



**Co-constructing Loyalty in an Era of Digital Music Fandom:  
An Experiential- Discursive Perspective**

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## **Co-constructing Loyalty in an Era of Digital Music Fandom: An Experiential-Discursive Perspective**

**Purpose:** This article seeks to answer the question: How can a discursive approach to how music fans construct loyalty in a digital context contribute to a theoretical understanding of brand loyalty?

**Design/methodology/approach:** Drawing on insights from theories of brand loyalty and fandom, this interpretive inquiry makes use of data from an online forum dedicated to the band, U2, and interviews with forum members. A combination of online ethnography and discourse analysis are employed.

**Findings:** The analysis shows that music fans mobilise particular discursive resources in constructing loyalty in the digital context, specifically: length of time spent as a fan; obsession; and the opposition of obligation and choice. These discursive resources reflect a grounded account of an experientially-rooted brand loyalty that extends beyond attitudinal and behavioural loyalty, and which is particularly salient in music consumption.

**Research limitations/implications:** This is a single case study, but as a rich and vibrant online community, it provides fruitful insights into the discursive construction of loyalty. The processes of negotiation, accommodation and conflict, engaged in through online discourse are important in laying bare the preferences, value systems and meanings that frame the experiences of loyal consumers.

**Originality/value:** Examining loyalty through the lens of online music fandom enables a discursive understanding of consumers' experience of brand loyalty. It shows how online engagement with other consumers of a brand facilitates a deep engagement with the notion of loyalty.

## Introduction

This study explores the discursive resources music consumers use to make claims about loyalty to an artist or 'b(r)and' (O'Reilly and Doherty, 2006) in a digital context. The allegiance of consumers to brands, mainly conceptualised as 'brand loyalty' has long held a central place in marketing theory and practice (Uncles et al., 2003). Most research has tended towards a supplier-oriented view that draws on logical positivist paradigms (Paavola, 2006) of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty, thus prioritising the interests of management. A consumer-oriented view that highlights the meaning and lived experience of brand loyalty has been pointed to in the work of, for example, Solomon (1986), McCracken (1993), Schouten and MacAlexander (1995), Fournier and Yao (1997), and Fournier (1998). While such a view promises to both widen and deepen our understanding of brand loyalty, the continued prevalence of behavioural and attitudinal approaches suggest that Fournier and Yao's (1997: 454) observation endures: "we have perhaps prematurely circumscribed the brand loyalty construct and our understanding of it, thereby precluding the accumulation of knowledge into a theory of brand loyalty that is valid at the level of lived experience".

The paucity of symbolic and affective dimensions in brand loyalty theory is problematic. Following the experiential turn, (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), it is now widely accepted that consumers are active and affective subjects who negotiate and transform market-mediated meanings in pursuit of identity. Furthermore, brand community research by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) and Muñiz and Schau (2005) has underscored the importance of the consumer-to-consumer axis in brand relationships. Facilitated by digital technologies and social media, communities form around brands that offer symbolic resources through which consumers can communicate with each other and share experiences. Hence, and in response to Fournier and Yao's (1997) implicit call, our study contributes to an expanded theory of brand loyalty by calling attention to the symbolic meanings that underpin loyal behaviour and in doing so, highlights the utility of an experiential perspective of brand loyalty.

Our research focuses on music, as it is a social and cultural product (Hargreaves and North, 1999) where consumer loyalties are critically important but often radically challenged. The music industry has recently experienced significant changes and challenges due to digital technology (e.g. Meisel and Sullivan 2002). Amongst these, is the growth of social media which have allowed large groups of consumers to form around music brands much more easily, on a different scale, at a faster speed and intensity, and with a broader geographic scope than in the days of fan clubs and zines. In response, there is a considerable literature on various topics related to digital music consumption, in which a key focus is the phenomenon of file-sharing and music 'piracy' (e.g. Choi, Bae and Jun 2010), in other words, behaviours that do not exhibit loyalty. While studies focusing on loyalty in the positive sense are not found, the connected, digital landscape of music offers a unique opportunity to advance our understanding of brand loyalty. Consumer-to-consumer interactions in these spaces shape, and are shaped by, the meanings, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of loyalty in a consumption context (e.g. Algesheimer et al., 2005).

