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The Marketing of Fame:

How Kim Kardashian has Sustained Her Fame, and What
Companies Can Learn From Her

By

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Marketing

A Thesis Submitted to Fulfill the Requirements of the
Honors Program at Assumption College

Spring 2020

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Introduction

Why is Kim Kardashian famous? Most people might recognize her name or face, as she is continually plastered on the front of magazines, advertisements, and sometimes even in the news. But what does she *do*? Why should anyone care? It is believed that celebrities are famous due to unique skills, attributes, and talents. Is Kim Kardashian famous because of special skills or incredible talents? Most would argue “no,” except maybe her talent for marketing herself.

Kim is just one example of a celebrity who is ‘famous for being famous.’ In a sense, her fame works in a loop: she is famous because she is talked about a lot, which is because she is famous, and so on. This kind of fame is seemingly new, as most celebrities in the past have risen to fame through some sort of skill, talent, or unique quality. There are also different kinds of fame and infamy, such as those who are famous for skills and good qualities, those who are infamous for doing horrible acts such as murder, and those who are well known for saying or doing bad and stupid things, such as encouraging crazy conspiracy theories. Celebrities like Kim sit in the middle of this spectrum between positive and negative, becoming famous for doing nothing of skill, and nothing particularly bad. Although my talents and skills are still developing, could I too become famous like her? There is clearly something special about celebrities like Kim and their ability to garner fame without talent or skill, and I believe this phenomenon needs to be investigated for the potential it may have on brands specifically and marketing in general. It is not an accident that she has gained 165 million followers on Instagram and other companies pale in comparison, such as McDonalds with only 3.7 million, or Coca-Cola with only 2.7 million (Kim Kardashian; McDonald’s; Coca-Cola). It is also no coincidence that one of her companies, KKW beauty, generated over \$100 million in sales in 2018, helping to contribute to her net worth of an estimated \$350 million (Kim Kardashian Net Worth, 2020; #26 Kim Kardashian West, 2019). Whatever she is doing is successful, and I think it comes down to the

innovative and effective ways she has utilized branding, marketing media and other tools. The potential lessons about branding we could gain from Kim could prove invaluable to the field of marketing, and to companies looking to improve their revenues. There is so much we stand to learn from Kim's branding and immense influence that could help guide business strategies, future branding, and identify new tactics for interacting with consumers successfully. Kim started out with a tarnished reputation and fought her way to the top of Hollywood's celebrities with nothing but the help of her marketing skills; if she can do this, other companies (with already better reputations) can take ideas from her on how to improve their brand and marketing in order to be at the top of their industry.

When she originally rose to the top of tabloid headlines, she had no talent other than creating stories for the media to buzz about, and photo-ops for them to supplement their celebrity gossip articles. Barbara Walters even said it to her face during an interview; "you don't really act, you don't sing, you don't dance, you don't have any, forgive me, any talent!" (ABC, 2011; Cashmore, 2019). Since then, she has developed her own brand and has achieved worldwide recognition, as well as created a very popular app called *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, sells beauty and makeup products from her company Kim Kardashian West Beauty, has created her own line of shapewear called Skims, and has also endorsed external products, such as Flat Tummy Co's Appetite-Suppressing Lollipops, or Skecher's Shape-Ups Shoes (Wick, 2018; Mulshine, 2014). Celebrities like Kim seemingly use their fame to further build up their brands, as well as sell brand extensions, such as Kim Kardashian West Beauty, and endorse and sell other products. These kinds of celebrities are constantly keeping themselves in the public eye by staying relevant with fashion, pop culture trends (if not starting new ones) and making

appearances. In turn, they get more self-promotion, which leads to more sales for brand extensions as well as any other products they are currently endorsing and trying to sell.

Kardashian was shoved into the spotlight for her own 15 minutes of fame with the help of an intimate “home video.” Somehow, she turned around this negative press and marketed herself so well that she has extended her 15 minutes of fame for over 10 years and built a brand empire along the way with the creation of business ventures such as Skims, KKW Beauty, and KKW Fragrance, *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood* phone app, and the *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* TV show, all helping contribute to her \$350 million net worth, as noted earlier (66, 67). This new type of fame (if it even is a *new* phenomenon in the course of the history) has clearly had an impact on marketing, as displayed through Kardashian and therefore it is important to analyze this new phenomenon and learn how it can be further applied in other marketing strategies and tactics.

This research paper stands to prove that celebrities are no longer simply revered only for their talents or skill but have begun to outgrow the natural fame that comes with the skill, and/or have become famous for really no apparent or tangible reason at all, or possibly that there is now a new definition of celebrity. Their fame has worked in a cycle, famous for being famous. I will set out to prove the following: they continue their fame through the efforts of clever marketing. They use new or improved marketing tactics to further build their personal brands, create connections with fans, and continue to sustain their fame. They seem to use social media as the main medium, along with endorsement tactics for their own brand and brand extensions. They also use their social media in a unique way that allows them to create connections with their audiences in a way that most firms have not begun to think about. Celebrities work on building their own brands using marketing and fame hand-in-hand. Is this a new type of fame? How does

their fame affect or work with their marketing efforts? How does social media affect this phenomenon? It is important to understand what celebrities, and the firms they create are doing, so that other firms can utilize the effective techniques to market their products. It is clear that this kind of promotion is an emerging trend, so it is important to fully understand it in order to apply it to other products and brands. This research is relevant because it examines a casual and less serious pop culture phenomenon such as Kim, and asks a pressing question: why is she famous? This paper will delve into a more scholarly explanation behind a cultural trend and explain how other companies can benefit from these lessons on the branding of fame.

On the surface, it might seem silly, light and frivolous, but the importance of this study lies in understanding what is behind her being so popular amongst millions of people (64.5 million on Twitter, 164 million on Instagram and 30 million on Facebook to be exact!) (Kim Kardashian [Twitter profile]; Kim Kardashian [Instagram profile]; Kim Kardashian [Facebook Profile]; Boyd, 2020). This kind of investigation of the world around us will help us to understand the phenomena that is becoming an important part of many people's lives and more broadly our culture. This research will look to develop a new definition of fame as it relates to businesses and their marketing efforts. It will analyze the process by which celebrities such as Kim manipulates her fame, reconstruct her rise to fame, analyze the marketing involved using the history and psychology of fame, and then apply key learnings as a guide to brand management.

Background on Kim Kardashian

Kim was originally on the outskirts of fame when her father represented OJ Simpson in his highly publicized murder trial, and with her childhood friendship with Paris Hilton. Hilton used to have her own TV show called *The Simple Life*, where Kim would make appearances

from time to time as her personal stylist and lackey (Delbyck, 2019). Then Kim rose to fame in 2007 after a scandalous home video of her and her boyfriend was released to the public. Since then, she has been hustling to improve her image and launch products such as perfumes, a TV show, an entertainment app, clothing and more. Along the way, her family has also been put into the spotlight, such as her stepsister, Kylie Jenner. Now, Kim and her family are some of (if not the most) popular and well-known celebrities in the world. Most people know who Kim is, some may even know her story, but for a more complete picture, please see the detailed timeline in Appendix A, which displays Kardashian's rise to fame, and her family tree.

Literature Review

In this section, I will explore the different aspects of her seemingly never-ending, as it is rooted in history and the development of media, psychology, anthropology, and marketing and branding.

❖ *The History of Fame and the Development of Media*

Kim is just the latest in a long line of people to become celebrities in our culture. What exactly is a celebrity, and how has that definition changed over time? Merriam-Webster defines 'Celebrity' as the *state of being celebrated: fame and being widely known and often referred to* (Merriam-Webster, 2020). They also define 'Fame' as *reputation and renown*, which are defined as *recognition by others of some characteristic or ability or overall quality or character as seen or judged by people in general*, and *a state of being widely acclaimed and highly honored*, respectively (Merriam-Webster, 2020). A second definition for 'Fame' that they provide is the archaic definition of rumor; *talk or report of a notable person or event* (Merriam-Webster, 2020). Kim is certainly widely known and recognized, constantly referred to in the media and in conversation, she is certainly notable but there just isn't a specific reason why. For example,

Michael Jordan is a famous celebrity who is widely known and recognized, specifically for his incredible skill and success in as one of the all-time great basketball players and ambassadors of the game. Although it seems like famous people are a new thing, they have been around for a while. What's new is how our culture has become 'celebrified' according to Douglass McDonnell in his book *Celebrity: A History of Fame* (28). He claims that today, being a celebrity

“Means being well known. But in ancient and medieval times, one indeed could be famous – as a king, queen, or emperor, as a successful military leader – but not necessarily constantly visible. they were this distant, all powerful figure that everyone knew of, but no one knew personally... fame was reserved for those rare people who were known because of their hereditary positions or extraordinary achievements; there was an aura around them; they were remote and inaccessible.” (Douglas & McDonnell, 2019, pg. 28).

Fame used to be something that came with what one was born into, such as a royal family, or something people achieved, such as being the general that led an army to great victories. A lot has changed since hundreds of years ago though, with Andy Warhol correctly predicting that “in the future, everyone will be world famous for 15 minutes” (NPR, 2008). In 2020 we still have long lasting celebrities such as Kim whom we are often exposed to, but we see everyday people becoming recognized and famous for 15 minutes. Some people have celebrity personas and could be famous for 15 minutes, however there are others who are truly unique and have real, lasting talents and turn themselves into cultural icons (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 53). Take for example, any meme (internet joke) that has gone viral including a person. Everyone shares it online, talks about it, and would recognize the person and has memorized their actions or words from the viral content. What has changed from medieval times to now is that not only are people more accessible to us than ever through the internet, TV and social networks, but also people no longer need a particular skill or position to become famous. Sure,

we still idolize Prince Harry solely because he was born into the royal family, or Beyoncé because of her incredible talent at singing, but there are now those such as Kim who have become renown for no particular skill at all. People are able to take this renown and turn their names into lasting brands (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 53).

With the dramatic changes in technology and media, it makes sense to see this shift from being famous to being a celebrity. Thousands of years ago, people had stories and lore, and maybe gatherings in the town square. The printing press was invented in the mid 1400's, providing books to more accurately tell these stories, and sometimes provide illustrations. In 1835, photography was invented, allowing people to see famous people for the first time without being right next to them. Later in the 1800's the telegraph and telephone were invented, allowing people to connect from far distances. In 1895, silent movies were invented, and then sound was added in 1927, allowing people to see actors that would become famous for their work, such as Charlie Chaplin. In 1922, radio broadcasts were invented, and both movies and radio had now become more immediate, one sided communication, allowing for radio hosts and movie stars to become famous through widespread exposure. In the 1940's, black and white TV broadcasts were invented (becoming color later in 1960), and also allowed for fame to be created and consumed through watching, such as Lucille Ball from I Love Lucy, or Neil Armstrong with the broadcast of the moon landing. In 1975 the first personal computer was invented, in 1999 high speed internet was invented, and in 2003 PC tablets with handwriting to text and video email was invented. These technologies had continued to improve and bring people closer together with the invention of the iPhone in 2007. Social media also started to develop along with these technological changes, such as LinkedIn in 2002, Myspace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, YouTube in 2005, Twitter in 2006, Instagram in 2010, and Snapchat in 2011. Kim quickly joined these

social media as they started trending, joining Facebook on January 8th, 2009 and Instagram on February 20th in 2012 (Kim Kardashian [Instagram profile]; Kim Kardashian [Facebook Profile]; Shaw, 2018). Every media communication advancement allowed for audiences to grow closer to these famous people that they would see and hear in this new media. First, media was all mostly one sided with television, radio and movies, but media communications technology has now become 24/7 and interactive through social media, especially in the last 10 years (Technology of Communication Timeline, n.d.; Jones, 2015). This original media was created and pushed out to people without the opportunity to interact and obtain immediate feedback or responses (with the exception of people calling into the radio station one at a time). This expansive growth of mass communication technologies is likely the most significant factors contributing to the expansion of modern celebrities. Although there were celebrities before such as emperors or war generals, there are many now not of royalty or military leaders who are famous for a variety of reasons, and they are more accessible than ever (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 56). The growth in both the reach and range of mass communication and media increased the demand for celebrities, but at the same time made it easier than ever to create and find new celebrities (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 55). This modern idea of celebrity would not have been possible without technology advancing the way it did. This growth in media has also created a sort of media ecosystem which has a mutual dependency on her fame, They rely on each other to stay relevant (Asseraf, 2018).

Celebrity and fame could also perhaps be a new kind of religion for our culture. For example, European cultures in medieval times used to be based on the Christian religion. The church ruled the state and ‘chose’ the Kings, laws were based on religion, society was based around religion. Now, trends in the United States show that religion is slowly becoming less important for people

(U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2020). Even beyond that, our society isn't solely based on one religion; people can now practice what they want, we respect other people's differing religions, and our laws are mostly separate from religion now. People used to idolize and worship God and practice religion, but now without that one singular religion to worship, perhaps we've turned to celebrities to attempt to fill part of that gap. Sure, Lady Gaga won't be able to tell us the meaning of life, but following her and being part of her fan group can create a very close-knit community and bonds with others over a common love for her. Some celebrities have super fans that idolize them, similarly to the way one might do for religion. Not only this, but people will pay thousands of dollars to purchase something once owned by a celebrity; for example, a dress that Princess Diana wore to the White House and danced with John Travolta in sold for \$347,000 at an auction (McDowell, 2020). Many times, people buy these relics because they have an emotional connection to the memories, usually explained through the concept of contagion. Contagion is when it is believed that a "person's immaterial qualities or essence can be transferred to an object through physical contact (Newman & Diesendruck & Bloom, 2011). Anthropologists first came up with this idea in the late 1800's when observing cultural practices emphasizing the transfer of a person's identity or soul to inanimate objects. It's an indescribable feeling that isn't as rare as it sounds. If you've traveled to Rome for example, you get that feeling of how precious and special something is when visiting historical sites like the Colosseum or the Vatican. This contagion and specialness of relics is very similar to religion, and perhaps is trying to fill that hole. Celebrities are worshipped by some of us, and because of that, we create communities around them.

❖ ***Recent History of Celebrities: Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian***

Paris Hilton, the original celebrity who was 'famous for being famous,' and childhood friends with Kim (Newman & Diesendruck & Bloom, 2011; Baxter-Wright, 2017), originally

became famous because of her family's legacy Hilton Hotel brand, as well as a sex tape that catapulted her to the front of headlines, but created her own brand from that initial fame (Paris Hilton Biography, 2017). Although she had already experienced a bit of fame because of her family name, she went on to star in a very successful show called *The Simple Life* in 2003 that Kim made appearances on as her friend, doing things like cleaning her closet or going on shopping trips with her (Paris Hilton Biography, 2017; Villafane, 2019). In an interview with *Rollacoaster Magazine*, Paris claimed she was "ahead of my time and just being an innovator, setting the precedent and creating a whole new genre of celebrity" (Davison, 2020). Paris now has a net worth of \$300 million, selling fragrances, handbags, pet apparel and more in 50 retail stores across the world, and she is still working to expand her empire (Davison, 2020). She certainly created this new trend of celebrity, and although she now has all these successful business ventures, she is not as popular as she once was. She still has loyal fans, but for the most part is associated with the 1990's and early 2000's as a fashion and entertainment icon for that time. Kim, however, has utilized this same new type of celebrity, but has been able to keep her influence going and stay relevant.

