

**Communication Audit - Monkee's of Blowing Rock**

Madelyn L. Hough

University of North Carolina at Wilmington

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Christine Willingham

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**Table of Contents**

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction .....	4
Methodology .....	5
Audit Diary .....	6
Audit Results .....	7
Conclusion .....	9
Recommendations .....	11
Appendix .....	12
References .....	16

## **Executive Summary**

Located in the mountains of North Carolina, Monkee's of Blowing Rock is an intimate shopping experience where genuine connections and friendships are formed. Monkee's of Blowing Rock is known to have excellent customer service and high-end fashion. Monkee's team members are expected to be courageous and genuine to every person who walks through the door. The Monkee's motto is "You might need a bigger closet!"

After an initial assessment, the organization has satisfactory internal and external communication strategies and a strong organizational culture. Employees feel connected to the Monkee's brand and embody brand values. Social media and other external outreach perform well and are effective in making sales. Branding is easily identifiable through consistent repetitive brand promotions.

In order to analyze internal and external communication, as well as the culture surrounding Monkee's of Blowing Rock, qualitative data collection was conducted. First, two interviews were conducted with Monkee's employees. Linda, age 75 was interviewed first. She has been employed as a part-time sales associate at Monkee's for 6 years. The second interview took place with Lauren who is the sales manager at Monkee's and has had about a year of experience in the position.

The two interviews determined that there is a strong organizational identity and organizational culture within Monkee's. Both parties felt very strongly that overall, communication was effective that all team members were respectful of each other, and that there are many genuine friendships within the workplace. Linda also mentioned the positive shift in the culture at Monkee's as well as the difficulty the owner has communicating in some instances.

Next, a survey was conducted for the organization. All employees were asked to participate, but only 4 responded to the survey creating a 30.8% response rate. The survey provided statements that employees could agree or disagree with and also provided an optional written response. Overall, the survey was well received and most employees said they felt that Monkee's is a welcoming environment for workers and customers, as well as that they felt that social media and external communication tools were effective.

Some employees who participated in the survey were concerned about the lack of inclusivity standards at the organization. The first concern is that Monkee's is not size-inclusive which they felt was leaving out a large segment of the customer base, and the employees were also concerned that there was a lack of diversity in the customer base as well. In addition to this, owner communication issues were brought to light again.

Seven key artifacts were identified from the organization. Artifacts such as social media posts, email marketing, group communication, personal communication, and email update threads were collected as artifacts. Based on the content of the artifacts, it was concluded that Monkee's

internal and external communication is consistent and effective overall. External communication demonstrates cross-promotional strategies which increase effectiveness and brand tone, image and voice were consistent throughout the external communications. Internal communication overall was very friendly which was effective. One example of an email update does demonstrate some passive aggressive communication from the owner of the store.

After the data collection, the strengths of the organization were identified as the following.

1. Monkee's of Blowing Rock is the third-grossing Monkee's in the franchise which is attributed to its strong social capital,
2. Demonstrates strong consistent external communication, and t
3. Strong organizational culture.

Weaknesses were identified as the following:

1. Monkee's of Blowing Rock lacks inclusivity.
2. Social media has a small following compared to other Monkee's stores of the same caliber.
3. The Monkee's of Blowing Rock owner has weak communication skills.

Recommendations for the Organization

1. Communication between managers, owners, and team members will be most effective if following the framework of simple control.
2. The entire management team, including the owners, should participate in a diversity and inclusion training program.
3. The Monkee's owner should take part in an effective communication and leadership course.
4. In order to increase following on social media platforms, Monkee's of Blowing Rock should partner with different social media influencers.
5. Proposed Brand Mantra: Upscale, Intimate, Shopping Experience

In conclusion, it was determined that overall Monkee's of Blowing Rock does have strong internal and external systems of communication, with some concern pertaining to the owner's communication style. Communication is effective and consistent but lacks some inclusivity which limits the brand's audience. Monkee's of Blowing Rock is in alignment with franchise values and serves as a model store for the franchise in sales and organizational culture. Employees have created a positive organizational culture and management employs a concertive control strategy. Monkee's is built on cocreation so customer satisfaction is essential.

