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A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE FEMALE TIKTOK INFLUENCER: HOW SMIs
ALTER THEIR IMAGE AND SELF-PRESENTATION BASED ON THEIR
COMMUNITIES

By

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B.A., Mount St. Joseph University, 2020

A Thesis
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A Thesis Approved on

April 19, 2022

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ABSTRACT

DO SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS ALTER THEIR IMAGE AND SELF-PRESENTATION ONLINE BASED ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES?

Sydney R. Dotson

April 19, 2021

Influencer marketing is a growing industry on social media platforms, like TikTok. Influencers have the power and authority to control the purchases and habits of their audiences, however, the communities of these followers can be just as influential. According to *TikTok For Business* (2021), “part of the excitement of [TikTok] is derived from people having the power to choose the spaces they want to be part of, and the content they want to interact with.” The purpose of this study is to determine if social media influencers alter their image and self-presentation based on their community. The study examines the TikTok accounts of two popular social media influencers who use TikTok to post video content for fun and share brand deals with their followers. Each of these influencers is 21 years old or younger and has an audience of mostly girls between the ages of 13 and 24. To determine if being an influencer means altering personal image on social media, researchers will examine their TikTok posts and comments to gather a deeper understanding of the SMIs when they began posting, how their content has changed, and what actions could have affected those changes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Influencer marketing is increasing continuously on social media, and with more influencers appearing as videos go viral and new platforms are created, more discount codes and promotional ads are constantly being promoted to younger generations. A survey from GlobalWebIndex discovered that members of Generation Z and Millennials were more likely to buy products because an influencer posted about that product on social media (Droesch, 2020). Teens and young adults find more inspiration from their favorite influencers than anyone else, and because of this, they are more likely to spend their time watching their videos and looking at their posts, which in turn leads to the individual trusting these Social Media Influencers, or SMIs. Specifically, platforms like TikTok are changing the industry and the way influencer marketing works. According to *TikTok For Business*, as of December 2021, the app had over 1 Billion users globally. TikTok embraces the idea that creators and communities drive the culture that younger generations are looking for: community, authenticity, and participation (TikTok For Business, 2021).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

The world of influencer marketing has been defined and explored for centuries. One of the earliest examples of influencer marketing stems from the late 1700s when King Henry encouraged his people to purchase Wedgewood pottery during a thriving ceramic market (Kennedy, 2021). Other popular examples of influencer marketing include Santa Clause, The Marlboro Man, and of course celebrities and athletes (Marsden, 2019). According to Meltwater, a company that provides social media analytics, it was not until the digital age with the rise of consumer opinion that influencer marketing became intertwined with social media (Kennedy, 2021).

In the late 90s, Amazon began offering affiliate marketing programs. Soon after, mommy blogs and opinion pages began rising to popularity. Since the digital age was allowing for real voices to speak about any topic imaginable, brands realized they could create organic growth partnering with these relatable individuals (Kennedy, 2021). With the growth of the internet and social media, brands also realized that real people could increase organic growth over their previous influencers because they offered trust and credibility to the public. This is when social media influencers as we know them came to fruition.

According to Chloe Ki and Youn-Kyung Kim (2019), today, “Social Media Influencers are people who have established credibility with large social media audiences

because of their knowledge and expertise on particular topics, and thereby exert a significant influence on their followers' and peer consumers' decisions" (p. 905). Compared to celebrity endorsements, Ki and Kim assert that influencers are more relevant, because they are constantly sharing information about their daily lives and are more relatable to their audience. For example, the average micro influencer, who according to Karen Freberg (2021) has between 10,000 and 50,000 followers, "are viewed as more authentic, are more inspired by the content they create...[and] are more engaged with their audiences" (p. 190). Micro influencers have the ability to create smaller communities and in turn gain the trust of their audiences, making it easier to work with brands.

A more recent definition from Influencer Marketing Hub suggests that Social Media Influencers are "people who have built a reputation for their knowledge and expertise on a specific topic" (Geysler, 2021). They typically partner with brands because they can create trends and encourage their followers to purchase the brand's product or service, making them the ideal marketing tool. For this research, the definition of a social media influencer, or SMI as it will be referred to from now on in this paper, is *anyone with a following on social media who has the ability to persuade their audience to purchase a service or product from a brand due to their credibility and trustworthiness.*

In recent years, brands have set aside large budgets to reach audiences on social media; a majority of this advertising comes directly from influencer endorsements. As Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2020) have asserted, "influencers do not only have the power to directly influence the purchase decisions of a large audience, but their followers

also judge them to be reliable information sources” (p. 260). Lin, Bruing, and Swarna (2018) also suggest that mostly female social media users have gained a large following and turned social media into a profession by sharing their self-generated content on popular topics such as beauty, fitness, food, and fashion.

As previously discussed, the social media influencer shares their daily life through images on platforms such as Instagram and through daily vlogs on platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. As they share their daily lives—which are often embellished to show their best self—they are creating a niche community with their followers. For example, SMI James Charles, who is a beauty guru on Instagram, YouTube and—most recently—TikTok, calls his followers “Sisters.” He introduces his videos by saying, “Hi Sisters” and even features the word written on his merchandise (Charles, 2017). Creating a community like Charles has done, allows creators to gain a sense of trust with their followers and influence them to purchase a product or service that they are promoting—either their own or another brand’s.

The Evolution of Influencers: 2000s to Now

In the early to mid 2000s, the influencer looked very different than they do today. Paris Hilton quickly became a pop culture icon on her rise to fame, practically inventing the social media influencer and defining how users, think about social media. Hilton has been given the title of the #OriginalInfluencer mainly due to her ability to influence over 14 million followers to buy any product, even a fake one like NanoDrop, which was a fictitious sparkling water (Netflix, 2018). Paris has always felt like she was ahead of her time. In an interview with the Observer earlier this year, Paris said, “I love seeing how something I thought of many years ago is now actually like turned into a new genre of

celebrity...anyone with a phone and a talent has the chance to build a career and a brand out of it (Simonetti, 2022). She's even joked that she invented the selfie, but feels guilty about "creating a monster" (Wang, 2020).

Girls have always wanted to follow in Hilton's footsteps—they've wanted to be her. According to her sister, "young girls are now running around getting styled head-to-toe to pick up Starbucks" (Sharf, 2019). Everywhere that Paris Hilton went out, the paparazzi followed. In an interview with Larry King, when asked why people are so interested in her, Paris said, "I don't know. From the moment I wake up until I go to sleep, they are outside my house, following me all day long" (Netflix, 2018).

Hilton's rise to fame came before social media, but the public narrative about her switched when her sex tape was released and she was criticized by the media. Due to this brief moment in her career, the public quickly shifted their favor. Even so, Paris believes this was the turning point for her profession, stating, "I felt that when that man put out that tape, it basically took that [respect] way from me because, for the rest of my life, people are going to judge me and think of me in a certain way just because of a private moment with someone that I trusted and loved" (Scharf, 2019). Not only did she deal with criticism, she also had to be someone she wasn't for most of her life. While she's excited about the potential of the career she created, she talks about dealing with her fake persona following her reality show *The Simple Life*. According to her documentary, *This is Paris*, she feels responsible for the unrealistic personification of influencers on social media. "I always had to project what the public want[ed]...and now I see little girls...they're trying to get the perfect selfie, they're putting the filters on, they can't even

look at themselves [on] the phone without putting a filter. I can't even imagine being a 13-year-old girl today (Wang, 2020).

