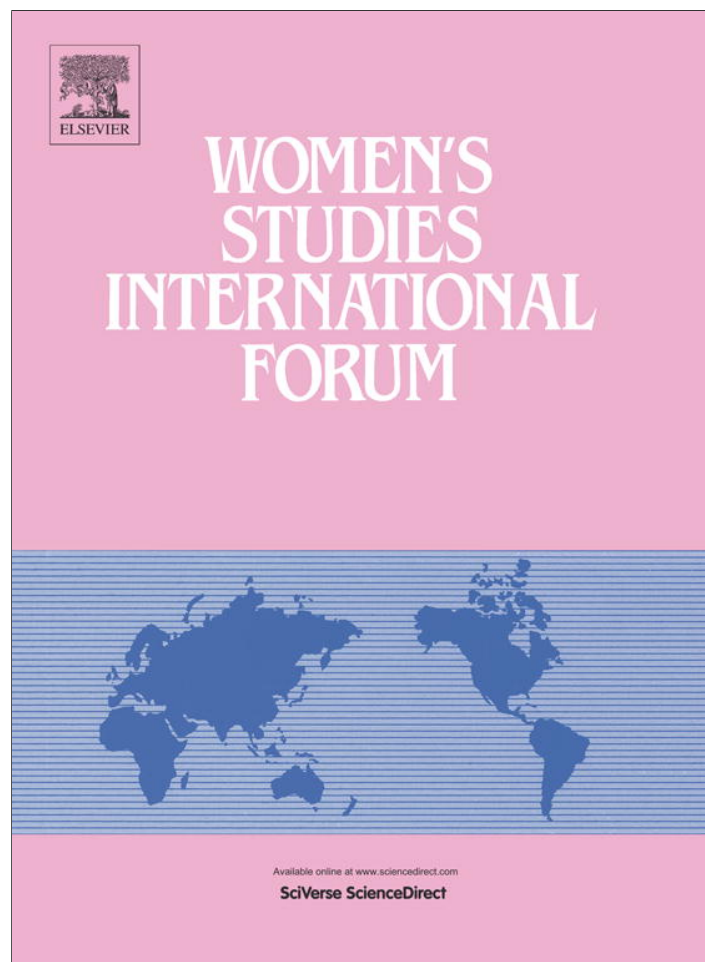


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## Buymylife.com: Cyber-femininities and commercial intimacy in blogshops

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## SYNOPSIS

Blogshops, online sites in which young women model and sell apparel via social media, have exploded onto the Singapore Internet scene. As an extremely popular form of e-commerce, blogshops have catapulted their owners and blogshop models to wealth and fame. The success of blogshops trades on commercial intimacies cultivated by blogshop models and the involvement of blogshop consumers in practices which economic anthropologist Robert Foster identifies as “value (co-)creation.” Whereas Foster and others have examined the creation of mass-mediated *product intimacy* around items such as detergents and soft drinks, we argue that in blogshops the micro-mediated (co-)creation of value rests on *persona intimacy*. Value (co-)creation does not focus on products per se. Rather it takes place around the online “micro-celebrity” of blogshop models and senses of homo-social intimacy between the persona of models and their audience of readers-cum-consumers. This focus on blogshop models' persona implicates both models and consumers in a homo-social discourse around emphasized femininities, in which women's bodies are subjected to a refracted male gaze carried out by women in the absence of men. This discourse within the commercial sphere produces powerful and disciplining effects for both blogshop consumers and the models themselves, thus highlighting deeply gendered intersections of femininity and commerce in online processes of value (co-)creation.

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## Introduction

Ever since they began gaining popularity, an online form of commerce known as ‘blogshops’ in Singapore has been noted for their tremendous commercial success built upon a large but apparently intimate, close-knit online community of women. Blogshop owners and models have gained success by reaching out to customers via personalized blog entries, in a form of “social selling” (*The Straits Times* DIGITAL LIFE, 2009<sup>1</sup>). These women produce distinct presentations of femininity on the Internet, which we term here *cyber-femininities*.<sup>2</sup> We define *cyber-femininities* as the portrayal and performance of female gender as mediated via the Internet and digital technologies. We highlight some ways in which women exercise agency in

the use of technology (Wajcman, 2000) and the role of information and communication technologies in empowering women (Kemp & Squires, 1998).

Like mainstream celebrity models, online blogshops entice consumers to desire and to seek, through vicarious consumption and emulation, the lifestyles of blogshop models who are young, feminine, successful and rich. Unlike mainstream celebrity models whose bodies are merely passively employed by major brands and companies to showcase designer wear, blogshop models are independent entrepreneurs who actively appropriate their bodies to craft an online persona through the everyday accounts of their lives on their blogs, in a bid to foster intimacy with readers and attract them to make purchases. As will be discussed later in the paper, blogshop models employ strategies to develop *persona intimacy* allowing them to remain accessible to their readers. Interactions between models and readers are framed as egalitarian friendships as opposed to more

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distant and hierarchical celebrity–fan relationships. In addition, blogshop models intentionally employ social media to personalize their interactions with individual readers. In contrast to celebrity models' mass interactions with their fans, dyadic relationships between blogshop models and readers are maintained by frequent email exchanges, emotive comments on the blogshop models' social media feeds, and even occasional face-to-face contact.

In this article, we analyze the economic and gendered aspects of blogshops by drawing together theory developed in the domains of economic anthropology, gender studies, and ethnographic, online media studies (e.g. Boellstorff, 2008; Whitehead & Wesch, 2012). We extend the arguments of Roberts (2004) and Foster (2007), who have written about the producer–consumer (co-)creation of value (surplus and profit) through cultivation of *product intimacy*, in which consumers pay a premium for products they love. In blogshops, we argue that an aura of *persona intimacy* between online blogshop models and their audience similarly (co-)creates surplus value and profit. Furthermore, we argue that this process of value (co-)creation through *persona intimacy* is best understood as an effect of a particular gendered and online environment. *Persona intimacy* is shaped by performances of *cyber-femininities*, homo-social desires, and a refracted (fe)male gaze, in which female participants in the discursive practices of blogshops monitor and discipline each others' bodies and gendered practices on the basis of presumed heterosexual masculine desires.

A distinctive feature of blogshop models is the unlikely combination of relative youth and phenomenal commercial success. The blogshop community comprises mainly women between the ages of 18 and 35, with the most successful and popular of the lot in the 20 to 25 age range. The business savvy and marketing techniques appropriated by blogshop models are usually informally self-taught and perfected through trial-and-error. They seldom undergo any formal business or entrepreneurship training, but instead rely on their own experience to explore what works and what does not. Most of them are also plainly imitating the structures and systems put up by other established blogshops and models.

