The Impact Of Internet On Subculture

If someone’s life revolves around specific values, interests, or styles, they are most likely part of a subculture. Subcultures are an important part of life for many people. They have been around for ages, and people begin really immersing themselves during their teenage years. Their time spent in a subculture can greatly impact the rest of their lives and will likely remain a part of them for a long time. However, times are changing with the boom of the internet. I believe that the internet has helped subcultures grow by connecting members across distances, forming stronger bonds between groups, and creating spaces for niche communities.

Some may believe that the internet has ruined subcultures by creating fans that just join in on whatever is mainstream. People that have been around before the internet became as accessible and wide as it is today especially disagree that the internet has strengthened subcultures. Patton Oswalt, an actor who grew up in the 70s, says in his essay “Wake Up, Geek Culture. Time to Die”, that the use of internet for subcultures “creates weak otakus. [Everything That Ever Was—Available Forever] doesn't produce a new generation of artists—just an army of sated consumers. Why create anything new when there's a mountain of freshly excavated pop culture to recut, repurpose, and manipulate on your iMovie?” (309). What Oswalt’s reasoning boiled down to was that the internet has retracted from the meaning of certain subcultures, the “geek” subculture specifically. I can understand where Oswalt’s argument is coming from—the availability and widespread-ness of media through the internet has certainly affected how a franchise could shape someone’s life. The same goes for other subcultures, as people can take in ideas on the internet and form an identity around them but move on so quickly. However, while this ability does create “weak otakus”, I think the internet also strengthens the subculture itself and can help members of the subculture feel more connected.

Connecting to other members is a key aspect of most subcultures. People set the grounds for what it means to be a part of the subculture, discuss things in relation to the subculture, and some subcultures are even formed around groups of people doing things together. But in our wide, wide world, it can be difficult to find people to connect with. Everyone has different interests, and different levels of investment in a subculture. For example, someone could be a part of the gaming subculture and have friends that like to game as well. But that doesn’t mean that their friends want to stay up until 3am every night fighting a boss on a certain game. And that is where the internet comes in. Bringing people from around the world together to share ideas and experiences within their subculture brings a whole new level of connection. In his essay, Oswalt says, “while we moved with the herd, we could share a wink and a nod with two or three other similarly connected herdlings” (306). I don’t think that this shared connection is gone at all. People are connecting even more than before through the internet, which in turn strengthens the subculture itself and forms a more united community.

In fact, people can connect so much with each other through the internet that they will organize meetups in real life. Meeting people thousands of miles away through the bonds formed in a subculture shows the strength of what connecting through the internet means. Photographer Amy Lombard photographs meet-ups between members of subcultures, and created a book of said photos, called “Connected”. Lombard says “The work documents a clear societal shift. We

no longer have to feel alienated with our interests. There is such a large variety of platforms to connect with people that being alone is practically a choice. As much as the Internet breeds bullying, it also offers us a safe space to meet and connect with like-minded people" (Lombard). The drive to travel and meet with a community formed online can hardly be called "weak". Some meetings can be organized for larger groups, such as events held at convention centers, and some can be more casual meet-ups for smaller groups of people. And sometimes more serious events like protests are organized for subcultures through the internet. Either way, the internet is helping to bring these people together in their subcultures, no matter how small they may be.

The internet is especially important for members or smaller subcultures. With so many subcultures out there, it can be difficult to find people who a part of it—sometimes they can even be scarce on the internet. Connecting online can help even the tiniest subcultures feel welcome and part of a community. Having a community is also important for support, especially with the harassment and bullying that can come with being a part of the online world. Nicole Gallucci writes in her article "What Happens When Internet Subcultures Get Discovered by the Masses" about the experiences that members of subcultures can face online. She cites Vix, a member of the furry community, talking about a friend who face harassment online. "While she got horrible attention from hundreds of outsiders, the community got together and helped her get past all of the negativity"(Gallucci). The furry subculture is a very large community, but issues can arise in smaller communities as well. That's why it's important to have other members to support each other, even in small subcultures. And while Oswalt is correct about the geek subculture becoming more mainstream, there are still members of the geek community and many other communities that face backlash for indulging in their interests. While someone might've been bullied into silence about their passions before because they had no support, with the internet these people can get the reassurance and sense of community that they need.

The sense of community created by the internet could be arguably stronger than the ones formed in real life. There are definitely people who jump around between subcultures and are quick to hop on the mainstream. But there are still numerous people who engage frequently in their subculture, and even treat is as part of their lifestyle. And the internet grants the ability to find others who also feel so passionate about their interests. Having the ability to connect with others who share the same unique passions is truly something special, because it means sharing aspects of one's life that they value a lot. Things that people may keep entirely to themselves in the real world are something that they can share freely and create friendships through. My own best friend lives about an hour and a half away, in a town called Duval. We only see each other in real life about twice a year, but we have talked to each other just about every single day since fifth grade. And I feel more connected to her than I do with any of my friends that live close by. We are both members of the gaming subculture, which means we share our favorite games and play online with each other. We are both members of the anime subculture, so we watch shows together and share our thoughts and recommendations. And we are both members of what could be called the Running Start subculture, so we complain about our assignments and discuss classes. She knows all of my favorite games, shows characters, subjects, and my plan for the future—and I know hers. My brother's best friend lives in Pennsylvania, but they have been playing Xbox together for almost 10 years and his friend is like a second brother to me. So while Oswalt says that the internet creates "weak" fans that will jump from interests every minute, I think that it creates stronger fans who can form lifelong bonds through their subcultures.

Overall, I believe that the internet has been very beneficial to subcultures and the people within them. It has helped to unite communities across the globe, bring people closer together, and create spaces for even the smallest subcultures. While some might argue that the easy accessibility to subcultures provided by the internet creates weak members of the community, I disagree and say that it has instead created even stronger members that unite within their subcultures.