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How did the Beatles impact cultural movement on different generations?

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Introduction: This study aims to identify the characteristics of the new generations of Beatles fans who are engaged in online fandoms and to explore how the Beatles continue to have an impact despite the band does no longer exist. To address these objectives, the study answers to the following research questions: Does the perception of the Beatles' impact at a personal level differ between generations of fans? If so, in what ways does the Beatles' influence manifest in the younger generation of fans and how does the new generation of Beatles fans define themselves?

Methods: In order to conduct the study, a mixed method design was used, specifically the preliminary quantitative input variant. In the first stage we collected data to identify whether there are differences in perceptions among generations about the impact of the Beatles through an online questionnaire, with closed and open-ended questions. The population was selected non-probabilistic and comprised 788 persons who listen to the Beatles and are members of Beatles fan communities on Facebook. In the second stage, we administered an online questionnaire with open-ended questions and analogy exercises to 23 persons from the same communities, to obtain more in-depth information about the new generation of Beatles fans (aged 18–35).

Results: Quantitative data illustrate that the new generation of fans is less influenced by the Beatles. When this happens, there are two areas where this influence is more substantial: personal development and social interactions. The main elements through the identification take place with the band are lyrics from the late period of the Beatles, with a more profound message and a philosophy of life. Through analogy exercises, qualitative data reflects elements of the social identity of Beatles' fans. Symbols like animals, plants, and instruments indicate who they are in terms of the groups.

Discussion: The findings extended our understanding of how the Beatles impact the new generation of fans and provide new insights from their social identity, which could serve as a foundation for future research, for scholar interested in exploring the identity of band music fans.

KEYWORDS

the Beatles, online fandoms, social identity, music, mixed method design

1 Introduction

The present paper aims to describe the characteristics of the new generation of Beatles fans engaged in online fandom from the point of view of lifestyle and identity aspects that define them. We want to see what impact the Beatles' music has on the new generation of fans, even if they no longer have their idols in front of them. We will start with a description of the importance of music in the life of each of us, after which describing how the Beatles appeared, the impact they had and their composition. We will continue with the description of the group of fans in music and we will identify the online fans by discovering their attributes and lifestyle. After that, through the lens of identity theories, we will try to make a profile of them.

Music is an important aspect of our life that is noticed in all areas of daily life. Music can be heard both in our homes and at concerts. It accompanies our lives as a background in cars, bars, restaurants, and shopping malls. Music means to reveal a universal language of emotions. The young population use music as a communication tool that crosses language barriers and other cultural elements. Music appeared with the development of the record industry and was later followed by the extension of radio-sound, film, television-music, videos, and the internet (Burnett, 2008).

The representation of music as a form of art-cultural expression triggered powerful emotions and memories in people. This was associated with people's feelings about what home means, the idea of belonging, about the past and the future of people. When we choose a certain type of music, it can tell us how we perceive the world and ourselves. The function of music is to give the listener a sense of security and identity. It can offer details about the place where listeners were born, the memories of the first years of their lives, their religious experiences, etc. As a conclusion, music represents a total of aspects and features regarding a person, because the music has the ability to highlight a person's capabilities and talents (Gazzah, 2008).

There are many bands that help many people overcome some challenges in their lives. One of the most emblematic examples is The Beatles, who practically gave the world a new perspective, musical-wise. The roots and significance of what were The Beatles began early in the year 1957. Few people know that The Beatles started as The Quarrymen, then The Silver Beatles with the adjacent name "Fabulous Four / Fab Four," and ultimately, through the televised appearance of The Beatles on the Ed Sullivan Show, they skyrocketed in popularity and instantly gained people's interest. After The Beatles left the United Kingdom and arrived in the United States, they immediately gained recognition and popularity, which sent them to the Far East as well as to the rest of Europe. The Beatles were an important vector and primary when it came to the globalization of pop culture, starting with Americans and how they interpreted the band itself (Lebovic, 2016).

Initially the band's composition consisted of John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Star. After that, other members joined the band. The music of the Beatles band was a real miracle on a global level, changing mentalities, lifestyles, visions of existence. The scream in the Beatlemania context was a release of joy, rebellion and most importantly a sense of belonging, the start of a new era, an exciting one. People were at concerts, on street corners, outside hotel rooms and waiting at airports (Rohr, 2017). This was only the beginning of a new page in the history of music.

Since then, the Beatles have manifested themselves as a cultural phenomenon, having an impact at a societal and personal level. The

band instituted new behaviors regardless of political, economic, social or religious factors through their suggestive lyrics, with emotional and philosophical meanings. Heilbronner (2008) argues about the so-called adoptions of some typical English characteristics specific to English pop culture.

Also, the Beatles shaped personalities, built lifestyles, and helped people get through critical situations. The band's music influenced some listeners to be better, creating their best version. It affected their personal life because they had better relationships with certain people and family. Some professional opportunities have appeared. The Beatles influenced many people to become professional musicians or to work in this area (some started a musical career, sold records, created content etc.). For example, The Beatles have a unique impact on Japanese popular culture. After a concert in Nippon Budokan, Tokyo, Japan, in 1966, many Japanese people embraced their music and started listening to it more and more, ultimately contributing to the cultural progress in Japan in the post-war era.

