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3. *L8r H8r: Commoditized Privacy, Influencer Wars, and Productive Disorder in the Influencer Industry*

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Since their earliest commercial endeavors on blogs such as Blogspot or LiveJournal and social networking sites such as Friendster or MySpace, ordinary people who become internet famous have established themselves as microcelebrities who utilize technology to brand themselves as authentic and famous to a niche group of followers (Senft, 2008). A more sophisticated incarnation of microcelebrities is Influencers—a highly viable, systematic, and professional form of microcelebrity whose careers operate on ideogeographical-specific and platform-specific ecologies of attention, aesthetics, affects, social ties, identities, and commerce across various social media, and between mainstream and amateur media industries. Influencers make most of their money from advertorials on their digital estates, as well as brand ambassadorships and appearances at physical events (Abidin, 2015).

In the last decade, the Influencer industry has become increasingly professionalized and saturated as people attain digital literacies at a younger age and find lower barriers to entry, digital affordances of platforms become more user-friendly and universally accessible, and pioneering Influencers demonstrate success and model scripts that aspiring Influencers can follow. Various social media have emerged with dominant tropes and prominent users; for instance, visually oriented Instagram has become the gold standard for publishing highly curated and congruent feeds featuring immaculate snapshots of Influencers' pristine lifestyles.

Some Influencers have begun to break away from the picture perfect mold of Instagram and the stasis of their rank in the Influencer industry. A bold group of Influencers is seeking new followers by commodifying their privacy

to chase drama and controversy, garner negative attention for themselves or others, display authenticity claims, engage in Influencer wars, and play with ideas around productive disorder. I will call such users controversy-seeking Influencers. Their hidden agenda can explain why, although some Influencers struggle with haters and the backlash associated with the job (Abidin, 2013), others invite and then dismiss such criticism with the maxim "later, hater" or "l8r h8r." This chapter looks at how Influencers negotiate between participating in negative attention rituals and relying on web amnesia to grow their follower base.

The data in this chapter is constituted from two field sites. The contextual knowledge of the Influencer industry and examples drawn from Influencers in Singapore are informed by my ongoing anthropological fieldwork with blogshop and Influencer cultures since 2008. This comprised participant observation among social media celebrities, their family and friends, their backend staff, their management agencies, their clients and sponsors, and their followers and haters in the flesh; personal interviews with the abovementioned groups; content analysis of Influencers' active digital estates; web archaeology into Influencers' abandoned digital estates; and archival research on press mentions and populist discourses on Influencers. The in-depth case studies of Influencer-related commotions and events are based on my research on the attention and aesthetic economy of various social media since 2014. This comprised archiving and analyzing in real time events such as global tragedies via trending hashtags, vernacular virality and memes, Influencer scandals, and changes on platforms including Blogspot, Wordpress, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook. I focus on three such Influencers scandals between 2012 and 2014. But to understand how Influencers come to play with negative attention rituals, we must first appreciate how Influencers at different ranks and stages of their careers experience differentiated privileges when attempting to commoditize their privacy.

Commoditized Privacy: A Lifecycle

The personae of Influencers are premised upon sharing selected aspects of their lives that are usually personal and publicly inaccessible. Therefore, privacy becomes a commodity that is manipulated and performed to advance their careers. At low-status, privacy is deemed a necessary sacrifice for career growth until it is distinguished as Influencer persona privacy and non-Influencer persona privacy. At mid-status, persona privacy is a calibrated performance to increase readership. At high-status, all privacy becomes a privilege with intrinsic value.

Low Status

In the early stages, Influencers have not yet developed Influencer personae nor distinguished them from non-Influencer identities. They conceptualize privacy as a personal quality based on their most private, non-commercial identities and desire to preserve it. However, success in the Influencer industry is measured by the volume of one's viewer traffic, and Influencers struggle between preserving their privacy but settling for low readership, or sacrificing their privacy and acquiring high readership.

