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# From Creator to Entrepreneur: Emma Chamberlain's Key Success Factors

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**Abstract**

Digital creators can attract large audiences while remaining dependent on platforms for visibility and revenue. This study examines how audience positioning and a distinctive creator identity connect with commercialization and independent business ownership through a qualitative case study of Emma Chamberlain. Drawing on Porter's focus and differentiation strategies, the analysis interprets 31 evidence units drawn from nine publicly available source items. Six case-based key success factors are identified: core audience and generational positioning, personality-based content differentiation, perceived authenticity, cross-platform expansion with brand consistency, selective partnerships with creative autonomy, and owned-brand development. The case links recognizable content with commercial opportunities through identity continuity and partnership fit, while Chamberlain Coffee illustrates the extension of creator associations into a consumer brand and operating business. The contribution is an integrated strategic interpretation of one creator's entrepreneurial development, intended for analytical comparison rather than causal estimation. Its practical value lies in identifying decisions about audience fit, creative control, and owned brand equity that creators can assess against their resources and market conditions.

**Keywords:** Creator Economy; Competitive Strategy; Personal Branding; Authenticity; Creator Entrepreneurship; Case Study

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Research background and motivation*

Traditional television, radio, newspapers, and magazines historically required substantial capital, equipment, and organizational resources. Digital platforms have reduced these barriers and enabled individuals to function simultaneously as content producers, distributors, community managers, and brand owners. The creator economy therefore represents not only technological change but also a reorganization of competitive strategy, audience relationships, and monetization.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

In an environment of abundant content supply, publishing alone is not an advantage. Creators must determine whom they serve, why audiences choose them, and how attention can be transformed into long-term value.

Practical discussions of self-media frequently emphasize follower growth, views, algorithms, and viral techniques. Traffic, however, does not necessarily constitute sustainable competitive advantage. Algorithmic changes can alter visibility, and platform lock-in can constrain a creator's access to audiences and revenue. These vulnerabilities make the development of recognizable identity and business ownership strategically relevant. This study examines how these activities connect in the development of one prominent creator.

*1.2 Research questions*

RQ1: What self-media business strategies has Emma Chamberlain adopted?
RQ2: How can focus and differentiation help interpret her audience positioning and distinctive creator identity?
RQ3: How has she extended self-media influence across platforms and commercial activities?
RQ4: Which case-based strategic factors characterize her development from creator to entrepreneur?
RQ5: How can Porter's framework and the case evidence be integrated into an interpretive framework of creator entrepreneurship?

*1.3 Research gap and contributions*

Recent research examines creator ventures and their success drivers (Edeling and Wies, 2024), staged influencer–entrepreneur progression (Cheng et al., 2024), and person-brand value-capture modes (Dolbec and Smith, 2025). Mardon et al. (2023) further show how commercial roles can create tensions within consumer collectives. Building on these contributions, this study asks how audience positioning and distinctive content relate to the management of commercialization within a single creator's documented trajectory. Its emphasis is on the connections among strategic functions: how a recognizable identity travels across media, how partnership choices preserve that identity, and how product ownership provides an additional mode of value capture.

This study connects competitive strategy with creator entrepreneurship in three ways. First, it interprets audience positioning and personality-based differentiation as the strategic foundations of creator advantage. Second, it explains how perceived authenticity, audience relationships, and partnership choices connect distinctive content with commercialization. Third, it examines owned-brand development as a form of value capture that can develop alongside platform and sponsorship activities. The analysis brings these elements together in an evidence-linked framework for understanding Chamberlain's development from creator to entrepreneur.

*1.4 Research process and analytical framework*

The study links public case evidence to six strategic factors and interprets their relationships using focus, differentiation, and creator-entrepreneurship research. The term 'key success

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

factors' (KSFs) denotes salient strategic themes in this successful case, rather than necessary or sufficient causes of success.

The paper first establishes the theoretical perspective and case context, then presents the evidence-to-code mapping, factor assessment, and implications for creator entrepreneurship.

## 2. Literature review and theoretical background

To explain the success of self-media creators, it is necessary to understand not only how digital platforms enable content creation and monetization, but also how creators build audience relationships, establish trust, and transform influence into commercial value (Bleier et al., 2024; Kim and Kim, 2021). Therefore, this section reviews literature on the creator economy, self-media, revenue models, authenticity, trust, and commercialization. Prior research further indicates that perceived authenticity is central to influencer persuasiveness and that commercialization can create tensions between monetization and authenticity (Lee and Eastin, 2021; Audrezet et al., 2020; Hofstetter and Gollnhofer, 2024). These perspectives provide the conceptual basis for identifying the strategic factors that may contribute to the long-term development and success of a self-media creator.

