

TechNews

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McCormick Tribune Campus Center  
Room 221  
3201 South State Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60616

E-mail: editor@technewsiit.com  
Website: http://www.technewsiit.com

TechNews STAFF

Editor-in-Chief	Anoop Sundararajan
Opinion Editor	Austin Gonzalez
IT Manager	Kristal Copeland
Copy Editors	Kristal Copeland Kayleigh Stevens Annie Zorn
Layout Editors	Kori Bowns Sijia Wu Xiaoyu Zhang Annie Zorn
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The many masks of the celebrity psyche

Timothy Ayodele

TECHNEWS WRITER

With the Grammys having just happened last week, it’s easy to get caught in a lot of the celebrity drama that happens before and after the fact. It’s usually all just good fun for people watching these media titans battling it out on Twitter and other social media sites, but there is a morbid truth to what seems like harmless celebrity fame grabs. The truth is that it’s all an act. Surprise, right? But before you roll your eyes, think about the last couple celebrity outbursts you’ve seen lately. If you’re thinking of Kanye West, you probably aren’t in the minority, yet what do we really know about him? Twitter would tell you he’s a glorified child who equates himself to Jesus Christ and Pablo Picasso, but does it tell you he’s a loving father, or a good husband, or an honest friend? Even besides Kanye West, try to think of any celebrity that truly posts on social media about their deep personal lives.

In a conversation I was having with a friend, he brought up the Twitter debate between Kanye and Wiz Khalifa, where Kanye West blew up over an alleged jab at his wife, and he seemed confused. My friend asked me “is any of that real? I mean it has to be an act, right?” At face value that seems to be the case, but a deeper look into Kanye and Wiz Khalifa’s social media shows more layers to their internet image. Many things that both celebs say indeed seems manufactured through a couple hardworking PR guys, but it’s hard to shake the air of authentic raw emotion that is often conveyed through celebrity social media postings. The possibility exists that the celebrity we see on social media may very well be the same person in real life, but not all of them.

The dangers of exposing your personal affairs and relationships likely causes celebrities to hide that aspect of their lives, while music corporations take what’s left of their personality and personally manufacture it for monetary benefit. Now this is just a theory, but this method does partially explain some of the trends we see today. Imagine, if the image on social media was really complete fiction, why do we have scandals? It is true many celebrity scandals end up boosting the fame of many of the celebrities involved, but what about the ones that drag celebrities’ reputation through the mud? In a world where all the personalities online are complete fiction, why would a celebrity purposefully sabotage themselves? Therefore, it validates the case that part of the celebrity you are seeing online is real, but it was the part of them designed to be seen.

Truthfully this is, in a sense, a given. Anyone who takes a couple minutes to actually examine the patterns of celebrity social media will note the obvious un-authenticity. What makes this fact important to point out is the people who don’t notice these trends, or worse yet, people who take on these online fictions and model part of their own lives after them. This is the beginning of a dangerous trend of celebrity worship. Celebrity worship—according to L. Bogart’s 1980 piece on the entertainment functions of television—is the act of following the potentially harmful, uninformed advice sometimes offered by celebrities for the purpose of fame or commercial gain. This is a common tool used by the music industry to generate wealth and fame, but also comes with side effects that damage society as a whole when left unchecked.

When people take what is essentially

an exaggeration of reality on social media and apply it to their actual lives, it creates a plethora of negative social norms that harms group image. Look at the fan bases of Kanye West or Wiz Khalifa as an example, many of their most hardcore fans can be found tirelessly defending their idols online and matching their lifestyle with their favorite celebrities to a T. Whether it’s taking on that trademark Kanye arrogance or chain smoking papers like Wiz for days on end. A culture like this begins to replace people’s sense of identity, as they associate who they are more and more with the celebrities they follow. A 2011 study on celebrity worshippers showed a significant relationship between traits such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem with celebrity worship.

It is important to remember, though celebrities are a great source of entertainment, they serve as poor replacements for the raw emotion and expression that is lost in translation when a certain fiction is enforced within a group. Oftentimes these online personas have negative effects, so one may wonder why they even persist. The simple answer is money and fame, but digging deeper a greater motive of the entertainment industry is uncovered. People are generally fickle, and will drop and appraise artists on a whim at any moment in time. Celebrity worship serves, in a weird way, as a safety net for the industry, giving them a solid and loyal consumer base to fall back on in times of need. This isn’t necessarily evil, but like anything in life, it’s important to realize what matters and prioritize the people around you rather than those you’ll probably never even have a conversation with.

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