Engagement and Monetization on Instagram

Pet Influencer Communities

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ABSTRACT

Today's online ecosystem is filled with various types of consumption phenomena waiting to be academically explored. This thesis explores the topic of pet accounts on social media, more specifically, cat accounts on Instagram. Via Netnography and 15 in-depth interviews with people who manage social media accounts for their cats, I investigate two research questions: Where does the management of a pet social media account belong in an ecosystem of performance online and offline? And what are the motivations behind, and strategies fueling, this aforementioned performance? As a result of this research, I establish a framework identifying the types of mediated performances occurring online and offline, as well as by proxy and non-proxy. I also locate the feline appreciation virtual community on Instagram within this ecosystem of mediated performance. Additionally, I develop a typology of pet social media account managers based on their respective desires for recognition and/or social connection. I, therefore, address the gap in the literature pertaining to this phenomenon as an online anthropomorphic performance that demonstrates a new facet of the pet-human relationship. Marketers tailoring to today's consumers would benefit from learning about the motivations and strategies implemented by the pet social media account managers as they have become companies' new online marketing tools as influencers.

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INTRODUCTION

As a response to the technological advances of today, celebrities are not only present on our television screens but also represented on the internet via social media accounts. An example of a social media platform which both celebrities and non-famous individuals use to represent themselves online is Instagram. As the social media platform with the sixth highest monthly active users (MAUs) after Facebook, YouTube, Whatsapp, and WeChat, Instagram, a photo and video sharing mobile application, has attracted 1 billion MAUs since its launch in October 2010 (Lua, 2019). A compelling aspect of Instagram is how some users have created accounts which attract a copious number of followers who check the posts religiously and are consequently inspired, touched, or simply entertained, and at times, marketed at. These social media accounts belong to individuals called microcelebrities or influencers (Abidin, 2015, 2016, 2018; Marwick, 2013, 2015; Senft, 2013).

A certain percentage of these 1 billion monthly active users (MAU) on Instagram are accounts representing an individual or entity, but are managed by another individual. This thesis intends to explore accounts of this type, namely, pet Instagram accounts. As of today, the most famous feline on Instagram, at 4 million followers, is an 8 year old Siamese-Tabby mix shelter rescue named Nala. This influencer cat became Instagram famous a little while after her owner created the account to share images of her furbaby with her family who resides overseas. As a result of her fame, Nala's owner has expanded the feline's social media presence to other platforms, such as, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, where she has 2.6M followers, 27K subscribers, and 24.9K followers, respectively. Currently, Nala is famous enough to sell Nala affiliated merchandise via her website and to be scouted by companies in order to effectively

promote products, such as, cat food, and cat accessories through her online presence. It is speculated that Nala makes $15,500 per sponsored post on her social media platforms (Colleen, 2017). Furthermore, with her established fame, the feline is lending a paw to certain charities and causes which are relevant to her story as a rescued cat: Kitten Rescue, Focus on Ferals, and Santedor.

The second most followed cat on Instagram is a cat with an underbite and feline dwarfism named Tardar Sauce, more commonly known as Grumpy Cat. However, unlike Nala, Grumpy's fame did not start on Instagram, but when her owner's brother posted a picture of Grumpy on the social news website Reddit in 2012. Once the photograph was used for parodies and memes and distributed online by other users, the Grumpy Cat inspired content went viral. Memes, defined by Milner (2016), are "amateur media artifacts, extensively remixed and recirculated by different participants on social media networks". In Abidin's (2018) book on internet celebrity, the scholar expands on the phenomenon of meme celebrities. When expanding on the "Meme Celebrity", Abidin cites Grumpy cat as an example, she explains that as a result of this meme fame, Tardar's owner, Tabatha Bundesen, capitalized on the fame and Grumpy Cat began to make appearances on TV shows such as NBC News' Today Show, ABC News' Good Morning America, CBS Evening News, Anderson Live, VH1's Big Morning Buzz Live, E! Network's The Soup, ABC's The Bachelorette, and WWE Monday Night Raw. Moreover, in order to accommodate and capitalize on the virality and fame of the Grumpy Cat inspired content online and elsewhere, Bundesen claimed the name of the meme and created social media accounts for her cat. Surprisingly, Grumpy's follower counts are greater than some humans', on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, she has 8.3M followers, 26.4K subscribers, and 1.4M, respectively. Additionally, Grumpy has become commercialized as the protagonist of a movie

and a book, a model, and an ambassador for brands and merchandising deals. As a result of all of these achievements, Grumpy was named "Most Influential Cat of 2012" by MSNBC, voted Meme of the Year at the 2013 Webby Awards, and crowned as Forbes' "Top Pet Influencer" in 2017. Moreover, due to her success, Grumpy Cat's owners specify via her website that they donate to shelters that can help save animals. While it was rumored that Grumpy Cat had made 1 billion a year, her owner refuted this, and in 2013, the cat's meme manager claimed that the income from Tardar is closer to a "low 6 figures" (Colleen, 2017).

Despite the above information on the potentially lucrative nature of pet microcelebrities and influencers, this type of influencer has not been academically explored. One can note that Influencers or microcelebrities who manage their own accounts have been explored by scholars who identify certain patterns and trends of behavior which these cyber celebrities engage in (Abidin, 2015, 2016, 2018; Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017; Marwick, 2013, 2015; McQuarrie et al., 2012; Page, 2012; Senft, 2008, 2013). However, there is an immense gap in the literature when it comes to the way in which account managers of pet social media accounts or other types of microcelebrities manage their accounts and the motivations attached to the activity. To clarify, scholars would not be able to solely leverage the literature on human microcelebrities who manage their own accounts in order to explain the actions of individuals who manage another entity's social media account. Unlike ordinary microcelebrities who manage their own social media accounts, the managers of accounts pertaining to another entity are responsible for predicting the thoughts and desires of the microcelebrity in order to best demonstrate their personalities via the social media account. Therefore, the aforementioned act of managing a microcelebrity's account can be considered an expressive, theatrical activity reliant on the media surrounding it. Due to the existence of the layer that is the account manager, pet microcelebrities

need to be explored as their own phenomenon while borrowing from the literature of microcelebrities who manage their own accounts.

Much like corporations, microcelebrities are responsible for self-branding, "...a series of marketing strategies applied to the individual", in order to maintain a consistency to their cyber presence, posts, and persona on these social media accounts (Marwick, 2013). Influencers and microcelebrities are able to create popular social media accounts which are followed by many, through creating a steady brand to attach to their accounts (Hearn & Schoenoff, 2015; Marwick, 2013, 2015; McQuarrie et al., 2012). An influencer or microcelebrity acts like a corporate brand by maintaining congruence of tone and themes on their social media accounts in order to maintain their followers' interest. Another source of inspiration for microcelebrity strategies and techniques is mainstream celebrities. Similar to Hollywood celebrities, a microcelebrity creates a "publicizable personality" via self-commodification and self-branding in order to best attract followers to their social media accounts (Marwick, 2013). This facet to this research suggests managing a pet social media account is a form of performance. There exists a number of activities which individuals participate in for self-expression and enjoyment. By exploring activities driven by similar motivations, this research hopes to discover where managing a pet social media account as an activity belongs in this ecosystem of performance online and offline.

In this thesis, I conduct qualitative research in the form of a Netnography (Kozinets, 2002, 2009) of the cat community on Instagram for 2 months through my cat social media account @mainecoonking by following a number of popular cat influencer accounts and observing their posts, captions, and comments. In addition I researched websites, articles, and online content outside of Instagram, and conducted 15 in-depth interviews with North American account managers of cat Instagram accounts in order to fathom their respective dedication and

attachment to these accounts. As the phenomenon being studied in this thesis is pet

microcelebrity accounts on social media, the platform chosen for this study's context is

Instagram. As a platform, Instagram has 1 billion users and is is an immense hub for the cyber

presence of businesses as well as their marketing efforts. Currently, 71% of businesses in the US

use Instagram and 25 million businesses actually hold Instagram accounts ("22+ Instagram

Statistics That Matter to Marketers in 2019", 2019). Furthermore, the unimaginably large

number of daily active users, estimated at more than 500 million make around 4.2 billion likes

per day ("22+ Instagram Statistics That Matter to Marketers in 2019", 2019). Given that

Instagram as a social media platform is heavily used both by consumers and companies, a study

on pet microcelebrities on Instagram will result with contributions which bear weight to

marketers. Thus, it is wise to make use of the data present on this social media platform in order

to thoroughly investigate the motivations and strategies implemented by pet microcelebrity

account managers.

Aside from focusing solely on Instagram as the social media platform, this thesis will

investigate cat microcelebrities. Cats have dominated the internet with more than 2 million cat

videos posted on YouTube.com by 2014 and with Internet users being more than twice as likely

to post cat content than they are to post a ''selfie'' online (Marshall, 2014; Myrick, 2015).

Myrick (2015) was able to identify the qualities which distinguish people who expose them more

frequently to internet cat content: attitudinal qualities, such as affinity for cats, behavioral

qualities, such as owning a cat currently or in the past, pet assistance behaviors, or time spent

online, and personality variables, such as agreeableness, anxiousness, or shyness. Furthermore,

Myrick (2015) concluded that the most important factors influencing enjoyment of Internet cats

can are the frequency at which Internet cat content is viewed, which can be explained by

Zajonc's (2001) mere exposure effect where an individual likes something more due to frequent exposure, and the experiencing of positive emotions post-viewing. Moreover, mood management motivations were also attributed to the viewing of cat-related media on the internet, wherein the researcher found that watching cyber cat-content increased positive emotion and lessened negative emotion for participants. This leads to the consideration of using such cat media for pet therapy initiatives for individuals who cannot engage in face to face pet therapy due to health or financial reasons (Myrick, 2015).

This thesis promises two theoretical contributions, one to the literature of virtual communities, microcelebrities, and pet-human relationships, and another to the literature of performance occurring in today's media taking place online and offline, as well as by proxy and non-proxy. The two research questions to be answered by leveraging and extending the above literature are: where does the management of a pet microcelebrity social media account belong in an ecosystem of performance online and offline? What is the motivation behind this aforementioned performance? And how is this performance implemented on a social media platform?

Firstly, extant literature studying the relationship between humans and their pets is explored in order to best understand how these relationships, bearing in mind today's technological advances, influence the pet owner to create the pet social media account (Archer, 1997; Hirschman, 1994; Veevers, 1985). It becomes vital to investigate pet social media accounts in order to learn about the patterns of behavior expressed throughout managing their pet's account and motivations behind creating such an account. This is important to explore because some individuals still sustain their pet social media accounts even if they don't achieve the fame of Nala and Grumpy Cat, therefore, other motivations exist which fuel the existence of

these accounts. Through citing scholars who have developed typologies for virtual communities (Kozinets, 1999; Martineau and Arsel, 2017), and scholars who have explored the phenomenon of the microcelebrity (Abidin, 2015, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Marwick, 2013, 2015; Senft, 2008, 2013), this research recognizes a typology for the pet social media account manager which is based on two desires fueled by a need for cultural and social capital as value derived from the activity (Bourdieu, 1986): the desire for recognition, and the desire for social connection, respectively.

Secondly, there exists literature on a number of performative activities, such as LARPing, Cosplay, pageants for children, spelling bees for children, math competitions for children, online video games, and even microcelebrities who manage their own accounts. Once looked more closely at, these separate, perhaps unrelated activities create a typology of mediated performance. This typology looks at two binary spectrums: whether the activity is online or offline, and whether it is managed by an individual using another entity, by proxy, or if the individual is both the manager and executor of the activity or performance, non-proxy. By establishing this second typology, this research is able to categorize the activity which pet social media account managers are participating in given the performance's venue and stakeholders.

By making the above two contributions and concurrently exploring the nature of such pet microcelebrity accounts on Instagram, this research hopes to managerially enlighten marketers and the social media platform about the motivations behind the creation of these different types of pet accounts on Instagram. Given the scarcity of literature on this relatively new topic of pet influencers, the current use of pet influencers by brands to endorse their products, the creation of pet micro-celebrity merchandise which is sold to fans and dedicated followers, and consequently, the high profitability of creating such accounts, one can deduce that researching the phenomenon

and elucidating the motivations behind and strategies of managing or following these accounts would help marketers better understand both their newfound advertising tool and their target audience in their second home: social media, particularly, Instagram. By doing so, this study aims to facilitate the marketers' jobs at recruiting these Instagram accounts as online marketing tools. Moreover, these findings will benefit the social media platform itself by better educating its managers about the inner desires and varying types of consumers. As a result, Instagram can better tailor their application for these consumers given their motivations and ways of behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to look into the phenomenon of pet microcelebrities, I will first study virtual communities in order to best understand how pet microcelebrities operate in a virtual community within a social medium, such as Instagram. After that, I will further discuss the conceptual foundations of pet celebrities as anthropomorphized brands, managed by their human companions

Virtual Communities

Ridings and Gefen (2004) explain that virtual communities are "characterized as people with shared interests or goals for whom electronic communication is a primary form of interaction". The topic of online or virtual communities has been and remains researched by scholars interested in the two stakeholders: the consumer and the marketer (Kozinets, 1999; Martineau and Arsel, 2017; Papacharissi, 2010; Ridings and Gefen, 2004; Wang and Fesenmaier,

2003). Nowadays, virtual communities can vary depending on the platform and content shared between the participants, be it a community connected through an online video game (Cole and Griffiths, 2007), social media (Haythornthwaite, 2007; Park 2010), or an online forum (Leigh, Peters, and Shelton, 2006; Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter, 2010; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koeing, 2002; Muniz and Schau, 2005, 2007; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

In his article on electronic tribes, Kozinets (1999) recognizes a typology of virtual consumption community participants, their behaviours, their interactions, and the different types of communities they engage in. With his article, Kozinets aims to educate marketers about the differences between marketing to the static consumers of database marketing and advertising to the active, layered, community-oriented consumers of virtual communities. Kozinets defines virtual communities as "a specific subgroup of virtual communities that explicitly center upon consumption-related interests" which share an enthusiasm for, and knowledge of a specific consumption activity or related group of activities.

What remains constant between the online communities from the start of the computer mediated communication age and today's is the desire to socially connect with others who share your interests online, make friends, or to contribute to and exchange information on an online platform (Horrigan et al., 2001; Ridings and Gefen, 2004; Jones, 1995; Utz, 2000; Wellman et al., 1996). Thus, through his study, Kozinets finds a 4-field typology based on two factors: social ties to the community and centrality to the consumption activity which concerns a member's involvement in the consumption of the brand's product. An example of a category of Kozinets' VCM members is the Tourists who are shown to have superficial social ties within the virtual community and low interest in the consumption activity at hand. Additionally, both Insiders and Minglers are highly community-oriented. In terms of self-centrality, Insiders are highly engaged

in the brand's consumption, while Minglers are not strongly attached to the consumption activity. Finally, Devotees are highly interested in the consumption activity but are not highly community-oriented.

Inspired by Kozinets' (1999) work on electronic tribes, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001)'s work on communities, and Bourdieu's (1986) work on the forms of capital, Martineau and Arsel (2017) create their own typology of engagement in online communities of co-creation. The scholars define their specific form of online communities as "projects that involve complex tasks requiring creativity and specialized skills as well as intra-community practices" (Martineau and Arsel, 2017). By exploring two online fashion communities of co-creation, the research results in a 2-by-2 consumer engagement typology which is defined by the individual's community and skill orientation: Communals, Aspirers, Utilizers, and Tourists (Martineau and Arsel, 2017). In terms of Communals, their desires for improving their skills and knowledge, as well as for social engagement are what fuel their cyber presence in their online communities. On the other hand, in their existence within their online communities, Utilizers are motivated mainly by their ability to strengthen and hone their skills, and less by the act of building connections with others. Moreover, with a high community orientation and a low skill orientation, Aspirers participate in the online community by engaging in small tasks, limited to simply giving opinions or ratings, and small talk which don't bring forth significant capital within the community. And finally, Tourists view the act of being an online community member as a way to pass the time.

The literature mentioned above looks into the extant work of scholars on virtual communities around specific tasks, hobbies and interests, thus providing a basis to understand the ecosystem in which the pet microcelebrity exists online. However, the above section does not specifically delve into the occurrence of virtual communities on expressive social media, much

like the cat community on Instagram. Consequently, the next section will explore in more detail the extant literature on communities formed via the social media platforms of today, in order to fully investigate the nature of the phenomenon, cat microcelebrities on Instagram.

VCMs on Social Media. Given the pervasiveness of social media platforms in today's world, with platforms such as Facebook having 2.23 billion MAU, YouTube having 1.9 billion MAUs, and Instagram having 1 billion MAUs, each social network site has become home to several virtual communities (Parks, 2010). For instance, within Facebook, the company has recognized 200 million community pages as "meaningful" (Perez, 2018). Creating or joining a community page on Facebook is an easy, straightforward way to become a member of a virtual community. However, Instagram communities are more ambiguous and less restrictive as they do not exist on a specific page within the platform. As these Instagram virtual communities are not represented by a page on Instagram, they are simply defined by the relationships formed between users of the medium itself who make up the community (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

Unlike the early days of the internet, where online communities merely existed within forums, the social media of today has expanded our playground so that we may form such electronic tribes more easily and less restrictively (Haythornthwaite, 2007; Parks, 2010). By citing Rheingold's (1993) pioneering book about communities of the internet, Parks (2010) successfully prepares his chapter, "Social Network Sites as Virtual Communities", to ultimately evidence the presence of virtual communities on the internet in the form of social network sites. Parks references literature on community and how it has evolved from viewing community with a prescriptive lens to perceiving it descriptively. Prescriptively, members in a community must be in a common physical space in order for it to be considered a true community, whereas

descriptively, a group which shares a culture or a set of interests and values can be classified as a community. Thus, given the latter definition of the concept, Parks classifies virtual communities on social network sites as communities due to their members' intellectual and affective connections.

In her work, Haythornthwaite (2007) defines the stakeholders and factors which serve as building blocks for social networks: the *actors*, who represent the users, companies, or events existing on the social media platform*,* creating *ties* between one another which are mediated by their *relations*. The aforementioned ties can increase in strength if they are host to social and emotional support as well as intimacy and self-disclosure. As a result, a collection of ties form a *network.*

After introducing the units which make up social networks, the scholar emphasizes that investigating the existence of a community in social networks occurs through the recognition of interconnection between members (Haythornthwaite, 2007). Patterns of interconnection on social media can be defined by the online community's shared activities, interests, and defining characteristics. Thus, Haythornthwaite explains that social communities are advantageous to join as they facilitate introductions between individuals with shared qualities or interests, through the creation of a community based on reciprocity, shared rituals, and a common culture. As a social network evolves in richness of relations and structure of rituals and culture, ties become stronger, and the added value of social capital becomes an extra advantage to belonging to the community (Haythornthwaite, 2007). The concept of social capital was introduced and defined by Bourdieu (1986) as social relationships between individuals of a network occurring within a community.

Additionally Haythornthwaite (2007) explains that social capital allows the evolution of individual connectivity to community connectivity, thereby creating a common language and

routine behaviors between all members of the community. Haythornthwaite expands on the

aforementioned ties by explaining that some ties which exist in electronic tribes are not strong.

Some ties occur between strangers and are hence called *bridging* ties. The aforementioned ties

form between subgroups and allow for the exchange of new information and resources. Thus,

Haythornthwaite concludes that for a community to be successful it must consist of strong

relations to maintain internal trust and norms, as well as weak relations which perpetuate the

exchange of new information and resource.

By delving into the fundamental literature of VCMs and their presence on social media,

this research establishes a foundation upon which to further explore the motivations for joining

such communities. In the next section, this study explores the desires which motivate individuals

to join VCMs. As a result, the research hopes to fully understand and categorize the pet

microcelebrity accounts which join their respective communities on social media.

Their Motivation: Desire for Social Connection. In this section, the literature on social

connection and social capital is investigated. Consequently, I will be able to effectively perceive

and justify the desires motivating pet microcelebrity account managers to create the accounts and

join the community on Instagram.

In Putnam's book (2001) 'Bowling Alone', the scholar delves into the decline of social

capital, in the form of in-person interactions which inspire educational, political, and civic

engagement, in the United States since 1950. Furthermore, Putnam explains that the internet is

responsible for this reduction in social capital in America. Other scholars, however, argue that

the internet either supplements (Wellman et al., 2001) or bears no impact (Lee and Lee, 2010;

Uslander, 2000) on social capital. On the other hand, some scholars identify specific structures

within the internet, namely virtual communities, and investigate the influence such digital networks have on the social capital of their members (Chiu, Hsu, and Wang, 2006; Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter, 2010). In Martineau and Arsel's (2017) study, the scholars cite relevant sources explaining that social capital is generated through relationships online with other members and with the central brand (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Thus, one can conclude that the desire for social connection can be satisfied by the building of social capital through an activity, be it an offline or online in nature.

The derivation of social capital through online engagement within a virtual community has been explored by various scholars (Chiu, Hsu, and Wang, 2006; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2006, 2007; Kozinets, 1999; Lee, and Lee, 2010; Martineau and Arsel, 2017; Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter, 2008; Wellman et al., 2001). Moreover, there exist a number of academic concepts which are constructed in order to best describe online social engagement within online communities, such as, Haythornthwaite's (2007) ties and relations, and Park's (2010) connections. Additionally, certain typologies have been created to reflect a desire for a social connection within online communities, such as, Kozinets' (1999) Minglers and Insiders, Martineau and Arsel's (2017) Aspirers and Communals.