Kim's sex tape was released in 2007, a couple months before the launch of the iPhone, but also during a huge time for reality television (Cashmore, 2019). *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* started its first season in October of 2007, and has continued ever since. It has been successful since it is unscripted, it is not always glamorous and shows the underside of fame through sibling arguments and the behind the scenes footage, and also as the full story behind what we see in the news and other media, as they clear up rumors and tell us what really happened (Asseraf, 2018). Kim first started in TV, then she had a presence on Facebook and Twitter, and now she has a massive influence on Instagram and Snapchat. Before with her

television show, she started gathering fans through this one-sided look into her life. But as her TV show continued and technology kept advancing, she continued to keep up with trends. She rode the wave of technology, or Web 2.0 to keep her fame going (Cashmore, 2019). She started with Facebook in 2009 and is now one of the most followed accounts on Instagram, posting about her life and interacting with fans. This change from famous, being well known and widely discussed, to becoming a celebrity, someone with a similar force but who is no longer too distant or inaccessible, is what makes Kim incredible. She was one of the first, and now the biggest celebrities, and a great example of the transition from simply being famous to being a celebrity. One of the reasons why she is so famous is because she was smart enough to ride this wave, keep up with the times, and now she is a leader on social media and in the celebrity world; it is part of what makes her so remarkable and what keeps her fame going: she rides the wave and stays ahead of trends, if not helping to create them.

From the influences of new media communication technologies, and the rise of Paris Hilton and Kim as famous-for-nothing celebrities, it is clear that fame has developed a new definition. Fame is currently defined as a public estimation (reputation) and popular acclaim (renown) (Merriam-Webster, 2020). I have issue with this because renown implies being honored and praised, and I think this suggests being honored for a talent or skill. People are now famous for a variety of reasons, some good and bad, although people will still enjoy watching them (think how every season of *The Bachelor* villainizes a few women and viewers love to hate them). It seems to me that someone is famous if they themselves, their words or their actions are widely known for good or for bad, accessible to and discussed by the public, lasts between 15 minutes and many years, and spreads by entering the mass media ecosystem and grows through and depends on the media for its continued fame.

To summarize, there are a few different forces that Kim has utilized to turn her fame into something positive and make her popularity last as long as it has. The definition of fame and celebrity had already been changing, especially the last few decades where development in media and communication technology has dramatically changed our awareness of celebrity. Paris Hilton is one of the biggest celebrities who is famous for being famous, and exposed Kim to the celebrity world through appearances on Paris' popular reality TV show, *The Simple Life*. Then in 2007, Kim's sex tape is released, and she kept her fame going by starring in her own reality TV show in late 2007, then taking advantage of the subsequent social media take off. She was at the forefront of the social media wave and kept up with, as well as set new trends. By riding these simultaneous and intertwining waves of evolving celebrities and communications technology, this new definition of celebrity and fame paired with this new extreme accessibility between fans and their favorite influencers has people worshipping and creating communities around celebrities, helping to further establish their fame. This though, is just one aspect of her intriguing journey to fame.

❖ *Social Psychology*

Fame and branding both are informed by social psychology. People who are famous act like leaders in a way, and that makes them so intriguing to everyone else. Humans have social tendencies with each other, and fame ties into that. To help explain how Kim's fame and marketing strategy is so successful, it is necessary to discuss social psychological concepts that are apparent in her marketing tactics and marketing in general, and anything else that makes up part of the concept of fame.

In *Seeing by Starlight: Celebrity Obsession* by Carlin Flora, sociologist Satoshi Kanazawa states, "the brain simply doesn't realize that it's being fooled by TV and movies... hundreds of thousands of years ago, it was impossible for someone not to know you if you knew

them. And if they didn't kill you, they were probably your friend" (Flora, 2004, para. 9). Flora describes how Kanazawa's research has shown some effects of this "feeling of friendship" with celebrities, such as people who watch more TV feeling more satisfied with their friendships, "just as if they had more friends and socialized more frequently" (Flora, 2004, para. 9). It feels natural when you continually see a celebrity on TV or on social media, as if they really are your friend even though you have never met; they become part of your life and inner circle. You feel like a part of theirs too, especially when they share personal stories and struggles; it feels like they are talking directly to you. Flora continues to say, "we are born to dish dirt, evolutionary psychologists agree; it is the most efficient way to navigate society to determine who is trustworthy" (Flora, 2004, para. 7). We see this in the media too, as the tabloid magazines and celebrity news sites report only on gossip from the world of the celebrities. Regular people gossip about celebrities, too. Take for example the reality TV show *The Bachelor*. Repeated exposure from the show itself, to social media, to the celebrity tabloids, turns these ordinary contestants into celebrities. When the show airs, users on Twitter cause the topic of *The Bachelor* to go viral every time, because people are tweeting about and interacting with each other about what's happening in the show. People dish and comment things like 'can you believe she said this or did that!' and they identify villains and heroes to gossip about in every season. Flora ascribes our responses to celebrities to primal connections in our brains that drive us to try to fit in with the community around us, gossip to determine who is trustworthy, and copy those with higher statuses than us in order to hopefully receive the same rewards that they are getting, such as attention, favors, and gifts.

This draw to celebrities could also be in part due to the mere-exposure effect, which was identified by Robert Zajonc, an American Social Psychologist (1968). His theory states that

people show an increased liking or preference for a stimulus as a consequence of being repeatedly exposed to said stimulus and is especially strong when the person is not consciously aware of the stimulus being presented to them (Mere-Exposure Effect, n.d.). This happens all the time as we are exposed to celebrities in the peripheries of our lives through movies, advertisements and product placements, social media, the news, and television.

Flora also concluded that reality TV stars are a better kind of celebrity because they are more accessible to us, and more willing to let viewers see private and embarrassing parts of their lives. Originally, Flora published this in *Psychology Today* in 2004, but so much has changed since then, as celebrities are even more accessible to us through smart phones and social media. Hundreds of years ago, celebrities were mostly accessible through radio or newspapers, and even further back from then, we learned about celebrities by reading stories and hearing legends of their great skills or feats, such as how they conquered lands and fought off beasts. Back then, these ‘celebrities’ (think religious figures, rulers and emperors of states, brave warriors) seemed more than human to us, and it was either impossible or extremely hard to actually see them in person, let alone meet and talk with them. Now in 2020, we have TV, the internet, smart phones, and social media which allows us to connect with these celebrities instantaneously like we never could before. You can learn a lot about their lives through the intimate things they discuss on their shows or post on their social media. And sometimes if you’re lucky, they might respond directly to one of your comments! This accessibility, being able to learn about and consume information about these celebrities at the touch of a finger, is a huge upgrade from hundreds of years ago. Although this instantaneous connection has been incredible, this change also has some direct implications.

In 2015, Jennifer Lueck wrote “Friend-zone with Benefits: The Parasocial Advertising of Kim” for the *Journal of Marketing Communications*, and her article directly references Kim Kardashian and similarly relates her fame and success to marketing tactics. The author ascribed Kim’s interactions with her fans to the theory of Parasocial Advertising, an application of Parasocial Interactions on marketing, and analyzes how this type of one-sided interaction with a celebrity could be marketable in order to make a personal connection with consumers. Parasocial interaction is described as a personal but illusory connection with the audience and the speaker, so essentially, you feel like someone is talking only to you as a close friend, but the connection is not real because the celebrity does not know who you are or anything about you (Lueck, 2015). The viewer creates what can be described as an intimate and strong relationship with the celebrity while interacting on social media, watching their reality TV show, and so on. This type of social interaction is specifically one-sided, where one party knows a great deal and has a connection with the celebrity, and that celebrity knows nothing about the other party. This one-sided relationship is analyzed through Kardashian and her social media fans on Facebook in this particular study in order to learn more about how she uses these interactions to promote and advertise.

This article is unique because it discusses these concepts in a way that makes use of them as a medium for marketing. They analyze Kim’s Facebook posts to conclude that not only can social media be used as a way to market and sell things, it can also be used to build up a connection with consumers and build up a brand through parasocial interaction. The way Kim posts without responding, and leaves the discussion open-ended allowed for constant, ongoing communication in the comments section, helping to further engage the audience through this parasocial interaction (Lueck, 2015). This motivates the consumer to share information about a

product or her brand, which creates a bit of a focus group and can be extremely useful to listen to. This act of sharing about products and brands creates a tight community based on this product and encourages other consumers to purchase the product and become part of this community. Also, if there is an emotional attachment to a celebrity due to parasocial interactions, Lueck inferred that this attachment could be translated into an emotional connection with the brand that is being promoted, which can lead to positive purchasing behavior (Lueck, 2015).

The illusion of intimacy can be used with the intent to endorse or sell products as well as endorse one's own personal brand. Lueck states that "the idea of Parasocial advertising is to promote a lifestyle, not a single brand. The ways in which Kim celebrates her own lifestyle gives audiences a virtual canvas for the use of brands" (Lueck, 2015, pg. 22). In one sense, this is true if there is an endorsement which is meant to be perceived peripherally by the audience. But Kim is not always plugging an external brand or product in her posts. The idea of Parasocial Advertising applies to her own brand, which encompasses her 'lifestyle.' If she did not first build up some interest in her own brand, other brands would not want to advertise and associate themselves with her. This is part of how she has kept her own personal brand so strong, she was a leader first on TV, then on social media when it came to building up her own personal brand. The information in this analysis is still mostly accurate and helpful, but since this was published in 2015, it is outdated considering that Instagram and Twitter are some of the biggest platforms now in 2020.

In "Why Celebrity Sells: A Dual Entertainment Path Model of Brand Endorsement" (2014), Kineta Hung discusses the concepts of source credibility, attractiveness, meaning transfer and image congruence when it comes to celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement has been around for a while, and while celebrities as brands themselves are a new concept, I believe that

they borrow some of these concepts of endorsement, and they affect not only their own brand, but also their brand extensions. This scholarly article from the Journal of Advertising looks at what drives people to get involved with products that feature celebrity endorsers. It discusses the Elaboration Likelihood Model, or the ELM method of persuasion, which is a psychological theory that describes the changing of attitudes. When applied to celebrities, they are the spokesperson trying to persuade you to buy a product. The ELM method is when celebrity's attributes are processed either elaborately (high involvement) or heuristically (low involvement) based on the perceived relevance to the decision making of the consumer (Hung, 2014). To break this down, consumers are either being persuaded directly, through a high involvement process about something important and intentional such as a car, including facts and changing their attitudes accordingly, or they are being persuaded through a low involvement, peripheral process, changing their attitudes without entirely realizing it, for example, seeing a hot celebrity drink a certain beer and then buying that beer the next time they see it. A celebrity can build their brand's popularity through either method; people either like the celebrity because they agree with things they say, or they like them due to peripheral things such as attractiveness (Hung, 2014).

This research combines this model with the dual entertainment path model, which describes why a person needs and desires lighthearted and mindless distractions from reality. There are two motives for those who consume entertainment: the playful motive, which causes someone to watch celebrity TV because it is easy and fun, and the aspirational motive, where consumers desire to be like these celebrities who are successful and live lavishly (Hung, 2014). It takes more energy though, as the consumer spends time on activities such as liking and commenting on posts, as well as going out and buying the products that celebrities are endorsing.

Some people might start watching *Keeping Up With The Kardashians* because it is fun, but then they are inundated with peripheral cues for an endorsed product they might not be aware of. On the other hand, some people watching might directly be persuaded and want to buy whatever product is being discussed or endorsed in an attempt to be more like Kim.

The authors conclude that entertainment experiences are a way for people to consume the product that is celebrities and celebrity related entertainment, and that these entertainment motives are driven by an emotional investment based on the need for companionship and belonging, which then has an effect on endorsed brand attitude. They discuss the different media through which this entertainment travels, like movies, television, print magazines and books, and newer social media. They describe celebrities as idols, a way in which some super fans see their favorite celebrity, and try to explain that fans have an emotional investment, and have both aspirational and playful motives when engaging with a celebrity, versus simply playful motives, which are the drive to just enjoy oneself or not be bored, for non-fans when they engage with a celebrity (Hung, 2014). This point is important because it helps explain the reason why people, both fans and non-fans, might choose to interact with a celebrity through watching their TV show, reading an article about them, or following them on social media.

The author also stated how non-fans participate in observational learning when interacting with a celebrity; they do not have to be totally invested or obsessed with a celebrity, but they still take social cues from them like the latest fashion trends (Hung, 2014). This could help explain why those non-fans of Kim and other celebrities even bother to follow up on their lives and interact with them. These people are still trying to be part of the 'in' group by following up with the celebrity, trying to stay connected with others and trends in our culture.

Another article from *Psychology Today* discuss fame and celebrities. In “Why We Are Obsessed With Celebrities,” Nathan Heflick discusses Tiger Woods, a famous golfer, and his scandals (cheating on his wife), as well as why we care. Heflick ascribed our opinions on this drama to the Halo Effect, which says one good impression causes us to associate good with other aspects of a person, for example, since Tiger Woods is a great golfer, we also think he is a moral and outstanding man (Heflick 2009). This could go for any celebrity; just because we see them as really good at one thing, we then assume that other things about them are good as well. This could be why we feel so shocked and pay attention to bad scandals. For example, when Kim’s scandalous home video came out, it was probably shocking to many people because she was a really good fashion stylist and friend, and therefore people probably thought she would be too innocent to release such an intimate tape. Similarly, the Terror Management Theory from evolutionary psychology tries to explain how human behavior stems from our fear and awareness of death (Heflick, 2009). This is a bit extreme, but essentially, bad things happen in life and we try not to think about it, and life feels better if we can figure out a way to live on post death. Fame is one of the ways to do that. Heflick concludes that celebrities are an integral part of our culture, are beloved because of the Halo effect, and are idolized due to the Terror Management Theory (Heflick, 2009).

Many of these theories are centered around an idea of belonging or trying to be successful, which are essentially the same human needs portrayed in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This hierarchy is a motivational theory showing different levels of human needs. The bottom of the pyramid’s needs is physiological and includes physical things such as water, food, shelter, and safety. Whereas the needs towards the top of the pyramid are more focused on esteem needs and self-actualization, which is the desire to become everything that one could

possibly become, achieving one's potential or self-fulfillment (McLeod, 2020). The middle tier is love and belongingness, which involves friendship, trust, acceptance, and is motivated by the need for interpersonal relationships. This could be driving people to interact with celebrities, even though it is a one-sided parasocial interaction. Being part of a group of her fans and feeling like part of her community could satisfy this need. Also, buying products from celebrities could help fulfil the next highest tier, which is esteem needs. This is the desire for respect from others or status, and if one is wearing the latest trends in clothes and makeup from Kim, this outward expression could help someone achieve this goal. So even though all these different authors discuss different theories and motivations, all of them have this underlying drive rooted in basic psychology as shown in Maslow's hierarchy (McLeod, 2020).

