



How has drag culture evolved through popular culture and how is it propelled by the use of social media within the USA nowadays?

by Paula Ulrika Luksevica

Advisor: Michael Krona

Examiner: Anders Høg Hansen

Grading date: 25-11-2019

Grade: B

Main Field: Media and Communications Studies

Culture, Collaborative Media and Creative Industries

Level: One-year Masters Thesis

Malmö University

Year: 2019

Abstract

Drag culture has become more and more popular throughout the last decade. Performances of drag queens, before, mostly available in secluded bars and clubs, now can be easily found in sold-out venues all around the world. The success of this community can be traced back to the immense success of the television show *Ru Paul's Drag Race* (Logo TV, 2009-2016; VH1 2017-present) and its subsequent impact on the drag performers (also called drag queens) reach through social media platforms, especially Instagram. This paper attempts to point out what was the chain of events that ultimately brought the phenomenon of drag culture to mainstream media and how is it currently narrated to the public.

For this research, several research methods were used, such as uses and gratification theory and media framing. A thorough data analysis was conducted, using a data frame, which was applied to a number of news sources within the US. Furthermore, statistics on Instagram following and engagement were taken into consideration as well as compared to individuals of 'celebrity status' in order to see how developed the profiles of chosen drag performers are on social media, particularly, Instagram.

It was conducted that drag culture on five most read news portals in the USA is generally presented in a positive light, however, has a surprising amount of neutral opinions and lesser amount of negative articles overall. It was also noted that this could be because of the fact that four of these news platforms are politically left leaning and only one is leaning right.

In regards of Instagram, it was conducted that the chosen drag representatives and the subsequently chosen individuals of 'celebrity status' are engaged with in a nearly identical manner, when it comes to the amount of people engaging with the content posted. That further promotes the entrance of drag within the mainstream media and culture.

The outcome of this research could, potentially, be useful for further investigation in terms of the popularisation of drag culture and the impact of social media and popular culture on this phenomenon.

Information highlighted in yellow has been added after the preliminary seminar on 28.10.19.

Keywords: drag culture, drag queen, Instagram, Ru Paul's Drag Race, content analysis, popular culture, social media, LGBTQ+

Table of contents

Abstract	1
Table of contents	2
List of figures and tables	4
1. Introduction	4
1.1. Research area and aim	5
1.2. Research paradigm	5
1.3. Thesis question	6
1.3.1. Sub-questions	6
1.4. Limitations	7
1.4.1. Time constraints	7
1.4.2. Geographical placement	7
1.4.3. Academic sources	7
2. Context	8
2.1. List of relevant definitions	8
2.2. LGBTQ + community	9
2.3. Literature review	10
2.3.1. Evolution of drag culture and its involvement with the LGBTQ+ community	10
2.3.2. Drag culture representation in film and television	11
2.4. Influencer marketing on Instagram	13
2.5. Drag queens	13
2.5.1. Trixie Mattel	14
2.5.2. Bianca del Rio	14
2.5.3. Sasha Velour	14
2.5.4. Violet Chachki	15
2.5.5. Adore Delano	15
3. Theoretical framework	16
3.1. Mediatization and mediation	16
3.2. Uses and gratification theory	16

3.2.1. Tension free needs	17
3.2.2. Cognitive needs	17
3.3. Media Framing	18
4. Methodology	19
4.1. Qualitative content analysis	19
4.1.1. Coding	19
4.1.2. Positive / Negative	20
4.1.3. Neutral/Irrelevant	21
4.2. Quantitative content analysis	21
5. Presentation and analysis of results	22
5.1. Leaning left / right	24
5.2. Ru Paul's Drag Race and mainstream media	24
5.3. Instagram following / engagement	25
5.3.1. Growth of Instagram following pre- and post-Ru Paul's Drag Race	26
5.3.2. Instagram engagement comparison - celebrities vs. drag representatives	27
6. Ethics	30
7. Concluding discussion / remarks	31
8. References	34

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Top 5 News Outlets in the US.....	23
Figure 2: Drag Queen Instagram Following.....	27
Figure 3: Instagram Audience Engagement Rate.....	28
Figure 4: Celebrity Following on Instagram.....	29
Data Frame: Link to Google Sheets.....	34

1.Introduction

This research paper is mainly focused on the impact of social media and the way it has worked as a tool to bring awareness to drag culture and it's representatives. In the authors view, this topic is both interesting and important from MSC perspective, as it presents the relevancy and role of social media platforms in terms of digital activism.

Activism on social media or, otherwise called digital or internet activism, has been around for decades. Even though not too prominent during the 80's, the movement started showing a definite progress with the first arrival of Web 2.0 (Anderson, 2007) and, later on, Facebook in 2004 (Rees, 2015) In regards to social media, platform discussed in this paper is Instagram judging by it's prominent stand in the media world, as well as the reason of this space being used the most by the drag representatives in question later in this paper.

In this thesis, specifically, the focus is put upon the culture of drag and it's participants, which in most cases are also connected to the LGBTQ+ community. Through drag performances and the culture's exposure online and on mainstream media (that including television and film), issues such as LGBTQ+ rights, gender discrimination, HIV amongst homosexual individuals etc. can often times reach a much larger audience. Therefore, the author will be discussing the drag cultures exposure on mainstream news outlets, their audience engagement rates on social media, particularly, Instagram, as well as briefly addressing the evolution of drag through video entertainment industry.

As an example, one could name arguably one of the most influential television series when it comes to drag culture, over the past decade - Ru Paul's Drag Race. A number of participants

shown on these TV series have further explored their new-found 'fame' by speaking out on various relevant topics on their consecutive platforms. The topics may vary from human rights to addressing certain gender-specific norms, lethal diseases, body image and much more. Therefore, by researching this topic, one could pinpoint the ways social media is and can be used to gain wider recognition on topics that may be considered tabu or inappropriate in many parts of the world.

From a geographic perspective, this paper is going to be focused on the United States, as the drag culture is the most prominent there in terms of exposure, number of widely known performers and drag culture consumption. This limitation also allows for the research to be much more narrow and precise.

1.1. Research area and aim

The author has chosen to research the correlation between drag culture and popular culture (therefore also social media), as it is genuinely interesting, as well as is believed to be a phenomenon that has not been thoroughly academically researched as of now.

As the LGBTQ+ community (which also includes the drag culture, at large, as the performers are largely homosexuals or transgender individuals) has expanded greatly over the past decade, it is of great importance, to the view of the author, that the, so-called, sub-cultures of this community are recognised as well.

Drag culture has been around for decades, but only recently it has reached the cult-phenomenon status, mostly thanking the push of the television show RuPaul's Drag Race, the rise of influencer marketing and mediatization and mediation.

The aim of this project is to analyse the rise and representation of drag culture within popular culture, mainstream news platforms and social media, towards reaching the status of popular culture. It is believed that drag culture and the LGBTQ+ community at large, has been perceived increasingly well, as opposed to its historical origins.

1.2. Research paradigm

When choosing the paradigm this paper could be written through, the author kept the fact, that this particular topic has not been largely covered just yet, in mind. Even though a number of

studies on popular culture and social media have already been created, a specific approach on the evolvement of the drag culture through these spaces has not been a research topic that has been widely discussed so far. However, this argument is also mostly based on the author's experience through gathering of research and analysis dedicated to this paper, therefore, may not be entirely accurate.

Regardless, due to the lack of available data in terms of statistics and previous analysis on the topic or topics closely related to the one in question, the author, by using the method of elimination, disregarded the possibility of using the positivist paradigm. The positivist paradigm is largely focused on facts that have already been established and proven, as well as refrains from being emotionally and personally involved in the research (Carson et al., 2001). As the topic discussed is relatively new, the author believes that it is best to look at all the available data, perspectives and ideas, to then narrow down to more specific touch-points later in the research process.

As the polar opposite to this model, one could use such example as interpretivist paradigm, which has ultimately been chosen as the framework of this project. As the author has used qualitative research, that being textual and visual data as well as using quantitative data, meaning, statistics and numerical data, this pattern served the best in terms of structuring and analysing the data collected. (Collins, 2010)

Furthermore, this approach allows the author to address the presented hypothesis through the views of many separate individuals, thus gathering qualitative data that can later be presented as the base of this research. Analysis of a number of opinions is relevant, as, as mentioned prior, there is not a lot of stable data available on this topic, thus, this approach can help for the finale data to be much more objective and critical.

1.3. Thesis question

How has drag culture evolved through popular culture and how is it propelled by the use of social media within the USA nowadays?

