

**INFLUENCER PERSONA AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF  
THE USER DECISION-MAKING DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TRADITIONAL AND  
SHORT-VIDEO-BASED SOCIAL MEDIA**

by

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Submitted to the Integrated Design and Management Program in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

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## **Abstract**

Social media influencer marketing, which is a new marketing method that takes on the idea of celebrity endorsement, is a growing phenomenon. The ever-increasing influence of social media as seen in society today places it as a key modern-day content-driven marketing movement. The atmosphere of different social media platforms, the persona of influencers, and the qualities of influencers' posted content are all possible factors that have an impact on the outcomes of influencer marketing.

This thesis explores the following questions: Are there any differences between short-video and traditional social media platforms on the influencer persona establishment? What, if any, are the reasons for the differences regarding persona establishment from both the audiences' and the influencers' points of view? How do influencer personae affect the decision-making processes of their audiences, and are there methods that can quantify those influences?

Presented in the thesis are A) The definitions and subsequent analyses of different social media platforms, influencers, personae from human-centered design, and behavioral marketing research aspects; B) Interviews and surveys of influencers and audiences on personae topics; C) Influencer-audience interaction data collections and analyses; D) The development process of a method that quantifies influencer personae evaluations.

**Thesis Supervisor:** Juanjuan Zhang

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Motivation

According to data from GlobalWebIndex, internet users worldwide spent an average of 144 minutes on social media in 2019, an increase from 90 minutes in 2012 (Clement, 2020). The influence of social media is also increasing with the amount of time users spend on it; according to the data from CIGI-Ipsos (Ipsos, 2019), 57% of internet users consider the influence of social media on information acquisition and opinion expression to be increasing.

Social media influencer marketing, a marketing method embedded deep in social media, is also growing as influencers naturally contribute, in no small part, to the content generated. Social media influencers, also called Wanghong, literally “red-hot on the web”, takes the idea of celebrity endorsements and places it into a modern-day content-driven marketing campaign. According to data from Influencer Marketing Hub (“The State of Influencer Marketing,” 2019), the size of influencer marketing reached 6.5 billion U.S. dollars in 2019.

However, the attitude of social media users towards influencers are still widely different. On the one hand, 45% of social media users tried products recommended by influencers they followed, and 25% of them purchased products recommended by influencers (Shareable, 2018). On the other hand, 86% of social media users distrust influencers and bloggers (Hill+Knowlton, 2019). The different atmosphere of social media platforms, the persona of influencers, and content qualities are all possible

reasons contributing to this significant disparity. As social media platforms are selecting and accumulating influencers that correspond with the atmosphere and the persona of specific platforms naturally, the author believes there might be relationships between social media platforms and influencer growth. For instance, a video game-related influencer might become famous very quickly by streaming on Twitch as opposed to describing the experience of playing a video game on Twitter. As gaming is more of an experience that involves sound, visual and real-time emotional expression, streaming on Twitch is a more appropriate platform in which to express those elements instead of Twitter which would entail posting texts, pictures or recorded videos. As there are two mainstream kinds of social media platforms nowadays, short video-based platforms and traditional text and picture-based platforms, this thesis discusses the differences between short video-based platforms and traditional platforms on influencer growth. And in terms of influencers' growth, the author chooses the indicator *persona*.

## 1.2 Goals

This thesis explores an opportunity for influencers on social media platforms to estimate the establishment process of their persona.

The thesis tries to answer the following questions:

- Are there any differences between short-video and traditional social media platforms on the influencer persona establishment?
- What, if any, are the reasons for the differences regarding persona establishment from both the audiences' and the influencers' points of view?
- How do platforms affect the decision-making processes of their user, and are there methods that can quantify those influences?

From an empirical point of view there are apparent differences between short video-based social media platforms such as TikTok and text-based platforms such as Twitter. The differences between the product structure determine which type of content suits each platform most: users can only post

videos within 15 seconds to TikTok, yet the mainstream content in Twitter is texts that are less than 140 characters. Such limitations foster users and the types of influencers as the example the author mentions in Chapter 1.1, the author tries to determine it by data.

The author also tries to perform qualitative analysis on the differences from the point of view of the followers as well as the influencers.

Finally, the author wants to conclude a way to quantify persona generally.

### **1.3 Approaches**

This thesis is being completed as a requirement for a degree through the Integrated Design and Management Program at MIT. This program centers around the use of a user-centric design approach to weave together the processes of product and business development. It's in this spirit that this thesis has developed a design and engineering integrated transformation at influencer personae evaluation that uses product design strategies, data analysis theories, and user behavioral marketing research to develop a method that quantifies and fosters persona evaluation.

Thus, the author conducts four parts of research and analysis:

1. Concept identification. In this part, the author identifies the three concepts that have been discussed in this thesis:

- The identification and scope of short video social media platforms and traditional social media platforms
- The identification and scope of influencers
- The identification and scope of personae

2. Data collection. In this part, the author describes the following data collection principles and methods:

- The data that reflects the persona identified by content generator (influencer) in both platforms
- The data that reflects the attitude of the audience (followers) towards content published by influencers in both platforms

The data above has two parts of sources:

- Qualitative data from user experience design aspects, including but not limited to the empirical and emotional reactions to the persona of influencers from their followers, as well as the emotional persona establishment intentions from influencers.
- Quantitative data from the data analysis aspect, including the numerical data that reflects the reactions from followers, such as the number of replies, number of likes.

3. Data analysis. The author uses two methods to analyze the data collected:

- Analysis conducted on a data science point of view.
- Analysis conducted on an experience design point of view.

## 1.4 Thesis Outline

The next chapter (Chapter 2) introduces the concept of social media, including the definition of short video-based social media (SSM) and non-short video-based social media (NSSM). The chapter also discusses the content logic and interaction logic of social media platforms, along with a brief review of the differences between SSMs and NSSMs.

Chapter 3 reviews the definition of influencers and followers. The chapter also reviews different types of influencers by categories, as well as how different influencers acquire and maintain their followers.

Chapter 4 offers a literature review on the existence of persona from the *Symbolic Interactionism* and the *Self-Presentation Theory* points of view. The chapter also discusses the general persona establishment and maintenance process by types.

Chapter 5-6 describes the data collection and analysis process, including data sources, collection methods, as well as a persona quantification method that is based on a multi-attribute model.

The final chapter (Chapter 7) offers a conclusion for the thesis. While limitations to the experiment and current system are acknowledged, it shines a light on two possible extensions of this work into the future: additional experimentations and a more elaborated model for persona evaluation.

# Chapter 2

## Social Media

### 2.1 Definitions

Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation or sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011; Obar & Wildman, 2015). The variety of stand-alone and built-in social media services currently available introduces challenges of definition; however, there are some common features(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010):

- Social media are interactive Web 2.0 Internet-based applications.
- User-generated content such as text posts or comments, digital photos or videos, and data generated through all online interactions, is the lifeblood of social media.
- Users create service-specific profiles and identities for the website or app that are designed and maintained by the social media organization.
- Social media facilitate the development of online social networks by connecting a user's profile with those of other individuals or groups(Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

By the definition shown above, Figure 2.1.1 the top ten social media platform in terms of the number of Daily Active Users (DAUs) (DataReportal, 2020).



To compare the effect on persona establishment, the author categorizes social media platforms mentioned above to Short-Video-Based Social Media (SSM) platforms and Non-Short-Video-Based Social Media (NSSM) platforms by the limitations of content on each platform.

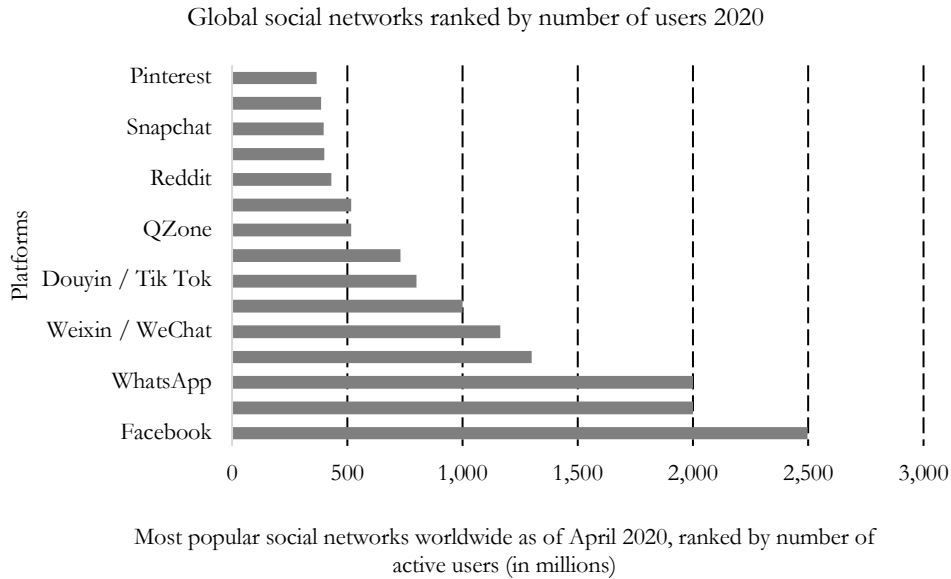


Figure 2.1.1 Global social networks ranked by number of users 2020

## 2.2 Existing Social Media Platforms

Usually, SSMs limit the content its users can upload to videos shorter than 15 seconds. Also, almost all SSM platforms limit the ratio of these videos to 16:9, which is also the screen ratio for most mainstream mobile phones. Examples of SSM platforms are Tiktok, Kwai, and Vine. Some other social media platforms did not support short-video functions in the first few years of their development but later added short-video functions and developed them into a significant component in terms of the DAUs of their products. The author considers this function solely as an SSM; examples include the Moment function on Instagram and the Channels function on WeChat.

Non-short-video-based social media (NSSM) platforms comprise a broader concept. In the thesis, the author identifies social media platforms that are not solely based on length-limited videos as NSSM platforms. Examples of popular NSSM platforms include Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat.

Although the most significant difference between SSM and NSSM platforms is the content users are allowed to upload, there are many other significant differences that distinguish them. The author analyzes and compares the commonalities and differences between NSSM and SSM platforms in the following chapters.

## **2.3 Content Logics**

Content logic controls content generation and distribution, namely, how generators upload their content and how audiences reach it. As connections between users and content are considered to be key aspects that keep a social media platform healthy, content logic has one of the most significant influences on the ecosystem of a social media platform. In what follows, the author uses the terms “content generator,” “uploaders,” and “accounts” interchangeably.

### **2.3.1 Content Upload Logic**

As the author mentions in Chapter 2.2, main differences between SSM and NSSM platforms are different limitations on its content. NSSMs allow their users to upload almost any kinds of content formation. For instance, Facebook allows users to upload text, pictures, video links, or even locations. In terms of the limitation to the content itself, although some of the NSSMs also had limitations on the content that their users can upload, most of them have extended limitations years after product release to gain a broader range of users. Twitter, for instance, removed 140-characters-text-limitation in November 2017, allows its users to upload more information in a single post. Snapchat, another social media platform that used only to allow the message sent by users to exist for 24 hours, has also extended the existence of its messages to an unlimited period.

For SSMs, the situation is different. Although up to February 2020, a few SSMs allowed a small number of selected users to upload videos that range between 15 - 60 seconds and allowed selected users to conduct live stream, most of them still limit the content upload ability of their majority users to videos with strict length limitation, and still excluding content formations such as text or pictures. Filters on the content and content formations on SSM generates an atmosphere that solely belongs to SSMs:

- An atmosphere that encourages more users to produce and upload content. Allowing only short video content lowered requirements of content generation. Compared to the requirements of generating text or image content, the requirements for making video content is extremely low. As the information density of video content is much higher than text or pictures, audiences naturally lower their requirements as they are not able to catch and examine all the details in the video. Thus, content generators do not have to cover and polish every detail in the video. Also, there are no pressures of choosing other possible formations when the video is the only option. Thus, more users switch themselves from solely audiences to audiences and content generators. In Kwai, for instance, most uploaders are ordinary people uploading their everyday lives.
- An atmosphere that encourages entertainment content. The limitation of video length is also the limitation of the depth of the content. Having in-depth discussions or complicated explanations about something under the frame of 15 seconds is more difficult than on NSSMs. Also, as users can quickly get a sense of satisfaction on short comedy videos, a serious video might not be as popular, as it is not able to give users the same quick satisfaction. Furthermore, once a platform has accumulated a relaxing vibe, it's also attracting users who would like to see entertaining content and form a positive feedback loop about relaxing content eventually.

### **2.3.2 Direct Content Distribution**

Content distribution refers to methods that content reaches audiences. The author lists two common kinds of distribution:

- Direct distribution. The content is passed to audiences directly from content generators. A typical scenario is that followers watch content in their timeline that posted by uploaders they are following
- Indirect distribution. The content is passed to audiences by users other than the original content generator. A typical scenario is that followers watch reposted content.

For SSMs and NSSMs, the direct distribution inside social media platforms usually depends on two channels: system recommendation, and user relationships/networks.

For SSM platforms, system recommendation is the primary way content reaches its audience. The content on the timeline comes from both system recommendations and accounts that the user follows. The percentage of each channel depends on the account the user is following and the number of videos the user browses as usually a video the user interacted will not appear in the timeline twice.

For NSSM platforms, the prerequisites for content that appears in users' timelines is that the user follows the accounts that uploaded or reposted the content. Although NSSM platforms such as Twitter and Weibo now provide system recommendation features such as *trending* or *what's happening*, these features are separate from the main timeline and are not a primary and sustainable way for content to reach audiences.

The differences in direct-content distribution shape the manner and priority of content generators. As content generators on NSSM platforms rely more heavily on their followers to bring traffic, the content generators for NSSMs are more likely to allocate a more significant portion of their content to guide their followers to follow them or to repost their content. Yet for SSMs, the content distribution relies more heavily on the recommendation mechanism; SSM content generators might be more focused on the content itself or on taking advantage of the recommendation mechanism by using specific keywords or ways of interacting with followers.

### 2.3.3 Indirect Content Forwarding and Reposting

Most NSSMs allow users to forward and repost content uploaded by other content generators with comments or even modifications. The repost action on Twitter, the *ReTweet* (RT), even became a unique culture of its own on the platform; Twitter users add “RT” in front of their messages to identify that the message is reposted.

Content reposting enables users to direct traffic from one account to another with only a meager cost. This makes it much easier to attract followers to accounts without any original content. As the author mentions in Chapter 2.3.2, traffic is one of the most critical aspects of content generation. Accounts that only or mostly rely on reposting content become a critical component of the content ecosystem of NSSMs. This logic makes it easier to direct content to one’s timeline but also discourages original content generation.

On SSM platforms, there is no such thing as content forwarding. This means that users are not allowed to forward content that is not uploaded by them to their main pages with comments or modifications. The non-forwarding/reposting logic makes it almost impossible for accounts to attract traffic without creating original content. These platforms thus encourage content generators to upload original content.

Although almost all SSM platforms do not offer a repost function, they all offer forwarding functions. Through forwarding, content can be sent to other users on the social media platform or another instant-message tool, such as WhatsApp or Telegram.

## 2.4 Interaction Logics

Interaction logic controls the way social media users, both content generators and their followers, interact with social media features, such as content viewing, upvotes, and commenting. Interaction logic encompasses interaction design, visual design, and information architecture. Interaction logic is

more tangible to users than content logic, influences the way users interact with the platform, and shapes the atmosphere of platforms using content logic.

As most SSM platforms only have mobile applications—the major traffic on NSSM platforms also comes from mobile-applications—the author only discusses interactions on mobile platforms, such as iOS and Android, and excludes web platforms on PC or Mac software.

### **2.4.1 Interactions with Content**

Interactions with contents are the ways users react to content.

Most NSSM platforms have a framework to integrate and display different elements, such as thumbnails of the content and the comments. The framework operates as an aggregation of entrances for different content sources: users can view different digests of content (thumbnails, short descriptions of content) on their timeline yet need to do future action to look into specific contents. For example, if a user wants to examine a picture on his feed, he has to click the picture to zoom it out to see the details; if a user wants to watch a video on his feed, although the video might also be playing automatically, the user has to click it to get a bigger view. The click interaction is similar to a confirmation—asking the browser to think twice before selecting the content. For pictures, the difference is whether the users would be able to see the more detailed picture. For videos and long articles, if users do not click the entrance, the content does not expend.

For most SSM platforms, video content is full-screen and auto-displayed after users launch the application. The nature of short videos makes this feasible; most short videos are produced by mobile devices and the content has the same ratio as most smartphone screens. The full-screen immersive interaction design of SSM platforms makes it easier for audiences to focus on content. Yet, the auto-start mechanism diminishes the user's right to select and think twice before watching a specific video – every video starts without the user's consent. On the other hand, because the process of deciding whether to watch a video is similar to the peripheral route of the elaboration-likelihood model, users are more likely to be affected by the credibility of content sources or the production quality of messages. On NSSM platforms, these include the content generators and the quality of the thumbnails and descriptions work as the messages. Because NSSM users have less information about the videos,

users might judge the quality based on the image of content generators. Yet, on SSM platforms, the videos are the message that is sent to users. This interaction mechanism replaces thumbnails and descriptions with the first few seconds of the video. Content generators have to use the videos themselves to attract audiences.

The auto-start mechanism also enlarges the effect brought about by the quality of the video. As users tend to watch videos recommended to them for at least the first few seconds, a low complete video-watching rate means that the content may not be good. The recommendation system will then lower the exposure rate of the video or even of every video by that uploader.

#### **2.4.2 Interactions with Content Generators**

There are several typical interaction methods that occur between content generators and their audiences:

- Comments: Words and emojis left below content
- Upvotes or Downvotes: Upvotes usually labeled as a “like.” Some NSSM platforms offer multiple emotional reactions for users to send, such as “dislike” and “disappointed”
- Direct Messages: Direct private message between two users

As the author discusses in Chapter 2.2, on most SSM platforms videos are automatically and completely in full-screen mode. The video that plays is the absolute dominant content and also plays the role of an entrance for other features, such as the author's profit, comments, and share function. These features are placed at the corner of the screen above the video content that is playing. One of the most critical and high-frequency functions, upvotes (also known as “like” on some platforms), is also simplified to a double click on the screen on SSM platforms. This design makes audiences remain inside the content when they are interacting with it or its comments. As this process is not disruptive, users might be more willing to interact with content on SSM platforms than on platforms that separate content and interaction interfaces.

For NSSM platforms, the content and interactions with content generators are individual on different interfaces. On Facebook and LinkedIn, for instance, comments and primary content interfaces are in different interfaces.

In terms of the interactions with content generators, NSSM and SSM platforms do not vary greatly in logic.

### **2.4.3 Interactions with Non-Content Generators**

A user can be non-content generator and content generator at the same time. When a user interacts with an influencer, the interaction is mostly an interaction between non-content generators and content generators, as the follower-following relationship is usually one-way. Yet, when two normal, non-influencer users interact, their roles constantly switch, depending on who posts the content and who reacts it; the follower-following relationship is usually two-ways.

Most interactions between non-content generators are comprised of sharing content generated by others. There are almost no differences between NSSM and SSM platforms when it comes to content sharing, namely direct messaging functions.

## **2.5 Influencer Differences between SSMs and NSSMs**

SSM lowered the requirements for generating and uploading content by specifying all the possible content into video, yet also limited the methods that influencers can use to build a persona. The limitations of content length and content formations are also limiting content that has severe or more profound thoughts. While NSSM have no such limitation, the platforms gave content generators more possibility of building a persona by creating different kinds of content. SSM might only suitable for specific categories of influencers.

