

**Social Media and Celebrities: Changing Messages Across Different Platforms**

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**Introduction**

The advent of the Internet brought with it many different ways to communicate. One of these methods of communication that has developed is social media. Social media has allowed for computer-mediated communication that spans across time and space boundaries, connecting people from around the globe (Hogan, 2010). Social media is now deeply seated in the everyday life of the average American. As social media popularity has grown, so has the number of celebrities who use the various platforms to share pieces of their lives. An aspect of celebrity social media presence is the building of his or her personal brand. There are several ways celebrities can choose to grow and construct their persona and part of how they accomplish this is through interpersonal relationships on social media accounts. If a celebrity is unable to maintain relationships with their social media following, they will cease to be relevant online. Due to the high amount of content available to social media users, most social media platforms are now designed to show content from those with whom the user has interacted with in the past most frequently. What this means is if an individual consistently likes what a celebrity posts, then that celebrity's content will begin to appear higher and higher up on the user's timeline. If the user does not interact with the celebrity's content, either by liking or responding to, the celebrity's content will most likely not be viewed. With many celebrities profiting greatly from social media endorsements, a loss of audience will mean loss of possible profits. These findings are also significant due to the influencing presence celebrities have on how social media is used. The ways celebrities choose to show relationships through social media will most likely be used by others in the future. If an individual changes how they portray their relationships over social media they may

begin to change how they treat relationships in person. This study will evaluate how celebrities use interpersonal relationships to grow their brand on social media using two popular platforms, Twitter and Instagram. To accomplish this, a content analysis will be performed on posts made by celebrities on both platforms. The analysis revealed that direct interaction between celebrities and fans is most prominent on Twitter, while interaction with those the celebrity personally knows is more prominent on Instagram. The study also discovered that interpersonal relationships are used to build a celebrity's brand by demonstrating what is important to that celebrity. This study was designed after a review of established literature revealed a possible gap in the literature pertaining to celebrity interpersonal relationships on social media and how that relates to the celebrity persona. A review of the analysis results showed the different ways celebrities use Twitter and Instagram to build their personal brands.

### **Literature Review**

In order to interpret the actions of celebrities, several theories and concepts must be understood. The concepts listed below help to explain how the study was designed. This already established research was also considered when analyzing the posts made by celebrities. Many of the ideas discussed in the information below explain why celebrities portray messages and relationships the way they do.

Authenticity is a concept designed to evaluate whether an individual shows their true self (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Celebrity authenticity is defined as "the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self," (Ilicic & Webster, 2016, p. 410-411). For celebrities the consumer or fan is the judge of whether the celebrity is perceived as truly authentic. Authenticity can be beneficial to celebrities who want to

build a relationship with fans over social media. “Research also suggests consumers form strong attachments to celebrities who satisfy basic consumer self-determination need of autonomy (need for independence) and relatedness (need for connectedness),” (Ilicic & Webster, 2016, p. 412). Authenticity is part of a brand image as well. If a celebrity is not seen as authentic there is a lack of trust in the brand they put forth.

Parasocial interaction (PSI) is the general relationship most public figures have with followers on their social media profile. This term is called a parasocial interaction because of the one-sided nature of it. Most social interactions are between two individuals who are fully aware of the interaction, which is not the case in a parasocial interaction. This relationship is defined as, “ an illusory experience, such that consumers interact with personas (i.e. mediated representations of presenters, celebrities, or characters) as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship,” (Labreque, 2014, p. 135). To the consumer, this relationship feels real and meaningful. The public figure supplying the content to the relationship is unaware of the consumer’s interactions. Watkins (2016) argues that PSI can lead to growth in the relationship a consumer feels with a celebrity. PSI can lead to feelings of friendship through the actions the celebrity persona portrays on their social media accounts (Labreque, 2014). “Perceived interactivity is contingent on creating an impression that the persona is listening and responding directly to the audience,” (Labreque, 2014, p. 136). Whether a celebrity is fully aware of the audience is irrelevant, all that matters is that the audience believes that the celebrity cares about their opinions. When a celebrity reposts a follower’s post they are acknowledging their fan base. These interactions foster the relationship growth that celebrities are seeking. A parasocial relationship is still an interpersonal relationship. An

interpersonal relationship is defined as any social connection with another person (Mazarin, 2016). Becoming a follower on social media is a social connection; therefore a parasocial relationship is still an interpersonal relationship. What makes this a unique interpersonal relationship is the one-sided aspect of it. In most situations a connection is not made until both parties recognize the interaction, but in parasocial relationships only one party does (Labreque, 2014).

