

Fandom through Social Media Affecting Wellbeing

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Abstract

As a society who is constantly consuming and modeling after other lives, “fandom” and the celebrities and products that have shaped us are becoming an increasingly more important part of our lives the more interconnected (but oh so disconnected) we get. As I realized this, I decided to conduct this study through Twitter and Instagram using Content Analysis to decide if the folks who I’d seen who were clearly so wrapped up in fandom and social media were doing ok mentally and if this phenomenon itself had any profound effect on that. This study poses the question of if there’s a negative effect of fandom based in social media circles, studying the behavior of those who act with over the top fandom and see signals and patterns that indicate things about their mental health. In reality there are probably positive effects of this phenomenon as well but it’s clear that negative comes along the way too. This study was done with a history of trauma and struggle related to identity/self worth and crises over social media and the world it hints at, and hopes to clear up the gray area between that world and real life in hopes to propagate more mindful usage of social media and investments in fandom through social media platforms. (Furtzaig 2019.)

Introduction to Study/Disciplinary

Experience

Leading up to my decision to take the Capstone course and track, my experience in college was a strenuous, emotional and hellish rollercoaster. A mix of confusion and buried emotions lead me into a quiet spiral of despair, suffering in silence and stillness as a result of my confusion. It took me a while to find out, but, I slowly realized that a large source of this depression was that there is an inadvertent game that people in this day and age are playing, especially of my generation, that is entirely disconnected from reality and everyday life. What's being referred to is the padding of social media we artificially throw around and on top of our lives that ends up seeping into our real lives, what I realized is that we are constantly on the same level playing field of the humans who have manufactured accomplishments and lavish lives, celebrities, and we often feel like we're inferior if we don't have the things they have, whether it's a peer college student or a worldwide icon, we are constantly told that we're aren't enough. At times our lives turn into theirs or a devotion to theirs, and the reality and dynamic of there just being opposing strangers staring at screens disappears as we elevate some and bring others down, fundamentally changing our lives, something that often bothers me deeply. As someone who was also kind of paralyzed from fear and confusion at the time(still sometimes now too), it often just felt like an endless barrage on my ego that I wasn't doing anything to improve or protect. Growing up the material that I was holding inside my body to let out into the world often felt like it would be ejaculated into the form of a television show, and as someone who spent lots of time as a child consuming entertainment, it made the most sense for me to originally pursue a career in some sort of entertainment. After taking a screenwriting class I realized the restrictions

and ways of teaching the medium turned me off and I was probably better off working under a wing of study that was less restrictive and just broader in general so I could create things that were fulfilling while having time for fun and figuring myself out, so here I am, trying to alleviate a lot of my stresses in this project, proving my insecurities false while also making it so I get to write about something exciting and inspiring, as well as something that I think would be vital to keep in mind for someone going into this field if they're going to have to guide their lives with this elevated sense of importance placed on them by the general public. In my project, I wish to discover the effects of social media mixed with celebrity idolization on consumer mental health, self esteem and depression

Introduction to Study

Our human instincts of how to get through life have changed hard over time, and are changing faster and faster, becoming more complex, harder to understand and maintain, a lot of which we can attribute to the digital world that we've created for ourselves. It makes sense, it's easier for us to sit at home and create the illusion of connection instead of doing the risky legwork of talking to people in real life without any of the chance, potential vulnerabilities and hurt that could come with it in real life. The study at hand sought to find out that if seeking out specific pop culture figures and obsessing over the versions of their life we see online, plus what we put together with the imagination of our head has any negative effect on us, it was assumed that it would all things considered, that after seeing an idealistic life in a single frame that we did not have, it would make us feel worse that we didn't have it. We constantly have people saying, albeit indirectly, that their lives are better than ours, we have so many versions of life that we can't have, endless amounts of things that are being sold to us. It is a winless battle, and this

research is going to set out to describe the history of celebrity idolization, provide some context through films like Martin Scorsese's "The King of Comedy", a tale of fame and unquenchable desire formed by a false view of the world, and talk about how it seeps into the modern world today overall.

