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A new media genre in the evolving participatory media culture

**Anastasia Veneti, Achilleas Karadimitriou and Georgios
Patsiaouras**



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ABSTRACT

Drawing on empirical data derived from an online survey, this paper examines the fan-celebrity relationship within participatory media culture through an examination of the fan-celebrity selfie and the classic type of autograph-taking. We argue that the fan-celebrity selfie is a new media genre whose value emanates from the possibilities of online publication and sharing, provided by the increasing number of digital platforms with user-generated content. Although both autographs and selfies signify a conquest on the part of fans, the achievement of a coveted or long-awaited contact with the celebrity world, selfies provide fans with an enhanced experience of a greater proximity, paving the way to a more intimate relationship.

1 INTRODUCTION

Audience's attempts to be in contact with celebrities are as old as spectacle itself (Inglis, 2010). Throughout the years autograph collecting has proven to be a prevalent and highly desirable means of such contact. It can perhaps be best described as an ever-changing practice of interaction between fans and celebrities, rather than as a static and unambiguous indication of admiration for famous personalities. After all, the complex and mutable features which characterise popular culture have affected audience's intentions with regard to the exploration of new ways of communicating with celebrities. Observing contemporary contexts with respect to the intensity of contemporary media evolution, it is necessary to reconsider the interplay between audience and celebrity culture, specifically taking into account the move towards a digital realm (Giles, 2017) - wherein possibilities of 'mass self-communication' (Castells, 2009) have clearly been enhanced.

As such, this paper aims to explore emerging interrelationships between fans and celebrities, identifying some of the transformations and special features of this relationship. In order to address our research objectives, we examined trends and practices related to both the classic case of autograph-taking and specific subset of selfies - that of the fan-celebrity selfie. These choices were made to better allow us to identify any changes that have occurred, as well as to explore the similarities and differences between the two modes of getting in contact with an admired celebrity or famous person. This study presents a preliminary investigation of the aforementioned interrelationships through paying specific attention to fan practices. Through such a focus it makes an important contribution to relevant academic literature, as this tends to focus primarily on celebrity practices (Collins, 2014, Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016) and much less on fans' practices and beliefs.

Drawing upon sociological and digital humanities literature, we seek to contribute to the growing and multifaceted scholarship on selfies and fan-celebrity studies (Rettberg, 2014; Tifentale & Manovich, 2015; Senft, 2008; Jenkins, 2006a). In our examination, we keep with Frosh (2015) and Gómez-Cruz & Thornham (2015) in perceiving the selfie as a social, cultural and media phenomenon, rather than an artefact - and as such a focus on practice and relations. Within this context, Jenkins's (2006a) notion of the contemporary participatory media culture - a networked environment of social media, where user-generated content is the driving force of communication and fans are active agents - plays a central role in our examination. Although selfies are considered deeply engaged cultural production, Jenkins et al. (2015: 13) explain that the term also includes routine practices like taking selfies - called 'ordinary forms' of participatory culture - as long as "these activities involve meaningful connections to some larger community."

Our discussion is based on empirical data derived from an online survey. During the design of this research we came across various media articles commenting on the evolving trend of fan – celebrity selfies against the sustainability of autographs; heralding the former as a new type of autograph (Robb, 2014). Some of these articles were used in our analysis, as they provided useful case studies of encounters between fans and celebrities and insight as to selfie/autograph practices. Contrary to what popular media outlets suggest, we argue that the fan-celebrity selfie is not a new type of autograph, but rather that we are witnessing the creation of a new genre that overrides both autographs and classic fan-celebrity photographs.

2 AUTOGRAPHS

Autograph collecting became popular as an American pastime in the nineteenth century, mainly among the literate upper classes (Lauer, 2007). Specifically, William Buell Sprague, a cleric working at George Washington’s family estate, has been identified as the owner of the first American autograph collection (Mulder and Stouffer, 1986). By the mid-19th century, other autograph collectors sought out documents signed by the 56 signatories of the Declaration of Independence. Obtaining such autographs was the ultimate goal of zealous collectors of American autographs (Lauer, 2007). The significance of the signature on written text as Lauer (2007: 148) eloquently argues can best be seen in the Elizabethan tragedy of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* ‘in which the protagonist’s pact with the devil is consummated with a signature inked in blood, underscoring the connection between body, text and soul an eternal connection, no less.’

Arguably, written evidence has always been the sought after goal of autograph collectors valued as a ‘material artifact and social mnemonic’ (Lauer, 2007). What is of great importance here is to understand what is viewed as so special about these handwritten signatures and how they embody and evoke the presence of the admired. In his seminal study *Signature Event Context*, Derrida (1977: 7-8; 1988) focuses on the repeatability of the signature - writing can be read indefinitely (in his words *iterated*) – and the ‘functional necessity of absence within presence’ (Wike, 2000). He argues, that “[b]y definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical non-presence of the signer. [...]” (Derrida, 1988: 20).

This evidence of presence or of a having-been present, as suggested by Derrida, encapsulates the performative function of the handwritten signature on autographs as a confirmation of a sort of ‘contact’ with the admired person. In the same vein, Milne (2010) in her work on epistolary technologies examines the role of ‘indexical’ traces to inscribe ‘presence.’ She argues that the use of written communication allows users to create ‘an imagined body, and a spiritual, almost telepathetic sense of [an] other’s presence’ (Milne, 2010: 2). The desire for documentary evidence is characterised by a search for the real and authentic and, as Lauer (2007: 146) argues, ‘signing renders the author present and, under the proper conditions of

textual belief, immortal.’ In this respect, to underline the significance of the handwritten signature one need only observe the trade in famous autographs; a process that derives from the need of the fans to obtain written evidence from a person they admire (Schlimm, 1997). The signatures and autographs of dead kings, presidents and famous writers are continually priced and reassessed in a dynamic marketplace which is galvanised by fans’ desire to possess this form of handwritten proof. In the 1980s, Anton Dvorak’s postcard was valued at US\$985, outpricing both Charles Dickens’ (US\$650) and Emile Zola’s (US\$495) autographs (Mulligan, 1980). Such a phenomenon also serves to highlight the enduring significance of individuals’ predispositions to attach themselves to famous people (Mulligan, 1980; *Washington Post*, 1929).

