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Celebrification of Instagram Users As a Practice

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Abstract

This paper discusses celebrification that occurs on social media, especially Instagram. Celebrification on Instagram triggered the emergence of the Instagram famous phenomenon called 'Instagram celebrity'. Instagram celebrity itself is a term that is used among users in Indonesia. It is a status given to Instagram users who earn and increase online popularity through and on Instagram. In fact, celebrification on Instagram is different from the celebrification that occurs in conventional mass media. Therefore, using Bourdieu's concept of habitus and ethnographic method, this paper focuses on the practice of celebrification by Instagram users who make themselves an Instagram celebrity. Research was conducted by participant observation and interviews with three informants who are Instagram celebrities based in Yogyakarta, there are two main findings: (1) Instagram celebrities are active and creative users so that the practice of celebrification in Instagram can be seen as a result of participatory habitus, and (2) participatory habitus can be conceptualized as a strategy to challenge the traditional ways in celebrity production, including the mediagenic persona and performance of authenticity.

Keywords: practice, celebrification, celebrity, Instagram, users, participatory, habitus

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1. Introduction

The rise of the internet and interactive media opens up opportunities for 'demotic turn', a term by Turner (2010) to describe when ordinary people have the opportunity to appear in the media. One form of demotic turn is celebrification. Celebrification can be understood as the changes at the individual level, more precisely, the process by which ordinary people or public figures are transformed into celebrities (Driessens, 2013: 643). When conventional mass media such as TV dominates and monopolizes in choosing who can appear in the media and be used as celebrities, the development of internet technologies such as social media allows ordinary people to make themselves celebrities.

Celebrification in the social media space triggered the emergence of the Instagram celebrity phenomenon. Instagram celebrity is a status given to Instagram users who earn and increase their popularity on Instagram. The term celebrity Instagram is a popular term among Instagram users in Indonesia. it is a term given to ordinary users, not someone who is known first in conventional mass media. Mostly, they are young people who are active and creative by creating content on social media, and usually called Instagrammers, bloggers or influencers. They attract attention and have a large number of followers on social media accounts.

Instagram celebrity can be seen as a form of micro-celebrity. Micro-celebrity itself can be understood as a style of online performances to increase online popularity by using digital devices and internet features such as web cameras, blogs, video, audio, and social networking sites (Senft, 2008, 2013), designed for the common self (Jerslev, 2016: 5239), and is a way of thinking about yourself as a celebrity (Marwick, 2013: 115). Accordingly, the limitation is clear in identifying celebrities who are born through social media with celebrities who appear first in conventional mass media. Therefore, this article focuses on how the practice of celebrification of Instagram users to make themselves an Instagram celebrity.

Bourdieu explained that conditioning related to the condition of the existence of a particular class produces habitus. Furthermore, Bourdieu explained that habitus is a system of durable, transposable dispositions. In other words, habitus works as structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structure. As a system or set of dispositions that are durable, transposable, and the structure formed tends to function as a shaping structure, the structures that characterize a condition of the existence of certain classes produce the structures of the habitus which in their turn are the basis of perception and appreciation of all subsequent experiences (Bourdieu, 1990: 53-54).

> *"...that is, the individual habitus in so far as it expresses or reflects the class (or group), could be regarded as a subjective but non-individual system of internalized structures, common schemes of perception, conception, and action, which are the precondition of all objectification and apperception..."*
> (Bourdieu, 1990: 60)

Based on the quote above, the individual disposition system is a variant of the class habitus. In this case, individual disposition system can be seen as a variant of the group habitus. The concept of habitus guarantees the coherence of the relationship between society and the actors or individuals. In other words, habitus becomes an

intermediary between individual and collective. Haryatmoko explained that habitus is a logical explanation for the functioning of society (2016: 40).

Instagram users who practice the celebrification can be seen as a variant of a digital society, where most of the media activities that include production, distribution, and consumption are done online (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017: 199). Celebrification practices by Instagram users involve digital and social media dispositions, also individual disposition. The concept of habitus as a theory to explain social practices in the process of Instagram user's celebrification is a variant of digital groups or communities.