### *2.1 Self-media and the creator economy*

Self-media refers here to media activity in which an individual or small team uses digital platforms to independently produce, distribute, and commercialize content while interacting directly with audiences. Compared with traditional media, core assets are more strongly concentrated in the creator's expertise, personality, style, community relationships, and audience trust. Creator-economy research also emphasizes the role of social platforms in enabling creator entrepreneurship and commercialization (Bleier et al., 2024). Recent scholarship increasingly treats creators as entrepreneurial actors rather than only as media personalities. Edeling and Wies (2024) develop a "creatrepreneur" perspective on creator ventures and their success drivers, Cheng et al. (2024) conceptualize influencer entrepreneurship as a staged progression, and Dolbec and Smith (2025) distinguish alternative value-capture modes through which person-brands appropriate economic value.

Personal-branding research places recognizable identity at the center of self-branding and micro-celebrity practices (Khamis et al., 2017). The earlier concept of parasocial interaction explains how mediated encounters can be experienced as interpersonal familiarity (Horton and Wohl, 1956). These perspectives help distinguish a creator's public identity from audience responses to that identity, which require separate evidence.

Traditional media generally follows an institution-to-audience structure, whereas self-media increasingly operates through creator-audience-community interaction. The creator may therefore become the central brand asset. Kim and Kim (2021) show that influencer characteristics including authenticity can affect trust, loyalty, and marketing outcomes.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

*2.2 Revenue models, authenticity, trust and commercialization*

Common revenue models include platform advertising, sponsorships, affiliate marketing, memberships, live-stream support, proprietary products, courses, services, and owned brands. Commercialization can be conceptualized as a value chain moving from content to attention, interaction, trust, brand value, and commercial conversion.

Perceived authenticity is an important source of influencer persuasiveness (Lee and Eastin, 2021). Commercial partnerships can also threaten authenticity, making fit, autonomy, and credibility important managerial issues (Audrezet et al., 2020). Hofstetter and Gollnhofer (2024) further describe an authenticity-monetization dilemma in creator markets. From an embeddedness perspective, Mardon et al. (2023) further show that influencers' movement into commercial roles can reshape relationships within consumer collectives, reinforcing the importance of managing commercialization without undermining relational legitimacy. Follower responses to monetization also connect creator commercialization with entrepreneurship research (Mei and Genet, 2024).

*2.3 Competitive strategy and self-media*

While the creator-economy literature helps explain the characteristics of self-media and creator-audience relationships, a strategic framework is required to examine why some creators are able to establish a distinctive and sustainable competitive position. Porter's generic competitive strategies are therefore introduced as the principal theoretical foundation of this study (Porter, 1980, 1985). In particular, Focus and Differentiation provide a useful framework for examining how a creator identifies a core audience, develops distinctive value, and converts these strategic choices into competitive advantage (Porter, 1980, 1985). Applying Porter's framework to the self-media context also allows this study to connect traditional competitive-strategy theory with the emerging creator economy.

Porter (1980, 1985) develops generic strategies for firms competing within industries. Here, the framework is adapted as a lens for a creator-led commercial activity whose decisions concern audience scope and distinctive value. Focus refers to an identifiable audience orientation, not a small absolute follower count: a large audience can still share generational interests and expectations. Cost leadership is not examined because the available materials do not document comparative costs or price-based competition. The adaptation therefore addresses positioning rather than testing all of Porter's generic strategies.

Focus codes identify explicit audience or category fit, while differentiation codes capture distinctive presentation and continuity of style. Reported audience scale, platform relationships, and business developments are recorded separately as outcome indicators, not as proof of competitive advantage. Open coding captures relational and commercial themes beyond Porter's framework. Research on content atypicality and engagement further motivates attention to differentiation in creator markets (Bravin et al., 2026).

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

## 3. Methodology

The qualitative single-case design defines the empirical boundary as Chamberlain's documented content, platform, partnership, and entrepreneurial activities. Qualitative content analysis links public observations to descriptive codes, concepts, candidate factors, and final interpretations. The analysis combines theory-directed coding with inductive attention to creator-specific mechanisms.

### *3.1 Research design and case selection*

This study uses an information-rich, purposively selected single case (Yin, 2018). Chamberlain's sustained content activity, visible audience reach, commercial partnerships, and consumer-brand ownership make the case relevant to creator entrepreneurship. Success is used descriptively to refer to these documented milestones, rather than to superior profitability or a measured causal outcome. Selecting a successful creator permits examination of a developed trajectory; it does not establish that the identified factors distinguish successful creators from unsuccessful ones.

### *3.2 Case background and strategic development context*

The following background summarizes the activities relevant to the analysis: content creation, audience development, podcasting, institutional partnerships, and consumer-brand ownership. These activities overlap in time and provide context for the evidence examined in Section 4.