## **Introduction**

Monkee's is a North Carolina-based franchised women's boutique that has over 40 locations across the US. Monkee's originated in Wilmington NC and the headquarters are located in Winston-Salem NC. This is an analysis of the Monkee's of Blowing Rock. Monkee's of Blowing Rock opened in 2001 and has been owned by the Wehrmanns for eleven years. Monkee's offers a



one-of-a-kind ladies' shopping experience where customers are treated like family when they walk through the door. Employees must be courageous, and outgoing, and create long-lasting customer relationships. Monkee's offers a wide array of popular high-end brands that are hand-picked by each owner/buyer of every store. The Monkee's motto is "You might need a bigger closet!"

Monkee's boutiques compete with other women's boutiques such as Uniquities and large retailers such as Nordstrom and Sak's. Monkee's of Blowing Rock competes with other small businesses on Main St in Blowing Rock, especially other women's boutiques such as Tazmaraz, the Funky Tulip, and the Stable. Monkee's key audience is women in their 30s and older. Monkee's of Blowing Rock especially caters to a more mature audience, the majority of the customers at this store location are 55 and older. Tourism is also a huge key audience for Monkee's of Blowing Rock. Because this store's clothing, shoes, and accessories are expensive, the key consumer is someone of higher socioeconomic status.

Each Monkee's has its own individual social media accounts per location. Monkee's of Blowing Rock has about 5.5k followers on Instagram and about 2.2k followers on Facebook. Each post averages around 25 likes on both Facebook and Instagram. Monkee's of Blowing Rock posts on Instagram every single day and posts on Facebook every other day.

The purpose of this communication audit is to evaluate the internal and external communication of Monkee's of Blowing Rock and to provide recommendations to improve communication approaches and organizational culture. In an initial assessment, the organization has a strong employee culture, effective communication, and minimal organizational issues. Monkee's functions as a role culture and takes a normative approach with employees. Employees feel connected to the company's values and the team. Owners are very hands-on and have a large influence on the organizational culture which can create some issues. Employee turnover is higher due to the location of the organization. Branding is in alignment with the values of the company and the employees and external communication is an accurate reflection the Monkee's brand.

## **Methodology**

### **Initial Sampling Dimensions**

*Setting* - Monkee's of Blowing Rock

*Events, activities, and processes* - Relationship between owners, managers, and employees as well as the relationship between the team as a whole and customers.

*Time* - 7-week period

*Materials and Artifacts* - Communication artifacts such as group texts, email chains, social media marketing, and email marketing

### **Initial Type of Sampling**

Homogeneous Sampling - Female identifying participants, all sales associates of Monkee's of Blowing Rock

Total Population Sampling - All sampled participants are employees of Monkee's of Blowing Rock

### **Data Collection Methods**

#### Interviews

1. Sales Associate
2. Sales Manager

#### Survey

Administered to the entire team of 13 individuals. 4 individuals responded to the survey.

Response Rate 30.8%

#### Artifacts

- Group email chains
- Group text messages
- Social media posts
- Email marketing

### **Criteria for consistency, inclusiveness, and effectiveness**

Consistency - Communication and messaging remain constant and are sustainable across all branding and platforms over an extended period of time. Communication executives exhibit reliable and trustworthy communication skills throughout projects and in organizational relationships.

Inclusiveness - All members of an organization have equal opportunity to participate in organizational communication. Communication executives manage the different modes of communication to ensure that content is appropriate and fair to the brand and its audience. Management should have a zero-tolerance policy for exclusion and the use of derogatory communication at the organization.

Effectiveness - Communication between management and members is productive and occurs regularly. Management exhibits meaningful directions and communicates appropriately to maximize employee engagement. Communication on multi-media platforms accurately represents the brand and clearly communicates organization offerings that support positive interaction between the brand and consumers

Initial Assessment of Monkee's of Blowing Rock - The organization has a strong employee culture, effective communication, and minimal organizational issues. Employees feel connected to the company and the team. Monkee's functions as a role culture and takes a normative approach with employees. Owners are very hands-on and have a large influence on the organizational culture which can create some issues. Employee turnover is higher due to the location of the organization. Branding is in alignment with the values of the company and the employees.