1.3.1. Sub-questions

- *What are the main characteristics and points that are used in order to describe drag culture on mainstream media?*

- *How does the impact of Instagram and popular culture influence the movement of drag culture?*

1.4. Limitations

In the process of developing this thesis, the author noted a number of limitations that should be acknowledged in order to better understand the circumstances regarding the production of this project.

1.4.1. Time constraints

Time limitation is one of the largest obstacles when it comes to the data analysis of this project. In order to collect relevant qualitative data, a significant amount of time is needed for research, coding and analysis, which then has to be interpreted from an objective perspective.

1.4.2. Geographical placement

The author has chosen to approach this paper limiting the geographical scope to the USA due to the amount of time it would take to further investigate and analyse available content in the rest of the world. USA was chosen for the reason that drag culture is often times labeled as originated in New York. Furthermore, upon the initial research, most content regarding drag culture leads to the United States, which offers the author a much more detailed view on this topic.

1.4.3. Academic sources

Due to the fact that this topic has not been widely researched as of now, not a lot of academic sources and data was available when it comes to this specific research. Regardless, the author has attempted to provide further data that could possibly be used for future analysis.

2. Context

2.1. List of relevant definitions

In order to create a seamless reading experience for anyone who might not have a large understanding on this topic, several definitions were clarified.

DRAG QUEEN - a man (in some cases, a transgender person) impersonating women, wearing wigs, make-up, clothes and padding to mimic female bodies. Not to be mistaken with transgender individuals. The biggest difference is that drag queens are entertainers and transgender individuals identify as the opposite sex (Carman, 2016).

DRAG BALL - originated in 1869, New York, drag balls served as a ‘safe space’ for gay and transgender individuals, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community by organising competitions of dance, fashion and more. These events were mostly deemed ‘unethical’ by the mainstream society, yet, served as a cornerstone of ‘creation creation and maintenance of LGBTQ culture.’ (Stabbe, 2016).

INFLUENCER MARKETING - As the name suggests, it is marketing done through influencer social media posts and physical appearances. Influencers are individuals who have gained an audience on one or several social media platforms and produce content, which is directly or indirectly sponsored and / or their personal opinions, tips and views. (Dada, 2017)

LGBTQ+ - This abbreviation includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), + standing for others which can be asexual, allies, pansexual etc. It is a term often used to recognise ‘the community of people who share some experiences.’ (Rosen, 2018).

MAINSTREAM MEDIA - Even though the definitions on ‘mainstream media’ vary from source to source, the author considers ‘mainstream media’ to be news sources that are, by the masses, believed to be ‘reliable’ (Collins Dictionary, 2019).

MICRO-CELEBRITY - An individual who has built their ‘career’ upon social media, thus gaining a loyal, interested audience. The term was first coined by Theresa Senft in 2008, upon her research on ‘camgirls’ in the age of social media.

POPULAR CULTURE - Part of culture that is generally known to everyone. Music found in the top charts, widely discussed art, ideas, mass media etc., are a part of popular culture with its opposing side being 'high culture', which would include areas like art, music and literature collectively agreed upon as exemplary (Collins Dictionary, 2019).

SOCIAL MEDIA - A number of media platforms designed for communication, including opinion sharing, social networking, video content, personal messaging etc. For example, the most known platforms sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

2.2. LGBTQ + community

Over the past decade, the humanity as such has made immense progress when it comes to such issues as LGBTQ+ acceptance, recognition and integration. Nevertheless, there is still a very long way to go. Looking from the perspective of the world, countries like Russia, Sudan and Brunei, to this day, have standing laws which could, potentially, bring a death sentence to a person engaging in homosexual behaviour. Rounding up to as many as 73 countries in the world, it is noted that homosexuality is considered to be a criminal offence. (Anti Gay Laws, 2019)

Within the USA, many moves towards a more accepting society and regulation system have been made thus far. These examples include such changes as introduction of 'gender neutral' bathrooms as recent as in 2017 to accommodate gender non-conforming, and transgender individuals and same-sex marriage across all of the United States of America, law finalised in 2015 after decades of attempts on legalising the union in every single one of the states. (Arsen, 2017)

In terms of relevancy of this topic for Media and Communications Studies and further research, in my opinion, these areas are only going to become much more intertwined than these are at the moment. Social media has long been a platform where communities such as LGBTQ+ and many more have been able to nearly freely express their beliefs, resulting in widespread awareness, individuals in power, supporting or recognising themselves as a part of the community coming forward (i.e. 'coming out') and serving as a space for further conversation on topics relevant to it.

As members of the community (this paper mainly focuses on the drag within social media and popular culture) are presented within popular culture (i.e. movies, music, television, etc.) more and more (e.g. 'A Star is Born', 'RuPaul's Drag Race', 'Moving Parts' etc.), the

conversation around the aforementioned issues is developing and normalises the tabu aspect of that.

2.3. Literature review

2.3.1. Evolution of drag culture and its involvement with the LGBTQ+ community

The early 1900s was a time of ever-growing presence of the homosexual subculture within the larger cities in the USA like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco. Trying to find 'safe spaces' where said individuals could come together without the fear of discrimination and mistreatment, several bars and social clubs, generally catering to the members identifying as gay and lesbian, were created. With the rise of this phenomenon, subsequently rose the implementation of laws and actions further attacking the community.

Media was generally framed to attack and deminish homosexual behaviour, including, but not limited to dressing in the clothing of the opposite sex, sexual relations with the same sex, etc. When covering the news of police raids in aforementioned clubs and any news concerning homosexuals, for that matter, newspapers, at this time, avoided using words like 'gay' and even 'homosexual'. These terms were deemed to be profane (as was generally any vocabulary used describing the community), therefore, could not be used in reputable news outlets. (Pitman, 2019)

The term 'drag queen' was first noted in the 1960's when drag performers were treated as 'underdogs' and were not acknowledged as part of the entertainment industry, but rather as utterly 'perverted', representing the overexaggerated stereotype of homosexual individuals. (Newton, 1972)

Even the more prominent and, so to speak, famous performers could not escape the axe of discrimination by the common public. One of the first ever publicly known drag queens, Flawless Sabrina, who has had a great impact on the recognition of drag culture secretly organizing and funding drag pageants throughout the United States since 1959, was also arrested multiple times for, seemingly, no apparent reason. She was taken into custody upon promoting her award-winning movie 'The Queen' in New York, even though the film had even gained recognition, ultimately receiving an award, from the Cannes film festival. Through these events, a scandal formed and Flawless was then invited to appear on a number of television talk shows, further exposing the cultural phenomenon. (Balzer, 2005)

Even though the 1960's are mostly remembered as the time of freedom, change and possibilities, the reality, especially for homosexuals and women, was much more harsh. Beginning from excluding these individuals from serving at armed forces to the countless laws incriminating homosexual relationships. When it came to this discrimination, laws in America by the 1961 were much harsher than those at Cuba, Russia or East Germany, notorious for their pro-stance on the issue. Outdated laws, targeting people wearing the clothing of the opposite sex (that including drag queens, transvestites and homosexuals) were brought back to maximize the oppression of the community (nowadays, LGBTQ+). (Carter, 2004)

People who were belonging to the communities described above were in hiding and gathering only in places that were deemed safe, at the time. Even though raids in these places like clubs and bars were not uncommon, a night in 1969 changed the route of the, now, LGBTQ+ community, also including drag performers. The events of this night, also called the Stonewall riots, named after Stonewall Inn, a popular place of gathering for these communities, sparked a series of protests, which are considered to be the cornerstone of the gay liberation movement and, subsequently, the movement of pride. (Columbia, 2011)

2.3.2. Drag culture representation in film and television

It is important to note the films that drag culture has been represented in, in order to note how drag culture was integrated into popular culture and how were these artists represented before the time of social media. It also helps further establish the importance of this subculture in terms of development of the LGBTQ+ community and exposure of drag to mainstream audiences. According to Allen (2005) the use and analysis of films can further help to understand social perspectives and further promote the use of social thinking.

Furthermore, filmed entertainment (including films, television and other video content) is the second largest grossing media and entertainment subsectors. First of these subsectors, surprisingly to some, is video gaming (SelectUSA, 2019). This sub-sector was not included in this research due to the absence of specific representation of drag culture within the gaming industry.

These specific films were chosen to showcase a timeline of drag culture representation within popular culture through movie production, as well as noting some of the most discussed films and television shows regarding the sub-culture in question.

Lastly, as drag culture is highly visual, it seems only suitable to discuss the presence of drag within and through projects created within the film industry, which is, arguably, the absolute best

example of visual expression through popular culture. As movies are the only suitable category for receiving the Academy Award for ‘Best Picture’, these are considered as the best examples for this project.