To this end, the present research presents a grounded account of the lived experiences and social realities of music fans as they co-construct notions of loyalty through consumer-to-consumer engagement within interpretive online communities. In adopting an experiential perspective, we also elaborate upon the contribution of a discursive approach to an expanded understanding of brand loyalty. Experiential brand loyalty recognizes not only the symbolic meanings that underpin loyal behaviour, but also frames the consumer as an active party,

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3 rather than passive recipient in the constitution and negotiation of meaning. Loyalty is  
4 viewed as lived and experienced by particular consumer groups. This study therefore  
5 challenges existing assumptions on the nature of brand loyalty, and points to  
6 conceptualisations that are valid and meaningful to contemporary consumers.  
7

8 We begin with a critical review of the literatures on brand loyalty and music fandom, as a  
9 'fan' is a subjective position often adopted by loyal consumers in the cultural sector. The  
10 study employs discourse analysis within a broadly netnographic approach to systematically  
11 observe the discursive resources utilized within the selected fan community along with direct  
12 contact with its social actors (Androtsoupouos, 2008). Three discursive resources that  
13 resonate with fans around loyalty were identified: time spent as a fan; obsession; and the  
14 opposition of obligation and choice. Findings confirm that an experiential view of loyalty that  
15 recognizes different ways of being loyal and of expressing loyalty, even to the same brand, is  
16 appropriate for the mediated, active and multifaceted consumers of today (Elliot and  
17 Wattanasuwan, 1998). It also constitutes a step forward in terms of an approach to brand  
18 loyalty that is awake to the lived experience of consumers as suggested by Fournier and Yao  
19 (1997).  
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### 22 **Brand Loyalty**

23 Existing literature defines brand loyalty in either behavioural or attitudinal terms, or as a two-  
24 dimensional model consisting of both (Rundle-Thiele and Bennet, 2001). Behavioural brand  
25 loyalty is mainly defined with reference to "the pattern of past purchases with only secondary  
26 regard to underlying consumer motivations or commitment to the brand" (Uncles et al.,  
27 2003:7). Repeated acts of purchase of a branded product are considered sufficient evidence of  
28 loyalty. According to Tucker (1964:32) "no consideration should be given to what the  
29 subject thinks or what goes on in his central nervous system; his behaviour is the full  
30 statement of what brand loyalty is". The benefit of this approach is that it is based on actual  
31 purchases, which are directly related to business performance (Mellens et al., 1995).  
32 However, it lacks explanatory power for the behaviour and assumes that purchase is  
33 necessarily a manifestation of loyalty. Behavioral models are therefore insufficient in  
34 providing a full understanding of the underlying factors that drive repeat purchase behaviour  
35 (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978).  
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38 Attitudinal brand loyalty is focused on attitudinal commitment, alone or in combination with  
39 behavioural elements (Day 1976; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). It is defined in relation to  
40 whether or not the purchase of a brand is a manifestation of loyalty or an act devoid of  
41 choice. An oft referenced proponent of this view, Oliver (1999), defines loyalty as "a deeply  
42 held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the  
43 future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing despite  
44 situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching  
45 behaviour" (p. 34). To track attitudes, proponents of the two-dimensional model focus on  
46 positive feelings, beliefs and commitment toward the brand, relative to available alternatives.  
47 Despite drilling deeper into the dynamics of loyalty than those accounted for under  
48 behavioural conceptualizations, attitudinal loyalty has not evaded criticism for its reliance on  
49 consumer declarations, rather than on observed behaviour (Odin et al., 2001).  
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52 Both behavioural and attitudinal definitions of brand loyalty privilege the supplier  
53 perspective, by prioritizing the interests of management (i.e. the purchase/sale) and adopting  
54 managerial discourses. Interpretive consumer research, through its experiential focus  
55 (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) has shed a different light on the nature of consumer-brand  
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relationships whereby the meanings and symbolic aspects of brand loyalty are brought into focus. For instance, Fournier (1998), argues that it is the relationship between the consumer and brand that provides meaning, and that a key to making sense of this meaning is to understand the psychological and sociocultural context of the consumer. Fournier's (1998) work, like much marketing and consumer research, is focused on the one-on-one, dyadic relationship between brand and consumer (O'Guinn & Muñiz, 2005). While this is important in understanding individual attitudes, motivations and decision making processes, the range of cultural behaviors, and complex culturally defined patterns that shape behavior are somewhat masked by focusing on a singular consumer-brand relationship. This holds greater significance when we consider the connected landscape within which consumers engage with brands.

