

Know Your Meme: Magibon

Seong-Young Her December 3, 2017

The notion of authenticity in online celebrities is concurrent with the notion of authenticity in Internet memes (cf. forced memes) mimics the notion of authenticity in fictional characters (cf. fanon).

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This study of Magibon from 2011 argues that these videos of a girl silently staring at the camera were able to repeatedly hit over a million views because the big eyes were moe.^[1] The researcher traces back the trend to lonelygirl15, a Youtuber who played a fictional vlogger on her channel. It's a pretty inane insight: people thought the big eyes are cute.

But the video is more interesting for the kind of questions it takes seriously than the content. The researcher asks, "Is she genuine? And will knowing more about Margaret Lillian Adams affect the character of Magibon?" Lonelygirl15 declined in popularity once it was revealed that she was playing a scripted character. The fans were disappointed by the inauthenticity of the character.

The notion of authenticity in online celebrities is concurrent with the notion of authenticity in Internet memes (cf. forced memes) mimics the notion of authenticity in fictional characters (cf. fanon). Forced memes are celebrated as the new norm now, except in a few cases such as art and celebrity; when the meme is tied to a personality, there is backlash against 'shills' who try to force the meme. The fanon-canon dichotomy has been under assault for a very long time.

It could be said that online celebrities are authored more by the users than the individual which it concerns, although the celebrity has a lot of power over the development. Consider extreme examples

such as meme celebrities like 'Bad Luck Brian' and 'Scumbag Steve'. Similar memes that developed more recently are either someone in a viral video/image (particularly political images, e.g. 'Trigglypuff') or celebrities turned into memes (e.g. Anthony Fantano). They have been less about users developing a lore together based on an interesting starting point, and more about the specific individual. An intermediate example is Ben Garrison, rewritten as a Nazi cartoonist, to his extreme frustration.

I think that this inversion of the nobody-to-meme-celebrity process into a celebrity-to-meme-celebrity process is the result of a continued move away from authorial 'authority' and 'authenticity'. Not only can users write the backstory about someone's picture together, they can also rewrite the life story of a very well known public figure. Virtual identity is not only still alive, it is leaking into real identity and corroding the wall between IRL and URL.

[Originally posted to /tpml/.](#)

Bibliography

[View Site Bibliography](#)

1. Study of Magibon. (2011). Video. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7ye0O3wlws>

[Back 1](#)