

Beyhive: The World Taken by Swarm

Tijauna Hamilton, Sociology and Psychological Studies

On the 10th May 2023, *Beyoncé* kicked off her Renaissance tour which saw celebrities and even royals in attendance demonstrating how far her popularity has reached (Vanity Fair, 2023). Yet, it was not the high-profile celebrities in attendance that intrigued me about the tour, it was how her fans showcased their excitement and the endless buzz about it circling on social media. We have seen this being an occurring theme in the music industry from looking at A.R.M.Y, the Swifties and the Barbz.

We are witnessing how musicians in contemporary society are building a loyal fanbase that fosters a strong connection between the musicians and the fans. I want to delve into how fanbase culture through modern processes in society has produced this fan culture phenomenon. This critical reflection will examine this by looking at how *Beyoncé* has amassed a strong relationship with her fanbase over her career, the Beyhive.

With 319 million followers on Instagram (Instagram, 2023), *Beyoncé* has almost 4% of the world's population invested in the interaction she chooses to put up on her social media account. To garner a following of this size, there has to be something that *Beyoncé* offers that draws her audience in. *Beyoncé* is known for music which tells a message about her struggle not only as a woman but as a black

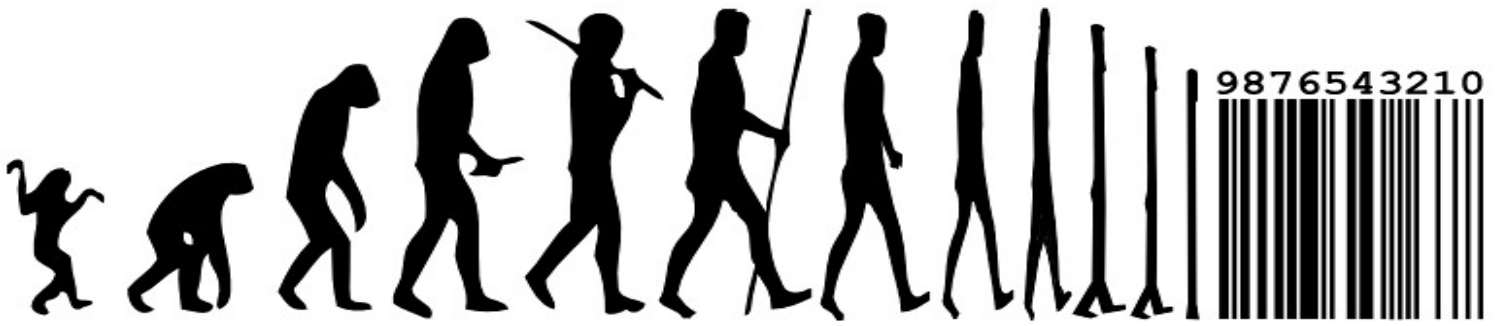
woman. Some would claim that she promotes her brand through sexual means, but she acknowledges the hypersexualisation of black women and how she wants to claim back this narrative and reform it (Weidhase, 2015).

Beyoncé has gained a brand for herself as an empowered woman who wishes to break down societal challenges for black women. Her use of femvertising, “female empowering advertising” (Åkestam et al., 2017), allows her to sell empowerment as a commodity to her fans (Windels et al., 2020). *Beyoncé* sets herself up to be an artist who defies what society stereotypes her to be and instead creates her own way of living. She sets herself up to be a role model so that her fans can be inspired. Yet, her status as a celebrity also sets her up to be a powerful figure to her fans which can be seen in how they call her Queen Bey (Petridis et



al., 2016).

Beyoncé has commodified her personal experience through her music this can be seen in her lyrics. “Mama's just tryin', I can't get no days off, I don't get no days off, Truly, I'm feelin' it, I had to say that thing twice, Tryin' to be a good wife, Still really hard, I can't lie, But I promised you I will fight, so I fight” (*Beyoncé*, 2019). Rottenberg (2014) notes how women who can balance both realms of a successful personal life and career are seen as superhuman. It makes you idolise their ability



to have it all and you are drawn into seeing the manifestation of this concept in the artist.

It is her story that she sells of being a strong woman who is up against the world but has managed to make herself a superstar despite her challenges that are being sold as empowerment. People want to feel empowered as it is an experience that they claim as leisure.

Blackshaw (2010) discusses the idea of liquid leisure and how leisure has changed over the years. With the development seen in contemporary society, we have seen leisure be rewritten from a set of traditional ideas as a result of technological development. Fans can now seek leisure through social networking and through watching their favourite celebrities on social media.

Social media itself is a form of surveillance as it allows “the many to see and contemplate the few” (Mathiesen, 1997: 219). This idea of synopticon is an idea by Mathiesen that was built on Foucault's panopticon showing a shift from the ‘many’ being the watched to becoming the watchers. Being able to observe *Beyoncé* through the use of mass media or information found on the internet shows our accessibility to information which allows people to maintain their connection with their idolised celebrity.

