

ACADEMIC PAPER

Individual celebration of pop music icons: A study of music fans relationships with their object of fandom and associated practices

Maud Derbaix¹  | Michaël Korchia²

¹Creative Industries Culture Expertise Center, Kedge Business School, 680 Cours de la Libération, 33405 Talence Cedex, France

²Department of Marketing, Kedge Business School, 680 Cours de la Libération, 33405 Talence Cedex, France

Correspondence

Maud Derbaix, Kedge Business School, Creative Industries Culture Expertise Center, 680 Cours de la Libération, 33405 Talence Cedex, France.
Email: maud.derbaix@kedgebs.com

Abstract

This paper seeks to identify kinds of relationships fans who celebrate their passion individually might have with their music icons and focuses on a better understanding of the content of these relationship (how these fans interact with their music icon and valuable consumption practices associated). It relies on recent works considering fandom as an intensely personal phenomenon that can occur in the absence of a group or social context. The theoretical background builds on subcultures studies, consumption practices related, and the attachment consumers can develop with celebrities or teams. Through a qualitative study with popular music fans who live their passion independently of any community or subculture, findings underline that some fans can intentionally gravitate more toward an individualized (rather than a collective) celebration of his or her object of fandom and that may result in various consumption practices. Also, this research highlights that being a fan does not necessary involve heavy celebrity worship, both terms being indeed not interchangeable, but can end up by valuable practices for both fans and their object of fandom.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Fandom is a common feature of popular culture in industrial societies. Subcultures of fans choose from the repertoire of media and entertainment industry celebrities and celebrate them in various ways (Fiske, 1992). The popular music business is a superstar industry in which artists are primarily concerned with successfully selling their image to markets and by staying connected to their fans, whereas popular music fans often engage in various relationships with their beloved artist. This research explores fans who gravitate toward an individualized—rather than collective—celebration of their pop music icon. According to Chung, Beverland, Farrelly, and Quester (2008) and more recently Seregina and Schouten (2017), fanaticism (or fandom) can be an intensely personal phenomenon that can occur in the absence of a group or social context as portrayed in much of the existing literature capturing extreme loyalty (e.g., brand communities and consumption subcultures). Focusing on one-way relationship from the fan toward the artist, this study seeks to identify kinds of relationships fans might have with their music icon and to better understand the content of this relationship. We also assume, following Jenkins

(2006), that being a fan and developing his or her passion is an active rather than a passive process: Regardless the kind of the relationship, fandom can lead to valuable engagement and consumption practices.

Music seems to be a particularly appropriate field to better understand fan and celeb relationships, because it has a wide range of experiential and social functions. Consumer researchers have paid most attention to the emotional and aesthetic motives for people to listen to music (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Lacher & Mizerski, 1994) as well as to communication and symbolic aspects of music consumption (Hargreaves & North, 1999; O'Reilly, Larsen, & Kubacki, 2013). Specifically some studies have focused on music–self–identity relationships (Hesmondhalgh, 2008; Larsen, Lawson, & Todd, 2010; Nuttall, 2009). These studies show that music enables people to construct, maintain, and communicate their identity through their individual preferences. Music is thus considered a hedonic product eliciting affective reactions and identity expressions, which can result in consumers' strong engagement with their beloved artist. Kozinets (2001) describes fans as loyal consumers who invest a lot of themselves in their consumption. They engage in a form of consumption diverging from that of ordinary consumers. For music fans, music is embedded in their daily

life in a much stronger way than for occasional consumers of music. These music fans follow their favourite band around the country, collect all the albums, memorize lyrics, study their meanings, and so on (O'Reilly et al., 2013). O'Guinn (1996) refers to the "touching greatness" phenomenon, whereby fans aim to achieve closer relations with their chosen celebrity through various consumption activities.

This article will thus argue that music fans can develop diverse personal or individual relationships with their beloved pop music icon and will seek to unravel the content of these relationships.

In order to meet this research objective, this article first presents the theoretical background built on subcultures studies, consumption practices related, and the kind and the attachment consumers can develop with celebrities or teams. A qualitative research is carried out with popular music fans who live their passion independently of any community or subculture. The main findings are then presented: Fan–music icon relationships are explained as well as fans associated market practices. The article concludes with a discussion on main findings, limitations, and future research avenues.

