

Cross-Platform Content Strategies on Social Media: A Case of Body Positivity Advocate Tess Holliday

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Abstract: Social media platforms, particularly Instagram and TikTok, provide new opportunities for body positivity advocates to challenge traditional beauty norms. This study examines how Tess Holliday employs cross-platform content strategies to maintain brand consistency and enhance audience engagement. Using a case study approach, this research analyzes 109 Instagram posts and 254 TikTok videos from 2024, categorizing content into 12 key themes. Findings reveal that Holliday tailors her content to platform-specific characteristics: Instagram reinforces her strong and confident brand identity, while TikTok highlights a more authentic and vulnerable side, leveraging viral trends for wider reach. Additionally, synchronizing core content across platforms helps maintain brand coherence. Existing research often focuses on single-platform strategies, overlooking how influencers navigate multi-platform environments. This study fills that gap but remains limited by its single-case scope and short-term data. Future research should expand case selection and adopt longitudinal methods to track evolving strategies. This study contributes to digital branding theory and offers practical insights for marketers and content creators on optimizing cross-platform engagement while ensuring brand consistency.

Keyword: Cross-platform; Body Positive; Self-branding; Content Strategy

1. Introduction

In a culture where thinness has long been the dominant beauty standard, social media has fueled the rise of the body positivity movement. Advocates use social media to challenge traditional body image norms and promote greater acceptance of diverse body types. Although platforms like Instagram and TikTok offer broad audience reach, the growing competition among platforms and frequent algorithmic changes compel creators to continuously refine their communication strategies. As a result, many advocates, including Tess Holliday, one of the most prominent figures in the body positivity movement, have adopted cross-platform strategies to strengthen their brand. By distributing content across Instagram and TikTok, Holliday has built a large following, demonstrating her ability to engage diverse audiences through a tailored content approach. By strategically adapting to these shifts, she not only mitigates the risks of platform dependence but also reinforces brand stability in an increasingly volatile digital landscape (Dhingra et al. 2024).

Social media, particularly Instagram and TikTok, have become central platforms for the expansion of the body positivity movement. These platforms enable advocates to challenge traditional beauty standards and promote more inclusive social perceptions in multiple ways. They empower users to showcase diverse body representations and foster self-love and acceptance through visual content, personal narratives, and community engagement.

Research indicates that body positivity content on social media promotes the acceptance of diverse body types. Additionally, it helps mitigate the negative effects of body dissatisfaction, particularly among marginalized groups, such as individuals with chronic conditions (Cunha et al. 2024).

Body positivity advocates establish personal brands through personal narratives and user interactions to promote the social acceptance of diverse body types (Albert et al. 2024). By sharing their experiences with body shaming and their journey toward self-acceptance, they foster deeper emotional connections with their audiences (Brewster and Sklar 2022.).

For instance, Leah Vernon and Stephanie Yeboah use their platforms to explore the intersections of race and body politics, advocating for a more inclusive perspective on aesthetics (Johansson, 2021). This authenticity and uniqueness not only enhance brand recognition but also cultivate long-term audience loyalty (Miguel 2024; Dhingra et al. 2024).

Instagram and TikTok provide a dynamic environment for advocates to share body-positive messages, allowing them to interact with their audience in real time. This engagement fosters a sense of community and support among followers, encouraging them to embrace diverse body types and challenge social norms (Longhurst et al. 2024). This "decentralized" dialogue mechanism fosters a strong sense of community belonging (Paraskeva 2024) and facilitates the retransmission of advocates' core values among audiences.

At the same time, cross-platform strategies enhance visibility and audience engagement. For body positivity advocates, distributing content across multiple platforms broadens their audience reach and reduces reliance on a single platform, thereby strengthening their overall brand image. For example, Instagram relies on social connections and hashtag strategies, enabling advocates to quickly connect with like-minded communities (Tafesse & Wood, 2023). In contrast, TikTok prioritizes interest-based recommendation algorithms that favor short, emotionally resonant content and enhance audience engagement through real-time interactions (Lan 2023). Advocates who tailor their content strategies to align with the algorithmic characteristics and user ecosystems of different platforms can improve their communication effectiveness. This strategic adaptation increases their chances of maximizing audience engagement and reach.