The recommendation mechanism on SSM lowered the requirements for content distribution. Content generators don't have to build the distribution network by gaining and maintaining followers. Yet this



mechanism also formulated the way that how a video could get more exposure. Also, as editorial recommendations are also one critical element among recommendation mechanisms, some good content that not flavored by the personal tastes of editors might not be able to get as much exposure as it should compare to network-based distribution methods that most NSSMs are using. Influencers are also more likely to operate on the SSM that more suite their own vibe, instead of operating and uploading content on every platform to get more traffic. Also, as a recommending system might rely more on the quality of contents, the generation of persona might not be as useful and essential on SSMs as NSSMs.

As the author mentions in Chapter 2.4.1, on SSMs, the first few seconds of a video that recommended to users are inevitably examined by users. The quality of the content, especially the first few seconds, is enlarged by this interaction logic. Influencers on SSMs are no longer able to attract audiences by solely thumbnails or descriptions. The scenario that users click into a video solely based on the brand of content generators is less on SSMs than NSSMs. Persona, as an essential part of branding, might be less critical on SSMs.

# Chapter 3

## Influencers

### 3.1 Definitions

An influencer is someone who:

- Have strong authority, knowledge, position, or relationship on distinct niches they actively engage.
- Have audiences because of the knowledge or expertise they shown on specific topics. Have the ability to influence the behaviors or attitudes of their audiences towards certain items or events.

Social media influencers are influencers who built a reputation and acquired a large number of audiences on social media. However, social media influencers do not necessarily have substantial knowledge or expertise on specific topics to acquire audiences as regular influencers do. Instead, they can also acquire audiences by the unique resources or characters they show or post to social media platforms.

Followers of someone in social media usually refer to those who subscribed to the content posted by the person and able to see the content in the followers' timeline or feed. The followers of an influencer would usually pay close attention to the content that influencers they are following post on social media and engage in the discussions based on the content and further comments. On NSSM platforms,

followers might also repost the content posted by the influencers they are following to help the influencer and the influencer's content to get more exposure and acknowledgment.

## 3.2 Types of Social Media Influencers

As the author mentions in Chapter 2, the differences in interaction and content logic between NSSM platforms and SSM platforms shape different atmospheres of social media platforms. Those differences are also selecting the types of content and influencers that fit platforms most. Thus, the author categorizes social media influencers by followers, content types, and content categories to prepare for future detailed analysis in Chapter 5.

### 3.2.1 By Number of Followers

As the author mentioned in Chapter 2, the number of followers each influencer has is one of the most critical metrics for influencers to identify the range of their influences as well as the quality of the content they posted. There are several tiers of influencers by the number of influencers they have:

#### **Mega-Influencers**

Mega-influencers are the content generators with a large number of followers on their social networks. There are no universal standards about the scope of the followers for Mega-Influencers. A common view is that Mega-Influencers usually have more than 10 million followers on a single social media platform. According to the data from Caas Data, a social media data company in China, the average follower number of top 100 influencers in Weibo, Kwai, and Tiktok, the three most popular social media platforms in China, is 11 million, 16 million and 19 million (CaasData, 2020), which corresponds with the standard. A large number of Mega-Influencers on NSSM platforms are celebrities who have gained their fame offline, such as singers, movie stars, or even government accounts or politicians. For instance, among the top 100 influencers in Weibo during the first half month of April in terms of

the Cass index(CassIndex, 2020), an index that indicates the popularity of influencers, 29 of them gained their fame offline.

On SSM platforms, the constitution of Mega-influencers is much more complicated, for instance, there are only two mega-influencers on Kwai who celebrities or institution accounts among the top 100 influencers in Tiktok are. Most of the mega-influencers in Kwai, another SSM platform, are ordinary people that share their lives.

### **Macro-Influencers**

Macro-influencers are one step down from the mega-influencers, according to an informal survey the author conducted with three anonymous Multi-Channel Network company employees, the range of followers of macro-influencers are 3 million to 10 million as there is a common view that it is tough for influencers to get more than 3 million followers. The follower number distribution from *2020 Short-video Content Trend Whitepaper Book* released by Cass Data also backed this conclusion(CaasData, 2020). Among all the users that have more than 100, 00 average followers in Kwai and Tiktok from January 2019 to December 2019, 1.58% of them have 1 million to 3 million followers, yet 10.88% of them have 3 million to 5 million followers. The users who have 1-3 million followers are 6.78 times as those have 3-5 million followers.

### **Micro-Influencers**

Micro-influencers are those whose follower numbers ranged between 300,000 to 1 million. Most Micro-Influencers are influencers that focus on a single specialist niche. Those influencers usually acquire their followers by sharing opinions and knowledge to those devotees of that niche. Most influencers that stay at a micro-scope for a long time are either expert in those niches and attract their audiences solely based on the high-quality content they consistently posted, instead of by activities or social media traffic tricks such as reposts or purchasing followers from MCN companies. It makes sense that on NSSM platforms, followers also tend to follow content generators other similar users are following; on SSM platforms, the recommendation system also recommends accounts that similar to the ones in which users are interested. Thus, Micro-influencers can acquire high cohesive audiences solely by contents, yet as the size of an individual niche is limited, influencers are not able to grow

larger. This can also be seen from the distribution of influencer followers in niches: 2.9% influencer among all the influencers with more than 100,000 followers has more than 3 million users, yet among seven out of 11 divided niches, the percentage of influencers with more than 3 million users are less than 2.9%.

### Nano-Influencers

Nano influencers are those who have less than 1 million followers. They might have some expertise or some characters that can attract constant audiences, yet not expertized enough or devoted enough to gain more influencers. Yet as Nano-influencers are more accessible and more eager to maintain relationships with their followers by interacting with followers, they are still able to keep a relatively large number of followers.

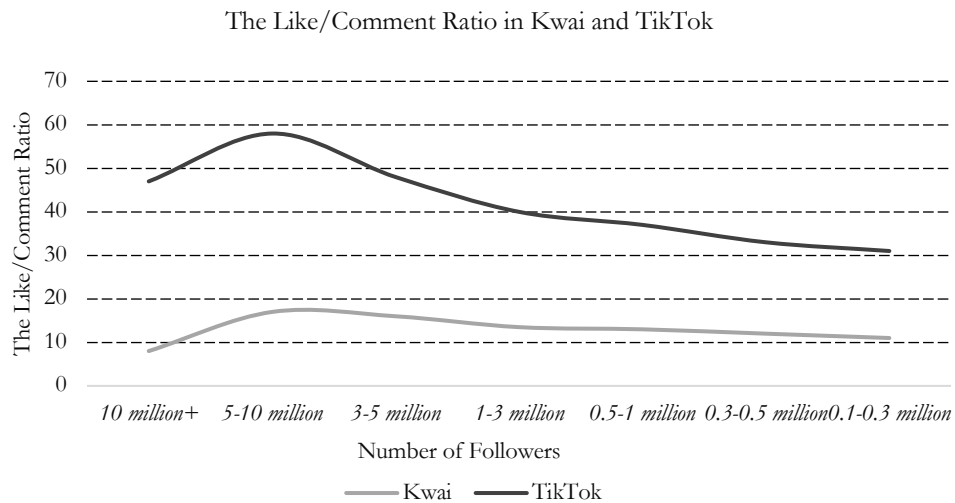


Figure 3.2.1 The like/comment ratio of influencers on different platforms

### 3.2.2 By Types of Content

Content types evolve as types of social media evolve. Further, social media influencers might post different types of content at the same time or evolve as mainstream social media platforms change or mainstream groups of audiences change. According to the types of content influencers post, the author categorizes them as bloggers, picture posters, video makers, and social posters.

## **Bloggers**

Bloggers are those who use texts as the primary carrier to deliver information. As the first generation of social media is forums and blogs, bloggers are the first group of people who became social media influencers. As a blog is usually informal diary-style text entries, most bloggers use text or text combined with pictures to share information. As at the first beginning, blog websites do not have social media property, the followers and influencers are loosely connected, and the size of followers for each influencer is relatively small. With the rise of more convenient blog-like social media platforms such as microblog Twitter, more and more bloggers shifted to other platforms. Take Tumblr, a famous blog provider, as an example: the monthly page visits of Tumble has dropped from its peak of about 2000 million in October 2013 to 321 million in February 2020.

## **Image Poster**

Image posters are influencers who use pictures as the primary carrier of their content. There are two types of image posters who are active on social media platforms:

- Image posters who post pictures to share, discuss, and demonstrate their skills in producing image content. Most of them post serious and edited content on social media. Those picture posters are usually art-related professionals, such as photographers and painters, and the social media forms they use are professionally directed niche platforms, such as Flickr and Behance.
- Image posters who use photos to present the outcome of their work. These posters choose images not for the skills they demonstrate, but because the images are the best way for them to display the object they want to share. Beauty, fashion, and travel posters are usually shared by this type of image posters.

## **Video Posters**

Video poster are those who use video as the primary carrier of their content. There are also two types of video posters:

- Serious video posters. These posters use videos that are elaborately produced, edited, and uploaded as their main content. Most serious video posters are active on NSSMs, such as YouTube and Bilibili, while some of them also post short content on SSM platforms, such as Tiktok.
- Leisure video posters. Similar to those who use pictures to post the outcome of their work, leisure video posters use videos to record and share the outcome of their work or their everyday lives. The video's quality and effects are not necessarily advanced, as these posters want to emphasize the content itself.

### **3.2.3 By Categories of Content**

It's difficult, almost impossible, to categorize every type of content that influencers post. A few NSSM platforms, such as Weibo, have a content category that is not exclusive. SSM platform, do not display official content categories, as SSM platforms usually use hashtags created by content generators to distinguish the content. According to the CAAS report, the five most popular content categories on SSMs are the following:

#### **Social Content**

Social content is the content that influencers share about their daily lives. The content can be in the form of text, pictures, or videos. Most celebrities, starlets, and wanghongs on social media post social content. As starlets and wanghongs heavily rely on their persona to attract new audiences, social content is one of the best ways to display pieces of their everyday lives. The content be comprised of selfies, life records, or video-logs that are recorded throughout a journey, or presents their fortune, such as luxury vehicles and residences.

#### **Funny Content**

Funny content can be in the form of videos and pictures that are either designed and filmed on purpose or taken by accident. Usually, audiences do not have high requirements for the quality of this

content, only focusing on the parts that make them laugh. As pictures, texts, and videos can all serve as the perfect carriers of humorous content, there is no significant difference in the division of entertainment content and influencers on different social media platforms.

### **Music, Dancing and Performance**

Music and dancing content have risen with the rise of SSMs. SSMs, such as TikTok, provide music and guidelines for users to follow, straightforward tools to help users modify their videos, and encouragement for users to upload their video. Users tend to compare, watch, and share their footage and that of other users. This creates a positive loop for SSM users to upload more related videos. A famous example of a TikTok dancing activity is the renegade, which has more than 1.5 billion views under the hashtag #Renegade. The music and dancing content on NSSMs may be more elaborate and professional, while that on SSMs may be more casual.

### **Sports and Gaming**

Sports and gaming-related content usually consists of recommendations, evaluations of games and sport stars, and news about gaming and sports competitions. The resilience of gaming and sports-related content is large – the content can be in the form of a clip of a gaming or sports experience, or a long article evaluating a new video game or a player’s performance.

### **Recommendations and Purchasing**

Shopping recommendation influencers are a significant part of the influencer market. Zhang Yi of iiMedia Research, a consultancy, reckons that wanghong endorsements influence up to 15% of sales on shopping sites like Taobao or social media apps such as WeChat. Unlike conventional luxury-and-beauty brand ambassadors, many wanghong have built their fan bases through compelling online content rather than a famous name. Usually, influencers use posts or live streams to recommend items to their followers, answer the question asked by their followers, and show details of the product they are recommending by the requests of their followers. Some influencers and platforms even provide quick entrances in the social media application for users to purchase items faster. Also, the experience of purchasing is highly customizable and interactive between influencers and their audiences, for



instance, the length of a dress might be decided by a survey of a wanghong's fans during their live-streams; its launch date might be based on the number of hits, shares or comments it garners, some of which can prompt last-minute design tweaks.

### **3.2.4 By Behaviors**

#### **The Trendsetter**

The Trendsetter is someone who is always actively seeking out the latest trends. Trendsetters pride themselves on being ahead of the game or create the trend themselves. Oftentimes, they have a large social following and strive to be the first in their network to introduce new brands, products, and trends. Fashion and beauty influencers can easily fall into this category.

#### **The Sharer**

The Sharer is a distributor of information. They share anything from videos to pictures, to blog posts and GIFs. Some sharer researches content to share and amplifies the information they find through their social networks; while others generate content themselves. Most influencers that create original content fall into this category: pets accounts, travel accounts, influencers who shares their everyday lives, etc.

#### **The Reporter**

The Reporter influencer is an individual who likes to get a conversation going online. Their topics of interest include current affairs, events, and new products, brands, and services. The Reporters aims to pique their social audience's interest. This type of influencers is those who are able to have the deepest influence on their audiences. The content observers comment on usually fall into the genre that with which the observers are familiar. typical commenters are car reviewers such as Jeremy Clarkson and Andy Wilman.

### **3.3 Seed Follower Acquisition Process**

There are several typical ways for social media account to become influencer accounts. Different types of influencers have different approaches to acquire their follower especially their seed followers. The author analyzed the way top 30 accounts acquire their follower in the popular NSSM platform Weibo and two popular SSM platforms Kwai and TikTok.

The author also interviewed two influencers on Kwai. Most of the follower acquisition approaches fall into ways that the author discusses in the following chapters. As expressing high-quality content and unique behaviors and characters are also typical ways for social media influencers to establish their personae, the author discusses them in detail in Chapter 4.3.

#### **3.3.1 By Shifting Influence from Offline to Online Platforms**

Celebrities, such as movie stars, singers, industry experts, and thought leaders, are considered influencers offline, and they can shift their influence from offline to online platforms. These influencers gain respect offline because of their qualifications, positions, or experiences in their area of expertise. Often, this respect is earned by the reputation of where they work. When they open their social media accounts, they can easily acquire audiences because of this pre-built reputation. In some scenarios, these influencers may something completely unrelated to the area from which they get their reputation, yet they still get large number of followers because of the influence of their names. For example, the famous singer Taylor Swift only posts her cats and other photos, but not her songs or music-related content, yet she still has 131 million followers on Instagram.

#### **3.3.2 By Posting High-Quality Outputs**

Acquiring audiences by high-quality contents or outputs are the most regular ways for a content generator to become an influencer. In many ways, social media influencers build their reputation online for being an expert in some particular niche. They are similar to key opinion leaders but usually have gained their reputation more informally through their online activity. They have created that reputation through the quality of the social posts they make, the blog posts they write, the podcasts they speak, and the videos they craft and post on their social media accounts. These influencers have

the best communication skills and engagement with their audience. They have enticed their followers and become recognized as experts in their field. Their follower numbers very much depend on their subject of expertise.

### **3.3.3 By Unique Character Settings**

Accumulating audiences solely on unique character setting, or persona, is almost only happen in the SSM platform Kwai. The author didn't find out any other platforms that have the same percentage of influencers that solely attract traffic and audiences by character settings. A large part of this type of influencers only upload their everyday lives, without any polish. Those influencers can be someone who goes to swimming every day or someone looks like a Russian but speaks fluent Mandarin and self-identify as a Chinese.

### **3.3.4 By Multiple Channel Networking Companies**

The influencer accounts that were built by Multiple Channel Networking (MCN) companies are also called bot accounts. MCNs, also called dedicated wanghong incubators, of which China now has around 50, seek out promising candidates, help them hone online followers and act as their financial managers, as well as agents. Usually MCN companies purchases fake followers and use repost bots to generate content and audiences for an account. Human users might judge whether they should follow an account by the number of followers this account has and the content the account has reposted. By this method those MCN-manufactured accounts could switch to a normal social media influencer account that accumulates its audiences one by one.

## **3.4 Content Logics**

Another influencer-related logic the author discusses is content-generation logic, which is the manner and priority of content generation and its release.

### **3.4.1 Regularity**

Influencers need to post content regularly to keep their accounts and followers active, and to maintain a stable and relatively high retention rate from their audiences. Influencers who acquire their audiences through content have to keep up a regular posting pace or at least inform their followers when they will release new content, as the high-quality content is the reason their audiences follow the account. Also, there is a phenomenon—especially common on NSSM platforms—called pushing-updating, by which loyal followers push the influencer to update or release new content. If an influencer’s regularity fails to meet the demands or expectations of his or her followers, the account’s retention rate may be influenced. The influencers who shift from offline need to post content and interact with their followers constantly; otherwise their followers might consider the account inactive and stop following. There are also opinions consider that the frequency can be too high, as audiences might feel disturbed. There are no conclusions on optimal frequency of content upload behaviors yet.

### **3.4.2 Consistency**

Consistency is another important point that influencer interviewees mention. In this context, “consistency” refers to the consistency of the content as well as the consistency of the persona the influencer has built or implied.

As the author mentions in the last section, for influencers who acquired their followers with high-quality content, content is the main reason that followers stay and continue paying attention. Sometimes the followers’ requirements for content is more specific than solely genre; they can also consider the content’s spirit or the message it delivers. Followers gather, watch, and comment under the content, seeking recognition from each other. Content that does not correspond with the followers’ expectations might set off a backlash. For instance, interviewee A mentioned a patriotic influencer who is famous for posting content that shows how fast his homeland is growing. During the COVID-19 period, one of his post that criticized the local government’s slow reaction made him lose about 2% of his followers on the day following the post’s release.

# Chapter 4

## Persona

This chapter functions as a literature review of persona and is constructed using different sub-chapters that are related to the purpose of the research. The sub-chapters discuss about the concept of persona from the *Symbolic Interactionism* and the *Self-Presentation Theory* aspect.

### 4.1 Definitions

A persona initially referred to social roles or characters played by actors. The word persona came from Latin and referred to costume masks (Bishop, 2008). Persona holds different meanings in different scenarios now: it can refer to the mask or appearance one presents to the world in psychology; it can refer to the role that matches the music performers singing on stage in music; in the context of the social web, persona originally refers to character settings of figures in animations and games. The persona of a character includes the style of the character, costume, facial expressions, and personalities. In this thesis, the definition of persona the author discusses in the context of social media is similar to its definition in the social web: the objects of personae are influencers instead of virtual characters in animations. Generally, the personae of influencers refer to the images and identities that influencers set for themselves or expressed by influencers' behaviors, words, and the content they generate. Often the appearances, lifestyle, and sense of values are also considered part of influencers' personae.

## 4.2 Meanings

The author discusses the meaning of persona from answering two questions:

- Why are influencers trying to establish personae?
- What is the effect of established personae?

The author considers there are two main incentives for influencers to establish personae from an empirical point of view:

- Positive personae shorten the distance between audiences and influencers. Once the audience considers influencers as their friends or someone trustworthy, influencers can quickly boost their business and receive a higher tolerance for their audience in terms of quality of their content and influencers' behaviors.
- It is human nature to establish a positive persona when interacting with others. When influencers are interacting with their audiences, they unintentionally form an image that is better than what they are.

The author discusses those two opinions in the following chapters from a symbolic interactionist point of view and a theoretical theory point of view.

### 4.2.1 Analysis from Symbolic Interactionism Theory

*“Symbolic interaction theory is a sociological theory that develops from practical considerations and alludes to people's particular utilization of dialect to make images and normal implications, for deduction and correspondence with others.”*

- Hall (2007)

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory that aims at achieving a more in-depth and better understanding of how individuals interpret the behaviors of others, and how those interpretations shape individual behaviors in return (Turner & West, 2010). It is a framework that helps understand

how society is preserved and created through repeated interactions between individuals. The author chooses symbolic interactionism to analyze the meaning of personae for the following reasons:

- Influencer persona is established mainly through interactions between audiences and influencers, and symbolic interactionism is a theory looking into interactions and interpretations.
- There are studies including identity(Kollock & Smith, 2002; Tapsall, 1997), discursive communities(Reid, 1993) And networking(Kiesler, 2014) on virtual communities such as social media, indicating that social media platforms are also social constructs. Thus, although the symbolic interaction theory originally came up to analyze social phenomena, it can also apply to social media.