Research Question

When it comes to concrete research regarding this subject, I wish to seek general levels of happiness, self esteem, confidence and insecurity in people who use social media and specifically idolize certain celebrities and devote their lives to them. I want to try and find a link between the social media image we put out for our friends and the image celebrities put on for their audience and the relations between all sides of those relationships. Generally I want to find the meat behind my hypothesis that the extent of the sway people we've never met have on our lives is beyond what we can even imagine (Not even to mention the influence they have on people's political views and action, see Choi/Berger 2010). Ethics of Celebrities and Their Increasing Influence in 21st Century Society. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91(3)) and even if we become self aware and want to get ourselves out of this cycle, it would take rather drastic and extreme measures to totally forsake that path behind us. That said, I don't know if there's research to be done about this or if there's ways to quantify this but it's something I'm going to include in my research, but I would like to see how someone would ideally totally divorce from themselves from this part of the world and the media while still living like a modernized generic 21st century human being. These are all things that play into a broad but generalized central idea about social media, society and human interaction and my original inclination of there being a

general negative effect of these things on the human psyche should not take into account the potential falseness of that hypothesis as well as the fact that there are definitely benefits from social media and our new, growing and changing interconnected world.

Review of Literature

Fandom and Social Media Effect on Mental Health

A recent study shows a correlation between celebrity worship and television viewing motives. The Celebrity Attitude Scale(CAS) judges specific fans levels of fandom with celebrities, going from “Casual Entertainment”, “Intensive Personal”, and “Borderline Pathological” and it’s shown that each category shows moderate increase in problematic behaviors(problematic behaviors, maladaptive daydreaming, and desire for fame.)(Zsila-Mccutcheon,-Demetrovics 2018).) There is also a finding that celebrity worship for intense personal reasons is associated with lower levels of cognitive flexibility, which explains the lack of desire and ability to be a part of social groups in investing their efforts in that instead. (Maltby-Day-Mccutcheon-Martin-Cayanus(2004). While it has been found that social media use between peers can help support and help each other at pivotal points of development, there is also a clear link of things like cyberbullying, depression, social anxiety, and exposure to developmentally inappropriate content. (Uhls-Ellison-Subrahmanyam 2017)

Links of Religion, other miscellaneous factors behind idea of Celebrity Worship

There are variables that link the constructs of religion and celebrity worship, and similarly it is often argued that fame can be viewed as a way of preserving an image of yourself for eternity, in the same way people think about religion and the afterlife(Maltby-Houran-Lange-Ashe-Mccutcheon, 2002). Many argue that the origin of the term celebrity and how it is used dates back to the worship of saints as icons in the eighteenth century.(Boone-Vickers, 2011). Studies have also shown that the thinking behind getting cosmetic surgery shows positive associations with celebrity worship, basically saying that people who have strong preconditions in changing their physiology for any discernible reason can tend to be on the intense personal side of celebrity worship scale.

Celebrity effect on consumer action, worldview and beliefs

In a South Korean study, it was found that after a suicide of a popular celebrity visits to the psychologist increased in the following month generally, and the more coverage of celebrity suicides of this sort their were in turn there would be more articles about depression treatment and prevention (Lee 2019). The global internet and interconnected society is often used by celebrities to further political and social causes and often has a clear effect. (Choi-Berger 2010). Specifically on the issue of cancer and other diseases, it was shown that there is significant rises and research done about such subjects with media coverage and celebrity involvement in such things (Norman-Wong-Lookadoo-Nisbett 2017)

Conclusion

There has been a wide range of differently natured literature that has come from recent world developments and investigations in the effect that is becoming increasingly evident and important that the internet, fame, social media as well as all of those things in tandem have on the typical person, most notably the young. The research talks about the specific mental dynamics that are attacked and triggered when these worlds and content are consumed, as well as things like religion and culture that can play into, as well as displaying the effect of the post physical relationship between consumers and the celebrities and how if pressed on too hard it's usually bad for both sides, and that generally more care and supervision should be taken in how we use social media culturally.