Even though Hilton faced such a hardship in her career, behind the scenes she was creating the present-day influencer. According to Dotson and Ashlock (2021), "Since her time on reality television, Paris was creating her personal brand behind the scenes and taking her narrative back into her own hands...[s]he continues to build her brand that includes forty-five stores, a fragrance line, nineteen product lines, and a skin care line, all while creating a new celebrity: the influencer" (Dotson and Ashlock, 2021, p.2). In 2022, Paris is trying to build a new persona for herself: her real personality. She's using her own voice and she said she's done being the dumb blonde. Even now, she's still predicting the next big trends, recently getting into NFTs, according to the Observer (Simonetti, 2021).

Since Paris's creation of the social media influencer, many have followed in her footsteps, such as Kim Kardashian, Lindsay Lohan, and Britney Spears. While women like Kim Kardashian have been successful, continuing to build massive careers out of their social media fame, others like Lohan and Spears have faced plenty of hardships. Britney Spears has spent over 30 years in the spotlight, as a child star and later a pop star. Most recently, she's been in the spotlight for legal battles over her independence. In 2008, after a series of incidents following her divorce and years of stardom, Spears lost custody of her kids, and Britney's father was named her conservator by the court system, according to Megan McCluskey of Time Magazine (2021).

A conservatorship, according to the California Courts, is "where a judge appoints a responsible person or organization to care for another adult who cannot care for himself

or herself or manage his or her own finances” (California, 2002). After being in a conservatorship for most of her adult life and being labeled by the public as unable to take care of herself Britney has been fighting for her autonomy since 2019. Fans have tried to fight for her freedom with websites like *Freebritney.net* popping up as early as 2009 (Betancourt, 2021). However, the #FreeBritney movement has only picked up on social media since Britney gained access to her social media account and fans perceived that the conservatorship was doing harm to the star’s mental health. Even other celebrities were speaking up. Paris Hilton said this on *Andy Cohen Live*, “I feel like if you are an adult you should be able to live your life and not be controlled. I think that maybe stems from me being controlled so much so I can understand how that would feel and I can't imagine right now if that was still happening to me” (Betancourt, 2021).

In November of 2021, Britney Spears’ conservatorship was finally suspended and she gained control of her life again, according to CNN (Melas, 2021). While Britney is a particularly tragic example of controlled self-presentation, what Paris said on *Andy Cohen* stands true for many influencers past and present: they feel controlled. Whether it’s by their managers or their fans, influencers feel the need to adjust their identity on social media in order to gain popularity and respect from their communities—they especially don’t want to be canceled. The stress of this pressure can often lead to breakdowns like those of Lindsay Lohan, or Britney Spears in 2008. This study will specifically look at how SMIs like TikTokers present themselves on social media to gain positive reactions from their audiences.

Social Comparison and Self-Presentation on Social Media

Social Comparison

It is human instinct to compare ourselves to others. We compare ourselves to our peers every day, but having the ability to compare ourselves to celebrities and influencers constantly as we scroll through apps like Instagram and TikTok, could have adverse effects on our mental health and contribute to the ways we present ourselves online. According to Galen Panger (2014), social comparison itself “is the basic human tendency to feel good or bad about ourselves on how we compare to others” (p. 2095). While it is human instinct to want to compare ourselves to not only our peers, but SMIs as well, those who have “a lower mental well-being are more likely to compare themselves, especially on social media platforms like Facebook” or Instagram (Dotson, 2019). In their article titled, “Social Comparison as the thief of joy: Emotional consequences of viewing strangers Instagram posts,” de Vries et al., suggests that there is “a growing body of research studying social media from a social comparison perspective [which] suggests that browsing others’ positive posts has negative effects on mood through envy and the feeling that others have a better life” (2018, p.2).

However, these posts, or even comments do not have the same effect on each of us due to individual differences in the way that we process messages (de Vries, et al., 2018). According to social comparison theory, individuals use information from social situations to learn about their own situations and compare themselves and their lives to others (Festinger, 1954). In terms of social media, there are mass amounts of social information for individuals to compare themselves to, which is why many university

students told interviewers that they compared themselves to others on social media (Fox and Moreland, 2015).

The idea of social comparison can be related to the Easterlin Paradox: the idea that people will not get happier just because they become richer. Much like this paradox, social comparison will never make us happy with ourselves—our body image, the things we own, our friends—because we are constantly comparing ourselves to our peers or SMIs on social media. Dotson (2019) asserted that the images and text that we see on our social media feed affects the user immensely. “When we see that others are enjoying a vacation in the Bahamas, one of our friends from high school just got engaged, or maybe someone got a promotion at work, we compare our current life to theirs. [Those types of posts] can affect our satisfaction of life and our happiness” (p. 3).

Social comparison online has both negative and positive affects for our individual experiences. According to de Vries et al., negative affects is an experience that causes an individual to have aversive emotions like hostility or fear, while positive affect is when an individual reacts with enthusiasm (2018). With social comparison, an individual decides whether they should feel worse or better than the target they are comparing themselves against. Especially in situations of upward comparison, especially, individuals tend to react with negative affect. In the world of social media, this upward comparison happens between individuals and SMIs. According to Petya Eckler, Yusuf Kalyango, and Ellen Paasch (2017), “when a woman compares herself to someone who is rated higher on an attribute, then this comparison would be upward, while measuring herself to someone who scores lower would involve a downward comparison” (p. 251).

According to Jiyoung Chae, “social comparison requires similarities between comparers and the target of comparison. Thus, women might be more interested in female influencers than men are” (2018, p.3). Chae and other academics believe that the topic is more meaningful to women due to a majority of influencers in previous studies being female and the idea that self-presentation online is based in post-feminist logic (Chae, 2018). Post-feminism is often characterized by the rationality to see femininity as “bodily property” which supports the sexual freedom of women (Gill, 2007). Since comparison is happening directly on social media, those who are SMIs or follow SMIs closely are more prone to social comparison and negative affect. In turn, they may choose to present themselves a certain way online to reverse those negative feelings.

Self-Presentation

According to Lauren R. Smith and Jimmy Sanderson (2015), self-presentation dates back to the early 1960s when Erving Goffman asserted that “people functioned as performers, expressing their identity through verbal and non-verbal messages with a goal to display the most credible image to audiences” (p. 343). In other words, self-presentation is done to ultimately reach a goal of the individual. The rise of social media has led to influencers, celebrities, and athletes relying on their public image and how the public perceives them (Smith and Sanderson, 2015, p. 344).