Symbolic interactionism considers the repeated interactions between individuals to create and preserve symbolic worlds, and the interpretation and understandings of those interactions help create and recreate the meaning of those symbolic worlds. The shared interpretations among individuals also affect the interactions between individuals in return. Another premise of symbolic interactionism is that individuals act on the premise of a shared understanding of meaning within their social context. Thus, interaction and behavior are framed through the shared meaning that objects and concepts have attached to them. From this view, individual lives in both natural and symbolic environments.

Most symbolic interactionists believe that a symbolic environment is developed at least in part from the real natural world. Individuals do not respond to the real natural world directly, yet the response to the symbolic world that created and mutual consents by themselves and other stakeholders in the same world. From the book *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application* by Richard West and Lynn Turner, there are three assumptions frame this symbolic interactionism(Turner & West, 2010):

- Individuals construct meaning via the communication process.
- Self-concept is a motivation for behavior.
- A unique relationship exists between the individual and society.

Based on the assumptions, Blumer (1986) came up with three premises:

*“Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.”*

The first premise Blumer came up indicates that things an individual see hear or touch, including physical objects or concepts, are received in a way and a meaning that this individual already given to them. The way and meaning identified by this individual are based on psychological and sociological explanations the individual established for those objects, behaviors, or concepts the individual receives.

*“The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and society.”*

The second premise two explains from where the explanations those individuals hold derived. Blumer claimed the interpretation and definition of concepts and actions come from several sources: the actions or concepts itself, the interaction happens between the object of the actions and the observers of the actions, and the context of the whole society. People interpret symbols and significations that attached to such actions and determine whether the action be taken granted, identified as not important. Sometimes an action can also be marked as a neutral behavior that presents only the action itself or a link that connects two factors.

*“The Meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.”*

The third premise is about how the meaning is processed. Emory Griffin described thinking as an inner conversation in his book *A First Look at Communication Theory*. The meaning of actions is processed, modified during the interpretative process, based on the sources that Blumer came up with at the second premise. The process of finding the interpretations is also the process of interacting with symbols and negotiated meanings of similar actions(Griffin, 2006).

Lindsey D. Nelson described Blumer’s perspective in his paper *Herbert Blumer's Symbolic interactionism*, proposed the formation of people’s reaction with each other have three core propositions:



1. People act toward things, including each other, on the basis of the “meanings” they have for them.
2. These “meanings” are derived through social interaction with others. Those social interactions act like “language.”
3. These meanings are managed and transformed through an interpretive process that people use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute their social worlds, and the interpretive process acts like “thinking.”

The language provides meaning by providing means to symbols. By humans giving meaning to symbols, they can express these things with language. In turn, symbols form the basis of communication. Symbols become imperative components for the formation of any kind of communicative act. Thinking then changes the interpretation of individuals as it pertains to symbols(Nelson, 1998).

The author uses the three core principles described by Blumer and Nelson to explain the activities and interactions between influencers and audiences:

1. Audiences of social media act toward things, including other audiences, influencers, and the content that presented or created by others, on the basis of the “meanings” they have for them. For example, an influencer’s specific behavior could have positive interpretations among the followers of influencers and hence get support from them; yet in the meantime have overwhelmingly negative interpretations among other groups of people. Audiences’ reactions depend on the mutual “meaning” of the behaviors that influencers and their audiences give them.
2. These “meanings” are derived through social interactions between audiences and influencers. These interactions are managed and transformed through an interpretive process described as “language” by Blumer, that audiences and influencers use to make sense of and handle the objects that constitute audiences’ symbolic social media world. To be specific, “language” is the way audiences interpret the actions of influencers, as well as the way influencers interpret the actions of other influencers.

3. The process of creating personae largely depends on “thinking,” which is the process of finding mutual interpretations of the symbols in the symbol world for audiences and influencers. Interactions between audiences and influencers such as comments, likes, or the content the influencers uploaded are all interactions that are influencing the “thinking” process. Those interactions are also attempting of influencers to entitle “meaning” that is preferred by audiences to the symbols they present.

Also, according to Joel M. Charon in his book *Symbolic Interactionism: An Introduction, An Interpretation, An Integration*, it is the constant search and reminiscence for social interactions that leads audiences to do what they do. Besides focusing on influencers and their personalities, what audiences do also depend on interactions with influencers earlier in their time and right now with social media(Charon, 2010). It is a constant process of “thinking” and finds “meaning” into a mutual “language,” meaning that personae establishment is an ongoing process. Thus, it is a constant process of “thinking” and find “meaning” into a mutual “language,” meaning that personae establishment is an ongoing process. Human beings are also described as active beings in relation to their environment and actively involved in what they do by Joel Charon. The symbols that get the broadest mutual interpretations and understandings can be easily transferred and acknowledged by audiences that without or have not built a mutual interpretation yet. With more existing audiences use the same “language,” and the clearer the “meaning” of the “language,” the fast and more natural the “thinking” process would be.

Thus, by symbolic interactionism, it is reasonable to establish and maintain a persona by constant interactions between audiences and influencers, to:

- Get a more positive mutual interpretation of the behaviors of influencers
- Get a higher tolerance of audiences towards influencers
- Get a faster interpretation establishment process for new audiences or other stakeholders

#### **4.2.2 Analysis from Self-Presentation Theory**

Another explanation about why influencers build personae can be found in the *presentation-to-self-theory* that came up by Erving Goffman in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The book proposed self-presentation theory and some researchers apply the theory to social media today, including Nell

Haynes's *Social Media in Northern Chile: Posting the Extraordinarily Ordinary* (2016), Belk's *Extended Self in a Digital World* (2013), Kaplan and Haenlein's *Users of the World Unite* (2010).

The presentation-to-self-theory claims that individuals have the desire to control the impressions that other individuals shape about them: when someone comes in contact with another person, the first person attempts to control or guide the impression the other person will form of the first person, by altering the first person's setting, appearance, and manner. At the same time, the second person attempts to form an impression of, and obtain information about, the first individual. And the impression and the information obtained is the persona of the first person (Jacobsen & Kristiansen, 2014). Goffman also compares the process of individual impression establishment to theatrical performances. In theatrical performances, actors perform on settings which are consisted of stages and back stages; there are props in both settings directing their actions; actors are being watched by audiences. In the meanwhile, actors are also audiences for their viewers' plays.

The same as theatrical performances, in social interactions, there is also a front region where the individuals (performers) are on stage in front of their audiences. Those stages are where positive aspects of self-image and desired impressions are highlighted. Actors use "manner," which presents how roles are carried out; and "appearance," which includes the outside appearances of actors to highlight those characters. On the other side of those stages are back regions that for individuals to prepare for their other performances or overturn their roles (Ritzer, 2007).

The situation of influencers' daily work is similar to Goffman's theory: influencers in many areas of life, including the ones that make influencers famous and keeps them attracting and maintaining audiences, according to the interviewee C in our interviews, will take on an already established role, with pre-existing front and props in front of specific audiences. Also, in accordance with the presentation-to-self theory, most of the roles that display to the audiences are selected and elaborated on positive aspects that intended to impress audiences. For example, former famous actor Tianlin Zhai established a persona that he was extremely capable of academia by extending the pre-existing front that he received his bachelor's degree from an esteemed college in China to a setting that he received his Ph.D. from another esteemed college. And Zhai acquired more than ten million followers in his Weibo by sharing his daily academic life and related works.

In terms of scenarios that when influencers are interacting with their audiences, influencers' main goal is to keep coherent with their settings, adjust to the different scenarios offered to them with their settings and maintain or even enhance personae that they are presenting to their audiences. Those goals are done mainly through interactions with other actors, such as other influencers or people that is related to influencers, sometime also with audiences. Through interactions, connections are built up among actors, or between actors and audience. To a certain extent, these connections enable the establishment yet also limiting the extensions of personae. In other words, the existing personae or settings of an influencer can guide the influencers' action, but also limit the influencer's action: the influencer will not do things that do not correspond to his or her personae.

Goffman considers the agreement between audiences and actors(influencers) on the definitions of situations and responses of actors(influencers) that presented by interactions are fundamentals in giving those impression coherencies. In interactions, or performances in Goffman's theory, actors usually try to strengthen impressions that reflect their positive aspects and encourage others, usually, audiences, to accept and give credence to their preferred definition. An individual can be an audience and a performer simultaneously.

Also, when accepted definitions of situations or impressions of actors have been discredited, some or all the involved parties, including actors and audiences, may tend to pretend that nothing has changed, to keep the coherency of their interactions and mutual benefits that they acquired by those interactions and impressions. After being asked a question by his friends in the middle of a live stream, audiences began to doubt Zhai after he failed to recognize what Zhiwang, a famous academic index website, was. Yet a large part of Zhai's followers didn't rise any doubts to the unexpected reaction of him and even tried to pretend that it was not rare that an academic person has no knowledge about Zhiwang while there were overwhelmingly criticisms about Zhai. Zhai himself also did not make any responses until more than five months after this incident involved a whole society rumination about academic integrity.

Returning to the context of social media influencer personae, according to Goffman's self-presentation theory, there are several meanings and reasons for establishing a persona:

- It is a natural process for a human being to establish a persona that meets or exceeds the expectations of other individuals. Influencers naturally tend to manage their impressions to others and keep in a way that favors audiences and other stakeholders.

- Related parties tend to help maintain the established personae of influencers. The related parties can be agents or fans of the influencers. This maintenance makes the investments of persona establishment more secure and hence creates a positive persona establishing loop for the persona establishment industry.

### 4.3 Persona Establishment Process Analysis

Persona establishment is the process that subjects conduct by engaging in social media activities, in order to achieve the goal of building an expected image among other individuals. Subjects measure actual situations, demands of targets, expectations of stakeholders, ethics of the society, and even regulations of laws before and while in the middle of those activities. After the process, the subject and objects complete the constitution of the subject's self-image recognition, which are frequently brief yet unique descriptions of the subject. Under the context of social media networks, the subjects in the establishment process are influencers, and the objects are the audiences, namely followers of the influencers. The process of persona establishing can also be concretized as the process of influencers' self-recognition and building the mutual recognitions about the influencers' image between influencers and their audiences. Thus, looking into the process of personae establishment is also the process of finding out how the influencers set up their self-recognitions and how they achieve the mutual recognitions about their images with their audiences.

The establishment of personae oftentimes is not solely because of one reason. For example, an influencer might establish his or her persona by posting the same content for ten months. Here, the length of the time and the content all contribute to the persona establishment. In this chapter, due to the limitation of the length of the thesis, the author focuses on the mutual recognition process of influencers and discusses two of the most common<sup>1</sup> contributors to social media influencer persona establishment.

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<sup>1</sup>The two most common ways are from the empirical judgement of interviewee C

### 4.3.1 By High-Quality Content

Some influencers obtained their influence and built up their personae by generating high-quality content. As a subjective description, “high-quality” is a concept related to the selected audiences of the content and has no universal standards. The content might be high-quality to one audience yet the opposite to another audience. In this chapter, the author classifies the concept “high-quality” into two categories: deep content and wide content, based on the different emphasis of the quality.

The concept “deep content” the author discusses here is similar to the general understanding of “high-quality” content, usually have one or several of the following characters:

- Content that is unreproducible, such as content that requires a significant amount of time or energy devotion, capital, innovation or skills
- Content that triggers resonance to audiences, either by the fact it presented, the emotion it expressed, or the message it delivered
- Content that has an image or musical performance that exceeds most similar content

The concept “wide content” the author discusses here is similar to “viral” content. The concept “wide” is not parallel or exclusive from the concept “deep,” but rather a description from another aspect that comes from the content’s dissemination character. High-quality content often becomes deep and wide at the same time. A wide content usually has one or several of the following characters:

- Evolves strong emotional reactions or resonance with the audiences
- Entitle sense of satisfaction of the audiences, examples are short humor video content in TikTok
- Evolves discussion, sometimes even controversy among audiences

Those “wide content” do not necessarily to be “high-quality” in terms of the quality of image or sound, oftentimes wide content becomes wide solely because of a moment in it or even a vibe the content captured.

A typical reaction from audiences for those high-quality content in social media is large volume of share and views. Audiences receive, consume the content released by the content generator, and a part

of audiences resonates with the content, to some extent, communicate with generators of the content mentally, and oftentimes try to comprehend the message of the content involuntarily. The whole content or part of the content, such as a sentence of text content, a scene of video content, act as symbols, and content consuming is a process of delivering symbols from content generators to audiences. In the meantime, audiences attach a mutual understanding of the symbols to the content generators. The understanding might use to be the mutual understanding between the audiences and the whole society, or between another third-party, yet now it transferred the content generator. And hence become the impression of content generators from audiences. For example, it is a mutual understanding among most people, that a person who is patient to kids has a higher possibility of being a good father or mother. When audiences watching a video that shows the content generator was softly answering questions from kids, audiences receive the message and transfer the message with the mutual understanding of the whole society. And then, understanding becomes a mutual understanding with the content generator. With the accumulation of this understanding from their audiences, content generator becomes influencer with a persona brought from the content they generated. To some extent, the persona they generated by this kind of methods also become their brands, as the persona is not only presenting personalities of content generators but also serves the purpose of the expectations from their audiences to content generators.

A famous example of deep content persona establish process is the YouTube uploader Li Ziqi, who acquires the persona “a girl enjoying idyllic life in a rural area with skills of traditional foods and antiques(Matei, 2020)” by posting rustic-chic videos of her life in rural China. Li’s videos emphasize beautiful countryside and ancient tradition. In videos sound tracked by tranquil flute music, Li crafts her furniture out of bamboo and dyes her clothing with fruit skins. If she wants soy sauce, she grows the soybeans themselves; a video about making an egg yolk dish starts with her hatching ducklings. And a famous example of a wide content persona establishment process is the starlet Gavin Thomas, who acquired millions of attentions solely by a faked polite simile and established his persona that “a boy that will maintain polite while being embarrassed.”

At last, the author wants to point out that as the interpretation process is a mutual process that happens between audiences and content generators, instead of a one-way process where content generators deliver messages or implications to audiences, there is a chance that the mutual understanding among the audiences are different from the understanding of the content generators,

or the symbols that audiences are paying attention is not the ones that the content generators try to express. A famous example is Pepsi's *Live for Now* advertisement. The short film was initially intended to express the kindness impression of Pepsi coke by protester Kendall Jenner passing a Pepsi coke to the police and then settle the roil. Yet the symbol interpreted by audiences as attempting to capitalize on imagery imitating protests in the *Black Lives Matter* movement, including *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge*, the iconic image of a woman approached heavily armed police alone and was arrested in a Baton Rouge protest in July 2016(Victor, 2017). The advertisement was revoked by Pepsi short after its distribution due to the large volume of criticism. The advertisement establishes a different persona than what the company was intended.

#### **4.3.2 By Behaviors of Influencers**

Some influencers establish their personae by behaviors, or their personae are influenced mostly by their behaviors, instead of the content they post. In contrast to the influencers in Chapter 4.3.1, the interactions between these kinds of influencers and their audiences are mainly direct interactions, such as comments and messages between influencers and their audiences. The author abbreviates that kind of influencers as behavior influencers.

The content released by behavior influencers are usually everyday life. Influencers oftentimes interact with their influencers through the content they generate or customize from the demand of their audiences. A typical platform that gathered a large number of influencers that establish their personae by daily activities is Kwai.

A typical type of behavior influencers is one with unique behaviors or skills, peculiarities, or even eccentricities. For example, the famous influencer Bideluofu Dongdesheng who the author mentions in Chapter 2.3, established his persona by his unique feature where he looks like a typical Russian yet can only speak fluent Mandarin Chinese with a strong northeast accent. What he posts daily is his ordinary life such as working at his farm or family gathering yet attracted almost two million followers in Kwai.

Persona establishment process such as Dongdesheng's can be explained by the expectancy violation theory. In his book *A First Look at Communication Theory*, Griffin defines expectancy violations as



actions that are noticeably discrepant from an expectancy and are classified as outside the range of expectancy. The term “arousal value” is used to describe the consequences of deviations from expectations. When individuals' expectations are violated, their interests or attentions are aroused. Arousal can divert one's attention or interest from a message to the source of the arousal(Griffin, 2006; Le Poire & Burgoon, 1996) Thus, *Bideluofu Dongdesheng*, for instance, swift their attention from the behaviors of *Dongdesheng* to the person himself, and *Dongdesheng*, the person himself, then be focused and his persona established.

Another typical type of behavior influencer is one with unique resources that are usually obvious and related to the fundamentals of their personae, reasons for their behaviors or the main theme of content they post. Typical resources are appearance, capital, or luxury items. Famous examples are *@DanBilzerian* and *@RichKidsOfTheInternet* that attracts more than 30 million and more than 370thousands of followers in Instagram, let alone the Kardashian families.

The personae establishment process of this kind of influencers seems obvious: since their persona is attached to an objective item or aspect, according to symbolic interactionism the author discusses in Chapter 4.2.1, the more times influencers show their resources, the more robust their personae are. There are no mutual conclusions on why a part of audiences show strong preferences on content that show fortunes or appearances of the content uploader, and hence interested in the influencers themselves. One possible explanation is mammonism, which presents the pursuits and adoration for wealthy and objects that can only be obtained by a large amount of capital.

### **4.3.3 By Persistence**

*“When you post a blog post or article, it will add to your existing library of content. After a period of time, this can add up and help brand your company.”*

*- 10 Reasons Why Content Matters, (Agrawal, 2016)*

Persistency also contributes to the establishment of personae. As the author mentions in Chapter 4.2, persona establishment is the process where influencers and audiences find mutual understanding about the symbols that are released by the influencers. The accumulation of the volume of symbols

that deliver to audiences contribute to the interpretation process. Thus, there are influencers that establish their personae by frequently repetitive behaviors or messages that send to their audiences.

## 4.4 Maintenance of Personae

Persona maintenance is an ongoing process. As the author discusses in Chapter 4.2, besides focusing on the influencer and his or her personality, what audiences do also depend on interaction with influencers earlier in their time, and it depends on their interactions with audiences right now. Thus, as long as influencers are still active, they have to interact with their audiences to maintain their personae. The following are several typical interactions among social media platforms:

- Posting original content
- Reposting content that accordant with the established personae
- Public interactions with other influencers
- Interact with audiences, usually by replying to comments and messages sent by audiences or live stream in some social media platforms.
- Offline activities. Offline activities can be interviews or presentations of the influencers to show their content or skills offline.

The method that influencers utilize usually depends on the persona the influencer generates. Influencers often use more than one of the interactions to create a more comprehensive persona, yet there are also influencers who limit their exposure to audiences solely to the content they generate to maintain the persona they created. Li Ziqi, as an example, seldom interact with her audiences outside or inside her posted content, and only accepted two offline interviews up to May 2020. This denial of exposure enhanced her persona of being an “isolated girl living in a retrospect way.”

The author discusses detailed personae maintenance methods in Chapter 5.

# Chapter 5

## Approaches

As the thesis investigates an emerging topic, the author conducts exploratory studies to understand it better. Exploratory research initially employs a broad perspective, and, as it progresses, the results crystallize (Adams & Schvaneveldt, 1991). The majority of the research related to influencer marketing and personae is conducted through quantitative data analysis (e.g., Xiao, Wang, and Chan-Olmsted (2018)). While quantitative data and research methods can offer a more detailed and nuanced understanding, survey and interview data can be useful in identifying qualitative patterns and perceptions. Thus, the dissertation applied qualitative approaches by analyzing subjective opinions and reactions on social media and combining quantitative approaches with analysis of influencers and audiences.

