KEEPING UP WITH THE KARDASHIANS ON INSTAGRAM:

CELEBRITY PRACTICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

COMMUNICATION

MAY 2016

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed celebrity practices on Instagram, a mobile content social network. Visual and textual content analysis was applied as method to examine the behaviors and strategies that reality TV superstars Kourtney, Kim and Khloé Kardashians use on Instagram. This research study looked at how Instagram creates opportunities for celebrities to interact with fans and helps to maintain and expand their celebrity brands.

Analysis revealed Intimacy and Self-Brand Promotion as the most used practice of the Kardashians. The study also demonstrated high amounts of endorsements and promotion practices embedded along with the personal photos. These findings suggest that parasocial interaction plays a key role in the Kardashians’ Instagram use. Moreover, this study implies that the Kardashians appropriate Instagram as an advertising platform, while rewarding their fans with an illusion of backstage access.

Keywords: Celebrity Practice, Instagram, Kardashians, Parasocial Interaction,
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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have had a remarkable impact in the entertainment industry, increasing visibility and marketing for celebrities to promote their TV shows, movies, concerts and events with just a click of a button. The social engagement across platforms heralds a new generation of savvy Hollywood stars backed by sophisticated online marketing teams that understand how to push past traditional media to build a tremendous fan base. Increasingly, stars, celebrities, and their teams are using social media to extend awareness of their brands online and off, driving ratings and box office as well as bigger fan bases.

Social media and the rise of smartphone culture have substantially altered how celebrities are treated and how people gain the vast platform of fame. Social media can catapult people to levels of fame they would otherwise never reach. For instance, Justin Bieber is often called the first YouTube superstar, and accurately so the pop superstar got his start by posting videos online, skipping through countless auditions that many stars before him had to endure. Bieber’s devoted fans are all the more dedicated about their favorite singer because he’s such an active social media user. They have a direct entrance to his attention, even if he likely misses the vast majority of audience members’ posts he receives just due to the sheer volume.

For many, social media have played an important role in their lives these past few years, especially with celebrities. For pop stars like Lady Gaga (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013) and Miley Cyrus (Marwick & boyd, 2011), Twitter and Facebook facilitate great ways to interact with fans and update them with their latest news, concert tour dates, and general thoughts. And social media can also be used as a very effective marketing tool for self-promotion.

While many of the existing studies (Click, Lee & Holladay, 2013; Courbet & Fourquet-Courbet, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2011) focus on celebrities and their use of Twitter and
Facebook, few studies have focused on Instagram, an online mobile based social networking app made for sharing photos and videos. As of September 2015, Instagram has amassed a global community of 400 million with 75 percent of its users living outside of the United States, with over 40 billion photos shared, an average of 3.5 billion likes each day, and an average of 80 million photos posted per day (Instagram, 2015). While many of the users are ordinary citizens, the most followed Instagram users are primarily celebrities.

Social Networking sites (SNSs) are changing how celebrities and fans interact with each other. In the past, relationship between celebrities and fans were seen as one-sided relationships. SNSs are changing the dynamics of these relationships. Today, celebrities are willingly sharing personal information on SNSs. In turn, audiences can feel more connected with the celebrity. Despite its popularity, parasocial interaction has received limited attention on Instagram. This study aims to further explore parasocial interactions on Instagram. With many companies using Instagram as a free marketing tool, this study also explores how parasocial interactions apply to promotion and branding.

This study looks at how reality TV mega-stars Kourtney, Khloé, and Kim Kardashian’s use the features of Instagram help solidify their celebrity status. While the Kardashians are non-traditional entertainment celebrities, they have many fans that rival those in traditional entertainment industries. Currently, the Kardashians are some of the most followed personalities on social media, especially on Instagram. This study provides an understanding of the family dynamics of the Kardashians and insight into the ways in which they effectively use the affordances of Instagram to market brands through parasocial interaction.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Instagram

*Instagram is a fast, beautiful and fun way to share your life with friends and family. Take a picture or video, choose a filter to transform its look and feel, then post to Instagram — it's that easy.*

As their mission statement suggests, Instagram is a social networking app that makes sharing photos easy. Ellison and boyd (2008) defined social network sites (SNS) as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Ellison & boyd, 2008, p. 211). While most social networking sites share some core features (i.e. following friends, liking and commenting), Instagram has become a culture in its own right as one of the most actively used mobile social networking app by teenagers, company brands, pops stars and television celebrities (Marwick, 2015).

First launched in October 6, 2010, the technology behind Instagram is nothing revolutionary. It did not appear to offer anything new compared to existing social networking sites that had similar features, such as image manipulation tools, location annotation of photos, and instant sharing. However, it is the harmonious operation of these elements within a single mobile application that might perhaps provide an explanation for Instagram’s widespread adoption. Furthermore, the “fast” and “easy” way to post photographs goes well with the heightened popularity of the “selfies” (Marwick, 2015).

The photograph has become an integral part of our lives. It is so deeply embedded in the way we capture moments in time and share information that we barely notice the medium that
we employ to do so much. On the heels of the success of Facebook and Twitter, Instagram found its niche by isolating one core function: instant photo editing and sharing. While both Twitter and Facebook included photo-sharing functionalities, they were always secondary functions to the text-based function of status updates. Instagram used pre-existing technology to change the focus from text-based status updates to vibrant, image-centered updates. It adopted the idea of the unending activity stream from other social media services, and made images the center of the service.

Figure 1: Interfaces of Instagram. (a) Instagram app home page, (b) Transforming a photo with filters and manipulation tools, (c) Adding caption, tagging people, adding location and sharing to different social medias

Instagram was originally an iPhone-only application that allowed users to upload, edit, like, and comment on photos. Today, the mobile application is available for the iOS and Android mobile operating systems. And, while Instagram has a website on which photos can be viewed,
the site’s functionality is limited and users cannot upload photographs. As a result, the vast majority of activity goes on through the mobile application (Marwick, 2015).

