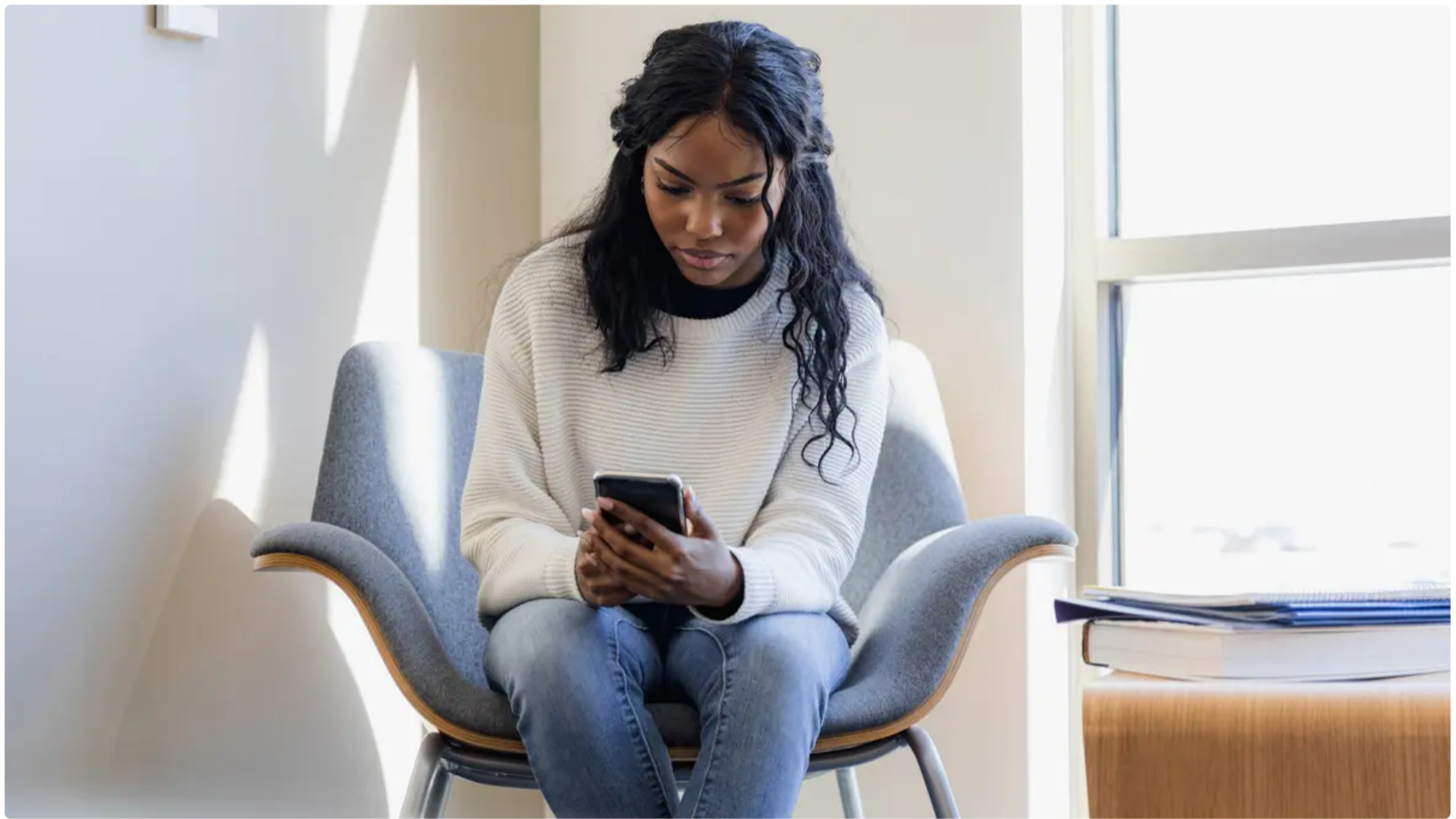


CREATOR ECONOMY

Creators Are Increasingly Lonely. Here's Why Brands Should Care

Protecting the talent is an investment in the industry



The Attorney General first cited loneliness as a public health crisis in May. SDI Productions/Getty Images



By Emmy Liederman

5 HOURS AGO



Don't miss **Brandweek**, Adweek's ultimate experience for marketers, September 11-14 in Miami. Connect with peers and gain insights and inspiration from top brand marketers and industry icons at **Glossier**, **Coca-Cola**, **Taco Bell** and more. [Register](#).



In a series of recent tweets, Doja Cat was asked by fans if she could say she loved them. "I don't though cuz I don't even know yall," was the response, making it clear that she is not interested in rewarding and reciprocating endearment.

The Grammy-winning singer presented the ultimate rejection of an intense parasocial relationship, which consists of one person being unaware of the other's existence. The tweets sparked widespread anger and have since been deleted.