### **Audit Diary**

The communication audit pertaining to Monkee's of Blowing Rock was conducted over a seven-week period from the beginning of March 2023 to the end of April 2023.

Over the seven-week period, two interviews were conducted with employees within the organization. The first interview was conducted with Linda, a sales associate who has had 6 years of experience at Monkees. The interview took place in person at Monkee's in March 2023, while the second interview was with Lauren and was completed via phone call in April 2023. Lauren works in management at the store and is head of sales. She has 13 months of experience at the time of this interview.

The survey was completed online via TypeForm and administered via text message the second week of April 2023. The survey was administered to all 13 individuals on the Monkee's team. Only 4 individuals responded creating a 30.8% response rate. The survey included 10 statements that participants could agree or disagree with. Each statement gave participants the chance to elaborate on their choices if they felt it was necessary. Responses were anonymous to protect confidentiality among team members.

Artifacts were collected over the course of the seven-week period via social media and personal communication. Artifacts include but are not limited to; social media posts from Facebook as well as Instagram, email marketing, team email chains, and management group messaging. All of the collected data is relevant and are dated from September 2022 to April 2023.

## **Results of the Audit Process**

### **Assessment of Survey**

The organization has a strong employee culture, effective communication, and minimal organizational issues. Internal communication is handled through email, text messages, and Homebase (scheduling app.) Employees feel connected to the company and the team. 75% of those who answered said they enjoyed working at Monkee's and all agreed that they feel welcomed. Half of the team members who answered feel that owners need to better communicate their expectations and use better communication tools to express their frustrations.

Social media and external branding and communication are representative of Monkee's Blowing Rock and Monkee's franchise values. Content is cross-promotional across all external communication channels and exhibits consistency. All employees are featured on social media along with current products which creates brand recognition with customers.

Customers feel welcomed in the store by employees and are satisfied with their experience at Monkee's. Based on the survey results, 50% of employees surveyed feel that Monkee's lacks size

inclusivity which is excluding part of Monkee's key target audience, and half of employees surveyed feel that Monkee's customer base lacks diversity.

### **Assessment of Interviews**

Employees and management are satisfied with the communication at Monkee's and feel that it has improved immensely over the past few years. According to the interviews, staff agrees that customer service is excellent and customers feel comfortable at the store. Lauren states "We have so much fun here and I think customers see that. I think they can feel the bond that we all have here which instantly makes it feel like home. Customers trust our opinions because we are truthful and genuinely care about them. " The team is considered family and customer relationships often are a part of this family relationship.

Both parties are in agreement that the owners are sometimes poor communicators which is the root of other organizational issues. Linda states "Now, [the owner] definitely has a hard time handling her stress and takes it out on us but that's normal to some degree. I hope in her newfound freedom she can learn how to communicate her stress to us." Other than this, staff feel that they can be honest and have open communication with other team members.

Both interviewees are satisfied overall with external communication such as social media. One manager did mention that even though the store's social media gains a lot of interaction, the social media pages have a small following compared to other Monkee's stores of the same size. She also mentioned that she enjoyed being included in the social media process and that it is collaborative in many aspects. Internal communication relies on Homebase and emailing for group communication outside of work, email updates, and informal group text messaging. These communication platforms allow for quick, direct communication, scheduling, and conflict resolution outside of the organization.

Monkee's has the best friendship consumer-brand relationship with its customers. Customers get to know the sales associates and owners at Monkee's and visit with them often. There is a certain level of trust between sales associates and customers as well as between customers and brands which keeps the customers returning. The team-based relationship and reward system at the organization is very much a power culture. Power is in the hands of the leaders of the organization such as the owners and managerial team. There is also lots of loyalty between team members, the owners, and the Monkee's brand itself.

### **Assessment of Artifacts - External Communication**

[Pictured below] are 4 examples of external communication from the organization. Included are social media posts but also a promotional email as well. As you can see from the images, the branding has a lot of consistency. From the setting of the images, the products that are being

promoted and even the typography and messaging are consistent. Messaging can be cross-promotional. The first two images promote "the owner's picks" across email and Instagram. The email also features the brand S/W/F, which coincides with the last post promoting different products from the same brand. The setting is consistent in the Facebook posts and all artifacts promoting the organization's products.

