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May 16 2022

## Celebrity Communication on Social Media

Abstract: Since the creation of celebrities, an unobtainable fascinating image of perfection has become a narrative that was previously commonplace for actors and other celebrities. However, many audiences have stopped accepting this narrative and have come to expect a certain level of intimacy and interaction on various social media platforms when interacting with celebrities online. With the increase in social media use and different platforms and growth in possible ways of communication on these platforms, an inevitable shift in relationships online has occurred. This paper will assess how interactions with fans have changed and how the way celebrities communicate and interact on social media has greatly shifted since the introduction of popular social media applications such as Instagram, Tiktok, and Snapchat. The ability to like comments and respond has led to increased interactions between celebrities and their fans and a closer experience than they ever would've had before. Audiences have grown tiresome of the "perfection" that celebrities attempt to pass off as their lives. As relationships with social media continue to grow and change, celebrities and the way they use social media to interact with fans will also continue to drastically change. Based on recent trends, it seems these changes will be largely positive.

## Introduction

With social media constantly changing and new forms of social media constantly popping up, celebrities are trying to make a name for themselves on every platform possible. They post pictures and videos and receive comments and feedback that tells them how to post in the future. How have celebrity roles and the way they interact with their fans changed over time? Celebrities have always had to communicate with their fans. While social media has created a direct path for people to directly communicate with people they have never spoken to and see posts from strangers, including celebrities, there have been many other positive and negative implications that follow. Social media has successfully supported and created unachievable standards and then tore them down and paved the way for realness and normalcy to become the new trend. In this day and age, many find themselves torn between finding comfort without the stress of presenting an online persona and still showing off their glamorous lives. The realness that comes with the introduction of social media has translated into a more personal and intimate account of celebrity's lives, usually shown through their own words. This could be seen as positive because celebrities are slowly providing more realistic accounts of their lives, can share their opinions on personal scandals without voices from the media, and find support when it is needed. It has also allowed for a more vague definition of celebrity. However, it can also be negative for both celebrities and fans alike because some celebrities may still edit their photos and lives, parasocial relationships may form and celebrities can sometimes get verbally attacked for forming opinions online. Social media has greatly changed the way celebrities communicate by providing more chances for a wider variety of celebrities to find people that support them while also providing them with a more direct way to communicate with those supporters.

## Golden Age of Hollywood and Interactions

In the old days, celebrities used to be nothing more than fantasy. Hollywood was a magical place where the most beautiful people lived and thrived, all while making quality content to entertain the masses. Hollywood during the 1910s saw the emergence of “an actor with a recognizable type on-screen— a ‘picture personality’ – accompanied by information about her off-screen made available through the proliferating fan images” (Peterson). Still, celebrities had no substance to them. The people who appeared on the screen didn’t have any depth to them off-screen. Slowly, distinguishable stars started to appear. With this, the importance of image appeared. Stars had to then become images of perfection and role models. If anyone were to disturb this idea, people thought that the image of Hollywood and the stars that inhabit it would be ruined forever. During this period in the early 1900s, people decided that movies depicting negative images would contaminate the minds of impressionable children, and in turn, “studios collaborated with the gossip press to make the stars’ lives seem squeaky clean” (Peterson). Stars were encouraged to handle their issues in private because they didn’t want to be known for their scandals. Movie studios didn’t want their movies and productions to be overshadowed by them either. It was too difficult to keep much of the drama under wraps despite the agreement between the press, the studios, and the celebrities. People were still able to learn about the issue happening in Hollywood, especially those that were in close proximity.

Drama among Hollywood stars ended up being a great source of interest for everyday people and scandals “served as a catalyst for the Hollywood to better manage its stars and their actions”(Peterson). Celebrities were able to better manage their scandals by taking control of the narrative. Scandals could bring a lot of attention to a given celebrity and studios had to learn how to work the scandals into a given celebrity’s image instead of trying to bury them. During this period, stars had little say over their personal image. The lines between a good and bad image

quickly became blurred as some companies and actors felt that negative media exposure was better than no exposure at all. Even when this plan failed, the scandals of old Hollywood were heavily controlled by production studios and gossip columns. Hollywood has a very distinct cycle of “the emergence of scandal; the subsequent emergence of techniques to manage it” which isn’t new behind the closed doors of Hollywood and “has structured the dynamics of Hollywood for this past century” (Peterson). The introduction of social media has only furthered the structure and allowed fans of celebrities to look at each scandal and magnify them, examining each detail and many times hearing both sides before they decide on their personal opinion. Further, it has helped to refine this structure because social media adds deeper layers to each scandal or dramatic moment among stars.

