

Creative Entrepreneurialism: The Use of Social Media as a Promotional Tool for Fiction Writers

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ABSTRACT

The creative industries can be fickle for creative people trying to make ends meet. There are an array of profit and sustainability issues, such as the project-nature of employment, the symbolic nature of the creative good and consequently, the possibility that the creative product will not lead to attention or income. However, the prevalence of social media can assist creative entrepreneurs by opening up a direct channel between them and their readership. Therefore, our research purpose was to explore how fiction writers use social media to communicate and promote themselves to their fans and readership. We used thematic analysis to examine the “Facebook Pages” (or profiles designed for businesses) and “Twitter feeds/ Tweets” of four female writers who are primarily publishing in the new-adult fiction genre. In essence, our research set out to consider the opportunities and potential limitations afforded writers by social media platforms and whether they conflated or assisted creative entrepreneurs in overcoming profit and sustainability issues. We identified that the authors use social media platforms to build relationships with their readership and to push the sales of their books, often by generating ‘buzz’. Additionally, the writers were frequently posting to social media to remain current and relevant in an ever-changing creative marketplace.

Keywords: Creative entrepreneurs, Writers, Social media, Promotion, Creativity, Connectivity

1. INTRODUCTION

Digitization has altered the publishing industry. Publishers once sought to “acquire rights, often with a costly advance, edit and print books, promote these works to critics and, in some cases, directly to consumers. Publishers also needed to ship books to stores and, usually, to incur the costs of shipping unsold books back from stores” (Waldfoegel & Reimers, 2015, p. 51). Although many of the publishing houses continue to fulfil these roles, digital technology has cut into their profit margins with e-books overtaking paper book sales and lowering book prices (Benhamou, 2015; Carrerio, 2010; Jiang & Katsamakos, 2010). These impacts of digitization, coupled with increased piracy, and competition for audiences, the dominance and restructuring of the publishing industry by the likes of Amazon, and a move amongst writers to engage in self-publishing to circumvent the influence of publishers, has meant that publishing houses have narrowed their focus to protecting and maintaining their high-profile, bestselling writers (Benhamou, 2015; Flahive, 2017; Waldfoegel & Reimers, 2015).

In an attempt to offset the financial losses incurred by digitization, publishing houses have engaged in cost-cutting which has seen writers receive little if any financial and marketing support. According to Flahive (2017, p. 26), this has meant that mid-list writers, such as those of this study, are forced into a “double role of writer and self-promoter”. To put it another way, writers are having to see themselves as creative entrepreneurs. Creative entrepreneurs are those people who are driven to do artistic work but who are also conscious of the “economic need for self-management” (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006, p. 234). They are engaged in the production of novel and useful ideas (Amabile, 1988, 1996), but use their talent to generate an income and to formulate a portfolio career (Bridgstock, 2005; Morgan, Wood & Nelligan, 2013; Throsby, 2010). Creative entrepreneurs are often

engaged in intensely individualized work, which also requires a degree of self-promotion in order to achieve success (McRobbie, 2002). Such self-promotion becomes essential to compete against others for the attention of the media conglomerates they contract with (Broekhuizen, Lampel & Rietvel, 2013; Christopherson, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Scott, 2002), and also to gain exposure among audiences inclined to purchase their creative products.

One way that creative entrepreneurs can gain exposure and set themselves apart from others is through their social media presence. For instance, Flahive (2017) describes how social media allows for the work of writers to have a global reach because geographical barriers are removed. Additionally, social media is cost effective, permits the targeting of niche audiences who can become loyal followers, and ultimately increases the two-way interaction between writers and readers. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to explore how a group of fiction writers use social media to communicate and promote themselves amongst their fans and readership. Here, we see social media as “a mechanism for the audience to connect, communicate, and interact with each other...through social networking sites” (Correa, Hinsley, Gil de Zúñiga, 2010, p. 248). Among the four top largest social networking sites by active users are Facebook and Twitter. We chose to narrow our focus to these social networking sites because, not only are they the most frequently used online marketing tools by the publishing industry (Criswell & Canty, 2014), but their users numbers are on the increase. Facebook has grown exponentially since its inception in 2005 with over 500 million users in 2011 (Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lee, 2012). In 2018, that figure was closer to 2.13 billion users per month, suggesting wide and continued use of this social networking site (D’Onfro, 2018). Twitter too has experienced annual membership growth. In fact, in 2010 Twitter was found to have 73.5 million users (Hughes, Rowe, Batey & Lee, 2012) and by