Perhaps Kim would not have been as famous today without her home video being released in 2007. Benedict Carey writes in his New York Times article, *The Fame Motive*, that "increased self-consciousness can plunge almost anyone into rumination over soured relationships or lost opportunities, psychologists find. And famous people in particular are forced to judge themselves against ideals set by others." (Carey, 2006). Celebrities are held to an almost impossibly high standard. Perhaps, not only did Kim get skyrocketed into her 15 minutes of fame by her home video, but she kept her fame going by trying to recover her name and trying to prove to the world that she is more than just the girl in that video, and more than just that sex tape. She said in an interview with Oprah, "that's how I was definitely introduced to the world. It was a negative way, so I felt like I really had to work 10 times harder to get people to see the real me" (Schwartz, 2012). While Kim's fame and popularity might be due to the psychological motives of her fans and consumers, it is also partially due to her own motives. She was now under this microscope and worked extremely hard to try to turn the narrative back and show

everyone who she truly was. If she had not hustled and worked so hard, who knows if she would be the same celebrity she is today, or if she would even be famous.

Also, Kim is significant as she has an effect on people's individual identities. In identity theory, the self can categorize, classify or name itself in different ways in relation to other social categories or classifications, or identification, and through this process, an identity is formed. The concept of identity can change and adapt based on surroundings. Also, a social group (in-group) is a bunch of individuals who have a common social identification or view themselves as being part of the same social category versus other people and other dissimilar groups (out-group), such as a band geek in-group versus other students and out-groups in a school like the jocks, the nerds, etc. (Stets & Burke, 2000). In order for someone to create or change part of their identity, they would need to gain the characteristics necessary to categorize themselves into the desired social group. For example, if one wanted to be perceived as being in a popular social group, they might buy things that would associate them with being popular, such as being fashionable and beautiful. Kim has many of these characteristics, and transfers this meaning to her brand extensions, and then to the consumer when they buy and use her products. In this way, Kim is popular because she helps people gain these characteristics to add to followers (consumers) identities and help them fit in to specific social groups.

It is now apparent that several underlying social psychological theories help make marketing more successful and cause people to behave the way they do, and Kim has utilized some of these in building her brand. Sometimes the brain is fooled with a feeling of friendship after continually seeing someone on TV and social media. Celebrities also create parasocial interactions with their fans, helping form an imagined connection between the audience and the speaker, and the fans feel like they have an intimate and strong relationship with the celebrity,

even though it is one-sided. This attachment and illusion of intimacy can lead a community to form around the celebrity, as well as be utilized to promote a lifestyle and products as if it is a recommendation coming from a close friend. Kim also borrows some concepts from celebrity endorsement and uses them to build her own brand. One example is the Elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion, which says that people can be influenced directly with lots of thought, or heuristically, which is more peripheral, where someone's attitudes are changed subtly without them realizing or thinking actively about it. The entertainment path model also helps explain why some people follow and interact with celebrities and other distractions in the first place, which can either be a playful motive (because it is easy and fun), or an aspirational motive (where people desire to be more like the celebrity). As for non-fans, many will still keep up with Kim in order to be part of the 'in' group and try to stay connected with others and trends in our current culture. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, humans desire friendship and acceptance which is motivated by the need for interpersonal relationships, which due to parasocial interactions, can include celebrities on TV or social media. Also, Kim has an effect on people's identities by sharing her characteristics with people through her products, helping them build on their identities and fit into desired social groups. Another element of Kim's fame comes from her own psychological motives, not only her fans. Famous people are forced to judge themselves against ideals set by others, and Kim once said to Oprah that she felt she worked 10 times harder to get people to see the real her. Not only did her actions psychologically draw in others, but she also was psychologically driven to keep working to improve her image. All of these social psychological concepts underlie Kim and her fan's actions to help sustain her fame and are an important part in understanding how she markets her brand.

❖ *Cultural Anthropology*

In “Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods” (1986), Grant McCracken gives a detailed insight to how the consumption of goods relates to culture. Since fame and the Kardashians are ‘pop culture phenomena,’ or are a widespread occurrence in popular or contemporary culture, it will be essential to understand what culture is and how Kim and consumer goods relate to culture. First, culture is the biased lens through which we view and analyze things, and it is also the rules that we follow that determine our social actions. Cultures also differ between different groups of people, and therefore people from all over the world will view things differently and follow different cultural rules. It could be as simple as how in some countries such as ours, it is polite to shake someone’s hand when meeting for the first time, but in other cultures, that would be inappropriate, and people would instead kiss each other on the cheek or bow (McCracken, 1986).

The author argues that cultural meaning comes from a ‘culturally constituted world,’ or a world validated by culture. This culture is transferred to goods by marketing and then customers once they consume the goods (McCracken, 1986). For example, if a brand of shoes is marketed as culturally hip and in fashion, then when a consumer buys and wears these shoes, they themselves will be perceived as culturally hip and in with current trends. Also, the act of consuming some goods over others further identifies, constitutes and substantiates that element into our culture. For example, if people buy Converse shoes, then it would be following cultural rules to buy Converse, and against it to buy Crocs. It would also help to further substantiate Converse as a cool and hip part of our culture. Cultural rules and the substantiation of them work in a loop like this, they are culturally constituted by the consumption of goods, and consumed goods can also create and substantiate elements of our culture. Cultural categories and cultural principles are validated by consumer goods, and then they organize and make up the culturally

constituted world. Culture can be transferred from the world to a good, and when purchased, the good to the consumer (McCracken, 1986).

In a way, advertising creates a similarity between a cultural meaning and product. It is a vehicle of meaning transfer because it brings the consumer goods and the cultural world together in an advertisement or product, which is then purchased and substantiated by the consumer. The author describes a person-object relationship and also touches on meaning transfer, which can be compared to person-celebrity relationships, as celebrities could be viewed as a substitute for the object or product. Culture in many aspects of our lives largely dictates our decisions, and our decisions substantiate and strengthen our culture. The author also touches upon how new cultural principles are made and substantiated into our existing culture; popular people with high statuses form a group of opinion-leaders, who create cultural innovations, changes in fashion, value, attitude, and they pass these new cultural norms on to the lower class, who then imitate them (McCracken, 1986). This is a great way of explaining how and why people listen to celebrities such as Kim and follow their fashion advice, or other trends that they create.

This article mostly focused on goods, less about celebrity endorsements, and not at all about celebrities as their own brand at all, but I believe this can be applied to Kim's personal brand in a similar way. A brand, such as Kim's, she can be viewed as both a product, and a cultural opinion leader. Kim as a brand leads the way in what is popular in products and trends, as well as what is culturally and socially relevant. These could be fashion trends, such as the rise in popularity for athleisure or bigger lips, or this could be more social trends, such as fighting for the release of inmates. These changes start with Kim saying something, or her brand pushing athleisurewear for example. Sometimes she leads the charge, other times she follows what is popular and therefore helps to substantiate it as part of our culture. People look to her and her

personal brand as a cultural opinion leader, either for the new trend or to follow the current cultural rules. When consumers purchase her goods or simply watch her social media or TV show, the act of consuming these cultural symbols further constitutes and substantiates this meaning into our culture. This cultural meaning is transferred to goods by Kim, and then to customers once they consume the goods. Also, the act of consuming some goods over others further identifies, constitutes and substantiates that element into our culture. She is both a leader, and a vessel to consume and follow the rules of our culture (McCracken, 1986). In essence, she helps us stay cool. By watching her and buying her goods, we tell the world, “yes this is cool,” while also taking on that coolness factor ourselves. This could be why she continues to stay in the spotlight as well. Because she is a leader, we look to her for what is cool and ‘in’ right now. By watching her and copying what she does, how she dresses and what she buys, we are substantiating all of that into being what is accepted by our culture. And because what she has done has been cool in the past, we will look to her for the next big thing. She has been caught in this loop for a while, as the media still constantly talks about her.

This relates to marketing as Kim often sells her own brand extensions or endorses other products. This creates a meaning transfer, from herself and her cultural values to the product, and then to the consumer once it is bought and consumed. This might seem complicated, but just think about New England culture versus the South; there are distinctions that [appear] are in the objects we use and consume. For example, Southerners drink lots of sweet tea, whereas New Englanders eat a lot of clam chowder. Marketers could even create a new market segment by creating a new cultural category of person; for example, organic, fair trade food for people who want to change the world. “Meaning resides in the ideas or values that determine how cultural phenomena are organized, evaluated, and construed” (McCracken, 1986, pg. 73), and because of

this, the value or idea of a clean earth is the meaning of this organic product, which then helps organize the culture and evaluate and organize other products as good for the Earth or not.

This new type of culture would be substantiated by the products people use, such as low emission cars, and the cultural meaning of these products would be transferred to the users, for example, this cohort of people care about the world. This is broad but can be an important tool for marketers when deciding what the cultural meaning of their product is (McCracken, 1986, pg. 73). Kim has done this in a way with her fans and those who consumer her products. People are kept informed by Kim “the present state and stock of cultural meaning that exists” in her products and other products by the way she advertises them or features them, paid or not on her social media and TV show (McCracken, 1986, pg. 75-80). Advertising in general can do the same thing, or as McCracken calls it, the “lexicon of current cultural meanings,” and as it changes over time, so does our culture (McCracken, 1986, pg. 75). The same can be said for social media posts in general, especially ones that trend such as memes.

People continue coming to Kim for cultural guidance because “cultural meaning is used to define and orient the individual” (McCracken, 1986, pg. 80). People can choose what they buy, and therefore they choose the meaning that they get from different kinds of goods which helps define themselves. For example, if you were to buy a Gucci belt over a regular belt, you would appropriate the meaning of the Gucci brand as part of your identity and culture. Kim is keeping people interested in what she has to say and leads or follows right behind trends in our culture, which helps keep her one of the most constantly talked about celebrities.

She could also be seen as living cultural currency, or something that is “simultaneously a 'social fact', and also – and this is precisely what makes it a social fact – something else in relation to reality, something which is against it and somehow autonomous” (Pinzon & Mansoor,

2018, pg. 9-10). She was never famous or culturally relevant for any skill, other than the fact that we keep coming back to her to consume her content, products, and then substantiate her as currency; she is human capital. If everyone just stopped keeping up with the Kardashians, they would not be famous. We are investing in this illusion and simultaneously keep it going (Pinzon & Mansoor, 2018). Also, it is through our cultural lens that we perceive Kim to not be working and being famous for being famous instead of for a skill or talent., but perhaps we have been conditioned to see work in a 9-5 desk job kind of way, and we have been invalidating Kim's unique approach to working (Pinzon & Mansoor, 2018). Her creation and sustainment of her self-brand has led to many endorsements, TV shows, and has led her to create businesses such as DASH, a boutique clothing store, and KKW Beauty, a high-end beauty company. So perhaps it's possible that we need to look at Kim and her empire in a new light before we dismiss her, as she might be able to teach us and companies valuable lessons regarding business and branding. Or, as Kim said in her response to Barbara Walter's questioning their talents, "we're still entertaining people" (ABC, 2011).

The Kardashians have gotten to a point where they are cultural leaders for us. Although they seemingly do not have talent, they are cultural opinion leaders for beauty and fashion, which is something that our culture desires and values (Rogan, 2018, pg. 174). After asking young girls in a study about the Kardashian's fame, Rogan found that, "While this type of fame was ridiculed by many of my participants, it seemed, in many ways, to make them more ordinary or, in some ways, more accessible to them" (Rogan, 2018, pg. 174). Although celebrity culture and being famous for nothing is usually ridiculed and dismissed, we still watch them, discuss them, and buy their clothes and makeup to be more like them (Rogan, 2018, pg. 174-175). While our society is torn as to whether our culture dictates, we laugh at them or follow their lead, either

way, we continue to keep them in the spotlight. Even those who dismiss the Kardashians will keep up and read the latest news on them, which helps substantiate them as an important part of our culture.

Along with the rise of social media and digital technologies, the culture of personal branding has become more popular (Rogan, 2018, pg. 168). Self-branding requires people to develop a distinct image for themselves “for commercial gain and/or cultural capital” (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 3). Not only has our culture started to embrace personal brands more as a norm, but personal brands in and of themselves are related to culture. Brands help you differentiate from others in a crowded environment, and with products, usually serve as a personality for brands, and help give them human-like qualities to help make the company more relatable (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 3-4). Brands are usually useful because they are consistent, you know what to expect when you see them and buy the product. This kind of consistency can be harder for humans to keep, but those trying to uphold a self-brand such as Kim will work harder to be consistent and avoid any scandals that might damage their carefully crafted name (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 4). The act of self-branding makes fame more attainable, since promoting oneself increases recognition and consequently loyalty (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 8). It is also interesting to note that fame seems to be tied to culture, as it came from the cultural industries of the past, such as movie and radio stars, or people who were at the height of our culture like royals (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 8). Self-branding is part of the promotional culture of advanced consumer capitalism and demonstrates how individuals can take the same strategies for marketing products and use them to market themselves (Khamis & Welling, 2017, pg. 8).

Psychological anthropology is the cross-cultural study of the social, political and cultural historical constitution of the self, and argues that the individual exists only within a social and cultural context (Lindholm, 2007, pg. 10). Culture itself is pretty similar to someone's personality and identity, where both have layers and patterns; "both the individual and culture are systems of ideas imbued with meaning and intention" (Lindholm, 2007, pg. 98). Since culture is the biased lens through which we see things, the world is subjective the way we view it, so the motives and norms that we all follow are subjective and different (Lindholm, 2007, pg. 152). Our personalities are in a way, reflections of our cultures (Lindholm, 2007, pg. 101). In some way, our own identities are shaped by our cultures, and our identities then substantiate our cultures. If Kim is seen as a cultural leader to some, then people will want to watch her and buy her products to emulate her and display her same qualities as their own identity. Then when people do this, they further substantiate her as an important leader in our culture. The idea of being famous for being famous is cyclical because that is how our culture works; we follow its rules and simultaneously substantiate them.

Culture, as has been discussed is a biased lens through which we see the world, and it is also the rules that we follow that determine much of our social actions. The meaning our culture has is created by us; we validate and decide what is acceptable and cool in our culture through the things we consume. These goods can have meaning assigned to them through marketing and advertising, and this cultural meaning can be transferred to the consumer once the good is consumed (meaning transfer), and this act further substantiates this meaning as part of our culture. Celebrities can either be the product being consumed, or their brand extensions will be the product that is consumed and which then transfers cultural meaning. Kim and her brand serves as a cultural opinion leader, and she leads the way and creates trends and affects what is

popular and socially relevant in our culture. She is caught in this media loop, since she's been a cultural leader in the past and still is, we look to her for the next big thing. Then, when we watch her show and buy her products, we absorb this cultural meaning for ourselves as well as substantiate it, and her, as being part of our culture and what is popular and cool. She could also be seen as a living cultural currency and human capital. There is also this new culture of personal branding and promotional culture that has become very popular and helps explain how Kim has become so popular. The act of self-branding and continually promoting oneself increases recognition, loyalty, and helps make fame more achievable. Also, our personalities are somewhat a reflection of our culture, since our identities are shaped by and further substantiate elements of our cultures.

