

Serving the superfans



1. The history of the superfan and why they are important to the music business



– Photos: Wikimedia Commons

THE HISTORY OF THE FAN is a long and curious one – with music, sport, literature, film and sci-fi all combining at different points to shape what fans are and how they express themselves over the centuries.

In popular music terms, the fan as both a cultural and an economic force can be traced back to the crooner era, with Frank Sinatra causing a sensation among the bobby-soxers of the 1940s. Each decade since has brought its own new forms of fan expression and identification.

Elvis and the early rock 'n' roll stars of the 1950s were fuelled by cinema, as well as the emergence of the teenager as a distinct demographic; Beatlemania in the

1960s was in part powered by mass access to television; T-Rexstasy and Rollermania rode through the 1970s on the back of glossy pop and teen magazines; Madonna and Michael Jackson in the 1980s became global icons in part due to the arrival of MTV; and wave after wave of boybands in the 1990s were made possible due to a meshing of all the above just in time for the CD to become music's dominant format.

In the 2000s, social media began to change how fans organised themselves and how they expressed their fandom. They took on new powers and greater importance in how they, rather than traditional media alone, could help acts become megastars.

They gave themselves names that alluded to their kinship with their favourite act and their loyalty to them (The Grateful Dead's Deadheads, Bob Dylan's Bobcats, Slipknot's delightfully named Maggots, Lady Gaga's Little Monsters, Beyoncé's Beyhive, Rihanna's Navy, One Direction's Directioners, the BTS Army and beyond), all of it arriving in a blizzard of memes, slang and complex codes of belonging that define them, but intentionally appear incomprehensible to outsiders as a new language of pop fandom was forged.

But it all goes back much further than Sinatra – with "Lisztomania" (or "Liszt fever") being coined as a term in 1844 to describe the audience frenzy at a run of

performances in Paris by Franz Liszt. Outside of music, Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle also attracted highly vociferous fans in their careers, with the latter having to bring Sherlock Holmes back from the dead due to fan demand in an early version of what we would understand today as a hashtag campaign.

Baseball coverage in US newspapers started using the term “fan” (short for “fanatic”) to describe ebullient attendees at games in the late 1800s and the term “fanzine” (a fan-produced magazine) dates back to 1930 when sci-fi enthusiasts started to create their own magazine to showcase their love for, and deep knowledge of, the genre.

It was American football that was to deliver (or at least popularise) the term “superfan” to describe that upper tier of fandom, with George Plimpton’s *Sports Illustrated* feature *The Celestial Hell Of The Superfan* from September 1965 helping to push the word into the mainstream.

The characteristics of the fan (or the superfan) have not really changed since those boisterous Liszt performances close to two centuries ago; only how and where fans communicate and feed their fandom has changed, adapting to and contorting around new technologies and media (from cheap magazines all the way to TikTok).

Superfans are the people who are defined by their unwavering loyalty to a group or a singer – buying the records and the merchandise, attending the shows and doing everything in their power to convert others to their cause. Acts will, of course, talk at length about why their fans are the best fans in the world and they will do so for cultural reasons (to give their music an elevated validity) but also for economic reasons (because fans of all stripes help make and amplify an act’s career).

The fan sits squarely on the axis of culture and commerce – giving acts not just an income but also an artistic resonance. It is only in gathering fans around them that a performer can truly become a star.



“They are zealous connectors with a strong desire to convert others and can sometimes stir up the frenzied worship of a brand,” is how Alison Hulme, research analyst at Decode, put it in a piece for Marketing Week on the role of the superfan in social media marketing. “They convert brand awareness into something tangible by convincing people to act who otherwise may not have done. Acting as kind of online missionaries, they turn friends into sales – so an evangelical superfan is a seriously valuable asset.”¹

The notion of the superfan has even been explicitly used in the marketing of acts – arguably reaching its apex in the 1959 release of the 50,000,000 Elvis Fans Can’t Be Wrong: Elvis’ Gold Records, Volume 2 compilation. It was released a mere three years after his first run of hit singles in the US, partly to underline just what a phenomenon he was. (The album concept and sleeve design was pastiched beautifully by obstinate Mancunians The Fall with their 2004 compilation 50,000 Fall Fans Can’t Be Wrong.)

In the heyday of physical products, superfans would be the ones queuing up to buy records on the day of release and would also buy the multiple formats of singles and special editions of albums, helping propel their chosen



acts up the charts. They would also be the first in the queue for tickets and the ones laden down with purchases at the merchandise table after a show.

They are also likely to be the ones buying physical product today – as acts like Taylor Swift and BTS understand, creating expanded or deluxe physical versions of albums designed with superfans in mind from the off, giving them an experience that goes far beyond what streaming can offer them.

Artists, however, do not need to be global megastars to harness the power of superfans, with acts of all sizes creating D2C and D2F initiatives, most typically for album release week, and encouraging fans to buy not just the new release but also offering bundles of products such as T-shirts, mugs, tote bags and concert tickets.

This can also be extended to more esoteric – but still lucrative – product lines such as figurines and bedsheets. This notion of the small but powerful audience was popularised by *Wired* editor Kevin Kelly’s essay *1,000 True Fans* to explain how audience loyalty – even in what might be seen as relatively small numbers – can make a career.

- Note

¹ <https://www.marketingweek.com/the-fan-ship-factor-understanding-the-role-of-the-superfan-in-social-media-marketing/>

1.

Understanding how audiences and clusters of fans use social media and technology to not only connect to artists but also to connect with each other is critical. In her 2018 book *Playing To The Crowd: Musicians, Audiences & The Intimate Work Of Connection*, Nancy Baym argued, “Musicians, once the powerful, elusive rock stars who dropped from the sky every four years and let you listen to their album if you were lucky, land now in a realm where the audience is deep in relations with one another and their own participatory practices of meaning making.

For artists, fans’ online gift cultures raise dialectic tensions between participatory desires for communication and connection and personal, economic, and artistic desires to control their work and image.”²

Streaming is also changing what fandom (and superfandom) is and how they consume music. Listeners today are more omnivorous than they ever have

been simply because everything is immediately accessible to them. If fandom and superfandom used to be built around scarcity – where consumers had limited disposable income and so heavily invested, both financially and emotionally, in one act – the nature of fandom is having to change and adapt to an era of ubiquity.

Live event marketing company Audience Republic drew on a survey from Vice that found 78% of young listeners claimed they could not be defined by the genre of music they listen to. Jared Kristensen of Audience Republic took this finding and worked it up into the idea of the “genre-less music fan” as a very modern phenomenon.

He suggested this is going to change how the industry finds and segments audiences in the future.



“This causes havoc from a music marketing perspective, because it’s almost impossible to pigeonhole anyone anymore.”³

Everything is changing at speed as technology shifts how audiences connect with stars, but the superfan remains paramount.

It might seem trite to say it, but that does not make it any less true: consumers come and go, but fans are the bedrock of the music business and superfans are the greatest asset any act can have. There is a presumption that superfans are the least critical and most likely to forgive acts a run of underwhelming releases or sub-standard performances. There may be some truth in that, but their loyalty should never be taken for granted and their enthusiasm must be nurtured anew with each project from an artist.