Cassandra, who had 1,200 daily blog views when I interviewed her at a very early point of her career, is unwilling to sacrifice too much privacy. She has stalled her career by intentionally remaining "low profile" and only blogs about things she feels "will not attract too much attention." In contrast, Natasha, who had once blogged about her experiences of underage sex to 30,000 viewers, feels she no longer "owns privacy"—not because of her blogposts' content, but her extensive popularity. A high-status Influencer, Natasha, deems this a "trade off" for her career.

Trading off between privacy and readership is confined primarily to early stages of careers when Influencers have low-status. As they distinguish Influencer personae from their non-Influencer identities, privacy becomes conceptualized as two layers: one for the commercial persona, and one for the personal identity. Commercial persona privacy is sacrificed, and personal identity remains intact.

Mid Status

After developing an Influencer persona, mid-status Influencers are concerned with increasing their readership. Many capture attention by turning usually private events into a public performance. Privacy is manipulated into a public staging, to captivate an audience in search of spectacles (Kitzmann, 2004). As the most taboo, sex captures the largest audience. So-called "Leaked" sex videos, "staged" domestic violence, and breakup "tell-all" exposés are intentionally produced to bait attention. Holly states on her blog that her "leaked" sex video "needed the chance to get your attention and sink in." Like many Influencers, she intentionally stages intimate moments for voyeuristic consumption as a business strategy (Abidin, 2017).

Some mid-status Influencers worry about nuclear family members reading their blogs when they are staging privacy. Influencers are generally comfortable with personal friends and romantic partners reading their blogs; the insecurity is because nuclear family members—who hold intimate knowledge of an Influencer's most private personal identity—potentially threaten the

congruence of the constructed narratives (Daniel & Knudsen, 1995). For instance, Jayne was "pretty okay" about blogging her "private life" until her older brother found her blog. He disagreed with some of her self-presentation and began to police her blog content, causing her much frustration. Belinda, however, "feels safe" because her mother is "not computer savvy" and unlikely to read her blog. Family is less of a concern for established Influencers who do not feel the need to stage privacy to sustain followers' attention.

High Status

Once Influencers have captured a sizable following, withholding information about their private lives acquires commodity value, because the mystique over what is not displayed makes followers curious; the less revealed, the more enticed followers are. Marianne notes that Anna can "afford to be private about her life now [because] she is more successful." Although Anna used to publish raw pictures about life behind-the-scenes, her blogposts are now infrequent and more polished. On her social media feeds, followers leave hundreds of comments asking about her relationship. Tracy remarks that high-status Influencers are "classy Influencers" who do not need to "push themselves all the time, [because] people will still want to know about [them]."

Alberoni (2007) noted that the elite class experiences less observability and more secrecy. Papacharissi (2010) has conceptualized privacy as a similarly privileged commodity, and in this case only among high-status Influencers, whose non-disclosure solicits as much attention as their disclosure of information. Influencers who have attained a particular standard and traction among their followers can play with privacy as attention bait to stimulate desire and excitement. Influencers pride themselves on being "ordinary people"; they are accessible to followers and more relatable than mainstream celebrities (Turner, 2010). Losing this status would jeopardize their credibility, so it is paramount that high-status Influencers carefully negotiate a balance between revealing and concealing their private lives.

Privacy for Profit

Turner argued that public figures become celebrities at "the point at which media interest in their activities is transferred from reporting on their public role … to investigating the details of their private lives" (2014, p. 8). Geraghty (2007, p. 100–101) similarly noted that this form of "star-as-celebrity" comprises attention focused on an individual's "private life" irrespective of their actual career or public personae. For Influencers, however, the private and the public often overlap ambiguously and strategically masquerade as

the other to bait followers' attention. As a form of "lifestreaming" (Marwick, 2013, p. 207), Influencers' conceptions of the private and the public underscore Warner's (2002, p. 414) third category of "publics" as a status that "comes into being" through being broadcast, circulated, and widely publicized. Marwick (2013) clarified Warner's argument by stating that what matters in publicness is the intentional dissemination of information, rather than the information simply being publicly available.