2017, that figure had increased to 396 million users (Fiegerman, 2017). Using Facebook and Twitter as our chosen media platforms, we thematically analyzed the “Pages” (or profiles designed for businesses) and “Twitter feeds/Tweets” of four female writers who are primarily publishing in the new-adult fiction genre.

We chose writers from a plethora of potential entrepreneurs, because historically and stereotypically, this vocation has been conceptualized as a solitary one (Bennett, 2005; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Gouthro, 2014), suggesting that examining how these writers maintain their social media presence could be worthwhile for understanding the evolving practices of creative people. Additionally, despite many of these writers having the backing of publishing houses, they continue to promote their work through social media.

2. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Profit and Sustainability Issues in the Creative Industries

Working in the creative industries can be difficult for creative people attempting to gain extrinsic and intrinsic rewards for their work. Creative entrepreneurs need to overcome the tensions posed by their artistic values and pragmatic needs (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006; Huws, 2010), but are then faced with a number of factors that influence their ability to be profitable and sustainable. Among the issues faced by creative entrepreneurs is the project-based nature of their work (Blair, Grey, & Randle, 2001; Bridgstock, 2005, 2008; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2002; Neff, Wissinger & Zukin, 2005; Oakley, 2014), and the uncertain demand for their goods and services (Caves, 2000, 2003; Schulz, 2015).

Creative entrepreneurs are commonplace in the creative industries, because according to Cunningham (2005), the creative industries are comprised of a ‘missing middle’. At one end of the spectrum there are big businesses that function as

cultural intermediaries and distributors, while at the other end, there are a number of contractors, entrepreneurs, and self-employed creative people that are often hired by big businesses to provide creative goods and services. Although entrepreneurs and bigger creative businesses can work together in what could be a fruitful and mutually beneficial business arrangement, more often than not these larger cultural intermediaries facilitate the entry of smaller businesses into the marketplace by controlling distribution channels (Scott, 2012; Shultz, 2013). Consequently, bigger businesses fund and release creative goods that serve their own interests. These business favor creative products that are cheaper to produce, can be created in short time frames (Christopherson, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Huws, 2010) and which originate from a small, preferred pool of talented creatives expected to multi-task (Bilton, 1999, 2010; Kerr, 2013; Scott, 2002). Such circumstances can be limiting to creative entrepreneurs, suggesting that technological developments that reduce or negate the need for big business in the production and distribution of creative goods, might be a preferred means for entrepreneurs attempting to break-in and establish a presence in the creative marketplace.

Another issue faced by creative entrepreneurs as they navigate the creative marketplace, is the project-based nature of their work. The “creative industries” has become increasingly characterized by the casualization of employment (Cohen, 2012; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; Kerr, 2013; Oakley, 2014), in which creative people are pushed to work sporadically as contractors and freelancers in order to lower production costs for media conglomerates (Christopherson, 2008, 2013). Therefore, at any one time a creative can be busy with multiple projects, but at other times, they can be struggling to find or complete work. Accordingly, feast or famine becomes commonplace resulting in creative people relentlessly job-seeking and creating to still be earning money in the ‘downtime’ (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). For example,

Davis (2011, p. 173) found that writers regularly experienced fluctuations in workload and pay. One writer remarked:

Project-based work is difficult at the beginning... It's unpredictable so you don't know how much money you'll make or what your income will be year to year. It's feast or famine: you have a lot of work but are too busy, and then you'll have nothing going on.