Pink Flamingos by John Waters (1972) - This film is special as it featured drag queen Divine, as one of its main characters, which, in the 70s was not a common occurrence. Even though it was banned in several countries due to the various ‘revolting scenes’ including vomiting, incest and cannibalism to name a few, it is still beloved by the LGBTQ+ community and gained a cult status.

Paris is Burning by Jennie Livingston (1990) - An American documentary about ‘drag balls’, which is described as a LGBTQ+ subculture in the United States. Drag culture very much originates from these events where groups, mostly consisting of black and latin gay, gender nonconforming and transgender youth, and compete in different categories such as dance and drag.

Pageant by Ron Davis (2008) - A documentary going behind the scenes of a beauty pageant ‘Miss Gay America’ held in 2004. The film was mainly focusing on the idea of everyone wanting to feel admired and accepted, no matter the gender, appearance etc. Some critics, however, were not too pleased with the outcome, stating that the directors have only ‘skimmed the surface’ of the drag pageant culture and its performers.

RuPaul’s Drag Race (2009-....) - Created by RuPaul, this show has been gaining popularity, making its way into mainstream media, since it began in 2009. The show follows RuPaul as the host of the show, where he attempts to find ‘America’s Next Drag Superstar’. The show gives a lot of exposure to the drag community and begins a conversation on acceptance of different cultures, religions and beliefs. After the 9th season of the show, it was moved from its original supporting network Logo TV, to the more mainstream platform - VH1.

Since the show was basically built from the ground up and supported by the largest gay-centred television network in the US, further popularised by the LGBTQ+ community, the decision to move the show to a mainstream network like VH1 received various opinions. Some were upset at the decision, as it would now become widely exposed to an array of viewers, but some were truly supportive of the show’s success.

That also meant that Ru Paul’s Drag Race would become a somewhat mainstream itself, as the show was already added to Netflix in a selection of countries prior to its move to VH1. As Ru Paul’s Drag Race is, arguably, the cornerstone of how drag culture is represented and seen,

nowadays, when discussing this topic, it is absolutely obligatory to discuss the impact of this television show.

2.4. Influencer marketing on Instagram

Even though the television show has ultimately reached audiences that may have never been reached without the help of ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’, it would have definitely not have kept its cult status without a strong presence on social media. The rise and reign of the television show ‘RuPaul’s Drag Race’ in 2009, which has since become almost a household name (Patten; Haring, 2018), and the sudden growth of ‘influencer marketing’ over the past half-decade (Biaudet, 2017) —are deeply connected. Just as conventional celebrities or ‘influencers’, these so called ‘drag queens’ are greatly present on various social media platforms, Instagram being one of the main spaces of branding and communications.

Due to drag culture being a strongly visual phenomenon, Instagram serves as not only a social media tool, but also as a form of a portfolio for each performer / individual participating in the act of drag. Furthermore, Instagram also works as a space where fans and admirers can also reach out to their favourite personas, propelling drag performers to the status of micro-celebrities.

2.5. Drag queens

As mentioned prior, this research topic is not widely discussed academically, therefore, it is relevant to introduce the reader to the individuals that are analysed in this paper, in order to give a better understanding and future references. As these performers have either won a season of RuPaul’s Drag Race or have been exposed to the mainstream audiences in a different way, they have also gained a lot of praise from the viewers, therefore, are within the most popular drag queens in the business.

These individuals are most relevant, as they have appealed to large audiences by pursuing their careers in combination with drag, whether it would be music, make-up, activism, comedy or fashion industry. They have penetrated the mainstream markets, still preserving their initial way of expression, emphasising the values of the LGBTQ+ community.

2.5.1. Trixie Mattel

Trixie Mattel, which is a stage name for Brian Michael Firkus, is one of the most prominent drag queens in the industry, nowadays. Her first appearance to a wider audience was on RuPaul's Drag Race's Season 7, where she, unfortunately, did not leave a substantial impact not the viewers at home and was voted out rather soon after. However, she and her Season 7 companion Katya Zamolodchikova (Brian Joseph McCook) began working on LogoTV owned YouTube channel, creating a comedy duo and creating an audience for themselves with a show called 'UNHhhh'. (Katya, 2019)

After this turn of events, Trixie was later invited back to RuPaul's Drag Race to compete in All Stars 3, which is a competition for all returning queens. She ended up winning this time and, with her newfound fame, continued to fully pursue her music career, eventually releasing a music album called One Stone, released in 2018. Besides that, she has also come out with her own cosmetics line, inspired by her Barbie-like aesthetic. (Trixie Mattel, 2019)

2.5.2. Bianca del Rio

Some may recognise her as Roy Haylock, but, by now, Bianca del Rio is definitely the main name the entertainer is sought after by. The winner of season 6 of Ru Paul's Drag Race, Bianca was set to change the way the LGBTQ+ community was visualised. Her sharp wit and talents such as acting, costume design, stand-up, and more, brought her to the eyes of the mainstream audience.

Bianca has followed her win with a number of acting roles, two of these starring as the main role, and continues to tour the world with her comedy special. Her exposure of her Cuban/Honduran roots was also largely praised by the minorities of the LGTBQ community, as her growing success brought a lot of exposure to the treatment of these groups.

2.5.3. Sasha Velour

This performer, also known as Alexander Hedges Steinberg, is a pioneer of 'use of projection mapping in lip-synch drag performances, and is known for combining emotional pathos with theatrical stunts.'. She is also a well known LGBTQ+ and cancer awareness activist, using her platform to further the conversation on these issues.

A producer and owner of her own drag show “Nightgowns”, she often speaks on such topics as queer history and politics, partially also due to the fact that Velour has previously spent a significant amount of time in Russia, therefore, often found exploring the topic of gay rights there. (Sasha Velour, 2019)

It should also be noted that Velour is a great advocate for LGBTQ+ rights and assimilation into mainstream society. She notes that “in its [drag cultures] newly visible forms outside localised queer cultures, drag as a media spectacle offers an important alternative to the pressure for queer people to assimilate to dominant forms of living,” also known as ‘straight’ culture. (Poletti & Rak, 2018)

2.5.4. Violet Chachki

A Winner of Ru Paul’s Drag Race Season 7, Violet Chachki gained popularity through showcasing her immaculate sense of fashion, costume design skills, as well as refined performance art. Violet, or Paul Jason Dardo, has grown to not only tour the world with other reigning queens of the television show, but has also created her own burlesque show, mentored by the iconic Dita Von Teese.

2.5.5. Adore Delano

This performer had reached a certain amount of popularity within the mainstream culture before attending Ru Paul’s Drag Race as a contestant on Season 6. Also known as Daniel Anthony Noriega, the drag artist competed on the seventh season of American Idol, thus starting her ongoing career in music. (Adore Delano, 2019)

Known for representing a grungy style that was not very common within the drag culture, Delano broadened the horizons of the idea of how drag queens were viewed by others. Competing as one of the youngest contestants on Drag Race, this performer has since furthered the conversation on gender fluidity with her audiences both online and offline.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Mediatization and mediation

To the view of the author, this theory is crucial when discussing the influence of social media and pop-culture on society as such. Hepp, Harvard and Lundby describes this phenomenon stating that "mediatization is, therefore, not a media-centric postulate about the media's direct 'causal influence' on every aspect of society, but an attempt to build a theoretical framework that will allow us to discuss the influences of media and communications in other social and cultural domains with researchers from other disciplines." (Hepp; Harvard; Lundby, 2015)

This project is written through the perspective of mediatization, as it is directly viewed from the idea that the role of media, when it comes to popularisation of different cultural aspects, is truly meaningful and is the cornerstone of large social change, such as merging of the drag culture with popular culture.

The impact of mediation has been well argued for by Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (2018), professors from the Netherlands and Canada, subsequently. Within their collective essay on thoughts regarding drag culture (specifically it's connection to RuPaul's Drag Race) as automediatiy, they state the following: "The current visibility of drag in popular culture is characterised by a shifting relationship between drag and media: what was once a location-based, temporally specific form of performance which occurred in bars, has been radically changed through the increased contact between the media forms of performance, television and social media." (Poletti & Rak, 2018)

3.2. Uses and gratification theory

The author has chosen to also look at this project through the lens of the uses and gratification theory. Since the topic is clearly linked to the impact media has on the society, this framework helps support the data gathered. In order to know how and for what reasons people use media, uses and gratification theory is perfect for further exploration.

Even though it was initially created for the use of working with traditional media, such as radio and television, due to the development of social media, it has proven to be valuable once again, regaining its significance in the era of the Internet (Tanta; Mihovilovic; Sablic, 2014).