Also, as Chapter 4 discusses, through the *Symbolic Interactionism* that personae are mostly generated and reflected by behaviors of both stakeholders, the author focuses mainly on data that reflect the behaviors of both influencers and audiences. In order to explore this phenomenon deeper, the author develops a model through the conducted analysis.

### 5.1 Data Sources

This thesis contains three types of data resources:

- Data that reflects influencer personae from content generators' point of view

- Data that reflects influencer personae from audiences' point of view
- Data that reflects influencer personae from a third party's point of view

In this subchapter, the author discusses the principle and method of data collection sources.

### **5.1.1 Platform Selections**

As the author discusses in Chapter 2.5, each Short-video Social Media (SSM) has a different atmosphere, attracting influencers and audiences with corresponding preferences. The author chose Kwai and TikTok as the selected SSM platforms to collect related data. Kwai and TikTok are the two biggest SSM platforms in terms of DAUs in China, and also cover more than 54% of SSM<sup>2</sup> users worldwide and more than 80% SSM users in China(W. A. S. V. s. C. d. H. DataReportal, 2019) . Thus, the data from Kwai and TikTok have stronger representativeness than data from other platforms or solely from one of them.

In terms of Non Short-video Social Media (NSSM), the author chose Weibo, a platform similar to Twitter, as the source of the data, as Weibo represents more than 95% of NSSM users in terms of DAUs in China and more than 17% of NSSM users worldwide<sup>3</sup> (W. A. S. V. s. C. d. H. DataReportal, 2019). As the author also mentions in Chapter 2.3, because of the nature of NSSM platforms that NSSMs server only as of the carriers of information, there are no vast differences between different NSSM platforms. Thus, Weibo can provide enough representativeness.

### **5.1.2 Influencers Selection**

In Chapter 3.2, the author states that a common understanding is that accounts with more than one million users can be considered as influencers, and most active influencers post more than two pieces of content a week. Also, as the author is comparing between NSSM and SSM platforms, the criteria for selecting influencers are:

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<sup>2</sup>The author identifies Snapchat, TikTok, Kwai, and Instagram as major SSM

<sup>3</sup>The author identifies Facebook, Weibo, and Twitter in the report as major NSSM

- Influencers with more than one million followers on at least one platform across TikTok, Kwai or Weibo
- Influencers have accounts on TikTok or Kwai, and Weibo
- Influencers who posted more than two new posts within the past seven days in both NSSM and SSM

The author also collects data from users whose followers' range between 500,000 and 1,000,000 to get a comprehensive view from users who are on the way to becoming influencers.

### **5.1.3 Audiences Selections**

The author selects two groups of audiences to obtain audiences' opinion from a general and influencer-relative perspective:

- a. Audiences that followed one or more selected influencers on SSM and NSSM simultaneously and watched more than five pieces of content posted by the influencers.
- b. Audiences that use SSM and NSSM simultaneously but are not following any specific influencers.

### **5.1.4 Other Data Sources**

The author also collects information on influencer personae from a third perspective, including:

- Analysts from social media content multi-channel network companies (MCN). Regarding the analyst selection, the author selected an analyst from one of the biggest MCN companies in China.
- Staff from social media companies, including NSSM and SSM platforms. The author selected one product manager from Weibo and one product manager from Kwai as the source of data from a professional side.

## 5.2 Subjective Data Collection and Analysis

The author conducted interviews and surveys to collect and analyze subjective data from influencers, audience, and third parties.

As influencers are the subject of persona establishment, and analysts from social media companies are closely monitoring the functions and trying to utilize influencer personae, the author assumes that those two groups of people have more information on personae establishment than audiences. Thus, the author conducts one-on-one index interviews with two influencers and an analyst from MCN in order to develop follow up questions and gain a more comprehensive understanding of influencer personae. Furthermore, in order to acquire information from more audiences, the author conducted surveys with 20 audiences.

### 5.2.1 Interviews on Influencers and Third Parties

The design of the interview questions focuses on four aspects:

- The content generation logic from influencers points of view. Influencers' decision-making process of topic choices, content standards, upload frequency, and content feedback mechanism, and whether those elements are related to persona establishment
- The interaction logic of influencers. Influencers' decision-making process of the methods and frequency of interactions. Influencers' feedbacks on the outcome and expectations of interactions with other stakeholders, and whether those interactions are related to persona establishment
- Influencers' understanding of persona, and influencers' evaluations of the importance of persona

- The differences between platforms from content generators' point of view. Influencers' decision-making process on selecting between platforms and platforms' influence on persona establishment

The author uses twenty-four open questions to guide those semi-structured interviews instead of predefined, structured questions. Examples of probing questions are: What is your favorite content that you have posted? What part of you do you think makes your followers unfollow you?

Due to time and resource limitations, the author interviewed two influencers and an analyst. The full questions of interviews and answers of interviewees are attached in Appendix A. All answers were transcribed almost verbatim, though not recorded.

### 5.2.2 Surveys on Audiences

The author conducts surveys on audiences to acquire their attitudes and understandings about persona on different social media platforms. Also, since this survey was conducted from the perspective of audiences, and one of the author's purpose is to look into audiences' understanding of personae, the author does not identify the meaning of persona before the survey. Although the audiences' view on persona is one of the main contributions of the survey, the possible vague understanding of survey responses might cause some inaccuracy in terms of their answers. The author combined the opinions of audiences with the opinions of analysts and influencers in future researches.

The design of the interview questions focuses on four aspects:

- The effect of persona on influencers' behaviors (positive, negative, or no effect at all).
- The understanding of influencer personae from the perspective of audiences.
- The establishment process of personae in different kinds of platform.
- The persona differences of the same influencer across different platforms (differences, or no differences at all).
- The reasons for those differences, if any.

Also, adapted from Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann (2003) and Spears and Singh (2004) scale of brand attitude, eleven items were measured on a 7-point Likert basis (e.g., there is. . . (1) no difference

to (7) huge differences between NSSM and SSM; (1) all the influencers to (7) none of the influencers have personae on SSMs.

All surveys were approached in the questionnaire platform WenJuanXing in May 2020. The author conducts surveys on 20 users that browsed at least one NSSM and one SSM for more than 30 minutes in the past week before the survey. The responses could be biased towards the age range that most participants of the surveys are in their 20s and 30s, and more than half of them had or are having university education due to time limitation, which does not correspond to the age and education distribution of social media users. Yet as 48.3% of internet users' age ranged between 20-39 in China(CNNIC, 2019), the survey still presents mainstream opinions of social media users. Other information of respondents can be found in Appendix B.1 and Chapter 6.

### **5.2.3 Subjective Data Analysis**

The prominence of analyzing qualitative data is on creating explanations on the insights gained from the empirical material (Ghauri, Grønhaug, & Strange, 2020). The author processes and analyzes qualitative data from the following steps:

- Data reduction. The author extracts and transcribes the relevant information from the original record of interviews.
- Data Compilation. The author compiles the information into categories that aligned with the purpose of interviews.
- Data Interpretation. The author interprets compiled data in a qualitative manner where the author has sought to adjust the respondent's answers by applying a certain experience or idea to understand the participant's responses.(Ghauri et al., 2020)

## **5.3 Observational Data Collection and Analysis**

Observational data in the thesis is collected from social media platforms generated by influencers and audiences with their behaviors, recorded and presented by social media platforms. Most of the



observational data are public and observable to users of the platform; thus, the author can collect and analyze them.

### 5.3.1 Observational Data Collections

Two source of observational data set are “content detail pages” and “account detail pages” of Weibo, TikTok, and Kwai. Those pages present the behaviors of influencers and their audiences that have already happened.

Content detail pages enable audiences and content generators to view behaviors related to specific content, such as the number of views, likes, comments, and the detail of comments. The account detail pages enable audiences and content generators to view behaviors related to the accounts’ owners, such as their follower number and following number.

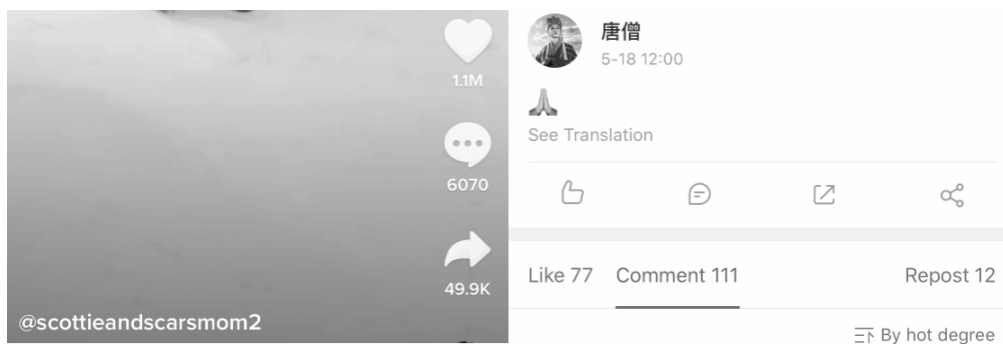


Figure 5.3.1 A part of Weibo and TikTok’s content detail page shows like, comments and repost/share

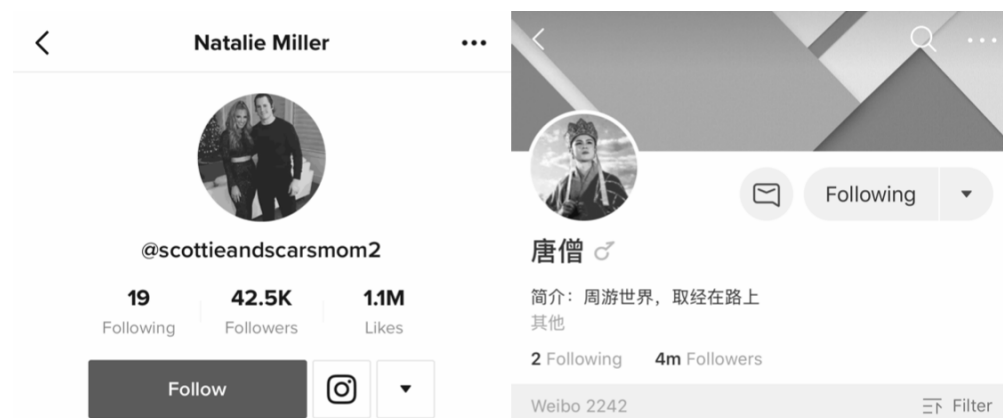


Figure 5.3.2 A part of Weibo and TikTok’s account detail page shows follower and following counts

Figure 5.1 shows Weibo and TikTok’s “content detail page,” and Figure 5.2 shows an example of Weibo and TikTok’s “account detail page.”

In terms of the data related to the content, the data the author collects comprises metrics shown in Table 5.1. The author decides the types of data the author collects based on the *Two-Step Flow Theory* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966) that four different principles can influence mass media communications – exposure, medium, content. The data includes three consumer engagement metrics: the number of likes, comments, and the number of shares/reposts on each post, which presents the exposure and content in the *Two-Step Flow Theory*. These metrics are commonly used in industry as measures of engagement. They are also more granular than other metrics used in extant research, such as the accumulated number of fans who have liked the content generator. Also collected by the author are the number of views<sup>4</sup> and the release date of content, which serve as auxiliary metrics to help present the engagement.

<i>Metrics of Content</i>	<i>Meanings of Metrics</i>
View	The number of users who have viewed the content from the moment the content releases
Like	The number of users who have shown positive feedback by pressing the “like” bottom, different from positive feedback derived from comments
Comments	The number of comments left on the selected content
Shares	The number of times users forward the content to other software, often other social media platforms
Reposts <sup>5</sup>	The number of users who have reposted the content to their homepage on the platform.
Date of Release	The date the content released

*Table 5.3.1 Metrics of content on social media platforms.*

Metrics in Table 5.3.1, combined with comments of the content under each post, and the content of the post comprise a content unit of analysis in the author’s data.

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<sup>4</sup> Due to the limitation of platforms that content with more than 100,000 views is shown as “100k+,” the author is not able to obtain exact view count of some content.

<sup>5</sup> This metric only exists in Weibo among selected platforms

In terms of the data that related to influencers, the data the author collects comprise metrics shown in Table 5.3.2.

<i>Metrics of Influencers</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
Number of Followers	The number of users followed the influencer
Number of Follows	The number of users the influencer is following

*Table 5.3.2 Metrics of influencers on social media platforms*

The data includes two consumer engagement metrics: the number of followers and the number of follows. The number of followers is commonly used in industry as a measure of influencer's influence, as well as one of the standards that classify influencers. Metrics in Table 5.2, combined with tags influencers attached to themselves in account detail page, comprise an influencer unit of analysis in the author's data.

The author randomly selected 40 social media accounts in the influencer scope the author identifies in Chapter 5.1: 39 influencers in Kwai with more than one million followers and one social media account in Kwai whose follower count ranged between 500,000 and one million as of May 1, 2020. The author randomly selected 40 posts from the first content to the latest content each influencer posted, up to May 1, 2020. Among all the selected content, the author randomly selects 40 comments under each content and collect the content of the comment. If the number of comments under a piece of content is less than 40, the author collects all the comments the content has. The author collects 121,299 TikTok and Kwai comments. This data consisted of a database that contains 1,600 content analysis units and 40 related influencer analysis units. The author acquires those data via Kwai's application programming interface (API) and Cass Data Company's application programming interface (API).

The author also selected the accordance accounts of the selected 40 social media accounts in Weibo. Among those selected Weibo accounts, the author selected 40 posts randomly from the first content to the latest content each influencer posted, up to May 1, 2020. Among all the selected content, the author randomly selects 40 comments under each content and collect the content of the comment. If the number of comments under a piece of content is less than 40, the author collects all the comments

the content has. The author collects 134,166 Weibo comments. This data consisted of a database that contains another 1,600 analysis units and 40 related influencer analysis units. The author acquires those data via an anonymous data collection firm that provides analytics services to Weibo account owners by leveraging data from Weibo.

It is a common understanding that social media platforms often present fake or augmented views, likes, and comments count. As the author is not able to verify whether the data collected from those platforms are altered, the author chose to use the data collected directly. Also, it is not rare that some influencers use “comment bots”, an internet script that creates fake accounts and leaves advertisement comments on content posted by others, or fake likes and support comments to boost the exposure of influencers’ accounts. As the author lacks essential methods to filter the comments left by bots, combined with the advice from interviewee C<sup>6</sup>, the comments will usually only consist of a small part of all the comments. The author also gives all comments the same credibility.

Table 5.3.3 and Table 5.3.4 shows the follower number allocations of selected influencers, and the statistics of the influencers’ activities in Kwai and Weibo.

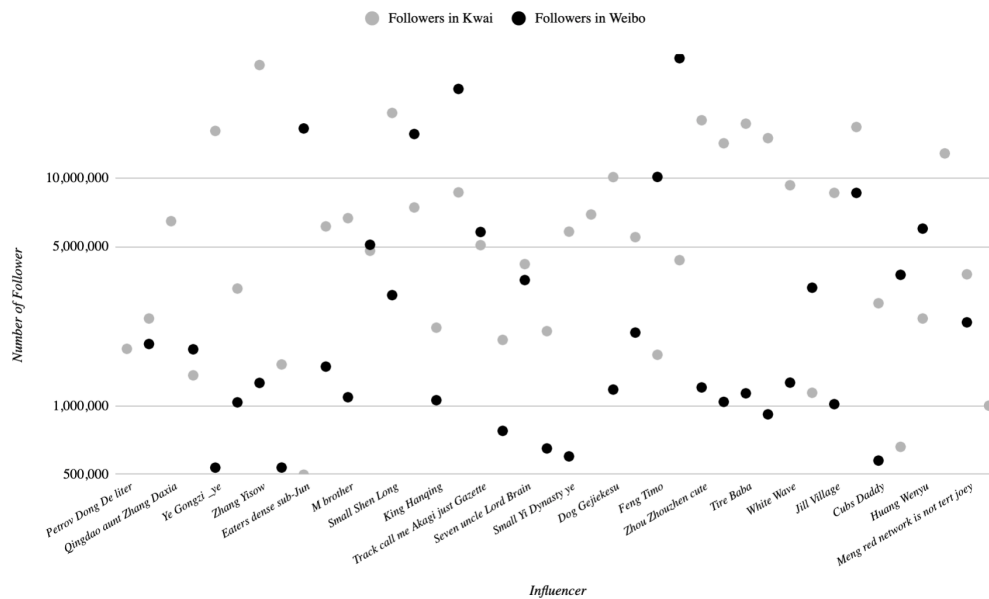


Table 5.3.3 Allocation of selected influencers’ follower number

<sup>6</sup> Interviewee C is the interviewee from MCN company and familiar with those bots.

	SSM		NSSM	
	#Followers	#Following	#Followers	#Following
Median	5,286,500	81	1,231,641	106
Mean	7,282,175	305	4,156,093	194
Max.	31,338,000	1,441	33,577,130	796
Standard Deviation	6,734,040.14	392.18	7,000,678.45	227.00

Table 5.3.4 Statistics of the SSM and NSSM influencers follower graph

### 5.3.2 Observational Data Processing

As the author mentions in Chapter 4.2 that audiences who both have a mutual understanding of the persona of a specific influencer may have arrived at their mutual understanding from interpretations of different symbols. For instance, two audiences may follow and agree with an influencer's persona for different reasons and have different motivations.

Also, since interactivity is considered a distinguishing characteristic of persona and personae of influencers is composed of multiple attributes (Zhao & Roy Dholakia, 2009), the author uses the multi-attribute model to analyze observational data. Build on the work of the paper *A Comparative Analysis of Multi-Attribute Attitude Models* that full multi-attribute model is appropriate for studies using behavioral intention or actual behavior (Lindgren & Konopa, 1980). The author based his persona model on the full multi-attribute model for the thesis. The full multi-attribute model is operationalized in the following manner:

$$A_{0i} = \sum_{j=1}^n B_{0ij} I_{ji}$$

Where:  $i$  = individual  $i$ ;  $j$  = attribute  $j$ ;  $0$  = object  $0$ ; such that:

$A_{0i}$  = individual  $i$ 's overall attitude towards object  $0$ ,

$B_{0ij}$  = individual  $i$ 's belief that attribute  $j$  provides satisfaction from  $0$ ,

$I_{ji}$  = individual  $i$ 's evaluation of attribute  $j$ ,

$n$  = number of attributes.

In the thesis:  $i$  = audience  $i$ ;  $j$ =attribute  $j$ ;  $0$ = the persona of influencer  $0$ ; such that:

$A_{oi}$  = audience  $i$ 's attitude towards the persona of influencer  $0$  reflected by a specific content

$B_{oj}$  = audience  $i$ 's belief that attribute  $j$  provides satisfaction from  $0$ ,

$I_j$  = audience  $i$ 's evaluation of attribute  $j$ ,

$n$  = number of attributes.

Based on the empirical analysis of the author, the attributes that influence influencer personae establishment are content, and the interactions between influencers and followers.

As the quality of content and effect of interactions are not quantifiable, the author uses the following behaviors to reflect the attributes:

<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Behaviors That Reflect the Attributes</i>	<i>Meanings</i>
Content	Percentage of Likes	= likes/ followers; the percentage of likes among all audiences who watched/read the content
	Percentage of Shares	=shares/ followers; the percentage of shares among all audiences who watched/read the content
	Percentage of Reposts	=reposts/ followers; the percentage of reposts among all audiences who watched/read the content
Interactions with followers	Percentage of Comments <sup>7</sup>	= comments/ followers; the percentage of comments among all audiences who watched/read the content
	Positive Comments	=positive comments/number of comments; the percentage of positive comments among all the views

*Table 5.3.5 Metrics of audiences' behaviors that can reflect attributes of content*

The authors choose the number of followers as the denominators of the percentage of likes/shares/reposts, as some audiences watch the content more than one time yet can only like the content once. More repetitive views mean the content is better at reflecting the persona of the influencer, yet it reduces the percentage of likes. Due to time limitations, the author cannot obtain the

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<sup>7</sup>The percentage of comments is not only influenced by the persona of the influencer but also influenced by the length of time the content released. Due to time limitations, the author does not consider this affection.

number of followers the moment the content is released. Thus, the author uses the number of followers on the date the author collects the data.

