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What Is The Trend Of Deinfluencing Promoting? And Why?

Introduction

Social media has become an integral element of everyday life, serving as a significant platform for acquiring information on which consumers make decisions based on influenced recommendations. This new digital age of marketing has come a new strategy: influencer marketing. Over the course of a decade, influencers have become treated as experts in their field and are responsible for influencing the decisions of millions through peer-to-peer marketing. Research shows that young adults often visit platforms like Instagram or YouTube for product reviews before making a purchase, and frequently purchase items solely because influencers recommend them on social media (Croes and Bartels). Social media influencers present themselves as “ordinary” people online and appear approachable, authentic, and friendly, and consumers are generally positively influenced by online advertisements featuring endorsers with whom they can identify (Croes and Bartels; Basil, 1996). Thus, research shows that identification with endorsers is strongly linked to buying behavior because young adults’ perceived risk is significantly reduced when they make a purchase based on their admiration of and trust in social media influencers (Croes and Bartels; Djafarova). They have a disproportionate amount of influence over their peers—all to meet the marketing and commercial objectives of an organization (Abed and Ali). But what begins to happen when people start to rally against this hyper-consumerist lifestyle? This exercise of discouraging consumers from purchasing products

is an interesting concept called 'deinfluencing'. In a social media landscape that has recently seen a boom in sponsored/paid posts by influencers, this trend seems like a respite for consumers, who wish to get genuine reviews to make informed decisions, but also as an antidote to consumption itself. It must be mentioned that one of the most important goals of deinfluencing is to discourage over-consumption (Chawla).

My research object is three videos (two from Instagram, and one from TikTok), that use the #deinfluencer & #deinfluencing within their descriptive captions. The first example is an Instagram reel from deinfluencer Laura Girard's account: @laura.girard. This video represents the intended definition and purpose of the deinfluencer trend, according to Chawla, and covers anticonsumerism and perceived expectations of influencer culture and products. Girard's video will stand as a comparative example to the second and third videos as a basis for proper engagement with the hashtag "#deinfluencer/#deinfluencing" and overall trend according to Chawla's definition as stated above. The second research object is a video from Alyssa Stephanie's TikTok account: @alysastephanie. The video is titled "TikTok cult products that I hate," and captioned with the tags "#deinfluencer/#deinfluencing." In the video, she capitalizes on products that are the current "craze" on TikTok claiming to deinfluence her audience on their consumption. However, as I will reveal in my analysis, her approach further contributes to consumer capitalism by redirecting viewers to cheaper alternative products rather than refusing the promotion of consumption of these products at all. Analyzing the term deinfluencer and the pattern that has emerged as a hashtag trend is crucial to communication studies as it offers a window into the evolving landscape of digital communication and consumer culture. These videos specifically reveal dynamics, ethical considerations, and malleable definitions of the social media trend through its discourse.

To thoroughly understand and analyze the deinfluencer trend as culturally significant, I will actively engage with the research object through the production of a feminist critique stemming from a Marxist lens that focuses on anticonsumerism, commodification, and ideological state apparatuses. The following research questions will guide such critique:

- How does each social media influencer engage with the “deinfluencer” trend?
- What does each social media influencer being female have to do with promoting such a trend & culture? In what ways can each of these videos be used to analyze how women are exploited through capitalism?
- How do #deinfluencer posts reflect broader societal shifts towards responsible consumerism and sustainability?

With these research questions, I intend to analyze deinfluencing rhetoric and how these posts are reflecting broader societal shifts toward responsible consumerism. I hope to reveal their relevant impacts on consumerism and influencing as a whole, and its connection to a growing desire and redefining of authenticity in social media marketing.

Literature Review & Methodology

Ecofeminism & Marxist Feminism

Ecofeminism philosophy as a social movement, investigates the links between environmental issues and women’s oppression. It contends that there are striking parallels between the dominance and exploitation of nature and the oppression of women. Ecofeminism emphasizes the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and environmental concerns and calls for an understanding of the interdependence of all kinds of oppression and the pursuit of social and environmental justice (Sollund; Mies, and Shiva). As a metatheoretical perspective that provides

a critique of many facets of Western culture, ecofeminism predicts global consequences of catastrophic proportions if current interrelated systems of oppression are permitted to continue to exist (Bigwood). On social media, deinfluencers often critique and challenge the mainstream narratives that are promoted by influencers, which may include consumerist, patriarchal, or environmentally harmful ideologies (Gaard). Ecofeminism similarly seeks to challenge dominant paradigms that exploit both men and the environment, so deinfluencers may align with ecofeminist goals in critiquing and offering alternatives to these narratives. Ecofeminism emphasizes the need for sustainable and ethical relationships with the environment and each other. Social media deinfluencers may promote sustainable living practices, ethical consumption, and environmental activism, which are consistent with ecofeminist values of care, interconnectedness, and stewardship of the Earth (Reuther). Feminist theologian Rosemary Reuther defines ecofeminism as the symbolic and social link between women's subjugation and nature's dominance, founded on a fusion of the radical ecology movement and feminism. She specifically urges that the women's movement collaborate with the ecological movement to envisage a dramatic restructuring of core socio-economic ties and societal ideals (Reuther).