In blogshops, women and women's bodies are both active consumers of images and passive objects of consumption, forms which Connell terms “social embodiment” (2002:47). Similar to beauty pageant contestants (Banet-Weiser, 1999) and erotic dancers (Barton, 2002), blogshop models are caught in a paradoxical intersection between “feminine objectification” and “feminine empowerment” (Reischer & Koo, 2004:312). But unlike the contestants and dancers, they trade on their femininity in relation to other women rather than in relation to male judges or clients. Attending to notions of femininity that highlight power and “reinstatement of the material body” (Martin, 2004:1263), in this article we examine the intersections of commerce and femininity in a homo-social domain as exhibited in the phenomenon of blogshops.

In evaluating the processes of commerce and intimacy in blogshops, we draw on recent work in economic anthropology. The cultivation of blogshop models' online persona is akin to Roberts (2004) concept of “Lovemarks” as a tool to build emotional attachments between customers and brands. Roberts argues that a product's lifespan depends on its ability

to command both intensive love and long-lasting respect from customers, through mystery, sensuality and intimacy, which are all evident in popular blogshops. Unlike the *product intimacy* evaluated by Roberts, blogshops foster *persona intimacy* with customers by cultivating an emotional attachment not to the products per se but to the online personas of the models via their blogs.

We build on Foster's (2007) analysis of “value (co-) creation,” in which he postulates that surplus (exchange) value is created through the process of consumption, by consumers whose agency and emotions lead them to personalize and invest meaning in products. An important distinction of blogshops, as opposed to corporate branding, is that consumers (blogshop readers and customers) invest meaning in the feminine persona of blogshop models more so than the specific products sold by the blogshops. We address the treatment of women's bodies when *cyber-femininities* are constructed, and when such “emphasized femininities” (Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) are consumed and made normative in a homo-social context through commercial intimacies. As pioneers in the study of blogshops, Fletcher and Greenhill (2009) dealt with the myths of e-commerce dispelled by bloggers and buyers in their interactions, but left out important implications resulting from blogshops being hyper-feminized spheres of consumption.

In the sections that follow, we first outline our methodological approach to analyzing blogshops in Singapore. In our analysis, we find that far from being uniform in their performances of online *cyber-femininity*, blogshops and blogshop models exhibit a diversity of femininities. This diversity fosters a sense of blogshop models embodying unique personalities through their online personas. We argue however, that despite this diversity, the blogshop environment subjects both models and consumers to disciplining effects of economic (value (co-) creation) and gendered performance. After outlining the phenomenon of blogshops in Singapore, we turn to our analysis of these regimes of economic and gendered discipline. In the first, we examine the processes of *modeling*, *role-modeling* and *role-playing* through which blogshop models set standards and cultivate desire in their readers-cum-customers. Second, we focus on the processes of value (co-)creation in the blogshops and argue that this process hinges on the persona of models rather than the products they are selling. Third, we turn to the role of the refracted male gaze in blogshops, which again ties economic value (co-)creation to gendered, heterosexual performance, despite the fact that the blogshop environment is almost exclusively female. In our concluding section, we discuss the implications of this analysis for thinking more broadly about intersections of economics and gender.

### Methodology and cyber-femininities

The primary research on which this article is based was carried out by Abidin (first author) from July 2010 to April 2011 and supervised by Thompson (second author). The authors have subsequently collaborated in revising this article to its present form. Abidin surveyed online forums, shopper communities and blogshop directories to obtain a sample of blogs for analysis.<sup>3</sup> In general, those sources document readership popularity by: (1) ‘Visitor count’ applications that log the Internet Service Provider (ISP) identification (ID) of a reader

and her time of visit, allowing bloggers to differentiate unique readers from 'stalkers' who repeatedly enter the site within the same timespan; (2) the size of a blogshop's mailing list, which shows the number of customers opting in to get first hand updates on new sales and enjoy membership privileges; (3) mentions in mainstream media such as magazines and newspaper articles, as well as discussion on online forums.

The sources used in this study are the most successful and popular according to the above-mentioned criteria and general consensus from the blogshop community across multiple online platforms. Our analysis focuses on a selection of five blogshops and eight affiliated personal blogs selected based on their popularity and accessibility for analysis. Of the eight blogs, one belongs to a blogshop model, four belong to blogshop models who are also owners, and the remaining three belong to blogshop owners. Because owners of blogshops also frequently model their own apparel in their personal blogs, we collectively term all eight individuals 'blogshop models'.

Among the selected blogshops and personal blogs, text and photographs constituted the bulk of the data. As online shops, these bloggers depend on "strong visual stimuli" (Dittmar, 2008:58) via photographs to convey the experiential consumption of the apparel marketed. Comments left by readers on personal blogs and by customers on blogshops were also analyzed, along with online forums pertaining to blogshops. Given that the blogposts and forum posts examined date back to 2006 resulting in a vast amount of data, only posts and comments published after 1 January 2010 were analyzed in detail to identify in situ themes within the visual and textual material (following Ryan & Bernard 2003). Only material publically available on the Internet without any restrictions to access is presented in this article. We adopt pseudonyms for blogshops and bloggers mentioned in the text.

Insights drawn regarding the relationship between blogshop models and readers were also informed by the Abidin's participant-observation among groups of undergraduates during their online shopping activity and at various flea markets and mass meet-ups.<sup>4</sup> A grounded theory approach was taken to identify categories of data, illustrated by "characteristic examples" (Glaser & Strauss, 1968:5). Employing Ryan & Bernard's (2003) techniques to identify textual themes, repetitions or "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978: 53) in blogposts were grouped together before a typology of *cyber-femininities* present among blogshops was created. Similarly, an analysis of blogshop models' online practices and dialog between models and consumers and among consumers was analyzed to produce an account of modeling and of homo-social disciplining, which we will turn to below.

