

Anti-Fandom Perceptions of Inauthenticity in a Celebrity Person-Brand

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Abstract

Brand narrative elements, such as plot events and characters, orient a consumer's understanding of the values and intentions of a person-brand. Consumers may develop expectations of a person-brand based on the brand narrative and repeated exposure. However, unmet expectations, violations of moral standards or perceived inauthenticity may drive consumers to develop negative attitudes toward a person-brand. By conducting a content analysis of an internet forum of anti-fans dedicated to a celebrity person-brand, this work examines the extent of the existence of authenticity violations (deception, ulterior motives and adulteration) within anti-fan commentary. Results indicate that perceptions of inauthenticity are related to negative off-brand behavior within plot events and characters because the narrative diverges from consumers' expectations and moral standards. Considering the extent to which consumers rely on an emotionally resonant narrative to establish trust and a connection, findings suggest there is importance in maintaining brand consistency. The absence of adherence to brand narrative expectations may influence the development of NPSRs, leading to anti-fandom engagement. This work embraces the call for further research about anti-fandom from a multidimensional perspective. It expands prior understanding of the strategic dynamic between person-brands and consumers, and suggests anti-fandom as a consequence for when a brand narrative is perceived by emotionally attached consumers as inauthentic.

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The propelling of a singer-songwriter or performance act to global stardom is not new – the BBC cites Franz Liszt as the first of what popular culture would conceptualize to be a musical celebrity (Burton-Hill, 2016). However, the likes of The Beatles and Michael Jackson may resonate more with the contemporary. Popstar Taylor Swift is also a contemporary example of a global celebrity. Her Eras Tour concert grossed over \$1 billion dollars (Mccluskey, 2024), and ignited adoration in swaths of superfans (Kingsberry, 2023). However, her increased relevance also ignited antipathy.

In less than a year since its inception, an internet forum of over 130,000 members caught steam with the goal of countering Swiftie-mania by criticizing "Taylor Swift's PR stunts, her questionable ethics, and the never-ending antics she wants fans to (literally) buy" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). This thesis examines how forum participants interpret Swift as inauthentic – a stark contrast to the current mediated narrative surrounding the popstar. While this work exemplifies consumer perceptions of inauthenticity using the brand narrative of Taylor Swift, the conversation regarding how people perceive inauthenticity is applicable to other celebrities, politicians and even private citizens. To begin, the primary field of which this thesis is oriented will be introduced: celebrity studies.

To undermine the influence of celebrity on the sociocultural landscape of the United States, would dismiss an entity that populations have looked toward for a “notion of transcendence” for centuries (Rojek, 2012). While some individuals may not be engaged in traditional denotations of religious affiliation, celebrity culture provides them with access to intimations of “elevated existence” (Rojek, 2012). The decline of organized religion in the United States is accompanied by the increase in Americans identifying as “religiously

unaffiliated” (PRRI Staff, 2023). In 2006, 20% of Americans declared religion as an important aspect in their lives. Fourteen years later, the percentage has dropped to 16% (PRRI Staff, 2023).

Rojek (2012) proposes that the rise in attention toward celebrity culture "rivals our relationship with Nature and, in Western society, now outperforms organized religion in the sheer numbers that it attracts” (p. 1). Meyers (2009) is in agreement with Rojek (2012), describing the cultural impact celebrities maintain through their relationship to consumers. Celebrity is now a vehicle by which some consumers make meaning of the world by "accepting or rejecting the social values embodied by the celebrity image" (Meyers, 2009, p. 891). The idea of consumers using celebrity as a figure for societal meaning is a symptom of the decline of western organized religion. The positioning of celebrities as "larger-than-life beings" (Rojek, 2012) has been made possible via new technological channels, industry operations and sociocultural values.

There has yet to be a time such as this, where it is possible to connect across the globe in the matter of seconds. The expansion to new media forms since the new millennium has led media producers to reconsider the role of media consumers. Web 2.0 – a term encompassing the current media landscape – summarizes the shift toward consumer participation. Social media networks afford media producers and consumers accessible channels where they can have mediated interactions, without traditional media intermediaries (Chin, 2020). Gone are the days when a consumer must send fanmail to a celebrity's management team. Social media networks like X (Twitter), Instagram and TikTok allow users to interact with each other, but most notably, with the celebrities they admire. Nearly 4 billion individuals are using a social media network (Lüders, 2022). With consideration to the sheer scale of social media usage in conjunction with the prescribed purpose of the platforms to "connect people," the sociocultural impact is undeniable (Lüders, 2022).

The things people say and do online can reflect their real-world interactions, and how they make sense of themselves and the world around them. Digital media acts as a “reality doppelgänger” (Peters, 2016, p. 105), suggesting the way people engage with each other and ideas in online settings may reveal social and political implications. Celebrity political endorsements carry weight as they may influence voter decisions (Dunn & Nisbett, 2021; Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023; Um, 2017), and consumer orientations of the sociocultural issues that matter (Meyers, 2006). As Rojek (2012) suggests, celebrities may help facilitate consumer processes of sociocultural meaning-making.

The notion of celebrities as simply vehicles of entertainment has shifted with the advancement of mediated proximity between consumers. It has become possible for consumers to receive messages directly from a celebrity's social media account. Advanced media proximity affords what some scholars describe as “imagined intimacy,” when details about the private life of the celebrity are disclosed and the boundaries between their professional persona and private persona blur (Meyers, 2009). When all information sources about a celebrity are in congruence, consumers may position the celebrity as authentic. However, the greater the perceived distance or tension between a celebrity's professional and private persona, the less consumers perceive the celebrity as authentic.

With regard to brand management, authenticity plays a large role in the longevity of brands, particularly the person-brand, which is the positioning of a person like a corporate brand (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). A celebrity might be regarded by consumers as inauthentic when they have engaged in what is perceived as morally transgressive behavior. Silver et al. (2021) present a framework with three domains of moral transgressions that influence perceived inauthenticity:

deception, ulterior motive and adulteration. These domains and their accompanied characteristics will be examined further in the literature review.

The implications of studying inauthenticity go beyond online anti-fandom and celebrity culture. Individuals perceive instances of inauthenticity when encountering and interacting with others. It is common to frame someone, and their associated behavior, as "fake." However, individuals may not be actively deliberating the ways in which they've determined someone is inauthentic. The cues may be implicit or subconscious, and are often tied to the framework developed by Silver et al. (2021). By examining how individuals interpret inauthenticity within a person-brand, this work aims to contribute to literature identifying how person-brand behavior can influence negative sentiment within consumers. By studying the domains of inauthenticity, this work offers consumers with negative sentiment toward a celebrity person-brand and those who seek to understand such consumers, a conceptual analysis of their behavior.

Ultimately, when a celebrity person-brand is positioned by individuals as inauthentic and there is a discrepancy between the expectations and perceived reality of the celebrity person-brand narrative, individuals will adopt moral reasoning strategies. Moral coupling is one reasoning strategy that can act as a gateway into anti-fandom, which is the grouping of individuals who have an intense dislike of a media object or media figure (Williams, 2019). Here, consumers ascribe poorly perceived behavior as a part of a celebrity person-brand and commiserate with others who feel the same way. Anti-fandom offers a way to cope with either a celebrity's moral violation or the perceived loss of who consumers thought a celebrity was. This work will examine these concepts further in the literature review.

To examine perceptions of celebrity inauthenticity in an anti-fandom environment, this study will analyze content from an anti-fan community dedicated to the Taylor Swift

person-brand. Using an online forum, this work will draw anti-fan rhetoric from comments to assess how participants interpret the Swift person-brand narrative as inauthentic. On a conceptual level, the findings in this work further the discussion of the implications of inauthenticity. On a practical level, the findings from this work may have the potential to inform consumers of the strategies employed by marketers that encourage brand attachment. Additionally, the findings may assist those who have felt or observed anti-fan sentiment toward another person, an understanding of such behavior to either regain agency or develop strategies to reframe how they engage with others.

This work will examine how domains of inauthenticity are related to a celebrity person-brand narrative. With regard to prior literature, this study will expand on research that emphasizes the role that authenticity plays in the new media economy (Preece, 2015) and how perceived off-brand narratives influence how consumers interpret a celebrity person-brand (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). Previous research is limited at the crossroad of anti-fandom and celebrity brand narratives. Thus, this work will adopt the Eng and Jarvis (2020) conceptualization of brand narratives to consider how anti-fans interpret specific brand narrative plot events or characters as inauthentic, contributing to a larger orientation of a person-brand as inauthentic. While there is prior literature examining perceived inauthenticity in influencer person-brands (Burgess & Jones, 2023; Mardon et al., 2023), this work will consider perceived inauthenticity in an ongoing celebrity person-brand, which to the author's knowledge has yet to be examined.

Literature Review

Authenticity is primarily examined within the field of psychology, but overlaps with the field of strategic communication in the context of person-brands. This literature review aims to contextualize the role of a person-brand in celebrity culture and how the development of brand

narratives ushers in anti-fandom due to perceived inauthenticity. In order to contextualize this study, the literature review establishes prior knowledge of relevant concepts and suggests the gaps in the literature that this work aims to fill. By providing an overview of how consumers engage with celebrity person-brand narratives, the review serves to structure the research questions and methodology that guide this work.

The first section will introduce how consumers form expectations of a celebrity person-brand via brand narratives. It will describe narrative transportation theory to explain how brand narratives evoke deep emotional connection within consumers. The second section will describe how these connections may lead to imagined intimacy and parasocial relationships. The third section will detail how consumers interpret brand narratives as authentic or inauthentic and the consequences of perceived inauthenticity. The section will connect consumer perceptions of inauthenticity with moral reasoning strategies to introduce anti-fandom. The last section will discuss existing literature surrounding the traits and intentions of anti-fandom and consumer attempts to establish distance between themselves and a celebrity person-brand. To conclude the literature review, the author will introduce the method this study employed to examine consumer perceptions of inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand.

Celebrity Person-Brand Narratives

Within marketing, particularly brand management, storytelling is a vehicle by which consumers are able to develop emotional connection to a product (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). Not only does it allow consumers to make sense of what the brand values, but it influences consumer behavior, whether that is in purchasing intentions or perception formation (Mills & John, 2021). Most brand management literature suggests how stories influence consumer behavior, rather than the construction of the story. Mills and John (2021) suggest that brand narratives are made up of

three elements: plot, characters and purpose, which allow consumers to engage with the brand in a meaningful way. The brand storytelling framework mirrors the elements of the literary story. The plot is the sequence of events that form a narrative, the character(s) are the recognizable personalities within the narrative and the purpose refers to the implicit and explicit meaning conveyed to consumers that proposes a particular outcome – or the "why" behind the narrative (Mills & John, 2021, p. 9).

Similar to a brand narrative, television series can evoke similar meaning via storytelling. Russell and Schau (2014) describe "continuous story lines" where a plot or "story arc" builds over the course of "several episodes or even an entire season" (p. 1040). In this way, consumers are engaged in a story with dynamic characters and plot points that over the course of the media object's existence, help to develop a "sense of the future, of the existence of yet unwritten events" (Russell and Schau, 2014, p. 1040). Consumers are able to fill-in-the-blank between episodes or seasons in the same way they might fill gaps between plot events or in the addition or absence of a narrative character. With available technology, consumers are even able to co-create narratives through fandom participation and fanwork like fanfiction (Jenkins, 2013).

The development of a narrative in this context is not limited to corporate brands or television series. It extends to the person-brand – also referred to as the celebrity brand or human brand (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). What makes the person-brand similar to a corporate brand is the way that "they encompass a range of products and services," and the brand operates within a system of various stakeholders and contexts (Preece, 2015, p. 623). The person-brand notably differs from traditional product or corporate brands, because "personhood is tied intrinsically to their brand identity" (Matthews & Luebke, 2023, p. 1399). Perceptions of the person-brand rely on their intrinsic or ascribed attributes (Matthews & Luebke, 2023), such as behavior or values. As a

result of the dynamic nature of personhood, intrinsic and ascribed attributes are considered unpredictable (Matthews & Luebke, 2023). Throughout this work, *celebrity person-brand* will be used to refer to an individual celebrity that operates as a branded entity. Applying person-brand as defined by Matthews and Luebke (2023) to the brand storytelling framework offered by Mills and John (2021), the person within the person-brand often serves as the main character of a brand narrative. The behavior and attributes of the main character contribute to the narrative's evolving plot. The meaning or purpose generated from the narrative can influence consumer closeness, to the extent that consumers become attached to the celebrity person-brand.

Expanding on celebrity person-brand narratives, Eng and Jarvis (2020) outline the process by which consumers become attached to the celebrity person-brand. Narrative transportation theory encompasses the way that "consumers who are immersed in a narrative world can show effects of their absorption in their actual lives" (Eng & Jarvis, 2020, p. 833), meaning that person-brand narrative can affect the emotional, behavioral and cognitive experiences of consumers (Eng & Jarvis, 2020, p. 832). Consumers use the perceived attributes and literary elements of the celebrity person-brand narrative to become immersed in the world of the celebrity. Consumer attachment legitimizes the strength of celebrity person-brands because compared to the corporate brand, brand values and narratives are communicated through immersive narratives of personhood (Preece, 2015).

Within the framework of a celebrity person-brand narrative, there are two types of personas for which new information about the celebrity person-brand is categorized: the professional persona and the personal persona (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). The professional persona involves information that is ascribed to a celebrity's performance and occupation-oriented activities, and the personal persona involves ascribed information about the celebrity's life

outside of their occupation (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). The narrative surrounding the professional persona is oriented in achievements and talent, and consumers exchange monetary resources like performance tickets with the celebrity person-brand (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). The narrative surrounding the personal persona is arguably more intimate, involving everyday behavior like hanging out with friends or grocery shopping (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). Within the above persona categories (personal and professional), consumers may assess the consistency of the narratives. First, on-brand narratives are those that align with consumer expectations and are "non-exploitative" (Eng & Jarvis, 2020, p. 840). Second, off-brand narratives are exemplified by behavior and attributes that are not consistent with consumer expectations and are perceived to be "exploitative" (Eng & Jarvis, 2020, p. 840). Off-brand narratives are more common within person-brands than other forms of brands because of the unpredictability of personhood (Matthews & Luebke, 2023, p. 1399). For both on-brand and off-brand narratives, consumers may perceive the behavior as positive or negative.