Overall, the organization demonstrates inclusiveness. These communication artifacts feature the organization's employees as well as a wide variety of products and brands. As you can see from the second post, customers commented on the post. The organization should have replied and been more inclusive and created a conversation with the customers rather than just simply liking their replies.

The organization is very effective at creating its identity through consistent messaging and high-quality products and brands that cater to the customers' needs. Cross-promotional content such as "the owner's picks" in addition to familiar faces and settings also builds a brand image for the customers.

### **Assessment of Artifacts - Internal Communication**

[Pictured below] are 3 examples of internal communication initiated mostly by the owner or management. The email chain is a more formal means of communication while text messages are more informal communication. Based on the artifacts, it is evident that there is a friendly tone between team members and this tone is consistent throughout most communication. Email updates include all team members on the receiving end, but text threads only include whom it may concern.

Multiple group messages and text threads can often become confusing and disorganized and would be more effective if the whole team was included, or just management was included. Email threads are initiated by the owner, and sometimes her tone can be somewhat passive-aggressive, for example in the email thread pictured below she writes, "We ALL have families that are important to us!" concerning the winter holidays. Overall, communication is open-ended, constant, and effective.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Conclusions**

Monkee's of Blowing Rock is in alignment with Monkee's franchise values and is an exemplary model of how a Monkee's store should communicate. Monkee's of Blowing Rock communicates franchise values through its carefully curated merchandising, social media campaigns, and through its excellent customer service. Most importantly, Monkee's of Blowing Rock employees identify with the organization and embody brand values.

Overall, Monkee's of Blowing Rock demonstrates some inclusivity internally and externally. Monkee's employees are included in social media and branding and always included in email

updates, scheduling, and of course interacting with customers. Occasionally, not all members of the team will be included in group messages which can create issues. All of Monkee's customers are treated equally and with the utmost respect, but some team members feel that the store lacks diverse clientele and is not size inclusive. It is also evident that there should be more interaction between the store and customers on social media.

Monkee's of Blowing Rock exhibits consistency throughout social media and internal branding. Cross-promotional campaigns promote certain products or brands across platforms and brand promotions are recurring. Even though Monkee's is constantly evolving in order to better serve customers and employees, brand values are consistent and lead employees in their decision-making and their relationships within the workplace.

Communication is overall effective at Monkees. Open-ended communication is valued in the workplace between employees and between customers and staff. The brand values and brand image created by Monkee's are effective and have created a strong sense of organizational culture while also creating a strong brand image. Most internal communication is effective and healthy with the exception of some issues concerning the owner. Indirect communication through text messages and apps needs some improvement.

Monkee's as a franchise is very much built on cocreation and its social capital along with stakeholders have built the franchise. Each Monkee's store is eager to receive customer feedback so that they can adapt to what their customers need from them. Because Monkee's is a personal shopping experience, stakeholder opinion is valued heavily.

### **Communication Strengths:**

1. **Monkee's of Blowing Rock is one of the most successful in the franchise.** It is the third largest grossing Monkee's and much of the success is attributed to its strong social capital. Even though roughly 75% of sales are tourism-based, customer relationships go beyond brick-and-mortar shopping. Monkee's of Blowing Rock stays connected with customers through direct communication, website, email marketing, and social media.
2. **Monkee's of Blowing Rock demonstrates strong consistent external communication.** External communication is driven by Instagram, Facebook, and email marketing. All social media links back to the Monkee's website. Email blasts are sent out weekly, while social media posts are posted every day. All content is cross-promotional creating consistency within the branding and is more effective in branding recall. Monkee's employees are encouraged to participate in social media really creating a unique personality for the Monkee's of Blowing Rock brand.
3. **Employees identify with the organization and have the best interest of the brand.** There is a strong family-like bond among team members where open communication is valued and feedback is warmly received. There is minimal organizational issues and a healthy culture that has been nurtured in the workplace. According to employees,

customers feel welcomed in the store and feel that genuine bonds have been created with Monkee's sales associates.