Also, for the percentage of shares and reposts, as they can happen multiple times by a single user, the author should have chosen the number of views as the denominator. Yet as mentioned before, Tiktok, Kwai, and Weibo all hide the real number of views when the number exceeds 100,000. The author chooses the number of followers as the denominator.

The percentage of likes, shares, reposts, and comments can be calculated by the data the author collected in Chapter 5.4.1. In terms of positive comments, the author uses a Natural Language Processing algorithm<sup>8</sup> to process the positive possibility of comments the author collects. To fix the idea, if there is a comment A that is analyzed by the NLP model, and the model shows that there is a 50% possibility the comment is positive, then the comment will be counted as 0.5 positive comments. In terms of the evaluation  $I_{ji}$ , the author uses the ranking given by the respondents of the survey, combined with empirical opinion from the author, the analyst, and influencers. The author lists the importance of different attributes in reflecting the personae of influencers in Table 5.3.6.

Thus, after adding the evaluations, for NSSM:

$$A_{content\ i} = \frac{0.24likes+0.20repost+0.24comments}{followers} + \frac{0.32(positive\ comments)}{comments}$$

For SSM:

$$A_{content\ i} = \frac{0.24likes+0.2shares+0.24comments}{followers} + \frac{0.32(positive\ comments)}{comments}$$

---

<sup>8</sup>The author uses Baidu's open-source sentiment classification system *Senta* to process the comment data under the help of the author's friend Sheng Lin. *Senta* has a prediction accuracy of 90%, according to the self-build database test of Baidu.

Source-code: <https://github.com/baidu/Senta>

<i>Ranking Votes</i> <i>Attributes</i>	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	<i>Total</i> <i>Score</i>	<i>Audience</i> <i>Weight</i>	<i>Final Weight</i> <i>for NSSM</i>	<i>Final Weight</i> <i>for SSM<sup>9,10</sup></i>
Percentage of Likes	2	7	6	3	2	0	0	104	20%	24%	24%
Percentage of Shares	1	5	7	4	3	0	0	97	19%	/	20%
Percentage of Reposts	1	2	7	8	1	1	0	91	18%	20%	/
Percentage of Comments	3	6	7	2	2	0	0	106	20%	24%	24%
Positive Comments	2	16	2	0	0	0	0	120	23%	32%	32%

Table 5.3.6 Evaluations of multi-attribute model over behaviors on social media

Where  $A_{content\ i}$  presents the persona of the influencer reflected by the selected post. According to the definition, the value of  $A_{content}$  is  $[0,1]$ .

The author also defines  $A_{influencer} = (\sum_{i=1}^n A_{content\ i})/n$ ,  $A_{influencer}$  presents the persona of the influencer reflected by all the selected content, which can be considered as the persona of selected influencer at the moment the latest content was released. According to the definition, the value of  $A_{influencer}$  is  $[0,1]$ . With the calculated  $A_{influencer}$  factor, the author quantifies the personae of influencers.

### 5.3.3 Observational Data Analysis

The author uses *descriptive statistics* to gather and present statistical data as a summary. Descriptive statistics are used to gather and present the statistical data as a summary, often by presenting the averages of the results, such as the median, mean, or the standard deviation of the data. The data can also be illustrated in statistical tables such as histograms (Hopkins, Glass, & Hopkins, 1987).

Also, the author uses *Regression analysis* to measure the relationship between the personae of influencers on SSM and NSSM. *Regression analysis* is the method to see if there exists a relationship between the variables as well as to what extent of strength the relationship has. The relationship can only be measured to its mathematical relationship as no causality can be assumed in its measurement (Malhotra, 1999). To be more specific, a t-test is conducted by the author to determine whether there are differences in personae establishment on SSMs and NSSMs.

<sup>9</sup> Final weights are audiences' weight combine with analyst and influencer' weight

<sup>10</sup> There is no "repost" function on SSMs the author selected, and no "share" counts on the NSSM the author selected



# Chapter 6

## Analyses

The author discusses personae reflected by the influencer factor  $A_{\text{influencer}}$ , as well as the data that reflects personae from empirical aspects in this Chapter. As the author mentions in Chapter 5, the factor  $A_{\text{influencer}}$  is calculated by the observational data collected from selected NSSM and SSMs; and the empirical data comes from the survey and interviews conducted with audiences, influencers, and from experiences of the authors.

### 6.1 Comparisons on Overall Personae Establishments

The author discusses the results of the overall personae comparison process and results between NSSM and SSM here.

#### 6.1.1 Personae Differences on SSMs and NSSMs

As the standard deviation for both populations are unknown, and the sample size is relatively small, the author uses a two-sample t-test to conduct the comparison. Empirically analysis, the author assumes there are differences between the two types of platforms. The author makes a two-sided hypothesis at  $\alpha = 0.05$ . The exact values of the influencer factor  $A_{\text{influencer}}$  for each selected influencer can be found in Appendix C.

The Hypothesis for the t-test are:

Null Hypothesis:  $\mu_{\text{personae on SSM}} - \mu_{\text{personae on NSSM}} = 0$

Alternate Hypothesis:  $\mu_{\text{personae on SSM}} - \mu_{\text{personae on NSSM}} \neq 0$

The results of the two-sample t-test are in Table 6.1.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Variance</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Hypothesized Mean Difference</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</i>	<i>t Critical two-tail</i>
<i>SSM</i>	15.0333	8.6071	40					
<i>NSSM</i>	21.9615	42.0067	40	0	54	-6.1591	9.46E-08	2.0049

*Table 6.1.1 The results of two-sample t-test on influencer factor*

In Table 6.1.1 P(T<=t) two-tail (9.46E-08) shows the probability that a value of the t-Statistic (-6.1591) would be observed that is smaller in absolute value than t Critical two-tail (2.0049). Since the p-value is smaller than the selected Alpha (0.05), the Null Hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the means of each sample is rejected.

Thus, the persona reflected on NSSM and SSM is different for the same influencer.

The survey results (Figure 6.1.1) and index interviews with influencers also show the same results:

*“But I do think that people follow me in Weibo for different reasons than those that follow me in Tik Tok. I am more relaxed in Weibo, and the other sites show different sides of me -Interviewee A”.*

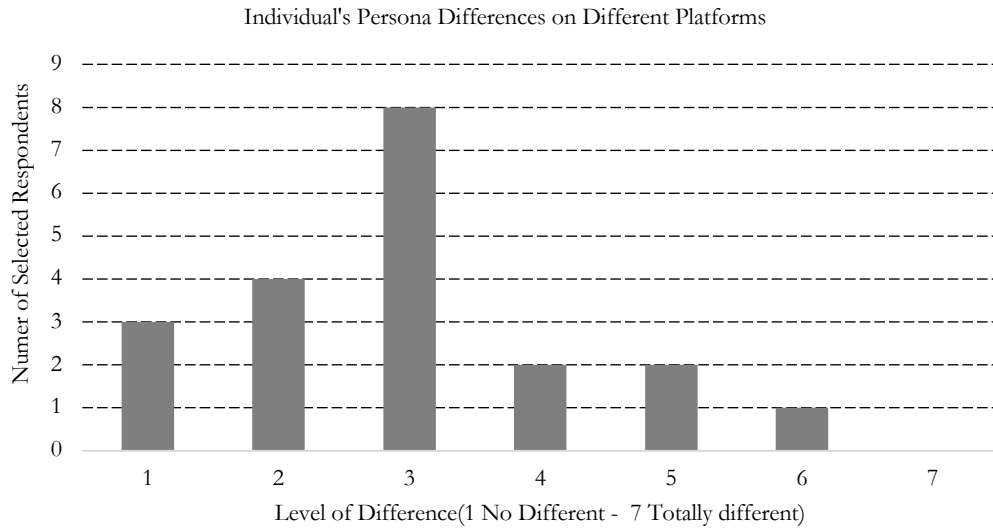


Figure 6.1.1 Individual's persona differences on different platforms

### 6.1.2 Personae Relations on SSMs and NSSMs

Since the personae established on NSSMs and SSMs are different for the same influencer, the author further investigates whether there is a relationship between NSSMs and SSMs for an influencer's persona. *The self-impression theory* indicates that individuals base their impressions to others on their real selves and change their image in the virtual front stage, depending on their audience. According to the theory, the personae of influencers in different platforms should be similar. The opinion of interviewee C also supports this theory:

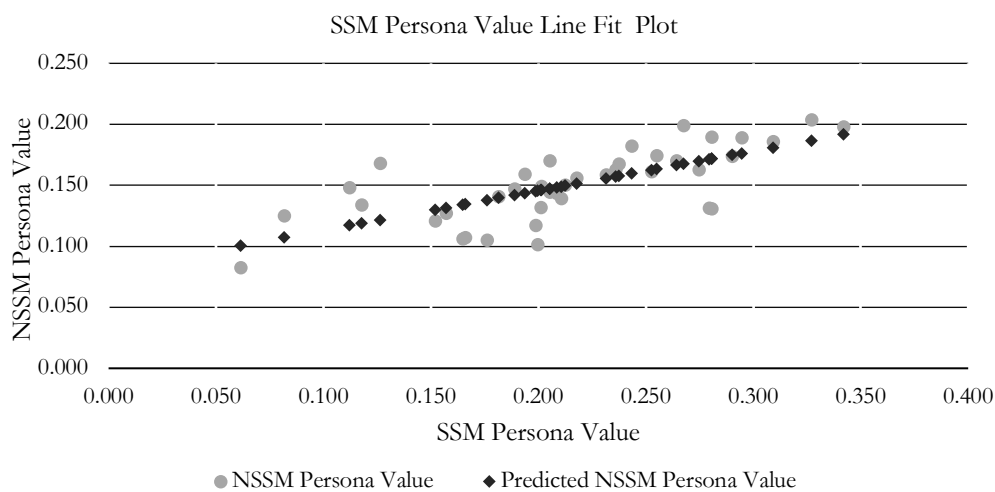
*“Usually, influencers' personae will be very similar on different platforms. They usually base their personae on who they are trying to attract on different platforms -Interviewee C”.*

The author uses a linear regression to verify the relationship. Table 6.2 shows the statistics of the regression. As Table 6.2 shows, the correlation coefficient is 0.726, which signifies a moderate positive correlation. The coefficient of determination is 0.527, indicating that 52.7% of the variation in the data is determined by the regression line.

<i>Regression Statistics</i>	
Multiple R	0.7131
R Square	0.5085
Adjusted R Square	0.4955
Standard Error	0.0208
Observations	40

*Table 6.1.2 Regression statistics of persona factors value*

Thus, the author considers that there are positive relationships between personae on SSM and NSSM for a specific influencer. For instance, the more established the persona in a platform, the more established the persona in another platform, as shown in Figure 6.1.2.



*Figure 6.1.2 SSM persona value line fit plot*

## 6.2 Analysis on Influencers and Personae

In this section, the author continues the discussion on the personae differences between NSSMs and SSMs. The author also tries to take a more in-depth view based on information provided in Chapter 6.1.2. The author categorizes influencers by the category that the author mentioned in Chapter 2.3,

and subsequently the author conducted detailed tests to determine the relationships between different attributes of influencers and persona establishments.

### 6.2.1 Personae and Influencers' Platforms

The author starts by reporting on the descriptive statistics among the influencer factor of all the selected 40 influencers, 80 accounts in total in Figure 6.2.1.

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Sample Variance</i>	<i>Kurtosis</i>	<i>Skewness</i>	<i>Range</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Sum</i>
NSSM	0.150	0.1499	0.0293	0.0009	-0.4728	-0.1973	0.1210	0.0824	0.2035	6.013
	3									3
SSM	0.215	0.2158	0.0634	0.0040	0.4417	-0.3901	0.2901	0.0654	0.3555	8.622
	6									7

*Table 6.2.1 the description of the statistics of selected influencer factor values*

Focusing first on the mean and the sum of the sample influencers, one can see that the overall influencer factor value on SSMs are significantly higher than NSSM. This suggests that reflected personae from observational data on SSMs is more concrete than personae on NSSMs. Nevertheless, from the standard deviation and sample variance, one can also see that the differences of personae on each influencer are more significant on NSSMs than SSMs, which means that influencer personae levels are more aggregated on NSSMs than SSMs. In other words, this data reflects two key facts:

- Overall, influencers established more concrete personae on SSMs
- A specific influencer can perform poorly or very well on SSM, while most influencers on NSSMs have a relatively similar performance on persona establishments.

The differences can also be seen from the results of survey questions “Among all the accounts you followed on short-video social media/non-short-video media, how many of them do you think have a persona? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is none of them, and 7 is all of them”. The answer is more scattered on SSMs than NSSMs, where 45% of respondents consider about 80% influencers on NSSM have

personae while the number of respondents who consider there are 50%, 80%, and 30% influencers have personae is nearly the same.

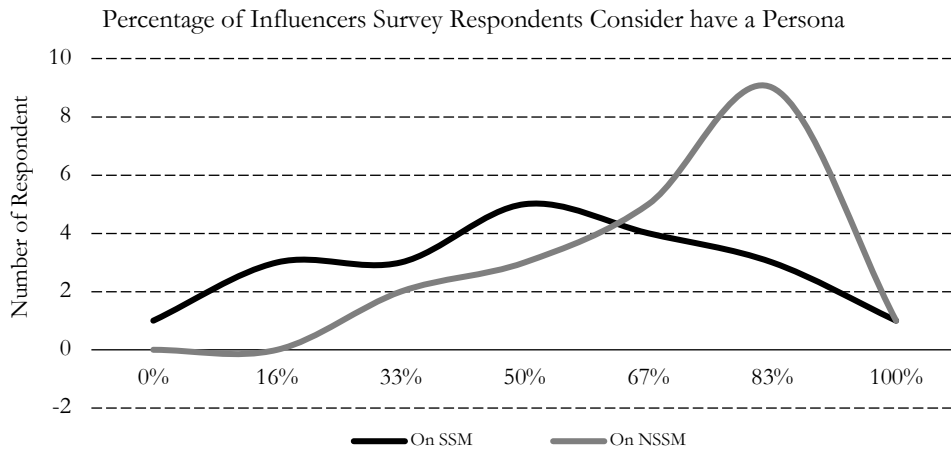


Figure 6.2.1 Percentage of influencers survey respondents consider have a persona

It seems natural that influencers on short-video platforms perform better on personae establishments than influencers that use other formats. According to the survey that the author conducted, content is the most critical element in persona establish (Table 5.3.6), while SSMs lowered the requirements for producing high-quality content. Video content also has a better information density, which could deliver more information from the influencers to audiences to boost the interaction process.

In terms of the more scattered SSM personae distribution, the differences in content logic and interaction logic may be reasons for this outcome. To be more specific, the author uses scenarios when users are using NSSMs and SSMs to explain this.

Users are designed not to focus too much on the content generator on SSMs. When users are using SSM applications, the content is usually full-screen video combined with sounds and consist of the only element that attracts users' attention. From the author's personal experience, users' priority is to consume the content and decide if the user needs to continue watching, or swipe to the next content. Since the name and avatar of the content generator are placed in the corner of the screen, it is natural for users to ignore the identity of content generators. On NSSMs, the priority of content generators' information is much higher than on SSM. In original content and reposted content, the content

generator's priority is similar to the content introduction and text content, as one can see from the interaction design as shown in Figure 6.2.2. Higher priority of accounts guides users to focus more on the content generators.

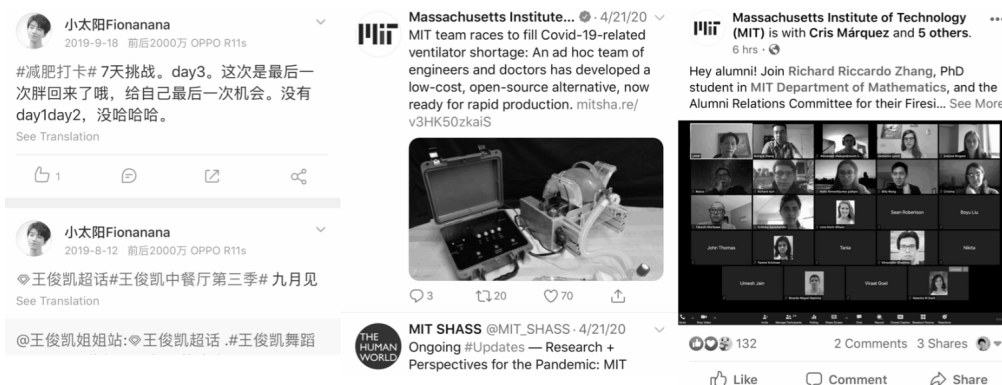


Figure 6.2.2 The priority of uploader's info on NSSMs

Users also do not need to focus too much on content generators on SSMs. As the author mentions in Chapter 2.3.2, SSM's content recommendation system mostly relies on watching related behaviors of audiences, instead of relying on the “follow” action as can be found on NSSMs. This to some extent shapes the behavior of users: the best way for a user to show their attitudes is to click the like button to tell content generators and the system that the user likes it, instead of clicking the follow button that is hidden in the account detail page. On NSSM, users would also hit the like button to show their attitude towards a piece of content, yet the main factor in deciding if a user sees the content generated by the uploader and similar uploaders is still by choosing to “follow the account.”

For influencers on NSSM, the platform's design is better for audiences to be able to pay attentions to influencers. Thus, those influencers that are not able to deliver their personae through videos or those that are not trying to establish a persona, will be weaker on SSM than on NSSM in terms of personae establishment.

## 6.2.2 Personae and Influencer's Genre

Continuing with the conclusions of Chapter 6.2.1, in that not all the influencers established a better persona on SSMs, the author analyzes personae differences in terms of genres. As the author mentions in Chapter 2.3.2, the limitations of SSMs shape unique atmospheres in different social media platforms, which attract certain users and content that fit with the atmosphere. Meanwhile, unique atmospheres are also excluding or undermining the content that is not accordant with the unique environment. Also, it is the nature of content that not all types of content and influencers are able to acquire a better quality and a better outcome in a short video environment. For instance, those content that requires repeated read or watch and pause for thinking are mostly likely to have a better performance and a better experience for users on NSSMs.

The author uses the content categories introduced in Chapter 3.3 to classify influencers selected into five distinct groups: lifestyle, music/dancing/performance, funny, pets and kids, sports and gaming. The detailed classification of each selected influencers can be seen in Appendix C.

The author uses a t-test to determine the relationship for each group. The author made Hypotheses for each test based on the observation of data:

- Null Hypothesis: There are no differences between NSSMs and SSMs in selected groups
- Alternative Hypothesis: the reflected personae on SSMs are better than on NSSMs in selected groups

<i>t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances on Grouped Personae</i>				
<i>Group</i>	<i>Ave. Persona Value SSM</i>	<i>Ave. Persona Value NSSM</i>	<i>Sample Size</i>	<i>P-Value</i>
Group 1 Dancing/Performance	0.237	0.152	8	0.0013
Group 2 Lifestyle	0.169	0.139	8	0.1895
Group 3 Funny	0.201	0.141	7	0.0003
Group 4 Pets and Kids	0.182	0.128	4	0.1178
Group 5 Sports and Gaming	0.232	0.161	3	0.0382
Group 6 Purchasing	0.281	0.186	5	0.0085

*Table 6.2.2 t-test results: Two-sample test on influencer groups*



According to the general rules of the meaning of the p-value<sup>11</sup> (Wright & London, 2009), the results that are shown in Table 6.2.2 from the t-test can be interpreted and are presented below. The author lists the results from “no differences” to “very large differences:”

- There is very little evidence that shows that lifestyle, pets, and kids influencers have personae differences on SSMs and NSSMs
- Sports and gaming influencers have a slightly better performance on persona establishment on SSMs than NSSMs
- There are sharp differences in music/dancing/performance and purchasing influencers on their personae establishment on SSMs and NSSMs
- The personae of funny influencers are much more influential on SSMs than their personae on NSSMs

From an empirical perspective, it is not hard to understand that performance, gaming and sports influencers gain a better persona on SSMs, since the nature of those types of content requires video as the delivery material. While video formats enable influencers to show more detail about the items they are recommending, and create a greater influential vibe when purchasing, it is also understandable that purchasing/recommendation influencers obtain better personae on SSMs.