Positive on-brand narratives are behaviors that are consistent with expectations and serve as vehicles for building trust and understanding (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). An example might be a celebrity person-brand who continues to donate to charity every year. However, attentive consumers may perceive certain behavior as too positive to the point of being staged or try-hard (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). Negative on-brand narratives, despite the negative framing, may present celebrity person-brand behavior as being consistent with consumer expectations because of the celebrity person-brand's "unique identity and aura" (Eng & Jarvis, 2020, p. 840). For example, if consumers expect a celebrity to be impulsive, a negative behavior such as erratically losing one's temper in public may be perceived by consumers as negatively on-brand. Conversely, off-brand positive narratives are those that are not consistent with consumer expectations, but are positive

behaviors (Eng and Jarvis, 2020). Although the behavior has a positive impact, it doesn't match the existing celebrity's person-brand narrative creating a perceived mismatch (Eng and Jarvis, 2020). For instance, a celebrity visiting a charity may appear positively off-brand if consumers expect them to continue their existing brand of being brash. Negative off-brand narratives maintain the most consequential with consumers perceiving the behavior to not be consistent with their expectations, compounded with the behavior itself being perceived as distasteful (Eng and Jarvis, 2020). The brand narrative framework introduces how consumers respond to on-brand and off-brand narratives, creating a hierarchy of how each of the four categories influences consumer attachment levels. As identified in the literature, more research is necessary to expand the findings. The current research will adopt this framework and examine how consumers use inauthenticity domains to perceive a celebrity person-brand negatively.

Consumer Perceptions of Inauthenticity

Negative off-brand behavior is perceived by consumers as distasteful and incongruent with their expectations of the celebrity person-brand. The incongruence is also referred to as inauthenticity (Eng and Jarvis, 2020). Although published literature about authenticity lacks an agreed upon definition, Burgess and Jones (2023) define authenticity as the consistent perception of a brand as “genuine, real, coherent” in which “consumers perceive a brand to be faithful and true toward itself and its consumers” (p. 1276). In marketing, brand authenticity assists with the formation of a consumer’s sense of emotional attachment to a celebrity person-brand narrative. With regard to the converse concept of inauthenticity, consumers may perceive a celebrity person-brand as disingenuous, false and incoherent when their expectations are violated. What was assumed of the celebrity person-brand does not match the perceived reality of the celebrity person-brand, creating a cognitive mismatch (Burgess & Jones, 2023).

Moulard et al. (2015) detail how celebrity person-brand uniqueness and behavioral consistency positively influence consumer perceptions of authenticity. In the realm of celebrity, the foundation of consumer perceptions of authenticity are rarity and stability. Rarity involves the perception that a celebrity employs some degree of talent, discretion and/or originality within their personal or professional persona (Moulard et al., 2015). Stability involves the perception that a celebrity is consistent, candid and/or moral within their personal or professional persona (Moulard et al., 2015). The absence of stability and rarity would present a celebrity person-brand as inconsistent and unoriginal, respectively. The work of Moulard et al. (2015) does not account for inauthenticity, however Silver et al. (2021) fills this gap and expands on what happens when consumers do not perceive a brand as stable or rare.

Within the comprehensive framework of inauthenticity from Silver et al. (2021), there are three domains in which narrative events such as self-disclosure, can elicit consumer perceptions of inauthenticity (Silver et al., 2021). Consumers may situate their perceptions of inauthentic behavior in their moral judgment. Deception, ulterior motives and adulteration are three categories of violations that have the ability to "provoke consumer perceptions of inauthenticity," leading to consumer interpretations of a celebrity person-brand activity as morally transgressive (Silver et al., 2021, p. 73).

Deception involves information and statements that are intentionally misleading or false (Silver et al., 2021). Omission and non-disclosure, time inconsistency, information manipulation and hypocrisy are examples of how deception may show up within a celebrity person brand (Silver et al., 2021). The presence of behavioral inconsistency in a person-brand is related to the way that consumers perceive an off-brand narrative. Regardless of the moral alignment of the actual behavior, behavioral inconsistency or off-brand behavior is generally interpreted as an

offense in itself (Eng & Jarvis, 2020). However, when a celebrity person-brand is engaged in negative off-brand behavior, if there was no prior commitment to a positive behavior, the absence of commitment has less impact on consumer perceptions (Eng & Jarvis, 2020).

Ulterior motive surrounds behavior that differs from the brand's true intentions or is conducted for the "wrong reason" (Silver et al., 2021). Pandering, self-promotion and virtue signaling are ways ulterior motives can manifest. In a celebrity person-brand, there may be a discrepancy between personal intentions and their professional behavior. Similar to positive off-brand behavior, even in instances where behavior is for the greater good – or "prosocial" (Silver et al., 2021), the consumer may still perceive the reason behind the behavior as an ulterior motive. Consumer perceptions of ulterior motives depend on when the prosocial behavior is carried out, the behavior's category, whether it was unconventional or risky and if there were possible benefits to the celebrity person-brand (Silver et al., 2021). This may be exemplified in a celebrity person-brand making a donation to a charity only after they received backlash related to their lack of philanthropic engagement. When self-interest is perceived as the motive for a behavior that was expected to be carried out with communal intent, consumers are likely to engage in moral outrage (Silver et al., 2021).

Adulteration refers to the perception of unearned achievement or unnatural modification (Silver et al., 2021). Consumers may perceive the celebrity person-brand, particularly the professional performance side of the brand, as being artificially developed through technology like autotune or simply improperly achieved. Consumer perceptions of adulteration are oriented around moral judgment and a preference for the original, pure or true version of something. Another subform of adulteration is the perception that the modified form of something, for example a musical performance, no longer makes the object desirable (Silver et al., 2021). When

consumers experience intense emotional attachment to a brand narrative, there are opportunities for more intense expectation mismatches when a media object is adulterated (Burgess & Jones, 2023). Building off of prior literature examining how inauthenticity presents among those that consume television and film content (Burgess & Jones, 2023) and influencer person-brands (Duffy, 2022; Mardon et al., 2023), the current research will continue to fill in a literature gap by focusing on how consumers perceive all three domains of inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand.

When celebrity behavior is perceived as incongruent with a celebrity brand-narrative, the event has the possibility to induce cognitive dissonance within consumers. Wang and Kim (2020) suggest "When a celebrity's transgressions compromise one's moral standards, cognitive dissonance occurs" (p. 115). In order to cope with the dissonance, consumers change their attitudes and depending on the severity of the emotional connection and transgressive behavior, consumers adopt a reasoning strategy (Wang & Kim, 2020). Drawing on cognitive dissonance theory, literature suggests that in order to overcome the congruent or conflicting beliefs, consumers must make an attitude change (Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023; Wang & Kim, 2020). To make the attitude change, consumers may adopt one of three moral reasoning strategies: rationalization, moral decoupling and moral coupling (Wang & Kim, 2020).

Rationalization is the reframing of a celebrity person-brand's actions as insignificant in order to lessen the dissonance (Wang & Kim, 2020). This strategy may involve reframing their actions as mistakes. Moral decoupling refers to the separation between a celebrity person-brand's professional or personal persona (Wang & Kim, 2020). In popular culture, this strategy is commonly referred to as separating the art from the artist. Here, the behavior may be framed as a deficit in the true personal persona behind the celebrity person-brand, rather than the professional

persona. In this way, individuals may still be able to accept the professional persona, casting aside their judgment of the personal persona or vice versa. Moral coupling is the act of merging the behavior of the celebrity person-brand with the person behind the brand (Wang & Kim, 2020). Plainly, this strategy is the opposite of moral decoupling and involves the merging of the professional and personal personas. If a celebrity-person brand engages in a certain behavior in their personal life, consumers may associate the entire celebrity person-brand, including the professional persona with that behavior. Those who identify strongly with a celebrity person-brand are more likely to adopt rationalization strategies, while those with weak identification are more likely to engage in moral coupling (Wang & Kim, 2020).

As stated, when consumers perceive inauthenticity within a celebrity person-brand, they may adopt moral reasoning strategies. Prior literature expands on this understanding and suggests that in some instances, behavior perceived as being high in severity may permanently evoke distance or dislike within consumers (Wang & Kim, 2020). For example, morally transgressive behavior is generally categorized as high severity, which could prompt consumers to seek permanent distance. In the context of celebrity endorsement, Wang and Kim (2020) state, "extreme misbehaviors of a celebrity tend to be permanently remembered as his/her predominant characteristic regardless of good deeds performed by that celebrity" (p. 120). The permanence of inauthentic behavior or moral transgression may cloud consumers' ability to perceive the celebrity as anything but morally transgressive.

This applies to the sphere of celebrity political endorsements. Consumers are likely to distance themselves from media figures in the event of political disagreement (Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023). The permanent severance of a relationship, particularly an emotionally one-sided relationship, is referred to as a parasocial break-up (Eyal & Cohen,

2006). There is limited information on consumer attempts to distance themselves from celebrities, considering most literature focuses on influencers (Mardon et al. 2023), celebrities who have taken political stances (Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023) and consumer reasoning strategies when a television or film series ends (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Williams, 2019). The concept of consumer distance can be applied more broadly to celebrity-brand narratives. The current research will fill this gap by examining the way that consumers who have attempted to distance themselves from a celebrity person-brand (pursuing moral coupling strategy), perceive elements of a brand narrative as inauthentic.

This work will examine how consumers interpret narrative plot and character events as permanently representative of the celebrity person-brand, despite maintaining an emotional connection. Depending on the severity, narrative elements can influence consumer perceptions that a celebrity person-brand is wholly negative or inauthentic. Using meaning transfer theory, Wang & Kim (2020) suggest that "negative evaluations of endorsed brands and products, transferred from a tainted celebrity, depends on the severity of the committed transgression" (p. 115). Burgess and Jones (2023) are in agreement with this position, suggesting that "when consumers negatively evaluate the closure and ending of a narrative brand, this can impact the opinion of the brand as a whole" (p. 1281).

In the same way that an endorsed brand or product can be affected by celebrity misbehavior or perceived transgression, in this work, endorsed brands and products are likened to the celebrity person-brand narrative. Elements of the celebrity-person brand narrative such as plot events or the addition or absence of characters can taint the brand narrative. In this way, the person-brand is akin to the corporate brand (Preece, 2015) and negatively received narrative elements within the person-brand represent perceived transgression or misbehavior. Narrative

elements that are perceived as incongruent with consumers' personal morality or societal values, and are thereby inauthentic or morally transgressive, may influence the way that consumers interpret the totality of a celebrity person-brand. While consumer perceptions of inauthenticity highlight how consumers respond to perceived incongruities in brand behavior, it is valuable to explore how these perceptions influence broader consumer intimacy and attachment. The next section will examine how these perceptions shape consumers' imagined intimacy and attachment and subsequent interactions with the brand, further solidifying the connection between authenticity and consumer relationships.

Imagined Intimacy and Attachment

Generally, a personal brand narrative is formed with attention to relatability because it allows consumers to develop an emotional response. This response is generally oriented in empathy, which enhances the perceived closeness a consumer feels with a celebrity. The perceived closeness mirrors that of an interpersonal relationship and is often referred to as an illusion of intimacy (Meyers, 2009) or imagined intimacy (Greenwood & Long, 2011). Consumers are often preoccupied with discovering the personal persona of the celebrity, so marketers may position the personal persona as the authentic "true-self" (Moulard et al., 2023, p. 175) of the celebrity. Earlier literature in celebrity culture suggests the scope of audience preoccupation with discovering a celebrity's true self. Meyers (2009) posits that the private details of a celebrity's life "emphasize the notion of a 'real' celebrity who, in her unguarded or supposedly outside the public eye moments, is just like the average person" (p. 892). Further, imagined intimacy relies on the disclosure of personal information about the celebrity which may "resonate with the audience's own experiences" and lead to a consumer's orientation that a celebrity is like them (Meyers, 2009, p. 893).

People like, and are more likely to become attached to people who are similar to them. Kim and Song (2016) suggest the concept of self-congruity to explain how consumers perceive similarities with a celebrity, courtesy of social media interactions and celebrity self-disclosure. Russell & Schau (2014) are in agreement, as close proximity through social media interactions and celebrity self-disclosure influences impressions of intimacy. In the likes of traditional media narratives in television, consumers may have "concern for and attachment to characters" as ongoing plot and character arcs emerge (Russell & Schau, 2014). When ongoing arcs and narrative events compound, consumers develop behavior expectations and general judgments of what a narrative means. Building on how brand narratives influence imagined intimacy, Burgess and Jones (2023) draw from Newmann (2006) to describe how narrative characters "prompt emotional attachment from consumers as they follow them and watch their development and changing story lines" (p. 1275).

In the context of television, Russell & Schau (2014) suggest that parasocial relationships and the existence of an "evolving narrative" make a show more "lifelike" for audiences (p. 1040). This conceptualization can extend to human brands, as Burgess and Jones (2023) suggest. Consistent narratives that elicit emotional responses in consumers influence brand attachment (Burgess & Jones, 2023; Eng & Jarvis, 2020). The more attached or close to a brand a consumer feels, the more they may identify with the brand and incorporate it into their self-concept, which is the fuel for emotional connection between the consumer and the narrative (Burgess & Jones, 2023). Related to celebrity self-disclosure and its influence on consumer self-congruity with the celebrity person-brand, a celebrity's mediated presence influences perceived closeness (Kim & Song, 2016). Social media creates an interactive communication channel where "fans 'meet' celebrities and learn about their daily life, whether it is one-way or two-way communication.

Through this interaction, fans might feel as if those celebrities are socially present in their life" (Kim & Song, 2016, p. 571).

Greenwood & Long (2011) align with the findings of Stever (2017) in relation to how consumer attachment with media figures is oriented in rectifying unmet psychological and social needs. Stever (2017) suggests that parasocial relationships may form out of evolutionary desires to connect with those that one is regularly and repeatedly exposed to. Which, as described by Kim & Song (2016), is now primarily through social media. The tendency to experience imagined intimacy in the context of media figures involves two characteristics: "attachment anxiety" and "a high need to belong" (Greenwood & Long, 2011). The idea of celebrities as a structure of attachment and social belonging for consumers is supported by Stever (2017) who draws on attachment theory.

Some individuals who have experienced a lapse in attachment to a primary caregiver seek "relationships with people who give a sense of security and safe haven" and seek "alternative sources of support" in media figures and celebrities (Stever, 2017). The development of such attachments is related to the formation of parasocial relationships, where individuals form a one-sided relationship with a media figure. Parasocial relationships are not inherently negative, nor are they new. Contemporary understandings of parasocial relationships are derived from the rise of broadcast media in the early 20th century (Reinikainen et al., 2020). As discussed, the accessibility and interactivity of social media facilitates some individuals' perception of media figures as "idealized surrogate attachment figures" that pacify their need to belong (Greenwood & Long, 2011, p. 280; Kim & Song, 2016).