Self-consciousness is the differing preference individuals have pertaining to attention and how it is directed, either towards or away from varying individuals (Joo, Lee-Won, Park, & Shim, 2014). Self-consciousness can be divided into two broad categories, public and private self-disclosure. Public self-consciousness is how an individual presents their self when aware that others can observe their actions. If an individual is high in public self-consciousness, they will generally always be aware of others observing their actions and will ensure that they act accordingly. These individuals are most likely to care about how others perceive them so they attempt to create a positive image of their self (Joo et. Al, 2014). This is the category that most celebrities would fall into. Private self-consciousness is the awareness an individual has about their actions that are not easily observable by others. “People who are high in private self-consciousness are typically more aware of their inner world and behave based on privately held beliefs, values, and feelings about the self,” (Joo et. Al, 2014, p. 414).

Self-disclosure is a technique used on social networks to assist in the maintenance of relationships (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). The more followers an individual has on a social network, the more maintenance is needed to maintain relationships with their followers (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). This would suggest that those with a large following

will reveal more about their person to maintain the relationships with their followers. Disclosing more of their self allows stronger relationships to form. A sign of intimacy in a relationship is being able to predict the actions of a person. The more an individual reveals about their self, the more those who follow them can predict their behaviors. The ability to do so allows for the growth of relationships (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). Because celebrities generally maintain a large media following, they must disclose more than the average person to maintain relationships with their followers. When considering celebrity self-disclosure, brand identity must also be kept in mind. Information disclosed must match the persona built by the celebrity or followers will feel that the celebrity is not being authentic.

Multiple audience problem is a challenge that has arisen for those trying to maintain a healthy relationship with a diverse group of followers who different cultures and social views in one space (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). Individuals who are trying to please all their followers will generally combat this problem by employing posts using the lowest common denominator. These posts are designed to please the largest group of people possible, and offend the least amount of people possible (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). This is often done by applying the concept of creating posts for two types of individuals: those that want to see the idealized self, and those who may not like the idealized self. An example of this occurring is when an individual is followed by his or her boss on a social media profile. The individual will most likely not post directly to their boss but they will post with the knowledge their boss could see the post. Celebrities will not post to directly please specific groups of people, but they will post with the knowledge that each post could be seen by specific groups of people. It is important for celebrities to not

offend groups of followers because it can negatively affect their personal brand. Unless a celebrity is trying to build a brand on offensive material, most want to be seen as open and accepting of all types of individuals and will avoid posts that lead people to believe the contrary. This is important to remember when analyzing posts made by celebrities. A post may be a toned down version of the celebrity's actual thoughts because the actual thoughts may offend many followers

Goffman was an early communication scholar who developed the idea of different stages that an individual must maintain, front stage and backstage (Hogan, 2010). The stage is a metaphor for various activities that an individual will participate in through out their life. Front stage is the ideal version of the self, the perfect image. Backstage is the more authentic version of an individual, the version of each individual that requires work to maintain (Hogan, 2010). While Goffman developed this approach in 1959, it still is applicable to much of what is studied today, especially when it comes to social media. This approach poses a question though, is social media a front stage or a back stage? Social media is seen as a backstage self, but is most actually the front stage (Hogan, 2010). Keller (2014) states, "New media forms, such as Twitter and other social media, encourage the notion they are immediate and authentic but they are at base asynchronous, mediated forms of communication that can be easily falsified," (p.152). For the purposes of this study, all posts will be seen as an attempt to put forth the ideal self. This allows the researcher to evaluate each post as something that has been prepared with intention to build the celebrity brand. "Brand identity consists of carefully selected attributes, benefits, and attitudes that are communicated to consumers through purposeful marketing

activities, such as brand stories told through advertising,” (Gensler, Volckner, Liu-Thompkins, & Weirtz, 2013, p. 243).