#### 3.2.1 The beginning: YouTube and the formation of a personal style

Emma Chamberlain began publishing YouTube content as a teenager in 2017. Her videos centered on everyday activities and personal reflections and became recognizable for an intentionally unpolished presentation, rapid editing, and self-deprecating humor. TIME (2019) highlighted both her unpolished presentation and the influence of her editing style on younger creators.

#### 3.2.2 Rapid growth: from YouTuber to generational creator

Chamberlain's audience expanded rapidly during the early stage of her YouTube career. TIME (2019) reported that, at age 18, she had approximately 8.5 million YouTube subscribers and 900 million views and noted the broader influence of her creative style.

#### 3.2.3 Cross-platform expansion: Anything Goes

In 2020, Chamberlain extended her public communication into the podcast Anything Goes. Spotify (2022) described the podcast as an extension of her candid approach to discussing everyday experiences and later entered a multi-year licensing relationship with the program.

#### 3.2.4 Entry into mainstream fashion and cultural institutions

Chamberlain's activities later expanded beyond creator-owned social channels into mainstream fashion and cultural institutions. Satenstein (2021) documented Chamberlain's Met Gala

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

participation in Louis Vuitton, while Vogue (2025) reported on her red-carpet interviewing and return appearances at the event. Guilbault (2023) also reported Lancôme's collaboration with Chamberlain to reach Gen Z audiences while retaining elements of her established content style.

3.2.5 Commercial partnerships: managing authenticity and brand fit

Commercial partnerships became an increasingly visible component of Chamberlain's creator business. In a Spotify discussion, she emphasized genuine connection with products, creative input, creative freedom, and preservation of her own voice when considering brand partnerships (Spotify, 2023).

3.2.6 Chamberlain Coffee: from content influence to an owned brand

Chamberlain Coffee was established in 2019 (Chamberlain Coffee, 2022), before several of the later podcasting and fashion developments discussed above. Coffee had already featured in Chamberlain's content, providing a connection between her public identity and the product category. York (2024) reported her subsequent appointment as co-CEO and involvement in retail strategy, hiring, and team building, alongside estimated 2023 revenue of approximately USD 20 million and distribution through retailers including Target and Whole Foods. The case therefore distinguishes brand formation from later operating involvement and business expansion.

3.2.7 Strategic development trajectory

Content creation, partnerships, podcasting, and business ownership overlap in Chamberlain's development. Table 1 organizes these activities by their documented timing and strategic role. The undated company account of café expansion is distinguished from the dated business milestones.

Table 1. Emma Chamberlain's strategic development trajectory

| Activity/ timing | Major Event | Role Transformation | Strategic Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Content creation (from 2017) | YouTube everyday-life content and personalized editing | YouTuber | Formation of recognizable content and personality style |
| Audience growth (by 2019) | Large-scale subscribers, views, and youth cultural influence | Influencer / generational creator | Formation of core young audience and market position |
| Podcast expansion (2020–2022) | Anything Goes podcast | Podcaster | Demonstrates personality and communication can transfer across media |

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

| Activity/ timing | Major Event | Role Transformation | Strategic Significance |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fashion/ cultural activity (2021–2025) | Vogue, Met Gala, luxury and beauty collaborations | Cultural figure/ brand partner | Converts digital influence into mainstream cultural and brand value |
| Partnership preferences (reported 2023) | Selective partnerships and creative freedom | Personal brand manager | Manages authenticity, brand fit, and monetization tension |
| Brand formation (2019) | Chamberlain Coffee | Founder/brand owner | Productizes creator associations and audience relationships |
| Operating role and retail expansion (2024) | Co-CEO role and retail distribution | Entrepreneur/executive | Deepens involvement in business operations and distribution |
| Café extension (date not specified in source) | Physical café experience | Brand owner | Extension of the product brand into an offline setting |

*3.3 Data sources and analytical evidence units*

The empirical database comprises 31 case-specific evidence units (E01–E31) drawn from nine source items: TIME (2019), Spotify (2022, 2023), Satenstein (2021), Guilbault (2023), Vogue (2025), Chamberlain Coffee (n.d.-a, n.d.-b), and York (2024). These include media reporting, platform announcements, public creator statements, and company materials. The dated source items span 2019–2025 and include retrospective descriptions of earlier activities; the two company webpages are undated. The additional company release cited in Section 3.2.6 verifies the founding year and does not add a coded evidence unit. Academic literature supports interpretation and is kept separate from the case evidence.