SMIs often post the best parts of their lives on social media. They typically keep the mundane, day-to-day stuff offline, to keep up the persona of their “best-self.” When we compare ourselves to their “best-self” it can often make users feel a dissatisfaction of life and in turn causes a cycle of comparison; we revert to comparing ourselves to others even more. Then, because we know that our peers are comparing their lives to ours, we

only share the best parts of our life online, and for just a moment, we get a dose of serotonin and a brief increase of overall satisfaction of life—until we start scrolling again and once again we feel envy, jealousy, and lower self-esteem. For example, according to Alicia Eler’s (2017) *The Selfie Generation: How our self-images are changing our notions of privacy, sex, consent, and culture*:

A great selfie takes work. You rarely get a good one on the first try. Selfie sessions can last anywhere from one minute to one hour...posting and receiving validation is not a bad thing. It’s human nature to #connect, to want to be seen. That said, I notice that if I get likes on selfies, I do feel a sense of validation. And I feel good—science has proven it so. Selfies provide me quick affirmation, like receiving a smile from a stranger. But, when I use the quick hit of a selfie too often, something else starts to happen. Too much looking in the selfie mirror can wear my perception of self, sending me into a downward spiral rather than the reward of pleasant reflection (p. 10).

The core of social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok is that a person chooses to present themselves in a positive idealized way. On Facebook, when people share themselves going to interesting events, or the positive things that are happening in their lives, it potentially makes their friends feel a dissatisfaction toward their own lives (Hawi and Samaha, 2017). However, on Instagram, the focus of presenting your idealized self, or your “best self” becomes more about appearance than about the positive and interesting things going on in your life. Editing your images on the app has become the norm.

Apps like Lightroom and Facetune have become popular among Instagram users because they give the user the ability to add filters and edit their appearance before posting their pictures to the app. For example, Facetune allows users to edit their waist to be smaller, or their breasts and butt to be larger. This, then, creates an unrealistic body image that could negatively impact women, especially teens. (Eckler et al, 2017, p. 250). Posting selfies and editing videos and photos allows for SMIs to achieve a positive social identity amongst their communities. According to “Do you filter who you are?,” “research shows that people modify their self-presentation to be more favorable with strangers” (2018). In other words, they create exaggerated versions of themselves in order to create positive images online.

When women use unrealistic beauty standards to compare themselves to SMIs and their peers, they tend to have a negative view of themselves, which in turn could create low self-esteem and mental and physical health issues for young girls and teens. According to Hawi and Samaha (2017) self-esteem is “an individual’s positive or negative evaluation of [him] or herself” (p. 577). While previous studies have examined how social media as an entity affects self-esteem, the purpose of this study is to look directly at how SMIs and the way they portray themselves on social media and whether or not they directly alter their image and self-presentation based on the communities that follow them.

For scholars like Alicia Eler (2017), being on social media platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, made her feel like she was replicating her teenage experience, “[a]fter all, social media easily lends itself to adolescent behavior, like gossiping, oversharing, and shaming” (p. 76). Just like others on social media, Eler found

herself increasingly addicted, and as she gained more “likes” and “followers,” she became addicted to the popularity. Eler’s experience is a good indicator of why so many young people, and girls especially use social media regularly. According to Mauricio Delgado in an article written for the American Marketing Association (2015):

All of these ‘social reinforcers’ are abstract but show similar activity in the reward centers of the brain. This suggests that perhaps, if you’re getting positive feedback in social media—likes and shares and retweets—it’s a positive reinforcer of social media and one that allows you to get the positive effects of it and return to it, seeking out more social reinforcement (Soat).

Self-Presentation and Gender

According to gender and communication theory framework, or social role theory, women and men perform different roles in social situations and this translates to social media, as they tend to use social media platforms to communicate differently (Lokithasan, et al, 2019). Women are often stereotyped and expected to be associated with certain behaviors, and this is perpetuated online, as many female SMIs have experienced. According to Statistica, Instagram, for example is stereotyped in representing gender, with a high number of users being female (2020) and in regards to influencer marketing, approximately 84% of sponsored posts in 2019 were shared by female influencers on Instagram (Guttman, 2020). As such, it is important to note that women present themselves on social media based on visual attention through platforms like Instagram and TikTok in order to seem more credible (Ermis, 2021).

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Content Analysis

For the purposes of this study, I will be conducting a content analysis of social media posts and comment sections on TikTok. This type of methods research is commonly used in media and communication because it allows the researcher to study human behavior. Content analyses allow us to see the actual interactions of people—whether it is on television, social media, in a video game, or film. By utilizing a content analysis for this research study, we will be able to analyze the behavior of TikTok influencers and their audiences.

To put it simply, a content analysis analyzes the content of some medium. A brilliant example of the definition of content analysis comes from Charles R. Wright (1986). In his definition from his book *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective*, he defines content analysis as:

A research technique for the systematic classification and description of communication content according to certain usually predetermined categories. Technical objectivity requires that the categories of classification and analysis be clearly and operationally defined so that other researchers can follow them reliably. For example, analysis of the social class memberships of television characters requires clear specification of the criteria by which class is identified and classified (p.125).

A more recent definition offers more clarity of the definition of what a content analysis is in the communication field. According to Donald Treadwell (2011), “In the context of

communication research, content analysis is a quantitative, systematic, and objective technique for describing the manifest content of communications” (p. 178). A content analysis is different from our usual ways of making sense of the world and communication around us. In this study, we will be taking a systematic and objective approach to looking at TikTok videos and comments. In everyday life, we have a biased view of these videos while still being interested in the meaning behind them.

Advantages of Using a Content Analysis

I have decided to use a content analysis for my thesis study because they are unobtrusive and inexpensive and they deal with current events, can be obtained easily, and yield data that can be quantified. These advantages explain why content analyses are popular forms of qualitative research, according to Arthur Asa Berger (2011, p. 239).

One advantage to doing a content analysis is that it is unobtrusive. Thus, when we look at videos and comments on TikTok, we will be able to analyze the content without affecting what is being studied. With other forms of research, such as participant observation, there may be ways that the research could potentially affect the outcome of the research, but, by doing a content analysis of the social media content of SMIs, there is no possible way that I, as the researcher could affect the research, unless I “cherry-picked” information, which would not be ethical.

Another advantage to conducting a content analysis is that it will not cost anything to obtain the material that I need to conduct my analyses. Since the content I will be analyzing is on my phone, everything I need is readily available to me. However, the coding process will be time consuming (but will have a low cost), since I will be analyzing the data on my own and will need to use an Excel spreadsheet for my coding

process. Another advantage is that I can use a comparative approach to the content analysis and analyze relevant and popular TikTok influencers to understand how young girls and teens right now are dealing with the effects of social media influencers.

Disadvantages of Using a Content Analysis

There are a few disadvantages, or problems that may arise from using a qualitative content analysis over other forms of research. In Arthur Asa Berger's (2014), *Media and Communication Research Methods: An introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*, he provides several issues that a researcher may run into with a content analysis: "finding a representative sample, determining measurable units, obtaining reliability in coding, defining terms operationally, and ensuring validity and utility in your findings" (p. 240). While there may be a few disadvantages to doing a content analysis, and some limitations to using only one method, I wanted to address these disadvantages and my rationale for continuing with this research method.