✧ *Marketing and Branding*

While there have been journal articles and other scholarly essays that touch on the subject of celebrities, or endorsements, very few that have really discussed the marketing techniques that involve fame. The most closely related essay to this topic would be “Celebrities as brands: Exploring the role of celebrities in marketing and advertising,” a doctoral dissertation by Christine Marie Kowalczyk at the University of Memphis in 2011. The author identifies that celebrities can be their own brands rather than just endorsing another brand, a distinction that not many authors have elaborated on. Along with this, the author discusses how, when celebrities are brands, they can have their own brand extensions (i.e., if Kim herself is a brand, her Kim Kardashian Perfume line is a brand extension). This is a defining theme throughout my thesis, as Kardashian and other celebrities are ‘famous for being famous’, or well recognized for branding themselves. Not only do they have their own self brands to market and promote, but this also affects their brand extensions. These celebrity self-brands allow celebrities to break through the celebrity clutter and are important because they allow the celebrity to increase their perceived

value and reputation (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 2). This strategy is a great way to expand one's fame and stardom and is likely why the Kim works so hard to protect and build up her brand identity.

The author also recognizes that while some celebrities are known for their special skills or talents, others are known just for being known, but did not elaborate on this fact much further. This applies directly to Kim, and it is interesting that this author has also recognized this type of fame. It was also stated that celebrities are characterized by unique features and skills which "inspire emotional and cultural connections" (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 2). This is something that Kim certainly does. People feel emotionally attached to her, and she is at the forefront of American culture and trends. The author also noticed that there has been a shift from celebrities as endorsers to developers of their own brands and product lines in recent years. Kim has certainly been part of this movement, because while she does still endorse products, she has also been developing her own brand. A successful brand has a recognizable image, for example, Nike is recognizable from their swoosh logo. The same goes for celebrities as brands themselves; Kim is highly recognizable for example, from her physical appearance to her voice to the branding she uses on her TV show. People see her products on her show or social media, and buy them to try to emulate her, her rich lifestyle and her beauty and personality since it allows consumers to 'own' a piece of her fame (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 4).

The author also studies the effective elements of celebrity marketing, and what conditions make a celebrity brand or brand extension effective. One of the strongest of these conditions is perceived fit between the celebrity brand and the brand extensions they are trying to sell, which is the perceived connection between the two (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 139). For example, Kim's brand is strongly focused on being the ideal shape and look for women's beauty, and being a leader in the beauty and fashion world. Therefore, when Kim created her SKIMS shapewear line,

or her entertainment app that focused highly on fashion, both of these products had a connection to Kim's brand, and therefore were believable and made sense for the consumer to buy. The consumer could then have this piece of Kim's fame and cultural meaning and assimilate it into their own personality in order to fit into a specific culture. There would be no connection or perceived fit if Kim made something like motorcycles for example. The typical consumer, an older, tough man would not want a Kim motorcycle because he would not want to associate the attributes and characteristics of her brand as part of his own personality, and she would also have no credibility with motorcycles compared to another brand such as Harley Davidson. Kim's products do well because she strategically picks which markets she wants to enter. However, there might be an exception with super fans, where people who really love the brand will buy any variety of product that they make (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 4; Yeung and Wyer, 2005).

The author interestingly points out how celebrity brands could be better and safer to make endorsement deals with rather than just any celebrity endorsement. Celebrity brands assume more risks than celebrity endorsements do, because their name and appearance need to be consistent and look good in the public eye. For example, Kim's brand is valuable because after the mishap in 2007, she worked very hard to create a positive brand image of herself and works hard to maintain that today. The author uses an example of Britney Spears who signed an endorsement deal with Pepsi in 2001 and was later pictured drinking a competitor product. The endorsement deal was not authentic to herself, and when she drank what she actually preferred, it was embarrassing to the company and undermined the endorsement's credibility. A celebrity brand has more at stake as they need to maintain their own reputation and will likely endorse and/or create brand extensions of things they actually use and enjoy, so as not to create cognitive dissonance with their true selves (brand), the way Britney Spears did when she drank a

competitor product after endorsing Pepsi. Celebrity brands will be more careful in their actions and will not want to ruin their reputations, and because of that, will be more reliable, credible and valuable to have as an endorser or owner of a brand extension (Kowalczyk, 2011, pg. 149). Celebrity brand extensions also help build connections to celebrities, since these products help connect consumers to these celebrities, and therefore relate to them more personally, or create a stronger attachment.

Sejung Marina Choi, an assistant professor of Advertising at the University of Texas at Austin, and Nora Rifon, a professor in the department of Advertising, Public Relations and Retailing at Michigan State University, focus on celebrity endorsements, specifically how it affects brand images and brings credibility to advertising in “Who Is The Celebrity In Advertising? Understanding Dimensions of Celebrity Images” (2007). The authors discuss the fact that every celebrity has a distinct image and are in a way a symbolic icon that is a part of popular culture, a statement which could also define Kim. This article touches on meaning transfer from celebrities to products, and how since people want to be like celebrities (relating back to entertainment motives), people will purchase things endorsed by a celebrity in order to close that imaginary gap within their parasocial relationship. They also add that celebrities in endorsements act like a good friend who is simply recommending products to you (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Kim does this through explicit ads, but also discusses products casually that she likes anyway, so she certainly does this. People then gain some sort of satisfaction from buying endorsed goods, because they have this belief that they are like that celebrity in some way, and these products help manifest that to the world, which helps to substantiate it as part of their own identity. The authors state that “both celebrities and products might symbolize and share popular ideas and meanings that their consumers or audiences find relevant and important” (Choi &

Rifon, 2007, pg. 318). These ideas and the traits of a celebrity can be transferred from the celebrity to the product through endorsement. The authors did two studies related to identifying image components of celebrities, and the relationship between these images and their perception of credibility (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Although this article focuses heavily on endorsements, all these theories can be translated over to a celebrity as a brand themselves, using their fame to build their brand and market their brand extensions.

These authors also made an interesting note that celebrity adoration and worship helps make them more powerful. They stated, “advertising is one of the key conduits marketers utilize to get socially desirable images of celebrities across to consumers in connection with products, and this might help perpetuate the phenomenon of celebrity idolization among today’s consumers” (Choi & Rifon, 2007, pg. 320). Basically, although advertising might start out focusing on the product, the advertising also has cultural implications, further endorsing the celebrity and their fame and idolization as well. Over the years, marketing has definitely had an effect on our culture, so this makes sense. For example, the marketing of De Beers Diamonds changed our culture to associate diamonds with love and marriage (Goldschein, 2011). Similarly, the more marketing Kim does, and the more brand extensions and products feature her, the more cultural currency she will have, and the more people will continue to look to her as a cultural figure and associate her as a trendsetter with these kinds of products and industries. We look to her as a trendsetter and for cultural advice because she has marketed and positioned that way as a cultural brand.

In *#sponsored - Influencer Marketing On Instagram: An Analysis of the Effects of Sponsorship Disclosure, Product Placement, Type of Influencer and their Interplay on Consumer Responses* by Nora Lisa Ewers, the author discusses influencer marketing, or the “modern form

of celebrity endorsement.” Influencer marketing is defined as “the art and science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messages with their audience in the form of sponsored content (Ewers, 2017, pg. 4; Sammis, Lincoln & Pomponi, 2015). Influencers are people on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube who have a following of over 2,000 and have an impact on their audience in some way. Companies sometimes reach out to them and ask them to promote their brands or products, and sometimes the influencers even create their own brands and sell their own products. There are different kinds of influencers, such as lifestyle bloggers, fashion bloggers, makeup bloggers, food bloggers and many more. Their audience is united by the love of the topic and eventually falls in love with the person and or brand as well. Influencers sometimes show off and talk about a product that they love out of loyalty, or they are paid to talk about a product in sponsored content. This kind of advertising has become a huge part of our society, and in 2019 the industry was worth \$8 billion according to Business Insider (Schomer, 2019).

Although this kind of marketing is new, the idea behind it is not. It works similarly to Word of Mouth marketing, which is when a person tells friends about a great product, and then they tell their friends, and so on (Ewers, 2017, pg. 4). Social media is an online network of people, so if someone were to talk about or share their love for a product, other people would see it and try the product, and then they would post online reviews for it that their network would so, and so forth. Through posting, sharing, and even liking and commenting, there is digital word of mouth being shared about products. Sometimes this endorsement is paid, and sometimes it comes from a genuine review of a product that the influencer really liked. Most of the time, content will be tagged in some way. Such as #ad at the bottom of an Instagram post, or a sponsored label on it to show that the content was paid for and is a sponsorship for the featured

product (Ewers, 2017). However, not just any influencer gets deals from companies to sponsor their products. The influencers carefully chosen by companies usually have similar targeted audiences and the influencer is seen as a cultural leader, someone that their audience goes to for advice on whatever they specialize in. This also demonstrates the idea of the 2-step flow theory of communication, which states that there are opinion leaders in society that most people will listen to, and those leaders will take information from mass media and pass these messages and their opinions on to the rest of their network (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966). These influencers serve as opinion leaders and influence their followers with messages such as ‘this dress is high quality for a great price, I love it and you’d love it too!’ for example. Sometimes these influencers spread their own messages or are paid to sponsor and talk about a brand or product. In both cases, the audience views this and receives the message and opinion from them, and then might go and buy the product. Kim is a cultural opinion leader, and spreads messages through her social media and TV show. She spreads ideas and opinions about many things, and this can also be used to sell products. Sometimes she genuinely enjoys a product and other times she is paid to talk about it, but due to her high reach and ability to contact and connect with a large number of customers, she usually ends up increasing sales for the brand (Ewers, 2017, pg. 4).

There are also different classifications of influencers based on their size. There are typical celebrity influencers such as Kim, and micro-influencers and micro-celebrities that have smaller followings and are usually seen as more relatable since they are closer to the average person and live a normal life (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017, pg. 1; Ewers, 2017, pg. 6). However, celebrities like Kim have many more followers and therefore a greater reach. Some of her followers might trust her just as much as a micro-influencer even though she lives a more lavish life due to the parasocial interactions that she holds on her social media. This study showed that

purchase intention was higher in celebrity social media posts rather than micro-celebrity posts, which was explained by the celebrity being perceived as more credible. So, although celebrities might lead a more unusual and expensive life, they are still seen as more credible and therefore people are more willing to buy from them as influencers (Ewers, 2017, pg. 26). Due to this credibility and astonishing reach, companies are willing to pay good money to have their products sponsored. This is because a familiar face like Kim's will be more persuasive to buy from, and since she is also credible, as she will not be perceived as trying to sell scams. Also, her reach is incredibly large as she has around 164 million followers on Instagram, or for perspective, is the 7th person with the most Instagram followers (The Most Followed Instagram Profiles, n.d.). For example, in 2019, Kim made, on average, \$910,000 per sponsored Instagram post (Hanbury, 2019).

Kim might also be effective as an influencer because of the frequency with which she is on TV, on social media and in the news. The more frequently someone sees a celebrity and the more intense each interaction is, the more likely it is that a strong relationship between the consumer and that celebrity will form (Klimmt & Hartmann, 2006; Knoll & Matthes, 2017, pg. 58). This regularity first started when TV was a big medium for entertainment, as she was featured on her weekly TV show. She was also all over the celebrity news in 2007 as part of the aftermath of her home video and has been able to keep these appearances up through drama such as her short marriages or appearing in Playboy magazine. While she kept up appearances in her TV show, she also started to change the tune of her personal brand from sex to a more serious mother and businesswoman. When social media started to become more popular, she led that medium with her frequent posts. Nowadays, she is still making frequent appearances on her TV show, on social media, and in the news for doing things such as advocating for inmates to be

freed from prison. All these frequent encounters she has had with consumers over this long period of time (13 years) have helped people become familiar with her and therefore feel like they know her well and as a friend. People then develop a desire to keep up with what is happening in her life, and maybe also a desire to become more like her (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005, pg. 326; Knoll & Matthes, 2017, pg. 58)

To summarize, Celebrities are now being recognized more as their own brands rather than simply endorsing another brand, which means products they sell are brand extensions. The brand represents the qualities and characteristics of the person that are attractive to customers (“fans”), and the products they create (“extensions”) provide an outward expression, and object that helps represent the things the celebrity represents. When celebrities have their own brand and market, promoting and maintaining it, not only does this help feed the famous for being famous cycle, but it also adds value to their brand, and these brands can similarly inspire emotional and cultural connections. One interesting result of celebrities having their own brands is that these celebrities will be more reliable to have endorsement deals with, since they are upholding the reputation of both their own brand as well as the endorsed company, so they will be more careful with their behavior so as not to have scandals, and are more likely to endorse brands that they actually like and use as its consistent with their lifestyle. It also seems that perceived fit between a celebrity brand and their brand extensions is still an element of effectiveness, for example, Kim would sell more self-branded perfumes than motorcycles. This is because when consumers buy something with a celebrity’s brand, they are assimilating or transferring the meaning of that brand into their personality and external look. Also, the more Kim markets her self-brand, brand extensions and other products, the more she is seen by the world and the more cultural currency she will have because people will associate her with being

a trendsetter with these industries. Another interesting result that came along with the advancement of social media was the term ‘social media influencer marketing,’ where people with a following of at least 2,000 promote products, either paid or not. This system of 2-step flow of communication helps constitute these influencers as cultural leaders, as we get information about products from them and look to them for more and see them as cultural opinion leaders. Also, frequent communication from these people on social media can lead to a bigger following and reach as well as credibility, which makes them more appealing for companies to have endorse.

❖ *Literature Review Conclusion*

Based on the analysis above, we can see how Kim managed to rise to fame and stay at the top. Many of the techniques she used can also be adapted to most any brand; utilizing trends, parasocial interaction, direct and indirect persuasion, playing to Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, understanding entertainment theory, acting as a cultural opinion leader, understanding meaning transfer, perceived fit, using the 2-step flow of communication, credibility, and frequency of communication. The analysis section that follows will apply these concepts to brands and explain how they can be used for effective marketing.

