

# Media, Celebrity, and Identity

The impact of online media on celebrity culture has attained unparalleled heights in the contemporary digital era. The advent of social media platforms and other digital channels has enabled celebrities to mold and propagate their identities in unprecedented ways. This paper provides a critical analysis of the impact of online media on the formation and distribution of celebrity identity. As a case in point, the study centers on Lizzo, a Grammy-awarded vocalist and songwriter. This paper will examine the effects of mediated celebrity culture on our comprehension of self and identity in modern society, utilizing pertinent theories and scholarly research in media and communication studies. The present essay thoroughly examines the subject matter by incorporating insights from the assigned course readings, concept videos, and tutorial activities.

## **The Rise of Online Media and Celebrity Culture**

The emergence of digital media has revolutionized the intricacies of the phenomenon of celebrity culture. Historically, celebrities have depended on conventional media platforms such as television, radio, and print publications to establish a rapport with their fan base (Tse et al., 2018). Digital media platforms have brought about a paradigm shift in how celebrities interact with their followers, enabling prompt and unmediated correspondence. Social media platforms, including Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, have emerged as potent instruments for celebrities to craft their public persona, disseminate intimate experiences, and engage with their fan base (Juntiwassarakij, 2018).

In order to gain an understanding of the impact that online media has on the construction of celebrity identity, it is imperative to analyze pertinent theories and academic research within the field of media and communication studies. Brooks, Drenten, and Piskorski (2021) have proposed a notable theory known as the concept of celebrity capital. This theory emphasizes individuals' strategies to attain and sustain their celebrity status. Furthermore, the theoretical framework pertaining to social connections within mediated environments accentuates how celebrities utilize social media platforms to cultivate connections with their respective audiences (Alperstein, 2019). The aforementioned theories offer significant perspectives on the workings of celebrity culture within the context of the contemporary digital era.

Applying these theories to the analysis of mediated celebrity culture reveals that online media platforms have a pivotal function in molding and circulating celebrity identity. Brooks et al. (2021) assert that social media influencers strategically leverage celebrity status to garner recognition and cultivate a loyal audience. Comprehending the impact of online media on the formation and dissemination of celebrity identity necessitates a thorough understanding of these dynamics.

According to Alperstein's (2019) analysis, the emergence of digital media has enabled a novel social interaction between public figures and followers. The advent of social media platforms has facilitated a direct mode of communication, enabling celebrities to interact with their audience more intimately. The phenomenon has facilitated the development of closeness and personal acquaintance, culminating in a heightened association with the public figure's persona and

character. The heightened level of transparency could diminish privacy and erode demarcations between the personal and occupational domains.

Furthermore, the impact of digital media on the construction of celebrity identity surpasses mere exposure. Contemporary celebrities possess greater autonomy and influence in shaping their public image and reputation. Individuals can meticulously manage their digital identities, portraying themselves consistently with their preferred image and storyline (Tse et al., 2018). Through social media platforms, celebrities can circumvent conventional media gatekeepers and directly convey their viewpoints, sentiments, and personal encounters to followers (Alperstein, 2019).

## **Shaping Celebrity Identity through Online Media**

Lizzo represents a compelling case study of a public figure who has adeptly utilized digital media to construct and propagate her persona. Lizzo has gained recognition for her advocacy of body positivity and her music that inspires confidence. She has effectively utilized various social media platforms to engage with her audience and advance her musical career. Through sharing personal experiences and promoting body positivity, Lizzo has developed a robust personal brand and fostered a dedicated and enthusiastic following.

The year 2022 saw the release of Lizzo's single "About Damn Time," which gained worldwide acclaim, in part, due to her astute utilization of social media. The individual employed social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter to disseminate recordings of her dance performances to the song and urged her followers to participate in the trend, resulting in a widespread viral phenomenon. The employment of a participatory approach fostered engagement among the artist's fan base, thereby providing them with a sense of affiliation and authorship concerning the triumph of the song. The song's impact was further enhanced by the widespread circulation of its accompanying music video on various social media platforms.

According to Marshall and Redmond's (2015) argument, social media provides celebrities with a heightened agency in managing their public persona and storytelling, allowing them to construct their self-concept consistent with their personal beliefs and goals. Through the strategic use of social media, Lizzo has successfully disseminated her personal experiences and propagated a message of body positivity, thereby establishing her celebrity persona as a paragon of self-acceptance and empowerment. Lizzo has constructed a distinctive online persona that has garnered significant resonance among her followers, positioning herself as an emblematic figure of self-affirmation and genuineness (Marshall & Redmond, 2015).

Lizzo's strategic utilization of social media is a platform to showcase her musical talent and enables her to shape her narrative actively. According to Tse et al. (2018), directly engaging with one's fans creates a feeling of closeness and attachment that may not be achievable through conventional media outlets. Lizzo motivates her audience to embrace individuality and question conventional beauty norms by sharing personal anecdotes and promoting body positivity. The user's virtual existence functions as a medium for enhancing the confidence and self-determination of her followers while advocating for a philosophy of self-affirmation and self-empowerment.

Similarly, Kim Kardashian, a prominent figure in the entertainment industry, has effectively employed various social media platforms to disseminate her personal life to her followers and advertise her commercial ventures. The individual in question has garnered a substantial audience on social media platforms such as Instagram, where she frequently shares carefully selected insights into her opulent way of life and engages with her supporters. Using online media, Kim Kardashian has effectively crafted a distinct brand that merges elements of sophistication, business acumen, and relatable qualities.