Building off of celebrity self-disclosure suggested by Kim & Song (2016) as a fixture for facilitating imagined intimacy, Mardon et al. (2023) outlines the way that imagined intimacy

interactions can be classified as either disclosive or reciprocal. Disclosive intimacies differ from reciprocal intimacies via a lack of interactivity and two-way communication. Mardon et al. (2023) state media figures engage in disclosive intimacies "by documenting and sharing their everyday lives on social media, giving 'followers the impression that they are privy to the private, usually inaccessible aspects of [their] lives'" (p. 1134). The imagined intimacy between consumers and person-brands includes symbiotic attributes. There is a two-way street of benefits that emerge out of the connection (Mardon et al., 2023). Media producers and marketers are able to leverage consumer-brand attachment strategies to encourage imagined intimacy – leading to the expansion of parasocial relationships among consumers. Those in parasocial relationships rely on opportunities to engage with a celebrity person-brand and co-create narratives that emotionally resonate with them. The active, emotional engagement from consumers offers media producers economic and cultural relevancy returns.

Further, Chung and Cho (2017) position celebrity self-disclosure in relation to social penetration theory, which surrounds the way that revealing personal information (thoughts, ideas, beliefs about oneself, others and the world) leads to perceptions of intimacy. For example, images or videos filmed in a personal narrative setting (a home), instead of a professional narrative setting (performance stage or film set) offer information that audiences may perceive as traditionally inaccessible. It is through instances of celebrity disclosure that consumer behavior can be reciprocated. Reciprocal intimacies involve an "illusion of mutual awareness whereby followers feel seen and acknowledged" (Mardon et al., 2023, p. 1135). On social media, such interactions can be in the form of a media figure directly replying to a consumer, liking their content, mutually following a consumer or reposting content created by the consumer. The existence of reciprocal intimacies within media figure-consumer relationships moves away from

traditional notions of parasociality. Consumers are no longer completely unknown – the relationship is no longer wholly one-sided (Mardon et al., 2023). To some degree, both parties are now aware of each other, although the reciprocity may not be shared equally. When a consumer feels a stronger attachment to the media figure, it's possible that a media figure may become interdependent on these attachments to preserve their professional relevance and influence on consumer behavior.

Each of these imagined intimacy attributes contribute to consumer emotional attachment to a celebrity person-brand in the same way that individuals may use disclosed information to form an idea of who a person is in an interpersonal relationship (Greenwood & Long, 2011). This work will explore the ways in which consumers perceive and respond to behavior that is interpreted as incongruent with a celebrity person-brand narrative. More specifically, it will focus on how perceived inner knowledge of a celebrity person-brand narrative is related to consumer perceptions of inauthenticity, filling a gap highlighted by prior works. As examined in Mardon et. al (2023), this research will continue to fill in gaps related to how segments of consumers engage in moral coupling within anti-fandom online communities, rather than breaking up with a celebrity person-brand for which consumers have perceived incongruence.

Anti-Fandom

The significance of fandom studies has been debated as cultural connotations associate the subculture of fans – derived from the term fanatic – as a collective of morally corrupt individuals, "crazies" and the socially immature (Jenkins, 2013). Traditional interpretations of fandom position it as "a dupe, passively blind receptor to corporate propaganda and establishment ideology and obsessive strange outcast" (Gray, 2003, p. 67). Notable scholars such

as Henry Jenkins and Jonathan Gray have reframed thought around fandom studies and influenced the legitimization of the field.

Perceptions of fandom as frivolous are related to socially constructed ideals of taste that are formed through sociocultural experiences and "rationalized" via "institutions that reward appropriate conduct and proper tastes" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 16). Culturally, bad taste is associated with unacceptable behavior and social dynamics reinforce this (Jenkins, 2013, p. 16). Classism and aesthetic taste are intertwined with traditional conceptions of fandom, and are related to power dynamics that mimic haves-and-have-nots ideology. Jenkins states, "fans lack direct access to the means of commercial cultural production and have only the most limited resources with which to influence entertainment industry's decisions. [...] Within the cultural economy, fans are peasants, not proprietors" (2013, p. 27). Jenkins (2013) considers the way that fans have become "textual poachers" in that they are able to reconfigure the meaning of text and engage in participatory culture where they are no longer passive consumers, but co-creators of media (p. 24). This correlates to the way that celebrity person-brand narratives are co-created by marketers, media outlets, celebrities themselves *and* fans (Russell & Schau, 2014).

The current work is oriented in the opposite side of fandom – anti-fandom – which has evolved in light of scholarship expanding the study of fandom dynamics. Studying anti-fandom aligns with the conceptualization of online communities as "reality doppelgängers" (Peters, 2016, p. 105). This position aligns with Gray (2003) who suggests fandom and anti-fandom studies provide insight into how fans interact with media and texts, explore the place that media has in society and continue to counter narratives of audience passivity.

The foundation of anti-fandom is the active dislike of a media object. Gray describes anti-fans as "those who strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid,

morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drive!" (2003, p. 70). Mardon et al. (2023) cites literature from Gray (2017) to discuss the dimensions of anti-fandom which include: "competitive anti-fandom, bad object anti-fandom, anti fans anti-fandom, and disappointed anti-fandom" (p. 1138). While it is possible for each of these dimensions to be present within a single anti-fan community, pertinent to this work, anti-fandom perceptions of inauthenticity will be examined through the dimensions of bad object anti-fandom and disappointed anti-fandom. The former occurs when fans have "widespread agreement" that a media object is bad (Mardon et al. 2023). The latter refers to when former fans feel "a sense of anger, disappointment, frustration, or irritation" toward a media object (Mardon et al. 2023). As Jenkins (2013) considered with fandom studies, studying anti-fandom provides valuable information into cultural understanding of media consumption values and audience expectations (Gray, 2003).

Echoing the significance of anti-fandom, anti-fan behavior and parasocial relationships are not mutually exclusive – they exist in relation to each other. Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023) discuss anti-fandom concepts and the way that they correlate with the concept of negative parasocial relationship (NPSRs), also referred to as non-amicable parasocial relationships (p. 376, 378). NPSRs are an extension of a parasocial relationship, considering "some fans are simultaneously profoundly attached to media characters and deeply disappointed in them. They generate alternative universes in fanfiction and fan video to negotiate and thus rework their relationships with media texts, adapting characters and plotlines to better meet fan expectations, especially when their appeals and demands to producers ("the powers that be") go unmet (Busse & Hellekson, 2006)" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 376). The authors reject conventional orientations of anti-fandom as being one dimensional, instead positing that "media consumers' experiences prove to be more complex than the dichotomy of either accepting

positive PSRs or opting for a parasocial breakup (PSB)" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 376).

Similar to the anti-fandom dimensions cited in Mardon et al. (2023), there are four dimensions to NPSRs outlined by Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023): pervasive NPSR, competitive NPSR, loyal NPSR and ludic/ironic NPSR.

First, a pervasive NPSR involves a consumer "who felt strong dislike for popular media and who felt it was unavoidable, invasive, and incessant" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 376). There may even be an element of social pressure when a consumer feels forced to engage with a media object they dislike, but those in their social circle have an affinity for (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 379).

A competitive NPSR involves "competition between media figures, teams, or messages" which can include parasocial jealousy toward a media object's romantic partner, rivalry between different media objects and conflict over the "symbolic meaning" of a narrative (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 379-381).

A loyal NPSR is closely related to Gray's dimension of anti-fandom – disappointed anti-fandom (Mardon et al., 2023; Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023). Here, a consumer "may feel that they cannot afford to or do not want to lose their PSR even if they find it unsatisfying" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 382).

Lastly, ludic/ironic NPSRs are oriented in entertainment or pleasure. These experiences are related to "hatewatching," where an individual engages with a media object via a "'love-to-hate' relationship" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 384-385). Other variations of this form of NPSR may involve morality and superiority. Here, consumer engagement "validates one's identity by affirming media users' superiority, values, and belief system" by expressing

"moral opposition to what the media personality represents" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 385).

Pertinent to this work, the author will draw on Gray's assessment of anti-fandom (Mardon et al., 2023) and adopt the nuanced concept of NPSRs from Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023) to examine the way that consumers, who have ludic/ironic, loyal and pervasive negative tendencies, foster anti-fandom sentiment toward a person-brand because of unmet expectations of authenticity. To describe consumers who dislike a media object or brand narrative, which in the case of this work is a celebrity person-brand, this work will moderate between the terms anti-fans and consumers. Within anti-fandom, Gray expands on the idea of moral expectation and cultural value by suggesting that "Behind dislike, after all, there are always expectations" (Gray, 2003, p. 73). Such expectations surround values "of what a text should be like, of what is a waste of media time and space, of what morality or aesthetics texts should adopt, and of what we would like to see others watch or read" (Gray, 2003, p. 73). The concept of consumer expectations corresponds with the way that frequent, repeated exposure and consumer familiarity with a brand narrative builds and reinforces consumer perceptions of what is categorically authentic (Burgess & Jones, 2023).

Attentive consumers are often privy to the elements of a narrative like plot and characters, thus they are likely to develop expectations of what is authentic. These expectations are then used to form assessments of person-brand authenticity, or the lack thereof (Burgess & Jones, 2023). If expectations are not met, attentive consumers with "intense emotional connection with the narrative brand" may hold resentment toward the brand for "disappointing them" (Burgess & Jones, 2023). They may perceive the unmet expectations as a transgression.

Inconsistent narrative elements threaten or contradict consumer interpretations of what is categorically authentic, leading to negative consumer perceptions of a person-brand.

Burgess and Jones (2023) suggest that "intense and positive emotions towards narrative brands" can become negative due to disappointment, dissatisfaction or resentment (p. 1278). Williams (2019) adds that anti-fandom sentiment can originate out of perceptions of betrayal or incongruence between reality and consumer expectations. The dislike of a media object is suggested as being just as intense as those perhaps found in positive parasocial relationships and fandom (Burgess & Jones, 2023). When consumers have yet to achieve closure with the loss of a brand narrative (Russell & Schau, 2014) or when they feel the narrative has either ended incoherently or has become inconsistent (Burgess & Jones, 2023; Williams, 2019), they may consider it a moral violation because of its perceived inauthenticity. The current work will examine how anti-fans perceive narrative events and characters as vehicles of deception, ulterior motive or adulteration using inauthenticity and authenticity frameworks by Silver et al. (2021) and Moulard et. al (2015).

To remedy intense dislike of a celebrity person-brand, in which a consumer has attached some level of familiarity, as described by Wang and Kim (2020) and Tukachinsky Forster and Downey (2023), consumers must change their attitude surrounding a media figure. Attitude change is likely to occur when a celebrity person-brand engages in behavior a consumer dislikes, whether it's morally transgressive or simply incongruent with consumer expectations. In conjunction, when a consumer has attached a sense of trust or narrative stability to a media figure, an "individual's self-narrative must be reworked in order to cope with this disruption" (Williams, 2019, p. 321). Prior literature suggests that consumers "may need to negotiate and deal with changes to an object of fandom" in relation to a narrative plot event or in the absence

or addition of a narrative character (Williams, 2019, p. 321). Not only are individuals choosing to engage in a form of moral reasoning based on the severity of the perceived incongruence, transgression or misbehavior, but they may turn to external support.

To cope with the loss of expectations because of a perceived narrative incongruence, consumers may commiserate with others who feel similarly through positive manifestations, like social sharing (Russell & Schau, 2014) or negative manifestations, like anti-fandom (Williams, 2019). For some consumers who have become unsatisfied with what they perceive to be celebrity misbehavior, engaging with others can act as a coping mechanism. They may share emotions, make sense of their expectations and perceived incongruence and create "collective memory" (Russell & Schau, 2014, p. 1043). This work considers community building in the context of anti-fandom, adopting Williams' (2019) orientation of consumers who have chosen to commiserate with others online because of perceptions of inauthenticity or narrative incongruence in a celebrity person-brand.

Those experiencing pervasive NPSRs may use anti-fandom as a way to escape "repeated unavoidable and unwanted exposure" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 379) from a media object they dislike. Particularly if the media object is attached to dominant popular culture or the individual feels social pressure to engage, they may feel the need to commiserate with others in anti-fandom to be able to express their grievances with a person-brand's perceived transgressions. Similarly, it is possible for anti-fan consumers who feel a sense of "loyalty" or "investment" toward a media object (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023) – particularly those who were longtime fans – to commiserate over the loss of a person-brand they identified with and felt familiar with.

Most prior literature focuses on the way that after the loss of a media object, individuals disassociate from it, often through parasocial break-up (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Therefore, this work adopts Russell and Schau's (2014) conceptualization of narrative ending that has roots in death studies, where "relationships continue after they have supposedly ended" (p. 1042). Relationships aren't necessarily severed when a loss occurs, instead there is a "changed bond" where individuals must "accommodate" or seek closure for what has lost (Russell & Schau, 2014, p. 1042). In this context, accommodation is described by scholars as the "process of finding closure and resolution to the ending of a narrative" (Russell & Schau, 2014, p. 1042). In the event of an attitude change brought on by the ending of a narrative or narrative inconsistency, whether or not ushered in by inauthenticity, consumers are tasked with resolving the dissonance between reality and their expectations, particularly if their identity is attached to the media object (Russell & Schau, 2014; Williams, 2019).

In instances where an individual has established self-congruity (Kim & Song, 2016) with a celebrity person-brand, they must re-establish their self-narrative and create a new meaning of who they are without the celebrity-person brand. Individuals may disregard media figure behavior that they do not like to bridge any discrepancy through decoupling, which is to separate the behavior from the celebrity person-brand (Wang & Kim, 2020). Others may rationalize or defend the behavior, maintaining their affinity toward the celebrity person-brand like the former group (Wang & Kim, 2020). Lastly, consumers might couple the behavior with the celebrity person-brand, creating the space for them to distance themselves from the celebrity person-brand. This may lead to permanently severing their affinity for the person-brand through a parasocial break-up or using anti-fandom to condemn the celebrity person-brand (Wang & Kim, 2020).

Anti-fans often interpret a media object in a way that they feel is "accurate" and therefore provide space to "react to and against it" (Gray, 2003, p. 71). Applying this concept to the current work, the author will examine how anti-fans interpret a celebrity person-brand narrative as inauthentic, therefore reacting to, and against the celebrity person-brand to reinforce the interpretation of the person-brand they believe is accurate. Individuals within the anti-fandom sphere are "variously bothered, insulted or otherwise assaulted" by the presence of fandom surrounding a media object (Gray, 2003, p. 70). In expressing their dislike, they are often consolidated into "social action groups or 'hatesites' and can be just as organized as their fan counterparts" (Gray, 2003, p. 71). The development of such groups or communities is related to the way Russell and Schau (2014) describe social sharing in the event of narrative loss. The organized groups Gray (2003) describes are commonly found online and will be the source of data collection in this work.

