

180 

Culture Flash

Next-Gen
Celebrity



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What it means to be a celebrity

Some of the earliest known celebrities were politicians, performers, and athletes, which nowadays are joined by reality tv stars, influencers and even avatars.

Whether it's Plato or Charlie XCX, celebrity culture continues to grip the consciousness of the masses. And with 'influencer' becoming a key career choice for Gen Z, many, perhaps more than ever, see celebrity status as a goal to strive towards.

The aspirational quality of celebrities may not have changed much, but with social media, algorithms and AI becoming ingrained in our lives, the gatekeepers and what it means to be a celebrity are drastically changing.

Photo source: Neilson Barnard



How tech is redefining fame

Now, fame is driven by technology. And it's leveling the playing field, making the community arguably the most important stakeholder in the future of celebrity.

The more we ingrain engagement-driven algorithms in our lives, the more we're knocking celebrityhood off its pedestal, freeing the path for anyone with a smartphone to become famous and making the chronically online public the gatekeeper of who is deserving of that status. Modern fame emerges and dies in this new digital landscape, with a new breed of relatable, community-driven, ordinary and sometimes non-human next gen celebrities popping up. It's safe to say change is coming for celebrity culture—for the better and for the weirder.

Image by Olivia Rodrigo for Glossier

The shift



From

An era in which celebrities were distant figures and had protected images.

To

Next gen celebrities, created and judged by communities.

The main forces at stake

This shift is influencing the shape and behaviours of several factors on social.

01.

Stardom

Celebrities, influencers and overnight viral sensations are navigating a time where both the community and they themselves have more control.

Addison Rae has rebranded herself, turning her memefied TikTok persona to a loved pop artist.



02.

Fandoms

Fans are now hyper connected to their idols and loved brands, making them more demanding and more powerful than ever.

Rhode changed its blushes following influencer Golloria's review that justified the lack of inclusivity for dark skin people.



03.

Platforms

Digital platforms are where the fame game plays out, rewarding celebrities that are making use of their features and communities.

Substack is on the rise, influencers rooting for content with more substance and focused on messages, rather than visual content.



Gen Z's view on fame and influence

This generation views stardom in a different light, something more attainable and worthy of being challenged due to a perceived closeness that stems from social media networks and the "normalization" of fame.

Source: Nielsen's Trust in Advertising Study, 2021

57%

consider influencer roles as their desired career choice

67%

say they belong to a fandom

88%

say they find recommendations from peers more influential than traditional marketing

A timeline of celebrity culture

Celebrity culture has changed over time, most recently being impacted by technological advances and integrations, which has opened way for new definitions of who is famous and how to get there.

Shift 1:

democratization of celebrity through technology

Shift 2:

the commodification of relatability and new tech is making room for a new kind of celebrity



Traditional celebrities:

Distant, on a pedestal, exclusive



The Overnight Sensation



The People's Prince(ss)



The Niche Superstar



The Pixel Icon



The Superfan



Where we are now



Where we're going

Next Gen Celebrities

01

Type 1

The Overnight Sensation

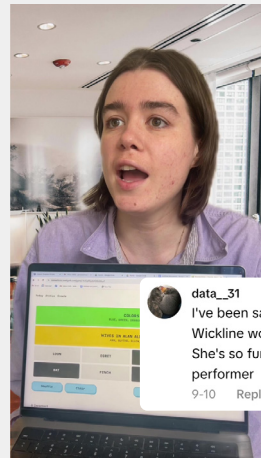
TikTok creator Jools Lebron became an overnight sensation, yet failed to trademark her catchphrase fast enough.

Not very demure: TikTok creator faces a legal battle over her own catchphrase

A man in Washington state has trademarked the phrase - but all isn't lost for Jools LeBron, legal experts say

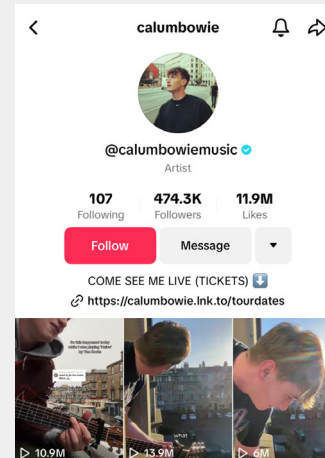


@janewickline who got her start in comedy on TikTok is the newest addition to SNL's line-up.



Algorithms shape who rises to fame, making social media a powerful cultural conductor

Calum Bowie, known for his viral TikTok posts where he sings out his window in Edinburgh, is receiving the Breakthrough Artist of the Year at the 2024 Scottish Music Awards.



