



The Practice of Micro-Celebrity in Bunda Corla's Instagram Account

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Abstract

The advancement of social media leads to the changes of celebrity practice. Needless to say, this made a progressive shift from traditional celebrities such as actors, musicians, and models who are taking a long process and journey to gain success in entertainment business to 'micro-celebrity' that is created by using social media platform such as Instagram. The objective of this research is to analyze the practice of micro-celebrity in Bunda Corla's Instagram account. As an influencer or selebgram (celebrity Instagram) with million followers, Bunda Corla is known as a 'woman' who likes to share her everyday activities and ways of life with her fans through her live Instagram. She constructs herself as a single working 'woman' with 'genuine' and easy-going personality. In addition, she openly states that she has no interest in money and appearing in any official TV programs. Interestingly, many verified accounts follow her account and frequently participate in her live Instagram. By applying Marwick's concept of 'micro-celebrity', netnography as well as textual analysis, this analysis also tries to investigate how micro-celebrity is practiced in social media. The finding of this research posits that Corla's 'genuine' character can be negotiated in some aspects.

Keywords: *Micro-Celebrity; Instagram; Bunda Corla; Selebgram*

Introduction

The advancement of technology has been celebrated around the world to increase individual's visibility, specifically in social media platform. We Are Social reported that in 2023 Internet users in Indonesia have reached 212,9 million. On average, they spend seven hours twenty-four minutes to go on the internet. Due to this fact, many people take advantage of social media (Facebook, Instagram, twitter, and so forth) to share their everyday activities, read news, find information, interact with their friends or relatives, and so on. Surprisingly, there are a lot of people gain 'spotlight' and thousand (even millions of followers) when the contents that they share through their accounts are noticed and shared by their followers. Consequently, they become famous like a celebrity.

Chris Rojek (2001) mentions three types of celebrity, firstly, ascribed celebrity who is predetermined celebrity status based on bloodlines, as with members of the royal family or sons and daughters of famous people, for example Prince William and Chelsea Clinton.

Secondly, achieved celebrity who is granted to individuals who accomplish greatness thanks to some special talent, skill or quality, such as Greats of the sporting world like Roger Federer and Venus Williams. Thirdly, attributed celebrity: in this case, individuals become celebrities without having any great talent or famous bloodline. Their celebrity is entirely media-generated, whether they like it or not. Reality-TV personalities like the late Jade Goody (former Big Brother contestant) are attributed celebrities, as are individuals forced into the media limelight due to tragic circumstances, like Kate and Gerry McCann.

Unlike traditional celebrities such as musicians, actors, singers, ordinary people having specifically creative contents which are relatable to people's lives have got the potential to be publicly noticed as a celebrity. As suggested by Marshall, P. D., & Redmond, S. (2016), this social phenomenon is called 'micro-celebrity' and the practice of micro-celebrity in the new media has made bloggers, youtubers, celebrity Instagram (also known as '*selebgram*'). Marwick (2014) defines micro-celebrity as people having large followers in their social media accounts. They become popular because they create interesting contents which can successfully entice a lot of people. They carefully maintain engagements by constantly creating specific contents and building emotional relationships with their audience.

One of people who practice micro-celebrity is Bunda Corla. An Indonesian *selebgram* now living in Germany who like to share her everyday activity through her Instagram live to her followers. Having 5,9 million followers in her account @corla_2, it can be said that Bunda Corla is a *selebgram*.

Social media offers its users freedom of expression to generate any kinds of innovations and creativity which are sometimes considered to be difficult to be done in an open public space. It also enables its users to get connected to other users having the same interest and ideas. Additionally, though it is hard to sort out the negative comments from other users, social media still offers 'safety' in the form of physical violence to marginalized people who voice their interest.

Kirandita's research (2017) on sexuality expression of female illustrators who share their work in Instagram due to normativity on offline space which hinders and taboo female's perspective who speaks about sexuality. Therefore, Instagram has been chosen to voice their perspective through their art of work.

In relation to this, Bunda Corla uses Instagram to speak about her life and sexuality without having to worry much about negative comments, hate speech, and any physical contacts. Instead of staying silent, she chooses to confront users who have different perspectives against her. In addition, the geographical aspect also matters since she lives far away from Indonesia, in Germany. Therefore, she will feel way safer from any physical contacts with people who are against her controversial attitudes and opinions.

By applying Marwick's concept of 'micro-celebrity' as well as textual analysis, this qualitative research aims at investigating how micro-celebrity is practiced by Bunda Corla. Another objective of this study is also trying to analyze how her 'genuine' character can be negotiated in some aspects.

Research Methodology

This qualitative research applies digital ethnography also known as netnography which treats social media platform as a locus of field research. Specifically, Bunda Corla's Instagram account @corla_2 will be the subject research. Postill and Pink (2012) argues that the everyday life of the social media ethnographer involves living part of one's life on the internet, keeping up to date with and participating and collaborating in social media discussions.

As a particular practice beyond ethnography, netnography is participant-observational research based in online fieldwork. It uses computer-mediated communications as a source of data to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural phenomenon.

Therefore, to collect the data, the researcher has to engage in Bunda Corla's live Instagram, participate in discussion as well as actively analyze every single comment of the viewers. Then, the collected data will be carefully interpreted using the concepts, theories, and any other relevant sources such as journals, books, and websites. In the textual analysis, the visual elements as well as the words generated in the captions and comment column will also be analyzed.