In his study, Bishop (2007) creates a 3-level framework along with a virtual ecology cognition level (Mantovani, 1996) as he explores the motivation behind participation or lack thereof in online communities. The ecological cognition layer of the framework will incite the actor's desire for engaging in an action (level 1), the actor then analyzes if this action is consistent with their goals, values, beliefs, and interests (level 2), and finally, utilizes their skills to implement the action and perceive their virtual environment (level 3) (Bishop, 2007). Within level 1, that of desires, the scholar defines 5 categories of desires, one of which is social. The

scholar ensures that he separates the concept of desires from needs and defines the former as

"...thoughts or requests for action that an actor experiences as opposed to a requirement or want"

(Bishop, 2007). By citing Rheingold's (2000) 'the social Web', Bishop explains that the social

category is justified given the social nature of the internet and especially online communities,

and the constant participation of their members via messages or chatting.

Another scholarly work which looks into the reasons behind joining and participating in

an online community, is Ridings and Gefen's (2004) 'Virtual Community Attraction: Why

People Hang Out Online'. In their study, the scholars explore and find the motivations for

joining a virtual community: finding a source of information and help to achieve goals, forming a

social identity of values, attitudes, and behavioral intentions inspired by membership in said

group, receiving social and emotional support, seeking friendship (Baym, 2000; Rheingold,

1993; Utz, 2000; Wasko and Faraj, 2000, 2005), and engaging in recreation. Given Ridings and

Gefen's findings, it is evident, that most of the reasons why individuals are motivated to join

online communities are driven by their need to accrue social capital.

Moreover, a set of scholars who explore social capital in the context of a specific virtual

community are Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter (2008). The scholars' work focuses on social

capital in the context of a virtual P3 community, "a virtual community dedicated to finding

solutions, exchanging best practices, and building expertise while forging meaningful social

relationships, all accomplished through textual conversations" (Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter,

2008). In their research, Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter (2008) introduce social capital as a

concept which can be applied at both the individual and collective level and which can be

defined in terms of the process of social capital accumulation as well as outcomes (Adler and

Kwon 2002; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998). To clarify, Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter (2008)

establish that social capital can materialize for members of specific social structures and is governed by relational norms of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust. Firstly, the scholars define voluntarism as a voluntary commitment of time and effort to engage proactively in the online community. Secondly, reciprocity is defined as a social stabilizer which induces cooperation, understanding, and empathy amongst the members of the community. And finally, the scholars explain that social trust is a willingness to take risks and act in mutually supportive ways in order to be helped and help others, respectively, within the community. Furthermore, their findings show that social capital creates value for members of a social netwok.

Conversely, a study which looks at how social capital, media use, and certain demographics impact the use of online community, found that certain factors of social capital do not relate to online community participation (Lee and Lee, 2010). The scholars find that while sociability and generalized norms are affiliated with building social capital in online communities, there are prominent socio-psychological factors of social capital, trust and life contentment which are not significantly relevant to online community use. Finally, the scholars establish that while the technological advances of online communities can improve members' ability to communicate, the face to face communication which takes place in traditional, offline communities is a vital factor which strengthens the overall quality of communities.

Given the extant literature on social capital within virtual communities, which does not agree on whether the internet and online community are able to satisfy a desire for social connection, one cannot conclude for certain that all members of such communities are socially satisfied. However, that does not mean that their motivation must be socially-driven. Thus, this research will either be successful at providing evidence for the Instagram cat community's ability to build social capital within their network, given their long-term memberships, or that the

motivation behind joining such a virtual community is not fueled by a desire for social connection, and thus, the members stay to satisfy another desire.

Their Motivation: Desire for Recognition. Given that the phenomenon of pet microcelebrity social media accounts are yet to be academically explored, this thesis must investigate a number of potential motivations which may be driving account managers to create and join the pet VCM on Instagram. Hence, this section delves into another desire which may motivate pet microcelebrity account managers to create the account and join the VCM, the desire for recognition.

In a broad sense, fame is studied by Greenwood et al. (2013) who investigate the relationship of the need to belong, narcissism, and relatedness with the appeal of fame. The scholars create a fame appeal scale, demonstrating 3 factors of fame (Visibility, Status, and Prosocial), and two items measuring frequency of fame fantasizing and the perceived realism of achieving fame. Their findings show that a higher need to belong translates into a higher appeal for fame on all 3 fame factor fronts, and a higher frequency of fantasizing about fame. On the other hand, narcissism was only significantly related to a higher appeal for visibility and status fame factors, but not prosocial, a higher frequency of fame fantasies, and a higher perceived realism for future fame. As for the final need, the higher the need was for relatedness, the higher was the appeal for the prosocial fame factor only. Thus, their study elucidates the reasons why individuals may be interested in fame as a phenomenon, and specifically the 3 different types of fame depending on their socioemotional needs.

When it comes to today's online form of fame, Marwick (2015) explains that microcelebrities "see their audience as fans rather than friends or family, and share information

strategically with this audience to boot their popularity and attention within a network".

Therefore, another desire which could be investigated as a motivation factor for joining an online

community is the desire for recognition. Seeing as the type of online community being

investigated is networked accounts on social media platforms, one can identify recognition as

attention attained through popularity or fame. The topics of fame, microcelebrity, and the appeal

of fame have been explored by various scholars (Abidin, 2015, 2016, 2018; García-Rapp, 2017;

Greenwood et al., 2013; Marwick and Boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2013; Marwick, 2015; Van

Krieken, 2018).

In the online world of today exists an economy dominated by the oversupply of content

resulting in competition between suppliers for the limited demand which exists in the form of

attention: the attention economy (Abidin, 2017a; Boyd, 2011; Burgess and Green, 2018; García-

Rapp, 2017; Marwick, 2013; Strangelove, 2010; Senft, 2013). Microcelebrities on social media

platforms compete with one another over the limited attention of their potential viewers using the

content on their accounts. To elaborate, Marwick (2013) explains that status in today's world is

easily quantifiable through an individual's online presence on social media and the platform's

metrics. These metrics differ depending on the social media platform in question, on Youtube,

significance lies in views, comments, and subscriptions, on Twitter, it's followers and retweets,

on Facebook, recognition is portrayed in likes or number of friends, and finally, on Instagram,

the metrics which matter are follower count, likes, comments, and engagement rate. The

aforementioned metrics which define value and credibility, thereby resulting with visibility and

popularity, are coined 'quantifiable metrics' (Marwick, 2013), 'metrics of popularity' (Burgess

and Green, 2008), 'metrics of fame' (Marshall, 2014), or 'popularity markers' (García-Rapp,

2017). When one achieves online attention through these metrics, it can result in "high visibility"

and an "ability to command an audience" (Marwick, 2013).

Another way to look at the desire for recognition is through cultural capital achieved via an online presence. In Martineau and Arsel's (2017) research on participation in electronic tribes, cultural capital is defined as "tacit skills and ability to relate to a field bound by practice as well as the recognition and status that one receives through these skills and ability". The scholars' typology is defined by two spectrums: skill orientation, and community orientation. While community orientation is affiliated with social capital (Bourdieu 1986), skill orientation is related to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The skills and abilities in this study pertain to managing a pet account on Instagram, and the recognition and status to be attained are attributed to achieving microcelebrity or celebrity beyond the cat community on Instagram. Thus, by achieving the aforementioned celebrity, whether within or outside of the community, the accounts accumulate cultural capital.

The literature explored in this section can be leveraged to explain the 'why' through the motivations behind creating a pet social media account: be it a desire for social connection, and/or recognition. In the next section, I will move to a discussion the 'how' or the strategies used by pet owners to represent their pets via the aforementioned accounts on social media.

Human Brands and Microcelebrities

Through studying the extant literature on human brands and microcelebrities, this thesis can accrue knowledge on the representation of certain types of public figures and brands. While pet microcelebrities do not all have the influence and celebrity of public figures and brands, they do have an online, public platform through which they are represented by their pet owner.

Therefore, in order to learn more about the techniques implemented by pet microcelebrity account managers, it is beneficial to look into the work of scholars on previously explored, similar phenomena: human brands and microcelebrities who manage their own accounts.

The topic of personal branding has been studied thoroughly since the concept of branding oneself first arose in a Fast Car article by Tom Peters (1997). Since then, the topic has been fleshed out by academics as the importance of creating a personal brand for both celebrities and professionals became vital for advancing in their careers (Labrecque et al., 2011; Shwabel, 2009). It is emphasized that everyone is in possession of a personal brand, which is referred to by Peters (1997) as a "sign of distinction". A brand can be based on the idea of a product, an organization, a person, or a symbol (Aaker, 1996). Bearing personal branding in mind, one can categorize the brand as a person with a distinctly unique expressed self-identity (Aaker, 1996).

Arruda (2003) explains that personal branding, similar to corporate branding, occurs in 3 stages: "extract, express, and exude". Initially, one would need to pinpoint the qualities which make them unique, after which a personal brand statement must be crafted and finally a medium must be found in order to disseminate the personal brand to the world (Arruda, 2003). A scholar who cites Arruda in order to best explain the phenomenon of YouTube personalities is Chen (2013). The scholar claims that YouTube personalities follow Arruda's 3 stages of personal branding in order to create their brand on YouTube. The process, which commences with 'extract', occurs through the searching within oneself for unique qualities. Secondly, in 'express' the YouTuber creates a personal brand statement using the attributes found through the 'extract' phase. And lastly, Chen recognizes that with the established personal brand, YouTubers 'exude' by creating a strategy to achieve their primary goal, attracting the attention of their audience and potential audience. While there exists literature on the use of branding to represent oneself as a

traditional celebrity and a microcelebrity on social media, there remains a gap in research which explores the act of branding when an account manager is responsible for a pet microcelebrity.

In Crystal Abidin's (2018) book on internet celebrity, the scholar looks into celebrity status achieved online and how such celebrities transform into influencers. When an ordinary person is thrust into fame through media formats such as *Dr. Phil* or *The Jerry Springer Show* which showcase a personal issue of theirs, thus making their private lives public, this has been coined a "demotic turn" (Turner, 2006). In the previous statement, the word ordinary does not mean average or typical, however, it does allude to the fact that these individuals are not celebrities or experts (Grindstaff, 2002). With today's technology and access to the internet, namely, social media, ordinary individuals are able to create and post "homemade content" on their own accounts, thereby bypassing the traditional media industries, and becoming what Turner (2006) has called a "DIY celebrity" (Abidin, 2018).

One of the first scholars to explore microcelebrities through studying camgirls is Theresa Senft (2008). Senft defines microcelebrity as a form of celebrity "where users employ digital media technologies and platforms to garner popularity by performing on the internet". Furthermore, the scholar explains that these individuals' main strategies to achieve the aforementioned goal is creating a public image of themselves as a brand and interacting with viewers through emotional labor (Abidin, 2018; Senft, 2008, 2013). Unlike traditional celebrities who distance themselves from their fans and establish their fame due to a skill or talent, microcelebrities base their popularity on being emotionally relatable and interactivity with their audience and authentically portray themselves as "real" people with "real" issues (Senft, 2008, 2013).

Another scholar who explored microcelebrity as a form of celebrity is Alice Marwick.

Marwick (2013) explains that, regardless of the size of their audience online, microcelebrities create an authentic, interactive, celebrity-like persona to cater to their fans or followers. In addition, as a form of branded self, microcelebrities demonstrate a mindset which perceives all followers and friends online as prospective audience and fans. In her book, Abidin (2018) states that the literature on microcelebrity has been expanded to showcase this phenomenon as a form of labor (Abidin, 2016; Duffy, 2016; Wissinger, 2015), branding (Booth and Matic, 2011), linguistic practice (Page, 2012), and community (Garcia-Rapp, 2017).

Additionally, McQuarrie et al. (2012) recognize that microcelebrities are ordinary consumers, lacking professional experience, an institutional position, and connections within the relevant industry, who reach out to mass audiences about consumption through the web: this phenomenon is called the megaphone effect. McQuarrie et al.'s (2012) article explores modern day fashion bloggers, a certain form of microcelebrity. The researchers leverage the work of theorists such as McCracken (1986) and Bourdieu (1998, 1999, and 2008) in order to explain the way in which fashion bloggers operate (McQuarrie et al., 2012). As it is explained at the end of their article, the phenomenon of the megaphone effect can be replicated by individuals who wish to become taste leaders by capitalizing on acts of consumption, other than fashion. Furthermore, the scholars highlight that the internet allows for and facilitates the existence of the position of taste leader who holds the megaphone and amasses an audience who partakes in a certain consumption activity.

Another academic work which looks at how the engagement of consumers in the fashion market is making market-level changes is Dolbec and Fischer's work (2015). More specifically, the change marked in the research is in the institutional work within the market which is demonstrated in two ways: the presence of online consumers who share fashion ideas without

financial motivation, and the betterment of institution-maintaining work within the market. With the involvement of these consumers in the fashion market, the institution's work has migrated online and is in the hands of individuals who replicate the work of professionals by curating their own looks and scenes for the online content they spread. As Dolbec and Fischer explain, there are evidently similarities between the online fashion consumer, whom they claim is forming this new category of actor, and the taste leader carrying the megaphone (McQuarrie et al., 2012). However, the scholars emphasize that while their findings converge with McQuarrie et al.'s, their contribution lies in their demonstration that accounts with a smaller following should not be considered outsiders to McQuarrie et al.'s 'insider', a fashion consumer with a big following online. To clarify, Dolbec and Fischer support the previous statement by explaining that despite their small following, these fashion consumers still make significant contributions as their collective online activities not only to help support the field but also affect the kinds of work done within it. Future research is yet to be conducted on web-enabled consumer behavior, and therefore, the works of McQuarrie et al. (2012) and Dolbec and Fischer (2015) can be leveraged to better explain the phenomenon of a web-enabled form of consumer behavior: the pet microcelebrity.

Microcelebrities as Influencers. This section continues to look into the extant literature on microcelebrity but specifically isolates the influencer as a type of microcelebrity. By doing so, the thesis is equipped with the knowledge needed to best understand the dimensions and motivations of a pet microcelebrity account manager.

Marwick leverages Rojek (2004) to explain that the celebrity garnered by microcelebrities can be categorized into two types: achieved, where they reveal certain private

information in order to establish intimacy with their followers, or ascribed, where they portray themselves as having higher status than their followers. This thesis focuses on achieved microcelebrity and therefore, the other end of the spectrum will not be investigated further.

Another facet of microcelebrity which Abidin (2018) discusses in her book is being an influencer. The scholar explains that influencers were early adopters of social media who made use of social media platforms in a completely commercial manner by employing their devoted followers as free labor. While anyone has the potential to become a microcelebrity, Abidin explains that not everybody is capable of "grooming their microcelebrity into a vocation like influencers". Abidin categorizes influencers into 3 types: independently operating influencers who negotiate with clients on their own given their popularity online and ability to bargain, influencers with time restrictions due to their daytime jobs who instead of making contractual agreements with clients, advertise or review products for a compensation of free goods, and lastly, new and upcoming influencers or those who haven't yet amassed a large enough following, who hope to be noticed by an influencer management company in order to be put in contact with potential clients. The scholar adds that influencers may choose to groom their offspring to become influencers as well in the form of micro-microcelebrities (Abidin, 2015). Other families engage in acts of microcelebrity by showcasing their ordinary lives on social media fronts and branding themselves as "family influencers" (Abidin, 2017b).

In terms of generating income through being an influencer, Abidin (2018) claims that this can happen in 3 main ways. Firstly, influencers can take part in advertorials, a highly-personalized manner of promoting a product using the opinions of the influencer on the advertised good. Secondly, an influencer could sell advertising space on their blog or social media accounts, therefore, each influencer has a package they can sell to companies which detail

what promotion deals they offer. Thirdly and finally, influencers with immense popularity could earn revenue by selling objects or products which have been already used by them to followers.

In order to best attract followers to their social media accounts and be successful at the above 3 promotional efforts, microcelebrities create a "publicizable personality" via self-commodification, much like mainstream celebrities (Marwick, 2013). Lair et al. (2005) are in agreement with Marwick's (2013) idea of self-commodification, as they explain that personal branding is basically an act of "turning oneself into a product". A strong personal brand allows an influencer to become more influential to their follower-base and thus more hirable by companies wishing to advertise through social media.

However, unlike mainstream celebrities who only give the illusion of intimacy with fans, microcelebrities, interact with their followers through comments, direct messages, or even face-to-face meetings at conventions in order to increase their popularity (Marwick, 2015). While both mainstream and micro celebrities require personal branding, a big difference between micro and mainstream celebrities is in authenticity. Mainstream celebrities have a public persona which is presented to fans, while microcelebrities are assumed to be genuinely who they portray on social media account (Hearn and Schoenoff, 2015; Marwick, 2013, 2015; McQuarrie et al., 2012). McQuarrie et al. (2012) leverage the ideas of Arsel and Thompson (2011) and Holt (1998) when they delve into authenticity as a means for fashion bloggers to maintain their follower base; they explain that microcelebrities need to reject labels inflicted onto them by the mainstream media and resist any influence from mass culture. McQuarrie et al. (2012) claim that while microcelebrities engage with their fans in the beginning of their careers, they tend to reduce such behavior as their blogs transforms from personal journal to taste display, their followers from community to audience, their role from curating to modeling, and their images

from snapshots to professional images. However, microcelebrities are capable of remaining authentic, even when they accumulate a large number of followers and sometimes become marketing tools themselves, through misrecognition, by feigning similarity with their audience or being self-deprecating in their posts, or by being perceived by their audience as deserving of the gifts and media attention they are receiving due to their taste leadership (McQuarrie et al., 2012).

The above two sections present a discussion of the extant literature on human brands and microcelebrities. The concepts I refer to in the previous statement set up a basis for rigorously exploring the phenomenon of pet microcelebrities. By going over the literature on microcelebrity in human form, I am able to expand into other forms of celebrity, pet microcelebrities.

Next, I will explore the past literature on relationships between pets and their humans. As a result of studying this work, my thesis will help academics better understand how the relationship between humans and their pets is influenced by the technology behind social media. Moreover, once the research better explains how these relationships shape the creation and management of these pet social media accounts, it will be able to justify how these social media accounts can be categorized within an ecosystem of performance online and offline.

Pets and their Human Companions

By going over the extant literature on the relationship between humans and their pets, this study can extend their findings in order to best understand how this relationship manifests itself and is sustained in today's world of advanced technology and communication. Thus, armed with the findings of extant literature on humans and their pets, this study will be able to look at the motivations behind the creation of these pet accounts, and the strategies used by pet owners to

manage these accounts.

Archer (1997) leverages Bowlby's (1969, 1973) attachment theory to explain that humans form an attachment to their pets and treat them as partners, children, or parents. The scholar goes on to explain possible reasons why pet ownership has arisen: to compensate for deficiencies in human relationships, or to accommodate the individualistic lifestyle of the modern western world (Archer, 1997). Furthermore, Archer explains that the relationship between a human and their pet can be regarded as a form of social symbiosis: where two species form a relationship defined by the benefits they can obtain from one another. It is further explained that social symbiosis is split into 3 categories: mutualism, where the benefits of the relationship between the two species outweigh the costs for both species, commensalism, where the benefits and costs are equal for both species, and finally parasitism, where the costs outweigh the benefits for one of the species (Archer, 1997). In addition, Archer argues that the relationship between pets and humans given the benefits provided by the pets, better health and well-being, and the costs, expenses and caretaking, is of a social parasitic nature in which the costs outweighing the benefits for humans. In Archer's research which was conducted in the 90s, the scholar, evidently, did not consider today's technological advances, more specifically for the purposes of this research, social media. Therefore, this research intends to address the lack of literature on the relationship between humans and their pets given today's technology by exploring the phenomenon of pet microcelebrities.

In her study on the relationship between consumers and their animal companions, Hirschman (1994) delves into the way in which humans perceive their pets using anthropomorphism, the humanification of animals, and neoteny, the immutable and endearing juvenile appearance displayed by animals which calls for nurture and care (Archer, 1997;

Veevers, 1985). Another scholar, Veevers (1985) also explores the functions which pets serve for humans. One function, highlighted by Vevvers, is the surrogate function wherein pets are anthropomorphized and seen as surrogate mates, friends, children, or parents. Similarly, Hirschman (1994) mentions that animals serve two purposes for their humans: their role as objects or products and their role as companions. A large portion of animals are regarded as children, mates, friends, or parents by their humans and are treated accordingly through their inclusion in any familial rituals which are usually done for human children (Archer, 1997; Beck and Katcher, 1996; Hirschman, 1994; Veevers, 1985).

