

Critical Analysis of NCAA Tiktok

Hauls

Tessa Yohan, April 2024

It's often said that all paths lead home, but in today's digital age, all paths take a click to a TikTok rabbit hole. With a staggering user base of nearly 1.2 billion, this video-sharing platform has emerged as a trendsetter for new and evolving social media genres. TikTok has firmly



established itself as the epicenter of the sports industry. A significant 46% of TikTok users frequently or occasionally utilize social media to catch up on game highlights, 42% seek out player highlights, and 43% engage with sports content and

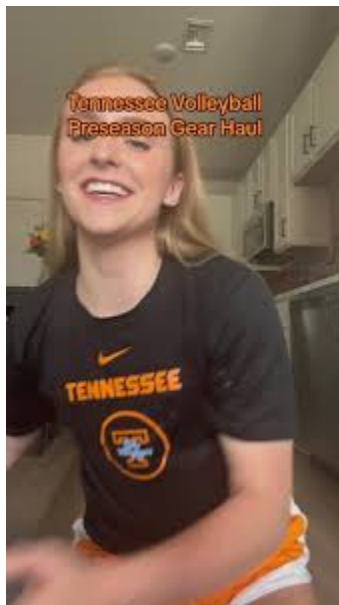
news. Undoubtedly, TikTok represents the future of sports media, prompting media outlets and sports entities to embrace it enthusiastically to reach a broader audience. TikTok acknowledges this passion for sports within its community, affirming its commitment to redefine entertaining sports content, whether it be women's NCAA Basketball, Jared McCain dancing, or showing off your team's gear. Consequently, sports brands and companies swiftly integrate TikTok into their marketing and business development strategies. This has become a way for Athletes to monetize their social media presence by partnering with brands for sponsored content or earning revenue through affiliate marketing. Gear and merchandise hauls present an opportunity for athletes to

generate income while providing valuable content to their followers. What starts off as a simple search on Google, YouTube, or even more popular TikTok of college athlete hauls' will lead you into a 2 hours scroll of thousands and thousands of videos, all ranging from NCAA Division I to III athletes to parodies videos, showing off the gear that they receive for the sport that they compete in. This has taken over social media, specifically when school starts in the fall or at the start of the school year. You go through your feed and are greeted with videos like this. Athletes frequently partner with brands for sponsorship deals, and showcasing sponsored gear or merchandise in haul videos is a common practice. These collaborations benefit the athlete and the brand, as they can reach a wider audience and increase brand visibility. Most colleges have a big athletic brand they work with, providing all the lift shirts/ shorts/ sneakers, etc. Most notable are "The Big Three" and no, not "The Big Three" Hall-of-Famers Kevin McHale, Robert Parish, and Larry Bird of the 1980s Boston



Celtics. I am referencing the big three sports brands: Nike, Under Armor, and Addidas. Most colleges partner with these companies that provide the uniforms that their athletes adorne pretty much exclusively. Athletes are influential figures with significant followings on social media platforms. When they share their favorite gear or merchandise, it can significantly impact their followers' purchasing decisions. Brands recognize the value of athlete endorsements and often collaborate with them to promote their products through haul videos. That being said, I'm sure that athletes recruited for the top schools will already be very aware of what gear will be provided and have many other factors to consider when choosing where to go. However, it

doesn't diminish that excitement when they get to open all those items and, better yet, get to share them with their followers and friends. Some even become famous off these videos as they are so highly watched that one may be like, oh!, this is a school I support, and I don't know this player, but let me follow them and see the rest of their potential four years. Still, for most college campuses that are not athletes, it's pretty addicting to watch and a sense of pride. Gear and merchandise hauls provide fans with insider access to products that are often exclusive or limited edition. This exclusivity adds an element of excitement and desire among fans, driving engagement and interest in the athlete's content. Athletes have a unique opportunity to connect with fans on a personal level by showcasing the gear and merchandise they use. This authenticity fosters a stronger bond between athletes and their followers, as fans get a glimpse into the



athlete's lifestyle and preferences. Let me just say it's quite impressive how much stuff they really get, especially at the Division I level. D1 athletes will receive any and every type of gear you can possibly think of. This includes socks, shoes, compression pants, shorts, joggers, sweatpants, undershirts, t-shirts, long-sleeve shirts, polos, rain jackets, sweatshirts, coats, beanies, hats, and any other accessories related to the sport you play. For games, the equipment managers will have separate straps that you can customize yourself. It will consist of all the gear you want to wear for that particular matchup that corresponds with the uniform. For home games, you

might have more of the primary colors picked out. On the road, you might wear more white-colored accessories. This is all customizable based on your colors and jerseys. The amount of extra gear that the majority of college athletes receive is mind-blowing. You will constantly

find yourself giving it away to friends or family because you honestly don't need all of it. For example, you might receive two coats every year for the winter. By your senior year, that would be a total of 8 coats. Most people don't want to have 8 different coats taking up space in their closet. So they end up giving away most of them and keeping 2 or 3 of their favorite or warmest. As a Division I college athlete, your locker and closet will be overflowing with excess school apparel.

So I can keep writing about the formation of these popular haul videos, but why? What's the importance of this? How does this fall into a genre in sports media? Social media genres are categories or types of content users commonly engage with and create on social media platforms. These genres can vary depending on the platform and users' interests. Still, some common social media genres that exist are lifestyle and fashion: content related to fashion trends, beauty tips, makeup tutorials, outfit inspiration, and personal style. These gear



hauls follow under this jurisdiction. Travel and Adventure: Posts about exercise routines, food recipes, skill development advice, updates on current events, and game commentary; these genres are not mutually exclusive, and many social media users may create content that spans multiple categories based on their interests and passions.

Additionally, new genres may emerge as social media platforms evolve and user behaviors change. The engagement of these videos speaks for itself. Non-competitive companies often send other gear to these athletes for promotion. For example, this year, the Texas Swimming and Diving team got the most popular jackets, “Super Puffs,” from Artiza to head to the NCAA championship. The visibility of the branded gear in social media posts and haul videos amplifies

the reach and impact of the sponsorship, effectively turning it into a form of organic advertising.

Overall, gear and merchandise hauls from athletes have evolved into a compelling social media genre due to their ability to seamlessly blend entertainment, authenticity, and marketing.