There have been attempts to understand the influence of groups on the individual consumer's behavior from a social-psychological perspective, however loyalty as an inherently social behavior that is constructed, enacted, and embedded within the collective is a vastly different undertaking. Researchers such as McCracken (1993) and Schouten and MacAlexander (1995) view brand loyalty as co-constructed by a community of consumers, but this perspective remains under-developed in the brand loyalty literature. Thus for a more complete picture of brand loyalty, the meanings that emerge through interaction need to be considered concurrently. A discursive/ experiential understanding of brand loyalty takes a step in this direction, by highlighting the ways brand loyalty is experienced by a group of consumers. From the consumer's perspective, the notion of the 'fan' is often evoked by those claiming a position of loyalty especially in relation to cultural products like films, sports and music (e.g. Kozinets, 2001), but also as relates to consumption more broadly. "Fandom" is therefore an effective lens for comprehending highly engaged and committed consumers and thus developing an understanding of the experiential nature of brand loyalty, especially when interacting through online music communities.

### **Fandom**

There is no single definition that encompasses all that a fan is. However, there is general academic consensus that 'fan' describes a person who has a special relationship with the object of their affection, characterized by a high level of engagement. O'Reilly et al. (2013) suggest that a music fan displays broad knowledge about the object of their fandom, exhibits strong emotional attachment to it, and celebrates their obsession even in social situations. Fans weave their passion for the brand or consumption activity into their sense of identity in stronger and more visible way than is the case with other brands, products, or activities (O'Reilly et al., 2013; Lobert, 2012). They express their passion and attachment to a brand even in banal, everyday situations, not as a fleeting consumption activity, but as a consistent, religious-like allegiance (Lobert, 2012). Although the focus of the work on fandom has typically been on cultural brands within the arts and sport, because all brands can be understood as a mediated artefact of popular culture (Holt, 2004), any brand could become an object of fandom. It is not far-fetched to suggest that consumers can make similar associations with brands as fans do with musicians or sports teams. Fans, however, are set apart from other loyal consumers by the degree and intensity with which they engage with the objects of their admiration (Fiske, 1992; O'Reilly et al., 2013). As such, fandom epitomises an elevated functioning of brand loyalty characterised by intense brand engagement, socialization and identity.

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3 Although fans can and do enjoy the consumption activity of their choice individually, fandom  
4 takes on a more powerful form when it is engaged with collectively (Harris and Alexander,  
5 1998). Loyal fans typically seek out other similarly highly engaged and passionate fans and  
6 congregate within communities online and offline where they share their consumption  
7 experiences (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Fan communities provide structures for collectiveness,  
8 centred around the object of their shared admiration.  
9

10 Fandom is also characterized by the semiotic and material productivity of fans (O'Reilly et  
11 al., 2013). They are 'excessive readers' (Fiske 1992) who are not content to simply receive  
12 and consume cultural texts as handed down in a producer-consumer exchange relationship.  
13 Rather, "fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who  
14 also participate" (Jenkins, 1992:214). The intensity of engagement plays out in the form of  
15 co-creative endeavours (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000). As fans engage proactively in  
16 practices such as connecting with other fans and reworking and repurposing cultural texts in  
17 their productive endeavours, the meanings of those texts are negotiated and constructed  
18 within the interpretive community. This provides the grounds for approaching fandom as a  
19 discursive practice (See Figure 1). Fandom is constructed as a heightened expression of  
20 loyalty irrespective of the type of brand being considered, in the sense that it encompasses  
21 repeated purchases (behavioural loyalty), positive feelings towards the brand (attitudinal  
22 loyalty) and meaningful engagement with the brand within the context of its community  
23 (experiential loyalty).  
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26 The use of the frame 'fan' is not unproblematic, with fandom often being described  
27 pathological terms (Jenson, 1992) as a deviant and potentially dangerous form of interaction.  
28 However, many recent studies treat fandom as a normal and harmless form of cultural  
29 behavior that comprises a diversity of rich experiences (O'Reilly, et al., 2013). According to  
30 Gray et al. (2017) where "critics had previously assumed fans to be uncritical, fawning and  
31 reverential, fan studies scholarship argued and demonstrated clearly that fans were active,  
32 and regularly responded, retorted, poached" (p. 3). The term 'fan' has also been used  
33 inconsistently in relation to its offshoots: 'fanatics' and 'fanaticism', and this, argues Chung  
34 et al., (2018) complicates the study of fans. Nonetheless, the term 'fan' does not typically  
35 attract negative associations; rather, it is often used to highlight enthusiasm and passion for a  
36 target object (Chung et al., 2018). Music fans in particular are highly active in engaging their  
37 shared passion for artist brands both online and off.  
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40 In sum, 'fan' elucidates the richness of consumers experience of, and practices related to  
41 particular brands. For example, Cavicchi's (1998) ethnographic study of Bruce Springsteen  
42 fans focuses on the meanings attached to their fandom as told from their perspective. The  
43 ethnographic accounts captured in that study, though deeply insightful, are limited in  
44 comparison to the typical quantity of consumer-to-consumer communications that are  
45 afforded by a digital context. The access to naturally occurring data in an online context  
46 brings into full view the co-constructive potential of consumer-to-consumer interactions.  
47 O'Reilly and Doherty's (2006) more recent study of New Model Army looks at how fans  
48 and the band co-construct meaning and identities for themselves and for others within the  
49 context of an online community. This current study by contrast is entirely focused on fans as  
50 active players in the co-constitution and reconstitution of what it means to be a loyal  
51 consumer of the b(r)and.  
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## Methodology

