2025-26 HIVE Summer Internship Project

Is there a typical Influencer 'face'?

Primary Academic Supervisor
Prof. Crystal Abidin

Project Background
The Influencer Ethnography Research Lab (IERLab) examines the socio-cultural impact of Influencers within the Asia Pacific. We produce original research on a wide variety of themes, specialising in the methodologies and pedagogies of Influencer research, the digital production and economies of the Influencer industry, and the socio-cultural impacts of Influencers on the subaltern. IERLab focuses on public scholarship, working closely with stakeholder across the globe including Silicon Valley and Asian tech companies, NGO groups, grassroots groups, and community organizations. As such, it is important that our research on Influencers is impact-driven, and that our scholarship can be translated to real-world applications to illuminate public discourse and understanding about Influencer cultures.

To this end, 'Influencer Face' extends from an IERLab-HIVE project from 2022-2023 'How Platforms See Influencers', to address the stereotypes and and issues of diversity in the Influencer industry. While the Influencer industry is fast growing across platforms, genres, and cultures, with promises of diversity and representation, this project is interested in interrogating what the yardsticks, baseline, and (stereo)typical perceptions of Influencers are, and what the average, normative, or median appearance of an Influencer looks like. Understanding this nuance allows us to question if the representational politics of platforms and Influencers do indeed generate an allowance for diversity, or if visual social media cultures and digital lookism still result in stereotypical Influencer Faces.

More crucially, the project interrogates whether there is a typical Influencer 'face' and what it might look like at the cusp of Generative Artificial Intelligence taking hold of visual social media, highlighting the importance of documenting organic diversity (and humanity!) at a time when it is being overridden by GenAI.

Project Description, Expected Outputs, Possible Stretch Goals

Close your eyes. Picture the faces of the 10 most successful Influencers whom you know. What do their faces look like? Do they share any resemblance? Have you ever thought about how you would look like if you were 'one of them'?

On social media platforms, visual filters are pre-set layers that users can use to superimpose on their own photo or video to augment their image. Some filters augment entire bodies while others focus on facial features and are known as 'selfie filters'. Selfie filters may be used in earnest, such as ‘beauty filters’ that enhance one’s appearance to fit various beauty standards, or used ironically, such as ‘clown filters’ which radically distort one’s appearance for amusement. There are also ‘prophetic filters’ which read a creator’s face before assigning them a specific distortion, such as editing them to be younger or older, fair skin or tanned skin, happy or angry.

The aim of Influencer Face is to create a set of selfie filters designed to reflect the typical 'Influencer Face' on different platforms and genres. The data informing this programming is drawn from a previously concluded IERLab-HIVE internship project from 2022-2023 entitled 'How Platforms See Influencers'. The endgoal of the project is a setup involving users standing in front of a screen, with a camera reading and projecting their face on the screen, and a set of options that users can select to apply different filters over their selfie.

Doing so will allow them to visualize how they appearance might be augmented should their facial features cohere with the top performing Influencers on specific platforms and in specific genres, provoking us to question if the saturation of the Influencer industry has resulted in a flattening of diversity or if diverse representation is still accounted for.

This project will be an important historical archive of what Influencer 'faces' look like at the cusp of the mass flattening and homogenization by GenAI.

Links to background reading and any relevant recent work in the field

[1] https://link.springer.com/book/10.1057/9781137476661

[2] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2056305116641342

[3] https://selfiecity.net/

[4] https://bobaebak.github.io/howplatformsseeinfluencers/showcase.html

[5] https://ierlab.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/how-platforms-see-influencers.pdf

[6] https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.kodestudio.filters&hl=en_AU&pli=1

[7] https://www.linkedin.com/posts/daily-ai-digest_artificialintelligence-ai-technology-activity-7220392474605699072-hxnc?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop

What type of visualisation will the student develop or produce?
The endgoal of the project is a setup involving users standing in front of a screen, with a camera reading and projecting their face on the screen, and a set of options that users can select to apply different filters over their selfie.

The visualization will be live video on screen augmented with a filter.

How will the visualisation contribute to your research outcomes?
Participants will be given a chance to reflect on the 'distance' or 'difference' between their actual faces and their filtered faces, hopefully with the opportunity to have both images juxtaposed side-by-side for comparison. This will provoke conversation about what facial features are considered desirable among the top-performing Influencers, whether there are patterns across the platforms and genres, and whether diversity and representation is still supported in the industry.

If the project is successful, where would you consider publishing the results?
Publicly-accessible editorial in The Conversation; Full co-authored research paper in Social Media + Society or New Media & Society.

Draft Project Timeline:

Week 1

Nov 10 - Full day HIVE induction
Nov 11 - Area and Project Induction with Primary supervisor
Develop project plan with HIVE and academic team
Literature and relevant project review

[Induction & ideation week 1] HIVE orientation, supervisor introduction, project overview, scoping literature review (research topic & methods); 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 2

[Induction & ideation week 2] Milestone 1: Complete written literature review, confirm data collection methods; 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 3

[Data collection week 1] 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 4

[Data collection week 2] Milestone 2: Brief written & oral report on data collection; 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 5

[Data analysis week 1] 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 6

[Data analysis week 2] Milestone 3: Brief written & oral report on data analysis; 1 meeting (online)

Week 7

[Report writing week 1] 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 8

[Report writing week 2] Milestone 4: Confirm outline of report; 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 9

Focus on report writing and presentation preparation

[Report & presentation week 1] Full draft of report; rehearse for presentation; 1 meeting (online or in person)

Week 10

Focus on report writing and presentation preparation
30th Jan Final Presentation Showcase Day and final report due

[Report & Presentation week 2] Presentation; submission of report; 1 meeting (online or in person)

Student Experience and Supervision:

How often will you meet with the student over the 10-week period?

One 1hr official meeting per week, with additional meetings to be added when needed. We will also correspond via email throughout the week,

Your work desk location and the location of student desk

My office is in Building 208, Level 3. IERLab has a room for our research fellows but our RAs and HDRs use hot desks. Hot desk can be organized for the intern in building 208 or 209.

Student Attributes:

Please indicate any preference for student's academic discipline or field of study

n/a – as long as the student has adequate interest in social science and humanities topics, and adequate technical skills for the project

What competencies are required to start this project

Intermediate - 2D image and/or video software (e.g. Adobe Suite, Sony Vegas)
Intermediate - 3D modelling software (e.g. Blender, 3ds Max)
Intermediate - Unity 2D/3D Artistry (assets, lighting, cameras, materials implementation)
Intermediate - Unity Programming (C# coding, animation syntax, debugging, problem-solving)
Intermediate - Unity Virtual Reality Development (rendering pipelines, scene content design, interaction)
Intermediate - Data structures, analytics, statistical modelling

Do you have any other student attributes you think are important to the project?

Initiative to drive the project, adequate writing skills to scale up from project report to journal publication.