Method

Materials

To study the topic at hand based on what's been said, the internet, a laptop and smartphone were used to conduct research. Twitter and Instagram accounts known as "stan" accounts, accounts dedicated to fandom to specific famous individuals or groups, were studied for this research to base their patterns off the fandom scale to determine and infer overall well being and come to a conclusion with a rather large sample size, compared to other internet accounts that displayed mild fandom for similar things. In addition to this, other stray accounts and interactions that were seen and deemed valuable were also studied along the way. These accounts and interactions were examined and observations were recorded in a Google document based on the general behaviors of the people running the account and what can be inferred by their general wellbeing as a result of their online activity.

Design and Procedure

This study was conducted using observations of behaviors and judgment of personalities of the users and cross referencing those behaviors with the Celebrity Attitude Scale(CAS.) The Celebrity Attitude Scale(CAS) judges specific fans levels of fandom with celebrities, going from “Casual Entertainment”, “Intensive Personal”, and “Borderline Pathological” and it’s shown that each category shows moderate increase in problematic behaviors(maladaptive daydreaming, and desire for fame, etc.) The main research tactic used in this research is content analysis. Content analysis is defined as examining data, searching for patterns, predetermined key words and themes, etc.

To do content analysis there has to be specific patterns of behavior and word usage that were to be taken note of, and anything setting of any of the levels of the Celebrity Attitude Scale was recorded as a note. This process was done several times for groups of accounts for different celebrities and groups to note behaviors and potential behind motivations. Patterns that I noticed amongst the stan accounts were toxicity/promotion/conflict, personal mental health, and contrived community, which is something that came up as a positive aside from the negative. Playing into these categories are the categories of the CAS scale, “Casual Entertainment”, “Intensive Personal”, and “Borderline Pathological”, once again.

Twitter and Instagram are the best methods to capture and study these phenomena, where stan communities and fandoms form and operate and the resulting drama and display of emotion results, where lots of young people operate and open up themselves into the void, the prime demographic for this social media issue.

Results

Toxicity, Promotion, and Conflict with other communities

The main demographic studied were stans of Korean Pop boy bands, who (based only on the accounts that I found that gave their age in their profile or anywhere on their account and post history) were predominantly aged anywhere from 12-17. A lot of these accounts portrayed harsh, obsessive tendencies, posting videos of the bands and idols of their choice performing and singing on stage on unrelated posts on random parts of the site. The research shows these accounts often tagging their posts with trending terms to get more people to see the tweets (so that if anyone ever clicks on the terms in the twitter trending tab, then the video will show up, to get more to see the video.) These accounts will do this regardless of what the trend is, one post was tagged with “John Prine”, someone of note who had recently died. These kind of accounts become notorious on Twitter especially for doing this and as a result often garner hateful comments towards these spam posts, memes and trends against Korean Pop as a whole often lashed out toward these posts, a meme depicting a poorly drawn version of the cartoon character Garfield explaining reductively what Korean Pop is, describing as a “cultural sinkhole” worthy of no actual appreciation was stumbled upon more than one time in my looking at these accounts behavior. As a result of this conflict and ongoing war, the stan accounts often double down and say hateful and demeaning things to the people they’re talking to, this kind of hardcore stan mindset being a common trait of all these accounts. A lot of this lines up with “Intensive Personal” and “Borderline Pathological”.

Personal Mental Health

With the borderline pathological assessment in mind based on the observations of the main operations in these accounts came my attempted investigation of the wellbeing of the people running these accounts. Key words were tracked and taken note of in the speech of each

account, the verbiage and tone taken into account, “stan *** or your ___ `” maybe you should stan (insert group/idol here) and you might not (insert bad trait/thing here)” are both common speech patterns that can easily indicate personal insecurity and anger in the users. Several accounts use their Twitter feed to talk about their mental health issues, tweets have said “I have been going through some stuff lately etc...” or even in some cases expressed suicidal and depressive feelings, whether in the context of a joke or more seriously (more often jokingly, and these were few and far between.)

Contrived Community

As a result of these accounts coming together, joining to celebrate (and often defend) a common interest, a strong seeming community that comes about was apparent in the research. Often the same kind of talk and energy going toward what they’re stanning over goes toward their fellow fans, while it did seem to cause some apparent drama. Over the course of the research, an instance including a popular YouTube star taking a break and falling into depression was observed. YouTube, being a video sharing site, houses Carson King, also known as “CallMeCarson”, who simultaneously while on his break had learned that his girlfriend had cheated on him with several other men. Upon Carson’s return he noted the outpouring of support upon this news story breaking to the public, citing his loyal fans specifically. Other instances of this level of support were noted, as well as between fans, not just from fans to the content creators themselves.

