Neoliberalsm and TikTok's Day in the Life Trend

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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TikTok's Day in the Life (DITL) trend, in which users show a typical day in their work life, shows how neoliberal ideology is reflected through social media content as users' performances in this trend depict neoliberalism in various ways. For my analysis I deployed a qualitative content analysis and a coding schema to examine 150 TikTok videos for depictions of neoliberal ideology. Additionally, I used Jack Zipe's folklore concept of conservatism and dynamism to identify persisting elements of neoliberalism that are ingrained into the trend itself as well as how neoliberalism was presented and performed by the video creators in various ways throughout the trend. This thesis affirmed that neoliberal ideology united the Day in the Life trend, despite its different variations, adding to literature surrounding platformization, memetics, conservatism and dynamism, and neoliberalism. By translating important aspects of neoliberalism into observable behaviors and actions, this thesis actualizes core tenets of neoliberalism. Converting these abstract elements of neoliberalism into observable behaviors and actions is important when understanding how neoliberalism manifests itself in the real world. This gives us clear, tangible examples of what to look for when describing neoliberalism, a necessary step in critiquing neoliberal ideals such as the transformation of the self into a brand and constant self-improvement in order to grow that brand.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The social media app TikTok was launched in the US in 2018 and has quickly become one of the most popular social media apps—growing from 133 million users in 2018 to over 1 billion users in 2023 (Iqbal, 2024; Zulli & Zulli, 2022). Social media (including TikTok) have received criticisms for algorithms promoting polarizing and conspiratorial content (Fisher, 2022; Klepper, 2024), concerns over citizen surveillance by government employees (Macleod, 2022), and being linked to misdiagnosing mental health conditions such as ADHD (Yeung et al., 2022). Beyond issues concerning controversial content, surveillance issues, and mental health, social media has the ability to convey and disseminate ideology without users being aware that ideology, "process of production of practices and sense the function of which is the production and legitimation of power relations" (Garcia & Sanchez, 2016). Apart from social media, all aspects of culture have the ability to disseminate ideology. However, what makes dissemination of ideology so effective on social media is that ideological messages can be ingrained into the content, with these ideological messages becoming even more effective when adding in the factor of enjoyment, which makes ideology less apparent, more powerful, and seemingly an inherent truth (Engesser et al., 2017; Dey & Lehner, 2017; Gbadegesin, 2020; Gitlin, 1979; Schmitt et al., 2022). Through taking pleasure in these depictions of ideology, subjects become less likely to question the ideology at play as subjects derive a sense of enjoyment from the ideology.

Of all the ideologies communicated by social media, neoliberalism is an ideology that is heavily ingrained into the content. Neoliberal ideology is a system of beliefs and ideas that "sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations" (Monbiot, 2016), classifies

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individuals as consumers, and encourages the marketization of all aspects of human life (Dean, 2008; Dean, 2023). As social media platforms are inextricably linked to the attention economy (an economic approach that considers human attention a commodity/source of monetization) (Kane, 2019) and motivated by profit, the content of these platforms reflect the capitalist ideology of the sites themselves. That is, the content reflects the owners of the platform's desire to encourage monetization and consumption, thus benefiting these stakeholders through enabling them to profit off users' attention. TikTok specifically relies on creating value through their prosumer (portmanteau for producer and consumer) model wherein viewers act as both consumers and producers of content (Flisfeder, 2015; Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2023). Through this business model, users create content (often for free unless they garner enough followers) for TikTok to profit from by selling these same users' data to advertisers (Flisfeder, 2015). Thus, as the platform's goal is to secure a profit from viewers' attention, certain content reflects this neoliberal need to marketize human life. As social media are neoliberal in orientation, I chose to focus on TikTok's "Day in the Life" trend (DITL) that is an especially pure encapsulation of neoliberal ideology. This trend embodies the dynamics of neoliberalism, and it is through this Day in the Life trend that we can see an example of how neoliberal ideology is transmitted—by using the trend to glorify the conditions and tenets of neoliberalism.

This popular trend among TikTok users involves creating "Day in the Life" videos of themselves which feature their day-to-day activities at their jobs. The trend follows a general template that can be altered by users to reflect creative and novel aspects of their own lives. The template of the DITL trend consists of users filming a "typical day in their life" focused on the occupation they have often explicitly identified which can be seen as a form of variation of the greater DITL trend. These variations include occupations and identifiers such as "Corporate

DITL", "Day in the Life of a Nurse", "A Day in My Life as an Entrepreneur in Miami", etc. These videos normally indicate the user's occupation and the video follows along a typical "day in the life" of the user going to work, school, creating social media content, etc. depending on the identifier of the trend. The videos center on the user's activities, often feature a voiceover narrating their day, music, or both.

These videos can be defined as a meme, or spreadable media that is reliant on user participation, transmission, and adaptation (Milner, 2016). Defining this trend as a meme helps describe what this TikTok trend is, how it is adapted, and how it is shared amongst users. This specific trend was chosen as I contend that it specifically communicates strong representations of neoliberalism as the trend focuses on the user's occupation, thus situating the individual as a vehicle for capital rather than focusing on other, personal aspects of the individual. Through users' performances of their day to day lives, they depict certain aspects of neoliberalism in a way that other trends may not through an intimate view into these users' lives. Through identifying the way neoliberalism is represented in these videos, it allows me to actualize that which is usually more intangible.

Representations of neoliberalism such as idealized working conditions of social media influencers that do not show the realities of their labor, videos of hyper-competitive entrepreneurs that encourage others to spend all their time working, and the endless onslaught of products being marketed to individuals through sponsored ads and influencer marketing are but just a few examples that can be found in social media content. These behaviors and themes found in TikTok's DITL trend encapsulate how neoliberal ideology is ingrained into TikTok and its content through performances of the ideology. I have chosen to demonstrate how neoliberalism is performed by users through the content they post, which helps to perpetuate the same ideology

upon which the site is based. Although we do not know the intention of these content creators and users when creating and sharing social media content that maintains neoliberal ideology, the ideology is often implicitly communicated through the performances of these users. This is all the more reason to call attention to how this ideology manifests for us to better understand what users are consuming and creating, as well as how ideology moves through them. While other scholars have examined the relationship between social media and ideology, none have connected neoliberalism and TikTok. I intend to fill this gap in the research through my contention that TikTok promotes neoliberal ideology through the DITL trend. This thesis underscores the way neoliberal ideology is implicitly communicated through subtle demonstrations of different tenets of the ideology as well as subjects' unawareness that they are living in a neoliberal society—a key feature of ideology. Additionally, this thesis concretely demonstrates ideas that are typically discussed in abstract terms. By translating important aspects of neoliberalism into observable behaviors and actions, this thesis actualizes core tenets of neoliberalism. Converting these abstract elements of neoliberalism into observable behaviors and actions is important when understanding how neoliberalism manifests itself in the real world. This gives us clear, tangible examples of what to look for when describing neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism was specifically chosen as I contend that tenets of this ideology are presented as nothing more than quotidian life and are exhibited throughout this trend as if they are the norm. It is important to interrogate this TikTok trend in order to understand how these videos reify this ideology through users' behaviors and themes found in the content. Reification of this ideology treats neoliberalism as the only viable economic reality, leading subjects of this ideology to believe that we should continue to marketize every aspect of our lives and prioritize profit over working conditions like pay and hours spent working. This marketization of life is

detrimental as it "contributors to human exploitation" (Brown, 2015, p.29), reduces every aspect of life to something that should be profited off, and encourages individuals to consider the profit motive as the most important aspect of one's life. As these DITL videos are spread to the creators' followers, and perhaps even shared by these followers to their peers, what is at stake here is neoliberalism becoming further ingrained as the norm. Investigating this trend matters as the constant creation and spread of these videos and the reification of neoliberal ideology may lead viewers to believe that that they must be in a constant pursuit of the neoliberal ideals shown to them on TikTok. Scholar Wendy Brown discusses the implications of living in a neoliberal society, which leads individuals to "comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value…through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting actors" (Brown, 2015, p.22). Here we see the endless pursuit of profitability and the "financialization of everything" become the priority while other facets of life and important issues, such as community or workers' rights, fall to the wayside (Brown, 2015, p.28).

Beyond just understanding that neoliberalism is present in this trend, it is also important to understand the various ways neoliberalism is expressed, as the casual glorification and legitimization of neoliberal ideology may reinforce the ideas that there is no alternative to neoliberalism and that we should continue to enjoy our labor conditions rather than work towards better opportunities. Neoliberalism specifically encourages this enjoyment of labor as it benefits from leading its subjects to derive pleasure from consumption and believe that everyone can become a winner, thus leading individuals to avoid criticizing the consequences of neoliberalism as it is framed as something to be enjoyed (Dean, 2008). As TikTok users are fed these depictions of labor as something to be delighted in, it further reinforces the legitimacy of

neoliberalism. Notions of media influencing users' perspectives can be found in cultivation theory research. Research regarding cultivation theory, which states that "the repeated and extensive use of mass media will entice audiences to absorb the broadcast information into their worldview", has shown that social media use contributed to eating disorders due to the distortion of users' perceptions as well as influencing people's perceptions of natural disasters, indicating social media's ability to influence users' perspectives (Cheng et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2021). Thus, we see how the DITL trend may distort users' perceptions of working conditions under neoliberalism. While perhaps users do not need to completely abstain from social media, I do believe it is important to be aware of the ideology that is being communicated, to better examine the content we are being shown, and understand how it may contribute to the perpetuation of neoliberal ideology.

Given the specific setup of TikTok and the centrality of neoliberalism in the DITL trend, I expected as a result to find direct material performances of neoliberalism in all the videos I examined. And, as I will elaborate on in the methods sections, I found exactly that; all videos were coded for these markers. It is the conservative elements, a term derived from folkloric study origins that refers to elements inherent to the tradition of the trend, that unify the trend, even as there are some dynamic, another term derived from folkloric study origins that refers to elements that manifest in a variety of ways, elements in this trend as well.

In summation, through my analysis I intended to show how neoliberalism is performed by TikTok users. Furthermore, I aimed to make visible that which is normally not seen or taken for the norm for those viewing these TikToks. To understand how neoliberal ideology expresses itself in the DITL trend, I examined these videos for markers of neoliberalism such as valorization of working conditions, the conversion of leisure time to productive time,

competition and marketization, promotion of brands, and positioning oneself as a brand. Through

analyzing markers of neoliberalism and themes found in these videos, I explored how the DITL

TikTok trend communicates a neoliberal ideology.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research used in this thesis draws on areas of literature examining platformization, memetics, conservatism and dynamism, and neoliberalism. Through this thesis I intend to add novel insight to each area. This project will add to platformization literature through understanding how TikTok's affordances, algorithm, and logic influence content creation norms to promote a neoliberal ideology in the DITL TikTok trend. I intend to add to the literature surrounding memes by arguing how neoliberal ideology is communicated via norms and values found in memes despite taking on different forms through reappropriation. I will add to literature surrounding conservatism and dynamism through applying this concept to TikTok to show the potential of dynamism to shape different versions of the DITL trend and how, through conservatism, these versions are united by neoliberalism. Finally, this thesis will add to literature regarding neoliberalism by demonstrating how TikTok trends promote, glorify, or challenge the hegemonic ideals of neoliberalism. Understanding how neoliberalism is communicated via the DITL trend is important as these validations of neoliberalism serve to reify the idea that neoliberalism is the only viable system and that we should enjoy working under neoliberal working conditions.

Platformization: Affordances and Logics

Platformization literature focuses on several themes—the first being how users' behaviors are influenced by the structure of the platform. Platforms can be understood through their structures and affordances, or "perceived range of possible actions linked to platform features" (Hase et al., 2022). Platformization is defined as "the penetration of economic, governmental, and infrastructural extension of digital platforms into the web and app

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ecosystems, fundamentally affecting the operations of the cultural industries" (Nieborg & Poell, 2018, p.4,276). Work on the influence of platform structures is closely related to affordance literature, which foregrounds how user behavior is impacted by the tools made available by the platforms (Bosma, 2022; Hase et al., 2022). Studies on affordances look at everything from "platformization of routines" due to relying on "affordances for interacting with audiences" and consumption practices that are influenced by affordances, to how platform tools affect self-branding practices (Caliandro et al., 2024; Cotter, 2019; Duffy et al., 2017; Dvir-Gvirsman & Tsuriel, 2022).

Platformization literature also investigates how user behaviors are shaped by the logics, or "interplay between different mechanics inherent to digital platforms", and guidelines of the platform (Andersson Schwarz, 2017, p.378). Chan et al. (2023) and Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) focus on platform guidelines and rules that guide the logic of the platform. Zeng and Kaye (2022) foreground what happens when those rules aren't followed—such as content being flagged, or users being banned. Arriagada and Ibáñez (2020) also consider how platform logics encourage users to share more content, modify strategies to successfully make their content visible, and adhere to the algorithm through adopting different content creation and promotion strategies.

Platformization and TikTok

Discussions of platformization are, of course, tethered to the platforms themselves; the kind of conclusions Arriagada and Ibáñez draw about Instagram cannot be directly applied to other platforms, and vice versa. That is why it is so important to consider the platform logics—structures, affordances, and guidelines—of the platform being examined. This thesis specifically focuses on TikTok, a "mobile video sharing social media application" that is mainly used to film

and share videos and offers the ability "to apply numerous video and music filters and effects as well as to create special kinds of cooperative videos, i.e. duets and reactions" (Shutsko, 2020, p.109). Bhandari and Bimo (2022) focus on TikTok's algorithm and how it influences one's representation of oneself on social media. Schellewald (2023) discusses TikTok's affordances and the importance of the algorithm in personalizing content. Finally, Chan et al. discuss the evolution of TikTok's "Community Guidelines" and its relation to "platform values" (Chan et al., 2023, p.2).