Additionally, Hirschman (1994) discusses that a pet can act as an extension of its human's self; that the human may project some of their traits or absorb some of their pet's qualities (Veevers, 1985). Another vital point to consider is the pet can represent the id of their human in that it is considered socially acceptable for these animals, unlike their human companions, to act on their impulses without judgment or social ostracization (Hirschman, 1994). Much like Hirschman (1994), Veevers (1985) explains that pets, being an extension of self, can also act as a status symbol helping humans convey their wealth or social status to others. It can be understood that obtaining, keeping, and caring for a pet requires financial resources, which depending on the breed or species of the pet can vary in amount. If this pet is a unique or expensive breed, the costs of procuring such a pet increase substantially. Additionally, Veevers (1985) explains that another function pets serve is as social lubricants. By attracting attention, reflecting positively onto their human companions, and being positive topics of conversation, pets can facilitate the interaction between humans.

Given that the aforementioned research was explored more than 20 years ago, it presents a gap in the literature on the current framework of the relationship between humans and their

pets, as well as the expressions of such a relationship after the development of the technological advances since the 90s. Therefore, unlike personal branding which is the current technique that people use to showcase themselves online, the strategies used by individuals to represent their pets on social media remain academically unexplored. Thus, this research intends to extend the literature on the relationship between humans and pets given today's technology and consequently the modes of expression employed to express this relationship online.

The next section will delve into the way in which individuals perceive their pets and therefore allows the study to better understand the specific techniques used by pet owners to manage their pet accounts on Instagram. By better understanding how humans perceive their pets and how their relationship has developed with today's technology, this research hopes to better understand where these pet social media accounts belong within an ecosystem of performance online and offline.

Humanizing Pet Microcelebrities via Anthropomorphism

An important facet of the pet microcelebrity phenomenon which deserves to be researched is the techniques implemented to manage these pet accounts in order to garner attention and followers while creating and maintaining the brand of the account. In This section, the thesis will explore the extant literature on how non-human brands are represented by their managers through anthropomorphism. By doing so, this study gets closer to understanding how pet microcelebrity account managers effectively represent their pets, a non-human entity, on social media.

Scholars have often regarded anthropomorphism as the precursor to a consumer forming

a relationship with a brand (Fournier, 1998). In MacInnis et al.'s (2017) work on non-human brands, the scholars explain that this type of brands is known to be humanized by consumers in 3 ways: by perceiving the brand's features as human-like, forming a brand-self connection, and forming attachments and human-like relationships with the non-human brands. Given that there exists research on how humans represent themselves online, this research intends to address the lack of literature on the manner by which account managers showcase their pets online.

Given their tendency to assume that all beings and sometimes inanimate objects such as robots and computers have minds of their own, "the theory of the mind", humans are likely to over-attribute which brings about anthropomorphism (Archer, 1997). Anthropomorphism is implemented as a marketing technique for brands or products in order to make the aforementioned entities more memorable, unique, or likeable (Aggarwall and McGill, 2011). It must be understood that phenomena such as brand personality and consumer-brand relationships, while frequently isolated and studied by scholars, are a product of a brand's anthropomorphism (Aggarwall and McGill, 2011). In their study, Aggarwall and McGill (2011) conclude that anthropomorphism is a significant moderator in the relationship between a consumer's affinity towards a brand and their behavior following a prime of the brand.

MacInnis et al. (2017) explore the humanizing of non-human brands through anthropomorphism, self-brand connections, and consumer-brand relationships. The researchers also leverage Waytz, Cacioppo and Epley's (2007) drivers of humanizing brands (Sociality motivation, Effectance motivation, and Elicited Agent Knowledge) to best explain the reasons behind the act of anthropomorphism. To clarify, sociality motivation deals with satisfying emotional needs such as loneliness, while effectance motivation addresses a need for control and power, and finally, elicited agent knowledge concerns an individual's knowledge and experience

in understanding human behaviour.

Initially, MacInnis et al. (2017) discuss the introduction of anthropomorphism through the portrayal of non-human brands with human-like physical appearance, human-like minds, or human-like personalities. The previous statement refers to a rhetorical device which activates Agent Knowledge as a driver to humanize non-human brands, called 'personification'. Furthermore, MacInnis et al. (2017) highlight that by portraying a brand as physically human-like, consumers are likely to perceive the brand as having a human-like mind.

By exploring the literature on the representation of non-human brands, this study can best explain the manner by which pet microcelebrities are represented by their pet owners via the pet social media account. In order to achieve the goal mentioned in the aforementioned statement, the next step must pertain to researching the different types of performance which individuals take part in through the use of media in order to express themselves.

Mediated Performance

There is a lack of literature which investigates the different types of mediated performance which take place in today's world. Given that this study looks into the motivations behind and behaviors affiliated with the creation and management of a form of mediated performance, cat Instagram accounts, it is vital to investigate the broader landscape in which this performance is located and narrow down on the specific type of performance which the phenomenon being studied falls under.

A number of examples demonstrating mediated performance are pageants in which parents sign up their children to compete in (Dejmanee, 2015; Hodel, 2014), Living Action Role

Playing (LARP) (Lukka, 2014; Mackay, 2001; Montola and Stenros, 2004; Seregina, 2014; Simkins, 2014; Stark, 2012; Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006), and Cosplay (Bonnichsen, 2011; Hale, 2014; Lamerichs, 2011; Peirson-Smith, 2013; Seregina and Weijo, 2016). Moreover, other types of mediated performers are video gamers who participate in online video games (Apter, 2008; Boellstorff, 2008; Klevjer, 2012), microcelebrities, and individuals who create microcelebrity social media accounts on behalf other entities. The aforementioned activities or performances bear the similarity of being driven by performative behavior in the marketplace either online or offline, and by oneself or with a proxy, however, there remains a gap in the literature which links them together.

Pageant Moms, Math Competitions, Sports, and Spelling Bees. Some parents who enroll their daughters or sons in beauty pageants, math competitions, or spelling bees, are said to be vicariously living the experience of such competitions through their children as participants (Dejmanee, 2015). In Dejmanee's (2015) work on pageant moms and their daughters on *Toddlers and Tiaras*, the scholar discusses 3 typologies of pageant moms: the vicarious mom, the usurping mom, and the neglectful mom. Most applicable to this study is the vicarious mom who sees her daughter's subjectivity as entangled with her own. An example, mentioned by Dejmanee, of a vicarious mom is a pageant mom who uses the first person plural when talking to her child, projects her own discomfort with her weight onto her daughter, and thus, lectures her about losing weight before the pageant. One can understand that the pageant mother in this case is engaging in mediated performance with the use of her daughter as a proxy representing the mom in the pageants.

A psychological concept which explains such behavior by parents or authoritative figures

is Achievement by Proxy (ABP) which ranges from normal to Achievement by Proxy Distortion (ABPD). A normal level of ABP "...refers to adult pride and satisfaction experienced in supporting a child's development while also nurturing that child's abilities, special talents, and performances", whereas in the case of ABPD "…a child is placed, with his collusion, volitional or otherwise, in a potentially exploitative situation in order for a perpetrating adult or adult system to gratify conscious and unconscious adult needs and ambitions for the attainment of certain goals or achievements" (Tofler, Knapp, and Lardon, 2005). Generally, the topic of pageant moms has not be adequately investigated by scholars and therefore, the literature on the phenomenon is sparse.

LARP. Another form of mediated performance is LARPing which is a type of role playing game with two features: "the players physically embody their characters, and the game takes place in a physical frame"; this type of activity involves role play, storytelling, rules, and good play (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006). The game itself can last from a few hours to a week, with a minimum of 2 players and an undefined maximum, and the players usually define a beginning and end for the plot which is being played out (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006). Prior to the start of the game, the players must have established a character, a fictional contract describing the fictional world and its rules, and an "opening situation" (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006). The players are the physical embodiment of their characters and thus, their physical actions within the physical space defined for the purposes of the game represent the actions of their characters. Conversely, in tabletop Role Playing Games, such as Dungeons and Dragons, the players remain seated and describe the actions of their characters.

Depending on the type of LARP, the players are engaged in, Open-type, Freeform, or controlled scenarios, characters are either generated by the players, are author-generated, or author-defined respectively, due to the varying need to control player focus and interactions in the 3 different types of LARPs (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006). In terms of storytelling, a LARP can have a narrative by both the players and Game Masters in the shared play space, or a narrative created by the perceived story of each individual player (Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006). In Stark's (2012) Leaving Mundania, the author details the story of an individual who engaged in LARPs as a child, he explains that "...LARP is a is a profound expression of identity, a vehicle of self-discovery, and a therapeutic outlet".

In Seregina's (2014) work on LARPs, it is found that players initially engage in the activity seeking a playful, escapist experience. As players become more reflective and comfortable with the LARPing process, they might choose move from LARPing for escapist purposes, playing known characters within comfortable, pleasurable fantasies, to trying out new plotlines, themes, and character types. Therefore, the scholar finds that LARPers exist within a spectrum with escapist, media-oriented games, to activist, thought-provoking games. Seregina also finds that, given that fantasy can help express identity and enrich experiences, LARPing can go beyond mere enrichment and can lead to reflective identity work. As a form of mediated performance, LARPing allows the players to create and live out their characters, thereby using these roles which they play throughout their performance to form connections with others.

Cosplay. This mediated performance is a "portmanteau that joins the words "costume" and "play". The term describes a performative action in which one dons a costume and/or accessories and manipulates his or her posture, gesture, and language in order to generate

meaningful correspondences..." (Hale, 2014). Moreover, Seregina and Weijo (2016) recognize Cosplay as a form of immersive ludic consumption, or play, which engages in a story, and is central to communal consumption. The act of Cosplay, as previously mentioned, concerns obtaining or creating a costume portraying a character from comic books, anime, or mainstream media and wearing said costume to a convention pertaining to these sort of characters or media. Furthermore, Cosplay is appreciated for two practices which define it: crafting the costume, and performing in the costume (Lamerichs, 2011; Seregina and Weijo, 2016).

Through crafting the costume, cosplayers are able to experience this leisure activity via 3 achievements: intrinsic rewards, building mastery, and positive affect (Seregina and Weirjo, 2016). The scholars find that when cosplayers purchase new crafting tools they are able to engage in more craft experimentation and project immersion (Seregina and Weirjo, 2016). Additionally, cosplayers create online profiles on Facebook, DeviantArt, or cosplay.com to showcase their work-in-progress, receive feedback, and build social capital through the online cosplay community (Seregina and Weijo, 2016).

The second practice of Cosplay is donning the costume and going to the convention. The convention itself represents the central communal consumption event where cosplayers engage in social interactions and showcase their costumes for the purposes of visibility and feedback (Seregina and Weijo, 2016). Depending on the size of the convention, the organizers may choose to invite famous cosplayers so that they may participate in costume judging competitions and other convention activities. To be an invited famous cosplayer signals the status for the cosplayer within the cosplay community.

Peirson-Smith (2013) explains that people engage in Cosplay as a means to reaffirm their identity, and escape from reality. In Cosplay, appearance represents a vital aspect in the

representation of self which is demonstrated through non-discursive communication as well as their outfit and accessories (Peirson-Smith, 2013). The cosplayer's projected self is made credible through the reactions and appraisals of others at Cosplay events and conventions (Peirson-Smith, 2013).

MMORPGs. Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPGs) are immersive, 3D, online environments in which users login and interact with other users via the internet in role playing scenarios, some examples of MMORPGs include World of Warcraft, Lineage, and EverQuest (Hsu, Wen, and Wu, 2009; Moon et al., 2013). The phenomenon has been studied by various scholars to better understand the motivation behind the gamers' assimilation in such cyber environments, the types of social interactions which occur between users, and how these gamers express their identities via MMORPGs (Gunkel, 2010; Klevjer, 2012; Jin, 2010).

Avatars, described as "representational proxies that may or may not reflect the physical attributes of their controllers" (Lastowka and Hunter, 2006), are the virtual characters which gamers control within their cyber environments in order to play the game. Some scholars have identified MMORPG avatars as a form of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) given that they are the gamer's medium when they socially interact with other gamers online (Konijn, Utz, Tanis, and Barnes, 2008). Furthermore, the topic of self-concept is regarded as important when studying avatars, their creation, and how they are used to interact with others online (Jin, 2010). Initially, one can categorize the self as disembodied or embodied, which are the user's psychological, mental self, and the user's physical, virtual representation, respectively (Jin, 2010). As the embodied self, the avatar, can be a direct visualization of the user's own image, or

an indirect creation, with the former, the avatar is a virtual replica of the user generated through visualization technologies, whereas the latter is a para-authentic self which could be arbitrarily chosen within the game. However, given the advances in technology in today's MMORPGs, the line between a direct visualization and indirect creation is blurred since we have access to character customizations which allow the creation of an avatar that is an almost replica of the gamer herself. Another typology used to study the self is whether one is regarded a doer or an object of attention (Brown, 1998). In 3D immersive virtual environments, one is both the doer, with high control over their avatar, and the object of attention, as the technology of such games allows the user to observe themselves within the virtual environments. And finally, the self can also be categorized into an individual (private) or a relational (collective) self, which could be primed through situational variables (Jin, 2010) or a chronic personality trait within the individual (Aaker, 1997; Markus and Kunda, 1986).

Jin (2010) also discusses the concept of self-construal, an individual's view of themself, one could be chronically independent, seeing oneself as an individual entity, or interdependent, seeing oneself in relation to others (Verplanken et al., 2009). The scholar highlights that self-construal within interactive media environments can impact a gamer's social interactions and relationships with others as their avatars (Jin and Park, 2009). Furthermore, the scholar hypothesizes that individuals with an interdependent self-construal will be more likely to engage in parasocial interactions with other avatars. In the case of virtual environments and avatars, the parasocial relationship is operationally defined by Jin (2010) as "the extent of users' interpersonal involvement with other avatars and perception of themselves as interacting with the other virtual actors in the environment".

Other scholars who investigate the relationship between the gamer and the avatar are

Moon et al. (2013), these scholars find that players with a high sense of control over their cyber characters exhibit psychological ownership over these characters. To explain the aforementioned statement, it is important to operationally define control and psychological ownership. The control which the scholars mention is categorized into primary and secondary. To further explain, primary and secondary control concern control over the cyber environment, and control over oneself, the avatar, in order to align with the virtual environmental forces, respectively (Rothbaum et al., 1982). As for the aforementioned psychological ownership, it can be described as a cognitive-affective state in which individuals believe they own a certain tangible or intangible target (Moon et al., 2013). In the case of gamers, the targets which they own are their avatars. Thus, the scholars evince perceived control as an antecedent for psychological ownership and psychological ownership as a partial mediator between perceived control and e-loyalty to the MMORPG itself.

Microcelebrity Children and Families. Microcelebrities or influencers on social media have been studied and categorized by scholars since 2008 (Abidin, 2015, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008, 2013). While traditional microcelebrities are their own social media account's managers, there exist microcelebrities with the same cyber presence managed by another individual. Examples of such microcelebrities are child microcelebrities, or what is coined as micro-microcelebrities, and family microcelebrities, which have only recently been studied by Crystal Abidin (2015, 2017a, 2017b). The aforementioned types of microcelebrities can be said to be a form of mediated performance by the account manager.

As the children of already established influencers, micro-microcelebrities are born into this form of a celebrity (Abidin, 2015). Abidin recognizes the form of celebrity achieved by

micro-microcelebrities as proximate celebrity, somewhere between ascribed and achieved

celebrity (Marwick, 2013), which is derived from and inspired by their mother's celebrity.

Before the birth of the micro-microcelebrity, the mom microcelebrity engages her followers and

creates attention and interest surrounding the birth of the micro-microcelebrity, if successful the

mom microcelebrity's efforts result in the fans creating fan accounts and pages for the unbirthed

child.

Moreover, Abidin (2015) demonstrates the differences between a micro-microcelebrity,

the child of family influencers, and the children featured in parenting blogs. While micro-

microcelebrities "inherit their Influencer mothers' social capital" and "are deliberately curated to

maximize advertorial potential" (Abidin, 2017b), parenting blog children are a peripheral aspect

of the parenting blog which may or may not be monetized, and therefore, they are not the center

of attention. As for children of family influencers, they are the embodiment of offspring

experiencing the "private domesticity" of everyday life. Furthermore, unlike children of family

blogs, children of influencer families are not portrayed to provide parenting tips or narratives.

Additionally, unlike micro-microcelebrities, the children of influencer families are not

advertisement tools, spokespeople, or ambassadors of brands, nor are they used for continuous

photographic or video content to amass followers or fans. And finally, the children of influencer

families provide both "anchor" and "filler" domestic scenes for their family's accounts. In terms

of "anchor" content, the scholar defines it as a representation the children's talents, whereas

"filler" content is the children's participation in mundane or routine domestic scenes.

This section looks at the above literature in order to establish a link between the

aforementioned activities and ecosystem of performances in which the phenomenon of pet

microcelebrity can be located. To clarify, pageant moms, LARPers, Cosplayers, MMORPG

video gamers, as well as micro-microcelebrities, and children of influencers families, are similar in the sense that they are all performances through which performers express themselves and connect with others (Abidin, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Jin, 2010; Peirson-Smith, 2013; Seregina, 2014; Seregina and Weirjo, 2016).

The first section of my findings is a conceptual discussion to theorize a framework of these performances and categorize the context of the pet microcelebrity within it. Before this I would like to detail the manner by which I conducted the research required to achieve my objectives for this study, to find the reasons and motivation behind the creation and maintenance of pet microcelebrity accounts and discover the strategies utilized by the account manager.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted for this thesis is qualitative in nature and this is because while it would be interesting to observe the rise and fall in follower numbers and engagement rate, the true purpose of this research is to understand the reasons behind creating and managing such accounts. In order to best delve into the aforementioned objective of the thesis, a qualitative research is best equipped to investigate the phenomenon through Netnography and in-depth interviews with the account managers.

Netnography

Preceding the interviews conducted for this research, I observed the cat community on Instagram passively (Kozinets 2002, 2009) through a cat account created prior to this thesis. My

cat account name is @mainecoonking with 323 posts, 468 followers, and 620 followed accounts. While the observation of other cat accounts and potential interviewees conducted was passive, the @mainecoonking account would still make posts to maintain a presence in the community. By observing the community for 2 months, I was able to understand the type of posts and engagement which occur within the community. Through developing this understanding of how cat accounts express themselves visually and textually and how they interact on Instagram, I had material which could be questioned within the upcoming interviews. Therefore, the netnography phase was vital as it showcases the dimensions and layers of the phenomenon which must be questioned through the interviews to be conducted.

Interviews

The sampling method used in this study for the pet account managers was non-probabilistic, purposive sampling. The pet microcelebrity managers who were chosen to be interviewed had to have at least 500 followers on their Instagram cat account. To investigate this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 pet account managers. Furthermore, these in-depth interviews covered topics such as the drive behind the creation of such accounts, the motivations behind managing the accounts, how managers choose the visual content to be posted, text captions, and hashtags for their content, the cat-affiliated jargon used in captions or comments, the persona created for the humanized cat of the account, and the nature of the relationships forged with other online pet accounts. I contacted potential participants by sending a direct message to them specifically via the account @mainecoonking explaining that I am a

student and a researcher conducting a study on pet social media account. Moreover, the message asked if they would be interested in being interviewed for monetary compensation. To view the direct message sent to potential participants please refer to Appendix A. Once a participant confirmed their interest in being interviewed, they were emailed the ethics consent forms and the interview took place only after the signed consent forms were emailed back to the interviewee.

Two Rounds. The Interviewees were conducted in two rounds, the first round taking place throughout the summer of 2018 and the second during January and February of 2019. Given that some connections were made within the cat community via the first round, it was easier to recruit interviewees for the second round as I was able to ask the interviewees from round 1 if any of their cat community friends would be interested in participating as interviewees for round 2. By establishing a connection within the community, the interviewees from round one helped transform the sampling method into snowball sampling (Coleman, 1958; Goodman, 1961) for the second round of interviews.

Duration and location of the interviews. The interviews lasted from 52 minutes to 3 hours, and only 1 of the interviews was in person, while the other 14 were via FaceTime, Skype, or Google Hangouts.

Participants. 14 of the 15 interviewees were female and 1 was male. Given that 58% of cat owners are female, the split in terms of gender does not justify the interviewees' gender disparity (Lengyel, 2017). Moreover, *HootSuite* finds that 50.3 percent of active Instagram users are female, while 49.7 percent are male (Worthy, 2018). The aforementioned Instagram statistics

also do not explain the gender disparity between the cat microcelebrity account managers

interviewed, therefore, perhaps this is a disparity occurring within this specific type of

microcelebrity. As there is no clear justification for the vast difference in numbers between

female and male pet microcelebrity account manager interviewees, I believe this warrants for

future research looking into how gender influences a consumer's choice to create and manage a

microcelebrity social media account for another entity.

Additionally, the ages of the participants ranged from late 20s to early 60s. 5 of the

account managers were from Canada (37.5%), and 10 were from the United States (62.5%).

Moreover, the account managers held various, dissimilar professions which differed in terms of

rank and industry: pharmaceuticals, law, medicine, interior design, IT, education, politics,

entrepreneurship, animal grooming, and market research. The table below demonstrates the

descriptors for each of the interviewees who were interviewed for this research. It is essential to

emphasize that the below names are pseudonyms to protect the true identity of the participants.

Furthermore, all cat names used later in the findings section are also pseudonyms.

Table 1.