Their songs, albums, and covers have inspired people to discover their creativity in art. Also, the Beatles encouraged the young generation of fans from that time to adopt a specific dress style, aesthetics, behavior, or simply be themselves and not anybody else (Pickard, 2011). These can be seen as positive aspects, such as a person reflecting on their thoughts while listening to the Beatles music, gaining valuable life insights, and ultimately becoming a happier person. It is remarkable that, despite the Beatles no longer existing, online communities of fans continue to bring together people across different ages. Based on studies regarding the Beatles and their influence on the world, this paper intends to explore whether the band still exerts an influence in contemporary times, particularly on the new generation of fans who are not contemporary with the band, the forms in which this impact manifests, and who are the new generation of Beatles' fans and how they perceived themselves as a fan.

Therefore, the following research questions were formulated:

Research question 1: Does the perception of the Beatles' impact at a personal level differ between generations of fans?

Research question 2: In what ways does the Beatles' influence manifest in the younger generation of fans?

Research question 3: How does the generation of new Beatles' fans define themselves?

2 Music fandoms

Nowadays, the concept of music fans is more and more widespread. This is specific to all age categories, from children, teenagers and young people to the elderly. Fans are usually described in relation to its etymological Latin root, fanaticus meaning enthusiastic, frantic, frenzied, and/or inspired (Wiatrowski, n.d.).

Music fan communities' areas are of great interest to the scientific research world. Such communities; regarding fans are well defined by a similar study (Jenkins, 2012). The study states that fans are people who share the same passion with each other, their identity involves similar tastes and preferences (Jenkins, 2012). In another study (Bielby et al., 1999), it is stated that "being a fan" is a concept that involves a

series of activities with emotional involvement that can also affect interpersonal relationships.

A previous study (Sandvoss, 2005), using the myth of Narcissus argues that the idea of being a fan can be associated with an extension of the self, in this case from the musical field. They imagine that the music star is talking to them. For some people music was precisely like a mirror, enabling them to recognize themselves in an image of an artist or the characters in his songs that he plays. This is an imaginary relationship. The same text can “mirror” differently for various kinds of people that derive from their interests and interpretations. Fan communities are cohesive entities that share the same passionate feeling about an artist or a band; for that matter. Some musical fan communities even act as brotherhoods/sisterhoods that adopt the look of a family.

Fan communities allow one to share emotions and experiences with others. There is energy of fans. The concept of fandom is described by words like fascination/obsession (which can be entirely personal) or words like contagion/hysteria (which can be social) (Duffett, 2013). This means that passion inhibitions disappear once somebody shares the same idea as you do and there is a strong bond between you and the others that feel the same way as you do.

Anderson (2016) argues that the concept of fandom is related to the “imagined communities,” even though most members will never meet face to face, they will share an image of their community based on similar language, commune memories and a sense of collective missions. This collective mission means aiming for shared scopes, such as seeing their favourite artist, maybe even participating in their concerts, sharing memories with them but most importantly keeping their musical tradition alive. The most important advantage of being a fan in a community is that it involves sharing emotions and experiences with others (Sundet and Peteresen, 2021). This aspect can be crucial to some people.

Researching fandom, and particularly popular music fandom with its characteristic practices and evident connection to affect, is therefore an opportunity to pursue an empathetic and in some ways autobiographic form of scholarship (Duffett, 2018).

Fandom is seen to form a sense of style, a place of belonging, impacts emotional, material, and social lives. Fans are engaged in a multitude of practices with affective impact, starting with desires related to sexual experiences up to fashion choices (Gray et al., 2007). Sexual desires are as simple as wanting to kiss your favourite artist, or they simply represent sex appeal, just like Elvis Presley always did, for example. Or people automatically, most of the times willingly adopt fashion styles, such as the famous *mop-top* hairstyle that belonged to the Beatles, etc.

Fans show certain specific behaviors in relation to those they adore: they accompany their favourite band all over the country, collect their albums, memorize the lyrics of the songs, study their way of being and so on (O'Reilly et al., 2013). We include here also the merchandize aspect that is sold through various Internet websites, temporary stands at concerts, and official physical stores (such as the Beatles one in Liverpool) etc. Fans even go as far as not sleeping for days on end or sleeping wherever they can just to be the first to see them, talk to them or listen to them. Duffett (2013) believes that fans have much more specific behavior besides consuming their favourite music. They create connections with others, collect albums, are tourists, producers and more. Some fans said that they are transported to another world when they see the artist, in a kind of hyperreality in which they could immerse themselves. For many loyal fans it feels like living the best dream possible. The pop icon can be a source of influence for the fan, in the

vulnerable periods of their lives. They take the values and beliefs of their beloved artists (Derbaix and Korchia, 2019). This guide is often used as a path in the life of a fan, a path that gives guidance to one's existence.

Sometimes the musician can be projected as a family member or close friend. Fans can imagine that they are in a close relationship with their favourite artist or that they can be themselves just like famous ones (Steuer, 2009). At the same time, personal decisions can be made in accordance with what they know about their loved ones, they can name their children after them. There are also many cases of fans naming their children after their favourite artists (eg. John, Paul, George, Richard, Elvis, Marilyn etc.).

We must carefully mention important consumption practices that bring joy to sides, fans as well as artists. Fans are happy that their favourite artist even noticed them, and artists are fulfilled by the idea that their fanbase appreciates and loves them. If we refer to consumption practices, fans have all kinds of creative strategies to maintain their favourite artists: they try to attract their attention by going to concerts and sitting in the front row, they send them letters and gifts, they collect objects for creating personalized memories of them, they organize their birthday celebrations according to the style of the famous (Derbaix and Korchia, 2019). There are fans who place the musicians in a higher place, as if they were their God, look for information about them, buy objects such as posters and books, play their songs on different instruments or sing their songs.