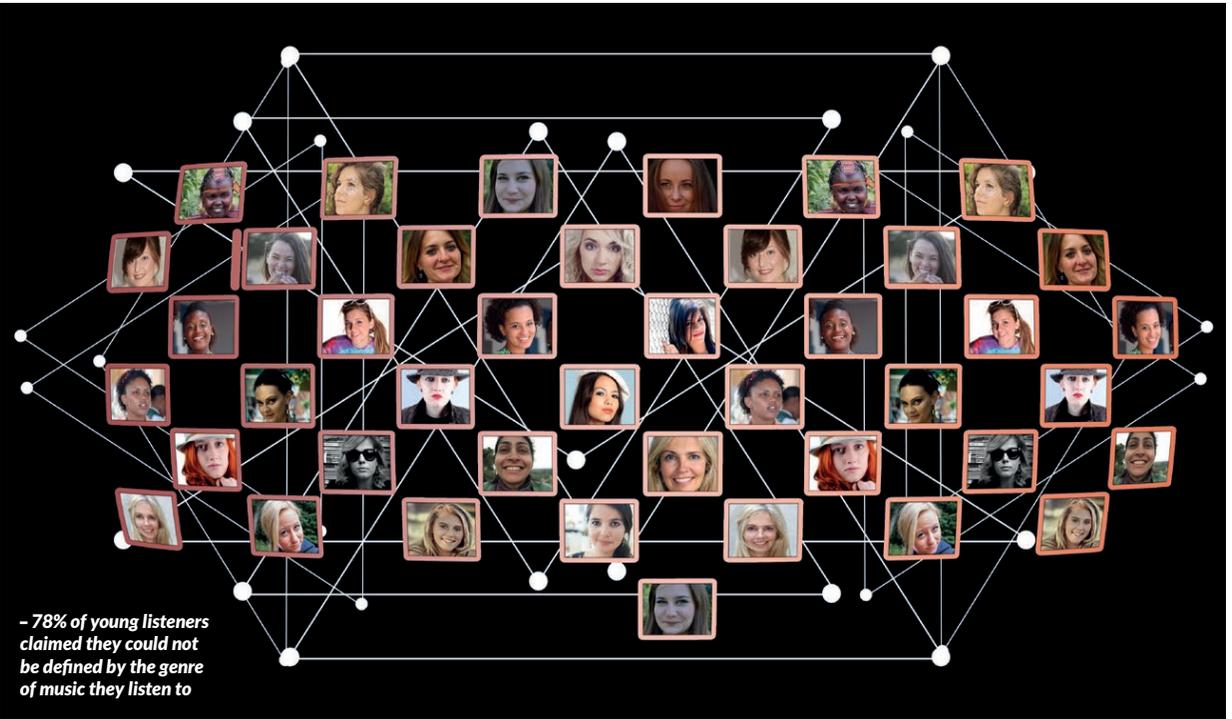
This report looks at who the superfans are, where they exist, how they organise themselves, where acts can work with them, what things work for them and what things are ‘fan Kryptonite’.

It looks at recent examples of campaigns that were designed from the off to appeal to – and work with – superfans, finding new ways to cultivate them and reward their loyalty.

It also spotlights the tools that labels and managers can use to not only segment their fans but also to understand what connects most with them and to deliver the best products, incentives and experiences for those fans.

It ends with a series of tips and insight into marketing to superfans and what best practice looks like.

Superfans are hard won, but should never be taken for granted because, as soon as you lose them, chances are they will never come back.



- Note
² <https://www.wired.com/story/book-excerpt-playing-to-the-crowd/>
³ <https://audiencerepublic.com/blog/the-rise-of-the-genre-less-music-fan>

Event case study

Hannah Ewens (author of *Fangirls: Scenes From Modern Music Culture*) in conversation with music and culture journalist Aimee Cliff



AC: What inspired the book?

HE: It was around 2014/2015, when women in music conversations started happening and when feminism came into pop music and pop culture discourse. It made me think about how the idea of the fangirl initially was something that was quite derogatory.

Twitter and [the rise of] One Direction was the first time where we had this proper 360 look at what fandom actually was. One Direction fans were the first internet fandom really that played out properly on Twitter and that was completely public for everyone to see.

We had this opening up of discussions about whether or not the idea of the fangirl was something that was derogatory. At the same time, young girls especially were reclaiming the term. That had a lot to do with Tumblr and 1D fans on Twitter.

The book is divided up by having each chapter on a different theme and a different fandom. All of it came from speaking to different girls about what they thought about their specific fandom and how that related to things like mental health, sexuality, lust, obsession or being a queer fan.

The idea we all have of what fans are has come from the media and music industry. The music press has always been very male dominated until quite recently. But now there are a lot of females and people of colour working as

writers and editors. That's really changed what we think of as a fan.

AC: You also spoke to lots of pre-internet fans. What do you think has remained consistent about those communities of superfans? And what do you think has changed with the way things are now?

HE: I was really surprised at how similar fans remained through time. The only thing that's changed is tech, social media and the speed with which fans are able to get access to artists and artists' work – and to each other as well. With the women I spoke to who were Beatles fans, Elvis fans or Frank Sinatra fans, it was like having the same conversation over and over again. I would then be speaking to a 1D fan, a Beyoncé fan or a Halsey fan, but the only thing that changed was the slang. The main thing that has stayed the same is the need for fans to have a story. The thing that makes someone a superfan is becoming hugely invested in someone's specific story.

AC: Tell us about how fandoms have been trendsetters online and what the industry and music media can learn from them.

HE: I used the Beyhive [Beyoncé fans] as the best example to show how fans online literally do – and this goes across all fandoms, really – act like bees. They go out, they collect all the information and they have a constant stream between themselves with all this information. It's not so much something that happens anymore, but a few years ago music journalism made the fans the news. The fans would do something – they'd comment on the fact that Beyoncé didn't turn up to an event, for example – and then that would be the news. Rather than talking about Beyoncé not turning up to the event, it would be, "Fans went crazy because Beyoncé didn't turn up". That's where the bee metaphor came to its conclusion of [fans being

like] beekeepers. Fans are this massive treasure trove of information. A big thing about superfans is that they are just completely relentless in how much they want information. They want to be the best compared to the other fans – and the way you do that is by collecting the most information. Over the last few years, tech and social media have really enabled the beginnings of stan culture [overly avid fans] to come out. There are so many artists who demand attention all the time. Social media has basically made this whole playground for stans to compete for artists to be the best. It's all about whether someone's had a hit or a flop, trying to prove that a certain artist is the best. Stan culture has turned being a fan into a competition. But it's not them who wins necessarily, although they're getting the dopamine hit from it. It's the artist who is the one who's winning.

AC: What did you learn from all your conversations with fangirls researching the book? What do they want from the industry more than anything?

HE: Something I've been thinking about recently due to quarantine is that the most important thing that the industry can do to provide something for fans – and help ameliorate the fact that fans are not able to go to gigs – is by helping artists tell their stories in the best way over the summer. Charli XCX is doing a great job of this. She's providing Zoom calls for her fans and inviting in celebs and journalists to ask questions. She's allowing fans to submit potential artwork for the cover [of the album she is making during lockdown].

Hayley Williams is also doing a really good job of engaging fans. She's released her album in three parts and she's just doing so much stuff online – speaking to fans every day and doing stuff on Instagram. The main thing is not freaking out and just letting artists tell their stories in the way that's the most interesting and passionate to them. That will then make it more interesting for the fans because they will connect with this so much more.



2. Overview of existing research



IN MUCH OF THE EXISTING RESEARCH ON FANS and superfans, there can be something of a tendency to zoom in on a particular area of their activities or the places where they congregate and engage – be it streaming, social media or live, often structured around particular age brackets.

But from this, interesting findings emerge, as do helpful typologies to understand why fans cluster in particular spaces and what that all means for how to not only reach but also nurture and reward them.

In 2015, video platform Vevo compiled a report on millennial consumers – grouping them into what it termed “fan tribes”.⁴

The report looked at how social media in particular was reshaping the relationship between artists and fans in completely new ways – and this was especially true for millennials (i.e those aged between 13 and 34 at the time of the research).

“Young consumers are given a personal window into artists’ lives, creativity, and thoughts, and have unprecedented access to them,” it said. “Of all of the different celebrities they know, Millennials by far have the deepest connections with music celebrities, who they see as more talented and admirable.”

Rather than use the term “superfan”, the Vevo report talked of “fan armies” – generally based around online

– Note

⁴ http://aws-cache.vevo.com/assets/file/VEVO_Millennial_Tribe_Whitepaper_V9_9.25_CMYK.pdf

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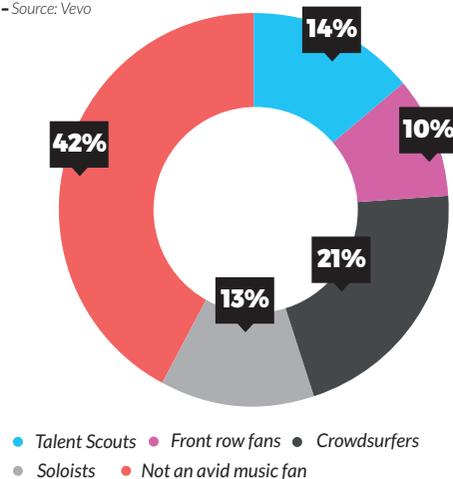


communities, with 65% of avid fans saying they belonged to a particular army.

