

# Bachelor Nation: Deep Dive Into a Discourse Community

Ella Kruse

Ella Kruse investigates Bachelor Nation, the discourse community of the popular romance reality TV show franchise “The Bachelor.” Kruse researches the history of Bachelor Nation and analyzes how members share common practices, language use, and goals.

## My Love/Hate Relationship with “The Bachelor”

You’re probably familiar with the reality television show “The Bachelor,” you know, that one where a guy is trying to find the “love of his life” while dating 30 women at once. Well, ever since I was little, I can remember awaiting the day that my mother would deem me old enough to watch the show.

Why was I so excited to watch a trashy television show as a child? For context, my mom has been watching the show since before I was born, so every Monday night for as long as I could remember, she would kick us out of the living room so she could watch. Every season finale, she would go to our family friend’s house for a watch party and come home with a red rose—the essential symbol of the show. She always swore she would stop watching after “this season,” but she always got sucked in again (as seen in the 2010 Facebook post in Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Facebook post by Beth Stoeckel Kruse (2010).

The big day finally came in 2019, when my mom said she'd let me watch Hannah Brown's season of "The Bachelorette." This was truly a rite of passage for me and my younger sister Delaney, thus the addiction was solidified.

I've been a mostly faithful viewer of the franchise watching the following seasons of "The Bachelorette," "The Bachelor" (minus Season 26), and "Bachelor in Paradise." When I moved to college, I continued to watch the show and discussed it with my mom and sister over text. Then Season 27 of "The Bachelor" was announced and came out that winter, and I set out my plan to convert my new friends. I was successful in my endeavors, and for the next 10 Mondays, we would pull out the projector and watch the show. It became our weekly hangout ritual. I found the show much more enjoyable when I began to watch it with my friends, filling the hole left by not being able to watch with my family. I believe it is a community experience. During the episodes, my roommate Mari would comb through Twitter and send us her favorite tweets, and I'd send Instagram posts to our group chat as they popped up the following days. This was my friends' introduction to Bachelor Nation, the online community centered around the franchise.

## What Is Bachelor Nation?

There are currently four Bachelor franchise shows. It all started with "The Bachelor" in 2002, then "The Bachelorette" in 2003, then "Bachelor in Paradise" spawned in 2014, and now "The Golden Bachelor" premiering in fall of 2023. (There were also some less successful spinoffs: "The Bachelor Presents: Listen to Your Heart" in 2020 and "The Bachelor Winter Games" in 2018.)

The premise of "The Bachelor" and "The Bachelorette" is this: each season of the show follows the lead, an eligible bachelor or bachelorette, searching to find love in a group of about 30 contestants. Each episode follows two one-on-one dates (intimate dates where the audience and lead get to know the contestant better) and a group date (this is usually where the drama and shenanigans stem from). At the end of each episode, there is a rose ceremony where the lead hands out roses to the contestants they want to "continue the journey with." The contestants who do not get a rose must leave the show and go home. By the final episode of the season, there are only two remaining contestants, one of whom will get proposed to. As the show progresses, viewers become more attached to some contestants, or people collectively despise others. This is often the point where viewers want to connect to share input and discuss our opinions. Whose side of the

argument are you on? Did someone go home when they deserved to stay? Who do you think should be the next Bachelor or Bachelorette? These and other questions are brought up by viewers desperate to share our opinions.

Given that “The Bachelor” is reality TV, there is a lot of drama. Since the show began, it has gotten a lot of fan discussion outside of the weekly episodes. Through these discussions, a discourse community was born. The ISU Writing Program defines a **discourse community** as “collections of people or groups that work toward collective goals through specific genres”

“**Discourse communities** are collections of people or groups that work toward collective goals through specific genres. Often, when we talk about discourse communities, we describe their communication practices, shared knowledge and language use, and the power structures that shape community features both to people who participate within the discourse community and others” (“Genre Research Terms”).

(Genre research terms, n.d.). Bachelor Nation is an example of a discourse community with shared knowledge of the people involved in the show, shared language use from aspects of the show, and complex communication practices as fans interact with each other. Bachelor Nation is a fandom made up of fans of “The Bachelor” and other shows within the franchise. The group is a collection of (mostly online) communities of people who discuss shared knowledge (what is happening in recent episodes, spoilers to figure out who the lead has picked and if they are still together) and use communication practices to participate in activity beyond the show (like interacting with past leads). As a discourse community, Bachelor Nation relies on participant discussion and interaction, especially the shared reactions of viewers.