2.1 Online fandoms

In terms of interpersonal relationships, people have found new ways to socialize. So virtual groups have become a new way to communicate, interact, create, and exchange impressions with others. Virtual community refers to a series of registered members who use social interaction sites or platforms to share information (Rodríguez-López, 2021). They are supported by a technological infrastructure, usually social network sites. Sharing information has become vaster and simpler to use with time. A virtual community refers to an online social entity in which there is mutual communication between active members, to learn from each other or to solve a problem (Lechner and Hummel, 2002). The fans gather online to create a space where they can affordably consume, create, and share their culture, much as they had done prior to the implementation of online media, but with greater connectivity and speed (Wiatrowski, n.d.).

Through online communities' people are brought together to discuss interests such as hobbies, ethnicity, education or beliefs (Korzenny, 1978). In this way, different groups with common interests form an online community that can discuss business, sports, books, movies, music and others (Zaphiris and Ozok, 2012). This means that it is solely based on a subject or preference, shared amongst all the members or potential members. People in virtual communities exchange information and/or social support (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). If they identify as being somewhat the same (regarding music of course), they are much more likely to support each other with advice, or even materialistically. Consequently, people have commitment and attachment, emotional and psychological connections to the virtual communities, to share and seek information with those who have similar interests (e.g., about musical band) (Luo et al., 2021). There is a social exchange of material and non-material goods, individuals voluntarily exchange resources with others to seek

rewards (psychological, economic, and social) (Homans, 1958). Members of online communities have a series of specific activities: they write messages and post them, ask questions about topics they are interested in and get answers, upload pictures they like. They also pay attention to what other members are doing, how they help each other or what they comment on other's posts (Hartmann et al., 2015). Interaction is crucial in these types of moments, as it can change aspects for the better.

Music fans groups have always been around since bands existed, from very rudimentary entourages to very complex and even exclusive access fan groups. Of course, groups would start at first to be offline and then gradually as the internet started to develop at a rapid pace, they transformed into online groups, with the big advantage of easier access to information and other members from different parts of the world. The sense of belonging to these types of groups implies how they share common values, practices, and rather similar lifestyles.

In this context of subcultures and communities of fans, which have their own norms and practices, which can act as support for those who own this capital, it matters who fits in this context and to who do not (McRobbie, 2000), (Williams, 2011). In other words, certain fan communities will even become aggressive toward newcomers that do not fit into the fan agenda. Moreover, there could even be attempts, sometimes successful, sometimes not, of rival band members (such as The Beatles vs. The Rolling Stones) that intentionally adhere to a rival band group and start to talk badly about their musical enemies. On the other hand, quite many fan communities' resort to a simple test when it comes to welcoming somebody in their group, the test consisting in asking a few questions about the band itself, such as when did the band form, who are the band members, where were they born, how many of them are still alive (if it is the case) and so on and so forth.

These online communities of fans are those who create links and have as a way of defining the interpersonal relationship between members who support and interconnect with each other (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki, 2012). The first step in the process of becoming a member of a community of fans is to create a profile, a presentation of oneself to others. They want to be liked by their audience. They want the audience to be impressed by them and to develop a positive perspective on them (Baumeister, 1982). Completing this profile basically creates a unique business card and basic information about a certain individual.

Most of the time, in their presentation people choose information that will value them, be suitable and relevant in the given situation (Leary, 1993). There is a series of information that members post in these social networks such as gender, age, geographic location, occupations, interests, affiliation to certain groups, favourite books, movies and music or certain statements in the "about me" section (Boyd, 2007). There is a similarity in member profiles, shared for example by demographic characteristics, interests, attitudes, values, taste (Schwämmlein and Wodzicki, 2012). Many of them identify artistically, for example, with the same aspect.

Regarding fans, Jenkins (2012) states that fans generate content through media based on their interests and preferences, ultimately becoming *prosumers* (they produce as well as consume generated content). The new ideal is most certainly being a fan. This also means that some fans create content (such as motivational messages, images, even memos) and share among other fans of the same band, for example Jenkins strengthens the idea that this is more and more

possible especially in the internet era, where information is shared vastly, rapidly and easily. Participatory culture is also of interest for Jenkins, who states that freedom of art sharing (or freedom of art expressiveness) encourages civic engagement. Although many people know the complexities and implications of being a fan, in the end the quality of being a fan is conditioned by various aspects and these aspects never cease to develop and metamorphose as time goes on.

Regarding virtual communities, we turn our attention toward Facebook, where many Beatles groups reside, interestingly enough created by younger fans (under 35), but not necessarily all of them. We can also take into account the fact that newer generations of fans that use the internet on a daily basis know how to create a group and manage to manipulate information much easier than older generations.

When talking about group members, most groups on Facebook that contain Beatles fans are quite large (over 10.000 members), some of them even reaching 50.000 or 100.000 members, for example the group *Here, There and Everywhere* (over 60.000 members) or *The Beatles Fans International* or simply *The Beatles group* (389.000 members). We have noticed that there is quite a large portion of older users in these groups, many of them belonging to the Beatles debut era (these users were either very young or teenagers during the start of the 1960s). After applying the analysis online, we noticed, also based on profile pictures and through certain questions (age), that there is a much higher chance of a user being older, considering some of these aspects, as well as reminiscing about the 60s being the boom of the Beatles, still reflecting in some people decades later who have aged. Through the power of example, a handful of teenagers and younger generations started to empathize with Beatles music and kept the tradition of listening to The Beatles from disappearing.

Almost all The Beatles fan groups on social media are selective, in the sense that you must answer a set of general as well as specific questions about the band. There are numerous admins and moderators that choose who should belong to the group and who should be dismissed or denied entry.

