

The Kardashians and the Ruminating Strategy

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Abstract

Many have wondered in these years about the reason behind the huge success the Kardashian (-Jenner) family raised and gained. Even if the reality show might not be one of the most innovative, nor original television products, it is impossible to see how the Kardashian's clan managed to become something more than a family who likes to air their dirty (and maybe expansive) laundry in public. Albeit there are different reality shows that have portrayed almost every possible family: religious, heavy metal, gipsy, wealthy Californian, dysfunctional, party animals; the Kardashians celebrated in 2018 their 10 years of reality shows. This might appear a silly, and not even a big deal: TV shows have existed for longer time in the American (and not only) panorama, yet the Kardashian made it possible to conquest with their unique style, and communication strategy something that other reality shows families did not reach. What did the Kardashians do? The Kardashians created a new communication strategy that allowed them to be the most popular family on three different media: press, television, and social media.

Keywords

Kardashian, Søren Kierkegaard, hermeneutics of television, internet and television, reality shows

The Kardashians forged a new type of communication strategy that involves different media, in which every media explains and gives different elements to understand part of the story that another media has provided us. This type of communication is similar to the ruminating process: some herbivore mammals chew several times their cuds during their digestive process. Animals such as cows spend almost one third of their time ruminating (De Ondarza 2000): i.e., the digestive process takes between 8 and 9 hours.

This typology of digestive process allows these animals to digest their food, and in this way, the long fiber is broken down.

This brief biology lesson ends here. However, this explanation was useful to clarify what rumination means and how this particular digestive process is the key to understanding why the Kardashians are still one of the most famous families in the world.

Indeed, the Kardashians' material is rarely new. The ability of this family and the key of their success rely on the ability to use and re-use the same material and stories all over again. As if they ruminated the same story, Kardashians tend to use more times the same story; but each time, they provide a different amount of information and details concerning that same story. During all the ruminative process, the animals digest fibers that are long strands of molecules during the different phases. The different stomachs elaborate the nutritional elements during all the different moments of digestion. Similarly, Kardashians tell their stories in the same way.

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The author's theory is that Kardashians rarely propose new elements, most of the times, they talk about the same story multiple times on different media with a different amount of details. In this way, we may call their communicative strategy as a rumination strategy, where the family chews the same story several times before digesting it.

According to this theory, it is clear why the Kardashians have been in the last 10 years one of the most famous families in the world. The author will show her theory enlisting a couple of practical examples, and she will therefore show how Kardashians use traditional and more innovative media in this strategy. This rumination strategy has made the Kardashians one of the most famous, and innovative families, in their synergetic use of the media.

For this reason, the author chose to analyze two cases in the long Kardashians' saga. She chose to focus this paper on Khloé Kardashian's husband Lamar Odom's overdose and the mysterious Kylie Jenner's pregnancy. The first case is useful to see how traditional media covered the story, but how the family used television and in particular their reality show to manipulate and spin the story. Even if the story and the news were largely known to the world, the family made it possible to keep things "private" and they used this plot during their reality show almost a year later and they gave all the details and backstage insights about this deed.

On the other hand, Kylie Jenner, a beauty mogul and Instagram queen disappeared almost six months from social networks. Her sudden disappearance made people talk, only TMZ (a gossip website) explained the reason behind the youngest Jenner's disappearance. The Kardashians did not reply, nor confirmed what happened to Kylie; some of them even denied everything, but after the birth, Kylie Jenner appeared online with a long post explaining that all the rumors about her were true, and she had delivered a baby girl. She did not wait for the family reality show, and she

revealed the truth about her health and her baby online. Rumors and tam-tam lead people to believe that she was pregnant, and on the same by social media, she replied to her fans.

Both cases are interesting, because they used differently stories that were known to the bigger audience and stretched stories for (almost) a year. Their stories, even if they were public and everybody knew them (in the first case, Lamar Odom has been hospitalized because of a substance abuse; in the second case, the teenager Kylie Jenner was pregnant), yet the family made it possible to hide several amounts of details and later revealed all the details about the story.

KHLOE KARDASHIAND AND LAMAR ODOM

Khloé Kardashian married Lamar Odom in 2009. He was a successful NBA basketball player, while she was the youngest female Kardashian. She married the basketball player during a ceremony that aired in *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* (Season, Episode 1 "The Wedding"). After having married a Kardashian, he became a regular character in the family reality show (Cacciola and Witz 2015). For this reason, the couple had their spin-off called "Khloé & Lamar" that was on air between 2011 and 2012.

After the series got canceled, in 2013, the first rumors concerning Lamar Odom's struggle with drugs and alcohol appeared on the press. Nobody from the family confirmed the news, but in the same year, Khloé filed for divorce from her husband.

On October 13, 2015, Lamar Odom was found unconscious in a Las Vegas brothel (TMZ 2015). Because of the overdose, he was brought to the hospital, where he was placed on life support. In this period, his wife Khloé withdrew her divorce request and remained at his bedside (Fisher 2015). However, the divorce was finalized in 2015.

Lamar Odom's substance abuse was not a secret. Gossips and rumors about the basketball player's health were already around, and his overdose became quickly public domain. Press covered the story immediately, while the Kardashian family struggled to keep things quiet (Cox Media Group National Content Desk 2015). Paparazzi caught on camera the Kardashians and Jenner visiting the hospital where Lamar Odom was. Lamar Odom's recovering was told by gossip and sports outlets: not a single step of Lamar Odom's health situation was a mystery. In addition, the police investigated on the case and every single detail concerning the abuse of drugs and what happened in that room in Las Vegas ended in the press (Rogers 2015). Very few details remained concealed, the only aspect of the story that nobody knew of was what the family lived and endured during these moments.