To examine the discursive resources music fans use to make claims about loyalty in a digital context, the study employs methods and techniques drawn from discourse analysis (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) within a broadly netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography is a method that “adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated channels” (Kozinets, 1998:2). This combination enabled both systematic observation of discourses within the selected fan community and direct contact with its social actors to further deepen understanding (Androtsoupouos, 2008). The key questions guiding the exploration were ‘how do music fans construct meaning in relation to loyalty in an era of digital music consumption?’, and ‘what discursive resources do they draw upon in making sense of loyalty to U2?’.

The music b(r)and, U2, were selected firstly, because they are a prototypical mainstream commercial artist brand with a vibrant online fan community. Second, their success and longevity mean that the fan community is diverse in terms of age, status, income, online engagement and duration of relationship with the band. This presents the potential for interactions drawn from a breadth of experiences, with different areas of alignment and divergence structuring fan’s relationships with the band. Finally, U2 have been through highs and lows; periods of extended commercial success and underperformance, and positive and negative media coverage that has both attracted, and tested, the loyalty of fans through the length of their career.

The study focused on one of two popular online U2 forums, which can be seen as a storehouse for the community’s interactive text. Forum threads (sometimes called a topic) consist of a collection of posts focused on a topic of discussion (Xun and Reynolds, 2010) (See Figure 1). Data was collected using a combination of “observation ethnography” (Bainbridge, 2000) which focuses on the static examination of online data without interaction with forum members, and “participant observation” (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994) which involves communication and interaction with community members. Data collection began with an initial read through the large number of posts made between August 2008 when the forum was started and February 2016, with subsequent rounds undertaken monthly to capture new posts and emerging discussions. Notes were made of what was observed and where (Brown et al., 2003). A second read-through focused on threads and exchanges that made reference to loyalty, fans, fandom or allegiance, particularly those exchanges that seemed to imply a degree of conflict or debate regarding their meanings. The aim was to achieve depth in terms of analyzing the way loyalty was talked about within the confines of the community. The downloaded threads comprised 106,000 words from a combination of 28 threads and individual posts. Each thread typically had from 10 to over 50 participants depending on the duration and the interest of participants in the topic under discussion.

Data was also collected via participant observation, where the first author initiated threads and engaged in discussions based on emergent themes (for instance, on the importance of length of time as a fan, relationship between heritage and loyalty etc.). Finally, Skype interviews were conducted with forum members who appeared likely to add depth and richness to the data, or to offer interesting perspectives.

Online research raises certain ethical issues that require consideration (Eynon, Fry, and Schroeder, 2008). At the start of the participant observation, permission was gained from the forum administrator to proceed, who also posted a message on the forum informing members about the study. A more detailed description of the research plan was also sent to all fans

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analysing the ways these discourses were negotiated through fans’

the notion of obsession; and the opposing views of ‘loyalty as an obligation’ tied to emotions toward the band and ‘loyalty as an economic choice’ that can be exercised at will. Of these,

is used as a means of asserting ‘real’ fan status, making claims to

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Of course I’m a real fan of U2. And so is anyone else who loves their music. [...]