3 Social identity of fans

Literature expresses that there are two theories that explain identity: social identity (Turner and Tajfel (1979) and self-categorization (Turner et al., 1994). Social identity theory emphasizes the distinction between oneself and others. It is said that individuals can act both as independent people and as members of the group. Both entities provide valid representation of identity in different social contexts (Turner et al., 1994).

This theory says that there is a transition from personal to social identity. In the present case there is a transition from the specific values of everyone to those promoted by the Beatles.

Self-categorization theory states that we must distinguish between social and personal identity. These represent two different processes of self-description. Social identity implies the belonging of a social actor to a group or to several groups (Tajfel, 1981). Social identities, in the form of such social categories (e.g., nationality, religion, gender, profession, ethnicity, political orientation etc) are internalized and constitute a potentially important part of the individual self-concept. In the process of self-categorization, social comparisons appear. They favor the in-group and disfavor the out-group (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992). This is done to maintain a

positive opinion in relation to the individual who is part of the group (Tajfel, 1981).

To have a sense of identification with the group or community, people must have a series of characteristics such as: culture, language, common historical background. These similarities are important points of identification (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983).

When it comes to music, identification with a band occurs when people perceive that they share similarities with that celebrity (Fraser and Brown, 2002). Individuals make social comparisons that favor the in-group to maintain a positive opinion of themselves, sharing similarities with the celebrity, in our case the fans in relation to the members of The Beatles. Individuals have a social identity referring to the knowledge and values of the group, in this case Beatles fans in online communities.

Once a fan cognitively recognizes oneself as a team member, evaluation of the group also takes place by constantly reflecting the in-group's status through comparisons with outgroups of similar interest (Chun and Sagas, 2022).

When identities of fans are analyzed by other people, they can create self-efficiency in performing their roles as music admirers. Nevertheless, enacting the fan role can lead to complications as individuals possess multiple roles (Chun and Sagas, 2022).

Music is a way to present the self to others (Larsen et al., 2010). On the other hand, music is a way to express personal identity (lifestyle – vision of the world, ways of enjoying free time) and on another hand, music can play an important role in forming identities for young people (Nuttall, 2009). Music makes fans define and maintain their identity through personal preferences but at the same time a cross between personal identity (who I am, who I am not) and social identity (who we are and who we are not) (Hesmondhalgh, 2008).

4 Materials and methods

4.1 Data collection method and sample

In this study, we used a mixed methods design, more precisely the preliminary quantitative input design. This variant is used when the researcher focuses on qualitative data. In the first stage, we collected quantitative data through a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions, which were transformed into categorical data, and the results are presented in quantitative terms. We collected this data to identify if there are differences in perceptions among generations about the impact of the Beatles at the personal or societal level and, if so, which is the category where more differences appear. We discovered such a category is 18–35 years. Therefore, in the second stage of our study, we decided to obtain more in-depth information about the new generations (18–35) who declared themselves fans. In this sense, we build another online questionnaire with open-ended questions to provide more details about the Beatles' impact on the new generation of fans at the personal level and how they perceive themselves as fans of the Beatles.

In the first stage the population was selected in a non-probabilistic way and was comprised of 788 persons who listen to the Beatles and are members of some Beatles fans' Facebook communities, as mentioned above in the article. Data was collected online through the free application Google Forms in 2021, between 25.01.2021 and

05.04.2021. Details about the sample are in the [Supplementary Appendix Table A1](#). In the second stage we collected data from the same communities, from people who wanted to offer in-depth information with age under 35 years (23 persons).

4.2 The research instruments

For the first stage we used a questionnaire with items regarding the favourite song (q10, open question), the representations of fans regarding what the Beatles meant to the World (q11, closed question), the situation where the Beatles made a crucial difference at personal or societal level (q12, open question) or in their lifestyle (q8, open question) and the degree of the Beatles impact on the personal life, way of thinking and personality (q15, on scale to 1 of 5, where 1 = total disagree, 5 = total agree).

In the second stage we had an online survey with open questions and an analogy exercise (Scârneci-Domnişoru, 2020). The open questions were addressed to find out in depth, the way in which the Beatles impacted the life of the youngest generations of fans. We used open questions such as: Since you started listening to The Beatles, has anything changed in your way of thinking? If so, what has changed? Please be detailed; Since when did you start listening to The Beatles, have there been changes in the values and principles of life that guide you? If so, what has changed? Please be detailed; Has the Beatles' music impacted your way of interacting with people and establishing social relationships? If so, what has changed? Please be detailed; Were there any situations other than the ones mentioned above when the music of The Beatles had a strong impact on your life? If so, can you give us an example? Please be detailed.

The analogy exercise has been used as an indirect test for studying identity. This is because it did not suggest to the subjects that it would be a method used for discovering identity traits. The special features of the analogy technique are that it diminishes the control mechanisms of the participants making the data that is obtained less sensitive to social desirability. To find as many and as different identity aspects, the analogies must be multiple. In this paper we used three types of analogies (animals, plants, instruments).

The exercise was made up of the following questions: 1. What animal best personifies a person who is a fan of the Beatles? (Brief characterization as you see this animal, especially the characteristic epithets, but also his typical actions) 2. What is the plant that you think best personifies a person who is a fan of the Beatles? (Brief characterization as you see this plant, especially the characteristic epithets, but also the "favourite" places, the "favourite" company, pedoclimatic conditions, etc.) 3. What musical instrument do you think best characterizes a person who is a fan of the Beatles? (Brief characterization as you see this tool, especially the characteristic epithets, but also anything else that is characteristic to you).