**Affordances of Instagram**

The concept of affordance suggests that humans interpret possible usage of an object from its shape and their earlier experience. For example, “a chair affords ("is for") support, and, therefore, affords sitting” (Norman, 2002, p. 9). Instagram offers its users a unique way to post pictures and videos using their smartphones. Users can take pictures within the app or use photos that already exist in their camera roll. The application then allows its users to apply 23 different filters and use manipulation tools in order to transform the appearance of an image (Fig. 1b). In this way, the user can change the image to suggest a different time or atmosphere and evoke a different feel and message (Hochman & Manovich, 2013).

Instagram, like any other social network, is based around having friends or followers. At the top of your profile (Fig. 1a) you will see the username, profile picture, how many photos have been uploaded, how many followers the account has, and how many they are following. By default, photos are public on Instagram but the app has a binary model of privacy (Marwick, 2015), where users can set their Instagram accounts to either public or private. This option lets users have more control over their audiences. When you follow someone, his or her latest photos show up in your stream listed in reverse chronological order. Users can ‘like’ photos and comment on them. The comment section allows users to engage with each other. People can ask questions such as “where was this taken?” and/or simply give appreciation such as “this is really beautiful”. Both ‘like’ and comment are seen as a very friendly gesture. These will appear in referenced user’s “updates” page so that users can keep track of “likes” and comments about
their posts. Given these functions, Instagram can be regarded as a *social awareness stream* (Naaman, Boase, & Lai, 2010) like other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter.

![Instagram Photo and caption](image)

*Figure 2: Instagram Photo and caption*

Instagram users can add more information to their photos by tagging people who are in the photo, geo-tagging the location where the photo was taken and adding a short caption to describe the photo. Users can also specify a theme to the photo by adding a keyword hashtag. Like other social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, user tagging of entries, media, and other information has been a central feature of Instagram (Highfield & Leaver, 2014;
Hochman & Manovich, 2013). The hashtag or # symbol (Figure 2) allows users on Instagram to categorize images and make them searchable under a particular topic that is represented by that hashtag keyword. In her Twitter study, Baym (2014) mentions that hashtags can work as “markers of certain topic, an issue, or an event and can help to coordinate the exchange of information relevant to such topics” (p.17). Furthermore, Baym (2014) believed that hashtags can “connect users who have no preexisting follower/followee relationship” (p. 6). While hashtags can facilitate communication between people who are interested in the same topic, it should be noted that hashtags can also be used mainly to express feelings or are “non topical markers” such as #win #fail (Baym, 2014, p.18).

Like the hashtags, @mention (Figure 2) can help facilitate communication with others by allowing users to tag or mention others by using the @ symbol, which effectively creates a link from their posts to the referenced user’s account. The @mention makes it possible to highlight a post or start a conversation with a specific user whether or not both users are following each other (Baym, 2014). Like with hashtags, it is important to note that not all @mentions are used for conversations. The @mention can be used to address a person by mentioning Instagram handle rather than their full name (Baym, 2014). Furthermore, celebrities as well as ordinary users can use @mention to address brands that they are endorsing.

The technological affordances of Instagram of being able to capture and document a pre-selected moment in time and share it with a widespread group of followers in a “fast” and “easy” manner is perhaps what propelled it to success.
Parasocial Relationships

The term parasocial relationship was first used by Horton and Wohl (1956) to describe the media audiences’ imaginary friendship with media characters. Horton and Wohl (1956) described parasocial relationships as being cultivated by the media to resemble face-to-face relationships. Parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships. The audiences devote time, energy and interest to the relationship but the other party (celebrity) is completely unaware of the other’s existence. Horton and Wohl (1956) believed that the audience is more than just observing; they are participating and interacting with the actor on screen.

Parasocial relationships are strengthened through repeated appearances of a performer or celebrity. When viewers begin to learn not only about the performer professionally, but also about their personal life, this strengthens the parasocial bond between performers and fans (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In addition, the celebrities might try to blur the lines between themselves (and their performance) and their audience (fans). Through exposure to celebrities in the media, audiences experience the illusion of a face-to-face interaction. Some ways in which a celebrity might enhance an intimate parasocial relationship include making messages casual, conversational, and using body language when applicable to mimic a casual interpersonal interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As knowledge about personality and personal life is accumulated, fans begin to think they really understand the celebrity (Chung & Cho, 2014).

Social Media and Parasocial Interactions

While in the past, parasocial relationship was highly controlled and was limited to publicity and promotion (Chung & Cho, 2014); the nature of parasocial relationship has changed in today’s Internet age. Celebrities willingly share personal information with fans (Chung &
Cho, 2014). Social network sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are popular and provide effective ways for celebrities to enhance parasocial relationships by facilitating direct interactions with their fans. For example, Click, Lee, and Holladay’s (2013) study of Twitter revealed how fans (Little Monsters) received direct and regular feedback from Lady Gaga (Mother Monster). Mother Monster would repost and comment on the posts of Little Monsters’ artworks and covers of her songs. In another Twitter study, singer Josh Groban revealed he was aware of his fans by following their post and movements on Twitter, enough that “he had a sense of who they are, how they think, and what they want from him” (Stever & Lawson, 2013, p. 350). In her study of parasocial interaction on Facebook, Lueck (2012) found that Kim Kardashian had to engage with her audience to keep her fans interested in her personae. Kim’s Facebook post creates parasocial interaction and gives the illusion of intimacy with the intent to sell and endorse products. The audience is constantly being alerted and informed with additional information about Kim’s life, thus “the audience wants to imitate her lifestyle and purchase the brands and products that make her lifestyle admirable” (Lueck, 2012, p. 21). Although the authenticity of her online identity is up for debate, Sastre (2014) believes Kim is aware that media and marketing are necessary requirements of modern fame.

