

## VCBrags did one last thing before deleting their account: a frame-up

*Jeremy Arnold*

8-10 minutes

VCBrags was a Twitter account with ~76k followers that transitioned from good-spirited ribbing to punching down on women, minorities, and junior associates for celebrating accomplishments in a way that the man behind the account didn't like.

The account was deleted in today's early hours, but not before it was used to frame founder/VC Sahil Lavingia as the owner, leaving him with non-trivial reputation risk.

This article outlines the evidence for who VCBrags is, and calls on him to come forward so that an innocent man doesn't have to pay for a persona taken too far.

(For the few readers I have outside of tech, VC stands for venture capital. "Tech investor" is the longform.)

**[EDIT: I updated the post with more content after it went live, though it seems there was a weird caching issue that temporarily created [another version](#) of the article. All edits marked. Also note that the VCBrags account was reactivated with a [PSA](#) acknowledging the thrust of my criticisms here.]**

Because I know people like a good cut to the chase, here's a frame from a video uploaded to VCBrags last week:



And a companion tweet:



Pasquale D'Silva ✓

@pasql

fascinating cameo in the latest  
[@vcbrags](#) video, I wonder what it  
means?

5:22 pm · 25 Aug 2020 · [Twitter Web App](#)

I found a high volume of tweets between those two accounts going back to the origin of VCBragS, including several pretty explicit “this is who I am” winks that I can’t reconcile with a serious interest in preserving pseudonymity. While it’s possible that they’re not the *only* one behind the account, they seem to be a major/culpable part.

(I’m leaving their name out of the text for compassionate reasons, even if not entirely deserved. I should also note that my focus on public evidence here is not indicative of it being the only evidence available to me. I just judged it as sufficient.)

**[EDIT: Adding more evidence here, as follows.]**

- This DM came to me directly from the restored VCBragS account, admitting (though downplaying) the connection.



Working on a revealing blog.  
Most likely posting in 1-2  
weeks. it is going to be super  
underwhelming. [@pasql](#)  
jammed with me on a few  
ideas from time to time and  
part of the fun was to keep  
people guessing

9:22 am

- See a history of his tweets mentioning the VCBragS account [here](#), and the reverse [here](#).
- The below tweet was sent before I wrote anything. Bear in mind that Sahil’s commentary to that point was “I am not VCBragS”. He refused to mention who he believed said person actually was. So this tweet ([archive link](#)) doesn’t really make any sense outside of a trolling/winking context.
- Another direct wink ([archive link](#)):
- This tweet ([archive link](#)) falls in the same category of “what does this even mean if you’re not trying to signal your connection with VCBragS”:
- Combine those winks with the frequency/tone/timing of their comments back and forth (and VCBragS having directly admitted that they “jammed” together!), and I’m a bit incredulous at the suggestion that there isn’t a serious tie here. Again, this man might not be the only person behind the account. It could be a few of them having a laugh together, etc. He’s just the one who seems really interested in people knowing about his connection.

## Why This Matters

I'm a big fan of pseudonymity in principle. It allows for a freedom of expression that isn't always possible with real identities, which can be profoundly useful.

Two classic issues though:

1. People can become the worst versions of themselves when they feel insulated from normal accountability structures that come with using one's own name.
2. When people misuse pseudonymity they ruin it for those who really need it.

VCBrag was an unusually clear example of the first dynamic at work.

## The Downward Path

Let's start with something VCBrag retweeted a few months ago that I think we'll mostly feel the same way about:

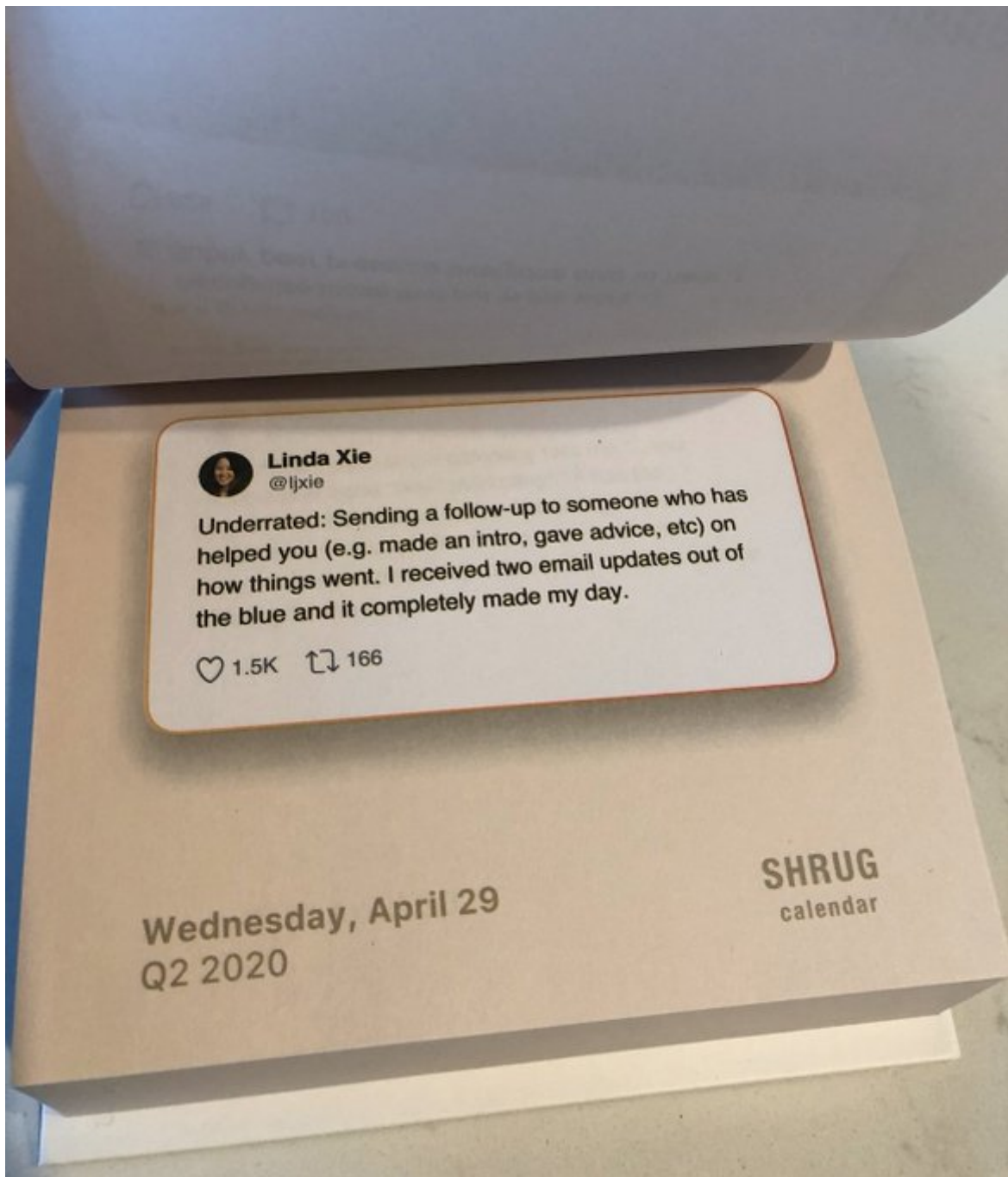
Look, sometimes people in tech say dumb things. If you look hard enough you'll find other examples that make you cringe a bit violently at the lack of self awareness. And while there are tricky competitive forces driving much of the humblebragging, some do go at it a bit hard, and there's certainly a level of pattern-matching that's a bit funny coming from the world's innovators. So, sure, I can see how some would find catharsis in an account that pokes fun at the worst offenders — *if that's all it was*.

The obvious trouble here is volume. There are only so many tweets that really meet the "ok I can't begrudge a bit of good-fun mockery here" bar. And when you have a novelty account dedicated to just one premise, a lack of content is a problem.

VCBrag made up the volume gap by:

- Shaming people for harmless/human expressions of excitement
- Setting up a bot to track deleted tweets from various VCs so as to pounce on bad takes despite them having been deleted for a reason
- Using workarounds to scour the accounts of VCs that had blocked them so as to find new things to pick on
- Promoting lazy one-sided criticisms of specific VC firms

Because the VCBrag account was deleted as I was finishing this section, I'm now the proud owner of a collection of a bunch of dead links. But I wanted to focus on one particular tweet where I'd saved the image prior. It was about a woman reacting to something she'd written having been printed in a popular VC calendar:



How is this the sort of message we want to shame? What good is there in being mean in the face of someone's honest joy?

**[EDIT: Now that the account is restored, I'm able to archive the links I'd pulled earlier. Above one [here](#). Even though their PSA admits to my criticisms, I figured more examples would be good. You can get a taste [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).]**

Pseudonymous accounts are increasingly popular on Twitter. Most of them descend into this sort of predictable toxicity. In the absence of having to be at least somewhat cautious and fair in what one attacks or theorizes, many quite reliably become a much worse alternative to that which they originally meant to criticize.

One last one (in reference to yet another VCBrags dunk on a normal tweet):

Having gone through all of VCBrags's 2020 tweets before he nuked the account, this was my question too. Somewhere early on this project went from parody to something dark, and the internet is better for it being gone.

Anyway, it gets worse.

## The Implosion

To give context to the video you're about to see:

- Sahil, the founder of Gumroad, is now also a VC **[Edit: I originally said Guntree, which is as totally different company; added to correction tracker [here](#)]**
- The person behind VCBrags posted and then deleted a tweet on Saturday morning as if they were Sahil
- The intended effect was that readers would think Sahil had access to both accounts, forgot which one he was using, then panic-deleted when he realized he'd posted something about his real identity
- The offender knew that people would screencap the tweet immediately (as it would look to them like they'd finally cracked who was behind the account, and they'd expect it to be deleted quickly)
- If you're wondering why Sahil was targeted, it likely has to do with his [tweet last week](#) about having uncovered VCBrags's identity
- It's possible that this was meant as a joke, and that VCBrags didn't think through how it would look to people in tech (many of whom are somewhere between angry and disgusted at what VCBrags became, and would thus be likely to view "one of their own" being responsible as particularly grotesque)
- Even if it was intended to be a joke, it became obvious pretty quickly that people were treating Sahil with a hostile suspicion (VCBrags engaged with some of those threads, so they knew it was happening)
- Instead of doing the right thing, the person behind VCBrags just nuked the account in the late/early hours (around 1-2am PT this morning)

That context in mind, here's a video that shows the offending tweet (I don't know anything about the account that posted it; I don't think they're relevant here):

There's an old saw about "success taking you where character can't sustain you". I suspect that VCBrags was indeed created for harmless reasons, and that the man behind it just lost control. But he ignored the hurt it was causing, and while deleting it was a commendable decision (if not when/how it was done), there's another step to be taken here. I hope he comes forward, and that we give him a way forward in return.