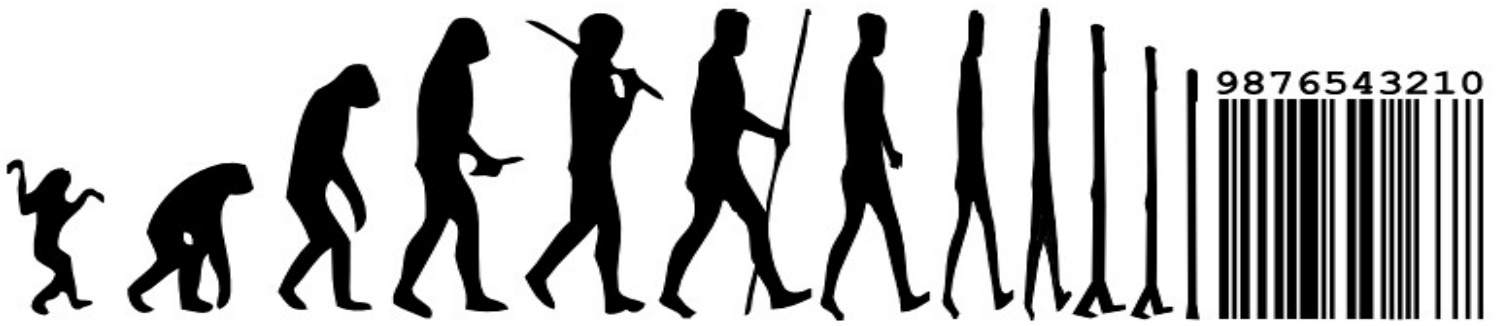
Featherstone (1990) identifies that part of the enjoyment of a commodity is “sharing the

names of goods with others”. The discourse online by the Beyhive treats any information of *Beyoncé* as a valuable good which can be discussed with individuals who like you share your interest. *Beyoncé* is known to have unexpected releases of music and to rarely conduct interviews which increases how valuable the information found is (Bereznak, 2016). The Beyhive have such high interaction online so that when the releases happen, they can discuss it with others who are like-minded. Social media has amplified surveillance in our society with the development of a quantified self. Elias and Gill (2018) examine how we represent an idea of ourselves through our online accounts. With our online accounts, we can monitor others and share this information with those who value this information just as much as you do. Those who feel that being a part of *Beyoncé's*

fandom is a part of their identity can use this online profile to find others who are also fans.

Tajfel and Turner (2004) explain how being a part of a group of individuals with similar viewpoints not only influences your attitudes and behaviours but can enhance your self-esteem. It allows for your identity as a fan to be embraced and with it comes the need to spend more time learning more about the information on *Beyoncé* online and following her music. While it might be conceived that *Beyoncé* is only as powerful as the audience she has gathered, amassing a following of





three hundred million is no easy achievement and shows just how powerful her branding is.

Arvidsson (2005) emphasises how brands are important as they sustain consumers' values, commitments and communities. They produce a shared experience which builds on their sense of community. The Beyhive joined together and developed such a strong network through their mutual values from the brand *Beyoncé* has built for herself and as a result them. Spracklen (2022) builds on the idea of why the Beyhive maintains such a strong identity in their fanbase. When our objects of passion are made into a commodity, fans are willing to buy into it as it helps them to feel more in touch with their identity.

We are seeing how the Beyhive have been drawn in by the empowerment Beyoncé has sold to them in her brand of being a strong black woman who goes against societal norms. With the accessibility they have from mass media, they can connect to build on their identity together. It is this need to build on identity that allows musicians to benefit from the merch that they put out. Their fans will buy their latest t-shirt, jumpers and even CDs as it is almost like a symbol of their membership in the fanbase. This idea that celebrities are inspiring their fans and in return are making a profit from it can be seen as an exploitive relationship. Yet, fan culture has shown us how this identity that they partake in has showcased the community

the fans have built for themselves and has given them a real sense of worth.

