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# Microcelebrities' identity construction on social media: A systematic review and synthesis

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## Abstract

Over the past decade, a robust body of scholarship on microcelebrity (MC) has emerged, occasioning several review studies of this growing field of research. Extant reviews on MC have mostly focused on microcelebrities' (MCs) strategic communication or audiences' attitudes, but no review has specifically focused on MC identity. Echoing the call for more attention to this particular aspect from recent reviews (Tanwar et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2021), this paper examined 97 empirical studies published from 2010 to 2022 that focused on MCs' identity construction on social media. Our analysis identified various research trends and synthesized MCs' identity tactics into ten categories. We situate the findings within current discussions of platformized cultural production and MC's role in it by drawing on and extending Duffy et al.'s (2021) "nested precarities" framework to account for MCs' identity work on social media. The review's key contribution is the conceptualization of MCs' identity-related tactics and its embedding in the formidable precarities of platform ecosystems.

## Keywords

Microcelebrity, identity, systematic review, tactics, precarities

## 1. Introduction

Microcelebrity (MC) has become one of the most prominent social and cultural

phenomena in digitally mediated online spaces and has attracted increasing scholarly attention across various disciplines, including communication (Arriagada and Bishop, 2021) and cultural studies (Abidin, 2019). Since the term MC was first introduced by Senft (2008) in her book titled "Camgirls: Celebrity and community in the age of social network", this phenomenon of ordinary people pursuing fame and money via online performance has been widely documented in the scholarly literature. At the same time, with the growth of empirical work in this area, a number of similar terms have emerged and been used to describe this phenomenon, such as "internet celebrity", "influencer", "wanghong", "content creator" and others. The proliferation of diverse social media apps and platforms worldwide has also introduced new labels, including but not limited to "YouTuber", "Instagrammer", "TikToker/Douyiner" and "streamer". In this paper, we have chosen to use the term microcelebrity because scholarship around it is rooted in a cultural perspective which connects to key aspects of identity, as explained next.

First, the term links to celebrity while also marking important differences. Traditional celebrities (or "stars" in older parlance) gain fame through professional achievements, talents or positions in the traditional entertainment industries or what Marshall (2010) terms "representational" media. MC on the other hand are a development of the "demotic turn" (Turner, 2004, 2006) of "presentational" media and encompass ordinary people who seek to develop personal brands through self-disclosure and continuous engagement with a niche audience online (Senft, 2008). In the current digital social mediascape, some of the lines between traditional and microcelebrities have become blurred given that traditional celebrities are now utilizing social media to further expand their fan group or reach new audiences and markets through activities more typical of microcelebrities (e.g., David Beckham posting cooking videos on Instagram). At the same time, there are differences, as it remains

difficult for MCs to enjoy the same privileges (e.g., access to high profile events or interviews) and resources (material and symbolic) that are available to celebrities in traditional media industries which are still hierarchical and involve gatekeeping (Lewis, 2020; Turner, 2004;). The prefix "micro" encapsulates some of these differences. It is also for this reason that we prefer microcelebrity over "internet celebrity" as the latter lacks specificity and fails to capture the "historical, structural, and cultural nuances" between traditional celebrity and MC (Abidin, 2018: 2). As Marwick (2016: 333, 347) concludes, MC is "something one does, rather than something one is"; it is the "set of mind-set and set of practices" for strategic self-branding/presentation that differentiate traditional celebrities and MCs. This is why the notion of identity as a set of practices is central to understanding the MC phenomenon; to increase their fan base, MCs need to construct unique and favorable identities and maximize visibility in a space where attention is the currency (Khamis et al., 2017).

Alternative terms such as "wanghong", "influencer" and "content creator" have different scholarly lineage and thus highlight different aspects of the phenomenon. "Wanghong" (literally: "red on internet") focuses on MC's "acute ability" to transform online viewership into financial gains through various business models (Guan, 2021; Han, 2021). China's wanghong industry features "multisided markets" (e.g., entrepreneurs, platforms, intermediate professionals and agencies, the government) (Craig et al., 2021) and can be far more complex and competitive than its western counterparts as it offers more lucrative opportunities afforded by technologies (e.g., "da shang", virtual tipping). Given the context-specificity and economic tenor of the term, and the fact that even in China it is polysemous (Zhao, 2021), the term "wanghong" is not appropriate as an umbrella term for a much broader phenomenon. Thirdly, the term "influencer" has strong roots in business and management studies with a primary focus

on their "reach and impact", e.g., their influence on followers' decision-making as well as the number of followers (Hudders et al., 2021: 7). Similarly, "content creator" and other similar terms like "YouTubers", "vloggers" are often used for "native amateur and professionalizing creators" (Craig et al., 2021) from the perspective of influencer marketing (e.g., advertisement, transactional revenue). As a result, these terms and attendant scholarship do not prioritize concerns over identity and online strategic self-presentation.

While we have opted for the term microcelebrity, we heed prominent scholars in media and cultural studies (Jerslev, 2016; Marshall, 2014, 2016) in avoiding a narrow view of celebrification as a simple process of transforming "individuals into celebrities" (Driessens, 2013: 653). Instead, we regard it as "a cultural and communicative practice" within which the logic of celebrity is enacted and operates in different ways, afforded by different platforms embedded in the larger contemporary media, labor, and sociocultural ecosystems (Jerslev, 2016: 5238). That is to say, MCs' creativity, digital labor and cultural-communicative practices are shaped by a broader economic system consisting of platform infrastructures, markets, and governance, although this influence varies in different sociopolitical contexts (e.g., Duffy et al., 2021; Poell et al., 2021). So MCs' cultural practices on platforms are not merely about their own individual pursuit of money and fame, but are part of the "platformization of cultural production" (Nieborg and Poell, 2018); that is, the "penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extensions of digital platforms into the web and app ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operation of the cultural industries" (Nieborg and Poell, 2018: 4276). Therefore, a systematic review of MCs' identity construction on social media platforms is of significance as it not only explores MCs' tactics of platform practices but also sheds some light on the recursivity between their cultural practices

and broader institutions and stakeholders, which embeds ongoing social struggles, contestations, and negotiations in terms of power relations and ideologies.

There are existing review studies which have focused mostly on the "influencer" phenomenon from the disciplines of marketing, business and communication. For instance, Sundermann and Raabe (2019) reviewed 39 articles focusing on the types of influencers they reported on, the credibility of sources, and their distributed content on social media platforms. Similarly, Vrontis et al. (2021) conducted a review of influencer marketing effectiveness (n=68) and identified several variables affecting marketing outcomes (e.g., moderators and mediators, message strategies, and the effect of contextual factors). To date, a systematic review of literature specifically exploring MCs' identity construction has not been conducted. Although issues related to identity have been touched upon in extant reviews, they have not been the main focus. In fact, in their bibliometric analyses, Tanwar et al. (2022) and Ye et al. (2021) have suggested that future research should consider and explore how MCs maximize their influence through "identities, their daily lives, and how they promote brands or products" (Ye et al., 2021: 13). The present review thus aims to fill this gap.