#### A New Form of Celebrity

When scandals were running rampant throughout Hollywood circles, the definition of a celebrity was very straightforward. With the increased use of social media, a new type of internet celebrity has arisen, known as an influencer. The rise of social media created a space for celebrities to show off their wealth, leading to a great increase in photos with many filters, careful angles, and sometimes even photoshopped. Influencers have stopped this trend on social media in its tracks. Rather than being glamorous and showing off clothing and looks that are unobtainable without vast amounts of money, there has been a rise in quirky relatable content. While this trend has received a fair amount of backlash on social media because celebrities and influencers are relatively far from ever being considered an average person without fame, the content is overall very well received online. The strongest example of a relatable influencer and one of the founding members of influencer culture would be Emma Chamberlain. She rose to fame on Youtube by showing off how tiring life can be. While being a YouTuber was one of the

most popular aspirations at the time, general YouTubers followed very structured formats and put out seemingly scripted videos that were heavily edited. Chamberlain on the other hand is different because she posts videos where she “shuns makeup, sometimes skips a shower, and doesn’t seem to care if she looks weird or if her camera is poised at an unflattering angle” (Lorenz). This level of relatability was previously unmatched by anyone who was making similar videos online. For many people, notably young girls and women, Chamberlain represented a new era of celebrification, where normal people could thrive and understand the typical struggles of a celebrity because their issues were similar. The content that helped her shoot to fame included “low-production-value fashion videos and vlogs about daily tribulations of teenage life” (Lorenz). People are sick of lots of careful editing and planning in the videos they consume. Instead, they desire raw honesty which is rare among celebrities. The model of influencers does come with its issues, mainly the fact that once someone can become an influencer, they are likely to have their fame rise tremendously. This means that they will quickly become less relatable and more like a typical celebrity. Still, Emma Chamberlain’s fans see her as a rebel in the fast-paced and fictitious facade that celebrities have created.

Social media has also made way for micro-celebrities. By this, I mean that people who may have been on reality television and amassed a small following can also receive recognition and brand deals through their online persona. This could be seen as an oversaturation in the celebrity market, but it also provides more people that are considered celebrities to interact with online. Having a wide variety of both internet and traditional celebrity has also led to a shift in advertising on these platforms. Celebrities don’t always use their newfound power to positively communicate for positive reasons. A rise in influencer culture and micro-celebrities means many more celebrities to advertise products. Further, the need for an authentic celebrity means that

advertising has had to change completely. People don't like advertisements that make them feel forced to buy something. Instead, celebrities have to find ways to advertise that feel casual and almost as if they are sharing their products with friends.

### Study on Celebrity Interaction Online

Celebrity endorsements have become crucial to selling products on social media. The more of an online presence a given celebrity has paired with the perceived honesty of a celebrity will strongly impact these sales as well. A study performed by Chloe Rushworth and Elmira Djafarova performed a study and found that "respondents noted that lower-scale types of celebrities were most influential, as these categories were perceived as more credible and relevant to female users" (Djafavora, Rushworth, 4). Women between the ages of 18-30 prefer influencers over celebrities when finding something to purchase online. Celebrities that are deemed trustworthy can give a product automatic credibility for many social media users when they purchase items online. By doing this, celebrities create a "Halo Effect" around the brand so they can use "celebrity endorsers with a positive 'halo' to generate a positive association with a particular product" (Djafavora, Rushworth, 4). Many celebrities, especially influencers use social media and personal posts to create this halo around them while traditional celebrities many times start by being seen in the media and appearing in movies. While they still build trust by posting similar to influencers, it doesn't initially come from content. Posting giveaways, responding to direct messages, and liking or responding to comments increase this effect. Micro-celebrities are particularly popular online. This study further found "that lower-scale types of celebrities were most influential, as these categories were perceived as more credible and relevant to female users" (Djafavora, Rushworth, 6). Traditional celebrities have a bit more specific criteria when coming across as trustworthy online. Specifically, people who use social media "trust the

celebrities to whom they aspire, as they presume that celebrities value their position of power and are unlikely to abuse it” (Djafavora, Rushworth, 5). Celebrities that are considered very famous have a great amount of credibility because people assume they are too successful to endorse products they don’t fully support. The open line of communication present on social media and ways of changing interactions have completely changed the world of advertising, especially on social media.