Analysis: Application To Businesses

One might read this paper and think, “how will you apply this to businesses? A business is so different from Kim!” And while they may have their differences, Kim’s brand and her brand extensions are not all that different from many businesses. With a little practice, firms could act much like a celebrity in the way they engage with their audience. For example, when I was a kid, I idolized Nike, thought that they were god-like and untouchable, that they could do anything, and that they would never interact with a lowly citizen such as myself. This is the same

way that many people view celebrities. This phenomenon is explained in *Celebrity Firms: The Social Construction of Market Popularity* by Rindova, Pollock and Hayward. This article helps to extend the concept of celebrity from an individual, to the firm level. The authors argue that our media socially creates celebrity firms by attributing extraordinary qualities to them, but I believe this is done by both our media and people and society in general (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 50). A celebrity is more important and valued than other celebrities if they have lots of public attention, far reach, and they generate more interest from the public. The same can be applied to a company, they will be more of a celebrity than other companies if they generate more attention and have a greater reach. The authors state that “one defining characteristic of celebrity is that a social actor attracts large scale public attention... a second defining characteristic of celebrity is that the actor elicits positive emotional responses from the public” (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 51). Successful companies similarly have lots of attention and are well known and have the most loyal consumers when the consumers feel positive emotions towards said company. Companies simply need to take advantage of their reach and the strong brand image they have already likely created.

Many people think of the word ‘celebrity’ as a status for a person only; however, the authors describe celebrity as *a property* of a person’s relationship with an audience instead of a characteristic of themselves. This is because celebrities are made when they receive lots of attention and positive emotional responses from people. I could say that I’m a celebrity, but if I do not have the fans to prove it, then that statement has no merit. Same goes for a company; just because they are big and profitable does not mean that they are also celebrity-like; they could be missing the loyal fans and the personality that usually comes with these celebrity brands. People act similarly towards companies as well, eliciting positive emotions when they see their

products' branding and logos, giving these companies attention and continued business (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 51). Brands are also symbols representing consistency and quality, so seeing a certain brand will make one think of a specific experience; for example, Gucci products are high quality. A celebrity self-brand similarly stands for a consistent image; for example, you can expect seeing Kim in person to see her wearing stylish clothes and talking monotone in a valley girl-like way. So instead of thinking of 'celebrity' as a characteristic, think of it as an intangible asset. Small businesses just starting out do not have the same celebrity asset as Coke does, for example. The Coca-Cola brand has credibility because it is been around for so long, consistently delivering what people expect. They are frequently seen in restaurants, convenience stores, advertisements and sponsorships, and they play to people's need to belong, have friends and be loved. Coke does this through their advertising campaigns such as Share A Coke With a Friend by giving a bottle to your friend with his/her name printed on it. This celebrity asset can open a company up to many resources and strategic opportunities such as partnerships, alliances and sponsorships (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 51). Think of when Netflix aired its third season of Stranger Things and partnered with Coke to create old fashioned 80's bottles to sponsor in the show; it was reminiscent of a celebrity guest star and was profitable for both Coke and Netflix (Appendix D4; Huddleston Jr., 2019).

Also note that there is a difference between a celebrity CEO and a celebrity firm, where the business has a persona, or firm-level characteristics and behaviors that allow the firm to tap into the same benefits that a celebrity might have access to, versus a simply famous person who is known for leading said company, like Steve Jobs. The Apple founder and former CEO was famous because of his high-quality work and innovation at Apple, but Apple still has its own celebrity status separate from him.

Trying to get one's brand or firm to have a celebrity property can be utilized as part of a differentiation strategy. Companies who stick to industry norms and do what is 'usual' might feel like this is a safe approach to business, but that will not likely differentiate the company from its competitors and end up being worse for them, even though it felt like a safe decision. The authors describe how positively evaluated under- and overconforming behaviors from the firm can lead to the firm becoming a celebrity firm. In other words, firms who go beyond industry norms, or try not to meet industry norms, can actually differentiate themselves and compete better, contingent on their consumers being receptive to these new ideas. This is because by nonconforming, the company differentiates itself from its competitors, and by doing so is more interesting and attracts more attention from consumers that turn into fans (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 60). Take, for example Elton John, who became popular for his beautiful singing and unique performances onstage, which differentiates himself from every other average joe singer with nothing 'unsafe' as part of his performance. But it is also important that the audience perceives this differentiation positively, because otherwise they could villainize the company. The authors consider these firms to be either rebels, who underconform and deviate from existing norms, or market leaders, who overconform to existing industry norms and therefore lead the industry with new behaviors and values. For example, a rebel company that underconformed to existing norms was Starbucks in the early 1990's when they underconformed to the usual practices of the coffee industry leaders like Nestle and Maxwell House by roasting their coffee very dark and selling their coffee only in specialty coffee bars (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 64). An example of a market leader who overconformed to existing norms and therefore led the industry with new norms was Nike in the athletic shoe industry in the 1970's and 80's. Their shoes were well designed, colorful and 'avant-garde' for the time, so

much so that the National Basketball Association (NBA) banned their red and black Air Jordan shoe since it broke their dress code; Nike was breaking industry norms with their colorful and different athletic shoes. Years later, the industry's norms have adapted, and Nike served as a market leader by overconforming and leading the charge for more colorful shoes (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 64). For both of these paths to be successful, they need to be positively interpreted by consumers. The rebels and market leaders risk social rejection by not conforming to standards, and the market leaders are also at risk because they can only maintain their celebrity status as long as other companies do not innovate to catch up with these new industry standards set by the market leader (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 63). It is a useful strategy for a brand to become a celebrity because when they are using their fame to position themselves and be highly visible, their products (or product extensions of their celebrity brand) can greatly benefit (Rindova & Pollock & Hayward, 2006, pg. 52). To summarize, it can be really useful for a company to try to garner fame by over or underconforming and use it as another tactic to achieve a strategy, and to help achieve a competitive advantage over their competitors.

There were many things that helped Kim rise to and sustain her fame, and some of those tactics translate nicely over to business like underconforming. These suggestions could help firms in a larger differentiation strategy or could create a new intangible asset that the company could use to build a competitive advantage, for example.

❖ *Ride The Wave*

Kim got lucky with the timing of her emergence as a star. and being at the height of reality television, as well as riding the social media wave. It is not every day that new media communication technologies are invented, but companies could exploit what they can similar to the way Kim did. For companies, it is important to be at the forefront of these trends and be a

leader in this everchanging market. For example, TikTok is the latest in media communications technology. TikTok is an app where users can post 15 to 60-second-long videos and can easily edit their videos to put popular songs and sound effects over their content. The videos mainly consist of dancing challenges and trends, as well as memes and jokes. TikTok uses a unique algorithm to serve consumers more of the content that they enjoy (Li, 2020). There are not nearly as many companies on TikTok as there are Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and TikTok is apparently notorious for being difficult to advertise on. Companies could be keeping up with this trend and riding TikTok's current wave of popularity by joining the app and making content. Although the app is not the easiest platform to use when it comes to paid advertisements, there is still an opportunity for building brand awareness and brand celebrity through creating an account and posting content like every other user. This can be seen through The Washington Post, who has had an employee chronicling his quarantine adventures daily and representing The Washington Post on TikTok (Appendix D1). His videos have been well received by the audience on TikTok, with 21.3 million cumulative likes on their videos and 446 thousand followers on their account (The Washington Post, n.d.). While this might not translate directly into increased sales, it is building brand knowledge and increasing the brand's celebrity to this relatively young audience. When they grow up a bit and become more avid news consumers (and have an income to spend on news), they will more likely recall The Washington Post and want to buy from them since they have a built-up trust from repeated viewings on TikTok. Besides new media technology trends, brands should ride out other trends as well. For example, while processed foods used to be the norm, now Americans are more concerned than ever with eating wholesome and natural food. Using Kim's techniques, a company will want to adapt to these trends by making healthier food, and even create new trends. For example, if organic chocolate is

becoming popular, why not innovate and create a new organic and fair-trade chocolate?

Tomorrow's norms are today's changing trends. If there is a meme circulating, hop on it, and be one of the first to help circulate it. The world moves fast online, so it is important to be quick and take advantage of these trending opportunities and stay at the forefront of what is popular the way Kim did.

❖ *Parasocial Interactions and Parasocial Advertising*

Kim uses parasocial interactions to help build her brand and fan base and keep people coming back for more (Appendix C1). Parasocial interactions, or talking and interacting on social media as if you are only talking to one person who is your close friend, causes people to see a kind of friendship in her, even if it is an illusion and one sided (Appendix C2). Celebrity brands do this often, and firms can take advantage of this way of communicating to their audience as well. Take for example, McDonalds on Twitter – they post very impersonal, straightforward ads – it is very obvious to the consumer that they are being advertised to, and it is hard to feel stimulated and attracted to those ads (Appendix D2). While people are seeing it (around 500 from the likes on the tweet), it might drive a few people to purchase a Shamrock Shake, but it does not encourage more interaction than *maybe* a like, but overall, it is boring. Compare that to Wendy's on twitter – they are freaking hilarious, and notorious for their out-of-the-box humor and challenging other brands such as McDonalds (Appendix D3). They have built up a celebrity brand and persona, as they are consistent in their humorous posts and playful digs at their competitors. People see them as a funny friend and enjoy their personality as if they were a person, and then follow and interact with the brand. Again, this might not directly translate into sales, but it is about the long game, and building brand recognition and loyalty so that people think of them later. They are, like what Kardashian has done, building authenticity, trust, and people are sharing in their brand personality and enjoying it. They will most likely help elicit a

warm friendship emotion from their followers since they make people laugh and will more readily come to mind next time they are thinking about getting fast food. This illusion of intimacy and friendship has led Wendy's to have a pretty dedicated community of 3.6 million followers on Twitter. By posting something and leaving a discussion open ended like Kim and Wendy's does, this allows for ongoing communication in the comments and engages the audience to discuss or post their opinions and thoughts. This engagement helps strengthen the parasocial relationship between the brand and consumer, as well as encourages a sense of community to form between all their fans. This could also serve as a focus group which would be beneficial for the brand to do some social listening to and respond to them by implementing any suggested changes. Lueck says that, "the idea of Parasocial advertising is to promote a lifestyle, not a single brand" (Lueck, 2015, pg. 22), but I think a brand can be a lifestyle. For example, a Target lifestyle looks different from a Walmart lifestyle or a Patagonia lifestyle. Yes, promote products occasionally, but always promote the brand, which encompasses things like lifestyle posts and memes; each is different to the brand's persona. Companies could post things that coincide with the brand and the way the brand's persona would live life; for example, Target posts modern but fun, playful and unique things, while Walmart mostly posts about simple, clean photos and cheap deals, and Patagonia will post exciting, adventurous pictures about being outside and being kind to the Earth and others (Appendix D9). These kinds of posts and the personal way that brands talk to consumers is effective parasocial advertising.

❖ *Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion*

Kim promoted her brand, brand extensions and other products two ways, directly and indirectly through the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) of persuasion. ELM persuades people through direct, high cognition messages which are very obviously advertisements, whereas indirect or peripheral messages convince the audience to buy things through low effort

thinking and peripheral cues like attractiveness and subtle placement, such as product placement in movies that has characters “regularly” using products, but not outwardly advertising for them. Examples of ELM in Kim’s posts can be seen in Appendix C3. Direct advertisements are obvious and usually present a lot of information and require thought and consideration, such as buying a car, whereas indirect advertisements are subliminal or peripheral, such as a main character in a movie drinking Coca-Cola. Celebrity brands can similarly promote themselves directly, through very obvious advertisements (using a hashtag ‘#ad’, or it simply is positioned and looks like a typical ad). Things can also be indirectly promoted, such as through Target’s Twitter and Instagram posts. They repost people talking about how they love ‘Target runs’ and always buy things they did not need when they go. This is indirect, but it persuades consumers to go to Target since it is whimsical and fun, and you find wonderful things you did not know you needed (Appendix D5). Think about the products that a company sells and how they might align with the ELM method; most car ads will require more direct and high-level persuasion such as including lots of information like price and APR, whereas food ads might be more indirect as people buy those on a whim. When posting a more direct ad, consider these. When a brand is posting to build itself up, a more indirect approach would work well since the goal is not specifically to sell a product, but to get people to think about the brand. People could either follow and interact with a brand because they agree with what the brand says and stands for (direct), or more indirectly, maybe the brand offers an attractive delicious product like ice cream or can draw them in with humor like Wendy’s (Appendix D3).

❖ *Mere-Exposure Effect*

Kim and other successful brands post on their social media often enough to remind consumers and make it feel like they are part of a community, but not so often that it is annoying and overbearing. Consistent and frequent postings help build a brand’s fame due to the mere

exposure effect. If a brand posts less often, people will not be used to it, but if a brand posts more often, people may show an increased liking since they are repeatedly being exposed to the brand. The message here is not overdo it, but still be consistent. Also, the more a brand posts and advertises, the more people will interact with it and share it, spreading both digital and real-life word of mouth. Simple exposure is helpful, but the more frequently a brand posts and the more intense each interaction is with their fans, the more likely it is that a strong relationship between the consumer and the celebrity brand will form. Therefore, it can be helpful to post frequently enough to keep people engaged and at the very least exposed to a brand to help be reminded of the brand and build a liking to it.

❖ *Be Accessible*

Kim quickly moved to social media and took advantage of being accessible, better than most other celebrities at the time. Media and communication technology has evolved to the point where celebrities can post and reply to fans in an instant and seem more human to them since they reveal the more private, behind the scenes parts of being a celebrity. Kim really differentiated herself and built her brand on her unapologetic realness; although she lives a glamorous life by day, she still argues with her siblings and cries on her show. She illustrates that although she is an extremely famous celebrity, she is still human (Appendix C4). Brands and firms could do the same and maybe get the same results. By letting fans see the messiness of behind the scenes of making the product, making jokes about the brand (such as Target joking about how easy it is to get distracted in Target), and showing empathy and care towards consumers, this can help build a sense of authenticity and trust between the brand and the audience. When people comment on posts, or when they share or talk about the brand's content or product, and when brands share these opinions on their page and reply to them, this can build trust and a feeling of friendship between the brand and the consumer. Kim took advantage of

social media's amazing interactivity, and it could similarly be beneficial to brands if they did the same.

❖ *Tap Into What Motivates People*

The entertainment theory explains that people consume entertainment for two reasons, either for a playful motive (because it is an easy and fun mindless distractions) or for an aspirational motive, where consumers try to emulate the brand or its attributes. Kim utilizes both, as people watch and follow her because they want to be like her, or because it is a mindless distraction, or both (Appendix C5). It can be easy to post things as mindless distractions, such as fun simple videos and pictures, and that can be a good tactic to use to get people to follow the brand. But it is even better when people consume the brand because of the aspirational motive, because then they will aspire to be like the brand and its attributes and be more likely to get involved and make a purchase. A post that tries to motivate people through aspiration might have a call to action or an ad that will encourage the consumer to consider their life with the brand, such as a Snapchat filter that features the brand and its persona. Switching between these two kinds of posts could encourage people to follow, and then pursue their aspirations to be like that brand and purchase the brand's products. Also, Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a motivational theory that describes how we need physical needs like food, water and safety before we aspire to fill needs such as love and belongingness, and finally self-actualization, or meeting our full potential as an individual, which we are all eventually striving to accomplish. People will aspire for love, belongingness, friendship, trust and acceptance in interpersonal relationships, which is a reason people interact with celebrities, even if it is mostly one-sided. The same could happen with a firm if their fans feel like they are part of a community because they buy a brand, that helps fulfil these needs for these people to help them on their way to achieving their full potential. Take for example Peloton, where its users share a community together, interact with each other, and

discuss how much they enjoy the product. They feel like they belong and are accepted, and are friends with the brand and its ambassadors, and maybe even love it. This product fulfills a physical need of being in shape, as well as being loved and belonging to a community, both of which help them to reach their full potential. Brands can similarly figure out what part(s) of Maslow's Hierarchy their brand might fill and strive to post and advertise towards these motivations. For example, with Peloton, you'll be in shape and you'll also be part of an exclusive community that cares about you (Appendix D6).