The two types of social media that will be evaluated in this study are Twitter and Instagram. The two platforms share many features but also provide different options for their users. Instagram requires a picture or video with every post and includes features that allow users to add effects and filters to the pictures (Instagram, 2016). Instagram also has no limit to length of text that can be included in the post (Instagram, 2016). Twitter has a more diverse choice of options than Instagram in terms of type of content. A post can be only text, or include a picture, or include a video, or be a repost of another post or share links to outside content (Twitter, 2016). Twitter also has a limit on the amount of text that can be included in a post, with a 140 characters maximum (Twitter, 2016). Both sites allow for the use of hashtags to find related posts.

For this study two research questions were posed.

RQ1: What platform should be used to witness celebrity interpersonal relationships?

This question is significant to evaluate where celebrities interact with others more. As previously stated, in order for a celebrity to stay relevant they must be seen favorably by their fans. Fans feel more connected with someone who interacts with them.

RQ2: How do celebrities construct a persona of themselves via social media through content that features an interpersonal relationship in the post?

Rui and Stefanone (2012) found that many online behaviors are related to the viewing of reality TV. Those who consume large amounts of reality TV want to mimic the actions of those they admire. This means that whatever celebrities are doing on social



media, those who follow them may attempt to recreate it. In line with that, it is important to evaluate how a celebrity builds their brand is going to effect how their followers try to build their own online brand. Keller introduced an idea called “celebrity power” (Keller, 2014). This is the concept that if a celebrity builds a brand based around body positivity and female empowerment, the celebrity’s followers are likely to create a brand for their self that represents the same ideals.

RQ 3: What platform should be used to participate in interpersonal relationships with celebrities?

While some people only want to watch celebrities interact, others will want to interact with celebrities. The purpose of this research question is to find the platform that celebrities use most frequently to interact with their fans.

## **Method**

For this study a content analysis was performed on posts from 14 celebrities from seven different reality TV shows, totaling in the analysis of 372 posts. The focus of this study was on reality TV stars, which are known for attention-seeking behaviors (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). These attention-seeking behaviors are praised on reality television leading many of their stars to continue that behavior off of the television (Rui & Stefanone, 2012). This type of behavior leads many reality TV stars to disclose more about their self with lack of regard for privacy. While Goffman would question whether this is true, I think reality stars portray their front stage differently than other celebrities. Reality TV is supposed to be more backstage than other genres of TV shows because it is not scripted yet it is still front stage because it is designed with an audience in mind. This would mean that reality stars are groomed to reveal more about their private life on the

front stage. The persona built by this excessive disclosure is what drove this study. Popular reality TV shows such as *Jersey Shore* and *The Bachelor* were chosen by the researcher as the sampling frame. These shows were selected off a list and chosen based on perceived popularity by the researcher. Celebrities were randomly selected from the cast list. If a celebrity was chosen and then upon evaluation of their social media profile they were found to be inactive, they were randomly replaced by another celebrity on the cast list.

Each individual post was considered a unit of analysis for the purposes of this study. On Instagram, every third post was evaluated over the period of four weeks. This means that each celebrity had a different amount of posts that were evaluated. An average of 14 posts were analyzed for each individual with a standard deviation of 4.4. On Twitter, every third post was evaluated until the number of posts evaluated was the same as the number of posts evaluated on Instagram. Most celebrities posted on Twitter much more frequently than on Instagram so ensuring the number of posts were the same helps to prevent against a data set skewed by more data from Twitter. Two coders were trained in how to read social media posts and understand the different language used. To ensure inter-coder reliability, one coder coded 100% of the sample while another coder coded 35%.

Krippendorff's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability for most of the shared posts Code 1 was a code designed only to indicate whether the post was on Instagram or Twitter so KA was 1 for this code on both Twitter and Instagram. When used on an Instagram posts code 2 had a score of KA .855. Codes 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 had a score of 1 on the same posts. Code 7 had a KA score of .82. When used on Twitter