Both ecofeminists and deinfluencers emphasize the importance of collective action and grassroots organizing in challenging oppressive systems. Ecofeminist theory encourages solidarity and collaboration among diverse social movements, including those focused on environmental justice and economic equality. Deinfluencers may mobilize their platforms to promote collective efforts to resist consumerist ideologies and advocate for systemic change, aligning with ecofeminist visions of transformative social and environmental justice. Overall, deinfluencers can contribute to ecofeminist goals by critiquing capitalist exploitation, promoting

sustainable alternatives, adopting an intersectional analysis of consumption, and mobilizing collective action to challenge oppressive systems and promote social and environmental justice.

Marxist feminist theory is a framework that combines elements of Marxist theory with feminist analysis to understand and address issues of gender inequality within the context of capitalist societies. It emerged in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries (late 1900s and early 2000s) At the same time ecofeminism and feminists began applying Marxist ideas about class struggle, exploitation, and capitalism to the study of gender oppression (Donovan). Marxist feminist theory and ecofeminism both critique capitalism and patriarchy, highlighting how these systems oppress women and exploit nature. They share common ground in their structural analyses of oppression, recognition of intersectionality, and emphasis on collective action for social change. Marxist feminism focuses more specifically on economic exploitation and class struggle within capitalist societies, advocating for socialist transformation. Ecofeminism emphasizes the interconnectedness of gender, nature, and spirituality, calling for sustainable and equitable relationships with the environment.

While they have distinct emphases, both perspectives contribute valuable insights to understanding and addressing the complex interplay between gender, capitalism, and ecological sustainability. Deinfluencers, who question the authority of conventional influencers, interact with Marxist feminist theory through criticisms of consumerism, efforts to redistribute power, identification of interlocking forms of oppression, and advocacy of collective action (Donovan). By challenging consumerist culture and promoting underrepresented perspectives, deinfluencers accord with Marxist feminist criticisms of capitalist exploitation and patriarchy. They push for more equal representation on social media platforms and work with a variety of social groups, highlighting the power of collective action in opposing repressive systems and promoting social

justice. In essence, deinfluencers contribute to larger efforts to destroy oppressive structures and promote gender equality, following Marxist feminist philosophy. principles, and seek personal pleasure and social approval. Similar to this, consumerism framed as feminism is an effective marketing tool because it is part of a hegemonic common sense of consumerism that allows companies to credibly present themselves as the vanguard of a consumer movement facilitating women's agitation and channeling resistance into commodity purchases (Johnston & Taylor). Consumerism is usually coded as feminine in a patriarchal culture, but where an older feminism would have rightly critiqued consumerism as something foisted on them by men, this feminist consumerism prioritizes commodity purchases and consumer choice above more ambitious goals; decentering the structural role of beauty in women's lives, processing negative emotions, or challenging men's relationships with feminine beauty (Johnston & Taylor).

Authenticity & Anticonsumerism

For this project, I will be using Beverland, Michael B., Francis J. Farrelly, and John Deighton's sourced definitions of authenticity; "Often described in terms of a 'search' or 'quest,' the desire for authenticity is also said to be a response to standardization and homogenization in the marketplace" (Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel 2006). Arnould and Price (2000) identify two means of appropriating authenticity to achieve self-authentication. The first is where the consumer cocreates product value or a consumption experience as part of self-authentication (an authenticating act). The second, described as authoritative performance, is a cultural display (such as rituals, festivals, or protest actions) representative of a social unit (e.g., family, affinity group, profession, and ethnic group) and what the consumer deems to be important aspects of life. Common to both is that the consumer is purposeful in linking the object or experience to

stories of the self as a means of displaying authenticity. There is widespread agreement that authenticity is a socially constructed interpretation of the essence of what is observed rather than properties inherent in an object (Beverland, et al.).

Deinfluencers seek authenticity by rejecting the shiny, manufactured content that conventional influencers provide. They accomplish this by sharing their experiences, weaknesses, and raw moments with their audience. This dedication to honesty may benefit them in a variety of ways. For starters, it may develop better ties with their audience if they choose to value the authenticity and relatability of their material over hyper-marketed and scripted reviews. This may build trust, loyalty, and engagement, resulting in more followers and prospects for cooperation. Furthermore, authenticity distinguishes deinfluencers from their more polished rivals, enabling them to carve out a distinct niche in the competitive influencer industry. They may use authenticity strategically to create a personal brand that appeals to authenticity-seeking consumers while also attracting companies searching for “real” collaborations.

Sally Robinson discusses the interaction between authenticity features in anticonsumerist critique as an a priori good that is always under threat, and while a great deal of energy is devoted to detailing that threat, the actual meaning of authenticity remains maddeningly vague. As numerous writers who have undertaken to pin down the meanings of authenticity have found, authenticity is known only by what it is not (Robinson). An anticonsumerist critique often relies on and perpetuates a gendered discourse about value, identity, and meaning that favors the masculine over the feminine and, more importantly, naturalizes the binary structure of gender itself. Because anticonsumerist critique rests on the assumption that consumer culture is inauthentic and de-individualizing, it must also identify and locate the authentic and the individual (Robinson). Authenticity can be an effective weapon for de-influencers, but for it to

be a weapon it must in turn cause destruction to mainstream influencers who rely primarily on polished representations and idealized lives in the same way that indie recording artists define themselves against pop music stars. As deinfluencers acquire popularity, they challenge the dominance of conventional influencers, thereby reducing their influence and marketability. Thus, while authenticity might be a useful advantage for deinfluencers, it also threatens the influencer industry's status quo.