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4 Tumbling Dice- I think length of devotion is an important qualification to being a REAL  
5 FAN [...]. Not that being a JohnnyorJillyComeLately can't *necessarily* be a REAL FAN,  
6 it's just that they'll likely be treated with some suspicion by us more longstanding and  
7 experienced REAL FANS. You see, we feel a kinship for having made the journey  
8 together through all the good times and the not-so-good times.  
9 **(forum: April 03, 2011)**

10 These fans are engaged in a online debate on what it means to be a fan of the band.  
11 Briscoteque's use of the word 'real' suggests a belief in the existence of fans who might not  
12 be genuine. This participant thus introduces the notion of social categories of fans. 'REAL  
13 FAN' in capital letters, hyphenated with the trademark symbol, seems to be a way of  
14 denoting and contrasting fans who are accepted as meeting some sort of criteria  
15 acknowledged by those in a position to know. The symbol could represent a type of fan  
16 sanctioned by the market versus a kind of fandom that emerges from organic or authentic  
17 emotions towards the band. Briscoteque's question raises the notion that interaction with  
18 other fans is necessary to come to a shared sense of what it means to be a fan.  
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21 Marsgirl starts the process of co-constructing loyalty and fandom within the exchange by  
22 enquiring if 'love' of the band's music is not sufficient to be considered a real fan, a view  
23 supported by Ayajedi. Drowning Man then evokes time as a discursive resource for  
24 constructing loyalty. Tumbling Dice picks up on this, although her opinion seems to be  
25 presented with an air of authority that is missing from the preceding comments. She expands  
26 on this position by confirming that a new or recent fan is likely to attract suspicion from older  
27 fans like herself. By so doing, she positions herself and others like her as 'REAL' fans,  
28 because they have bonded through thick and thin over the course of their 'longstanding'  
29 fandom. Tumbling Dice's comment is an example of a classic othering technique, a way of  
30 establishing difference and hierarchy (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It provides a means of  
31 dismissing others as less, in this case less worthy of trust, respect, or fan status. Time  
32 therefore operates as its own currency within this digital community, to the extent that it  
33 helps to establish the realness or authenticity of the fan. As we shall see, the currency of time  
34 cannot be accumulated simply by purchasing the band's music and merchandise. It has to be  
35 earned through time invested in the relationship with the band.  
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38 The length of time as a fan of U2 is used to position some fans as more invested than other  
39 'casual' fans, and this also affects the interactions within the online community as a whole.  
40 For example, in another extract drawn from the interviews, Diane expresses her frustrations.  
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42 I think I was the youngest member on the forum, and I kind of had the feeling, the vibe from some people  
43 that, you know, "You've just been a fan for like a year. We are bigger fans because we know them from  
44 like Redrocks, and we saw the tours", and I'm like, "Sorry I wasn't born earlier." **(Skype interview,  
45 February 27, 2016)**  
46

47 Diane feels that fans who have followed the band for much longer than her perceive  
48 themselves to be 'bigger' fans. Time is thus seen to not only be a constructive resource for  
49 the depth of loyalty, but is also used to structure relations within the community. Similar  
50 patterns are found by Widdicombe and Woofit (1990) in their study of punk subculture and in  
51 Larsson's (2013) exploration of heavy metal culture, where the time the individual member  
52 had been involved had a direct effect on their level of status and accumulated cultural capital  
53 (Bourdieu, 1986). Also, to the extent that engagement (as against purchase and the expression  
54 of preference) can be seen as a heightened expression of devotion, participants are effectively  
55 making claims about loyalty to U2.  
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4 *(b) Time and cultural capital*

5 Cultural capital also seems to relate to another way of emphasizing time as a constructive  
6 device for loyalty, where some fans claim the role of connoisseur with regards to the quality  
7 of the band's music and other issues. Daniel alludes to this in the interview quote below.  
8

9 I can say that, because I was able to witness the band in their prime, it probably adds a little more weight in  
10 how good they are now vs their prime years. The last few U2 tours, while good, are not even close to the  
11 earlier tours in terms of the band's performance. [...] Night and day difference. **(Email interview, March**  
12 **4, 2016)**  
13