Name	Age	Gender	Type of Account Manager	Followers	Occupation
Cara	In her 50s	F	Fame Hound	360K	Animal Groomer
Sophia	32	F	Cat Herder	56K	Nursing student and works at a pharmacy
Jamie	27	F	Fame Hound	52.2K	Lawyer
Nora	57	F	Busy Beaver	22.3K	Office Administrator (works from home)
Aly	32	F	Fame Hound	21.5K	e-Commerce and Planning Manager
Hannah	30	F	Cat Herder	17.6K	English Teacher
Lola	In her 50s	F	Cat Herder	13.9K	Entrepreneur of a Pet Sitting Business
Kate	In her 30s	F	Fame Hound	8.3K	Unemployed
Jill	61	F	Cat Herder	6.2K	Retired
Tina	42	F	Cat Herder	4.7K	Psychiatric Screener
Greta	28	F	Cat Herder	4.1K	Nurse
Lily	49	F	Cat Herder	2.6K	Works for a Financial IT Platform Business
Kimberly	In her 40s	F	Cat Herder	2.4K	Visual Merchandiser
Annie	30	F	LoneWolf	2.3K	Behavioral Scientist
Roger	31	M	Cat Herder	512	Works in Democracy Based Development

Ethics

Prior to contacting participants or conducting any interviews, I obtained a certification of ethical acceptability for research involving human subjects from the members of Concordia University Human Research Ethics Committee, please refer to Appendix B and C. It was also disclosed to the committee that this research was funded by the Concordia Aid to Scholarly Research Fund Grant.

The participants were not deceived in any way as I made clear what the interview pertains to and asked for their consent before interviewing them for the purposes of this thesis. Additionally, there were no foreseeable benefits or risks for the participants. Moreover, the participants were informed via the consent form that they were obligated to let me know within 2 weeks after the interview if they did not want their information to be used in the thesis. If the participants asked to be excluded from the research within 2 weeks after the interview, the audio file of their interview would have been deleted and their real names would also have been deleted from the spreadsheet file created to keep track of the participants and their pseudonyms. However, none of the participants contacted me after their interviews to ask to be excluded.

Pseudonyms were created immediately so that the information collected may not be linked to its respective participants. The file containing the real names and the pseudonyms of the participants is in a password protected file. All files and mentions of the participants are under the created pseudonyms. The transcriptions of these interviews, in Microsoft word format, are kept in the external drive. The only people to have access to the audio interviews were me and my supervisor.

Data analysis

Given that the data collected throughout this research is qualitative, the analysis

conducted was in the form of inductive coding preceded by a light research on the literature

which I predicted would bear weight on the findings: branding, anthropomorphism, and

microcelebrities. Initially the audio files were transcribed and a round of pre-coding took place,

where I highlighted significant or striking quotes from the participants, after which I went

through a round of open or data-driven, descriptive coding. After the preliminary cycle of coding

from the first 7 interviews, a coding scheme based on the major categories was created through a

cycle of codifying and I created a spreadsheet table showcasing these categories and themes.

Once the data was represented in the aforementioned manner, I was able to axially code the data

by finding relationships between the codes derived from the open coding. For instance, a cat

account manager's (CAM) manner of celebrating birthdays tied into the motivation behind

creating the account, and therefore, the 2 open codes were linked in that birthday celebrations

indicated or was tied to your desire as an account manager. And lastly, I selectively coded the

data by identifying the core variable present within the axially coded data and rereading the

transcript to code with the core variable in mind. An example of this selective coding is how the

participant indirectly and differently defined success at managing the account. The core,

immutable variable was the success, and when delving back into the transcripts, I searched for

quotes in which the interviewee directly or indirectly referred to their success or lack thereof as

pet social media account managers.

In round 1, many of the interviewees' behavior could be explained through the literature

on branding and anthropomorphism. However, before round 2 commenced, a new search for

literature took place to explain some of patterns which could not be justified through the initially found literature. The second round of interviews was finalized when the interview count reached 15 and the data reached theoretical saturation. At that point, the literature had grown and new topics such as mediated performance and virtual communities had been thoroughly researched in order to adequately analyze the 15 interviews. And finally, the second round of interviews were transcribed and coded much like the first round, and thus the researched literature was matched to the dimensions of the phenomenon which it could explain.

FINDINGS

My thesis investigates a never before studied phenomenon and therefore conceptually defining the subject is necessary before getting into the empirical discussion. As a result, the first section of my findings is a discussion proposing a typology for mediated performance in order to locate where my context fits.

Types of Mediated Performance in Contemporary Marketplace

A palpable similarity between most cat account managers is that their creation and management of such accounts can be regarded as an act of performance. A mediated performance occurs when an individual engages in a performance in a market mediated setting in order to express themselves. The examples of mediated performance which were previously discussed were pageant moms, LARPing, Cosplay, MMORPGs, microcelebrities, micro-microcelebrities, and the children of influencers.

Upon conducting research about certain types of performances based off of the media of today, I recognized two qualities which categorized a mediated performance.

The Venue. Certain types of mediated performances take place offline, such as pageant moms, spelling bees and math competitions, as well as LARPs and Cosplay, whereas others occur online, such as MMORPGs and microcelebrities.

The Presence of a Proxy. On the other hand, mediated performances can be categorized depending on the presence of a proxy or lack thereof for the individual engaging in the performance. For instance, LARPers, Cosplayers, microcelebrities who represent themselves, or even individuals who are members in a virtual community or are using a chatroom or email, are all participating in a form of non-proxy mediated performance. The reason why these performances are considered non-proxy, is due to the use of the individual's own physical and/or mental selves in order to partake in the performance.

Conversely, performers such as pageant moms, MMORPG gamers, or account managers of children, pets, or families, are participating in mediated performance by proxy. The reason why the aforementioned examples are mediated performances by proxy is because there exists a layer or entity between the individual and the performance. For instance, in MMORPG, the video gamer is represented by their avatar in the virtual environment, pageant moms are represented by their children in the pageant, and the account managers are represented by whomever the account revolves around on social media, thereby making the avatar, the child, and the pet the proxies or layers between the performer and the mediated performance.

Figure 1.

	Non-Proxy	**By Proxy**
Online	Microcelebrity Member of virtual community	MMORPG Pet Microcelebrity Micro-microcelebrity Family Influencers
Offline	LARPs Cosplay	Pageant Moms Parents of children who participate in math, sports, or spelling bee competitions

In terms of online mediated performance by proxy, the study initially looked at

MMORPGs, micro-microcelebrities, and children of influencer families. In MMORPGs, gamers

use avatars to represent themselves in the virtual, online environment of the game. This

embodied version of the self within the game is controlled by the gamer and can therefore be

regarded as their proxy in the MMORPG. In a similar manner to MMORPGs, managing a pet

microcelebrities on social media is a form of online mediation by proxy where the cat of the

account to the CAM is what an avatar is to a gamer. For instance, it was previously explained

that the self can be categorized into disembodied and embodied self (Jin, 2010). Given that the

embodied self is the user's physical, virtual representation, then both the avatar and the cat

represented on the account can be defined as embodied. On the other hand, the disembodied self

is the individual's psychological, mental self, that is the gamer or the CAM themselves who

control their virtual proxies (Jin, 2010).

Another concept which is studied is parasocial interaction, which in Lee's (2004) work is defined as the interaction with virtual characters, avatars, which represent another gamer. The scholar finds a significant positive relationship between interdependent self-construal, or collective self-construal, and parasocial interaction. Similarly, this relationship can be loosely applied to CAMs with a high desire for social connection who can be considered to have a high interdependent self-construal. Thus, one can conclude that those with a high desire for social connection will have a more parasocial interactions with other virtual characters, in this case cat accounts.

And lastly, scholars who have also directly investigated the relationship between the gamer and the avatar (Moon et al., 2013) found that with a high sense of control over the avatar, comes a high sense of e-loyalty to the brand of the game being played. What's important to note and compare to CAMs in this case is the 2 types of control recognized in the study, primary, over the virtual environment, and secondary, over one's virtual self. In the case of the CAM, unlike the MMORPG gamer, the individual does not have direct control over the virtual environment given that it is powered by other CAM's reactions and actions via comments, posts, and direct messages. However, the CAM does have secondary control given that the account is completely designed and controlled by them within the frame that is offered by the social media platform, Instagram. For example, the CAM chooses the profile picture, the bio, the posts they make, and the way in which they interact with others via the account. In Moon et al.'s (2013) study, they define the concept of psychological ownership as a cognitive affective state in which individuals believe that they own an intangible or tangible target. The scholars find that perceived control is an antecedent of psychological ownership, and so the higher the perceived control the more an

individual believes they own their target. Therefore, in terms of CAMs, if they perceive that they have both primary and secondary control over their accounts, then they are more likely to perceive psychological ownership over their cat social media account.

In the case of most pet microcelebrities, unlike micro-microcelebrities who inherit their fame from their influencer mothers, the pets are not usually born or adopted into a parent with established social media fame. And unlike children of influencer families, the cat social media account is almost always centered around only the cat and not the family who care for it. Furthermore, a cat microcelebrity is also unlike the child of a parenting blogger, as the cat microcelebrity is not usually the pet of an owner who hosts a pet blog. On the other hand, while most cat microcelebrities are not pets within an influencer family, pets of an established microcelebrity parent, or pets within a famous pet owner blog, the relationship between the manager of the pet account and the pet as the subject of the social media account is found to be much like the case of the aforementioned children in the spotlight, a mediated performance.

Given the literature found on the above mediated performances and the devised framework, I am now able to categorize managing a pet social media accounts as an online mediated performance by proxy. With the aforementioned finding at hand, the research can now advance to recognizing the presence of a community of cat microcelebrities on Instagram. And ultimately, the thesis will explain the similarities and differences within said community by developing a typology for this phenomenon, the pet microcelebrity.

Cat Instagram Accounts and their Community

My study finds that Instagram is home to a community of cat accounts, centered around feline appreciation and fandoms, created by pet owners who become account managers. The concept of community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and more specifically online community (Kozinets, 1999; Martineau and Arsel, 2017) has been explored previously by scholars in order to find the behavioral patterns and typology of individuals who join these communities. Given the 3 tenets which arise in Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) work, this group of cat accounts on Instagram can be categorized as a community. The scholars find consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibilities to be the 3 main elements which define a community.

Consciousness of Kind. Initially, consciousness of kind, meaning the members' connection to one another despite geographical distances between them, is defined by legitimacy of a member in the community, and their loyalty to an oppositional brand. The concept of legitimacy, defined by a community's ability to identify others of their kind through certain behaviors, can be seen in CAMs' utilization of Meowlogisms (Podhovnik, 2018).

It is well known within the cat community on Instagram and even broadly on the internet that there exists a specific language to publicly and sometimes privately converse with other cat-interested folk online: Meowlogisms (Podhovnik, 2018). Coined by Edith Podhovnik (2018), she defines a Meowlogism, a play on the word neologism, as "a word whose spelling has been altered or a part of which has been substituted to make it cat-specific by using cat-related words." However, the scholar explains that Meowlogisms are not cat-specific and may be used

by dog account managers as well. After explaining that a ubiquitous term of Meowlogism, #Caturday, was brought to life via a message board website called 4chan's Chanspeak, its members' language, the scholar delves into the origins of cat-associated languages on the internet. Podhovnik brings forth the fact that Lolspeak, also known as Kitty Pidgin, is a combination of baby talk and Leetspeak, a language used by hackers. To further explain its relevance, Lolspeak is the language which is most commonly associated with cats on the mainstream internet.

Originally, Lolspeak was and still is related to images of lolcats, a popular internet phenomenon which showcases the perceived internet dominance of cats (Podhovnik, 2018). Shown below is one of the most popular demonstrations of lolcat memes, the "I can has cheezburger" meme. As is evinced by the depiction below, when Lolspeak is used "cats are given a baby voice, and specific orthographic, grammatical, and lexical features are used, such as mis-declined verbs, mis-declined gerunds, incorrect plural and verb forms, and article dropping." (Podhovnik, 2018).

Figure 2.

As previously cited, communities invoke a social capital for their members which ultimately creates a common language and routine behaviors between them (Haythornthwaite, 2007), in this case the common language is literal and feline-specific. While interviewing Lily, she elucidated the manner through which she expressed herself when taking on her cats' voices via Meowlogisms on the cat social media account:

> [….] it helps make it clear that it's the cat's voice, and the cat's perspective, which is usually what you're trying to get across when you do that, I mean, usually, so if it's me, if I say "humom here", um, and I have something to say, I just say it regular, um, and then like I said, Snow will use more baby talk, which is more like the "dis" and "habing" or whatever, um, that certain cats, they, I don't even know the right word to call it, you know, not everybody talks like that, not everyone in my cat family talks like that but um, and when it's, it's just part of telling the story when it's appropriate to make it cutesy, then I will more likely do that versus when it's appropriate to you know make the cats speak like

an adult, then I don't, but I do use the substitutions of meow and paw and purr whenever

possible, but the baby talk isn't always.

This explanation reveals a great deal about the ways in which CAMs communicate with one

another without confusion over who the speaker is. The use of Meowlogisms, to begin with,

indicates that the account is a cat account. Furthermore, it seems that the use of Meowlogisms

can be a method to signal to others that the current speaker is the anthropomorphised cat and not

the human behind the account. To further demonstrate the use of Meowlogisms in the cat

community on Instagram, below is a post by Kimberly:

Figure 3.

Hence, the use of such unique words, such as, "pawsome" and "furriends", bolsters the

community and increases the likelihood of members identifying one another and thereby forming

bonds through their use of the community-specific language to communicate with one another.

This research did not find specific examples of oppositional brand loyalty, given that the

community is an interest-oriented community, the interest being the feline species. Additionally,

these CAMs tend to be animal people in general who appreciate all animal species, thus an

oppositional brand was not found in the process of this research.

On the other hand, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) emphasize that community members will showcase a self-awareness and sensitivity concerning the commercial nature of their community, and members will even joke about their level of commitment to their community. This study has found that CAMs will call themselves crazy cat ladies or make an effort to explain how the account is of a ridiculous nature while concurrently justifying their allegiance to it by explaining that the community consists of good, supportive people who share an interest and care about one another. When interviewing Hannah, she explained that the attention to her account was surprising due to its nature:

> I got the idea for the account, it's because my coworker, she jokingly said that with the amount I post of Deedee on my own personal Instagram, I should just make her own Instagram. So I said "Sure, why don't I just do that." So it started out as just something I would do and now I have 15.4K followers and it's just ridiculous... But that's why I started it, it was just a suggestion so that I would stop flooding everybody's account.

Another example of this type of behavior is from my interview with Aly, she explains that in order not to behave like a cat lady on her personal social media accounts, her husband suggested she creates a cat account on Instagram:

> I'm not gonna post them on my personal Instagram [photos of cat], or on Facebook, just photos of my cat all day, like a crazy cat lady, but I enjoy photography to a certain extent also so it kind of, so I just kept taking photos, so he [husband]

suggested to compile them on Instagram, so in January 2018 I started his account, no real goal in mind other than to post photos of him.

Rituals and Traditions. As per Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), brand communities connect with one another and create rituals and traditions in the form of social processes which they participate in, thereby celebrating the meaning of the community and perpetuating its message and existence. In the Instagram cat community, CAMs celebrate the history of their brand by participating in the celebration of birthdays and what they call adoptaveraries, the anniversaries commemorating the adoption of the cat affiliated with the account. While different types of CAMs celebrate birthdays differently given their level of desire for recognition and social connection, all CAMs tend to acknowledge a cat account's birthday or adoptaversary when it is announced by the birthday or anniversary cat account through a post. To clarify, Nora is a good example of a CAM who made a themed birthday post and invited others to partake in the celebrations:

> That was his party and if you look at that hashtag, a few other people um would have, let me see, what was my hashtag #pawtyforleo so if you're looking at the hashtag you can see other cats posted pictures with fish themes and things like that, it's kind of funny.

Nora created the idea for her cat's birthday party and included a hashtag so that others could join her in the celebrations by creating a relevant post and including the hashtag in their caption.

Thus, allowing her to easily locate those who virtually partied with her cat on Instagram. Therefore, one can understand that while the participation is cyber in nature, the party-goers showcase their connection by celebrating with the party CAM.

Furthermore, another way to celebrate the history of their felines on Instagram is through hashtags. Depending on the type of hashtag, a CAM will include it in their post captions, their Instagram stories, or even in their account bios. For instance, a cat account could use feature hashtags, day-theme hashtags, challenge or contest hashtags, cat features or breed hashtag, or a CAM could even create a unique hashtag for their account or cat (Podhovnik, 2018). Given that Instagram limits the use of hashtags to 30 per post caption, CAMs must choose the hashtags they wish to use given the motivation behind their account and its existence. To clarify, this motivation pertains to a CAM's level of desire for recognition and social connection, this will be discussed in a later section. However, it is vital to understand the existence of these motivations in order to fully appreciate the purpose of these hashtags depending on their types.

The day-theme hashtags are hashtags which reflect a play on words as a means of celebrating that specific day of the week with a cat or animal photo: #Meowgamonday, #Tongueouttuesday, #Whiskerwednesday, #Throwbackthursday, #Fridaynightboxparty, and #Caturday. While many CAMs are guilty of using day-theme hashtags, an example of this was found during my interview with Jamie:

> [....] so Tuesday is #tongueouttuesday, so I'll go through my pictures and see if there's something that I have with like, one of them licking themselves or just with their tongue out, Wednesday is #whiskerwednesday, so showing off the whiskers, Thursday is #throwbackthursday, so weird, so you just show baby pictures or like

I don't know, if it's winter, show summer pictures, or if it's summer you show

Christmas pictures or whatever, it's fun.

Another example of the use of day-theme hashtags is in Lily's cat account who also refers to the hashtags she includes in her daily posts: "[....] or if it's a certain day of the week, I would use the tag for the day of the week like #meowgamonday, or #tongueouttuesday, or #whiskerswednesday, or whatever."

Sometimes cat accounts will use certain hashtags which represent their cat's breed or even a unique hashtag representing the cat themselves or the account. Thus, this community remains connected with these hashtags which represent their feline appreciation. For instance, Kate, will use hashtags she's made up in her captions to represent her 3 cats: " So Jake has his own hashtag, Eddie has his own, Millie has 2 hashtags, so I make sure I include those every time too." She also includes hashtags representing their specific breeds: "Um, I use black cat on every one of Jake's posts, Millie always has Russian Blue and British shorthair." Conversely, Lily created a hashtag specific to the account itself: "I have a hashtag for my page it's "Home to Paws", I try to put on there."

To keep their rituals and traditions alive, CAMs also tell their feline's story to other members. The way in which they do so is by telling the story of their pet's adoption, rescue, integration into the family, or even demonstrating their day to day activities via Instagram stories with text or posts with text captions. In the image below, Greta tells the story of Ray the cat's illness before his passing. Greta presents this story using the Instagram stories option, and uses both text and visuals to commemorate Ray's life, and to teach others about the health issues he faced.

Figure 4.
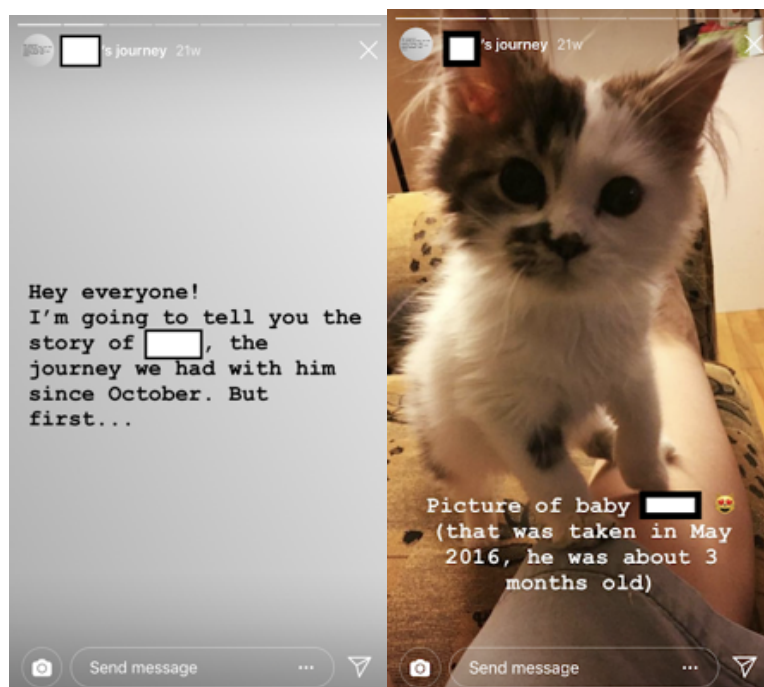
Kate, on the other hand, used the caption under an Instagram post to tell the adoption story of her

youngest cat, Eddie.