1.1 | Subcultures of fans

Existing literature in consumer research has focused on various fan subcultures with various contributions: internal organization of brand communities, consumption practices, and the process of collective value creation (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009); collective affective investments of science fiction aficionados (Kozinets, 1997, 2001); symbolic aspects of sport fans consumption (Derbaix & Decrop, 2011; Holt, 1995); or religious aspects of fans' consumption (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; O'Guinn, 1996). Most of these studies on fandom have addressed issues—looking for a better understanding of these subcultures and relationships among members—using an ethnographic approach and offer a significant contribution to the knowledge of fans activities, consumption, and organization. Among the most famous research in this stream is the seminal study by Kozinets (2001) about Star Trek's culture of consumption, which examines the subcultural construction of consumption meanings and practices as they are negotiated from mass media images and objects. More particularly, Kozinets (2001) provides an insightful description on how fans immersed in such a subculture can make collectively affective investments and create consumption practices to construct their identities and relate them to their social sphere or general society. Holt (1995), observing baseball fans and spectators, proposed a typology of consumption practices. Consuming is viewed as a type of social action in which people make use of consumption objects in a variety of ways. He distinguished four metaphors for consuming: (a) consuming as an experience (which views consuming as a psychological phenomenon emphasizing emotional states arising during consumption), (b) consuming as integration (which depicts how consumers acquire and manipulate an object's symbolic properties through assimilating, producing, and personalizing), (c) consuming as classification (which views consuming as a process in which objects act to classify their consumers), and (d) consuming as play (which describes how people use consumption objects to play and develops the relationship between this aspect

of consuming and the other three dimensions). Schau et al. (2009) took inspiration from Holt's works to study brand communities practices as implicit ways of understanding, saying, and doing things. These authors show that consumption practices foster consumption opportunities and create value for both consumers and marketers.

Fan studies are also a fertile ground to inform research on fandom, subcultures, and valuable consumption practices. Since the publication of influential studies in this field, particularly illustrated by Hills's (2002) work on fan cultures and Jenkins's (2006) work on convergence culture, fans are considered to be valuable prosumers who can support media products in a way that no advertisement can ever do. In the same way, Duffett (2013) argues that fans are a valuable commodity. He highlights that fans are more than consumers as some fans are networkers, collectors, tourists, archivists, curators, producers, and more. Moreover, today, thanks to the Internet, the fan does not have to join a community or attend conventions any more to know more about his or her favourite star.

Fans do not need to engage heavily in celebrity worship either. Works by Stever (2009, 2011) argue that celebrity worshipers are only a type or level of fan. These fans may exhibit both borderline-pathological interests in celebrities and intense personal interests in celebrities that can be problematic for the fan, the celebrity, and the society. However, many very committed fans, whose commitment to a celebrity could be perceived as celebrity worship, also carry on normal relationships and normal healthy and satisfying life.

Individual approaches and the attachment to the object of fascination seem thus to be relevant elements when studying fans and the construction of their identity (Sandvoss, 2005). The current research does not focus on a specific fan club or community and internal relationships among members or collective practices. Instead of that, it assumes that fandom can be intensely personal phenomenon that can occur in the absence of a group or social context. Our contribution thus lies in the identification of the different personal relationships fans may develop with pop music icons.

1.2 | Relationships between fans and their icons

Consumer researchers have investigated consumer attachment (and other closely related concepts) to celebrities in various fields and derived different typologies of fans according to the strength of this attachment. Thomson (2006) studied why consumers develop strong attachment to human brands. He namely relied on Fournier's (1998) previous research focusing on feelings of attachment and love, which lay "at the core of all strong brand relationships" and demonstrates that strong attachments are predictive of satisfied and committed relationships. Thomson identified autonomy, relatedness, and competence (viewed as fundamental human needs) as the antecedents of attachment strength and found that autonomy and relatedness were key determinants to attachment strength. However, competence was not a significant predictor. A recent research by Loroz and Braig (2015), studying the Oprah Winfrey brand and its fans, expanded this model of human brand attachment and validated brand personality appeal as an important moderating factor in the relationship between the antecedents of attachment and attachment outcomes. In another

study on the influence of sport fans personality traits on parasocial relationships (Sun & Wu, 2012) show that parasocial relationships are determined positively by materialism and negatively by self-esteem. Media psychologists (e.g., Giles, 2002) use the term "parasocial" to describe the relationships between fans and their object of fandom. More particularly, parasocial interaction is defined as "a one-way relationship to a person, most often of higher status, whom you know intimately but who hardly knows you if at all" (Stever, 2009, p. 4). These relationships are called "parasocial" (or "imagery social"; Caughey, 1984) because they exist beyond the person's social network (Giles & Maltby, 2006).

Going beyond the concept of attachment, Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) investigated the nature and consequences of brand love. In their research, positive emotional connection, enduring passion, and self-brand integration are the core elements of brand love, whereas brand loyalty, word-of-mouth, and resistance to negative information are outcomes.