❖ *Identify The Brand's Cultural Meaning*

Kim's self-brand has a cultural meaning, and so do many companies and their products; for example, Kim's brand represents to her followers the ideal look and beauty, fashionable, cool, friendly and relatable, Vans to their followers represents a skater subculture, whereas Nike represents being athletic to a sporty subculture. Brands, as mentioned earlier have broader cultural meanings as well, which are transferred to the consumer, becoming part of their identity. When they buy and represent that brand, the consumer also helps promote that identity. Kim, as we have seen, is a cultural opinion leader for fashion and beauty, and she stays on top of trends as well as creates them. Companies could emulate Kim's tactic by staying on top of trends relating to their cultural meaning, just like Target did by collaborating with the trendy Magnolia and creating the Heart & Hand collection, thus staying on top of what is chic, clean and stylish (Appendix C6, D10). Also, advertising helps create cultural meaning and connections between the product and a specific cultural meaning. Brands could emulate Kim's success by trying to be opinion leaders and staying on top of trends, ride them out when possible, and carefully associating the product with a desired cultural meaning. For example, many people look to Apple as a technology leader in our culture, even though they are often years behind Samsung's innovations (Petro, 2019). Either way, everyone still perceives them as the technological leader,

and as if these technological advancements are only cool and popular when Apple does it. Brands can also transfer meaning by brand associations. Whenever Kim endorses a product, she transfers her cultural meaning to that product; so, if she is fashionable, beautiful and stylish so is the eyeshadow palette she's endorsing. New cultural meanings can be created for the product through endorsements, or even by teaming together, such as when similar companies team up and do giveaways; they are associating with each other and sharing their cultural meanings, or strengthening them if they are already similar (Appendix D7). Kim is also in a way a cultural currency, and companies could try to do the same with their brands to gain celebrity firm status. Self-branding can be for commercial gain as well as for cultural capital, and it is important to focus on both. Sometimes it might be outright commercial gain, but cultural capital might gain more loyal followers and consumers and therefore sales in the long run since people see the brand as a cultural opinion leader. It seems also important to be consistent when self-branding, and to try to establish a unique persona for the brand the way Kim has. Also, by continually promoting the brand, it will likely increase recognition and loyalty and therefore makes fame more attainable. Also, culture can have significant effects on people's identities since parts of our identities form based off our culture and its influences, such as people being very outgoing and independent in America versus more dependent on others in a more collectivistic culture. It is important to note that a brand might be influencing some people's identities, as they are a reflection of culture. Having a strong and consistent voice, as well as inspiring emotional and cultural connections through posts as opposed to bland, straightforward advertisements may help build customer loyalty and eventually sales.

❖ *Perceived Fit Between Personality and Products*

Perceived fit is one of the strongest conditions that makes a celebrity brand or brand extension effective, which is the perceived connection between the brand and the product being

sold. This can be seen with Kim and her brand extensions such as the SKIMS shapewear line and her KKW Beauty makeup line; these are related to fashion and beauty, and Kim is a cultural leader in fashion and beauty, so the perceived fit is very good (Appendix C). This is important because when people buy things, the meaning of the thing is transferred to them. People will buy things that have a specific cultural meaning and when they consume it, that product and its attributes become part of their identity; for example, buying Gucci may allow one to feel they have a lavish lifestyle. However, if one buys a Harley Davidson, that identity aligns with being as tough as nails and the nonconformity of being part of a biker gang. These meanings are transferred to their consumers, and these people display them as part of their identity; one can learn things about people by what brands they wear, what they buy and eat, etc. Kim's brand (fashionable, sleek, beautiful) fits well with the types of products she sells. When building a brand, it can help to fit the brand's persona with the products being sold. For example, Magnolia (a retail store for home décor and furniture) puts out a clean, sleek, rustic, warm, stylish persona and voice, which fits well with the actual style of the products they sell: rustic, warm, and inviting furniture (Appendix D8). A brand personality that would not fit well with these products would be the persona of Wendy's: wild, hilarious, pushing the envelope, etc. (Appendix D3). However, Wendy's fits well with their product, food, which can be fun, enjoyable, unafraid of trying new things, bold, etc. Also, influencer and social media marketing works as a digital version of word of mouth marketing. Organizations or firms starting something popular or viral online could get people involved through word of mouth, and then people share these things with their friends online and in person. Shareable content that is worth talking about helps to reach more than just direct followers. Kim reaps the benefits of word of mouth all the time, as she will

post something on her snapchat story, and then people share it both online and in person, and the media will repost and share her story on different outlets for more people to see (Ahlgrim, 2018).

Conclusion

Marketing is a wonderful, beautiful mix of business, psychology, social psychology, culture, and more. When applied to a brand it is important to try to understand the implications and motivations behind consumers when they act the way they do. There is much that goes into marketing, and a lot that has helped make Kim a very effective brand. First, she simply got fortunate with the timing of her home video and hitting the peak of reality television as well as the creation of a modern celebrity as a personal brand rather than just an endorser. Then, when social media began to emerge following the creation of the smartphones she cleverly hopped on those trends and became one of the first and biggest names utilizing these new technologies. Unlike other companies though, she did not simply post ads for her brand extensions, she posted in an informal way that created parasocial interactions between her and her fans. She showed them intimate, behind-the-scenes pictures, and talked to them in a voice similar to that of a close friend, causing people to feel like they were truly friends with her, even though the relationship is illusory and one sided. Along with this, she posts both direct and indirect kinds of posts to persuade people to buy her brand extensions, as well as posts often so that people are repeatedly exposed to her brand. She also taps into people's motives for following her, either because it is an easy distraction, or because they aspire to be like her, or because she helps build up our identities through consuming her brand, and also because she fills needs such as love and belonging that we all crave. She is also a cultural opinion leader and has a cultural currency, and we all keep coming back to her because of her leadership, and further substantiate her cultural meaning every time we do. She inspires emotional connections through psychology and cultural

connections as a self-brand. She also has a good perceived fit between her brand and business ventures and helps advertise for her brand extensions through online word of mouth and through using a two-step flow of communication. She is credible because she has been around for a while and has built up a good audience and has a much larger reach than many other celebrities and companies. She has had an incredible career so far, and is continuing to evolve her cultural meaning, as now she is an advocate for justice and prison reform. Instead of dismissing her fame and success as being talentless, take a closer look at what she has accomplished. Companies can use these same tactics to help build up their own celebrity as a business tactic and use their fame as an intangible asset to help build a competitive advantage. From this analysis of her life and the tactics she has used to sustain her fame, it is clear to see that we could learn a thing or two from Kim. She is not just any ditsy celebrity; she is a marketing mastermind.

Appendices

❖ *Appendix A: Timeline of Kim Kardashian's Life*

October 21, 1980: Kimberly Noel Kardashian is born in Beverly Hills, CA to parents Kris and Robert Kardashian.

March 1991: Kris and Robert Sr. Kardashian Divorce.

April 1991: Kris remarries Bruce Jenner (later Caitlyn Jenner).

1995: Robert Kardashian Sr. serves as an attorney during the infamous OJ Simpson trial, where OJ (Orenthal James), a former American football running back, was being tried for the murders of his former wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ron Goldman (Mead, 2019).



<https://www.biography.com/news/oj-simpson-kardashians-relationship>

January 2000: Kim marries her first husband, a music producer named Damon Thomas (Jensen, 2018).

September 2003: Robert Sr. Kardashian dies of esophageal cancer.

February 2004: Kim and Damon Thomas divorce (Jensen, 2018).

2004: Kim's first appearance in the world of entertainment as a personal shopper and stylist for singer and actress Brandy Norwood (sister of Ray J) (Askinasi, 2020).

2003-2006: Kim appeared on Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie's TV show called *The Simple Life* and worked as Paris' personal stylist and did things on the show like help get her closet under control (Pomarico, 2020).

June 2006: Kim, Khloé and Kourtney Kardashian open a high-end boutique clothing and accessory store called DASH (Heller, 2018). There were stores in West Hollywood, Miami Beach and Manhattan, and all locations closed by April 2018. Kim's original hope for the show was to bring more attention to the DASH brand at the time (Pomarico, 2020).



<http://www.thesfnews.com/woman-machete-arrested-dash-store/40525>

February 2007: Kim Kardashian and her then boyfriend, Ray J (real name: William Ray Norwood Jr.), had created a sex tape while on vacation in 2002, which was released to the public in 2007 by Vivid Entertainment as a 41-minute movie called “Kim Kardashian, Superstar.” Kim initially filed a lawsuit against Vivid but later dropped it and receives around \$5 million as part of the settlement between the two (TMZ, 2019; Coleman, 2017; Marcus, 2017). Kim was later interviewed by Oprah Winfrey, who asked, “would you be where you are without the sex tape?” to which Kim replied, “I’m not naïve to that fact. That’s pretty much how I was introduced to the world. It was a negative way, so I felt like I really had to work ten times harder to get people to see the real me.” (Gilchrist, 2012).

October 14, 2007: Keeping Up With The Kardashians (KUWTK), a 30-minute reality TV series, aired for the first time in the United States on the E! cable network. As of 2020, it is now on its 17th season. Over the years, there were many spin-offs of the show, including *Kourtney and Kim Take Miami*, *Kourtney and Kim Take New York*, *Khloé & Lamar*, *Kourtney and Khloé Take The Hamptons*, *Dash Dolls*, *Rob & Chyna*, *Life of Kylie*, and Scott Disick’s *Flip It Like Disick* (Tinubu, 2019).



Season 1 of KUWTK, from left to right: Kendall, Rob, Kim, Kris, Bruce, Kylie, Kourtney, Khloé.

Source: <https://pagesix.com/2017/03/27/the-kim-kardashian-sex-tape-an-oral-history/>

December 2007: Kim decides to pose nude for the December issue of Playboy Magazine, a decision that she discusses with her family during the first season of KUWTK (Baxter-Wright, 2017).

2008: Kim and Paris Hilton end their friendship (Pomarico, 2020).

April 2009: Kim releases a 3 DVD workout plan called *Fit In Your Jeans By Friday – Amazing Abs Body Sculpt* (Baxter-Wright, 2017).

2009: This year, she appeared in a tragic romantic comedy movie called *Deep in the Valley*, with Chris Pratt.

April 2010: Kardashian Glamour Tan, a self-tanning gel created by Kim, Khloé and Kourtney was released exclusively at Sephora (The Kardashian Sisters Introduce Signature Self-Tanning Gel, 2010).

October 2010: Kim releases her first perfume called Kim Kardashian by Kim Kardashian.

March 2011: Kim releases her first and last music video for her single called Jam (Turn It Up), and donated half of the proceeds to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital (Baxter-Wright, 2017). Video: <https://www.cosmopolitan.com/uk/entertainment/a12464842/who-is-kim-kardashian/>

August 2011: Kim marries American basketball star Kris Humphries, in a televised wedding event that cost around \$10 million. After 72 days, the couple famously filed for divorce, but it wasn't finalized until 2013 (Jensen, 2018; Most Expensive Weddings, n.d.). She also released her third perfume called Love as a limited edition to celebrate this marriage (Baxter-Wright, 2017).

February 2012: Kim joins Instagram.

July 2012: Kim releases her fourth fragrance called True Reflection (Baxter-Wright, 2017).

November 2012: Kim, Khloé and Kourtney launch the Kardashian Kollection, a line of clothes at Sears. The line flopped and was officially discontinued in 2015.

2013: In this year, Kim starred in Tyler Perry's movie *Temptation: Confessions of a Marriage Counselor*.

May 2014: Kim marries Kanye West, a famous American rapper. They are still currently married as of January 2020 (Willis, 2019).



<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-5523633/Kardashian-florist-Jeff-Leatham-says-flower-walls-over.html>

June 2014: Kim released a mobile app video game called *Kim Kardashian: Hollywood*, and by August of 2018, the game had grossed \$8 million (Tinubu, 2019).



<https://www.glu.com/games/kim-kardashian-hollywood/>

March 2015: Kris and Bruce Jenner (later Caitlyn) divorce.

April 2015: Caitlyn Jenner officially comes out to the public as a transgender woman (Brockes, 2017).

May 2015: Kim releases a coffee table photo book called *Selfish*, which featured 448 pages of selfies she had taken in the past 8 years (Tinubu, 2019).

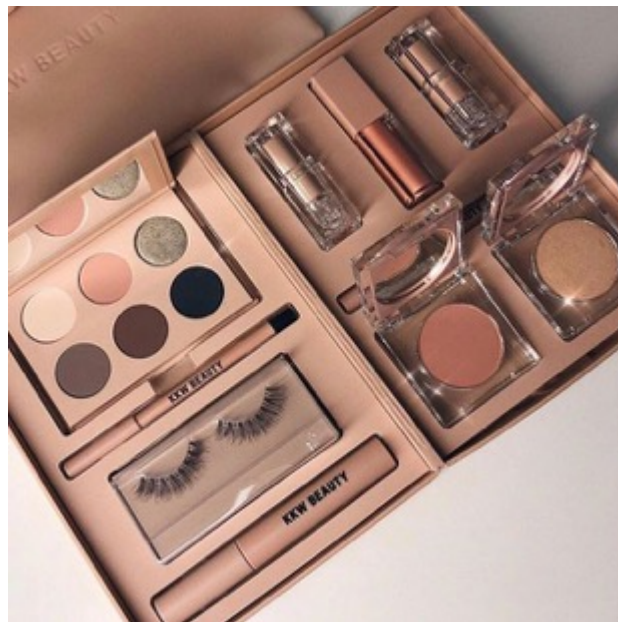


<https://stylecaster.com/kim-kardashian-new-selfish/>

December 2015: Kim launched Kimoji, an app of personalized Kardashian-related emojis for iOS. The app was so popular that it crashed the Apple App Store (Tinubu, 2019).

October 2016: Kim is robbed at gun point at her hotel in Paris, with robbers taking over \$5 million worth of jewelry, and leaving her with her wrists and ankles bound. She took a break from social media after this incident to help her recover from the trauma (Kim Kardashian West, 2020).

June 2017: Kim launched her KKW Beauty business with a \$48 contour kit, and it sold out in minutes, bringing in around \$13 million in sales. The brand has since expanded and now sells body makeup, eyes shadows, foundations, lip glosses and more.



<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/835980749558470022/>

November 2017: Kim launched KKW Fragrance, her own line of perfumes, with her first scent making \$10 million.

April 2018: All remaining DASH locations close.