It was able to identify five groups of fans – going from the most proactive and engaged down to the much more passive – and showing what percentage of the overall audience they made up.

Vevo Millennial Tribe Research

– Source: Vevo



– Note
⁵ <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2013/turn-it-up-music-fans-could-spend-up-to-2-6b-more-annually/>

The Vevo research defines **talent scouts** as those who want to be most active in evangelising about an act and they are voracious in their appetite for new content (across a multitude of technologies and platforms) and experiences. These are the tastemakers who will be actively spreading the word about their new discoveries as far and as wide as possible. The genres that define them are dance, pop, electronic, alternative and R&B.

The **front row fans** are the next tier down but are no less engaged in spreading the word about the music and art they love, regarding themselves as cultural influencers. Their interests are not confined to just music and they also proselytise about cinema, fashion, food and beauty. The genres that define them are rock, pop, country and alternative.

Crowdsurfers are more plugged into a constant feed of content and it soundtracks their entire day. “They’re the most interested in entertainment buzz,” says the report. They are also heavy sharers of content online. The genres that define them are Latin, indie pop, hip-hop/rap and dance.

Finally, **soloists** are, as the name suggests, one step removed from the pack (or at least would like to regard themselves as sitting outside of the pack). They consume on non-mainstream channels, they want extra depth on what they consume (such as behind-the-scenes footage) and will be heavy buyers of merchandise at concerts. They are not necessarily defined by a particular genre.

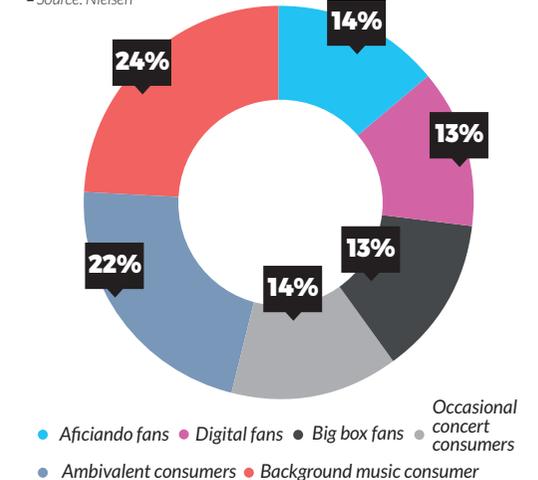
A Nielsen study from 2013 entitled *The Buyer & The Beats: The Music Fan & How to Reach Them* takes a slightly different approach in terms of how it categorises different types of fans and their levels of fandom.

Its focus is on the financial contribution of fans to the music industry, first breaking them down by types of fans and then looking at how their spending compares to each other. While it is based on respondents in the US, many of the findings are applicable in developed music markets.⁵

Music consumers and their music spending

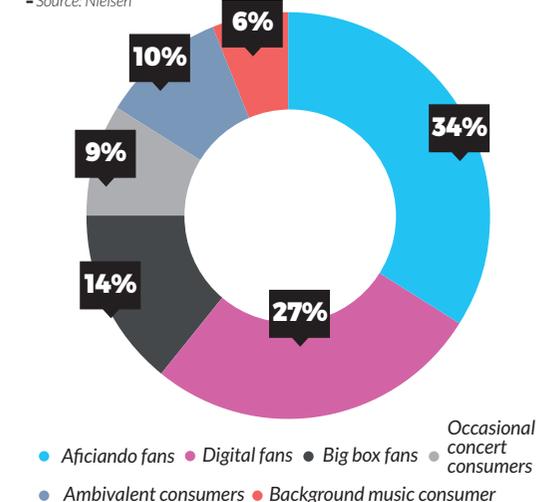
Music consumers by segment

– Source: Nielsen



Share of music spend

– Source: Nielsen



What is most apparent here is that certain fan demographics over-index in terms of their total spending.

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Aficionado fans might make up 14% of all fans, but they account for over a third (34%) of all spending by fans. Nielsen defines them as “the top-tier connoisseurs of music” and they are broad in terms of the eras and genres of music they are interested in. Their hefty aggregate spending comes from the fact that they are more willing to pay for music physically (and use streaming services) as well as buy concert tickets and related content such as merchandise in serious volume.

For **digital fans**, they are more akin to the talent scouts as defined by Vevo in its research. They are around the same size as aficionado fans but spend less – although they do account for over a quarter of all fan spend (27%). They “consider themselves to be the tune trend finders, listen to music through social networks and are very engaged”, according to Nielsen.

Big box fans are much more mainstream in their tastes and activities. Their size is roughly comparative with their share of total fan spend. They typically consume and discover music via TV, games, adverts and movies and are swayed in their purchasing decisions by price and discounts.

Occasional concert consumers typically listen to music when at work but less often when at home and they rarely engage with live music – and even then just for their favourite acts.

Ambivalent music fans are the second-biggest grouping in size but the second-lowest in terms of spending. While they use free streaming services, they are willing to buy content or experiences that they consider to be special or unique.

Finally, **background music consumers** are the largest grouping by number but the smallest grouping by spend. They are the least engaged with music and this is typical of their consumption of entertainment in general. Getting to this audience is hard, but they are the ones that can make a star into a superstar just by virtue of their sheer size.

Nielsen found that the industry was arguably underserving key fan demographics by not presenting them with exclusive or unique content as much as they could. “These big spenders have indicated that, at large, they’d be willing to pay even more for exclusive extras, like in-studio updates, real-time emails, pre-orders, limited editions, autographed copies, vinyl records and lyric sheets handwritten by the artist,” the report claimed, suggesting the industry was unconsciously leaving money on the table here.

Finally, Havas conducted its own research into fans in the digital age in terms of what they do, how they connect with acts (and how acts can connect with them) and what contemporary digital-powered fandom is.⁶

It found that 56% of those surveyed listen to at least 10 genres of music – and it came up with the term The Shuffle Age to describe this new eclecticism in music consumption and fandom.

It also tried to understand what it called “the how and why of music fandom” – distilling down what it is that fans do with music and what it is that draws them to their favourite artists and genres.

It is in providing a sense of identity that draws in most fans – with this being the very essence of fandom, using an act to help define them and also work as a shortcut for them to reflect that self-identification back to the world. This is why fans need to be treated with the utmost respect and care as music is so inherently woven into their very sense of self.

Here is why fans are so powerful for acts – they are invested in terms of their time and money, of course, but also in terms of their personality and identity. Artists and marketers, when dealing with superfans, forget this at their peril.

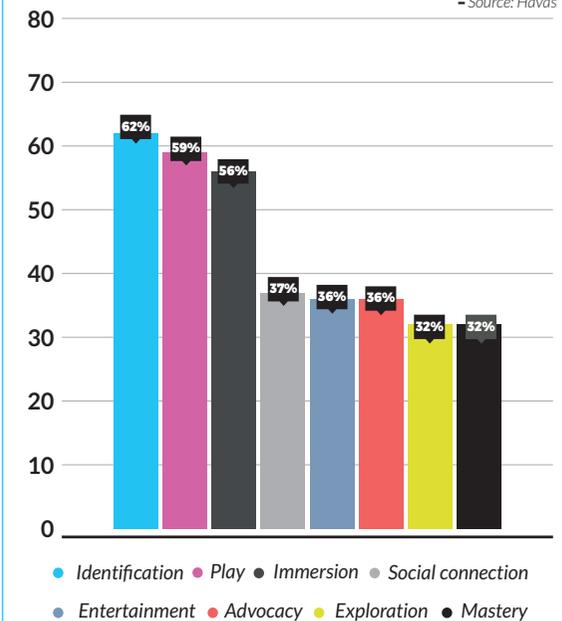
Music is also an escape for them, with over half (65%) saying that it is something they immerse themselves in,

wanting to know and consume as much about an artist as they can.