Several studies have proposed fan typologies to describe types of attachment that fans have with their favourite celebrities or teams. They have used a range of terms to characterize these bonds, varying from normal, ordinary enthusiasm (Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999) to allegiance (Funk & James, 2001) or more complex and excessive devotion (Chung et al., 2008). Between these two extremes, other words often used include involvement (Thorne, 2011), loyalty (Beaven and Laws, 2007), and engagement (O'Reilly et al., 2013). A research conducted by Banister and Cocker (2014) puts forward a framework illustrating a range of consumer-celebrity relationships and identifies the role celebrities can play in consumer identity construction. More specifically, they assume that the concept of congruency can extend beyond brands and includes celebrities, and they suggest that the source of congruency informs the type of relationship sought and is a constraint to consumer identity project. Psychologists McCutcheon, Lange, and Houran (2002) suggest that celebrity worship develops because of overidentification based on psychological absorption and addiction. These authors developed the celebrity attitude scale, from which three dimensions underlying fandom have emerged from principal components analysis. These dimensions vary in terms of the interaction between fans and celebrities: (a) entertainment-social (fans are attracted to a celebrity because they find him or her entertaining and a source of social interaction and gossip), (b) intense personal (there is a strongly personal aspect to the attraction to a celebrity; a person may experience a negative event in the celebrity's life as keenly as if it were happening to him or her personally), and (c) borderline pathological (this is characterized by obsession and fantasies about the celebrity; people may imagine they have a special relationship with the celebrity). This third dimension is about the unhealthy end of the spectrum of fan behaviour discussing fandom as a pathology. Stever (2009, 2011) takes exception to the interpretation of fan interests as pathological and clearly demonstrated that the use of celebrity worshiper as synonym for fan appears to be conceptually flawed. So "fan" and "celebrity worshiper" are certainly not interchangeable (Stever, 2011, p. 1357).

It is only recently that some researchers (Wohlfeil & Whelan, 2012; Fuschillo and Cova, 2013; Seregina & Schouten, 2017) have explored the nature of fans' everyday relationships with their favourite

brand or celebrity and highlighted the bright side of fandom. As underlined here above, fandom is a multidimensional phenomenon and thus can induce not only celebration but also negative affective states such as frustration, disappointment, anger, and so on. In this research, we do not investigate this "dark side" of the relationships between fans and the object of their fandom. Our sampling procedure (see hereunder) did not select extremely obsessive fans who have the potential to do harm to both their celebrity object and themselves. These high level fans are only (Stever, 2009, p. 1) a small percentage of the people who identify themselves as dedicated fans of a celebrity.

Table 1 summarizes what we have presented so far in this paper about the fandom phenomenon.

Previous research have mainly underlined how fans celebrate collectively their passion or have emphasized the strength of the relationship between fans and their favourite celebrity or team. In our study, in addition to the identification of the kinds of relationships fans may develop with their music icon, the focus is on the content of these relationships and the associated consumption practices.

2 | METHOD

The exploratory nature of this study leads the authors to rely on a qualitative research method. This technique seems to be the most appropriate for learning more about relationships and their content. The main goal of this research was to gain insight into the relationships of fans who prioritize individual celebration with their beloved pop icon. Two of the four criteria (behavioural indicators) proposed by Stever (2011, p. 1360) were used to select our informants: attending events such as concerts and having memorabilia collections that focus on a single celebrity. This is in line with the principle of theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the idea that the researcher should go to the people who are most likely to provide relevant information. Access to these fans was gained initially through contacting a few fans who we knew to be fans prioritizing individual celebration of their pop icon. They introduced us to other fans with supposedly similar behaviour. We continued this snowballing sampling procedure until nothing really new emerged from the data. In-depth interviews were preferred to focus groups because the respondents had to express their feelings and personal thoughts regarding their beloved music icon. Fifteen semidirective in-depth interviews were thus carried out with fans of musicians or bands of various musical styles (see Table 2). They came from different regions of France and French-speaking parts of Belgium (both countries are similar, especially in terms of culture) and their ages ranged from 20 to 60. The literature suggests that individuals form their self-concept and musical preferences during late adolescence and early adulthood (Holbrook & Schindler, 1989). A majority of the informants had thus already built a mature, stable, or persistent relationship with the artist. While looking for informants, the authors tried to get in touch with fans of various artists of different streams of popular music, different ages, and different styles. The authors also extensively read fan forums, watched YouTube videos of fans, read fanzines, and so on.

A discussion guide was developed containing questions about the expressions of fan attachments to a pop icon (singer or band), the

TABLE 1 Selection of some relevant research on fandom

Area	Themes	Contribution	Authors
Subcultures			
Consumer research	Brand communities and their internal organization	Knowledge of fan activities and relationships among members Process of collective value creation	Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) Cova et al. (2007) Schau et al. (2009) Kozinets (1997, 2001)
	Affective investments of science fiction subcultures	Understanding of fans collective emotional commitment and associated consumption practices	
	Symbolic aspects of sport consumption	Understanding how consumers consume (consumption practices) and meanings given to consumption functions supporting the creation and expression of private and collective identities	Holt (1995) Derbaix and Decrop (2011)
	Religious aspects of fans' consumption	Understanding fans' consumption activities and meanings relying on the assumption that brand or celebrity worship is borrowed from religion	O'Guinn (1996) Belk and Tumbat (2005)
Fan studies	From deviant fan to prosumer fan	Highlight that fans are valuable consumers who can support media products	Hills (2002) Jenkins (2006) Duffett (2013)
Fan–icon relationships			
Consumer research	Attachment or love to (human) brands	Highlight antecedents, consequences as well as moderators related to consumers' strong attachment or love to brands or celebrities	Fournier (1998) Thomson (2006) Batra et al. (2012) Sun and Wu (2012) Loroz and Braig (2015)
	Fans typologies	Proposing fans typologies according to fans degree of attachment or devotion to their favourite brand or celebrity or team	Hunt et al. (1999) Funk and James (2001) Beavens and Laws (2007) Chung et al. (2008) O'Reilly et al. (2013) Banister and Cocker (2014)
	Nature of fans' everyday relationships	Understanding the nature of consumers' everyday fan relationships and emotional attachment to favourite brand or celebrity Highlight the bright side of fandom and fandom as a way to solve identity ambiguity	Wohlfeil and Whelan (2012) Fuschillo and Cova (2013) Seregina and Schouten (2017)
Psychology	Celebrity worship	Development of a celebrity attitude scale (CAS) with three dimensions: entertainment-social, intense personal, and borderline pathological Understanding behaviours of fans at each level and also charting how they might move from one level to another over time as they engage in relationships with celebrities	McCutcheon et al. (2002) Stever (2009, 2011)