The typological analysis demonstrates that performances of femininity in the blogshop environment are far from uniform. Blogshop models trade on online persona exuding idealized, emphasized femininities. As with other, recent work on femininity and masculinity, our analysis of blogshops moves away from a simple dichotomy between hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity on the one hand and subordinate masculinity and femininity on the other (Connell, 1987, 2002; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) toward a more nuanced view of diverse and complexly hierarchical femininities (Schippers, 2007). At least six different sorts of femininity became evident in analyzing the online content of blogshops. The 'family girl' portrays herself as a loving daughter and

stresses the importance of her tight-knit family. The 'material girl' emphasizes branded goods and other possessions in her online presentation of self. The 'globetrotter' blogs about her travels and adventures. The 'fashionista' updates readers on the latest and upcoming trends in apparel and accessories as well as beauty tips. The 'party girl' showcases her sensational nightlife and provocative (hetero)sexuality. The 'rebel' claims to reject social norms, including female body image, and expresses herself through verbal rants and expletives.<sup>5</sup>

These femininities – or modes of feminine expression – are not mutually exclusive, though certain blogshop models are known for highlighting one or more through their online persona. 'Alice' for example, exudes the qualities of a family girl with frequent reference to her mother, her family, and God. 'Cindy' portrays herself as a frequent traveler, pictorially cataloging her overseas trips. 'Fiona' openly flaunts a grunge, punk image replete with multiple tattoos and piercings. While these and other blogshop models perform diverse *cyber-femininities*, in contrast, for instance, to a singular hegemonic femininity or masculinity (cf. Connell, 1987; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), their position within the commercial sphere, as we argue below, produces powerful and disciplining effects for both blogshop consumers and the models themselves.

### Singapore blogshops

Blogshops dominate the Singapore blogosphere along with Nuffnang bloggers<sup>6</sup> and independent bloggers.<sup>7</sup> Popular blog directories catalog more than 5000 blogshops. Blogshops are usually small-scale and run by one to three blogshop owners. Owners take photographs of their products and upload them onto their blogshops with accompanying descriptions and price tags. Customers simply leave a comment with their email address on the blog, and wait for the owners to contact them to confirm the sale. Monetary transactions are done via electronic banking or Automated Teller Machine (ATM) transfers.

The blogshop scene in Singapore is predominantly Chinese, with a small proportion of models being of Eurasian or European descent. The language employed in Singapore blogshops is predominantly English. Our analysis does not extend to the very small community of Singapore blogshops run by Malay or Indian women who seem to engage in different strategies, as well as an upcoming trend of blogshops for men. The blogshops considered are all Singapore-based and we have not examined budding blogshop scenes that have recently sprung up in Taiwan and South Korea. As of 2010–2011, blogshops were a phenomenon largely unique to Singapore, first emerging around 2004–2005 (Fletcher & Greenhill, 2009).

While blogshops sell a wide variety of products including beauty products, baby products and even food items (*The Straits Times*, 2009<sup>8</sup>; *The Sunday Times*, 2011<sup>9</sup>), the majority sell ladies' apparel and accessories such as shoes, bags and jewelry, sourcing products from "various regional countries" (*The Straits Times* URBAN, 2010<sup>10</sup>). Blogshops appear to utilize the same few suppliers because apparel marketed is generally similar in design and style, and often even identical. In the same month, the same piece of clothing can be simultaneously marketed by no fewer than twenty blogshops that imbue different meanings in the product and sell them at different prices. The typical price range for blogshop apparel



is between SGD20 and SGD30. Popular blogshops may even be able to fetch up to SGD45 for the same item simply through more effective marketing techniques.

Apparel is either modeled by the owner or by women they hire. Blogshops only use one to three models in order to establish the 'face of the blogshop' with readers, and to distinguish themselves from competitors. The faces of some owners are never revealed to readers, especially if they do not appear to be particularly attractive or do not conform to dominant standards of beauty. These owners then depend solely on their blogshop models for branding. In this paper, the blogshop models discussed are either owners who were also models of their blogshops, or hired models who were already popularly recognized and accepted as the ambassador of the blogshop. Hence, in our further discussion, we do not distinguish between blogshops which feature owners as models and those which used hired models.

Almost all prominent and successful blogshops employ the strategy of crafting blogshop consumer intimacy through the personal blogs of their models. Hyperlinks to these personal blogs are visibly put up under banners or icons on the blogshop's main page or under their "About Us" section. At times, captions on these banners such as "Click to view behind the scenes!" and "Get to know us better!" are included. While seldom openly acknowledged as a marketing tool, exposure to the supposedly private realm of blogshop models via their personal blogs humanizes an otherwise impersonal commercial exchange.

Blogshops frequently refer customers back to their models' personal blogs for "real life pictures", "additional description" and "fashion ideas". Readers get to sneak a peek at "a day in the life" of blogshop models, with subtle suggestions that through purchasing apparel and accessories marketed by these alluring women, the reader can experience glamorous lifestyles and embody ideal femininities. This "halo effect" (Dittmar, 2008; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) – where desirable attributes unrelated to appearance, such as rewarding personal relationships, successful careers and bliss, become associated with a well-dressed and good-looking body – allows blogshop models to translate cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) of gender competencies (Connell, 2002) into economic capital.

Since 2005, the visibility of blogshops in Singapore's print media has showcased their exponential growth and explicitly feminized exchange. Blogshops even experienced a "boom" despite the 2008–2009 economic downturn (*The Sunday Times*, 2009<sup>11</sup>). Articles educating the public to purchase from (*The Straits Times*, 2009<sup>12</sup>) and set up their own blogshops (*The Straits Times*, 2008<sup>13</sup>; *The Sunday Times*, 2009<sup>14</sup>; *My Paper*, 2010<sup>15</sup>) have been streaming in since the mid-2000s. A string of media reports began highlighting the success of blogshops, particularly those run by young women in their late teens and early twenties. Successful blogshops reportedly earned up to \$10,000 monthly from sales (*The Straits Times*, 2008<sup>16</sup>; *The Sunday Times*, 2009<sup>17</sup>; *The Straits Times LIFE*, 2009<sup>18</sup>), with one particular store netting up to \$30,000 monthly (*The Straits Times*, 2009<sup>19</sup>) and an even more popular blogshop bringing in "a seven-figure sum" annually (*The Straits Times URBAN*, 2010<sup>20</sup>). Such mainstream publicity further feeds into the homo-social desire and fantasy constructed by blogshop models: a successful woman is one who is feminine, beautiful, and rich.

Judging by the disproportionate number of female bloggers turned up by local search engines, blogging in Singapore is in general a highly feminized field. In the blogshop scene, women aged between 15 and 30 are predominant as blogshop owners (*The Straits Times*, 2007<sup>21</sup>; *The Straits Times*, 2008<sup>22</sup>), blogshop models (*The Straits Times LIFE*, 2009<sup>23</sup>; *The New Paper*, 2010<sup>24</sup>), blogshop community reviewers and blogshop customers. Blogshops are an overwhelmingly homo-social environment in which women engage in emotional exchanges and commercial transactions with other women.

Blogshops and blogshop models engage in two related business strategies to entice customers into making purchases and sustaining brand loyalty among their readers. The first, which we outline in the next section, is a cycle of *modeling*, *role-modeling*, and *role-playing* which sustains a production of material desire among blogshop consumers. Second, to be discussed further in the subsequent section, blogshop models foster a relationship of commercial intimacy with readers and customers via products, presentations of self, and personalized exchanges which emphasize homo-social friendship and camaraderie, while masking the underlying business transactions motivating the exchange.