Figure 5.
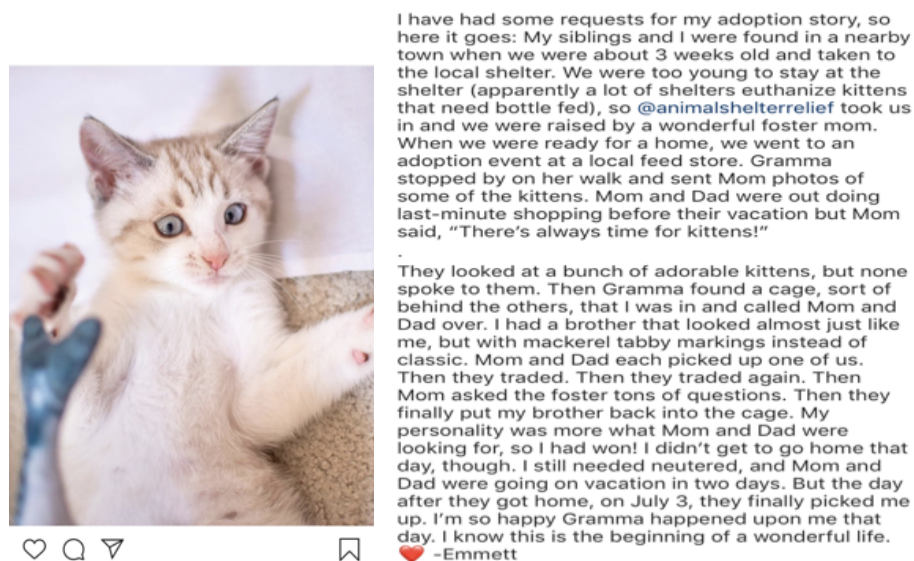
Moral Responsibility. The third principle defining communities is the sense of moral responsibility between members (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). This sense of moral responsibility is reflected as a member's sense of duty towards individual members and towards the community as a whole. While moral responsibility is context-specific, it is not limited to serious, emotionally charged issues, but also everyday occurrences or social commitments. The scholars specify 2 ways in which members adhere to the last principle of the triad which allow the formation of a brand community: (1) integrating and retaining members, and (2) teaching members how to properly use or engage with the brand. In the case of the cat community on Instagram, established members may introduce newer members to the cat community and help integrate them into it by making a feature post to specifically welcome the newer member and ask others to befriend them. To help others integrate into the community, CAMs act as feature Instagram accounts, however, this does not become the sole purpose of the account, simply an activity which the account participates in so that they could give back to the community.

An example of a CAM practicing moral responsibility is when Nora created a challenge for her followers and members of the cat community where they could tag her account with the hashtag #Leokissed in order to get a chance at being featured by her Leo's cat account. By featuring a smaller cat account in the post through Leo's account, Nora both introduces and demonstrates the participatory nature of the CAM responsible for the account. Therefore, Nora ensures that the featured account is positively perceived by her followers who are likely to follow and interact with this new entrant into the Instagram cat community. The same welcoming behavior is seen from members who feel the need to always respond to accounts which reach out via comment or direct message.

In the below quote, Kate describes her method of interaction with accounts which comment on her posts. It is evident that Kate comments back and acknowledges others' comments on her posts in an attempt to recognize the members' appreciation of her account, and also to nurture the relationships between her and others she is in frequent contact with in the community.

> [....] so now I like every comment, I respond to every question, if there's a question, I respond to every I love you, and I would say most of the time I respond to every hello, and then if there's just something like someone says "wow this is a really stunning photo" then of course I wanna say "thank you.", because I do really appreciate feedback...and then I return comments on every account that I follow, so if an account I follow comments on my post then I'll comment on their post.

By responding and maintaining the conversation between community members, CAMs encourage one another to remain active in the community via comments, likes, and direct messages.

Another way in which CAMs help one another with their feline companions and their accounts is through raising money for CAMs with sick pets or immense vet fees. When a CAM's cat faces health issues, the account manager may choose to disclose this via the account in order to receive support and positive wishes from their Instagram community. Some CAMs create Gofundme accounts in order to fund the vet fees associated with their cat's health problem, and fellow CAMs will spread the word about this cat's illness to the rest of the community, imploring them to help with the cat's medical fees in support of this fellow community member.

By doing so, the community comes together and provides emotional and financial support to the CAM with the sick pet, thereby helping them properly care for their cat, so that they may ultimately return to the community's daily fun routines. An example of the help which the community provides to CAMs with sick cats is in the quote below from my interview with Greta whose cat, Ray, suffered from health issues after the creation of the account.

> I made a Gofundme for Ray when he was sick because like it cost a lot of money, and the thing is like, it's not like I want people to give like all their money, it's just like, I know sometimes, if we would have more money I would like to give more, but the thing is we're still paying off our vet bills from Ray [....] I think it helped me get through like Ray's death as well because I've been talking with a few, there's been some people that were like a little bit closer, a lot of them, like they send us messages saying like if you need anything like we'll try to help you and just like sending messages of support, so I think it helped us in like knowing, like if we never met them, we kind of know them a little bit. So it's kind of like, not that it's not real, but it's kind of like you're creating a little community for yourself of people that like they're gonna be there, they're gonna try to help you anyway they can.

In the above passage, Greta talks about receiving support from the community both financially and morally. Therefore, it is palpable that the cat community on Instagram consists of members with a strong sense of moral responsibility to one another. And finally, another CAM who

received financial support from the community and became a source of support to other CAMs with cats who have the same illness as her Tom, is Sophia.

> [....] so when Tom had gotten ill, quite a few people who wanted to donate had asked if I had had one [an Amazon Wishlist] and I said no, so I set one up, and during that time a lot of people would go on there and buy the food and send it, because it's easier, especially from people outside of Canada, with money exchange and stuff and taxes, so they would just send food or litter, treats, toys, honestly, it was unbelievable the amount of stuff people send.

Furthermore, in the upcoming quote, Sophia explains that some of the members who reach out to her via direct message are in need of information about Tom's illness which certain cats suffer from, Feline hyperesthesia syndrome. Given that she is open about the fact that her cat, Tom suffers from this ailment, CAMs with similar situations contact her for suggestions and recommendations of treatments and product brands which may help their sick cats: "[....] it's people reaching out for more information about FHS or people looking to help spread awareness on their accounts."

Discussion: Ruling Out Alternative Conceptualizations. While data evidence establishes that the phenomenon is a community, it might be helpful to rule out alternative conceptualizations such as subcultures, publics, or tribes. In Arvidsson and Caliandro's (2015) article, "Brand Public", the authors explain the differences between publics and communities by emphasizing the ways in

which each develops, those being mediation and social interaction, respectively. While both publics and communities make use of hashtags in order to perpetuate their existence, the scholars highlight that publics, unlike communities, use hashtags, as a mediation device, to create a common discursive focus by perpetuating the presence of such discourse on their social media platforms. The main difference however between the hashtags of communities and those of publics, is that publics are not inclined to commence and maintain a discussion or social interaction pertaining to the theme or topic at hand. Moreover, publics engage in modes of participation defined by their private or collective affect, in addition, they define themselves by their heterogeneous perspectives on the brand, and lastly, they derive value from the public through publicity not identity and forging connections.

Given this research's findings about the cat community on Instagram, it is clear that the CAMs form a community and not a public. Firstly, this community is based on interconnectivity between different cat accounts, despite the fact that there exist 4 different categories of CAMs which will be discussed in the next section. In Haythorthwaite's (2007) work on VCMs on social media, the scholar explains that weak ties, bridging ties, which occur between subgroups must exists within a community to allow for the exchange of new information and resources. Therefore, the existence of 4 categories of CAMs does not refute that they occur within a cat community on Instagram. Furthermore, the community's emphasis on celebrating each other's birthdays and adoptaversaries, commenting on each other's posts, participating in direct messages between one another, and using hashtags in order to bring one another closer and create more connections, indicates that the cat community exists due to a set of relation sustained interactions. In addition, the collective identity of this community revolves around the CAMs having cats as pets and their personification of their cat's character on the account via

Meowlogisms, anthropomorphism, and their interactions with others as the cats. And finally, in

terms of value derivation, the cat community is fueled with value through the social and

professional bonds forged between members and sometimes between members and businesses.

Furthermore, value materializes due to the achievement of status or recognition by members

within the community and sometimes transcending to outside of the community and into

mainstream media. Thus, this study finds that the cat community's use of hashtags completely

differs from a public's use of hashtags. The purpose of hashtags for CAMs lies in promoting

social interactions by increasing camaraderie and bonding via the common hashtag themes or

satisfying the demand of consumers within the attention economy (Abidin, 2017a; Boyd, 2011;

Burgess and Green, 2008; García-Rapp, 2017; Marwick, 2013; Strangelove, 2010; Senft, 2013),

while publics use hashtags to perpetuate the relevance of a topic in media.

An interesting study to explore in order to best recognize a consumer community is

Canniford's (2011) work in which he delves into and finds differences between 3 types of

consumer communities: subcultures, tribes, and brand communities. Firstly, subcultures of

consumption are described by Canniford as being cohesive, dedicated, and resistant. By

cohesive, the scholar refers to a subculture's social hierarchy, strong interpersonal bonds, rituals,

and unique set of values and beliefs. The aforementioned cohesiveness bears an impact on the

collective identity of the members of the subculture. Furthermore, the identities of the members

are influenced by the subculture through processes of acculturation, evolution of motives, rituals,

and a sense of dedication to the community. As for the subculture's resistance, it is defined by

the presence of "tropes of barbarity, rugged self-reliance, outlaw status, liberation from authority,

dominant social institutions and schedules, as a freedom to behave in manners barred in many

sectors of society." (Canniford, 2011). Moreover, Canniford explains that the locus of a

subculture is defined by an activity, its power structure by the hierarchy of core members, its purpose by the member's sociality as a response to alienation, and its social position by marginality.

Given the qualities attributed with subcultures, one can conclude that the cats of instagram (COI) community cannot be categorized as a subculture. To further explain, while the cat community is home to members with cohesive interpersonal bonds and a sense of commitment to the COI community, resistance and marginality cannot be considered as their defining traits. The COI community has a more mainstream social position given the ubiquitous cyber presence of pet social media accounts. In addition, while the community can be a long term place for social connections, it does not adhere to a locus defined by an activity and has been infiltrated by business marketing efforts in the form of sponsorships through cyber influencers. Thus, the COI community cannot be recognized as a subculture.

Secondly, tribes are anchored by a locus of affect and emotions, they lack a hierarchical power structure, and the members are driven by their desire for social connections and their passion. In terms of marketing potential, given their tendency to give rise to new brands of their own, tribes are likely to be entrepreneurial rather than a target segment for a business. Also, tribes tend to be of a transient nature, with a fluid, swift structure, and ambivalent social position. Bearing Canniford's (2011) description of tribes in mind, this study finds that the COI community cannot be defined as a tribe, due to its strong bonds with businesses and promotion of their products, and its locus being an emotion tied to an activity which concerns an interest, that being felines. Furthermore, the COI community is not based on short-lived bonds or characters, and thus, their structure is not easily shaken or fluid. And lastly, unlike tribes, the COI community's social position is more mainstream than ambivalent. Hence, the COI

community is not a tribe.

Finally, Canniford (2011) defines brand communities, much like subcultures, as cohesive and committed. However, unlike subcultures, brand communities are not described as resistant or marginalized. Moreover, brand community members, unlike subculture members who share a common activity, are bound by "the shared consumption of brands that becomes central to community membership, identity and consciousness." (Canniford, 2011). Additionally, brand communities are centered around a brand, their power structure is a hierarchy of their members and brand managers, and they are fueled by brand use and their desire for sociality. This long term consumption community has a concrete structure and mainstream social position. Therefore, the COI community can be categorized as an interest-oriented consumption community given its long term time span, slow to change structure, and mainstream social position. However, while the COI community is not a brand community, it is home to certain branded accounts of influencer cat social media accounts, such as the previously mentioned Nala and Grumpy Cat, amongst others.

By discussing the literature surrounding mediated performance and virtual communities alongside the data collected from the Instagram cat community, my study is finally able to classify the phenomenon of pet social media accounts as a form of online mediated performance by proxy occurring within a feline appreciation community on Instagram. Now that the phenomenon at hand has been explored and categorized as a performance by proxy community, in the next section, I commence a micro-analysis of the various types of cat account managers driven by different motivations to join this community.

The Typology

From the 15 interviews conducted, I was able to devise a rough typology with 4 cat account manager categories: Lone Wolf, Cat Herder, Busy Beaver, and Fame Hound. Much like Martineau and Arsel's (2017) article on the typology of engagement in online communities of co-creation based on 2 dimensions, community and skill orientation, the categories of CAMs which I constructed are defined by 2 dimensions: the desire for recognition on Instagram, and the desire for social interaction via Instagram.

The 4 categories of CAMs were found to share a few qualities. Firstly, most if not all CAMs represent their pet on the social media account via an anthropomorphized personality (Aggarwall and McGill, 2007, 2011; Archer, 1997; Chandler and Shwarz, 2010; Guido and Peluso, 2015; MacInnis et al., 2017; Waytz, Cacioppo and Epley, 2007). One could equate the anthropomorphism implemented by the pet account managers to the self-branding done by human microcelebrities or influencers in order to build a consistent brand and subsequently a devoted follower-base (Marwick, 2013). For instance, pet microcelebrities' posts are commonly accompanied by a text caption of the pet's alleged thoughts, which are meant to be perceived as human-like. Additionally, pets may be given a human name, such as Marnie, or Alfie, or put in human attire and made to wear nail polish or accessories on their nails, thus further humanizing the animal in the eyes of their followers via human-like features.

CAMs share this technique of anthropomorphism to represent their pets as humanized brands on their Instagram cat accounts via a human-like mind (Aggarwall and McGill, 2007, 2011; Archer, 1997; Chandler and Shwarz, 2010; Guido and Peluso, 2015; MacInnis et al., 2017;

Waytz, Cacioppo and Epley, 2007). This is also explored by Hirschman (1994) and Veevers (1985) as the manner in which pet owners perceive their own pets. The below quote is Annie's take on the matter:

> I usually interact with other people as if in my cats' voice, when I first started it, I think this was a decision I had to make like what kind of voice was I gonna have like was it gonna be me I guess like the cat mom or was I just gonna be like this is what my cats would say if they were on the account, and I guess like in general, I'm somewhere in between now, like I think definitely there is certain language norms on cat accounts, like especially when people are speaking as their cats, like not using proper language or proper grammar, using words like hooman instead of like human or referring to people as like their pawrents or as their meowmies or something, obviously there's like a vernacular around it and like part of the decision I made was how far down that road I was gonna go, and I think I landed somewhere in between [....] I talk to them as in my cats' voice but with like human concerns.

Another example of anthropomorphism is when Nora recounted her method of representing the cats on the Instagram account:

> [....] with the Instagram, I try to make the captions in Leo's, what I perceive to be, would be his voice, and he's kind of got a little bit of attitude, little bit of a jerk sometimes, but he's very kind and sweet and caring, and Penny, she's just, she's actually a bully (laughs), she's a bully, she always tackles him, like he'll be licking her face, licking her ears, and then she'll go crouch low and jump at him, you know

get up from underneath and pound him, she's quite funny that way, she's quite a

bully.

When asked how she ensures that followers understand which of her 9 cats is talking in the

captions of her post, Lily explained that: "[....] they each have their own um, voice and

personality for sure." By saying this, Lily clarifies that she represents her cats via Instagram by

giving them a humanized personality each.

Another similarity between CAMs is their recognition of their pets as family. This type of

surrogate family relationship which individuals form with their pets is viewed as a function of

pets by scholars such as Veevers (1985) and Hirschman (1994). Pet owners must feel the need to

create social media accounts for their companion animals in order to equate them to other people

and to themselves in order to better include them in their families and communities. For instance,

when asked what her relationship is like with her cats, a Cat Herder, Lily, said: "I would explain

that they're part of the family, no I don't think they're my children, no I don't think that they're

my brothers and sisters or whatever."

Another CAM with the same perspective is Kate, a Fame Hound, whose first cat, Jake,

holds a special place in her heart: "Jake is our baby, we both pick him up and snuggle him every

chance we get and he follows us around the house like a little dog." In addition, Nora, a Busy

Beaver, referred to how her own family situation justifies how she feels about her cats: "I could

bore people, you know how some people would talk about their grandchildren, I have none yet,

so they're my babies, like I'm just obsessed."

Furthermore, CAMs are united by cat-ified, internet phrases and a language called

Meowlogism (Podhovnik, 2018). Throughout the interviews conducted for this study, the

participants described and then gave examples of Meowlogisms. In this quote, Kate gives a couple of examples: "[...] words that are cat-ified, like a "pawty" instead of a "party" and spelling perfect with "purr" things like that."

In like manner, Jamie talked about the Friday night box parties which she digitally participates in through her cat account and the Meowlogisms pertaining to such cyber events:

> It's a hashtag, it's like imaginative so you'll be like, oh who wants to bring the caviar, who wants to bring the tuna-tinis, and then people are like, I'll bring it, I'm coming, but like they're people in like Russia, like they're not coming to the Friday night box party. But it's fun, like you create like a little world on Instagram that's not real.

Additionally, most CAMs, regardless which category of pet account manager they fall under, have a desire for their posts to be perceived as funny and aesthetically pleasing.

Fame Hounds (High DR, Low DSC)

A Fame Hound is a type of CAM with a high desire for recognition through their Instagram cat account, and a low desire for social connection. Through the research I conducted for this study, 4 of the 15 subjects were categorized as Fame Hounds.

Managing the Account. As Fame Hounds, CAMs find the act of managing their cat Instagram accounts "stressful" or "overwhelming". In her response to "how managing the account makes her feel", Jamie said:

Oh, it can be stressful, like a lot of people in our pods have left because it's just too stressful, too time consuming, and there is like, I don't know, maybe it sounds so obvious, but we can, like in all of our pods there's a lot of like, because we're all women, except for a few, there's a lot of like competition, and so like secret hate-love relationships exist like in the real world, so yeah it creates a lot of stress, like people literally, I don't care, because I just do it for fun, yes it bothers me sometimes, like I'll complain to my boyfriend, like I can't believe it like this this, I posted this, it was supposed to be the best post in the world, and it got like no views, like nothing, but I don't care, but a lot of people like, they'll be like I can't do this, I need to take time off, I need to leave.

It seems the groups, some which Fame Hound CAMs form in order to increase each other's engagement rates, can harbor negativity due to their fixation on inciting recognition and increasing follower counts. The issue in such groups is, as Jamie points out, competition; these accounts are in competition for recognition. While the effort in such groups seems to be symbiotic, it is also competitive given that the accounts are attempting to appeal to the same audience, or in this case, followers.

Much like Jamie, Kate finds that managing the account for her 3 cats can be "depressing" at times when her posts and efforts are not recognized by her followers:

[....] especially with not having a job, I need to feel like I'm doing this for a reason, so on the days that are bad when I don't get activity or people aren't noticing me or I'm being excluded from things and it just feels like why am I even here? This

doesn't make me feel good? But, the good days make it worth it. I just have to know when to stay away.

Success in the form of followers and high engagement rate. Aly, who is a Fame Hound, has one cat. She's been managing her cat Pedro's Instagram account for one year and a half. This Instagram account is followed by 21.5K followers. Fame Hounds, who have a high desire for recognition (DR) and a low desire for social connection (DSC), perceive managing the pet account as a success only when their follower count increases or when their followers are engaged. This desire for recognition can be explained through the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Hence, Fame Hounds, much like Martineau and Arsel's Utilizers, have a high desire to accumulate cultural capital in the form of recognition of their cat account posts which serve as a tangible reflection of the CAM's skills. These skills are used to attract the attention of an audience on Instagram in what has previously been defined as the attention economy (Abidin, 2017a; Boyd, 2011; Burgess and Green, 2008; García-Rapp, 2017; Marwick, 2013; Strangelove, 2010; Senft, 2013). To better explain, Fame Hounds hope to garner attention in the form of Marwick's (2013) quantifiable metrics which on Instagram are follower count, likes, comments, and engagement rate. For instance, Aly explains the definition of success as a Fame Hound:

> Well for me at this point it's just like, to get people to interact as much as possible, for my own satisfaction I guess, as long as like I've obviously seen my followers go up and my interactions go up, but sometimes they go down again, and I go "why did this photo suck today?", or "why did this post not do well? why did I only get 50 comments instead of 100 comments?", "Why did I only get 10 followers today?".

> For it's just like, some kind of like upswing in the interactions in his account is what
> I consider successful.

Another Fame Hound, Kate, who has been managing the cat Instagram account for her 3 cats since August, 2016, explains the importance of success in the form of recognition:

> [....] on the days that are bad when I don't get activity or people aren't noticing me
> or I'm being excluded from things and it just feels like why am I even here? This
> doesn't make me feel good? But, the good days make it worth it.

Moreover, as a means to gain more followers and better her quantifiable metrics (Marwick, 2013), Kate tailors the pictures she takes of Jake to reflect what she believes followers find appealing, she also uses the Feature hashtags so that her posts may be chosen and featured on the feature page's account. By being featured on the feature Instagram page, CAMs are able to receive the recognition they crave on the skills pertaining to their management of the Instagram cat account. Thereby, CAMs are able to harness cultural capital with the help of these feature pages which publicize to a large audience, their followers.