### Weaknesses and Concerns

1. **Monkee's of Blowing Rock lacks inclusivity.** Half of the surveyed employees were concerned about the diversity and inclusion of the organization. While employees felt included, their concern was customers, the lack of diversity coming through the door as well as the lack of size inclusivity. Employees feel that because of this exclusion, Monkee's is missing a large part of its target market.
2. **Social media has a small following compared to other Monkee's stores of the same caliber.** While external communication practices are strong and consistent, social media platforms have very small followings. This puts the organization at a disadvantage and could be responsible for missed opportunities or interactions with new customers.
3. **The Monkee's of Blowing Rock owner has weak communication skills.** As mentioned in the interview with Linda, the survey, and in the artifacts, it seems that the owner of the store has difficulty expressing her needs and wants for the store to the staff. Passive aggression is often used to exert power in situations which is not a healthy form of communication. This is a weakness of the entire team, as it is important to have a strong leader.

### Recommendations

1. **Communication between managers, owners, and team members will be most effective if following the framework of simple control.** Simple control requires a strong relationship between team members and management which Monkee's of Blowing Rock already has. This framework is beneficial for a small team of 13 employees and for an organization that has very hands-on leadership. This should be effective immediately because it costs very little and is not time-consuming.
2. **The entire management team, including the owners should participate in a diversity and inclusion training program.** An inclusivity training course will bring new perspectives to the management at Monkee's and hopefully help the team adjust communication and products to be more inclusive. Understanding and working through internal bias will help Monkee's staff better the organization and foster new relationships with new customers. This should be a somewhat urgent matter but should be completed when time will allow, such as the slow season when store hours are reduced.
3. **The Monkee's owner should take part in an effective communication and leadership course.** Based upon the concerns of the employees at Monkee's of Blowing Rock, the owner should work internally to better her communication skills. Employees express that passive aggression and lack of communication from her are the sources of most of Monkee's issues that could easily be avoided. In order to be an effective leader, owning mistakes and communicating effectively is very important. This should be done immediately in order to better serve team members.

4. **In order to increase following on social media platforms, Monkee's of Blowing Rock should partner with different social media influencers.** Social media influencers have the ability to bring in new audiences to a brand or organization. This kind of relationship will help build a larger and stronger following for Monkee's of Blowing Rock. Influencers are quite pricey so this is something that should be implemented when money will allow.
5. **Proposed Brand Mantra: Upscale, Intimate, Shopping Experience**

## Appendix

### Results of Survey

1. Customers feel welcomed in the store - 100% yes
2. Customers feel the staff is genuine - 75% yes
  - a. No - Sometimes we come off as too pushy and overly happy
3. The store's social media presence is representative of staff and merchandise - 100% yes
4. Monkee's of Blowing Rock properly represents Monkee's values and principles - 100% yes
5. The store's social media presence accurately reflects Monkee's brand values - 100% yes
6. Monkee's is inclusive of all people - 50% yes
  - a. If you answered no, why not?
    - i. A: Monkee's is not size-inclusive, only carries sizes XS-XL
    - ii. A: Monkee's seems to attract mainly white women, we rarely see anyone of color in the store.
7. Enjoy working at Monkee's - 75% yes, 25% somewhat
8. Staff feels welcomed at work - 100% yes
9. Communication is efficient in the workplace - 50% yes
  - a. No A: Passive aggression from the owners makes me feel uncomfortable and that I can't do anything right
  - b. A: There seem to be frustrations over small issues that could be easily solved through a little more communication!
10. Monkee's has effective internal modes of communication - 100% yes

### Interview Transcripts

#### Interview 1

Linda - 75 years old

Position: Part-time Sales Associate - 6 years of employment

Q: How would you describe the atmosphere of Monkee's? For customers? For employees?

A: "Oh Monkee's is just bright and full of joy, especially when the store is busy. We get to laugh a lot, sometimes too much. I think the customers feel welcome and I hope they enjoy chatting



with us as much as I do. There are days when the store is quiet and it's tense. You can feel the angst if [the owner] is upset. Overall it is a positive atmosphere and I love working here a couple of days a week."