posts, code 2 had a KA score of  $-.038$ . For this code, percentage agreement was also used and was found to be 86% agreement. Code 3's score was  $.72$ . Codes 4 and 10 had a score of 1. Code 5 had a KA score of  $-0.18$ , which led the researcher to use percentage agreement. The percentage agreement was found to be 64% agreement. Code 6's score for KA was  $.44$ . Percentage agreement was used for this one as well and was found to be 86%. Code 7 had a score of  $-.29$  so percentage agreement was applied to and resulted in an agreement of 50%. Code 11 had a KA score of  $.001$  and a percentage agreement of 93%. Most codes were well above the  $.70$  considered to be reliable for Krippendorff's alpha and for those that weren't percentage agreement was used as well. For a few of the codes evaluated that had a low result for Krippendorff's alpha, percentage agreement was used. Percentage agreement was used for these codes because the result from Krippendorff's alpha was extremely low. This low result is most likely a product of the high number of one value and the absence of another. Due to the fact the codes affected are nominal and only two coders were used, these codes are eligible for Percentage agreement allows for us to see the minute disagreement that Krippendorff's does not provide in this case (Joyce, 2013). Most codes were above the 80% agreement considered to be acceptable. Code 7 had a low percentage of agreement. This means that the code was most likely to open for interpretation. Each coder's own opinions were required too much which led to disagreement.

## **Results**

As stated above, code 1 was only needed to evaluate whether a post was on Instagram or Twitter and does not need to be explained further. Code 2 evaluated whether or not the post featured another person or not. On Instagram, an average of 8

posts featured another person with a standard deviation of 4.3. On Twitter that number was 8.3 posts with a standard deviation of 3.8. Code 3 recorded whether or not a post included a picture. On Instagram all posts included a picture. On Twitter, an average of 4.4 posts included a picture. The standard deviation for this code was 3.6. Code 4 questioned whether the post showed the celebrity posing with another person. Image 1 shows a representative post for this code. The picture shows the celebrity near another individual while obviously facing the camera. The picture is not candid but a prepared shot.

Image 1:



(Khloekardashian, 2016)

Code 5 dealt with directly addressing another individual in a post using the @ sign. An average of 3.9 Instagram posts and 7.1 of Twitter posts addressed another individual using the @ sign. For this code, Instagram had a standard deviation of 2.8 and Twitter had a standard deviation of 3.3. Image 2 demonstrates an example of this code. @kyliejenner is tagged in the caption letting viewers know who the picture features.

Image 2:



(@khloekardashian, 2016)

Code 6 evaluated whether or not a post was in response to another user. No post evaluated on Instagram was found to be a response to another user but it did occur on Twitter. Image 3 shows a celebrity response to a tweet sent from a fan. The message in the smaller box is the original post from a fan. The words above that is the celebrity response.

Image 3:



(@JoelleFletcher, 2016)

Code 7 dealt with promotions and how often celebrities used them on their profiles. An average of 6.4 Instagram posts, with a standard deviation of 4.7, included a promotion of some kind. On Twitter it was an average of 7.8 posts that included a promotion, with a standard deviation of 4.2. Image 4 an example of a promotional Twitter post. The celebrity is using a product, in this case a facemask, while also encouraging her followers to try it for themselves.

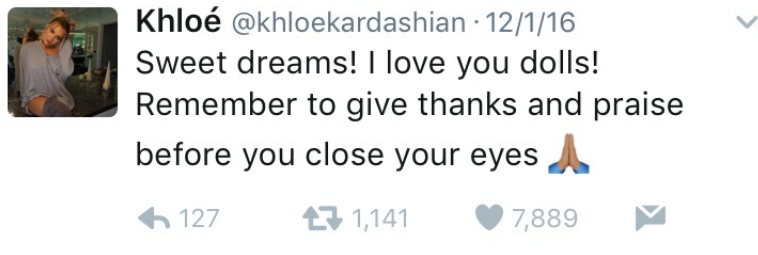
Image 4:



(@kourtneykardash, 2016)

Code 8 evaluated posts for the presence of the words love, you, like, proud, congratulations or some combination of the four. Image 5 demonstrates a post that includes multiple of the words in the context of a relationship. In this post the celebrity is addressing her followers directly. This post was chosen because it is a good example of the interpersonal relationships shown on Twitter, but in a broad perspective. This post does not address anyone directly until someone reads it, then that individual is being addressed directly. This is how parasocial relationships begin to form. The celebrity is not directly addressing a follower but that follower feels that they have made a connection with the celebrity and that the celebrity cares.