evolution of this passion over time, and the fan's feelings and thoughts about this relationship. The interviews lasted between 30 min and 3 hr. Longest interviews were because of fans' various anecdotes and experiences with their beloved celebrity and also because they wanted to share their collection of objects (some had a full room dedicated to these items). All interviews were filmed (to capture visual items such as collections). Thus, interviews were backed by observations and films through a comprehensive approach. Our informants gave us permission to tape the interviews. These recordings were watched and listened to several times, after which the authors created a videography and then fully transcribed each interview.

Data analysis and interpretation were interactive processes closely connected with data collection. Categories and patterns emerged from a systematic comparison of the data and were permanently called into questions. Concretely, both authors began the analysis with an independent general reading and interpretation of each transcription. Back-and-forth exchanges about the theory and the content of the interviews as well as between the researchers were carried out ("multiple iterations" involved in grounded theory

approach). Having individually read and interpreted each interview the authors' insights and notes were compared until a shared understanding of the central findings emerged.

The research data presentation mode leaves room for "consumer" voices that is, quoted transcripts from fans, because these quotes are often better vehicles than researcher syntheses for conveying fans' experiences and the relationships they build with the object of their fandom. Our fans are just identified by their first name as a result of confidentiality agreements.

3 | FINDINGS

This section is structured around two main themes. First, the different kinds of relationships are developed, and specific fan practices at the individual level are emphasized. Then, the researchers look at the intersection between the individual and his or her social spheres and show how individual fan practices can occur in the social sphere and prove to be valuable practices.

TABLE 2 Sample description

Name	Gender, Age	Occupation	Fan of ...
Agnès	F, 46	Accountant	Nolwenn Leroy (French “variété” singer)
Alain	M, 40	Senior executive in the financial area	Mylène Farmer (French pop singer)
Alain	M, 60	Supervisor	Johnny Hallyday (French singer), state funeral, Paris, December 2017
Chloé	F, 21	Student	Finnstroll (Scandinavian metal-folk band)
Eric	M, 36	Accountant manager	Morrissey and the Smiths (English pop singer; band)
Fabien	M, 21	Student	Indochine (French pop band)
Laurent	M, 45	Advertising manager	Sex Pistols (seminal punk band)
Linda	F, 30	Student in medicine	Michael Jackson (pop singer)
Martial	M, 50	Skilled worker	Barón Rojo (hard rock band)
Martine and Jean-Louis	F, 52; M, 54	Employee; policeman	Claude François (hugely popular French “variété” singer, who died in a household accident in 1978)
Mickaël	M, 23	Student	Booba (French rapper)
Miguel	M, 32	Business owner	Radiohead (pop-rock band)
Nicolas	M, 34	Nurse	Mylène Farmer (French pop singer)
Romain	M, 23	Student	Jack White and the White Stripes (rock band)
Sylvain	M, 36	IT engineer	Jean-Louis Murat (French pop singer)

3.1 | Fan–icon relationships and consumption practices derived at the individual level

The data suggest first that the fan–icon relationship can arise at different moments of a fan's life, through different processes, and at different rates. First, passion can be revealed to the fan in a heartbeat because he or she hears a song, watches a video on TV, or attends a show of his or her beloved music icon. Martine (52, Claude François fan) remembered how she was affected when she heard Claude François's voice for the first time on the radio and carried away by her favourite singer. In the same way, Linda (30, Michael Jackson fan) said she was transported to another world the first time she saw the “Thriller” video. She compared the famous video clip to a kind of hyperreality in which she could immerse herself. In other cases, love for the music icon is not revealed as quickly. It can go through different phases, such as the progressive discovery of the artist and his or her universe and identification at key stages in life. Nicolas (36, Mylène Farmer fan) highlighted the ideal image he projected on his icon and the impact of the culture she represents when he “built his life.” The pop icon is considered here to be a guide for the fan, and he or she can be deeply influenced by the icon's values and convictions during sensitive periods of his or her life.

Once fans engage with their beloved artist and build a more mature, stable, persistent link with them, they form different kinds of relationships. Four kinds of relationships emerge and metaphors are used to describe the content of these relationships: The fan can consider his or her object of fandom to be a *quality manager*, a *guide*, an *intimate*, or a *god*.