Despite extensive research on body positivity content on social media, certain gaps remain. For instance, Strach (2023), Albert et al. (2024), and Cohen et al. (2021) have confirmed the high engagement rates of body positivity advocates on Instagram and TikTok. Brathwaite et al. (2023) also highlighted differences in how users across multiple platforms, such as Instagram, evaluate body positivity content.

However, two significant limitations persist in the existing literature. First, most studies focus on single-platform analyses, limiting insights into how body positivity advocates navigate multiple platforms. Second, cross-platform research does not sufficiently address the strategic operations of content creators.

To address these shortcomings, this study examines Tess Holliday as a case study. It explores how she has strategically adapted her content on Instagram and TikTok to align with different algorithmic logic and user interaction patterns. At the same time, she maintains the core brand concepts of "body positivity" and "social inclusion."

2. Methodology

This study employs a case study approach, analyzing Tess Holliday's 2024 content strategy and audience engagement on Instagram and TikTok. Using an inductive method (Creswell and Creswell, 2017), it first categorizes content types and platform-specific differences before summarizing her cross-platform strategy. The research follows four key steps: case selection, data collection, content classification, and data analysis.

2.1 Case Selection and Research Subject

2.1.1 *Typical Cross-Platform Influence*

As an internationally recognized plus-size model, Tess Holliday has a substantial following on both Instagram (approximately 2.6 million followers) and TikTok (703,000 followers) as of 2024. She remains highly active on both platforms and frequently adjusts her content strategy to align with each platform's unique characteristics, making her a representative case of cross-platform brand management.

2.1.2 *Clear Brand Positioning for In-Depth Analysis*

Holliday's core philosophy centers on "body positivity" and "social inclusion," which have remained consistent over time. Her case provides a valuable opportunity for examining the intersection of micro-celebrity personal branding and social issue advocacy.

2.1.3 *Data Accessibility and Research Replicability*

Tess Holliday's Instagram and TikTok accounts are publicly accessible, allowing researchers to legally collect and analyze her posts. This study adheres strictly to platform privacy policies and does not involve private or sensitive data.

Given these factors, selecting Tess Holliday as a single-case study is both highly representative and methodologically feasible, providing a robust and reliable data foundation for this research.

2.2 Data Collection and Organization

This study examines Tess Holliday's public posts on Instagram and TikTok throughout 2024, totaling:

- Instagram: 109 posts, including images, videos, text descriptions, hashtags, and interactive metrics (likes and comments).

- TikTok: 254 videos, incorporating video content, subtitled text, and interactive data (likes, comments, shares, and favorites).

During data collection, researchers manually recorded each post’s publication date, content format, main theme, and engagement metrics to ensure the accuracy and completeness of subsequent coding and analysis.

2.3 Content Classification and Coding

To identify Tess Holliday’s core content strategies across different platforms, this study employed an inductive approach to systematically extract and code the collected posts. The coding process was divided into three main stages:

2.3.1 Keyword Extraction and Visual Content: Posts are Initially Classified Based on the Primary Image or Scene, Covering Categories Such as Fashion, Travel, Events, and Brand Collaborations.

Text Content: Keywords related to "body positivity," "female empowerment," "self-confidence," and "political views" are extracted from captions and titles. Additionally, the overall sentiment and value orientation of each post are recorded.

2.3.2 Determining Category Labels

Based on the preliminary keyword analysis, this study identified 12 primary content labels (Table 1), categorizing Tess Holliday’s posts across Instagram and TikTok:

Table 1: Categories and Descriptions of Tess Holliday’s Content Themes.