The first problem that Berger (2014) described was finding a representative sample of the text being studied (p. 240). To determine which two TikTok influencers would be my representative sample, I looked into which female influencers had the largest following on TikTok, used TikTok as their main platform or rose to fame on the app, were not a celebrity before using the app, and had a majority of their followers between the age of 12 and 18. Based on these factors, I believe I was able to find a representative sample of influencers who would be able to help me answer my research question. The next difficulty that Berger (2014) described is determining measurable units (p. 240). For this specific research study, I will be analyzing both influencer posts and the comments under each individual post. While the post is an easy measurable unit,

the comments become more complicated. We will be analyzing each comment in relation to its current post and a future post to determine the effect comments may have had on an influencer. In order to determine if comments actually have an effect on an influencer with millions of followers, we will need to have a measurable unit of 10-20 comments to determine importance. For example, if there are fifteen comments under a video criticizing the influencer's weight and in the next video she appears smaller, we can determine that the comments had an effect on the content she is posting.

The third difficulty with conducting a content analysis is obtaining reliability in coding. As the researcher, I need to make sure that I code my material with operational definitions and actions. So, I will need to make sure that I classify every action I want coded and give them each a valid definition. This will allow for other researchers to be able to follow my process and test the reliability of my method. With all of the difficulties in mind, I will focus on analyzing the content from the two influencers, so that I can measure my results and find them to be valid and useful.

TikTok

According to the *2022 Social Media Trends Report* from HubSpot and TalkWalker, TikTok is dominating over other social media platforms. "The short-form video platform has broken download records, quickly becoming the go-to app for connecting with current and future consumers" (p.6). The app began gaining traction during the pandemic. According to the *Trends Report*, "a 61% increase in mentions year over year during the first half of 2021, converted into new users, making it the first non-Facebook app to reach 3 billion global downloads" (2022, p. 3). The popularity of TikTok stems from two simple facts: it is driven by consumers and brands are listening to

their customers. In other words, user-generated content is changing the marketing world. “The pandemic has shown just how crucial this new app [TikTok] is to access a more direct way to engage with consumers” (Talkwalker, 2022, p. 11).

This direct form of engagement for brands is through influencer marketing. According to the *2021 Influencer Marketing Benchmark Report*, “TikTok engagement is far higher for influencers of any size compared to their Instagram or YouTube counterparts...micro-influencers receive a whopping 17.96% engagement on TikTok.” (Geyser, 2022, p.15). The support of SMIs by the TikTok community is evident. According to Abrar Al-Heeti, the appeal of TikTok is its focus on humor and authenticity, compared to other platforms where unauthentic images of influencers are constantly being shared (Al-Heeti, 2020). For the purpose of analyzing self-presentation on social media, I decided to analyze the TikTok comment sections and videos of two popular SMIs, since TikTok is currently the most trending social media platform.

Subjects

For this content analysis, I will be analyzing the TikToks of two popular social media influencers. The influencers that I will be studying are Addison Rae and Charli D’Amelio. I have determined that these social media influencers will be beneficial for answering my research question because they meet the following criteria: these girls have over 50 million followers, are age 17-22, a majority of their followers are girls between the age of 12 and 18, they rose to fame on TikTok (or use the app as their main app to post content), and they were not previously celebrities before joining the app (see Figure A). According to Influencer Hub, Charli D’Amelio is the most followed TikToker with

over 100,000 million followers on the app. Figure A provides more information about each of the SMI's followers, according to reports from Hype Auditor (2021).

Table 1: A table describe the SMI and the demographics of their followers.

SMI	Followers on TikTok	Age of Followers Between 13-24	Gender of Followers
Charli D'Amelio Age: 17	129.3 Million	13-17 – 28.46% 18-24 – 32.52%	Male- 27.7% Female-72.4%
Addison Rae Age: 21	85.8 Million	13-17 – 22.83% 18-24% - 27.17%	Male – 34.2% Female – 65.8%

Process and Procedures

The purpose of this study is to determine if SMIs alter their image on social media in order to present a new identity formed by their community of followers. In order to answer the research question, I examined the TikTok accounts of two popular social media influencers, Charli D'Amelio and Addison Rae who use TikTok to post video content for fun and share brand deals with their followers. To determine if being an influencer increases their need to gain positive reactions from their audiences by altering their image on social media, I examined the chosen SMIs' TikTok posts and comments to gain a deeper understanding of their beginnings on the platform in 2019, how their content has changed from 2019 to now, and what could have effected those changes.

To ensure that each influencer was measured the same way, the same number of videos were examined for each SMI. I examined three videos for each girl from 2019, five videos from 2020, five videos from 2021, and two videos from 2022. Both influencers had over 500 hundred videos to choose from, but I wanted to create an accurate representation of what their content was like for the respective year. For 2019, I made sure the first video available on their page was reviewed and for 2022, I chose the most recent video at the time of my research. I wanted to ensure a representative sample of the videos for each SMI, so for the rest of the years, the videos were chosen at random, allowing the review of the SMIs most viewed videos for that respective year, but also videos that the communities dub as “rare” for having fewer views. For each video, I analyzed the video of the comment section and coded each group of comments. To keep a consistency across both influencers, after analyzing the fifteen videos along with their comments, I decided on six different codes: *appearance*, *old content*, *mental health*, *haters*, *fans*, and *dating*. After viewing the respective videos and their comments, I began noticing themes across the most popular comments. Commenters were focused on requesting old content, commenting on the SMIs’ appearance or talent. Each SMI also received comments that were both positive and negative views toward their content and selves. Based on these themes, the aforementioned codes were defined. The definitions of each code are explained in Table 2.

Table 2: Codes/Themes of TikTok comments and their descriptions.

Code	<i>Appearance</i>	<i>Old Content</i>	<i>Mental Health</i>	<i>Haters</i>	<i>Fans/Supporters</i>	<i>Dating</i>
Definition	Comment refers to SMIs appearance relating to body, clothing, hair, etc.	Comment refers to commenter preferring the SMI's older type of content, i.e. dancing, lip syncing, etc.	Comment refers to the SMI's mental health in positive or negative way.	Comment is meant to represent a negative opinion of the SMI.	Comment shows love and support to the SMI or represents a positive view of SMI.	Comment refers to the current relationship of the SMI at the time of the video, either positively or negatively.

After examining the themes for each video, I determined whether or not the SMI changed the way she posted, looked, or acted based on her community of commenters. I looked for changes from individual video to video, as well as year to year. I used any noticeable patterns to make a critical analysis of the self-presentation of each SMI based on comments and their video, which included their caption. It is of importance to note, that there were many comments that happened after the year of the corresponding post (e.g. a comment left from 2021 on a post in 2019). These comments were included in the research, as the app is continuously evolving and changing, just like opinions. Older videos may appear on a person's TikTok For You Page (the curated feed of the user's personal interests) if they are interacting with the SMI enough, so incorporating comments from past years was necessary. Comments that happened after the video was posted like "who's here from 2021" for example, were left out of the findings, as they did not effect the research.

In a previous qualitative study conducted by Merjah Mahrt and Mannekatrin Bock titled, *YouTube stars as role models for teenagers: Display, affirmation, and negotiation of adolescent Identities*, the authors used a content analysis of nearly 6,500 user comments to determine what types of interactions were happening between viewers and YouTube content creators (2017). The authors created codes, such as affirmation and negotiation to determine what perceptions the viewers of two popular German YouTubers had of the creator based on the videos they create. I used this study as an example of how I wanted to measure my collected research. The codes collected from the thousands of comments on the SMIs' TikTok will allow themes to appear based on how the audience and community view the influencer. These themes can help better interpret the larger picture to answer the following research question: Do SMIs alter their image and self-presentation online based on the perceptions of their communities?