We manually compiled the public materials listed above and organized the observations by source and event. We defined an evidence unit as a discrete and publicly verifiable observation—such as a Chamberlain statement, platform milestone, partnership decision, business action, or documented developmental event—that (1) was directly relevant to at least one research question, (2) contained sufficient substantive information to be coded independently, and (3) could be traced to an identifiable public source. Emma-related items were excluded when they were unrelated to the research questions, merely duplicated the same underlying event without adding substantive evidence, or lacked sufficient information for independent coding.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

The 31 units are codable observations, not independent documents or confirmations. Thirteen units derive from two Spotify items, four from two company webpages, and two from Vogue's event video. Thus, 19 of 31 units come from platform, company, or institutional materials connected to the case. The remaining 12 units come from four media reports, which may themselves reproduce interested-party statements. Appendix Table A1 preserves these distinctions. This is a bounded interpretive corpus, not an exhaustive search of Chamberlain's public output.

### *3.4 Qualitative content analysis and coding*

Each evidence unit is linked to a first-order descriptive code and a second-order concept (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2018). Focus identifies audience or category fit, Differentiation captures distinctive presentation, and Outcome indicator records reported developments. Open coding captures relational and commercial themes. Appendix Table A1 presents the source–evidence–code mapping, allowing readers to inspect the basis of each interpretation. E19 directly indicates audience fit, while E02–E03 provide context for generational positioning.

### *3.5 KSF screening and source triangulation*

Candidate factors are assessed for recurrence, explanatory relevance, strategic importance, and evidentiary support. In the assessment matrix, recurrence means that a theme appears in more than one distinct observation; it does not count independent confirmation. Explanatory relevance concerns its connection to the research questions, and strategic importance distinguishes a broad function from a technique or isolated event. Evidence support is rated Partial when accounts of authenticity lack direct audience evidence or when a theme relies predominantly on stated preferences. Factors with broad explanatory and strategic scope are retained with these qualifications; narrower elements are merged or treated as supporting evidence. Table 2 identifies source links, and Table 3 makes these interpretive decisions explicit (Carter et al., 2014; Yin, 2018).

### *3.6 Methodological rigor and analytical chain*

The audit trail links each reported observation to its source, descriptive code, broader concept, and strategic interpretation. The steps linking evidence to the final factor assessment are outlined below:

The first-order codes describe observations within each source. The second-order codes group observations across sources by strategic function. The assessment in Section 3.5 yielded six factors.

The study analyzes public secondary materials, including mediated creator statements, rather than private records, internal analytics, or new interviews. Reported financial figures remain media estimates. Audience trust is inferred from authenticity narratives and prior literature, rather than directly measured. Analytical generalization concerns the usefulness of the proposed relationships for comparison with other cases (Yin, 2013, 2018).

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

## 4. Findings

### *4.1 Empirical coding and candidate strategic dimensions*

Appendix Table A1 reports the evidence and coding, and Table A2 lists the theoretical and methodological support. Table 3 summarizes the candidate factors and their final analytical treatment.

The assessment covers nine candidate factors: core audience and generational positioning; personality-based content differentiation; perceived authenticity; cross-platform expansion with brand consistency; partnership fit and creative autonomy; owned-brand development; distinctive editing techniques; coffee as a lifestyle symbol; and mainstream fashion exposure. Brand consistency is considered jointly with cross-platform expansion. Monetization is examined through partnership choices and owned-brand development rather than treated as a separate KSF.

### *4.2 Deductive Porter analysis and inductive open-coding results*

The clearest Focus evidence is the stated commercial value of Gen Z reach (E19); E25 indicates product-category fit. E02–E03 contextualize generational positioning through style diffusion and audience scale, without being recoded as direct evidence of targeting. Differentiation is reflected in presentation and style across content and commercial work. Outcome indicators record platform relationships, cultural roles, and business development separately from these strategy codes.

Inductive coding highlights authenticity narratives, preservation of voice, product connection, creative freedom, and entrepreneurial involvement. These concepts inform the interpretation of the candidate factors alongside the theory-directed codes.

### *4.3 Source triangulation*

Table 2 distinguishes media reports, partner-platform materials, and company or institutional materials. The categories describe publication context, not guaranteed independence: both media coverage and partner publications may reproduce creator or brand statements. For each factor, Table 3 reports evidence-unit and source-item counts alongside the qualitative assessment. These counts make concentration visible without treating document frequency as validation.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

Table 2. Source triangulation results

| Strategic theme | Media reporting | Partner platform | Company/ institution | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Differentiation /authenticity | TIME: E01–E02; Guilbault: E20–E21 | Spotify: E04, E08–E10 | Vogue: E23 | Consistent descriptions; trust inferred |
| Core audience | TIME: E02–E03; Guilbault: E19 | — | — | Audience positioning supported |
| Partnership choices | — | Spotify: E12–E16 | — | Stated preferences; limited corroboration |
| Cross-platform extension | Satenstein: E17–E18 | Spotify: E05–E07, E11 | Vogue: E22 | Activities and identity continuity |
| Owned-brand development | York: E28–E31 | — | Chamberlain Coffee: E24–E27 | Origin narrative and business development |

Notes: Evidence IDs refer to Table A1. Media reporting includes TIME, Satenstein, Guilbault, and York; partner-platform material refers to Spotify; company/institutional material refers to Chamberlain Coffee and Vogue's event video. Publication context does not guarantee independence. Authenticity descriptions do not directly measure trust.