Category	Description
Body Positivity	Posts promoting body positivity and self-acceptance.
Fashion	Outfits, styling, and fashion trends.
Empowerment	Content advocating for women's empowerment and self-worth.
Category	Description
Audience Interaction	Responses to follower comments and discussions.
Lifestyle	Daily life activities and personal updates.
Trends	Content related to platform-specific viral trends.
Politics	Political opinions, activism, and advocacy.
Travel	Travel experiences and location-based content.
Branding	Business collaborations, sponsorships, and personal brand promotion.
Confidence	Self-expression, motivation, and confidence-building posts.
Events	Participation in public events, interviews, and collaborations.
Non-Sexualized Body Expression	Content featuring bold, revealing fashion choices that challenge societal norms on exposure, emphasizing confidence and self-expression rather than sexualization.

2.3.3 Coding Process

Each of the 109 Instagram posts and 254 TikTok videos was tagged individually. Each post could receive one or two tags to reflect its diverse themes.

The dataset was re-examined to ensure consistent categorization, with particular attention to potentially ambiguous classifications (e.g., distinguishing between "Body Positivity" and "Confidence," or "Fashion" and "Non-Sexualized Body Expression").

For posts featuring multiple overlapping themes, a comprehensive assessment of both visual and textual content was conducted. When necessary, either priority ranking or parallel double-tagging was applied.

To minimize subjective bias, the coding process was refined through multiple rounds of review.

2.4 Data Analysis Methods

After coding, this study analyzes the data from two key dimensions:

Content Strategy Distribution: The frequency of each content category is calculated for both Instagram and TikTok to compare content distribution across platforms. This analysis examines variations in content types and their alignment with Tess Holliday's core messages of "body positivity" and "social inclusion."

Engagement Metrics and Visibility: On Instagram, engagement is primarily measured by comments, with likes as a supplementary metric. On TikTok, engagement is assessed through likes, comments, shares, and favorites. The analysis explores how audience interaction varies across content categories and examines the influence of platform algorithms and user preferences on content visibility.

3. Result and Discussion

While maintaining her core brand concept of body positivity, Tess Holliday strategically adapts her content to align with the algorithmic mechanics, audience preferences, and engagement dynamics of Instagram and TikTok. This section analyzes her approach from three key aspects: content adaptation strategies, algorithm-driven communication patterns, and cross-platform synchronization with brand consistency.

3.1 Content Adaptation Strategies

An analysis of the hashtags used in Tess Holliday's Instagram and TikTok posts in 2024 (Table 2) reveals that her content is centered around 12 primary categories. While her core philosophy remains consistent across platforms, the specific content she posts varies based on each platform's unique characteristics.

Table 2: Comparison of Content Category Distribution Across Tess Holliday's Instagram and TikTok Posts.

Category	Instagram (posts)	TikTok (posts)
Body Positivity	29	30
Fashion	38	47
Empowerment	9	13
Audience Interaction	0	33
Lifestyle	16	83
Trends	0	32
Politics	5	9
Travel	9	3
Branding	10	6
Confidence	23	25
Events	14	15
Non-Sexualized Body Expression	12	11

3.1.1 Instagram's Content Strategy

On Instagram, Holliday's 109 posts primarily focus on fashion (38), body positivity (29), and confidence (23), categories that closely align with her brand identity as a plus-size model and body positivity advocate.

Although her content is diverse, body positivity remains a recurring theme. Even when posts do not explicitly use the "body positivity" label (e.g., those categorized under "Non-Sexualized Body Expression" or "Fashion"), she continues to reinforce self-confidence and body acceptance through personal style and visual storytelling. For instance:

Under the "Non-Sexualized Body Expression" category, she conveys the idea that "all body types deserve to be appreciated" by showcasing confident poses and body representation.

Under the "Fashion" category, she challenges traditional beauty standards by wearing diverse outfits, further reinforcing her brand identity.

This internalized brand expression helps her maintain high user engagement on Instagram while continuously strengthening her position as a body positivity advocate. For example, on August 3, 2024, Holliday published a post incorporating fashion and travel elements. Although the post does not explicitly reference body positivity, she reinforces her brand values through a carefully curated visual presentation.