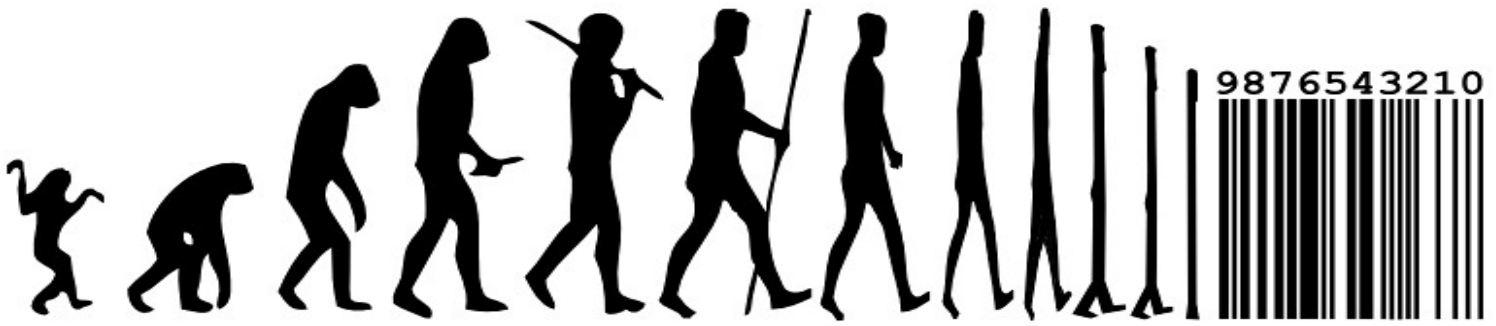
From her recent tour across Europe and the US, we can see how the Beyhive have expanded to be a fanbase across the globe. The Renaissance tour emphasized LGBTQ+ culture and presented a show which exhibited icons in the community (Haile, 2023). The majority of the Beyhive are women and gays



and so this recent tour has expanded to encompass not just her female audience but the empowerment of the queer as well (Pink Panther, 2020). By giving them a global stage for them to

perform, she is reinforcing that she recognises her fans and supports them in their freedom to express themselves in a world that does not always allow it.

In doing this, she has shown her down-to-earth nature of recognising and relating to her fans showing herself to be their supporters. With the help of social media, globalisation has taken this tour to all around the world digitally and people were able to experience scenes from the tour online. Giddens (1990) explains how globalisation demonstrates how social relations around the world are magnified and events can have an impact on places on the other side of the world. It is through globalisation that the Beyhive have been able to expand their fanbase to multiple different



countries. As a result of the access, they have to technology, which granted them insight into the happenings of the tour.

While this critical reflection has focused on the fanbase, the Beyhive, it has also shown that fanbase culture as a whole is a phenomenon which inspires a deep-rooted connection with an artist. *Beyoncé* has managed like many other big-name musicians to curate a group of people who come together through the mutual interest of a commodity which in her case is empowerment. She sells them inspiration through her music which displays her ability to make it through all the personal challenges she faces.

It is difficult to say she is doing it with whole-hearted intention as during the duration of her career she has amassed a net worth of 800 million dollars (Dellatto, 2023). Seeing the identity, inspiration and admiration built in the fans which have led them to form the fanbase, the Beyhive, it could be said that what is most important is what the fans feel they get out of the relationship. As the Beyhive are still thriving during *Beyoncé's* latest tour, it can be assumed they feel what they get out of it is a lot.

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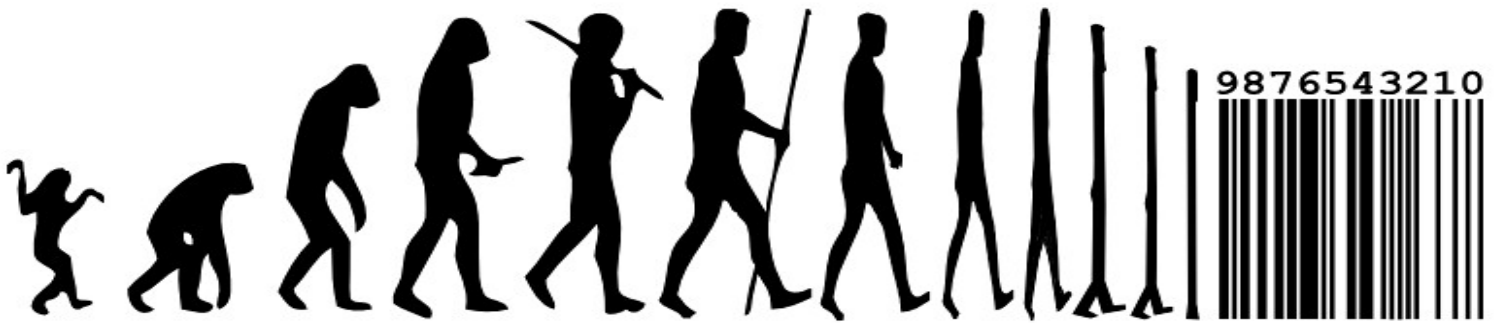
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Images:

[Beyhive Letter Print Crew Neck T-shirt, Casual Short Sleeve Summer Top, Women's Clothing \(temu.com\)](#)

[Beyoncé Fans BeyHive - Search Images \(bing.com\)](#)

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[Beyonce - I am...Yours - Rio de Janeiro | Bruno Weler | Flickr](#)