In fact, it is their very private lives that constitute their public personae, as navigated via mechanisms of "presentational culture" (Marshall, 2010, p. 45) afforded by social media technologies. In other words, privacy is no longer personal seclusion in which one is free from public attention. Rather, it is manipulated into a commodity for gain, and it differs across the Influencer status spectrum.

Attention Events and Rituals

Goldhaber (1997) asserted that the scarcity of attention has generated what he called "the attention economy." He argued that "economies are governed by what is scarce," and that as abundant, overflowing information drowns us, we must distinguish ourselves from the crowd. Goldhaber said that commanding attention required originality, transparency, and the ability to convert attention into other resources and currencies. Davenport and Beck (2001, p. 2) later added that although "capital, labor, information, and knowledge are all in plentiful supply," "human attention" is in shortage. They developed three pairs of attention types: voluntary/captive, wherein one gives attention by choice or not; attractive/aversive, wherein one gives attention for gains or to avoid loss; and front-of-mind/back-of-mind, wherein one gives attention explicitly and consciously or out of habit (2001). Influencers usually command a passive form of voluntary, attractive, and back-of-mind attention. However, the controversy-seeking Influencers I discuss here engage in spectacle-like practices to generate an active form of captive, aversive, and front-of-mind attention to recapture the foci of existing followers and attract new ones.

The Influencer wars and negative attention rituals I discuss show how Influencers convert bad publicity, self-shaming practices, and hating into attention, which in return expands their follower traffic and increases the value of the advertorial exposure they can provide. Influencer wars and negative attention rituals are spectacles in that they are visually dominated with symbolic codes of a "certain size and grandeur" (MacAloon, 1984, p. 243), and serve as a "focal point of consciousness" and "means of unification" (Debord,

2002, p. 6) in a social group. Boorstin (1961) called the orchestrated spectacles I observe "pseudo-events": news that is staged, executed for the mere purpose of creating newsworthy content, bears an ambiguous representation of the reality of events, and most crucially, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Debord similarly emphasized the false consciousness generated by spectacles that "ai[m] at nothing other than [themselves]" (2002, p. 7). With the Influencers in this chapter, this is especially the case because the spectacles are often merely exaggerated and dramatized accounts of and reactions toward the mundane; Turner (2014, p. 92–93) termed this an "explosion of the ordinary" that is mined as seemingly authentic and dedicated representations despite actually being calculated productions of entertainment, or a "demotic turn" in which (micro)celebrity culture is enabled by digital technology to be increasingly ordinary although not necessarily increasingly democratic.

Anthropologically, these spectacular practices bear some semblance to what Turner (1974, p. 33, 37) termed "social dramas"—"public episodes of tensional irruption" in which conflict arises from "aharmonic" or "disharmonic" processes. Social dramas are also concerned with the cohesion and conflict within a social group. They can be productive to a group when the conflict foregrounds the usually negligible "customs and habits of daily intercourse," causing people to "take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints, often against their own personal preferences" (p.35). Turner (p. 37–43) outlined four main phases of social dramas: 1) "overt breach or deliberate nonfulfillment" of "norm-governed social relations"; 2) escalation of the crisis causing a reordering of social relations; 3) redressive action initiated by "representative members of the disturbed social system"; and 4) "reintegration of the disturbed social group" or "the social recognition and legitimization of irreparable schism between the contesting parties."

Influencer Wars: Three Case Studies

Influencer wars are short lived but intense events in which Influencers engage in heated disputes with competitors through controversial claims to generate publicity for themselves. Similar clashes have been noted on YouTube as "flame wars" in which "a flurry of video posts clusters around an internal 'controversy' or an antagonistic debate between one or more YouTubers" (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 97). Although Burgess and Green describe YouTube flame wars as a ludic event that is spontaneous, undirected, and even playful, the Influencer wars are deliberate publicity attempts. Through exaggerated and highly sensationalized accounts, Influencers stimulate widespread

interest beyond their regular following, inviting other Influencers and their followers to comment on the issue. The commotion produces a short time in which Influencers can capitalize on general curiosity by producing insider accounts of the controversy, joining camps (polarized supporters of opposing parties in the dispute), or making provocative statements in order to join in the Influencer war. This event disrupts the equilibrium of Influencers' relative stable follower traffic, in which they can wrestle for attention, create publicity for themselves, and increase their followings.