According to Garland (2010), such celebrity practice - or even indications of this phenomenon - can be traced back to classical antiquity, in the context of the Greek and Roman empires, although the term was still unknown. Madigan (1930) suggests that the autograph age possibly began around the middle of the 15th century. However, it is more precise to say that in pre-industrialised societies ‘fame’ - deriving from achievements or heroic deeds - was what made some personalities stand out (Inglis, 2010). Later on, with the transition to industrialised societies ‘fame’ was gradually associated with being in the public eye. Such transformation occurred with the advent of capitalism, in the late 17th century, with the emergence of a new type of famous personality, the so-called ‘celebrity’, systematically manufactured by the media industry (Marshall, 2006; Evans & Wilson, 1999; Giles, 2000). Several authors draw a distinction between the concepts of fame and celebrity (Braudy, 1997; Gamson, 1994), while Boorstin (1962: 57) defines the modern hero-celebrity as ‘a person who is known for his well-knownness.’

The twentieth century heralded a more image-centric era, in which media play a crucial role in the cultivation of celebrity culture (Marshall, 2006). In contemporary Western societies, the process of celebrity-seeking has been rendered omnipresent within a fame-intensive culture, where the desire to promote or achieve visibility seems almost holy (Holmes and Redmond, 2006). As media continue to evolve, the concept of fame is undergoing dramatic shifts and ideals of fame, success or worthiness are redefined, alongside the mementos that contemporary fans desire from their favourite celebrities. Statements by various celebrities, such as the American singer Taylor Swift and the Australian former international cricketer Shane Warne, pronouncing the death of the autograph and its replacement by selfie, have triggered discussions regarding the validity of such claims and about the modern relationships between fans and celebrities (Jackson, 2014). Michael Hecht, former president of the Universal Autograph Collectors Club (UACC) - one of the largest autograph societies in the world - claims that there is a diminishing demand for autographs, along with a steady decline in UACC membership (Robb, 2014). On the other hand, Andy Broughton, an autograph collector with a collection of 10,000 signatures worth £100,000, seriously doubts the predominance of the selfie over the autograph (Crowson, 2014). In line with his views, it seems that both a

historical importance and a commercial value are still embedded within autographs. The aforementioned examples echo and reflect debates about changing perceptions with regard to autographs and fan-celebrity selfies, as means by which audiences engage with famous individuals.

3 FAN-CELEBRITY SELFIE: A SOCIOTECHNICAL APPROACH

New digital technologies have revolutionised the way we communicate, share information and even produce content - and it is within this context that Castells (2009: 55) coined the term '*mass self-communication*', in order to both emphasise and explain the rise of creators of user-generated content that can potentially reach a global audience. These developments in networked media and the subsequent multi-potentiality of mass self – communication have greatly influenced fans' practices. Jenkins' (2006a; 2006b) extensive research on fandom has shown that fans have undertaken a much more active role in producing and consuming culture and he termed this new development '*participatory culture*'. For a deeper understanding of this emerging culture, Booth (2010) suggests that we need to examine not only new media technologies, but most importantly the ways in which these are utilised by fans. According to Booth (2010: 12-13), these new ways of using media technologies are characterised by what he calls '*philosophy of playfulness*'; denoting the pleasure fans get from engaging in such practices.

Amongst these new developments afforded by the new media technologies, the selfie with a celebrity, either for the fan community or individual admirers of famous people, has become a very popular practice (Wendt, 2014). Although self-portraits are nothing new – art history holds many examples of artists portraying either themselves or requested images of others (Rettberg, 2014; Saltz, 2014) – the distinctive value of the selfie primarily lies in its publication on a social networking site, facilitated by the usability of mobile multimedia devices (Lasén & Gómez-Cruz, 2009; Tifentale & Manovich, 2015). In contrast to an autograph (that could also be distributed online), the fan-celebrity selfie is by its nature (realised through the reverse mobile camera) immediately ready for sharing through a range of online practices. It is these online sharing practices (that are complementary to its memorial function – in a similar manner as with autographs), that speak to issues of online sociability, social connection and community building, that have rendered the selfie popular in fandom communities as a means of facilitating like-minded people's interactions (Holiday et al., 2016; Jenkins, 2006b; Senft, 2008).

In this respect, the selfie, as a (mainly) publicly oriented photo of oneself, is inherently social and becomes a *technology of embodiment* (Jones, 2002); a digital, easy-to-use, interface through which users can interact with each other. Building on this, Tembeck (2016: 3) argues that 'the

selfie offers a privileged means through which to continually explore possible relationships between one's personal sense of identity and one's public self-image.' A carefully curated image maximises the possibility of attracting more positive responses (likes and shares) from other online users and research has shown that positive responses are profoundly important for users - functioning as a form of 'social currency' (Marvick, 2015: 142; Choi et al., 2017). This enhanced control over self-representation, viewed as 'an intimate act of strategic management of the self' has been fundamentally important for both fandom and celebrities (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016:254). The selfie concerns the ability, given to users by technology, to create their own image in a very particular way and subsequently to disseminate the result widely to mass audiences (Gye, 2007). The visibility that can be attained through the online posting of the selfie represents, for many of its users, an insatiable desire. Within this context, a selfie with a celebrity enhances the visibility potential and resonates with Turner's (2010) notion of the 'demotic turn' – an era of the growing visibility of ordinary people across media - when common individuals seek and find fame through practices of micro-celebrity (Senft, 2008, 2013). The selfie can be interpreted as an invitation to 'look at me', which emerges from an inner impulse to project ourselves to a wider public. As Frosh (2015: 1610) argues, 'it points to the performance of a communicative action' by inviting the viewer to 'see me showing you me.'

The popularity of the selfie has also intrigued celebrities, who seek to capitalise on the attributes of this new practice as evidenced by the words of the American actor James Franco (2013) "a well-stocked collection of selfies seems to get attention. And attention seems to be the name of the game when it comes to social networking. [...]" Franco's statement clearly reflects the significance of the selfie for celebrities. Drawing on current scholarship that examines celebrities' practices of managing publicity through social media, celebrity selfies can be used in a plethora of ways; as promotional materials for consumer goods (Iqani & Schroeder, 2016); selfies with their fans help them build intimacy with fans and secure a stable fan basis; and selfies as a means to construct a more accessible and authentic persona (Marwick, 2013; Marwick & boyd, 2011).

Another important aspect of the fan-celebrity selfie, this 'coming together' of the fan and the celebrity realised through the photographic act, is that it creates a sense of intimacy; a shortening of the distance between the fan and the celebrated person through a shared experience. Embracing what Jerslev and Mortensen (2016) eloquently support when discussing the performative construction of the self, it is this simultaneous act of being and doing that, we argue, that provides proximity, intimacy and the sense of presentness in the case of the fan-celebrity selfie. As Sandbye argues, current modes of production and distribution of photography 'enhance the feeling of experiencing the moment' (Sandbye, 2012:2 cited in Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016: 252). In this context, this enhanced feeling of the shared experience is animated by a detailed depiction of the moment (the time and place the

photo is taken, the visual reproduction of the actors' faces and possibly parts of the body) that constitute an inclusive document of remembrance (Jerslev & Mortensen, 2016). As further support for this argument, the selfie with celebrities provides fans with desirable proof of their encounter with them - a detailed evidence of the event, echoing Barthes' (1981) celebrated observation that 'every photograph is a certificate of presence.' Drawing on these features, afforded by the photographic medium, the selfie with a celebrity can provide heightened emotional value for the fans. The aforementioned literatures highlight the growing importance and popularity of the fan-celebrity selfie as a medium for capturing the essence of celebratory moments between fans and their idols.