A second rationale for this review is that social media and microcelebrities with it have developed in new directions in recent years yet previous reviews only covered research up to 2019. For instance, more types of MCs, such as "wanghong" have emerged and there has also been a surge of studies exploring MCs' online identity work in recent years (n=71 since 2019 in this review). Further, newly developed technologies such as live streaming have become extremely popular in the last several years and regionally developed platforms (e.g., Zhubei live, TikTok) only emerged recently. There is thus a need for an updated review which takes account of these new developments and research in its scope and timeframe. As Dyer and Abidin (2022)

suggest, more scholarly attention is necessary for online identity performance in order to understand how the design of digital platforms shapes users' actions and interactions, how individuals can agentively produce novel identity performance and how users' acts and experiences are constrained by their extant resources.

In light of the above, this paper aims to provide an up-to-date review of research on MCs, specifically in relation to identity. The paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly review the scholarship on identity drawing primarily on interpretivist frameworks, and particularly the work of Bucholtz and Hall (2005) who define identity as an intersubjective and discursive product of social interaction rather than pre-existing macro social categories such as race or gender. In the following section, we introduce the methodological design of the review, the procedures of data collection and analysis. The third section presents the findings of the systematic review and identifies ten different groups of tactics of MCs' identity construction on platforms. Finally, we consider the findings of MCs' tactics from the perspective of precariousness (Duffy et al., 2021) in the broader platform economy.

## 2. Defining identity

As one of the most discussed yet complex concepts in the social sciences, identity has been defined in a variety of ways due to its application in numerous fields (e.g., Bucholtz and Hall, 2005; Dyer and Abidin, 2022; Goffman, 1959). In fact, it would be quite impossible to provide a comprehensive overview of all theoretical approaches to identity, especially as such overviews already exist (Hogg, 2016; Lawler, 2015). Moreover, after more than ten years of research on microcelebrity and social media influencers, it is also clear that some approaches may be more appropriate than others to the study of identity as self-presentation of personae within digital platforms. Specifically, here we will briefly review micro-analytic approaches that see identity as

a process of active construction within the constraints and expectations of social and technological contexts.

From within sociology, Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to identity seems apt as it views the self as "a performed character" that stages "a dramatic effect" (e.g., front/back-stage performance) and projects a desirable self "which has some influence on the observers". Five key components are crucial in Goffman's (1959) framework, they are actor, the performance, the audience, the team, and the stage. It is within interactional situations that actors can tailor their performance and manage their tactics of impression in response to the audience. While Goffman's (1959) work is valuable to explain how individuals project and manage identity in everyday face-to-face social encounters, it does not overtly capture the micro-level details, nor is it nuanced enough to understand the complex relations of digital online spaces due to the increasing "context collapse" effect (Dyer and Abidin, 2022). On the one hand, new media and the internet have greatly changed the way that audiences and content producers interact; on the other hand, online identity performance can be more challenging since users need to utilize affordances to negotiate with multiple audiences in the online environment (Marwick and boyd, 2010).

Semiotic approaches to identity emerging from linguistically-oriented disciplines (Ochs, 1992; Silverstein, 1976) seem well-suited to examine micro-analytic details of self-presentation in online environments. Here identity is understood as an intersubjectively and discursively negotiated product of social interaction, rather than something pre-existing said interaction or residing in individuals (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). In fact, scholars often view and investigate identity as a process of identification: the ways individuals use and orchestrate various semiotic resources (words, images, sound, color, body posture, etc.) as meaning units in positioning themselves and others

as particular types of people (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004). When viewed this way, identification is not just about macro-categories of gender, ethnicity or race; it entails various levels of discursive positioning ranging from the act of interactional stance-taking (such as positioning oneself as knowledgeable in a video) to broader social categories that are imbricated with larger ideologies and social structures made relevant to local interaction (how positioning oneself as a "diva" is meaningful only against larger ideological gender norms) (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005).

This current review follows the above body of work in its theoretical orientation as it examines the selected corpus of research on microcelebrities' identity performances online. Specifically, we adopt Bucholtz and Hall's (2004) notion of tactics of intersubjectivity as an analytic lens to synthesize findings of the studies reviewed. Drawing on de Certeau (1984), Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 382) advocate the term *tactics* to understand how individuals enact "the local, situated, and often improvised quality of the everyday practices" to accomplish their social goals even when constrained by the external environment. The concept of *intersubjectivity* emphasizes how individuals form identities through social agency and interactional negotiation. Thus, *tactics of intersubjectivity*, according to Bucholtz and Hall (2004: 382), can be viewed as "the relations that are created through identity work". Instead of using strategy, the notion of tactics of intersubjectivity allows one to examine how MCs negotiate their identity with potential audiences through acts of stance-taking in the local contexts without losing sight of the sociocultural identity categories at the macro-level. Given the above considerations, this review aims to examine extant research into MCs' identity construction by asking the following review questions:

1. What are the research trends in studies of microcelebrity and identity? Trends here capture a range of research-relevant factors including the year of

publication, type of MCs studied, region of studies, research methodology, type of identity categories, and platform.

2. What are the tactics of MCs' identity construction identified in the reviewed studies?

In the following sections, we introduce the methodology employed in this review which is followed by the findings. In the discussion, we couch these findings within the broader cultural-economic context of MC by drawing on Duffy's (2021) framework to discuss how identity construction is implicated in mitigating various precarities in platform cultures.

## 3. Methodology

This review adopts a systematic approach (Cooper, 1982) to synthesize studies pertaining to MCs' identity construction. According to Cooper (1982), the primary objective of an integrative review is to provide a synopsis of the accumulated state of knowledge concerning the relation(s) of interest and to highlight important issues that previous research has left unresolved. Five stages are suggested to conduct an integrated review (Cooper, 1982: 291): (1) problem formulation; (2) data collection; (3) evaluation of data points; (4) data analysis and interpretation; and (5) presentation of results. The preceding sections of the paper were focused on the problem formulation, which culminated in the two research questions. In this section, we detail points 2-4 in Cooper's framework by describing the database we searched, the search terms, and the criteria for inclusion and exclusion.

### 3.1 Database

Two major databases were searched for relevant research articles: EBSCOhost and Scopus. These databases were selected because they provide the greatest coverage and are frequently used by researchers. EBSCOhost includes Academic Search Complete,

British Education Index, Education Source, ERIC (Education Resources Information Centre), Teacher Reference, Communication and Mass Media Complete, Computer Source, MLA (Modern Language Association) International Bibliography with Full Text, Library Literature and Information Science Full Text. Scopus offers the broadest and most integrated coverage of peer-reviewed literature across sciences, social sciences, arts and humanities.