RQ1: How do TikTok's affordances, algorithm, and logic influence content creation norms to promote neoliberal ideology in the DITL TikTok trend?

Memetics

The main figure central to meme-related conversations is Richard Dawkins, who defined a meme as "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation" (Dawkins, 1989, p.192). He gives a few examples, such as "ideas, catch-phrases, [and] cloth[ing] fashions" and emphasizes how these memes jump from "brain to brain" in the process of imitation, thus leading to the spread of these ideas (Dawkins, 1989, p.192). Since publishing his foundational work on the subject, Dawkins' concept of memes has been criticized for his notion that culture spreads like a virus—rather his detractors insist that culture does not spread passively in the way that this use of the word viral implies (Milner, 2016; Percival, 1994). Despite this criticism, the concept of memes has spread to many different disciplines such as neuroscience (Di Leva, 2008; McNamara, 2011), semiotics (Fomin, 2019; Grundlingh, 2018), and psychology (Heath et al., 2001; Myrick et al., 2022). Similarly, this criticism inspired Ryan Milner's idea of memetic logics, a term that refers to culturally transmittable media that is dependent on "collective creation, circulation, and transformation" and can be considered texts that encourage

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"participation by reappropriation, by balancing a fixed premise with novel expression", which focus more on the participatory qualities of memes rather than Dawkins' quasi-biological, deterministic concept of the meme (Milner, 2016, p. 14).

Memetics often overlap with conversations about platforms and affordances when examining how collective creation, circulation, and transformation of memetic media are influenced by platforms. In his discussion of memetic logics, Milner departs from Dawkins' idea of memes as deterministic, instead focusing on Dawkins' idea of memes as cultural transmitters and connecting them with the idea of not only texts that rely on ideas of collective creation, circulation, and transformation, but the idea that memes can be seen as "a set of social practices" that endure (Milner, 2016, p. 3). Milner's idea relates back to platformization through the way that social media platforms encourage these memetic ideas of collective creation, circulation, and transformation through a platform's affordances and logics.

Other scholars use the term memetic logic when discussing the relationship between memetics and platforms. Both Caliandro and Anselmi (2021) and Schöps et al. (2023) argue that platforms and affordances encourage memetic logic through both the platform's infrastructure and affordances by encouraging a standardized template for content creation. Similarly, Zulli and Zulli use the term "platform logic" rather than memetic logic (in this case meaning the same thing) to argue that TikTok's structure, features, and norms of production encourage imitation and replication thus creating networks formed through "processes of imitation and replication" (Zulli & Zulli, 2022, p.1,873). Nicoll and Nansen (2018) further the conversation around replicability by positing that content production of YouTube unboxing videos is shaped via genre norms of production and performance. Research in this area also examine how affordances affect the creation of memes themselves as Linor Shifman (2014) discusses the importance of

affordances in influencing photograph-based memes while Kate Miltner and Tim Highfield (2017) discuss how different platforms influence GIF memes in different ways depending on their affordances. These works extend the concept of memetics to the level of the platform to demonstrate how platforms themselves can encourage memetic processes.

RQ2: How is neoliberal ideology communicated via norms and values found in this trend despite taking on different forms through reappropriation?

Conservatism and Dynamism

As literature surrounding memes and memetic logics are integral in highlighting ideas of replication and standardized content found on social media, literature on the twin laws of conservatism and dynamism are essential to understanding how media evolve over time. These twin laws are essential to investigate how, through dynamism, traditions evolve and diverge and, through conservatism, how traditions maintain their essence. Milner and Phillips use folklorist Barre Toelken's twin laws of conservatism and dynamism to help describe "the transformation of familiar expressions as they spread through new moments and audiences" (2016, p.24). In folklore, conservative elements are viewed as unchanging; they retain "certain information, beliefs, styles, customs, and the like, and the attempted passing of those materials, essentially intact, through time and space" (Toelken, 1979, p.39). These elements "are not to be tampered with or rearranged" as they are essential to the tradition (Toelken, 1979, p.40). Dynamic elements of folklore are those that change over time and allow individuals to "alter features, contents, meanings, styles, performance, and usage" (Toelken, 1979, p.40). Dynamic elements promote perpetual change in the tradition, despite possible attempts to keep these elements from changing (Toelken, 1979).

The concept of conservatism and dynamism is mainly found in folklore studies. It has been especially insightful when discussing the evolution of how traditions are passed down and repurposed in later iterations. Through an examination of fairy tales, folk tales, and their inextricable link with politics, Jack Zipes explains how despite societal changes and changes in class dynamics that "penetrated the folktale", the essence of the folktale resisted transformation despite later adaptations (Zipes, 1975, p. 121). Sarah Wilde's examination of contemporary Disney princesses adds to this through articulating how traditional princess narratives are reappropriated for a new audience in a way that maintains the inherent traditional qualities of the princess story but reshapes different aspects through princesses becoming more "complex characters with a variety of traits" (Wilde, 2014, p.147). In his study investigating the performances of traditional and folkloric dance, Matthew Krystal expands upon evolving traditions using conservatism and dynamism to argue that folkloric dance "helps performers and audiences create and share meaningful notions of heritage, and, in turn, identity" (Krystal, 2007, pg.75).

RQ3: How does dynamism shape different versions of the DITL trend?

RQ4: How does conservatism unite these different versions under the umbrella of neoliberalism?

Neoliberalism

Research on neoliberalism foregrounds what exactly the ideology is. Neoliberalism refers to both an economic theory as well as an ideology derived from this theory. It is a "paradigm for economic theory and policy-making" heavily influenced by economists Milton Friedman and Freidrich Hayek after being heralded in by President Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom (Metcalf, 2017; Thorsen, 2010, p.8). Neoliberalism has been the basis for US economic policies and regulations and emphasizes tenets of a capitalist free market,

laissez-faire approach rather than government intervention in economics (Thorsen, 2010). However, neoliberalism is far more than just an economic theory. According to scholar Jodi Dean it "is a philosophy viewing market exchange as a guide for all human action" that redefines life in "accordance with economic criteria" and "holds that human freedom is best achieved through the operation of markets" (Dean, 2008, p.48). Scholar Jonathan Dean, who draws much from French philosopher Michel Foucault, adds to this by arguing that neoliberalism is far more than an economic theory, it "extends logics of competition and marketization into almost all domains of human life", encouraging "the optimization of one's human capital" in every aspect of one's life (Dean, 2023, p.8). While neoliberalism may have been implemented as an economic theory, it extends into the domain of ideology and the metaphysical. Beyond influencing market relations, neoliberalism influences various aspects of life including behaviors, identity, and relationships.

Although neoliberalism is a pervasive, hegemonic ideology, it is rare to find people explicitly promoting or even acknowledging the existence of the ideology itself. Instead, tenets of this ideology are communicated implicitly through promotion of different aspects of the ideology, such as marketization of human life, rather than explicitly stating that a neoliberal approach should be followed. In general, it is rare for individuals to be aware that they are living under neoliberalism. This lack of awareness is characteristic of ideology.

Slovenian scholar Slavoj Zizek contributes to contemporary discourse surrounding ideology by "arguing that ideology refers not to what people know, but to the belief underlying and animating people's actions" (Dean, 2008, p.51). According to Zizek, ideology is an omnipresent, all-encompassing system that goes beyond traditional perception and understanding, forming our perceptions of reality without the subjects even being aware that it is

there at all (Zizek, 1989). Schmitt et al. (2022) describe the implications of a ubiquitous ideology by describing how the dominant ideology masks exploitation of the non-dominant class and functions to keep the oppressed from realizing their oppression. That is, those living under the hegemonic ideology are often unaware this ideology even exists, often until they intentionally look for this ideology or become negatively affected by it.

Research on neoliberalism highlights the implications of living under a neoliberal ideology. In reviewing literature surrounding neoliberalism, themes have emerged regarding social media's manipulation of our perspectives, commodification of religions and subcultures, and advertisements reflecting aspects of neoliberalism. In Matthew Flisfeder's (2021) book *Algorithmic Desire,* he investigates how social media acts as a reflection of neoliberal ideology through its antisocial effects, endorsement of entrepreneurialism and a hedonistic lifestyle, and legitimizes itself through creation and distribution of content. Chris Miller explores how neoliberal ideology is present in "WitchTok", a genre of TikTok dedicated to witchcraft, through users' promotion of self-brands, businesses, and commodification of connections to nature (Miller, 2022, p.1). Kanai and Gill (2020) investigate how radical politics, like feminist or LGBTQ movements, are co-opted by corporate advertising and reappropriated in a neoliberal fashion, thus dismantling their subversive power and contributing to upholding the status quo.

As these neoliberal ideals are so pervasive through media and everyday life, they are viewed as constructing certain identities in its subjects. Jodi Dean conceptualizes neoliberalism as an ideology that uses identity as a means of control by reconstructing individuals' identities as either consumer or criminal and demands its subjects to enjoy and consume, arguing that "people have little opportunity to do other than consume" (Dean, 2008, p.64). Orgad and De Benedictis also contribute to conversations of identity as a means of control by examining how UK media

constructs the stay-at-home-mom as a "neoliberal post-feminist subject", thus further alienating middle and working class mothers (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015, p.419). Shawn Van Valkenburgh investigates how neoliberal ideology is present in an online forum for misogynistic men through the way users construct women as commodities and integrate neoliberal ideology into their "seduction strategies" (Van Valkenburgh, 2021, p.99). Catherine Archer also invokes the identity of the mother in neoliberalism through examining how bloggers are exploited by "neoliberal market forces" and notions of entrepreneurialism, leading to poor working conditions and prioritization of the work life (Archer, 2019, p.161).

Self-Branding and Neoliberalism

As neoliberal ideology permeates all aspects of life, it influences the way social media users portray themselves. The practice of self-branding, also known as personal-branding, is utilized by social media influencers and non-influencers to broadcast their public persona to an audience in order to acquire financial and/or "cultural capital" (Khamis et al., 2017, p.191). To clarify use of the word "influencer", I use Brooke Duffy's definition of influencer, "cultural tastemakers who generate profit by integrating sponsored products and services into mediated depictions of their aspirational, albeit real lives" (Duffy et al., 2022, p.1,658). As the self-brand is used to market oneself and to "stand out in the labor market", it seemingly goes hand-in-hand with notions of neoliberal ideology such as entrepreneurialism, obfuscating labor conditions, and the conversion of the self into a vehicle for capital (Khamis et al., 2017, p.192).

Self-branding is often viewed as a neoliberal practice with scholars identifying the different ways it can be depicted as such. Scholars such as Whitmer (2019), Banet-Weiser & Juhasz (2011), and McGuigan (2014) see personal branding as a way of commodifying or marketizing the self. Brooke Duffy identifies many of self-branding's neoliberal aspects in her

book *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender, and Aspirational Labor in the Social Media Economy* by examining the aspirations of influencers as well as their working conditions, discussing how despite being led to believe being an influencer is easy, it can be a grueling, exploitative occupation that involves objectification of the self. Khamis et al. (2017) trace the emergence of self-branding alongside social media and argue that social media encourages self-branding. Duffy and Hund (2015) demonstrate how self-branding practices depict an idealism of blogging through tropes that obfuscate the real working conditions of being an influencer and glorify the notion of working and consuming. Duffy and Pooley (2019) further explore ideas of obfuscating the realities of labor through examining how celebrities' self-branding practices of entrepreneurship, meritocracy, authenticity, and self-promotion are used to create a personal brand. Flisfeder (2015) also links self-branding practices with labor conditions by describing the prosumer's unawareness of their exploitation by the ruling class and the user as a neoliberal subject who unknowingly becomes more alienated through practices of self-branding.

Reviewing research on neoliberalism, specifically what the ideology is and implications of life under neoliberal subjectivity, helps extrapolate behavioral markers. These include valorization of working conditions, conversion of leisure time to productive time, competition/marketization, promotion of brands, and the positioning of oneself as a brand. These markers will be further explained and detailed in the method section below.

RQ5: How do TikTok trends promote, glorify, or challenge the hegemonic ideals of neoliberalism?

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

For this project, I focused on observable behaviors and messages found in the TikTok DITL trend. I was specifically interested in understanding how neoliberal ideology is implicitly communicated via the DITL TikTok trend. I stayed away from users' motives in creating these videos, instead focusing on how these videos communicated neoliberal ideology through implicit messaging via visuals, products, environments, movements, language, and behaviors found in the videos. In this thesis I used the concept of memetics to bound the data set of the Day in the Life TikTok trend as a form of meme through the five memetic logics of multimodality, reappropriation, resonance, collectivism, and spread. Memes all follow these five logics, thus any piece of media that fulfills all five logics should be considered a meme. Here multimodality means that texts are expressed via multiple modes of communication, such as "image, audio, [and] video" (Milner & Phillips, 2017; Milner, 2016, p.4). Reappropriation refers to the reworking and "recombination of existing cultural materials" (Milner & Phillips, 2017, p.31). Resonance is about how the text brings personal meaning to the individual—the personal meaning of these texts inspires the processes of "creation, circulation, and transformation" (Milner, 2016, p.30). Collectivism means that memetic media are a result of collective participation (Milner and Phillips, 2017; Milner, 2016). Finally, spread means "circulation through mass networks" (Milner and Phillips, 2017, p.31). Memetic logics is best used to define the DITL TikTok trend as a meme as these five logics clearly articulate the characteristics of a meme, rather than other definitions that mainly focus on similar characteristics of the memetic variations and a mutual awareness in memes (Nissenbaum & Shifman, 2018).