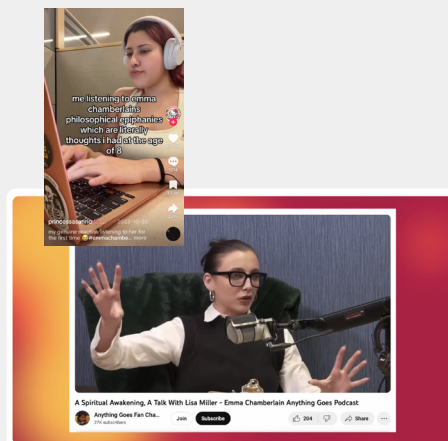
Social media is a breeding ground for talent with a much lower barrier to entry than what the entertainment industry has seen so far. And with algorithms built around engagement, going viral and becoming famous is seemingly democratized. Fame doesn't seem to have a specific sound, look or aesthetic anymore: anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection can be propelled to stardom.

Those seemingly egalitarian algorithms are a double-edged sword though, as they're also making fame much more transient. 15 minutes of fame is as true of a concept as ever, with engagement being favored over crediting original creators of a viral catchphrase, trend or dance - let alone paying them for it.

Type 2

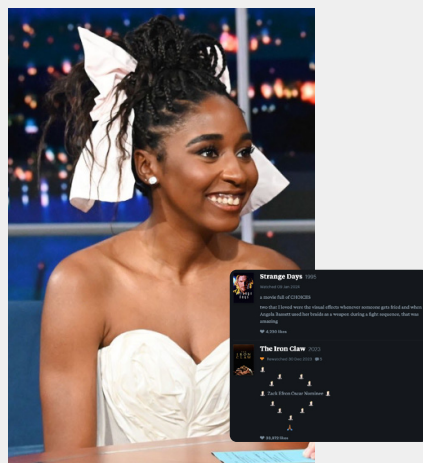
The People's Prince(ss)

Emma Chamberlain has faced criticism for allegedly being in an "echo Chamberlain." The influencer's podcast had been perceived as a feel-good listen, but a wave of users started to claim her narrative lacked understanding when touching on deeper subjects.



The Emma Chamberlain podcast controversy: when audiences start to desire more...

Ayo Edebiri is often described as a friend-like celebrity. Her Letterboxd reviews gained traction and praise due to her honesty and funny, youthful tone.



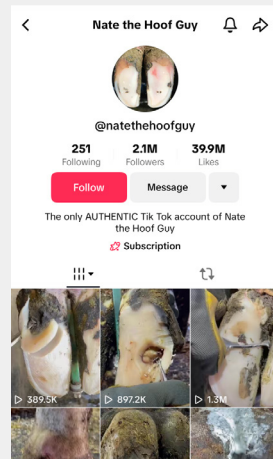
Type 3

The Micro Superstar

A duo of digital creators in LA launched clothing brand OGBFF last year, with a T-shirt that said "niche internet micro celebrity."



Nate the Hoof Guy's cow hooves trimming videos have become a daily staple for those with a "satisfactory cleaning" crave.

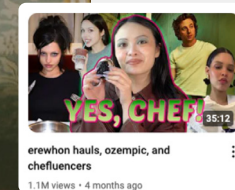


Fragmented media consumption drives niche online communities and closed-circle popularity

With Gen Z's increased participation in online niche communities (according to 2024 report The State of Community, 30% has recently joined or increased their participation in one), we see a shift in how they perceive internet-driven influence too. Online fame is fragmenting: someone can reach celebrity status in a community while being virtually unknown outside of it.

Not only are people congregating around a common interest, they're also doing it on platforms that are specific to their needs. As a result, so called one-platform influencers are often only present or popular on the channel predominantly used by their target audiences, and absent or onpopular on others.

Mina Le, with over 1.5M YouTube subscribers, has built a cult following due to her cultural and fashion related video essays.



Type 4

The Pixel Icon

South Korean agency SM Entertainment has introduced Naevis, an AI-powered K-Pop star that interacts with other groups but also has her own songs.



TikTok Symphony, the platform's creative AI Suite, allows the creation of GenAI Avatars with dubbing and translation opportunities.



Technology redefines stardom: 'parafame'—a new era where celebrity no longer needs humans or requires physical presence

From human-controlled CGI figures and digital duplications of real-life stars to the latest independent fully-virtual figures, the new frontier of fame is phygital.

Virtual influencers emerge with human-like fictional characters, such as Lil Miquela, and extend towards the digital recreation of celebrities, letting them coexist in virtual spaces, namely video games. However, we're now seeing more sophisticated models that don't require constant human interactions once designed and trained, being able to react real-time.

The Fortnite Festival keeps being a total hit, each edition with headliners from different genres such as Metallica, Billie Eilish and Karol G as the latest one.



Fortnite Festival tracks showed an average lift of 8.7% in On-Demand Audio streaming.