3.2 Search terms

The following search sentence (where "TI" is short for "title", and "AB" is short for "abstract") was used for the search: (TI "microcelebri*" OR AB "microcelebri*" OR TI "influencer*" OR AB "influencer*" OR TI "internet celebrity" OR AB "internet celebrity" OR TI "celebri*" OT AB "celebri*" OR TI "content creat*" OR AB "content creat*" OR TI "wanghong" OR AB "wanghong" OR TI "YouTube*" OR AB "YouTube*" OR TI "vlog*" OR AB "vlog*" OR TI "blog*" OR AB "blog*" OR TI "live-stream*" OR AB "live-stream*" OR TI "Instagram*" OR AB "Instagram*" OR TI "Twitter" OR AB "Twitter" ) AND (TI "persona*" OR AB "persona*" OR TI "identit*" OR AB "identit*" OR TI "performa*" or AB "performa*" or TI "authentic*" OR AB "authentic*" OR TI "self-brand*" OR AB "self-brand*" OR TI "self-presentation" OR AB "self-presentation"). The notion of *personae* was included as it can be useful to the understanding of identity in the digitally mediated online world as Moore et al. (2019) argue that online personae can be seen as a strategic public identity constructed by performances through their online presence. The term "self-presentation" and "performance" were used in line with the theoretical perspective taken in this paper which aligns with Goffman's (1959) views of an individual's acts as composing "a version of him/herself for the world" and careful impression management tactics (Marshall, 2010: 39). As China's digital platform rapidly evolves

and live streaming business grows (Wang, 2021), Chinese MCs have attracted increasing scholarly attention. Chinese MCs are usually referred to as "wanghong" (internet celebrity) or "live streamers" (*zhubo*), so these emerging terms were thus included in our search terms. Given our intention to review the entire literature on MC in relation to identity, we selected the timeframe of August 1990 to August 2022.

### 3.3 Criteria and assessment

The initial search yielded 5,558 publications in Scopus and 5,115 in EBSCOhost. A series of criteria were applied successively to this initial batch to ensure the relevance and quality of the articles in view of the review's focus. We first limited the corpus to peer-reviewed academic journal articles written in English, omitting books, book chapters, conference proceedings, editorials, and other nonrefereed publications. With this criterion applied, a total of 2,903 articles in Scopus and 2,734 in EBSCOhost were identified. Next, duplicate copies across the two databases were removed. After this, through manually annotating, we assessed the relevance of each article by title, abstract and full text. The criterion for relevance was determined by the presence of the two key concepts (MCs and identity) in the title and abstract, and they had to be discussed in the full text. The second criterion was quality. We carefully examined the full text and evaluated if the articles were rigorous in methodology, analysis, and discussion. Articles of low quality were excluded. Thirdly, the data selection was strictly limited to empirical studies. After the criteria of relevance, quality and the need for empirical study were applied, we were left with 49 research articles in Scopus and 30 in EBSCOhost. An additional 18 were included based on cross-referencing of citations from identified articles and reviews, i.e., the Ancestry approach (Cooper, 1982). Finally, a total of 97 peer-reviewed papers were included in the review (see Appendix A for the detailed list of references). Given the rigorous sampling/selection process, we

are confident that the coverage is robust enough to provide a comprehensive understanding of research on how MCs construct identities. A flowchart of the selection

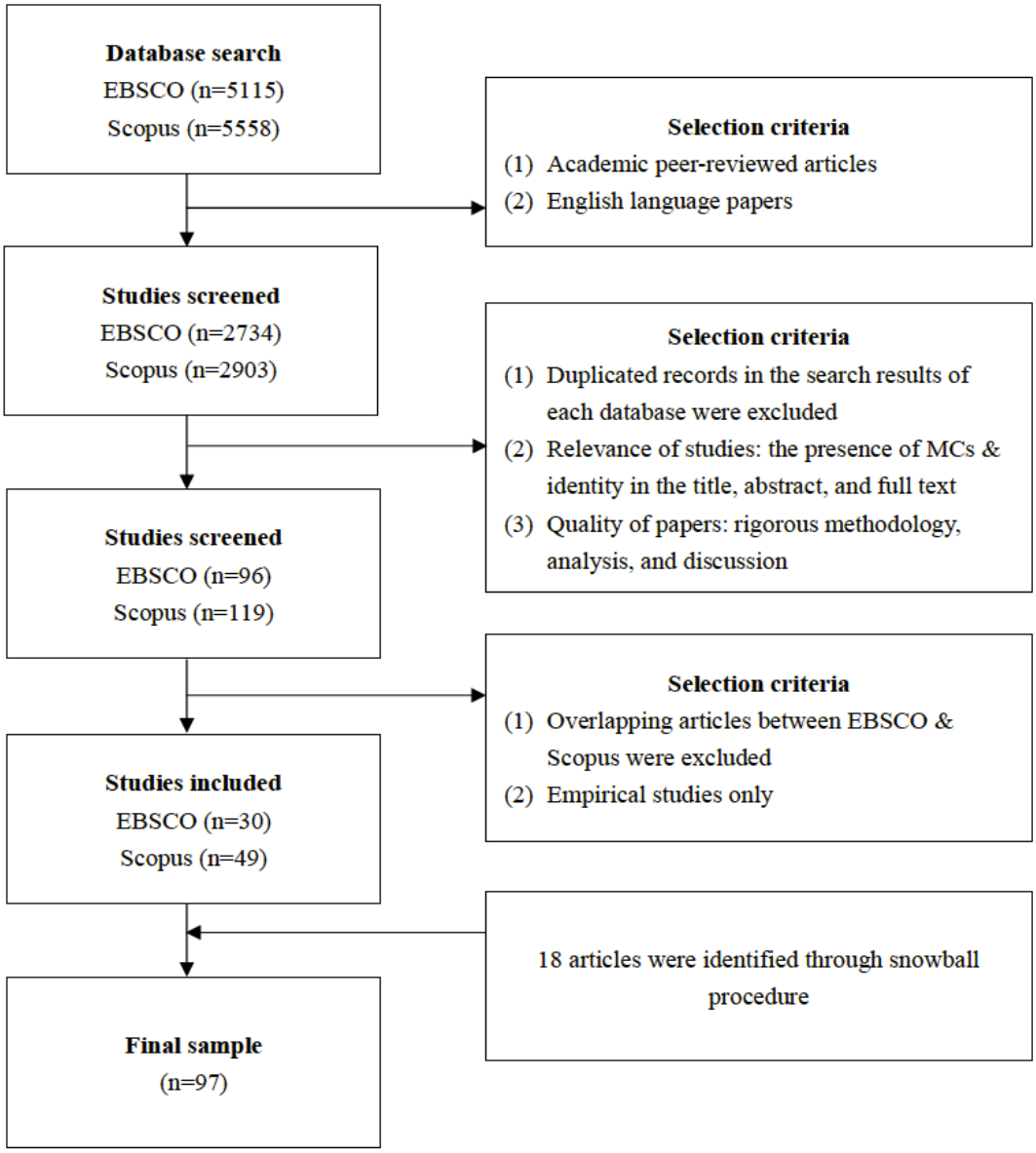


**Figure 1**. The flowchart of the selection process

process is provided in Figure 1.

Once articles for the review were selected, we adopted an inductive thematic analysis (Tracy and Hinrichs, 2007) to code the data. Tracy and Hinrichs (2017) highlight that the use of an inductive (bottom-up) approach can help researchers observe "how the unfolding data analysis helps solve the problem identified at the beginning of the research process, and points to how it attends to salient research

foci/questions in the existing literature". For RQ1, we created a codebook by noting down the references of articles (titles, authors, journals) and specific information (theoretical frameworks, methods, data, platforms, and key findings) on a data-extraction Excel sheet. For RQ2, we conducted open coding by examining how researchers themselves in the studies framed and explained MCs' identity-related work. Similar to axial coding, we then iteratively organized, synthesized, and grouped the first-level codes into larger categories that generated conceptual sense. These umbrella or hierarchical codes were iteratively compared among each other, given new names, and referenced against existing reviews.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. RQ1: What are the research trends in studies of microcelebrity and identity (the year of publication, type of MCs studied, region of studies, research methodology, type of identity categories, and platform)?