Ideological State Apparatuses

Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) are societal institutions and structures that affect people's views, values, and attitudes in ways that reinforce the current social order or ideology. They work through education, media, religion, family, and other institutions to shape people's views and actions. Louis Althusser defines Ideological State Apparatuses as:

“Ideological State Apparatuses function massively and predominantly by ideology, but they also function secondarily by repression, even if ultimately, but only ultimately, this is very attenuated and concealed, even symbolic... If the ISAs “function” massively and predominantly by ideology, what unifies their diversity is precisely this functioning, insofar as the ideology by which they function is always in fact unified, despite its diversity and its contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of “the ruling class” (Althusser, 81).

Essentially, ISAs are systems for transmitting and maintaining dominant ideas within a community, sustaining the status quo, and fostering social cohesiveness. ISAs function and legitimize themselves through ideology (Althusser). Social media and influencers are actors that

perform within Ideological State Apparatuses by indirectly shaping people's beliefs, values, and behaviors.

Influencers and deinfluencers with large followings, use their platforms to consequently promote specific ideologies, lifestyles, and consumer behaviors, while the social media platforms themselves reinforce the dominant cultural norms and political viewpoints through algorithms and content curation. Deinfluencers, or individuals who actively work to counter the influence of mainstream influencers and challenge dominant ideologies, can be seen as a part of the dynamics of ISAs that introduce friction in the system. Their role is to disrupt the transmission of prevailing beliefs and values by offering alternative perspectives, questioning societal norms, and advocating for social change. Deinfluencers rely on the use of social media platforms to disseminate their messages and engage in counter-narratives that challenge the status quo being promoted by mainstream influencers and ISAs. In this way, they contribute to the diversity of ideas and viewpoints within an ideologically structured society, in a way that diverges thought and influential beliefs upheld by traditional ISAs. Altogether, influencers and deinfluencers form an online world that serves as an ideological echo chamber to normalize certain behaviors and promote consumerist ideology as it contributes to the maintenance and reinforcement of existing social order.

For my Methodology, I will be using a comparative and descriptive analysis of four videos through each lens discussed in previous sections: Ecofeminism & Marxist Feminism, Authenticity & Anticonsumerism, and Ideological State Apparatuses. To do this, I will be taking the transcribed audio (or if present, closed captions) from each video and rhetorically analyzing the language being used in the context of a deinfluencer video. I hope that dissecting the individual videos and the language being used as opposed to examining deinfluencer culture as a

whole, will provide specific insight and thought on the connections between feminism, consumerism, and this new age shift for social media influencing and consumer culture. There is already an existing field of scholars studying the discourse around influencing and consumer culture, yet because of its newness, there is a lack of scholarly or peer-reviewed studies that directly analyze deinfluencers and their content. *Vox*, *Ruby Media Group*, and *Dazed* are all media outlets that are studying these videos directly and discursively analyzing their contents and audience receptiveness and reactions. Rebecca Jennings from *Vox* writes about the “lie of deinfluencing” and how influencers will never influence the public to buy less stuff – It’s antithetical to the job (Jennings). Diyora Shadijanova from *Dazed* analyzes whether the new ‘deinfluencing’ trend is genuinely an antidote to our culture of overconsumption, or if it’s just a symptom of our economically turbulent times (Shadijanova). Kris Ruby from *Ruby Media Group* has the most thorough study of the deinfluencer trend overall as she divides the video from the producer and rather discusses how the trend has evolved and connected to broader ideas of American culture overall. Although these sources are not scholarly by definition, I will use them as references as they are directly engaging with videos similar to my research object and the deinfluencer trend including its evolution.

Analysis

In the field of communication studies, researchers often analyze how social media is used by individuals to interact, share information, and express themselves online. Social media is essentially a large playground for communication researchers to understand how people interact and communicate in the digital age. In connection with the influencer world on social media (specifically Instagram) comes a new version of influencing that essentially refuses

consumption through consumption: deinfluencing. Instagram is a marketing platform, and the term deinfluencer is a departure from this ideology. Analyzing the term deinfluencer and the pattern that has emerged as a hashtag trend is crucial to communication studies as it offers a window into the evolving landscape of digital communication. Looking at Instagram posts and reels that specifically use ‘#deinfluencer’ is the best site of analysis to understand how this trend is functioning rhetorically, including the effects it's producing. This ‘#deinfluencer’/ ‘#deinfluencing’ trend reflects shifts within consumer behavior and attitudes towards influencer culture, providing insights into power dynamics, authenticity, and trust in media messaging. As this trend is relevant and modern to the digital world, it’s becoming more malleable in definition as people are shifting its use by every video they post with the hashtag. By examining #deinfluencer on Instagram specifically within these posts, my research will explore platform dynamics, ethical considerations, and audience engagement in online discourse, producing a Marxist feminist critique that focuses on commodification, ecofeminism, and ideological state apparatuses.