The shift of realistic photos and attitudes in social media culture greatly impacts traditional celebrities as well. Traditional celebrities are formed by “narratives” that heavily “revolve around achievement, social mobility or wealth: they are stories of successful selves” (Franssen). Although once they earn credibility, it is easy for them to become popular online, most times they have to work very hard to prove they are successful to reach a point where they flourish with their celebrity status. Once they are online, they have to be willing to be more honest than they would be in interviews or events. While at one point, this would risk their success story, the introduction of social media has made honesty the best way to improve relations among fans and celebrities. People are now encouraged to share their struggles because relatability sells. This newfound push for honesty has some positive implications. Honest interactions with celebrities online show that even though they are rich and famous, at the end of the day they are still people. Further, normal people have become normalized in a sense. There is much less pressure to have a perfect body or live a perfect life and it is generally now looked down upon to overly edit photos or narratives to appeal more attractive or live a more attractive lifestyle.

#### How Cancel Culture Impacts Interactions

Some online interactions may involve celebrity opinions or cancel culture. Previously, people would've had to watch, enjoy, and move on. Now, if someone feels a connection to someone on a certain show, they can find their information and a platform they are active on most likely within minutes. As mentioned before, celebrities with bad attitudes or immoral views have existed for as long as celebrities have. It can be easy to see a celebrity's values because on most platforms it is clear what celebrities have liked, commented on, and reposted. They are under much more scrutiny than ever before in all of their interactions online. Canceling someone through cancel culture is typically when a celebrity's "(in)action, or speech are so offensive, one no longer wishes to grace them with their presence, time, and money" (Clark). Very public actions and speeches translate into very public reactions. Social media provides many places for others to express their issues and in some cases can either gain lots of support for their issues or in other cases celebrities can risk opening themselves to criticism and a lack of support for future endeavors.

A very recent victim of cancel culture would be Dwayne "the Rock" Johnson. He is a very popular former wrestler and current actor. Under one of Rogan's posts, Johnson posted "Great stuff here brother" which disturbed many left-leaning fans who were familiar with Rogan's controversial persona (France). When he voiced his support for controversial podcast creator and television show host Joe Rogan in his comment section, he showed many people where his values are. This caused outrage among people who disagree with Rogan's views and caused Johnson to have many negative comments in his comment sections. Johnson was close to finding himself in a negative situation while people were calling for him to be canceled on social media. After learning of Rogan's wrongdoings, he changed his opinion and ended up posting "I hear you as well as everyone here 100%," and continued to tweet "I was not aware of his N word



use prior to my comments, but now I've become educated to his complete narrative. Learning moment for me” (France). This shows how important it is to recognize mistakes made online and how easily uninformed friendships or old opinions can cause issues among fans and the celebrities they look up to and support.

If something bad happens in a celebrity's life and the media speaks out on it before the celebrity is comfortable, social media can provide an outlet for them to ask fans for support, patience, or privacy. An example of this would be Ariana Grande when her ex-boyfriend Mac Miller passed away. The media reported it and within hours, thousands of fans were commenting on her posts. While the majority were offering premature condolences, some were leaving negative comments or rudely announcing his death in their comment section. The rude comments are another issue that comes with cancel culture and increased social media interactions. These hateful comments are usually left by internet trolls, a new online plague. Social media interactions fuel hateful comments because people have the opportunity to be anonymous when posting and commenting online. Further, this lack of information and “anonymity” can create more issues and more opportunities to be hateful “because it can curb social inhibitions, [and] has been associated with incivility and hostility online” (Barnes 9). Online trolls can overshadow support or reasons for acting a certain way because their main goal is to cause issues. If people want to deal with trolls, it is important to note that people must see the “behavior as a social problem, not an internet problem” (Barnes 10). While this issue usually takes place through the internet and on social media platforms, the problem isn't completely with those platforms. People need to recognize that there are actual people behind the screen consciously choosing to make anonymous hateful decisions.