Research trends can help us understand the variation of scholarly interest in MC studies by analyzing the number of publications, the specific focus of the studies, the distribution of MCs being studied, the methodologies used to study MC in these articles, the type of identity categories, and platforms examined in the reviewed articles. Table 1 summarizes the general trends of MC research in terms of year of publication, type of MCs, regions of studies, research methodology, and type of identity categories studied (when explicitly identified or labeled by the researchers).

**Table 1.** Year of publication, type of MCs, region of studies, research methodology, and type of identity categories

| | 2010-2012 | 2013-2015 | 2016-2018 | 2019-2021 | 2022 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Total** | 4 (4%) | 4 (4%) | 18 (19%) | 57 (58%) | 14 (14%) | 97 (100%) |
| **Type of MCs** | | | | | | |
| Lifestyles | 3 (3%) | 2 (2%) | 14 (14%) | 39 (40%) | 11 (11%) | 69 (71%) |
| LGBT/feminist | | 2 (2%) | 4 (4%) | 10 (10%) | 1 (1%) | 17 (17%) |
| Expatriate | | | | 5 (5%) | 2 (2%) | 7 (7%) |
| Politics | | | | 2 (2%) | | 2 (2%) |
| General | 1 (1%) | | | 1 (1%) | | 2 (2%) |
| Total | 4 | 4 | 18 | 57 | 14 | 97 |
| **Region of studies** | | | | | | |
| Asia-pacific | 2 (2%) | | 3 (3%) | 20 (20%) | 8 (8%) | 33 (33%) |
| North America | 2 (2%) | 3 (5%) | 4 (4%) | 15 (15%) | 2 (2%) | 26 (27%) |
| Europe | | 1 (1%) | 6 (6%) | 6 (6%) | | 13 (14%) |
| Middle East | | | 1 (1%) | 2 (2%) | 1 (1%) | 4 (4%) |
| Australia | | | 2 (2%) | 1 (1%) | | 3 (3%) |
| South America | | | | 3 (3%) | | 3 (3%) |
| Africa | | | | 2 (3%) | | 2 (2%) |
| Cross-region | | | 1 (1%) | 3 (3%) | 2 (2%) | 6 (6%) |
| Unspecified | | | 1 (1%) | 4 (4%) | 2 (2%) | 7 (7%) |
| Total | 4 | 4 | 18 | 56 | 15 | 97 |
| **Research methodology** | | | | | | |
| Qualitative | 4 (4%) | 4 (4%) | 18 (19%) | 56 (58%) | 13 (13%) | 95 (98%) |
| Thematic | 4 (4%) | 4 (4%) | 13 (13%) | 40 (41%) | 6 (6%) | 67 (69%) |
| Semiotics/discourse | | | 5 (5%) | 16 (16%) | 7 (7%) | 28 (28%) |
| Mixed method | | | | 1 (1%) | 1 (1%) | 2 (2%) |
| Total | 4 | 4 | 18 | 57 | 14 | 97 |
| **Type of identity categories** | | | | | | |
| Gender identity | 1 (1%) | 3 (3%) | 4 (4%) | 11 (11%) | 4 (4%) | 23 (23%) |
| Citizenship identity | | | 1 (1%) | 14 (14%) | 3 (3%) | 18 (18%) |
| Religious identity | | | 1 (1%) | 7 (7%) | | 8 (8%) |
| Class identity | | | | 6 (6%) | 1 (1%) | 7 (7%) |
| Political identity | | | | 2 (2%) | 1 (1%) | 3 (3%) |
| Total | 1 | 3 | 6 | 40 | 9 | 59 |

4.1.1 Year of publication

As shown in Table 1, increasing scholarly interest in MC studies can be observed, especially after 2019. The earliest study on MC from within research articles in the data was found in 2010; though we note again the earlier existence and use of the term in book publications (notably, Senft, 2008).

4.1.2. Type of MCs studied

Five different types of MCs were identified in the reviewed studies. Lifestyle MCs, mainly including fashion and beauty creators, have received the most (71%) scholarly interest over the years. A growing number of studies have begun to extend to LGBT (14%) and feminist (3%) themes. Expatriate MCs, generally referring to tourists and immigrants, have taken up 7% of the overall reviewed studies. Political MCs are those explicitly posting content relating to political or partisan issues, which have attracted the least scholarship (2%). MCs whose content includes multiple topics were categorized as general (2%).

4.1.3 Region of studies

Overall, MC in Asia-Pacific has attracted the most scholarly attention with a large number of studies (33%) in the corpus and research has experienced a significant increase since 2019. North American MCs are the second most examined across different regions (27%). European MCs as the object of research rank third (14%). MCs of other regions, such as the Middle East, Australia, South America, and Africa remain relatively under-explored in the body of research reviewed here. Six studies drew samples from multiple regions.

4.1.4 Research methodology

Regarding the research methodology, most were qualitative (98%) and only 2% of the articles used a mixed approach. There were no studies using a purely quantitative methodology. Among the qualitative studies, 69% were thematic analyses. A

significant rise in studies (28%) adopting semiotic and discourse analysis was observed in the corpus, especially after 2019.

4.1.5 Type of identity categories

Many studies narrowed their focus by explicitly labeling the kind of identity the MCs were projecting. Five types of identity categories were observed among these studies. Gender identity takes up the highest percentage (23%) while citizenship identity ranked the second highest (18%). Religious identity (8%) is primarily observed in studies of female MCs' religiously-grounded identity construction, often along clines of modesty/immodesty studies where class identity was the focus made up about 7% while political identity attracted the least scholarly attention among the reviewed studies (3%). It should be noted that only 59 articles framed the research substantively around explicit identity categories. Nevertheless, the review of various identity categories may provide us with some insights into the research trend regarding identity as a fixed category within existing MC research.

4.1.6. Platform

We used three characteristics: modality (text, image, and video), synchroneity (synchronous and asynchronous), and length of contribution (bitesize and full-length) as lenses to characterize various platforms (see Table 2) the reviewed articles reported on. Modality can be a way to differentiate platforms as social media platforms have expanded from static texts, images to multimodal videos. Synchroneity is another important characteristic to categorize platforms, including synchronous and asynchronous. For instance, live streaming can be synchronous while content such as short and long videos are asynchronous because they need to be filmed, edited, and uploaded with some time lag. Recent studies have identified that live streaming can facilitate emotions (e.g., joy, hope, fondness, sensuality) and generate affective values

among the audience (Wang, 2020). Thus, it is important to categorize this difference as a feature of platforms. Lengths of contribution can be short and long. For instance, text is considered short if it is confined to 280 characters (e.g., Twitter/X). Length with regards to images is rather complicated, although in general, small emoticons and single photos are considered bitesize, whereas scrollable screenshots or albums are full-length. Video is considered short if it is less than five minutes. Together, the three characteristics show at least 12 (3*2*2) possible permutations, with each having its unique affordances which may prove to be consequential for MC research.