When looking at this theory, one can separate a number of different categories that can be extracted from this theory: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative and tension free needs. Upon further research, it was decided that affective and personal and social integrative needs did not apply to the thesis in question, therefore, were not investigated further. However, tension free and cognitive needs perfectly match the ongoing research and identifying these needs in correlation to the proposed questions could potentially be useful for future data analysis.

3.2.1. Tension free needs

Entertainment industry is well known for its relaxing properties, most of the time. Reality, talk and game shows all serve the same purpose - to entertain it's viewer. Furthermore, entertainment and relaxation is often used as synonyms, as it is meant to encompass the viewer in a way that the activity in question becomes the sole purpose of the consumer.

Therefore, when it comes to the drag culture, consumers may not be looking up content on this particular topic to educate themselves, as it would be more likely to be used as an entertainment source. Drag queens are, in their core, entertainers, thus are made to relieve the viewer from any tension and frustration that may have built up over time. Therefore, such television shows as Ru Paul's Drag Race serve as a tool of instant psychological relief.

3.2.2. Cognitive needs

On the other hand, when consuming any type of content, the reader / viewer, might be deliberately looking into a specific topic knowing they are most likely to find information relevant to them. It could be argued that consumers actively watching such shows as Ru Paul's Drag Race are not doing so just to be entertained, but also, to subsequently learn more about different social constructs and environments. As these types of shows also touch upon topics in regards of LGBTQ+ issues, one may use this content to further explore a potential research topic (Communication Theory, 2019).

Regardless, it is also relevant to note that this theory may also be rather flawed due to its lack of set limitations. It is simple to say that each viewer is consuming any part of media with a certain goal in mind and this way could ultimately be linked to the best way of media use, whether it should be for education or relaxation.

As people are not always able to articulate their thoughts when being questioned for research purposes in exactly the same way, as when they actually proceed with their everyday routines in terms of content consumption, this theory may not provide a completely reliable outcome (Tanta; Mihovilovic; Sablic, 2014).

3.3. Media Framing

The mainstream media and its various platforms have often come under scrutiny in regards of a story that has been slightly twisted to appear in a more positive or, just the opposite, a more negative light (Guardino, 2019). The media framing theory lacks a specific definition, however, for the sake of this project, an explanation by Sophie Lecheler and Claes H. de Vreese (2018) was taken into account. They argue that the main use of the news frame is its *selective function*, meaning that the source publishing the article can be the one deciding how would they want the story to be perceived by the audience.

This method was used in order to see how does the most read media frames the conversation on drag culture. The result would ultimately help understand if this framing serves as an advantage or disadvantage in terms of drag culture being placed in the limelight of pop-culture by mainstream media. Media framing was focused upon within this project, as the author wanted to, mostly, address this topic from the perspective of mass media consumers, as it is known that media can often be altered to suit a particularly created narrative.

To further investigate the news frame that could possibly be found relating to drag culture, the author proceeded with an inductive approach. This approach is well made for analysing the stance of the overall media by observing a certain pattern, which can later be interpreted as a theory. (Saylor Academy, 2012)

Deductive approach was later introduced, to further establish the role of drag culture and its representatives within social media, more specifically, Instagram.

4. Methodology

4.1. Qualitative content analysis

The scope of this project is rather narrow and concentrated towards qualitative content analysis, as due to the potential interviewees in question nearly reaching 'celebrity status'. Considering the geographical disadvantage, personal interviews were decided not to be used at this time, therefore, this approach served as the most appropriate.

Placing focus on the qualitative content analysis is the most reliable and efficient way of gathering relevant data considering all limitations mentioned prior. In order to conduct this analysis, a framework is to be established. This is done to further specify the parts of content that should be separated, to, later in the process, minimise the amount of irrelevant content and extract the data that is relevant to the research questions presented.

4.1.1. Coding

Creating a coding frame for this approach was the first crucial step, which later allowed for the author to better understand the overall consensus towards drag representatives and what they stand for in the United States. This type of analysis correlates with the theory of media framing, as Tettah and King (2011) state that framing theory proposes an idea of how people perceive a specific individual or a group of people in question. However, it does also propose an alternate conclusion to using this theory, which is argued for by Entman (1993), who states that the 'coders' have to be careful on not drawing subjective conclusions on the text presented, thus possibly undermining or overexaggerating the given meaning of the textual evidence. Regardless, he also notes that if a proper coding frame is set with working with the rules agreed upon beforehand, it this method can also result in a set of valid, useful data.

Therefore, this data coding was then applied to five statistically most read media sources in the US - CNN, NBC, The New York Times, Huffington Post and Fox News. These particular news platforms were chosen for a number of reasons. First of all, as these, according to statistics presented on

The coding was done by setting up the coding frame. The creation of this frame was done according to Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) who suggest for the data sheet to be divided into three main categories:

1) *Raw data* - which, in this case, were the titles of articles found when searching 'drag queen' in each of the aforementioned platforms. However, it was noted that due to the way the algorithm has been programmed to operate the search bar, the term 'drag queen' was searched as two separate words, therefore, resulted in a vast amount of irrelevant data.

2) *Preliminary code* - words that would indicate the tone of the article. Important to note that for the sake of this research only titles were taken into consideration. As first introduced by David Ogilvy in a book called *Confessions of an Advertising Man* (1963) recognising the preliminary code, which, from the beginning stages of the analysis was to be 'drag'. However, the author noted that as the code was not specific enough, many irrelevant articles were presented, as 'drag' was also found in contexts correlating to automotive news, social constructs i.e. 'dragging someone through the mudd' and more. (Saldana, 2009)

Therefore, a decision to advance the preliminary code to 'drag queen' was made. Further research showed that even though, this code also generated a number of irrelevant articles, it also increased the amount of relevant articles presented. Due to a significant number of articles that were either irrelevant - the words put into a different context, altering the meaning of the combination - or neutral, which will be written about shortly, three separate categories for these articles were created - positive, neutral/irrelevant/negative.

3) *Final code* - The final code was derived from the titles of the articles presented by the algorithm in each news outlet. As explained in detail in the following sections, the final code was then extracted from the titles; words that had a distinct positive or negative connotation. If the title consisted of words that were neutral, it was disregarded.

4.1.2. Positive / Negative

When recognising positive as well as negative connotations in written text, one has to be very aware of the fact that, even though it is impossible to be completely objective on this matter, context, current political situation and other external factors have to be kept in mind to avoid severe subjectivity, thus falsifying the data. This is also a crucial ethical factor that is further discussed in detail further on in this paper.

Therefore, when stating preliminary codes after analysing the given titles, the ones marked as positive had to be either completely unmistakably positive, as such words as ‘fun’, ‘beautiful’, ‘shine’ etc., or the context of the sentence was to be interpreted in the least subjective way possible, by using the aforementioned methods. It is undeniable, however, that, ultimately, all of this data is relatively subjective, as it most of the times are when using an inductive approach. As well as, when discussing titles with negative connotations, such points as ‘opposition’, ‘bullying’ and ‘protest’ were deemed as obviously negative.

It is also worth noting that many of these articles may have been intended to fall in the ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ category, however, due to the lack of clearly distinguishable positive or negative connotations, in order to keep the data as reliable as possible, the author marked these as ‘neutral’.

4.1.3. Neutral/Irrelevant

As one may note, most of the articles presented in the data analysis frame, have been marked as neutral or irrelevant. Since the author of this paper was mostly discussing the percentile between positive and negative mentions of drag culture in the media, both, neutrally recognised and irrelevant titles were placed in the same category.

Neutral articles, as mentioned prior, were not clearly distinguishable as either positive and negative, therefore, were disregarded for future analysis. Irrelevant articles, however, were titles that were presented by the algorithm of each media platform after proceeding with the search tag ‘drag queen’, that were not relevant to the topic at all. These articles were considering such topics as sports, politics and the music industry. Thus, as explained at 4.1., due to the many interpretations of the words ‘drag’ and ‘queen’, some of these articles, even though, technically correctly found, were irrelevant to the topic of this thesis paper.

4.2. Quantitative content analysis

To further support the findings of the qualitative data analysis, later interpreted as quantitative data, the author also proceeded with gathering independent quantitative data. This approach is relevant when approaching large data, which is usually compiled in a form of statistics.

As the author has chosen to mainly rely on data generated by social media platform Instagram, due to the fact that it is the most used platform by the drag representatives, certain rules were put in place.

Various data was compared. Starting with the 'queens' following before their appearance on television and after, a comparison of their current following with the following of celebrities and, lastly, their followers engagement versus the celebrity reach.