*4.4 KSF assessment*

Table 3 retains six broader factors. Editing techniques are incorporated into personality-based differentiation because they represent one expression of the creator's style. Coffee as a lifestyle symbol supports the interpretation of product fit and brand development, while mainstream fashion exposure is treated as an instance and outcome of expansion. These classifications avoid counting a narrow tactic or visible outcome as an additional success factor.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

Table 3. KSF assessment matrix

| Candidate factor | Repeat | Relevance | Strategic role | Support | Decision | Units/items / media |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Core audience/ generational positioning | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | KSF 1 | 3 / 2 / 2 |
| Personality-based content differentiation | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | KSF 2 | 4 / 3 / 2 |
| Perceived authenticity | Yes | Yes | Yes | Partial | KSF 3 | 5 / 4 / 1 |
| Cross-platform expansion with brand consistency | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | KSF 4 | 7 / 4 / 1 |
| Partnership fit and creative autonomy | Yes | Yes | Yes | Partial | KSF 5 | 5 / 1 / 0 |
| Owned-brand development | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | KSF 6 | 8 / 3 / 1 |
| Distinctive editing techniques | Yes | Yes | Partial | Yes | Merged into KSF 2 | 2 / 2 / 2 |
| Coffee as lifestyle symbol | Yes | Partial | Partial | Yes | Supporting evidence | 3 / 1 / 0 |
| Mainstream fashion exposure | Yes | Yes | Partial | Yes | Mechanism/outcome within KSF 4 | 3 / 2 / 1 |

Notes: Counts are evidence units / distinct source items / media-report items, using the factor-specific IDs stated in Section 4.5 for KSFs 1–6. The remaining rows use E02/E20 (editing), E24–E26 (coffee symbolism), and E17–E18/E22 (fashion exposure). Repeat denotes recurrence; Relevance denotes explanatory relevance; Strategic role denotes strategic importance. Media reports are not necessarily independent corroboration. Recurrence denotes more than one observation; it is not a reliability score. Partial evidence support reflects the absence of direct audience evidence for perceived authenticity or reliance on stated partnership preferences. Retention reflects explanatory and strategic scope; narrower manifestations are merged or used as supporting evidence.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

*4.5 Final key success factors*

**KSF 1: Clear Core Audience and Generational Positioning**

The evidence connects Chamberlain's audience scale and youth-cultural influence (E02–E03) with Lancôme's stated interest in reaching Gen Z (E19). Together, these observations support an interpretation of audience positioning as commercially relevant. The case does not require that this position resulted from a formally specified targeting plan.

**KSF 2: Personality-Based Content Differentiation**

Everyday presentation and a recognizable editing style appear in TIME's account (E01–E02), while personality-centered podcasting and the retention of signature style in commercial work show their extension across contexts (E08, E20). Distinctive editing is therefore treated as one component of a broader personality-based differentiation pattern.

**KSF 3: Perceived Authenticity**

Spotify describes Chamberlain's willingness to share vulnerable moments (E04, E09), and the Lancôme coverage emphasizes her approachability (E21). Chamberlain describes her creative choices as instinctive (E10) and her interview style as driven by genuine curiosity (E23). These accounts show how Chamberlain, her partners, and the media characterize her public persona.

**KSF 4: Cross-Platform Expansion with Core Brand Consistency**

The podcast and licensing relationship document expansion into another medium (E05–E07), while statements about maintaining personality across projects indicate continuity of identity (E11). Fashion and cultural participation provide additional examples of extension (E17–E18, E22). These activities are grouped with brand consistency because the interpretation concerns the portability of a recognizable creator identity.

**KSF 5: Selective Partnerships and Creative Autonomy**

In the public Spotify discussion, Chamberlain emphasizes product connection, product use, creative input, and preservation of her voice (E12–E16). These stated preferences support a partnership-selection interpretation. They indicate how she describes governing commercial collaborations, rather than providing a direct test of their effect on long-term brand equity.

**KSF 6: Owned-Brand Development**

The company's brand history connects coffee products with the creator's content and personal habits (E24–E26). A separate, undated company webpage describes the extension into physical cafés (E27). Business reporting describes retail expansion and deeper operating involvement (E28–E31). Owned-brand development captures product creation, distribution, and enterprise participation. The brand began in 2019 and developed alongside other creator activities.