Those two instruments contain much more information, but in this study, only the indicators related to the research questions are presented.

4.3 Data analysis

There are several ways to present data and to integrate the results (Creswell and Plano, 2017; Wittink et al., 2006). In this study,

we present data collected in the first stage, followed by the data collected in the second stage and the integration occurred during the interpretation stage.

For the answers to the open questions from the first stage of collecting data we used the quantitative content analysis, empirical approach (Züll, 2016).

Therefore, we coded the answers for q10 in two categories: songs from the early Beatles (code 1, until 1964–1965) or from the later Beatles (code 2, after 1966). We used a difference between The Beatles' members' age firstly and then the difference in lyrics and ways of transmitting ideas through lyrics as time went by while the members' experience was increasing, reflected in their songs starting with the early 60's up until late 60's. Early Beatles would be the young and rather simple but romantic individuals while the late Beatles are characterized by maturity, philosophical aspects and much more complex ways of transmitting feelings and ideas (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B1](#)).

The answers for q12, the situation where the Beatles made a crucial difference were coded in 2 categories: impact at the society level (code 1) or personal level (code 2) (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B2](#)).

The answers for the q8 regarding the impact of the Beatles on their lifestyle were coded into ten categories such as personal development, positive emotions, social political activism, interest in culture, tourism, professional development, interest and love for music, personal habits, philosophy of life, social interactions (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B3](#)). Afterwards, starting from this variable, ten dummy variables were built, with code 1 the presence and 0 absence of these categories of answers:

The results of these categorizations were compared on age categories (<35 years/> 35 years) with the help of the Chi-square and Adjusted Residuals. The answers to the q15 were compared with the Independent Samples *T* Test.

Initially we made comparisons depending on age categories, with three categories. We saw that there are differences only between the youngest and the rest of the respondents and we present final data with two categories of ages. In this paper only the significative statistical results are presented (see [Supplementary Appendix Tables C1,C2](#)).

In the qualitative data analysis during the second stage of the research, we used thematic analyses (Naeem et al., 2023), open coding procedures (Flick, 2014; Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to code representative quotations, which were then transformed into categories such personal development and social interactions. Examples of quotations related to these two categories are illustrated in [Supplementary Appendix Table C3](#).

5 Results

The majority of the fans interviewed (55.7%) have a preference for songs from the latest period, with lyrics more profound and sometimes with a spiritual approach (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B1](#)), and their answers reflect the association of the Beatles with band who had an unimaginable talent (38.8%), that succeed trough this to start a cultural movement (24.5%) around the World, bringing changes in the lifes of many people (29.7%) (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B4](#)). They

consider that the band made a crucial difference especially at societal level (42.1%) (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B2](#)). They consider that the main impact was in giving a voice to the youth and promote values such as peace, love over war, anti-segragation, and anti-discrimination. The Beatles played a fundamental role in changing the values of people around the world.

A segment of 24.9% believed that the major impact was at the personal level, influencing their own lives or those of their friends and family members (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B2](#)). Through their songs and lyrics, they succeeded in strengthening bonds with some family members, relatives, acquaintances, and even in making new friends. Also, the message of the songs helped them to stay positive and gave them the strength to overcome lifes's obstacles.

When they are asked about only the impact at personal level, they consider that the most frequent impact of the Beatles on their life was interest and love for music (36.1%) followed by personal habits (20.5%), professional development (16.5%) or philosophy of life (14.7%), personal development (11.9%) and social interactions (3.7%) (see [Supplementary Appendix Table B3](#)).

Personal habits refer to clothing style, hair style, spending money on CDs, collecting CDs. The philosophy of life refers to thinking about the world in new ways, appreciating the small things, maintain in an open mindset to accept and love those wfrom different cultures, and increasing interest in new spiritual ideas. Professional development refers to the fact that many of them were inspired to become musicians/ copywriters/ producers or at least to play musical instruments while others began to learn English. Personal development incorporated answers such as helping with the anxiety, depression, fear, gaining the courage to live. The music helped them stop smoking or drinking alcohol, and allowed them to focus on other things, providing them positivity and hope for the future. Social interactions refer to fact that respondents consider that trough the music, they succed to increase their networking, having common topics to with others. To discover differences by ages, the data is presented comparing persons under 35 years old with those who are over. These persons identified in a higher number than others with the songs from the latest period of Beatles (q10) [$\chi^2(1) = 7.193$, $p = 0.007$]. They are interested in the profound and spiritual message transmitted by the song. It is surprising because we expected the youngest to prefer the song more light from the first period, with lyrics adequate more to the age. These data are correlated with the answers to question q11, where again the youngest is correlated with the answer "spiritual comfort." For them, the band represent a change in their philosophy of life and spiritual values (see [Supplementary Appendix Tables C1,C2](#)).

These fans considered that the Beatles have slightly less influence on their lifestyle and way of thinking than the older ones (q15) [$M1 = 3.88$, $SD1 = 1.09$; $M2 = 4.19$, $SD2 = 0.96$; $t(786) = -3.03$, $p = 0.002$]. They are the category that considers in greater measure the impact was at a personal level rather than a societal one (q12) [$\chi^2(1) = 20.197$, $p = 0.000$]. The music and the fact that there are fans helped them especially with personal development (q8) [$\chi^2(1) = 11.622$, $p = 0.001$] or to increase the social interactions [$\chi^2(1) = 18.491$, $p = 0.00$] (see [Supplementary Appendix Tables C1,C2](#)).