My research object is made up of four different posts from Instagram that use the #deinfluencer & #deinfluencing within their descriptive captions. Three of the posts are reels (short videos), and one is a standard post comprising nine photos. These posts are similar to those you may see on TikTok, as both platforms enable short 30-60-second videos of all kinds to be posted and shared. Yet, it is different from your typical Instagram post or TikTok post, as the ones selected specifically use the hashtag of study, in combination with different rhetorical languages and discourses, to describe the trend of deinfluencing. These Instagram posts aim to debunk the hype surrounding certain products or services promoted by influencers. These Instagram posts about #deinfluencing typically feature captions and graphic overlays that

explain why a certain product is not worth purchasing, accompanied by other images and videos that illustrate the reasons behind the deinfluencer's opinion. The reels highlight specific features and aspects of the product that the deinfluencer found disappointing or misleading and include comparisons to alternative options that offer better value or overall performance. Overall, the tone of every post is often critical but informative, aiming to empower followers to make more mindful purchasing decisions and encouraging a more skeptical approach to influencer recommendations. As I will show in my analysis, however, this approach actually contributes to consumer capitalism by redirecting viewers to different products instead of refusing to consume at all. The history of the deinfluencer trend goes back to the beginning of 2023, as some of the first videos carrying the hashtag were released on TikTok. As an article from the source Dazed states, "We're in our deinfluencing era," as they describe the trend starting with influencers on TikTok telling their followers what *not* to buy under the guise of critiquing overconsumption and saving money (Shadijanova). The trend had mainly taken root in the beauty and lifestyle communities and consisted of videos in which popular products are labeled "overhyped." These 'Deinfluencing' videos began to surface at the beginning of the year as a sincere attempt to join the dots between trend cycles, unethical labor practices, and excess waste. Yet, as is often the case with online platforms, the trend has been co-opted by influencers to shill out even more products.

Deinfluencing videos feature influencers, dubbed "deinfluencers," candidly discussing regrettable purchases and urging viewers to be more discerning in their buying habits, considering factors like effectiveness and sustainability (Ruby). This movement has gained traction on social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, with millions of views and discussions under hashtags like #deinfluencing, signaling a growing interest in responsible

consumerism and sustainability. Deinfluencers are advocating for brands to adapt to changing consumer preferences and integrate corporate social responsibility into their marketing strategies (Ruby). This new phenomenon encourages consumers to reconsider purchases based on personal experiences, promoting more mindful consumption and challenging the pervasive influence of 'influencer' marketing. At first, many of the videos tagged "deinfluencing" were genuine appeals to push back against the influencer culture. However, the trend quickly morphed into a savvy anti-marketing marketing tactic as the hashtag gained popularity and people. Rather than persuading people to buy things, regular influencers would caption their posts using "#deinfluencing," and simply post negative reviews of products they didn't think were worth the money, and tell you what to buy instead (Jennings). There are still many ethical questions that persist, particularly regarding the authenticity of deinfluencer endorsements and the way deinfluencing fails to critique the underlying consumerist culture within influencer marketing. Deinfluencer creators are nonetheless aiming to dissuade their audiences from overconsumption and overspending on social media-driven trends. Despite misconceptions and political associations, deinfluencing represents a broader cultural shift from excessive consumerism to more conscientious consumption practices (Ruby).

Many popular media critics have written about the deinfluencer trend specifically concerning the TikTok platform, and they all are reaching similar conclusions about the trend. The pervasive influence of product promotion on TikTok has led to viewers being bombarded with recommendations, often accompanied by affiliate details and purchase links. In response, "deinfluencers" have emerged to challenge excessive consumption, offering honest advice and promoting conscious consumerism. This trend signals a broader shift in consumer behavior, urging companies to prioritize authenticity over short-term gains in their relationships with

influencers (Bramley).

As many critics go on to say, the rise of "deinfluencing" on TikTok reflects concerns about influencer integrity and the authenticity of product reviews, although opinions on its effectiveness vary (Adamczyk). Despite this, creators view it as an opportunity to establish trust with their audience and promote responsibility in influencer marketing. This trend, initially seen on TikTok, has spread to other platforms like YouTube and Instagram, providing brands with valuable feedback for product improvement (Adamczyk). Deinfluencing is not limited to specific categories and is recognized as a means for creators to build credibility with their audience (Chawla). While its impact on brands may vary, it underscores the importance of listening to consumer feedback and fostering transparency in social media marketing. As consumers increasingly demand authenticity and responsible practices, deinfluencing is poised to become a significant trend across various sectors (Chawla).

Sarah Macken wrote an article for the Sunday Times in which she investigates whether deinfluencing could help change our overconsumption habits. She talks about Fionnuala Jones, a Dublin-based podcaster known for sustainability talks, sharing used beauty products on Instagram, sparking a buzz (Macken). Jones shifted into "deinfluencing," a trend critiquing overhyped products, like pricey beauty gadgets, gaining momentum on TikTok. Jones believes it's a reaction to lockdown consumption spikes, urging a rethink of product accumulation. Lynn Hunter, founder of a talent agency, sees deinfluencing as vital for building trust with followers, stressing the need for authenticity. Eadoin Fitzmaurice, a content creator, emphasizes the importance of honesty amid sponsored content saturation, echoing Jones's sentiment on transparency (Macken). However, deinfluencing's effect on consumption remains unclear, with skeptics questioning its role in promoting alternative products. Jones sees deinfluencing as a

call for transparent influencer advertising, highlighting a shift in brand-influencer dynamics toward authenticity. TikTok fosters a more candid review environment, potentially driving more genuine collaborations and informed purchases. Ultimately, deinfluencing offers a path to authenticity in influencer marketing, aiding consumers in making informed choices and promoting credibility (Macken).