14 Daniel constructs himself as having accumulated experience and cultural capital in the U2  
15 brand, and as knowledgeable enough to make such a comparison. Fans have been found to  
16 act from the position of gatekeepers as they try to argue for a preferred view of the fan object  
17 and set arbitrary standards for what constitutes their best work (Robinson and Price, 2015).  
18 The length of time fans claim to have invested in the band is a tool they use in exercising the  
19 discretionary right to curate U2's cultural output. Consumption communities can remember  
20 their pasts through "the output of a collective memory produced from the collected memories  
21 of community members" (O'Reilly et al., 2017, p186). The use of time within the U2 forum  
22 is a device to control and dictate what cultural artefacts should resonate with other fans in the  
23 construction of this collective digital memory.  
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26 Relatedly, the length of time as a fan is used to add heft to opinions expressed within the  
27 online community, especially when those opinions take a critical position against the band  
28 and their music. This appears to be done to forestall claims from other fans that the criticism  
29 is only being made because the speaker is not a 'real' fan.  
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31 **Extract 2**

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33 VegasPatrick: Here's what I hope, as a fan of the band for 25 years:  
34 If you don't really like this song at this point (which I don't), I hope you don't get castigated  
35 for expressing that opinion on this forum.  
36

37 You shouldn't have to like everything the band puts out in order to be considered a fan of the  
38 band [...] I love probably 95 percent of their catalogue, maybe more. And I've invested way  
39 more money and time into U2 than into any other entertainment outlet in my 40 years on this  
40 planet. **(forum: January 20, 2009)**  
41

42 Vegas Patrick is responding to the backlash from some fans over a critical opinion about a  
43 song that he shared on the forum. His opening gambit draws on the authenticity of his  
44 relationship with the band, showing that his criticism is not made lightly, but rather is based  
45 on the reflection and knowledge afforded him by the length of his fandom. He also indicates  
46 that his views come from a place of genuine care ('love'); and seems to be disappointed that  
47 it has been interpreted negatively by other fans. Time is therefore used to take a defensive  
48 position against further complaints. Later he explicitly notes his investment of 'money and  
49 time'. Whereas the traditional behavioral view of brand loyalty would consider monies spent  
50 on concerts and merchandise to be a sufficient indicator of loyalty, the time invested in the  
51 brand is here given equal value.  
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54 *(c) Time and socialization*

55 Fans also make use of time as part of the routine process of socialization within the online  
56 community. In the following two excerpts it is clear that time plays a role in the introductory  
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pleasantries that fans use to interact on the forum.

**Extract 3**

Bowman - Hi everyone, I registered here more than a year ago but never really took the time to actually post. [...]  
So, anyways, I am only 17 years old but I've been a U2 fan for as long as I can remember. My earliest memories of listening to music were hearing Achtung Baby and ATYCLB in the car as a young child. My dad became a fan as long ago as Boy [...]  
So, I suppose maybe I was bred to be a fan. (forum: November 28, 2015)

**Extract 4**

Jenny - I'm Jenny from Minnesota. I should have probably been on this forum a long time ago. I've been a U2 fan since 1983, when I saw them perform Sunday Bloody Sunday at the US festival on TV. After that I became pretty obsessed with them. I had a collage that covered one wall of my bedroom. (forum: January 15, 2017)

Bowman's claims that U2 have been a part of his life from his earliest childhood memories is constructed to indicate the taken-for-granted nature of his relationship with the band: he 'was bred to be a fan', thereby making claims to a sort of hereditary fandom. It can be argued that Bowman, by evoking his father, is attempting to negate an objective experience of time, in so far as his fandom has been handed down paternally (Woermann and Rokka, 2015). Similarly, Jenny applies a time logic, using the length of her fandom to tell her life story. This has two functional effects: first, she asserts her loyalty and consequently offers up justification to belong within the forum; second, time is a tool for establishing the depth of her allegiance, thereby attempting to ensure she is welcomed by this online community.

**(2) Obsession and Loyalty**

Also related to fandom is the use of obsession as a discursive resource within the U2 forum. Some fans take pride in their 'obsession' with the band and see it as a reflection of the extent of their fandom and loyalty. For other fans, however, obsession is a label to be avoided because of perceived parasocial (Horton and Wohl, 1956) underpinnings.

Fans provide evidence for their claims of obsession by drawing parallels with money spent in engaging their fandom, and stressing their collecting behaviour, and frequency of activity on the forum. One thread in particular highlights this range of perspectives.