As memetic logics are used to define the DITL TikTok trend as a meme, conservatism and dynamism help demonstrate how neoliberal ideology is inherent in the trend across its many variations within the meme. In this thesis I applied the concept of conservatism and dynamism to TikTok trends to examine how neoliberalism is a conservative and enduring logic uniting the different variations of the DITL trend despite their dynamic variations. Similarly, I used this concept to understand the conservatism and dynamism of how neoliberalism is demonstrated in the DITL trend. The concept of conservatism and dynamism is specifically useful in this thesis as it helps to identify how neoliberalism was represented in different ways or potentially subverted across these videos while still tying back to the same overall neoliberal logic.

Sampling and Data Collection

TikTok's platform allows users to find videos through search methods, the "For You Page"—a personally-curated algorithmic feed, sounds, and hashtags. I chose to locate DITL trend videos through selecting videos found in the #dayinthelife, #dayinmylife, #dayinalife and #ditl hashtags to ensure that I was finding videos related to the DITL trend. From here I selected the videos through both the "Top" and "Videos" pages, choosing the first videos shown to me. Videos were not selected if they were not related to the DITL trend. Using this method, I relied on TikTok's search algorithm to provide me with videos, which provided me with videos from the timeframe of February 2022 to March 2024. I created an account in order to access and save these videos for coding and further reflection. I created a TikTok account specifically for this project. This means that I may receive different videos than someone who has an established account as the algorithm has not learned what my preferences are through engagement with content as it would with someone who has been consistently using TikTok. This has some

benefits as my personal algorithm might mimic what new users are shown on TikTok but has drawbacks in that it does not reflect what content many other established users may receive.

I collected this information through 150 videos, based off of content analyses of TikTok videos done by prior researchers (Lookingbill, 2022; Marynak et al., 2022; Minadeo & Pope, 2022; Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022). As TikTok is a social media platform where "content is explicitly produced for public consumption", rather than a platform intended for private communication, it was not necessary to gain consent from users to analyze their videos (Warren, 2020 as cited in Miller, 2022, p.4).

Qualitative Analysis

To demonstrate that neoliberalism is inherent to the DITL trend, I employed a qualitative content analysis. Hsieh and Shannon define qualitative content analysis as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). In this case, I believe qualitative content analysis to be the best choice of method in order to focus on discovering themes that can be found in social media content. This method allowed me to create codes for identifiers of neoliberalism, analyze the videos for these codes, and identify themes in these videos. In this case, I found qualitative content analysis to be more beneficial than quantitative content analysis as this project required me to extrapolate and analyze user behaviors, language, and themes in each video, which could not be done through data scraping and quantitative content analysis. Data obtained from quantitative content analysis benefitted from having a human eye to clearly catch the behaviors, language, themes, etc. found in each video to make sure that nothing was missed.

Qualitative content analysis can take three different approaches when analyzing the data: conventional, directed, or summative (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I employed a directed, or conceptual, content analysis as this type of content analysis is guided by existing theory relevant to the phenomenon being explored (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The goal of this kind of content analysis is "to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1,281). Directed content analysis involves initially classifying coding categories prior to data analysis and creating definitions for each category through use of each theory, which I have done below. Through reviewing literature regarding neoliberalism, I identified key themes of neoliberalism and translated the concept into behaviors.

Codes and Analysis

To clearly indicate these key themes of neoliberalism found in the DITL TikTok trends it was integral to develop a coding schema that identifies behaviors found in the videos. These codes include:

- Valorization of Working Conditions (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021; Duffy, 2017; Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Khamis et al., 2017)
    - Showcasing the benefits of one's job (Duffy, 2017)
    - Obfuscating or ignoring negative aspects of work (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Khamis et al., 2017)
    - Highlighting poor working conditions in a casual or positive way as if there is no alternative (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)
- Conversion of Leisure Time to Productive Time (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)
    - Post-work routines that prepare oneself for the next day of work (Flisfeder, 2021)
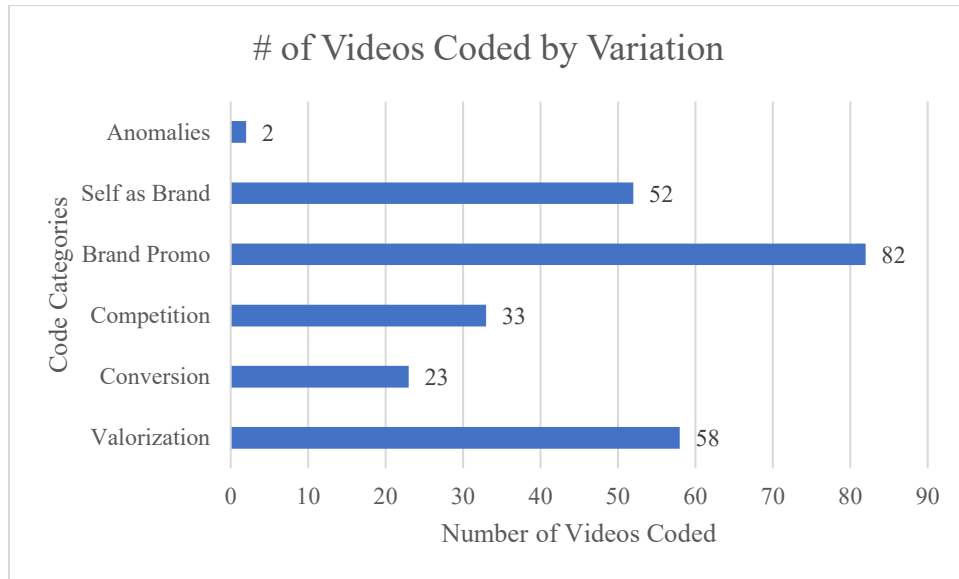   - "Recharging" from work (Flisfeder, 2021)

- Activities that help accrue capital or build skills for accruing capital—the idea that the self is something that must be worked on and constantly improved (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)

- Blurred lines between work and leisure time (Flisfeder, 2021)

- Competition/Marketization (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021; Duffy, 2017; Flisfeder, 2021; Khamis et al., 2017)

    - Glorification of the entrepreneurial lifestyle—sacrifice as necessary for success, long hours, work taking up almost all of one's time (Duffy, 2017; Flisfeder, 2021; Khamis et al., 2017)

    - Optimization of everyday life (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)

- Promotion of Brands (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)

    - Promoting products or brands either as explicit ads or through showcasing products (Dean, 2008)

    - Enjoyment via commodities—commodity fetishism or video centering around consumption of products (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021)

- Positioning Oneself as a Brand (Banet-Weiser & Juhasz, 2011; Dean, 2008; Duffy, 2017; Duffy et al., 2022; Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Flisfeder, 2021 Mcguigan, 2014 Whitmer, 2019)

    - Positioning oneself as a brand through one's occupation as their identity (Dean, 2008)

    - Promotion of one's business, social media, etc. (Dean, 2008)

    - Utilizing authenticity as a form of marketing oneself (Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Duffy et al., 2022; Whitmer, 2019)

o   Objectification of the self—treating oneself as an object, brand, or commodity rather than a person (Banet-Weiser & Juhasz, 2011; Duffy, 2017; Flisfeder, 2021; Mcguigan, 2014 Whitmer, 2019)

In order to capture every instance of neoliberalism, I reviewed all 150 videos, sorting each video into one of the pre-existing codes and set aside two videos that could not be initially coded (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). From here I created a new code, Anomalies, as these videos did not express any of the predetermined codes for neoliberalism. However, these videos did express neoliberalism in other ways, which I discuss in the results section. Through the background research conducted, I expected neoliberalism to be a conservative feature of the DITL trend. After determining this to be true, my task became to demonstrate how exactly neoliberalism was communicated/performed, which was shown through coding these videos, providing examples, and "offering descriptive evidence" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1282). Additionally, I used explicit examples of users exhibiting behaviors that represented these codes. I chose to remove their handles to respect their anonymity and privacy. Although this data is considered public, there is no need to name individual users; it is just as effective to describe their behaviors without making their accounts public.

of Videos Coded by Variation

Anomalies 2
Self as Brand 52
Brand Promo 82
Competition 33
Conversion 23
Valorization 58

Code Categories

Number of Videos Coded (0, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90)

Codes by Variation						
	Valorization	Conversion	Competition	Brand Promo	Self as Brand	Anomalies
Nurse	11	1	1	7	4	0
Student	7	1	8	17	12	1
Entrepreneur	2	4	3	3	3	0
Unemployed	0	1	2	3	1	0
Corporate	16	9	8	12	5	0
Influencer	9	3	4	17	10	0
Mom	7	2	3	9	4	0
Ambiguous	0	0	0	8	2	0
Beauty	0	0	1	2	4	0
Waged	5	1	3	1	1	0
Doctor	1	0	0	2	2	0
Other	0	0	0	1	2	1

The results below identify and discuss the general conservatism and dynamism found in the DITL trend as well as the different code categories of neoliberalism identified in the methods section. All videos were successfully coded for markers of neoliberal ideology, clearly indicating the DITL trend's dissemination of neoliberal ideology. Nearly every video was coded into a

predetermined category of neoliberal ideology and just under half (49%) of these coded videos reflected multiple instances of neoliberalism by being coded into multiple categories. This demonstrates the ability of many of these DITL videos to communicate neoliberalism in multiple ways in just one video. This analysis focused on the conservative elements of neoliberalism found in each code as well as how neoliberalism manifested itself in various ways through dynamism.

While my analysis focused on conservative and dynamic elements of neoliberalism, some general demographic trends of the creators should be highlighted as well. When looking at the gender of the creators, females made up 91% of videos while males made up 9%. When looking at race, White creators were disproportionately the most prevalent at 58% with the lowest being Hispanic creators at just 3%. 47% of users were aged 18-24, 45% were aged 25-34, and 8% 35-44. When it came to engagement, on average, creators had 415K followers and garnered 132K likes and 549 comments per video. Males typically received 25% more followers than females, yet females garnered 39% more likes on average. When it came to race, Asian and Pacific Islander creators had the highest engagement at 693K followers, 199K likes, and 765 comments on average. For age, creators in the 35-44 range attracted the most followers (674K) while those in the 18-24 range garnered the most likes (142K) and comments (494) on average. Finally, when broken down by variation, the Other variation received the most followers (1.6M) and likes (316K) on average—though this was likely skewed by one creator who had 5.9M followers. The variation with the next largest average following was Influencers at 1.1M and the variation with the next largest average likes was Unemployed people at 285K.

While videos in the DITL trend took on a variety of forms and showed many different occupations and activities, I will provide an example of a typical DITL video to give a general description of the trend:

One Corporate worker began her video posing in her pajamas for the camera before making her bed, with text in the center of the video showing viewers that it was 6:30 AM. Her room is all white, seemingly with no windows, and a few pieces of art and decoration that are also white or grey. This creator is a 24-year-old white woman who works an "eight to five" corporate job. After making her bed she moves the camera to the bathroom to take viewers through her skincare routine, making sure the camera captures her laying out all of her products. She then moves to the kitchen to drink her supplements before heading back to her room to get in bed and journal. Next, she films herself applying makeup and choosing her outfit for the day, carefully showing off the brand of her New Balance shoes. She adorns her jewelry, showing her rings off for the camera, and sprays perfume on herself before making an iced coffee, showing off the brand on her coffee cup. The creator gets in her car for her commute to work, making sure to film the BMW logo while talking about her favorite podcast, "The What We Said" podcast. She briefly shows her breakfast at work, which she eats at her desk while typing away, and talks about planning for her workday. The Corporate employee then takes her lunch at noon, mentioning stopping at Starbucks and showing herself typing on her computer outside. She leaves work at 5:00 PM, once again showing herself getting in the car and flaunting the BMW logo on her steering wheel. She then gets home, where she participates in an online Pilates class. Next, she showcases her post-shower skincare routine, purposefully laying out the products for the camera. Finally, she films herself eating the sushi she ordered in bed while watching reality

TV before going to bed. Throughout the video, the creator narrates the video, films herself in a third-person perspective, and includes timestamps throughout all of her filmed activities.

Conservatism and Dynamism Across Codes

From a topline view of the DITL trend, conservatism was evident through every video being coded for at least one marker of neoliberalism. 99% of videos were coded into the predetermined categories with 1% of videos being coded into a new category, Anomalies, that reflected neoliberal ideology in ways not found in the predetermined codes. Dynamism was evident through the range of occupations, or variations, that diverged across the trend. After reviewing all videos, I identified 11 major types of occupations and 1 category for occupations that remained ambiguous, indicating the divergence into different variations in the DITL trend. Occupations ranged from nurses, corporate employees, and entrepreneurs to students, stay at home moms, unemployed individuals, and more. Throughout the trend there was a broad range of occupations and identities present that had characteristics inherent to their own variation. For example, most videos in the nurse variation focused more on their job by showing their typical tasks for each day and explaining what they do. For example, a Nurse walked us through her day, showing what she eats for breakfast at work, talked a bit about her patients, and showed and narrated her work tasks—like discharging patients and completing an AVS summary. On the other hand, videos in the influencer variation often focused on a blend of personal activities and work-related activities. One Influencer showed viewers a day in the life as a "full time content creator", filming herself in a meeting, making breakfast, running errands, and talking about filming an ad for a client. Dynamism was also evident through the creation styles of each video. Not every video took the exact form outlined in the beginning. Some videos are 30 seconds long and others are a few minutes long. Some videos include narration or music, a combination of the

two, or are silent. However, every video shows the creator's workday routine, and many show their pre-work or post-work routine, or both.

Despite these divergences in the general themes of each variation, markers of neoliberalism remained a persistent, conservative force uniting each variation of the DITL trend under the umbrella of neoliberalism. For instance, every variation embodied some form of the Promotion of Brands and Positioning Oneself as a Brand codes, illuminating the DITL trend's focus on advertising, consumption, and converting the self into a brand. One Student's DITL video was a sponsored ad (see Appendix A) while an Unemployed user showed off some of her favorite skincare products (see Appendix A), showing the prevalence of brand promotion in different ways. The prevalence of users positioning themselves as brands can be found in an Entrepreneur's video describing himself as a "$20K per month 21-year-old automation agency owner" (see Appendix A) and an Influencer creating a specific brand through her unique editing and referring to her other social media pages.