Aja Barber, the author of *Consumed: The Need for Collective Change - Colonialism, Climate Change & Consumerism*, has been documenting and analyzing similar concepts to the idea of deinfluencing for a long time. She emphasizes that the concept is far more intricate than merely suggesting product substitutions or deeming certain items unworthy of purchase, “if you actually care about deinfluencing people, teach them a thing or two about the places that they are buying from” (Barber). The deinfluencing trend stretches to include topics of sustainability and Barber reminds people that breaking old habits proves challenging, and she frequently reiterates her intention is not to promote more consumerism but smarter consumerism: “We all have a striped T-shirt, we all have a Breton top, we all have black trousers,” she says, “Here’s a way to put these pieces together in a way that feels fresh ... We’re looking at the shapes, we’re looking at the structures of the pieces, right? It’s not about having the particular brand” (Barber).

Influencers are often perceived as the knowledgeable friends you turn to for advice on living your best life, offering valuable tips and tricks as this is accomplished through an authenticity appeal. It's inherent to influencing that they share their genuine likes and dislikes; that's the essence of the role (McNeal). Critics may argue that influencers promote the same products due to sponsorship, and deinfluencing aims to counteract this trend. While it's true that some influencers endorse products solely for profit, and certain items gain popularity on social

media platforms through heavy influencer promotion, it doesn't necessarily mean that all endorsed products are disliked or insincerely promoted. Deinfluencing may be an entertaining trend and a popular term on TikTok, but the media's adoption of the concept reveals some misunderstandings about influencers (Bramley). Contrary to what some may believe, it doesn't signify the demise of the industry; rather, it represents a different iteration of the same phenomenon (McNeal).

The initial conclusions of my research object reveal that despite misconceptions, deinfluencing signifies a shift toward conscientious consumption rather than the demise of influencer culture. The Instagram reels and posts that I am choosing to highlight stand as descriptive posts in which the audience can see positive versions of the #deinfluencer trend at work. In conclusion, research on "deinfluencing" Instagram posts highlights a trend challenging consumerism and influencer culture. These posts offer insights into changing consumer attitudes towards product recommendations, reflecting a growing desire for authenticity and transparency in social media marketing. While the impact on actual consumption is unclear, deinfluencing signifies a shift towards responsible consumerism and prompts questions about influencer influence. Further exploration of rhetorical strategies and ethical implications is crucial for understanding their potential influence on consumer behavior in the digital age. As this paper goes on there is a set of research questions I hope to answer through my research: How does each social media influencer engage with the "deinfluencer" trend? What does each social media influencer being female have to do with promoting such a trend & culture? In what ways can each of these videos be used to analyze how women are exploited through capitalism? How do #deinfluencer posts reflect broader societal shifts towards responsible consumerism and sustainability?

Analysis - Research Object

Deinfluencing is a trend that was created to discourage viewers of social media content from hyper-consumption. Although the main goal is to promote anticonsumerist practices, some Instagram users have turned it into a marketing opportunity to promote their preferred products over those that are in favor. Through my analysis, I hope to reveal the truth behind this trend and Instagram members' manipulations of the deinfluencing trend, and why this confusion is controversial for audience members of this content. Using a Marxist analysis that focuses on consumer practices, and an eco-feminist approach to understanding women within such a field of digital videos, these methodological approaches allow me to reveal my thesis by thoroughly analyzing a set of videos that carry #deinfluencing.

Video #1:



The video above is from the Instagram account @Laura.girard, one of the self-proclaimed deinfluencers I will be analyzing. The video is from December 28, 2023 and at

the time of this analysis the video has 1,256,828 plays and 100,568 likes. To begin with the caption of the video she states, “Bull **** is in season this time of year - stay safe out there, besties!!”

Firstly, Girard is addressing her audience and followers by establishing a casual relationship with them by calling them her “besties”- this projects a trusting relationship with a deeper level of intimacy with her followers/audience. In her caption she also mentions the time of year being December, which is around Christmas and New Year’s by the videos’ release date. Addressing this holiday season as one that is filled with “bull****” asserts that there is nonsense being spread throughout society both online and offline that she warns her audience about. This characterization, when coupled with the mode of address to her audience as “her besties,” positions Girard as a trusted friend who is there to protect them before they have the chance to be swayed. Furthermore, her caption includes the hashtags, “#deinfluencing #deinfluenceme #consciousconsumerism #consumerism” each of which directly ties the video to deinfluencing along with the anticonsumerist practices that deinfluencing pushes.

The video itself is made in response to a comment she received on another post as there is a text bubble in the video from the account @jesskirchner stating “This content is a breath of fresh air.” Being that this comment was from one of her followers, it is acknowledging the content Girard is making and encouraging her to make more by saying she enjoys how refreshing it is to watch and hear deinfluencing content. If her audience is being so reciprocative towards this content then it is going to push Laura to continue making such videos which further push the deinfluencing agenda.