5. Presentation and analysis of results

As briefly mentioned prior in section 4.1.1., the data presented in Figure 1 is a compilation of data gathered by performing a thorough analysis on 5 most read news platforms in the US. These figures note the overall consensus of the average American reader of digital media when it comes to content where terms 'drag' and 'queen' be found. To further preface, the search was initially conducted for the full term 'drag queen', but as discussed before, the algorithm recognised this term as two separate words. It was then emitted as 'drag', for example, can be widely discussed when speaking of the car industry (drag racing) and 'queen', at most, was found correlating to articles regarding the British Royal family and Queen Elizabeth II.

Only the titles of the articles were taken into consideration due to three main arguments. First being the belief that 80% of the readers of news online spend time reading after the 'page fold', which is, approximately, the middle of an average screen. This would mean that a general reader views a half or less of the article presented, thus, the title being a 'given' that would primarily be seen by the reader. (GO-Gulf, 2018)

Secondly, it is also argued that 97% of people read the title of the article, whereas, only 60% continue to the rest of the text and, even then, they are possibly skimming through the content rather than actually reading what's there (GO-Gulf, 2018). This further arguments for the use of titles in this analysis, as, to the view of the author, news outlets do create articles in a specific way to accommodate its readers, thus showcasing their stand on different topics.

Lastly, the title of the article should reflect the content available upon further reading. Therefore, the author argues that media framing theory can be used through analysis of titles, as it, in theory, should be a condensed version of the following content.

Top 5 News Outlets in the US

NAME OF PUBLICATION	TIMES TERMS 'DRAG' AND 'QUEEN' HAS BEEN MENTIONED	ARTICLES USED	POSITIVE ARTICLE	NEUTRAL ARTICLE	NEGATIVE ARTICLE
The Huffington Post	644	100	37 %	52 %	11 %
CNN	131	100	23 %	67 %	10 %
The New York Times	766	100	17 %	72 %	11 %
Fox News	289	100	7 %	77 %	16 %
NBC News	1.970	100	39 %	49 %	12 %
AVERAGE			25 %	63 %	12 %

Figure 1: Top 5 News Outlets

To perform this analysis, first hundred finds of each platform were taken into consideration, in order for the news sources to be treated in an identical manner, therefore, presenting the data in the most objective way possible. Qualitative analysis was conducted primarily to develop a semi-precise division of articles with a positive, neutral and negative connotation. It could only be done by noting specific words in each title presented that would correlate with the given emotion. According to the Media Framing theory, articles can be presented in various ways. For example, even if the content is correlating to a positive connotation, a news platform could easily choose to reconstruct its representation of the topic in question to their own views and beliefs.

As seen in Figure 1, the number of times the words coded were mentioned in the overall available archive of articles varies drastically. There could be a number of reasons for this pattern, varying from overall interest in the topic by the readers of the specific platform to having a particular agenda that is needed to be pushed (expanding on this idea below).

However, it should also be noted that a very large amount of data is presented as neutral. Even though the neutral and non-relevant (articles that have been mixed in due to a specific algorithm work offering content on automotive content and articles discussing the Royal Family), it is interesting how such a relatively unconventional topic could be written about in a neutral manner. The author had noted that some of these articles could be deemed positive or negative, however, it would then have become too subjective, as there were no specific wording indicating one or the other.

The news platforms were strictly picked from a statistics point of view and were not chosen to reflect the author's subjective political stance on the matter. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that nearly all of the analysed media outlets lean left, except one, which Fox news, which is leaning right.

5.1. Leaning left / right

The Huffington Post, CNN, The New York Times and NBC News all lean left, when it comes to the content posted on these platforms. It could be suggested that the drag culture is mostly represented well (see Figure 1) due to their lean towards the Democratic party.

As presented by the statistics found on AllSides Media Bias (2019) where thousands of people have had the chance to express their stance on each of these aforementioned platforms, it is clear that these media outlets are favouring stories that share issues and opinions popularised by the Democrat agenda. As the liberal parties are interested in promoting content that would essentially support their beliefs, drag culture, subsequently, which mostly consists of LGBTQ+ representatives, is a topic often discussed in a positive light. (Suhay, 2016)

Lastly, due to Fox News notoriously drastically leaning right, it becomes apparent why it may, out of all of these platforms, be the only one where the overall negative amount of content exceeds the number of positive pieces. Regardless, by summarising this data, it is clear that, even though not by a large difference, content regarding drag culture is mostly represented in a positive light.

By using the same data frame, but altering the search criteria slightly, the author also noted that 16% of the overall titles presented, were connected to Ru Paul's Drag Race or Ru Paul alone. In this case, the preliminary code was set to 'RU PAUL' and 'DRAG RACE' to note impact and popularity of the TV show, as it is the first of it's kind to ever be featured on such prominent entertainment channel as VH1.

5.2. Ru Paul's Drag Race and mainstream media

In the beginning of creating a data frame, it was only made to be used for analysing and discussing the connotations of content produced by the mainstream media. However, upon analysis, it was noted that the prominent television show Ru Paul's Drag Race (RPDR, for future reference) was referenced relatively often.

Therefore, another code was created, to understand how much was RPDR discussed within these platforms. Due to its successful format and large audiences, it was suspected to have a large impact on the way the drag culture and it's representatives were perceived.

Upon further research, it was noted that throughout all of the titles analysed (100 per platform, 500 in total), 80 of these articles were either in some way referencing RPDR or Ru Paul. The author had decided to not divide these results, as Ru Paul is the 'face' of the show and is strongly associated with it, therefore, when considering one, the other would be considered too.

Poletti and Rak (2018) also emphasise that drag queens are often called "superstars" and are considered as local "celebrities" in the specific subculture scenes they dominate. However, the real stardom has been brought on by reality television, taking Ru Paul's Drag Race into consideration as the leading influence and social media, again, particularly noting Instagram. Exposure on these platforms have further increased the visibility of a number of drag representatives, which in turn have radically exposed these 'queens' to "hundreds of thousands of fans" internationally.

An amazing addition to their 'stardom' is the ability to speak on important matters through their platforms beyond the community already supporting the subculture. These performers, by using their 'celebrity status' can further reach parts of society that have not yet been exposed to drag culture and, perhaps, have also not been widely educated on the matters of LGBTQ+ community. (Poletti & Rak, 2018)

5.3. Instagram following / engagement

The platform in question, Instagram, is used for a number of reasons. First of all, Instagram is, currently, the most used visually based application, according to statistics gathered in July of 2019. (Clement, 2019) It is important to choose a visually stimulative and dominant applications, as considered previously, drag culture is, in its core, based on the idea of entertainment, as well as the fashion industry.

Drag culture, being highly connected to fashion or rather, costume design, as well general looks due to the idea of a drag performer having to convince the audience of their femininity, is truly visually dependant. That further establishes the individual's preference of portraying their 'art' on social media, as studies show that these social platforms allow for a wider recognition of various expressions through fashion, that including drag, a variety of body types, colors of skin etc. (Khamis & Munt, 2010)

Lastly, it should be noted that Instagram is an absolutely massive platform for not only drag representatives, but also other fields depending on visual exposure, such as painters, dancers, make-up artists etc. Kyle Kucharski (2018), a journalist and photographer well immersed in the subculture of drag notes that Instagram often "acts as a resume, business card and a digital agent

for any performer's brand. Looks and drag aesthetic can be displayed, video of performances can be archived and catalogued, and interaction with fans and followers can be instantaneous. This medium, combined with international visibility of a show like "Drag Race" can be the catalyst a performer needs to put themselves on the map and make a profitable career out of drag."

With the platform also being absolutely free of charge, it is simple to use and exploit for individual purposes. By showcasing their work and behind-the-scenes of their performances and everyday lives, it becomes a lot easier for the viewers to be fully immersed in their favorite 'celebrities' day-to-day. Furthermore, content produced from live performances can further live on these sites and even become viral, further expanding the reach of the performer. (Kucharski, 2018)

In order to create an understanding of the current state of drag culture within social media, quantitative analysis was conducted.

Quantitative analysis was used for this part, since during this project the author wished to focus on the perception of the viewers towards the drag culture from an outside perspective. Therefore, it was relevant to note the consumer engagement with the content produced by the representatives chosen rather than discussing the value of the content posted on the specified social media platform, Instagram.

5.3.1. Growth of Instagram following pre- and post-Ru Paul's Drag Race

To further establish the idea of the overall growth of the performers in question, described in section 2.4., their following was compared from the time when they had not made appearances on the show yet (RPDR) to present time. The following attempts could be looked at through the lense of mediatisation and mediation and the effects that these shifts have had on the way the consumers of media can now engage with their idols and role models.