May 2018: Kim lobbied President Donald Trump to consider clemency for Alice Johnson, a grandmother from Tennessee who was sentenced to life in prison in 19 charges related to cocaine

possession and money laundering. Trump granted her release on June 6th, and Kardashian had the honor of breaking the good news to her (Kim Kardashian West, 2020).



<https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2018/12/10/kim-kardashian-fought-woman-be-freed-jail-keeping-up-with-kardashians-showed-how/>

May 2019: Kim has been helping to commute the life sentences of 17 first time nonviolent drug offenders, as well as helping by donating money to them (Melas, 2019).

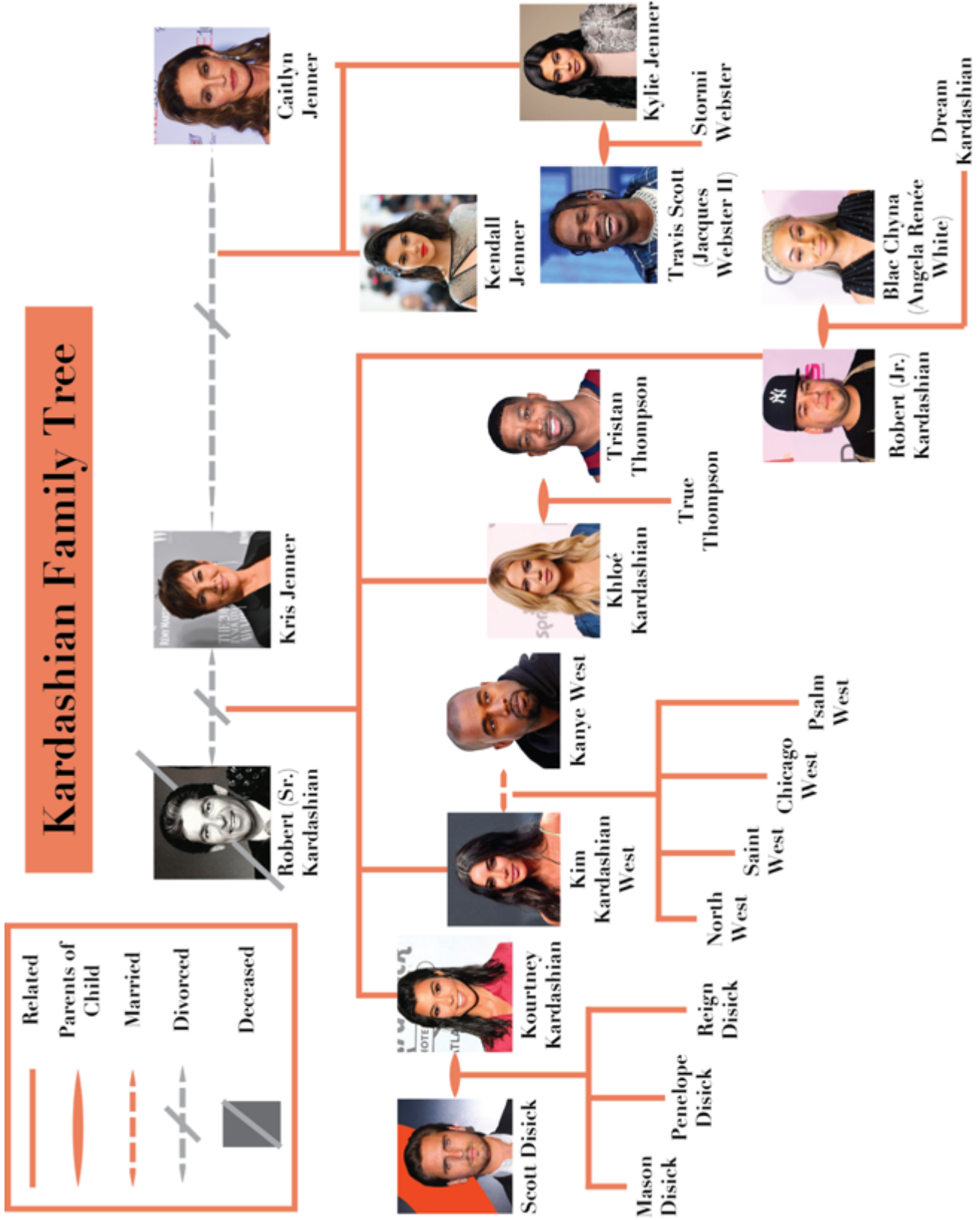
September 2019: Kim launched SKIMS, her own line of shapewear. Originally, it was going to be called Kimono, but she received backlash from the name as it appropriated Japanese culture, so she rebranded to SKIMS (Tinubu, 2019).

April 2020: Kim Kardashian's latest endeavors have been leading the fight for criminal justice reform, as she released a documentary on Oxygen called Kim Kardashian West: The Justice Project which highlights how she started with Alice Johnson and she's now taking on more cases (Tinubu, 2019).

2020: Currently: Kim is participating in the California Law Office or Judge's Chamber Program, where she can apprentice with mentor lawyers (hers are Jessica Jackson and Erin Haney), and at the end of 4 years she is allowed to take the bar exam to become a lawyer (Hess, 2019).

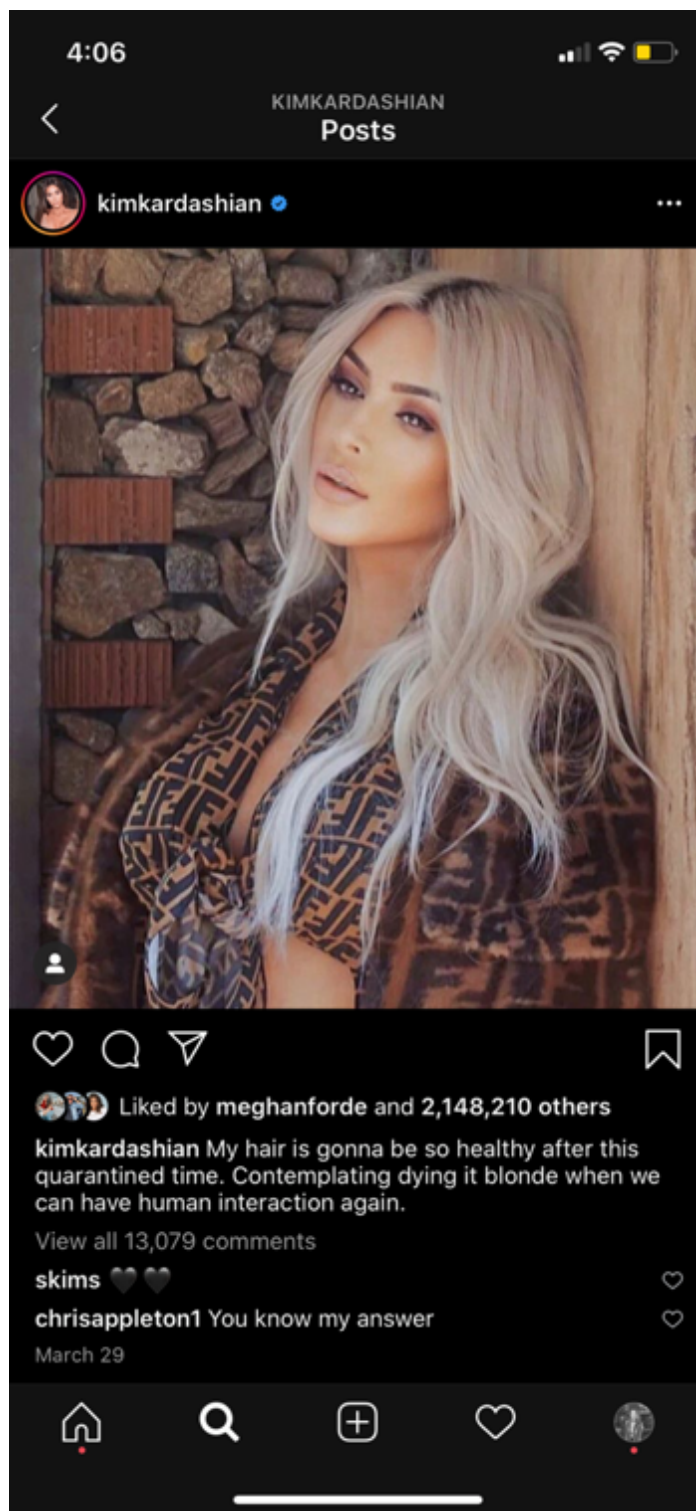
2022: Kim plans to take the bar exam (Hess, 2019).

✧ Appendix B: Kardashian Family Tree



✧ *Appendix C: Kim Kardashian's Social Media Examples*

C1. Kim talks to her fans on social media in a friendly, intimate way, and leaves her caption's sentiment open for discussion in the comments.



C2. Here, Kim show us a throwback, behind the scenes picture, and picks fun at her fashion choices. This elicits an emotional connection from her followers, she shows her humble beginnings and we feel that she's more authentic, and as if we're a close friend going through her photo album with her.



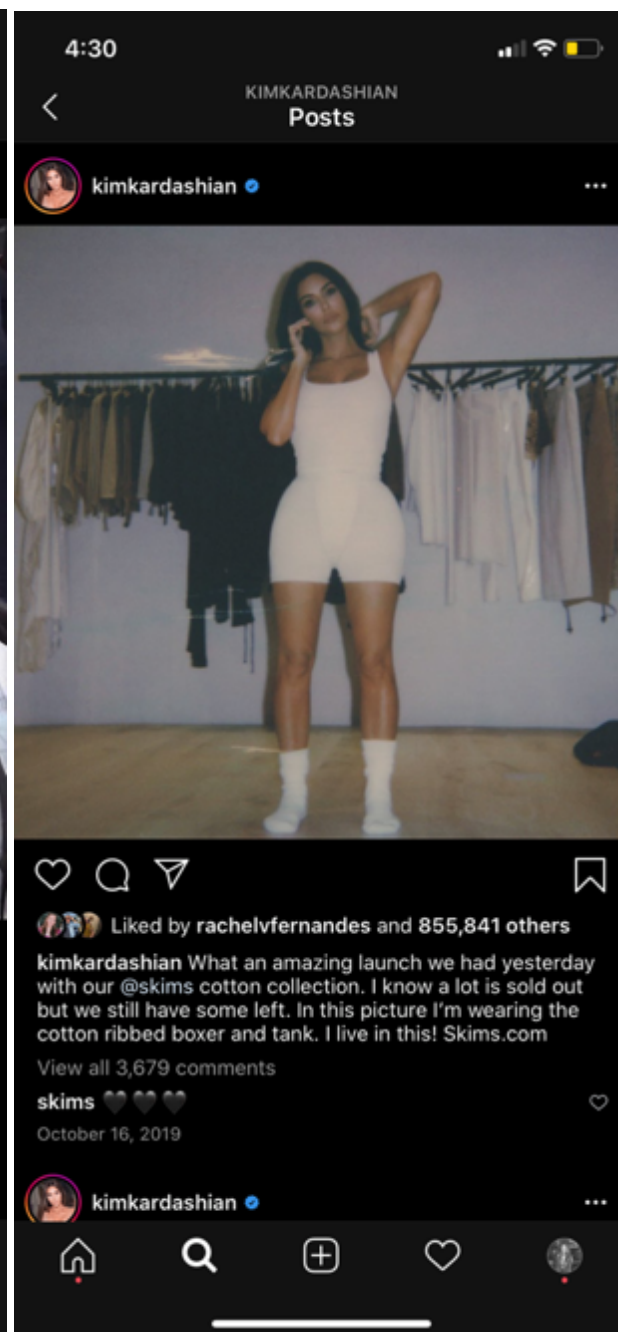
C3: Kim's direct and indirect posts sponsoring brands – on the left is an obvious advertisement from her caption, the #ad at the end, and the paid partnership tag at the top. On the right, it's clear she's drinking a Diet Coke, but it is not labeled as an ad. However, by showing that she likes drinking this product, she's peripherally reminding people about Diet Coke, and will influence them to buy it next time they go shopping because it's what Kim likes, and they would therefore like it too.



C4: Kim posts photos of behind the scenes of her celebrity life. Here, she's posting messier pictures of her family that shows her authentic, motherly, family-oriented side, something that many people can relate to.



C5: People follow and interact with Kim either because it's a fun distraction, or because they aspire to be like her. One such fun, distracting post can be seen on the left, whereas a post that has more substance and inspires action for those who aim to be like her is shown on the right



C6: Here, Kim is seen staying on top of cultural trends, if not helping to create them. She's culturally well known for her fashion and beauty and style.



✧ *Appendix D: Other Brand's Social Media Examples*

D1. The Washington Posts' TikTok account.

TikTok
@washingtonpost

Quarantine,
Day 13

We are a newspaper.
@washingtonpost

😊 #happyathome
🎵 Muhammad - nofiljutt53
74.5K likes · 368 comments

Get the app to see comments and join the conversation!

<https://www.tiktok.com/@washingtonpo> COPY



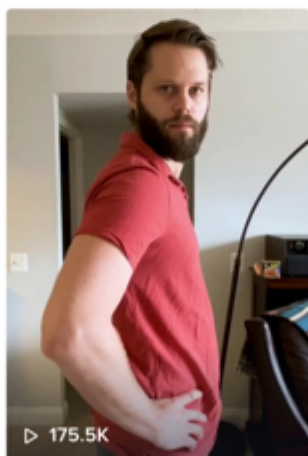
We are a newspaper.

@washingtonpost Verified account

2 Following 446.6K Followers 21.3M Likes

Email Dave at tiktok@washpost.com

Tag us in your quarantine videos!



We are a newspaper.
@washingtonpost

We are sorry. #telenovela #thursdays
🎵 sonido original - pamelapancito
3096 likes · 24 comments

Get the app to see comments and join the conversation!

<https://www.tiktok.com/@washingtonpost> COPY

D2. McDonald's Twitter Account.



D3. Wendy's Twitter Account.