Girard begins the video by stating, “I think it’s time for a little more deinfluencing.” This demonstrates that deinfluencing is a recurring content subject on her social media page.

Then she jumps in. ““This _____ changed my life’ - did it?? Or is it just a concealer with a good shade match or did you, like, find a planner that you’re still excited about or did you like lose a marginal amount of belly fat?” Right away Girard deflects the claim that a certain product has the ability to change a person’s life entirely, and rather presents a more practical analysis of an individual finding a correct skin color match for a makeup product, or an agenda book that they have remained excited about and used since their purchase. She continues with a comment about weight loss products promoted on social media, by highlighting the individuals who lose a small amount of weight around their stomach area and proclaiming the product that was sold to them is to blame for the result. She then says, “We’re playing it fast and loose with the definition of ‘life-changing’ over here.”

There are two things to notice; Girard first is launching a wholesale critique of the exaggerated voice of Instagram influencers, who often claim that products have changed their lives. This critique gets to the heart of anticonsumerism at the center of deinfluencing, which asks viewers to think critically about how influencer marketing reinforces the ideology that the best and even only way to “live your best life” is through carefully managing the proper consumption of commodities. The second is that this framing reinforces Girard’s projected role as a trusted confidant talking to her friends. The use of “we” here connects and groups herself with the audience to include herself in the conversation rather than just talking at her audience. This re-acknowledges the trusting relationship that Laura promotes through her content. She thrives on relating, grouping, and connecting herself with her followers, and establishing such relationships promotes deinfluencing content because people find her content “refreshing” meaning, unlike the typical content they consume. Of course, this is the same rhetorical approach influencers use as well. Here it is used to critique influencing through the same

rhetoric but with a different message. And, also like influencing, this in turn benefits Laura as she gains views, likes, and followers from her continuing to create such content. So, although she is promoting smarter consumption or even anticonsumption, she is still gaining something personally by creating this content and staying on top of the trend. This is a pattern I will be analyzing later in this paper.

The video continues with, “Also, most people do not have eight besties... most people do not have eight besties (period) if each of those eight besties is getting matching stockings full of hundreds of dollars worth of product, chances are it’s a tax write off.” Mentioning stockings brings back the idea of the Christmas holiday season and the tradition of filling stockings with items of your choice to then give to other people. By including this in her speech, Girard is challenging the exaggerated use of the word “besties” in the culture, asserting that we all know you can only have one best friend, by definition. Again, this is ironic given that she also addresses her own viewers as her “besties.” Further mentioning the hundreds of dollars that an individual can spend on said stockings, ties in the absurdity of money that one may spend on the products themselves. Highlighting the act of spending said money on certain products, as part of one’s income as an influencer and content creator, it becomes a simple tax write-off for them, versus a genuine act of spending money as an audience member.

She continues this idea by saying, “In the comment section on those videos full of ‘what do you do for a living??’, ‘I wanna do what you do for a living!’, chances are you’re looking at it, and that’s Fine!” In many of the videos, she recognizes that there are people who are commenting on things that pertain to a state of wanting what another has, and she critiques this point of view when she mentions that what an audience member is watching is legitimately what they do for a living. The content creator and influencers’ income relies on the content they

are producing and the views, likes, comments, shares, etc. that they receive on a video which is all perpetuated by such comments. This ties it back together with being a tax write-off, as these individuals are filling these stockings for their social media content jobs. Girard continues to say, “We are ALL trying to live under capitalism but just keep that in mind,” which directly ties in with the current socio-economic climate. By saying that we are all living in a capitalist society, I believe Girard is trying to comfort her audience by relating to them and including herself within that “all” to make her more relatable to her viewers and make them feel less alone as they, too, are battling capitalism, together.

