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**INTERNET  
CELEBRITY**

Understanding  
Fame Online

**Crystal Abidin**

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Understanding Fame  
Online

# SOCIETYNOW

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University of Queensland

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# INTERNET CELEBRITY

## Understanding Fame Online

BY

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

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Carissa:

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



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## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Yours,  
Crystal Abidin aka wishcrys.