Anti-fandom, especially in online formats, is propagated by "snarky or outright hateful engagement" where participants position their engagement as "humorous critique" (Williams, 2019). Key attributes of anti-fandom spaces include expressions of disappointment, resentment, disgust or betrayal, often through vitriolic statements. Particularly for consumers who are looking to reconstruct their self-narrative in the event of perceived inauthenticity, they may look to "protect themselves against threats to their fan identities" by diminishing the quality of narrative elements (Williams, 2019, p. 323-324). This is particularly true for those who are engaging in disappointed anti-fandom because they are former fans (Mardon et al., 2023). To further the distance between their past expectations and what is perceived to be reality, such anti-fans may devalue media objects by "highlighting flaws in the narrative and characterization" which positions the media object as "no longer worthy of their attachment" (Williams, 2019, p.

329). The current research will examine the ways in which anti-fan rhetoric, as discussed by Grey (2003) and Williams (2019), draws on specific domains to orient consumer perceptions of inauthenticity.

Earlier discussion of a consumer's ability to fill in narrative gaps to further emotional connection extends to anti-fandom. In order to remedy the incongruence or erosion of positive perceptions of a celebrity person-brand, some anti-fan communities may work to fill gaps in the now incongruent narrative. Mardon et al. (2023) builds on the attributes of anti-fandom, by outlining the way that forensic fandom works to help consumers reconstruct and reorient their changed attitudes toward a celebrity person-brand. Forensic fandom is described as a practice where "fans adopt a detective mentality as they seek out clues and evidence to support their proposed fan theories" (Mardon et al., 2023). They may dedicate time and energy to internet "sleuthing" to form a narrative that rectifies their perceptions of inconsistency (Mardon et al., 2023). They may distort narratives as a way to reckon with the eroded narrative that is not only perceived as inconsistent, but a moral transgression. To make sense of a celebrity person-brand in a way that matches perceived inconsistencies (Mardon et al., 2023), past and ongoing narrative plot events and characters may be framed as examples of inauthenticity to support the collective anti-fan interpretation of the entire celebrity person-brand as inauthentic or morally transgressive.

This work's orientation of what happens when consumers maintain a dislike toward celebrities will fill prior literature gaps regarding NPSRs (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023), conventional understandings of parasocial breakups (Eyal & Cohen, 2006), anti-fandom (Gray, 2003; Williams, 2019) and consumer-media figure distance (Mardon et al., 2023; Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023, Wang & Kim, 2020). This work will extend prior literature by

orienting anti-fandom as a strategy of media object distance, despite consumers maintaining a level of parasocial attentiveness toward a celebrity person-brand. Prior literature considers how anti-fandom sentiment arises when fictional characters leave the television circuit in the context of the television program, *Friends* (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). However, the finding that parasocial breakups (PSB) with fictional characters in mediated environments are weaker than interpersonal breakups does not take into account the possibility of a greater PSB impact when the attachment source is a real person that, while still in a mediated environment, can interact with audiences.

Prior literature also does not consider anti-fandom as an alternative form of PSB. Most literature is limited in examining how perceived inauthenticity is a driving force of celebrity person-brand anti-fandom. While Williams (2019) goes further than Eyal and Cohen (2006) to provide an analysis for anti-fan behavior when a media object ends, the focus is still primarily on a television series. It also does not account for how consumers become anti-fans in the event of what is perceived to be an ongoing, inauthentic celebrity person-brand. Thus, this work adopts the position of Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023) who suggest there is conceptual overlap between NPSRs and anti-fandom. As mentioned, there is limited scholarship related to negative parasocial relationships, particularly in the context of anti-fandom. The current research work will expand literature surrounding the relationship between anti-fandom and NPSRs by exploring how perceptions of inauthenticity may induce such activity among consumers.

Summary and Research Questions

The current work draws on the outlined concepts of celebrity person-brand narratives, inauthenticity, imagined intimacy, NPSRs and anti-fandom to examine how anti-fan consumers interpret inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand. Using content analysis, this work examined how the three domains of inauthenticity – deception, ulterior motives and adulteration (Silver et

al., 2021) – present within the anti-fandom of a celebrity person-brand. The author analyzed online anti-fan rhetoric to assess the existence of inauthenticity segments in the context of a celebrity person-brand narrative. To explore the central concept of anti-fan perceptions of inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand narrative, the research questions were as follows:

RQ1: To what extent are domains of inauthenticity related to narrative plot events?

RQ2: To what extent are domains of inauthenticity related to narrative characters?

Methods

This work employs content analysis to examine how anti-fan consumers perceive domains of inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand. The author used two elements of the celebrity person-brand narrative – plot events and character-event groups – to examine how anti-fans perceive inauthenticity. In the following sections, a description of this work's research content and the inclusionary and exclusionary criteria for the universe of the content are provided. As it pertains to the criteria for the universe of content, the author considered factors related to plot events and character-event groups, post engagement metrics and account availability. Next, the work details how forum comments serve as the unit of analysis. Following this, the author describes the coding categories for which the units of analysis are being examined. The author does this by explaining the frameworks from Silver et al. (2021) and Moulard et al. (2015) that orient this work. To conclude, the author justifies the usage of content analysis in this study and presents ethical considerations for this work.

Content Description

This work analyzed comments in the r/travisandtaylor subreddit. Indicated by the subreddit's name, the r/travisandtaylor subreddit was established in the onset of the ongoing relationship between National Football League athlete, Travis Kelce and singer-songwriter

Taylor Swift in 2023. The subreddit's about section describes the online community as a "snark sub" that questions all things related to the Taylor Swift person-brand ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). The description states, "We're here to roast and criticize Taylor Swift's PR stunts (looking at you, Travis), her questionable ethics, and the never-ending antics she wants fans to (literally) buy" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). The positioning of the subreddit as an anti-fandom community continues via their rejection of any fan-related content. They state, "Let us be clear: fan behavior will incur bans, and harassment of our members will be reported to Reddit admins" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). The subreddit disallows content that is offensive, which is described as "overly sexual in nature, wishes harm on others, is posted solely to elicit shock responses from the user base, or serves as ragebait" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). They also prohibit content that is oriented in conventional understandings of hate or offensive speech toward protected classes or "racism, sexism, homo- and transphobia, ableism, sanism, antisemitism, xenophobia" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).

The comments this work analyzed were within individual posts made by redditors. The use of the subreddit is in accordance with methodology criteria described by Mardon et al. (2023), who selected anti-fandom communities because of their "relevance, activity, interactivity, diversity, and richness" (p. 1140). At the time of the study, the subreddit was less than one year old, as the creation date is listed as November 12, 2023. At the endpoint of data collection on October 30, 2024, there were over 130,000 subreddit members and the subreddit was within the top 2% of the largest reddit communities. In December 2024, the subreddit was ranked as the fifth most popular celebrity-oriented subreddit, meaning it had a high level of visitors and engagement compared to other celebrity-oriented subreddits. To exemplify the level of activity on the subreddit, there were 15 posts made on October 30, 2024 and 128 posts made in a one

week span from October 23 to October 30, 2024. The upvote count for posts made on the final date of data collection ranged from 50 to over 2,000 upvotes, illustrating the activity of the subreddit and the level of member engagement.

Universe of Content & Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The corpus of this study involves posts made between April 28, 2024 and October 30, 2024. As mentioned, the subreddit is less than one year old. This work used Google Search to collect data. Although posts exist from before April 28th, such results were involuntarily omitted in this research because they did not appear when conducting searches using the data collection tool. Considering the time constraints within this study's methodology process, the day most of the codebook was drafted was chosen as the endpoint for data collection. To maintain a level of practicality, it was decided that it would not be effective to incorporate new data during the data collection process.

Within the outlined timeframe, it was determined that the study would be limited to posts featuring specific post flairs. Post flairs are a tagging system that is unique to Reddit. Users can add post flairs to categorize their content within a subreddit determined theme. Site visitors have the opportunity to click on a flair to find content within a specified theme. In the r/travisandtaylor subreddit, there are numerous post flair options. After informal, non-participant observation, the author determined a set of post flairs that correspond most closely with the plot events and characters in this study. Posts without a post flair were excluded because of their uncategorized nature. Posts with the flairs *Reformed Swiftie*, *Discussion*, *Certified Cringe*, *Critique*, *Charts*, *The Ex-Files*, *Eff Taylor Swift*, *Rant*, *Question*, *News*, *Politics*, *Taylor Stiff* and *Swiftly Off-Key* are frequently related to general discussion of mostly plot events, but also characters relating to Swift's narrative person-brand (Appendix A). Posts with the flairs *The*

Ex-Files, *Tayvis* and *The Football* are primarily related to characters associated with Swift's person-brand narrative (Appendix B). Posts with the flairs *Stupid Swifties*, *Humor*, *Updates* and *S-post Sunday* were excluded because the content within these categories is user-generated in response to the Swift person-brand, related to the behavior of Swift fans or meta content related to the subreddit.

Plot Events

After informal, non-participant observation of r/travisandtaylor, the author selected the following six plot events to examine how subreddit members perceive celebrity person-brand inauthenticity: the death of a fan at an Eras Tour concert in Brazil (Eras Tour Ana), the cancellation of Eras Tour concerts in Vienna (Eras Tour Vienna), Swift's general performance at the Eras Tour (Eras Tour Performance), instances of Swift releasing music on the same day that other artists released music (Chart Blocking), Swift's attendance at The 66th Annual Grammy Awards ceremony (2024 Grammys), and Swift's perceived delayed endorsement of former Vice President Kamala Harris for the 2024 United States Presidential Election (Political Endorsement).

Within the universe of the subreddit, there were multiple posts about all six topics with more than 1,000 upvotes, illustrating high post engagement. Per a post soliciting information about what drove subreddit participants to develop a dislike of the Swift person-brand, these six events were frequently mentioned ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Each of the six events were also covered by mainstream entertainment news outlets and discussed on social media platforms outside of Reddit. Content relating to other narrative plot events and general discussion of Swift's person-brand were excluded because the author observed lower levels of member engagement, post frequency and thematic category consistency.

Narrative Characters

Expanding on the selection of six narrative plot events, two narrative characters were selected after informal, non-participant observation. To maintain research practicality and streamline the data collection process, each narrative character is associated with a specific contextual event. The first narrative character is Brittany Mahomes in the context of her support of President Donald Trump in the 2024 United States Presidential Election (Brittany Mahomes - Donald Trump). The second character is Travis Kelce in two separate contextual events – the 2024 US Open (Travis Kelce - US Open) and his paparazzi appearances with Swift (Travis Kelce - Paparazzi). Considering the subreddit's primary focus on discussing the relationship between Travis Kelce and Swift, there is a wealth of content related to Kelce. Thus, posts were limited to the above contextual events.

Within the subreddit universe, each of the two narrative characters have some degree of connection to the Swift person-brand. Per the author's informal, non-participant observation, subreddit members have disclosed how each individual has influenced the perception they have developed about the Swift person-brand ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Some posts referencing the narrative characters have as many as 1,600 upvotes, illustrating high post engagement. Similar to the narrative plot events, narrative characters have garnered coverage from mainstream entertainment news outlets and public discourse across other social media platforms. Other narrative characters within Swift's person-brand narrative were excluded because the author observed lower frequencies of post mentions, a lack of entertainment news outlet coverage and a lack of ongoing relevance to the Swift person-brand during the sampling frame timeline. Additionally, other narrative characters maintained a wealth of content that was not practical to collect within this study's research timeframe

Post Engagement

The content included in this work met the criteria of having more than 400 upvotes and less than 1,000 comments. As illustrated in Appendix A and B, posts were organized into three categories of upvotes ranging from 400 to 9,999 and five categories of comments ranging from 0 to 999. Considering the extensive amount of time it took the author to examine a post with more than 1,000 comments and the research time constraint, the author omitted posts with more than 999 comments. Posts with more than 9,999 upvotes were also omitted. Considering posts with thousands upvotes were included, to balance the scale of engagement, posts with less than 400 upvotes were coded as low engagement posts and were omitted.

In each of the 10 character-event group artifacts and 39 plot event artifacts, Swift had to be mentioned or the point of discussion. Similarly, posts that were not focused on the narrative character-event group or plot events outlined were excluded. Considering this work is focused on how anti-fans interpret inauthenticity within a celebrity person-brand, it is imperative that the posts discuss the outlined character-event groups or plot events. For instance, content about a narrative plot event like the 2024 Grammys must discuss how Swift's presence or behavior influenced perceptions of inauthenticity within the Swift person-brand. Content about other individuals or general comments about the event itself with no mention of inauthenticity were omitted. For narrative character-event groups, the same approach was taken. For instance, content about Brittany Mahomes' personal life unrelated to the Swift person-brand or her support of President Donald Trump was omitted, unless it was explicitly mentioned that it influenced anti-fan interpretations of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.

Artifacts that mention a narrative plot event or character in passing, but are not focused on the plot event outlined were also excluded. An example of such a post would be one that

speculates Swift must be jealous of another artist whose music was featured in former Vice President Kamala Harris' 2024 presidential campaign. This does not relate to an outlined plot event, despite mentioning former Vice President Kamala Harris who is a part of a plot event.

Account Availability

The last artifact criterion was that the post, nor the original poster's (OP) account, have been deleted. Posts with content that one can still read, but the OP is listed as [deleted] or u/[Deleted_Account] were omitted because the individual made their account unavailable. Similarly, posts that read "[deleted by user]" or have a red garbage can icon with the text, "Sorry, this post was deleted by the person who originally posted it" were excluded. Presumably, the OP no longer wants their content available.

Unit of Analysis

The individual unit of analysis were the comments within a subreddit post – also known as a post thread. Subreddit participants wrote comments in reference to the topic presented by the individual who made the post, also known as the OP. When referencing a comment thread, the author of the original comment may also be referred to as an OP. The process of collecting units of analysis was similar to collecting artifacts. Although comments that have been deleted do not show up, occasionally comments from accounts that have been deleted remain. Such comments were excluded. It was necessary that the comments included in data collection had a negative sentiment as this is what separates anti-fandom from fandom. Negative sentiment was determined based on the author's understanding of positivity and negativity. For example, a comment describing how much a forum participant likes Swift would be excluded from data collection because it does not align with anti-fandom's key trait of being a collective dislike toward a media object or in this case, a celebrity person-brand. For the current study, in order to

determine whether the post aligned with any of the coding categories and had negative sentiment, the author examined the words and phrases used in the post.

Coding Categories

Frameworks

The coding categories used in this work were adopted from the frameworks of Silver et al. (2021) and Moulard et al. (2015). The former study developed a framework for inauthenticity featuring three overarching principles of authenticity violations or inauthenticity: deception, ulterior motives and adulteration (Silver et al., 2021). Within the three overarching principles, there are segments that encompass the various ways the authenticity violations may present. In the current study, the existence of language related to inauthenticity segments was examined for both narrative plot events and character-event groups. The latter study suggests consumers perceive celebrities as authentic when they are perceived as stable and rare. Moulard et al. (2015) assessed that within the domain of stability, consumers perceive celebrities as consistent, candid and moral. Within the domain of rarity, consumers perceive celebrities as talented, original and discerning.

