

# Study suggests celebrities and influencers are less persuasive/likable when they turn off their social media comments

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Researchers from University of Alabama and Vanderbilt University published a *Journal of Marketing* study that examines the negative

consequences that celebrities and influencers incur when they disable social media comments.

The study, is titled "[No Comments \(From You\): Understanding the Interpersonal and Professional Consequences of Disabling Social Media Comments](#)" and is authored by Michelle Daniels and Freeman Wu.

Celebrities and influencers like Addison Rae, Hailey Bieber, Justin Timberlake, and even Oprah have, on various occasions, disabled access to their social media comments in response to negative sentiment. Is this misguided?

The answer is yes, according to the new research. The study finds that influencers who disable social media comments are less persuasive and less likable than those who do not, even when the displayed comments are mostly negative in their content.

Celebrities and influencers are more than just public figures in today's digital age. They often serve as a bridge connecting brands and consumers by integrating their personal narratives into sponsored brand content.

Despite their popularity, influencers receive plenty of criticism and they often disable comments on social media as a first line of defense against [negative feedback](#). However, this behavior can negatively impact how consumers judge influencers and respond to their promotional content.

Online influencers have the ability to interact with their followers in a relatively intimate and informal manner, which makes them seem sincere and approachable.

Such positive assessments are often a product of how influencers engage with their viewers or followers, including directly addressing them in

their posts and treating them more as friends than as consumers. While these behaviors can dramatically increase consumer engagement, this level of approachability can also come at a cost.

As consumers become accustomed to influencers' accessibility, they may feel emboldened to share feedback that is critical. The constant stream of followers' feedback can be overwhelming and even detrimental to influencers' mental health. As a result, many influencers have chosen to turn off their comment sections at various points, likely to avoid unwanted feedback. This research reveals the negative downstream consequences of this seemingly well-intentioned behavior.

## **The cost of disengagement**

As Daniels explains, "we discover that when influencers disable comments, they are perceived as less receptive to consumer feedback, or what we term 'consumer voice.' Consequently, they are judged as less sincere and ultimately incur both interpersonal and professional consequences. In other words, disabling comments can undermine a key influencer asset, their perceived receptiveness to consumer voice and their ability to connect and engage with their followers."

In fact, turning off comments is more costly for an influencer's reputation than leaving them on, even when the displayed comments are mostly negative in nature, like those you might find flooding an apology post. This effect occurs because influencers who leave their comments enabled appear to be interested in hearing from the public and learning from their actions while those who turn them off signal their dismissiveness of others' opinions.

Under certain situations, consumers understand an influencer's decision to disable comments. If, for example, an influencer is perceived as taking reasonable measures to protect themselves during times of

emotional turmoil and distress (e.g., grief and mental health struggles), the backlash against disabling comments is weakened.

"However, it is critical to note that it is consumers, rather than the influencers, who decide what are considered reasonable forms of self-protection," says Wu. So, while consumers might empathize with an influencer's decision to disable comments if their beloved pet had recently died, they may be less empathetic to influencers who disable comments to avoid negative feedback after apologizing for a transgression.

## **Lessons for influencers and brands**

These findings highlight the importance of understanding the delicate balance between establishing personal boundaries and managing audience expectations. While it is necessary for influencers to protect their mental health, how they decide to communicate this desire and manage their social [media](#) interactions play a significant role in shaping relationships with their viewership.

Global spending on influencer marketing campaigns reached \$34.1 billion in 2023 and is projected to surpass \$47.8 billion by the end of 2027. Therefore, seemingly innocuous online activities could have important professional ramifications for influencers' brand partnerships.

The decision to disable [social media](#) comments can reduce influencer persuasiveness, which emphasizes the importance of ensuring communication between brands and [influencers](#) to optimize their strategic partnerships.

The study encourages thoughtful consideration of how best to manage one's online interactions and highlights the need to clearly communicate a legitimate reason for disabling [comments](#) to avoid sending the wrong

signals to viewers.

**More information:** Michelle E. Daniels et al, EXPRESS: No Comments (from You): Understanding the Interpersonal and Professional Consequences of Disabling Social Media Comments, *Journal of Marketing* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/00222429241252842](https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429241252842)

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