Social network sites are slowly changing the dynamics of celebrity and fan relationships. Celebrities are no longer seen to be “extraordinary” and “magical” (Turner, 2014). As SNS facilitate conversations between celebrities and fans, it creates a sense of closeness and connectedness. Through SNSs, celebrities are able to strategically disclose their thoughts and emotions. As a result, fans feel a sense of understanding of their celebrity idols making the relationships seem “real” (Chung & Cho, 2014; Stever and Lawson, 2013). This constant communication and easy access to celebrities increases the intimacy and strength of the
parasocial relationship (Chung & Cho, 2014; Stever & Lawson, 2013; Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013).

**Celebrity**

Scholars have defined the term celebrity in a number of different ways. In his book, *The Image*, Boorstin (1987) defined celebrity as “a person who is known for his well-knownness,” (p. 57). According to Click, Lee and Holladay (2013), celebrity is a complicated cultural construct. Celebrity is a noun meaning ‘a famous person’ (e.g. Beyoncé) and celebrity can also refer to a state of being or cultural phenomenon (e.g. celebrity magazines). Furthermore, Marwick & boyd (2011) states that “celebrity is maintained through mutual recognition of power differentials by fan and practitioner, and maintenance of one’s fan base through performed intimacy, affiliation, and public acknowledgment” (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 140)

Currently, celebrity culture is in a state where entertainment industries, via reality TV (e.g. Keeping Up with The Kardashians), are able to produce celebrities from ordinary people who do not necessarily possess any inherent talent or notable merits (Turner, 2014). This has led to a situation, where reality television stars and those with mediocre talent can be seen on tabloid and magazine covers next to traditional stars, who have achieved their status through success and achievements in sports, cinema, or recording. Today, A-list celebrities, lesser celebrities, and celebrity wannabes capitalize on the affordances of social media to further maintain their celebrity status and maintain a huge fan base.

**Micro-celebrity**

Today, it seems as though famous people are everywhere. Social network sites such as
Celebrity Practice

While there are many ways to describe what it means to be a celebrity, this study focuses on celebrity as a practice, a performance, rather than a set of qualities of an individual. In their study, Marwick and boyd (2011) investigated Twitter activity of actors, musicians, technologists, politicians, reality television stars, and others. The study’s main argument was that celebrity is a performative practice, which means that celebrity and fame can be seen as a continuum, rather than a line separating the famous from the non-famous (p. 141). Furthermore, the authors revealed that the practice of celebrity involves authenticity and sincerity, intimacy, affiliation,
public recognition and fan maintenance. To further explain the concepts that involve celebrity practice, each concept is highlighted and examples are provided below:

**Authenticity and Sincerity.** This practice refers to the authenticity and sincerity of a celebrity practitioner on social media. Marwick and boyd (2011) state, “not all ‘celebrity’ accounts are written by the purported individual” (p. 149). Fans must recognize that the celebrity practitioner is real. Marwick and boyd (2011) pointed out things such as typos and using first person voice as subtle signals of authenticity. Grammatical error and referring to themselves in first person are seen as authentic and sincere. *Figure 3* shows pop star Britney Spears using a first person voice to describe how much she loves her drink.

*Figure 3: Britney Spears enjoying a drink*
**Intimacy.** Celebrity practitioners create a sense of affection and closeness to their followers and fans. This can include showing followers glimpses of the personal life of the celebrity practitioner, giving fans and followers access to intimate details and facts concerning the celebrity practitioner. *Figure 4* shows Justin Bieber sleeping next to his little brother.

*Figure 4: Justin Bieber sleeps next to his little brother*
**Affiliation.** This practice involves showing connections to other famous individuals, and thus strengthening one’s status as a true celebrity among other celebrities. For example, rapper/musician Nicki Minaj might emphasize her celebrity status by collaborating on a song with another musician such as pop star Beyoncé. This practice can also show connection with celebrities and fans using language, words, cultural symbols, and conventions. In *Figure 5*, Katy Perry spells “dem” instead of “them,” a common spelling that is identical to the language used by her young fans (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

*Figure 5: Katy Perry shows support for Hilary Clinton*
Public Recognition and Fan Maintenance. Celebrity practitioners use public acknowledgment, in the form of @replies, to connect with others. If fans receive @replies back, they function as a mark of status and are publicized within the fan community (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 145). Celebrity practice also requires constant interaction with fans to preserve the power differentials. This includes communication, replying to fan messages and postings, as well as showing gratitude toward fans. Figure 6 shows rapper Nicki Minaj posting a fan drawing of her. Here, Nicki used the @reply affordance to give the artist credit and appreciation for her work.

Figure 6: Nicki Minaj post a fan art
The practice of celebrity online gives fans and celebrity followers so called backstage access where they see glimpses of the daily life and routines of the famous person (Marwick & boyd, 2011, pp. 143-144). Media technologies and social network sites such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram further facilitate this phenomenon.

**Keeping Up With the Kardashians**

*Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (KUWTK) is a reality television series that focuses on the personal and professional lives of the Kardashian-Jenner family, a family of socialites who have monetized on their 15 minutes of fame to build a business empire and take over pop culture (Malitz, 2014; Brodesser-Akner, 2015). While the show has been widely criticized for its concept and seemingly fabricated storylines, the show is now in its 8th year and on its 11th season. There have been 5,135 telecasts and the show is now broadcast in 160 countries (New York Times, 2015). It has produced other spin-off shows such as *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, *Khloé and Lamar*, *Kourtney and Khloé Take The Hamptons*, and *Dash Dolls* (IMDb, 2015). The Kardashian family has monetized fame by venturing in various activities such as acting, hosting, modeling, and entrepreneurship.