Another important factor is that of social connection – where music becomes the entry point into friendship circles and acts as the connective tissue between everyone there.

Logic of engagement Why fans embrace music

— Source: Havas



What is clear here is that superfans might be smaller in number, but they are – by some considerable distance – the most engaged. They buy products, they repeat stream, they attend all the shows and they are the engine room of any act’s social media. They are, in many ways, the easiest to spot as they are the most vocal – in the real world and on social media – but care and attention needs to go into how they are dealt with. Making the most of your superfans is complex but will pay off in the long term many times over.

— Note

⁶ <https://huguesrev.files.wordpress.com/2015/07/e3a5f2e6b7d7b4b02c-c087bd6ec429a6.jpg>

Event case study

Putting music fanatics first, Martin Vovk, Head of Insight, Sony Music UK

There are four macro categories of music fans that we look at in the UK – Fanatics, Enthusiasts, Casuals and Indifferents – who broadly cover the engagement spectrum.

We know that music plays a role in everybody's lives in one way or another, but there is a sliding scale in terms of just how big a role music plays.

At the top end of the scale are music fanatics, who are the smallest group of the UK population but the most engaged. At the other end are indifferents, who are the biggest group, though very much clustered at the older end of the population, for them music is more a background influence on their lives.

BUSTING MYTHS AND REALITY CHECK

#1 Music fanatics are not a rare breed

Some people think hardcore music lovers are a pretty obscure group. For these fans, music is the defining passion in their life. Reassuringly, that audience is wider than many people realise and covers around 8m people in the UK.

#2 Superfans are not necessarily fanatical about music as a whole

Superfans of particular artists may be different to fanatical lovers of music in general. Fanatics are much more likely to engage with everything from



– Martin Vovk

subscribing to a streaming service to buying gig tickets, physical products and merchandise.

They are two-and-a-half-times more likely than the average person to have pre-ordered music, so they're a vital audience to understand.

#3 It's harder to skip straight to the mainstream

We've seen this shifting over the last few years alongside media consumption trends: artists could once shoot to fame through mass audiences, like reality TV shows, but audiences are now more segmented. Reaching fanatical audiences first, especially younger ones, is vital because they can kickstart an artist's career. They are early adopters who lean into new music discovery, stream more often and champion artists on social media and in the real world. They can bestow credibility and help make a story travel – and digital media means it's easier to reach them.

#4 Not just 'streamers' or 'buyers'

It's not as simple as saying that younger fanatical audiences stream while older ones buy albums. Some 63% of fanatics in our research both stream and buy physical products, at least sometimes, which is one-and-a-half-times higher than the UK average (24% say they only stream and 11% only buy). This means there's potential to engage in different ways. There are not necessarily two separate audiences.

#5 Younger fanatical audiences are not always more fickle

We've done a lot of work in recent years looking at Gen Z music fanatics and whether that generation still cares about artists or is more interested in tracks and playlists. We found they do, but they're more



selective about who they engage with, why and how. Authenticity is key.

#6 Not true that you need to be mainstream to succeed

We always try to reach the widest possible audience for our artists, while recognising that some artists can be very successful focusing on music fanatics first and foremost. With a pool of 8m people, there's a lot of potential for deep engagement, whether it's the start of a campaign that then crosses over to enthusiasts and casuals or whether hardcore fans are the sole focus.

Key takeaways:

- The UK has a wide and hugely valuable audience of music fanatics for whom music is the defining passion in their life
- These audiences are vital for kickstarting developing artists, so understanding how to connect with them is crucial
- They don't divide easily into digital versus non-digital consumption; campaigns that blend both will see the most success
- Young fanatics aren't just fickle playlist obsessives, but it takes more than just the music to form long-term bonds with an artist
- Fanatical audiences can be a starting point or a destination in themselves – but they shouldn't be ignored.

3. Making the most of your superfans



THE FIVE-STEP GUIDE to making the most of your superfans.

#1 Find fans – not just streams and listeners

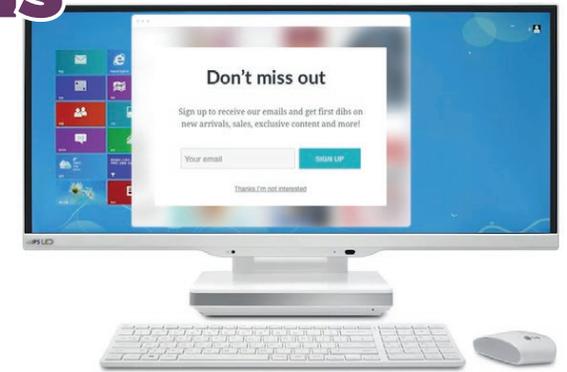
Superfans are great. In fact, they are the best fans there are – so you should be trying to find them from the outset. We sometimes see some marketers chasing streams and playlists, but what they really should be doing is finding fans, the best ones, who really love the artists. The hope here is that, the more real fans you find, the more superfans you find. Work hard to find those superfans and they will surely work hard for you and your artist in return.



– Laura Marling

#2 Giving back for what you take: more than a pre-save?

When Patrick Ross and colleague David Emery came up with the concept of the “pre-save” for the Laura Marling album *Semper Femina* while at AWAL in 2017, they had something very different in mind to how it’s being used today. Most pre-saves that we see these days are all about getting data from a fan so you can push things their way. It’s asking a lot of the fan to hand over data while not delivering much value. You should try to ensure fans whose email addresses you ask for are getting something in return, something of value; like, perhaps, unlocking access to a new track that hasn’t been released yet or adding them to pre-sale access for the next tour.



#3 Mailing lists as fanclubs

Tying in the point above, when you do collect email addresses from fans, value them. Treat them like your fanclub and remember to use them. Jessie Scoullar of Wicksteed Works often talks about the importance of this and her main point is: don’t forget the transaction that occurred with the fan registering their interest and opting in to be emailed by you. Value this by giving value to them in your email strategy.

#4 Tags, replies and DMs

Posts and stories without tags are orphans. Don’t forget to treat social media as just that – “social” media. You can easily do this by tagging fans, adding things they tag into your story and, most importantly, paying attention to those DMs and comments. When fans comment, comment back. Show them you value them and their fandom by engaging back and rewarding your top engagers.

#5 The number one problem in retail

This is wisdom that comes from bricks and mortar retailers. The number one reason people come into a shop and don’t buy anything is because nobody asked them to. Remember who your loyal fans are and be sure to make them aware of exclusive merchandise and ticket offers. If you don’t offer them the option to buy, they most likely won’t. And if you’ve identified them as a superfan, well then it’s probably a good idea to make them an offer they can’t refuse.

4. Label case studies



Coldplay - *Everyday Life* (released November 2019)

ANYA DU SAUZAY, Head of Audience & Engagement at Parlophone, and **Jack Melhuish**, Director of Marketing, Partnership & Strategy at Parlophone.

We work closely with our research and development team with regard to how we categorise fans. Broadly, we have the superfan, the casual fan and lapsed/potential fans. When it comes to streaming, there is the discovery level fan and then the non-fan.

Streaming can usually give us a clear idea of where they sit and whether they are a lean-in listener who is streaming

regularly out of their collection or a more lean-back consumer and therefore with a passive level of interest.

With Coldplay being who they are, there is a very big pool of existing superfans. We know when it comes to the fanbase that anything and everything translates onto socials very quickly.

For the latest album campaign, we used our social and streaming insight as well as things like CRM and cookie data to identify the types of fan and their respective consumption habits and listenership potential. We also identified strong markets outside of the obvious ones like the US, the UK, Europe and Australia.

All these things impacted on the type of content and messaging that we used to engage each audience in order to introduce them to the new record and at what point during the campaign. We also looked at where there were strong pockets for streaming and, in particular, for superfans.

We believed that, if we were going to do something interesting and slightly cryptic, that we should do it in these geographic hotspots as opposed to doing it in the top-tier markets because of the level of engagement and social conversation it would generate. It was very much a strategy to super-serve those fans who maybe haven't had the band come in and play to them for a long time or even at all and are hungry to participate with them.

