

Britney Spears commentary

Padlet link: <https://padlet.com/d6fh5y5z6d/britney-spears-through-the-years-r0pocqshsy54t2lu>



The persona of Britney Spears first emerged through the Disney show 'Mickey mouse club' in 1992, here Spears presented herself as a child star among other soon to be 'stars'. Shingler (2012) defines a star in relation to one's talent, 'stars may stand out because of some quality... this quality may have attracted the attention of a casting director... who is subsequently responsible for launching the individuals rise to stardom', ultimately this specific talent or 'quality' that a star possesses is imperative in defining their star status. This idea of talent forming a celebrity therefore categorises Spears as an 'achieved celebrity', Rojek (2001 as cited in Redmond, 2014, p.7) believes an achieved celebrity 'derives from the perceived accomplishments of an individual', like a pop star. Shingler (2012) also proceeds to explain how stars 'possess several identities... determined by the various aspects of their character', although Spears is not so much an actress and instead the 'princess of pop', it is still clear that she embraces several identities and through the years her 'character' has developed in various ways.

There was a significant shift in Spears' persona in the late 90s as she went from being a child star to a raunchy pop princess. Her music video 'baby one more time' was the catalyst for this change as she is depicted as a 'sexy' school girl. Lowe (2003) explored the audiences perspectives on this and found that many young girls were referring to Britney as a 'slore' which is an elision of 'slut' and 'whore', it is clear from this response that people were not impressed with this shift. Lowe (2003) further explores this response in relation to feminism and explains how this type of discourse 'is used to describe nearly all female behaviour, sexual and otherwise' and not so much male behaviour. Ultimately, it has been deep rooted in young girls to attack other young girls on their sexuality and expression. Despite the negative response to Spears' change in persona, she persistently tried to push this narrative that she had entered womanhood. The Rolling Stones front cover in 2001 for example, pictures Spears' in a bikini top and mini skirt beside the headline 'Don't treat me like a little girl', this specific language is demanding and directly addresses the audience. This is also significant as Rolling Stones are highly influential in the industry.

Celebrity endorsements are another factor that shaped Spears' image. McCormick (2016) expands on this as he says celebrity endorsements 'draw more attention to the adverts' and 'have the ability to create an immediate identity/persona for the brand'. Britney's first huge success was in 2004 when she released the perfume 'curious' with Elizabeth Arden as it became the most sold perfume of that year. When advertising a perfume, the celebrity is crucial as they are the selling point in making the perfume seem 'sexy' or 'classy' to wear. Britney's promotion of Pepsi is another example of where celebrity endorsements can transform a brand and reach a multitude of consumers. Research conducted by Real Research media(2021) conveys how 'joy of pepsi' by Spears is still the most expensive and popular advert to this day.

Arguably one of the biggest changes in Spears' life was in 2005 with the arrival of her first son. Spears' documented this whole experience on her reality tv show 'Britney and Kevin:chaotic', here she was portrayed as her most honest self. This links to celebrity authenticity, which Kernis and Goldman (2004 as cited in Moulard, Garrity and Rice, 2015) defined as 'being true to oneself'. Although Spears presents herself as authentic in this reality show, she received backlash for her parenting skills and her image was tainted. Bachechi (2014, p. 174, as cited in Daros,2022) believes that this show 'deconstructed her old image and attributed her, among other reputations, to that of a 'bad mother'. Celebrity mothers, including Britney, are also often portrayed as a 'yummy mummy' throughout the media when they become mothers. A yummy mummy is a mother who is 'attractive, confident or well-groomed' (Stephanie O'Donohoe, 2006, as cited in, Jermyn, 2008,p.4).

In 2007, Spears' image deteriorated when she was pictured by paparazzi shaving her head. This iconic moment hit the papers and essentially gave the media a free pass to shame Spears. From this moment, Spears was framed as a 'trainwreck' in the press, Doyle(2016,as cited in Hopkins, 2020) defines the term 'trainwreck' as someone who is 'usually a female pop star known for her drug use, troubled relationships, erratic or self-harming behaviours and emotional instability', all of which relate to Britney throughout various stages of her career. While Spears' does fit this 'train wreck' narrative, it is important to analyse why Britney presents herself in this chaotic way. Analysing the shaved head moment in particular, Rojek(2004, as cited in Daros, 2022, p.9) argued that it was not a moment of weakness and emotional instability but instead 'an attempt to reclaim the essence' of her veridical self that has been completely destroyed by her public face ; 'she no longer recognises herself due to so many interventions by the industry and its cultural intermediaries' so she was trying to rebuild her image. Nevertheless, these unstable moments led to her conservatorship in 2008. During her 13 years under conservatorship, Spears 'lost the right to decide directly about her career – including taking care of her social

media accounts – as well as her personal life – from decisions about getting married to getting pregnant again’ (Daros, 2022).

The Free Britney movement that began in 2008 and dominated mainstream media in 2021 was a significant part of Spears’ liberation from her conservatorship. The movement consisted of fans advocating for her freedom, with some fans even protesting outside the courts. This movement therefore highlights the importance of fandom in celebrity culture. The term celebrity fandom can be defined as ‘a state of profound attention toward and adulation of a celebrity that is expressed in feelings, attitudes, and behaviours’ (Lee & Scott, 2009, as cited in Lee and Yoo, 2015). The influence of social media is also a driving factor that led to Britney’s release as it brought the topic of Britney’s conservatorship to the forefront of public discourse.

To summarise, throughout Spears’ career she has had to establish her own self -image and her persona has shifted a multitude of times. Britney has also delved into many aspects of the celebrity culture that have helped form an image of her. Britney now embodies stability and realness in her self as the latest glimpse of her image was in a self-written memoir titled ‘the woman in me’.

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