The conditions of project-based work can lead to creative people being exploited by bigger businesses that provide employment opportunities but expect creatives to work for lower wages (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). Yet creative entrepreneurs remain in creative industries and abide by these potentially unhealthy working conditions in order to have 'perceived' creative freedom and because of the opportunity to experience self-actualization, intrinsic rewards (Amabile & Mueller, 2007; Grant & Berry, 2011; Auger & Woodman, 2016) and social rewards derived from working in prestigious industries (Bridgstock, 2005, 2008; Cohen, 2012; McRobbie, 1998, 2002; Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005). Because creative entrepreneurs can struggle with fluctuating work, the role social media can have in ensuring creative entrepreneurs remain current and present in the downtime becomes another worthwhile avenue of exploration.

Finally, creative entrepreneurs are in the precarious position of creating goods whose success hinges on the subjective tastes of their target audience. According to Caves (2003, p. 74), a defining feature of creative goods is their "nobody knows" properties, because it is unclear how the creativity will be received until the consumers have evaluated the meaning of the goods against their own identities, tastes, and preferences. The uncertainty can lead businesses and entrepreneurs to standardize their products, choosing to capitalize on the success of previous creative works at the expense of originality (Huws, 2010; Kellner, 2002; Peterson & Anand,

2004; Ryan, 1991). Similarly, creatives may need to amend their creative direction in response to the changes in tastes and preferences, which can potentially impact on their creative drive and decisions. For instance, the recent popularity of paranormal media texts (Hill, 2011) has led writers to dabble in the genre, perhaps to maintain currency and market share, even though this might not be their strength.

Creative people pursuing success, whether financial or otherwise, need to overcome a number of structural inequalities and conditions that exist within the creative industries. Coupled with the shifts in the publishing industry, it would appear that writers may have more of an influence on how their work enters the marketplace and makes social media platforms attractive, because social media can establish an audience for their creativity and move writers away from relying on cultural intermediaries (Fridey, Cybulski & Nguyen, 2010; Ryan & Hearn, 2010).

2.2 Creativity in the Social Media Age

The pervasiveness and accessibility of social media has created opportunities for creative entrepreneurs and small businesses to extend their creative potential. The value of social media to creative people is in its capacity to remove space and time constraints. The Internet allows creative people to freely enter markets and communicate directly with consumers, increasing their market appeal and penetration (McLean, Oliver & Wainwright, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2015; Ryan & Hearn, 2010; Walmsley, 2016). Additionally, advances in new media increase the creative entrepreneurs creative control and intrinsic rewards (Humphreys, Fitzgerald, Banks & Suzor, 2005; Kulash, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2015) and potentially their profit margins (Potts et al., 2008), because they no longer rely on big businesses for investment and distribution. That is, creatives enter the highly competitive marketplace with fewer production costs (Fridey, et al., 2010; Ryan

& Hearn, 2010; Spencer, 2008), and create positive relationships with consumers (Flew, 2017; Moisisio & Rokman, 2011; Walmsley, 2016). It is outside the scope of this article to explore all of the benefits afforded creative people by social media, therefore only those pertinent to our research objectives are explored below.

Among the advantages of the Internet and social media is the ability of creative people to directly communicate with their consumer/fan base. For the creative people, the obvious benefit is they are able to market their products to a wider audience and can use the direct communication to entice their fan base with free content and updates about their creative work (Haynes & Marshall, 2017; Smith, 2009). For example, "Facebook enables arts organizations, groups and individuals to advertise their events... free through creating and publicizing an event to fans or members of the group" (Smith, 2009, p. 187), which can prompt the establishing of a direct emotional link between the creative person and their chosen public (Haynes & Marshall, 2017; Kulash, 2010). Having a personal connection with consumers and fans can create the conditions for identification and commitment (Cheney, 1983), which encourages consumers to make decisions that favor the creative person (Tompkins & Cheney, 1985), but it also assists creative people feel a sense of belonging to a community in what is an isolating vocation (Bennett, 2005; Day, 2002; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Gouthro, 2014). In other words, the direct communication assists in marketing creative products, but it can also validate creatives' role identities because the interpersonal exchange afforded by the social media platform sees consumers speak of their experiences with the creative product, potentially supporting the talent of the creative people (Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane & Greig, 2012; Day, 2002).