Another conservative element of the DITL trend was the Corporate variation's embodiment of each marker of neoliberalism. For example, some users in this variation valorized working conditions through showing the benefits of their jobs, converted leisure time to productive time through blurring the lines between labor and leisure, demonstrated the competitive nature of neoliberalism through glorifying their early wakeup times, promoted brands through showing off outfits or skincare products, and positioned themselves as a brand through using authenticity as a part of their personal brand. When analyzing each predetermined category for the number of times each variation's videos were coded into the category, the Corporate variation was a top three variation in each category and the top variation for Valorization of Working Conditions and Conversion of Leisure Time to Productive Time.

However, it must also be noted that the Corporate variation was the second largest genre with 25 videos, likely contributing to its prevalence in each code category.

As neoliberal ideology remained a constant, conservative element of the DITL trend, the way neoliberalism was embodied deviated throughout the variations as users adapted and altered the trend through their respective variations, editing styles, use of commodities, and more. Due to this dynamism, each code category reflected neoliberal ideology in a multitude of ways, rather than just one way. Users found multiple ways to glamorize their working conditions or promote brands all while still connecting back to their respective code. For example, DITL creators valorized their working conditions through highlighting the positive aspects of their jobs or framing the negative aspects in a positive way. Similarly, creators promoted brands through brand sponsorships and advertisements as well as highlighting the products they use daily for no compensation. These dynamic elements reflected the overarching, conservative element of neoliberalism. Despite these dynamic elements of the DITL trend resulting in constant change, the conservative element of neoliberalism was present.

Valorization of Working Conditions
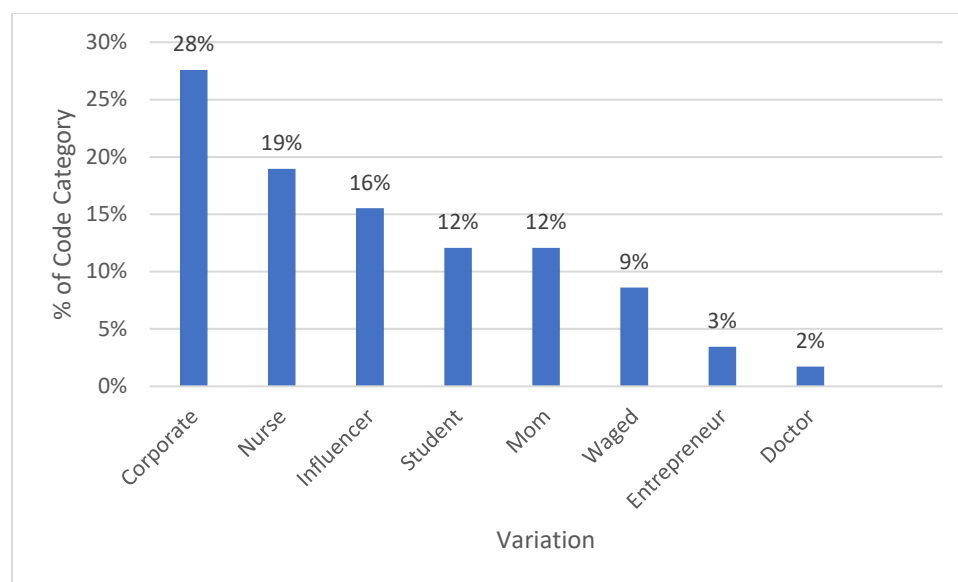
Videos coded into the Valorization of Working Conditions category were videos that, intentionally or unintentionally, glorified the working conditions of one's occupation. 39% of DITL videos were coded into the Valorization category, with the Corporate variation making up 28% of videos coded into this category. Roughly 64% of Corporate DITL videos were coded for Valorization, demonstrating the corporate world's glorification of their working conditions in the DITL trend. Dynamism in neoliberal ideology was found in the various ways working conditions were valorized throughout this category. Valorization was communicated through highlighting only the positive aspects of one's job (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017), endorsing or downplaying poor working conditions as if they were something positive or should be accepted without resistance (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017; Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Khamis et al., 2017), and attempts at subversion that resulted in upholding neoliberal ideology. Yet despite these variations in the way neoliberalism was upheld, the element of obfuscation of labor conditions remained central to each video in these categories.

One Corporate employee flaunted a day in her life, beginning at 5 AM in which she filmed herself dancing and showing off her outfit, showing her excitement for the day. She signed up for a boxing class and took viewers through the Buzzfeed office, a news and entertainment company, where she works. Her office features a giant red "Buzzfeed" logo, large white desks, and windows showing the city and buildings around her. She and her coworkers are seen dancing, and she mentions they weren't doing any work. Her and her coworkers don't seem to be adhering to any uniform, instead wearing whatever they choose rather than a specific office dress code. She shows some specifics of her jobs, including a clip from her work where she sits in front of a purple backdrop with a pink bucket hat on. She then fast forwarded to after work where she attended a Complex Magazine event, showing the bright lights of the neighboring

buildings at night in the rain. She filmed many clips throughout the event and ended the video talking about getting home late. The valorization of working conditions can be seen here through this creator's curation of content to only show the benefits of her job, ignoring any negative aspects that may come with her job.

DITL videos in this code category highlighted the positive aspects of one's job through making one's job look easy and enjoyable, thus obfuscating the hardships one may endure in that occupation. These behaviors were largely adapted from work on self-branding, social media influencers, and bloggers (Duffy & Hund, 2015; Duffy, 2017). One Entrepreneurial creator showed only the positive aspects of being an entrepreneur such as setting his own schedule, leaving the office early, and flexibility of working areas. A Corporate employee glorified working full time in biotech while being a part time influencer, focused on working from home, finished work early, and had plenty of time after work. 53% of videos in this category only showed the best parts of their workday, like creators being able to choose where they work, short hours, or perks of their job—such as free meals provided by their company. In instances of videos that curated their video content to only show the enjoyable aspects of their day, users do not see a realistic "day in the life", instead they see highlight reels of the profession that do not address issues that occur in one's day-to-day work life. By choosing to only focus on positive aspects of their jobs for the DITL videos, leaving out anything that viewers might find negative, these videos constructed an idealized, fantastical version of their working conditions.

Beyond just omitting the negative aspects of one's job, videos in this category sometimes showed instances of users discussing their poor working conditions by framing them in a positive way, with 29% of videos in this category doing so. These behaviors were extrapolated from Jodi Dean (2008) and Matthew Flisfeder's (2021) work on neoliberalism and enjoyment. Poor

working conditions were sometimes explicitly conveyed by creators pointing out their dissatisfaction and other times were not mentioned at all, instead being present in the video without the creators addressing them. A Mom highlighted the difficulties of being a stay-at-home mother by discussing people criticizing her for not working, her long hours spent caring for her child, and her general lack of time. Similarly, a few nurses in the DITL trend showed or discussed being so busy they couldn't eat. Two creators discussed how they are often not able to eat lunch but framed this as an expectation of the job, both going on to talk about how much they enjoy being a nurse. It appears that videos valorizing working conditions, beyond only showing positive aspects of one's work, obfuscate poor labor conditions by framing them as something that comes with the job and downplaying the negative aspects, such as long hours, low pay, etc. Through these positive framings, we see neoliberalism's demand to enjoy one's labor despite difficulties in one's occupation. There is no harm in enjoying one's job, however we do see unrealistic representations of the reality of work when users glorify the negative aspects of their jobs. By legitimizing negative or exploitative workplace issues, these creators are actively participating in neoliberalism's notion of profit taking precedent over working conditions.

However, not every video glorifying their working conditions made these glorifications explicitly obvious, embodying a dynamism through the way neoliberalism was present in this category. As the DITL trend communicates a neoliberal ideology that valorizes neoliberal working conditions, the DITL trend also becomes a site that contains the potential for subversion. That is, as the template calls for and allows for users to glorify their working conditions, creators can attempt to subvert the template and show the reality of one's working conditions. Despite the large number of videos glorifying their working conditions, there were a

few instances (18%) of users attempting to subvert the traditional positivity found in the DITL trend to show a more realistic version of their job and their attitude towards working.

One Waged employee discussed having no friends due to her work schedule, showed herself going to bed at 3:00 AM, and included the hashtag #dontwork2jobs (see Appendix A) in the caption of her video. There were also instances of a few users in the Mom variation who classified themselves as "#brokemoms" (see Appendix A), indicating that they did not have the same amount of time or money that other mothers in the variation had. However, despite users showing a more "realistic" version of their day-to-day work life that captured, and sometimes centered around, negative aspects of the workday or poor labor conditions, these users were still unable to subvert the neoliberal ideology inherent to the trend. Ideology resists these subversions as "ideological illusions cannot be dispelled through critical interrogation", rather they only allow us to cope with the reality of the situation (Coffin, 2022, p.467). Despite the Waged employee's realistic depiction of her working conditions, she continues to reinforce the status quo through a certain humor and positivity in her video alongside some small benefits that come with her jobs. Other videos contribute to glorification by aestheticizing these videos with music, carefully crafted shots, or including some humor despite their very real (and valid) complaints about the system they have been forced to work under. One Nurse discussed her 13-hour shift and the lack of time she has but was quick to cover up the reality of her long hours and lack of time by joking about finally being able to take a lunch, something that she insinuates does not happen as often as she would like. Here we see a fetishistic disavowal, where "informed subjects continue to act as if they are unaware of the truth", by acknowledging long hours, lack of time, etc. yet continuing to operate as if these conditions do not affect them (Coffin, 2022, p.467). This fetishistic disavowal works to uphold the neoliberal ideology present in these videos. This can be

seen through these more realistic videos demonstrating that there is no alternative to neoliberal capitalism—they do not try and change their working conditions or inquire deeper into the root causes of the issue; rather they have accepted them, reifying notions of neoliberalism, despite their critiques throughout the video.

Throughout the DITL videos that valorized working conditions, obfuscation became a conservative element inherent to this category despite variations in how it occurred—either through leaving out negative aspects, framing them in a positive manner, or brushing them off after discussing the difficulties that come with these conditions. Similarly, despite users highlighting difficulties or poor working conditions, creating a dynamism in the way that working conditions were discussed, the conservative element of neoliberalism remained apparent as these users still inadvertently reinforced neoliberal ideology through their behaviors.

Conversion of Leisure Time to Productive Time
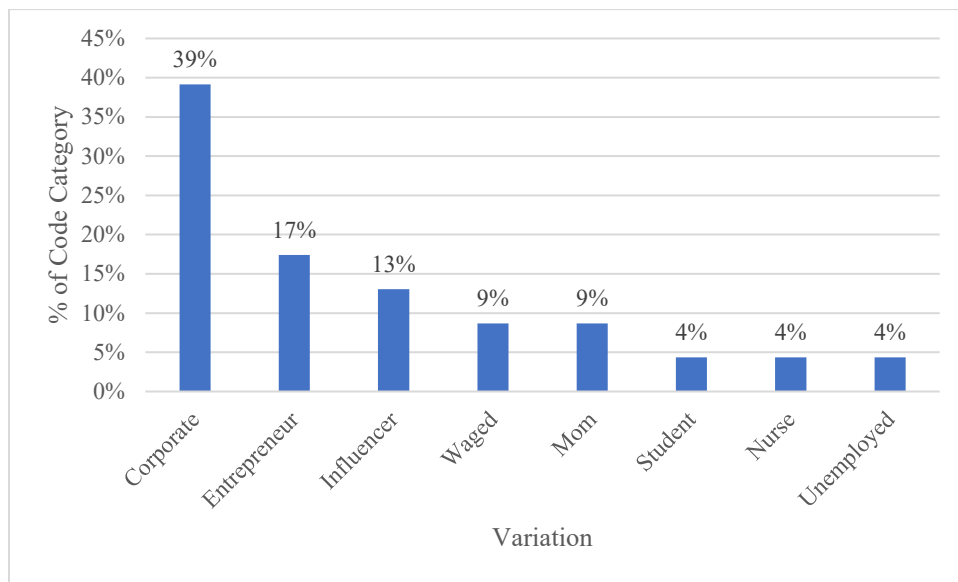
Under neoliberalism, individuals are encouraged to optimize every bit of time in an effort to become more productive, thus taking away from their personal leisure time (Flisfeder, 2021). This category was the smallest, with only 15% of DITL videos being coded into this category.

Despite its small number, neoliberal ideology was still very much embodied in these videos. The Corporate variation made up 39% of this category, perhaps indicating the neoliberal effects that this type of work has on the individual in the DITL trend. In all variations coded in this category, dynamism of the conversion of leisure time to productive time was seen through users converting relaxing, personal activities into productive tasks and blurring lines between leisurely and productive activities. Despite the dynamism found throughout these videos, an element of productivity—in this case, activities that benefit oneself through increasing one's ability to accrue capital—remained persistent throughout this code.

The conversion of leisure time to productive time can be found in one "24, unemployed and living at home with my parents" creator's DITL video. She begins her video checking her emails, editing her LinkedIn, and tending to other productive tasks on her computer. We immediately see her white room, with polaroid pictures lining the wall above her computer and her colorful keyboard. She then goes to meet her friend to work together at a café. The café features ambient lighting, wooden chairs, tables, and some walls with sunflowers painted on one of the walls. Finally, she ends the video talking about the vision board she created and showing herself playing videogames in front of the same computer and wall we see in the beginning of the video. Right away in this video we see leisure time converted into productive time through the creator starting her day off checking emails and working on her LinkedIn profile and then heading off to get some work done with her friend. Of course, there is nothing wrong with someone who is unemployed looking applying to jobs, however, we do see neoliberal ideology here as the creator may feel pressured to be as productive as possible by applying to jobs and making herself more marketable through working on her LinkedIn and working with a friend.

