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Analyzing Tate McRae's Instagram Through Marwick and boyd's Lens

Celebrities always strive to possess the biggest and best fanbase. This means staying connected with fans, routinely and cautiously to maintain engagement. The digital era of today adds a pivotal development to this practice of attaining and appeasing the celebrity's imagined audience: social media. Social media has become a groundbreaking platform for celebrities and influencers worldwide to connect with their fans and followers, as well as shape their public personas to connect and reach such imagined audiences. One platform, specifically intended to fulfill this purpose stands out when it comes to followers: Instagram. Instagram is a social media platform that curates "self-representation" of the content creator, blending authenticity with performance, to form deeper connections with the imagined audience, thus expressed through followers.

"Self-representation" is a concept deeply inspected by PhD Candidate at NYU's Department of Media, Culture, and Communications Alice E. Marwick and researcher at Microsoft Research danah boyd through their article, "I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately." In short, self-representation is collaborative. Self-representation, or the shaping of identity, unites a vast range of audiences together to become the one target or imagined audience through selectively disclosing personal information and altering perceptions. Common strategies are applicable to most celebrities on social media platforms, and rising pop star Tate McRae is no different.

Known for her emotional yet invigoratingly powerful lyrics and heart-shatteringly relatable themes, McRae utilizes her Instagram to connect with her complex, imagined audience, through similar strategies and analysis found in Marwick and boyd's framework. Tate McRae's Instagram presence, viewed through the lens of Alice Marwick and danah boyd's article, conveys relatability to her audience through her authentic representation of images, songs, and heartbreak while simultaneously symbolizing the evolution of pop music. In curating a more promiscuous persona while maintaining relatability, she strategically targets her complex imagined audience, reflecting her significance in the future of the pop industry. Although her complex imagined audience ranges from a female genre viewing her with admiration to men objectifying her in a sensual sense, she conveys an Instagram presence and feed that accommodates all viewers.

When strolling through McRae's feed, a general theme and aesthetic can be identified. Despite her prevalent popularity and presence as an upcoming pop star, her feed aesthetics produce a more promiscuous yet edgy, Adidas-sponsored, and Sporty Spice feel. This sense of sensuality through her outfits, poses, and more can connect to several different audiences, ultimately connecting with the phenomenon enlarged by Marwick and boyd's article. Combining viewers to create one imagined and targeted audience is concluded as "context collapse," (Marwick and boyd, p.122). Through a bold and sexually powerful image, McRae creates a verifiable singular identity. The "context collapse" was defined in their conclusion of such created "tension", or in this case, her aesthetic, motivating wide and diverse audiences to "flock to a social network," here being McRae's Instagram account (Marwick and boyd, p.122). Thus, this overlapping of audiences obtained by McRae strategically conceals information, while enlarging enticing or attracting strategies. In concealing information, she, in agreement with

Marwick and boyd's conclusion, targets different audiences in "attempting to portray both an authentic self and interesting personality," (Marwick and boyd, p.122).

Firstly, McRae's most evident tactic towards gaining her imagined audience is her music discovery, or fans extending their support beyond streaming and onto other platforms, such as social media. Whether it's from fandom or random exposure, McRae's account following continues to increase from its current 4.5 million followers by strategically employing a sense of curated authenticity within her posts and music. McRae's posts often are music videos, performances, or photos, containing her music, thus producing a thematic strategy on her account.

Her songs often explore themes of heartbreak, self-discovery, and the complexities of relationships, capturing emotional vulnerability, heartbreak, loneliness, and the struggle for self-acceptance. Universal emotion combined with raw and honest lyricism makes her music relatable, resonating with many listeners, especially those navigating similar emotions.

Articulating feelings of sadness and empowerment through her singing and expressive dancing, she creates a sense of authenticity and brings visibility to her audience, fostering trust and connection. Further, the dancing content and posts consist of fluid, sharp, and painful choreography, reflecting the emotional intensity and heartbreak of the lyrics in her songs. Sharp movements reflect the painful lyrics, enlarging her emotional ache, while seductive moves including twerking, body rolls, hip isolations, floor work, popping and locking, and flicks and whips produce a sexy yet powerful feeling that she can move on from her heartbreak, and so can her imagined audience.