### Modeling, role modeling, role playing

In order to stimulate desire and motivate customers to purchase from their new collections, blogshop models engage in a cycle of *modeling*, *role-modeling* and *role-playing*. These modes of modeling are sequential steps, though not isolated nor discreet steps, in stimulating desire. Modeling is the first step, both in presentation of the model herself and in any given instance of product presentation. Modeling establishes the presence of both the model and products within the space of the blogshop website. Modeling is the most straightforward step in stimulating desire. Blogshop models pose for and post photographs of themselves modeling apparel for sale. After modeling is achieved, it continues simultaneously with role-modeling, through which blogshop models aim to set standards and impart to their readers skills of "gender competence" (Connell, 2002:81). Finally, in tandem with and building upon modeling and role-modeling, blogshop models engage in role-playing, in which they enact their femininities (Butler, 2005), further kindling desire among readers and customers. It is particularly through role-playing that blogshop models produce commercial intimacies in relationship to their customers, a point we return to below, after first elaborating the modes of *modeling*, *role-modeling* and *role-playing* through which blogshop models perform their *cyber-femininities*.

In *modeling*, blogshop models pose for photographs of themselves, modeling the apparel for sale, and post these photographs to the blogshop website. The photographs are accompanied by simple descriptions of the apparel including the fabric used, color, measurements and a price tag. We can observe several "bodily practices" (Turner, 1984) in modeling, all of which become "spectacles" (Richards, 1990) through the hyper-visual nature of blogshops seeking to entice and hook readers. Blogshop models carve out niche appearances to differentiate themselves from competitors. These distinctive elements vary from hairstyles and make-up varieties to highlighting distinctive bodily characteristics to poses and facial expressions. 'Gemma', for example, is known

for the styling her hair up in a 'bump' and for her defined collarbones; 'Heather' is known for her polished smile and 'crisscross' leg poses; and 'Elaine' is known for her fair complexion and pouty lips. Repeated emphasis of these body parts helps models to distinguish their appearance in the market. In addition to their niche appearance, models deck themselves in luxury brand shoes, bags or accessories to complement the blogshop apparel, which is the only item actually up for sale. Blending of high-end branded goods with cheap mass-produced clothing flatters and lends some prestige to the latter, persuading buyers to look beyond its often cheap substandard quality.

Blogshops also trade on mass media celebrity to stimulate desire in readers. Here, it is Hollywood or other mass media celebrities who are role-models, while blogshop models act as a conduit of cultural taste between international celebrities and customers. Blogshops pick out trends and styles from well-known celebrities and produce similar mock-ups for sale, creating a middle ground between seemingly unobtainable celebrity "high-life" and mass culture. This practice results in a wide array of "inspired products" — the blogosphere's euphemism for imitation goods. Blogshops afford customers the opportunity to own a garment "as seen on" a particular celebrity.

Whereas practices of *modeling* in the mainstream catalog and runway industry are largely passive, with the body of the model acting as the site of display or conduit of desire, models in the blogshop community take on more active practices in *role-modeling* and *role-playing*. In practices of *role-modeling*, blogshop models aim to set bodily, beauty and behavioral standards for their readers. Across all blogshops performing different *cyber-femininities*, models are predominantly tall (above 1.65 m), slender (under 50 kg and UK size 6 to 8), fair-skinned (either of Chinese, Eurasian or European descent) and have long hair (beyond shoulder length). Blogshop models subtly shift from *modeling* to *role-modeling* by setting the core benchmarks of body image across *cyber-femininities*. Alternative body sizes such as shorter, plumper, dark-skinned, shorthaired models are seldom seen, and even when evident, are not as popular among readers judging by their visibility and lifespan in the scene. It is a norm for blogshops to include their "model stats" (short for model body statistics) in their blogposts, with these figures closely conforming to a largely unspoken industry standard. Most blogshop apparel, though tagged "free size", is actually tailored to fit body proportions of blogshop models.

"[name], 1.67 m tall, uk size 6–8" (Size of a model from LESHOP)

"[name] stands 165 cm, uk 6–8" (Size of a model from OHSHOP)

"Model [name] is a UK6–8, 166 cm" (Size of a model from LOVESHOP)

Blogshop models are objectified when their attributes come to be detached and perceived as "objects of exchange" (Radin, 1996:156). Certain models utilize this strategy most often by overtly showing off their curves in the skin-tight apparel, implying that customers who purchase and don these outfits can likewise channel the same sexy vibe. Blogshop models also play role-models by offering beauty

tips and fashion advice to readers. Through the "halo effect" (Dittmar, 2008; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), readers perceive the model's choices and guidance as coming from women "in the know," having successfully achieved the unusual merger of "beauty and brains" as evidenced by their economic success in blogshops and feminine attractiveness (cf. Fletcher & Greenhill, 2009; Perrin, 1921; Prather, 1971).

In addition to setting body-standards and fashion trends, blogshop models role-model the performance of their (hetero)sexuality by giving readers relationship advice. Advice meted out is usually framed in terms of the models' own personal experience and supposedly private relationships. They give detailed descriptions of dates with their boyfriends before branching out into discussions on how girlfriends and boyfriends ought to be treated.

*"These 5 days without him [her boyfriend] I managed to successfully get lost in the area around office a couple of times (boo)... the space has made me realise how I sometimes take his presence for granted... he is truly the entertainer of my life. That my life would be entirely boring without him and his antics. and that is why I'm glad I made the choice to spend the rest of my life with him :) \*okay, mushy part over\*" (sic) — Brenda, 10 January 2011*

*Role-modeling* is accompanied by *role-playing*, in which blogshop models perform their femininities in a variety of ways to kindle desire among readers. One aspect of role-play and performance are instances in which blogshop models engage in playing dress-up to draw out social scripts of femininity (Laws & Schwartz, 1977; Wiederman, 2005). They suggest appropriate occasions for different types of attire and adjectives connoting particular features of the models' projected *cyber-femininities* are found in text accompanying photographs of feminine performance. For example, "power blazers" are intended for the workplace and channel the look of "strong" and "independent" women; tight-fitting "bodycon"<sup>25</sup> dresses are meant for clubbing and portray "sexy chic;" and maxi dresses are great for relaxing days at the beach and intended to conceal tummy bulges on "fat days." When blogshop apparel is personified and marketed as the dominant modes of adornment socially accepted by other women, the message is that readers' bodies too should conform to performances of emphasized femininities.