First, musicians can be considered to be a *quality manager* but for which the fan feels affection and a positive emotional connection. The musicians make quality products (records, DVDs, sometimes they own a ready-to-wear brands, etc.) and provide services (concerts).

The fan enjoys these things in a “reasonable” manner: These fans love the music that their music icon make, but they refuse to consider themselves as too obsessive about them or to go beyond what they consider to be important to understand and appreciate:

They do their job, their music, but then you're not obliged to appreciate the people behind. I just want to focus on their music. (Miguel, 32, Radiohead fan)

These fans do not feel a particular bond with the artists, but they do feel a bond with the music that the artist makes.

Well, Murat has three faces, because he is the musician, the man, and the beast of the media circus. The beast of the media circus does not interest me at all; the musician, well, obviously I am interested in him; otherwise, I would not listen to him, and then the man, sure, he's married, he has kids, I am happy for him really but that's all, I do not care ... you are a fan because you like the songs, what counts are the songs and nothing else. (Sylvain, 36, Jean-Louis Murat fan)

Contrary to other fans, those who see musicians as a quality manager refuse to pay too much attention to the musicians' private lives and more generally to anything not directly related to their music, their “work of art.” Using Stever's (1991, 2009 p. 16) terms, we may speak of “task attraction”: Fans show clear attraction based on the target's talent and capabilities in his or her chosen field.

Furthermore, fans in this situation often distinguish themselves from what they consider die-hard fans, emphasizing differences between them. Miguel, who is also a Led Zeppelin fan, adds:

Some people talk about Led Zeppelin as a person, just like if the band was a famous human being. The band members disappear behind the band—it makes no sense.

Sylvain, also, tries to track down all the songs that Jean-Louis Murat has sung, even if some are very difficult to find. He also knows the lyrics of many of the songs by heart. In this sense, Murat is very important for him, in his life, but many of his friends do not know of this relationship because he does not want to annoy them with it and also because he thinks that there is much more in life than Murat. The fan who considers his or her beloved artist to be a quality manager generally has some competence in the field of music (he or she could be an artist like Sylvain) to pass judgment on the artist's work. He or she also enjoys listening to and creating new sounds or lyrics while being inspired by his or her icon's work. He or she focuses on emotions elicited by the icon's music.

Second, musicians can be considered to be *guides* (they make music the fan adores, the fan may become concerned about their private lives but is mainly interested in their public lives):

I know that he got married with a model from Yves Saint-Laurent, and I also know more about musical things ... He talked, in 2010, about a solo release ... I'm still waiting for it! But I'm also interested in his guitar solos and the effects that he uses for his guitar. I'm actually interested in everything. (Romain, 23, Jack White fan)

This kind of representation of the fan–icon relationship is characterized by a need to acquire knowledge about the celebrity (his or her music and his or her personal experiences, etc.), sometimes with the aim of better understanding his or her work of art (Schau et al., 2009):

It's a game that he's playing and that is coherent with his gangster image ... He tries to shake people up a bit, tries to focus the attention on him, tries to advertise himself ... and today Booba is trying to promote himself any way he can ... and then is it good, is it not good? That's another question ... But now, does it work, does it not work? I can assure you that it does work. (Mickaël, 23, fan of the rapper Booba)

Mickaël also told us that he identifies himself with the rapper because of his music and lyrics but also because both of them are of mixed race. Here, we have something reminiscent of “Identificatory Attachment B” (Stever, 2009, p. 16) describes as “the celebrity is like me.” This result is also coherent with celebrity congruency, which helps in identity construction, as evoked by Banister and Cocker (2014):

Because it's true that today being of mixed race is pretty complicated ... Because ... Well, both sides don't necessarily recognize you as being one of them ... It's a bit complicated, it's a life where ... And so it's complicated, so, it's true that listening to someone who's going through the same thing and who's talking about it ... And who's having that conversation, well, that can help you.

In addition to the appreciation of the pop icon and his or her work—as a dimension of the experience practice of work—here consumption practices can be related to the “consuming as integration” metaphor Holt's (1995) and more particularly through assimilation.

Indeed, the study shows that fans engaged in this kind of relationship attempt to become competent about their object of fandom: not only do they listen to their icon's music but also they read as much as possible on them. Because assimilation involves thinking, feeling, acting, and even looking like the object of fandom, the guide representation is based on fan identification with his or her pop icon.

Third, the musician can be seen as a *close friend or family member* (“filial attachment” in the words of Stever, 2009, p. 16). Fans thus feel they are part of the musician's intimate circle, often because the musician reveals a lot about his or her personal life. Fans often call their beloved artists by their first name and pretend to know them personally, are able to describe their personality, or tell private anecdotes. They also show a lot of empathy when celebrities make mistakes in their career. They refer to them in terms of a significant other, most typically as a friend, lover, or husband (O'Guinn, 1996):

I lost my father, I lost my fiancé, I lost everything ... All the men in my life I loved ... When Claude died my world collapsed ... Ah yes, it was my life, my world, I was 20, everything collapsed ... For me, I had no future, it was over, my life was finished, down the drain ... Without Claude, there was no reason to live anymore. (Martine, 52, about the French singer Claude François's sudden death in 1978)

In this second case, we have a verbatim evoking something close to “romantic attachment” or even “infantile attachment” (Stever, 2009, p. 16).