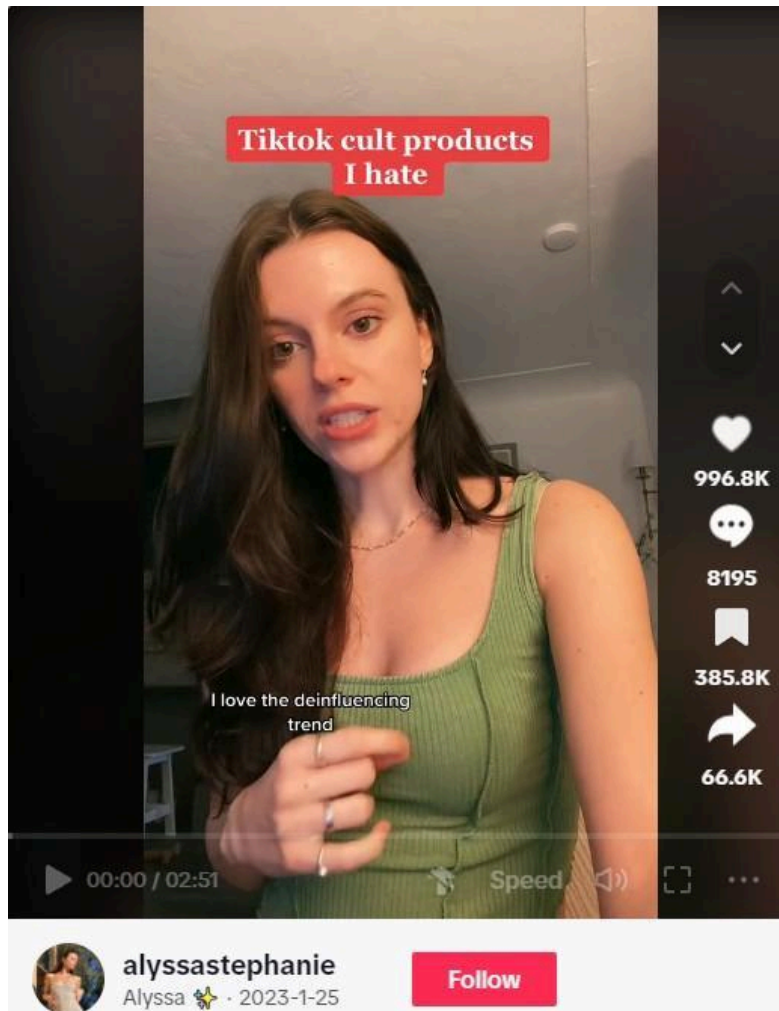
This is ironic to Girard’s account as she too is making content on social media that is marketed under the deinfluencer hashtag. Her videos receive the same attention that those of a standard influencer would receive. It’s just that her approach is to be more vulnerable and relatable to her audience and does the proclaimed opposite of an influencer. It is therefore granting her a higher seat within the social media trends as she is doing the proclaimed opposite of what an influencer is doing on their social media sites. This points to the large dynamic at play here: when a critique of a media form operates within the same platform, it is difficult to escape the structural dynamics one is critiquing. There would be no deinfluencing without there being influencing, as Girard herself is creating influencing content for her audience that is promoting anticonsumerist practices.

Girard ends the video by helping her audience prepare themselves to critique the upcoming post-Christmas appeals from influencers regarding New Year’s resolutions. She specifically targets the popular “75 Hard Challenge,” a weight loss and wellness fad focused on committing to changing your behaviors for 75 days. She says, “In a couple of weeks you’re gonna start to see the 75 hard videos, no matter how you **feel** about the 75 hard, the one thing

I can guarantee the 75 hard gives you is 75 days worth of content. So are you seeing people do the 75 hard? Or do you see the people make the content? And again that's fine. See the point about surviving under capitalism." What I am interpreting from what Girard is saying here is that she wants her audience to understand that some of these macro trends that are coming out of social media stem from influencers creating content that adheres to such algorithms and further gains them more revenue from the audience consuming such content. She is advising the audience not to base what they feel about the 75 Hard Challenge on the number of posts or people they see taking part, and to see through the marketing ploy to recognize that the influencers get paid not only for pushing certain products but for keeping their audience engaged.

A final pattern I notice within the video is her dismantling and disagreeing with the content standard influencers are presenting, she states "That's fine," almost to ensure that though she disagrees it doesn't mean that the other people are wrong for stating or promoting what they want to. She then brings up capitalism and society once again, as she relays "trying to survive" as if there is a unanimous detriment "all" people are experiencing under the vice of capitalism.

Video #2:



My second video is by @alyssastephanie on TikTok. Alyssa Stephanie is a content creator on both Instagram and TikTok, with the majority of her videos being posted on the TikTok platform. Though my analysis is mainly focusing on the platform Instagram, Alyssa Stephanie's video was removed by her on Instagram and is now only viewable on the TikTok platform. At the time of this analysis paper, the video has 998,000 likes, 8,201 comments, and 66,600 shares. The video is two minutes and 51 seconds long, but I will only be focusing on the first minute and forty seconds of the video for this analysis. The video was posted on January 25th, 2023.

Alyssa Stephanie's caption says, "I love deinfluencing *heart emoji*," clearly stating the sort of audience that she is trying to reach and the basis for the content of this video. Similarly, she uses the hashtags "#deinfluencing #deinfluencergang #cultproduct" within the caption of her video. As the video goes on, Alyssa Stephanie shows the products that she doesn't recommend people buy, which is ironic because she obviously had to have bought it to show it in the video or she was sent the product by the brand. After criticizing these products, she then recommends the cheaper option that she advises people to purchase instead.

Before I begin my thorough analysis of the video, it's important to state that her video, in particular, is twisting the meaning of deinfluencing from an anticonsumerist perspective (Chawla), into someone who is suggesting cheaper alternatives, rather than telling people not to purchase products in their entirety. Her video shows that the trend is being placed on videos that are not necessarily deinfluencing, but making other direct consumer list recommendations.

Looking at the cover page of the video there is an evident speech bubble that states, "TikTok cult products I hate" which immediately claims that the products she will be mentioning are on a predetermined list of hyper-consumed and crazed products. Alyssa Stephanie begins her video by stating, "I love the deinfluencing trend, so here are all the things that I would deinfluence you from buying as somebody that spends thousands of dollars a year on health/beauty/hair products, but loves to save a buck." Just from this first sentence, it's obvious that this is something that she has done continuously and something she considers normal. She says she spends thousands of dollars a year on health and beauty products, which indirectly places her deinfluencing in its own category of recommending cheaper alternatives, instead of promoting anticonsumerist practices of refusing consumption and influence.