 **Wendy's** @Wendys · Apr 13
You: I dip my fries in my Frosty!

This guy:

 **Ryan Gosling** @FOX152 · Apr 13
Let me tell ya, @Wendys has the best ketchup for coffee



657 2K 24.2K

 **Wendy's** @Wendys · Mar 23
We got our own Animal Crossing island. Get some Wendy's delivered and come hang out with us! twitch.tv/wendys




728 3.5K 22.9K

 **Wendy's** @Wendys · Feb 28
Here lies mediocrity. #EggRIPMuffin



1.6K 4K 48.7K

 **Wendy's** @Wendys · Mar 1
Y'all got any plans for breakfast tomorrow orrrrrrrrr.....?

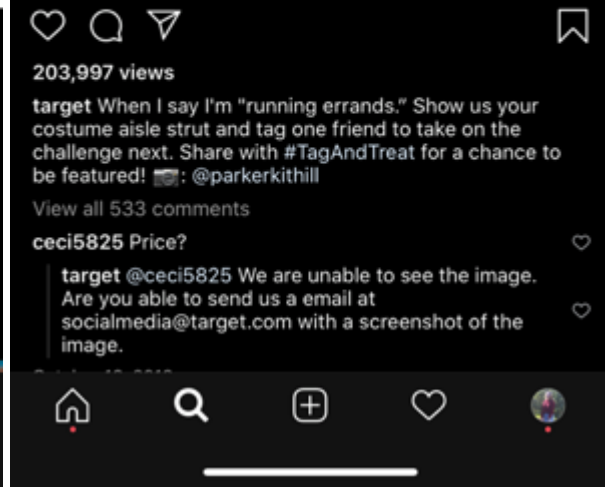
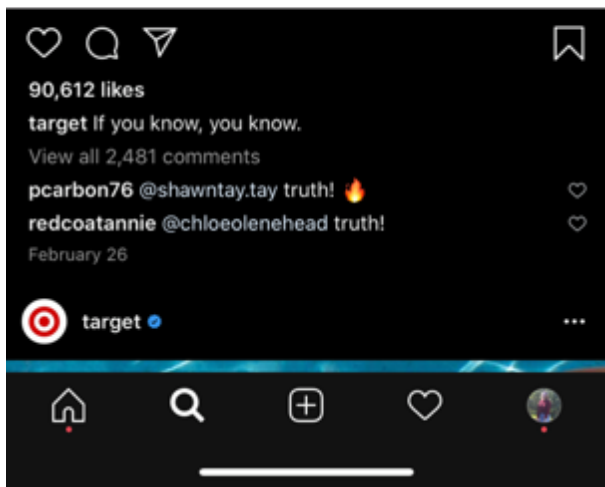
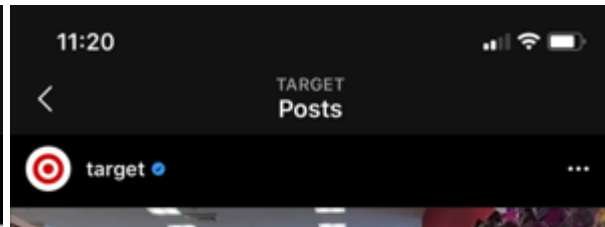
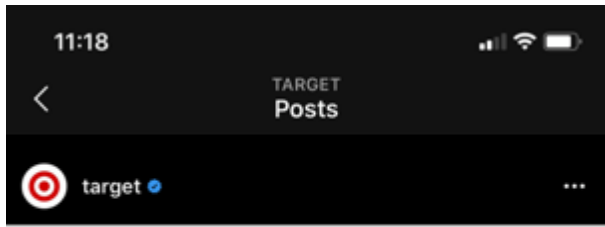
4.6K 1.8K 40.1K

D4. Coca Cola and Stranger Things partnership.



D5. Target's Twitter and Instagram Accounts.





D6: Peloton's Twitter and Instagram Accounts.



D7: Examples of giveaways on social media.

11:51

ORGANICVALLEY
Posts

organicvalley



25,303 views

organicvalley 🍌 GIVEAWAY 🍌
Take a breather and DONUT forget to treat yourself! And what better treat than donuts and milk? We've... more
View all 1,794 comments

revels.noah @trentmathews556 yes of course, you have a Sophisticated pallet 🤔🤔

trentmathews556 @revels.noah yes only the finest for my digestive system 🤔

March 31

11:51

SAVANNAH.USHER
Posts

savannah.usher
Fort Worth, Texas



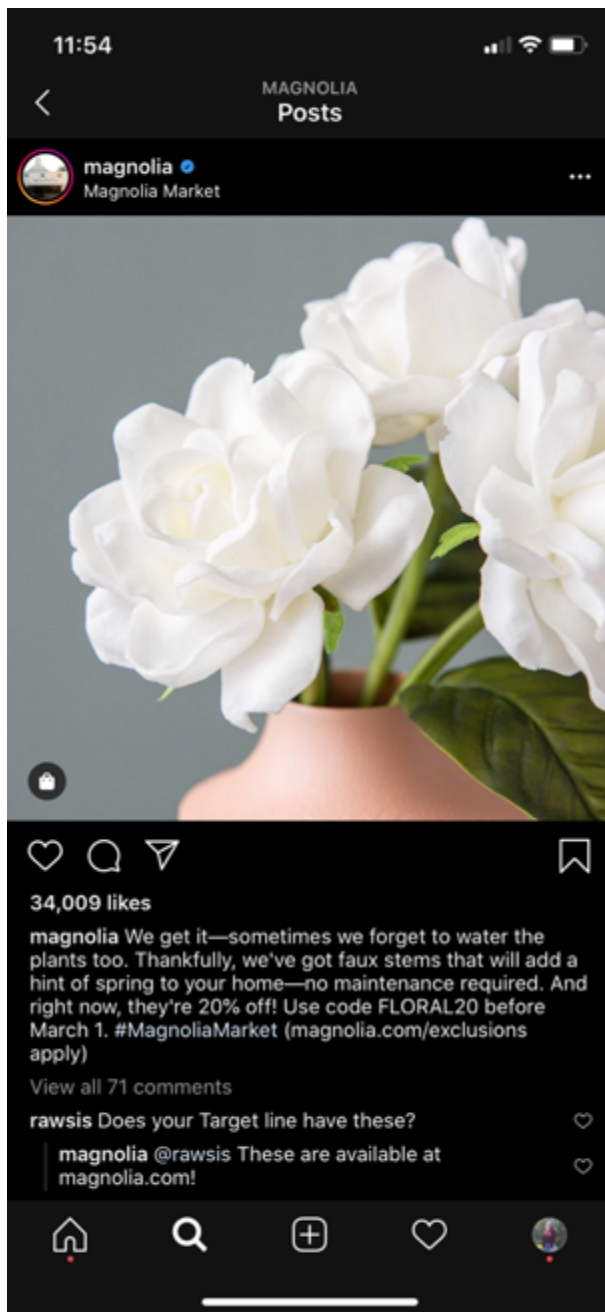
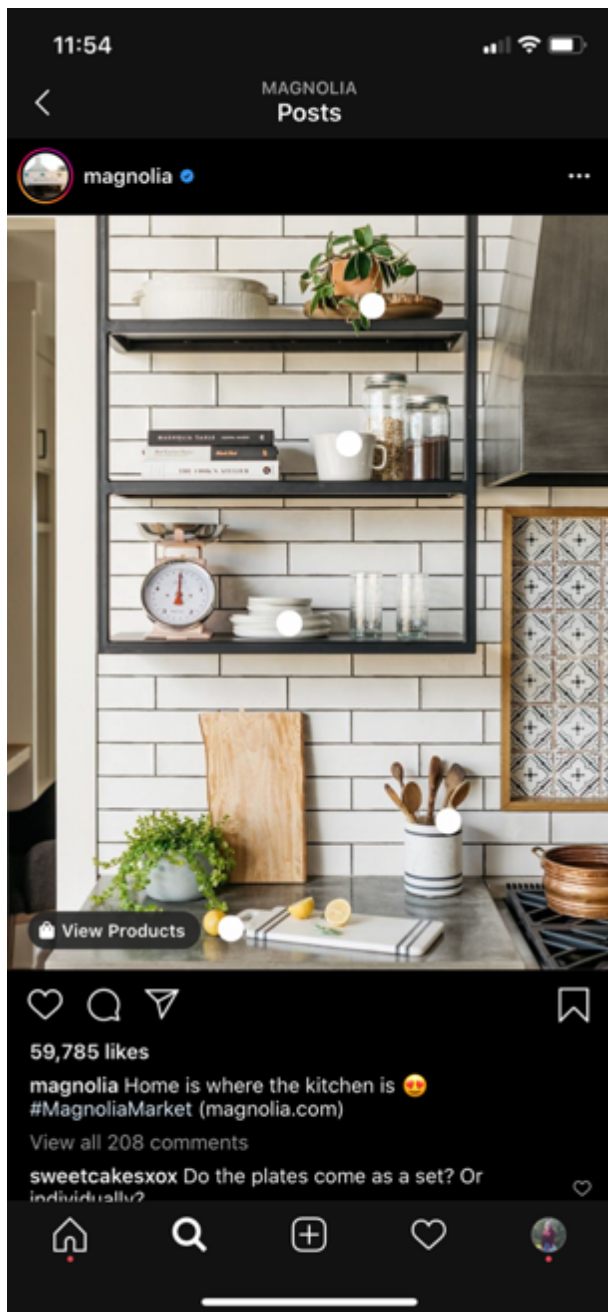
4,254 likes

savannah.usher 🎉 GIVEAWAY TIME 🎉 In need of a spring wardrobe refresh? I'm teaming up with @venus and @yvetteg23 to give away a \$300 VENUS shopping spree!

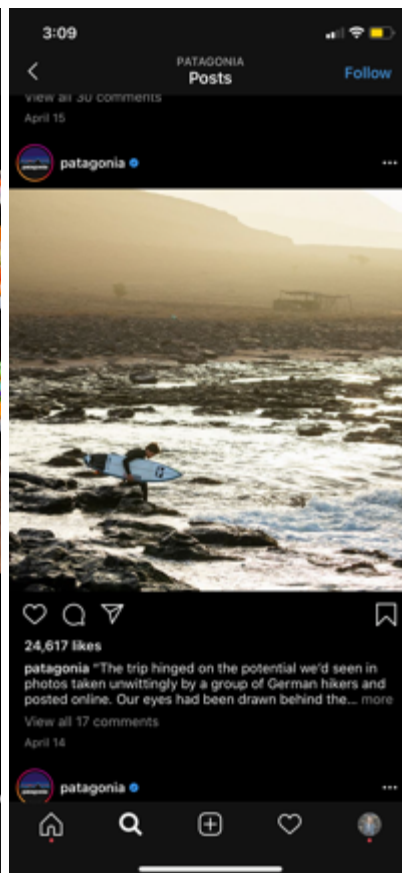
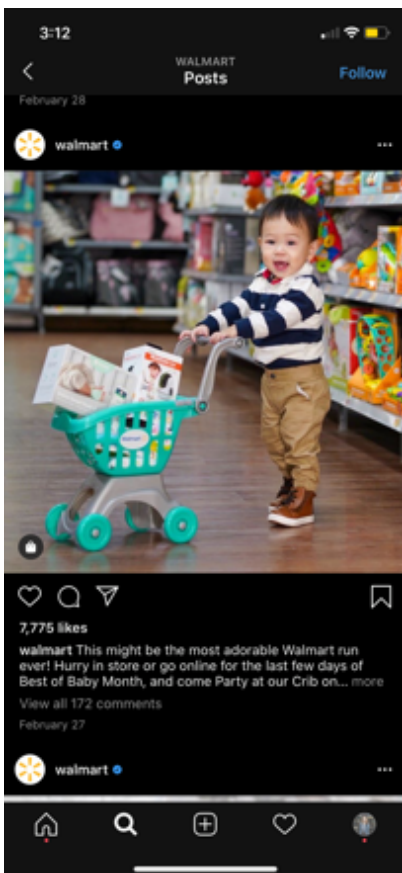
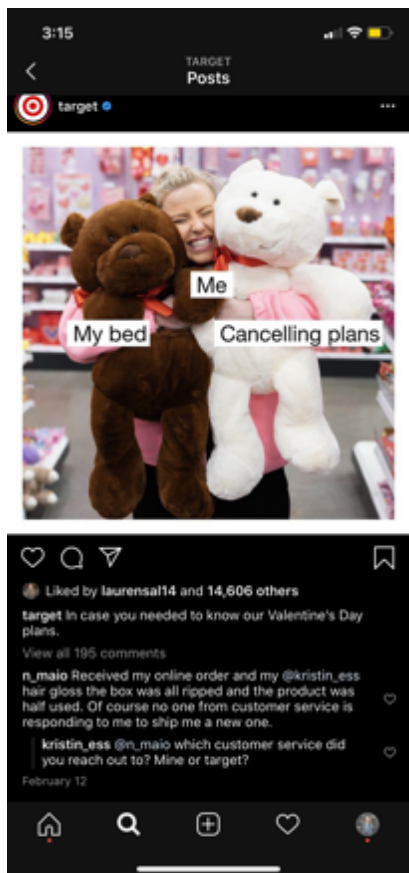
How to enter:

Follow @savannah.usher, @venus and @yvetteg23
Like this post and tag a friend in the comments below
Do the same on @venus and @yvetteg23's posts

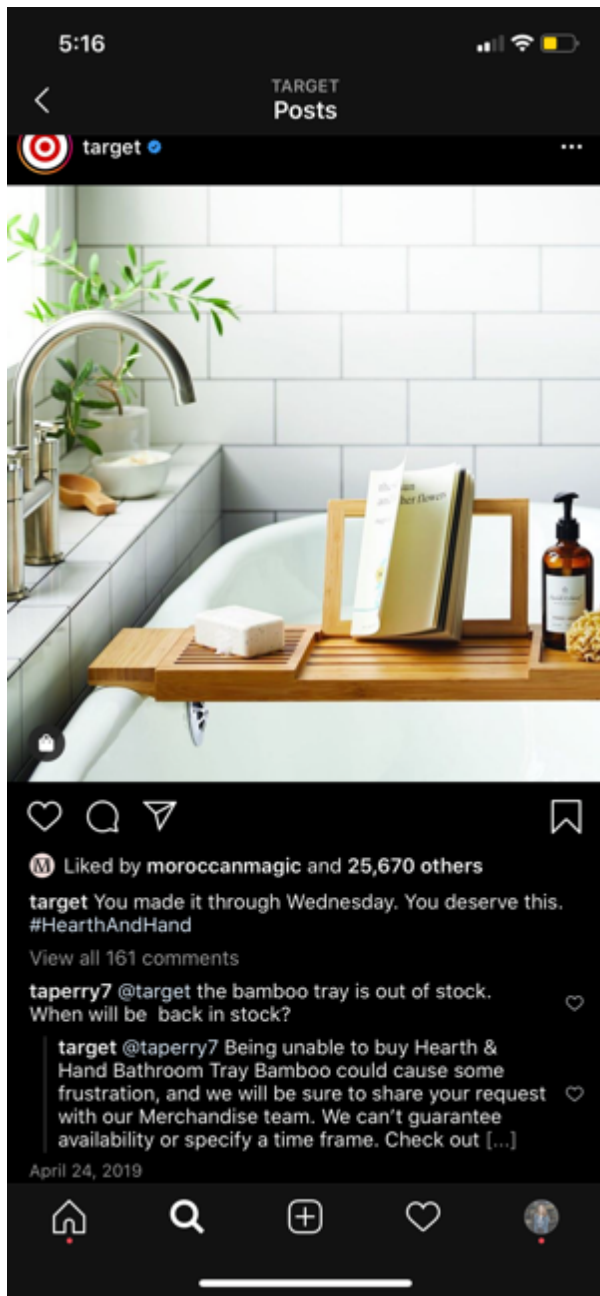
D8: Magnolia's Instagram.



D9: Target's Instagram versus Walmart's Instagram versus Patagonia's Instagram.



D10. Target's Hearth & Hand collection, the newest collaboration to keep them at the top of the culture of chic home décor.



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