This work argues that the domains of authenticity from Moulard et al. (2015) can be inverted to align with the Silver et al. (2021) framework of inauthenticity. In the event of a perceived wrong-doing or moral transgression, the authenticity domains may shift from perceiving the celebrity as stable and rare, to inconsistent and unoriginal. The inverted authenticity domain of inconsistency, based on Moulard et al. (2015), fits within the Silver et al. (2021) domain of deception or adulteration. It is referred to in Silver et al. (2021) as the segment of behavioral inconsistency or modification, respectively. Similarly, the inverted authenticity domain of unoriginality fits within the Silver et al. (2021) domain of deception or adulteration.

More specifically, unoriginality aligns with the Silver et al. (2021) segment of plagiarism or the segment of artificial enhancement, respectively.

Deception

Deception involves "representing oneself dishonestly" (Silver et al., 2021, p. 77). This may entail providing information or acting in a way that is false. In accordance with Silver et al. (2021), segments of deception include lying, behavioral inconsistency, hypocrisy, flip-flopping, strategic non-disclosure, plagiarism and false-credit claiming.

Lying. This segment refers to perceptions that a celebrity person-brand is stating false statements that they know are false. This may also extend to pretending or acting in a way that is false while trying to convince others that such behavior is true. A comment stating, "*She may have feigned the occasional, superficial support, but when it really matters seems to be the ONLY time she can shut her mouth*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), would fit this segment. The OP believes that the Swift person-brand's support of a political ideology was false.

Behavioral Inconsistency. This segment refers to a lack of consistency in behavior. It involves the changing of behavior to the extent that it is difficult to determine a behavioral constant or a form of predictability within a celebrity person-brand's behavior. A comment stating, "*shes a terrible dancer, and her lyricism though really good in the folkmore era peaked and has now degraded into these cringeworthy lyrics [...] i feel like her performances for speak now and even red era were not bad but its really just cringe to watch right now*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), would fit this segment. The OP believes Swift's songwriting and performance ability has changed throughout her musical career.

Hypocrisy. This segment refers to the perception that a celebrity person-brand says one thing, but does the opposite. A comment stating, "*As a WOC it is especially angering to see her*

do this because she's the face of white feminism and the level of sabotage is so blatant it's triggering to me. This rhetoric is based on her real actions and is evidence of her hypocrisy. She brands herself as a feminist but it's all just self serving and self righteous behavior that actually harms other women !" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), would fit this segment. The OP believes that the Swift person-brand projects an image of feminism, but does not actually operate in accordance with feminist values.

Flip-flopping. This segment refers to perceptions of a celebrity person-brand having wavering beliefs or actions. While similar to behavioral inconsistency, flip-flopping primarily involves insecure or shallow values that can be easily changed under different circumstances. A comment stating, *"I think maybe she's flipped and wants the orange bloated freak for President now because she knows that the other option is going to force bigger tax cuts on her and other billionaires"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits under flip-flopping. The OP believes Swift may have changed with her political views because of a new financial status.

Strategic Non-disclosure. This segment refers to the perception that a celebrity person-brand has voluntarily chosen, or planned to not speak about something. A comment stating, *"I hope Taylor endorses Harris (and not with some Easter egg bull[expletive]) because the opinions of celebrities unfortunately carry a lot of weight for some people, but her silence tactic so far has definitely left me a bit salty"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits within this segment. The OP believed Swift was strategically deciding not to endorse a political candidate.

Plagiarism. This segment refers to the perception that a celebrity person-brand copied someone or something without attributing credit. A comment stating, *"she's never been innovative and experimental. she's been copying Lana since the late 2010's"* ("travisandtaylor,"

n.d.), fits within this segment. The OP believes Swift has been copying another singer-songwriter for years.

False-credit Claiming. This segment refers to perceptions of a celebrity person-brand taking the credit for something that they did not do, earn or deserve. A comment stating, "*So disappointing how Taylor gets the credit for this and the kindness of the citizens of Vienna*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), would fit this segment. The OP believes Swift and her team took credit for alternative experiences for those who had tickets to her cancelled concerts in Vienna.

Ulterior Motive

Ulterior motive surrounds behavior that is carried out "for the wrong reasons" or in a different interest than what is being portrayed (Silver et al., 2021, p. 77). In accordance with Silver et al. (2021), segments of ulterior motives include bragging, self-promotion, cheap talk, virtue signaling, pandering, prioritizing profits and naked self-interest. In this work, naked self-interest (Silver et al., 2021) is referred to as explicit self-interest.

Bragging. The segment of bragging relates to perceptions that a celebrity person-brand may say or do something solely to boast about it. For instance, a comment stating, "*idk why she started the eras tour and starting acting like she's god. she's literally touring like how artists have nightmares about and then she's trying to flex it she's so weird*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). The OP perceived that Swift is trying to brag about her concert tour, but believes that other musical artists would not envy her tour schedule.

Self-promotion. The segment of self-promotion relates to the belief that a celebrity person-brand says or does something for the purpose of promoting themselves or to further advertise themselves. For instance, a comment stating, "*Her pr team is strategizing on how to maximise the attention she can get from it as we speak*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits within this

segment. The OP perceives that the public relations team behind the Swift person-brand is actively planning to increase the promotion of Swift.

Cheap Talk. The segment of cheap talk refers to the belief that a celebrity person-brand says something for the sake of saying it, but doesn't follow-through or truly believe what they said. An example of this segment would be, *"If she actually cared, she could have used [Ana's] death to call for regulation change in the region. Shame the venue. If a major celebrity riled up the world, she could have made a real change in the safety regulations of Brazil"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Here, the OP perceives that there should have been more action from the Swift person-brand to show that she cared about the death of a fan at a concert venue.

Virtue Signaling. The segment of virtue signaling relates to perceptions that a celebrity person-brand is signaling their moral righteousness or admirable traits for the sake of positioning themselves as a good person. A comment stating, *"That's part of why this is so despicable to me, because her actions are so removed from the brand she's created. The Taylor image she's projected to her fans would never have reacted like this. They were led to believe she cared about them and they would be safe at her events :("* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits within this segment. The OP insinuates that the Swift person-brand has previously signaled that fans are cared for, but must have only done so for the sake of her brand image.

Pandering. The segment of pandering refers to the perception that a celebrity person-brand is trying to get in favor with a certain person or group of people by doing or saying things that they, personally, may not actually believe. A comment stating, *"Oh I agree, but I'm just pointing out the missed opportunity by trying to stay apolitical to appease everyone"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits within this segment. The OP believes that the Swift person-brand

missed out on being a part of a political candidate's campaign by trying to stay in good standing with everyone.

Prioritizing Profits. This segment pertains to the perception that a celebrity person-brand places a high priority on making decisions that generate money. Prioritizing profit may surround the belief that money as a benefit outweighs other factors. A comment stating, "*Her team seems like it will do whatever it takes to push Taylor in any way that will make her more money*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), would fit this segment. The OP believes that the marketers and managers affiliated with the Swift person-brand only make decisions based on the potential financial return.

Explicit Self-interest. This segment references the perception that a celebrity person-brand prioritizes decisions that benefit themselves, and it is rather obvious or clear that they do so. A comment stating, "*This really comes off quite self-serving and about her*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), fits within this segment. The OP believes that a statement published to Swift's social media account after the cancellation of concerts in Vienna reads in a way that is self-centered.

Adulteration

Adulteration refers to the perception of unearned achievement or the "creation of a product in the wrong way" (Silver et al., 2021, p. 77). In accordance with Silver et al. (2021), segments of adulteration include artificial enhancements, genetic modification, unnatural additives, mass-production, automation, outsourcing, shortcuts. While many segments of adulteration traditionally refer to a product or inanimate object, this work adopts an orientation of adulteration as being applicable to person-brands from Burgess and Jones (2023). The author chose to modify the adulteration segments from the Silver et al. (2021) framework considering

the focus of this work is on a person-brand. To discuss the perceived inauthenticity of a person-brand, the author chose to use terminology that still emphasizes the humanity of a person-brand. For this reason, unnatural additives was shortened to unnatural, and mass-production, automation and outsourcing were omitted. Genetic modification was shortened to modification, as genetic modification does not align with the concept of a person-brand. Modification is used in this work to broadly reference changes within a person-brand.

Artificial Enhancement. This segment refers to the celebrity person-brand employing unnatural elements to enhance or improve aspects of the person-brand. For instance, a comment stating, "*if she has to lip sync and barely dance to make it through a 3 hour show, maybe she's not actually that impressive??*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), qualifies as artificial enhancement. The OP perceived Swift as using artificial enhancements like backing vocals to lip sync, instead of singing live.

Modification. This segment refers to changes made within the person-brand. While similar to behavioral inconsistency, modification is not limited to behavior. Modification in this context also involves a change to something that historically has not changed more than once. Behavioral inconsistency always involves modification, because something has changed. However, modification does not always entail behavioral inconsistency because there must be multiple changes to signify inconsistency. For instance, a comment stating, "*She was better when she was a wholesome country pop singer*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Here, the OP perceives the Swift person-brand's performance persona has changed and that she is no longer a country pop singer.

Unnatural. This segment refers to perceptions of the celebrity person-brand being different from its "original or true form" (Silver et al., 2021, p. 76). For instance, a comment

stating, "*that was the most forced laugh I've ever heard*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), qualifies under the unnatural segment. The OP perceived Swift's laugh as not being a true laugh.

Shortcuts. This segment refers to perceptions that the celebrity person-brand did not take an appropriate or acceptable process to achieve something. As in, the person-brand is perceived to not have genuinely earned something (usually an award) because they did not use appropriate resources or exert an acceptable amount of effort. A comment about the Eras Tour states, "*Zero energy, singing like she's bored, barely singing at all while the track does most of the work and the constant pointing and bending over in place of dancing was making me actually cringe*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). This would fit within the shortcuts segment.

Manifest and Latent Data

The data collected examined the manifest presence of specific words and phrases in order to assess the latent variables of deception, ulterior motives and adulteration. In other words, the author collected data that indicates the existence of an inauthenticity segment by using specific words and phrases that corresponded with an inauthenticity segment. Then, the total number of indications for an inauthenticity segment assists with the formation of a latent meaning of anti-fan consumer perceptions. For all the segments within the three inauthenticity domains, a list of terms and phrases were searched within an artifact to generate comments that fit a segment. The words and phrases were decided upon based on the vocabulary of the author and thesaurus references. Comments using these phrases were excluded if they did not reference one of the six plot events or three character-event groups.

To quantitatively analyze the data, the author used a Google Sheets document to indicate the presence of language that matched a segment of inauthenticity. The number "1" indicated the presence of language related to a segment of inauthenticity. In the event that an artifact did not

feature language relevant to a segment, the column was marked with the number “0.” To assess the existence of the segments and domains, all "1" numbers were counted.

Justification of Method & Procedures

Quantitative content analysis was selected as the method of research. This was in consideration to research time constraints and the nature of the thesis. First, research time constraints and requirements made the option of a survey impractical. The thesis does not afford the opportunity to use multiple methods of research. Surveying members of the subreddit would have been outside of the author's research timeline and capacity. A survey would have presented findings about how certain narrative plot events and character-event groups influenced consumer perception of the Swift person-brand over time. It would have considered how the relationship between consumers and the person-brand has evolved as a result of perceived inauthenticity. It is possible that a survey would have also presented comprehensive qualitative findings related to anti-fan perceptions of inauthenticity, rather than the purely quantitative and observational findings used in this work.

With regard to these limitations, content analysis was the ideal method. At the time of the study's inception, it was already known that the subreddit fit within the margins of anti-fandom. The wealth of relevant data available on the forum influenced the author's decision to conduct a content analysis of an online anti-fandom. Through content analysis, it was possible to collect data related to plot events and character-event groups and thematically assess the data for cues related to the three domains of inauthenticity.

Ethical Considerations

The author considered prior literature of anti-fandom scholars to develop an ethical approach to collecting artifacts and evaluating units of analysis. Drouin (2021) discusses the

ethics of archiving fan misbehavior. In analyzing a "hall of shame" related to fan misbehavior within a fandom, Drouin (2021) considered that most of the accounts that have been archived are deactivated, abandoned or renamed, thus archiving such content poses little risk or harm to the owners of the accounts.

The author took a converse approach in this work. Content from accounts that were no longer available were intentionally omitted. This work argues that to include such content, would immortalize an account that presumably an individual no longer would like available. Jones (2016), cites Busse and Hellekson (2012) who describe how it is perceived as a fandom violation to "reveal the real-life identity of a fellow fan" (p. 289). It is this way because individuals, in both fandom and anti-fandom alike, often use pseudonyms to protect their personal and professional lives (Jones, 2016, p. 289). Considering societal conventions surrounding fandom (Jenkins, 2013) and the intensity of anti-fandom, fans may want to protect themselves from offline repercussions. With this considered, the majority of individuals on Reddit tend to assume pseudonyms and operate out of anonymity.

Building off of anonymity in fandom and anti-fandom, Jones (2016) describes how the boundaries between what is public and private have blurred in internet spaces. She states, "It is arguable that fans are aware they post publicly in posting on these sites" (Jones, 2016, p. 289). The author adopts this position considering Reddit is a public platform and one that, unlike X (formerly Twitter) or Meta platforms, does not limit the content a site visitor can see without an account. Presumably, individuals who post to a public website are aware they are posting to a public website. However, Jones (2016) cites her argument from 2014 where she states, "fans posting to fan sites are typically writing for a small audience of fellow fans, and minimal critical attention from outside sources" (p. 286). She continues, citing another scholar who argued that

while there isn't very much legal expectation of privacy in public settings, it is often unethical to violate that privacy (Jones, 2016, p. 286). This work argues the subreddit operates with an expectation that their messaging is not private, because they celebrate instances when their messaging gains traction outside of the subreddit.

When a news outlet covered the subreddit, members of the subreddit expressed gratitude that their anti-Taylor Swift sentiment was getting attention ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Similarly, a post about a YouTuber discussing the subreddit in a video garnered high engagement on the forum. One of the most upvoted comments under the post mentions that the subreddit has received free advertising as a result of the YouTuber's video, despite the YouTuber's dissent of the subreddit ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). The subreddit appears to be aware that their discourse is public, and a subset of members also express a desire that their sentiment reaches Taylor Swift and those associated with the Swift person-brand. The author concludes that unless a subreddit participant has made the decision to, or attempted to delete their account and content, members are not operating under the guise that their content is for a small audience. Particularly because there are over 130,000 members and they have already received and welcomed critical attention.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data set, the author assessed the existence of the study's variables using pivot tables for both narrative plot events and characters-event groups individually. The author analyzed how prominent the three inauthenticity domains (deception, ulterior motives and adulteration) occurred across 39 plot artifacts and 10 character-event group artifacts. For each plot event and character-event group, the author totaled the indications (1s) of relevant domain segments as plain numbers to calculate how many perceptions of inauthenticity exist. The same

process was completed to calculate how many perceptions of inauthenticity exist across overall plot event and character-event group data sets.