Habitus is an aspect of human behavior and cognition, formed through and in habitual habituation and formation (Jenkins in Ritzer, 2004: 69). Bourdieu explained that as a system of disposition, habitus allows to produce thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions that are adapted to environmental conditions or the context in which habitus is produced (Bourdieu, 1990: 56). As habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products, such as thought, perceptions, expressions, and action, limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production.

1.1. Method and informants

To understand the celebrification of Instagram users, the researcher used a qualitative approach with digital ethnographic methods for this study as the unit of analysis is the practice of celebrification of Instagram users. Data was collected through participant observation and interviews and will be analyzed by using the concept of habitus in Bourdieu's logic of practice.

The informants in this study are Instagram celebrity based in Yogyakarta. Yogyakarta is one of the big cities where Instagram celebrity activity is growing rapidly. Based on preliminary research, researchers found some public accounts which are becoming a forum for Instagram celebrities to share content. These accounts had a large number of followers and were still actively uploading (repost) Instagram celebrity content. For example, @jogjavidgram account, which is an account that shares Instagram celebrity video content, has 65,300 followers. In addition, the @ootdyk account, which is a public account for collecting and sharing fashion ideas for Yogyakarta celebrities, has 21,500 followers. Meanwhile, @selebgramjogja account, which is a public account that shares information about Instagram celebrities, has 190,000 followers.

Next, the researcher collected and tracked the personal accounts from these public accounts. Accordingly, there were selected 20 personal accounts that matched the criteria for an Instagram celebrity, including actively creating content for the past two

years, from 2015-2017. The assumption was that within two years, informants would have had the experience of celebrification and knowledge about Instagram celebrity activities. In addition, during that time informants would have absorbed meaningful information (Marshall, 1996: 1). Furthermore, the criteria for Instagram celebrities are based on the number of followers. There are no rules from Instagram regarding how many followers you must have to refer as an Instagram celebrity. However, there is a convention among Instagram users to refer to someone as an Instagram celebrity by seeing the number of followers in the range of twenty thousand accounts (Setiawan, Pratama, Ihsanuddin, & Prabowo, 2017).

For the next step, researchers followed these selected accounts on Instagram (at this stage, researchers became a follower of Instagram celebrities) and contacted them via e-mail, Line and Direct Messages. Of the 20 Instagram celebrities, three responded and were willing to become informants. The three informants are:

1. Dinda Ayu Larasati (@dindayularasati)

   Dinda became an Instagram celebrity and has endorsed products from 2015. At the time this research was conducted, Dinda had 26,700 followers and 460 posts. On Instagram, Dinda presents herself as a traveler, fashion and beauty enthusiast.

2. Hemas Nura (@hemasnura)

   Nura became an Instagram celebrity is 2015. Now Nura has 57,100 followers and 751 posts. In her daily life, Nura works as a doctor. As an Instagram celebrity as well as a doctor, Nura presents herself as a stylish doctor by uploading hijab and fashion style photos.

3. Meizda (@_meizda)

   Meizda became an Instagram celebrity in 2013. Until this research was conducted, Meizda had 46,700 followers and 1,207 posts. She presents herself as a woman who likes natural activities, such as hiking.

2. Result and Discussion

2.1. Instagram celebrity

Instagram celebrity is a reference for Instagram users who earn and increase their popularity on Instagram. Achievement of popularity is marked by the number of followers the user has. Instagram celebrity usually have followers above the average of other users that range from hundreds of followers (usually consisting of friends and relatives), or close to the number of followers that conventional celebrities have. Despite having the same term, Instagram celebrity cannot be simply compared to celebrities because both genres are systemically different. Traditional celebrities or conventional celebrities are products of mainstream or conventional mass media, such as celebrities who appear on infotainment TV programs. While Instagram celebrities are Instagram users from the general public who voluntarily turn themselves into media content (Turner, 2010: 2) through user-generated-content to become a celebrity (Abidin, 2017: 3).