Discussion

While and after researching this topic it became clear that my assertion that social media and fandom have a profound effect on people, mainly causing negative behavior with some positive things coming to the people due to it too. As my literature review covers a rather broad spectrum of effects and fields of study regarding fandom and social media, the research and observations themselves did not end up covering them all, but it is clear that in regards to the CAS that certain behaviors that are caused by this over the top fandom mentality, cutthroat and extremely dedicated to their fandom causes rude and often very cutting behavior. This study adds to the common assertion today that social media has a negative effect on people especially youth, here showing it especially through the lens of fandom.

There pretty clearly seems to be a loss in reality with how obsessed these people are with their respective things, and I think that gives it a notable spot on the Celebrity Attitude Scale. The determination that where things line up on the scale determining where things line up in the reality of their mental health is tricky, but definitely can be made in these cases. It can be assumed logically that anywhere from Intensive Personal and Borderline Pathological on the scale can be regarded in a bad state mentally for the person, focusing on a celebrity they don't know rather than themselves. In a study conducted by McCutcheon, it was found that people who scored higher in regards to celebrity attitude were found to generally be less adept socially and intelligently, and that people neutral or lower in celebrity attitude often had higher social skills and higher intelligence. (McCutcheon-Maltby, 2002) The investment of oneself into another they don't even know in this case of all these converging things can probably imply an either unfortunate and sad mental state as well as just a poor one, and in this research, it pretty

much all lines up and shows that yeah it's not all bad but there is a certain culture that breeds a deficiency in real support (blurring real life emotions and instilling a false sense of reality) and other toxicity.

My literature review had a wide array of different interesting topics some of which weren't even necessarily related to my main goal. The true effects of the relationship between celebrities and fans was found though, in Carson King's plight and support. King, who had previously aired grievances about how he and some of his friends were treated by fans, as if they're not human and himself voiced displeasure about the ideas and implications of modern day fandom as well, still even finds true support in this. Religion and celebrity worship have clear parallels but without much psychological anecdotes behind the things I encountered in my research it's hard to call definitely certain fandoms cults. That being said, it is a worthwhile sub category and probably a lot to go off of. The lack of that feeling of reality is really what comes across here, and the true disconnect that we think we live in connection with.

Conclusion

Using content analysis through logical observations of communities of accounts on Twitter and Instagram and cross referencing the observations with the Celebrity Attitude Scale as well as using common sense through the observations allowed me to evaluate the mental state of the subjects in the fandom, and the celebrity to fan relationship in general. Throughout convening with each other on Twitter mainly, these kinds of fans engage in consistent fights and conflicts through their fandom, but also in a way show support for their person as well as each other. A clear disconnect from true reality can be pointed out, things that would never be said or acted upon in real life is visible, and it's clear that a whole different world is being operated on

here. It is vital that people keep this in mind when they fall under the sway of a celebrity, that what they're consuming is a sort of front and not a person, and the platforms that they operate on and what they consume are not indicative of real life.

This study was great and fruitful but proved some disorganizations and limitations. The connection between mental health and the scale seemed logical but may not have been exactly clear. Thinking about the reality of things compared to the internet and social media made me think that actually interacting with real people and observing their mannerisms could be another way to absorb this information. Some sort of structured more intimate investigations with these kinds of fans, maybe a therapeutic look at their lives that indicated their mental health could be helpful in a deeper study.

As people hear stories like Carson King's, and going back all the way back to the likes of Michael Jackson and Elvis Presley and all of the other stories of the reality behind fame compared to how we treat it behind the screens of our phones and laptops, I think it's becoming increasingly more important to value our real lives compared to these manufactured ones. People like King's insight and at this point there are enough quotes and wisdom from celebrities urging people not to desire fame and live truly, and as research like this continuously proceeds to come out, there's hope that people can find themselves and live true lives.

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