Image 5:



(@khloekardashian, 2016)

Code 9 evaluated codes for a physical interaction, which only applied to those posts that included pictures. A representative post coded for a physical interaction of touching can be found in Image 4. The celebrity and the other individual featured in the photo were sitting close enough together that they were touching, which is a physical interaction. Code 10 evaluated whether a post wished an individual a happy birthday. Only a small percentage of posts wished another a happy birthday but this code was added because the wish of a happy birthday is an example of a relationship that a celebrity has. If someone is important to a celebrity and they want others to know that, they will share the post on social media. Each person that a celebrity highlights on their page is helping to build that celebrity's brand by showing the type of individuals that a celebrity surrounds himself or herself with. Code 11 examined posts to see whether the post included a picture featuring only the celebrity. An average of 2.8 Instagram posts were a picture featuring only the celebrity while an average of only 2.1 Twitter posts were. For Instagram the standard deviation was 2.3 and for Twitter it was 2.6. Code 12 asked whether a post was a repost/retweet of another post. On Instagram, no post evaluated was found to be a repost. On Twitter, an average of 4.3 posts, with a standard deviation of 4.4, were a retweet.

The results of this study found that direct interaction between the celebrity and followers was present primarily on Twitter. Twitter had the highest number of individuals addressed directly with the @ sign, as well as having the ability to repost the posts of fans. Both sites had a high number of promotional posts. The promotional posts were often combined with a picture that featured only the celebrity. Posts showing the celebrity physically interacting with someone, whether through talking or touching, were more prominent on Instagram. Instagram was used more frequently to wish someone a happy birthday. The results of this study also demonstrates that key words, such as love and proud, are present more often in posts featuring another person than in posts featuring only the celebrity.

### **Discussion**

From the results of this study it can be found that both social media sites show interpersonal relationships but do so in different ways. Twitter is used to show direct interaction with fans. An example of this can be seen in Image 3. It is also used to portray what fans think about some aspect of a celebrity's life by allowing the celebrity to repost consumer's posts. Twitter was also used to address the celebrity's fans as a whole more than Instagram. An example of this can be seen in Image 5. Instagram is used to show the physical relationships with those the celebrity personally knows. Celebrities may wish an acquaintance happy birthday on Instagram or craft a post praising the actions of someone they know. Based on these results, in response to RQ1, Twitter would be the platform most likely to witness interpersonal relationships. Because of the ability to retweet fan interactions and the result that 63% of Twitter posts addressed



another person directly compared to just 20% of Instagram posts, Twitter is the platform used most for interpersonal relationships between the celebrity and their followers.

In regards to how celebrities build their personal brand, much of that seems to come from promoting events or products that the celebrity is currently involved in. Celebrities help to promote their individual brand by featuring only themselves in posts involving a promotion. Celebrities also use relationships to build their brand. Posts featuring another person allow the individual to see whom the celebrity surrounds their self with. Consumers also help the celebrity to build their brand over social media. If a consumer posts a positive review of the celebrity, the celebrity can choose to repost it. This allows other consumers to see how one consumer viewed the celebrity positively, helping to encourage others to view the celebrity positively.

Another way that celebrities portray themselves is by showing their interactions with those who they know. Image 6 is an example of this. In the post the celebrity is interacting with her nephew. They are discussing how much he loves her. This post is being used to show that the celebrity is a caring aunt. This point is made more relevant by the fact that someone else shared it first and the celebrity just reposted it. When another person is showing appreciation for something a celebrity does, it has more of an impact because it makes the post more authentic, similar to a testimonial type of advertising.

Image 6:



(@khloekardashian, 2016)

The two platforms, Twitter and Instagram are used for brand building in different ways. Twitter is utilized to show more of what others think about the celebrity. This adds authenticity to the brand because the message being spread is one directly portrayed by the celebrity. Instagram is used to show the types of individuals the celebrities surround themselves with. These other celebrities' personal brand adds to the brand being portrayed by the celebrity. For example if a celebrity posts a picture with a presidential candidate, it will be assumed the celebrity will be voting for that candidate. This can change or strengthen the perception of those who follow the celebrity about what values the celebrity holds.

For further research it would be suggested to research what type of posts consumers prefer to see from celebrities. It would be beneficial to evaluate what consumers of celebrity media would prefer to see compared to what the majority of posts actually do show. Celebrities post to build a relationship with consumers and future research could explore if celebrity posts are effectively building those relationships with consumers or if posts better designed to fit the wants of the consumer would be more

effective. I would suggest that future research uses a focus group method to find what types of posts are seen as the most authentic and true version of different celebrities.