Constructing three genres of Influencer wars as case studies, I turn to Influencers' engagements with status claims, authenticating appearance, and tell-all exposés.

Status Claims

In July 2014, Influencer Eunice Annabel posted a picture of her management's annual event, comprising a group of Influencers with the caption "So you wanna be on top?"—a quote from the TV program *America's Next Top Model*. She changed her Instagram profile title from "blogger" to "celebrity blogger." This was understandable and perhaps justified given her recent movie and television appearances, and endorsement deals with various cosmetics brands. She was a regular on magazines and newspapers and continuously received good publicity from the press. Although she had been a child actress, her recent prolific appearances in the mainstream media was her formal crossover into the entertainment industry after having established herself as an Influencer.

This angered a rival Influencer from a competing firm, Xiaxue, who published a series of Instagram posts cryptically and directly criticizing Eunice Annabel. This eventuated in two camps, supporting Eunice Annabel or Xiaxue, cross-posting cryptic captions and critical statements of support across various social media feeds. The Influencer war mostly occurred on Instagram and Twitter, although several Influencers also published opinion pieces about the incident on their blogs. This was widely dubbed "Xiaxue vs. Eunice Annabel" by the mainstream media, with heated discussions and follower camps breaking out on popular online forums and online news outlets.

At stake was what constitutes "celebrity," whether it can be achieved or ascribed, and who was entitled to use the label. There was no formal resolution; both camps generated relatively equal amounts of support and hating. However, after the commotion passed, Eunice Annabel edited her Instagram biography again, removing the "celebrity" title.

Authenticating Appearance

Influencer Seline has been accused of Photoshopping her photos since she began blogging in 2005. She has refuted these claims in some instances, but ignored others. Unedited photographs of Seline are widely circulating on the Internet, and several threads on forums and blogposts are dedicated to exposing her Photoshopping antics.

In July 2012, however, a relatively low-profile Influencer, Jermaine, published a blogpost collating several of these active discussions, in a bid to call out Seline's edited images. This blogpost circulated widely and was cross-posted onto several social media platforms and online forums. The post featured a string of flickering GIFs to demonstrate how much Seline had doctored her images. Jermaine filtered through several forums, public Facebook albums, and blogposts to compare and contrast Seline's before and after images. Although it is widely known that Influencers use photo-enhancing applications, Influencers who do not disclose or who deny this practice receive criticism from their counterparts. In Seline's case, the long-standing and extensive doctoring of her images with no disclaimers thrust her into an Influencer war for not being truthful about her self-representation.

"Tell-All" Exposés

In December 2013, Influencer Cassie published an Instagram photo of herself sitting on a man's lap. Although this is not an unusual sight on her feed, the deliberately hazy image featured a man who was not her then boyfriend (who was well known among Cassie's followers). The image of this new man was widely circulated, creating much gossip among followers, until a handful of Influencers published social media posts identifying the man. He was allegedly a romantic interest of one of Cassie's best friends, and it was speculated the two had been exchanging intimate correspondence despite Cassie's current relationship. Cassie's best friend soon published a blogpost detailing what she termed her "betrayal" and "hurt."

In response, Fern was among the first Influencers to publish an exposé of the issue, revealing that Cassie's mystery new boyfriend was one of her ex-boyfriends. Fern wrote a lengthy blogpost entitled "Girlfriend code," arguing that ex-boyfriends' best friends and best friends' ex-boyfriends are "strictly out of bounds" in the dating game. She also drafted several other codes of "femininity" detailing the relationship boundaries she felt "girls" could or could not transgress among each other. Many other Influencers and followers published similar sentiments on social media platforms and blogs calling for "sisters before misters" and "bros before hoes."