Other fans, such as Alain (60, Johnny Halliday fan), confided to us that Johnny is actually a part of his self and that he has gone through his life with him. He strengthened his fan–icon relationship with specific (or even nonconformist) reification practices such as writing letters to his favourite music icon, asking a painter to make a portrait of his icon and him side-by-side, or giving to his own children the first names of people strongly linked to his idol:

Sometimes I write to him, when there is a particular event ... When his son David was born ... My son is also called David, just like his son, there are similarities, that's not the only reason though ... And my daughter is called Sylvie [the name of Johnny Halliday's first wife], so there is a bit of a connotation there ... But sometimes I send him messages, not writing personally to tell him something but I sent messages when David was born and things like that [...] There was this painter who was actually specialized in doing portraits of Johnny and he was offering his services to do portraits. So I sent him a photo and he did a portrait of Johnny with well, with my head next to him. And I think it's well done because it looks like me and that's already pretty good. And Johnny it looks like him too. So I am pretty happy. But it's not very valuable, it has a lot of sentimental value but it is not really of any material value.

Alain imagines thus being in a special relationship with his beloved artist and wants to be like the celebrity (thus not far away from “Identificatory Attachment A” (Stever, 2009, p. 16) or “wishful

identification"; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Alain even makes very personal decisions (choosing the names of his own children) based on the choices made by his beloved music icon showing in a certain way that he wants to be like him.

Considering consumption practices, fans use more and more creative strategies to maintain their relationships with their beloved music icon: They try to attract celebrities' attention by attending concerts and sitting in the front row, sending letters and gifts, collecting personalized memorabilia, creating or customizing objects, or even organizing their holidays according to the favourite celebrity's key life stage:

We went twice to Egypt, the place where he was born ... we walked the streets of his childhood village, we met people who live in his home nowadays, we went to his nursery school ... that was intensely moving. They [local people] did not understand that people could be fans like that, to idolize someone, travel so many kilometers, spend so much money to see the place where he lived. (Jean-Louis, 54, Claude François fan)

These kinds of practices can be linked to personalizing and producing consumption practices, as suggested by Holt (1995). Hebidge (1979) found that fans often desire to involve themselves in the creation of the primary material to facilitate the imagination of being with the celebrity. Through these reification practices, some fans attempt to individualize their relationships with their objects of fandom.

Finally, some fans see the musician as a *god* (possessing an ethereal and immortal quality). It often happens when the idol or the band has a cult status such as the Smiths and their charismatic singer Morrissey:

There is something emanating from this person, something very ... very iconographical, really, pretty sacred ... This kind of mysticism which ... which really gave me a lot actually when I was younger. (Eric, 36, fan of Morrissey and of his band the Smiths)

Much has been written about consumers who consider a brand or celebrity to be a god (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Kozinets, 2001; O'Guinn, 1996). This intense relationship consumers have toward their idols elicits passion and involves specific rituals and sacred devotion:

I had an entire wall dedicated to the Sex Pistols ... I had an English flag and I had some newspaper cuttings, ads, I did drawings ... But it was very precise ... Back then, my father called it the chapel of rest ... That was exactly the right word. (Laurent, 46, still fan of the Sex Pistols)

Laurent also told us that he used to customize t-shirts with logos or pictures of the Sex Pistols and Sid Vicious. Moreover, he also mentioned that when he was younger, he spent a lot of time in front of his mirror trying to look like and imitate Sid Vicious. As for Eric, he admitted that he was more interested in the search for authentic, rare items.

3.2 | Intersection with the social sphere

As far as fan practices are concerned, it appears thus that some of them are directed more toward the fan him or herself, such as music listening, searching for information, buying objects related to the celebrity (posters, books, etc.), collecting various memorabilia, learning lyrics, singing the songs, and playing the songs on an instrument. Nevertheless, these individual manifestations of fandom are frequently not completely isolated practices and often interfere with the social sphere of the fan. Some informants explained the pleasure they get when they can share their passion with friends:

It's funny when I play Radiohead music to some people who had never heard the band before. I like it when I help people discover some less famous Radiohead songs, it's contagious: 'If you love what I love, I love you.' It's a bit egoistic, you don't share what your friend loves, you share what you love. But I don't get mad over that either, if it doesn't work, I switch to something else. (Miguel, 32, Radiohead fan)

Other informants (e.g., Martine and Jean-Louis, Claude François fans) have a room dedicated to their idol and were very happy to welcome the researchers and talk and share stories about their idol. They also frequently lend some of their items for exhibitions:

Martine (52, Claude François fan): *What interests us these days is finding new things, or acquiring clothes which are on the net, clothes that some people are getting rid of ... clothing, bottles from his cellar ... well any of a thousand objects which might have belonged to Claude, so that way by foraging around here and there, we have been able to pick up a few rare pieces...*