Another example is Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. He is a prominent figure in the entertainment industry and a former athlete in wrestling, and he has effectively constructed his public persona through digital platforms. The individual in question upholds a robust online presence on various social media platforms, including Instagram, where he disseminates exclusive glimpses into his daily routine, exercise regimens, and uplifting messages. Johnson has established a persona that resonates with his followers by portraying himself as a symbol of fortitude, perseverance, and achievement, positioning himself as a source of motivation and authority.

It is crucial to recognize that the culture of mediated celebrities can have consequences for an individual's self-perception. The study by Charmaraman et al. (2021) examines the potential relationship between early adolescent exposure to social media and the development of body dissatisfaction. The prevalent use of curated and filtered images on social media platforms can establish unrealistic beauty standards and foster feelings of inadequacy among individuals who do not conform to these ideals. Individuals must critically analyze mediated celebrity culture and uphold positive self-esteem and physical appearance.

### **The ramifications of mediated celebrity culture on the self and identity.**

The mediated celebrity culture phenomenon holds significant implications for the self-perception and identity of individuals. Frequently, celebrities are regarded as exemplars, epitomizing triumph, affluence, and renown that numerous individuals strive to attain. Celebrities' veneration may adversely impact one's self-esteem and self-worth, especially those who fail to conform to the societal norms propagated by the celebrity culture (Parmar & Mann, 2021). The proliferation of idealized depictions of celebrities engenders unrealistic benchmarks, thereby exacerbating body image concerns, depression, and anxiety, particularly among adolescents who are more vulnerable to media sway (Seo & Hyun, 2018).

Scholarly investigations have highlighted the detrimental consequences of depicting celebrities as faultless and impeccable. Individuals' persistent contrast between themselves and celebrities' seemingly perfect lives can elicit emotions of discontent and incompetence. This is because individuals may perceive themselves as not measuring up to the societal norms propagated by the culture of celebrities (Chan & Zhang, 2007). Celebrities' deliberate curation of self-representations on social media adds complexity to forming their identities, as they balance between being genuine and the demands of upholding a good public persona (Juntiwasarakij, 2018).

Examining celebrity identities in online media necessitates critically evaluating authenticity and genuineness as pivotal factors. The curation of celebrities' online personas prompts inquiries into how their identities accurately mirror their offline counterparts. The imperative to uphold a positive public image and establish meaningful connections with supporters may prompt the

development of meticulously constructed personas that deviate from one's genuine identity. The performative nature of celebrity identity on social media can obscure the boundary between private and public domains, rendering it difficult to distinguish the authentic persona from the virtual one (Brooks et al., 2021).

## **The impact of digital media on the commercialization of celebrities.**

The advent of online media has brought about a significant transformation in how celebrities are perceived as influential brand endorsers, thereby facilitating the process of commodification of their image and endorsements. Internet personalities utilize their extensive followings to promote merchandise and endorse products, taking advantage of people's affiliations and identification with famous individuals (Marshall, 2010). The commodification driven by celebrities leads to the increased commercialization of personal identities, causing a blurring of the lines between genuine self-expression and commercial branding, as noted by Brooks et al. (2021).

Integrating celebrity endorsements and product placements have become a crucial aspect of online media, effectively blending entertainment and advertising. The impact of celebrities on consumer behavior is noteworthy, given that their endorsements have the potential to establish a perception of reliability and authenticity among their fan base. According to Brooks et al. (2021), there is a tendency among individuals to seek guidance and validation from celebrities when making purchasing decisions, which can result in a rise in consumerism and the commercialization of personal identities. The indistinct boundaries between genuine endorsements and remunerated promotions give rise to ethical apprehensions and pose a threat to the openness of the commercialization driven by celebrities. The critical evaluation of celebrity endorsements' authenticity and motives is imperative for individuals to make informed consumer decisions (Parmar & Mann, 2021).

The ubiquitous presence of celebrity culture in digital media affects personal identity and molds wider cultural standards and principles. Persistent exposure to celebrities and their meticulously crafted lifestyles may reinforce viewers' materialistic aspirations and consumerist tendencies (Marshall, 2010). Individuals can cultivate a yearning to imitate celebrities' lifestyles and material possessions, thereby perpetuating a culture that emphasizes consumption and the pursuit of external validation. The emphasis on the consumer as the central focus can affect an individual's perception of self and identity, as their value becomes linked to tangible possessions and their capacity to emulate the lifestyles of their revered public figures (Seo & Hyun, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of digital media has revolutionized the terrain of celebrity culture and the construction of personal identity. Digital platforms' impact on forming and propagating celebrity persona is significant. The adept utilization of social media by Lizzo serves as a demonstration of how a public figure can craft and disseminate their image. Through disseminating personal anecdotes and advocating self-acceptance, Lizzo has cultivated a robust individual identity and nurtured a loyal fanbase. Likewise, Kim Kardashian and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson have effectively employed social media platforms to construct personal stories and interact with followers.

However, Individuals must critically analyze the mediated celebrity culture while preserving a constructive sense of self-esteem and identity. The ubiquitous nature of celebrity culture within digital media has the potential to impact individual identity and reinforce materialistic desires and consumerist inclinations. Comprehending the intricacies of mediated celebrity culture is imperative for individuals to exercise discernment and maintain a sound sense of self in the contemporary digital era.

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