Results

This work sought to examine how anti-fan consumers perceive inauthenticity in a celebrity person-brand narrative. The author utilized content analysis to assess the relationship between elements of a person-brand narrative, plot and characters, and anti-fan perceptions of inauthenticity. The results presented to measure the existence of inauthenticity domains in comments from anti-fan consumers related to six plot events and three character-event groups. The author used pivot tables to assess the extent of the existence of each segment within a domain, however only the most prevalent segments across all plot events character-event groups are included. The following sections will provide the percentages and raw counts of the existence of inauthenticity domains and relevant segments for overall plot event data and each of the six plot events to answer RQ1. In a similar manner, the subsequent sections will provide the percentages and raw counts of the existence of inauthenticity domains and relevant segments for overall character-event group data and each three character-event groups to answer RQ2.

In this work, an indication refers to the existence of a word associated with an authenticity segment from Appendix A appearing in a comment (unit of analysis) within one of the 39 plot artifacts. The existence of a word was indicated in the data set as a "1" or "0." Therefore, the "1" represents the presence of a segment of inauthenticity such as lying, self-promotion or artificial enhancement. If a comment within a post mentioned the word "attention," it would be indicated as a "1" for the segment of self-promotion. The "1" indications were counted across the segment groups that are categorized under the three domains of inauthenticity. As mentioned, the domains are deception, ulterior motives and adulteration.

Within deception, there are seven segments: lying, behavioral inconsistency, hypocrisy, flip-flopping, strategic non-disclosure, false credit-claiming and plagiarism. Within ulterior motives, there are seven segments: bragging, self-promotion, cheap talk, virtue-signaling, pandering, prioritizing profits and explicit self-interest. Within adulteration, there are four segments: artificial enhancement, modification, unnatural and shortcuts.

RQ1: Existence of Domains and Segments by Plot

The first research question in this work examined the extent to which domains of inauthenticity are related to six unique narrative plot events. The narrative plot events assessed in this work were as follows: 2024 Grammys, Chart Blocking, Eras Tour Ana, Eras Tour Performance, Eras Tour Vienna and Political Endorsement. This work measured the existence of the three domains of inauthenticity – deception, ulterior motives and adulteration – within a plot event. The existence of a domain was determined by totalling all of the indications (1s) across the segments of a domain. For instance, all of the "1s" for the seven segments of ulterior motives were totaled across for plot events overall and each plot event. For instance, there were 23 total indications (1s) of ulterior motives for Eras Tour Vienna. The sum of all indications (1s) from all three domains for the Eras Tour Vienna plot event was 55. Thus, ulterior motives comprised 41.8% (n=55) of all inauthenticity indications for the Eras Tour Vienna plot event.

Combining the indications for all plot events (n=323), the most prevalent domain was ulterior motives with 37.1% (n=120). After totalling the cue indications for each of the segments of ulterior motives for every plot event, explicit self-interest was the most prevalent segment of ulterior motives with 29.1% (n=35) of total ulterior motives indications. Prioritizing profit was the second-most prevalent segment of ulterior motives with 28.3% (n=34) of total ulterior motives indications. Widening the scope away from segment data, the second-most prevalent

domain for the entire data set of plot events was adulteration with 36.2% (n=117) of total indications (n=323). The least prevalent domain for plot events was deception with 26.6% (n=86) of total plot cues (n=323).

Plot	Deception	Ulterior Motives	Adulteration	Total Inauthenticity Indications
2024 Grammys	35% (n=7)	30% (n=6)	35% (n=7)	100% (n=20)
Chart Blocking	19.5% (n=16)	37.8% (n=31)	42.68% (n=35)	100% (n=82)
Eras Tour Ana	33.3% (n=6)	44.4% (n=8)	22.2% (n=4)	100% (n=18)
Eras Tour Performance	24.1% (n=21)	29.8% (n=26)	45.9% (n=40)	100% (n=87)
Eras Tour Vienna	30.9% (n=17)	41.8% (n=23)	27.2% (n=15)	100% (n=55)
Political Endorsement	31.1% (n=19)	42.6% (n=26)	26.2% (n=16)	100% (n=61)
Domain Totals	26.6% (n=86)	37.1% (n=120)	36.2% (n=117)	100% (n=323)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

For the 2024 Grammys plot event, the domains that were most prominent were deception and adulteration with 35% (n=7) each out of the total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=20). As it relates to Chart Blocking, the domain that was most prominent was adulteration with 42.68% (n=35) out of total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=82). For Eras Tour Ana, the domain that was most prominent was ulterior motives with 44.4% (n=8) out of total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=18). Pertaining to Eras Tour Performance, the domain that was most prominent was adulteration with 45.9% (n=40) out of total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=87). For Eras Tour Vienna, the domain that was most prominent was ulterior motives with 41.8% (n=23) out of total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=55). For Political Endorsement, the domain that was the most prominent was ulterior motives with 42.6% (n=26) of total inauthenticity indications for the plot event group (n=61).

RQ2: Existence of Domains and Segments by Character

The second research question in this work examined the extent to which cues of inauthenticity are related to two narrative characters in the context of three unique events. The narrative characters and associated events were as follows: Brittany Mahomes - Donald Trump, Travis Kelce - Paparazzi and Travis Kelce - US Open. This work measured the existence of the three domains of inauthenticity – deception, ulterior motives and adulteration – within a narrative character-event group. The existence of a domain was determined by totalling all of the indications (1s) across the segments of a domain. Similar to plot events, all of the "1s" for the seven segments of ulterior motives were totaled for character-event groups overall and each character-event group. For instance, there were 13 total indications (1s) of ulterior motives for Travis Kelce - US Open. The sum of all indications (1s) from all three domains for the Travis Kelce - US Open group was 31. Thus, ulterior motives comprised 41.9% (n=13) of all inauthenticity indications for the Travis Kelce - US Open group.

Combining the indications (1s) for all character-event groups (n=73), the most prevalent domain was ulterior motives with 35.6% (n=26). After totalling the indications for segments of ulterior motives across all character-event groups, self-promotion was the most prevalent segment with 30.76% (n=8) of total ulterior motives indications. Explicit self-interest was the second-most prevalent segment with 26.9% (n=7) of total ulterior motives indications, and prioritizing profit was the third-most prevalent segment with 23.7% (n=6) of total ulterior motives indications. Widening the scope to the remaining domains, the second-most prevalent domain was adulteration with 32.8% (n=24) out of total inauthenticity indications (n=73). The least prevalent domain was deception with 31.5% (n=23) out of total inauthenticity indications (n=73).

Character	Deception	Ulterior Motives	Adulteration	Total Inauthenticity Indications
Brittany Mahomes - Trump	44.4% (n=8)	38.8% (n=7)	16.6% (n=3)	100% (n=18)
Travis Kelce - Paparazzi	33.3% (n=8)	25% (n=6)	41.7% (n=10)	100% (n=24)
Travis Kelce - US Open	22.5% (n=7)	41.9% (n=13)	35.4% (n=11)	100% (n=31)
Domain Totals	31.5% (n=23)	35.6% (n=26)	32.8% (n=24)	100% (n=73)

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

As it pertains to Brittany Mahomes - Donald Trump, the domain that was most prevalent was deception with 44.4% (n=8) of total inauthenticity indications for the character-event group (n=18). For Travis Kelce - Paparazzi, the domain that was the most prevalent was adulteration with 41.7% (n=10) of total inauthenticity indications for the character-event group (n=24). Regarding Travis Kelce - US Open, the domain that was most prevalent is ulterior motives with 41.9% (n=13) of total inauthenticity indications for the character-event group (n=31).

Summary

Findings suggest that overall, among both plot events and character-event groups, ulterior motives was the most prominent domain. Within ulterior motives for plot events, the segments of explicit self-interest and prioritizing profits maintained the highest existence within the data. Similarly, for character-event groups, self-promotion, explicit self-interest and prioritizing profit had the highest prominence within ulterior motives data. Ulterior motives as a subgroup of inauthenticity surrounds behavior that is perceived as being conducted for the wrong reason or for an undisclosed reason that doesn't align with what is being portrayed. It is possible that anti-fans perceived the intention behind Swift's behavior or those associated with her person-brand as vehicles to increase profit or benefit Swift. Therefore, anti-fans may have categorized such intentions as morally transgressive.

Additionally, the results may suggest that meaning transfer theory is present as a cause for how anti-fans discussed their perceptions of the Swift person-brand based on plot events and character-event groups. The theory traditionally encompasses the impact of a negatively or positively perceived celebrity endorsing a brand and its impact on consumer behavior. Here, there appears to be a connection to how anti-fan consumers perceived narrative elements and the Swift person-brand.

Lastly, there is observational evidence that many attentive anti-fan consumers have developed expectations for the Swift person-brand and use prior behavior, familiarity and exposure to the Swift person-brand to determine whether her behavior is authentic or inauthentic. For most of the plot events and character-event groups, anti-fans used prior expectations and narratives to orient what is off-brand and on-brand for the Swift person-brand. Thus, certain plot events and character-event group activity that diverged from their knowledge were interpreted as inauthentic because anti-fans perceived cues of adulteration, deceptiveness and, primarily, the wrong intentions behind a narrative.

Discussion

The results of this work show ulterior motives as the most prominent domain across both the overall plot event data and the overall character-event group data. Considering these results, it is clear that among all plot events and character-event groups observed, anti-fan consumers perceived the Swift person-brand as operating in a way that prioritizes publicity and profit. As it pertains to the research questions examined in this work, there is some relationship between plot events and perceptions of inauthenticity. The presence of a relationship suggests a possible correlation between meaning transfer theory and person-brands. The most prevalent domains and segments largely differed depending on the context of the narrative element, suggesting either

that negative sentiment about a narrative character or plot event may transfer to the totality of a person-brand or anti-fans must rework narrative elements into their negative orientation of a person-brand. The observational results of anti-fan commentary also illustrates the extent to which familiarity and expectations of a person-brand narrative influence how anti-fan consumers orient their understanding of what is authentic.

The following sections will expand on the findings the author drew from the results utilizing prior literature and references to anti-fan commentary. The first section will expand on why ulterior motives and the accompanied segments were so prevalent. The subsequent section will detail the presence of meaning transfer theory and how anti-fan assessment of person-brand is similar to the impact of a celebrity endorsement. The last section will describe the role of expectations and consumer familiarity in orienting anti-fan evaluations of what is, and isn't authentic to a person-brand narrative. To conclude this section, the limitations of this study will be examined to ground future research within the current work's subject field.

Prominence of Ulterior Motives

As discussed, among all plot events and character-event groups, anti-fans perceived the intentions behind behavior exhibited by Swift as being entrenched in profit and publicity priorities. Ulterior motives is one category of a moral violation or transgression that may lead to consumer perceptions of inauthenticity. This category is reliant on perceptions of something being done for an undisclosed, wrong reason that isn't morally just. In the context of the Swift person-brand, anti-fans interpreted plot events like the release of a public statement or the lack of a response in what they believed to be a crisis as inauthentic. Anti-fan commentary about the Eras Tour Ana plot event references their displeasure with Swift's public statement about the deceased fan, the photo she took with the deceased fan's family and their perception of a lack of

preventative venue measures. Subreddit participants ascribed the reasoning behind these actions as examples of Swift and her team's prioritization of profit and herself. For example, one participant states,

"Taylor is wealthy enough that if she didn't want to cancel the other shows she could've refunded everyone's money for the next show in Brazil and given a free show in memory of Ana. This could've saved any heartache for any fans who would miss a show due to cancelling. She could've spoken up to have the venue supply enough water and ventilation. She could've paid for the young lady's funeral costs & acknowledged Ana on stage. She has no problem singing about everything else in her life, why such a problem acknowledging a fan? Fans are who made her who she is! These are all things a decent human being would've done. Megastar or not. I am surprised no one in her camp suggested any of this. She has such an immaculately curated image, how could they have missed the mark? Her team must be just as greedy and soulless as she is. No words for how low this put her in my book" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).

Anti-fan consumers perceived that Swift and her team's response and/or lack of response was indecent because they did not take the actions that anti-fan consumers felt would have been more ethical. The emphasis on ethical decision-making in anti-fan commentary on a person-brand's crisis response is relevant to prior literature that suggests how consumers may use celebrities as vehicles of meaning-making to reinforce societal values of what one should believe or do (Meyers, 2009; Rojek, 2012). There is a disconnect when a person-brand is perceived as embodying values like greed, the prioritization of profit, self-interest or attention-seeking behavior in the eyes of a consumer who feels these are unethical or morally transgressive values.

Even in instances of prosocial behavior, ulterior motives may still be perceived if they appear to be "motivated by profit or reputation" (Silver et al., 2021, p. 75). Silver et al. (2021) suggest the extent to which consumers perceive a prosocial or positive on-brand behavior as inauthentic depends on factors like the timing of the action, the type of action, and the potential benefits to the brand. Anti-fan commentary exemplifies this point. One subreddit participant states, "*Literally. She only met up with Ana's family after being bullied for it and getting bad PR*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.), suggesting the timing of Swift's response was only to gain the benefit of a favorable reputation. Another subreddit participant states, "*This just seems like such a preventable tragedy that was used as a pr story to make Taylor look good. Makes me sad. I'm old and grew up with Taylor. She lost me as a fan this last year through all this mayhem..*" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). This comment suggests not only did they find Swift's response transgressive to the point of creating distance between themselves and Swift, but also that Swift's response was not out of genuine sympathy, but to gain reputational benefits.

Silver et al. (2021) also posit that ulterior motives as a violation of authenticity is related to whether consumers orient their relationship with a brand as fundamentally communal or transactional. Silver et al. (2021) draws from prior literature that describes fundamentally communal relations as those "entailing an obligation to behave selflessly—vs. fundamentally transactional—and therefore entailing no such obligation" (p. 76). In the Eras Tour Ana plot event, anti-fans interpret that Swift's response should have been oriented in selflessness and generosity toward fans because elements of her person-brand narrative suggest so. One subreddit participant states, "*Yes, my issue is that she did nothing. If she's so proud of her parasocial relationship with fans, the ones she love so much... her only actions were a cold note on*

instagram stories and taking the family to see the last concert in Brazil" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).