- Luminate Data, 2024

Type 5

The Superfan

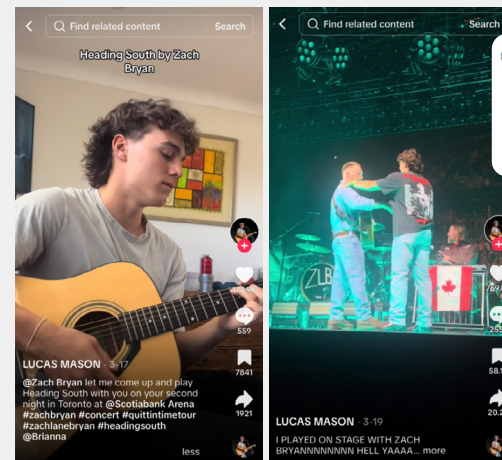
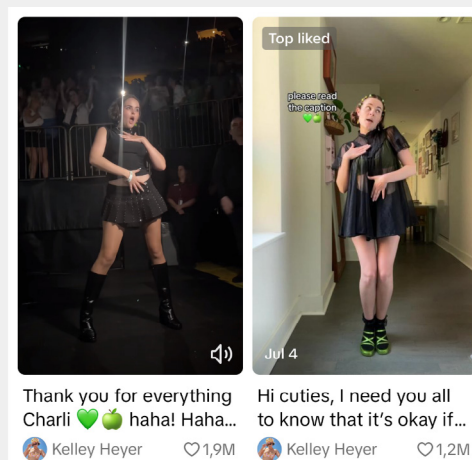
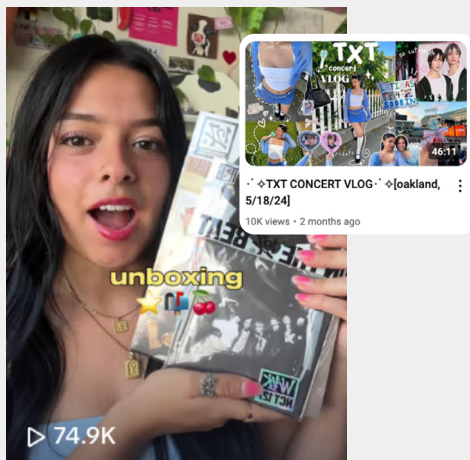
@yaimoi is a devoted NCT fan who shares her passion for the K-band on social media, becoming an iconic figure within the fan community.

Kelley Heyer creator of the viral Apple dance, was gifted tickets for Charli XCX's MSG concert and performed the song on the big screen.

Engaging, interactive superfans can evolve into semi-celebrities, gaining recognition for their devotion

Once dismissed as trivial and shallow, fans are now recognized as an essential asset in a celebrity's success. They form a community, offering a space for creativity and connection. And, most importantly, they've become somewhat of a celebrity themselves.

As some of fans become more active and visible, their popularity in the community rises and they go from being ordinary admirers to a new kind of public figure: an influential fan content creator. This "halfway celebrity" is accessible, down-to-earth, and trusted—qualities highly valued by Gen Z, who are increasingly wary of mainstream influencers and favor peer recommendations. Are superfans the new celebrities?



Cheat Sheet

02

In Short, these are the Next Gen Celebrities



The Overnight Sensation

Algorithms shape who rises to fame, making social media a powerful cultural conductor



The People's Prince(ss)

Perceived closeness on social fuels demanding fanbases and cancel culture



The Micro Superstar

Fragmented media consumption drives niche online communities and closed-circle popularity



The Pixel Icon

Technology redefines stardom: 'parafame'—a new era where celebrity no longer needs humans or requires physical presence



The Superfan

Engaging, interactive big fans of specific artists can evolve into semi-celebrities, gaining recognition for their devotion

Opportunities for Brands

Become part⁰¹ of the narrative

Engaging with celebrity fans of your product or finding clever ways to become part of the online discussion on your brand is a great way to get brand fame.

Strong community management and social listening is key in spotting these opportunities.

Keep an eye on⁰² the right platforms

Keeping an eye on the right places, where consumers are actually spending their time, is vital to determining who an audience may want to engage with.

Platforms like TikTok is where tomorrow's talent is emerging and can keep brands ahead of the curve.

Go peer⁰³ to peer

With influencer marketing increasingly seen as just another form of advertising cluttering their feeds, consider working with the most

influential people in Gen Z's lives: their peers.

Don't be afraid⁰⁴ of being niche

Mainstream fame isn't the only thing brands should strive for. With niche communities being so prevalent online, aligning

your brand with a very influential person in a niche community can be just as beneficial.

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Every day, our **180 Social** team observes and analyses online communities.

Using a blend of social listening tools and qualitative / coolhunting approaches, in order to enrich analysis for brands & organisations.

We monitor rising trends & behaviors, and identify rising KOLs / KOCs within specific tribes.

Get in touch if you want to know more about our methodologies: [180 Global](#)

Any questions or comments about this Culture Flash series?

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With love,

180 Social