A major theme in this category was users transforming their leisurely activities into productive ones with 60% of videos in this category doing so. These behaviors were extrapolated from Matthew Flisfeder's discussion of "value-producing activity"—activities that are performed in order to add value to oneself (Flisfeder, 2021, p.110). Activities were less about leisure and more about optimizing one's time and building one's skills in the name of productivity. This was demonstrated in an Entrepreneur's use of meditation, an activity known for relaxing and clearing one's mind, as a way to become more productive for the workday. This was also demonstrated by another Entrepreneur's refusal to read any book that isn't self-help or finance related, thus ensuring that his reading time is spent learning a new skill or finding a way to increase knowledge that will help him leverage more capital. Neoliberalism displaces these once leisurely and relaxing activities and recodes them into capitalist tools for increasing one's worth and further optimizing their time.

While some users converted leisurely activities and downtime into productive time, other users blurred the lines between where leisure activities begin and work ends. User behaviors were adapted from Flisfeder's (2021) discussion of the lack of separation between work and leisure under neoliberalism. Under a neoliberal ideology, as individuals attempt to convert more and more leisure time into productive time, it can be difficult to tell where work-related activities end and where personal time begins. 43% of videos in this category demonstrated blurred lines between one's work and personal life. One user walks viewers through a day in her life as an Influencer (and a mother), filming a large portion of her day, including filming her son's haircut and birthday party for a vlog. Perhaps typically seen as more intimate or private events, this creator chose to take the opportunity to turn them into monetizable content for her vlog. Productive time can be seen in another way as a Corporate employee showed herself enjoying

some wine with friends/coworkers with her laptop open during the workday—here it becomes unclear if she is on break, at a work-related happy hour, or has decided to combine her leisure time (drinking with friends) and productive time (working). These users have blurred the lines between their personal time and their working time, through an inability to see where work ends and leisure begins. It appears that for some creators every aspect of the day, as well as days off work, are a chance to be turned into something productive. The neoliberal pressure to monetize everything can be seen here through not being able to separate work from one's personal life, instead choosing to monetize one's personal life or focus on productive tasks throughout their personal time.

The notion of productivity was a persistent, conservative element of neoliberalism found throughout this category. Users reflected some aspects of productivity through either explicitly converting their leisure time into productive time or by blurring the lines between their personal and working time. Dynamism resulted in this bifurcation in the way productivity was shown throughout videos coded into this category as users reappropriated the way productivity was communicated.

Competition/Marketization
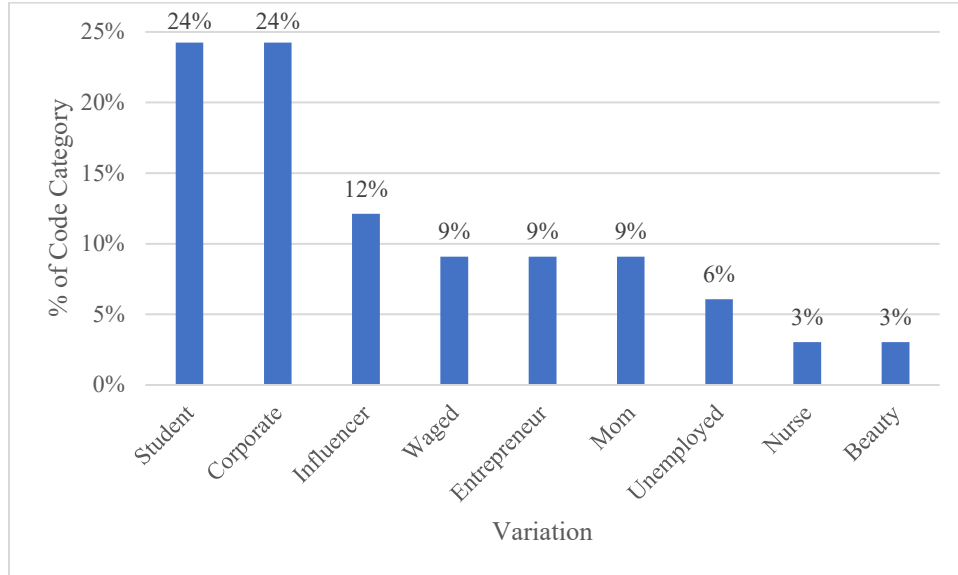
As users found ways to convert much of their downtime and leisure time into productive time, users also endorsed the competitive nature of neoliberalism and marketized themselves in the process (Dean, 2008). Throughout this category a conservative element of sacrifice can be found—the notion that users had to sacrifice their time and activities to be competitive members of the workforce. Videos coded into the Competition/Marketization category embodied neoliberalism in various ways, typically seen through early wake-up times, sacrificing activities or multitasking, and using competitive rhetoric throughout the video. Despite these variations, videos in this category reflected this element of sacrifice. 22% of videos were coded for markers of competition/marketization with Students and Corporate employees each making up 24% of the videos in this category, demonstrating the hypercompetitive nature of academic institutions and corporate jobs found in the DITL trend.

One Student provided a clear example of the Competition/Marketization category through her DITL. Her video starts in the bathroom, showing off clean white walls and a clean sink, where she adorns her gym outfit—an oversized brown sweatshirt over exercise shorts and a

t-shirt. Before leaving she makes her bed, where we see her room with all white walls and some wooden shelves that hold a few books and a small plant. Her day starts at 6:30 AM to get to the gym before returning home to eat breakfast and read her bible, saving time by multitasking. Upon returning home we see her wooden floors, white wood shelves and cabinets, and her black couch. She then goes to class, meets a friend, and goes to Target to do some shopping. Throughout the video she uses rhetoric that references productivity using "#productivity" in the caption and titling the video "Busy College Day in My Life" in the opening frame. This Student embodies competition through her early wakeup time, multitasking, and rhetoric that allows her to be more competitive and thus market herself as a busy and productive college student.

One of the glaring indications of competition and marketization were videos featuring users waking up at very early hours in order to complete their morning routines before work, with 48% of viewers showing themselves waking up early or articulating that they did so. The competitiveness of waking up early was derived from Duffy (2017), Flisfeder (2021), and Khamis et al.'s (2017) notions of glorification of entrepreneurialism and the need to sacrifice for one's occupation under neoliberalism. As the adage goes, "time is money" and neoliberalism invokes its subjects to optimize their time to be effective employees and accrue more capital. Some Corporate employees demonstrated their dedication to competition by showing themselves waking up before 5 AM to go to the gym and get ready before work. These users hardly acknowledged these early wakeup times as if this were a standard expectation in order to remain a competitive member of society. This can partially help be explained by the notion that the contemporary lifestyle has become rushed due to being "inextricably immersed in a continually accelerating neoliberal sociopolitical and economic order in which speed is propounded in the name of competition and efficiency" (Sugarman & Thrift, 2020, p.861). For these users, it

appears that getting an early start to the day helps them become more competitive and efficient in their occupations. Some users seemed to be forced to wake up at increasingly earlier times just to be able to complete the routines that help them get ready for work and stay healthy, routines that everyone deserves to have ample time to complete. Other creators listed the benefits of waking up early and explicitly glorified their early wakeup times, not only contributing to this idea that sacrifice is necessary to get ahead, but endorsing it. Users advocating for early wake ups early have wholeheartedly embraced the competitive nature of neoliberalism, thus further idealizing the competitive nature of neoliberalism through their own content and marketing themselves as competitive members of neoliberal society.

As some users woke up early to fit in all their tasks before work and get a jump on the competition, 21% of users forwent or substituted certain tasks and activities (like cooking and the gym, for work and studying) to make themselves more competitive with their peers. Similarly, other users stacked multiple tasks on top of each other and optimized their daily lives to maximize their profitability, displaying another dynamic aspect of the competitive nature of neoliberalism. Forgoing/substituting tasks and multitasking fall in line with Dean (2008) and Flisfeder's (2021) discussion of the optimization of one's time under neoliberalism. The sacrificing of activities and hyper-optimization of everyday life can be seen as efforts to embrace competition through maximizing efficiency to gain an advantage wherever possible. One Corporate employee walked on a treadmill while she worked while a Student mentioned not having time to cook due to studying for finals, both finding ways to optimize their time for maximum productivity. Many videos in this category embodied the neoliberal work ethics of sacrifice and optimization in order to remain competitive in their occupation—in these cases it

was not merely enough to get up early, one had to forgo activities or multitask, to remain a competitive member of the neoliberal workforce.

Another important aspect of this category was justifying, productive, and competitive rhetoric used in videos with 42% of videos in this category employing this rhetoric. Rhetoric was identified from extrapolation of Duffy (2017), Flisfeder (2021), Khamis (2017), and Dean's (2008) discussions of neoliberalism and competition. One way this was communicated was through users justifying their working conditions through invoking words like "sacrifice" and "grateful" to demonstrate how lucky they were to be able to be in the position they were in. While, of course, there are much worse places to be than at an office, working two jobs, or working full time as a mother, this does not mean that we must accept difficult or exploitative working conditions. Some TikTok users stated how thankful they were or how they needed to be more thankful about the position they were in while showing themselves working long hours and/or working multiple jobs. We can see even more dynamism within this subcategory as while some users felt the need to justify their long hours, other users blatantly glorified it or encouraged it. Users sometimes used competitive and productive rhetoric to communicate the neoliberal idea of competition. One Entrepreneur often used words like "conquer" or "dominate" throughout his video when talking about his workday, while another user who works two jobs included "lets get this money" and hashtags such as #monteytok, #moneymagnet, and #workworkwork in the caption (see Appendix A). Both users glorified the competitive pursuit of capital through deploying specific words that positively portray competition. For some of these users, work was not about collaboration, it was about competing with rival businesses and other members of the workforce to become the most successful. We can clearly see neoliberalism's ability to reconceptualize daily "life in terms of its ideal of competition within markets" in the

way certain TikTok users frame their labor and routines as hyper-competitive (Dean, 2008, p.49).

The conservative element of sacrifice was seen throughout videos in this category, dynamically taking on a few different shapes. Users sacrificed time and/or sleep to get up early, surrendered activities to be more competitive, and even invoked themes of sacrifice in their competitive rhetoric. Throughout the instances of competition/marketization seen above, we see some form of sacrifice in each, despite the dynamistic variations in the way this sacrifice was demonstrated.

Promotion of Brands
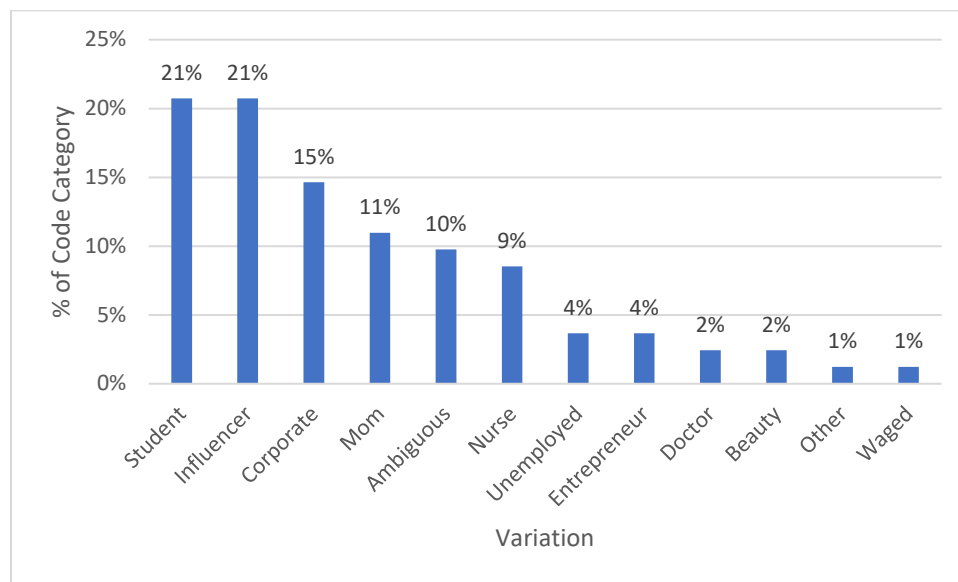
As the competitive nature of neoliberalism was promoted through the DITL trend, so was neoliberalism's consumptive nature. In fact, consumption was a major trend throughout the entire DITL trend with Brand Promotion coded in over half (55%) of the videos. Throughout this category, videos can be found with users promoting products explicitly as advertisements, showcasing products thus inadvertently promoting brands without compensation, and their video being centered around commodities and consumption (Dean, 2008; Flisfeder, 2021). The Student

and Influencer variations each made up 21% of the videos coded into this category, demonstrating the consumptive nature of these occupations in the DITL trend. Consumption and advertising remained conservative elements throughout this category, with these elements dynamically taking different shapes through brand partnerships/sponsored ads and users inadvertently promoting products.

The promotion of brands can be clearly seen in a Student's DITL video. She starts the video by showing herself get out of bed and get ready for the day. While getting ready, she shows off her outfit, making sure to name the brand for every article of clothing and jewelry. She then heads off to school, showing off the label of her kombucha before she leaves. She then eats lunch and goes to class before ending her video waving and blowing a kiss to the camera. In this video she inadvertently promotes brands by naming the companies of all the clothes she is wearing. Despite her showcasing of brands, there is no indication that she has partnered with any of these brands in her video.