Role-play by blogshop models blurs the distinction between their online persona and real life identities. At times, models' activities offline are directed to manufacturing blogposts for readers online. In other words, models appear to be "on stage" all the time (Goffman, 1969) in order to produce something to blog about. As role-models, the lifestyles of blogshop models are objectified for readers' consumption when the models market apparel in theme with their private lives. Life offline, at least as it is reflected on the blogshop websites, becomes a stage for performing (role-playing) the model's persona such that online/offline distinction blurs or seemingly disappears.

Online reality is not a simulation of offline reality (cf. Baudrillard, 1994). Rather a model's role-play offline, motivated by online representations of her persona, produce a reality in which the online-offline persona of the model appears fused, one-in-the same, and therefore authentic. For

instance, planned face-to-face meet-ups and random encounters between blogshop models and readers are often fed back into the social medium through photographs and blog posts. As mentioned earlier, these interactions are framed as egalitarian friendships as opposed to hierarchal and distant celebrity–fan relationships. In addition, blogshop models' portrayal of their online persona is crafted through the narrative accounts of their everyday life, in contrast to celebrity models' staged performances on the runway or at media appearances. Authenticity, in turn, is an important element of the commercial transaction. Readers are told to “stay tuned” or “check back” if they wish to purchase the outfit the model wore on her birthday, to a certain party, or during festivities such as Christmas or the Lunar New Year. In essence, the blogshop models openly acknowledge that fans want “a piece of them,” and exploit the blogshop consumer's desire to emulate the blogshop model in the closest possible way.

### Commercial intimacy and value (Co-)creation

Constable's (2009) work on marriage-migration and domestic work has highlighted instances of the commodification of intimacy within the family and conjugal relationships. Similarly, Hochschild's (1983) research into the service industry revealed the use of intimacy in commercial transactions as a business strategy. Within the homo-social blogshop industry, we illuminate the commercial intimacies fostered in platonic friendships among women that have become the driving force sustaining otherwise distant and detached business transactions. We see this realm of commercial *persona intimacy* as closely related to and illuminated by recent arguments by economic anthropologists about value (co-)creation in processes of consumption.

In theorizing a shift from the creation of commercial, exchange value in production processes to creation of value in consumption processes, Foster (2005, 2007) has identified the role of consumers in value (co-)creation around products and corporate brands. Roberts (2004) proposes the concept of “Lovemarks” – “brands that are not simply respected and trusted, but loved” (cf. Foster, 2007:708) – as a tool used by mass market advertisers to cultivate emotional attachments from customers to their products. In order to differentiate their products from similar ones marketed by many other competitors, companies have to ensure that their brand name possesses a “special emotional resonance” (Roberts, 2004:74) for customers. In manufacturing “Lovemarks,” marketers stimulate in customers “an emotional connection and attachment to a brand that goes beyond reason – and for which a premium price can be charged” (Foster, 2007:708). This economic strategy is not only cheap but also brilliant because “emotion is an unlimited resource” (Roberts, 2004:43) and surplus value is created by drawing consumers into the process of co-creating that surplus value. Put simply, corporations cash in on customers' love for and attachment to their brand by selling commodities at a premium.

A distinction between the mass media strategies of large corporations and the micro-media strategies of blogshops is that rather focusing primarily on cultivating *product intimacy*, the blogshops and blogshop models cultivate *persona intimacy*; in other words an emotional attachment between blogshop consumers (reader/customers) and the models. We use the

term *persona intimacy*, as distinct from *personal intimacy*, as intimacy between persons (personal intimacy) is not, in general, driven by underlying commercial interests. In the context of blogshops, models engender emotional attachments to their commercially motivated *persona*. Similarly, *persona intimacy* is distinct from *product intimacy*, in that blogshops cultivate an emotional attachment to the persona of their models rather than the products per se. Their message is not simply “buy my clothes,” but rather “buy my life.”

For readers to identify with models and be stimulated to have material desires, blogshop models ensure that readers feel an emotional attachment to them. Whereas service industry workers engage in emotional labor at the point of service delivery (Hochschild, 1979, 1983), in marketing blogshop model's personas, emotion is affected in the context of commercial intimacy. We can identify at least four practices through which this sense of intimacy is produced.

First, blogshop models use terms of endearment to communicate with readers as a form of “girl talk” (Currie, 1999; Waff, 1994). The most commonly used terms include “dear”, “hunn”, “love”, “sweetie”, “babe” and “girls”. Second, blogshop models reveal sneak peeks “behind the scenes” of the blogshop industry<sup>26</sup> by intermittently displaying photographs of their businesses in action “offline.” Unlike clean, professional mass media photographs, these informal exposures range from candid model poses during photo-shoots to messy warehouses stocked up with goods. At times, blogshop owners and models are also captured goofing around in their pictures. Such “self-documentation promises or at the very least pretends to be able to promise... a glimpse at Real Life” (Kitzmann, 2004:116) which personalizes what would otherwise be a distant and detached relationship between blogger and reader.

Third, blogshop models delicately balance the portrayal of their luxurious lifestyles with the idea of their commonness in order to maintain readers' identification with them. While displaying their extravagant routines and expensive belongings to entice readers and produce envy, blogshop models also ramble on about the mundane to remind readers that they are “just like everyone else.” Examples of such points of identification include complaining about daily household chores and errands, and the hard work required to keep up their businesses. Similar to Dove's mass media print ads, which replaced professional models in favor of “real women” with “real curves,” blogshop models are “more interesting than actors because they are perceived to represent commonality” (Danesi, 2008:225). The marketing strategies of blogshops are essentially sensual in their appropriation of the female body – dolled up, cleaned up, and manipulated via photo editing software – to sell their apparel, especially focusing on certain body parts. Yet, care is taken not to have models portrayed as “too airbrush perfect,” because their realness and attainability are part of the appeal and intimacy constructed to encourage vicarious consumption in readers via the purchase of blogshop apparel (Peter, 1993; Sutherland, 1993).

Fourth, blogshop models carry the “virtual intimacy” constructed online into real life during face-to-face interactions with readers and customers. These direct exchanges usually take place at warehouse sales, flea markets, symposium discussions or chance meetings at clubs or eateries. In order to keep up the relational proximity with readers conceived via



the Internet, blogshop models still have to constantly produce and present their *cyber-femininities* in real life whenever they meet fans. This “public privacy” blurs the “divide that separates the public from the private” (Kitzmann, 2004:80) – which is the online avatar and the offline self – allowing readers to sustain their affection towards blogshop models.