Since “The Bachelor” and its related shows have been on the air for more than 20 years, Bachelor Nation as a discourse community must have changed over time, especially because the way we communicate with each other has changed a lot since 2002. Most importantly, “The Bachelor” started airing before the rise of social media. But nowadays, most Bachelor Nation participants interact through social media sites. Personally, I largely associate Bachelor Nation with major social media platforms because that’s how I’ve mostly interacted with it as a community, but I thought it would be interesting to see how the community evolved.

Discourse communities can evolve over time, and members may come and go, but at its core, do the goals of the community and what it provides to a group of people stay relatively unchanged? In this GWRJ article, I discuss how the discourse community of Bachelor Nation has evolved over time by comparing the components of the community off and on major social media platforms.

## Researching Bachelor Nation Beyond Social Media

I already had some antecedent knowledge of the history and of the community because my mom had brought it up in discussion before and I had been exposed to the community before. The ISU Writing Program understands **antecedent knowledge** as all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when a writer takes up any kind of writing (Uptake terms, n.d.). So I knew that, in the early seasons of the shows, fans mostly connected through talk radio or workplace discussions. It was an easy way to connect with coworkers and have something to talk about. Connection was the driving factor of the discourse community, but I didn't have a lot of information about what else was happening before major social media platforms like Instagram.

So I conducted content research in order to find out more information about the early practices of Bachelor Nation. The ISU Writing Program defines **content research** as “the practice of seeking, finding, and processing information from a variety of places” (Content research terms, n.d.). Through additional content research—and not just my antecedent knowledge—I learned about specific Bachelor Nation discourse community practices before and off social media.

### Shared Norms and Practices

Discourse communities develop their own shared norms and practices. For Bachelor Nation, fans mainly connected through online forums before major social media platforms became the community's main channel of communication. On forums, people would discuss and react to what happened in the latest episode. Forum users, who referred to themselves as sleuths, would try to guess the outcomes by picking up on clues from television previews. For example, they would guess that the first girl to exit the limo on the proposal day is the girl who will be broken up with. In the previews, they often show the hem of the dress and shoes but, of course, not the girl. The sleuths would try to track the shoes or dresses in other parts of the show to figure out and guess who the final girls were before it was revealed in the final episode of the season. This was one norm in practice on Bachelor Nation forums.

This discourse community practice has continued online even on platforms that aren't major social media platforms. Now, sleuths interact and post on Twitter, like when they discovered who they thought won Season 24 of “The Bachelor” based on Venmo accounts! According to a Women's Health article following this rumor, “Both Peter and Hannah Ann have private Venmo accounts (a.k.a. celeb couple style), and the other ladies are

public (a.k.a. former reality stars reverted to normal IRL)” (Nied, 2020). Hannah Ann was the winner of Peter’s season, so the sleuthers were correct. Even without using major social media platforms, we still see instances of Bachelor Nation members searching for connection and knowledge related to the show that they can then share with others.

### Shared Language Use

Discourse communities also often use shared language within their community. An example of this shared language use would be the community-wide usage of the term sleuthers to label those who attempt to figure out who won the season before it is revealed on the show. One limitation to trying to research Bachelor Nation off or pre-social media is that it’s harder for us to access what people used to say. So while there’s likely more shared language use, sleuthers is one clear example of how people in this community adopted a term from elsewhere (like detective novels or TV shows with people who sleuth out crimes) and applied it to themselves as a shared practice.

### Shared Goals

One of the defining aspects of a discourse community is shared goals: what the community is working toward and its driving force. From what I could find in my content research, it seems like the shared goals of Bachelor Nation off major social media platforms were to form connections with fellow watchers and use any available resources to share in the practice of sleuthing to try to figure out spoilers.

## Bachelor Nation Today: Norms and Practices

Contemporary Bachelor Nation is nothing without major social media platforms, most notably Instagram. Using my antecedent knowledge, my current experience, and some more content research, I can share lots about the defining aspects of Bachelor Nation as a discourse community relying on major social media platforms as tools for communication practices.