Data from the second stage came to complete the data from the first stage. These data helped us to understand better why the young generations of fans make references to categories as personal

development or social interaction (see [Supplementary Appendix Table C3](#)). Regarding personal development, qualitative data from the second stage reflects that Beatles music influences fans to discover coping strategies in hard moments, motivates them to want to live their dreams, to think that things will get better. The music of the Beatles offers support both through melodicy and through the messages provided in the lyrics. The music installs in them inner peace, balance, calm, tranquility and the lyrics develop new coping strategies to get through life. They manage to develop a positive mindset, to accept themselves as they are, to accept that life is also made of more unpleasant moments, but you have to find the strength to move on, to be motivated to succeed in life like the four band members did. At the same time, by listening to the lyrics, fans begin to have other perspectives on life and try to rise above the small things. They learn to be freer and to recognize and express their feelings. Relevant in this sense is what one of the interviewee declared: “Their music is catchy and stuck in my mind all the time, and there are many lyrics that encourage our life so I think positively by just keeping listening. I used to be negative, but their songs help me a lot to be more confident.”

The qualitative data provides also a better understanding of the way in which the music influenced their social interactions, directly and indirectly. Their musical preferences helped them make friends both in the country and abroad, both in the physical environment and online. First of all they have something to talk about and this helps them to improve their interactions and communication with other persons, young, elderly or even with members of their family (e.g. father): “Here I can say that there was an impact, namely that I managed to make friends just by the simplicity of the fact that we were all fans of The Beatles.”

Secondly, the song lyrics helped them become more empathic and pro-social, and thus they were much more open to making new friends. Some of them made friends in real life, even life partners. For others, being a member of online communities helped them overcome social anxiety and they managed to make friends in the virtual environment, with whom they also met in the physical environment. One respondent declared: “I have met Beatles fans in person, but I have been and I am involved in several online music groups (mainly on Twitter), some of which are Beatles fan groups, and this has helped me make some new online friends who share my passion for music. I came out of my “cocoon” and this helped me partially overcome my social anxiety.”

And last but not least, the messages and values conveyed by the Beatles helped them change their perspective on human relationships and one of the benefits was greater tolerance and non-judgment toward others. Indirectly, the band helped them to learn English, and this opened up new opportunities for them to meet people from different countries, both in online and offline communities.

But why does this new generation of fans feel the need for the Beatles’ music to enhance certain personal and social abilities? Who are the individuals appealing to the online community to achieve this?

To answer this question we analyzed data collected from the analogy exercise. The answers were coded in the three category presets: animals, plants and instruments. For each category there are examples presented and reasons that they have chosen a specific example in [Supplementary Appendix Table C4](#).

Regarding the analogy of the band members with *animals*, the example that appears most often is the dog (7 fans out of 23 mentions

the dog as a representative animal). The dog is loyal, loving, friendly with the surrounding world, trustworthy and is very curious about everything that happens in the surrounding world, just like people.

Dogs are faithful, loyal to their owners, just as the band is loyal to its fans and the reciprocal is valid (dog): “they are faithful, believe, and dedicated.”

There are respondents who associate Beatles fans, the band and implicitly what its members created as cultural-musical products, as an immortal work, (like the immortal jellyfish), the unmistakable musical style being appreciated by future generations, not only by those of the past. The message of their songs is one of emancipation that liberates and gives freedom just like the birds (in the song Blackbird): “I chose the bird because I associate the band and those who listen to it with the song “Blackbird.”

Likewise, Beatles fans are those who have refined gestures and concerns related to music, they are elegant, but at the same time with an old-school vibe, which denotes style and naturalness (associated with the giraffe or the horse): “So, the first thing that popped up in my head was a very fancy elegant giraffe. With that fancy haircut and a turtleneck knitted sweater and of a guitar, having this old school-dreamy kind of vibe, singing with her head over the clouds” or “For me, people who love the Beatles are people with a good taste in music, and I think the horse is elegant.”

Beatles fans and the band itself are represented as an identity profile by calm, warm people, who bring a good mood, who do no harm and do not want to disturb others (lazy, dolphin, based hunt): “The lazy animal- it does no harm to disturb no one.” (A).

Finally, the music of the Beatles was a continuous artistic evolution. The transformations of the band and implicitly the fans were associated with the transformations of a butterfly. From a larva a wonder of the world was created - a future. The identity changes of the fans, with different versions of the self related to style, clothing, tastes, and desires related to music were associated with the transformations of a future (butterfly): “I think the craziest thing about the Beatles is their artistic evolution. It’s one in calibre that no other artist has come anywhere close to. A change like this, we see in butterflies, we see in the band itself, and with it’s fans. Over the last four years I’ve gone through so many different versions of myself with completely different looks and styles. I think this is really common for fans of the group. You never know when you might change, when you are favourite Beatles record may change. I’ve been into some Beatles albums and songs more than others at completely random times. My taste in that is constantly changing, just like a butterfly.”

Regarding the analogy of the band/its members with a *plant*, the most common is the sunflower (5 fans out of 23 mention this).

First, it is associated with the representative song of the band, the one that brought them a lot of notoriety “Here comes the sun.” In this song it is mentioned that we must always see the good side of life, despite the bad weather in life, and then everything will be fine. Just like the sunflower plant always faces the rays of the heavenly star and the torrential rain. They stand straight, beautiful and face everything, just like the band members: “Sunflowers always face the sun. They’re always standing tall and beautiful, facing the bright star that gives all things in life. I think Beatles fans are those who love music to the highest extent. Anytime with artistic creation I’ve always found myself in a position thinking that it just is not worth comparing myself to anyone else but The Beatles. They are music.”