Even if the numbers don't over-index like the UK or the US might, it doesn't mean that the power of the fanbase isn't there. That was very much part of the strategy when it came to disseminating information – whether it was on a local news channel or an outdoor campaign in Africa or the Middle East.

The visuals for the album were very 1920s-looking where everything is a bit 'lo-fi'. That was part of the approach as opposed to using AR (Augmented Reality), shiny technology platforms or social apps to disseminate information. It was going back to basics in terms of running album announcement ads in a local newspaper that maybe a few thousand people in a country would get, premiering a video or piece of information on a local news channel or having a billboard in a country where there would not be high footfall.

You could argue that putting it in local newspapers in the Middle East is quite obscure; but actually, it's both traditional and disruptive as an approach in terms of people's expectation of how a big album will be promoted. It was just as simple as taking an ad for a couple of hundred pounds in a local newspaper with all the information quite clearly laid out and then waiting for people to pick it up, run with it and tell that story themselves.

That was very much part of it – allowing fans to discover the information and champion the album themselves. That then created a massive ripple across more traditional media including international news outlets and mass mainstream publicity channels. Sometimes the smaller, unexpected things become the most powerful in terms of audience, media interest and sentiment.

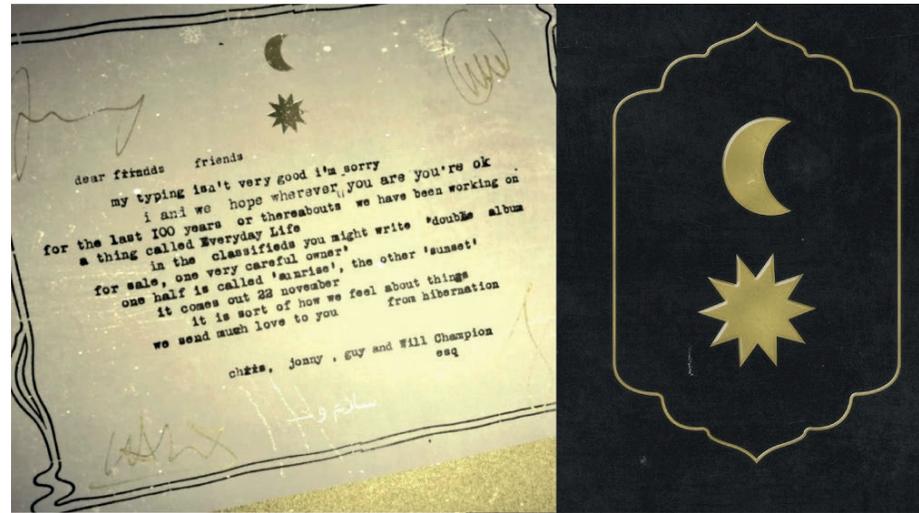
Coldplay are very nurturing of their fanbase; but they're not a traditional act in the sense that you may not get an update or Instagram Story every day, you're not going to get daily live streams or a constant flow of artist access. That is not their approach. For this album, they very much wanted to allow the fans to tell that story for them before landing some incredible marquee campaign moments that connected the fanbase and media globally.

Another example is that we mailed out ornate A5 postcards – that were really beautiful and were gilded with gold foil and signed by the band – to 500 fans worldwide, and 150 of those were in the UK.

We very carefully picked superfans including those who had heavy content consumption and had interacted with the band's website and webstore in the previous 12 months, so we had a good chance of all the addresses being fresh and up to date.

Chris Martin typed up an original note and the band then hand signed each one where they confirmed the album title and release date. It was the first time the band announced the new record anywhere in the world and so it carried a tremendous significance to the band's audience.

It's a good example of how, alongside the bigger content moments and partner activations, the band were very



much aware that they needed to super-serve those fans who have been there from the start and had really been championing the band – just making sure that everybody was included.

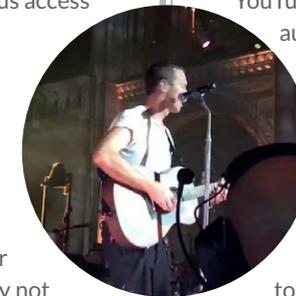
Over the years, we have got a clear idea of who the top-tier fans are from their activity and social interaction. We also have a huge CRM database which gives us access to that information as well.

Through that, we can categorise our fans who are engaging most with the content that was sent out from our CRM database via the mailer. We can see who's opening, who's clicking links, who's purchasing via the D2C store and so on. We can see who our top-tier and most-engaged fans are; they may not necessarily be shouting on socials, but we know that they are really deeply engaged with the band.

In terms of additional digital activity, we echoed the Easter egg-style approach of the ads in local newspapers on digital platforms with a unique teaser activation. There were: backdated post from 1919 revealing the Sun and Moon symbols on Facebook [each represent a side of

from around the world.

This all led up two huge 'rendezvous' moments for the global and UK fanbase to celebrate the album release. Firstly, an hour-long live stream of a stunning live performance of the entire album in Amman, Jordan that was broadcast in two parts – at sunrise and sunset – on



YouTube on the day of album release to a huge global audience of different fan segments and with massive support from the platform.

The other was an intimate show for fans and select media at the London Natural History Museum performance that took place on the week of album release. If you had pre-ordered the album, you were in with a chance to access tickets to this show.

Both these moments were essential in presenting the album in its intended form with the scale and nuance that was so crucial to Coldplay and the project.

This campaign was very much about giving fans ownership of the story and it feeling very personal in its approach.

4.

Little Simz – Grey Area (released March 2019)



HELEN BARRASS, Senior Director of Marketing at AWAL and **ARIEL COHEN**, Digital Marketing Manager at AWAL

HB: Fans were at the forefront of this campaign from the start. We've worked with Little Simz since her first album and she had a very close and direct relationship with her fans. When she played live, at the end of the show she would go into the crowd and make sure she introduced herself to every single person. She's always been very fans-first.

AC: The whole campaign took a multi-pronged approach in terms of clearly identifiable groups of fans. There was the proper hip-hop head fans who have loved Simz from back in the day; they are slightly older – mid 20s to mid 30s with a bit of a male lean. Then there was this other demographic with a slight male lean, but who weren't necessarily hip-hop heads; they were more indie music fans. Then there was a younger, more female-leaning fanbase who saw Simz as a real role model.

AC: We put together a bus tour and event for fans on the day of the album release. Simz posted out on her socials and it was a simple sign-up form. The bus activation ended up being something that really appealed to that younger audience who were slightly more female-leaning.

We created a bus route that went to a number of stops around London. It started in North London near where Simz lives, so she was the first person that we picked up and we then picked up fans from that area. We tried to make sure that we had a roughly equal amount of fans coming in at each stop and communicated with them to make sure that they were there at the right time.

We had decorated the inside of the bus and we had pizza. It was a simple meet-and-greet otherwise that just happened to be on a bus. It ended at Somerset House where we had organised an album launch party.

HB: We had a gallery exhibition as well. One of the things that Simz wanted to showcase was her art. She had taken a number of photos for the album and single artwork as well as imagery that was associated with the record. We had them printed out and created a mini gallery in Somerset House. We also had a photo booth, which was Little Simz branded and she jumped in there with her fans.

AC: With these launch parties and celebrations, 99% of them are just close friends of the artist and their teams – and sometimes the media might get invited. It is very rare for fans to be invited to them.

That made it feel extra special because we made sure not to reveal anything about that to the fans. We also had a week of release underplay tour in tiny venues.

She also live streamed on Instagram throughout the campaign. She's teaching herself how to DJ and she would live

stream her sets throughout the campaign and fans would interact with that.

HB: We didn't have an awful lot of access to Simz during the campaign rollout so we had to maximise the things that we did have. So when she was signing records we were filming that and making content from it. A lot of things do come quite naturally with her when engaging directly with her fans.

AC: A lot of artists in the hip-hop world are very aware of the importance of authenticity. It has to be natural for Simz for it to work. It's slightly different in the pop sphere where artists will engage in more gimmicky or novelty-type activations. We really had to make things true to Simz.

One of the things that is very Simz-y is the close relationship she has with her fans. She is essentially the same person as her fans.