Another strategy which Kate employs to attract more engagement and garner more cultural capital is hosting themed contests through Jake's account, thereby engaging a number of her followers as well as potential followers. As a response to why she hosts such contests, Kate simply said "More followers". Similarly, Jamie, another Fame Hound, with an account for her 2 Bengal cats, Butter and Toast, is concerned with her followers' engagement with her posts. Therefore, she addresses this concern by hosting themed challenges and giveaways:

Well, I mean, it's sort of like, the idea behind most giveaways is you pick a theme, like right now there's mother's day giveaways and different. Oh yeah, yeah ok. Uh so now there's like, it goes with themes, like Christmas, I think we did a New years one, and like I don't think it's the actual theme itself, so like Valentine's Day, it really has to do with engagement. Because doing giveaways increases your follower count, it increases your engagement, people like notice you, they're like oh yeah there's that person that's on my newsfeed.

Moreover, as her follower numbers increase, Kate makes posts on the pet account to celebrate the milestones. By doing so, Kate simply perpetuates the cycle of positivity in hopes that she will attract more followers and more cultural capital:

I just like to thank people for being there, but I also like to be able to use the hashtag and hope that that will bring me more followers if someone clicks into the hashtag.

Rituals. Due to their low desire for social connection, Fame Hounds are not strongly interested in forming friendships or forging deeper connections with other CAMs from the community. Thus, when engaging with other accounts via Instagram, CAMs make small social efforts in order to maintain their social connections; this is because their main focus is to receive recognition for their posts and account. For instance, Kate wishes other cat accounts a happy birthday by posting a picture of her own cat on her story and mentioning the birthday feline. Moreover, Kate explained that if she decides to incorporate the birthday wish into her Instagram post instead of her Instagram Story, this is how she does it: "Um, if someone is having a birthday and they also have a birthday hashtag, then I will usually post a little message under my post, but

it's still my photo, not theirs."

As previously mentioned, Abidin (2018) explains that microcelebrities are not tantamount to Influencers given that anyone has the potential to become a microcelebrity but not everybody will properly mold their microcelebrity so that they become influencers. The above data elucidates the fact that Fame Hounds, as a type of microcelebrity, aspire to have a vocation as Influencers.

Participating in direct messaging groups. Additionally, Kate uses her account to keep in touch with certain CAMs via a direct message thread on Instagram. Furthermore, given her high DR, Kate wishes but is unable to become a participant in certain Instagram message threads called Pods. Within these Pods, CAMs rely on one another to increase each other's engagement via liking and commenting on one another's Instagram posts within an hour of posting. As a result of increasing recognition through larger follower numbers and higher engagement rates, a CAM also enjoys the added value of cultural capital via the cat account (Bourdieu, 1986; Cauquelin, 2003). In Kate's interview, she explains her wish to be in such a group.

> So it's a place where people get together to share insights, usually gossip of course, you have to have a place to gossip, get support if you're having a bad day, so comment on, increase each other's engagement, so you go into the group, and you say I've just posted, and everyone goes and likes and comments on your photos, and you get a big boost of engagement in the first couple of minutes, which definitely matters on Instagram.

Jamie is a member of a number of Pods, she explains the expectations of a CAM who is a member of such a direct message group:

> They dictate the rules, so it usually goes with engagement, so for engagement purposes, you have to write more than 4 words [in a comment on a post], not like emojis, it has to be words, or else it's not taken into account by instagram as it being a real comment, it's taken as like a bot, that just, auto-generates whatever random thing, it has to be within the first hour [of posting] if you can. And that's usually it.

> *Professionalization*. Aly recognizes that by tailoring her posts to demonstrate what her followers want to see on her account, she will be able to keep her followers engaged:

> I think as I started building relationships with other accounts a little bit more, I'm realizing what people wanted or what would make people comment more or interact more, so probably over the last like 6-9 months I started putting in more effort in my captions.

Moreover, CAMs generally focus on the quality of their posted pictures and so they use professional cameras and/or software used in order to ensure that their pictures are of high quality. Given that the main goal for Fame Hounds is to attract followers and increase the engagement rate of the account, their use of a camera more professional than that of an iPhone's, and a high quality software pertains to their need to tailor their photos' specifications to the followers' preferences. For instance, Kate uses both a Nikon D7500, and Adobe Lightroom for her photo edits. She explains in the following quote that as a photographer, she chooses to

capture photos in the way that followers prefer rather than in the way that satisfies her as an artist. Additionally, in true Fame Hound fashion, she clarifies that a photo is only a success if it achieves recognition and as a consequence, cultural capital through the admiration of her followers via their likes and engagement with the account.

> I'm still working on my photography, this sort of war going on between what I want to take pictures of and what's popular on Instagram, usually what I wanna take pictures of isn't what's popular and so it can be really tough, because I have to decide, am I doing this for popularity or am I doing it for fun, and as much as it is for fun and my art, it's always, it always feels like high school. If I don't get a lot of likes, then I'm not popular, and I'm a failure.

Another example is Aly who uses a professional camera which, as she notes, has improved her photo quality for the purpose of the account:

> Yes, I did buy the DSLR [camera] mainly for this [The cat account], but actually I do enjoy photography in general [....] it was definitely to improve the quality of my photos on Instagram.

When asked why it was important for her to improve the quality of her photos, Aly explains:

> Well a lot of the big accounts, obviously, have like very nice photos, like a lot of people retouch their photos, like I don't really retouch my photos [....] I figure like to have a good account like that you need a pretty good quality photo.

By "big accounts", Aly is referring to the accounts of influencers, those with large follower counts. Therefore, her concern with photo quality helps achieve her aspiration of becoming successful like the big accounts she idolizes.

Promotions. In terms of the benefits of having a pet, humans with microcelebrity pets might be earning a sum of money through the pet account which amplifies the benefits of the relationship between the 2 species, thereby elevating the relationship from parasitism to social mutualism or commensalism (Archer, 1997). However, in the case of the humans who manage pet accounts with smaller follower counts, the account management could be regarded as either a cost, in terms of the time sacrificed to maintain the account, or a benefit, in terms of the emergent enjoyment or entertainment.

When it comes to Fame Hounds, in order to complement their efforts to gain followers and follower engagement, they sometimes engage in promotions for 3rd party businesses via their cat's Instagram account. Initially, the company reaches out to the CAM through direct message on Instagram or through email. In their message they introduce themselves and ask the account manager if they are interested in promoting the company's product through posts via the Instagram account for a certain type and amount of compensation. In terms of compensation, the CAMs interviewed for this study highlighted that the company may offer one of 2 types of reimbursements: free company products or money. Some companies offer the recruited CAM a unique discount code so that the company can track the number of orders made by individuals who were influenced by that specific CAM. By doing so, the company promises the CAM a free product or money once they've hit a certain number of sales inspired by their cat account.

Regardless of the method of reimbursement, some CAMs might reject the offer to promote certain goods:

> Basically like anything that is either, it has to be something that I actually like, I'm not just gonna like promote Purina, well I don't feed him that and I'm not gonna feed him that, so why am I gonna tell people that hey this food is great or whatever product it happens to be, I feel it has to be something, I don't wanna be a sellout or anything, it has to be something that actually is cute or functional and something I already use.

In the above quote, Aly clarifies that she will not promote a product that she doesn't use or that doesn't find practical and worth using. Another example of a CAM with specific prerequisites to accepting a promotion offer is Kate, who specifies that the products and reimbursement must be useful for her cats:

> But I've also gotten some [businesses] that are just it's like cat jewelry and cat shirts and stuff, but I tell those accounts no, because I myself am not interested in those items and if we're gonna get something I want it to be for the cats, not for me.

Similarly, Aly explains that the brand she is about to promote through her cat account is one that she currently uses. She also elucidates that she would not promote a brand she would not use for her cat as she would like to remain sincere to her followers.

> [....] one of the ones I got was wuruva, which is my cat food that I actually already feed him, they contacted me on Instagram, I didn't receive my package yet still, but

they're supposed to send me an influencer pack, so basically they're gonna send me a bunch of free food, and I just have to make a post about it, but that was cool because it's actually something that you know he used, like that's his wet food that I give him, so to me that was pretty cool.

Pet Merchandise. Another monetization activity which Fame Hounds may participate in is creating their own products with the help of a 3rd party business in order to sell them through their Instagram cat account. For example, Kate, Jamie, and Cara have engaged in this type of behavior. Kate created a calendar using pictures of her cats and pillows with her cats' pictures on them via a certain website, and consequently she attempted to sell these products in order to make some extra money. Conversely, Cara's pet has a larger following on Instagram, she also created a pillow, book, and other products showcasing the image of her cat: Shuffle.

Figure 6.

Additionally, Jamie created her own website and used it as a platform to sell goods which are

unaffiliated with her pet and made by a 3rd party company. Evidently, she used her Instagram cat

account to promote the products she was selling via her website.

From Microcelebrity to Influencer. When certain accounts reach a greater level of fame

than most, which can be appreciated through their outstanding number of followers, high

engagement rate, and media presence beyond Instagram, such accounts may transition into

supporting bigger causes at a larger scale. An example of such a case is Shuffle, the cat with a

congenital condition called hypertrichosis, who due to his illness developed a unique appearance,

dissimilar to an average cat's. His owner, Cara, whom I interviewed, explained that in the

beginning of her journey as a CAM she would sometimes notice that her cat is being cyber

bullied in the form of negative comments and even death threats via Instagram. Due to the rarity

of the cat breed and the startling appearance of the congenital disease, Shuffle eventually began

to gain more followers on his several social media accounts as a result of gaining attention of

traditional media in the same way that Grumpy Cat did (Abidin, 2018). Examples of traditional

media which Shuffle participated in are interviews with Cosmopolitan Magazine, Meow

Quarterly Magazine, Catster magazine, and Feline Wellness Magazine, as well as appearances

on 100% animal of the Télé-Quebec channel, and at several cat themed conventions such as Le

Chatlon, or the Cat Expo.

With the amount of attention which this unique cat was receiving, the CAM who started

the account began to involve Shuffle in anti-bullying and acceptance projects. Much like many

microcelebrities turned influencers, this CAM started to utilize her mediated performance as a

platform for a cause relevant to the account. In this case the cause was anti-bullying

enlightenment as Cara and another CAM created a children's picture books with stories

pertaining to bullying which stems from a person's differences in appearance, much like

Shuffle's unordinary looks.

Figure 7.

The above product, which was promoted via both CAMs' cat accounts, showcases a mediated performance by proxy which these individuals participated in. In this case, the cats were the proxies which were used as mouthpieces to help spread awareness about a cause dear to their hearts.

As Shuffle's social media accounts became popular, this cat microcelebrity was becoming a career for its account manager, Cara, therefore, the microcelebrity was becoming an influencer. As a result, the account was beginning to engage less with the fans or followers, and was transforming from a personal journal for the feline to more of a taste display given the account's affiliation with organizations, mainstream media, and promotions for businesses (McQuarrie et al., 2012). In addition, given the account's rising popularity, the followers become more of an audience, and the snapshots used for Instagram posts become more professional (McQuarrie et al., 2012).

Much like the fashion blogs explored by McQuarrie et al. (2012), cat microcelebrity accounts, another form of consumption display online, with small followings can amass a larger following and become influencers through the megaphone effect. As the scholars explain, this effect occurs when ordinary consumers, whom McQuarrie et al. define as individuals lacking professional experience and an institutional or family position, post to the web about consumption and amass a large audience. Given that Shuffle and Nala's owners can be recognized as ordinary consumers or appreciators of felines with cat social media accounts online, their cat accounts' increased popularity can be seen as examples of the megaphone effect (McQuarrie et al., 2012). As Grumpy Cat's fame did not occur through popularity of a social media account or blog online, I was not able to explain her fame as a result of the megaphone effect (McQuarrie et al., 2012).

In the above subsection, the Fame Hound CAM category was explored in-depth. However, not all CAMs are motivated by a desire for recognition to create and manage their cat Instagram accounts. In the upcoming subsection, I present the CAMs driven by a desire to forge relationships through social connections with other accounts on Instagram.

Cat Herder (High DSC and Low DR)

A Cat Herder is the type of CAM which has a high desire for social connection with other CAMs in the cat community, and a low desire for recognition. Through the research I conducted for this study, 9 of the 15 subjects were categorized as Cat Herders.

Managing the Account. Almost all 9 of the Cat Herders I've interviewed have expressed 2 concepts: importance, and entertainment. By importance, the Cat Herders mean that the account is emotionally significant to them, and is a prominent part of their daily schedules. For instance, Tina, a Cat Herder, responded to my question about the meaning of the account in her life by explaining that it is important: "I think it's important to me, I feel like it's more important now that I've established friendships with some people, you know over the messaging."

Another example came from Lily, another Cat Herder:

It's very important, especially since, I am divorced and sort of tied down due to the responsibility of having 9 cats...since I'm in this situation, and a great deal of my what I call social interaction with real people it happens on Instagram, because whether it's via posting, commenting, or DMs that we send each other...I enjoy it, I mean I enjoy the creating, I enjoy the interaction, you know, and the days it starts

to feel like work, then that's usually when I take a break and say I can't do Instagram today because it's not fun, I'm tired, I wanna do something else, it's not fun.

Thus, it is evident that Cat Herders regard managing their cat accounts as an important, leisurely, social activity and a prominent part of their daily lives.

Success in the form of friends and connections. Through Ridings and Gefen's (2004) work, we learned that people join online communities for several reasons, however, the reasons which are significant in the case of Cat Herders are receiving social and emotional support, and seeking friendship (Baym, 2000; Horrigan et al., 2001; Rheingold, 1993; Utz, 2000; Wasko and Faraj, 2000, 2005). It is evident that Cat Herders create social media accounts for their pets in order to be more likeable, popular with others, or to ease social interactions (Veevers, 1985). An example of a CAM who joined the online community and received much needed support is Greta who lost one of her cats throughout her management of the account.

> I gained like 2000 followers in 2 months, and I think it helped me get through like Ray's death as well because I've been talking with a few, there's been some people that were like a little bit closer, a lot of them, like they send us messages saying like if you need anything like we'll try to help you and just like sending messages of support, so I think it helped us in like knowing, like if we never met them, we kind of know them a little bit. So it's kind of like, not that it's not real, but it's kind of like you're creating a little community for yourself of people that like they're gonna be there, they're gonna try to help you anyway they can.

Another example of a CAM who received the support of the cat community is Sophia whose cat suffers of FHS.

> I just had fun with it, and it was really nice, and then when Tom got ill, I needed a lot of surgeries, I found that it came in handy with the group community of cat people were really supportive and helped out in a lot of ways, and since then I just kept it because I've met a lot of people all around the world on there that have the same interests.

Moreover, Cat Herders seek friendships through their accounts, for example, Jill, who expresses her appreciation of the global friendships she has formed through the Instagram cat account.

> Now I have my Instagram account with the cats, that I have friends all over the world, and so I enjoy getting up in the morning and going through and seeing my messages from friends and so I'd say it's a big part, it's the way I communicate with a lot of people.

Additionally, in order to best describe the social connections forged online between community members, one can use the terms established by Haythornthwaite (2007), ties and relations, and Park (2010), connections. The CAMs in the cat community can be seen as the actors which Haythornthwaite defines as one of the building blocks for social networks. The remaining building blocks are the ties created which are mediated by the relation between the actors. In the case of CAMs and their Instagram community, the ties created between them are strong due to the social and emotional support, intimacy, and self-disclosure present in their relations. Thus,

the various ties between certain CAMs are what create Haythornthwaite concept of network. These interconnections between Cat Herder are defined by their shared activities, which will be discussed later, shared interests, those being felines, and defining characteristics, which are the desire to forge social connections and showcase their pets. Moreover, Haythornthwaite discusses that social networks become stronger with rich relations and a structure of rituals and traditions, and thus, by belonging to the cat community, Cat Herders specifically enjoy the added value of social capital given that they desire social connections (Bourdieu, 1986). A friendship seeking Cat Herder, Jill, has met 2 of her CAM friends in person after establishing strong ties through the cat account online. Furthermore, Lola emphasizes the interconnections' strength through the shared interests she has with the 2 CAMs she met.

> [....] one woman who was a very good, her cat and Fluffy were always involved in the same similar activities and stuff like that, she ended up moving to my town so we have gotten together a couple of times and have, it's been really really nice, and another woman of another account, we shared a lot, was vacationing down here, we go together for lunch kind of thing, so it's definitely a social network. It would start with direct messaging and you know if you felt a connection or whatever you want to do.

Moreover, Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter (2008) find that social capital is created and fueled within social structures through relational norms, voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust. Therefore, one can understand that Cat Herders exhibit voluntarism through their contribution of

time and effort when engaging in the online community. For instance, Jill lists a few activities has participated in since creating her cat account.

> I'll comment on cat's pictures, um, we have, there's a big block of hashtags that we, the big group of people that I follow, a big block of hashtags that we follow that are specific, like today is Thursday so it's "throwbackthursday" so we'll put up pictures from the past of our kitties, so I'll go through and look at their past pictures and make comments. We celebrate birthdays together, we celebrate Instagram anniversaries together, we celebrate adoptaversaries together, 2 of my cats are married, Biscuit next week is celebrating his second wedding anniversary, they had a virtual wedding, so his wife, her owner and I are real good friends and so we had a virtual wedding, and there's a wedding coming up this weekend.

Moreover, an example of reciprocity is Roger who points out the community's support of others who have financial problems or deceased pets or family members.

> During the expensive, incredibly dysfunctional US government shutdown for last month, people were kind of pulling together to see ok who is a federal government worker, who is not getting paid in this group? who needs food? who needs litter? how can we support each other? and we, we had only just had a member who moved away to the other side of the country and her cat actually died which is quite sad and we all kind of put together a kind of fund to, put together a little memorial for her pet and donate to where she had adopted her pet from.

And, finally, social trust is represented by the mutually supportive ways in which CAMs sometimes promote each other's products using discount codes or through raffles, contests or giveaways, this will be discussed later in the promotions section.

As mentioned before, Bishop (2007) created a 3 level framework detailing the motivations behind participating in an online community: ecological cognition, perception of congruence between desires and actions, and utilizing skills to implement action in the virtual environment given its features. When implementing actions online in order to initiate or perpetuate social connections, Cat Herders perceive a social desire via their first layer of ecological cognition, secondly, their beliefs must be congruent with their actions of forming a social connection, and finally, they can decide the manner through which they'll make these social connections given Instagram's features and interface. Examples of such actions conducted to form social connections are likes, comments, or direct messaging. In addition, more specific ways to forge social connections are rituals such as celebrating birthdays, adoptaversaries, and the like, or participating in giveaways, contests, and competitions.

While CAMs meet and interact through Instagram by liking and commenting on each other's content, and direct messaging, when they have the opportunity to meet in person, they seem to grab it. Therefore, even though the online community generates social connections, it does not completely satisfy Cat Herders' desire for social connection as they choose to meet in person if a strong tie is established and their geographical locations permit. An example demonstrating the fact that Cat Herders' desire for social connections is not completely satisfied solely through the online community and consequently, they will choose to meet in person, is this story about a CAM gathering told by Hannah.

We found out that the nationals are having a Caturday night at the ballpark, so I posted it up on my story, I said "if you're in the area and you wanna go, let me know, we can arrange a meet up", and so 8 of us actually all arranged to do a meetup, and how we all figured out who we were is that we all made flat cat versions of our cats and so we went to the brewery beforehand we all had our cats, so we knew who each other was...it was a lot of fun and we're gonna do it again this summer.

Below is an image of Lily, who also attended the same event Hannah described above.

Figure 8.

Rituals. Given their high desire for social connection, some Cat Herders are highly interested in honoring their friendships and interacting more closely with other CAMs from the community. An important ritual that most Cat Herders engage in is participating in each other's

birthdays or parties. This celebration of their cats' birthdays is unique in nature, the birthday CAM will create a post announcing that it is their cat's birthday and that in order to participate in the celebration CAMs can create a photoshopped photo with the theme of the birthday in mind. In the quote below, Lily explains how she feels about participating in birthday parties through digital edits of pictures or by posing her cats with toys that reflect the theme defined by the birthday CAM.

> [....] the party pictures are my favorite and they're the ones that take the longest because for me, and I do believe for a lot of the people who do it, it's creative outlet...so if you have a theme and your theme is, um, you know fairytale princess or your theme is bring your own mouse, I'm still going to, you know, either, well I usually do some kind of edits, but I mean there's definitely some editing involved, whether I make a whole entire not real photo that I stick my cats in and just put a lot of stickers on to tell the story, or whether I take, we get Kitnip boxes so you get a lot of themed toys, whether I take my cats and their toys and create a scene for them.