When looking at the graph, the dark green area showcases the initial following of these performers, which was, mostly, well under the two hundred thousand mark according to data gathered from SocialBlade (2019) - platform tracking user statistics. However, since their appearances on RPDR, their following has gradually, yet steadily increased and now averages at 1.7 million followers. This data could be addressed when speaking of these representatives in terms of exposure within popular culture and the entryway to "celebrity status", which would further establish their presence with mainstream media consumers.

According to A. Marwick (2010) and judging by the data presented below (see Figure 3), the drag queens discussed could fall under the category of ‘micro-celebrities’, a definition briefly mentioned prior. Marwick (2010) states that rather than being a subcategory of ‘celebrities’, being a ‘micro-celebrity’ is more of a mindset where the person treats their followers as a fan base, creating a persona specifically for the digital platform.

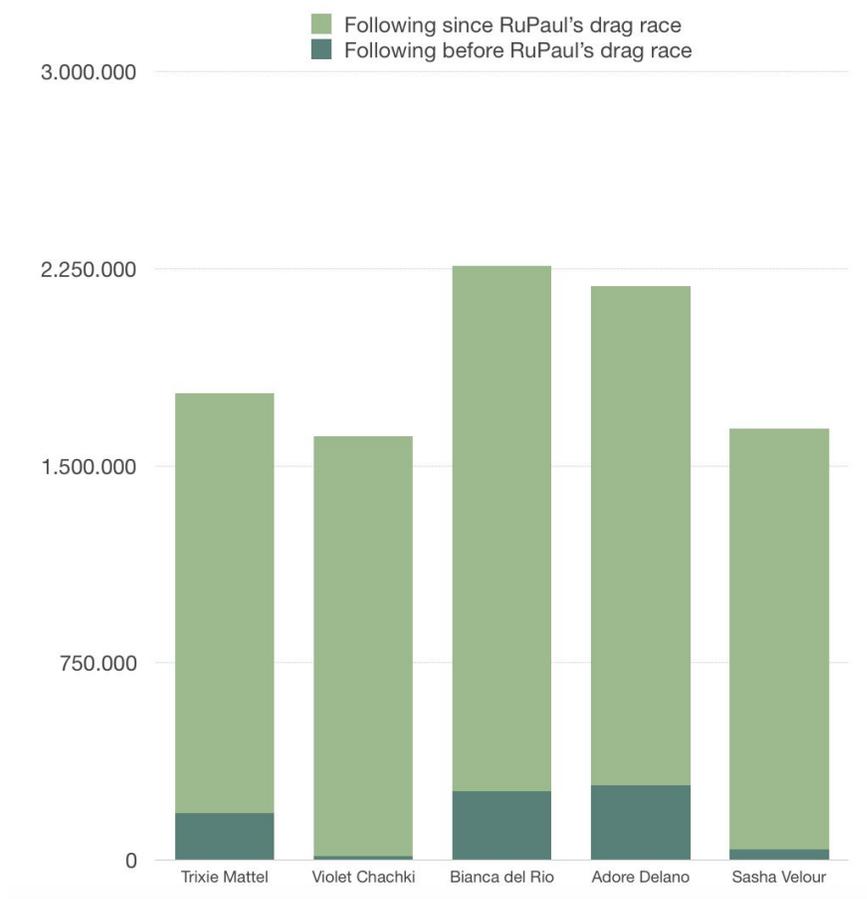


Figure 2: Drag Queen Instagram Following

5.3.2. Instagram engagement comparison - celebrities vs. drag representatives

Furthermore, another quantitative comparison was conducted to see how would these drag performers compare to actual celebrities. It was done to see if the chosen drag queens could be considered as ‘celebrities’ or ‘micro-celebrities’ according to the engagement of their ‘fanbase’. When choosing the celebrities in question, two main points were taken into consideration for this analysis to result in most objective data possible:

- 1) The person had to be connected to the drag or LGBTQ+ community
- 2) The person has to have a profession that is not being a drag performer

It was truly important to consider celebrities that were vaguely connected to the drag culture in order to fairly compare the two categories. If the drag queens would be compared with famous athletes or scientists that had no connection to the art of drag or the LGBTQ+ community, it

would not be fair, as these categories are absolutely different and cannot be objectively compared.

However, at the same time, these celebrities were chosen as they are professionally known primarily for being representatives of other categories than drag. Therefore, a comparison between these two categories is still different enough to produce relevant, valid data.

The people chosen were the following:

Jeffree Star - musician / business mogul / make-up artist, gender fluid

Sam Smith - musician, gender non-conforming

Laverne Cox - actress, transgender

Billy Porter - actor, LGBTQ+ activist, homosexual

Jonathan Van Ness - TV personality, LGBTQ+ activist, gender fluid

Upon gathering the data on their Instagram engagement through SocialBlade (2019) and creating a visual support graphic, it became quite apparent that the overall engagement rate of the drag queens, which could also possibly be named ‘micro-celebrities’, was nearly identical to the engagement of the high-class celebrities.

To be clear, the average engagement rate within micro-celebrity and celebrity groups in question were 3,41% and 3,93% subsequently. As the difference between both of these results is minimal, this confirms the fact that the drag performers have a fanbase comparable to a ‘regular’ celebrities.

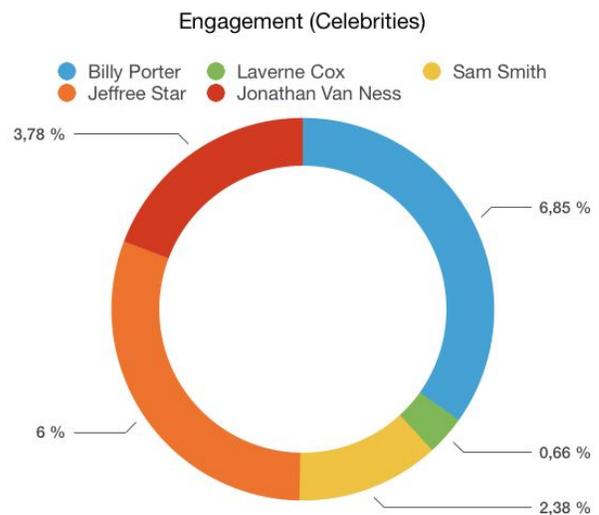
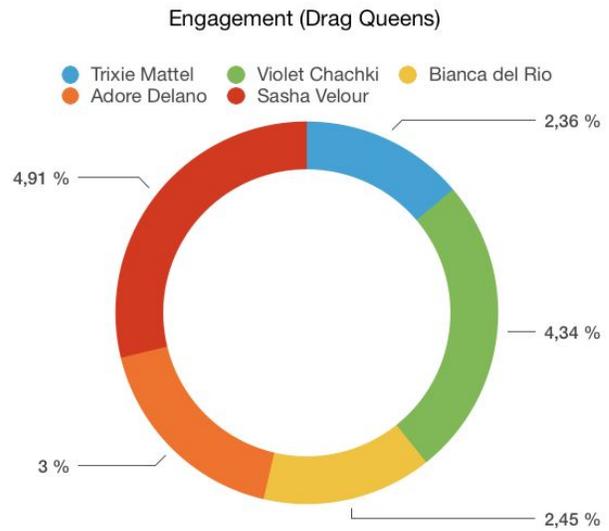