#### Dangers of Celebrity Interactions Among Fans

Celebrities used to be able to communicate in an extremely uninvolved manner. They would simply post updates on their lives in magazines, hold press conferences, or send out letters with their side of the story on any given topic. Now, celebrities can directly speak to their fans and interact with them. These interactions are increased “on social media” because “celebrity fans are more likely to create a parasocial relationship by following and subscribing” (Kim, Kim). More than ever before, fans are at risk of developing parasocial relationships with their favorite celebrities if they have an active social media presence. These seemingly personal celebrity interactions promote unhealthy habits for their fans. This is more related to influencers and micro-celebrities because they tend to make more of a point to interact with their fans. However, fans may begin to see the personalized posts that celebrities create as personally posted for them to see. In their minds, these fans create a one-sided friendship that can absorb them if they focus too much on the unhealthy attachment. When celebrities share information about their lives and fans can relate, this can also create a path for a parasocial relationship. This is due to the fact that “sharing mutual interests and interacting with each other builds social media users' perceived similarity” (Kim, Kim). Once someone thinks they have a lot in common with a celebrity, they may want to begin to match up similarities and feel that they could genuinely get along with the celebrity if given the opportunity.

A survey conducted by Jiyuhn Kim and Hayeon Song asked a group of 572 people to describe their relationships online in an attempt to find why parasocial relationships form in this manner on social media. Further, this study was conducted to assess whether parasocial relationships aren't completely negative. One participant in the study remarked that “By helping fans feel like “they are in my life; I feel so connected”” (Kim, Song). This social media user feels close enough to the given celebrity on their mind that they are a part of their life and vice

versa. This can be positive because they feel a sense of friendship and comfort while having posts to look forward to. However, it also nurtures a one-sided relationship between fans and celebrities which is more intense than ever before thanks to social media platforms.

This study further found that a “celebrity's personal social media can be used as a cost-effective marketing tool” (Kim, Song). The more honest and likable a person is on the internet, the easier it will be to sell products and make money. A sense of fake honesty can be easy to create online and even the appearance of advertisements much change when being looked at on social media platforms. The conclusion of this study tells social media users that “celebrities' professional and personal self-disclosure and fans' act of retweeting celebrities' tweets enhance feelings of social presence” (Kim, Song). Celebrities who are more honest and seem transparent will have much more success online than those who barely use social media or try to only post glamorous aspects of their lives. It can elevate a person's online experience if they feel a closeness with a given celebrity. Parasocial relationships can help to make fans happy but it can also create a scenario where fans think they have a false sense of support for a celebrity simply due to things they post. If a celebrity only uses social media to gain trust for advertising and marketing, this could be a greatly negative experience for the fans. Whether these one-sided interactions are more positive or negative is up for debate but there is sufficient evidence to make either argument.

A study put forth by Kara Chan and Fei Fan examined the reason that older people find celebrity endorsements interesting. In a study of 38 people between the ages of 50-64, people were asked about their reasoning for enjoying celebrity endorsements and listening to what celebrities promote. This study generally found that a “celebrity's public moral image and civic responsibility become prevalent factors in selecting celebrity endorsers” (Chan, Fan). For older

people, media presence is less important when compared to their role in society. If celebrities want to advertise to older fans, they have to prove that they are an important member of society.

#### Other Options Beyond Direct Celebrity Interaction

Some major celebrities don't adhere to these social pressures and continue to post impersonal pictures and not interact in any way. Leonardo DiCaprio is an example of a celebrity who doesn't use social media in the traditional sense. He uses his Instagram platform to advocate for the environment and declines to post about his personal life. This leads to very straightforward and minimal interactions on social media between DiCaprio and his fanbase. However, he is still able to clearly communicate his beliefs and values through his Instagram account. DiCaprio's life strongly focuses on the environment and trying to save it. Many times, he works in tandem with the United Nations to bring attention to causes he cares about on his social media and through their websites. According to the United Nation's Website, DiCaprio's main concern is reducing the impact of climate change and with his work on "grantmaking, public campaigns, and media projects, Mr. DiCaprio has worked to bring attention and funding to the protection of biodiversity, ocean and forest conservation, and climate change." Not everyone has to adhere to the strict guidelines of social media and risk any negative effects that come with it, but it does help a celebrity's social media status if that is what they are concerned about.