Jean-Louis (54, Claude François fan): *So that's all, we share it because there's a demand for it.*

As a creator, Sylvain (36, Jean-Louis Murat fan) confessed that he hoped the girl he was in love with would be impressed by his fans artefacts:

We made a whole CD with just covers of Murat actually ... A friend of mine on the guitar, me on the bass and singing ... It was pretty much really a basic concept: one day, one bottle of alcohol, one Jean-Louis Murat song ... You do it just for fun during the holidays with a friend and it's just really nice ... Yeah, I listen to it again sometimes and then I played it to some friends ... It's

fun ... And then later I also ... because I was in love with this girl, at the time, so it was also something to give to her, etc., you see? It also always has a resonance with your personal stories.

Objects of fandom here are clearly used as resources by some of the informants to relate to other people (Schau et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the data also showed that several informants do not want to share too much of their devotion with other people. For example, Alain (60, Johnny Hallyday fan) also has a room dedicated to his idol, a considerable collection of items related to him, but prefers to maintain and protect his passion:

My thing is to be alone and to listen to Johnny's music ... When the fan club asks me to lend stuff, I say no, I tell them that I do not have but I have ... I am fine with myself and with him and it's enough.

In other cases, some fans just want to avoid retreating into the "confined worlds" of fan communities:

On the 'Hard Rock 80' forum, I do some reviews, I make new friends ... There's perhaps, in my city, an association involved in hard rock, some fans of the Barón Rojo, but I don't want to confine myself, I don't want to confine myself! If a good friend of mine is into jazz, I'm fine with that, even if I don't like that style too much. Hard rock is my music, my way of life, but I don't want to spend my life with hardos [fans of hard rock], there are other things in life! (Martial, 50, Barón Rojo fan)

Thus, fan-celebrity relationships can also be privately elaborated and preserved without conspicuously exhibiting it.

4 | DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Duffett (2013) reminds us that "we lack empirical investigations that question and observe fans themselves in order to unravel and understand their practices and affective experiences." That is what we have tried to do in this study. Duffett asks also to focus on terms offering insights into how fans articulate their affective ties. In our study, most of our fans' verbatim are clearly describing affective ties.

In this article, we thus show that there are different types of fans prioritizing personal or individual relationships with their beloved pop icon, and we unravel the content of these relationships. Moreover, being a fan does not necessary involve heavy celebrity worship or strong engagement but can end up by valuable practices for both the fan him or herself through self-expression and creativity (Stever, 2011) and the object of fandom through customization and production practices. Table 3 summarizes our main findings.

We notice that respondents who are in an intimate or god-like relationship with their celebrity acknowledge that their passion can be sometimes excessive (Yeah now I think I am really a bit nuts—Agnès; *We did lots of mimicking, that was more when we were 20 ... 25, pretty bad huh?*—Eric). This behaviour possibly can produce stigmatization by friends or family (Smith, Fisher, & Cole, 2007). Indeed some behaviours can be perceived as eccentric by nonfans.

TABLE 3 Main findings summary

The pop music icon as a/an ...		Quality manager	Guide	Intimate	God
Fans focus on (beyond music)	Meaning of the lyrics	+ personal experiences and public life	+ personality and private anecdotes	+ aura and charisma	
Fans' practices (beyond listening to music or going to concerts)	Inspiring (by their icons' music) →Creation practices	Reading, learning about icon's music and life →Assimilation practices (Holt, 1995)	Reading, learning, showing empathy, sending letters and gifts, collecting memorabilia, creating or customizing objects →Production and personalization practices (Holt, 1995)	Reading, learning, collecting authentic and rare memorabilia, looking and behaving like their idols, showing gratitude, worshipping →Devotion practices	
Relationships with other fans	Making a difference between them and other fans	Not looking for interactions with other fans	Not interested in interactions with other fans but only with their pop icon	Not interested in interactions with other fans and do not consider any real interaction with their idols, their idols being "untouchable"	
Interactions with the social sphere	Very few	Few but are competent about their beloved artist in the social world and like to share their knowledge	Few, are competent about their pop icon but their fandom is preserved as a secret garden (sometimes in some rooms entirely dedicated to their celebrity). share occasionally their objects for exhibitions	Very few	

Driving 20 hr and spending a lot of money to go to a concert or having a portrait painted of oneself with one's idol seems odd to most people (Alain says that this portrait "makes people laugh") but is something normal for fans who belong to a community in which high engagement is required. Schau et al. (2009, p. 38) report that fans of TPATH "compete on the basis of knowledge and number of concerts attended." Martine says about Claude François that she absolutely wanted to meet him:

It was my project ... I really wanted to get my driver's license ... so, in 76, I got my license, I was 18 then and I wanted to go there [his office in Paris, several hundred kilometers from where she lived] and be like the other girls, wait for him, and hope for a kiss...