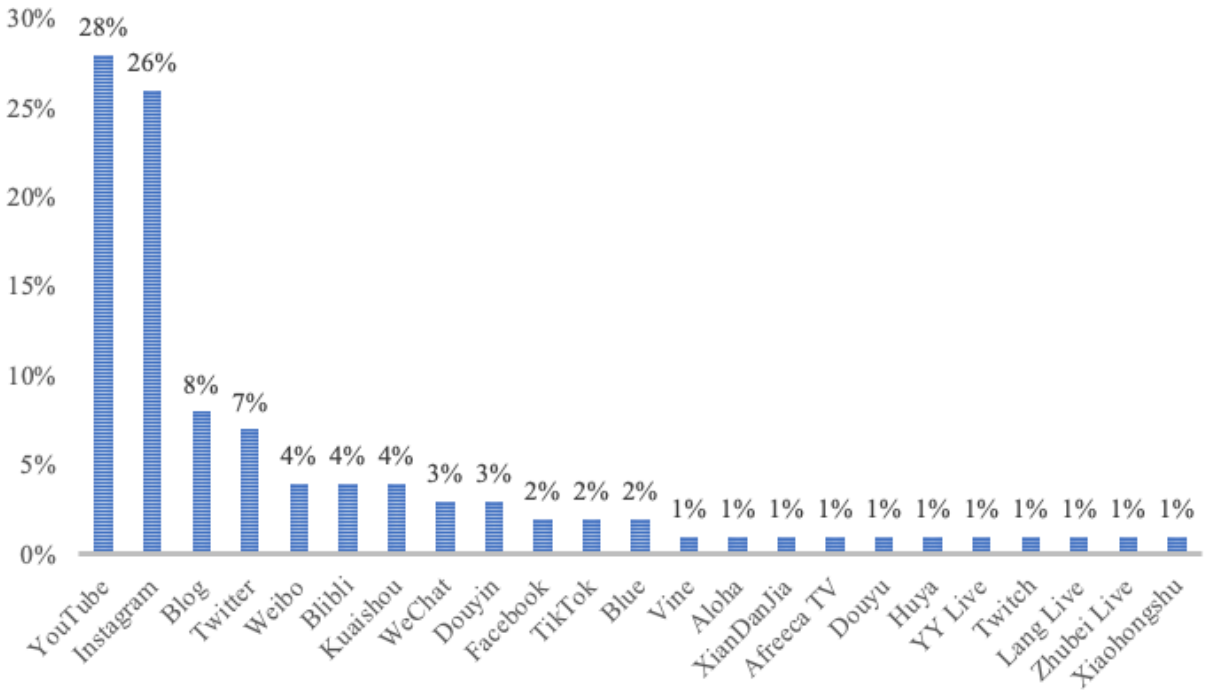


**Figure 2**. Percentage of studies examining platforms

In terms of multimodality, the results show that text and image remain a dominant focus (n=57, 50%) in this body of empirical work. This is not surprising given that text and image-based platforms (e.g., Facebook, Weibo) have been popular since the 2000s. Among the platforms in the reviewed articles, YouTube as a site of research has been the most examined social media platform (n=32, 28%), followed by Instagram (n=29, 26%) (see Figure 2). Overall, platforms with traditionally longer videos (e.g., YouTube)

dominate in studies that have analyzed MC videos, with research on MC and identity in short-form videos (8%) such as TikTok and synchronous streaming platforms (11%) lagging behind. These percentages reflect the particular period of our corpus – 1990 to 2022. At the time of writing, we observed that many of these platforms were continuously updating their functions, transforming from relatively text/image-based platforms into more dynamic ones allowing videos and live-streaming (e.g., Xiaohongshu) or vice versa (e.g., YouTube's incorporation of Shorts).

**Table 2**. Platform and number of studies

| | | Short | | Long | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Text and image | | Instagram | 29 (26%) | Blog | 9 (8%) | 57 (50%) |
| | | Twitter | 8 (7%) | Weibo | 5 (4%) | |
| | | WeChat | 3 (3%) | Facebook | 2 (2%) | |
| | | Xiaohongshu | 1 (1%) | | | |
| Video | Asynchronous | Kuaishou | 3 (3%) | YouTube | 32 (28%) | 44 (39%) |
| | | TikTok | 2 (2%) | Blibli | 4 (4%) | |
| | | Vine | 1 (1%) | | | |
| | | Douyin | 2 (2%) | | | |
| | Synchronous | | | Blue | 2 (2%) | 13 (11%) |
| | | | | Aloha | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | XianDanJia | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Afreeca TV | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Douyu | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Huya | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | YY Live | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Twitch | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Lang Live | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Zhubei Live | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Kuaishou | 1 (1%) | |
| | | | | Douyin | 1 (1%) | |

4.2 RQ2: What are the tactics of MCs' identity construction identified in the reviewed studies?

Our review utilizes the analytic notion of tactics to examine the corpus of research articles on MC and identity. As explained above, tactics draw attention not to identity categories (gender, ethnic, racial, etc.) but rather to how through discursive and techno-semiotic processes of identification MCs position themselves vis-à-vis important others – followers, sponsors, the platform, brands, competitors, "haters" and so on. In the paragraphs below, we present our findings after synthesizing these tactics in relation to the larger cultural and economic dimensions of the social media ecosystem. We group tactics under ten broader categories (see Table 3) and for each we provide some examples of tactics from the reviewed studies. Four of the larger categories have been identified by earlier reviews although with different terms (our terms for these are: *commodifying identity, amateurizing professionalism, professionalizing amateurism, establishing intimacy*) while another six are new in this review (they are: *disciplining the self, aestheticizing the self, operating visibility, initiating alliances, disclosing the self*, and *subtexting the self*) (see Appendix 2 for the detailed list of tactics and number of studies). The names of categories themselves reflect the broader social, cultural, economic or political relations that are fostered through MCs' identity work.

*Commodifying identity* encompasses a set of tactics that help to monetize MCs' identity, and it is commonly the focus of studies. Consistent with previous reviews, *explicit* and *implicit* disclosure of sponsored content and advertisement are some of the tactics linked to this (Sundermann and Raabe, 2019; Ye et al., 2021). Other expressions that are clearly linked to the commodification of identity and that were found in the reviewed articles are "shoppable life" (Hund and McGuigan, 2019), or "self-commodification" (Marwick and boyd, 2010). Commodifying identity could increase

MCs' "realness" and "authenticity" (Hund and McGuigan, 2019) and help MCs maintain a trustworthy persona (Wang and Picone, 2021). These studies have shown that tactics of commodifying one's identity are dependent on the context and MCs' purposes. For example, the Chinese MCs in the study by Wang and Picone (2021) and Song (2021) favor explicit commodification while many MCs in Anglo-centric regions tend to implicitly thread their identities with advertisement when positioning themselves in terms of commercialism.