Thus, having on the one hand the various trends and uses of selfies predicated on the technological affordances of mobile telephony and social media, and on the other hand their importance for both fans and celebrities, research suggests that this practice alters existing borderlines between celebrities and fans, between the private and the public (Mortensen & Jerslev 2014). Until recently, celebrities were characterised by a managed mystique, which served the purpose of keeping distance between them and the public - and the autograph was a means to temporarily minimise that gap. The autograph has been the most tangible confirmation of celebrities' meeting with their fans, a confirmation mainly controlled by the famous person. However, contemporary fans feel the need to not only be an integral part of publicity's glare, but also to disclose this participation to the widest possible audience - a process materialised through the online posting of the selfie with the celebrity (Saltz, 2014), as discussed above. In this context, the growing trend of fan-celebrity selfie - within the field of participatory media - lessens celebrities' control over their public image and further transforms traditional patterns of the idealization of the celebrity. Research on the framing of celebrity culture, over the last two decades, has illustrated a broad reversal of the idealisation of celebrities that prevailed for much of the twentieth century. As Lai (2006: 215) states, 'the iconography of celebrity photography has begun to move away from the contrived gloss of the "ideal" towards the more mundane territory of "the real".' While such processes contribute to the demystification of celebrities, the distance between fan and celebrity is not eliminated. However, it is shrinking to the extent that this eventually causes an illusion of intimacy and prompts fans to assume the existence of a closer relationship with celebrities. This latent intimacy between fans and celebrities, created through selfies, is closely related to what Horton and Wohl (1956) called 'parasocial interaction'; 'the illusion of a "real", face-to-face friendship with a performer created through watching television shows or listening to music' (cited in Marwick & boyd, 2011: 144).

With this literature on autographs and fan-celebrity selfies as a guide, we formulated the following research questions:

RQ1: What use do fans make of fan-celebrity selfies and autographs?

RQ2: Which are the meanings ascribed to them?

4 METHOD

To answer our research questions, we conducted an online survey using Free Online surveys. To avoid giving the false impression of a confirmatory research approach, it is important to clarify that the present study was exploratory in nature (Wagenmakers, Wetzels, Borsboom, van der Maas, & Kievit, 2012). To further explore the various uses of selfies and autographs and the meanings ascribed to them, we designed a questionnaire which consisted of nine questions of various types; seven forced choice (closed) questions, one open, and one using the five-point Likert scale to measure intensity of feelings about certain statements related to the issues under study. Three out of the seven closed questions included the option 'other', thus allowing respondents to reply in an open way. By using a questionnaire that combined closed and open questions, we sought to identify preferences (questions with one response only), and explore issues (open options) that might not have been considered in the rather limited research on the specific subject matter or that were not originally anticipated when the survey was initiated.

Data collection took place between the 9th of July 2016 and the 30th of January 2017. The survey was based on a non-probability (convenience) sample that generated 402 valid responses. The survey link was posted on social media networks (Facebook and Twitter) and emailed to various recipients who could choose to further circulate it. Thus, anyone interested in the survey could opt in and answer the questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed by 269 females, 132 males and one other, of whom 289 were Greek, 70 British and 43 of other nationalities (see also Table 1 and 2 for age and education distribution respectively). Although the use of non-probability samples is associated with certain drawbacks, such as a greater likelihood of generating a biased sample than in probability sampling and the difficulty in conducting formal statistical inference, non-probability-based samples are commonly used and useful for collecting data from a geographically dispersed audience (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Cooper, 2000). A further issue for consideration here is that the distribution of the survey via social media makes our sample susceptible to the algorithms of the specific platforms. The high percentage of graduates responding might be such an indication. Although we need to carefully consider such limitations when interpreting our data, we argue that the convenience sample used here allowed us to reach a dispersed audience (according to a study by Maltby, Houran and McCutcheon (2003), one third of the population is affected by Celebrity Worship Syndrome) and the online distribution secured, at least to a certain extent, that respondents were familiar with online sharing applications - which is an important factor in assessing

selfies and autographs, as this paper positions the discussion within the digital participatory culture.

Table 1. Age distribution (N=402)

18-24	25-34	35-44	45+
142	138	83	39

Table 2. Educational background (N=402)

High School	University degree	Postgraduate studies	PhD	Other
31	199	119	46	7

5 MEASURES

Demographic measures. Participants responded to items identifying their gender, age, ethnic background, and education. At the beginning of the survey, participants indicated their informed consent for their data to be used in the research.

Practice preference. In order to measure respondents preferences as to requesting an autograph or taking a selfie with a celebrity, participants were asked whether they had ever asked for an autograph or what they would opt for if they met with a favourite celebrity.

Meanings ascribed to autographs and selfies. Participants could either select one of the pre-determined answers or opt for ‘other’ and provide an answer of their choice. The suggested answers were sourced from the relevant literature; example items include “The signature of the celebrity is of great importance to me” (Lauer, 2007; Schlimm, 1997), and “It is a proof of my meeting with the celebrity” (Holmes and Redmond, 2006).

Intensity of feelings. Participants responded to a list of nine statements. The first six referred to their perception of autographs and selfies, and the last three to practical aspects of the use of a selfie with a celebrity (see Table 4). These statements were informed by the literature in this area (Lauer, 2007; Marvick, 2015; Mortensen and Jerslev, 2014). Using a five-point Likert scale anchored by *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (5), we asked participants to report the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement.

Digital practice. In order to further assess online uses of the selfie we asked participants whether they had ever published their selfies online, and why. For the second question, participants could either select a predetermined answer that resonated from relevant theory such as: “To share it with friends” (Jenkins, 2006b; Senft, 2008); “To gain likes” (Marvick, 2015); or give their own answer through ‘other’.

The data entry for the quantitative analysis and the elaboration of the results was conducted through SPSS 22.0.

Our dataset for this research has also been complemented by media articles which we harvested online, using a combination of search terms such as ‘autograph and selfie’, ‘selfie with celebrities’ and ‘autograph v selfie’ that could provide us with examples of the kind of discussions taking place in contemporary media discourse. Although we did not conduct any systematic media analysis, the media articles provided valuable insights with respect to specific types of audience, such as celebrities and devoted autograph collectors, which we could not reach or identify by means of the main research design. Thereupon, abstracts from interviews and media reported case studies are included in our analysis, either to illustrate our findings or to provide a more inclusive context (various peoples’ testimonies) for the development of the arguments made here.