Additionally, by sharing personal experiences and insights on body image, Holliday cultivates an authentic and relatable presence, positioning herself as a trusted opinion leader among her followers (Ebben and Bull 2023). On Instagram, she frequently discusses confidence, emphasizing that "confidence is an innate ability," while offering practical, actionable advice to her audience.

3.1.2 Tiktok's Content Strategy

Holliday's 254 TikTok videos exhibit a notably different content distribution compared to her Instagram posts. Her TikTok content is primarily categorized into lifestyle (83), fashion (47), audience interaction (33), and trends (32). Interestingly, "Audience Interaction" and "Trends" make up 21% of her TikTok content but are entirely absent from Instagram.

This contrast suggests that Holliday adopts a more interactive and trend-driven content strategy on TikTok, aligning with the platform's algorithm, which prioritizes engagement and viral content. The dominance of lifestyle content (83 posts) indicates that she primarily builds emotional connections with her audience by sharing everyday moments. Meanwhile, her frequent participation in TikTok trends (32 posts) and direct interactions with viewers (33 posts) further enhance content visibility and audience engagement.

Unlike Instagram, where content is more curated, Holliday's TikTok strategy extends beyond content creation, emphasizing real-time engagement to strengthen her personal brand image. For instance, she frequently discusses body positivity, gender equality, and mental health in a humorous, short-form format, responding directly to audience comments. This approach lowers the barrier to discussing serious issues, making them more accessible, shareable, and widely disseminated. Additionally, she strategically engages with both positive and negative feedback, a practice that proves especially effective in TikTok's highly interactive environment. Her candid responses reduce the distance between her and her audience, fostering a sense of belonging and trust among followers, thereby enhancing brand authenticity (Ebben and Bull 2023). This transparent and open engagement model not only reinforces her position as a body positivity advocate but also solidifies her presence as a public figure within the TikTok community.

3.2 Algorithmic Propagation Strategy

As shown in Table 3, the algorithmic traffic allocation of social media platforms directly influences content dissemination and visibility. Instagram's algorithm primarily operates on follower relationship chains, where the algorithm prioritizes visual aesthetics, brand curation, and long-term brand building (Kusumasondjaja 2020)). As a result, Instagram users primarily see content from creators they follow. This makes brand engagement more reliant on consistent long-term interactions rather than short-term viral spikes.

Data from this study indicates that Holliday's average number of comments on Instagram remains relatively stable across different hashtags, ranging from 221 to 491 per post. This consistency suggests that her content sustains high audience engagement over time, rather than relying on isolated bursts of virality.

Table 3: Comparison of Engagement Metrics Across Content Categories on Instagram and TikTok.

Category	Instagram (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. likes)
Body Positivity	325	484	12578
Fashion	369	91	3193
Empowerment	385	204	3690
Audience Interaction	0	322	8668
Lifestyle	291	124	1638
Trends	0	58	1552
Politics	237	291	3791
Travel	365	190	5696

Category	Instagram (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. likes)
Branding	249	96	529
Confidence	280	130	2020
Category	Instagram (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. comments)	TikTok (Avg. likes)
Events	221	45	2335
Non-Sexualized Body Expression	499	72	791

In contrast, TikTok’s algorithm follows an interest-based recommendation model, where content dissemination is driven by engagement metrics (likes, comments, shares) rather than follower relationships (Ionescu and Licu 2023). This system amplifies emotionally engaging and interactive content, such as responses to comments, body positivity discussions, and politically themed posts. In contrast, commercial collaborations and promotional content receive significantly lower exposure due to limited interaction. Consequently, Holliday’s TikTok content experiences greater volatility in reach and engagement, reflecting the platform’s preference for highly reactive and shareable content.