There are limitations to this study as well. The sample for this study was based entirely on the casts of reality TV shows. These celebrities are known for attention seeking and may post with more self-disclosure than other groups of celebrities. There is also nothing to prevent against selection bias. Also, because percentage agreement was used for some codes instead of Krippendorff's alpha, some statistical aspects of the coding results do not account for chance agreement. Another limitation is the Instagram comments that were not examined for celebrity interactions. These comments could hold interactions with followers similar to that on Twitter, which would affect the results of which site holds the most interactions between celebrities and their fans.

The findings from this study lead to a few significant details. The first is that those seeking specific information about celebrities can seek that information on the platform most likely to represent it. Second, is that those hoping to gain social influence can copy the practices put forth by celebrities to gain followers. Celebrities are social influencers and the practices they follow are often used by the masses eventually. I do not think using the same social media practices as celebrities is bad as long as individuals do not focus solely on trying to gain followers. I think some of the beauty of social media is the blending of so many personalities and thoughts and if it becomes more about increasing followers and less about sharing individual thoughts then it will no longer be a positive. Celebrities censor more of their lives than non-celebrities because of the amount of individuals interacting with the celebrity and I think that practice would negatively affect social media. The findings for this study are significant in part due to

advertisements. If endorsers are aware of the relationship consumers feel they have with celebrities on a social media platform, endorsers can use that to create their advertisements. They also have information on what platform is most suitable for certain audiences. The most significant finding from this study deals with how celebrities build their brand. So much of the celebrity social media brand is built around promotions of varying products and events. It is already known that consumers of celebrity social media create their own brand in the same way celebrities build theirs. If celebrities devote a large part of the brand building to promoting events that means that consumers will eventually begin to do the same. This could eventually lead to social media being used mainly for the promotion of products instead of social interaction with others like it is used currently. I do not think this series of events would be a positive one. Social media should be a space about expressing who each individual is, and a place to share creative thoughts. There are plenty of other places that can be used for capitalistic purposes and some spaces should be reserved just for the sharing of thoughts and ideas between individuals.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this research show that the platform primarily used by celebrities for interpersonal relationships with fans is Twitter, while Instagram is used to show interpersonal relationships with those the celebrity knows personally. For personal social media use this shows that if an individual wants to post content on the platform most likely to begin a discussion or conversation in which they will be included it would be wise to post that content on Twitter. It also shows that celebrities deploy many different techniques to build their social media brand, including the interactions with those they

now and promotions of events. In the future, an evaluation of consumer satisfaction in the posts of celebrities would be effective. Because social media is a “front stage” performance, it would make more sense for the posts to be catered to what the audience wants.

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**Appendix A**

## Codebook

- 1) Is the post on Instagram or Twitter?
  0. Twitter
  1. Instagram
- 2) Does the post feature another person?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 3) Does the post include a picture?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 4) Does the post show the celebrity posing with another person?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 5) Does the post address another person directly, using the @ sign?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 6) Is the post a response to another post or person?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 7) Does the post promote or discuss a product?
  0. No
  1. Yes
- 8) Does the post include any of the following words?
  0. Love
  1. You
  2. Like
  3. Congratulations
  4. Proud
  5. Multiple of above
  6. None of the above
- 9) Is the celebrity interacting with another person in the post?
  0. No
  1. Yes, interacting by touching
  2. Yes, interacting by talking to another person
  3. Yes, interacting by smiling to another person
  4. Yes, interacting by multiple of the above
  5. Yes but not interacting by any of the above
- 10) Does the post wish an individual happy birthday?
  0. No
  1. Yes

11) Is the post a picture featuring only the celebrity?

0. No

1. Yes

12) Is the post a retweet or repost?

0. No

1. Yes

**Appendix B**

- *Keeping Up With The Kardashians*
  - Khloe Kardashian
  - Kourtney Kardashian
- *Jersey Shore*
  - Nicole Polizzi (Snooki)
  - Vinny Guadagnino
- *Teen Mom OG*
  - Amber Portwood
  - Farrah Abraham
- *Real Housewives of Atlanta*
  - Kandi Burruss
  - Nene Leakes
- *The Bachelor*
  - Ben Higgins
  - Jojo Fletcher
- *The Hills*
  - Audrina Patridge
  - Brody Jenner
- *Duck Dynasty*
  - Korie Robertson
  - Sadie Robertson