Models, as they gain readers and customers online, shift from passively modeling or channeling mass mediated celebrities to becoming “micro-celebrities” (Powell, 2009) in their own right. Akin to mainstream corporations' use of mass media celebrities, associated with Hollywood, J-Pop, K-Pop, or Mediacorp,<sup>27</sup> as ambassadors to promote their products, blogshop models, who have gained the online, micro-media attention of blogshop followers, act as “micro-celebrities” in setting fashion trends and establishing standards of beauty. By garnering a cult following on online, blogshop models lend credibility and clout to the styles of apparel they don, which in turn increases the appeal of the products marketed. Blogshop consumers, as evident from a wide array of online contributions from comments on blogshop blogs to their own Facebook pages, feel both intimately connected to blogshop models and excited by the models' aura of micro-celebrity. Both online content and blogshop profits attest to the efficacy of persona intimacy generated by blogshop models. These effects, both communicative and commercial, are not produced solely by the efforts of the blogshops and models, but demonstrate the power of value (co-)creation.

Readers' consumption of blogshops and their affiliated blogs contribute layers of significance to otherwise cheap and mundane apparel, which translates to economic worth for blogshop models, and concretizes vicarious consumption for readers. In this new economy, “surplus value” (Marx, 1863/1968) is no longer solely extracted from producers, but has come to be dominated by consumers “whose meaningful use of the purchased products invests these products with the consumer's identity” (Foster, 2005:10–11). Customers are simultaneously producers and participants in the hype they create. Blogshops frequently announce the specific dates and times of their new product launches up to five days before the release, revealing only a few images or “previews” of their new products to create hype among customers. These strategies thus both unveil and conceal the mystery of blogshops. Customers of the more popular blogshops, as is widely discussed and observed in the blogosphere, camp by their computers minutes before the unveiling of new collections in order to be the first to view their *cyber-celebrities* in new apparel and secure their buys. These apparels are hardly exclusive given the range of similar items available from other blogshops. Besides, blogshops often hold backorders<sup>28</sup> for items that are sold out. This means that customers can pay in advance to secure a piece of the apparel when the next batch arrives. Nevertheless, the intensity and suspense of ‘camping out’ adds a layer of emotional value to the items of clothing, which as “commodities in themselves have no meaning other than the one shoppers give them” (Oh & Arditi, 2000:77).

The cult of “micro-celebrity” is another form in which blogshop consumers' emotional attachments produce a surplus of value that ultimately attaches itself to blogshop products. Readers idolize blogshop models during face-to-face interaction or chance meetings. In such “celebrity spotting” some readers observe and stalk blogshop models from afar, sneakily snapping

photographs, or request a picture to be taken together with the model. In some cases, readers post these exchanges and photographs on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter or their own personal blogs boasting of the elusive privilege of having met these blogshop models in real life.

In online comments, readers also commonly make pleas for blogshop models to reveal more of their private lives on their public blog. Readers complain and plead with blogshop models to update their personal blogs more frequently. This adoration of the “micro-celebrity” (Powell, 2009) is most evident in the comments section of the blog where a disproportionate bulk of remarks is requests for bloggers to make their appearances, personalities and commodities more “consumable” to the reader for a vicarious experience.

*“hi [name of blogger], you are really a fashionista!! i love almost every single outfit of yours and am dying to own your wardrobe. i bet i will go crazy looking at all your clothes!... you guys are my role models – young, successful, living a fulfilling life, doing what you love. can i get some advice from you on dressing tips? how to dress well, presentable and know what really suits oneself? thanks a lot.” (sic) – Anonymous, 16 March 2011, 03:24pm*

Falk's (1994) notion of “I consume therefore I am” succinctly captures the essence of such “ingestion” (Dittmar, 2008) which includes seeking beauty and fashion tips, asking about their relationships, inquiring about their latest luxury purchases, and most commonly, asking blogshop models to manufacture cheap knock-offs of the branded goods they own and display.

*“please manufacture all the clothes you modelled on [name of a website] for [name of blogshop]! I will buy all. I promise. Cross my heart hope to die. :D” (sic) – 20thoctober, 21 March 2010, 03:12 am*

*“GOSH!! [name of fellow blogshop owner] and u are really fasion icon man. and those balenciaga handbags/clutches are soooo preeetty!! it's so tempting..and babe!!... madness gorgeous. SG fashion ICON..esp loving ur corporate meeting outfit, CNY visit, gala dinner and wedding luncheon!! the Karen Millen Cocktail Dress for wedding luncheon is SUPERB...consider manufacturing for [name of blogshop]!! HAHAAHHAHAA=p” (sic) – sveltekiss, 20 March 2010, 01:53 pm*

Such emulative consumption becomes a reader's quest to create a fantasy world with “new” malleable identities – though this is often a mere reproduction of blogshop models' *cyber-femininities*-expressing a “romantic longing to become an *other*”; given that complete emulation is difficult to achieve, “consumption must [thus] go on in quest of a fulfillment that can never be attained” (Friedman, 1991:158, emphasis in original), hence engaging buyers in an ongoing consumerism driven by homo-social desires.

### The refracted (fe)male gaze

In this homo-social context, one might assume that the absence of men removes the pressure for heterosexual



women to discipline and perfect the presentation of their bodies. Instead, women have come to stand in for the absent man and play out an internalized “male gaze” – a phallogocentric scopophilia in which pleasure is gained from looking at women on display (Mulvey, 1975) – upon the bodies of other women, and with a greater intensity at that. As communicative peer groups, women come to imagine an ideal body in the eyes of an invisible male audience and socialize each other into internalizing these dominant sizes and shapes. They discipline each other's bodies by highlighting discrepancies between their communal goal and one's current state of the body. Although third-wave feminism – which encompasses an assertion that women are free to desire and refashion their gender identities (Genz & Barbon, 2009; Snyder, 2008) – takes pride in having women appropriate their sexualities for empowerment, such as to earn income in the case of blogshop models, a tension arises when only a small handful of women benefit from the commodification of femininity at the expense of the masses.

Readers objectify the bodies of blogshop models by compartmentalizing and evaluating their individual body parts. Sometimes, they provide positive feedback to blogshop models through comments approving their body images:

*“hey! i really love how u pin up ur fringe! it's very gorgeous. :)”*  
(sic) – janelle, 20 April 2010

*“hi [name of blogger], i love your complexion!”* (sic) – Anonymous, 01 Feb 2011

In other cases, blogshop models have met with judgmental comments. For example, “Fiona” has been told off by readers for getting “chubby” and “flabby,” while there has been a buzz among online blogshop forum users regarding “Debra's” apparently “fatty armpits.” Akin to Kilbourne's (1994) analysis on advertising and the obsession with thinness, the “tyranny of the ideal image” (1994: 396) compels women to nitpick at every portion of their bodies, culminating to a “perfect body” that becomes simply too unrealistic to attain. Such same-sex peer pressure intends to discipline the wayward female body but ironically sees women putting up with more self-inflicted pressure to adhere to higher benchmarks of emphasized femininity.