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Addison Rae

After examining fifteen different videos from Addison Rae (@addisonre) on TikTok, from her first video in 2019 to a recent video in 2022, it can be concluded from the collected data that Addison has presented herself differently throughout the years. She has developed a new image that her fans are not reacting positively toward. This conclusion is based on the most popular comments on the fifteen videos analyzed. In her first video, posted on June 9, 2019, the TikTok influencer lip syncs to a country song in a cowboy hat. The video has 22.6 million views and the comments from around the time the video was posted focus on Addison's appearance with comments like "you are so stunning" and "so gorgeous." While newer comments focus on being hateful or missing her old content with comments like: "I miss this addison [sic]" and "addison racists first tiktok [sic]."

In the next two videos from 2019, Addison dances to popular songs. The comments are mainly from 2020 to 2021 display themes of missing her old content and discuss her mental health. Popular comments relating to her mental health are as follows: “I don’t mean this in any negative way, but I feel like this Addison was very bubbly-cute. Now she seems a bit more serious than back then” and “remember when she actually seemed like a nice person and made good content? fame had really changed her...[sic].” Comments like “we need the old Addison” Other comments from these vides focused positively on her appearance or were hate comments directed at her dancing skills.

It seems like Addison stepped up her dancing game from 2019 to 2020. In back to back videos in March of 2020, where she dances to the song “Savage” by Meg the Stallion—one with her mom in the background and one by herself—each garnering over 130 million views, she received more encouraging comments from fans and supporters. She received comments like “omg you did this so good” and “she threw it back.” However, she still received some comments from haters referring to bad dancing or to the fact that she didn’t credit the original creator. Addison still received comments from 2021 and 2022 fans claiming they missed her old content like this (Figure 1).

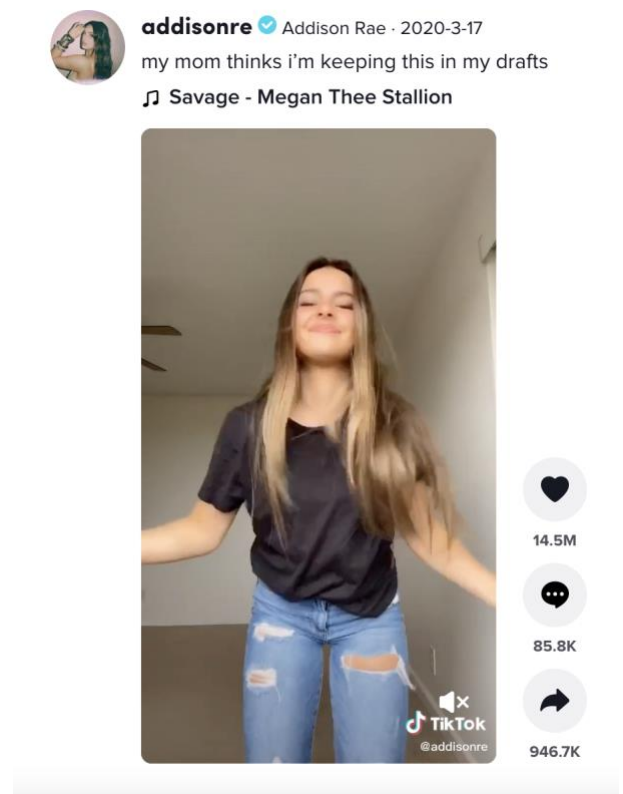


Figure 1: Addison's TikTok from March 2020.

In the next video I analyzed, from June of 2020—a year after her first TikTok, Addison posted a video dancing in front of her friends and fellow creators, Larray and Brady, dancing to “GOOBA” by 6ix9ine with 201.7 million views. While she received a few comments from haters, most of the comments on this video were all supportive and came from fans. Most of the popular comments were from 2021 and 2022 claiming that this was the Addison that her fans missed the most. For example, a few comments read: “this Addison was prime” and “why did you change from this Addison?” The next video I examined was from August 22, 2020 and was a video of her reacting to her mom dancing to the song “WAP.” Many of the comments on this video could be coded as

haters or *appearance*. For example, various comments read, “this is embarrassing” or “Addison gets 10 mil [views] for literally just standing there and other people spend hours making content.” Some comments focused on how they would rather see Addison do the “WAP” dance over her mom insinuating they wanted to see Addison in more sexual positions.

The last video from 2020 which garnered over 72 million views, is of Addison dancing to a popular song using a TikTok filter. She captioned the video, “[I] literally was sweating bc I couldn’t get this filter right [sic]” Most of these comments were positive and focused on her appearance or were from fans supporting her dancing. A few comments were categorized as *haters*, such as one comment that reads “somebody says she dances like she has wet nail polish and I’ll never be able to see it any other way.” This comment basically meant that Addison danced awkwardly and like she was uncomfortable. Others used words like “cringe,” which means the commenter felt embarrassed or disgusted by the content or

The first videos that I assessed from 2021 were videos of Addison dancing with her boyfriend at the time, and fellow creator, Bryce Hall in January. A majority of comments on both videos focused on the relationship and can be coded as *dating*. The comments on these videos read, “you guys look so happy,” “I want this kind of relationship,” and “I miss them.” Most of the comments in 2021 idealized their relationship and after they broke up, later comments focused on the fact that they missed their relationship and were “jealous” of it. In other comments from the January 19 video, which had around 85 million views, fans let Addison know they missed her old content, supported her, or commented on her appearance, mentioning how “gorgeous” she was.

The next video analyzed on Addison's TikTok was from June 3, 2021. In this video, Addison dances outside of a restaurant in a short red dress. She does a "lap dance" in a chair in front of friend and fellow creator Larray. This video was one that received the most comments that could be coded as coming from *haters*. The comments were brutal and said things such as, "why is she always doing the most" and "where is the talent." One of the more hateful comments read "poor chair gotta smell [fish emoji]." Another read "strip" and "bruh she is such a pick me its annoying...[sic]" meaning she just wants attention from men. While I did not see a video response to these comments, I can't imagine they had a positive effect on Addison if she read them.

Comments on the next video from November were also mostly focused on *appearance* and came from *haters*. In a video from November 9, 2021, Addison dances to the song "Roses" with two other girls in a yellow sweatshirt and jeans at a sports event. There were many comments that I sifted through that read "congrats on the pregnancy." These comments were just being hateful towards her appearance, possibly referring to her gaining weight or just covering her body up in this video. Some fans tried to protect her by asking commenters not to "body shame her" and telling her that "she's naturally pretty." The next video was from October of 2021. The video received 95.1 million views and shows Addison dancing in a blue dress while, she holds the camera close to her body as she shakes her butt close to the camera. It seemed like fans were shocked by this content. While some were supportive, others were hating on her for posting this type of content or made hateful comments on her appearance. Comments read, "can you not," "someone's thirsty for more clout," and "Looks like Addison Rae needed some more

views.” However, a few fans wrote comments like these, “ngl [not going to lie] she killed this” and “she didn’t disappoint.”