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

## 5. Discussion

### *5.1 Integrating competitive strategy and creator entrepreneurship*

The six KSFs describe complementary strategic functions. Focus and differentiation concern positioning; authenticity and audience relationships concern relational value; and platform extension, partnership choices, and brand development concern the expansion and capture of that value. Their integration provides a case-based interpretation of creator entrepreneurship.

Porter's lens organizes audience scope and distinctive value; personal-branding and relational perspectives explain why continuity of identity may matter as activities expand. The framework connects these functions as interpretive relationships, without requiring a fixed sequence. It complements, rather than replaces, accounts centered on platform dependence, resources, or entrepreneurial progression.

Three propositions summarize the framework for subsequent comparative research. First, a recognizable content identity and audience fit may make creator associations transferable across media. Second, partnership fit and creative autonomy may preserve identity continuity during commercialization, with perceived authenticity and trust as potential relational mechanisms. Third, product-category fit may facilitate extension into an owned brand, while operating capabilities and distribution resources condition its development. These propositions organize the interpretation of the case; they are not tested causal effects.

Within the framework, Focus and personality-based differentiation explain how a creator establishes a recognizable competitive position, consistent with Porter's emphasis on focused positioning and differentiated value (Porter, 1980, 1985). In the Chamberlain case, the strategic significance of a younger digital audience is not simply demographic; it provides a defined market context within which a distinctive creator identity can become meaningful. Her less-polished presentation, humor, editing rhythm, language, and everyday-life orientation collectively form a differentiation system that is more difficult to reduce to a single imitable content technique.

The relational interpretation concerns how distinctive content may acquire value beyond immediate attention. Public descriptions of authenticity provide case evidence for a recognizable creator identity, while prior research offers a basis for interpreting trust as a possible connecting mechanism (Lee and Eastin, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021). Cross-platform consistency may help preserve that identity as activities expand. Research on atypical content and engagement supports the strategic relevance of differentiation (Bravin et al., 2026), although engagement alone does not demonstrate enduring advantage.

Commercialization brings choices about partnership fit, creative autonomy, and ownership. Previous research documents tensions between authenticity and monetization (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hofstetter and Gollnhofer, 2024; Nistor et al., 2025). Chamberlain's stated partnership preferences illustrate how a creator approaches these choices. Her consumer brand represents a complementary mode of value capture through products and business operations, consistent with

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

research on creator entrepreneurship and person-brands (Edeling and Wies, 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Dolbec and Smith, 2025). Brand ownership can develop alongside platform activity; it is not necessarily the endpoint of a linear progression.

*5.2 Analytical approach and transferability*

The evidence-to-KSF procedure provides a traceable way to connect public case materials with strategic interpretation. It combines established qualitative content analysis with a theory-informed assessment of candidate factors (Schreier, 2012; Krippendorff, 2018). Its value lies in making the mapping and classification decisions inspectable, rather than introducing a new qualitative method.

The same procedure could support comparisons across creators. Using consistent evidence-unit rules and candidate-assessment criteria would help distinguish recurring strategic patterns from features specific to Chamberlain's scale, commercial partners, and cultural setting.

*5.3 From differentiation to relational advantage*

The case suggests that differentiation and relational value should be considered together. A distinctive style can attract attention, while perceived authenticity may support an enduring audience relationship. This interpretation extends the discussion beyond distinctive content to the relationships through which creators may sustain its value.

*5.4 The authenticity–monetization tension*

Commercial partnerships offer revenue opportunities but can create tensions with perceived authenticity. Chamberlain's public emphasis on product connection, preservation of voice, and creative autonomy illustrates her stated approach to managing this tension. These preferences can be interpreted as principles for commercial decision-making, with their effects on audience trust remaining an issue for further empirical research.

*5.5 From platform dependence to owned assets*

Chamberlain Coffee illustrates value capture through a consumer business alongside content and sponsorship. Its 2019 formation and later retail expansion distinguish initial brand creation from business scaling. The creator's involvement in products, distribution, and management provides a different form of participation from a platform account or sponsorship contract, consistent with entrepreneurial value-capture modes discussed by Dolbec and Smith (2025).

*5.6 Boundary conditions and rival explanations*

Chamberlain's early platform entry, exceptional reach, access to institutional partners, and managerial resources may have amplified her opportunities. These conditions offer rival explanations to a strategy-only account. Algorithm changes can reduce discovery or alter audience access, while platform lock-in can limit the portability of followers. Brand ownership diversifies commercial participation but introduces inventory, fulfillment, working-capital, and customer-acquisition demands. In a crowded direct-to-consumer market, familiarity with a

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

creator need not translate into repeat purchases. The framework therefore connects identity and commercialization while recognizing that resources, platform conditions, and product-market competition shape their outcomes.

