within Musical.ly without using Live.ly. In Musical.ly, users can purchase virtual coins with real money in order to buy gifts for users that they like. The price for 100 coins is €0.99 and, for 10,000 coins, a user pays €99. During the livestreaming of a video, users can react to the video or send gifts; these gifts vary from 5 to 5,000 coins. A gift can be given to support a favorite muser; however, when a user gives a gift, it is shown to everyone watching the livestream, so it also provides publicity for the giver. For a person who streams a live video, this can be a lucrative activity. According to *Business Insider*, the top 10 livestreamers made an average of \$46,000 over a two-week period (2016). While Instagram does not reward users with money for views or likes, they can use their Instagram accounts to promote YouTube videos or to announce that they are planning to stream a live video.

I would argue that these different possibilities offered by each platform for deriving capital contribute to the transmediated construction of micro-celebrities' identities. The dispersed element creates the networked story-world that is essential to the transmediated self (Elwell 2014). Micro-celebrities use different platforms to share content that fits the affordances of each platform: YouTube for long videos, Instagram for snapshots and Musical.ly for lip-synching videos. However, they also use the different platforms to promote content that they have shared on other platforms. Essentially, the greater the number of fans who view a video or live stream, the more money the micro-celebrity earns.

Besides micro-celebrities and social media platforms, a third party is involved in the process of self-commodification, namely brands who wish to collaborate with micro-

celebrities and pay them for videos or photos with promoted content in order to obtain access to their fan bases. In one of Baby Ariel's videos, she shows her audience how she prepared for her prom (Martin 2016a); she purchased her dress, shoes and make-up from Nordstrom, the brand that actually paid her to make this video. In such cases, micro-celebrities are required to mention that they are sharing promoted content (Google 2017). Marwick emphasizes a contradiction in the process of self-commodification: on the one hand, micro-celebrities are supposed to be "authentic," as discussed in previous chapter, but they must also be suitable business targets (2013a, 167). This can be recognized in what micro-celebrities upload: for example, they may give their viewers a "behind-the-scenes" experience in which they film themselves trying dresses in a fitting room, but, at the same time, they are promoting clothing brands and cosmetic products. Banet-Weiser conducted research on beauty vloggers, which led to the following observation:

The amateur quality of the video is clearly one of the most important elements of the beauty vlog, as the point of the media production is to transfer make-up application skills to the millions of followers who will be reproducing this labour on themselves (2017, 277).

This logic would explain why brands are keen to work with micro-celebrities: the amateur quality and authentic feel of the video in which Baby Ariel buys a dress for her prom will likely trigger her fans to do the same. This shows how commodification has infiltrated into the content of these micro-celebrities and how brands cleverly exploit these circumstances.

On YouTube and Instagram, brands partner up with specifically targeted micro-celebrities. On Musical.ly, however, brands can launch campaigns in which every user can participate. Brands can launch a campaign or challenge with a matching hashtag that musers can then use in their video descriptions. In a challenge, musers are encouraged to make a video, using a theme or a song in order to promote a brand, product or company. By doing so, musers can win a product, a meet and greet with an artist, tickets for a concert, etc. The content that is produced by the musers is thus no longer user-generated content; rather, it is user-generated advertising (see Image 7).