The final two videos I analyzed on Addison’s TikTok were from February of 2022. The first video had over 40 million views and was a video of the Addison lip syncing to a video with a popular sound while getting her makeup done by a professional make-up artist. Comments were mostly supportive and commented positively on Addison’s appearance. Most of the comments were happy that Addison was comfortable showing her acne on camera saying things such as, “thank you so much for being real & showing your real skin.” In the other video from February of 2022, Addison lip syncs to another song and makes faces at the end of the video. Many of these comments were focused on missing her old content with comments like “I remember when she only

Table 1: This table is a representation of how many times codes discussed in Table 2, were found across the 15 videos.

MAJOR THEMES

ADDISON RAE TIKTOK COMMENTS

CODE/THEME	NUMBER OF VIDEOS WITH THIS THEME	EXAMPLE OF COMMENT REPRESENTING THEME
Appearance	9/15	"congrats on the pregnancy [body shaming]"
Old Content	8/15	"I miss the old Addison :("
Mental Health	1/15	"I don't mean this in any negative way, but I feel like this Addison was very bubbly-cute. Now she seems a bit more serious than back then."
Haters	12/15	"Where is your talent? LMAO"
Fans/Supporters	9/15	"thanks so much for being real and showing off your real skin"
Dating	2/15	"I want this kind of relationship"

danced” or “post a dance video.” Other comments came from haters wondering how her content was successful, “how does this get so much likes...[sic]”

Overall, it seems that Addison’s content has changed since 2019, and over the years she has tried to change up her style more than once. While getting a lot of hate for showing off her body or producing more adult content in 2021, she moved to up-close lip-syncing videos and received less hate. Based on my exploration of comments, it’s clear that Addison receives several comments daily on her appearance, both positive and negative. If she wore a short dress in one video, she would receive negative comments about her appearance; if she chose to wear a sweatshirt, she still received hateful comments. In about half of the videos analyzed, fans let the creator know they missed her old content and were not happy when she tried out new trends or tried to target an older audience.

Charli D’Amelio

After examining fifteen of TikTok influencer, Charli D’Amelio’s (@charlidamelio) videos on the platform from early 2019 to now, it’s clear that Charli has had her share of controversy and hate on the app. However, even with hate comments and fans missing older content, it can be assumed that Charli has a supportive fan base. The first video Charli has posted to her page is a lip sync video with a friend in 2019, however, most of the comments were from 2021 and 2022. These commenters were trying to find her first video and see what the “hype” was all about. (Hype in this context means excitement or exaggeration of importance.) The comments read “I scrolled to the bottom and still don’t get the hype” and “Right, we get the point. We all still don’t get the hype.” These comments can all be coded as *haters*, since they are criticizing her content.

A few comments can be coded as *fans/supporters*, however, because they scrolled to find the origin of their favorite TikTok creator commenting, “At this moment, a legend was born.”

In the second video on her TikTok page, Charli is dancing with friends, she is in the background of the video. Again, the comments are mostly from 2021 and 2022. All of these comments can be coded under *old content* because they all referred to how her content was changing. Commenters said things such as “I bet those aren’t her friends anymore,” “I miss this,” “dang this was the time when you actually posted good stuff [sic].” Based on the fact these comments were posted recently, it’s clear that her fans are not enjoying her current content but prefer videos like this one. In her eleventh video, Charli is dancing in a black dress and received negative comments regarding her dancing or her *appearance*. “Same dress as last time?” “Do you own another dress,” “this is great, but something just seems unproportional [sic],” and “so we have a go at Danielle cohn for dressing inappropriately, yet its fine if Charlie does it [sic].” However, she did receive a few positive comments from fans, saying her dancing has improved or “I’ve found the origin of the hype.”

The next group of videos I analyzed were from 2020. The first video was from April 8. In this video, Charli dances with a Dunkin coffee cup and quickly puts it down, almost just to promote the coffee brand quickly. There were many comments from 2021 about missing this type of content, while others were just girls wishing they looked like her. A few notable comments mention that she used to look happier. The comments read, “why can’t I look like her,” “I miss the old videos” and “Charli looks so sad in 2021, the comments are hunting her, like look at the difference.” These comments can be coded as

mental health, appearance, and old content. After this video, I analyzed the comments from a TikTok on April 18, 2020. The video is a partnered video with the brand Aerie. It uses text boxes to share positive comments while dancing to the song “100% Real Love”. There were a lot of people who found the sentiment sweet, others commented on her nails and a few mentioned the actual brand being promoted. Comments like this were coded as *fans/supporters* and said things such as, “you are such an amazing person” and “aww charli so sweet [sic]”

The third video I analyzed from 2020 was from June 15. In this video, Charli dances to the song “Freak” by Doja Cat with the caption “ouch.” She’s wearing a yellow sweatshirt and sweat pants outside by the pool. At the end of the video, someone off camera throws an empty Dunkin cup at her. Again, all of these comments could be coded as *fans/supporters* or *appearance* with comments such as “Charli changed...but in a good way,” “yellow is her color omg,” and “the queen of tiktok [sic].” After this, I analyzed a video from August 1, 2020 that received 50.2 million views. The video is captioned, “everyone is posting their drafts so here is mine,” and the video is of Charli eating soup while lip syncing with bruises under her eyes and bandages on her nose after her nose surgery. This was the first video I analyzed where the majority of comments were hateful. The comments read, “so is you telling me you get 6 million likes for that what [sic]” and “u don’t deserve to be at the top of this sound with minimal effort.” These can be coded as *haters*. Other comments mentioned the bandages on her nose, either asking if she got a nose job or implying that she did (even though in previous videos she explained she had surgery on her nose for health reasons). These comments were coded as *appearance* and *haters*.

The final video that I analyzed from 2020 was posted on October 17. This video received 37.9 million views. In this TikTok, Charli shows off her pink hair, her dog, and another Dunkin' coffee while dancing to a "Here Comes Santa Clause" remix. The comments on this video were a mix between *fans/supporters* and *haters*. A few of the fan comments were directed at her appearance, specifically her new hair: "I love the new hair color" and "the hair [heart emoji]." Other comments directed at her appearance were from haters, with comments such as, "why did you die [sic] your hair" or "imagine lime green," implying that lime green would look better than pink. These comments, both positive and negative were coded under *appearance*. Other comments from haters wanted to know how Charli received so many views with this type of content or just called her "overrated."