In mass media advertising, the female body has traditionally been sexualized and appropriated to market products including alcohol, cologne, and cars to men (Kilbourne, 1994). Intriguingly, this very same strategy has been imported over to the hyper-feminized homo-social domain of blogshops, and appropriated to market products to women. Women strive to construct increasingly disciplined versions of an ideal female body and apply the ideal to themselves and other women to the point that it becomes a perverse regulatory regime mediated online. Similar to cosmetic industry discourse on “how woman should look” (Scott, 1998:137), blogshop blogs, while written by women, also appear to replicate heterosexual masculine desire. At this level, tension exists between two classes of women: Blogshop models who set standards of emphasized femininity, and readers who consume these ideals and contribute to the construction of higher benchmarks of beauty through feedback to the models. Even though such “woman to woman” transactions seem to “bypass...a male

authority” (Bowlby, 2003:168), the invisible male gaze (de Beauvoir, 1953; Scott, 1998:139) is still at work.

The male gaze as traditionally perceived to be performed by men on women's bodies is re-enacted through a new (fe) male gaze. As individuals in heterosexual interactions, women psychologically internalize the male gaze and thus conform to socio-cultural expectations of emphasized femininity. As a gendered group in homo-social interactions, women intensify the internalized male gaze and discipline each other's bodies even in the absence of men. Such endless scrutiny engages the group in continual (self-)objectification and (self-)discipline which become homo-social norms intended to increase one's (hetero)sexual value. Regulation in the domain of homo-social interaction also encompasses an implicit competition among women, who are fundamentally vying for heterosexual attention and attraction.

A small minority of discerning readers are reflexively critical about the falsity of body images and *cyber-femininities* propagated by blogshop models. Such reflexive comments mainly concern the dominant body size among blogshop models:

*“is it just me or are [name of blogshop] clothes **extremely tight?** are the models like secretly anorexic or something? their fits are so unrealistic! i am a EUR38, mostly S size top and i cannot fit ANY of the tops i bought from them! not even this blazer that i bought recently... not to mention it makes me feel as if i am damn bloody fat, when i know in mind i'm not! just that psychologically i feel like i have to lose tonnes of weight to look as “hot” as them”* (sic) – issorandom, 24 December 2010, 4:11pm, emphasis in the original

Others criticize the use of photogenic models as opposed to “average looking” women or the use of photo editing software to generate ideal body types:

*“Besides, they edit their pictures so the fit of clothing we see on the models are not necessarily true. Made mistakes gauging like that but now I know not to trust their pics anymore (not like their dimensions given are accurate also, argh!).”* (sic) – DeLicaTe, 15 February, 2011, 10:14am

*“They really need to step up their game and not only rely on pretty models to make their pieces look good on the web whilst they travel around the world shopping for balenciagas n birkins! It has to be wearable”* (sic) – elle teo, 6 February 2011, 9:10pm

Ultimately, some posts reveal an acute sense of awareness of being exploited:

*“Well, at least you know the general sentiments of it being poor quality but overpriced clothing....most probably funded their material possessions. They wear chanel, balenciagas, LVs, ferragamos, Hermes etc etc while you're shopping at at blogshop?”* (sic) – bleep, 10 February 2011, 5:14pm

As consumers, the basis of exchange is the deficient female body that yearns for some remedy. Hinging upon the women's general inferiority complex, the sense of lack which breeds self-consciousness and low self-esteem is often

appropriated to stimulate more homo-social materialist desires. Reflective of Foucault's notion of biopower as "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and control of populations" (Foucault, 1978:140), women appropriate beauty products and apparel to enhance their body image. The internalized ideal that physical features and personas can be purchased with money to better one's physical body is a result of productive and diffusive biopower, that "touches [the] bodies [of these women] and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning process and everyday life" (Foucault, 1980:30). As "products of disciplinary practices" (Connell, 2002:37), women's bodies have shifted from producing commodities to being produced by commodities (Williams, 1998:754) or for that matter becoming commodities, as the body is in sex-work. In blogshops, as contrasted to sex-work, it is the embodied lifestyle of blogshop models, rather than the body per se, which is an object of consumption. Moreover, the small pool of blogshop models do effectively trade upon their own embodiment of desirable *cyber-femininities* and benefit economically from such exchanges. Blogshop models are hence pitted against customers in the extraction of surplus value, raising a challenge to traditional feminist thought that all women's interests are aligned (cf. Riley, 1988).

### Femininity, commerce and power

The blogshop industry is a lucrative form of e-commerce in Singapore. Blogshop models' use of *persona intimacy* as a marketing strategy is exceedingly effective. This would not have been possible if not for the country's well-developed technological infrastructure and stable island-wide Internet networks. The small and constrained space of the island also means that popular public gathering spaces for the young are relatively few. Meeting points between blogshop models and customers are usually large coffee joints or make-shift flea markets within the Central Business District (CBD) where young people prowl through rows of shopping malls in search of entertainment. In part, this geographical limitation has enabled frequent and intimate exchanges between both parties which breeds familiarity and maintains their friendship. Moreover, Singapore is generally affluent with an elaborate consumption-oriented shopping culture (Chua, 2003). In some of these respects, the success of blogshops and value (co-) creation through *persona intimacy* may be unique to or at least exaggerated in the case of Singapore. In other respects, our analysis of the blogshop phenomenon in Singapore has implications for broader issues of internet-mediated communications, economics and gender.

The phenomenon of blogshops raises important questions as to the empowering and/or disciplining effects of online interactions and e-commerce. Blogshops consistently condition customers into believing that they have the agency to refashion their bodies and make up for their inferiorities through apparel selections and beauty regimes. Young, feminine, rich and successful blogshop models guide blogshop consumers in their pursuit of the ideal female body, while other fellow customers in turn keep blogshop models' performances of femininity in check through evaluative comments. Through the choices blogshops offer them, are women truly empowered

or still being objectified? What is the role of homo-social intimacy in these transactions? Who really benefits from this performance of femininity?