Furthermore, both celebrity genres have differences in media uses. Traditional celebrities tend to use Instagram as a promotional medium to support their popularity in conventional mass media. For example, film actors promote their latest films by uploading posters or trailer footage on their Instagram accounts. In addition, they also upload updates on their activities as celebrity to create an intimate relationship with their fans in online space. While Instagram celebrities are active and creative users where they use Instagram to achieve certain goals, they pay more attention and invest their time and energy in producing content. In addition, they also pay attention to interactivity with their followers on the platform. Accordingly, Instagram celebrities are seen as making an effort to create a personality and audience in the social media space.

Referring to Marwick's argument about micro-celebrities (Marwick, 2013: 116-117), Instagram celebrities as a form of micro-celebrities are divided into two types, namely ascribed Instagram celebrities and achieved Instagram celebrities. Ascribed Instagram celebrities include users from traditional celebrity descent or families who have not been exposed to conventional media and users who are considered charismatic or physically attractive. While achieved Instagram celebrities is an achievement of popularity sought by users. One of the efforts made is that Instagram celebrities usually create content that can attract public attention. Achieved Instagram celebrities include bloggers and users who have an influence on their followers (influencers), as well as other ordinary users who are not bloggers or influencers but they have content that can attract the public's attention as content creators.

2.2. Celebrification experiences

The Instagram celebrity phenomenon can be understood by using the concept of habitus. To find out how habitus works and operates in the practice of celebrification of Instagram users, the researcher traced and observed the informants' trajectories on Instagram social media as a context of time and space where the practice of celebrification occurs. This refers to Bourdieu's statement that individual habitus extends within the singularity of its social trajectory (Bourdieu, 1990: 60).

Therefore, first, researcher traces how they began to become an Instagram celebrity. To the three informants, the researcher asked how they first achieved popularity and became an Instagram celebrity. The three informants gave answers that were quite diverse but also with similarities. Dinda for example, said:

> *"Awalnya main Instagram tuh biasa aja, main-main biasa. Aku juga suka difoto, suka fotografi juga. Mungkin karena orang-orang suka sama foto aku, jadi orang tertarik dan makin lama makin banyak followersnya. Tapi kalau awal-awal follow[ers]nya udah banyak, mungkin karena temen-temen di Bali. Mereka udah pada aktif jadi udah agak naik. Terus masuk ke UGM, aku sempet masuk di [akun] ugmcantik, terus naik lah followers tapi itu masih sembilan ribuan. Habis itu aku ketemu sama cowokku, dia juga Insta-gramers. Nah dia itu sebenernya yang ngasih tahu aku dunia Instagram karena dia yang duluan terkenal di Instagram. Dia kan fotografer, dan dia sempet jadi suggest Instagram user. Jadi sebenernya dia yang naik duluan."*

("At first I was playing Instagram, it was just normal, playing games. I also like being photographed, like photography too. Maybe it's because people like

my photos, so people were attracted and more people began following me. But if the initial follower number was a lot, maybe because of friends in Bali. They've were already active so it was already going up. I then entered UGM, I joined the [account] ugmcantik, then my followers kept rising but it was still nine thousand. After that I met with my guy, he was also an Instagrammer. Well, he is actually the one who told me about the world of Instagram because he was first famous on Instagram. He is a photographer, and he has been suggesting Instagram users. So he's actually going up first.")

Being an Instagram celebrity was not Dinda's goal in using Instagram at the beginning when she became a user. It can be observed that Dinda uses Instagram as a place where she can express her hobbies in photography by uploading self-portraits. However, the popularity she got was not only because of a photo of her that she had uploaded. Dinda said that the increase in the number of followers she got was also caused by the social environment and circle of friends who were involved in the Instagram celebrity arena in the first place.