She can get on with her fans pretty easily because there isn't so much of a barrier between them in terms of interest or character. A lot of her fans are mini Simzes anyway.



Event case study

Passenger - Spotify Fans First initiative and e-commerce, Stephen O'Reilly, Director, ie: music



- Stephen O'Reilly

With Passenger we did an exclusive Fans First performance where Spotify identified Passenger's top listeners in the UK and invited 150 of them to a show at their London offices in July 2017.

It was a money-can't-buy one-off experience. We also used the music from the show to help to market the album *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* so there were some Spotify-exclusive performances from the Fans First show.

It served a number of purposes: one was rewarding Passenger's top listeners on Spotify; and the other was creating content to market the record on Spotify again. It worked for us and it worked for Spotify. You need more content anyway.

We gave him a few ideas to market the album and he really loved the Spotify one. Spotify and YouTube are such huge platforms for him so we tried to do fan-specific events for each platform. Spotify was the live session and YouTube was a livestream concert from YouTube HQ in London.

Spotify had a specific team looking after that whole initiative; it was all run by them and it was seamless. There was not a lot that we had to do except lock in

the dates and the deliverables. They looked after all of the comms and the invites while we supported it on socials. When Spotify do these events for fans, they tend to do things in a package. It was part of an overall promotional package for the record.

We look across the different platforms and work with different fans in different ways - identifying the fans where we can.

With Spotify, you don't know who the fans are [due to privacy issues], so you have to work with Spotify. That's why Fans First is all controlled by them.

For our own D2C, if we have exclusive products or limited-edition products that we know will sell out, we will email the fans who have been the most loyal customers on the store. We have all of their historical purchasing information over the years and can identify top spenders by city, by country or by territory.

The Robbie Williams fan app was something we used to put on a concert last year at the Roundhouse in London. It was only for people who were premium users of the app.

The tickets were highly reduced in price and the only people who could buy tickets to the show were premium subscribers to his official app. The concert only included Robbie's B-sides and tracks from his rarities albums [the *Under The Radar* series].

Under The Radar is a really interesting series because it's just Robbie and his fans. You can only buy the albums on his website. We've done three albums in the series so far. We're really interested in the concept of fan-centric shows for any artist that can turn these fan events into brands. You could almost look at that night

as a brand in itself - these live events that could happen every year if Robbie wanted them to because we know that there is demand for it. We sold it out without doing a press release and we didn't do anything on social media. It was all done via the app. It was a really interesting way of selling out the Roundhouse without telling anybody that it was even happening.

We always look at our analytics every time we do any kind of marketing. For every social media post, every email, every release, we look at the analytics on a daily basis to see what's working.

If you take the mailing list as an example, the analytics are telling us how many people open the email and how many people clicked on the link. We do sometimes add A/B testing to see which clips or calls to action, such as different subject titles in the email, respond a little bit better. On Facebook, the analytics optimise the ads.

We're constantly advertising, even when we're out of campaign. We are promoting posts and promoting our content to fans where we know that it's in our long-term interest. Lots of artists only promote things around the release of a record or in the six weeks up to the release of a record.

With Robbie's Christmas album last year, we started our Christmas marketing in January 2019 without actually promoting the record. We had a budget for 2019 to keep the Robbie audience as hot as possible so that on the day that we announced the Christmas record we had a huge pre-sale in one day.

A significant amount of sales for the Robbie Christmas album went through his website - and it was probably the biggest single driver of sales.

Event case study

**Howard Jones -
Human's Lib, John Reed,
Director of Catalogue,
Cherry Red Records**



- John Reed

The superfans have changed how this business operates, which for them is predominantly about physical product.

In the music industry for many years, product was very affordable. That is commendable as it made everything inclusive; but there was a more devout and serious fanbase out there than someone buying a CD in the HMV sale who were not being served.

Even as a consumer myself, I felt frustrated for many years that there was an indifference from record companies towards this hardcore of people that was later labelled "£50 Man". What has happened is that that market has evolved.

People who buy physical product today are not buying it on a whim. Most people buying physically now are serious buyers. Those people who used to buy one CD a year are just listening on Spotify now. The market has become far more delineated.

It's more unusual than usual for us to issue single-CD editions of albums now. Most of our releases are multi-disc and come in special packaging. The superfan - the person who is prepared to spend what it takes to buy a high-end product - is the physical buyer now. You have to give them more in a release.

Sometimes the demand is for vinyl, but a lot of the time it's about combining lots of disparate releases from the past so that it becomes an issue of convenience for the buyer.

It is putting everything in the box while improving the packaging and the presentation to make something look more enticing.

It rarely works if you're only offering packaging. It has to start with the music being innately in demand -

either adding unreleased material, or at least collating everything that was previously available across multiple releases and making it more presentable.

You definitely don't want to be giving people everything they've already got. You equally can't get away with giving people too much stuff they've never heard of. It's a balance.

The superfan can also become a resource. It is quite common when working with an artist that one of the first questions we ask them is: have you got a superfan or an überfan that you already work with?

-continued »...



Event case study

Howard Jones, continued...

Quite a lot of the time there already is someone who works with the artist or their manager and looks after social media or does their merchandise. That's the perfect scenario. In that case, it's really straightforward because it's just an extension of what you're already talking about with the artist.

You can use superfans as a form of pre-awareness marketing, asking them if they have any suggestions for tracks to be included in a release. That then goes out on the online forums where the fans communicate with each other. As long as you have the right superfans who are advising you on it, you're much less likely to put out an inappropriate product or a product with mistakes.

The superfan has become a lot more knowledgeable and a lot more discerning. They are probably older and have bought this stuff before. With online resources at their fingertips, they are aware of mistakes with tracks on previous releases and they are aware of things they haven't got. You have to make sure that you're ahead of that curve and that you're giving people what they want.

For the 1980s pop market, make sure you get the right mixes. These fans want every single

version of every track because that's what that era was about.

With artwork and packaging, make it nice and make sure it's appropriate. Do not overdo it. There are some deluxe packages selling for £150 or £200 and I am sometimes fearful that this quite buoyant market might get killed off.

Fatigue is the ultimate obstacle. If people start to think there's too much coming out and it's too expensive, they'll drift away and spend their money on something

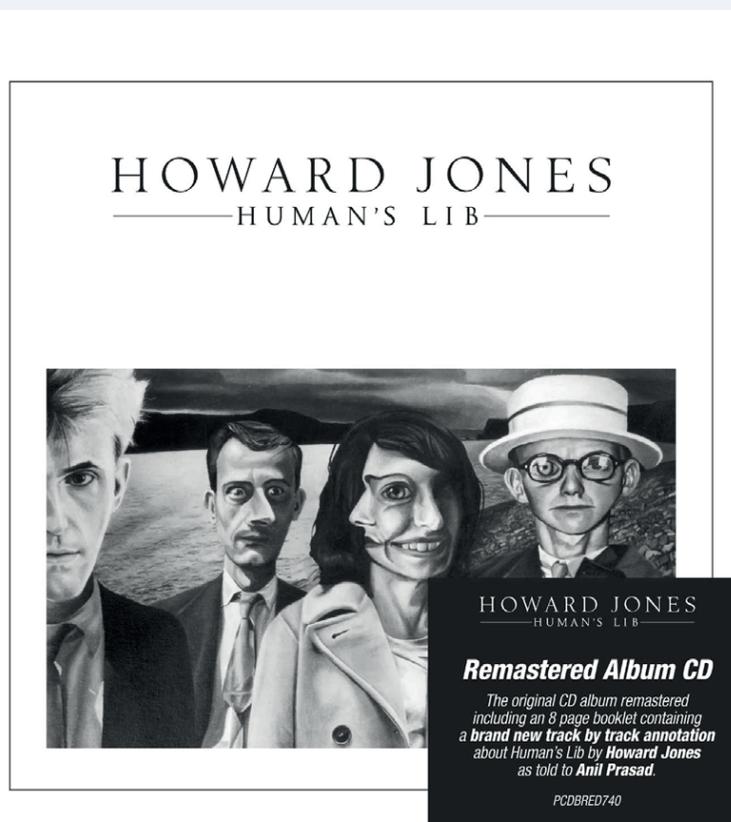
else. Price is very important. You've got to make people feel they're getting good value for money.