Although Cassie came out to clarify that she had already broken up with her previous boyfriend a week before the incident, followers charged her for not having "declared" or "announced" this publicly before posting the "intimate" picture. Many Influencers also weighed in and chided her for dating again "so soon after the break up" and for having relations with a man of whom her best friend was fond. Interestingly, most of the focus was on Cassie's alleged "promiscuity," with little discussion of the man's behavior. Cassie soon responded with what she termed a "heartfelt post," bearing connotations of regret and hints of apologies. She also expressed surprise at how quickly her Instagram photo went viral. However, the overarching discourse about her "transgression" that was popularized by Fern's exposé and parroted by others overshadowed Cassie's attempts at redemption.

Productive Disorder

Although it is tempting to brand such spats as mundane or trivial, and gloss over them as mere gossip mongering, Influencer wars are actually a ritual of disorder affecting everyday practices (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). Staging wars and smear campaigns against competitors is a productive form of disorder through which Influencers wrestle for followers' attention and renegotiate viewer traffic. Influencer wars generate captive, aversive, and front-of-mind attention (Davenport & Beck, 2001) which entices new followers to observe the confrontation and join a camp while strengthening existing followers' allegiance.

Influencer wars such as status claims, authenticating appearance, and tell-all exposés follow the cycle of social drama outlined by Turner (1974). In each of these, an Influencer accuses another of committing a breach by using a status-elevating title already claimed by a higher profiled Influencer, by being dishonest about the use of photo-enhancing software, or by apparently inappropriate dating behavior. Generating controversy in the industry generates hype or a frenzy of activity, in which the Influencer hierarchy's stasis is disrupted. Despite the apparent frivolity of things, these topics can command attention and attract (good and bad) publicity, and function to appropriate drama and controversy for individual Influencers' gain.

In Influencer wars, the peak of the drama is the *escalation*, during which the accuser produces a string of highly emotive and persuasive accounts to convince fellow Influencers and followers of the accused's wrongdoing, resulting in a frenzy of users breaking into camps in support of one party and a proliferation of attacking/defensive accounts from each camp. Low-profile Influencers may seek the attention of passersby by capitalizing on this sense

of disorder, attempting to produce side commentaries, personal editorials, or mini (and often sloppy) exposés of their own promising previously unseen information from behind the scenes as an insider—in summary, by producing clickbait (Blom & Hansen, 2015). This creates publicity for themselves and intensifies the exposure for their social media platforms through redirected click-throughs.

As an attempt toward *redressive action*, Eunice Annabel omitted the title celebrity blogger, and Cassie wrote a clarification blogpost and removed the photograph from Instagram. However, Seline did not respond to the accusations apart from a few cryptic and seemingly passive-aggressive statements on her blog, suggesting that haters will always be "attracted to drama" and are "not worth [her] time". Engaging in wars, or responding if one happens to be dragged in, is not always a viable option. Some Influencers stay away from drama, save for the occasional cryptic one-liners (ironically) signifying their disregard of haters and disengagement with the commotion. Others are ambivalent and may comment only to refute allegations. Still others feel that Influencer-warring is an inevitable element of their industry. Although some Influencers appear more hesitant than others to speak up, almost all keep up with breaking news and new scandals around the clock.

In the *reintegration* process, a new stasis is constructed in which alliances among Influencers are reformed, and allegiances to the accuser and accused that were publicly declared during the escalation process are publicly reinstated. Lines between each camp are made more defined. More crucially, follower traffic would have substantially increased for the accuser, the accused, and the most vocal supporters within each camp, until the next Influencer war breaks out to wrest attention away from the temporarily static hierarchy again.

Hating

Hating as a practice and vernacular concept among Influencers and their followers warrants a brief discussion. As noted above, Burgess and Green (2009) considered flame wars on YouTube an internal controversy or antagonistic debate among YouTubers manifesting as a high volume of video posts within a short span of time. However, I want to focus on hating as a practice among followers toward Influencers that may occur in peaks and troughs (as in Influencer wars or negative attention rituals) or as an ongoing background reaction to the voluntary, attractive, and back-of-mind attention (Davenport & Beck, 2001) that Influencers elicit. In existing scholarship on the attention economy, hating most closely resembles trolling. In her study of subcultural

trolling practices, Phillips (2015, p. 15) defined "troll responses as those that 'fish for flames,' 'flames' indicating an incensed response."