The first video that I analyzed from 2021 was a controversial video—not because of the content of the video, but because this video was posted after her trip to the Bahamas with other creators. The trip upset many people because the group traveled during the pandemic. The video from January 5, 2021 received 113.3 million views (Figure 2). While there were a few comments from supporters (such as, "I love your energy" and "you are beautiful girl, you are my idol"), most of the comments were coded as

haters. The comments said the following: "I hope putting life's [sic] at risk knowing

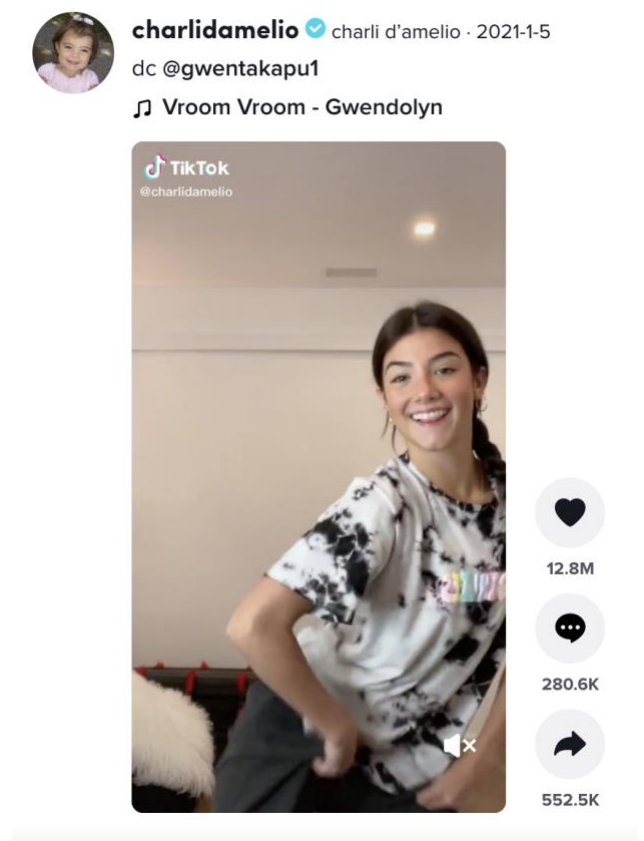


Figure 2: Charli's TikTok from January 2021

damn well thousands of people die everyday cause of this virus was wort the tan girl” and “COOL TAN WHERE DID YOU GET IT [sic].” The commenters were not happy with Charli for traveling nor that she was ignoring the controversy, commenting, “so you’re just going it ignore it so you look like a good person? Ok sure.”

After watching the influencer’s next video from February 7, 2021, it’s clear that Charli ignores the hate. I could not find a TikTok on her page addressing the trip or the comments. In the February 7 video Charli dances to a Rihanna x Sean Paul x Mr. Vegas Mash up in a black crop top and blue jeans with white stripes. She gives dance credits to the original dance creator. The comments on this video ranged from supporters to haters and mentioned her appearance as well as missing her old content. Comments read “no talent alert” and “Maddie did this better,” but also, “wow Charli your hair is amazing I loved it” and “I love her omg.”

In the next video from June 16, 2021 Charli dances with Chase Huddy to the song Hell Shell facing away from the camera, showing her butt, while Chase faces the camera and they hold hands with their arms in the air. The video received 67.9 million views. All of the comments focused on whether or not the pair were *dating* and were coded as such. The comments read, “just friends,” “I have a feeling they’re secretly dating” and “ok they’re just PLAYING WITH MY FEELINGS [sic].” It is clear fans are very passionate about Charli’s relationship with Chase, however, she never addresses their relationship.

In a video from July 5, 2021 Charli dances with her sister Dixie and her sister's boyfriend Noah Beck to the song “Dixie.” All three SMIs are matching, wearing all white. Dixie and Charli are twerking, while Noah is flexing in the back. Once Charli turned away from the camera and begins to twerk, Noah runs up and covers her butt and

turning off the video. Commenters were quick to question if the group was drunk or to give their opinion on whether or not the dance was appropriate. These comments were coded as *haters* and *appearance*. However, a few comments from fans said things like this one, “I love this Charli to be honest, she looks so confident.

In the final video I examined from 2021, Charli does a “get ready with me” (a video where the viewer can get ready for the day along with the SMI) to promote her makeup collaboration with the makeup brand Morphe. She uses the hashtags #morphe2xcharlidixie #morphepartner. The comments under this video, uploaded in December, were positive and were posted by her fans and supporters. The comments read, “I love your makeup,” “you’re amazing and beautiful” and “I know that you will never see this message, but you are such a nice person, you are beautiful, talented, and you have such a good heart.” A few comments referred to missing her dancing content and were coded as *old content*.

The final two videos I analyzed were from 2022 and both received over 16 million views. The first video was from January. In this TikTok, Charli partnered with Spotify to promote her sister Dixie's new song “Psycho” and promote #spotifylyrics. The video shows Charli texting lyrics from Dixie's song to her parents and her parents’ confusion. Many of the comments were negative toward either the partnership or toward her sister, but a few focused positively on her appearance. In the second video from

MAJOR THEMES

CHARLI D'AMELIO TIKTOK COMMENTS

CODE/THEME	NUMBER OF VIDEOS WITH THIS THEME	EXAMPLE OF COMMENT REPRESENTING THEME
Appearance	9/15	"This is great, something just seems, unproportional"
Old Content	4/15	"I miss the old videos"
Mental Health	1/15	"Charli looks so sad in 2021, the comments are hurting her, like look at the difference"
Haters	8/15	"Overrated"
Fans/Supporters	10/15	"I know that you will never see this message, but you are such a nice person, yo are beautiful, talented, and you have such a good heart"
Dating	1/15	"Their relationship is so confusing"

Table 2: This table is a representation of how many times codes discussed in the 15 videos.

February 11, Charli shows off her outfit outside a house to the popular remix “no idea x body party” and captioned it “draft.” Most of the comments focused on her outfit or girls wanting to be like her and look like her. Comments like these, “I like your outfit,” “help me look like you” and “girl you are extremely stunning” were all coded under

appearance. A Table depicting these findings on Charli's videos can be found in Appendix B.

After examining fifteen videos from Charli's TikTok page, surprisingly, Charli's self-presentation remained unaltered, even when commenters are hateful or commenting that they miss her old content. She continues to try new trends and reach new audiences, while successfully partnering with brands. Compared to Addison, Charli receives significantly less hate and more positive comments regarding her appearance.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study examined fifteen videos of two different popular TikTok influencers to determine how SMIs portray themselves on social media and whether or not they directly alter their image and self-presentation based on the communities that follow them. After examining the TikTok videos of both SMIs from their start in 2019 to the present. It is clear that they have had different experiences with self-presentation in relation to their communities. One factor to keep in mind is that these girls are 17- and 21-year-old girls. So, the way they present themselves could be affected by the fact that they are still discovering their identity.

However, based on the data that I collected during my content analysis, both communities of the SMIs believe that they have a prominent say in the SMI's life: leaving comments about wanting old content, not liking their new appearance, or wanting them to date an individual (communities may believe they have the right to comment for change in content considering the influencers are a form of entertainment or business to them). For Addison, it was clear that her community affects how she presents herself on the app. In 2021, Addison tried to appeal to a more adult audience, but when she received backlash from her community and received comments on old videos expressing a desire for her old content, she reverted back to her previous self-presentation.

It is less obvious when analyzing Charli's videos if she lets her community affect the way she presents herself online. However, we can see that her fanbase is supportive, even when she faced controversy in early 2021 for traveling during the pandemic. Based on her content, I would argue that Charli does a great job at appealing to her different audiences. She makes all sorts of content, so even when she's partaking in new trends, she will likely also post a video that her fans are sure to enjoy that same day, presumably to keep the peace within her community—if compared to a similar community as Addison's.