Q: Has Monkee's changed in the time that you have worked here? You are the longest-standing employee!

A: "Oh has it?! [the owners] never used be away from the store and travel like they do now and frankly, they have not always been so... relaxed either. I am really happy for them and I think it is great that they have had three wonderful managers running the store with them. [the owner] used to be very uptight many days and that would kind of set the tone for the store. We did tasks and chores exactly how she said they should be done. Now it seems we cut corners so to speak sometimes and that is kind of nice in a way."

Q: Do you feel that the Monkee's team employs effective communication skills? Why or why not?

A: "I sure would hope so! It works for someone like me at least. I like using Homebase as a shared calendar and I like that we are able to have a group text on the app. I appreciate you girls always texting and letting me know what's going on before I even get to the store. The weekly-ish email updates from [the owner] are always good too because you know I am only here twice a week."

Q: What do you think about the multi-media marketing for the store?

A: "Well I don't know too much about email marketing and all of that that you do, but I know that you do a great job. I love seeing all of the posts you make on Facebook."

Q: How is the in-person communication?

A: "Oh I think it's wonderful, we all work very well together as a team and believe me it wasn't always this way. We can be serious when we need to be and also have a glass of wine at the end of the day too. I always appreciate you girls being completely honest with me and dealing with me. Now, [the owner] definitely has a hard time handling her stress and takes it out on us but that's normal to some degree. I hope in her newfound freedom she can learn how to communicate her stress to us."

Q: Do you think the Monkee's of Blowing Rock team is in alignment with Monkee's values? Why or why not?

A: Absolutely. Now, our team doesn't fit the typical mold of a Monkee's if you know what I mean. But our team provides the best customer service compared to any other Monkee's in my opinion. We constantly hear "This is my favorite Monkee's" and that is for a reason."

## Interview 2

Lauren - 22 years old

Sales Floor Manager - 1 year of experience

Q: How would you describe the atmosphere of Monkee's? For customers? For employees?

A: "We have so much fun here and I think customers see it. I think they can feel the bond that we all have here which instantly makes it feel like home. Customers trust our opinions because we are truthful and genuinely care about them. Our team has such a healthy relationship, no one is ever mad, and can take constructive criticism well. Except [the owners]. The only time an issue arises it is because they are dissatisfied... which I guess makes sense."

Q: What has been your impact as a manager?

A: Well Madelyn, when I started working here you talked a lot about what the old managers used to do and talked about the strict environment you were in. I think that my managerial style is a lot more relaxed until I need to be strict. I feel that everyone is capable and I do not need to watch them like hawks, I want to see people grow on their own. I hope that I have impacted the team in a positive way."

Q: Do you feel that the Monkee's team employs effective communication skills? Why or why not?

A: "Like I said earlier, everyone here has a great attitude and is able to take on constructive criticism so well. I think that we have the most effective communication style as a team when dealing with customers. Our customer base is older so they appreciate sales associates like us staying engaged with them and giving them the Monkee's experience. There is definitely work to be done between us as managers and [the owners]. I feel like they are often upset and I think that is due to a lack of concise effective communication.