Pop Base
 @PopBase · [Follow](#)



Doja Cat responds to fans asking if she can say she loves them:

"I don't though cuz I don't even know yall"

I DON'T KNOW CUZ I DON'T EVEN KNOW YALL

5:20 PM · Jul 23, 2023



221.2K Reply Copy link

Read 9.7K replies

While Doja Cat's delivery was received as nothing more than another controversy from a brutally honest entertainer, her message offers a glimpse into the social tensions of a public existence. Hannah Bayles, a full-time creator who got her start on YouTube, said the career comes with fan entitlement for access that might otherwise be reserved for close friends and family.

"For YouTubers and TikTokers near burnout, there starts to be this resentment toward fans," said Bayles, who has battled long periods of burnout that have halted her content creation. "You say 'I have to keep going because I owe them this.'"

While the influencer marketing industry draws parallels to the entertainment space at large, the mental health challenges of maintaining a public identity are compounded by the isolation that comes with freelance production and the decentralization of a budding industry. When these increasingly young creators enter the space without knowledge of typical workplace environments, they are especially prone to swapping distinct professional and personal relationships with the all-encompassing and conditional ties that can exacerbate loneliness.

And when brands and agencies prioritize organic connection between creators while offering more collaborative workflows, they invest in stronger partnerships and contribute to the sustainability of the industry at large.

"It's exhausting and repetitive and you feel like you're on this hamster wheel. And you can't get out because your whole business will crumble."

Lizzy Capri, YouTube creator

"There's a self-fulfilling prophecy of burnout in the sense that you're distancing yourself from your social circles by overworking and then filling that time with more work," said Madison Utendahl, founder of design studio Utendahl Creative, who has also developed a following on social media and reflected on how platforms can be breeding grounds for loneliness. "That cycle is one of the hardest to escape."

Legitimizing loneliness

Loneliness, deemed a public health crisis by the attorney general earlier this year, demands more complex solutions than simply increasing social interactions—**according to researchers**, the feelings correspond with a discrepancy between existing and preferred relationships.

Earlier in her career, as a YouTuber, Lizzy Capri felt pigeonholed which exacerbated feelings of burnout. When she tried to move away from the content geared towards children that first made her viral, she saw a decline in performance. Capri was reminded of the high expectations from fans that can keep content creators feeling isolated. She emphasized the distinction between entertaining on a platform like YouTube, where the product is your personality and **every piece of content is tethered to your mood**.



ADVICE FOR BRANDS WORKING WITH CREATORS, FROM CREATORS

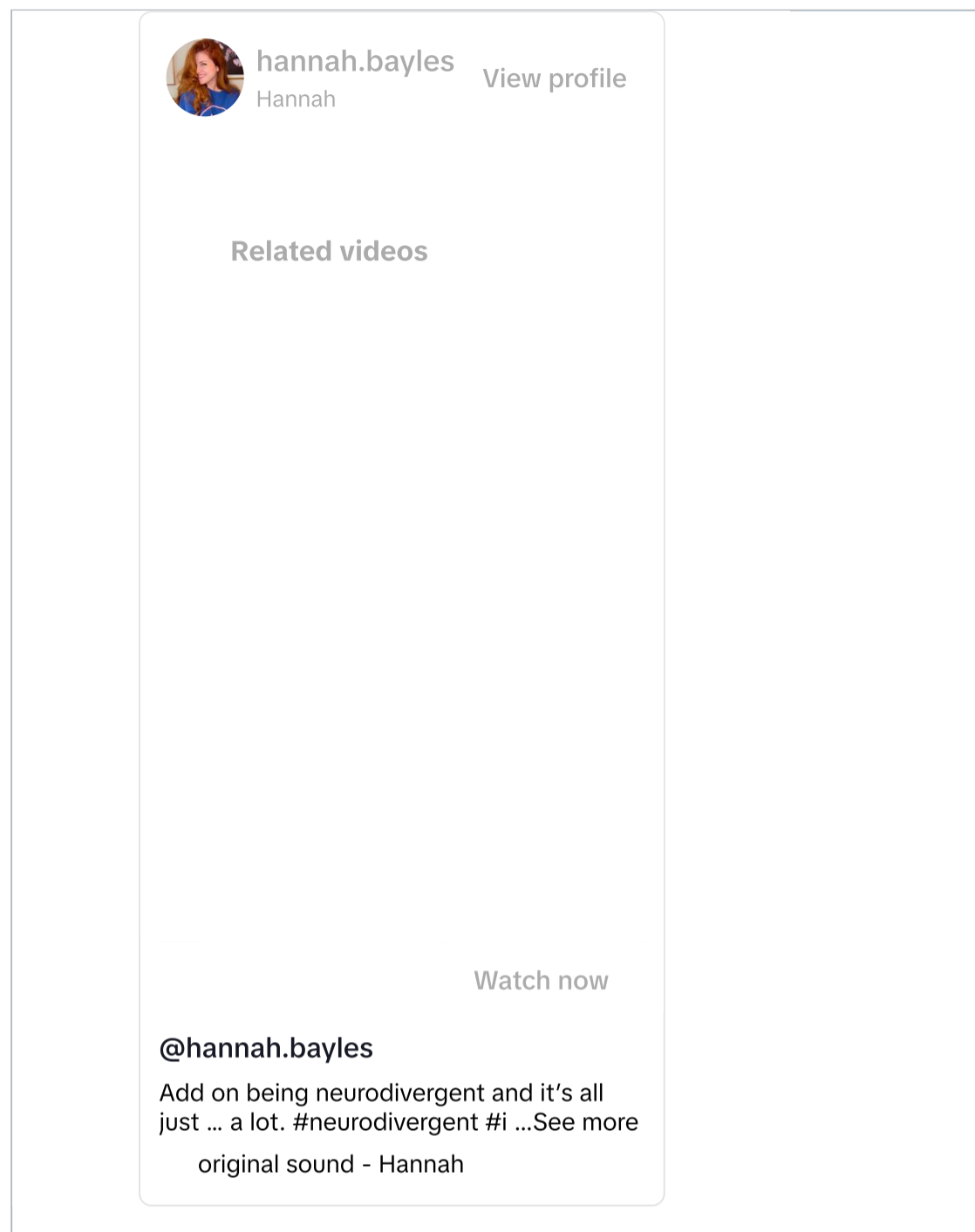
"People go on YouTube to connect with who you are, and you can see when I'm not being genuine and forcing it," said Capri. "It's exhausting and repetitive and you feel like you're on this hamster wheel. And you can't get out because your whole business will crumble."