6 SURVEY RESULTS

Respondents were asked to assess what the autograph and the selfie mean to them. As Figure 1 shows, 33.6% of the respondents consider the autograph a proof of their meeting with the celebrity, with 23.6% considering it a memento of great emotional significance. Regarding the 20.6% ‘Other’, we identified two central themes: one that considers the autograph as memorabilia with sentimental value - similar to the predetermined answer, and the other as indicating no real interest in autographs. With regard to the former, the open responses included comments that highlighted respondents’ interest in autographs primarily as a teenage hobby whose importance diminished over the years or with which they do not engage any more.

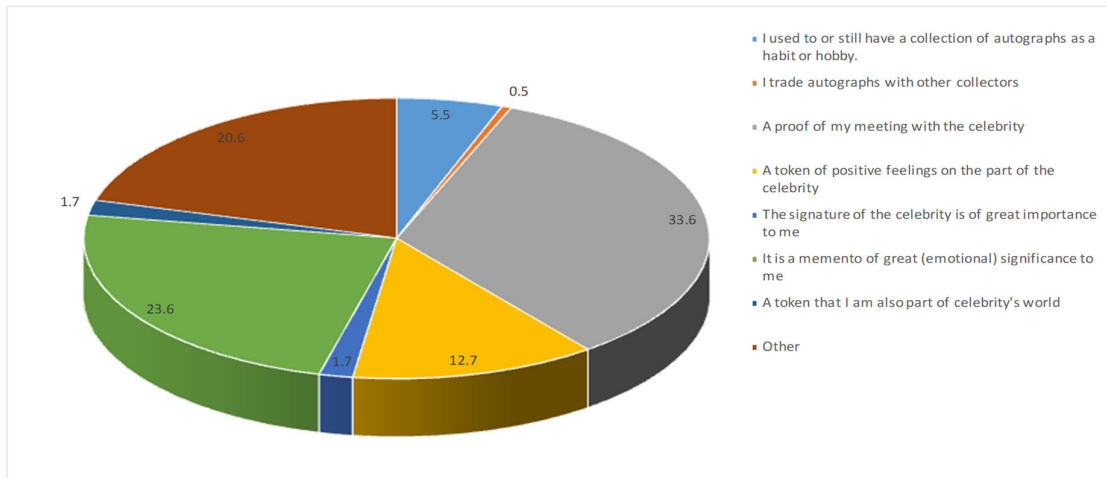


Figure 1. What does the autograph mean to you? [Select the most important (one answer)]

In a similar question with respect to selfies, as Figure 2 demonstrates, the majority of the respondents (32.8%) reported that a selfie with a celebrity is proof of their meeting. 21.6% considered it as fun and trendy and 20.9% as a memento of great emotional significance. The 20.6% who opted for 'Other' focused primarily on its perception as a memento of sentimental value. What was new here and marks a difference with autograph-taking, are the references to the possibility of sharing the selfie online (e.g. *I can post it on my social media; A potentially interesting post for my Instagram*) and that a selfie with a celebrity implies spontaneity and intimacy. Although feeling part of the celebrity world and a perception of a more intimate relationship did not gather a significant percentage in the quantitative data, such statements have been widely reported in the open answers, as can be seen below (Table 3).

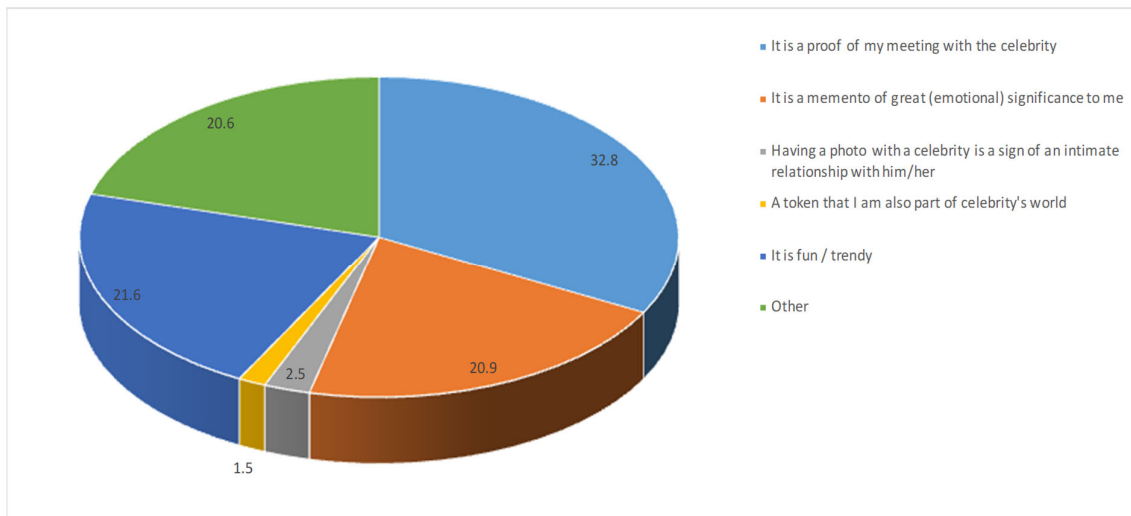


Figure 2. What does the selfie with a celebrity/famous person mean to you? [Select the most important (one answer)]

We also asked respondents, by means of an open-ended question, to explain what they believe the difference is, if any, between an autograph and a selfie with a celebrity. Five main themes emerged from the analysis of these responses (N=402) as shown in Table 3. The first one, *Personal value*, showcases the importance of the selfie, for the majority of the respondents, as a memento of high sentimental value which resonates with both the attributes of photography as memory and on the multi-usability of the selfie afforded by its technical characteristics. The second theme, *Proof*, encapsulates fans' perception of the selfie as a tangible ('real' as a term mostly used) evidence of their meeting with the celebrity. The third theme, *Participation and Proximity*, revolves around issues of engagement and interaction with celebrities and the subsequent intimacy and sense of proximity that such processes arouse amongst fans and celebrities. Finally, the last two themes indicate the popularity of selfies nowadays and the idiosyncrasy of this photographic genre that has rendered it so popular - its capability to be shared online with a large audience. Moreover, the storage capability of the selfie was mentioned as both easier and safer when compared with the autograph - emphasising that a signature may fade away. A more detailed discussion of this qualitative data is provided in the next section.