A few (6%) brand partnerships and sponsored ads appeared throughout this category. The promotion of brands is derived from Dean's (2008) discussions of neoliberalism and the constant encouragement of consumption. Some users briefly talked about products they received from sponsors and included the brand in the caption of their video. Other users' DITL videos were completely centered around the product they were promoting, such as a video showing a Student using the iPad she "bought" off the website Backmarket (see Appendix A), and using the hashtag "#ad". Similarly, one Influencer's DITL video is all about her visiting Labcorp to get health testing done, including the hashtags "#ad" and "#labcorppartner" (see Appendix A) in the caption of her video. In these types of videos there was a dynamism in the way brand sponsorships or advertisements were disclosed—while some videos briefly featured users

showcasing these sponsored products, other videos were entirely centered around this advertisement. Despite advertisements taking on a few different forms, the conservative element of consumption was present in these videos through users becoming spokespersons for the brands they are promoting, encouraging users to purchase these products. In some cases, the entire video became an advertisement, highlighting the neoliberal need to marketize everything that can be marketized.

While some users received some form of compensation to promote brands in their DITL video, it is likely that the majority (94%) were not compensated (or at least did not disclose the partnership/compensation). These behaviors were derived from Dean (2008) and Flisfeder's (2021) discussion of neoliberalism's constant encouragement to enjoy and consume. Users often talked about their favorite products they used in their morning routines, actively showcased products they enjoyed, and even reviewed or endorsed products in their video. A Nurse showed off her favorite shoes and lotion, a Corporate employee named the brand of every article of clothing in the outfit she wore, another Corporate employee talked about her job at Google as if the video were an advertisement for the company, and a Beautician reviewed the products she uses at her job. Despite no indications of these users receiving compensation or partnering with the brands they were inadvertently promoting we still see the consumptive nature of neoliberalism in these videos. The constant, deliberate showcasing of products may remind one of Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption, the idea of consuming to demonstrate one's wealth (Walters & Carr, 2019). Yet unlike the notion of conspicuous consumption, it is not only the bourgeois and nouveau riche flaunting their luxurious products, it is all classes that engage in this behavior. Similarly, this behavior seems to move beyond conspicuous consumption, instead some videos heavily focused on consumption throughout the

day, creating an almost consumptive-ontology—that is, brands and commodities have become so important under neoliberalism that our lives begin to center around consumption.

As consumption became an important aspect of users' videos, some products were also framed as useful and productive (taken from Flisfeder's (2021) notion of neoliberalism's encouragement of every activity to be a productive one) through a fusion of the notions of productivity and consumption. Some users purchased products that helped them free up their leisure time as they felt (and demonstrated) that they did not have enough time before or after work to do everything they wanted or needed to. Some videos featured these creators drinking "morning greens", a type of supplement that helps consumers get in vitamins and nutrients typically obtained from fruits and vegetables, thus saving them the time and hassle of cooking and eating. Videos also featured creators using vacuum robots, ordering takeout, and subscribing to meal preparation services in order to save themselves time from cleaning and cooking. For example, one Corporate employee showed off her new "robot vacuum" that cleans for her so she can unwind and watch TV after a long day of work. Neoliberalism is apparent here through the workday exhausting users' time, thus leading to purchasing products that promise to help them take back more leisure time. As neoliberalism requires the average worker to spend much of one's day working, leaving less time for consumption, neoliberalism also finds ways to overcome this self-imposed barrier of time through the creation of products that promise to give individuals their time back (Flisfeder, 2021).

The conservative element of consumption and advertising were evident in every video in this category yet took on a dynamism by diverging into two evident forms—the paid advertisement and users promoting brands without compensation. Despite the majority of videos not technically being advertisements, many of them contained aspects of advertising through

videos highlighting the products users consumed. Here we see neoliberalism embodied through the obvious promotion of brands through advertisements, further encouraging viewers to consume more products, but also through a more subtle promotion of brands through creators discussing and showcasing brands they use. Neoliberalism seems to reconceptualize the entertainment value of the DITL trend, partially converting these videos into advertisements through both sponsored and non-sponsored endorsements of products by the video creator. This contributes to the consumptive nature of neoliberalism by the products that the creator promotes or consumes becoming a large focus of the DITL video. Throughout this category there appeared to be a pervasiveness of advertising that affected content creation strategies, ranging from partnering with companies to creating videos that felt like advertisements. This use of the TikTok as an advertisement reflects the neoliberal ideology through making these videos an investment for those who have secured brand partnerships, the aspiration to secure a brand partnership, and/or a nonconscious effect of users attempting to recreate videos by adhering to the content creation norms seen in previous videos.

Positioning Oneself as a Brand
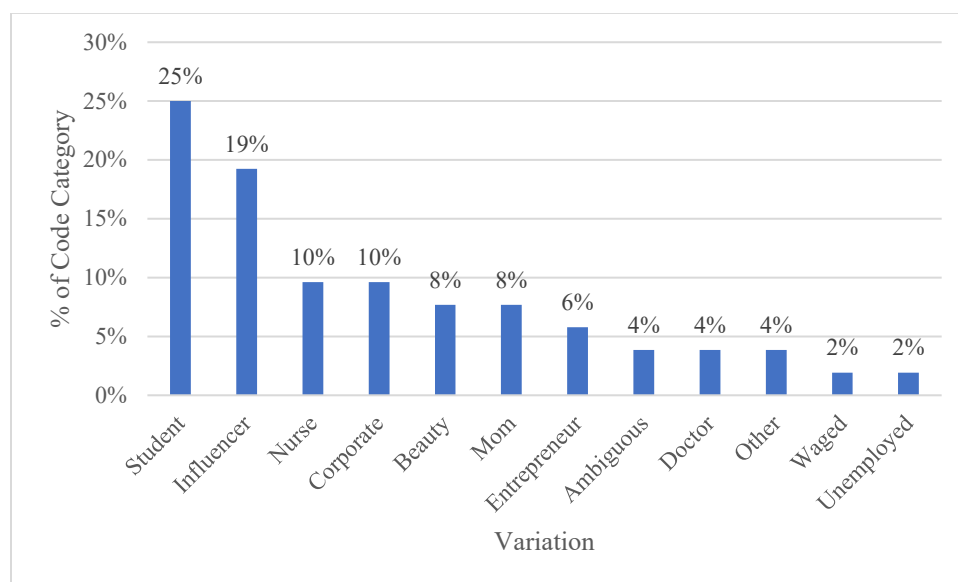
Some TikTok creators participating in the DITL trend mirrored promotion of brands and products they used by also positioning themselves as brands (Banet-Weiser & Juhasz, 2011; Duffy, 2017; Mcguigan, 2014 Whitmer, 2019). 35% of DITL videos were coded for Positioning Oneself as a Brand, with the Student variation making up 25% of the videos in this category. Videos were coded into this category when users positioned themselves as brands through extreme aestheticization of videos and employing deliberate movements to create a distinct brand, deploying authenticity as a brand, and self-objectification by reducing themselves to a marketable brand. Self-objectification remained a conservative element throughout this category as creators employed different strategies to position themselves as a brand to their viewers.

An Influencer couple provide a clear example of converting the self into a brand through their DITL. They take us through a typical day in their life in New York City, starting off the video getting ready for the day set to a calm song. They use quick cuts to show themselves exercising, walking around the city in the rain, eating, and going to a spa. They then adorn new outfits, posing for the camera while showing off their clothes. The influencers then show themselves at a fancy event taking pictures before ending the video. In the caption of the video, they include a reference to another social media page—"my new makeup routine on YT". Here we see these creators converting themselves into a brand by using their editing style to create a unique brand and encouraging viewers to check out their other social media page, an extension of this brand. Similarly, this appears to be the only DITL that focuses on a couple, perhaps indicating their use of their relationship as a part of their brand.

One of the ways dynamism was communicated in this category was through creators' use of editing and behaviors to communicate their self-brand. These behaviors were derived from research on neoliberalism and self-branding (Banet-Weiser & Juhasz, 2011; Duffy, 2017;

Mcguigan, 2014 Whitmer, 2019). Specifically, 19% of users in this category's style of editing and curation communicated their self-brand through extreme aestheticization and deliberate, repetitive movements. This was quite apparent in a user's "DITL of a mom" in which she showed herself making the same face (smiling with eyes closed) throughout much of the video, speaking softly into the microphone, and using deliberate, exaggerated, and repetitive movements while she cooked. An Influencer engaged in a similar practice by using a fast, choppy editing style in tandem with slow, zooming shots and exaggerated, deliberate movements throughout his video. Similar to Valorization of Working Conditions, users often also chose only the best shots possible to include in their videos that would provide some aesthetic appeal. Some creators chose to foreground well-organized products and lavish meals, while others created aesthetic coffee art and some men filmed themselves exercising shirtless in well-lit gyms. Together, all of these highly specific, curated choices and movements created a specific brand for the creator by demonstrating a very specific style of video. This brand can be seen as another way to market oneself to potential audiences and further capture viewers' attention. Thus, the brand the creators communicated represented a marketized and commoditized self—a neoliberal self-brand.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, rather than creating highly curated content, roughly 21% of TikTok creators in this category used authenticity to construct a self-brand, contributing to a dynamism in the way users converted the self into a brand. The use of authenticity was adapted from work on self-branding and authenticity (Duffy & Pooley, 2019; Duffy et al., 2022; Whitmer, 2019). Creators filmed "realistic DITL" videos that gave viewers a glimpse behind the scenes of typical social media's idealized content. One Corporate employee filmed a "realistic morning of a 27-year-old with a normal job" (see Appendix A), demonstrating her authenticity

through showing herself wake up, looking sleepy and having not gotten ready, and taking viewers through her morning routine. A Nurse communicated her authenticity through using the word "realistic" in the title of the video, talked about how nursing is "not like Grey's Anatomy" (a TV show), and filmed herself using the bathroom all while talking about what the workday entails. Other users did not explicitly use the word "realistic" in the title of the video, but instead demonstrated authenticity by discussing topics that conveyed a sense of realism and may create a sense intimacy with her viewers. For example, one Nurse talked about getting amniotic fluid on herself at work and shared personal opinions on her job. Literature on self-branding discusses how presenting oneself as "authentic" becomes a way to commodify and market oneself to viewers which can be seen in these users' videos use of the word "realistic" and giving users "behind-the-scenes" glimpses into their daily lives that may differ from the highly curated videos found in the DITL trend. These notions of authenticity become opaque, and perhaps even diminished, as viewers may begin to wonder if these filmed behaviors are genuine or just another way to market themselves to users.

As users found ways to further promote themselves, they also displayed a dynamism in the ways they objectified themselves, with users presenting themselves as more of a brand than a person, which was seen in 74% of users in this category. Self-objectification and reflections of the self as a brand originated from research on neoliberalism and self-branding (Banet-Weiser & Juhasz, 2011; Duffy, 2017; Flisfeder, 2021; Mcguigan, 2014 Whitmer, 2019). One way this was done was through their handle, or username, being a reflection of their job or creator status, which was seen in 28% of users in this category. For instance, users included the words "recruiter" (see Appendix A) and "hair by" in their handle to leave no ambiguity as to what their occupation is. While some users opted to show more personal aspects of their daily life, many

users chose to only show their work, and these handles often indicated that the video would be more oriented towards their occupation than other DITL videos. When watching a video of a Nurse take us through her activities before and after work, one may get a greater sense for who the user is rather than the Corporate employee who only shows himself sitting at his desk typing away on his computer and drinking coffee. In the latter case, we learn nothing about the user, instead we are only able to see what their job entails. This may give off the impression that the creator may have little going on in their life outside of work and perhaps has made work an important aspect of their identity. Users also converted themselves into a brand through promoting their other social media channels or using their video to promote their business. A UPS worker promoted his self-brand by asking viewers to follow his YouTube channel while an Influencer made references to her vlogs and other social media posts. Beyond these users promoting their social media these creators treated the viewers like fans of their self-brand by making sure they were up to date with all of their content, further positioning themselves as some sort of product or brand. Another example of self-promotion can be seen in creators using their DITL to promote their business. One Beautician demonstrated this self-promotion by extensively showing the work she did on her client and including the pricing of her services in the video as if it were a commercial.

This conservative element of self-objectification remained persistent throughout this category, dynamically taking on various forms through creators turning themselves into a brand through their content creation style, using authenticity to market themselves, and self-objectification through equating oneself with their occupation, promoting their social media platforms, or using their DITL as an advertisement. These reductions of the self into a brand

indicate neoliberalism's ability to objectivize the individual and turn them into nothing more than commodities, ready to be sold to the attention economy.