**Kourtney Kardashian**

While her younger sister, Kim, was the first to hit fame, Kourtney, the eldest of the Kardashian siblings, was the first Kardashian to be featured in a reality show, *Filthy Rich: Cattle Drive*, back in 2005 (People, 2015). Today, Kourtney has made a name for herself as the most entrepreneurial among her siblings. Being a mother of three, Kourtney appeals to young moms
everywhere. Kourtney has collaborated with her sisters to launch clothing lines, boutiques, skincare, books and multiple ad campaigns. One of her boutiques is called *Kardashian Kids* and *Smooch*. While her first reality show was a disaster, Kourtney has found success with her KUWTK spin off shows, *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami, Kourtney and Kim Take New York, and Kourtney and Khloé Take the Hamptons.*

**Kim Kardashian-West**

Kim is arguably the most famous of all the Kardashians, and she became famous through a negative way. Kim became infamous as the subject of a sex tape leaked in 2007 (Toomey, 2015). The tape, however, propelled Kim into fame and soon after, the socialite turned reality star became a household name in Hollywood. She has capitalized on her fame by appearing in numerous endorsement deals, from burger, weight loss pills, lollipops and even liqueur (Forbes, 2015). Aside from her reality TV show and its spin offs, Kim Kardashian has also monetized on her marriages to basketball player Kris Humphries and rapper Kanye West by collecting licensing fees, endorsement, and broadcast deals. Kim is also a regular celebrity gossip subject due to her controversial relationships and racy photos. *Huffington Post* calls Kim Kardashian a “multimedia and social media celebrity” (Huffington Post, 2015). Kim Kardashian uses her reality television show and various social media platforms to keep her consistently visible and ‘accessible’ to the public (Sastre, 2014). Kim has cashed in on her media success selling products such a book of her ‘selfies’ titled *Selfish* and a video game, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* (Huffington Post, 2015). She also ventured into entrepreneurship by releasing clothing lines, fragrance, makeup, and a fashion boutique along with her sisters. Kim Kardashian
Khloé Kardashian

Like her sisters, Khloé is often a subject of celebrity news gossips for her body size and relationships. Like many of the Kardashian members, Khloé has ventured into retail and fashion industries with their DASH boutiques, which has locations in Miami, Los Angeles, and New York (Huffington Post, 2015). Her marriage with former NBA star Lamar Odom led to the creation of a KUWTK spin off show, Khloé and Lamar (Malitz, 2014). Khloé has managed to carve out her own separate identity from her publicity-loving, high profile family by venturing into hosting. She has done a few hosting stints on radio and TV shows such as The X Factor and E! Celebrity News (Biography, 2015). Khloé will also host her own upcoming show called Kocktails with Khloé (Variety, 2015).

Kardashians on Instagram

The most popular Instagram users are primarily “traditional” celebrities whose fame is conferred by mainstream media or entertainment, such as television shows or professional sports. But unlike many celebrities who have gained popularity as singers, dancers, or actors, the Kardashians are considered as atypical celebrities; they don’t sing, dance, or act and some people would say the Kardashians are “famous for being famous” (Marcus, 2011). While the Kardashians are not the typical entertainment celebrities, they however have many fans that rival those in the entertainment industry. Currently, the Kardashians are some of the most followed personalities on social media, especially on Instagram. They have a combined total of 114.8
million Instagram followers. As of November 5th 2015, Kim Kardashian is the third most followed Instagram account with 51.1 million, just behind pop superstar Taylor Swift and Instagram itself. Khloé and Kourtney are also on the Top-15 most followed Instagram users with 35.3 million, and 28.1 million followers, respectively (Social Blade, 2015). Because of their unconventional celebrity status and their huge social media following, the Kardashians are a good example of how famous people capitalize on affordances of social media to further their celebrity status. They use social media to invite followers (fans) into their worlds, turning their daily existences into content for fans to consume.

**Research Question**

This study aims to analyze the behaviors and strategies that celebrities use on social media. In particular, this study looks at the Kardashians’ use of the mobile app Instagram. The following research question guided this work:

RQ: What celebrity practices do the Kardashians use on Instagram?

This is among the first studies to conduct a deep analysis of photo content and celebrity practice on Instagram. The mobile application offers researchers the opportunity to study how users document elements of their everyday lives, in this case in a predominately visual context, and how these are presented online (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). Having a deep understanding of Instagram is important because it will help us gain further insights about social and cultural issues about people’s activities through the lens of their photos.
3. METHODS

McMillan (2000) advocated for web content analysis using traditional techniques of content analysis (CA) and applying it to web-based materials. However, Herring (2010) argued that the traditional approach is problematic because “a growing number of web studies analyze types of content that differ from those usually studied in CA—such as textual conversations and hyperlinks” (Herring, 2010, p. 236). To address this, Herring (2010) argues that an “expanded paradigm” is needed in which “insights from paradigms such as discourse analysis and social network analysis are operationalized and implemented within a general content analytic framework” (Herring, 2010, p. 234).

While Instagram is an image-based social network, a mixed method of visual content analysis and textual content analysis was employed for investigation. First, a visual content analysis analyzed the main draw of Instagram, the photographs. Because Instagram photos are typically taken via mobile phone, they tend to be a document of people’s lives. It’s a look at people’s lives and what they value. Visual content analysis is an observational method used for examining the ways in which the media represent people, events, and situations (Bell, 2001). Second, a textual analysis analyzed themes and patterns that can occur from the use of captions by users on Instagram (Madden, Ruthven, & McMenemy, 2013).

Sample

Photos for analysis were drawn from the official Instagram account of Kourtney (@kourtneykardash), Kim (@kimkardashian), and Khloé Kardashian (@khloekardashian). For this content analysis, 50 public photographs from each user were analyzed. Since images on
Instagram are listed in reverse chronological order, photos were analyzed from newest to oldest.