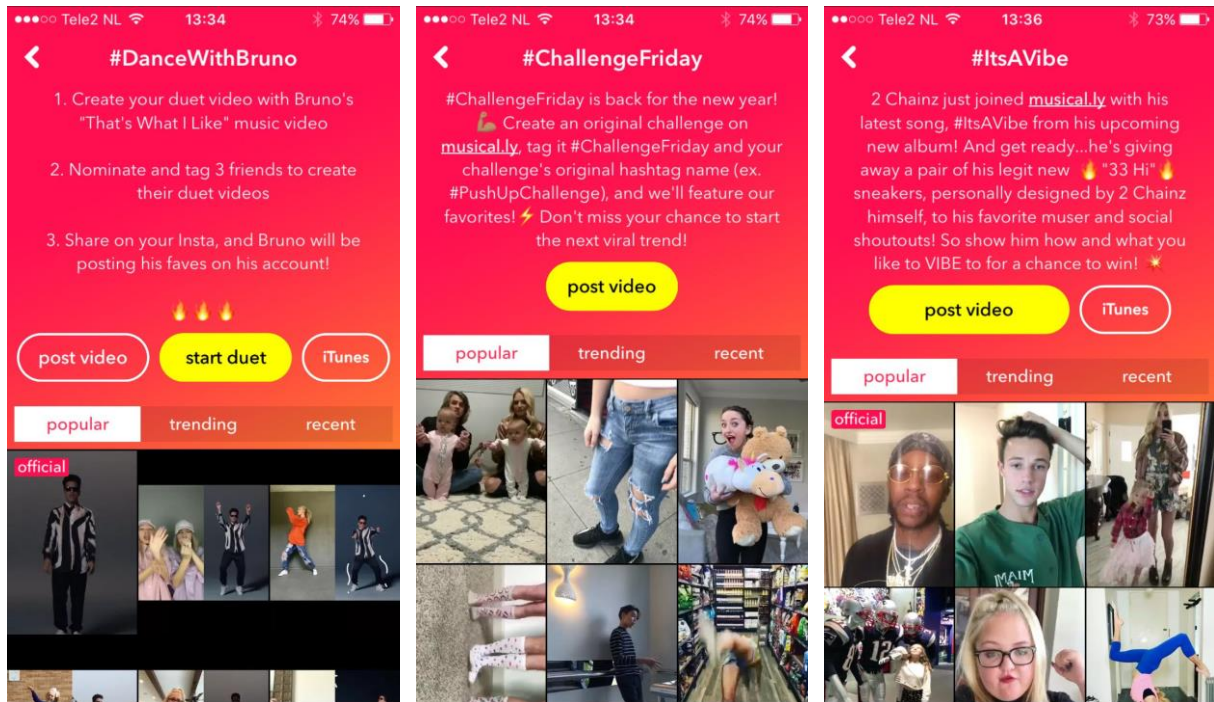


Image 7 – Challenges on Musical.ly, retrieved March 24, 2017

Brands are cleverly tapping into teenagers' desire to become famous. However, musers who have already achieved micro-celebrity status, with large numbers of followers, dominate the "popular" section. So, for unknown musers, these circumstances make it extremely difficult to achieve micro-celebrity status. Even though micro-celebrities already have many followers, they still participate in those challenges; in one video, for example, Baby Ariel mentions that "I love to do my Musical.ly videos every day" (Martin 2016b). However, according to Marwick, micro-celebrities are expected to be available to their fans (2013a, 116). In order to meet the expectations of their fans, they need to post content on a regular basis. This chapter showed that self-commodification is a crucial element in the course of becoming a micro-celebrity. The affordances of the social media platforms stimulate this by rewarding micro-celebrities with fame or even actual money.

7. Interaction with the fan base

The previous three chapters discussed how individuals market themselves and transform themselves into a commodity. In this chapter, I discuss the final characteristic associated with the notion of micro-celebrity, which is also an important element of the transmediated self: interaction with the audience (Elwell 2014). Micro-celebrities can only exist by virtue of their fans; therefore, interaction with their fan base is an important aspect of micro-celebrity practices. This interaction has already been discussed in relation to authenticity, in Chapter 5; in this chapter, I will elaborate on this relationship, and the possibilities that these

platforms offer for interaction and employing the methods associated with micro-celebrities are also discussed. In the analysis, I show that micro-celebrities leverage every form of fan interaction, both positive and negative, to strengthen their statuses. First, however, I explore the possibilities that these social media platforms offer in terms of interaction.

Social media platforms offer their users different means of interacting and communicating with their audiences. On all three of the platforms discussed in this thesis, fans can react to (“love” or “like”) or comment on content; YouTube also allows viewers to explicitly dislike a post using the “thumbs down” button. On both Instagram and YouTube, it is possible to “like” or “love” a reaction. YouTube offers the opportunity to react to a reaction, creating a conversation. Instagram and Musical.ly do not offer this option, but, given the possibility of tagging another user, a conversation can still take place. All three platforms also offer the possibility of sending direct messages to users. These platforms offer several ways of keeping in touch with fans; however, in the vast majority of cases, micro-celebrities never actually reply to user comments, as they tend to keep control in their own hands. What often happens is that a micro-celebrity will do a Q&A video, in which they answer a number of questions. This both functions as a means of staying in touch with fans and allows fans to get to know the celebrity better. However, it is also a way to create content for a YouTube video and to earn money.