Anomalies
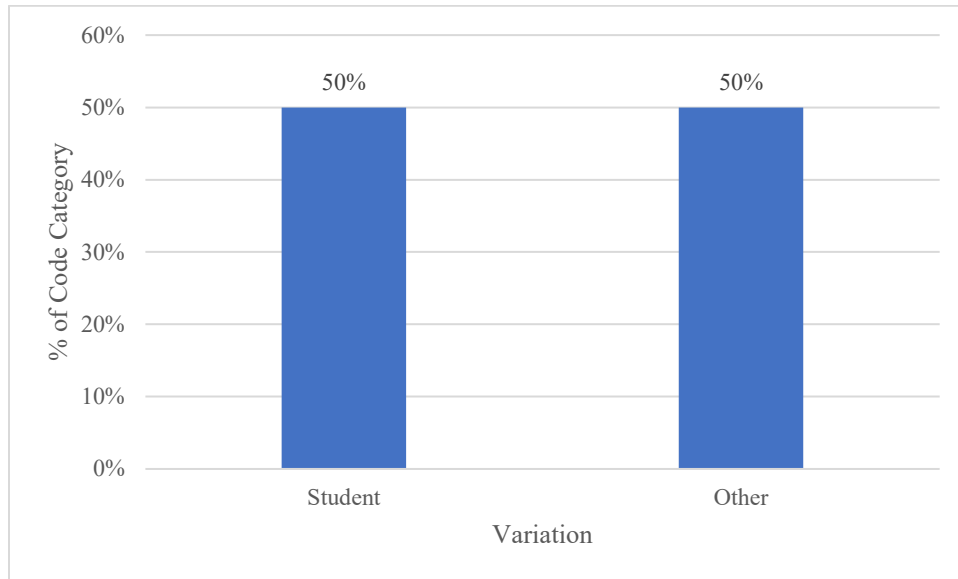
Videos coded into the Anomalies category perhaps take on the greatest dynamism of all the code categories. Videos coded into this category did not initially fit into any of the predetermined categories, with only two videos (1%) coded into this category. These videos did not glorify one's working conditions, demonstrate conversion of personal time into productive time, promote any brands, or position oneself as a brand. Despite these videos not communicating the normal tenets of neoliberalism found in every other video, they did still communicate an important aspect, or symptom, of neoliberalism—atomization. A Student took viewers through an average day in her life going to class and running errands. Although she was in public places for much of the video, we do not see her interacting with anyone else. Instead, we see her eating alone, going to class alone, and ending her day alone. Similarly, an airline pilot (Other variation) filmed her daily life getting ready for work, flying, and going straight back to a new hotel after work. Although it can likely be assumed that both creators had some form of

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social interaction throughout their day, the user-centric approach to the video (also found in many videos throughout the DITL genre) highlights the importance of the individual and the commitment to one's occupation having the potential to isolate one from others through a lack of time. Through depictions of days spent alone and a lack of socializing we see how the conditions of a neoliberal society serve to cut individuals off from each other. Long, busy work or schooldays convert communities into nothing more than individuals by normalizing individualistic routines and further marketizing oneself in the pursuit of capital.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This thesis analyzed 150 videos found in TikTok's Day in the Life trend in order to examine the videos for conservative, persisting elements of neoliberalism that were inherent to the trend as well as how videos exhibited dynamism through neoliberalism being presented and performed by the video creators in various ways. This analysis was done by first describing the overall conservatism and dynamism found in the DITL trend before diving into conservatism and dynamism found in each code category to examine how neoliberalism took on various forms throughout the trend.

Throughout this thesis I was able to demonstrate how neoliberal ideology remained an enduring theme throughout the DITL trend through every video being coded for markers of neoliberalism, the Corporate variation's embodiment of neoliberalism, and the persistence of the predetermined codes throughout the trend. I established neoliberal ideology's ability to take on dynamism through the various variations of the trend and neoliberalism's ability to manifest in different ways throughout each predetermined code.

This thesis demonstrates TikTok's ability to promote neoliberal ideology specifically via the DITL trend through users' ideological performances that serve to reify neoliberalism. By finding direct examples of these performances, I was able to demonstrate what neoliberalism looks like through visual representations rather than through abstractions, as neoliberalism is typically described. I specifically chose to focus on neoliberalism as this ideology is presented throughout this trend as the standard way of living. It is important to examine how the DITL trend reflects neoliberal ideology as it is imperative to understand how these videos uphold neoliberalism, thus contributing to the notion that there is no alternative to neoliberalism. The

belief that neoliberalism is our reality and that there is no alternative is harmful as it may lead

subjects to commodify and marketize their daily lives and identities, accept suboptimal working

conditions, and ignore efforts to strive for improvements in one's work life. Similarly, this

reification of neoliberal ideology is detrimental as it sets neoliberalism as the norm and

contributes to the economization of every aspect of life, thus minimizing the importance of other

aspects of life outside of profit and competition. While this thesis will not deliver us from

neoliberalism, it does provide a starting point from which to analyze social media for the

persistence of neoliberal ideology, as well as the different forms this ideology takes. By being

aware of the media we consume, or create, we can begin to understand how this content

perpetuates and upholds tenets of neoliberal ideology. Through being more aware of how

neoliberalism is implicitly portrayed in social media content, perhaps we can find ways to

become more resistant to this ideology's indoctrination. Despite this, there is still much work to

be done in the area of neoliberalism and social media. As new iterations of media are created and

ideology finds new ways to be disseminated, research should continue to examine how it is

communicated.

Limitations

I acknowledge that there are certain limitations in conducting this analysis as I was reliant

on TikTok's algorithm to provide me content. This may mean that the videos I received when

looking for these videos may have been different than what others may receive due to unique

curations of the TikTok algorithm dependent on each user. This could mean that other users may

be exposed to different types of DITL videos that may not necessarily reflect the same data I

gathered. For instance, they may see more of certain variations or different variations altogether.

This may lead to different findings, such as conservatism and dynamism being apparent in other

ways, different variations being more prevalent throughout the trend, or finding different themes in code categories. Another limitation of this study is the study being limited to online behaviors only. Because of this I was unable to gauge users and creators about their opinions on the DITL trend and ideology. Other limitations regarding the TikTok platform include videos that could be considered part of this trend that were not under the hashtags I chose to explore. This study's findings do not capture the full landscape of the DITL trend due to posts related to the topic without the hashtag not being explored and convenience sampling videos given to me through searching these hashtags. Similarly, this analysis only documents a certain point in time (February 2022 to March 2024) and cannot account for future videos. Despite these limitations, I believe that this thesis provides a representative framing to address how neoliberalism is communicated via TikTok trends through looking at a variety of videos that capture a range of variations over time.
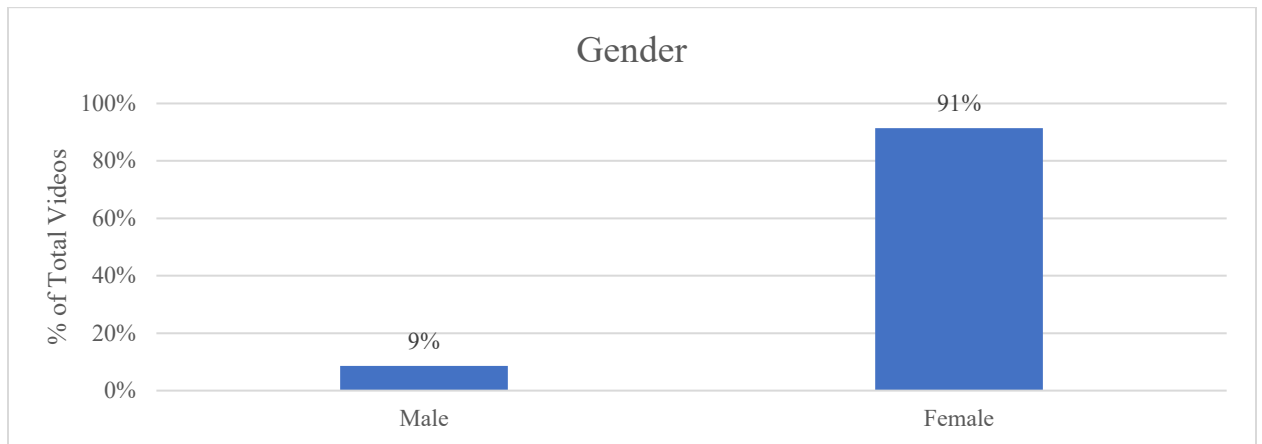
Future Research

Further research could be done by focusing on participant research. This could be done by interviewing creators who have participated in this trend to better understand their content creation strategies and what they decided to show in their video. Similarly, viewers could be surveyed or interviewed to investigate how much DITL content they consume and if they are influenced by the content. It would also be beneficial to investigate other platforms, like YouTube or Instagram, to explore these platforms' effects on communicating neoliberal ideology as well as similarities and differences between DITL content found on each platform. Additionally, it may be helpful to conduct research on how these behaviors manifest in "real life"—such as how is valorization of working conditions or conversion of leisure time to productive time found in everyday life outside of social media.
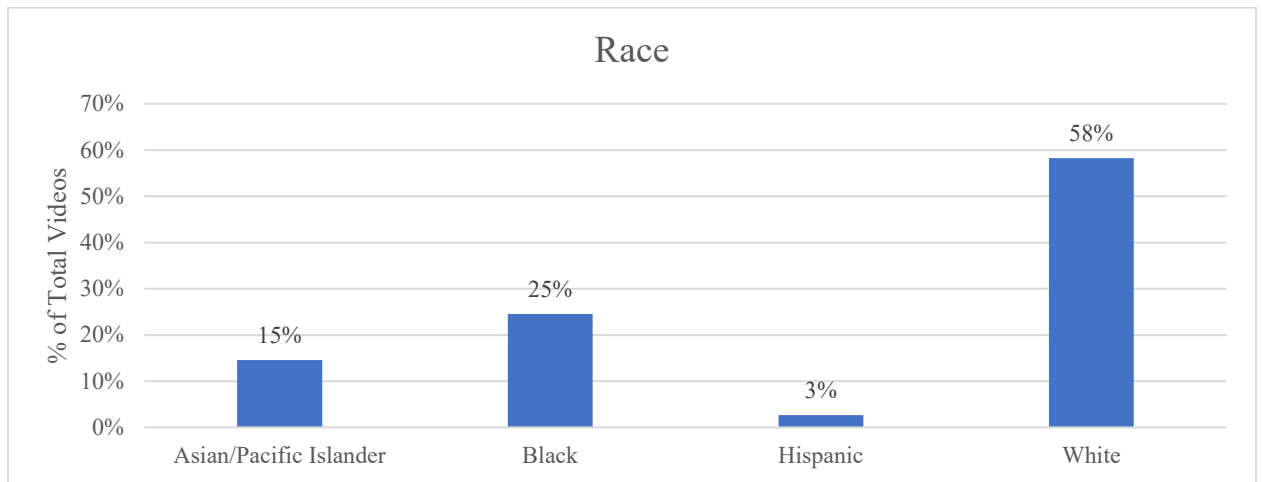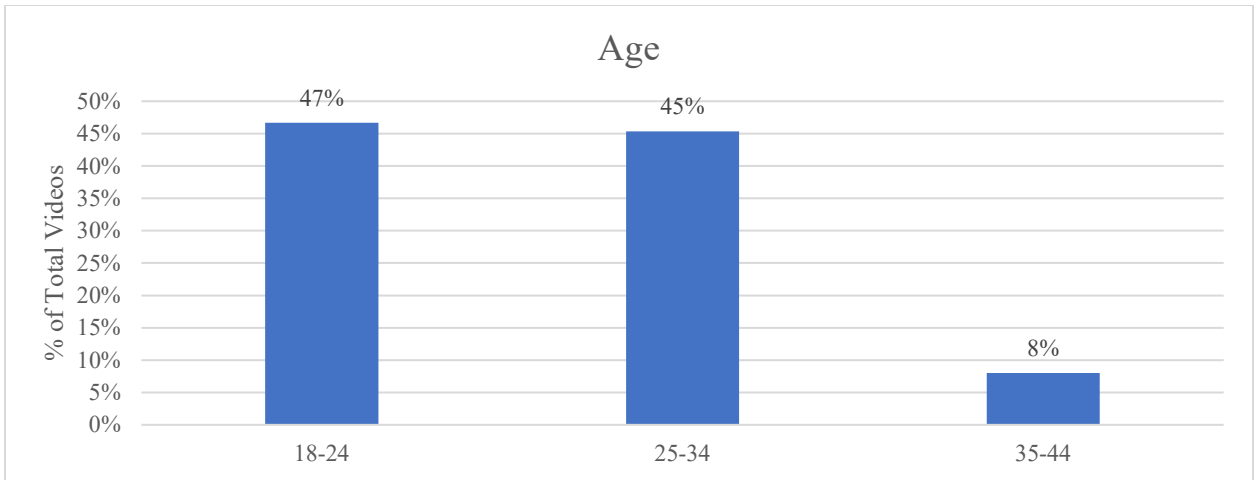
Appendices

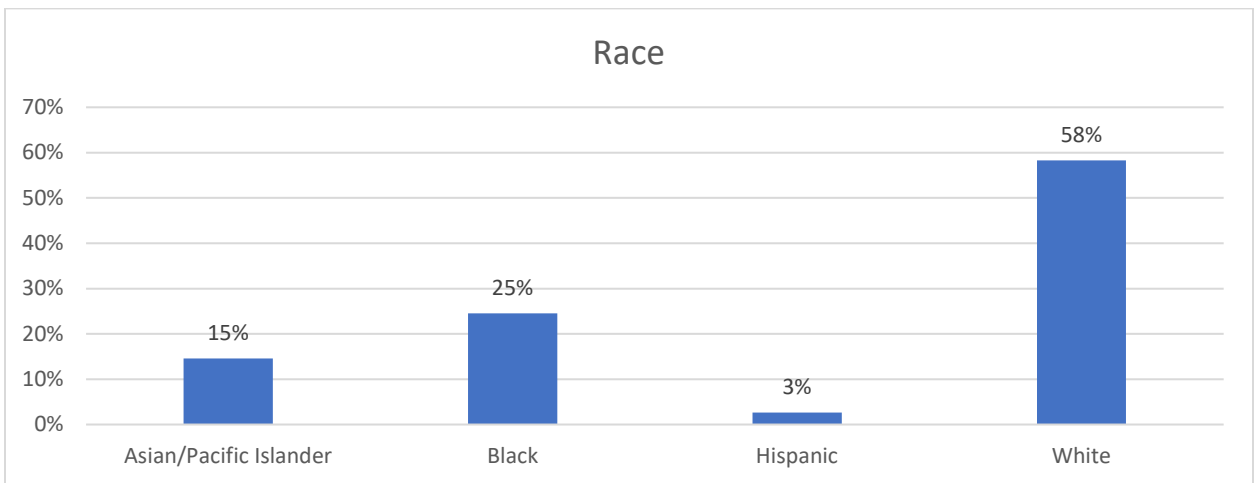**Appendix A: Demographics Charts**

1. Gender Distribution

Gender

A bar chart titled "Gender" with y-axis "% of Total Videos" ranging from 0% to 100%. Male: 9%. Female: 91%.

2. Race Distribution

Race

A bar chart titled "Race" with y-axis "% of Total Videos" ranging from 0% to 70%. Asian/Pacific Islander: 15%. Black: 25%. Hispanic: 3%. White: 58%.