Although Burgess and Green defined haters as "negative and often personally offensive commenters" (2009, p. 96), many Influencers I interviewed perceive unanimous agreement in their industry that hating can sometimes occur "just for the sake of it." Influencers felt that hating comments were not merely "harsh criticism," but deliberately unproductive, hostile, and malicious to generate ill will. Similarly, in her study of the term "troll" in Usenet group rec.equestrian, Hardacker defined a troll as a person "whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or to trigger or exacerbate conflict for the purposes of their own amusement" (2010, p. 237). The extent and momentum of hating generated by controversy-seeking Influencers could be attributed to the fact that their spectacles accord with Bird's (2003) observation that long-lasting scandals generally dramatize and skirt the boundaries of moral codes, invite judgment from followers, allow followers to engage in dialogue such as in supporter and hater camps, appeal to emotions as human interest stories, and are excessive to the point that followers are able to distance themselves from Influencers as violators.

Phillips observed that some early scholarship on trolling focused on "effects-based definitions" (2015, p. 17), in which the practice is premised on deception. However, she views trolling as a subculture "marked by a set of unifying linguistic and behavioral practices" (p. 17), and that trolls are motivated by "lulz," an "unsympathetic, ambiguous laughter" in which trolls "reve[l] in the misfortune" of those they dislike (p. 24). Contrary to popular sentiment among followers I have interviewed that hating is "frivolous stuff," "just for fun," and "has no effect in 'the real world'," haters and their hating are valuable to Influencers in that they ultimately comprise follower traffic and help raise awareness of and interest in the Influencer.

Hating accusations cannot always be verified and are often shrouded in rumors and fictives (e.g., "I heard from a friend of a friend," "According to this unnamed source"). However, they can galvanize extensive support or disregard for Influencers, as evidenced in the Influencer wars and negative attention rituals evidenced above. Following from Phillip's (2015) analysis of systemic subcultural trolling behaviors and drawing from my personal interviews among a small pool of followers (and haters), I summarize why some followers engage in hating as a vernacular practice. Through a close coding of my personal interviews with followers, I identified five prevalent discourses of hating: counter-normativity, non-news, manufacturism, sensationalism, and temporality.

Haters repudiate controversy-seeking Influencers for being *counter-normative* and straying from the "mainstream" crowd. These Influencers are chided for attracting "too much attention" to themselves:

> Everything she does is just "me, me, me," it's damn annoying lah … she is sooo AA ["attract attention"—vernacular abbreviation referring to a person who warrants unnecessary attention]
>
> Some of [the Influencers] are high profile for good things, like their achievements?… But [name of Influencer] is just always in the news for no reason … everything also talk to reporters …

Although Influencers frequently headline newspapers and magazines, haters highlight that much coverage of controversy-seeking Influencers is merely frivolous and trivial gossip (i.e. Influencer spats and plastic surgeries). These are occasionally labeled "first world problems," after an Internet meme connoting that the exaggeration and disproportionate self-pity over very minor frustrations are luxuries that only well-off peoples can afford. Many haters reference major world events, such as wars and natural disasters, occurring as Influencers dominate the national imaginary, to underscore a disproportionate amount of publicity accorded to "*non-news*:"

> I think it's damn lame because like, the front page news is about some stupid bloggers fighting … or [having a] Twitter war, but it's not really news news like people dying or what …

The third type of hating discourse focuses on the *manufactured nature* of Influencers' controversies and gripes. These usually feature Internet users complaining about Influencers who stage incidents of little substance, such as if Influencers decried shaming incidents that followers did not feel breach any moral code—for instance, Influencers who fail to mobilize weaponized shame due to failing to understand vernacular shame, resulting in receiving reflexive shame from followers:

> … haiyah you know they say until like they [are] damn tragic, but who knows?… maybe they all pakat pakat [conspire in secret] then come out to [create] drama … it's always like that one