At the same time, the band was also associated with the honeysuckle, an invasive plant species, just as the Beatles were all over the globe as a musical phenomenon. They were also associated with the rose, a symbol of eternal love, but at the same time a sharp plant when it feels threatened, as were the songs of the Beatles band: *“Although it represents the symbol of eternal love, this plant can become very sharp and very fierce when she feels threatened.”* Another comparison was made with the daisy, a simple but elegant plant with an impact on the landscape. There is also a comparison with the chestnut which can adapt to any climatic conditions, just as the formation can grow and prosper in any location; the comparison with the cactus that resists and survives regardless of the weather is based on the same idea. *“This chestnut is a big one, its age is irrelevant. It can adapt to normal climatic conditions, but it can also grow and prosper in any location.”*

Another interesting association is with Jade Vine, an exotic, special plant, as the Beatles were also considered. They had become so famous that they believed themselves to be above God. This plant is a climber, just like the members of the band fought and worked to become famous. Their struggle, their work versus the beautiful part of the journey is representative of this plant: *“Hmm, first I know it must be something exotic/special. The stories I heard about The Beatles were about them becoming so extraordinary and so famous that they thought they were above God. So, the plant I found it’s called Jade Vine and its colour especially it has this feeling...also the plant is hanging, which represents well their struggle and overwork vs the beautiful side of their journey.”* (A).

Regarding the analogy with the *musical instrument*, the most common is the bass/bass guitar/acoustic guitar. It is the representative instrument with which Paul McCartney played throughout his career, it is a symbolic element. It exudes harmony, calm, it is pleasant to the ear, it is classic, versatile, suitable in any situation, it never gets old, it is eternally fashionable: *“Bass and violin - this is a personal “bias,” because I am a bassist, with all this bass that Paul has played with throughout his career is one of the most recognizable models in music history.”*

The association was also made with the classic piano, black, well-kept, but which does not show its age, the most famous instrument and the one with which you can play in all musical genres: *“Piano – the most famous and the best instrument to play in a lot of genres.”*

Also mentioned were the drums - essential elements for the music of the Beatles and the harp - a warm, relaxing instrument that anoints your soul and calms you: *“The harp, an instrument that anoints your soul and calms you.”* Piano is another important instrument in the economy of an orchestra that can very well be independent, autonomous, and easily used for solos. The autonomy seems that it distinguishes itself from other fans.

6 Conclusion and discussions

Today, global fans are interested in celebrities through subscriptions to certain fan pages, but mostly through fan-musical communities found on the internet, with easy access. Consequently there are talks about the so-called, self-organized online communities” (Widita, 2018), which basically create and govern their own small sphere of culture based on a passion, in this case, music (Widita, 2018). Interestingly enough, fans that belong to virtual communities become, intimate strangers” (Widita, 2018), because

everybody is friendly with each other but they very rarely meet any fan that belongs to that group in real life. The fan communities brings people together from different cultures and different parts of the world, even if they do not know each other in real life. Fans solidify relationships together and certain elements, such as music, can pose as a very fruitful and ideal way of bringing people that share the same passions. The common space that Wiatrowski (n.d.) talks about is the perfect link that opens new means of communication, such as shares, likes, reactions, and of course instant messaging as well as the ability to publicly share within the group experiences, ideas, or preferences regarding a certain subject. The present study shows that the younger generation of Beatles fans identify less with the band than the older ones, considering that this band has a big impact on their lives, but not to the same extent as the older ones. We know that if individuals identify with a certain group of people, they do so because of a perception of similarities existing between themselves and this group (Gazzah, 2008). In daily life, people who feel that they belong to a particular group, and identify themselves with this group, most of the time articulate in a symbolic way. Symbols have a “group defining meaning,” such as clothing, language, customs, gestures, rituals, hair fashion and colors, values and beliefs of their favourite artists.

As far as older generations of Beatles fans are concerned, the symbols of identification with the group seem to be most mentioned above. They take over the lifestyle of singers, collect albums, go to concerts, and start working in the music industry. In this way, they become not only consumers, but also tourists, collectors, producers.

Fans from the younger generation grew up with Beatles music, listened to them from their parents, being a fundamental aspect in their lives. For them it seems that those symbols mentioned earlier appear less in their identification as Beatles fans. Maybe the fact that they do not live in the same period as the band, these means they have less impact on them. Maybe this is the reason for why they awarded lower scores than the older fans to the item regarding the general level of impact in their life.

For the new generations of fans, the important element for identifying with the fan’ groups are the lyrics. They feel that resonate better with songs from “the later period” of the Beatles, more mature songs, with a profound message. According to what Wiatrowski (n.d.) said regarding the identity of fans in the online environment, and how they work together to create a common space, where they can share their culture and ideas; we can say that we also identified in our research the idea through which the vision of life is to rethink the world in new ways and visions. The messages transmitted through lyrics by the Beatles helped them to change their perspective on human relationships and one of the benefits was greater tolerance and non-judgment toward others. Also, these messages helped them in various situation especially in personal development, to be more positive, to have the courage to pass over problems, to trust and to accept themselves exactly as they are, to give more importance to love as a value and to live more in the present.