In June 2013, Instagram introduced a feature giving its users the ability to create and upload short video clips (Marwick 2015). The short videos have seen an increased in popularity since its introduction. While the Kardashians use this feature, this study focused on static images, which are still the majority of the Kardashians Instagram content.

**Data Collection**

The researcher selected the date of January 10, 2016 to begin data collection. And working backward from that date, data collection consisted of the 50 most recent photographs from Kourtney, Kim and Khloé’s verified Instagram account. At first, this study assumed that the text caption corresponded with the photograph provided. However, a pilot test revealed that some captions had nothing to do with the photographs. Thus, photographs and captions were analyzed separately using separate schemes and analyses (see Appendix 1). Using visual analysis on photos and textual analysis on captions resulted in more significant findings of how the Kardashians enact celebrity strategies through their photographs as well as the captions they provide.

**Coding Protocol**

To the researcher’s knowledge, there is no existing codebook for celebrity strategies on Instagram. To categorize the types of celebrity strategies used by the Kardashians on Instagram, a codebook was developed based on previous analytic investigation by Marwick and boyd’s (2011) celebrity practices used on Twitter as an inspiration. The following celebrity practices were included: authenticity and sincerity, intimacy, affiliation, and public recognition and fan maintenance (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Each photo was analyzed and categorized based on the
content of the photo. This research examined if the photo relates to Kourtney, Kim and Khloé’s personal life, business life, fan communication, pop culture, or social cause. Photo captions were also analyzed to examine the use of hashtags (# symbol) and user tags (@ symbol). Textual analysis examined if company brands, fans, and other celebrities are tagged in the photo caption. Hashtags were examined for promotion of social causes (i.e. #prayforparis), brands, or events. After a pilot test was completed, additional categories were created to categorize photos that did not relate to any of the existing categories. New categories include Endorsing Brands, Self-Brand Promotion, and Inspirational Post. Endorsing Brands refers to using fame to promote a product or service. Self-brand promotion refers to promoting or publicizing oneself or one’s products. Inspirational post refers to messages, quotes, words or hashtag that are intended to convey inspiration.
4. RESULTS

Inter-coder Reliability

Inter-coder reliability is a critical component of content analysis. In order to establish reliability and avoid any biased coding from the researcher, a second coder was recruited. Both coders each independently coded 10 Instagram posts from each account for a total of 30 photos and 30 captions. Percentage agreement, Cohen’s kappa, Scott’s pi and Krippendorf’s alpha were calculated to determine inter-coder reliability figures. Table 1 shows the results of the calculations for inter-coder reliability for Instagram photo post. Table 2 shows the results for the captions.

Percent agreement is the easiest to calculate, as it is simply the proportion of units that two coders observe and agree upon. In terms of percentage agreement, the two coders’ ranged from 93.3% to 100% agreement in photo posts, while photo captions ranged from 96.7% to 100% agreement. Cohen’s Kappa was used to calculate chance agreement. Wimmer and Dominick’s (2006) range of .70 was used to determine what qualifies as an acceptable level of reliability. Cohen’s Kappa figures from the analysis ranged from 0.76 to 1, and therefore above Wimmer and Dommick’s (2006) acceptable range. A subsequent meeting between the coder and the researcher was conducted to reach a consensus among the categories that had disagreements.
Table 1: *Inter-Coder Reliability – Instagram Photos*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent Agreement</th>
<th>Scott’s Pi</th>
<th>Cohen’s Kappa</th>
<th>Krippendorf’s Alpha</th>
<th>Agreements</th>
<th>Disagreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity &amp; Sincerity</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>0.869</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation with Celebrities</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsing Brands</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>0.762</td>
<td>0.764</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Brand Promotion</td>
<td>93.3%</td>
<td>0.814</td>
<td>0.815</td>
<td>0.817</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: *Inter-Coder Reliability – Instagram Photo Captions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent Agreement</th>
<th>Scott’s Pi</th>
<th>Cohen’s Kappa</th>
<th>Krippendorf’s Alpha</th>
<th>Agreements</th>
<th>Disagreements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation with Celebrities</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation with Fans</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsing Brands</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Brand Promotion</td>
<td>96.7%</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.889</td>
<td>0.891</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

This research asked the question of what celebrity strategies the Kardashians use on Instagram. To investigate this question, data were collected through content analyses of 150 photos and 150 photo captions from Kourtney, Kim and Khloé Kardashian’s official Instagram account. The results from this analysis are presented in Table 3, and Figure 7 and Figure 8 and show how frequent each category appeared during analysis. Results from this analysis sheds light on which celebrity strategies are being used by the Kardashians.

Table 3: Summary of category frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Photos</th>
<th>Photo %</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Comments %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity &amp; Sincerity</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation with Celebrities</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation with Fans</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Recognition &amp; Fan Maintenance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endorsing Brands</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Brand Promotion</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational Post</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7 shows the different proportions of photo categories. As shown in this figure, 39% of the photos in the dataset were Intimacy category. This discovery supports the idea that SNS allows for a backstage look at the celebrities’ lives (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Other popular categories include Self-Brand Promotion with 26% and Authenticity and Sincerity with 19%. This is in line with the belief that Instagram is used for promoting brands. Data also revealed that Public Recognition and Fan Maintenance (1%) and Affiliation with Fans (0%) were the least popular categories. Other categories – Endorsing Brands, Inspirational Post, and Affiliation with Celebrities all consisted of 5% each of the categories.
Figure 8: Frequency of Categories in Captions

Figure 8 shows the different proportions of categories for Instagram captions. The top categories for captions are similar to the photo post with Self Brand Promotion (37%) and Intimacy (23%) appearing as the most popular categories. Even though Affiliation with Fans appeared as the least popular in the photo post, this category appeared as the third most popular category in the captions post with 14%. This suggests that the Kardashian affiliate with fans more through text rather than photos. Further analysis showed Endorsing Brands consisted of 11% of the data. Authenticity and Sincerity, which was the third most popular category in the photo post, appeared less significant in the caption with only 7%. Rounding up the data is
Affiliation with Celebrities with 5%, Inspirational Post with 3% and Public Recognition and Fan Maintenance with 0%.