We had a conversation about the box set of Howard Jones's debut album, Human's Lib, where we were reluctant to push it north of £100. You cannot assume that people have got bottomless pockets. You've got to give people things that seem affordable.

With Howard, we had the luxury that his Warner-era albums had never been reissued in an expanded format. We were not going to suffer from that fan fatigue. It was obvious to put them out on vinyl and we also wanted them back out on straightforward CD. Then we had the super deluxe box sets.

It all came back to the material. We reproduced the demo cassette he sent around and that eventually got him his deal with Warner in the 1980s. There was also some fanclub memorabilia and tour programmes added in. We had an embarrassment of riches there and felt confident the superfan would want it. The super deluxe edition sold out within a few months.

Superfans can be your greatest ally or they can rip you to shreds. The superfan is also keeping record companies on their toes. They can make a record company's life difficult if they make mistakes. But if you are doing what you should be doing – namely giving people what they want and doing the job properly – then that shouldn't be a problem.



5. Platform focus: understanding the fan-centric tools they offer and the tricks they allow



YouTube

WHO ARE YOUR SUPERFANS on YouTube? Well, the easiest metric would be to look at who your subscribers are. If they have subscribed to you, they are likely a fan. But YouTube Analytics lets you go deeper. You can go into the Audience tab on YouTube Analytics and get a breakdown of not only how many unique people have been watching your content but also how many of them are subscribers. Seeing a lot of non-subscribers? Then

perhaps it's time to head over to Google Ads, build out some Audiences and target some ads at people who don't subscribe to your channel.

Google makes this very easy to do and gives you great data on where your views and, most importantly, your Watch Time is coming from. Don't be afraid of the Community tab on your channel. It's likely your superfans are already there just waiting to be engaged with.

Spotify

THE FIRST METRIC TO PAY ATTENTION to when looking for superfans on Spotify is your followers. Listeners ebb and flow, as do streams, but followers are a much more trustworthy metric of who your fans are. Spotify For Artists' Audience tab gives you some good insights into where these followers are, who else they like and their demographics.

This is really helpful, but they aren't giving up the data directly. Spotify does, however, have a very robust API which has allowed for data-mining tools like the aforementioned "pre-save". If you get people to access your music via a third-party tool, and they grant you access, then there is a goldmine of information you can get from them, including their email address. That said, in a post-GDPR world, fewer and fewer people are giving that data away so readily.

Apple Music

APPLE MUSIC FOR ARTISTS is the place to go to understand your audience on Apple Music. But it's not going to tell you who they are, being a bit more conscious of privacy concerns than these others. As we know, Apple Music is not about public numbers or data. (Sure, if you use the platform and add your friends, you can see what they are listening to, but it's not public to the world.) So, the best thing you can do is to better understand where your fans are. Apple Music has a great interface for looking at where your listeners are coming from – allowing you to drill down to a specific city or area – and have a far more granular look at where you have an audience. A useful tool, but it's not going to give you their specific data to contact them. So look to Apple Music to help you understand where they are and lean on their tools to better understand who they are.

5.

Facebook

FACEBOOK HAS ALSO MADE IT EASY to find your Top Fans. Just navigate to your Facebook page URL/ community. There you will see a list of your most recent Top Fans. (You do have to enable this feature first.) Once on, you not only get a list, but fans are rewarded by having a little badge next to their name when they post on your page. This is a pretty simple way to see who your most engaged – and top – fans on Facebook are.



TOP FANS WITH THINGS IN COMMON

 **Manjeet Singh**
1 mutual friend: Vishal Gupta

ALL TOP FANS

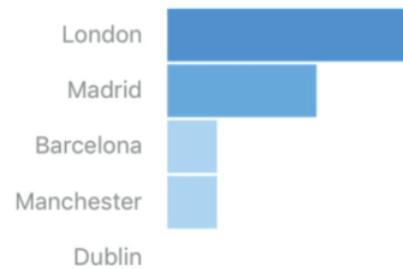
 **Daniel Patterson**
New top fan

 **Allan Yates**
New top fan

 **Mohamed Hisham**
New top fan

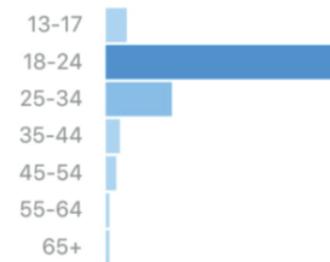
Top locations

Cities Countries



Age range

All Men Women



Gender



20% Men | 80% Women

Followers

Hours Days



- screenshot, Instagram Insights

Instagram

INSTAGRAM OFFERS LITTLE INSIGHT into the identity of your superfans on the platform, but there are some ways you can make sure that they are being looked after through various tools. Instagram Insights shows you the account's audience growth in the last seven days, the top five towns/cities and countries, age and gender splits, as well as when your followers are most active. This can help you gain an understanding of the overall audience, but to understand who your superfans are, you will have to do some manual work.

For example, pay attention to which accounts are frequently the first ones to comment on posts and stories – and make sure you engage with them. In Facebook Business Manager, you can set up audiences based on Instagram engagement such as direct messages or saving

posts. These activities can indicate that someone is a superfan. There is an opportunity to utilise the Close Friends tool as a fanclub on the platform. By adding the users you have identified as your superfans you can use this to share extra content that only those fans can see.

Twitter

TWITTER USED TO HAVE A ROBUST ANALYTICS PLATFORM which gave you plenty of information on your followers, such as age and gender split, countries, languages and your audience's top interests. It even used to provide deeper analytics, including what type of lifestyle the followers lead and what kind of purchaser they were, as well as household income and phone carrier they used (in the US). This has now been retired from the analytics page and the only type of information on your audience is your monthly top follower and top mention.

Event case study

Five Pointers For How To Make Email Your VIP Channel, Jessie Scoullar, Founding Director, Wicksteed Works

#1 Start building your list

As soon as the artist is out there active on any online platforms, there ought to be an effort to start building their mailing list. You always want to be building and deepening engagement.

One good example of that is George Ezra. He does a really good job of keeping his list informed about what he is doing. He writes his emails really engagingly and they feel like they are written by a friend. It feels authentic.



- George Ezra



- Jessie Scoullar

Nils Frahm is an artist who removed himself from Facebook and Instagram, but if you go to his website, the first thing he does is to invite people to sign up to his mailing list. This is a smart way of showing that email is an important way for him to keep in touch with his fans because he is one of the growing group of artists who do not want to engage with social media.

#2 Welcome your fans

The moment that a fan signs up to an email list is a really significant moment in the artist/fan relationship, but it's pretty easy to get it wrong.

You should make sure that you configure a welcome email acknowledgement that will be sent to the subscriber as soon as they sign up. It is safe to presume that the vast majority of consumers would expect an acknowledgment as soon as they sign up to a mailing list. If you don't follow through on this, you're already on the back foot in terms of establishing a good relationship.

When a fan is very highly engaged with the artist and has just signed up to receive ongoing email, this is the perfect moment to acknowledge that, to say thank you and to set out some expectations about what the fan will get from this mailing list. You can also use this chance to mention your current promotions or offer a discount for the artist store.

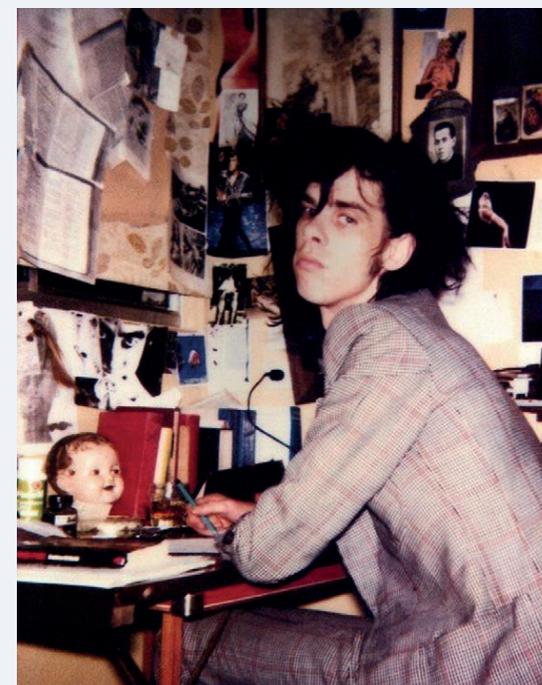
#3 Find your voice

This is where you need to be careful and strategic about finding a balance between selling and telling. You don't want to be hammering sales messages and equally you don't want to be spamming fans. In order

to get this right, it comes back to having a clear sense of identity and values as an artist.