Themes	Responses
Personal value	Selfie is more intimate / A selfie is more personal whereas autographs are always the same/ An autograph is one more signature and sometimes a more impersonal process. Selfie could also be impersonal but if you want to use it in social media, you can create a specific context to present it to your followers without looking impersonal/A photo is more personal because you see yourself with the celebrity where as an autograph could be to anybody/ The photo is of sentimental value
Proof	An autograph should be part of an object of symbolic value. A selfie is about indicating to the public your surprise/admiration that you found yourself in the same physical space, that they are "real" and not just on TV or distant./ Selfie is more real/ A selfie shows that you had contact with the celebrity and you must have spoken- it's proof/ A selfie is more proof as autographs can be faked/ a selfie is solid proof you met the person and engaged with them in a more intimate way/ A selfie is a proof that you were

Participation & Proximity	<p>there and met her/him while someone could have brought you the autograph/</p> <p>Selfie with a celebrity presupposes the person's involvement in the celebrity's world/ Selfie is more favorable, memorable and creates engagement. You are part of it. [...]/An autograph can be given within a second, across a barrier, through a window and does not help you remember the experience. With a selfie, not only do you get to spend more time interacting with the celebrity and even maintain physical contact with them, but it also helps you remember the experience of interacting with the celeb, [...]/ Selfie is a higher achievement than autograph/A selfie requires effort, the celebrity has to pose for the photo [...]/[...]With the selfie you are participating in the creation and therefore you consider yourself important and/or chosen because of that/gives a sense of being equal to the celeb/ The selfie [...] has digital shareability scripted into its production. The camera phone is also a device I carry regardless of context, whereas carrying paper and pen would imply a foresight and expectation of meeting the celebrity. In this sense, the selfie communicates that we casually "bumped into" the celebrity; that we move in the same physical spaces as our heroes</p>
Trendiness	<p>An autograph is more old style, [..]/An autograph is fine and all, but a picture looks cooler/ autograph is outdated/selfies are now a more popular means of showing off about meeting a celebrity/ selfie is in fashion!</p>
Online sharing & visibility	<p>I can share the selfie with my friends/ You can post the selfie online and its more exciting as its both of you together whereas an autograph is quite dated and you're not sure what to do with it/ [...] uploading a selfie with you and a celebrity would get more of a reaction online, than a piece of paper with a scribble on it/ it's easier to show off with a posted selfie rather than with an autograph/ The selfie is more fun, immediate and instantly shareable</p>

Table 3. Examples of responses for the thematic categories

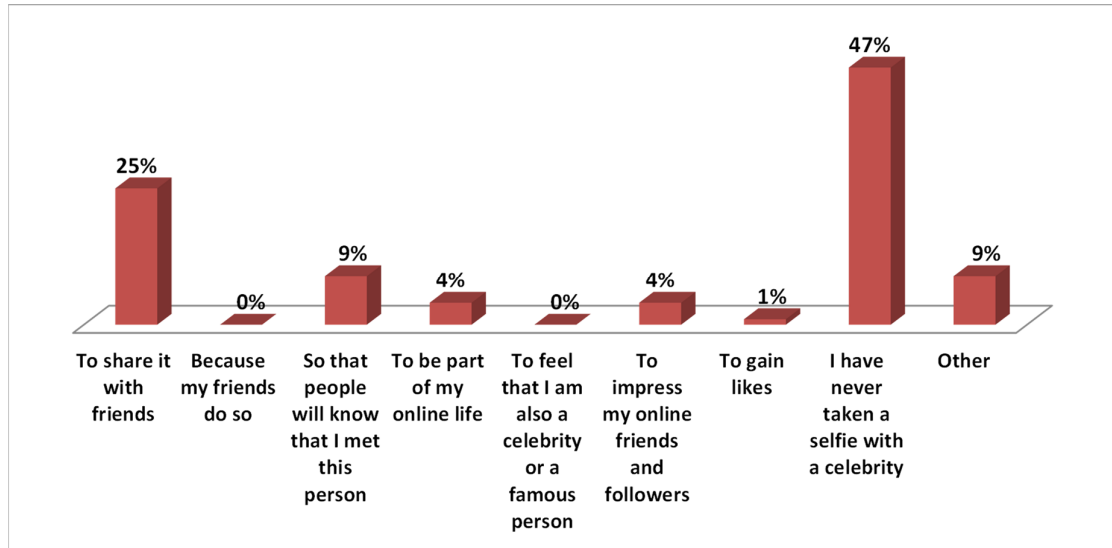
We used a five-point Likert scale to allow respondents to specify their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements in Figure 4, below. The responses confirm the themes above. As illustrated by Table 4 the autograph is considered to have some kind of value as a physical memento (35% answered 'Neither disagree nor agree' and 26% 'Agree') and according to 33% this value increasing over time. Moreover, 34% of the respondents regard autograph taking as a rather old-fashioned practice. More than half of the respondents (54%) agreed that a selfie is a digital token of their meeting with celebrities which they can choose to print and hold. However, when asked whether they do print them, the positive response rate was very low.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither disagree, nor agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The autograph is something which I can physically treasure	53 (13%)	75 (19%)	139 (35%)	105 (26%)	30 (7%)
An autograph signature is far more personal than a selfie	54 (13%)	138 (34%)	95 (24%)	81 (20%)	34 (8%)
The autograph gains more value during time	21 (5%)	60 (15%)	140 (35%)	131 (33%)	50 (12%)
It is rather old-fashioned to ask for autographs	35 (9%)	97 (24%)	93 (23%)	138 (34%)	39 (10%)
A selfie is more intimate compared to an autograph	15 (4%)	67 (17%)	92 (23%)	172 (43%)	56 (14%)
A selfie is a digital token of my meeting with the celebrity which I can still print and have	11 (3%)	25 (6%)	74 (18%)	219 (54%)	73 (18%)
I usually print the selfies I get with celebrities	134 (33%)	111 (28%)	128 (32%)	18 (4%)	11 (3%)
It is important for me to show to my online friends that I have a selfie with a celebrity	148 (37%)	101 (25%)	93 (23%)	45 (11%)	15 (4%)
It is important to get many likes/comments when I post a selfie with a celebrity online	149 (37%)	99 (25%)	97 (24%)	43 (11%)	14 (3%)

Table 4. Selfie with a celebrity versus autograph

Although the importance of the ability to share the selfie with the celebrity online was made clear in the open responses, this appears to be contradicted by the rather negative response to the statement 'It is important for me to show to my online friends that I have a selfie with a celebrity', as shown in Table 4 (37% 'Strongly disagree' and 23% 'Neither disagree or agree'). In attempting to explain this response in light of responses to another question 'Why have you posted the selfie?' (Figure 3) we now consider that the wording of the statement (Table 4) – as emphasising 'importance' could have misplaced the focus of the statement, perhaps suggesting a consideration of 'showing off' rather than sharing- and as such, potentially discouraging more positive response. Especially in light of the fact that 'to share it with

friends' (25%) was the most popular answer among those who have taken and posted a selfie with a celebrity (as shown in Figure 3, below).