This behaviour was absolutely normal in her eyes, as footage and pictures of fans doing the same thing were shown on TV and in the magazines she read. Those fans often adopt a critical perspective on their current or past fan practices, but they assume their own extravagance. Over the years, some fans can change practices and fan–icon relationships can evolve. Thirty years after he listened to the Sex Pistols for the first time, Laurent now considers them to be no more than a brand. His change of view was gradual, but it can sometimes be more brutal. For example, on seeing Mylène Farmer live for the first time, Nicolas stopped worshipping her: *I had thought she was a dark, provocative singer, but I realized that she was actually more like a Disney character!*

The phenomenon of celebritization, described by Kerrigan et al. (2011, p. 1510) as "what happens when the logic of celebrity is exploited as a mode of production in the service of economic calculation and marketing ends," is more important to fans who consider the musician to be an intimate or a god: They tend to be more compulsive in their behaviour and to collect or create items related to their idol. They engage in customization, production, and devotion practices with the objective of strengthening their relationship with the artist. Only some of them embark in a collective form of the fan–idol trajectory in order to preserve their unique relationship with their idol.

4.1 | Limits and research avenues

As far as this research is concerned, it is important to acknowledge a number of limitations that deserve to be addressed in further research. This article is based on a single qualitative study of 15 face-to-face interviews. Because the researchers wanted to focus on individual practices and the meaning of the artists for the fans, they chose not to go out in the field to do an ethnological study. Moreover, by interviewing fans at home (in their home), we did not get the opportunity, as it is possible when attending concerts or gigs, to observe and record fans producing texts by dressing up, making videos, dancing, or singing songs of their beloved singer or band (on these kinds of "paratexts" see Geraghty, 2015).

We interviewed respondents of varied profiles and backgrounds, but these subjects cannot be considered representative of fans of popular music. In addition, our sampling procedure (snowballing

sampling procedure) finally led us to integrate only four women in our interviews and data. Fan identity may be still more nuanced.

There is yet room for more research, both qualitative and quantitative. More interviews could complement the findings. It would be interesting to follow some respondents over several years to study how fandom changes in terms of practices and relationships and whether (and why) some practices could be considered normal at one point, but nonnormal later. Intergenerational transmission of fandom as well as long term (enduring) and later life fandom (Harrington & Bielby, 2010; Derbaix & Derbaix, 2010) are rich research avenues to explore. Interviewing fans who have been dedicated fans of the same pop icon for at least 20 years will lead to capture the evolution of their relationships with their beloved icon and realize that some fans change relationships with their beloved icon as they age.

As far as methods are concerned, autobiographical reasoning could also have been an appropriate research method to implement, especially to realize how people revisit specific life events and if becoming a fan is really a "turning point" in the life course.

Also, netnography would be useful to understand the resulting feelings and practices after fan epiphany. Last, quantitative studies could more systematically address the relationships among the four identified relationships and practices.

It could also be relevant in future research to study the fan–icon relationship from the celebrity point of view. Indeed, because of the massive development of social networks on the Internet, relationships between consumers and fans have changed. Through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and so on, celebrities can create a more intimate, day-to-day connection with fans (Steuer, 2011). Marwick and Boyd (2011) show, for example, that celebrities use different strategies to communicate with their fans on Twitter. Some just send very factual tweets, related to their career and news. Others go much further and communicate about their private and sentimental life, a photograph of their meal, or even their new manicured fingernails. In this case, the fans who follow these artists have the feeling of being backstage with them and feel as if they share some intimacy with them. Bennett (2012) notes that the feeling of direct and personalized dialogue on a social network is a powerful way to improve fans' commitment to an artist. Baym (2010) strives to understand online fandom, communities, or personal social networks and proposes that the digital is not in opposition to the real. She adds "as relationships strengthen, more forms of communication are added" opening a research avenue linking the type of fans, the strength of their relationships with their pop icon and the variety of forms of communication they use.

All kinds of fans can be regarded as valuable consumers for a variety of reasons: They are heavy users, can act as opinion leaders, and also go to great personal and financial lengths to support the object of their fascination (Chung et al., 2008). Moreover, with the diffusion and proliferation of digital technologies and social media, fan information now can take various forms, including blogs, unofficial websites, Facebook pages, and so on. These can have great influence on the success of musical endeavors. Fans have become important partners in cultural practices, creating, reproducing, and eliminating competing discourses surrounding the production and consumption of music (O'Reilly et al., 2013).

ORCID

Maud Derbaix  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1419-1795>

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Maud Derbaix is Professor of Marketing at Kedge Business School, France, and a member of the Research Center for Creative Industries and Culture. She holds a PhD in Business Administration from the University of Namur, Belgium. Her research interests focus on consumer behaviour within the context of arts and cultural activities including music, live performances, and heritage. Her works have namely been published in *Recherche et Applications en Marketing, Psychology & Marketing*, and *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Michaël Korchia is Professor of Marketing at KEDGE Business School, France. He has published articles in several international journals and at a number of conferences. His main interests are consumer behaviour and its relationship with brands (in areas as varied as sales and music). He is an active member of the *Association Française de Marketing* board. He is also a photographer and musician.

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