3. Age Distribution

Age

Bar chart titled "Age" with y-axis labeled "% of Total Videos" ranging from 0% to 50%:
- 18-24: 47%
- 25-34: 45%
- 35-44: 8%

4. Race Distribution

Race

Bar chart titled "Race" with y-axis ranging from 0% to 70%:
- Asian/Pacific Islander: 15%
- Black: 25%
- Hispanic: 3%
- White: 58%
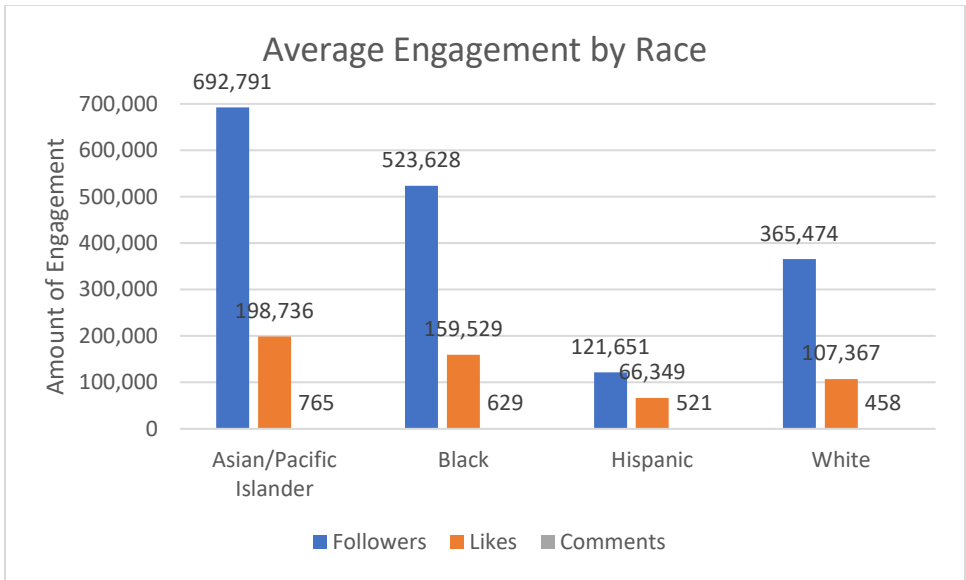
5. Average Engagement Distribution

Average Engagement

6. Average Engagement by Gender
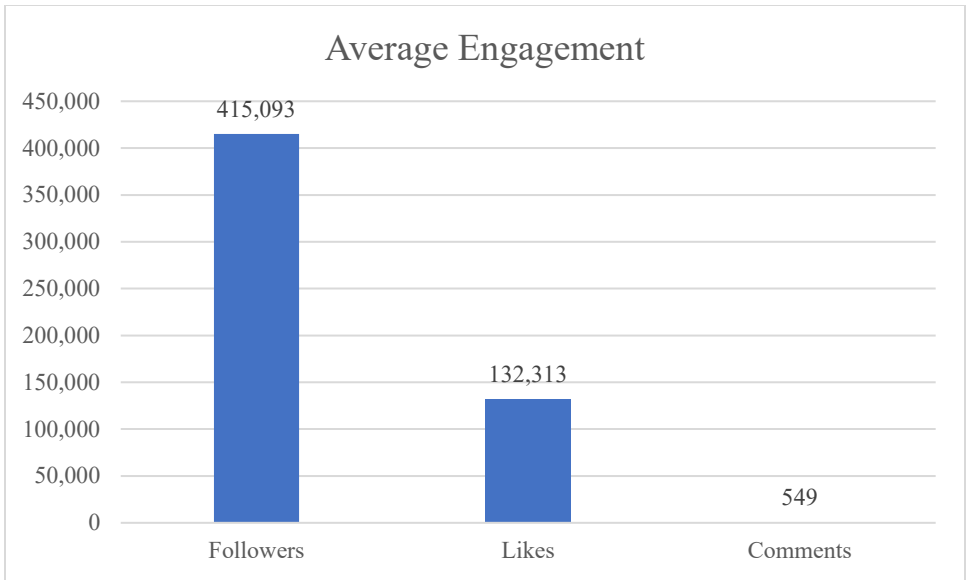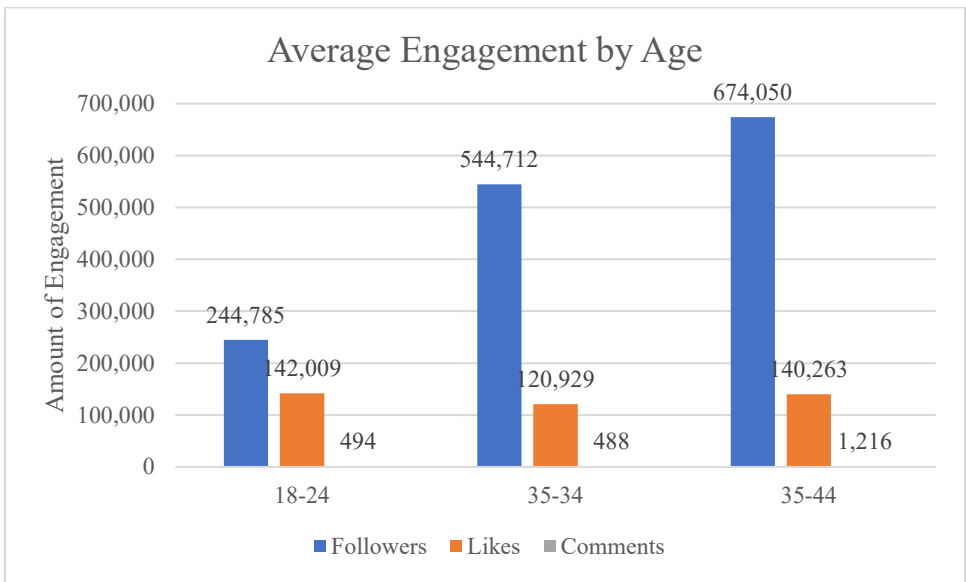

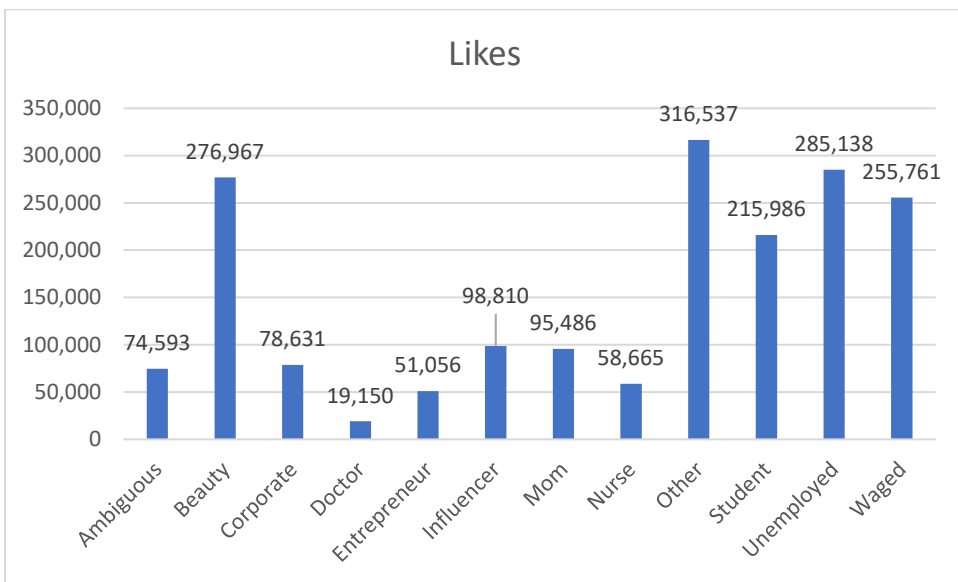Average Engagement by Gender

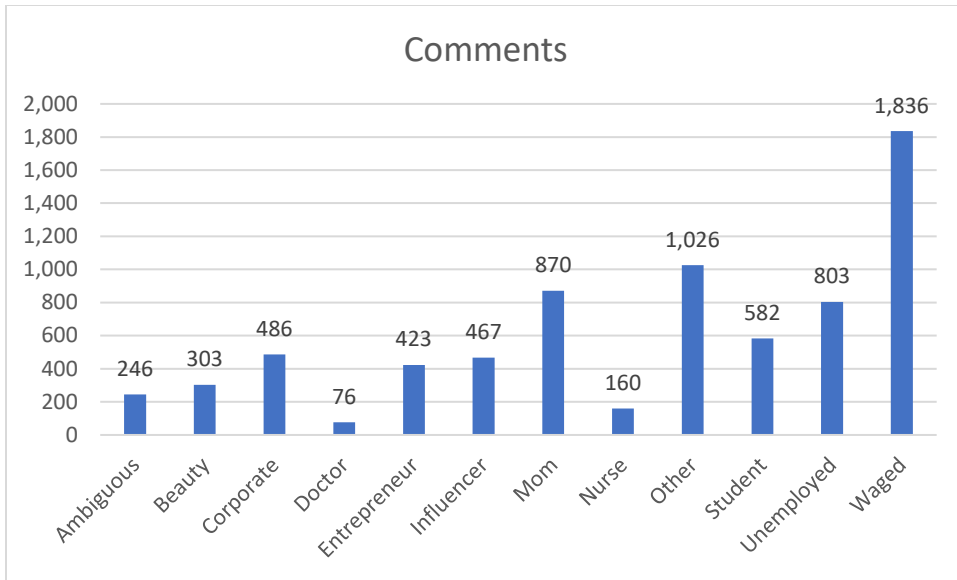7. Average Engagement by Race

Average Engagement by Race

Amount of Engagement

- 692,791
- 198,736
- 765 (Asian/Pacific Islander)
- 523,628
- 159,529
- 629 (Black)
- 121,651
- 66,349
- 521 (Hispanic)
- 365,474
- 107,367
- 458 (White)

■ Followers ■ Likes ■ Comments

8. Average Engagement by Age

Average Engagement by Age

Amount of Engagement

- 244,785
- 142,009
- 494 (18-24)
- 544,712
- 120,929
- 488 (35-34)
- 674,050
- 140,263
- 1,216 (35-44)
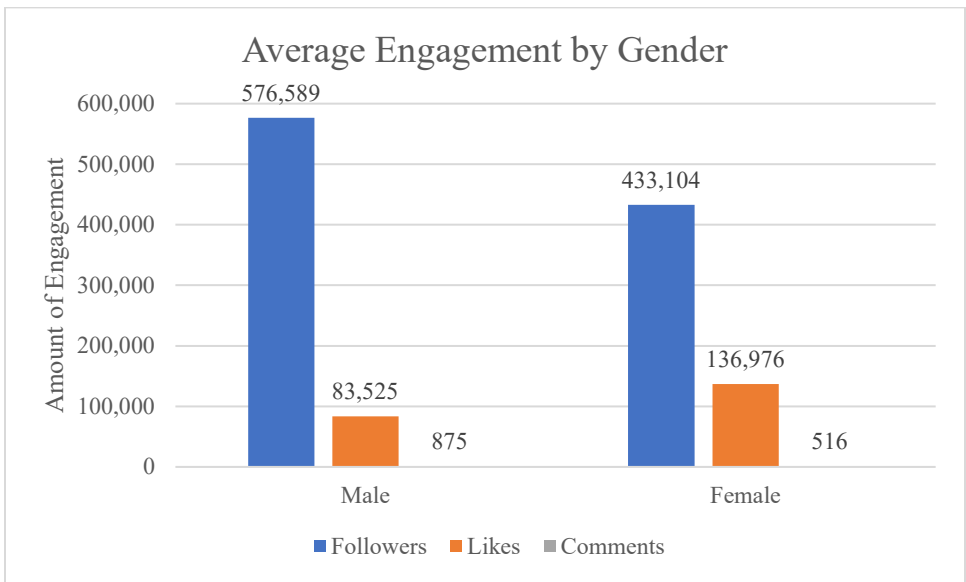
■ Followers ■ Likes ■ Comments

9. Followers by Variation

Followers

Category	Value
Ambiguous	111,068
Beauty	121,183
Corporate	203,657
Doctor	103,148
Entrepreneur	59,083
Influencer	1,074,360
Mom	388,953
Nurse	205,541
Other	1,620,628
Student	344,610
Unemployed	302,875
Waged	70,538

10. Likes by Variation

Likes

Category	Value
Ambiguous	74,593
Beauty	276,967
Corporate	78,631
Doctor	19,150
Entrepreneur	51,056
Influencer	98,810
Mom	95,486
Nurse	58,665
Other	316,537
Student	215,986
Unemployed	285,138
Waged	255,761

11. Comments by Variation

Comments

Category	Value
Ambiguous	246
Beauty	303
Corporate	486
Doctor	76
Entrepreneur	423
Influencer	467
Mom	870
Nurse	160
Other	1,026
Student	582
Unemployed	803
Waged	1,836

Appendix B: Captions, Hashtags, and Handles

DAY IN MY LIFE @AYBL ✨ 🐕 💗 #uconn #dayinmylife #vlog #diml #collegelife #dimlvlog #dayinmylifevlog #uconnhuskies
♫ The Gold - Phoebe Bridgers Version - Manchester Orchestra & Phoebe Bridgers

Figure 1. Sponsored Ad

Figure 2. Unemployed user's skincare products

Figure 3. Entrepreneur describing himself as a "$20K per month 21-year-old automation agency owner"

Figure 4. #dontwork2jobs caption

Figure 5. #brokemoms caption

Figure 6. Waged employee's captions

Figure 7. Backmarket Ad

Figure 8. Labcorp Ad

Figure 9. Realistic morning of a 27-year-old with a normal job

Figure 10. Positioning self as a recruiter in handle/username

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