From experiences and index interviews, influencers that focus on pets and kids should also be the group that are taking advantage of short videos. The 15 second limitation can lighten their burden of content production, as most “cute moments” are short, and it is not the best strategy for influencers to spend time accumulating materials and then post them together. Yet there are no significant differences on personae of this type of influencers between platforms. There are also different and funny content that can be delivered by texts, pictures, and video. From an empirical analysis, there should only be little differences on funny influencers’ personae. Yet the data shows that the differences between the selected funny influencers are the largest amongst all genres.

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<sup>11</sup>  $p > .10$  implies “little or no evidence against  $H_0$ ”,  $.05 < p \leq .10$  implies “some evidence against  $H_0$ ”,  $.01 < p \leq .05$  implies “good evidence against  $H_0$ ”,  $.001 < p \leq .01$  implies “strong evidence against  $H_0$ ”,  $p \leq .001$  implies “very strong evidence against  $H_0$ ”.

One reason for the relatively weak statistical power of the t-test could be due to the small sample sizes. As the thesis only has four to eight influencers in each group, there is the possibility that samples have deviations from the entire population. Also, the above analysis demonstrates that the influencers are categorized by the content they post, with the author only analyzing the influence of content. Take influencers that post their kids as an example, it is possible that influencers are also recommending toys or posting experiences on parenting to establish personae. Also, for those posts that audiences need to read carefully, NSSMs outdo SSMs in terms of repetitive reading, archiving, and content searching.

The author conducts further investigations on other elements that might have a more comprehensive view on personae in the following sections.

### 6.2.3 Personae and Influencer's Number of Followers

*"I think this (more followers) will damage my relationship with my followers. Most of my friends and I do most of my talks with my followers on Weibo; and other followers might be more influenced by my image in Weibo than Kwai.*

*Those that have so many followers must be very good at maintaining their image – Interviewee A".*

*"So, I would say that the more followers you have, the better quality your content is, and the stronger persona you must have. This effect would definitely augment on short video platforms like Kwai – Interviewee C".*

Two interviewees in the index interviews mention that the number of followers, persona, and platform have correlations:

- Mega influencers need good personae to retain the large number of followers that they have
- Followers with a large number of followers have a better persona on SSMs than NSSMs as videos can augment what influencers have done

However, while the augmentation demonstrated by the influencers might be true, it is also reasonable to assume that influencers with fewer followers tend to interact more with their followers to strengthen their personae. This is because it is also common knowledge that interactions contribute to a significant part of persona establishment.

In order to find the relationship, the author uses the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient<sup>12</sup> to determine the relationship between personae and the number of followers an influencer has. Table 6.2.3 shows the results of the calculation.

	<i>Followers on SSM</i>	<i>Followers on NSSM</i>	<i>NSSM Persona Value</i>	<i>SSM Persona Value</i>
Followers on SSM	1			
Followers on NSSM	-0.109	1		
NSSM Persona Value	0.179	-0.002	1	
SSM Persona Value	0.286	-0.098	0.713	1

*Table 6.2.3 Pearson Coefficient of persona and follower numbers*

However, as one can see from the table, there are no relationships between influencers' number of followers and the influencer's persona. The author analyzes the behaviors of audiences to discover more relationships.

## 6.3 Analysis on Audiences and Personae

Based on the observational data of users' behaviors, the author analyzes the impacts of different platforms to audiences and personae from a user-centered design aspect.

### 6.3.1 User Behavior differences in Comments

The influencer persona factor  $A_{\text{influencer}}$  consists of four user behaviors: the percentage of comments, the percentage of repost/share, the percentage of like, and the percentage of positive comments. Figure 6.3.1 - Figure 6.3.4 shows the differences between those four behaviors on NSSMs and SSMs.

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<sup>12</sup> The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is a measure of the strength and direction of association that exists between two variables measured on at least an interval scale.

Figure 6.3.1 shows the differences between the percentage of comments among all the followers on each content on NSSMs and SSMs. As usually there is only 0.05% - 1% followers post comments on each content; the author augmented the number of percentages in the figure for 10,000 for a more accessible view. In order to make the figure clearer, the author also skipped all the names of influencers. This process also applies to Figure 6.3.3 and Figure 6.3.4.

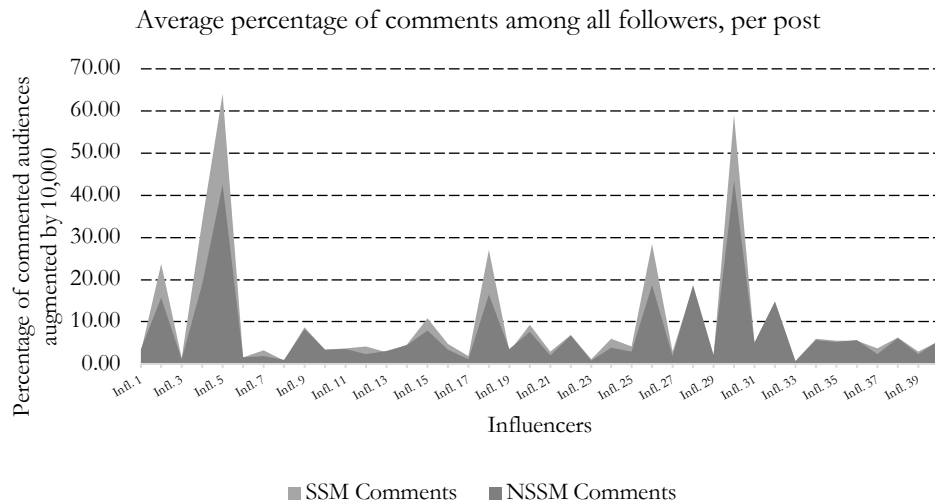


Figure 6.3.1 Average percentage of comments among all followers, per post

As one can see from the figure, the engagement of audiences on SSMs is much higher than on NSSMs. As the author mentions in Chapter 2, the density of information on content on SSMs is much higher than pictures or texts on NSSMs; thus, audiences will be more natural to have opinions and comment on content (Thomas, Peters, Howell, & Robbins, 2012). Interviewee C also mentions these behaviors in the interview:

*“People comment on the things that they understand. They might not understand or don't read the text at all - but for videos, they have so much information in them. You can hardly cease your impulsion to reply to the video”.*

The atmosphere of platforms is also influencing the rate of comments. Take the NSSM Weibo for example, the author suggests that: one ongoing discussion on Weibo is the “internet troll phenomenon”. Trolls are individuals whose sole purpose in social media is to seek out people to argue with over extremely trivial issues. The troll phenomenon is generally considered more common on

NSSMs than SSMs and may influence the interactions between influencers and their followers. As content generators have the power to delete or pin specific comments, often all of the comments under a piece of content are also considered as a part of the image of the content generator. Thus, a comment area with trolls are negatively affecting the personae of the influencer. The situation is also reflected in Figure 6.3.2 regarding the percentage of positive comments, with the percentage of positive comments on SSMs significantly higher than on NSSMs.

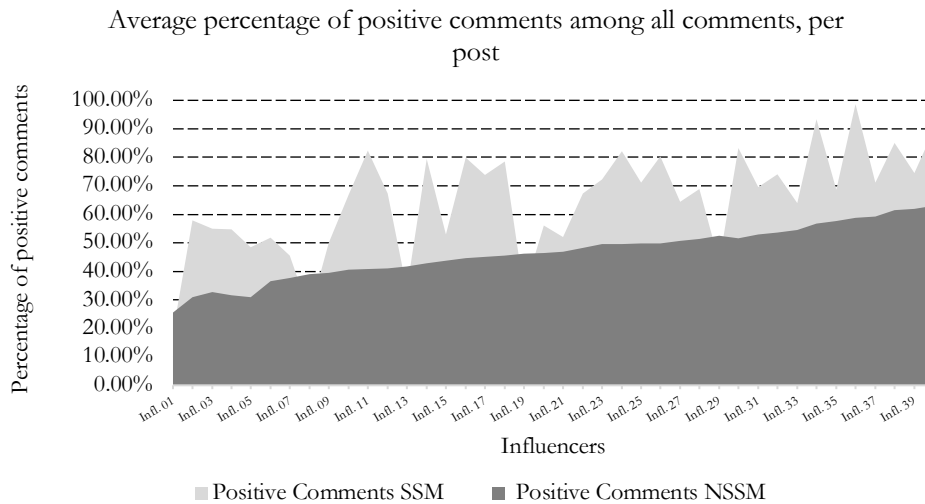


Figure 6.3.2 Average percentage of positive comments among all comments, per post

### 6.3.2 User Behavior Differences in Shares

Figure 6.3.3 shows the repost/share actions on two types of platforms. Besides the content and personae of influencers, logical differences are also affecting the number of reposts and shares for a specific content. Repost is an asynchronous way to post content on ones' homepage and sharing is a real-time action that immediately sends the information to others. The differences are also on the interaction side: pressing the share button, users are guided to another application or software; the user also has to conduct future actions to finish the share action such as selecting the target contact. Numerically speaking, the complexity of this action will undermine the percentage of shares while reposting can be finished with just one click on the repost and post button. Although behind the share action is the strong willingness of users to share the content to others and contain a robust positive meaning towards the information, the user might still fail to do so and give up the interaction with

influencers and their content. This failure of continued interaction may undermine interpretation processes of mutual understanding, according to *symbolic interactionism*.

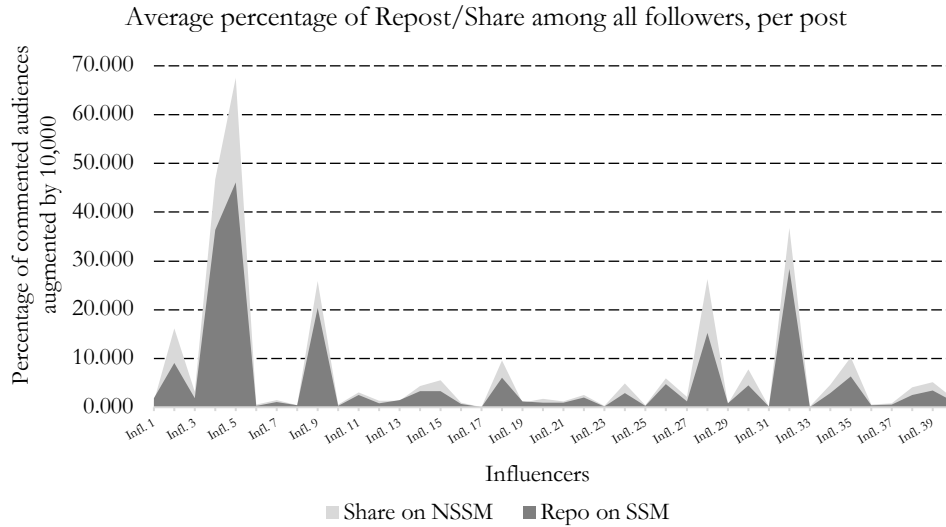


Figure 6.3.3 Average percentage of repost/share among all followers, per post

However, one can still see from Figure 6.3.3 that for some influencers that the percentage of shares is still more massive than the percentage of reposts on NSSMs. The author mentions in Chapter 2.4 that information with pictures and sounds is more natural for individuals to have emotional resonance (Weber, Ritterfeld, & Mathiak, 2006), and therefore have the stronger incentive of sharing the resonance even though the sharing function is harder to users than repost. The stronger resonance also explains why influencers are, in general, easier to generate personas through SSMs, especially when they are the topic or the video’s content.

### 6.3.3 User Behavior Differences in Likes

Figure 6.3.4 shows the “like” statistics on NSSM and SSM. The number of like on SSMs is significantly larger than on NSSMs.

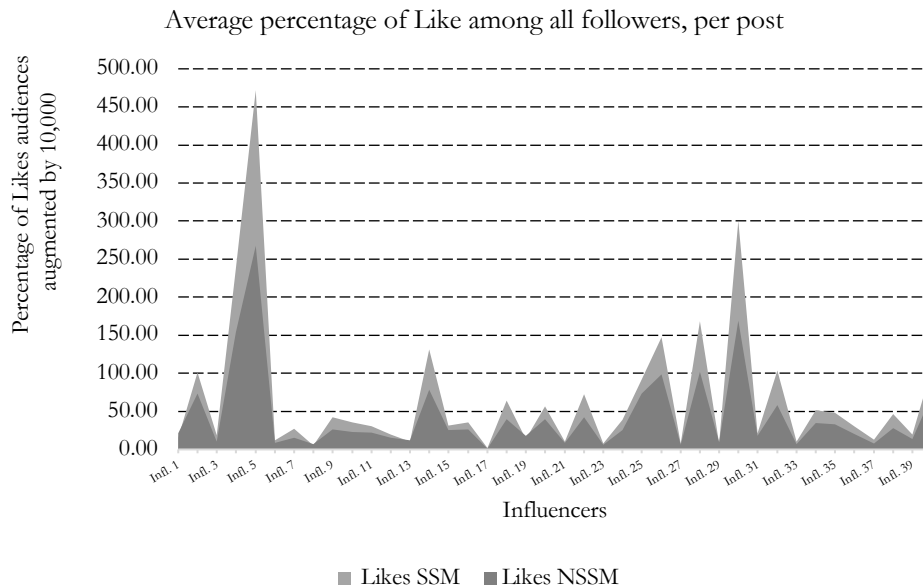


Figure 6.3.4 Average percentage of like among all followers, per post

As most users use social media for escapism and self-expression purposes (Omar & Dequan, 2020), the simplicity of the platform’s expression is important to most users. Act is a virtual presence function (Naylor, Lamberton, & West, 2012) that plays an essential role in participation. The level of satisfaction and the “like” button (and other buttons with similar functions) is critical for users, as well as for personae of influencers on the mutual interpretation seeking process.

On most NSSMs, the like button displays as a thumb or a heart with the same hierarchy as other interactions such as repost or reply. In terms of the color-side, the button usually has the same color as other buttons (indicated in Figure 6.2.2). Also, after pressing the button, users used to have no sense other than the change of the “like” number<sup>13</sup>.

On most SSMs, the users can double click anywhere on the screen when they are trying to show their acknowledgment and/or to send a “like” to the content generators. Take TikTok as an example, there will also be a giant heart with animation on the screen (Figure 6.3.5.) A stronger animation presents a

<sup>13</sup> Facebook and Twitter added animations in early 2019. The animation is not as large as in TikTok and other SSM platforms. Up to the release of the thesis, Weibo has no animation after clicking the like button.

stronger emotional feeling, with the animation creating a lively vibe with the video and sound that is playing. It works as a signal that guides users to express more emotions, and it interacts with the content generators, as indicated by one survey respondent who is a heavy user of TikTok:

*“It’s all about feelings! When you click the like button, pong! You showed your gratitude and admire the uploader. Double click, click again, the feeling is so strong that you even want to see more good content so that you can send more likes!”.*

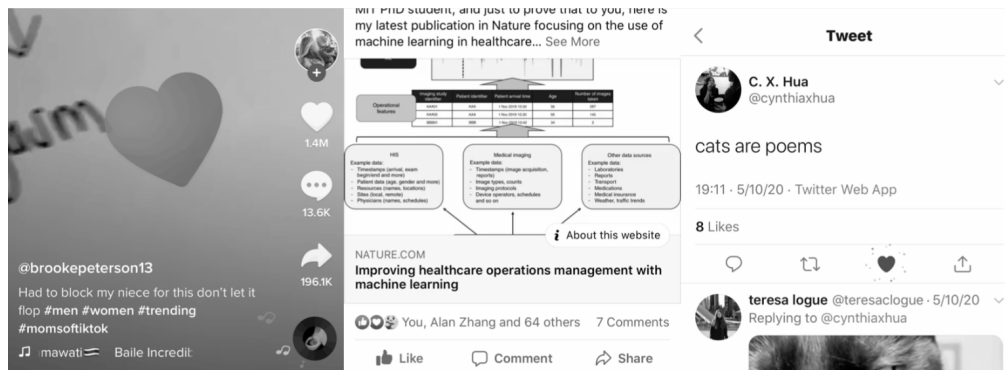


Figure 6.3.5 The effects of pressing the like button in TikTok, Facebook, and Twitter

What is presented in the quote of the respondent is the effectiveness of the like button, meaning how strong the feedback of users’ actions is. Functioning as the way that the majority of audiences interact with influencers and the content (Nonnecke & Preece, 2001), the effect of the strong “like” consisted of a large part of the gratification and gave the users a feeling of participation and enlarge the possibility of having interactions with influencers, hence boost the interpretation process of persona establishment. While an established positive persona brings more tolerance for audiences, audiences are more likely to provide positive feedback by clicking the like button or comments. The cycle of “like” – “better persona” – more “like” can easily be a positive loop that hastens and enhances the influencers’ persona establishment process on SSMs.



# Chapter 7

## Conclusions and Discussions

### 7.1 Summary of Findings

The followings are the author's findings from data analyses, interviews, and surveys.

Personae situation between platforms according to data analysis:

- a) There are differences reflected in personae on NSSMs and SSMs
  - The persona of a specific influencer on NSSMs and SSMs has positive correlations.
  - In general, influencers hold better personae on SSMs than NSSMs.
  - Influencers' persona establishment performances are more stable on NSSMs than SSMs.
  
- b) Among popular genres, influencers who focus on different content have different performances on each platform
  - For lifestyle influencers, pets and children influencers, the data did not reflect any persona differences on each platform.
  - Funny influencers, dancing, music, performance influencers, and purchasing recommendation influencers' personae are generally better established on SSMs than NSSM.
  - There are no significant differences in sports and gaming influencers on different platforms.
  
- c) There are no relationships between the number of followers and persona establishment.

Audiences' behaviors according to the data analysis:

- a) Audiences are more likely to give positive comments on content on SSMs than on NSSMs under influencers with similar personae.
- b) Audiences have stronger intentions to share high-quality content from SSMs than from NSSMs with their friends.
- c) Audiences are much more likely to "like" content posted by influencers with a similar persona on SSMs than on NSSMs.

Audiences' attitude towards persona according to the survey:

- a) Most social media users (75%) are familiar with the persona concept and consider most influencers to have personae.
- b) Audiences consider positive comments to be the most significant factor that could reflect an influencer's persona positive levels (weighted 32% among all five factors).
- c) Most audiences (70%) consider high-quality content to be the crucial factor that influences persona establishment.
- d) Most audiences (55%) consider content differences to be the main factor that causes personae differences across different types of platforms.
- e) Although persona is essential to audiences, when audiences evaluate content, the most important fact is still the content itself (weighted 86.5%), while persona only consists of a small part (7.1%) of audiences decision-making process; when evaluating influencers, the most critical fact is still the content (weighted 41.2%).

Influencers' attitude towards persona according to index interviews:

- a) Most influencers tend to deny that they shaped their personae on purpose.
- b) Most influencers consider content and interactions with audiences are key factors in establishing a persona.
- c) Most influencers consider positive personae to be critical in attracting new audiences and retaining existing audiences.

- d) Most influencers consider the policy differences across different platforms to contribute most to their possible persona differences.