## 6. Conclusions and implications

### *6.1 Main findings*

The analysis identifies six interrelated KSFs linking audience positioning, personality-based differentiation, perceived authenticity, consistent platform expansion, selective partnerships, and owned-brand development. Chamberlain's case illustrates how content creation and entrepreneurial activity can develop together, with a recognizable identity supporting multiple forms of commercial participation.

### *6.2 Theoretical implications*

The study connects focus and differentiation with authenticity narratives, partnership governance, and owned-brand development. It complements research on creator ventures, staged progression, and person-brand value capture by specifying how these strategic functions can coexist within one trajectory (Edeling and Wies, 2024; Cheng et al., 2024; Dolbec and Smith, 2025).

### *6.3 Practical implications*

For creators, the framework offers a set of decisions to assess rather than a formula for reproducing Chamberlain's scale. Audience clarity and a recognizable voice can guide content choices; product fit and creative-control terms can guide partnership selection. Mid-tier creators may apply these principles through a manageable content format, selective collaborations, and small-scale product tests before committing to inventory or broader distribution. Expansion into an owned brand requires operational capacity as well as audience interest. The relevant lesson is to align commercial commitments with identity, demand, and available resources.

### *6.4 Limitations and future research*

The study draws on nine public source items covering an unusually successful creator. Source concentration and promotional narratives limit independent corroboration; the corpus does not systematically sample critical audience reactions. Financial figures are reported estimates, and audience trust is not directly measured. A comparison with less successful creators, audience research, and analysis of original content would help assess the proposed relationships and distinguish strategic choices from visibility and resource advantages.

Future research can compare creators with different audience sizes, resources, and market positions using the evidence-to-factor mapping. Longitudinal work could examine how audience responses and product performance change around partnership decisions or brand launches, testing the propositions in Section 5.1.

Declaration of interests:
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.
Data availability: The public sources and the evidence-to-code mapping used in this study are identified in Appendix Table A1 and the reference list.

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Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

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Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

## Appendix A. Coding audit trail and traceability of the empirical analysis

This appendix separates empirical case evidence from theoretical and methodological support. Table A1 reports the 31 coded Emma Chamberlain evidence units (E01–E31), including source, source type, time, observable evidence, first-order code, second-order code, and theory/open-coding classification. Table A2 reports selected theoretical and methodological sources used to support interpretation and research rigor; these sources are not counted as empirical evidence units.

Table A1. Coding audit trail and traceability of the empirical analysis

| ID | Source | Type | Time | Observable Evidence | First-Order Code | Second-Order Code | Theory/Open Dimension |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E01 | TIME (2019) | Media reporting | 2019 | Early videos retained acne, ordinary routines, and imperfect moments. | Unpolished presentation | Naturalized content | Differentiation |
| E02 | TIME (2019) | Media reporting | 2019 | Her editing style inspired a recognizable subgenre among young creators. | Style imitation | Distinctive content language | Differentiation |
| E03 | TIME (2019) | Media reporting | 2019 | About 8.5M subscribers and 900M views at age 18. | Large audience scale | Reported audience reach | Outcome indicator |
| E04 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2017–2022 | Consistent sharing of highs, lows, and vulnerable moments. | Long-term self-disclosure | Authenticity narrative | Open dimension |
| E05 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2020 | Candid communication extended into Anything Goes. | Media translation | Cross-platform extension | Outcome indicator |
| E06 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2022 | Podcast achieved major global recognition. | Podcast performance | Cross-platform success | Outcome indicator |
| E07 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2022 | Spotify entered a multi-year licensing relationship. | Platform recognition | Platform bargaining value | Outcome indicator |
| E08 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2022 | Podcast remained personality-centered across broad topics. | Content breadth | Personality-centered content | Differentiation |
| E09 | Spotify (2022) | Partner platform | 2022 | Spotify emphasized vulnerability and authenticity. | External authenticity attribution | Perceived authenticity | Open dimension |
| E10 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Creation described as instinctive rather than persona construction. | Non-manufactured persona | Personality consistency | Open dimension |
| E11 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Personality maintained across projects. | Cross-project consistency | Brand consistency | Differentiation |
| E12 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Partnership selection emphasizes genuine product connection. | Selective partnership | Brand fit | Open dimension |
| E13 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Chamberlain described trying Lancôme products before promoting them. | Product-use verification | Commercial credibility | Open dimension |
| E14 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Maintaining her own voice is a priority. | Voice autonomy | Creative autonomy | Open dimension |
| E15 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Creative input and freedom are valued. | Creative control | Brand-consistency governance | Open dimension |
| E16 | Spotify (2023) | Partner platform | 2023 | Successful collaboration balances brand and creator personalities. | Mutual fit | Brand co-creation | Open dimension |
| E17 | Satenstein (2021) | Media reporting | 2021 | Met Gala participation with Louis Vuitton expanded her into high fashion. | Fashion crossover | Cultural-capital extension | Outcome indicator |
| E18 | Satenstein (2021), accompanying video | Media reporting | 2021 | Served as Met Gala red-carpet interviewer. | Hosting role | Mainstream-media extension | Outcome indicator |
| E19 | Guilbault (2023) | Media reporting | 2023 | Lancôme selected her partly to reach Gen Z. | Generational representation | Target-audience value | Focus |
| E20 | Guilbault (2023) | Media reporting | 2023 | Lancôme project retained signature raw style and dynamic editing. | Commercial adoption of style | Transferable differentiation | Differentiation |
| E21 | Guilbault (2023) | Media reporting | 2023 | Described as authentic, approachable, and vulnerable. | External personality attribution | Authenticity/proximity | Open dimension |
| E22 | Vogue (2025) | Company/institution | 2025 | Repeated Met Gala participation showed sustained collaboration. | Repeated partnership | Sustained cultural influence | Outcome indicator |