A defining aspect of social identity is the rich social network of Beatles fans, created both face-to-face and through the media. What seems to be a fundamental characteristic of the group of fans starting from the listed attributes is that they subsequently make friends much more easily and the quality of being fans helps them to improve their social interactions, whether in the online environment or in real life, day by day, face to face. Their basic social needs are gratified through interaction with the others (Ridings and Gefen, 2004) and

they feel that they receive social support directly and indirectly from the community of fans. The fact that they listen to the same music, they share the same values transmitted by the lyrics and this helped them to succeed in establishing connections with others, whether young, old or family members. Some of them declared that in some bad periods, the lyrics helped them a lot but also interactions with other members (online or offline), who gave them informational and emotional support. This helped them overcome anxiety, depression, and the hardest periods in their lives.

The connection created between fans, face to face or through the online environment, develops a greater cohesion of the group, some of them even meeting their other half. There is a strong bond between the fans due to the common vision of life - they have similar passions, ideas, values. Music thus becomes a leitmotif in the life of Beatles fans, a way of living life and seeing the world. Last but not least, according to Duffett (2018), music fandom is an opportunity to create an empathetic and autobiographical form of advantage, of better self-knowledge, which emerges from our research. Regarding personal development, the Beatles' music influences fans to discover coping strategies in hard moments, motivates them to want to live their dreams, and makes them think that life will get better. The music of the Beatles made fans have positive feelings and emotions, inner peace, trust, empathy, artistic skills, freedom, positive self-esteem, the desire to live life beautifully, honesty toward oneself and the others. All these aspects related to their identity made these fans feel an evolution regarding their definition as people. The music, the lyrics and the messages transmitted represent a standard in the harmonious development of the fans.

Chun and Sagas (2022) mention that fans, through social comparison with other similar groups, create their identity. Using analogy, we tried to capture how fans perceive themselves and what distinctive characteristics they have compared to other music fans.

The results show that Beatles fans were associated with different plants, reflecting the complex character of the band and its influence on the fans' traits. On the one hand, the association with sunflowers shows the optimism and the positivity characteristics of Beatles fans. On the other hand, there is the association with the rose, which is the symbol of eternal love and illustrates the fans' sense of romance and fidelity toward the band. Additionally, the association with the daisy, which is a simple plant, but with an impact on the landscape, illustrates that even seemingly simple messages in songs can significantly impact the fans' view of life... Comparisons with the cactus or the chestnut, which are important plants for the environment, can face the weather and adapt to any climatic condition, as was the music of the Beatles, which has withstood all the changes in the music industry over time. A final analogy is with climbing plants that struggle and climb, but eventually reveal their beautiful side, just like the Beatles who overcame challenges to uncover the special, profound, and impactful essence of their songs. They transitioned from being an innocent boyband that delivered simple love songs to a more meaningful, analytic, and philosophic band, in their later years, who transmitted through melody and lyrics some of the most important and impactful messages in the history of music. This helped people discover themselves in various ways.

What seems to be a fundamental characteristic of the group, from the listed attributes, is the association with the acoustic guitar, a versatile and fundamental instrument, always fashionable and which never gets old, followed by the piano, which denotes classicality and elegance, the drums - defining elements in the Beatles' music, which generates relaxation and melody.

The complex portrait of the Beatles resulting from these analogies shows how deep, edifying, and impactful their music was, as a source of inspiration for fans, that guided them throughout life. Fans truly enjoy and experience these aspects that nurture their talents and interests, to express themselves better artistically and establish connections with other people much easier. Or, to put it simply, fans have an easier time of thriving in some respects through life with the help of their passion, delivered by the Beatles.

In conclusion, our findings illustrate that Beatles fans perceive themselves as loyal to the music they listen, which help them maintain positive thoughts. They view themselves as trustworthy and friendly, much like dogs, but also unique, non-conformist and emancipatory similar to birds that fly freely. They express sophistication and elegance through the music they listen to, much like the giraffe or the horse. At the same time, they embody a classic vibe, reflecting a positive evolution in the development of their identity similar to that of a butterfly. The evolutionary journey of the Beatles is deeply appreciated by the fans, from a youthful style, which later transformed into a more refined, philosophical and analytical approach in the latter part of their career. This evolution is reflected in many examples of their analogies, suggesting that the fans embraced the idea of being open and adaptable to life's changes, regardless of age.

7 Limitations and future research

Our study was an exploratory one that tried to capture elements specific to the new generation of Beatles fans, but it has several limitations. We brought to the readers' attention elements related to their social identity as fans, who, in common with each other belong to some virtual communities. We did not succeed in applying the new approach of the Integrated Fan Identity by Chun and Sagas (2022) to illustrate the relationship between personal identity, social identity and role identity. However, our study provides new insights into social identity that could serve as a foundation for future research, for scholar interested in exploring the identity of Beatles fans.

Another limitation is the fact that we did not succeed in observing differences by cultural factors. Our sample for the first stage does not have sub-samples comparable to compare some areas or countries. Most of the members of those online communities' fans were from USA, UK, Canada, and Australia. The reason is related to the place where the movement started and spread. It would be interesting to observe, with bigger subsamples for the other countries, how the cultural factor can have a different impact on fans. Furthermore, with more extensive samples for areas/countries, a multilevel analysis could illustrate how fans' perceptions can vary by socio-cultural context. Future research can focus on the impact of the Beatles on personal life level in depth (interactions, personal development, professional development, personal habits etc.) with other instruments (standardized tools for values, identity aspect, and in-depth interviews) and an illustration of them by age category.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/Supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving humans were approved by the Committee for Ethics in Social and Human Research of Transilvania University of Brasov. The studies were conducted in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. The participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

CC: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. LM-S: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. AD: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. VB-P: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Supplementary material

The Supplementary material for this article can be found online at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2024.1525016/full#supplementary-material>

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