## 7.2 Limitations

Due to the limited time and knowledge of the author, some limitations affect the research's representativeness.

### The collection of the data

The size of samples the author collected for each genre is not large enough. On average, the author collected only six sample influencers for each genre, whose performance might not be able to present the situation of the whole genre it presents and hence causes deviations on reflections of the whole population.

### The formula of the persona factors $A_{influencer}$ .

To make the statement clearer, the author relists the formula of the factor:

$$A_{content\ i} = \frac{0.24likes + 0.20(repost\ or\ share) + 0.24comments}{followers} + \frac{0.32(positive\ comments)}{comments}$$

$$A_{influencer} = (\sum_{i=1}^n A_{content\ i}) / n$$

As the author mentions in Chapter 5, to get more accurate reflections of the status of shares, reposts, and comments, the author should use the view count of the selected content as the denominator to calculate the percentage of comments and the percentage of shares/reposts. View counts are also repeatable by users' behaviors as reposts/shares and comments, yet as the number of followers is not repeatable, it is not able to reflect the repeatable behaviors of users. In another words, a user can share,

repost, or view specific content multiple times and the behaviors will be reflected in the number of shares, reposts and views; yet an audience can only contribute one count to the number of followers.

In terms of coefficients of each percentage, although in theory, scopes of all percentages are  $[0,1]$ , yet in practice, the author found that the percentage of users who comment and share content is much smaller than the percentage of likes and positive comments. These differences potentially influenced the final results of the calculation. For example, although the coefficient of the percentage of shares among all the followers is 0.2 while likes is 0.24, yet as the average percentage range of share is 0.5% - 1%, while for likes it is 5-10%. Their actual influence on the final result is different.

Also, as the number of followers for an influencer is continuously changing, when calculating the percentage of likes, a follower number at the moment the content released will function better in reflecting the whole population of followers related to other metrics.

In terms of the calculations on  $A_{\text{influencer}}$  and  $A_{\text{contents}}$ , the author did not consider the time aspect. As a persona is an object that is continuously changing, each piece of content that is released in different periods is different. A weighted calculation considers the release date and length of time will make  $A_{\text{influencer}}$  better reflect facts.

## 7.3 Future Works

Individuals are immersed in an increasingly technological world, in which many new technologies are designed to enlarge the influence of individuals by empowering them with the ability to retrieve and exchange information with almost every other individual in the world. Social media is one of the tools that helps individuals to share and to receive information. The three stakeholders in the thesis, platforms, influencers, and audiences, live in a mutualistic symbiosis system that relies on one another to fulfill their needs.

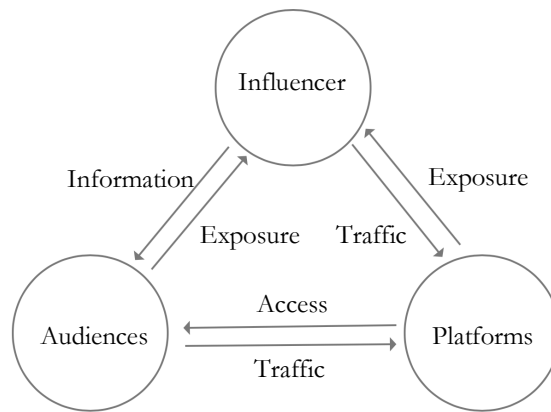


Figure 7.3.1 The mutualistic symbiosis of platforms, influencer, and audiences

Due to the differences in features and typical users, short-video-based social media platforms and non-short-video-based platforms developed different mutualistic symbiosis ecosystems. After the author discusses the differences and possible reasons for the differences in past chapters, some future work could include:

- Collecting more voices from users' aspects and platforms' aspects. The author only conducted a casual interview with one audience who responded to the survey. Qualitative data from audiences and platforms may help the research acquire a better understanding of audiences' information digest process, as well as the exposure logics of platforms which is shown in Figure 7.3.1.
- Conducting analyses with a larger size of samples. Future data collections and analysis may consider increasing the number of selected influencers and selected genres of influencers to acquire better representativeness.
- Refine persona influencer factor formulas. Refined formulas with more accurate presentations of the real priorities of each behavior that reflects the establishment of influencer personae can also contribute to the robustness of representativeness.

- Implement design revisions on discussed features of social media platforms. The author mentions possible reasons for the design of interactions and logics that cause the differences between different platforms. The revisions on the real platforms may also verify those potential causes for the differences.

# Appendix

## Appendix A Interviews

Appendix A includes the interview question designs for social media influencers and analysts and the transcriptions of three conducted interviews.

### Appendix A.1 Interview Questions for Influencers and MCN Analysts

#### Purpose of Interview

- To observe the persona establishment process
- To discuss differences between non-short-video-based social media and short-video-based social media platforms from the influencers' and social media analyst's point of view.

#### Questions

##### About Content

1. Do you upload new content every day?
  - a. If not – how often do you upload?
  - b. If yes – how many videos per day?
  - c. What factors influence the frequency of your uploads?

2. How do you decide what content to generate/upload?
  - a. If the content is randomly decided – have you tried to post a serious or fixed type of content? Why?
  - b. If the content is already decided – what factors affect your decisions?
3. Since beginning to use Kwai and Tik Tok, has the content you generate/post changed, such as the style, content genre, etc.?
  - a. If it has changed - what content did you post at the first beginning?
  - b. If it has changed – why do you make the change?
  - c. If it hasn't changed – why did you not change?
4. What kind of features do you always add in your videos or when you are interacting with your audiences? Such as logos, gestures, slogan, or other things?
5. Are there any rules on the platform that are limiting your content? If there are no limitations, what change will you have on your content?
6. What is your favorite content that you have posted? Why?
  - a. What's your standard for a good post?
  - b. What was the data performance of the content?
    - i. If the performance was excellent – is the reason you like it because of its performance?
    - ii. Did you know there would be such positive/negative/no apparent reactions from the audience before you posted the content?
7. What is the least favorite content that you have ever posted? Why?
  - a. What's your standard for bad content?
  - b. What was the data performance of such content?
    - i. If the performance was terrible– is the reason you don't like it the data performance?
    - ii. Did you know there would be such positive/negative/no apparent reactions from the audience before you posted the content?



## **About Interactions**

1. What do you think makes you have such a large volume of followers?
  - a. If mentioned interaction – what percentage of interactions (replies to followers' comments, talking to followers during live stream) do you think contributed to the volume of followers?
2. Do you have a habit of interacting with your followers?
3. How do you usually interact with your followers?
  - a. Mediums?
  - b. Frequency?
4. What are the most common reactions of your followers after you post new content?
5. Do you have any interaction experiences with your followers that impressed you a lot?

## **Persona**

1. What part of you do you think makes your followers follow you?
2. What part of you do you think makes your followers unfollow you?
3. What words would you choose to describe yourself?
4. What sentences would you choose to describe yourself as an influencer?
5. Have you intended to shape your image in front of your followers?
  - a. Yes – what image are you shaping?
  - b. Yes – Do you think you succeeded in shaping the image?

6. Can you recall any words that your followers are using or have used to describe you?
  - a. If no – if you ask your followers, what words do you think your followers would use?
7. Do you think there are any changes in your image from the very start of your influencer career?

## **Platforms**

1. Do you post content anywhere besides the platform that you are active in? Are you active on multiple platforms?
2. Which platform do you like most?
  - a. If there is a preference - Why you like the one you chose?
  - b. If there is a preference - Why don't you choose other similar platforms?
  - c. If there is no preference - Why don't you have any preferences?
3. What differences do you think those platforms have?
  - a. Content posting logic differences
  - b. Experience logic differences
  - c. Other differences
4. Do you think there are differences in the followers on different platforms that you are uploading content?
  - a. Do you think there are differences in atmosphere on those platforms (when you reply to their comments or look at their comments)?
  - b. If there are differences, can you give one or two examples?

## **Others**

1. Do you want more followers?
  - a. Yes – what would you do to get more followers?
  - b. No – Why?

## Appendix A.2 Interview Transcription with Interviewee A

### Backgrounds of Interviewee A

Interviewee A is an uploader active in both Weibo (NSSM) and Kwai (SSM). A has about 300 thousand followers in TikTok and about 100 thousand followers in Weibo. Interviewee A upload beauty related videos to both Weibo and Kwai every two days.

### About Content

**Question(Q):** Do you upload new content every day?

**Interviewee A(A):** No, almost one video every two days, yet I will post greetings or my thoughts to my Weibo every now and then. I have to spend time recording, edit, and find new topics for my videos, so not be able to upload content more frequently.

**Q:** How do you decide what content to generate/upload?

**A:** Well, it depends. Sometimes my friends or I just got random thoughts on future content and wrote them down, and we produce those content one by one. On some other occasions, we just follow the trend or some current events and do something related. Types of my videos are not 100% fixed, I mean, most of my videos are about makeup and beauty recommendations, that's what my followers follow me for after all, but I am open to anything that interests me.

Most occasions, I will think about what would happen when my followers see the videos I am about to make. Will it make them happier? If the answer is yes, I will make the video.

**Q:** Since beginning to use Kwai and TikTok, has the content you generate/post changed, such as the style, content genre, etc.?

**A:** I am a beauty uploader at the very first beginning. That's what I am passionate about, and almost the only thing I know well. The genre never changed.

**Q:** What kind of features do you always add in your videos or when you are interacting with your audiences? Such as logos, gestures, slogan, or other things?

**A:** I will always say "I love you all" at the end of videos. That's it.

**Q:** Are there any rules on the platform that are limiting your content? If there are no limitations, what change will you have on your content?

**A:** Not really. I am pretty happy with what provided by platforms, including TikTok and Weibo.

**Q:** What is your favorite content that you have posted? Why?

**A:** One brings me about 50,000 followers and helped gathered my first group of followers. We really devoted a lot of time and energy into it and redid it for so many times. And my followers love it. They sent me photos and videos about their thoughts after they tried what I thought them. I know people will love this video before I send it out, yet I didn't expect it to attract so many followers and views.

About content, my standard is pretty simple - my followers like it, then I like it.

That video is a video that mimicking a starlet in China about his responses to his repetitive failures about getting the headline. Actually, I don't think it is reproducible. We tried mimicking the starlet who's famous for his extramarital affair recently, but it has not really received very positive feedback.

**Q:** What is the least favorite content that you have ever posted? Why?

**A:** No, none of them. All my videos are my babies, and I love them all.

## **About Interactions**

**Q:** What do you think makes you have such a large volume of followers?

**A:** Well, first of all, I do believe that I am just a third-tier video uploader, you know there are a lot of accounts which have more than 10 million followers and earning more than 10 million a year.

I think my reason for attracting so many followers is that I am always trying to teach my followers something useful. And I am still listening to my followers. I talk to them; I post on Weibo asking them what they want and accept their advice. I am not a stranger to them, you know, I am someone they trust. In terms of how meaningful my interactions with my follower is, I would say 51%. Because they are just important, as important as my videos.

**Q:** Do you have a habit of interacting with your followers?

**A:** Yes! As I have just said, I am always interacting with my followers. I talk to them, I mean, I reply to their comments, I respond to their direct messages, I talk to them in my live streams. Some followers even have my private WeChat account. I speak to them every day, EVERY, DAY.

**Q:** What are the most common reactions of your followers after you post new content?

**A:** Well, I usually receive comments only in the first few hours after posting my videos, most of them are comments about my performances, and opinions from my followers. There are always a few comments that not related to the video yet show my followers' support by saying they are the first people who comment on my video, such as “sofa!” or “comment first and then watch.”

On TikTok they also click like to show their loves to me

**Q:** Do you have any interaction experiences with your followers that impressed you a lot?

**A:** Yes, a lot, really a lot. The most positive one is that I once saw a follower in the subway that was replying to my video. Her reply was a very long one with supports and advice for me. I was so moved, and I tapped her shoulder and said, hey, do you want to talk to me directly instead of waiting for my reply? And she's so happy we talk for almost an hour before she got off the subway.

The most negative one is that there once has a follower who attacks me with different accounts every time I post new content out. And the reason for that was I had a negative comment on a starlet that she was following. And my comment is even not a very harsh one and based on facts! I sometimes just don't get why some followers of other starlets are so sensitive. I don't think my followers would do similar things! They are the cutest people in the world.

## **Persona**

**Q:** What part of you do you think makes your followers follow you?

**A:** My videos, of course. I would say 90%. Then 10% for my beauty(laugh). But I do think that people follow me in Weibo for different reasons than in TikTok. I am more leisure in Weibo, and this is different side of me.

**Q:** What part of you do you think makes your followers unfollow you?

**A:** I am a very objective and direct person. If I don't like a product, I would just say it out loud. That might make some of my followers unfollow me. But I don't regret it.

And there is also one time that I was ill, and in hospital for a few weeks, I lost about 10% of my followers. Sad.

**Q:** What words would you choose to describe yourself?

**A:** Cute? Hardworking? Beautiful? Nice?

**Q:** What sentences would you choose to describe yourself as an influencer?

**A:** A girl with an infinite passion for beauty products and skills of makeup.

**Q:** Have you intended to shape your image in front of your followers?

**A:** No, never. The one behind the screen is exactly who I am in real life. I don't want to fake an image that is better than me.

**Q:** Can you recall any words that your followers are using or have used to describe you?

**A:** Beautiful, sweet patient. I think it will be pretty the same as the word I use to describe myself.

**Q:** Do you think there are any changes in your image from the very start of your influencer career?

**A:** Yes, there are changes, I am growing after all. I am an extremely straightforward person at the first beginning when I was uploading content. I hurt a lot of people when I discommend something and sometimes, I will just block who was not agree with me. Now I won't do those things. I am more openminded and care more about the feeling of others. After all, my followers generally don't like aggressive influencers, and I am trying to be a person that is not aggressive.

## **Platforms**

**Q:** Do you post content anywhere besides the platform that you are active in? Are you active on multiple platforms?

**A:** No, just Weibo and TikTok. They are different things to me. TikTok is a place for me to show the outcome of my work, my serious work. I treat it very carefully, and I will not post anything that is not well produced. Weibo is different, I can send texts and videos about my thoughts, about my daily life, I won't do those at TikTok.

There are no similar platforms with Weibo in China, so I have no choice. In terms of TikTok, well, the only similar platform is Kwai, but that is not the platform for people like me. It's not a fashion and stylish platform, and users of Kwai are poorly educated. I tried Kwai actually, but all the comments

I receive is something like, “Hey, how much can I buy you for a night,” very disgusting. Kwai seems to have no young female users, and young female users are my target audiences.

**Q:** Which platform do you like most?

**A:** Where my followers go, where I go. So different platforms basically make no differences to me.

**Q:** Do you think there are differences in the followers on different platforms that you are uploading content?

**A:** From my observation, they are basically the same groups of people. I can even name the most active one hundred followers in TikTok and Weibo, the list will be almost the same.

### **Others**

**Q:** Do you want more followers?

**A:** Of course, I will be happier with more followers, but that’s not something I care about. More followers might also bring me higher requirements, ask me to devote more time to it. I have a day-job, and I also love it, I don’t really want to ruin my influencer experience by getting more followers. Also, more followers will reduce my interaction with my followers, and I will not be able to find those who I am familiar with. I think this will damage my relationship with my follower. Most of my friends and I do most of my talks with my followers on Weibo; more followers might influence my image in Weibo more than Kwai. Those who have so many followers must be very good at keeping their image.

## Appendix A.3 Interview Transcription with Interviewee B

### Backgrounds of Interviewee B

Interviewee B is an uploader active in Weibo, Kwai, and Tik Tok. B has about 1.7 million followers in Kwai, about 600 thousand followers in Weibo, and about 500 thousand in Tiktok. B uploaded videos about his daily life 8-10 times a week.

### About Content

**Question(Q):** Do you upload new content every day?

**Interviewee B(B):** Yes, I will upload at least one video each day to keep my account active. Sometimes two videos a day if there is something worth celebrating. People want to watch my videos so severely, some of them will wait for my update. If I don't upload new videos, then messages and comments that push me to upload new content will be everywhere.

I don't have to do too many things about recording videos. A video costs me an average of only 10-20 minutes, so one video per day works pretty well for me.

**Q:** How do you decide what content to generate/upload?

**B:** My content is my life; I don't have to decide anything. I just let it happen. I will usually choose those which make me, my family, and my friends (Interviewee B also refer his followers as friends.) happy.

**Q:** Since beginning to use Kwai and Tik Tok, has the content you generate/post changed, such as the style, content genre, etc.?

**B:** No, my style is like myself. Never changed.

**Q:** What kind of features do you always add in your videos or when you are interacting with your audiences? Such as logos, gestures, slogan, or other things?

**B:** I will always say hi and say goodbye to my friends. That's it.



**Q:** Are there any rules on the platform that are limiting your content? If there are no limitations, what change will you have on your content?

**B:** I don't get Kwai's rule about promoting a video to their frontpage. Sometimes the admin tells me that because my videos have "brand exposure" or "potential hazards" so that they are not allowed to add that video to the front page. I am just confused. Also, Kwai only allows me to upload videos within 60 seconds, that's not enough for me to say hi to my friends!

And I am not really allowed to talk about everything to my friends, you know, a lot of sensitive words that might cause me to lose my friends or even the account. (B didn't elaborate on what those sensitive words are.)

**Q:** What is your favorite content that you have posted? Why?

**B:** Every content is my favorite content because they are all my memories. When I upload something, I don't think about data performance, strategies, or whatever. I am not that highly educated, I can't figure those things out. But sometimes I will delete those videos with lower views and likes, to make my homepage neat. I don't want my new friends browsing a bunch of boring videos, I want everyone happy.

**Q:** What is the least favorite content that you have ever posted? Why?

**B:** No, as I said, no. Period.

### **About Interactions**

**Q:** What do you think makes you have such a large volume of followers?

**B:** I am a REAL person. Not like those celebrities or starlets that only show what their audiences want. I don't like those starlets. And also, I talk, every video is made for my friends. I chat to them in the video, I chat to them in live streams.

Also, because of my face, I guess. I have a foreigner's face. People sometimes amazed at how good my Mandarin is, but I am Chinese myself.

Yes, I don't reply to comments on my video, most of them are boring, and some of them are offensive. As I said, I am always talking to my friends in my video, that the most critical part.

**Q:** Do you have a habit of interacting with your followers?

**B:** Yes, and No, as I said in the last question. I am always talking to them, but only in my videos.

**Q:** What are the most common reactions of your followers after you post new content?

**B:** Questions about my family and myself. They are always curious about me and my family, sometimes my son and my daughter, specifically. Some old friends would leave comments that related to my content, I sometimes reply to them in my next video. There are usually too many comments, I am not able to respond to all of them. If I answer to only one or a few of them, those who I didn't reply sometimes will accuse me of ignoring them. And I don't like typing. The voice-to-text function in Kwai also works not very well for my northeast accent.

**Q:** Do you have any interaction experiences with your followers that impressed you a lot?

**B:** My friends really care a lot about me. There are always words that warm my heart. The video about my son admitted to an excellent college has more than 1,000 congratulations. I am delighted that I met so many friends.

## **Persona**

**Q:** What part of you do you think makes your followers follow you?

**B:** Did you already asked this question? Realness, I would emphasize it again. Because of my realness.

**Q:** Which part of you do you think that makes your followers unfollow you?

**B:** Some people think I am a fake Chinese. They consider me as someone who learned Chinese and trying to take advantage of my appearance. Some other friends don't like me selling products from my farm. Whatever.

**Q:** What part of you do you think makes your followers unfollow you?

**B:** Normal people, a father, someone who really likes making friends.

**Q:** What sentences would you choose to describe yourself as an influencer?

**B:** Someone who's trying his best to give his family a better life. Someone who's trying his best to bring happiness to his friends.