Engagement rates on TikTok vary significantly across different content categories. For example, posts categorized under "Audience Interaction" received an average of 322 comments, whereas "Fashion" content garnered only 91 comments. This disparity suggests that TikTok’s algorithm prioritizes content that sparks discussion and controversy (Klug et al. 2021). Similarly, posts tagged under "Body Positivity" accumulated 12,578 likes, whereas "Branding" received only 529. This suggests that TikTok prioritizes content with strong emotional resonance and high user engagement. In contrast, advertising and sponsored content tend to have lower visibility due to limited interaction.

TikTok’s algorithmic preference for controversial content amplifies Holliday’s responses to body shaming rhetoric, making them more likely to go viral. By directly confronting critics and engaging in discourse, she generates buzz and provokes emotional responses from users. This increased engagement, reflected in likes, comments, and shares, ultimately expands her brand influence. However, due to TikTok’s lower fan loyalty and fast-moving content cycle, frequent posting of controversial topics may result in follower attrition over time.

3.3 Cross-Platform Content Integration and Brand Consistency

Tess Holliday’s cross-platform communication strategy in 2024 balances platform adaptation with brand consistency. On Instagram, she cultivates a stylish, confident, and influential brand image. In contrast, her TikTok content is more personal and lighthearted, featuring daily moments, humor, and direct audience interactions. This approach makes her brand identity more dynamic and multidimensional. However, this differentiated strategy also presents challenges. While she strives to maintain a consistent brand image across platforms, she must also take full advantage of TikTok’s high virality to expand her reach and enhance brand recognition.

The implementation of this strategy yields three key optimization effects.

First, it strengthens brand consistency. TikTok and Instagram operate within distinct content ecosystems, and platform-specific content strategies may lead to a fragmented brand image. However, selectively synchronizing content across platforms ensures that Holliday’s core brand values remain consistent.

Second, it optimizes audience reach and user engagement flow. Given the platforms’ algorithmic and demographic differences, identical content can yield different levels of engagement on each platform. By strategically synchronizing content, Holliday expands her audience reach and enhances brand visibility.

Third, balancing TikTok’s high virality with long-term brand building. TikTok’s algorithm boosts brand awareness quickly but its short content lifespan hinders brand loyalty. To maintain long-term brand impact, Holliday reinforced her brand narrative on Instagram, ensuring that TikTok’s fragmented, short-form content did not dilute her overall brand identity.

4. Conclusion

Using Tess Holliday as a case study, this study examines the cross-platform content strategies employed by body positivity advocates on Instagram and TikTok. It further analyzes how these strategies enhance personal branding and audience engagement. The findings indicate that Holliday optimizes her brand communication

through strategic content segmentation. On Instagram, she cultivates an image as a confident advocate to reinforce her brand, while on TikTok, she presents a more authentic and vulnerable side, leveraging the platform's viral mechanisms to amplify her influence. Additionally, by simultaneously publishing core content across platforms, she ensures brand consistency and minimizes fragmentation. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in advancing the understanding of cross-platform communication strategies among body positivity advocates. It also uncovers the interaction between content strategy and platform algorithmic ecosystems while enriching the theoretical framework of digital media communication and brand management. From a practical perspective, this study provides strategic insights for digital marketers and content creators, illustrating how influencers and brands can tailor their content strategies based on platform characteristics and audience preferences to balance short-term growth with long-term brand development. However, as a single case study focused on Tess Holliday, the findings have limited generalizability. Furthermore, since data collection is restricted to 2024, the absence of longitudinal analysis makes it difficult to capture long-term dynamic trends. Future research could broaden the scope of case studies and incorporate longitudinal approaches to improve generalizability.

Ethics Declaration

This study used publicly available data from Instagram and TikTok and adhered to their terms of service. No personally identifiable information (PII) was collected or analysed, and ethical approval was not required.

AI Declaration

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors utilized AI-powered tools for language refinement and grammar checking. However, all research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, and substantive content were independently conducted by the authors without AI assistance. The use of AI tools was limited to enhancing the clarity and readability of the text.

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