. Figure 3. Why have you posted the selfie with the celebrity?

Another important factor that needs to be taken into consideration is that, as a consequence of the convenience sampling, we have 47% of respondents who have never taken a selfie with a celebrity. Nevertheless, it's important to mention that in responses to the question 'If you met your favourite celebrity or famous person that you admire, would you ask them for an autograph or a selfie?' 32% responded 'selfie', 8% would ask for an autograph and 21% would ask for both (the remaining 38% preferred not to answer, or selected none).

In Figures 4 and 5 we examine the preference for autographs and selfies with regard to age groups. The numbers here represent cases and not percentages. Using a one-to-five Likert scale question, where one is 'totally disagree' and five 'totally agree', mean values (Table 5) demonstrate that young people (18-24) are more confident that the selfie is more intimate than the autograph. Respondents aged 25-44 are more proportionally split.

	Means: An autograph signature is far more personal than a selfie	Means: A selfie is more intimate compared to an autograph
18-24	2.56	3.60
25-34	2.78	3.46
35-44	3.05	3.23
45-54	2.79	3.51

Figure 5: Mean values

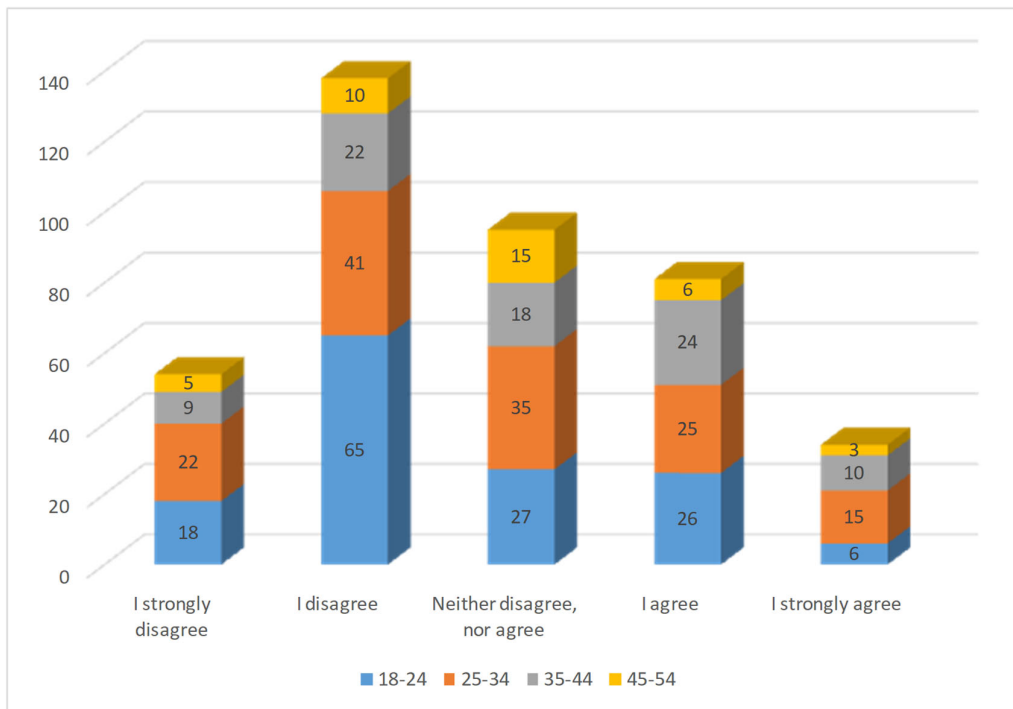


Figure 4: An autograph signature is far more personal than a selfie/ Age Crosstab (chi square p value 0,018) According to our chi square p value (0.018<0.05), the age (group) influences the perception of an autograph as more personal than a selfie.

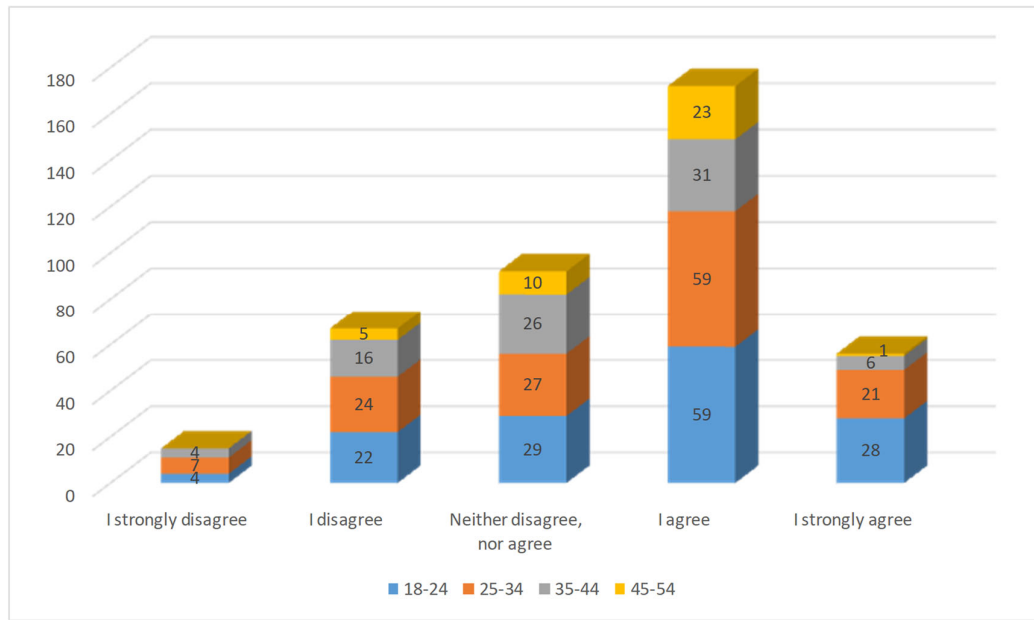


Figure 5: A selfie is more intimate compared to an autograph/ Age Crosstab (chi square p value 0,064). According to our chi square p value (0.064>0.05), the age (group) does not influence the perception of a selfie as more intimate than an autograph.

7 FAN-CELEBRITY SELFIE: A NEW MEDIA GENRE

The purpose of this research was to explore the uses and meaning of the fan-celebrity selfie and how this affects the fan-celebrity relationship in comparison to the traditional practice of autograph-taking. The findings of this study suggest that the autograph has become less popular, specifically among younger people, compared to the selfie practice. However, we do not suggest that the latter is a new type of the former. Rather, we argue that the fan -celebrity selfie supersedes the autograph, as an extended popular practice within the context of a changing fan-celebrity relationship provoked and afforded by new media technologies.