As a screenshotted image of the *Dyson Air Wrap* (a \$500 product) appears on the

background of the screen, she goes on to say, “People ask me all the time ‘what the f**** do you used to style your hair?’ ... [She points to the image behind her.] It’s not this.” The video then cuts to another image of herself, holding a hair curler set saying, “Go on Amazon, spend \$30, you’re welcome.” She never states what the product is called. She never states where to find the products that she talked about but rather just to simply go onto Amazon the website and somehow miraculously finds the \$30 hair curler set that she’s talking about. However, upon further research, all of the products that she mentions within her videos are mentioned in her linked accounts that she has in her social media bio which takes you to her Amazon influencer page. This brings us to a further irony here: no matter who clicks on the link, she will gain a percentage of that sale simply by using her affiliate link to purchase the product, so within the first 19 seconds of this video, she is already showing that she is seeking to gain profit off of using the deinfluencing hashtag while invoking it.

She then goes on to talk about the *Olaplex Bond Repair Shampoo and Conditioner* stating, “This is a cult product that I hate. If you have thin hair, fine hair, a little bit of hair, this is gonna be too heavy for you. Also, it smells bad.” Each of these bottles of shampoo and conditioner is \$30. Alyssa Stephanie is also physically holding the bottles in her hand while claiming that she hates them, which makes sense if you were to buy the product to test it, but why couldn’t she have shown a picture of them like the *Dyson Air Wrap*? She follows with, “The *Redken* version. Obsessed. I have fine hair. I have a lot of it. This has saved my hair. It has changed my hair. I love it.” My initial thoughts of this were that *Redken* is not a version of *Olaplex* shampoo and conditioner, but rather an entirely separate company that costs more than double (\$80 combined) what *Olaplex* costs. Furthermore, she mentions the unessential need for “expensive hair oils to help your hair grow,” but she rather advises her audience to “go to Ulta,

buy *The Ordinary's multi-peptide serum* for your hair. I swear it'll change your life." One pattern I immediately began to notice within her video is that besides the first product in the video, she does not mention the price of the products she is referring to, but rather states her opinion on how much she believes they are going to impact her audience's lives stating that she "swears" to buy a product. This opens the invitation for people to come back at her, and make claims that could go against what she is promoting in her videos, while it simultaneously establishes more of a trusting relationship with her audience, as they are conditioned to believe 'if it worked for her, it has to work for me'.

Continuing on, she states, "Don't spend a lot of money on hair, growth, shampoos, and things. Put these in the shampoo that you already like. They're from Target. They're three dollars a pop, I buy them for everybody. They are so good." Here again, she fails to name what the product is or what it is called. To me as an audience member watching this video, it's not only frustrating that she's not mentioning the name of a product but it's making me question if she's allowed to state the name of such companies in a video that is directly telling a mass population of people to not buy their product.

The next two products that she brings up are a sunscreen from the company *Supergoop* that she compares to a *Trader Joe's* \$8 one, and a *Kosas Air Brow* (eyebrow tinted gel) that she compares to one from the company *Essence*. Within each of these products, I noticed the pattern of her simply stating it was not worth the money and to buy the cheaper option to "save your coin."

In the portion of the video where she talks about her next product, I wanted to highlight specifically the language she uses. She states, "I'm so mad y'all made me go on a waitlist for this s***. The *Glowgasm Charlotte Tilbury*. Horrible. I hate this. I never use it." From the very

beginning of her sentence, it's evident that she is very upset with the product that she tested, but she goes further to place the absolute blame on her audience members who supposedly "made" her go on the waitlist. As if her online audience has any sort of physical power or ability to make her do something. Not only that, but she's establishing a personal emotional relationship with said viewers, stating that she's mad at them specifically. Adding a layer to this interaction is that she is a content creator, a lot of her income stems from the number of likes, comments, views, etc. that she receives on a post. If she were to speak to such an audience that has control over her presentation of information, I would think she should use more respectful language and mannerisms. Her vulgar use of language makes the video more explicit for any younger viewers who may be watching, and as someone who has such a large fan base, likes, and view counts on her videos you would expect more caution when using this sort of language.

All of this to say, her content reaches a larger demographic of viewers who potentially enjoyed the video and may not have taken this comment of hers too personally, yet rhetorically there is an interesting relationship going on here between Alyssa Stephanie and the viewer. Lastly, she finished off this section of her video by stating, "Go buy it. Or don't. Because I'm trying not to influence you but I'm just telling you cheaper alternatives." This ties directly into my overall thesis for this analysis; she is stating cheaper alternatives rather than advising her content consumers to not purchase at all, which opposes the deinfluencing trend as a whole. Yet, she still includes and highlights that she "loves the deinfluencing trend" and uses it for her benefit and popularity. Though this is one video, this small scale escalates quickly through social media trend culture to thousands of videos, all of which are choosing to turn the deinfluencing trend in this direction rather than promoting anticonsumerist and conscious consumption practices as a whole. Promoting this use of the platform furthers the notion that Instagram will

always be a platform for marketing and audience manipulation.

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