**Q:** Have you intended to shape your image in front of your followers?

**B:** No.

**Q:** Can you recall any words that your followers are using or have used to describe you?

**B:** Uncle, friends, real?

**Q:** Do you think there are any changes in your image from the very start of your influencer career?

**B:** No.

### **Platforms**

**Q:** Do you post content anywhere besides the platform that you are active in? Are you active on multiple platforms?

**B:** I post content simultaneously on TikTok, Kwai, and Weibo, so that I can be exposed to more friends than just uploading videos on Kwai. But for Kwai and Weibo, basically, I just move my content in Kwai to TikTok and Weibo. I don't read the comments there, I don't really care about the views there.

**Q:** Which platform do you like most?

**B:** Kwai. Kwai gave me the chance to show myself to others. Thank you Kwai! Most of my friends are using Kwai, I am a heavy user of Kwai. Kwai is a platform that closer to my life, not like TikTok or Weibo. TikTok is a young people's world, and I am just simply having no idea what to do in Weibo, and there is no interesting content there. Besides, I like watching videos more than watching texts and pictures. What's more, I know the rules in Kwai most, I don't want to learn new things.

**Q:** Do you think there are differences in the followers on different platforms that you are uploading content?

**B:** I don't know what my followers look like in TikTok and Weibo. I am not able to answer this question.

## Others

**A:** Do you want more followers?

**Q:** Of course! Who doesn't want more followers? I don't see any reasons that are stopping me from making more friends.

## Appendix A.3 Interview Transcription with Interviewee C

### Backgrounds of Interviewee C

Interviewee C is an analyst at a short-video social media analysis company, has her personal Weibo and TikTok account with more than 200,000 followers. She only answered a few questions among our questionnaire.

### About Content

**Question(Q):** Do you upload new content every day? To your knowledge, do most influencers upload new content every day?

**Interviewee C(C):** I don't upload new content every day. Most influencers in TikTok or Kwai upload content every two days or three days. The requirements of audiences are getting higher and higher, influencers need to post edited and interesting content to retain audiences. Generally, those influencers with more than 1 million users are not in a hurry, they usually post 4-5 videos a week. Yet those with about 1-3 million users will post 7-8 videos a week, I guess they are trying to get more followers by posting more content. I am not sure if this strategy works.

Some influencers are using short-video platforms to sell products. Those influencers have a lot of things to concern, such as prices, logistics, etc. The progress of the whole supply chain is limiting their content release speed.

The situation is different in Weibo, as there are video influencers and text or picture influencers there, it's hard to generalize their peace about uploading content.

**Q:** Since beginning to use Kwai and TikTok, has the content you generate/post changed, such as the style, content genre, etc.? How about the situations in general?

**C:** I didn't change the type of content since I started to use TikTok. To my understanding, at least 70% of influencers tried at least two kinds of styles or genres of content. The goals of a lot of uploaders are just getting famous. Once they realize one type of content they made is not good enough to attract enough audiences, they will switch to another track swiftly.

Also, audiences are having a higher requirement for video content recently, as well as shifting their interests to new areas constantly. Funny, dancing, and cute kids/pets used to be the three most popular

genres in TikTok and Kwai. Yet we realize that audiences are more leaning towards to fashion, beauty, and sports-related content, especially in the first a few months of 2020. Such changes require content generators to have a relatively high understanding of the specific topic they are about to talk about. Also, more and more content generators are now focusing on a specific niche as the requirements of audiences go up, they are not able to focus on more than one niches.

**Q:** What kind of features do you always add in your videos or when you are interacting with your audiences? Such as logos, gestures, slogan, or other things? How about other influencers?

**C:** For me, no. For most influencers, they add slogans, logos, or gestures to their videos, trying to make their audience remember them. A famous example is *Big Brother Giao* in Kwai, who's always saying “Giao Giao” in his videos. I even doubt he knows what the weird sound means, but it just works. A lot of audiences love mimicking the sound and follow him on Kwai.

There are also influencers mention those who sponsored them at the end of their videos, but not too many. A unique situation in Kwai is that almost every uploader would thank Kwai at the beginning or at the end of their videos, I guess it is because of the strict rules in Kwai.

In traditional platforms such as Weibo, I don't think there are such situations.

**Q:** Are there any rules on the platform that are limiting your content? If there are no limitations, what change will you have on your content?

**C:** There are so many rules for influencers in Kwai and TikTok. Just read the user agreement, and you will find out all the rules. Also, some politic related rules exist purely in China, but I will not elaborate on it. I think those rules are also part of the reason that uploaders in Kwai are thanking the admins of Kwai constantly.

**Q:** What is the favorite content that you have ever posted? Why?

**C:** Let's just stop focusing on me. For influencers, I bet they would say the one with most views is their favorite because of the exposure and followers it brings to them. And they will pretend they like it because their followers like it.

**Q:** What is the least favorite content that you have ever posted? Why?

**C:** For influencers, I bet their first a few videos will be the ones that they don't like – very few views, likes. They might also look silly.

## About Interactions

**Q:** What do you think makes those famous influencers have such a large volume of followers?

**C:** This is a very complicated question. For most influencers, high-quality content. Those content doesn't have to be very well-produced, but they need to be either exciting or teaching people some real skills. The good thing about short-video platforms is that those platforms only focus on your ideas. Platforms are doing their best to help influencers to produce what they want.

Also, there is another kind of influencers. We call them “little brothers” or “little sisters,” meaning those who attract followers solely with their good-looking bodies and faces. What they do is just posting some selfies and doing some talks with their audiences. It used to be a fast way to acquire a large number of audiences. Still, it's getting harder and harder for newcomers to attract audiences just by their appearances. Audiences have a higher taste nowadays, and you know, one thing that social media platforms don't lack is beautiful young people.

**Q:** Do most influencers have a habit of interacting with their followers?

**C:** Well, it also depends. Most influencers have a habit of replying to their followers by saying hi or answering questions of their followers in their videos. In general, influencers with a smaller number of followers tend to respond to their followers more frequently. Mega influencers, with more than 1 million followers, are almost impossible to reply to their followers. Once you answer to one follower, other followers will require you to respond to them as well, or you might lose those followers. And once you replied to a few followers under a video, you have to reply to followers under every video. Otherwise, you will be lost followers as well.

**Q:** What are the most common reactions of your followers after you post new content?

**C:** The most common ones are “sofa,” meaning the user who posted the comment is among the first a few people who see this post. Usually, most comments in Kwai and TikTok are about the content itself. Sometimes influencers will have inside jokes with their audiences, and those jokes are also common comments under influencers videos.

The situation is pretty the same on NSSMs such as Weibo, but comments in Weibo are usually less than in TikTok or Kwai. People comment on the things they can understand. They might not

understand or don't read text at all - but for videos, videos have so much information in it. You can hardly cease your impulsion to reply to the video.

## **Persona**

**Q:** Which part of you do you think makes your followers follow you?

**C:** The decision-making process of most people in TikTok or Kwai are:

- Saw some interesting video
- Enter your homepage to see if you have any other interesting content
- If you have more than five content that makes the audience happy, then the audience has a very high chance of following you.

So, I think still good content that is the key to attract audiences.

**Q:** Which part of you do you think makes your followers unfollow you?

**C:** After they follow you – I mean, followers have to follow you before they unfollow you, right? Almost every video you post will be sent to your followers' timeline – They will have 99% chance to see your content. If they consider your content is boring or offensive, or your opinion is different than theirs, you will be unfollowed. That's why I always emphasize that every influencer should avoid political and region related topics.

**Q:** What words would you choose to describe yourself? How about influencers?

**C:** Most influencers have a persona – meaning they have a very obvious “identity tag,” a fan will be able to say those tags out very quickly. We had researched this in 2019, and the result shows that more than 55% of influencers with more than 100,000 followers have a steady persona. Recently influencers are more and more focus on establishing a persona, especially those who attract their followers by their appearances at the first beginning.

**Q:** Have you intended to shape your image in front of your followers? How about influencers?

**C:** Of course! Otherwise, how come they can have a very obvious persona in such short notice. But I have to say the personae of most influencers are not coming from nowhere. They usually base their persona on who they are yet elaborate it for a little. For example, an influencer who used to be a farmer might depict himself as a hardworking people who went to his field every day with a meager



income, no matter how rich he is, or how lazy he might be. Usually influencers' persona will be very similar on different platforms.

## **Platforms**

**Q:** Do you post content anywhere besides the platform that you are active in? Are you active on multiple platforms?

**C:** Most short-video influencers are only active in one platform: either in TikTok or Kwai and use Weibo as their personal territories. For Weibo influencers the situation is vice versa. The atmosphere in Kwai and TikTok is so different. The preferences of followers are very different: nearly 70% of users only have one short video application on their phones<sup>14</sup>. The cost of posting on both platforms is actually very high, yet the ROI might be very low, because it is almost impossible to please users on both platform with the same content, even if the content is funny content.

But I also have to say that as some influencers are reaching their ceilings in terms of their follower number and their income. And actually, more and more mage influencers are establishing their accounts in both platforms, especially those who acquire followers by their good looking, and by funny content.

## **Others**

**Q:** What influence do you think that would bring to influencers persona when their number of followers grow?

**C:** More followers means more kinds of demands and higher requirements for you content. People has different interest points; thus, every detail of your content will be examined - you content have to stand to scrutiny. Also, most influencers' follower number looks stable – that's because they can't keep posting high-quality content to retain their followers, not because they do not have any high-quality content. So, I would say the more followers you have, the better quality your content is, the stronger persona you have. This effect would definitely augment on short video platforms like Kwai.

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<sup>14</sup> From 2019 Caas Influencer Report, 64% users only have one SSM application in their mobile phone among all the users who are using short-video social media apps

## **Appendix B Surveys**

Appendix B includes the survey question designs for audiences and survey results.

### **Appendix B.1 Survey Questions for Audiences**

#### **The Purpose of the Survey**

To examine the effects of personae, factors that affecting and reflecting personae, and impacts from different platforms to personae from an audiences' point of view.

#### **Respondents**

All the respondents are users who used both at least one of SSM and NSSM for more than 30 minutes in the past seven days.

#### **Questions List**

##### **The Effects of Persona on Influencers' Behaviors**

1. What elements are affecting your decision to follow an account? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is strongly negative effect, and 7 is strongly positive effect.
  - Past content with large view numbers (1-7)
  - Attractive account self-introductions (1-7)
  - Good impressions of the account (1-7)
  - Recommendation of others (1-7)
  - Other, indicate in the answer (1-7)
2. What elements are affecting you to judge whether a content is good or not? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect

- The content itself (1-7)
  - The account who upload the content (1-7)
  - Other, indicate in the answer (1-7)
3. What elements are affecting your decision on recommending an account to others? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect
- The content which the account release (1-7)
  - The overall image of the account in your mind (1-7)
  - The interaction of the account with its audiences (1-7)
4. Will you support the behaviors of an influencer solely because of their images in your mind? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is totally no influence, and 7 is totally influenced by the image

### **The Understanding of Influencer Personae from Audiences' Aspects**

1. Are you familiar with the word “influencer persona?” Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is totally not familiar, and 7 is extremely familiar
2. Among all the account you followed on short-video social media, how many accounts do you think that have a persona? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is none of them, and 7 is all of them
3. Among all the account you followed on other social media platforms, how many accounts do you think that have a persona? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is none of them, and 7 is all of them
4. What do you think are affecting people’s understanding of the persona of an influencer? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect
- Good content (1-7)
  - Frequent interactions with other accounts (1-7)
  - Frequent interactions with audiences (1-7)
  - Other, indicate in the answer (1-7)

5. In what way do you think personae can be reflected in the content influencers post? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is can't reflect at all, and 7 is totally reflecting the personae
- The percentage of likes (1-7)
  - The percentage of shares (1-7)
  - The percentage of forwards (1-7)
  - The percentage of comments (1-7)
  - The percentage of positive comments (1-7)

### **Persona Differences on Different Platforms**

1. Are there any differences between the influencer's persona on different platforms? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is no differences, and 7 is totally different
2. What elements do you think contribute to the differences? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not contributing at all, and 7 is all because of this
  - Different content, if any (1-7)
  - Different platform policies (1-7)
  - Different audiences (1-7)
  - Influencers' intentions (1-7)

## Appendix B.2 Survey Results

<i>Scores provided to respondents</i>	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	
What elements are affecting you to judge whether a content is good or not? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect								
The content itself (1-7)	1	14	5	0	0	0	0	<i>*number of</i>
The account who upload the content (1-7)	0	11	4	3	1	1	0	<i>respondents who</i>
Other, indicate in the answer (1-7)	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	<i>select corresponding options</i>
What elements are affecting your decision on recommending an account to others? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect								
The content which the account release (1-7)	3	14	2	1	0	0	0	
The overall image of the account in your mind (1-7)	0	15	3	1	1			
The interaction of the account with its audiences (1-7)	0	2	8	4	2	3	1	
Will you support the behaviors of an influencer solely because of their images in your mind? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is totally no influence, and 7 is totally influenced by the image								
	0	0	8	7	0	1	4	
<b>The Understanding of Influencer Personae from Audiences' Aspects</b>								
Are you familiar with the word "influencer persona?" Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is totally not familiar, and 7 is extremely familiar								
	0	15	3	2	0	0	0	
Among all the account you followed on short-video social media, how many accounts do you think that have a persona? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is none of them, and 7 is all of them								
	1	3	4	5	3	3	1	
Among all the account you followed on other social media platforms, how many accounts do you think that have a persona? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is none of them, and 7 is all of them								
	1	9	5	3	2	0	0	
What do you think are affecting people's understanding of the persona of an influencer? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not affecting at all, and 7 is extremely strong affect								
Good content (1-7)	0	15	3	2	0	0	0	
Frequent interactions with other accounts (1-7)	0	0	10	7	1	1	1	
Frequent interactions with audiences (1-7)	0	3	7	5	2	2	1	
Other, indicate in the answer (1-7)								

In what way do you think personae can be reflected in the content influencers post? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is can't reflect at all, and 7 is totally reflecting the personae

The percentage of likes (1-7)	2	7	6	3	2	0	0
The percentage of shares (1-7)	1	5	7	4	3	0	0
The percentage of forwards (1-7)	1	2	7	8	1	1	0
The percentage of comments (1-7)	3	6	7	2	2	0	0
The percentage of positive comments (1-7)	2	16	2	0	0	0	0

### Persona Differences on Different Platforms

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Are there any differences between the influencer's persona on different platforms? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is no differences, and 7 is totally different

0 1 2 2 8 4 3

What elements do you think contribute to the differences? Rank from 1 to 7, 1 is not contributing at all, and 7 is all because of this

Different content, if any (1-7)	0	11	6	3	0	0	0
Different platform policies (1-7)	0	8	5	3	3	1	0
Different audiences (1-7)	0	6	6	5	2	1	0
Influencers' intentions (1-7)	2	6	3	5	3	1	0

# Appendix C Information of Sample Influencers

## Appendix C.1 Influencer Factors of Selected Influencers

<i>Influencer</i>	<i>Influencer Code</i>	<i>Followers in Kwai</i>	<i>Followers in Weibo</i>	<i>N.SSM Persona Value</i>	<i>.SSM Persona Value</i>
King Hanqing	Influ. 1	2,202,000	1,057,731	0.082	0.061
giao brother	Influ. 2	6,130,000	1,485,530	0.101	0.199
Bean Ali	Influ. 3	6,916,000	329,038	0.105	0.176
Once Zhu	Influ. 4	1,360,000	1,769,330	0.106	0.165
Hand Geng	Influ. 5	2,416,000	1,867,213	0.107	0.166
Dog Gejiekesu	Influ. 6	10,091,000	1,177,715	0.117	0.199
Tire Baba	Influ. 7	17,319,000	1,134,034	0.121	0.152
Jill Village	Influ. 8	8,604,000	1,016,292	0.125	0.082
Carpenter and small Zou	Influ. 9	2,126,000	649,491	0.127	0.157
Ye Gongzi _ye	Influ. 10	16,096,000	534,907	0.131	0.280
Feng Timo	Influ. 11	1,674,000	10,108,781	0.132	0.279
Seven uncle Lord Brain	Influ. 12	4,188,000	3,563,605	0.132	0.201
Eaters dense sub-Jun	Influ. 13	498,000	16,502,356	0.134	0.118
papi sauce	Influ. 14	4,358,000	33,577,130	0.139	0.210
Meng red network is not tert joey	Influ. 15	3,777,000	2,324,141	0.141	0.181
Lid wer	Influ. 16	1,518,000	535,349	0.143	0.208
White Wave	Influ. 17	9,294,000	1,263,344	0.144	0.205
Huang Wenyu	Influ. 18	2,416,000	5,995,012	0.147	0.189
Cubs Daddy	Influ. 19	2,819,000	574,446	0.148	0.112
Small Yi Dynasty ye	Influ. 20	5,814,000	599,361	0.149	0.201
Hi s	Influ. 21	4,792,000	5,091,847	0.150	0.212
My name is Abbily	Influ. 22	5,500,000	2,095,433	0.156	0.218
Liming Lin	Influ. 23	16,745,000	8,601,953	0.159	0.231
Track call me Akagi just Gazette	Influ. 24	5,073,000	5,793,842	0.159	0.193
Pickle good thing	Influ. 25	14,963,000	916,842	0.161	0.253
Petrov Dong De liter	Influ. 26	1,778,000	154,217	0.163	0.236
Small Shen Long	Influ. 27	19,305,000	3,060,041	0.163	0.275
Li Ziqi	Influ. 28	8,648,000	24,607,540	0.167	0.237
Li Jiaqi	Influ. 29	7,424,000	15,600,221	0.168	0.126
Qingdao aunt Zhang Daxia	Influ. 30	6,463,000	42,335	0.170	0.205
Zhang Yisow	Influ. 31	31,338,000	1,259,757	0.170	0.264
Western Yunnan brother	Influ. 32	660,000	3,757,437	0.174	0.290
M brother	Influ. 33	6,663,000	1,089,973	0.174	0.255

Puncture strawberry porridge	Influ. 34	1,946,000	775,736	0.182	0.243
Zhou Zhouzhen cute	Influ. 35	17,934,000	1,203,524	0.186	0.309
Zhu Jia Hang	Influ. 36	1,001,000	310,374	0.189	0.294
Wang crooked	Influ. 37	14,207,000	1,040,044	0.189	0.280
Qi room kiki	Influ. 38	3,270,000	1,035,008	0.198	0.342
Sister turned out to be Simon	Influ. 39	1,140,000	3,298,504	0.199	0.267
Han Meijuan	Influ. 40	12,821,000	444,286	0.203	0.327

## Appendix C.2 Genre Information of Selected Influencers

<i>Influencer</i>
<b>Group1 Music/Dancing/Performance</b>
Bean Ali
Once Zhu
Feng Timo
Puncture strawberry porridge
Liming Lin
My name is Abbily
Han Meijuan
M brother
<b>Group 2 Lifestyle</b>
Jill Village
giao brother
Li Ziqi
Li Jiaqi
King Hanqing
Eaters dense sub-Jun
Petrov Dong De liter
Western Yunnan brother
<b>Group 3 Funny</b>
Hand Geng
papi sauce
Meng red network is not tert joey
Lid wer



Huang Wenyu  
Small Yi Dynasty ye  
Pickle good thing

---

**Group 4 Pets and Kids**

Cubs Daddy  
Dog Gejiekusu  
Tire Baba  
Carpenter and small Zou

---

**Group 5 Sports and Gaming**

Wang crooked  
Hi s  
White Wave

---

**Group 6 Recommendations/Purchasing**

Sister turned out to be Simon  
Zhou Zhouzhen cute  
Track call me Akagi just Gazette  
Qi room kiki  
Zhu Jia Hang

---

**Group 6 Others**

Ye Gongzi \_ye  
Seven uncle Lord Brain  
Small Shen Long  
Qingdao aunt Zhang Daxia  
Zhang Yisow

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