The autograph surely maintains its prominence amongst enthusiastic autograph collectors focusing either on the importance of having something that you can physically treasure or the autographs' trade value. As evidenced by the survey findings, almost half of the respondents consider autographs a more old-fashioned practice. The technological characteristics of the selfie have made it very popular for many people, especially for generation Z (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008; boyd, 2007). As support for this finding, when Michael Hecht was asked about the demographics of UACC's magazine, *Pen and Quill*, his one word answer was: 'Old' (Robb, 2014). With respect to participants' accounts and intergenerational preferences regarding an emotional attachment to autographs:

“An autograph is a piece of them in the sense that the signature is hand written, and you remember how you came about getting one. For instance, my favourite football player - Ryan Giggs; when I met him in a club, I asked him to sign a £10 note, because my mum had got George Best’s signature on a £5 note when she was younger. There was significance to having the autograph.”

Presence and the photographic practice

Although both the selfie and the autograph serve a purpose as a ‘social mnemonic’ (Lauer, 2007), the significance of ‘presence’ (Derrida, 1977) associated with the handwritten signature has now shifted from the ‘imagined body’ (Milne, 2010) to the actual physical presence of it. The findings of this research (specifically the themes of Proof and Participation/Proximity) suggest that, for contemporary fans, their relationship with admired people becomes more intimate through the collective experience of selfie-taking, where the actual presence of all actors involved is a pre-requisite. Furthering this argument, the necessity for physical presence (real bodies) when taking the selfie validates the actual encounter of the fan with the celebrity, while an autograph could well have been signed for and/or passed on by someone else, without the final recipient ever meeting the celebrity. These findings seem to corroborate and support Jerslev and Mortensen’s (2016) discussion on the performative construction of the self. Statements such as *“with a selfie, [...] you get to spend more time interacting with the celebrity and even maintain physical contact...”* resonate with Jerslev and Mortensen’s (2016:254) arguments, in that this intimate act of strategic management of the self, image and act cannot be separated, supporting their conclusion that selfies should be understood as “performative statements, a form of visual speech act uttering a presence in the here and now”.

Although our data demonstrate that both autographs and selfies serve as forms of documentation of an event, in the contemporary image-centric era (Marshall, 2006), the fan-celebrity selfie has earned a privileged position in the contemporary digitalised environment. Exemplifying this shift, the former Australian international cricketer Shane Warne tweeted ‘After doing 5 selfies with people this morning before 8am on my morning run/walk I’ve come to the conclusion that the autograph is dead!’ (Jackson, 2014). In a similar manner, the pop idol Taylor Swift (2014), in an article for the *Wall Street Journal*, argued that: ‘There are a few things I have witnessed becoming obsolete in the past few years, the first being autographs [...] I haven’t been asked for an autograph since the invention of the iPhone with a front-facing camera. The only memento ‘kids these days want is a selfie.’

Thus, the fan-celebrity selfie can be seen as a means of materialising and documenting a kind of presence that goes beyond the traditional boundaries of sharing merely amongst friends, given how digital technologies and storage operate. Our findings support and develop

Rettberg's (2014) arguments around the role and capacity of digital technologies in both how we present ourselves and also in how we log and record unique moments of our lives in ways that serve as future references.

7.1 Circulation

The concept of circulation is also prevalent in our findings as it permeates both practices (autograph-taking and the fan-celebrity selfie) though in quite distinctive ways. Although an autograph could also be shared online, our data reveals that it is primarily a material artifact with symbolic significance that is more personally treasured by its owner, congruent with relevant scholarship (Lauer, 2007). Furthermore, the main circulation terrain for an autograph is the autograph marketplace, characterised by the laws of economics. In contrast, the fan-celebrity selfie, though still realised in an offline environment, is animated from the moment that its online journey begins. Sharing it online involves multiple functions, such as image self-management, social connection and community building, as we explain below.

Participants responses suggest that, creating and sharing a selfie is a highly engaging process that involves self-generated material capable of triggering conversations both in direct time - the instant selfie is uploaded - and in the future (through the journey of the selfie across different online platforms). As Rettberg (2014: 12) argues 'creating and sharing a selfie is an act of self-representation [...]. A selfie also exists in a social context, once shared.' An example of such is provided by the fans almost instantly uploading the selfies they took with the famous actor Russell Crowe when he was spotted at the World Club Challenge (*St Helens Star*, 2015). While traditional signature seekers criticise such online sharing practices, viewing them as primarily 'showing off' and 'ego-driven,' as shown in the survey's open options responses, they are exactly those that turn it as appealing to those people interested to share pictures of themselves in the company of famous people (Tembeck, 2016). In this context, our findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that the value of the selfie is mainly with respect to practices of online publication and sharing (Tifentale & Manovich, 2015), as well as in terms of seeking digital visibility and online acceptance (Marvick, 2015; Choi et al, 2017; Schau & Gilly, 2003). From a sociological approach, Skog's (2013) research underlines the importance of the 'like' symbol, in that it becomes an integrated characteristic of online image-building and acquires a social role - in the sense that the number of 'likes' that one receives is interpreted by content producers as proof of appreciation from other cyberspace dwellers.

The fan-celebrity selfie also has the capability of providing a (latent) conversational terrain through, synchronous and asynchronous interaction with the photo (selfie) in online environments. This is the case with respect to the incident involving Angelina Jolie's selfie

with a fan who suffered a panic attack caused by people pushing her whilst she was trying to get an autograph from the actress. The actress saw the mayhem that had been created, helped the girl and then posed for a selfie with her. Immediately after obtaining the selfie, the fan uploaded it on to her Instagram account and shared the story. In just few hours, this selfie received hundreds of likes and comments (Lee, 2014). The story attracted wide media coverage and went viral. Jolie attracted a great deal of positive publicity celebrating her compassionate behaviour towards the fan, and the girl obtained a selfie with the actress she adored, which she shared with the online community, leading to a series of online engagements. Considering such uses of fan-celebrity selfies, it is plausible to suggest that this particular type of selfie enhances the active role of fans in contemporary participatory media culture (as described by Jenkins (2006a), generates new ways for a coming together between fans, celebrities and other like-minded people, as well as providing the means to satisfy various needs and desires - as described above and discussed by previous studies (Booth, 2010; Castells, 2009).