A case in point is Nick Cave's Red Hand Files. He understands the massive potential in connecting with a fan directly and he makes himself available. He is really generous and his emails are insightful and wise.

I don't know anyone who has read them and who hasn't been blown away. He has been doing them at least once a week since 2018 and the quality has never dipped.



There is zero commercial messaging in Nick Cave's emails. Any commercial messaging is kept to the Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds mailing list. He keeps them separate.

- continued »...

Event case study

continued...



- The Magic Lantern

Equally The Magic Lantern's emails have included very personal and heartfelt messages explaining some of his experiences lately and the inspiration for the music. This kind of disclosure isn't for everyone, but if it does feel right then it can really build a sense of connection with the fans.

#4 Send emails

Establishing a voice is really important for engaging the fans; actually using it and getting emails out the door is the next step. When planning your communication schedule, you need to be thinking about email alongside your social networks and website partners such as Bandsintown and Spotify. All those channels need to be updated as new



- Metallica

messaging becomes relevant and you should also make sure to include email in there and for it not to be an afterthought.

The bare minimum would be a quarterly newsletter. There is value to keeping a connection alive.

If you are serious about developing an email channel, it needs to be treated as VIP; it needs to let fans know that they are getting the best news first and that there's a point to actually opening the email.

Metallica have an initial series of four or five emails that go out to new subscribers. On one of the first emails the subject line is, "You will always be the first to know." It's a very clear message to get people into the habit of realising that if they get an email from Metallica it's because they're getting some news before anybody else.

Imagine the artist-fan relationship like a goodwill bank. When you give the fans a good experience, it

is depositing into this goodwill bank; then when you ask them for something – like an email address, a referral, a share or some kind of purchase – this is withdrawing from the goodwill bank. If you are planning frequent deposits, then you're going to have a positive balance.

This could be by sending a simple thank you message, doing some kind of a shout out on socials, including a personal note along with a merchandise order or giving them something extra like a sticker. All these things that are going to contribute a positive deposit into the goodwill bank.

#5 Trim the excess

You need to think about re-engaging and potentially unsubscribing mailing list subscribers who are not interested in being on your list anymore.

When an artist has been using email for a year or so and has a decent-sized following, it will become apparent that there is some dead wood in the list.

This excess of subscribers will bring down the performance metrics on things like open rates; plus, it will cost you to have people on your list who are not opening your emails. Most importantly, it can also affect deliverability if there are lots of people who aren't opening emails.

The way to handle this is to periodically trim the excess by writing a re-engagement campaign that is targeted at people who haven't opened emails in the past six months or so, for example. If they don't open that email, then you can remove them from the list.

6.

bigger – be it a live stream or an album listening party. This lies at the very heart of the superfan dynamic and it would be a crying shame if this was not built on when things, finally, start to return to normal. Artists are busy people and the pressures on their time are phenomenal, but making time for their superfans is something that will be remembered.

As we have covered, data tools give us audience insights and intricate segmentation that were unimaginable even a decade ago. It should not be forgotten that they are there to build relations first and monetise second – never the other way round.

Superfans are hard won but will drift away if they feel taken for granted. Putting them at the centre of things – as the Coldplay, Little Simz, Passenger and Robbie Williams case studies in this report all show – is the most important thing a marketer can do. Superfans need to be part of the marketing and not just be marketed to.

They are also an incredible resource (as the Cherry Red campaign for Howard Jones shows) and they sit as the conscience of the industry. They are not just a market. They love your act. But this must be something to work with rather than just presume.

There is a lot of focus on influencer culture at the moment – but superfans are the real long-term influencers. Understand and treat them as such. Their enthusiasm is more powerful in the long term than any #promoted post. Work with influencers, of course, but never to the exclusion of superfans. They are also the best “street team” you will ever have.

“If you put in the time and effort to nurture the relationship with your superfans, they could become



lifelong, diehard supporters of your music,” recommends a feature on artist marketing platform Hypeddit. “Not only will they be your most loyal customers, but they’ll also be your best ambassadors, taking every opportunity they can to turn others on to your music.

Superfans are the ones you can count on for powerful word-of-mouth marketing that will propel your music career forward faster and more effectively than anything else.”

It adds, “A core following of loyal superfans is the difference between a sustainable, thriving music career and a failed one. No matter how niche your

music is, it’s entirely possible – and necessary – to attract and nurture superfans.”

Hu, in another piece on music-tech pivots, talks about the importance of livestreaming during lockdown. “Digital media is becoming a core part of the fan experience, not just a means to an end,” she says. “With the touring circuit off the table, livestreaming is no longer a mere feature; for artists and event organizers, it’s now the entire product.”

She also talks about the “expansion of digital world-building around an artist” and how that is evolving superfans’ potential, giving Charli XCX’s Zoom events for fans and Travis Scott’s Astronomical “concept tour” within Fortnite as standout examples of this in 2020.

Tied to Fortnite is the idea of digital collectables, such as skins and emotes (i.e. dances) that can be purchased within the game.

Marshmello was the first pop star to really capitalise on this on a mass level with his live set inside Fortnite in February 2019.



6.

Emotes and skins are items that can be used by fans to express their fandom, effectively the digital equivalent of a T-shirt or a poster on their wall.

In the physical world, there is a natural scarcity associated with tangible objects (with the limited-edition record being a long-standing part of marketing), but there can also be scarcity associated with digital – where, for example, acts can limit a Fortnite skin or emote to the first 1,000 fans who buy them.

During the global pandemic, areas like touring have been put on hold and both Marshmello last year and Travis Scott this year are showing the engagement and the revenue possibilities of creating digital content within a game like Fortnite, as well as beyond.

Labels are seeing the huge potential here. Back in 2018, Universal Music Group and esports firm ESL formed a JV label to bring the worlds of music and sports closer and acts also moving into this space by investing in esports companies include The Weeknd and Drake. But digital collectibles go beyond gaming, and there is a huge opportunity in the broader digital and social space, as demonstrated by startups like Fanaply, a finalist of the Techstars Music 2020 accelerator cohort. Also, interestingly, in 2019 Warner Music Group was one of two companies (alongside Andreessen Horowitz) to invest \$11m in

Dapper Labs, the company behind the wildly popular CryptoKitties app (where you collect and breed digital cats – yes, really).



“Warner Music is always searching for new opportunities for our artists and has dedicated itself to exploring emerging technologies to enable these,” stated Jeff Bronikowski, former Head of Innovation & Emerging Technology at WMG (now Global Head of Strategic Music



Initiatives at Apple) in a press statement following the Dapper Labs investment. “When we met with Dapper Labs, they immediately understood our vision so we sought to solidify the partnership through this strategic investment.”

He also told Forbes, “When I was in college, you’d walk into someone’s room and you’d see 200 CDs and you would say, ‘That guy’s a big music fan.’ And now you just see somebody with a music subscription service and some playlists. We think that as people spend more time crafting their persona in the digital realm, digital

goods and collectibles is a great way to express that fandom.”

Ultimately, the superfan sits at the top of the pyramid: the smallest by size but unquestionably the most important in cultural terms and also economic terms.

They are the heavy lifters, they are the early adopters and they are the loyal flag-wavers. That faith, however, should never be presumed: it must be earned and re-earned over and over again. There is an important nurturing process at play here. Getting it right will create superfans for life; but too many missteps and you will lose them forever.

Superfans are the beating heart of the music industry. Properly catering to them and nurturing them will not only make hits – it will make careers.