Figure 3: Instagram Audience Engagement Rate

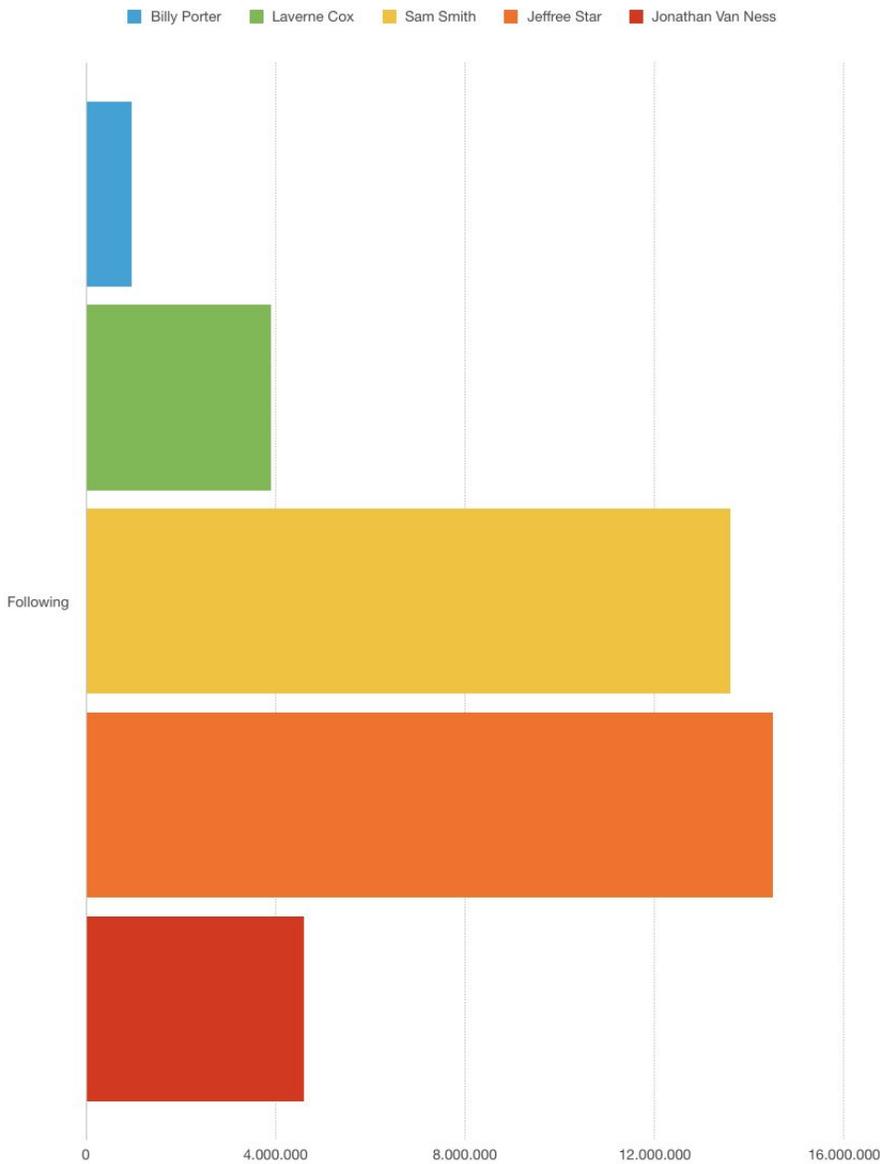


Figure 4: Celebrity following on Instagram

However, in order to judge this from an objective perspective, the average has only been evened out due to the fact that the engagement rate of one of these celebrities, Laverne Cox, is very low, thus, helping to even out the overall score relating to the drag performers. Regardless, it also shows that celebrities, even though their following is often much larger than the drag queens discussed (see Figure 4) do have a very similar engagement rate, therefore both parties could be considered nearly equal. Nevertheless, this analysis further establishes the fact that drag culture has become or is on its way of becoming a part of popular culture, supported by the audience of social media.

6. Ethics

A number of aspects need to be considered when speaking of ethics within academic research. It may seem like a self-explanatory after-thought, however, it is absolutely crucial to adhere to ethical norms whilst working on projects such as this.

First of all, ethics are basic guidelines for the author / researcher to provide the most truthful, academically correct and valuable evidence. As these norms serve as a reminder to avoid technical errors, misrepresentation and falsified data, it becomes a core of any well-written project. (David B. Resnik, 2015)

Secondly, as many research papers do require collaborative efforts, it is truly relevant to establish a certain understanding on how the project will be interpreted, especially if the collaborators have joined from different backgrounds.

And most importantly, to the view of the author, as described by J.D., Ph.D David B. Resnik (2015), ‘‘many of the norms of research promote a variety of other important moral and social values, such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, and public health and safety.’’

In regards of the initial choice of this research topic, the author strongly believes that it is current and ethically relevant, since the rights of LGBTQ+ representatives, even though increased, are still limited (Human Rights Watch, 2019). As drag queens, looking from a historical perspective, have further evolved in the gay community, originating from a form of discrimination itself, it could be noted that these female impersonators are, in fact, a large portion of spokespeople for the LGBTQ+ community nowadays.

To further illustrate this point, it should be noted that, as the majority of widely known and presented drag queens are homosexual, therefore, it is a crucial point to discuss. Discrimination judging by ones sexual preference is not ethical and is still a large talking point in terms of politics and societal norms.

A large point that definitely should be noted within the ethical considerations of this project is the presence of political favoritism, which the author has considered through the use of media framing. Even though the data collected was collected in the most objective approach, it is clear that the paper itself has been written from a perspective, which supports the left-wing policies. It should be taken into account that, even though the author has clearly (yet unintentionally)

showcased their beliefs in terms of political stance when it comes to the overall consensus of this paper, opinions of the right leaning advocates has also been taken into consideration.

This project has been created considering all of the aforementioned points, as it may touch upon certain ideas and issues that may be an unnerving or uncomfortable topic for some. However, it is also important to note, that this paper is based on qualitative and quantitative data presented in the popular culture and media, therefore, possibly reflects an opinion of a large part of the society.

7. Concluding discussion / remarks

The final data analysis and conclusion of this paper suggests that drag culture has not only been popularised by the, so called, popular culture and social media, but has also become a sub-culture of the popular kind. This phenomenon was definitely propelled to the scene of the average consumer by the likes of the television show Ru Paul's Drag Race (of course, not disregarding the drag appearances in such films as "Pink Flamingos" and "Pageant"). The success of these projects could be linked to the uses and gratification theory, confirming that people consume certain content for certain needs. Therefore, a show like RPDR is a great example to producers responding to viewers needs of entertainment provided to them for relaxation purposes. However, when it comes to such film as "Paris is Burning", an average viewer would most likely be interested in this documentary to satisfy its need for further knowledge on the topic.

Regardless, drag appearances have now become less and less radical, showing up not only in specifically curated content, but also in libraries (Flood, 2019), fashion shows (Salesy, 2018) and the music industry, fighting for this culture not only to be accepted, but also celebrated. With their main focus still remaining pinned to entertainment, these drag representatives have also helped push relevant narratives in regards of LGBTQ+ communities rights and address various points varying from illnesses to education.

Moreover, it should be expressed that the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods have been truly beneficial in conducting a well argued for data collection and analysis. The author strongly believes that the use of mixed methods has helped in expanding the ways of retrieving valuable data. Qualitative data perfectly helps to interpret the textual content presented, whereas the quantitative research explores the use of numeric data, complementing each other and, ultimately, reflecting to each other in the process of the analysis.

As noted from the research, the media is mostly neutral in regards to the topic, however, a significant amount of content is also written in a positive leaning direction. Of course, one has to take into consideration the opposing political movements, which may influence the overall consensus. Nevertheless, as the news platforms discussed are upon the ones read the most, it is concluded that the overall thoughts on the topic are positive.

On this note, media framing should also be considered. As the political preference could be a large part of the relatively large amounts of articles written in a positive light, it is possible that these titles have been specifically designed to appeal to a certain group of people, praising or highlighting the best in drag culture, mostly disregarding the negative aspects that would not help further bring the narrative needed. On the other hand, mediatization and mediation also had a large role to play in terms of handling of the quantitative research. Due to these paradigm shifts the consumer relationship with, otherwise, relatively unattainable celebrities and micro-celebrities has changed completely. By analysing the engagement of the fanbase of both categories, it was found that, on average, drag representatives are close to the engagement levels that celebrities have on social media. Therefore, it further explains the growth of drag culture over the years.

Furthermore, upon reflection to the theories used, the author would like to emphasise that, even though the uses and gratification theory was helpful in terms of presenting the context of the research, media framing theory was ultimately the core of this research paper. This theory could be further used in expansion of this topic, as it could be viewed from the perspective of the drag representatives themselves, thus, providing another way of looking at the data available.

It would be relevant to further analyse a number of news platforms leaning right to objectively address this topic, however, for this project, it was only chosen to focus on the most read news portals, which happened to be mostly left leaning. Political representation is a seemingly large part when considering media framing, especially working with this particular topic, therefore, it should be explored further.

Furthermore, in terms of future opportunities regarding analysis, one could also pursue qualitative research on Instagram, which was omitted at this time. Possible analysis of content posted by the drag representatives themselves could give a much needed look into the self-representation of these individuals, thus creating an image of their representation of the drag culture at large through social media.

The large following stemming from the initial push of the nearly cult television series, further recognition of mainstream media and the open concept of influencer marketing, is a great asset of these performers. Through these channels they have gained recognition, which could now

nearly put these drag queens on the 'celebrity' pedestal, further breaking the image of 'celebrity' as it has been portrayed through media until recently.