#### Traditional Social Media Platforms and Celebrities

Snapchat is perhaps the most casual platform on social media. It allows for pictures and videos to be shown once for up to 10 seconds and then they are never accessible again. There is limited room for text and the application is largely photo-based. While it was initially meant for

interaction among friends, Snapchat has given people the ability to subscribe to their favorite celebrity's Snapchat accounts to see what they are posting from their stories.

Initially, Instagram had very little pressure to interact with others. While there were likes and comments, the desire to share photos in one space was the main selling point. However, after seeing the success of more interactive options as displayed on Snapchat, Instagram quickly took notes and began to incorporate more features to interact such as stories, reels, and the ability to like comments within a post. In fact, Instagram has created so much interaction, that they have had to provide the option to remove likes and comments on posts altogether, thereby taking the application closer to its original purpose. The CEO of Instagram Adam Mosseri stated that this change is “about creating a less pressurized environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves” (Meisenzahl). This shows a slow push away from social media brought about by the new realistic trend communicated by both influencers and honest celebrities.

#### How Social Media Interactions Impact Celebrities

Social media and celebrity interactions with their fans aren't only positive for the fans. In certain scenarios, the appreciation is mutual and drastic changes are made due to fan support. Demi Lovato would be a strong example of a celebrity who has found great support and success through genuine social media interactions. When she was openly struggling with addiction and mental illness she was able to retain her audience and fans because “she embraced her mental struggle and diagnosis with bipolar disorder and incorporated them into her celebrity narrative” (Franssen). Her posts and interactions didn't center around pretending to have greatly improved or accusing the media of lying. Instead, she was honest with all of her struggles and posted her recovery, allowing her fans to show their support and share similar stories. Whether or not she responded, the community she created by allowing fans to engage with the posts became, unlike

any other response that would've been received before the heavy use of social media. Fans related to her in multiple ways. She found great general success through her own personal success. On the one hand, "she has fought addiction, depression, and bulimia and is living successfully with bipolar disorder, while on the level of celebrity" (Franssen). Lovato's ability to embrace her issues while remaining a celebrity and in the limelight allowed people to see how strong she was. Her level of fame never dipped, even once she recovered. On the other hand, "she has regained her cultural status as both an idol and a role model" (Franssen). Lovato was able to successfully bring her reputation back and find a supportive community within her social media platforms. By becoming stronger than her addiction, she showed that she deserved to be a role model more than ever before. These issues are a significant part of communication between celebrities and their fans online. For instance, many times, these difficult topics open up an important conversation on mental health. In Demi Lovato's case, there was a mutual need to feel supported by both Lovato and fans going through similar issues. In some cases, fans can help completely change a celebrity's life by getting directly involved through social media.

Another example of social media interactions greatly supporting celebrities would be the case of Britney Spears. She broke free from her conservatorship with the help of her fans and social media. They assessed and analyzed each post to attempt to find deeper meanings and while it seemed crazy, they were able to figure out that the star was in great distress over her situation. The attention that her fans brought to her social media account was impossible to ignore and as of 2020, she is free from her conservatorship and free to post and live as she pleases. Fans noticed that Britney Spears had a specific way of posting and noticed when captions and pictures were "out of character for Spears" (Spanos). This created suspicion around the entire situation because no one knew why her account would change so drastically unless it

was someone else making posts for her. This concern caught the attention of many worried fans and “the hashtag #FreeBritney picked up steam, with many fans using a pink icon containing the hashtag as their AVI on Twitter and Instagram” (Spanos). Fans brought attention to the conservatorship and analyzed every post from Britney Spears to see if they could figure out who posted it. The fact that this was a cross-platform effort meant that more people were able to see it and do research for themselves. Without the power of fan interaction on social media, Spears might’ve never reached this point and never been able to speak out. While there are some claims that this success and admiration is based solely on “suffering, dysfunction or the personal flaw,” others maintain that the closeness experienced by the personal experiences being shared is what brings this level of interaction both on and off social media (Nunn 60). However, this is a possibility that must be considered when people are sharing parts of their lives online. It is integral to remember that everyone may not be looking out for a given person’s best interest.