One shared practice that stands out in Bachelor Nation is that past contestants and leads continue to be part of the community through major social media platforms. They often become influencers, start their own brand, write memoirs, and much more—thanks to the support of the online discourse community. In recent years, many contestants apply to get on the show in hopes of becoming Instagram famous and eventually reach influencer level, which is an example of how some members of the discourse

community (the future and former contestants) participate in the show because of what they might get from the discourse community (and others) after they appear on the show.

As part of the Bachelor Nation discourse community, the average fan has access to multiple shared practices using shared digital tools. The first is interacting with “The Bachelor” show alumni, even possibly the most famous of them. As the most followed contestant on Instagram, past Bachelorette Hannah Brown has 2.7 million followers. Instagram seems to be the easiest way for fans to interact with past contestants through story Q&As, DMs (direct messages), and comments. The other shared practice is similar to how people used forums: discussing the show and sharing reactions to it. For Bachelor Nation members, platforms like Twitter and Reddit are more centered around the fans of the show and their reactions to specific episodes. However, on Instagram, there are also many accounts dedicated to Bachelor Nation, such as retweet accounts where people can find things like the dresses contestants wore. There’s also an account (@bachelordata) where the creator analyzes different aspects of the franchise: the likelihood of someone winning based on the type of date they go on, kiss counts, follower gains per episode, relationship timelines, dress colors, and more. So in addition to interacting with contestants and sharing reactions to the show, Bachelor Nation members can also participate in the shared practice of learning more details about things surrounding the show (and not just who the winner is, was, or might be). And Bachelor Nation members on major social media platforms provide more subinterests within the community: podcasts with past stars, accounts dedicated to funny tweets, and data on dress color.

One important difference from before Bachelor Nation members relied on major social media platforms is the lack of spoiler sleuths in any of the accounts I describe above. Instead of forums, if Bachelor Nation members want to seek out spoilers, they have to turn to Reality Steve, who always somehow has the inside scoop. Viewers can easily look up who the final four picks are or who the final rose possibly goes to. With Reality Steve’s monopoly on spoiler information, the forum sleuths fizzled out, and most of the information on the other major social media platforms accounts is about different aspects of the discourse community.

## The Most Dramatic Discourse Community Yet? Language Use

With the community reliance on major social media platforms and the chance to become a famous influencer by being on the show, we start to

see new shared language use. For example, contestants are now able to be accused of “being here for the wrong reason.” This is shared phrase commonly used to describe a contestant who seems like they go on the show hoping to become famous or specifically to win the Bachelor or Bachelorette competition, rather than to “find true love.”

Another example of shared language use in any online discourse community is community-specific hashtags. Bachelor Nation uses the following hashtags across social media to access related posts: #Bachelornation, #TheBachelor, #TheBachelorette, or #BIP.

Because Bachelor Nation exists mainly on social media, one really visible part of the shared language of the discourse community are the shared inside jokes via memes and/or tweets that rely on tailored lingo and are shared across major social media platforms. As part of my content research, I looked through past Twitter posts using the shared language hashtags (above) to find recurring community inside jokes within Bachelor Nation.

The first recurring joke is the overuse of the idea that this is “the most dramatic” season or episode yet, used by the show’s advertising and the host. Throughout recent seasons, the franchise has claimed that whatever season is airing will be “the most dramatic,” and this is repeated by the host of the show every single episode leading to the finale (Figure 2). Most of the



**Figure 2:** Host Jesse Palmer teasing “the most DRAMATIC moments” of a season in a future episode (2023).

time, the hosts can't even get through saying the line with a straight face. But, since they say this every season whether it's true or not, it has become an inside joke with the show that's often circulated on social media in ways that Bachelor Nation members immediately understand.