From Dinda's experience, the celebrification process is not always an independent choice of individuals and can be a cultural reproduction. Instagram celebrity cultural reproduction is influenced by environmental factors, specifically relationships where informants had knowledge and participate in practicing Instagram celebrity cultures which later became the subject's habitus. This can be observed through Dinda's activities for making content.

> *"Kalo konsepnya lebih ke aku, tapi awalnya aku dikenalin sama komunitas temen-temennya dia (pacar Dinda) karena Instagram temen-temennya banyak yang traveling jadi aku lebih masuk ke temen-temen traveling gitu, makanya foto-foto aku juga banyakan foto aku traveling. Aku juga belajar sama mereka itu, baru manage sendiri. Cuman kalo foto masih dibantuin orang atau cowokku. Aku sih pinginnya ke traveling aja, tapi kalau sekarang masih belum bisa, waktunya ngga ada karena ada kuliah juga kan, jadi aku masukin ootd sama beauty karena aku suka dandan juga."*

("The concept is more for me, but initially I was known in the same community as my boyfriend because a lot of my friends are travelling on Instagram, so I'm more friends with those who like traveling too. Because of this, I also have lots of photos where I travel. I also learned with them, and I've just started managin it myself. It's just the photos now where I need assistance by others or my boyfriend. I just want to travel, but right now I can'. There is no time

because I have university, so I enter ootd with beauty because I like grooming too.")

Habitus is practiced based on calculations related to the experience of the informant. In the production of content as an aspect of the celebrification process on Instagram, Dinda takes the opportunities where it might be easier for her and her content production. Here this would be if she chooses the concept of traveling according to the community or the current circle of friends, because of the ease of access, facilities, and infrastructure. However, she also takes into account the possibilities and impossibilities; takes into account that she still has responsibilities as a student. Therefore, Dinda chooses to create content that suits her wishes or preferences. From Dinda's experience, it can be observed that habitus itself is practiced based on calculations related to the factors of possibility and impossibility; desire or freedom and need (Bourdieu, 1990: 54).

The second informant, Nura, has a quite different answer, she said:

"Jadi selebgram tuh kayak ndilalah aja. Dulu tuh sering banyak yang mulai ngelikes gara-gara aku sering foto traveling, yang wisata-wisata gitu. Terus followers makin naik pas aku sering posting ootd sama konten yang ngebahas soal gimana kuliah kedokteran, karena pernah pas aku posting terus di caption aku tulis tentang pengalamanku kuliah kedokteran itu banyak yang [me]respon. Sistemnya Instagram tuh kalo misal banyak yang ngelikes banyak yang follow."

("So it's like it's just gone. In the past, there were often many who started to ride because of my frequent photos of traveling, the tourists like that. The followers continued to rise when I often posted with the content discussing how to study medical course because once I posted it on the caption I wrote about my experiences in medical education there was such a response. Instagram's system is like if you get many likes you get many followers.")

Nura also did not have the goal of becoming an Instagram celebrity at the beginning when she joined Instagram. Even so, there is a difference in the process of Nura's experience with Dinda's. Nura emphasized her engagement in the using of media. She said that the increase in the number of followers she got was due to her activity as a user which included the intensity of uploading photos. Based on the observations, Nura has a high intensity of posting that is at least twice a day and is carried out almost every day.

From Nura's experience, habitus is inculcated by the mode of media consumption. According to Calka's argument, time spent on social media platforms (intensity using

social media) means that users not only consume media content but actively create and share personal messages (Calka et al., 2014: 16). This can be observed in Nura's content production activities. She said that the content she created and uploaded on Instagram was more telling her as a woman wearing a hijab, a doctor, as well as a model. So often she shared her experience when she was a medical student until she became a doctor. While on the hijab fashion theme, she got inspiration from the celebrities she followed on Instagram, then she adjusted it to her personality. Nura's experience showed that the celebrification process was supported by media facilities and user habitus. Habitus users will influence the decision to choose what to post on Instagram.