Haters also decry the sensationalist nature of Influencers' "antics," citing actions and statements getting blown out of proportion and coming across as *melodramatic and exaggerated*. One hater mentions Cassie's "hazy Instagram photo" discussed earlier, ridiculing how merely being photographed sitting on a man's lap can "blow up" and invite insinuations that an Influencer "is a slut" or "sleeps around." Others observe that Influencer wars can break out

as soon as one Influencer (mis)interprets another's "vague" Tweet as a smear campaign against oneself despite no confirmation:

> … who really knows [what vague Tweets refer to]? They are all so PA [Passive Aggressive] … every small thing also make until so drama[tic]… like the situation is actually very small, but they can talk and hype until it's damn big deal

Lastly, haters deride the *temporality and transience* of Influencer drama, dispelling the necessary effort to keep up with every single incident. Influencer wars and negative attention rituals are constantly attempted by Influencers, with attempts co-occurring and wrestling for followers' attention, resulting in attention fatigue. However, only some become recognized as actual Influencer wars and negative rituals, replacing the stasis of voluntary, attractive, back-of-mind attention with captive, aversive, front-of-mind attention (Davenport & Beck, 2001):

> … after a while I was like, I give up, because the trends keep changing and there is always a new [incident]… and they are all mostly the same just repeating repeating repeating …
>
> as soon as you [have been up-to-date] with one [incident], another one will pop up …

Despite their denouncement of Influencers' controversy-seeking practices (counter-normativity, non-news, manufacturism, sensationalism, and temporality), haters are still generally active and creative in their hating practices, constituting a form of productive disorder for Influencers through increased interest and traffic. In fact, haters and hating are so prevalent and effective that laws have been enacted in response to Influencers' concerns over their safety, reputation, and intellectual property rights: the Protection of Harassment Act (November 2014) allows Internet users to be guarded from others who cause them alarm, distress and abuse, including harassment, fear of provocation of violence, threats, and unlawful stalking. Influencer Xiaxue used this act in January 2015 to obtain a Protection Order against Internet vigilante group, SMRT Feedback (Ltd). She cited fear for the safety of her toddler and husband, given that her personal information, including address and contact number, was published on the SMRT Feedback (Ltd) Facebook page.

However, anonymous users on popular local forums speculated that this move was merely Xiaxue's bid to silence haters, given that she has publicly announced her (and her toddler's) whereabouts on social media for years and that much of her personal information is voluntarily archived on her blog. We are beginning to observe something akin to Debord's notion of a cyclical spectacle that "aims at nothing other than itself" (2002, p. 7), or Boorstin's

(1961) pseudo-event, in which the generated news staged by controversy-seeking Influencers, the solicited reaction from followers and haters, and controversy-seeking Influencers' response to the hating form a feedback loop that amplifies the synthetic novelty of self-shaming, in a self-fulfilling prophecy that continually generates attention for Influencers. This is also evidenced in the observation that an increasing number of Influencers are dedicating entire blogposts addressing their haters despite being (recently) unprovoked. Such blogposts are situated to aggravate haters and incite more hating, and thus publicity, toward the Influencer.

On the whole, many of the Influencers to whom I spoke claim they try their best to distance themselves from Influencer wars and negative attention rituals. The majority acknowledges that controversy-seeking Influencers are brave to engage in these provocative attention-gathering tactics, and that not everyone is able to stomach the judgment and criticism that undoubtedly accompany their actions. The attention-garnering strategies are often spectacular, scandalous, and occupy a significant portion of mainstream media coverage on Influencers. However, controversy-seeking Influencers who engage in shame practices are a vocal, high-profile minority and not representative of the larger segment of the industry—Influencers who generally aim to put their best behavior forward and maintain their role-model status among followers.

Demonstrating some reflexivity on the permanence of information on the web, a handful of Influencers also mused about reactions from their parents, prospective employers, and future children if the top few search results for their names raked in controversial material as a result of their self-surveillance, or what Humphreys (2013) described as recording oneself for archival or sharing purposes. However, these concerns were often merely passing comments. When asked if they worried about the privacy of their personal information archived on the web, few Influencers displayed any concern as they, like Humphreys' informants, "implicitly defined privacy as privacy from other users or people and not privacy from state, corporate or bureaucratic entities" (2013, p. 6). In fact, many Influencers seem to have faith that new eruptions of pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1961) and the cyclical spectacles that take the form of social dramas (Turner, 1974) would quickly surpass their Influencer wars and self-shaming, making them yesterday's news.