**Extract 5**

Luieu2 - are you all obsessed like me i cant go a day without listening to u2

Sydney\_ After telling her all about my CD's, DVDs, LPs, bootlegs, books, Singles, remastered editions, T-shirts, Forum posts, concert attendances and photos, my psychotherapist reckons I'm totally obsessed. I say, I just like 'em a lot

StrongGirl - Ummm, check the number of posts I have here. That should tell you my answer

Mariamontreal - completely, totally, shamefully, shamelessly, unambiguously obsessed. For 20 years

Starfish - Obsessed within reason, if such thing is possible.

Aburrow - That's a strong word. I would say I have a very close connection with them and the music

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[...] [...]

‘abnormality’ of fan obsessions (Duffet,

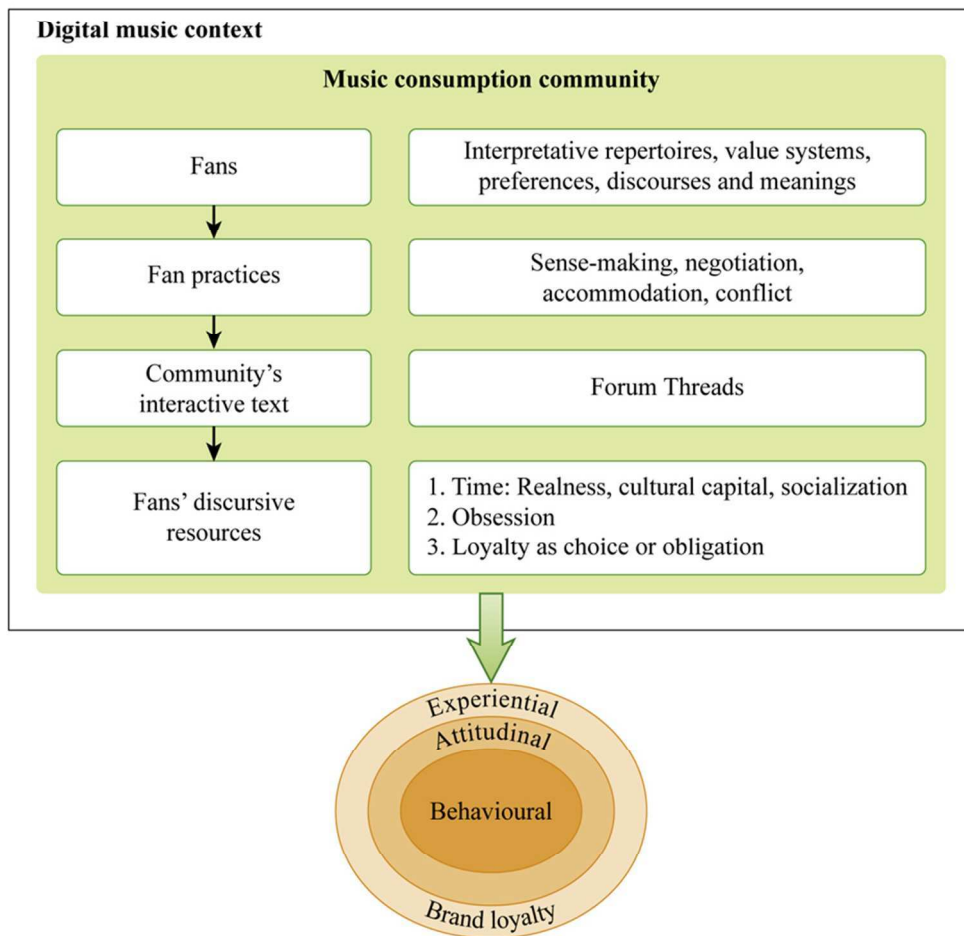
itself. Mariamontreal claims the obsessed label ‘unambiguously’. By suggesting that ‘obsessed within reason’ however,

‘big money’ her knowledge of ‘every’

to legitimate her current ‘comfortable’ relationship with the band whe ‘excitement’ ’s music

as a fluid, constantly changing relationship that goes from periods of ‘infatuation’ to periods

**EXPERIENTIAL BRAND LOYALTY IN A  
DIGITAL MUSIC CONSUMPTION COMMUNITY**



Experiential Brand Loyalty in a Digital Music Consumption Context

340x352mm (72 x 72 DPI)

eting