Not all interaction occurs online. Micro-celebrities mention their P.O Box addresses frequently, which makes it possible for fans to send them gifts. Loren Gray and Baby Ariel both upload videos to their YouTube channels in which they unbox these packages and thank their fans for sending them candy, jewelry and other gifts (Gray 2016b; Martin 2015). Again, this functions as a way in which these micro-celebrities can create content for their YouTube videos. When fans send these celebrities letters, they ask the latter to follow or subscribe to their channels. Both Loren and Ariel promise in their videos that they will definitely do so; this serves as an incentive for other fans to send mail to these micro-celebrities. Micro-celebrities offer a variety of rewards, including shout-outs and BFF status, in order to thank fans for their commitment. All three of these micro-celebrities have performed tours throughout America in order to meet their fans. These micro-celebrities have stated that they love meeting their fans, but these tours also generate large amounts of revenue, as fans must purchase tickets and the micro-celebrities are provided with opportunities to sell their merchandise. Jacob Sartorius released a music EP in early 2017, so his tour was mainly intended to promote his music and perform for his fans.

Fans are not the only ones who react to micro-celebrities: (cyber-)bullying and the expression of hatred online are phenomena that go hand-in-hand with micro-celebrity practices. All three of the micro-celebrities examined in this thesis routinely deal with haters, partly because, according to many people, lip-synching is not an actual talent, at least not

when compared to actual singing or dancing. Social media platforms use different tactics to discourage cyber-bullying: Instagram and Musical.ly only provide the options to like/love a photo or video. YouTube, however, provides the option to give something a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” All three platforms allow users to comment on a photo or video; however, only YouTube offers the possibility of removing this option. Musical.ly encourages its users in the comment section to “say something nice,” as opposed to Instagram’s “add a comment” and YouTube’s “add a public comment.” In one of her YouTube videos, Baby Ariel reports that, when she started with social media, people sent her hate comments, which really upset her. For this reason, she started an anti-bullying campaign (2016b).

These micro-celebrities often transform these negative comments into something positive, as discussed in Chapter 5, by creating videos in which they read and react to hateful comments, as shown in Image 8.

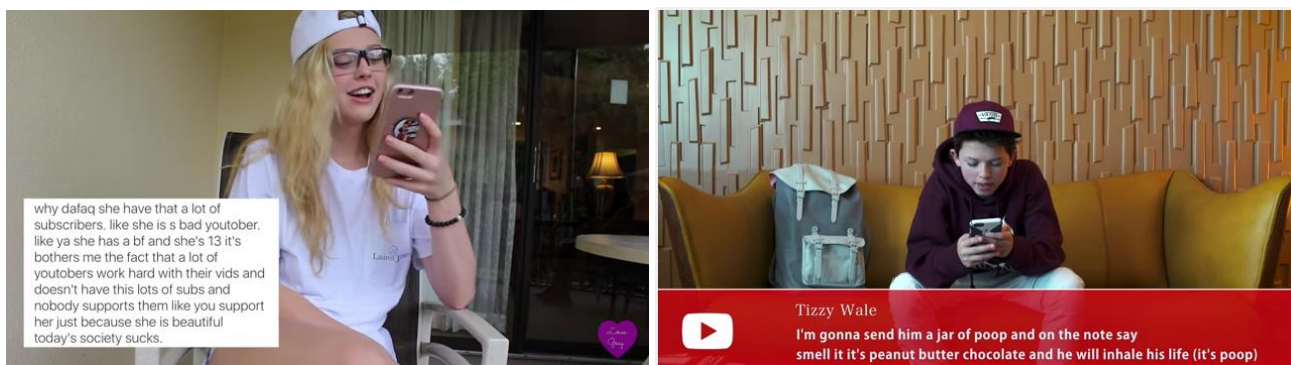


Image 8 – Loren Gray (2016c) and Jacob Sartorius (2016a) reacting to hateful comments

These videos show how micro-celebrities attempt to show positive versions of themselves, as discussed in Chapter 5. However, these videos also demonstrate how micro-celebrities attempt to create content for their YouTube channels, where views can be converted into money. These videos suggest authenticity: the micro-celebrities present themselves as being vulnerable by reading these hateful comments; however, they exercise control over which ones they discuss. In short, their main advice is that viewers should embrace themselves, remove all negativity from their lives and only surround themselves with positive people who genuinely care about their well-being. This is consistent with the argument I made previously regarding how the logic of the market has infiltrated into our social relationships. This chapter showed that fans do not only support the micro-celebrities, they also provide them with content they can use in their YouTube videos. Also, these interactions provide micro-celebrities with opportunities to show an authentic, idealized version of themselves.