In order to determine whether some celebrity strategies are more favored than others by the Kardashians, a chi-square ‘goodness of fit’ test was undertaken. Using Preacher's (2001) calculation for the chi-square test, photo categories were found to be statistically significant \( (\chi^2 = 125.127, df = 6, p=0.00) \). In addition, caption categories were found to be statistically significant \( (\chi^2 = 91.131, df = 6, p=0.00) \). As a result, we can conclude that there is a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies of celebrity strategies performed by the Kardashians for both photos and captions. Thus, celebrity strategies are not equally preferred by the Kardashians.

**Intimacy**

One of the frequent ways celebrities use social media is to build their brand by getting closer to their fans, the main supporters on their brands and endorsements. The Kardashians use Instagram to reach out to their supporters by posting images that make them appear like regular people, which create a sense of closeness and familiarity between themselves and their followers.
Figure 9: Khloé with niece Penelope during Christmas

Figure 10: Kardashian family gathering for thanksgiving
Figure 9 shows Khoé and her niece enjoying a relaxing time in their pajamas during Christmas and Figure 10 shows the whole Kardashian during a family gathering for thanksgiving. Here, the Kardashians employ performative intimacy by posting personal pictures (Marwick & boyd, 2011). Social media culture and smartphones have allowed users to post camera phone pictures directly to Instagram. The Kardashians frequently use these services, creating the illusion of first-person glimpses into their lives. While the pictures seem candid, they are however strategically chosen (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Self-Promotion

Social media are ideal for self-promotion, and it doesn't take a lot time or energy. Daily tweets, status updates, or photos keep celebrities in the public eye. Celebrities make use of several social media platforms all at once so they can keep all their fans updated. Celebrities will share their activities, their plans, and information about upcoming projects to keep people in the know.

The Kardashians are particularly good at this. They use the affordances of Instagram to hint, tease, and riddle about upcoming events, tours, and videos to keep their fans guessing.
Figure 11 shows Kim and her husband, rapper Kanye West pictured together in their stylish clothes accompanied by a caption that promotes both her app and website. In the said caption, Kim talks about her anxieties. While not giving away too much information, Kim hints of struggles during her pregnancy. This picture post shows how Kim Kardashian strategically uses photos of herself to invite people to learn how she deals with anxieties during pregnancy. She seamlessly utilizes Instagram to attract fans to use her app and website and in return, fans are rewarded by learning more about their idol’s personal struggles.
At first glance, Figure 12 seems like a regular picture of hair styling tools and products. A closer look at the photo reveals some Kardashian hair products. The caption provided further indicates that the products are strategically placed in the photo. In the caption, Khloé shares information on where to purchase the Kardashian hair products in the UK. She shares her excitement with her dolls (avid Kardashian fans). While this particular post is targeted towards her UK dolls, Khloé also communicates with the rest of her fans by announcing that the hair products are also available online and ships worldwide.
CELEBRITY PRACTICE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Despite Kim being arguably the most well-known member of the Kardashian family, she has never held back on sharing her success with her family. Figure 13 shows Kim promoting Kourtney’s app. In the caption, Kim praises her older sister for being a good advisor. Here, Kim hints that the app is a lifestyle app where people can get advice.

The Kardashians have essentially built an entire business empire around their “Kardashian” family name. The Kardashians use Instagram to promote events and products, which help to expand their brand. They share information about the details of their brands and offers photos peeking at their life. The result, of course, is that it keeps their fans on the edges of their seats and makes fans curious.

Figure 13: Kim promotes her sister’s app
Authenticity and Sincerity

While there are numerous celebrities who use social media to reach fans, not all celebrities share the updates themselves. Some choose to hire a social media manager to update their profiles with news about their daily lives and careers. With a manager on duty, they benefit from constant updates, even if they're busy in the studio or on the set of a movie.

The Kardashian has thrived on social media because of their seemingly openness and realness. The Kardashians constantly update their social media. Accounts keep their fans happy, because they receive fresh content every day.

Figure 14: Kim takes a selfie
Figure 14 shows Kim Kardashian taking a mirror selfie. Selfie is a term used for a photo that somebody takes of him or herself with a smartphone. This is a great way for celebrities to let fans know they are real users because selfies are authentic, personal, and unmediated.

**Endorsing Brands**

The Kardashians, as well as being reality show royalty, have their own clothing store and products, which they showcase on social media such as Instagram. They make money by sharing their ideas and products on social media. While they are self-brands themselves, celebrities often have outside endorsements to derive income.

![Figure 15: Kourtney promotes FitTea](image)

*Figure 15 shows Kourtney endorsing a tea product. Kourtney used the @mention affordance to promote the product company that she is endorsing. Like on Twitter, @mention or*
“at-replies,” are Instagram affordances that use a ‘@+username’ to refer to other Instagram users; these can be used to identify people and address posts to particular users. In this case, Kourtney used the @mention to not only address the company name that she is endorsing but to also give followers an easy way to look at the company’s Instagram account. This strategy allows followers and consumers to learn more about the company and their products. Kourtney’s post also used additional marketing strategy by using the hashtag affordance. Kourtney wrote “#teatime.” The hashtags or the # sign followed by a word, mark post with descriptive terms. Tags are typically used to group post together by subject. Hashtagging a post allows for an easy way to locate a post according to the selected subject.