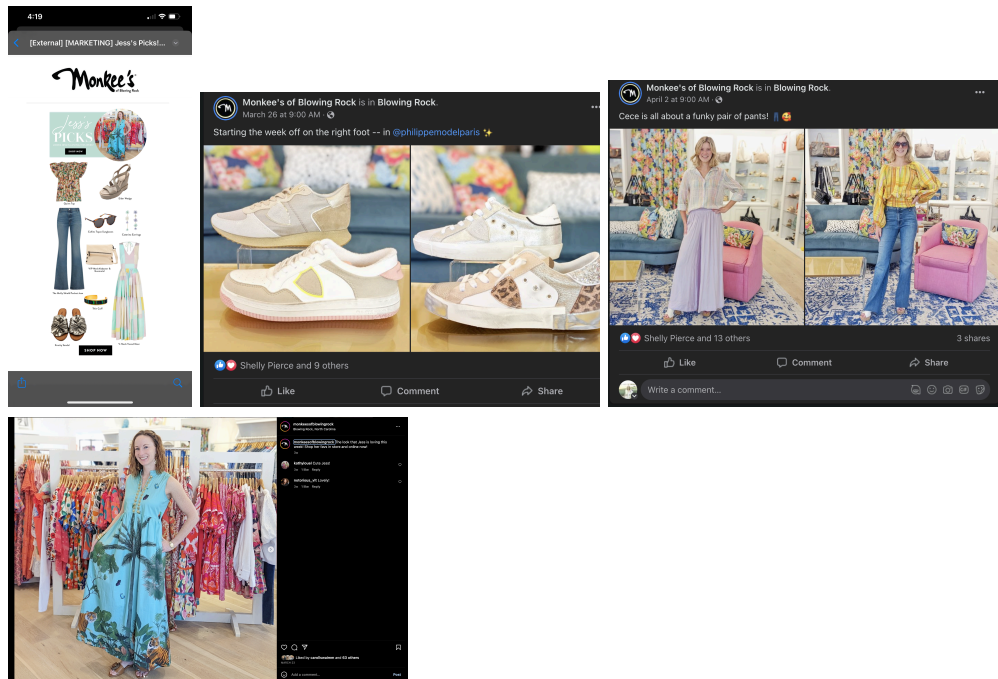
Q: What do you think about the multi-media marketing for the store?

A: "I think it's great, and you have done a lot with it. I know we have a smaller following on our platforms compared to other Monkee's performing at our caliber but we still are getting a ton of interaction and orders so I think it's great. I love making reels with you and I am glad I can be a part of the process.

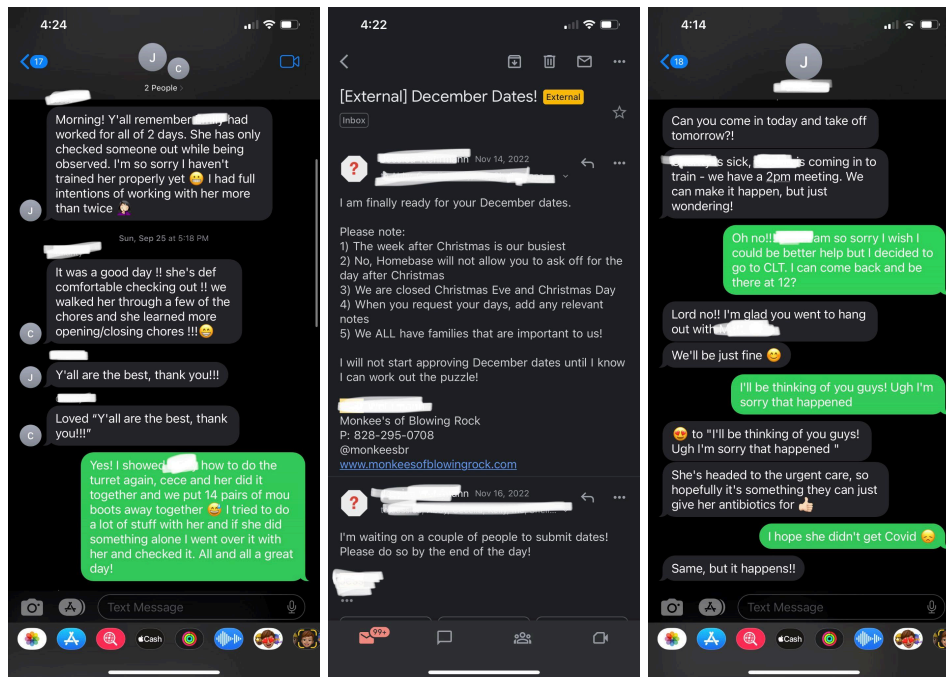
Q: Do you think the Monkee's of Blowing Rock team is in alignment with Monkee's values? Why or why not?

A: "Yes and to further that statement I feel we uphold the Monkee's values better than any other Monkee's store. We are by far the friendliest staff, most inclusive, and curate the most genuine relationships."

## Artifacts



Artifacts 1- 4.



Artifacts 5 - 7.

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