Consumers' active engagement with the creative process can extend to the creation of fan videos, fan fiction and the like, which is also beneficial for the creative people as these fan constructions

can be shared through social media platforms, increasing the exposure of the original creative product and generating buzz (Flew, 2017; Morris, 2014; Scott, 2012). Therefore, social media is also beneficial to consumers who are not isolated and passive, but who are included in the creative process and the shaping of creative value (Moisisio & Rokman, 2011; Morris, 2014; Vlieghe, Muls, & Rutten, 2016). In essence, the direct communication and consumer involvement can offset the "nobody knows" (Caves, 2003, p. 74), principle of creative goods, because their assessment of the creative product is recognized from the development of the creative product through to its distribution and consumption.

Of course, the direct communication with consumers is not always beneficial for the creative person and product. For instance, Smith (2009, p. 185) argues that too much collaboration with fellow creatives and fan communities can lead to "production blocking", where the creative listens too much to the ideas of others at the expense of their own creativity and mental energy. Accordingly, creative people may find that they have been freed by the constraints of big business but are now confined by the demands of their consumers. As Fridey, et al. (2010) put it, "We buy. We download. We use. We socialize. We demand", suggesting that the Internet has heralded what Leadbeater (2004) describes as a knowledge driven economy where consuming is a relationship rather than an act. In essence, it can be argued that some of the creativity produced is less about meeting "art for art's sake" motivations, and instead is becoming increasingly consumer and capitalist driven as creatives respond to the needs and wants of their audiences (Fridey, et al., 2010; Leadbeater, 2004).

3. METHOD

Using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), we analyzed the Facebook Pages and Twitter feeds of four writers: Abbi Glines (Simon & Schuster), Jessica Sorenson (Hachette),

Jennifer L. Armentrout (Entangled Brazen & Harpercollins) and Jessica Shirvington (Harpercollins). All four writers are mid-list writers, which means they are more likely to be engaging in both writing and promotion in response to cost-cutting in the publishing industry (Flahive, 2017). At the time of our study, both researchers had finished reading the latest offerings from all four writers, which meant that we had an affinity with their work. Furthermore, Glines (Goodreads.com, n.d.a), Sorenson (goodreads.com, n.d.b) and Armentrout (Goodreads.com, n.d.c) had been recognized as New York Times and USA Today bestsellers, while Shirvington had recently been awarded the “Cosmopolitan Annual Fun Fearless Female Award” (Goodreads.com, n.d.d), thereby validating their contribution to the publishing industry and making them worthwhile case studies. As mentioned previously, they have all written or are currently writing in “new-adult” fiction, where the stories focus on romance, coming of age, college experiences and family drama. In some instances, the writers of this study have also written paranormal fiction ranging from books on aliens to angelic entities. We opted to narrow our focus to new-adult fiction writers because, according to statistics released by Pew Research Center, Facebook and Twitter were more popularly used by those aged between 18-29 (Perrin, 2015), the same age bracket that these new-adult fiction writers were targeting.

We analyzed a year’s worth of Facebook data that included 84 posts by Glines, 116 posts by Sorenson, 108 posts by Armentrout and 73 posts from Shirvington. Similarly, we also applied thematic analysis to the Twitter feeds of the authors, specifically those appearing from the 1st October 2014 to 1st December 2014. In this time, we examined 460 posts by Glines, 6 posts by Sorenson, 600 by Armentrout, and 35 posts from Shirvington. We chose to use Facebook Pages and Twitter feeds, because at the time of the research, both social media platforms were considered the most popular for marketing amongst those in the publishing industry (Criswell & Canty, 2014).

Thematic analysis is considered a “foundational method in qualitative analysis” (Braun & Clarke, 2006) because it has wide applicability, regardless of theoretical orientation. Furthermore, it is a useful means for analyzing large quantities of data, which is the case with this research project. Posed with a number of Facebook and Twitter posts, thematic analysis allowed us to systematically reduce our data set according to identified patterns and connections. According to Boyatzis (1998, p. 4), a pattern “at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon”, which allows the researcher, then, to categorize and interpret the layers of reality manifest in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These patterns and connections ultimately produced “a rich description of the data set or a detailed account of one particular aspect” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83) because both researchers worked reflexively, letting the data guide our interpretations and understandings.