Based on comments on both influencer's videos from 2019 to 2022, and the way that their TikTok videos have changed, you can tell that the communities Charli and Addison are a part of affect the way they present themselves online. The creators, like many SMIs, share their daily lives on social media through multiple daily TikToks. The analyzed comments showed that they changed their content based on the way their communities reacted, especially Addison. For instance, after receiving many hate

comments regarding her body or her provocative dancing, Addison adjusted her content to be mostly lip-syncing videos filmed with the front-facing camera or to videos promoting sponsored content.

Charli on the other hand had to deal more with comments relating to her personality or talent rather than appearance. However, it seems that Charli was less affected by the comments, considering her content did not change as drastically as Addison's. Even with these differences, the findings show that social media influencers adjust their appearance online (though to different extents) based on what their preferred communities are looking for. For Charli, this means when she veers from her original content and receives backlash, she returns to what worked before. For Addison, this means she hides her appearance to ignore the hate.

The findings were not surprising as past literature has made it clear that female creators, from Paris Hilton to Britney Spears, have struggled with how to present themselves online. Addison and Charli are in formative years of their lives—similar in age to when Paris was on her reality show and Britney was forced into a conservatorship. Being young and in the spotlight can add to the stress of trying to find yourself, add in comments from unhappy fans, you are faced with the pressure of trying to please a variety of voices. For Addison and Charli, they are trying to present themselves online in an authentic way and portray to their audiences who they are as people, but when they try to show new parts of their lives, their communities get upset and this can create limitations for their content.

The current findings, thus, offer support for previous research that social media has consequences on one's social comparison and how females and young girls present

themselves online. The findings add to our knowledge of these consequences by bringing SMIs into the discussion and demonstrate how reading comments on their TikToks can encourage them to present themselves in a different way. By using TikTok instead of a platform previously researched regarding self-presentation, external validity was maximized in a controlled setting. I was able to specifically test the affective consequences of comments on SMIs TikTok content. The results, having implications for future researchers, individuals who view social media posts from SMIs daily, and SMIs.

Due to time limitations, I could only research two female TikTok Influencers. For future research purposes, it would be necessary to analyze other SMIs with different demographics and followings to provide further insight. Discussion on the differences in how SMIs with different followings (e.g. micro influencers, macro influencers, mega influencers, etc.) present themselves would be an interesting research study. The same application from this study could be applied to this research. It would also be necessary to determine if the results of my study differ with respect to specific social media platforms and specific areas of expertise.

A future study to investigate whether communities participate in consumption behavior based on the way the SMIs present themselves would be interesting. For example, does an influencer with changing content affect brand deals or their authority to influence their communities. This study did not look into the self-presentation of women of color and how their presentation online is affected by their communities. A future study would benefit from including female SMIs of color and comparing the experiences.

Overall, the research study provided important insights into how communities can directly affect the way SMIs present themselves online. Namely, my findings show that

negative comments about appearance and talent can direct an influencer to limit themselves to specific content and focus on increasing the positive enjoyment of their communities, rather than their own enjoyment. As we've seen recently, creators are being canceled or ignored for being their authentic selves on social media. In 2021, Jojo Siwa came out as queer to her fans on TikTok and in 2022, Siwa was not invited to the Nickelodeon Kids Choice Awards, an award show she has been attending since 2017. While, Nickelodeon has since come forward and claimed her exclusion was an honest mistake (Murphy, 2022), after taking to Instagram to address the rumors, it is clear Siwa felt she was excluded for other reasons.

This case study of Jojo Siwa provides implications for the future exploration of SMIs. As influencers decide to be more authentic versions of themselves, will this cause partnerships and brands to decide not to work with SMIs in the future. We've seen cancel culture end brand deals (e.g. James Charles losing his brand deal with Morphe), but will authenticity create a fussier market for brands when it comes to influencer marketing? The research in this study begins to bridge the gap between self-presentation and SMIs based on their communities. This gap could be further explored by examining the role that brands play in the relationship between the SMI and their communities. Theoretically, brands could be forcing the SMI to present a certain way more so than their communities who are asking for authenticity.

The findings of this study, show that SMIs use social comparison theory to compare themselves to their comment sections (e.g. who am I supposed to be in relation to my community) and present themselves as less authentic versions of themselves to please their respective communities to gain the satisfaction of receiving likes views, as

the past literature as shown us. These findings have implications for the future practice of SMIs, in regards to their personal content and branded content, as well.

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CURRICULUM VITA

Sydney Dotson–*Graduate Assistant*

PROFILE SUMMARY

I am a graduate student at the University of Louisville. I specialize in social media content creation, communication strategy, and writing content for print and digital media. I am currently working as a GTA, teaching two public speaking classes, editing book chapters, writing a chapter for publication, and working on the creation of a panel and publication relating to influencer marketing for NCA.

CAREER SUMMARY

Graduate Teaching Assistant and Lecturer

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE / PRESENT

- Develop and manage syllabus materials.
- Create tests, assignments and online discussion exercises to measure performance relative to standardized learning objectives.
- Facilitate Class Instruction and evaluate student performance.
- Maintain up to date records of student attendance, homework marks and test scores.

Social Media Manager

ULIMI / JUNE 2020 - JAN 2021

- Create content for social media platforms including Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram.
- Increased engagement and followers on social media platforms for both ULIMI and Click360.
- Created case studies, blog posts, and press releases for ULIMI and Click360 Blogs.
- Promoted product, new clients, and A.I. & chatbot-related content onto selected social media platforms.
- Implemented new digital marketing practices to increase engagement and ultimately sales.

Digital Marketing Intern

CERKL / MAY 2019 - DEC 2019

- Helped to Increase Engagement Score for the company newsletter by writing and editing content.
- Helped to Increase social media engagement for content and event posts for LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook.
- Played a critical role in the implementation of a new customer-facing software product.
- Researched current trends in the internal communications and employee engagement field.

- Filmed and edited promotional videos for social media.
- Created a campaign to gain contributing writers for Internal Comms Pro Blog.
- Created a content series dedicated to innovators in the internal communications industry.

CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

- Presented a paper at KCA in September 2021 and received the Michael S. Shelton: Top Graduate Student Paper Award.
- Received Outstanding Graduate Student Teaching Award from the University of Louisville Department of Communication.

- Spoke on a virtual panel for the University Career Center about my experiences with internships.
- Created a successful social media campaign on Instagram, Pinterest, and WordPress that encouraged women and girls aged 15-24 to shop for fashion in an ethical and sustainable manner.
- Created and co-hosted multiple podcasts during my time at Mount St. Joseph University.

- Received M. Lambers Humanities Scholarship for my work with the online paper at MSJ and work with underprivileged communities and advocating for the environment.

ACADEMIC HISTORY

University of Louisville

MASTER'S OF COMMUNICATION, CLASS OF 2022

- GPA of 4.0
- Currently attending

- Graduate Teaching Assistant - Fall 2020- *Spring 2021*
- Teaching COMM 111 Public Speaking- *Fall 2021- Present*

Mount St. Joseph University

BACHELOR OF ARTS, COMMUNICATION AND NEW MEDIA STUDIES, CLASS OF 2020

- GPA of 3.7
- President of MountCast (Podcast Club)
- Public Relations Chair of Student Environmental Enthusiasts - Co-Founder of Dorothy Day Club for Social Change
- Writer for Dateline (Online Newspaper)