The images below represent a number of CAMs celebrating their fellow CAM's ocean themed birthday event #squishsoceanpawty. The participation in these birthdays includes both a visual and textual form of engagement: the edited photo, and the caption wishing the cat a happy birthday and detailing how the party is being celebrated.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.
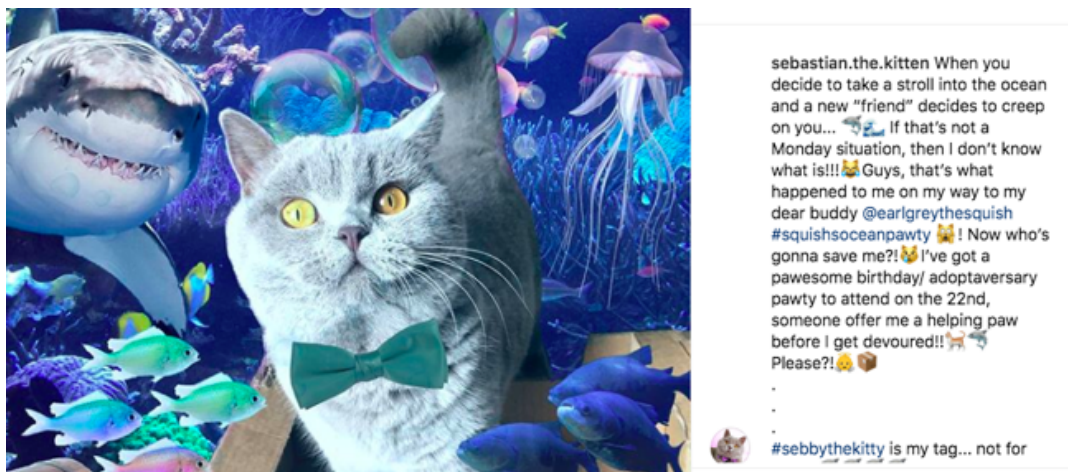
It is important to note that the parties which most Cat Herders celebrate through photoshopped

photos are not simply for birthdays. For instance, some parties are simply themed parties or

events celebrated or participated in by Cat Herders as a means of interacting with one another

and strengthening their ties (Haythornthwaite, 2007). One such event is the Catlympics, through

which sporting categories are defined by the event's host @repurrblic_of_catlandia. Examples of such categories are boxing, figure skating, "making biscuits" which is a colloquial expression denoting a cat kneading, and other winter sports. Coincidentally, a number of the CAMs who were interviewed for this research participated in the Catlympics. In the images below, the CAMs make posts and captions demonstrating that they would like to participate in the Catlympics and detailing how they'd like to do so. In all the captions below, the CAMs tag the host of the event, @repurrblic_of_catlandia, and use the hashtag defined by the host, #catlympics2018.

Figure 11.

Figure 12
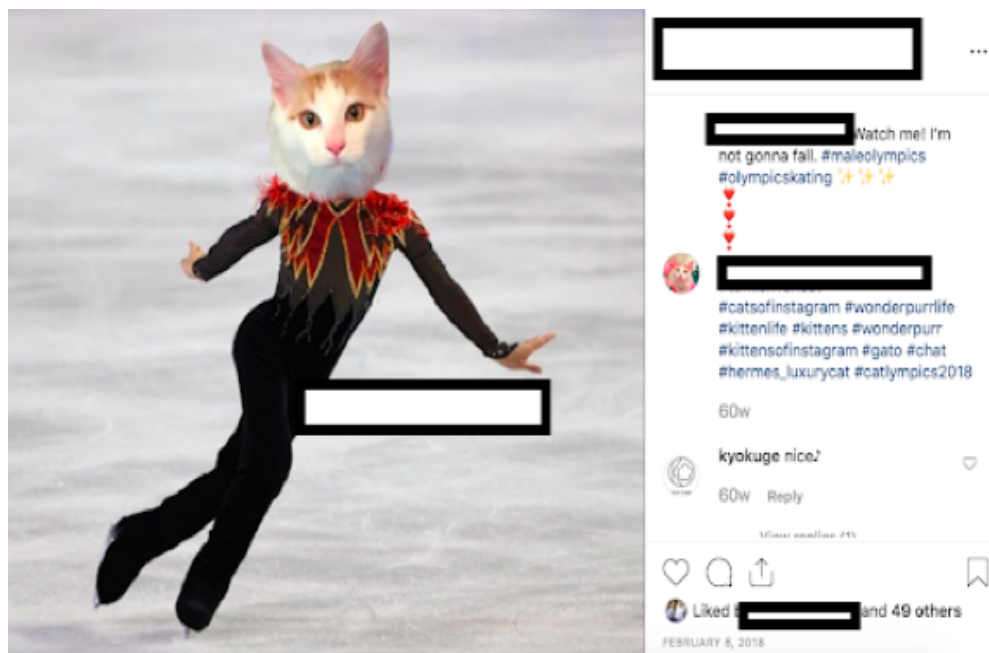
Figure 13.

Figure 14.
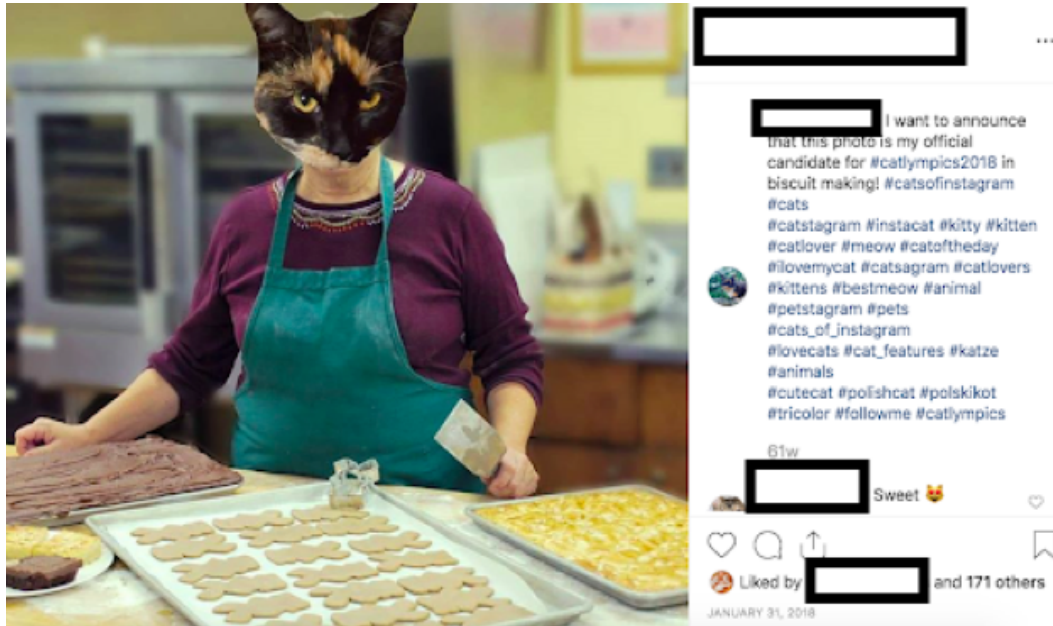
By participating in such shared virtual activities, Cat Herders, are able to strengthen their ties and

the interconnections between one another (Haythornthwaite, 2007). Thus, with these stronger ties

and relations and a more established social network within the cat community, Cat Herders are

able to enjoy the social capital accrued through their engagement with others in the Instagram cat

community (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

Participating in direct messaging groups. Direct messaging is an important means of

communication for Cat Herders as they are able to connect more intimately than they do in their

public interactions through comments and captions. Given that Cat Herders are interested in

receiving social and emotional support, as well as friendship (Baym, 2000; Rheingold, 1993;

Utz, 2000; Wasko and Faraj, 2000, 2005), participating in DMs can satisfy the aforementioned

desires. Furthermore, one can see examples of relational norms, voluntarism, reciprocity, and

social trust (Wiertz, Mathwick, and Ruyter, 2008) within these DMs, and therefore, Cat Herders

are able to amass social capital through their online cat community. In the below quote, Greta described being included in a direct messaging group in which she engages in friendly conversation and reciprocal emotional support.

> One of the accounts asked me if I wanted to be in a closed group, I think we're like 20 accounts, so we can like keep up with each other, make sure we're not missing any posts, it's just a place as well we're sharing our pictures but at the same time we can have like conversations, and there's a few of them, like I've been talking to them every once in a while, if they had like questions, and also like one of the accounts, like we got 2 of our fosters adopted, we were talking pretty often as well, because she, before she adopted the 2 cats she lost her cat in September, and like it was very hard for her as well, and she actually found us through Instagram and we've been talking about like, because she wanted to know the cats like their personality, so we were talking back and forth to see if she could find a good cat, and she got 2 of the best cats we fostered, like super cuddly, super social [....] they're making the loss of her cat a little bit easier, like we're talking at least once a week for sure...It's like having friends without knowing them, it's kind of like virtual, not that it's not real, but it's not like face to face, but you feel like you know them, so it's nice.

Promotions. Cat Herders engage in promotional efforts as an act of voluntarism, reciprocity, and social trust. Cat Herders may promote the products of their friends through the pet account in order to help with their startup businesses. An example of this is Lily's quote

below, where she describes how she helped her friend promote her bows and blankets through a raffle she hosted via her cat account.

> I promoted her, you know as my contribution to the raffle, you know, the item that I was gonna put up, um and to help out a friend that has an Etsy, I used her store as one of the raffle options, you know your choice of bow or blanket, or whatever [....] so I've only had that [a discount code] probably since May in my bio.

When a company reaches out to the Cat Herder, they do so through direct message on Instagram or through email, in a similar fashion to what is done with Fame Hounds. Similar to Fame Hounds, Cat Herders will sometimes choose not to promote a certain product if it does not match a certain belief of theirs. For Instance, Greta rejected an offer to promote a certain international brand because she already represents the same type of product for a local brand.

> I have been asked by a company last week that were doing bandanas as well, I wouldn't feel comfortable saying yes to them because I feel like it would be a competition in between and the thing is the other accounts weren't from, I think they were in Turkey or they were in someplace in Europe, so I probably if they would've been the first to ask me, I would've said yes, but now that I already have someone that I'm working with and it's local, I wanna encourage her business to grow, but I have like I have like 3 discount codes from different places, but they're all selling different stuff, so I feel ok, like I have the bandanas, I have the sweater, and then the other one is like a website they sell a little bit of everything like cat toys, like they have things for T-shirts, they have like mugs, a little bit of

everything, so since it's not in the same category, I feel ok working with different people.

Another reason for rejecting a promotion offer is if the Cat Herder does not have these advertorial type goals for the cat account and would not like to convert this leisurely activity to a form of work, a good example of this is Hannah.

> I don't have those goals because it would be a lot of work, and that's just a lot work, I've read stories about how some teachers to make more money have become influencers on Instagram for teachers, there's even a whole subsection on Instagram for teach influencers, and when I read what they are required to almost required to do to make the money, I'm like now, like yeah I enjoy spending hours on her account some days, but some days I barely touch her account like I don't ever want to feel like I have to do it, because the moment I feel like I have to do it it's gonna lose it's fun.

Another CAM who chose not to promote through the pet account is Roger, who seems to indicate that he does not want this sort of action to define the worth of his pet.

> I definitely understand people who through no malicious means want to monetize their pet or bring celebrity to their pet or themselves, that's totally fine, it doesn't bother me, um, but it's just, it's not something I want for me or for Simba, like I'm not, I didn't adopt him to get him to be a celebrity, I adopted him because he was

adorable, and I was looking for a cat...It just seems like a whole lot more hassle than it's worth.

And lastly, much like Fame Hounds, Cat Herders will want the compensation for their promotions to be geared towards their cats. This is something that Sophia expresses in the following quote: "Well I find if he's working for it, he should benefit from it, so I always just found it should go towards him and if it goes towards him well then it should be his toy his food."

Busy Beaver (High DR, High DSC)

A Busy Beaver is the type of CAM which has a high desire for social connection with other CAMs, and a high desire for recognition through their Instagram cat account. Through the research which I conducted for this study, 1 of the 15 participants was categorized as a Busy Beaver. This type of CAM bears similar qualities to the aforementioned two, and thus, as a type of CAM, Busy Beavers are a combination of both Fame Hounds and Cat Herders.

Managing the Account. As it is with Cat Herders, Busy Beavers find the activity of managing the account enjoyable. This is explained by Nora in the following quote:

It's enjoyable, it's entertaining, the cats are in themselves are entertaining, like if we're watching TV, we could be halfway through the movie and out of the corner of our eye we see them playing together, we just pause the movie and watch them,

because of how cute. So you know, it's entertainment, um, and it brings a lot of joy,

and I love pictures of other cats as well.

Success in the form of followers and friends. The overachiever of the 4 categories is the Busy Beaver who has a high DR and DSC. Nora, a Busy Beaver, has managed her 2 cats', Leo and Penny's, account for 3 years. Her cats' account has 22.3K followers. Nora manages the cat account for entertainment purposes and enjoys seeing her follower number grow. However, while she finds watching her follower count rise, it is not her main goal to increase her followers.

As an activity it's fun, I get a kick out of it, I got such a huge kick out of watching

it grow, like before it gets into the thousands, you see it go up one by one number,

you know 176, you know and then it's like 550 and then oh my god it's 10K and

then it becomes, well no one thousand, and then it's just 1K, 1.2, it's just amazing,

how fast it grows.

Busy Beavers are also interested in the social connections they form via the cat account. Hence, their interest lies in both social and cultural capital. Nora's interest in establishing ties through relations with other CAMs is expressed in the quote below (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

We have some connections, I guess you'll call them, with cats, that he made early

on when I started that still engage with him today and um, that, you know, that

just, I've had cats or people contact him and say we wanna send you a Christmas

card, like a real Christmas card in the mail, or a Valentine's card.

Rituals. Similar to Cat herders, Busy beavers might choose to participate in or host themed birthday parties, thus, perpetuating their established ties and strengthening the social network formed in the cat community (Haythronthwaite, 2007). In the below quote, Nora details a party she once hosted for Leo, and a couple of other edits which she made to pictures celebrating certain events.

> That was his party and if you look at that hashtag, a few other people um would have, let me see, what was my hashtag #pawtyforLep so if you're looking at the hashtag you can see other cats posted pictures with fish themes and things like that, it's kind of funny. And then I did another cutandpaste [the editing software] for the royal wedding, with him and Millie with their hats on, in front of Buckingham Palace. Oh and I put him on a sailboat when my daughter and her boyfriend went to the beach. Oh and when my daughters went to the Netherlands, I put a picture of, I cut and paste him onto the suitcase by the airport.

Moreover, below is a photo exhibiting the event which was hosted by Nora celebrating Leo's fishing-themed 4th adoptaversary.

Figure 15.

Participating in direct messaging groups. In terms of interactions with other people, Nora explains that she mainly comments and likes their content. This Busy Beaver does not suggest that she uses direct messaging heavily.

> [....] going through your feed and liking and commenting more importantly on some
> things, like if you see their cats having a birthday, wish them a happy birthday, or
> what we call adoptaversary, you know, comment on that, instead of just liking it
> comment on it, like, "oh, that's a fancy bow tie you've got" or "have a happy
> caturday!", that kind of thing, just engage...well because they comment on his

pictures [her cat's], um it's reciprocal, I mean not just the ones that comment on his,

but if I think something is really cute, I'm gonna make a comment on it.

While Nora highlights that when she comments it is sometimes reciprocal for social purposes (Mathwick, Wiertz, and Ruyter, 2008), not all her commenting and interactions are an act of reciprocity. Hence, it is evident that not all the actions of a Busy Beaver do not specifically revolve around accruing social or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Promotions. In the same way that companies contact Cat Herders and Fame Hounds, they also reach out to Busy Beavers to promote their products. When it comes to promoting products through the pet account, Nora is somewhere between a Cat Herder and a Fame Hound when it comes to experience.

[....] they have received some things [her cats] for free, in exchange for like a review, or posting it, or sharing about it, um they've received a litter box from a new company...they came to the house [the company], they took pictures of them, they took pictures, they did a little interview with me, they did pictures of me showing how easy it was to clean this litter box, this 3 part thing, um, another company sent him like a water fountain, a drinking fountain and some toys.

An example of such promotions is the below still image of a video showcasing Nora's cat, Penny, drinking from the water fountain mentioned in the above quote. In the caption, Nora describes Penny's fascination with the fountain and the extent at which she enjoys using it. Nora also tags the company which provided her with the fountain.

Figure 16.
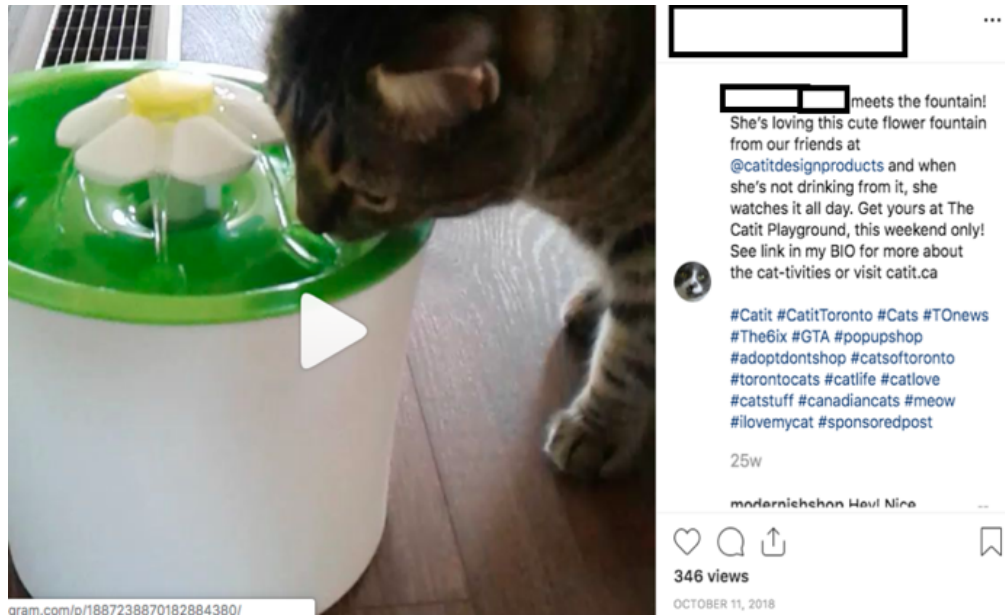
In her interview, Nora specifies that she is not interested in promoting products that are not pet-related due to their lack of relevance to her followers, and that she would rather support local businesses than international companies.

As I will explain in the discussion further, the Busy Beaver is a transient type within the typology due to the inability of a CAM to maintain both the desire for recognition and the desire for social connection as satisfying one becomes an obstacle in the way of satisfying the other. Therefore in order for a CAM to remain functional as an account manager they will have to shift back into one of the types of account managers fueled with one desire, Fame Hound or Cat Herder, or exit the community.

Lone Wolf (Low DR, Low DSC)

A Lone Wolf is the type of CAM with a low desire for social connection with other CAMs in the cat community, and a low desire for recognition through their Instagram cat account. Through the research I conducted for this study, 1 of the 15 subjects was categorized as a Lone Wolf.

Managing the Account. Unlike the other interviewees, Annie is a CAM who had a change in her professional schedule and interests throughout her time as an CAM and therefore, the type of CAM she is currently differs from the type she was when the account was created. Given that Annie started out as a Fame Hound and ultimately became a Lone Wolf, she describes how her level of activity dwindled due to a free time to spend on the account, and the attenuation of her previous compulsion to interact with other CAMs.

> Um, it's definitely changed a lot, like when I first, probably for the first year or two where I started it, I was a lot more active on it, and now it's sort of more of an occasional thing, and it's more like, when I have a moment, like oh yeah I have this like cute picture of them that I haven't shared like I'll do that, um I mean like during the time where I was more active on it [....] I feel less compelled than I used to, I think to keep the account up to date, I think that's just like a function, I just don't have as much time anymore, like just with like before when I was writing my PhD I had a lot more time at home, like I was working from home a lot and it was easier to take those breaks and now when I started my new job, when I first started especially, I had a very long commute and often I was just too tired to do it.

Success in the form of a creative outlet. Annie describes her initial interests to be related to building a follower base, a desire for recognition. Thus, as with Fame Hounds the account as an activity was geared toward satisfying her desire for recognition by attracting cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) via higher quantifiable metrics (Marwick, 2013).

> I don't know, I think like when I first started it, it was more of a curiosity to see if I could get my cats a bunch of followers, partially like obviously they're my cats so I think they're really cute and everyone else should think they're really cute, I mean how many people can I get to like look at my cats, but, after a while it was like a little bit less of that and a little bit more of like I just enjoyed taking photos of them and I still do, it was like a fun creative exercise to like think of different, to notice different times where I could take pictures of them, to like workout like how the photos will be composed and then like take those photos and eventually edit them and post them so there was kind of like that creative component to it and like I just like find it enjoyable, I find it enjoyable to look at other cats [....] and now I don't know like I guess now, I guess I don't think about it as much, like I do it when I can and like the purpose of like even keeping it going, I still like being able to share them with the world sometimes.

However, Annie reflects and recognizes that the objective of the account has now shifted from attracting followers and a strong desire for recognition, to a creative outlet.

Participating in direct messaging groups. When asked about forming connections with other CAMs, Annie showed little interest in communicating past commenting and liking. This indicates that she has a low desire for social connections.

> [....] like sometimes they'd just write and be like "oh your cat looks a lot like my cat or something" and if they were to like DM me I would usually respond in DMs but I wouldn't feel compelled to sustain that like conversation.

Promotion. When it comes to promotions, Annie is discouraged because of her sense of realism and her disinterest in spending more time on the account in order to transform it into a promotional tool.

> Like yes, I've thought about it because I know it's possible, but I've more thought about it in the sense that like ok this is a thing that's possible, but realistically is this cat account going to get me to that point and the answer was like probably not, like even at the level where I was doing it before where I was like posting more frequently, it took so much time, and just thinking about how much time it would take to be able to get the account to a point where it was monetized, like it just didn't seem realistic.