8. Conclusion

As the affordances of social media platforms make it possible for individuals to transform themselves into celebrities, the number of micro-celebrities has grown (Marwick en boyd 2011). The self-representation techniques employed by these micro-celebrities need to be re-evaluated, as these practices are mediated and shaped by the affordances of social media platforms. For an individual to become a successful micro-celebrity, self-commodification is inevitable. This thesis explored how the industries responsible for the production of these commodities, specifically social media platforms, offer affordances that individuals employ in an effort to transform themselves into micro-celebrities. The analysis showed that both the affordances of these platforms and the efforts of the micro-celebrities have clear commercial motives. In this chapter, I provide answers to the sub-questions and the main research question. The limits of this research are also discussed and, finally, I identify possible directions for further research.

The answer to the first sub-question (*how do the affordances of Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram contribute to the expansion of micro-celebrity practices?*) focuses on the affordances of these social media platforms. The literature on micro-celebrities shows that there are four important elements in play: individuals (1) market themselves by (2) adopting self-consciously constructed personas, (3) in a manner similar to those of brands or celebrities, (4) when presenting themselves to an audience or fan base (Marwick 2013a). The analysis showed that the possibilities to discover and share content offered by these platforms contribute to the first characteristic. The possibility of editing content, and thereby the potential to show the audience an idealized version of one's self, contributes to the second and third characteristics. Finally, the possibilities offered by these platforms in terms of allowing interaction with their audiences allow micro-celebrities to stay in touch with their fans.

The three case studies, focusing on the micro-celebrities Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray, showed that they have all constructed transmediated selves that transcend individual platforms. As such, I will answer the second sub-question (*how are the identities of the micro-celebrities Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray constructed online?*) by focusing on the roles of (integrated) themes, such as appearance, positivity and authenticity, their construction of overarching self-stories. These stories are constructed across multiple platforms (dispersion), connect the present self with the past and the future (episodic) and focus on the micro-celebrity's relationship with the audience (interaction).

The affordance analysis and three case studies showed how micro-celebrity practices are financially of interest to both the platforms and the micro-celebrities, which answers the

third sub-question (*how can the interactions between affordances and micro-celebrity practices be understood from a political economy perspective?*): micro-celebrities can convert their fame into actual economic capital using the affordances offered by social media platforms. Partnership allows the platforms to retain control over the content, since micro-celebrities are required to conform to their guidelines.

So, how can the celebrification of social media platforms be understood from a political economy perspective, when considering the relation between the affordances offered by platforms and the self-representation of micro-celebrities? Both parties, the platforms and micro-celebrities, intelligently exploit the possibilities afford by each other. Social media platforms use teenagers' desire to become famous for their own interests, and micro-celebrities use the possibilities provided by the platforms in order to strengthen their statuses. They both use ideologies to disguise their actual intentions: the platforms by "providing a stage for self expression" and the micro-celebrities by "doing what they love and trying to make their fans happy." Eventually, both the platforms and micro-celebrities increase their (economic) capital.

While this research has provided some interesting insights, some limitations should be mentioned. First, the precise functioning of a partnership between platforms and users remains vague for outsiders, like myself. I have described this cooperation with all the available resources, but I am aware of the fact that some arrangements are slightly different from what I have described. Second, as this thesis explored only three case studies, the results of this research cannot be generalized. Also, besides Musical.ly, YouTube and Instagram, the micro-celebrities use several other social media platforms. Therefore, I am aware of the fact that I have not been able to map the entire transmediated selves of the micro-celebrities. Furthermore, Baby Ariel, Jacob Sartorius and Loren Gray have all reached a level of fame that means that they have some sort of management to represent them. Baby Ariel has signed a deal with the Creative Artist Agency (CAA), Jacob Sartorius is represented by a similar agency (Jarvey 2016) and Loren Gray is represented by a model agency (SMM 2016). These three micro-celebrities now have professionals managing them, which could have influenced the content that appeared on their social media accounts.

Within the field of micro-celebrities, there are many opportunities for further research. In this research, I focused on three extremely popular micro-celebrities; in further research, it would be interesting to investigate the extent to which the average social media user unconsciously adopts these micro-celebrity practices. This would provide further insights into how these celebrity practices have infiltrated into people's everyday lives.

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