The family released only generic comments and prayers. Khloé commented on her personal blog:

The past week has been incredibly difficult. I am so thankful to family, friends and fans who have sent nothing but prayers and well wishes to Lamar. I also want to take a moment to thank everyone at Sunrise Hospital, including the amazing doctors and nurses for their kindness and diligent work. Under their amazing care, incredible, strides have been made. You can never be prepared for an experience like this, but without the outpouring of love and endless prayers Lamar has received and the strength I was given from my loved ones, it would have been difficult to endure. Thank you for your continued support. God is great!!!!

While her sisters posted prayers and photos of him.

Although, it might appear that the press was out of the firm Kardashian's grip, this is false. Dennis Hof (Ramirez 2015), the owner of the brothel where Lamar Odom was found unconscious, clapped back at the famous family, because they wanted him to not disclose anything about that night and about his client. Dennis Hof did not want to "spill the tea", since his work involves privacy, yet he did not want

that the storyline the Kardashian's family was providing (and in particular, his enterprise) was the only version available. Indeed, in those days when Lamar Odom was in hospital, some of the sex workers of that place confessed and told their version of facts: Lamar Odom bought somewhere else cocaine and nobody stole his wallet during his stay, and only the staff at the brothel found and made everything in their power to save his life.

However, it is clear how the Kardashian family works. The story happens: Lamar Odom had an overdose in a brothel. The piece of news appeared in almost every magazine or newspaper that covered either gossip or sports. The family did not discuss it now, they waited until their show aired, and then they talked about it in different episodes (Elgart 2016) of their reality show. In this way, they made possible that an event that occurred in 2015 was still relevant in 2018.

Khloé's final decision concerning her marriage is discussed in several episodes: Season 11, Episode 5 and Season 12, Episode 6. While Lamar's recovery was shown on Season 12, Episodes 1 and 2: many fans did not react well in finding out that Lamar's rehabilitation was material for the reality show. In 2016, Kris Jenner (Khloé's mother and Lamar's mother in law) said that doctors had warned the family that the basketball player was about to die and they did not expect him to survive (Season 11, Episode 11).

In 2018, Kim Kardashian dissed Lamar Odom on Twitter (Stone 2018) after he had bad mouthed his ex-wife Khloé. In that tweet, Kim had her sister's back and revealed another detail about Lamar Odom's night in Las Vegas: she hinted that the basketball player had visited multiple brothels in Las Vegas.

As we can see, Lamar Odom's struggle with drugs was on the press from 2015, but the story was still discussed and portrayed on other media, and Kardashian family waited an entire year before giving their version of what happened during that night. In this case, we might see how an old story that has been

fully covered by magazines and online, had another space of development on television.

KYLIE JENNER IS PREGNANT

Another interesting case is Kylie Jenner's pregnancy (TMZ 2017). The beauty mogul disappeared out of the blue from her social networks. At first, nobody understood this strategy: only TMZ (a famous gossip website that covers widely the Kardashians' adventures and lives) broke the news. Kylie Jenner was pregnant with her boyfriend.

At first, the piece of news was shocking and many waited for a reply from the young mom, but nothing happened. Kylie herself did not answer, nor appear anymore on social media. The Kardashian's sisters, see Kim on Twitter, denied everything and mom Kris Jenner was subtle. When the Kardashian-Jenner's families posed as models for a famous lingerie brand, Kylie Jenner held a blanket in front of her womb (Bailey 2018).

The mystery was cryptic. Kylie did not face rumors. Only after the birth of her daughter, Stormi, she posted a long message on Instagram (Spangler 2018) and a video in which she told her version. She got pregnant after having dates for only a couple of months, and she decided that she did not want to live her pregnancy under the spotlight.

While Kylie Jenner was offline, fans spotted her around and about Los Angeles. Different theories (Harvey 2018) surfaced online (was she Kim's surrogate mother?) and her silence made more and more people talk about her.

Kylie Jenner's pregnancy was also caught on tape: Stormi's birth is the main event in Season 15, Episode 9. It may be possible that Kylie's pregnancy should have been a part of "Life of Kylie": the spin-off about Kylie Jenner and her best friend's lives. However, the series was canceled after the first season.

As we can see, in the second case, Kylie Jenner's sudden disappearance intrigued her fans. She did not

answer any of her fans' doubts, but an online gossip magazine gave the answer. More theories appeared online, and even her sisters helped create chaos about her pregnancy. Only after the birth, Kylie Jenner appeared online once again and explained what has happened during the months of her silence. Almost a year later, the reality show *Keeping Up With the Kardashians* aired what happened.

CONCLUSIONS

This structure is the core of the success of the family, and the reason why they managed to be synergetic and use at their highest potential social media and traditional media. The Kardashians make it possible to use the same story more times, but each time, they give a different amount of details about the story that we have already read or heard of. In particular, during their reality show, the family gave their final and complete version of facts and we have a complete prospective on the story. For this reason, the author believes that we can call this strategy a ruminating strategy, because the Kardashians are most of the time focused on few storylines, yet these stories are developed at their best.

For example, a mysterious gang robbed Kim Kardashian (Saul 2016), while she was staying in Paris for the fashion week in 2016. At first, she did not comment the piece of news and she did not want to post anything for a long period. After several months, the woman started again to post and interact with her fans on social media; and in 2018, she commented in her reality show how she felt, and what happened during that terrifying night.

It is interesting to see that Kardashians did not only realize and create a new type of communicating strategy, they might have answered a question that has puzzled Kierkegaard (2009). The Danish philosopher asked himself if the repetition was possible, repetition meant "a clothing that never becomes old" (Kierkegaard 2009: 3), and Kardashians prove him

that it is possible. The same event may occur multiple times, and never gets boring.

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Note

1. See: <https://www.khloewithak.com/xo/212-message-khloe-kardashian/>.

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