*Amateurizing professionalism* is characterized by the tactics that MCs engage in to maintain an aura of amateurism even as professional social media personalities. This strategy helps MCs to increase their ordinariness and thus their relatability or credibility. For example, fashion and beauty bloggers in one reviewed study (Duffy and Hund, 2019) perceived themselves as "storyteller" or an "awkward girl" rather than fashionistas. Past reviews have used the term *authenticity* (Hudders et al., 2021; Sundermann and Raabe, 2019), and other researchers in the reviewed articles describe it as "performance of authenticity" (Jerslev, 2016), "behind-the-scene" strategy (Liao, 2021), "staged authenticity" (Abidin and Thompson, 2012), all of which hint at the planned or purposive aspects of these tactics. For example, "behind-the-scenes" strategies such as "without makeup" and "without perfect hair" (Duffy and Hund, 2019) projected authenticity discourses or "true self personae" and aptly created one's distinctive brand persona. However, in our view, authenticity, or rather, processes of authentication (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005) are a much more general tactic of intersubjectivity which can be harnessed to achieve a variety of goals, including but not limited to amateurizing professionalism.

Conversely*, professionalizing amateurism* refers to pursuing the status of an expert as an amateur by presenting authority, which could enhance the MCs' credibility

and maintain followers' attention. For instance, Chang and Chang (2019) found foreign expatriate YouTubers in Taiwan deliberately showcased their insider knowledge of Taiwan's culture as transcultural and multilingual experts/teachers despite their foreigner/noncitizen identities. Some reviewed studies used *expertise* and *authority* to describe similar tactics (Hudders et al., 2021; Sundermann and Raabe, 2019). Other reviewed studies described it as "professionalism" (Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021), "genuine expertise" (Arriagada and Bishop, 2021), or "experts" (Chang and Chang, 2019). Interestingly, professionalizing amateurism and amateurizing professionalism are both frequently linked to the notion of authenticity as a foundational aspect of online credibility (Tolson, 2010). Yet in our view, it is helpful to differentiate them analytically given that they can entail somewhat different discursive strategies of self-presentation. They are by no means mutually exclusive; in fact, some MCs are constantly adjusting their tactics between an amateurish and expert self (Novoselova and Jenson, 2018), resulting in a "hybrid discourse of the ordinary expert" (Tolson, 2010: 283).

*Establishing intimacy* is a set of tactics that MCs use to create close interpersonal relationships with their followers. Such tactics are termed "parasocial relationship" in other reviews (Hudders et al., 2021; Sundermann and Raabe, 2019), "parasocial/networked intimacy" (Tan et al., 2020), "parasociality" (Usher, 2018), and "relatability" (Chan, 2019; Raun, 2018) in the reviewed articles. For instance, it is found in some reviewed studies that MCs address viewers as "you" and "us" (Raun, 2018), "dear", "love" (Abidin and Thompson, 2012) to create a family/friend-like relationship in virtual communities. Here again the prefix "para" points to what may be seen as staged or strategic; however, we prefer the more neutral umbrella term of establishing intimacy given the false dichotomy of "real" versus "staged" evoked by these labels.

As mentioned earlier, the four tactics reviewed above have been widely discussed in the literature, albeit under slightly different names. However, we have also identified six additional tactics of intersubjectivity employed by MCs for identity construction in more recent studies in our corpus of articles: *disciplining the self*, *aestheticizing the self*, *optimizing visibility*, *initiating alliances*, *disclosing the self,* and *subtexting the self*.

*Disciplining the self* is about MCs' self-management (Duffy and Hund, 2015), self-discipline (Liao, 2021), and even self-censorship (Marwick and boyd, 2010). As celebrification is precarious and competitive (Shi et al., 2022), embracing an "always-on" personae and viewing themselves as subjectivity that constantly creates content and re-invents the self can be a tactic to sustain audiences' attention (Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020). MCs in the reviewed articles tend to frequently upload new content (Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020), suppress their negative feelings (Tan et al., 2022), and carefully select or filter out their content (Hund and McGuigan, 2019).

*Aestheticizing the self* refers to the use of various tactics, including embodied identity performance (Duffy and Hund, 2015) and the skill of creating appealing images (Duguay, 2019). Similar terms used by researchers were "aesthetic styling/stylization" (Liao, 2021), and "aesthetic labor" (Duguay, 2019). In the studies reviewed, MCs used two different approaches to attract attention, *coarse or refined*. For example, the queer female MCs in Duguay (2019) exhibited a desired self and created a recognizable brand through polished bodily and stylistic techniques to gain visibility. In contrast, some vloggers (Lin and de Kloet, 2019; Yueh, 2020) embraced a kind of vernacular aesthetics, which is neither extraordinary nor spectacular but reflects a mundane life for self-branding (Yueh, 2020).

*Optimizing visibility* relates to MCs' tactful deployment of multiple platforms/accounts (Arriagada and Ibáñez, 2020), platform affordances (Hurley, 2022),

and algorithmic labor management (Chan, 2019) to increase their online presence. On the one hand, many MCs in the reviewed articles used keywords and metadata to optimize their searchability and to take advantage of the algorithm (Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021). On the other hand, they were found to deploy hashtags with identity categories (Raun, 2018) and multimodality such as audio dubbing, selfies, and lip-syncing (Hurley, 2022) to interact with audiences and gain their attention. Multiple accounts and cross-platform tactics whereby MCs use various channels or social media platforms to curate their content for greater attention are also observed among MCs (Song, 2021).

*Initiating alliances* includes the cross-promotion tactic which sees MCs partnering with other MCs (Yueh, 2020), inviting ordinary guests (Abidin, 2019), branding themselves with specific campaigns or brand sponsors (Arriagada and Bishop, 2021), incorporating themselves within MCN companies (brokers between MCs, and brands) or becoming platforms' official MCs (Guo, 2022). Early reviews only observed the way that companies or state agencies maintain relations and coordinate with MCs in a top-down manner (Hudders et al., 2021; Sundermann and Raabe, 2019) but not how these collaborations have now extended in a horizontal way. In the reviewed studies, this tactic is termed "cross-promotion" (Chan, 2019) and "vernacular collaboration" (Yueh, 2020). We categorize such tactics as part of identity work because through alliances, MCs can construct a collective identity within the online community, highlighting the likeness of in-group MCs, thus authorizing and legitimizing their identity within the platform culture.

*Disclosing the self* relates to MCs' disclosure of emotions and views in their private life (Duffy and Hund, 2019). This tactic has been depicted as "self-disclosing" (Raun, 2018), "confessional discourse" (Jerslev, 2016), and "sharing personal

stuff/experience/opinions" (Van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021). For example, the South Korean live streamers on Afreeca TV in Song (2018) satisfied their audiences' sense of voyeurism by publicizing their private life ranging from dating life to domestic violence of married couples.

*Subtexting the self* is an implicit tactic of intersubjectivity that prefers self-deprecative or sarcastic performative style in a humorous, critical, or exaggerated manner to parody ideologies. This tactic is found in the form of satirical skits which playfully disrupt or challenge the sociocultural and political norms due to political censorship and surveillance (Andrews, 2021; Weninger and Li, 2022). This tactic is particularly prevalent in contexts where various forms of censorship and sanctions place constraints on MCs' content and identity expressions. Using tactics of *subtexting the self*, MCs in such contexts may still attract audiences' attention, take on novel personae, and avoid censorship, online hatred, and conflict.

Table 3 presents the summary of the ten categories of tactics, their description, and number of studies.