8. References

- Luksevica, P.U. (2019) *Data Frame*
https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_Pi771g4-VyIBzdG0K20jFCCIOxtYzAmT0hY2MpFDXI/edit?usp=sharing
- Allen, M. (2005). 'It is as it was': *Feature films in the history classroom*. *The Social Studies*, 96 (2), pp.61-67.
- Balzer, C. (2005). Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde. *The Great Drag Queen Hype: Thoughts on Cultural Globalisation and Autochthony*. pp. 111-131.
- Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C., and Gronhaug, K. (2001). *Qualitative Marketing Research*. Sage.
- Carter, D. (2004). *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*. pp. 14-
- Collins, H. (2010). Creative Research. *The Theory and Practice of Research for the Creative Industries*. AVA Books.
- Entman, R.M. (1993). *Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4). pp.51-58.
- Guardino, M. (2019). *Framing Inequality: News Media, Public Opinion, and the Neoliberal Turn in U.S. Public Policy*. Pp.4-8.
- Khamis, S., & Munt, A. (2010). *The three Cs of fashion media today: Convergence, creativity and control*. *SCAN Journal of Media Arts Culture*, 7(2).
Retrieved from http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=155
- Kucharski, K. (2018). *"The Gentrification of Drag"*. CUNY Academic Works
Retrieved from
https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1320&context=gj_etds
- Lecheler, S., de Vreese, C. H. (2018) *News Framing Effects: Theory and Practice*. pp. 5-11.
- Liamputtong, P., Ezzy, D. (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods*. pp. 270-312.

- Marwick, A. (2010). *Status update: Celebrity, publicity and self-branding in Web 2.0 (Doctoral dissertation)*. New York University.
 - Newton, E. (1972). *Mother Camp: Female Impersonators in America*. pp.3-5.
 - Pitman, E. G. (2019) *The Stonewall Riots: Coming Out in the Streets* pp.19-22.
 - Poletti, A., & Rak, J. (2018). “*We’re All Born Naked and the Rest Is*” *Mediation: Drag as Automediality*. *M/C Journal*, 21(2).
Retrieved from <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/1387>
 - Saldana, J. (2009). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. pp.1-185.
 - Tanta, I., Mihovilovic M., Sablic, Z. (2014) *Uses and Gratification Theory - Why Adolescents Use Facebook?*
-
- Adore Delano (2019). *About*.
Accessed 14 October 2019 <http://adoredelano.com/about.php>
 - AllSides (2019). *Media Bias Ratings*.
Accessed: 18 October 2019 <https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/media-bias-ratings>
 - Anderson, P. (2007). JISC Technology & Standards Watch. *What is Web 2.0? Ideas, technologies and implications for education*.
Accessed 20 September 2019 http://www.ictliteracy.info/rtf/pdf/Web2.0_research.pdf
 - Anti Gay Laws (2019). *Countries that still criminalise homosexuality*.
Accessed 20 September 2019 <https://antigaylaws.org>
 - Arsen, S. H. (2017) SHRM. *California’s Equal Restroom Access Act: 5 Facts Employees Need To Know*.
Accessed 21 September 2019
<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/state-and-local-updates/pages/california-equal-restroom-access-act.aspx>
 - Biaudet, S. (2017) *Influencer Marketing as a Marketing Tool*.
Accessed 10 October 2019
https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/134139/Biaudet_Sofie.pdf?sequence=1
 - Carman, C.E. (2016) *Encyclopedia Britannica. Drag Queen*.

Accessed 20 September 2019 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/drag-queen>

- Collins Dictionary (2019). *Mainstream media*.

Accessed 1 October 2019 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mainstream-media>

- Collins Dictionary (2019). *Popular culture*.

Accessed 1 October 2019 <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/popular-culture>

- Columbia University Libraries (2011). *Stonewall and beyond: Lesbian and Gay Culture*.

Accessed 27 October 2019 <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/exhibitions/sw25/case1.html>

- Communication Theory (2019). *Uses and gratification theory*.

Accessed 13 October 2019 <https://www.communicationtheory.org/uses-and-gratification-theory/>

- Dada, G. A. (2017) Forbes. *What is Influencer Marketing And How Can Marketers Use IT Effectively?*

Accessed 19 September 2019

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescommunicationscouncil/2017/11/14/what-is-influencer-marketing-and-how-can-marketers-use-it-effectively/#738505be23d1>

- Flood, A. (2019). The Guardian. *Protest Seeks to stop US libraries supporting Drag Queen Story Hour*.

Accessed 12 October 2019

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/07/protest-seeks-to-stop-us-libraries-supporting-drag-queen-story-hour>

- Gerbner, G., Gross, L. (n.d.) *Living with Television: The Dynamics of the Cultivation Process*.

Accessed 13 October 2019 <http://web.asc.upenn.edu/gerbner/Asset.aspx?assetID=1644>

- GO-Gulf (2018) *How People Read Content Online – Statistics and Trends*.

Accessed 29 October 2019 <https://www.go-gulf.ae/how-people-read-content-online/>

- Hepp, A., Hjarvard, S., Lundby, K. (2015) *Mediatization: Theorizing the Interplay Between Media, Culture, and Society*

Accessed 12 October 2019

https://curis.ku.dk/ws/files/131445234/Hepp_Hjarvard_Lundby_Mediatization_theorizing_the_interplay_between_media_culture_and_society_MCS_preprint_for_repository.pdf

- Human Rights Watch (2019). *#Outlawed - The Love That Dare Not Speak Its Name*.

Accessed 15 October 2019 http://internap.hrw.org/features/features/lgbt_laws/

- IMDB (2019). *Willam Belli*.

Accessed 21 September 2019 https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1316418/?ref_=ttfc_fc_cl_t17#writer

- Jacobs, T. (2018) Pacific Standard. *Research shows that white mass shooters are treated more sympathetically by the media.*

Accessed 12 October 2019

<https://psmag.com/social-justice/white-mass-shooters-are-treated-more-sympathetically-by-the-media>

- Katya (2019). *Bio.*

Accessed 15 September 2019 <https://www.welovekatya.com/#bio>

- Merriam-Webster (2019). Social media.

Accessed 1 October 2019 <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/social%20media>

- Patten, D., Haring, B. (2018) Deadline. *'Ru Paul's Drag Race' Hits All-Time Highs With Season 10 Ratings.*

Accessed 11 October 2019

<https://deadline.com/2018/06/rupauls-drag-race-hits-all-time-highs-with-season-10-ratings-1202419952/>

- Rees, A. (2017). RESET. *Digital and Online Activism.*

Accessed 13 September 2019. <https://en.reset.org/knowledge/digital-and-online-activism>

- Resnik, D.B. (2015). *National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. What is Ethics in Research & Why is it Important?*

Accessed: 17 October 2019 <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm>

- Rosen, R. (2018) Parent Info. *LGBTQ+ glossary for parents.*

Accessed 18 September 2019 <https://parentinfo.org/article/lgbtq-glossary-for-parents>

- Salessy, P.H. (2018). *Vogue. Opening Ceremony had a drag-queen filled fiesta at their Spring/Summer 2019 show.*

Accessed 28 September 2019

<https://www.vogue.fr/fashion/fashion-news/story/opening-ceremony-new-york-fashion-week-drag-queen-sasha-velour-hungry-lypsinka-spring-summer-2019-bjork-nicki-minaj-kelly-rowland/3718>

- Sasha Velour (2019). *About.*

Accessed 14 October 2019 <https://www.sashavelour.com/about-1>

- Saylor Academy (2012). 2.3. *Inductive or Deductive? Two Different Approaches.*

Accessed 15 October 2019

https://saylordotorg.github.io/text_principles-of-sociological-inquiry-qualitative-and-quantitative-methods/s05-03-inductive-or-deductive-two-dif.html

- SelectUSA (2019). *Media and Entertainment Spotlight. The Media and Entertainment industry in the United States.*

Accessed 28 October 2019 <https://www.selectusa.gov/media-entertainment-industry-united-states>

- SocialBlade (2019).

Accessed 12 October 2019 <https://socialblade.com>

- Stabbe, O. (2016) National Museum of American History. *Queens and queers: The rise of drag ball culture in the 1920s.*

Accessed 21 September

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/blog/queens-and-queers-rise-drag-ball-culture-1920s>

- Suhay, E. (2016) LSE US Centre. *Left-right disagreement over whether people are ‘‘born gay’’ is both a cause and consequence of polarised gay rights attitudes.*

Accessed 15 September 2019

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2016/02/22/left-right-disagreement-over-whether-people-are-born-gay-is-both-a-cause-and-consequence-of-polarized-gay-rights-attitudes/>

- Tetteh, D.A. & King, J.M. (2011). *Newspaper coverage of the U.S. healthcare reform debate: A content analysis.* Business Research Yearbook, 18. pp.503-510.

Accessed 28 October 2019 <http://blue.utb.edu/lfalk/BRY2011v2.pdf>

- Trixie Mattel (2019) *About.*

Accessed 14 October 2019 <https://trixiemattel.com/about/>