Many celebrities, the Kardashians included, send out sponsored posts. Occasionally, the posts they write on any subject earn them money, sometimes a surprisingly huge amount. The Kardashians have used their huge following on social media to boost sales of their product empire and solidify themselves as good product endorsers.
5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore celebrity practice on the social media platform Instagram. Previous studies have looked into celebrity practice on Twitter (Marwick & boyd, 2011), but to the researcher’s knowledge, no study has explored celebrity practice on the photo based social networking app, Instagram. This study asked what celebrity practices the Kardashians use on Instagram. The results of this exploratory study revealed that the Kardashians used celebrity practices such as Intimacy, Self-Brand Promotion, Authenticity and Sincerity, and Endorsing Brands on Instagram.

When looking at the results of the analysis, several themes emerge. One interesting theme is the occurrence of Intimacy as the top category in photo posts and second top category in caption posts. Consistent with past research (e.g. Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013, Marwick & boyd, 2011; Stever & Lawson, 2013) this study demonstrated that social media is a place where fans get an illusion of backstage access and uncensored glimpses into the private lives of the rich and the famous. While Intimacy was revealed as the second top category in the captions, analysis also revealed that some captions were categorized alongside the accompanying photos. One-word captions such as “mood,” “project” and the use of icons (emojis) lacked enough content to fit in any of the categories; thus these captions were categorized with the accompanying photos. These revelations suggest that while Intimacy was the second top category in the captions, the Kardashians are less likely to disclose intimate information via text captions. Furthermore, data analysis revealed Self-Brand Promotion as another popular category in both Instagram photo and captions. Self-Brand promotion was the second popular category in the photo post, and the top category in the caption post. Additionally, data analysis revealed that Endorsing Brands was also a frequent category in the caption post of the Kardashians.
The results of this study suggest that celebrities, like the Kardashians, use social media to reach out to their fans to support and consume their brand endorsements. This promotional activity should be nothing shocking or surprising, since celebrities make a living as endorsers. However, what makes the Kardashian’s celebrity practice interesting is their seemingly emphasis on performed intimacy rather than endorsement. While it is well known that celebrities use social media to promote, it is important that they maintain a sense of authenticity to increase their credibility as trusted endorsers, thus the Kardashians try to maintain a level of authenticity and sincerity within their Instagram posts.

A Kardashian Family Affair

Whether they make music, star in movies and television shows, or write books, celebrities aren't just people, celebrities are brands unto themselves. Lady Gaga is a brand; Mariah Carey is a brand. And like other celebrities, the Kardashian family has been able to build an entire empire out their name. While there are many factors that make them successful, perhaps the one thing that has made and continues to make the Kardashian so successful is their consistent and fascinating bond as a family.

Further analysis on their Instagram posts reveal how much the Kardashians interact with each other. Whether they are posing for a selfie together, playing with their kids, or promoting each other’s apps, the Kardashians always emphasize family bonding. This has made them incredibly relatable to their fans and brand consumers. Collectively, the family business has something for everyone. With six children varying in ages, their significant others, and parents all in the business, the Kardashian brand covers a large demographic of people. While each family member is a brand, they are still a huge support system to one another. Together they
created a multi-million dollar business, where they share their lives to others openly. The Kardashian family has a large fan base, which accordingly, makes popular brand endorsers.

**Instagram and Affordances**

Celebrity endorsements are nothing new. Traditional celebrity endorsements often include TV commercials, billboard, and print advertisement campaigns, but the explosion of social media platforms like Instagram has shifted the practice into new territory. Social media, such as Instagram, has allowed celebrity endorsers to reached millions of their fans anytime and anywhere with only their smartphones.

The key to Instagram’s success was developing a mobile app with a focused and singular function: the simple editing and sharing of photographs. Instagram’s affordances allow and encourage people, like the Kardashians to share their daily experiences. With the help of Instagram, the Kardashians effectively share photos of their private lives while also utilizing the app to market brands. Analysis revealed that the Kardashians take advantage of the caption affordance to provide URLs to their websites and give details about their business endeavors. Additionally, the Kardashians use the @mention affordance to publicly endorse company brands as well as their Kardashian brands. Furthermore, they use the ability to hashtag their photos with a searchable tag. The hashtag serves as additional marketing strategy and acts as supplemental text related to the their endorsements.

Instagram’s “fast” and “easy” ways to upload photos has allowed celebrities to show off their pictures or their extravagant lives while seamlessly advertising a product, idea or lifestyle within a single post. The Kardashians are masters of this technique, placing exclusive, intimate content between images of their latest entrepreneurial endeavors. On the other hand, fans benefit
as well as it gives them an illusion that the wall, which separates them from their favorite celebrity, has been broken. Additionally, the image-centered focus of Instagram allows brands, and celebrity endorsers to communicate in the universal language of photos and videos, opening the possibility to reach more consumers (fans) worldwide.

**Parasocial Advertising on Instagram**

A number of studies have analyzed advertising strategies and celebrity endorsements on social media. This study attempts to further expand on this research and further explore the nature of reality television stars turning their 15-minute of fame into consumable brand. This study confirms previous work by Lueck (2012) demonstrating the importance of parasocial advertising to the Kardashians. The results of this research demonstrated that the Kardashian’s Instagram posts create parasocial interaction. The reality TV stars give the illusions of backstage access into their private lives with the intent to endorse and sell products.

The Kardashians are strategically utilizing Instagram as way to connect with their fans, the main consumers of the brands they endorse and sell. The Kardashians embed brand promotion into personal photos thus the audiences are constantly consuming brand endorsement while being rewarded with personal information about their celebrity idols. This illusion of backstage access to the Kardashian’s private lives is alluring and makes their direct branding efforts less obtrusive and more acceptable. This strategy is well employed, hence the result that Intimacy, Self-Brand Promotion, Authenticity & Sincerity, and Brand Endorsements were the most frequent categories in this study.