Vol. 10, No.11; 2026

ISSN: 2456-7760

| ID | Source | Type | Time | Observable Evidence | First-Order Code | Second-Order Code | Theory/Open Dimension |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| E23 | Vogue (2025) | Company/institution | 2025 | Interviewing framed around genuine and authentic curiosity. | Genuine curiosity | Natural interaction | Open dimension |
| E24 | Chamberlain Coffee (n.d.-a) | Company/institution | Undated origin account | Coffee linked to early YouTube everyday life. | Content-product linkage | Brand-origin consistency | Differentiation |
| E25 | Chamberlain Coffee (n.d.-a) | Company/institution | Undated origin account | Early content repeatedly featured coffee and café culture. | Long-term category association | Product fit | Focus |
| E26 | Chamberlain Coffee (n.d.-a) | Company/institution | Undated origin account | Initial product grew from personal coffee habits and needs. | Need productization | Creator-to-product conversion | Open dimension |
| E27 | Chamberlain Coffee (n.d.-b) | Company/institution | Undated expansion account | Brand expanded into physical café experience. | Offline extension | Brand assetization | Outcome indicator |
| E28 | York (2024) | Media reporting | 2024 | Moved into co-CEO role. | Deeper operating role | Creator entrepreneurship | Open dimension |
| E29 | York (2024) | Media reporting | 2023 | Estimated revenue of about USD 20M. | Revenue outcome | Commercial performance | Outcome indicator |
| E30 | York (2024) | Media reporting | 2024 | DTC combined with retailers such as Target and Whole Foods. | Channel diversification | Business scaling | Outcome indicator |
| E31 | York (2024) | Media reporting | 2024 | Participation in retail strategy, hiring, and team building. | Operational participation | Enterprise governance | Open dimension |

Table A2. Theoretical and methodological support used in interpretation

| Source | Type | Primary support | Analytical role |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kim and Kim (2021) | Academic | Authenticity, trust, loyalty and marketing outcomes | Relational mechanism |
| Lee and Eastin (2021) | Academic | Perceived influencer authenticity and persuasion | Relational mechanism |
| Audrezet et al. (2020) | Academic | Authenticity threats under commercialization | Commercialization governance |
| Hofstetter and Gollnhofer (2024) | Academic | Authenticity–monetization tension | Commercialization governance |
| Edeling and Wies (2024) | Academic | Creators as entrepreneurs; creator venture models and success drivers | Creator entrepreneurship context |
| Cheng et al. (2024) | Academic | Staged influencer–entrepreneur progression | Creator entrepreneurship context |
| Dolbec and Smith (2025) | Academic | Person-brand value-capture modes, including entrepreneurship | Value-capture context |
| Mardon et al. (2023) | Academic | Embedded entrepreneurship and commercial role tensions | Relational/commercialization context |
| Bravin et al. (2026) | Academic | Atypicality and social-media engagement | Differentiation context |
| Yin (2013, 2018) | Methods | Multiple evidence sources, case-study validity and analytical generalization | Methodological rigor |

Appendix note. The audit trail supports transparency rather than statistical sampling. Where a single public source contained multiple strategically distinct observations, those observations could be unitized separately while retaining the same source identity; substantively duplicate reports of the same underlying event were consolidated. The empirical KSF analysis is grounded exclusively in E01–E31. The literature summarized in Table A2 supports theoretical interpretation and methodological rigor but is not treated as case evidence.