Besides parasocial relationships and a lack of honesty for fans, many celebrities can also experience negativity from changing interactions on social media. One negative implication of the changing way celebrities interact on social media would be much less expected privacy. If they want views and attention, they, have to be willing to share parts of their lives that others would deem too personal to make public. For instance, most celebrities prefer to keep their family life private. However, many times today their kids have access to social media because it is almost impossible to keep them hidden from the world once they reach a certain age. North West Kardashian, daughter of Kim Kardashian has been banned by her mother from going live because she showed her house on a live stream without permission. While this may be an issue for normal parents in general, Kim Kardashian has more at stake by having her daughter post anything she wanted without checking it first. The Kardashians are known for their standard of

perfection as well as carefully curated drama. North West Kardashian is too young to understand why her mother would dislike her posting unedited and unfiltered images and videos of her everyday life. During one of her live streams, a young boy remarked in the background that she was “not allowed to be live” shortly before it ended (Kayhart, Levy). Still, easy access to social media and millions of fans can be alluring for anyone, especially a young child that may see it more as a game rather than a moment to market oneself.

Claudia Conway, who is older than North West and has a much more controversial family has also found herself using social media against her famous parent’s wishes. She has more posting freedom than North West Kardashian clearly and has posted videos of her relatively well-known mother, Kellyanne Conway, without makeup, screaming, and in less than ideal situations. Using the popular application Tiktok, “Claudia began to reveal the complicated family dynamics of the Conway household and made explosive claims about her parents “for everyone interested to see online” (Harris, Mendez). No one was aware of how complicated the situation was until her daughter brought it to light. Claudia exposed family issues, problems in her parent’s marriage, and mocked her mother’s political views. It is harder to control what is online and their online personas must reflect this awareness. A lack of smoothing over from her Republican activist mother made the issues glaringly obvious. It is much harder to remain ignorant. Another negative implication is how genuine online personas are. Many celebrities find attention through social media. Sometimes, this can result in less than honest posts in an attempt to fake vulnerability for support. This doesn’t necessarily negatively impact fans. However, if donations are involved or people are experiencing a parasocial relationship with a given celebrity, it may have an extremely negative result.



Celebrities are also much more open to criticism on social media. When they post on any given platform, there is a clear implication that they are not above a normal person. They do similar activities and take pictures with friends and families that they want to share on a variety of platforms. They have their comments and likes open for people to decide how much love and attention to give them. They have instant access to thousands and sometimes even millions of fans with a click of a button. True fans of a given celebrity will enjoy the post no matter how casual or uninformative they appear. Celebrities don't always use their newfound power to communicate for positive reasons.

These changes and expectations have led to certain celebrities making themselves more accessible by way of communication applications such as Cameo. On this site, people can interact with their favorite celebrities. They can buy services such as video chat or a prerecorded video. On their website, they state their services as having the ability to “access thousands of celebrities and request a personalized video message for any occasion” (Cameo). They make this experience seem very special, personal, and interactive. Meet and greets have been relatively popular for a very long time. Having the opportunity to meet celebrities, especially huge fans is extremely significant in certain people's lives. However, they are usually crowded, can sometimes be overwhelmingly expensive, are only in certain locations, and depending on the celebrity can be very impersonal. Cameo forces the celebrity to know exactly what to say and can be accessed from just about anywhere and by anyone. It would be integral to research surrounding celebrity interactions for researchers to study the impact of Cameo in relation to parasocial relationships and mental health.

### Conclusion

Overall, the role of celebrities has greatly changed since the Golden Age of Hollywood. Instead of being beacons of unachievable beauty and popularity, there has been a great push for a more authentic celebrity. We will see the role of social media and how it impacts celebrities' relationships with their fans as time goes on. As popular applications shifted from photo to video sharing, ways to communicate increased and roles on social media between celebrities and their fans have drastically changed. Further, what the public considers a celebrity has drastically changed and widened overall as a category. These factors have caused our opportunities to interact with celebrities to greatly increase and their pressure to post meaningful and personal posts as well as interact with likes and comments has grown. These posts and interactions through likes and comments have caused both positive and negative outcomes among both fans and celebrities, which will only continue as more social media platforms and ways to communicate online are created.

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