Manufacturing social circles



When it comes to creating healthier professional environments, dialing down does not address the mental health challenges that are often

disorienting was that I could sit in front of the camera and talk to this invisible audience, but when I turn off the camera and there's just silence, it feels like an episode of Black Mirror where I've been like, 'I have not been around people for the past five days.'



Sophie Crowther is the senior talent partnerships manager at influencer marketing agency Billion Dollar Boy, where she is one of five trained mental health professionals on staff. According to Crowther, managers are often positioned to offer their clients emotional support without having the necessary qualifications or appropriate stakes in their wellbeing.

Capri also pointed to the dangers of working at the center of a team that relies on her emotional stability in an industry defined by fluctuation. And when she "shows signs of weakness" or is having a hard day, she worries that it will "dampen the whole team's mood."

"If I'm a talent and I sign with an agent who says they'll be on hand to support me just like a friend would, that's great, but they're still getting 20% of my revenue," said Crowther, speaking to the conflict of interest when managers are also expected to be a creator's "mum, babysitter and therapist."

Reconsidering community

Bayles has put in more effort to find social situations where she can receive as much social energy as she is giving of it. Despite the challenges of separating work from life in an industry that banks on personality, she has set healthier boundaries by recognizing her quota for social connection cannot be filled by relationships with fans.

"We think of parasocial relationships as fans becoming too close to us and obsessing about us, but it's even easier for us to feel like these people are our friends," she said. "We say 'They really support me and they really love me' and forget that it is a very unequal relationship."

Madeline Johnson, a creator who specializes in travel and lifestyle content, said she would benefit from connecting with other creators in settings that aren't defined by brands promoting a product. According to Johnson, these interactions are often short and focus on brand relationships as opposed to creators connecting with each other. Capri, who emphasized the importance of community for young creators, spoke to the community-building efforts of creator platform Spotter, which brings creators together through honest industry conversations about mental health.



change.”

Madison Utendahl, founder of design studio Utendahl Creative

madds.maxj...
Madds [View profile](#)

Related videos

[Watch now](#)

@madds.maxjesty
Being a creator can be lonely! Its nice to get to know and share ideas wi ...See more
Sure Thing (sped up) - Miguel

Revising responsibility



Penn Weinberger, founder and head of partnerships at production studio Bad Behavior, has found that bringing creators into workflows while valuing their autonomy creates the most productive dynamic.



While some brands have the tendency to present their partners with deliverables and maintain little contact until they reach their deadlines, Weinberger works to maintain long term relationships with talent by recognizing their skills go beyond a fixed project. Bad Behavior recently extended its relationship with Elliot Walker, a creator known for making "mini TV shows for the internet," as a full-time consultant.



AD-TECH FIRMS SPY AN OPPORTUNITY IN YOUTUBE INVENTORY QUALITY SCANDAL

Since completing her training in mental health support, Crowther has found that she can recognize early warning signs of burnout before a creator starts missing deadlines or completing disconnects from teams. She argued that protecting the wellbeing of talent is the ultimate investment in the industry's sustainability.

According to Utendahl, the work also lies in a creator's decision to invest in identities and relationships that fall outside their sphere of digital influence.

"We speak about it in finite terms, but loneliness is an impermanent state and something you have the agency to change," she said. "There is a lot of autonomy in these emotions."