The interconnected blogshop processes of commerce, performed femininity and value (co-)creation are sustained by a (fe)male gaze that presupposes a male audience and disciplines women's bodies into conforming to dominant standards of emphasized femininity, and thus, normative (hetero)sexuality. Power dynamics are in tension between men and women, but more crucially among women themselves. Blogshops exhibit an important intersection between creation of economic (surplus, exchange) value and embodied gender (feminine) value. The discourse carried out among women through blogshops draws attention to the (sexual) exchange value of women's bodies in heterosexual relationships, even in the absence of a direct male gaze. In our analysis of blogshop content, we find that male gaze refracted through the multiple lenses of models' displays and readers' comments. Moreover, despite the apparent diversity of femininities and individuality that blogshops seem to afford as a form of social rather than mass media, this diversity is subject to a critical gaze and commentary, through which models and consumers mutually discipline each other in reference to standards of heterosexual performativity and refracted masculine desire.

When the blogshop scene functions as an "affective community" or "emotional cult", women's agency and individuality are likely to be lost "within the collective body" (Williams, 1998:759) due to homo-social pressures to conform to hegemonic and legitimated performances of emphasized femininities. The relationship between blogshop models and customers is a site of tension, which models must skillfully negotiate. Blogshop models as "micro-celebrities," who are playing on the politics of envy to stimulate desire in readers, at the same time have to ensure that they retain their commonness to remain accessible to readers, who emulate them and buy their products because they perceive the ideals propagated by blogshop models as attainable.

Despite the apparent emphasis on blogshop-customer intimacy, the ultimate aim of these relationships is still to encourage readers to spend more and buy deeper into the notion of an ideal femininity, purchasable through material goods. As businesses, blogshops are fundamentally profit-oriented and the emotional ties they encourage are tied to business strategies. The dichotomy of intimate relationships as personal and selfless and commercial relationships as exploitative and self-oriented blurs when blogshops engage in commercial intimacies to sustain their customer base.

In sum, the relationship between blogshop models and customers can never be purely based on friendly intimacy. When the competing values of intimacy and business come into conflict, it is the values of business that win out. Intimacy has merely been appropriated as a marketing strategy for businesses to involve consumers in the "value (co-)creation" of their brands, over which the former (businesses, owners and models) hold exclusive rights and receive economic gain (Foster, 2007). Blogshop models' reproduction of emphasized femininities objectifies their own bodies, but also brings economic benefits and social mobility to these women (cf. Scott, 1998:138). And even in the homo-social, almost exclusively female space of blogshops, "the reality of beauty as power" (Scott, 1998:140) is that only bodies that align

themselves with hegemonic, heterosexually androcentric notions of gender performativity enjoy privileges.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See Heng, Edvarcl. 2009 "Social selling." *The Straits Times*, October 7, DIGITAL LIFE p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Cyber-femininities* or the performance of femininities in the realm of computer-mediated-communication should not be confused with *cyber-feminism*, which refers to feminist political activism and networking through the Internet (see: Sollfrank, 1999, n.d; Wajcman, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The main sources included: Bestblogshops, <<http://www.bestblogshops.com>> accessed February 1, 2011; Blogshopcity, <<http://www.blogshopcity.com>> accessed February 1, 2011; Blogshoppin, <<http://www.blogshoppin.com>> accessed February 1, 2011; Blogshopmagazine <<http://www.blogshopmagazine.com>> accessed February 1, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Abidin was herself a 22-year-old Singaporean in her final year of undergraduate studies at the time of the research.

<sup>5</sup> The labels we give to this typology (e.g. "fashionista") are drawn from the online discourse of blogshops; however the typology is neither explicit within blogshop discourse nor exhaustive of all sorts of gendered performances online. Rather, we are using this typology to demonstrate the sort of diversity found in the Singapore blogshops.

<sup>6</sup> Nuffnang is Asia Pacific's first blog advertising company. It sells advertising space on the blogs in its network of "over 100,000" (Nuffnang <<http://www.nuffnang.com.sg/about>> accessed February 1, 2011) subscribers to corporate clients selling products or services.

<sup>7</sup> Independent bloggers are unaffiliated to any advertising firm. They are run by individuals or communities who use blogs primarily for narrative writing, as opposed to blogshops that use blogs primarily to display photographs of items for sale.

<sup>8</sup> Luo, Serene. 2009. "Blogshops warned to stop contact lens sales." *The Straits Times*, March 10, p. A4.

<sup>9</sup> Koh, Xin Hua. 2011. "Blogshops haven't closed eye to contact lens trade." *The Sunday Times*, January 2, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Anon. 2010. "Click Chic: Her Velvet Vase." *The Straits Times*, June 25, URBAN p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Anon. 2007. "Blogging's not for all small businesses". *Business Times*, December 28, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Chiew, Kristie. 2009. "From blog to riches." *The Straits Times*, April 28, INS p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Ng, Jane. 2007. "Business-savvy kids turn blogs into e-shopping outlets." *The Straits Times*, January 8, p. H7.

<sup>14</sup> Anon. 2009. "11 tips on starting an online business." *The Sunday Times*, April 5, p. 21.

<sup>15</sup> Sia, Ling Xin. 2010. "Trust is the key to virtual-biz success." *My Paper*, June 21, p. A18.

<sup>16</sup> Lim, Pow Hong. 2008. "Cost: \$0; Montly sales: \$10,000." *The Straits Times*, August 14, p. B7.

<sup>17</sup> Lee, Xin En. 2009. "Blogshops venture out of cyberspace." *The Sunday Times*, July 5, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Ng, Magdalen. 2009. "Model owners." *The Straits Times*, September 27, LIFE p. 6.

<sup>19</sup> Teo, Eisen, Heather Lim, Chew Pei Shwen, and Lynn Yang. 2009. "From blogshop to flea power." *The Straits Times*, August 10, INS p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Anon. 2010. "Net Worth: BonitoChico." *The Straits Times*, June 25, URBAN p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Ng, Jane. 2007. "Business-savvy kids turn blogs into e-shopping outlets." *The Straits Times*, January 8, p. H7.

<sup>22</sup> Chow, Pamela. 2008. "Buying between the lines." *The Straits Times*, January 28, INS p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ng, Magdalen. 2009. "Model owners." *The Straits Times*, September 27, LIFE p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Chua, Charlene. 2010. "Payback time." *The New Paper*, June 27, p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> "Bodycon" is blogshop lingo for "body conscious." It refers to tight figure hugging clothes that explicitly show off a woman's figure.

<sup>26</sup> Anon. 2007. "Blogging's not for all small businesses". *Business Times*, December 28, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Mediacorp is one of the main local producers of media content in Singapore. "J-Pop" and "K-Pop" refer to Japanese Pop and Korean Pop, genres of music popular throughout Asia.

<sup>28</sup> "Backorders" is blogshop lingo for transactions that require buyers to pay in advance to reserve items that are not yet in stock but will arrive later.

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