

“Sorry My Obsession is so Deep”: A Rhetorical Analysis of Parasocial Relationships with Love Island Cast Members on Instagram

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Background

- *Love Island USA* season 5 aired in July 2024 and gained lots of fame and the contestants or microcelebrities prominence
- Newfound fame led to increased microcelebrity and viewer parasocial relationships.
 - Parasocial relationship: one-sided, non-mutual relationship
- The comment section allows the viewers to comment on various opinions and it has been used to analyze the themes of parasocial relationships

Research Questions

Main purpose: examine the rhetorical implications of parasocial relationships by analyzing the Instagram comments on *Love Island* contestants’ accounts.

- What are the different rhetorical characteristics seen in the comments while the show was airing versus after the contestants left the show?
- What are the different rhetorical characteristics seen in comments posted on female and male contestants’ posts?

Methodology

- Generative theory (Foss, 2017) was used to analyze the comments.
- I collected 50 comments from 12 different posts (from 3 different periods- during the show airing, immediately after, and a few months after)
- From 4 *Love Island* contestant’s accounts
 - Winners: Serena Page and Kordell Beckham
 - Runner-ups: Leah Kateb and Miguel Harichi
- With 382 comments left, I sorted into 4 large themes and 12 smaller groups based on the content of the comments and the interpreted intent



Comment Themes

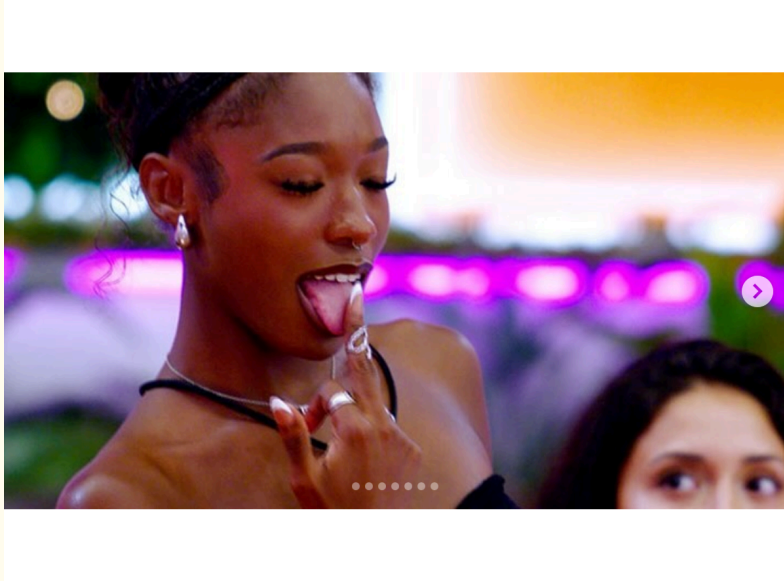
- About the show’s content
 - congratulations & show’s content
- Wanting engagement from
 - about the post and interactions
- Projecting onto microcelebrities lives
 - interjecting into relationships, hate comments, giving advice, and fighting for microcelebrity
- Praising microcelebrity
 - fashion, I/we love, compliments, and compliments about relationship

	Period One	Period Two	Period Three	Totals
About the Show’s Contest	26	9	2	37
Wanting Engagement from Microcelebrity	7	13	20	40
Projecting onto Microcelebrity	111	16	11	138
Praising Microcelebrity	43	83	51	177

Fig 1. Comment Themes and Post Period

Fighting for Microcelebrity

“Nah, what we aren’t going to do is slander this woman for protecting her feelings and this dude showed exactly why she felt she needed to be closed off! She wouldn’t be this hurt if they didn’t finally click emotionally and a few episodes ago.. seemed physically too. Yall ain’t watching close enough....Team Serena till I die 🍷”



Period 1 from @serenapagee: Serena ate it up and left no crumbs last night🍷🔥 Who tuned in?•• #bouncinthatthang #speakup

Show’s Content

“Queen I’m so sorry you’re being gaslit by production and that manchild”

Fighting for Microcelebrity

“We ride at dawn for you baby”



Period 1 from @leahkateb: Surprise...I bet you thought you’d seen the last of me 😊

Fashion

“Those who know nothing about fashion will not like this, and it’s ok. Everyone style is different, and everyone will not see the vision. If they aren’t talking shit, you ain’t doing it right...”



Period 3 from @kordell1:6 in the mornin’ again
Hoggin the road in the Benz
I’m on my way to the ‘tel
She tanglin’ up with her friend 🎧🎶

	Serena Page	Leah Kateb	Kordell Beckham	Miguel Harichi
About the Show’s Contest	2	19	10	6
Wanting Engagement from Microcelebrity	8	18	6	8
Projecting onto Microcelebrity	38	19	62	19
Praising Microcelebrity	37	44	32	64

Fig 2. Comment Themes and Microcelebrity

Hate Comments

“GET OUT OF MY VILLA!!!!”

“I am so pissed at you why would you do this she literally TOLD YOU ABOUT THIS BRUH”



Period 1 from @kordell1: Yall do ya boy a favor and go vote now. Link in bio!!!!!!!

Interjecting into relationship

“Mom and Dad!! I love you all so much, @leahkateb I hope you see this comment💕💕💕 sorry my obsession is so deep 🥰”

“Leah girl you won 🏆🎉”



Period 3 from @Miguel_harichi: Our 1st premier was definitely a movie... iykyk 🥰

Interactions

“come to my house”

About the Post

“Red. Always red. Red 3 to be exact🥰 trust, it’s won multiple times for me in Vegas 🥰”



Period 3 from @leahkateb: Money on black or red? 🖤❤️🍀

Findings

- More comments on the Period One posts (188 comments) versus the Period Three posts (85 comments).
 - Less likely for a parasocial relationship to form as the microcelebrities gain more fame and have less access to them.
- Similar number of comments for the male and female microcelebrities, but there was a variation of the theme of comments.
 - Females had more comments on praising the microcelebrity, while Kordell had the most projecting onto the microcelebrity.
 - Kordell and Serena had the most hate comments.
 - Two reasons: comments on situations in the villa and possibly racially motivated comments.
 - Males had more comments about their relationship while the female’s comments mostly reference only them due to identification theory
- There was a switch in the rhetor and the audience of the parasocial relationship.
 - The viewers were the rhetor of the messaging of parasocial relationships and the microcelebrity was watching, but there was a switch near the third period.

Implications

- Academic Implications:
 - *Love Island* viewers can craft their parasocial relationships with microcelebrities within the comment sections
- Practical implications are for microcelebrity and television creators.
 - Microcelebrity: Analyzing what posts create parasocial comments and engagement to keep fame
 - Instagram posts with questions in caption can facilitate the creation of parasocial relationships
 - Television creators: use the comments to create drama and show the contestants what people online think of them