Another subreddit participant states,

"For someone who prides herself on the parasocial relationship she has with her fans, she did the bare minimum for Ana. Her fans having to crowdfund to send Ana's body home is embarrassing and her making no statement other than to say a beautiful fan died before the show, which was not accurate, is [expletive]. The whole situation was handled poorly by everyone involved" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).

The dissatisfaction from subreddit participants regarding the discrepancy between perceived expectations and reality for this plot event aligns with the consequences of self-interest motives in an expected communal context. Silver et al. (2021) state, "Introducing self-interest motives into contexts in which communal motives are expected or preferred generates moral outrage and perceptions that the actions of brands or individuals have violated a truer authentic purpose" (p. 76). Anti-fan consumers expected Swift to respond in a way that aligns with the narrative they feel the Swift person-brand has portrayed, however their interpretation of a self-interested response resulted in perceptions of inauthenticity. Narrative expectations clashing with negative, off-brand behavior connects to prior literature findings from Burgess and Jones (2023). Because attentive consumers are often privy to the elements of a narrative like plot and characters, they are likely to develop expectations of what is authentic. Their understanding of what is, and isn't authentic, creates space to ascribe one of the three domains of inauthenticity to person-brand behavior. The next section will further discuss how consumer expectations provoke negative sentiment within consumers.

Narrative Expectations and Negative Framing

Consumers who continue to engage with a person-brand to the extent of actively participating in a dedicated anti-fandom are often just as attentive as those in fandom. Despite maintaining a negative sentiment toward the person-brand or media figure, anti-fans experiencing an NPSR as described by Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023), are privy to the elements of a narrative like plot or characters. Especially if they are former fans. As Burgess and Jones (2023) suggest, consumers use expectations gathered from a person-brand narrative, their familiarity with the person-brand and exposure to a person-brand to form perceptions of person-brand authenticity. When such expectations are unmet or behavior is perceived as off-brand, some consumers may interpret these occurrences as transgressive. When assessing the Swift person-brand, subreddit participants often used prior behavior and existing narrative elements to form expectations that oriented their understanding of what is on- and off-brand.

Particularly in the character-event group results pertaining to Travis Kelce, the most prominent domains were different from each other. For Travis Kelce - Paparazzi, adulteration was the most prominent domain and for Travis Kelce - US Open, ulterior motives was the most prominent domain. The difference in most prevalent domains for the same narrative character suggests that there were certain aspects within each context that fueled perceptions of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.

In the context of Travis Kelce - US Open, the majority of comments examined referenced prior relationships and narrative characters to frame their perception of Swift and Kelce's presence at the US Open. Notably, anti-fan consumers drew comparisons between Kelce and Swift's behavior at the US Open to Swift's former boyfriend Joe Alwyn at Wimbledon. For instance, under a post that presents images of Swift and Kelce compared to images of Alwyn and

his castmate, one subreddit participant states, *"I think her type is who her pr team generally thinks would make good headlines. Joe and Taylor might have been real but I struggle to believe this is anything but cringe pr tbh with kelce"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). This comment exemplifies how one perception of a person-brand is influenced by a consumer's understanding of past behavior or characters. Their understanding of prior narrative elements influences perceptions that the brand narrative is inconsistent. Anti-fan consumers interpreted the relationship between Swift and Kelce as being a means for increased publicity for each individual, using the behavior of Alwyn as a measure for authenticity.

With Travis Kelce - Paparazzi, anti-fan consumers perceived there to be a level of unnatural behavior that isn't exhibited by other celebrities or even Swift in previous relationships. One participant states, *"These two are not normal. I can recall no celebrity couple that does as many pap walks as they do. Yes, we get it, you are spending time together!! They are so attention seeking like how can someone genuinely be a fan of this couple?"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). Both of these examples provide insight into how consumer expectations and knowledge influence their understanding of what is authentic in a person-brand narrative. As illustrated, perceived off-brand narrative elements may evoke negative sentiment within anti-fan consumers. Negative sentiment derived from the discrepancy between consumer expectations or knowledge and the person-brand, may permanently impact how anti-fan consumers interpret the totality of the person-brand.

Impact of Negative Narrative Elements

The results in this work suggest that meaning transfer theory may be present. The theory pertains to how "negative evaluations of endorsed brands and products, transferred from a tainted celebrity, depends on the severity of the committed transgression" (Wang & Kim, 2020, p. 115).

It primarily refers to the impact of a positively or negatively perceived celebrity endorsing a product. The positive or negative perception of the celebrity can transfer to the product. Other scholars support this concept and it extends beyond celebrity endorsement (Dunn & Nisbett, 2021; Tukachinsky Forster & Downey, 2023; Um, 2017). Considering how prosocial or positive off-brand behavior may still influence negative sentiment within consumers because it is ultimately still a divergence from the brand narrative regardless of how positive it is, Silver et al. (2021) state, "it may take only one piece of inconsistent information to undermine those beliefs, resulting in the judgment that the brand or its products are entirely inauthentic" (p. 72). Burgess and Jones (2023) support this concept by positing that a negatively evaluated ending to a narrative brand can cloud perceptions of the brand in its entirety (p. 1281).

In the current work, anti-fan consumers appeared to perceive the entirety of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic because of the perceived inconsistency in elements like plot events and the addition of narrative characters. For instance, because of Swift's association with Brittany Mahomes who publicly supported President Donald Trump, anti-fan consumers believed that Swift also supports Trump. They considered both her nonresponse to Trump's usage of a generative artificial intelligence image of Swift supporting his campaign, as well as what they perceived to be a delayed endorsement of former Vice President Kamala Harris, as representative of her political stance. Although the political narrative around Swift includes her public support for former President Joe Biden in the 2020 United States Presidential Election and previous support of left-leaning issues like LGBTQ rights, anti-fan consumers expressed displeasure with what they perceived as her undisclosed right-leaning beliefs because of narrative characters – those affiliated with her. One subreddit participant states, "*Her dad is a Trumper. Her partner is a Trumper. Her new friends the Mahomes' are Trumppers. The idea that*

she is a Democrat is pure hopium rather than based upon her actions" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).

In the context of the Eras Tour Ana plot event, another participant states, *"I was a fan of her persona for a while there (the Joe years) and now I'm not a fan at all. Taylor used to be known (and still is for some reason) for how well she treats her fans and her relationship with them. This was the night I realised even that was a facade"* ("travisandtaylor," n.d.). While the results appear to be supported by meaning transfer theory – suggesting that elements of a brand narrative can lead to anti-fans perceiving an entire person-brand negatively and disingenuously – it is possible that there is another explanation.

It may not be that anti-fan consumers transfer negative sentiment toward a narrative element to the entirety of a person-brand, but that anti-fan consumers already maintain a negative sentiment toward the person-brand and frame narrative elements as negative to fit their perspective. Tukachinsky Forster and Click (2023) discuss the way that anti-fans may "negotiate and thus rework their relationships with media texts, adapting characters and plotlines to better meet fan expectations, especially when their appeals and demands to producers ("the powers that be") go unmet (Busse & Hellekson, 2006)" (p. 377). This aligns with the conclusion drawn by Williams (2019) who suggests that to remedy intense dislike or disgust with a media object, consumers must change their attitude toward the media object. If trust and perceived narrative consistency is lost, Williams (2019) states, "an individual's self-narrative must be reworked in order to cope with this disruption" and they "may need to negotiate and deal with changes to an object of fandom" (p. 321). It is possible that the above examples illustrate the moral coupling process conducted by consumers to maintain a negative perception of the Swift person-brand, rather than negative sentiment toward narrative elements tainting the person-brand.

Limitations

While findings emerged related to the prevalence of a type of inauthenticity when a narrative character is associated with a plot event, this work is limited in comprehensively understanding the *weight* of the plot event. This work chose to examine a narrative character in the context of a plot event to adhere to the thesis timeline and project scope. For instance, it was not practical to evaluate all posts relevant to Travis Kelce, considering the subreddit's heavy focus on his presence within the Swift person-brand. However, it is unclear how much or how little each associated plot event influenced negative feelings about a narrative character that then influenced perceptions of the person-brand. For instance, Brittany Mahomes was also in attendance at the US Open. To what extent would her presence in this context have influenced perceptions of inauthenticity? Would adulteration still have been the most prominent authenticity violation as it was for Travis Kelce - US Open? Because the posts were limited to specific contexts as well as other parameters, a more comprehensive understanding is needed to assess how plot events influence the weight of a narrative character's ability to usher in perceptions of inauthenticity.

Similarly, the plot events and character-event groups used in this work, while distinct from each other, did not encompass a wide variety of categories. Consumers are more likely to perceive a celebrity person-brand's onstage performance as being adulterated through artificial enhancements like autotune, rather than perceiving the onstage performance as an example of hypocrisy. More specifically, Eras Tour Ana, Eras Tour Performance and Eras Tour Vienna are all under the same narrative umbrella of the Eras Tour. Again, while they are all distinct events, Eras Tour Ana and Eras Tour Vienna involve public statements and strategic crisis responses. Thus, it is possible that the plot events were similar in nature, increasing the prevalence of

ulterior motives in the results. The categories and distribution of narrative elements included in this work are not as representative as further research will have the opportunity to examine.

Pertaining to the sample size, this work did not examine the same number of artifacts or units of analysis across plot events and character-event groups. For instance, there were two artifacts relating to the Brittany Mahomes - Donald Trump character-event group compared to four artifacts about the Travis Kelce - Paparazzi character-event group. The subreddit boasts more than a year's worth of content with multiple, high engagement posts per day. Time constraints, corpus parameters and the inability to scrape data from the subreddit influenced how data was collected in this work. For example, posts were required to have a post flair because of the data collection method. However many posts that may have been relevant to a narrative element did not have one.

Lastly, this work does not account for the fact that some of the words used to indicate a segment, and thereby a domain, are similar. The author's internal judgment was used to frame an understanding of how forum comments fit into segments. For instance, a comment containing the word "pretend" may refer to a segment of adulteration like unnatural as well as a segment of deception like hypocrisy. This relates to the absence of intercoder reliability, as the scope of the project did not involve a second coder to corroborate the content analysis.

Further Research

Subsequent studies should consider merging social psychology concepts like parasocial experiences with media studies to develop a more expansive understanding of how consumer relationships to media changes over time (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 384). There is space to consider the dimensions of NPSRs, contrary to prior literature that separates anti-fandom from parasocial relationships (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 390). In this

work, there was evidence of ludic and ironic PSRs – individuals who enjoy engaging in snark or seek validation from anti-fandom to assert their moral superiority. There were also hints of loyal NPSRs – disappointed former fans who are too invested to "break-up" with the Swift person-brand. To some extent, there was also evidence of pervasive negative PSRs – anti-fans whose negative perception of Swift derived from "repeated unwanted or unavoidable exposure" (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023, p. 379) to narrative elements like the Eras Tour or her relationship with Kelce. As with the four dimensions of NPSRs, future research should expand on how these forms of negative sentiment show up within the anti-fandoms of person-brands.

Further scholarship may build on this work by measuring the weight of certain plot events. This could be done by conducting qualitative surveys of anti-fans. It would be beneficial to engage qualitative methods to better understand how consumers navigate the evolution of a person-brand narrative. Such methods would offer insight into how certain elements impact consumer self-identity, sociocultural conceptualization of the world and perceptions of person-brand authenticity. As discussed, anti-fan consumers did mention that certain plot events or narrative characters influenced their negative perception of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic. However, to what extent do multiple, related or unrelated plot events or characters work together to influence the decision to distance oneself from a person-brand through moral coupling? How does the severity or perceived severity of negative on- or off-brand narrative behavior influence perceptions of inauthenticity? This work also focused on plot and characters as elements of a brand narrative, but did not examine purpose as defined by Mills and John (2021). Studies that follow this work could examine how all three narrative elements influence perceptions of inauthenticity or lead to consumers becoming anti-fans.

Conclusion

Considering that consumers use celebrities to make sense of the world, particularly in the new media economy where there is more information and access than ever before to become familiar with celebrities, consumer perceptions prove to be dynamic and multidimensional. As prior literature suggests, fandom or positive parasocial relationships are not the only way a consumer may maintain strong emotions toward a celebrity. Anti-fandom as it pertains to negative parasocial relationships have largely been left unstudied (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023). Thus, this work explored the relationship between the narrative told through the corporate branding of a media figure (person-brand) and anti-fan consumers' perceptions of inauthenticity.

Brand narrative elements, such as plot events and characters, often inform consumers of the intent of a person-brand, the person-brand's values and what they represent. However, when there is inconsistency between reality and consumer expectations or knowledge of a person-brand narrative, consumers must negotiate the incongruence. This process invites an attitude change and in the case of anti-fans, involves moral coupling. After examining how consumers discuss inauthenticity in an anti-fandom setting, this work confirms that consumers use expectations and perceived inner knowledge of a person-brand narrative to assess authenticity or the lack thereof. Forensic fandom, as described by Mardon et al. (2023), suggests that some consumers engage in a form of internet sleuthing and fandom-like attentiveness to support their orientation of a media figure. Via the results of this work, it is also clear that negative sentiment affects the way consumers perceive the totality of a person-brand. This sentiment – derived from incongruence, frustration or moral condemnation of plot events or characters – has the ability to permanently affect how consumers view a person-brand. It is also possible that consumers rework new and existing narratives of a person-brand, such as the

person-brand's actions and intentions, to align with the negative sentiment they already hold. Additionally, the prevalence of consumers perceiving ulterior motives behind the actions of the Swift person-brand illustrates an emphasis on consumer desire for person-brands to subscribe to their moral standards and remain consistent because of existing brand narratives.

There is importance in maintaining brand consistency, considering the extent to which consumers rely on prior expectations, familiarity and inner knowledge to establish trust and an emotional connection. While strong emotional connections can have positive effects for a person-brand, there are consequences when the dimensions of antipathy are triggered. In the case of this work, narrative incongruence and negative, off-brand behavior influenced consumer perceptions of primarily ulterior motives, but also adulteration and deception. Thus, the way that consumers perceive inauthenticity in a person-brand is related to unmet expectations and negative sentiment toward the brand narrative.

This work merges and draws parallels between mass media and communication studies, social psychology and marketing to examine the roles of person-brand narratives and inauthenticity in an anti-fandom setting. It extended prior literature by embracing the multidimensional approach of negative sentiment toward a media figure that historically only focused on parasocial break-ups. This work embraces the call for further research on negative parasocial experiences (Tukachinsky Forster & Click, 2023), by considering the complexity of an individual's engagement in anti-fandom.

This work utilized the example of a celebrity person-brand because of the prominence and consolidation of data provided by the online forum. Anti-fan consumers utilized their personal knowledge of Swift and their moral beliefs to assess the brand narratives of her person-brand. This behavior is not limited to those who engage in anti-fandom or fandom.