The experience of the third informant, Meizda, in the celebrification on Instagram is similar to Nura. Meizda said:

"Sebenernya aku ngga ada maksud ke arah sana [menjadi selebritas Instagram] ya, mbak. Aku main Instagram ya main biasa aja, upload foto yang menurutku bagus, ngga mikirin feed, tapi kok ya banyak yang suka, ngelikes, ngefollow. Itu [mendapat likes dan pengikut] pokoknya pas aku sering upload foto-foto [mendaki] *gunung, Kalau dibilang pamer sih ya terserah ya, aku niatnya cuma upload aja buat seneng-senengan, berbagi pengalaman lah. Aku juga bingung sendiri kenapa banyak yang ngelikes sama follow, padahal feedku acak-acakan, ngga kayak selebgram pada umumnya."*

("Actually I didn't have the intention to go there [become an Instagram celebrity] yeah, mbak. I play on Instagram, just like normal. I upload photos that I think are good, I do not think about feeds, but how come there are many who like and follow? That [gets likes and followers] just when I often upload photos [hiking] mountains, if they say I show off, I don't care. I mean I just upload it for fun, to share experiences. I am also confused about how many people follow the same, even though my feed is disheveled, not like a general selebgram.")

Meizda uses Instagram as a place where she can express herself. In this case, media content created by informants works as a representation in the online space.

Based on the experience of the three informants, the celebrification by Instagram users includes participatory practices where they do not only consume media (register as Instagram users, and consume media content) but also participate in media content production (upload photos and write captions). In addition, the content created by informants has personal value and meaning.

Referring to Bourdieu, habitus makes it possible to produce thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions that are adapted to environmental conditions or contexts in which habitus is produced (Bourdieu, 1990: 56), then participation can be seen as a habitus that disseminates the practice of celebrification of Instagram users. Participatory habitus encourages Instagram users to manage their personal profiles on social media and produce content. The participatory form of Instagram users includes the disposition of user-generated-content which is understood as the creation of content by media platform users, and in the content creation process, users add personal value and creative effort (Moens, Li, & Chua, 2014: 8).

2.3. Celebrification strategies

Based on the results of participant observations that the researcher did on informants' activities on Instagram, the three informants had several strategies in the practice of celebrification, such as:

1. Mediagenic Persona

Referring to Rojek's argument (in Ritzer, 2004: 84), the mediagenic persona is an individual well versed in a set of coping strategies that elicit relaxed, productive relations with the various limbs of the media. Based on the observations, the three informants used the mediagenic persona strategy which includeded: first, continuous presence and continuous updating. The three informants had a high intensity of posting. Nura for instance, regularly posts photos at least once a day, while Meizda is at least twice a day. Dinda is quite different; she posts weekly, at least three times a week. Nura said that the intensity in posting is a way to manage the existence on Instagram so that she does not lose followers.

Second, establish relationships with marketing agents, such as joining the Instagram celebrity management. It can be said that Instagram celebrity management is one of the impacts of the Instagram celebrity phenomenon. Instagram celebrity management functions as a mediator between producers or online shops who want to work with an Instagram celebrity. Nura said that she had joined some Instagram celebrity management groups. She explained that Instagram celebrity management is in charge of inviting Instagram celebrities to join the Instagram celebrity community and connect them with the digital advertising agencies or online shops to facilitate communication. In addition, Instagram celebrities who join the management can help each other or

support exposure on Instagram by mentioning the name of the account in the posting. However, not all Instagram celebrity joins that kind of management. Dinda and Mezida for instance, they say that they work directly with digital advertising agencies that usually handle advertisements on social media (digital marketing agency) or with producers and online shops without going through intermediaries.

Third, communicating with followers. Instagram celebrities see their followers as their audience and fans. Dinda for instance, when the researcher asked why she uploaded a *selfie* or self-portrait on Instagram she said:

> *"Mungkin karena orang-orang suka sama foto aku. Ya, aku mikirnya karena orang-orang suka dan tertarik sama foto aku."*
>
> ("Maybe because people like my photos. Yes, I think because people like and are interested in my photos.")