Aside from building credibility through expressive song and dance, her feed additionally enhances these themes of authenticity, relatability, and vulnerability through cohesive visual

storytelling. By sharing both polished images and backstage moments, she strikes a balance that fosters a genuine connection and community of trust with her audience. Building such authenticity, trust, and connection are used to curate a parasocial interaction with followers. Thus, followers landing in the imaginary audience respond as if McRae is a personal acquaintance or on deeper identification levels recognizing McRae's characteristics shared by themselves. Aside from the content posted, she instills parasocial interaction by reposting fans' recreations of her tour performances or dance routines to her trending songs. According to Erving Goffman, this un-structuralized, un-algorithmic, and more casual feeling content creates the "backstage feel," "conceptualizing identity as a continual performance," and revealing a more personal connection or "candid" aspect of McRae (Marwick and boyd, p. 123). It motivates the imaginary audience to view her as a friend and someone they can identify with, rather than the typical celebrity, thus creating a diverse audience and following.

Additionally, through her stylistic choices, McRae attracts another category of audience. McRae's fame has allowed her to soar up the pop-ranking charts, so the extension of this pop-star image is far from surprising. However, to go beyond her typical collective of pop listeners she already attracts, she decides to use symbolic references to a famous 2000s face of pop: Britney Spears. When simply searching #TateMcRae on Instagram's explore or search pages, it's inevitable to not see side-by-side comparisons of the two pop stars. Returning to McRae's feed, it can be analyzed that some concert performance recordings are edited to have a VHS aesthetic or feel. While commonly appearing as the use of an aesthetic overlay for the pop star's music video, it creates a reference to pop in the early 2000s, dominated by Britney Spears.

Semiotics, the theory and study of these signs, reveal how things come to have meaning or significance within cultures, especially through repetition or pattern, like the VHS overlay.

Another example is how McRae's more recent posts have been performances or photographs of her wearing the iconic Britney Spears total-pop-star headset. Wearing the headset, the signifier, symbolizes or signifies how McRae is indirectly claiming to be the next face of pop while paying tribute to the past of the genre. Additionally, by resurfacing the legendary trends of Spears, she extends her category of audience to gain noticing, liking, and possibly being followed by the Spears fandom or millennials.

Concluding with arguably the most evident noticing of McRae's account, her feed illuminates a provocative and scandalous feel. At first glance, viewers are destined to see skin, midriff, or cleavage. Further, the first twelve posts when scrolling on McRae's feed consist of poses arching her back, accentuating curves, and revealing cleavage, creating a collection of seductive and sensual photos, videos, dances, lyrics, poses, and more. Each music video is filled with sexual dancing, the tracing of her body and lips with fingers, as well as sensual hair flips, all in skimpy, strappy, and lingerie-style clothing. This is exemplified through one of her most recent posts provocatively dancing while wearing a revealing, mesh corset, covering only the nipple of the breast with embroidery.

However, such promiscuous and risqué theming, such as the corset, extends her imagined audience. It connects to audiences in a wide range of ways. To women, McRae singing about heartbreak in a stunning, yet revealing appearance instills feelings of power and strength to move on after heartbreak. It provides women with a role model and someone who makes them seem respected, seen, heard, and appreciated. Although they aren't friends, it feels like an acquaintance, rather than a fandom, because of the parasocial interaction built.

Contrastingly, this promiscuous appearance and aesthetic of McRae's feed can attract a polar category of audience. To men, some possibly unable to name a Tate McRae song, they see

her feed, drool, and instantaneously follow. They may not be a fan and could be undermining her talent, but see such revealing content and merely view her in a sexualized lens. Although this fandom is brought in for arguably the wrong reasons, McRae uses her beauty, stage-presence, and sensual mannerisms to her advantage. She extends her imagined audience and continues to “context collapse,” combining a wide range of viewers to create one imagined and targeted audience.

McRae’s ability to switch between relatable emotional narratives and bold, confident representations illustrates how pop artists can navigate complex social dynamics while maintaining a diverse following or imagined audience. McRae's Instagram account serves as a compelling example for the evolution of self-presentation among contemporary pop artists. Through her blend of authenticity and a more promiscuous persona, she successfully engages a complex imagined audience while reflecting broader trends of the past, present, and future in the pop music industry. As Marwick and boyd highlight, there is a cruciality of negotiation between authenticity and performance for artists today. McRae evokes this dynamic on her Instagram account through signifying individuality, relatability, sensualism, and power while indicating her role in shaping the future of pop music to her complex imagined audience.

Works Cited

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