8 ANOTHER RELATIONSHIP? TRACING CHANGES IN THE FAN-CELEBRITY RELATIONSHIP IN THE PARTICIPATORY MEDIA CULTURE

The common denominator linking autographs and selfies with celebrities is the desire by fans to achieve a sense of relationship with the famous person, and meaningful evidence of this. However, the fan-celebrity selfie, is viewed as a new way for fans and famous people to come together, indicating a shift in their relationship. The findings of this study illustrate a narrowing of the gap between the two poles: the admirer and the admired. In the classic form of autograph seeking the protagonist in this relationship used to be the famous personalities, whose signature (and often also their handmade dedication) officially recognised the contact with the ordinary citizen. In contrast, in today's participatory media culture, contemporary fans feel they are almost equal contributors to the value of imaging with celebrities, seeking to steal a bit of sparkle from their world and render this visible through the utilisation of digital tools - as evidenced by the responses in this study (see Participation/Proximity theme, as well as Couldry's (2014) work on media glamour). It is this proximity, realised by the *desideratum* meeting with the celebrity and being sealed by the selfie that creates the sense of a more intimate relationship. Our findings are further supported by relevant media stories, such as that of 26 year old Vanessa Sky, owner of a collection of around 10,000 selfies with a series of well-known stars, who stated 'I've waited outside hotels for celebrities to come out for 12 hours before - but there's no better feeling than when you meet them' (Nolan, 2013), and that where Swift (2014) argues that the relationship between artists and fans 'is only made more intimate by social media.'

Comparing attitudes to and uses of the classic autograph and the selfie clearly proves that the evolution of new media has given rise to questions with regard to the impact of new technologies on the ways celebrities are launched, promoted or represented. As Marshall (2006: 634) puts it ‘the symbiotic relationship between media and celebrity has been ruptured.’ In the context of this rupture the fan-celebrity selfie as a new media genre plays a dual role: on the one hand, it serves the need of celebrities to maintain their reputation and be visible to the widest possible audience and on the other hand, it represents a new threat to their idealised image. The transition from the traditional type of autograph to fan-celebrity selfie marks a major change in image management on the part of the celebrity. The classic autograph offered celebrities greater control with respect to the management of their image, as they were able to define the representations of themselves through pictures, made in advance on the basis of their personal criteria. With the advent of the fan-celebrity selfie this control has been replaced by a risky process of self-representation, where standards are defined by both the celebrity and the fan. Either as a result of undesirable demystification or because of the irritating intrusion into their privacy, many celebrities have expressed their discontent with regard to such practices. As the English musician Noel Gallagher argues:

*“Autograph. I thought that was annoying, but then people showed up with their f*** phones. I never like going on photo’s but now you get approached by everyone guarded or unguarded any time of the day. If I’m shopping with my misses, or when I’m having lunch with the kids. Even in the toilets people come up and ask, Noel? [...]”*

(StopCryingYourHeartOutNews, 2015)

The previously formal and stylised image of the distant and lonely celebrity has given way to the spontaneous, casual and unscheduled portrayal of the moment, where the participation of the audience is crucial. Fans have acquired a much more active role with respect to their relationship with celebrities – as the selfie can be understood as a bottom-up, participative means of image construction. The fan-celebrity selfie can be regarded as a new media genre, characterised by an improvised participatory process taking place between celebrities and fans, in which user-generated content is what enhances celebrity's value. The elusive life standards put forward by traditional lifestyle media are degraded, and the ‘parasocial interaction’ facilitated through the selfie creates a sense in which the fan becomes (almost) on a par with the celebrity (Marwick and boyd, 2011). However, the two poles remain unequal. The selfie does, to some extent, bring famous people and fans closer together, but it does not amount to the creation of an equal position in the public sphere.

9 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The relationship between fans - celebrities and how this has been affected by new media technologies is a fairly recent research topic, with much work on this ongoing and being approached from a wide range of different perspectives. The findings of this study build on and extend the theoretical work on the sub-genre of the fan-celebrity selfie, bringing together scholarship on selfies, fandom and celebrity studies (Senft, 2008; Rettberg, 2014; Jenkins, 2006a; Turner, 2004). Through an emphasis on the uses of the fan-celebrity selfie and the meanings ascribed to it by its users, we argue that selfies with celebrities is a new media genre that introduces new ways of forming relationships with celebrities, based on proximity and intimacy; also, we suggest that this practice goes beyond the traditional autograph based mode of relationship, towards new forms that are characterised by the affordances made available by mobile technology and social media applications. In this context, the selfie appears to be evolving into a sophisticated new media genre, acting as a bridge of familiarity or linkage connecting audience to a popular world outside the confines of their everyday experience. In this type of contact and thanks to the new technologies, fans play a significant role in the production and publication of the evidence of this contact.

In conclusion, this study constitutes an initial attempt to theorise this area through addressing questions regarding the fan-celebrity selfie and the classic type of autograph. There are certain limitations to this research project, in particular its reliance on a convenience sample. Although a more rigorous recruiting process would allow generalisations and reveal significant correlations this does not negate the usefulness of convenience samples as utilised in our research design (Berson et al., 2002). The themes that emerged from this research offer a preliminary, though important, glimpse into an understudied area. Future research could involve a closer examination of patterns of behavior with regard to this phenomenon in specific fan communities and/or with autograph collectors, so as to explore more accurately practices of posting of selfies and autograph taking - and their value for a more organised fandom. Moreover, we suggest that future research should expand the exploration of fans' perceptions and motivations, fostering a broader argumentation and unveiling different aspects of the fan-celebrity relationship through a qualitative and/or historical research approach.

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Notes for contributors:

Contributors are encouraged to submit papers that address the social, political, economic and cultural context of the media and communication, including their forms, institutions, audiences and experiences, and their global, national, regional and local development. Papers addressing any of the themes mentioned below are welcome, but other themes related to media and communication are also acceptable:

- Communication and Difference
- Globalisation and Comparative Studies
- Innovation, Governance and Policy
- Democracy, Politics and Journalism Ethics
- Mediation and Resistance
- Media and Identity
- Media and New Media Literacies
- The Cultural Economy

Contributions are welcomed from academics and PhD students. In the Autumn Term we also invite selected Master's students from the preceding year to submit their dissertations which will be hosted in a separate part of this site as 'dissertations' rather than as Working Papers. Contributors should bear in mind when they are preparing their paper that it will be read online.

Papers should conform to the following format:

6,000-10,000 words (excluding bibliography, including footnotes)

150-200 word abstract

Headings and sub-headings are encouraged

The Harvard system of referencing should be used

Papers should be prepared as a Word file

Graphs, pictures and tables should be included as appropriate in the same file as the paper

The paper should be sent by email to Bart Cammaerts (b.cammaerts@lse.ac.uk), the editor of the Media@LSE Working Paper Series

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