Another Bachelor Nation shared inside joke is “Yosef has a daughter at home,” which is a joke about a contestant. In season 18 of “The Bachelorette,” the show featured Clare as the bachelorette. During the show, one of the contestants, Yosef, yelled at Clare, saying “he had a daughter at home” and that he was ashamed that she would have to witness what happened on the show. He was referring to the fact that one of the group dates featured the men in speedos. After Yosef berated Clare for something she didn't do (that would be the producers' decision), she promptly sent him home. But Yosef still became a meme heavily circulated in Bachelor Nation (Figure 3). Anything that may have been considered taboo for women at some point in history (Figure 3's example is women wearing bikinis) is bound to get someone to tweet a meme that Yosef “has a daughter at home.”

Sometimes, shared jokes are directed at the couple who “find true love” in the final episode, often regarding their short relationships after the show ends. In live tweets during the show, there are many references to guessing how long the couple will stay together after the show (Figure 4). Only five of the past 28 Bachelors are still married to the final choice. As of March 2024, the latest Bachelor, Joey, and the season's winner, Kelsey, are engaged and plan to get married. No one ever said this reality television show was a foolproof way to find love. But because of these stats, Bachelor



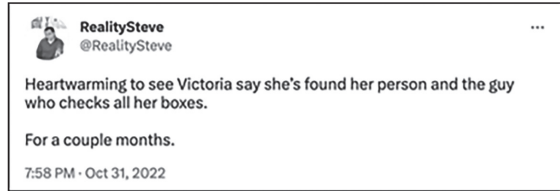
**Figure 3:** One of many uses of the “Yosef has a daughter at home” joke (That Bach Boy, 2023).



Nation members will immediately understand Figure 4’s inside joke that someone “checks all her boxes ... for a couple months.”

Next, we have the Bachelor Nation hating/teasing of the host, Jesse Palmer. Hate might be an extreme word, but I’m sure some Bachelor Nation members would use it. After Chris Harrison, the past host of “The Bachelor” and its many spin-offs, left in the middle of Season 25 due to controversial comments, they replaced him multiple times. At first, it was two past bachelorettes, Kaitlyn Bristow and Tayshia Adams; then a brief appearance by David Spade; and finally Jesse Palmer took over. Jesse is a past bachelor, retired NFL player, and college football announcer. Bachelor Nation members saw him as a strange choice, to say the least. A lot of people had loyalty to Chris Harrison, but I could care less. Honestly, Jesse has grown on me. But as a member of Bachelor Nation, when someone makes inside jokes about him as the host, I understand the humor immediately, like in Figure 5 when someone teases that he is doing his real job (being a football announcer) at his fake job (hosting “The Bachelor”) when he hosts the Bachelor Bowl as a bit on the show.

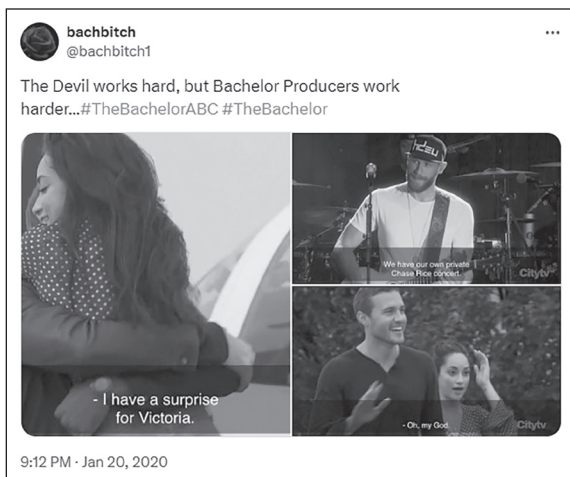
The last inside jokes that I’ll share here that Bachelor Nation members would immediately understand are about the show’s producer interference. Experienced watchers with antecedent knowledge of what goes on behind



**Figure 4:** A Bachelor Nation shared joke about the length of post-show relationships (RealitySteve, 2022).



**Figure 5:** Host Jesse Palmer getting teased about hosting the Bachelor Bowl (Finegan, 2023).



**Figure 6:** An inside joke about producer interference (Bachbitch, 2020).

the scenes are aware of how the producers create drama and often exploit the contestants. I feel like I have even more antecedent knowledge about this now since I wrote a persuasive speech for my COM 110 class on how reality shows exploit contestants. When wild things happen on the show, I am now more aware of how producers can edit and rearrange footage to make it sound like someone is saying something they might not have said. But because this is a running joke on social media, Bachelor Nation members can all get the references, as in Figure 6, which references a time when the show's producers manipulated the situation that they then recorded when they hired a contestant's ex-boyfriend to be the musical guest on her one-on-one date.