Although this work heavily focuses on the Taylor Swift person-brand by crossing the areas of negative parasocial relationship dynamics and anti-fandom, the findings extend to how people perceive inauthenticity in other media figures, politicians and even private citizens.

Socially, individuals may assess and form perceptions of who others are. Individuals may cast judgement on others based on what they believe is acceptable or morally just. Individuals may consider how their social circle associations influence how people perceive them. They may assess aspects of the personal narrative of their life — plot, characters and purpose — or in other words their life choices and social circle, to ensure they are authentic in representing the person they want to be. Through this work, it is clear that there is a relationship between how anti-fan consumers assess the authenticity of the people they are frequently exposed to and the framework of authenticity violations (Silver et al., 2021). Individuals may not always go through the direct process of interpreting another person's silence about something they normally may not be silent about as strategic non-disclosure and therefore an ulterior motive. However, it is common to perceive others as "fake" or hiding something, without necessarily deliberating how that conclusion was formed.

Conceptually, this work presents an understanding of how person-brand narratives influence negative sentiment among consumers, particularly attentive consumers who are emotionally connected to a person-brand. It evaluates strategic branding tactics such as celebrity self-disclosure and the role it plays in developing an emotionally resonant brand narrative. This work expands current understandings of the dynamic between person-brands and consumers, as well as how strategic communicators encourage brand attachment to advance their goals. By acknowledging the dimensions of such experiences, there is the possibility for more effective strategies for remedying negative parasocial relationships. Such strategies may include helping

others regain their agency and psychologically reframing how they perceive the lives of others. It is necessary to evolve beyond the conventional internet expression, and perhaps, the easy assumption that individuals experiencing the feelings examined in this work are haters who need to touch grass. As illustrated, it may not be that simple.

Appendices

Appendix A - Content Analysis Codebook

Plot Corpus

Enter the following search query into Google Search: *site:reddit.com/r/travisandtaylor/*. Using the tools function below the search bar, insert the custom date range with April 28, 2024 as the start date and October 30, 2024 as the end date. For each relevant plot event, add one keyword enclosed in quotation marks, to the search query. Repeat with one, or multiple of the following keywords per search: *perform, block, Vienna, Ana, Brazil, Celine Dion (and other forms), charts, Eras Tour, Grammys, dance, sing, concert, variant, Kamala Harris (and other forms), awards*. Click each result that is generated until the last Google results page. For each result assess whether the post meets the following criteria:

- a) Is the post or the original poster’s account deleted? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- b) Does the post flair match the parameters? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- c) Does the post date match the parameters? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- d) Is the post itself (not the comments) about one of the outlined plot events? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- e) Are there more than 400 upvotes? If yes, include the result. If not, move to the next result.
- f) Are there less than 999 comments? If yes, include the result. If not, move to the next result.

Plot Codebook

Item	Item Specifics	Value	What is included or excluded?
Search term			
Post flair	Reformed Swiftie Discussion Certified Cringe Critique Charts The Ex-Files Eff Taylor Swift	Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the post flair options.	Posts without a flair are excluded because of the extensive nature of the artifacts and research time constraints. To assist with analysis, posts without a flair exist as uncategorized and are difficult to track. Posts with the Rumor, Humor, S–post Sunday, Deep

	<p>Rant Question News Politics Taylor Stiff Swiftly Off-Key</p>		<p>Dives and Research Vibes flairs were excluded because they include user-generated content separate from the plot event. Most of the content also involves unsubstantiated claims, despite being relevant to the Swift person-brand. The Updates flair was excluded because it includes meta content about the subreddit. Posts with the Stupid Swifties flair were excluded because they focus on content about Swifties rather than the Swift person-brand.</p>
<p>Plot event</p>	<p>Eras Tour Ana Eras Tour Vienna Eras Tour Performance Chart Blocking Grammys 2024 Political Endorsement</p>	<p>Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the plot events.</p>	<p>After informal, non-participant observation of r/travisandtaylor, these six events were frequently mentioned by forum participants as moments that changed their perception of Swift. The events were reported on by mainstream entertainment outlets. There were also multiple posts about all six events with more than 1,000 upvotes, which was coded in this work as high engagement. Posts that were not focused on the plot events outlined were excluded. Posts that mentioned a plot event in passing, were not focused on the plot event were excluded. For example, "... for trying to block Charli from getting #1 in the UK and now BRAT is getting recognition from Kamala Harris' team and (who know?) interfering in the course of this year's American elections. Taylor might have made numbers this year, but Charli's making HISTORY" ("travisandtaylor," n.d.).</p>

Post title link			
Post date	April 28, 2024 until October 30, 2024.	Day/Month	The year is excluded from the value because all of the data collected was from 2024. Considering time constraints in the methodology process, the author determined Oct. 30th as the endpoint for data collection. The author assessed that it would not be useful to incorporate new data as it was being collected.
Popularity by upvotes	400 - 999 1000 - 1999 2000 - 9999	Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the upvote options.	Posts with less than 400 upvotes are excluded because they were coded as low engagement posts. While there were posts with more than 9,999 upvotes, they were excluded because they did not meet other item criteria.
Popularity by comments	0 - 50 51 - 100 101 - 300 301-500 501-999	Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the comment options.	Posts with more than 999 upvotes were excluded because of research time constraints.
Inauthenticity: Deception			
Lying	Lie, lying, lied, deceive, deceit, dishonest, make up, feign, fiction, invent, imaginary, trick, gaslight, faker, false, pretend, act, imposter	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments.
Behavioral Inconsistency	New, old, unpredictable,	Indicate "1" if a	There are contextual limitations that influence the omission of results. For

	discrepancy, clash, dissonance, conflicting, not logical, illogical, inconsistent, change, usual, used to	word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	example, when searching a source (post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
Hypocrisy	Hypocrisy, hypocrite, pretense, two-faced, phony, insincere		
Flip-flopping	Flip, flopping, change, reverse, wishy-washy, insecure, shallow, wavering		
Strategic Non-disclosure	Omission, silence, silent, evade, hide		
False-credit Claiming	Credit, claim, declare, demand, discredit		
Plagiarism	Copied, plagiarize, unoriginal, steal, mimic, original		
Inauthenticity: Ulterior Motive			
Bragging	Bragging, boast, bighead, flex, pride	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments. There are contextual limitations that
Self-promotion	Overexposed, pap walk, paparazzi, attention, PR		
Cheap Talk	Doesn't care, didn't care, not care, care		

Virtue Signaling	Preach, pearl-clutch, self-righteous, superior, complex, holier-than-thou, project	Indicate "1" if a word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	influence the omission of results. For example, when searching a source (post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
Pandering	Pandering, appease, ally, defend, favor		
Prioritizing Profits	Money, profit, greed, commercial, billionaire, prioritize, capitalize, sell		
Explicit Self-interest	Narcissist, narc, self, self-interest, selfish, charts, sue, lawsuit, soulless, unethical, ego, self-serving, self-absorbed, inconsiderate, self-centered, hogging, validation, power		
Inauthenticity: Adulteration			
Artificial Enhancements	Cringe, talent, autotune, lip sync, artificial, enhancement, unreal, real, synthetic, overdone, exaggerate, plastic, production	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	The adulteration domains of automation, outsourcing and mass production from Silver et al. (2021) were omitted for context purposes. The segment, unnatural additives, was shortened to unnatural. The segment, genetic modification, was also shortened to modification. These domains generally refer to products and inanimate objects.
Modification	Changed, old, new, good, bad, garbage,		

	trash, anymore, different, modify, better, used to, before, now, usual	word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments.
Unnatural	Paid, payola, block, calculated, scheduled, planned, groomed, forced, manipulate, unnatural, marketing, natural, sing, dance		There are contextual limitations that influence the omission of results. For example, when searching a source (post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
Shortcuts	Quick, quality, effort, work, easy, shortcut, skill		

Appendix B - Content Analysis Codebook

Character Corpus

Enter the following search query into Google Search: *site:reddit.com/r/travisandtaylor/*. Using the tools function below the search bar, insert the custom date range with April 28, 2024 as the start date and October 30, 2024 as the end date. For each relevant character, add one keyword enclosed in quotation marks, to the search query. Repeat with one, or multiple of the following keywords per search: *Travis Kelce, tennis, Travis, Kelce, US Open, Tayvis, Brittany, Mahomes, Brittany Mahomes, Donald Trump, Trump, Republican, endorse, pap walk, paparazzi*. Click each result that is generated until the last Google results page. For each result assess whether the post meets the following criteria:

- a) Was the post or the original poster’s account deleted? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- b) Does the post flair match the parameters? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- c) Does the post date match the parameters? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- d) Is the post itself (not the comments) about one of the outlined plot events? If yes, move to the next step. If not, move to the next result.
- e) Are there more than 400 upvotes? If yes, include the result. If not, move to the next result.
- f) Are there less than 999 comments? If yes, include the result. If not, move to the next result.

Character Codebook

Item	Item Specifics	Value	What is included or excluded?
Search term			
Post flair	Reformed Swiftie Tayvis Discussion Certified Cringe Critique The Football The Ex-Files Eff Taylor Swift Eff Travis Kelce Rant Question News Politics Taylor Stiff Swiftly Off-Key	Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the post flair options.	Posts without a flair are excluded because of the extensive nature of the artifacts. To assist with analysis, posts without a flair exist as uncategorized and are not as easy to evaluate. Posts with the Rumor, Humor, S–post Sunday, Deep Dives and Research Vibes flairs were excluded because they include user-generated content separate from the plot event. Most of the content also involves unsubstantiated claims, despite being relevant to the Swift person-brand. The Updates flair was excluded because it includes meta content about the subreddit. Posts with the Stupid Swifties flair were excluded because they focus on content about Swifties rather than the Swift person-brand.

<p>Character with associated plot event</p>	<p>Brittany Mahomes - Donald Trump</p> <p>Travis Kelce - Paparazzi</p> <p>Travis Kelce - US Open</p>	<p>Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the character - plot associations.</p>	<p>In light of research time constraints, the author used informal, non-participant observation to determine pivotal plot event themes that included the two narrative characters. The events were reported on by mainstream entertainment outlets. There were also posts about all three events with more than 1,000 upvotes, which was coded in this work as high engagement. Posts that were not focused on both the outlined character and their accompanying event were not included. If the post mentioned a narrative character in passing, but the post itself was not focused on the character, the post was excluded. For example, "When will people wake up? So everyone was in uproar that she was photographed hugging and laughing with Brittany Mahomes, so Taylor has now released this picture..." ("travisandtaylor," n.d.)</p>
<p>Post title link</p>			
<p>Post date</p>	<p>April 28, 2024 until October 30, 2024.</p>	<p>Day/Month</p>	<p>The year is excluded from the value because all of the data collected was from 2024. Considering time constraints in the methodology process, the author determined Oct. 30th as the endpoint for data collection. The author assessed that it would not be useful to incorporate new data as it was being collected.</p>
<p>Popularity by upvotes</p>	<p>400 - 999 1000 - 1999 2000 - 9999</p>	<p>Values were chosen from a dropdown</p>	<p>Posts with less than 400 upvotes are excluded because they were coded as low engagement posts. While there</p>

		menu that matched the upvote options.	were posts with more than 9,999 upvotes, they were excluded because they did not meet other item criteria.
Popularity by comments	0 - 50 51 - 100 101 - 300 301-500 501-999	Values were chosen from a dropdown menu that matched the comment options.	Posts with more than 999 upvotes were excluded because of research time constraints.
Inauthenticity: Deception			
Lying	Lie, lying, lied, deceive, deceit, dishonest, make up, feign, fiction, invent, imaginary, trick, gaslight, faker, false, pretend, act, imposter	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments. There are contextual limitations that influence the omission of results. For example, when searching a source (post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
Behavioral Inconsistency	New, old, unpredictable, discrepancy, clash, dissonance, conflicting, not logical, illogical, inconsistent, change, usual, used to	Indicate "1" if a word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	
Hypocrisy	Hypocrisy, hypocrite, pretense, two-faced, phony, insincere		
Flip-flopping	Flip-flopping, change, reverse,		

	wishy-washy, insecure, shallow, wavering, you never know		
Strategic Non-disclosure	Omission, silence, silent evade, hide		
False-credit Claiming	Credit, claim, declare, demand, discredit		
Plagiarism	Copied, plagiarize, unoriginal, steal, mimic, original		
Inauthenticity: Ulterior Motive			
Bragging	Bragging, boast, bighead, flex, pride	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments.
Self-promotion	Overexposed, pap walk, paparazzi, attention, PR		
Cheap talk	Doesn't care, didn't care, not care, care		
Virtue signaling	Preach, pearl-clutch, self-righteous, superior, complex holier-than-thou, project	Indicate "1" if a word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	There are contextual limitations that influence the omission of results. For example, when searching a source (post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret
Pandering	Pandering, appease, ally, defend, favor		
Prioritizing profits	Money, profit, greed, commercial, billionaire,		

	prioritize, capitalize, sell		narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
Explicit Self-interest	Narcissist, narc, self, self-interest, selfish, charts, sue, lawsuit, soulless, unethical, ego, self-serving, self-absorbed, inconsiderate, self-centered, hogging, validation, power		
Inauthenticity: Adulteration			
Artificial Enhancements	Cringe, talent, autotune, lip sync, artificial, enhancement, unreal, real, synthetic, overdone, exaggerate, plastic, production	Is at least one of the words or phrases in the second column present in the post?	<p>The adulteration domains of automation, outsourcing and mass production from Silver et al. (2021) were omitted for context purposes. The segment, unnatural additives, was shortened to unnatural. The segment, genetic modification, was also shortened to modification. These domains generally refer to products and inanimate objects.</p> <p>The words chosen were manually deliberated by the author. They were based on the author's subjective understanding of the Silver et al. (2021) framework. The author conducted an internet search for synonyms and related terms for each of the segments.</p> <p>There are contextual limitations that influence the omission of results. For example, when searching a source</p>
Modification	Changed, old, new, good, bad, garbage, trash, anymore, different, modify, better, used to, before, now, usual	Indicate "1" if a word/phrase is present. Indicate "0" if none of the words or phrases are present.	
Unnatural	Paid, payola, block, calculated, scheduled, planned, groomed, forced, manipulate, unnatural, marketing, natural, sing, dance		

Shortcuts	Quick, quality, effort, work, easy, shortcut, skill		(post) for artifacts (comments) relating to money, the author omitted artifacts from the data that discussed the financial decisions of people who attended Swift's Eras Tour. While the parameters matched, the context was not about the Swift person-brand. Artifacts with positive sentiment were excluded in the data collection, because the scope of the study is to analyze how anti-fans interpret narrative elements of the Swift person-brand as inauthentic.
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