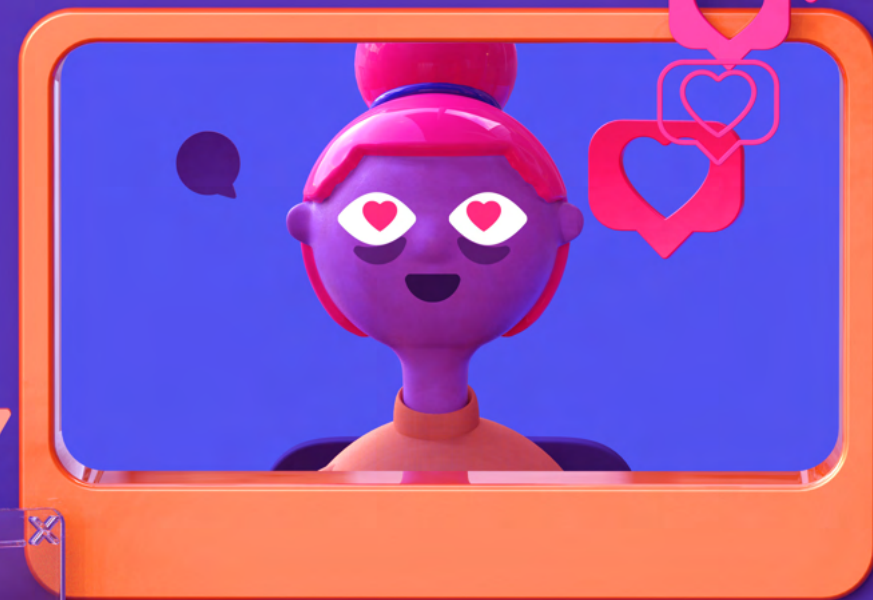


FROM SUPERFANS TO SUPERSTANS

Twenty years ago, stans relied on sending fan mail, but today, the internet and social media have given us much easier access to the celebrity of our choice.

Story by Chastain Flores



It was October of 2014. My friend got a reply on Twitter from Luke Hemmings, the lead vocalist in the band 5 Seconds of Summer, our favorite band. She facetedimed me and we both instantly started freaking out. My friend replied back to him, “follow my friend, she loves you so much.” Minutes later, another 5 Seconds of Summer stan replied to the both of us, “be grateful he replied to you.” We just ignored it, but then things got ugly. She began to tweet at us more, telling me to kill myself and that neither of us deserved a reply nor follow from Hemmings.

If you have ever been on social media, you’re likely to have come across one of these stan accounts. While they may look like they’re run by harmless fans, stan culture can be toxic and harmful to fans, as well as the celebrities.

The word “stan” originated from a song by American rapper Eminem called “Stan,” in 2000. The song was written about a man who would write and send fan mail to his idol. He never got a reply from said idol and with that, he was sent over the edge. While some stans are like that, the definition as given by the Oxford English Dictionary is, “an overzealous or obsessive fan of a particular celebrity,” and was only recently added as an official word in 2017. Twenty years ago, stans relied on sending fan mail, but today, the internet and social media have given us much easier access to the celebrity of our choice.

With that access, it can sometimes bring toxicity and harassment from fan bases as a whole. This behavior is known as mob mentality or herd mentality, defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as, “the tendency of the people in a group to think and behave in ways that conform with others in the group rather than as individuals.”

Stan culture is something that I myself have been part of since the age of 13. At that age, it was hard. It wasn’t easy for me to find happiness at the time until I found O2L and One Direction and whoever else I was starting to stan. Their music and videos were something that made me happy. It gave me that chance to escape my realities, even if only for three minutes while listening to a song or watching a Youtube video.

Though there are positive outcomes from stan culture, there also comes the negative outcomes which can at times outweigh the good.

Back in March 2020, singer Billie Eilish had liked a meme on Instagram of Louis Tomlinson, a member from One Direction. It was captioned, “When you move and the snapchat filter comes off,” with a picture of Zayn Malik, a former member of One Direction, presenting someone with a snapchat filter on, alongside a picture of Tomlinson, who was meant to be “filter comes off.” Tomlinson’s fans did not like the meme, or that Eilish liked it so they decided to go after Eilish. One Direction stans came to Twitter and began tweeting the hashtag #BillieEilishIsOverParty, in an attempt to cancel her. They even took it as far as bullying her on her appearance.

Allie Bain is an avid Harry Styles and 5 Seconds of Summer stan. She has been a part of stan culture for the past 11 years of her life and has experienced bullying. She didn’t know much about K-Pop group BTS and would often tweet about not understanding things a BTS stan may know everything about. As a result, she would often get bullied and picked on for her looks. “I was always stressed out about what people were going to say about me. People would make comments about my dark circles, like yeah I know,” Bain says.

Illustration by Andrea Koehler