**Table 3.** Categories of tactics, description, and number of studies.

| Tactics | Description | No. of studies |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Commodifying identity | A set of practices to monetize one's identity | 56 (16%) |
| a. Explicit | Being frank in identity monetization | 30 (9%) |
| b. Implicit | Carefully blending identity into commodification | 26 (7%) |
| 2. Amateurizing professionalism | Maintaining amateurism as a professional; performing as an "ordinary expert" or "everyday individual" to develop an accessible and approachable persona | 42 (12%) |
| 3. Professionalizing amateurism | Pursuing professionalism as an amateur; pretending to be an expert and distinguishing oneself from ordinariness | 31 (9%) |
| 4. Establishing intimacy | Perceiving closeness and establishing intimacy (e.g., family/friend like relationship) with followers | 56 (16%) |
| 5. Disciplining the self | Intense scrutiny, self-control, autonomy, and self-management | 28 (8%) |
| 6. Aestheticizing the self | Aesthetic appearance and bodily performance, such as feminine/masculine, urban/barrio, luxury/vernacular aesthetics | 34 (10%) |
| a. Refined | Refining aspirational and fantastic aesthetics through presenting luxury, perfect feminine, and urban lifestyle | 31 (9%) |
| b. Coarse | Staging grassroot or vernacular aesthetics to attract attention | 3 (1%) |
| 7. Optimizing visibility | Harnessing digital affordances for greater visibility, such as emoji, hashtags, algorithm, and search optimization | 22 (6%) |
| 8. Initiating alliances | Aligning or partnering with other microcelebrities, audiences, agencies, campaigns, or brands to promote self and attract attention | 21 (6%) |
| 9. Disclosing the self | Disclosing personal information or stance about everyday life | 35 (10%) |
| 10. Subtexting the self | Playfully projecting satire, humor, parody in metaphorical way to avoid censor and gain popularity | 17 (5%) |
| Total | | 342 (100%) |

## 5. Discussion

Based on a review of the 97 research articles in the corpus, we have identified key trends in the scholarly literature on microcelebrity and identity over the period of 2010 to 2022. As for the conceptual issue encapsulated by RQ2, we distilled ten categories which each subsumes a range of tactics of identity construction MCs employ. Notwithstanding MCs' disclosed personal goals of self-fulfillment or social advocacy which motivate their online presence (Abidin, 2019; Chan, 2019), these sets of tactics must also be viewed as profoundly instrumental in helping them to integrate into the platformized social media ecosystem. Duffy et al. (2021: 2) contend that MCs' online experiences are not merely shaped by "the promise of visibility, but also its precarity". Through interviewing 30 MCs on various social media platforms, Duffy et al. (2021: 1-2) present a framework to measure the unpredictability in MCs' platformized creative labor, which includes three levels of precarities: (1) *market precarity*, (2) *industry precarity*, and (3) *platform precarity*. In this "nested precarities" framework (Duffy et al., 2021), MCs need to face the unpredictability arising from markets (changeable audience tastes, advertiser demands, and competition), industries (an ever-changing multi-platform working environment), and evolutions in platforms themselves (new features and algorithmic mechanisms). Inspired by this work, and the need to conceptually anchor our findings within extant theorizing on MCs' creative practices within the digital culture industry, we situate these findings within the framework of precarities and contextualize them within the broader technological, sociocultural, political-economic context which directly or indirectly exerts influences on MCs' process of identification.

*Platform precarity: infrastructures, features and algorithms*

Scholars have observed that platforms are not neutral conduits but have immense

power to govern cultural production and users' experience through regulation, curation, and moderation (Poell et al., 2021). To sustain their competitiveness, platforms need to constantly evolve their business models, increase economies of scale, decrease the cost of operation, and attract the widest variety of MCs (Poell et al., 2021). For MCs' part, they need to familiarize themselves with the skills and literacies to navigate the technological affordances, attune to platforms' evolution (e.g., interfaces, algorithm systems), and counter their capriciousness (Poell et al., 2021). This kind of precariousness is usually described as "algorithmic precarity" (Duffy et al., 2019) or "platform precarity" (Duffy et al., 2021).

In the reviewed articles, it is found that MCs strategically engaged in various tactics to reckon with platforms' power and adjust to their continuous evolution. In light of the emotional exhaustion caused by long hours of affective labor (Craig et al., 2021), MCs have to engage in *disciplining the self* so as to sustain their content production and audiences' attention. Importantly, MCs need to endlessly engage in *optimizing visibility* and *aestheticizing the self* to mitigate platform precarity. MCs' identity tactics are thus constantly geared toward anticipating, managing and maximizing the volatility of platform-dependent cultural production.

*Market precarity: audiences, trends, and social shifts*

Much of the precarity of platform labor is rooted in the flux of platform markets since many economic factors are unpredictable and uncertain (Poell et al., 2021). In the neoliberal gig economy, individuals are faced with increasing pressure to create a unique personal brand and they are being evaluated as entrepreneurial subjects (Duffy and Wissinger, 2017). Attracting and sustaining the audiences' attention through novel identity construction can be MCs' eternal task. However, their construction of personae or identity is not fixed and once-and-for-all but must attune to the rapid market changes

and viewers' tastes over time. Duffy et al. (2021) describe the changeable state of audiences' tastes and advertisers' demands as *market precarity*.

Many of the tactics reported by the reviewed studies and grouped by us under categories reflect MCs' ongoing efforts to compete for and sustain audiences' attention and seek commodification. These tactics are *commodifying identity, amateurizing professionalism, professionalizing amateurism, establishing intimacy,* and *disclosing the self*. Particularly, identity construction serves as an effective tool for both commercialism and credibility. MCs were found to constantly moderate their identity between amateurism and professionalism to compete for attention and sponsorship. Meanwhile, many MCs in the reviewed articles consistently created parasocial relationships with the audiences; the intimacy in the virtual communities may also be helpful for them to increase the "sticky" effect of their content and services and mitigate market precarity.

*Industry precarity: ecology of platforms*

Apart from the dependence on platforms and markets, MCs' cultural production is characterized by various "institutional dependencies", such as the inter-industry relationship between companies or the intra-industry relations within markets (Poell et al., 2021: 31). From a macro business perspective, the platform economy is subject to the development and transformation of industry sectors (e.g., telecommunications, consumer electronics, and media companies) as well as the economies of scale and scope (Poell et al., 2021). Therefore, the evolution of platform markets would increase the competition and risk for MCs. Duffy et al. (2021) term this uncertainty as *industry precarity*.

Based on the findings, it is observed that MCs tactfully aligned with the business models of platforms to enhance their creativity and competitiveness, as well as deal

with industry precarity. For instance, the tactic of *initiating alliances* is widely observed in the reviewed corpus. Through alliances, MCs may amplify their collective identity and thus increase their influence over like-minded groups in social media networks. Such a tactic can be helpful because it provides individuals with support and shared experience to sustain their aspirations and legitimization within a precarious industry.