## Bachelor Nation Interview Research: Shared Goals

Every discourse community, by definition, must have more than one person to participate in shared practices, language use, and goals. So to research the shared goals among current Bachelor Nation members, I decided to get some input from people who are part of the discourse community. I interviewed four people I know who have varying degrees of involvement with Bachelor Nation to see what they thought were the shared goals of the discourse community right now.

First, here's some info on who I interviewed:

Beth (my mom) has been watching the show since 2002 (Season 2 of "The Bachelor"). She is a major fan. She even held a finale party for the

latest season. Figure 7 shows some of the party favors she made. Her main method of connection to Bachelor Nation is through Instagram where she follows past contestants and winners, listens to podcasts, and watches live tweets on Twitter.

Becki, a family friend, has been watching on and off since 2003, but she then started to consistently watch in 2017. Her main method of connection was the podcast “The Popcast with Knox and Jamie” and Instagram.

Delaney, my younger sister, has been watching since 2019 (Season 15 of “The Bachelorette”). She isn’t very connected to the online scene of Bachelor Nation since she doesn’t follow any accounts directly, but she does get posts that will pop-up on Instagram, Twitter, or TikTok.

For Mari, my roommate, this is her first time watching the show (thanks to me)! Her only method of connection is looking at Twitter during commercial breaks, but she has been getting recommended posts on Instagram and Twitter related to Season 27 of “The Bachelor.” Her relationship with the show and discourse community is purely based on the fact that I convinced her to watch with me.

Below, I share their replies to my two primary interview questions.

**Ella:** How involved in Bachelor Nation would you describe yourself?

**Beth:** I think I’m more involved than the average person I know. Definitely not an extreme super fan, but I listen to podcasts, and I like to follow past people from the show—but not Reddit level.

**Becki:** I guess somewhere in the middle. I really watched so that I could appreciate the commentary of my podcasters, but then it also gave me things to talk about at work and with friends.

**Delaney:** Not too involved. I don’t seek out information. I just listen to the drama that you and Mom tell me. I’ve tried to convince some of my friends to watch it, but I don’t think it’s worked. I like having people to talk to about the show. I just don’t know a lot who actually watch.

**Mari:** Pretty not involved. I really just like looking at the tweets, but I only really watch the show to spend time with everyone.



**Figure 7:** Finale party favors Beth made for the finale of Zach’s bachelor season.

**Ella:** What do you think is the point of Bachelor Nation?

**Beth:** To be able to talk about what is happening and see others' opinions on what happens. Also, to make fun of it. I think I still watch the show because I like to see what people are saying on Twitter, so that's a big part of it.

**Becki:** I think it's something that allows people to connect, and it can be easy topics of conversation amongst people you might not even know well.

**Delaney:** Maybe people just like the show a lot. They probably like to talk about it, too. I think people like to make fun of it. I think everyone kind of makes fun of it now because it kind of sucks.

**Mari:** Naturally, fans of a show/artist tend to band together because people really try to find someone to relate to and talk about things to form a community. That's psychology. People are a social species, and people want to belong.

The interview participants seemed to come to a consensus on one possible shared goal of Bachelor Nation: this community strives for connection. Is this constant over time, based on my research and experience? Yes. The connection was just achieved in different ways based on the norms and practices of specific times—and the tools that people use to make connections. People like to share experiences with others. Viewers want to find solidarity and connections. With social media, we're able to easily interact with others around the world and share the things we love.

## The Final Rose

Before major social media platforms dominated, people connected through online forums. As major social media platforms came into play, there were more outlets to meet members of Bachelor Nation—and more expanded ways to participate through different kinds of accounts where people shared more information that they also found online. There were also different kinds of members adding to the community, including past contestants, so the connection wasn't only between viewers but also the participants of the show. So any shared practices, language use, and goals evolved over time as more people had more ways to participate in the discourse community. Though the norms and practices and language adjusted to fit the medium, the driving force of Bachelor Nation is to discuss the events of the show and, in doing so, to form connections and relationships as a community.

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