Much like the Busy Beaver, the Lone Wolf is a transient type of CAM as the will to sustain the cat account must be fuelled by a desire. Without the desire for recognition or the desire for social connection, a CAM will not have a motivation to continue to manage the account and thus, a CAM will either in transform into a more stable type of account with a desire, Fame Hound or

Cat Herder, or they will exit the community.

Discussion

Figure 17.

Fame Hounds (High DR, Low DSC)
1. Success is equated to more followers and/or a high engagement rate (High picture qualities, Engaging captions, Strategic Hashtags, Hosting themed challenges and giveaways ,etc.)
2.Managing the account is stressful or overwhelming
3. Birthdays of other accounts are celebrated via pictures and hashtags via Instagram Stories.
4. Participating in Direct Messages (Joining Pods)
5. Monetizing the account (Promotions, Pet Merchandise, etc.)

Decrease in DR

Increase in DR

Lone Wolf (Low DR, Low DSC)
1. Success is equated to using the account as a creative outlet (Taking the pictures, editing them, and posting them on the account)
2. Managing the account is an activity which satisfies creative tendencies.
3. Will not participate in promotions because of low expectations for monetization and lack of time to invest in such an activity.

Increase in DSC

Decrease in DSC

Inability to maintain high DR and DSC

Increase in DSC

Busy Beaver (High DR, High DSC)

A combination between Fame Hounds and Cat Herders

Inability to maintain high DR and DSC

Increase in DR

Cat Herder (Low DR, High DSC)
1. Success is equated to making friends and connections (Supporting one another, Shared interests and activities, etc.)
2.Managing the account is important and fun.
3. Birthdays of other accounts are celebrated via creating and posting photoshopped pictures of the cats celebrating the themed birthday and creating a descriptive caption and adding the birthday hashtag to accompany the picture.
4. Participating in Direct Messages (Friendly Conversation, EmotionalSupport, etc.)
5. If engagement in promotions occurs it is to support friends with businesses, local businesses, etc.

The above diagram summarizes the findings. Further to note, the diagram showcases a process, not just a static typology. To clarify, while a CAM could start off as one type of pet microcelebrity account manager, they may transform into another type due to a change in desire. For instance, if a CAM starts off as a Lone Wolf, without high desires for recognition or social connection, they will eventually transform into either a Cat Herder or Fame Hound depending on the first desire they develop and whether they are able to sustain that desire through accruing cultural or social capital.

On the other hand, if a CAM has high desires for both recognition and social connection, they will reach a point where they must choose which desire is more valued as sustaining both becomes too stressful or even impossible. For instance, Jill, a Cat Herder, explains in the below quote that she prefers that the account not get too popular as she will lose track of the friends she's made via the cat account.

> No, I'm happy where it's at, I think to be more popular would just mean I'd have to keep up with it a lot more, I feel like I'd have to post a certain amount of photos every day and be more key as to what type of photos I was putting up and things like that. Like if I won a giveaway, I make sure I take a post when we get it and put those kind of things up there, but I wouldn't want to be somebody that had to sponsor somebody's stuff and take pictures of that, because even though I have, there's about 6000 people that follow me, I only follow about 2000...I'm not there to entertain other people I'm just there to have some friends.

The above quote further supports that a CAM will shift away from a transient type, Lone Wolf or Busy Beaver, as it is unsustainable. The aforementioned types are deemed transient because for a certain type of CAM to remain sustainable, the CAM must have a desire fueling the management of the account, conversely, a CAM will also not be able to concurrently sustain 2 dissimilar desires, namely the desires for recognition and the desire for social connection, given that satisfying one impedes satisfying the other.

When a CAM transitions from a stable type, such as Fame Hound or Cat Herder, to a transient type, Busy Beaver or Lone Wolf, this ultimately results in either a shift back into a stable type or an exit from the community. For instance, Annie, a Fame Hound turned Lone Wolf, shifted from the stable type to the transient type due to a schedule constraint and a dying down in the desire for recognition.

> I don't know, I think like when I first started it, it was more of a curiosity to see if I could get my cats a bunch of followers, partially like obviously they're my cats so I think they're really cute and everyone else should think they're really cute, I mean how many people can I get to like look at my cats, but, after a while it was like a little bit less of that and a little bit more of like I just enjoyed taking photos of them and I still do...I started this cat account now I just wanna maintain it and keep it going and yeah, and now I don't know like I guess now, I guess I don't think about it as much, like I do it when I can and like the purpose of like even keeping it going, I still like being able to share them with the world sometimes.

While Annie has not exited the community yet, it seems likely that she will due to the new time constraints mandated by her new job and the sense of realism which she has developed that seems to lower her passion for managing the account. This participant's case will be fleshed out later in the section on Lone Wolves.

CONCLUSION

As previously discussed, while the phenomena of microcelebrities who manage their own accounts have been studied by scholars (Abidin, 2015, 2016, 2018; Marwick, 2013, 2015; Senft, 2008, 2013), the literature still suffers from a gap in the shape of microcelebrity accounts managed by an individual other than the subject of the account. Abidin has ventured into the aforementioned gap by looking into micro-microcelebrities accounts which are managed by the mothers of the microcelebrity, however, the literature remains lacking as scholars have yet to explore the motivations behind the management of such accounts and strategies implemented while doing so. Furthermore, the act of managing a microcelebrity's social media account has not been classified by scholars within an ecosystem of performances which individuals take part in in today's world.

The findings of this thesis address both of the aforementioned gaps in literature. Initially, the phenomenon of a microcelebrity managed by another individual is explored through the context of Instagram cat microcelebrities. By conducting research on other mediated performances engaged in by individuals today, and collecting data through a Netnography of the cat community on Instagram and interviews with cat account managers, I was able to construct a framework displaying the different types of mediated performances which consumers engage in.

This framework was categorized depending on the activity's venue, online or offline, and whether a proxy must exist for the activity to take place.

Additionally, the thesis uses the collected data in order to better understand the dimensions of the aforementioned phenomenon. Firstly, my findings point to the presence of a cat community on Instagram within which these cat microcelebrity accounts exist. Secondly, cat account managers or CAMs were categorized into 4 different types within a process to demonstrate the motivations and strategies fueling the mediated performance.

Through the above findings, the thesis contributes in 2 fashions by expanding the literature of microcelebrities, virtual communities, and pet-human relationships, and addressing a palpable gap in the literature of mediated performance.

Contributions

Theoretical Contributions. Firstly, the research focuses on classifying the act of managing a pet microcelebrity social media account as a type of performance. The literature explored is that which investigates various types of performances participated in by individuals today: LARPs (Seregina, 2014; Stark, 2012; Tychsen, Hitchens, Brolund, and Kavakli, 2006), Cosplay (Bonnichsen, 2011; Hale, 2014; Lamerichs, 2011; Peirson-Smith, 2013; Seregina and Weijo, 2016), pageants for children (Dejmanee, 2015; Tofler, Knapp, and Lardon, 2005), online video games (Apter, 2008; Boellstorff, 2008; Klevjer, 2012), microcelebrities (Abidin, 2015, 2016; Marwick, 2013; Senft, 2008, 2013), micro-microcelebrities, and children of influencer

families (Abidin, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). By delving into the aforementioned literature, I was able to compose a framework showcasing the different types of activities participated in within an ecosystem of mediated performances. The devised framework was based on whether the activity took place online or offline, and whether it was participated in with the use of a proxy. As a result, LARPing and Cosplay were categorized as offline mediated performances non-proxy, and microcelebrities were classified as online mediated performance non-proxy. On the other hand, children pageants were understood to be offline mediated performances by proxy, and finally micro-microcelebrities and children of influencer families were seen as online mediated performances by proxy, the proxies being the children and the performers being the parents. Therefore, given the framework resulting from this research, cat microcelebrity accounts on Instagram were found to be categorized as online mediated performances by proxy within the ecosystem of the mediated performances of today. Thus, this thesis provides a framework for mediated performance which will allow future scholars to categorize a performance engaged in by consumers depending on its venue and use of proxy.

Secondly, extant literature studying the relationship between humans and their pets is explored in order to best understand how these relationships influence the pet owner to create the pet social media account (Archer, 1997; Hirschman, 1994; Veevers, 1985). Throughout my exploration of the literature and analysis of the data collected through interviews, I find that pet owners, much like those in the research from 20 years ago, still consider their animals as members of their family. This sentiment, however, is expressed differently in today's world given the opportunities which technology provides. In the context of a CAM, as a pseudo parent, the cat owner might create an Instagram account for their pet to share images of their furry children with the world. Moreover, given that these pets are considered family, the owner will

create the social media account in order to help elevate the status of the pet as a member of their family by equating them to others within the community who hold social media accounts. The aforementioned findings demonstrate an evolution of the previous pet-human relationship in order to adapt and make use of the technology of today. Hence, as an extension of the literature on pet-human relationships, upcoming literature can have a better understanding of the internet influence on how today's pet owners behave to express sentiments towards their pets.

In addition, the phenomenon of pet microcelebrity accounts are investigated through the aforementioned context and are found to exist within a community. By researching the literature on virtual communities (Kozinets, 1999; Martineau and Arsel, 2017; Parks, 2010; Haythornthwaite, 2007), I find that the cat community on Instagram is an interest-oriented community. In my findings, the cat community displays a consciousness of kind through the use of a cat-folk specific language, Meowlogisms (Podhovnik, 2018), engages in rituals and traditions through the celebration of birthdays, the use of cat-specific hashtags, and the sharing of the cat's story, and demonstrates moral responsibility through the welcoming of new accounts to the community, and the emotional and financial support offered when a CAM is struggling (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, I go a step further to find evidence that the cat community is indeed a community by evincing that it is not a public, due to the COI's interconnectivity, a tribe, due to the COI's long-term nature and strong bonds between its constituents, nor a subculture, due to the COI's lack of resistance and marginality (Arvidsson and Caliandro, 2015; Canniford, 2011). In the future, if a scholar were to look into a pet community on social media, they would be able to leverage this work in order to best understand the workings and nuances of such a unique community.

Finally, the thesis contributes to the current literature on microcelebrities by devising a

typology which categorizes pet microcelebrities account managers based on their desire for recognition and/or their desire for social connection. Consequently, 4 types of cat account managers arise, Fame Hound, Cat Herder, Busy Beaver, and Lone Wolf. Two of these types, Fame Hound and Cat Herder, are stable, whereas, the Busy Beaver and Lone Wolf are considered transient states due to their unsustainable desire structures. To clarify, a Busy Beaver must sustain the desire for recognition and social connection concurrently, however, satisfying both becomes impossible due to the fact that they work against each other. By satisfying the desire for recognition through follower numbers, the CAM loses track of the social connections made due to the increase in followers and the development of impersonality within the account and vice versa. Whereas, a Lone Wolf will not be able to retain their status as Lone Wolf because of their lack of both desires which will lower the motivation for a CAM to remain in the community. As a result, CAMs will always move away from a transient category back to a stable one or they will exit the community.

When it comes to the typology and the specific qualities of each categorization, the 4 classifications are varied due to their different motivations for managing the account. The resulting detailed typology is therefore a rich framework to be leveraged by scholars in order to explore other online mediated performances by proxy. Additionally, it would be advantageous to marketers as it would facilitate the process of finding and recruiting a cat microcelebrity on Instagram to market their brand or products.

Managerial Contributions. The above mentioned typology of CAMs showcases 4 types of account managers, Fame Hound, Cat Herders, Busy Beavers, and Lone Wolves. Given that Fame Hounds are primarily motivated by a desire for recognition, their goal is to convert their

cat from a microcelebrity into an influencer. Therefore, they hope to change their mediated performance from a hobby to a vocation (Abidin, 2018). This is vital to note, because it is beneficial for marketers of pet-oriented products to target Fame hounds as potential social media marketing tools given their interest in quantifiable metrics (Marwick, 2013). The aforementioned interest translates into wider reach for companies' promotions online. By avoiding Cat Herders when scouting a microcelebrity to promote or represent the brand and focusing on Fame Hounds, marketers will be recruiting the best promoter for their product given that the latter is motivated by a desire to grow their account in the attention economy (Abidin, 2017a; Boyd, 2011; Burgess and Green, 2008; García-Rapp, 2017; Marwick, 2013; Strangelove, 2010; Senft, 2013) through followers, and engagement rate. Therefore, the marketer would ensure that the CAM would spread their message extensively as they attempt to increase their popularity on Instagram as a means to accrue cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Furthermore, there exist companies which provide services to microcelebrities in order to facilitate their management of their accounts ("20 Social Media Management Software Tools of 2019", 2019; "15 Social Media Management Tools That Can Help Your Business Thrive", 2017). In addition, there are companies which act as agencies for human and pet microcelebrities with a medium sized following. These companies serve CAMs by connecting them with brands to promote in order to catalyze their transition from microcelebrity to influencer (Sorokanich, 2018; Taylor, 2018). These 2 types of companies, are bound to benefit from the typology of CAMs devised by this research as they will have a better understanding of the patterns of behavior attributed to Fame Hounds, their target segment. Consequently, social media account management companies and agencies will be able to optimize the phrasing and targeting of their advertisement toward their target segment of recognition-desiring Fame Hounds.

Another stakeholder to benefit from this research is the social media platform which hosts this specific online mediated performance, namely, Instagram. With this devised typology of CAMs and recognition of their existence within a community, Instagram gains knowledge about on a certain type of its users. As a result, Instagram can capitalize on the qualities attributed to each type of CAM in order to best cater to the manner by which they use the social media platform. For instance, when it comes to Fame Hounds, in order to facilitate the satisfaction of their desire to attain recognition, Instagram could hold online or offline networking conventions for CAMs, social media management companies, pet social media account agencies, and businesses interested in recruiting influencers to promote their products online. By connecting the aforementioned stakeholders, Instagram would be helping Fame Hounds satisfy their desire to achieve recognition, thus, perpetuating their use of the social media platform. On the other hand, in order to perpetuate the presence of Cat Herders in the cat community on Instagram, the platform could help those CAMs better achieve social connections between one another. For example, in order to ease the editing of photos in order to participate in other CAMs' celebrations within the community, Instagram could integrate its editing tool for Instagram stories into their post creation, thereby, facilitating the process of forging connections between Cat Herders within the community. Furthermore, Instagram could host conventions for the cat community both online and offline or even suggest cat-themed outings for Cat Herders to plan with other CAMs like them, thus strengthening their ties and perpetuating their presence in the community on Instagram (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

While the context of this thesis is cat microcelebrity account managers on Instagram, I believe that the findings and contributions can be considered generalizable depending on the phenomenon being studied. To be more specific, I believe that the findings of this thesis can be

leveraged by scholars who are looking to study other forms of online mediated performances by proxy on social media platforms.

Limitations

This thesis, while thoroughly researched and conducted, can be refined or made richer through the suggestions recommended in this section. For instance, as previously explained, Fame Hounds are interested in joining DM groups on Instagram with other Fame Hounds in order to increase each other's engagement rates, and follower counts through interacting with one another's posts. Despite hearing the description of the Pods through the interviewed Fame Hounds, I was not able to secure a spot as a cat account within any of these elite DM groups. This can be explained by my low follower count as @mainecoonking, and also due to my low social and cultural capital within the community. However, had I been invited to a Pod, I believe it would have provided more insight on the motivations of, and strategies implemented by Fame Hounds, as well as their relations amongst each other (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

While I was able to ask questions about offline interactions between CAMs via the interviews, I did not get the chance to conduct an ethnography in order to capture the patterns of behaviors and nuances which occur when Cat Herders meet in person. By collecting the aforementioned data, I could have further observed and described the strength of the social capital harnessed from their online relationships and how smoothly this social capital transitions to their offline relationships.

Furthermore, I was unable to secure interviews with big Influencer Fame Hounds who have attained mainstream media celebrity past their community, such as, Nala, Grumpy Cat, and

Lil Bub. This has presented me with a lack of data which demonstrates how the behavior of a Fame Hound changes once they achieve their much desired recognition. This is important because if a Fame Hound or other type of CAM reaches that kind of fame, the stakeholders involved in the account will increase to include companies, consultants, or agencies who manage the account, thus causing a change in the pet owner's role as account manager and perhaps their exit from the typology altogether.

Additionally, there exist conventions hosted in North America to celebrate felines through the sale of feline-oriented products, foods, and even through meet and greets with microcelebrity and influencer cats. Any data collected from this type of event on the interaction between the cat account managers of meet and greet microcelebrities and fans would have benefited the research by enriching the data collected on Fame Hounds. To clarify, observing the offline behavior of the CAM could have strengthened the description and analysis of Fame Hounds by providing an offline display of their motivations and strategies to attract potential followers to their cat social media accounts.

And lastly, even though I mentioned that there are states of CAMs, Lone Wolf and Busy Beaver, which are transient, there is no specific way to find evidence for their transience. I was only able to interview 1 CAM representing each transient type, and while it is proposed that the account manager will shift back to a stable state, Fame Hound or Cat Herder, or exit the community, there is no tangible evidence found in the data showcasing this type of shift. Therefore, these dimensions of the phenomenon need further research.

Future Research

Banister and Cocker (2014) found that fans can have one-sided relationships with celebrities. This allows for the existence of similar one-sided relationships between followers and the anthropomorphized pet microcelebrities social media accounts (Archer, 1997; Banister & Cocker, 2014; Hirschman, 1994; Veevers, 1985). Therefore, the next step following this thesis' findings would be to study the inverse side of the equation: the followers.

A followers' attachment to the pet accounts can be equated to fans' attachments to celebrities and their social media presence (Banister & Cocker, 2014; Freling et al., 2011; Horton & Wohl, 1954; Loroz & Braig, 2015; Thomson, 2006). This type of relationship is called a parasocial interaction as per Horton and Wohl (1956). The possibility of the follower forming a parasocial relationship with a pet microcelebrity could elucidate the manner by which this parasocial interaction strengthens the attachment of followers to pet microcelebrities as a form of anthropomorphized brands (Banister & Cocker, 2014; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Fournier, 1998).

This research paves the way for future scholars to study the followers of pet microcelebrities who are not pet microcelebrity account managers themselves. This would extend the literature on parasocial relationships, and microcelebrities by studying the unseen stakeholders who participate through likes, comments, and ultimately their development of a one-sided relationship with the pet microcelebrity.

Furthermore, the first contribution of this thesis is a framework of the mediated performances engaged in by today's consumer. While a framework is devised, the relationship between the motivations of each type of mediated performer and the venue and presence of

proxy is yet to be explored. By exploring the relationship between venue and how it satisfies the

performer's motivation, as well as the presence of proxy and its fulfillment of the consumer's

desires, future scholars will be able to explain why a specific type of mediated performance

satisfies the motivation behind the activity. For instance, a context to study would be how

LARPers and Cosplayers satisfy their motivations through offline mediated performance which

is also non-proxy, and not through other online mediated performance by proxy or non-proxy.

And finally, this thesis contributes to the literature of microcelebrities through a typology

of pet microcelebrity account managers. Since this thesis focuses on the context of cat

microcelebrity account managers on Instagram, the research can be expanded by studying a

different species, and a different social media platform. Future Scholars may be able to apply and

adapt this typology to classify other types of microcelebrity account managers engaging in this

online mediated performance by proxy, such as dog microcelebrity account managers, or micro-

microcelebrities (Abidin, 2017b).

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Hello,

My name is Ghalia Shamayleh and @mainecoonking is my pet cat. I am a master's student at Concordia University in Montreal under the supervision of Professor Zeynep Arsel. I am currently working on my thesis about pet accounts on Instagram.

I was wondering if you, as an account manager of a pet Instagram account, would be interested in being a participant in my research. What that entails is simply an interview with you that would last at least an hour and you will be compensated for giving me your time with 30 CAD.

The questions asked during this interview will revolve around your pet, your relationship with your pet, the reasons behind creating and maintaining your pet's account. The information you provide during the interview will be used in the thesis, but you will be referred to using a pseudonym, unless you tell me otherwise.

Let me know if you would be interested in being a participant in my research and we can arrange for a cyber or in-person meeting for the interview!

Thank you very much,

Ghalia

Appendix B

Concordia
UNIVERSITÉ UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	Ghalia Shamayleh
Department:	John Molson School of Business\Marketing
Agency:	Concordia University
Title of Project:	The Cat, the Account Manager, and the Follower: Pet-Microcelebrities as Influencers
Certification Number:	30008423

Valid From: October 05, 2018   To: October 04, 2019

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix C

Concordia
UNIVERSITÉ
UNIVERSITY

CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL ACCEPTABILITY
FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Name of Applicant:	**Ghalia Shamayleh**
Department:	**John Molson School of Business \ Marketing**
Agency:	**Concordia University**
Title of Project:	**The Cat, the Account Manager, and the Follower: Pet-Microcelebrities as Influencers**

Certification Number: 30008423

Valid From: September 29, 2017 **To:** September 28, 2018

The members of the University Human Research Ethics Committee have examined the application for a grant to support the above-named project, and consider the experimental procedures, as outlined by the applicant, to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

Dr. James Pfaus, Chair, University Human Research Ethics Committee

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