*State precarity: regulations, surveillance, and censorship*

The state's intervention, surveillance and regulation of both platforms and MCs can be different across sociopolitical contexts. Social media entertainment (SME) in the West is mostly heavily shaped by laissez-faire attitudes (Craig et al., 2021), or centered on platform enterprises or markets themselves. Conversely, in the Chinese context, the precarious status of content creators and even the whole industry is intricately intertwined with political frames (Cunningham et al., 2019). It is not only the way platform content is circulated and filtered but also the interactions between platforms, governments, and users that are shaped by the state's rules and measures (Cui and Liu, 2020). We term this political risk as *state precarity*. As Duffy et al. (2021) mainly focus on Western social media, this political precariousness is largely absent in their framework. We argue that the inclusion of state precarity into the "nested precarities" framework complements it by drawing attention to the state's regulation and governance as a possible source of precarity for MCs in such contexts. Given increasing calls from Western governments for strict legislative regulations of social media platforms (such as the Social Media Child Protection Act in the United States that is pending at the time of writing), such state precarities may increase in importance across the world.

How MCs' identity construction is impacted by state precarity can be observed in our findings. To resist the political precarity, MCs in more constrained sociocultural

and political contexts (Andrews, 2021; Li, 2019) need to walk a fine line between state regulations and their identity construction (e.g., LGBTQ and political identity in particular). Through the tactic of *subtexting the self*, such as the use of humor, irony, or metaphor, MCs particularly those in the MENA (Middle East/North Africa) countries and China managed to express their stance and subtly satire sociocultural stereotypes without causing direct conflicts with the nation-state.

Taken together, although MCs seemingly benefit from content creation, circulation, and exploitation of visibility, their entrepreneurship and cultural practices on platforms are interdependent within the social media ecology. Identity as a cultural phenomenon becomes an important way to increase MCs' economic stability, seek opportunity for sponsorship and advertisement, as well as combat the various precarities in the platform ecosystems.

## 6. Conclusion

Our review systematically synthesized MC studies on identity construction on social media platforms. In answering RQ1, we examined various research trends in this body of work, including the year of publication, type of MCs studied, region of studies, research methodology, type of identity categories, and platform. Findings show that research on MCs' self-presentation and identity construction within the reviewed articles has significantly increased since 2010, although research attention on the types of MC is distributed unevenly. Lifestyle MCs (e.g., beauty, fashion, travel, family) tend to receive the most scholarly attention while practices of many other minority MCs remain relatively underexplored, despite growing research on LGBTQ and feminist MCs. In addition, previous studies on MCs have typically concentrated on well-known MCs like Zoella, Li Ziqi, Papijiang, (Chen and Whyke, 2022; Jerslev, 2016; Weninger

and Li, 2022); they tend to overlook small-scale MCs' tactics in self-branding and their struggles with precariousness amidst market competition (Chen et al., 2021). More research is needed to look into how MCs of different types and scales skillfully develop, negotiate, maintain, or contest certain identities through processes of celebrification across different career phases. Regarding the region of studies, it is observed that western MCs remain the main research focus (e.g., North America, Europe) in the reviewed studies while there has been a significant increase in research on Asia-Pacific MCs since 2019. Given the dynamics of platform economy in the Asia-Pacific region, it is crucial to furtherly de-westernize and de-colonize academic knowledge in the Global South and non-English-speaking countries, for instance, through a cross-cultural comparative lens (Abidin et al., 2021).

In terms of methodology, studies are predominantly conducted by qualitative methods, among which thematic analysis remains the most popular method for researching MC cultures. Many qualitative sub-methods were observed in the data, including interview, digital ethnography, walk-through methods, and textual analysis which enable nuanced and dynamic accounts of identification in MC practices. At the same time, cultural or micro-analyses of MC and identity are rarely paired with an account of their embedding within platform economies. This is true of the growing field of discourse-analytic research into microcelebrity self-presentational practices where researchers provide a detailed analysis of discursive nuances without attending to the dynamic interplays between MCs' self-presentation and other stakeholders (e.g., followers/haters, agencies, platforms, the government) in a broader platformized economy. This may have resulted in a lack of critical accounts of social relations, labor, power, and ideologies (KhosraviNik, 2022). In contrast, approaches in media and communication studies, political science and other social sciences tend to provide a

macro-global/national perspective for MC studies with a focus on politico-economic power, at times neglecting empirical studies at the micro-local/regional level (Qiu, 2023; KhosraviNik, 2022). Thus, there is a strong need for multidisciplinary research to provide a more nuanced and holistic understanding of ordinary people's celebrification at both "macro-industry, meso-communicative and micro-discursive" levels (KhosraviNik, 2022: 121).

The main contribution of this review lies in the way it conceptualized MCs' various tactics of identity construction and mapped those onto the troubling precarities these MCs encountered in a hyperplatformized economy. In response to RQ2, we grouped MC's tactics of intersubjectivity into ten categories, including *commodifying identity*, *amateurizing professionalism*, *professionalizing amateurism*, *establishing intimacy*, *discipling the self*, *aestheticizing the self*, *optimizing visibility*, *initiating alliances*, *disclosing the self*, and *subtexting the self*. Based on our analysis, these identity construction tactics serve to mitigate four types of precarities: *platform*, *market*, *industry*, and *state*. These findings imply that the MC self has thus transformed into an object of commodification in a context of digital capitalism based on the mundane production and consumption of cultural goods—identity-oriented content and self-presentation (Törnberg and Uitermark, 2022).

This findings of this review extend current understanding of the MC phenomenon in several ways. First, the study indicates that MC is not merely individuals' endeavor for money and fame through the presentation of online selves, but a set of "cultural-communicative practices" consisting of various *tactics* that are entangled with labor, commodity, power, and ideologies within the platformization of economic and cultural production. Findings showcase that MCs in the gig economy face significant precarity as they lack the resources and mechanism of support afforded to traditional celebrities

by the mainstream media and cultural industry (Duffy et al., 2022; Marwick, 2013). Second, our analysis shows that MCs' labor and self-branding are "mutually transformative" in such a fast-changing and highly competitive industry where inequalities are invisibly deepening, and MCs' identities have been "mutually constitutive" within the process of global neoliberal commodity culture (Zhang, 2017: 6-7). In light of this, future research should explore how different MCs' identification processes are intertwined with various social actors (e.g., the platforms, followers/haters/other MCs, advertisers, agencies, and the state) in the platformized economy within specific contexts. Third, our review points to the need for a multidisciplinary agenda to study the interplay between MCs' identity construction, self-presentation practices, and their labor in a highly digitalized and precarious economy.

Like any other research, the present review has limitations. First, access/subscription issues prevented us from including some of the latest published papers despite having identified the titles and abstracts in the database. Second, this review did not include book chapters, books, dissertations, non-English publications, and non-empirical studies which limits the applicability of our claims. Due to time and resource limitations, we only synthesized 97 empirical studies on MCs' identity construction. Despite these limitations, this review can be of interest to scholars in media and cultural studies, and it sheds some insight into MCs' various labor and tactics for self-presentation, provides an inquiry into the platformization of globalized media, consumer culture, the digital economy, and political governance. Future work in this area could expand the inclusion criteria and further explore scholarship in this area, such as how different types of MCs agentively negotiate, co-opt, and resist various

precarities through new tactics, and how their identity play is intersubjectively enacted and constructed through interactions from a longitudinal perspective.

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