Dinda's reason for upload a picture of herself was because she thinks that followers are an audience who likes and are interested in her photos.

Meanwhile, Nura said that communication and interaction with followers can maintain and increase popularity on Instagram. Communication with followers includes replying to comments in the comments column that are contained under the photo (caption), as well as responding to comments or direct messages through content. In addition, other informants like Meizda build interaction with followers by means of question-and-answer using features on the platform. Repeatedly, Meizda gave an opportunity for her followers to ask questions that Meizda would later answer and she would post the questions on *Instagram Stories* so that they could be seen by the audience. Usually, Meizda provides certain themes in the question-and-answer session, for instance, themes related to hiking activities, and personal themes such as relationship. Thus, the informant gives the impression of the connectedness between herself and her followers. Referring to Elliot's argument (2018), celebrities need media to increase popularity, and it is important for them to always be present in the media. In this case, an Instagram celebrity manages and maintaining online popularity by maximizing the use of media to build relationships with followers or audiences.

2. Authenticity

The other strategy used by informants is the performance of authenticity. Authenticity in the context of social media refers to Walker's argument (in Marwick, 2013: 120), that authenticity is not a matter of revealing deeply personal information but is based on

production and circulation of self-knowledge which is then measured through informal attributes such as consistency.

The three informants displayed authenticity in various ways. Nura has created 751 more posts on fashion and displays the beauty and tends to appear perfect. But she has also often made content containing confessional content about the experiences and the pleasure of being a medical student and her experience when becoming a doctor in rural areas. In addition, Nura shared about her life's journey about how she was in the past compared compared to a picture of herself in the current year. Through this content, Nura is showing honesty and being herself.

Meizda also shows authenticity through live video on *Instagram Stories* called "Live" where users can interact directly (real-time interaction) with followers. Meizda often does live videos, both spontaneous and scheduled. Several times Meizda has gone "Live" while eating or waiting for someone. Meizda didn't talk too much in the video but she greeted every follower who joined the audience in Live and answered the questions by the audience. She also looked directly at the screen so that it made an impression of closeness. In addition, Meizda also often holds scheduled "Live". She makes advance notice if she will hold a "Live" specifically discussing hiking activities, complete with information when the Live will be held.

Referring to Bourdieu's argument (as in Jenkins, 2014: 51) that strategy is the result of the interaction between user disposition and the possibility of occurring in the social arena, in this understanding, the mediagenic persona and authenticity strategies are "the feel of the game" (Bourdieu, 1990: 82) in celebrification on Instagram. The mediagenic persona strategy is an effort made by users who make themselves Instagram celebrities to create a publicity personality (Marwick, 2013: 117), and an authenticity strategy is used to gain trust from followers.

3. Conclusion

The transformation of Instagram users into celebrity include active users, and on the other hand, social media also has a crucial role. Instagram as a social media does not create celebrities themselves, but the structure of the media platform provides opportunity and allows users to gain and increase online popularity by actively and creatively producing content that can attract public attention.

This study highlighted two main findings; *first*, the celebrification that took place in the Instagram space can be seen as a result of participatory habitus in which the Instagram users' modification in making themselves Instagram celebrity included digital

dispositions and active users. *Second*, participatory habitus can be conceptualized as a strategy developed by Instagram users to challenge traditional ways of celebrity production. Based on the research that has been done, the celebrification strategy by Instagram users including the mediagenic persona and performance of authenticity in which each strategy includes the creation of a persona that can be published and interactivity with followers or their audience on the platform. This is what distinguishes celebrification that occurs in social media or interactive media with celebrification in conventional mass media, such as TV. Celebrification in conventional mass media tends to be a narrative built by the media. In other words, transforming ordinary people into celebrity is media construction. However, the celebrity that occurs on social media is a form of freedom where users have the power or capital to make themselves celebrity by being active and creative users in creating a persona and producing media content.

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