Web Amnesia

Controversy-seeking Influencers may not always publicly discuss their concerns about negative publicity. On the contrary, many invite it to capitalize on the attention. In my interviews, however, other Influencers perceived

Influencer wars and negative attention rituals as effective but harming attention strategies. Many agree that "it is very important to stay relevant," that they "want to remain talked about," and that they want to "differentiate" themselves from others. Yet, they also value the ability to dissociate themselves from deviance over time. Although not always explicitly expressed, many Influencers reference a sentiment of "forgetting" or what I term "web amnesia:"

> … the news changes so fast, it won't even be relevant in a few days
> … the [negative attention event] used to be the hottest news … we [would] check forums and Tweets everyday, but I think not a lot of people remember it now …

Unlike scholarly discussions that describe the infrastructure and technology of the Internet as one that never forgets (Rosen, 2011) in light of data retention tendencies, web amnesia is focused on the social effects followers experience in the age of abundant data (Goldhaber, 1997). I posit here three vernacular understandings of web amnesia that have emerged from my personal interviews and observations.

First, as observed by Goldhaber (1997), in the attention economy, there is always an abundance of content that is rapidly circulating. This has been exacerbated in recent years by increasing volumes of content produced via new social media and messaging platforms not covered in this chapter (e.g., Snapchat, WeChat, LINE, and QQ). With spectacles and trends experiencing a high turnover rate, even dramatic news gets old very quickly and loses its impact on followers, resulting in lack of capacity to wrestle attention.

Second, there are typically several attempts at soliciting publicity in any given period of time. As the Influencer industry in Singapore rapidly expanded, some Influencers took to shaming practices as an attention-grabbing strategy to distinguish themselves from others (Goldhaber, 1997). Multiple Influencer wars and negative attention rituals often collide and appeal to different segments of Internet users. As such, whether one's incident or shame practice trends and receives the spotlight may be a matter of how controversial it is, timing, or just plain luck. Only a selected few Influencers ever get propelled into a national—or region-wide limelight.

Lastly, with the practice of Influencer wars and self-shaming becoming popular and even blasé to desensitized followers, controversy-seeking Influencers are pioneering new practices of clickbait (Blom & Hansen, 2015) (e.g., staged leaked sex tapes or grotesque visuals from plastic surgeries) in a bid for attention. In other words, the moral boundaries of shaming are ever shifting. In 2010, it was largely taboo for Influencers to admit to having

undergone plastic surgery. By 2012, such surgeries became renarrativized as an intimate journey of sharing, commoditized for sponsorship, and normalized among followers. As boundaries of what constitutes a spectacle keep shifting, newer shaming practices will reinvent narrative scripts and innovate to further solicit reactions and command attention.

L8r H8r

Some Influencers vie for attention through negative attention strategies such as Influencer wars and indulge in inviting hating from followers. Yet, as observed in my discussion of web amnesia, most Influencers have to manage a high rate of ephemerality in the spectacles they stage. For this reason, Influencers deliberately strategize and labor over feedback loops comprising their spectacle, reactions from followers, and responses to the hating they receive in a self-fulfilling prophecy that continually generates new attention; this is evidenced through taking and circulating screenshots of already-deleted faux pas, archiving and publicizing even the bad press they receive, and provoking haters. In an environment where attention is scarce and increasingly dispersed, Influencers rely on followers and haters, and on controversy-seeking Influencers and each other to sustain an ecology of attention in which moral boundaries are continually reasserted in order to be breached through weaponized, vernacular, and reflexive shame, such that pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1961) and social dramas (Turner, 1974)—or unsocial pseudodramas—can continue to be produced as spectacles. As one veteran Influencer told me, "all publicity is good publicity, even bad publicity … yeah only if you know how to manage it."

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