The merging of parasocial interaction and brand promotion and advertising happens when fans want to imitate their idol’s lifestyle and purchase the brands and products that the celebrity use and endorse. The Kardashians endorse and sell products such as clothes, make up,
hair product, and lifestyle apps. Through parasocial interaction the Kardashians are no longer seen as an unreachable stars, but rather they are seen as a lifestyle coach or a friend who gives advice on how to live a certain lifestyle using the brand products they are endorsing. Further analyzing the Instagram posts suggests a branding theme that might contribute to the Kardashians’ success as brand endorsers. While this is not part of the results of this study, it is worth noting that most of the products being endorsed by the Kardashians are targeted towards female audiences. The Kardashians are aware who their consumers are. The Kardashians only market products that they themselves would use, thus increasing their authenticity and sincerity.

This research study supports the idea that parasocial relationships play a key role in consumer’s connection to a brand or a product. The endorsement is an access to the celebrity’s lifestyle and therefore the brands and products are seen as connection to a celebrity, which can lead to positive purchasing, brand loyalty and stronger consumer interest. SNSs have changed the dynamics of celebrity and fan relationship. SNSs continue to blur the line that separates celebrities and fans, which could indicate a new form of parasocial interaction that is worthy of future research. This study indicate that Instagram is not only used as a channel for celebrities to share images of their private lives but it is also used as a powerful marketing tool that draws attention to various brands and products.
6. CONCLUSION

This study focused on celebrity practices on Instagram. Content analysis was applied to explore how social media creates opportunities for celebrities to interact with fans and helps to maintain and expand their celebrity brands. Since this is an exploratory study on celebrity practices, no hypothesis was formed beforehand. However, it was found that the major findings are consistent with prior research on the illusion of backstage access and use of image-based social media for marketing. The most significant finding is that the Kardashians employ parasocial interaction to seamlessly embed high amounts of endorsements and promotions to accompany their personal photos in order to conduct successful advertising.

As with all research, this study has limitations. The sample for this study can be considered a limitation. The research analysis only evaluated posts from the 50 newest photo and caption posts. Future research should expand the analysis to all posts to increase the diversity in themes. Longitudinal research with a larger data set is needed. Further research can also expand the analysis to include other members of the Kardashians on Instagram. This can further shed light on how their family dynamics helps their brand collectively.

This research also limited its analysis to photo and captions only. The comments section where fans can write comments to the celebrity was left out. This information could have further evaluated the role of parasocial interaction through discourse between fans and the celebrity if any. As a part of the suggestions for future work on parasocial interaction, scholars should extend this work by incorporating other features of Instagram such as the user’s bio, hashtags, and comments to further understand the nature of celebrity and fan interactions.

Because the Kardashians are considered non-traditional celebrities, additional work could investigate whether the celebrity strategies found in this study also applies to traditional
celebrities. Future research can explore if the strategies found in this study are common strategies amongst celebrity endorsers within the social media age.

Instagram is an addictive way of allowing us to see the world through the eyes of others. From shots of dinner parties to selfies to vacation sunsets, it’s surprising how much you can learn from following someone—and it’s even better when that person is famous. While the image-centered affordance of Instagram allows for a successful blending of parasocial interaction and advertising, future research should also extend this study to other social media outlets to see if the trends found in this study are applicable or effective in other platforms.

Despite the limitations, this paper provides an important examination on some areas that has received very little attention. With the rise of micro-celebrities and accessible celebrity practices, this exploratory study helps to understand how social media can be used to maintain celebrity status and endorse brands. Celebrities and other high profile figures are more accessible to fans today because of the affordances of social media. With the influx of companies using social media, particularly Instagram as a marketing tool, this type of study can help identify different strategies that company brands can employ to increase brand recognition, improve brand loyalty, and help decrease marketing cost.
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APPENDIX A: Coding Protocol

CODING

Coders will be provided a screenshots of Instagram post that include picture and caption.

Categorize each Instagram photos and captions into one of the following categories. Captions that do not fit in any categories will be categorized together with the accompanying photo.

1. Authenticity and sincerity:

   **Photo:** Post that contains amateur photos such as selfies and behind-the-scene photos of events such as photo-shoots, TV appearances etc.

   **Caption:** Post that shows grammatical errors and typos.

2. Intimacy

   **Photos:** Post that shows personal life of celebrities such as access to their homes. This can include intimate and private events such as family vacation, gym sessions, picture with friends and family.

   **Caption:** Post that reveals intimate details and facts concerning the celebrities. These can include disclosing private matters such as relationship breakups and hookups and special announcements of pregnancy and health matters.

3. Affiliation with other Celebrities

   **Photo:** Posts that show association and interaction with other celebrity.

   **Caption:** Post that shows communication and mention of other celebrities.
4. Affiliation with fans

*Photo:* Posts that show cultural symbols (national flags, holidays), use of

*Caption:* Posts that show use of language, words, cultural symbols, and conventions that is identical to the one used by fans (i.e. hashtag such as #tbt or language such as “on fleek”).

5. Public Recognition and Fan Maintenance

*Photo:* Posts that show celebrity interacting and posing in pictures with fans. This can also include posts that show appreciation for art and photos made by fans.

*Caption:* Posts that shows communication, replying to fan messages and postings, as well as showing gratitude toward fans.

6. Endorsing Brands

*Photos:* Posts that show support for companies by using and promoting their products. These posts can contain brand logo, slogans, and products.

*Caption:* Posts that directly mentions any hashtag of a company brand their slogans and products.

7. Self-Brand Promotion

*Photo:* Posts that contain professional photo shoots, shows their outfits, Kardashian products and logo, event fliers, and tours, book, apps etc.

*Caption:* Posts that promote the celebrity’s activities such as events, tours, TV shows, or any information about upcoming projects that they’re working on.
8. Inspirational Post

Photo: Posts that contain inspirational quotes, photographs of inspirational people (Martin Luther King) and support of social causes (black lives matter).

Caption: Posts that contain inspirational messages, quotes, words or hashtag that express support for social causes (i.e. #blacklivesmatter, #prayforparis).