Result and Discussion

Even though she refused to be said a *selebgram*, it is inevitable that Bunda Corla has publicly become famous and gained a lot of followers. When she is doing live Instagram, she attracts large viewers, approximately more than 350.000 viewers. Surprisingly, her viewers exceed fans of an American famous singer Justin Bieber. Lots of snippets of video containing captions and hastags #bundacorla were actively shared by people in Instagram and Tiktok platform.

Cynthia Corla Pricilla, also known as Bunda Corla is a working woman originally from Medan, North Sumatera-Indonesia. Through her Instagram account @corla_2, she likes to appear live just to share her daily routine and life experiences in Germany to her followers. She likes to share mundane things such as cleaning the house, eating simple food, sharing her love stories, and working in a fast-food restaurant. Interestingly, some verified accounts and traditional celebrities were actively watching and commenting in her live Instagram.

She builds a personal branding as a single working woman who enjoys her life and does not let anybody define her as a subject. She will behave and speak rude words to counter her followers who try to criticize and preach her. Additionally, she does not even care if people might like her or not. Unlike many celebrities, Bunda Corla does not like gimmick. She does not even try to look perfect in front of her followers and she just likes to be herself. She smokes, eats with her bare hand, dances, rarely wears make-up, speaks and does whatever she wants when doing live Instagram. Her 'innocent' characteristic plays an integral part and becomes the background reason why she wins over people's attention.

Bunda Corla presents herself as an independent, 'genuine', as well as innocent subject to strengthen her image in social media. Uniquely, though having large followers, Bunda Corla states that she is not interested in making her account verified. Moreover, she is also not interested in monetizing her popularity. Many Indonesian celebrities and influencers give her a lot of money for free without any commercial purposes.

She said that she has no intention to monetize her account or to gain profit from it as she just likes to live a simple life. Additionally, she does not want to teach herself and her family to make instant money. This is, of course, a rare personality in this modern life where most people are competing so hard to verify their social media account, gain public attention, and even create gimmick to make profit from it, but Bunda Corla appears as a contrast figure.

To understand the phenomenon of Bunda Corla, the concept of micro-celebrity is applied to carefully analyze how she becomes a *selebgram*. Theresa Senft (2008) in her article titled *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Network* defines micro-celebrity as a communicative way involving an individual to increase his or her popularity in website through various techniques such as videos, blogs, and social media. In line with this argument, micro-celebrity serves as demotic turn which increases one's visibility to public by using social media platform (Turner, 2010).

Meanwhile, Alice E. Marwick argues that in the practice of micro-celebrity, one has targeted specific audience and maintains them through constant communication and interaction. By using social media platform such as TikTok, Instagram, twitter, YouTube, people from many different social-cultural backgrounds develop strategies to gain public attention and build online communal presence through micro-celebrity. In this case, an ordinary person including Bunda Corla can strategically use social media to gain followers by producing contents such as videos, photos, and live streaming.

Boyd and Marwick (2011) stated that there are several important elements in the practice of micro-celebrity, such as the maintenance of a fanbase, performance of intimacy, authenticity, construction of consumable persona, and affiliation to other celebrity.

Bunda Corla meets all those aforementioned elements in the practice of micro celebrity, in the aspect of the maintenance of a fanbase, she successfully builds up an emotional relationship and connection with her followers by actively responding their comments on her live Instagram. Additionally, she also likes to call them '*anak-anak bunda*' (my kids). Conversely, they call her '*bunda gue*' which means 'my virtual mom'.

Meanwhile, in terms of authenticity and the construction of consumable persona, Bunda Corla creates a 'unique' personality. She portrays herself as a 'genuine', 'innocent' and independent woman who is proud of her imperfection. She avoids any forms of gimmick and might be one of the very few people who rejects to have a verified account that most people dream about.

Interestingly, even though she likes to speak rude words, which in Indonesian tradition it is perceived taboo to be done by a woman, her followers do not care about it and are more focused on her substantial message which motivate them to live a simple life happily and be thankful in every situation.

Finally, in the aspect of affiliation to other celebrity, Bunda Corla connects to several famous Indonesian public figures. It can be seen when she was doing a live Instagram, many local celebrities such as Ivan Gunawan, Tuti Wibowo, Soimah, Nikita Mirzani, Putra Siregar with verified accounts were identified to get involved in her live chat.

To sum up, the Bunda Corla successfully meets all important elements in the practice of micro-celebrity. In contrast, there are some changes that she has made, particularly in relation to her image. Bunda Corla's authenticity is also negotiated in some aspects. She is now mostly appearing in many commercial products advertisements and TV programs. Though she used to say that she was not interested to be invited in any official TV programs and monetize her account, she came to Indonesia to hold her 'meet and greet' in big cities and her show was commercial and organized by a professional management.

Conclusion

Micro-celebrity has made some progressive shifts in the practice of celebrity in new media. Definitely, this has made entertainment business in Indonesia very competitive. As stated by Marwick and Boyd, Bunda Corla, an ordinary single and independent working woman living Germany, successfully practices the elements of micro-celebrity by maintaining a fanbase, performing intimacy and authenticity, constructing a consumable persona, and showing connection to other popular local public figures.

By practicing those elements of micro-celebrity, Bunda Corla gains millions of followers and appears as one of famous *selebgrams* or influencers. Her 'genuine' characters made her popular among Indonesian viewers. Her messages were liked and actively shared by her followers not only in Instagram platform, but also in any other platforms such as TikTok and Twitter.

Even though, Bunda presents herself as an independent working woman who is not interested in monetizing her account, she has made a significant change as she gains more followers and becomes more popular. In addition, her authenticity is negotiated in some aspects. She is now mostly appearing in many commercial products advertisements and TV programs and came to Indonesia to hold her ‘meet and greet’ in big cities and her show was commercial and organized by a professional management.

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