We began our thematic analysis by reading and rereading the data sets to identify patterns, trends, key words and ideas before establishing codes (Boyatzis, 1998). These codes, or basic segments of the data, were perceived to be “interesting features” or key understandings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87) that were initially quite broad, but through rigorous comparison and assessing the compatibility of codes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006), were able to be reduced to those themes discussed in the data analysis to follow.

After careful consideration, we settled on three overlapping themes which we labelled social media and creativity, connectivity, and promotion. The first of our themes, *social media and creativity*, encompassed subthemes such as the bottom line, inspiration, fan fun, reward, profit, and selling the soul. Essentially, these minor themes offered insight into how creativity manifested on the social media pages and feeds and indicated potential motivations for why certain posts were present;

freedom of expression or profit-making opportunities. The second of our themes, *social media and connectivity*, was developed from subthemes such as relationships, personal connections, feedback, networking, identity and self-disclosure. We decided on connectivity as the label because it emphasized the interpersonal nature of the social media platforms and constant need for new information expected of the writers. Finally, our third theme, *social media and promotion*, was established to encompass subthemes such as marketing, publicity, generating buzz and hype. Promotion was representative of the primary behavior we found the writers engaged in and explained activities such as book reviews, interviews, references to book signings and events, giveaways and sneak peeks. Social media and promotion was by far the largest of the three themes and could have encompassed the creative and connectivity activities of the writers. That said, although interrelated and far smaller, social media and creativity and social media and connectivity were discrete themes because, although they contributed to promoting the writers and their products, the promotion could be perceived as a by-product of the interaction rather than the overt aim.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Theme 1: Social Media and Creativity

In our examination of the data it became evident that writers actively sought the advice and queried the demands of their consumers. For example, on her Facebook page Jennifer L. Armentrout polled over 1600 readers on what they wanted to read more of or, put another way, what their “requests” were in the young adult and new-adult fiction fields. The voluminous response from her readers meant that Armentrout could canvas a range of readers’ opinions in formulating an understanding of trends and potential audience reactions to her own writing. She is able to reduce some of the risks associated with her writing by tailoring her decisions to the needs and wants of her consumer-base.

There were a few occasions in which the writers would pen posts that added to their original stories, which did extend their creativity beyond the original novel. For example, Jennifer Armentrout rewrote a scene from her book from a different character’s perspective. However, these additions were used as rewards for achieving a certain number of likes or reviews for the authors’ books, rather than because the authors were newly inspired. Therefore, although social media afforded authors the opportunity to further demonstrate their creative ability, for the most part, this creativity was underpinned by pragmatic motivations such as reviews, suggesting that social media is potentially a useful tool for promoting creative work for commercial gain.

Despite the commercial nature of the creativity emerging from the authors, their products seemed to generate a wealth of original creativity from their fans. For example, fans of the books sometimes created artwork based on the storylines; from sketches of the characters or situations to superimposing their favorite quotes onto computer-generated images. One fan even went so far as to design a line of bespoke jewelry. Each of these fan-creations were posted to the social media sites in an attempt to draw the writers’ attention, and in many cases, the writers would award fans with signed copies of their books, perhaps as payment for permitting the writers to then use the fans creations for promotional purposes. Using the contributions of fans and consumers for commercial and promotional objectives is a recent development afforded by social media (Belsky, Kahr, Berkelhamer, & Benkler, 2010; Hanna, Rohm, & Crittenden, 2011), and suggests that the technology does inspire creativity in others.

4.2 Theme 2: Social Media and Connectivity

Social media spaces were originally developed as places for intimate contact with peers, and as such, the conventions of the space remain conducive to interpersonal exchanges (Honey

& Herring, 2009; Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, Simmering, & Orr, 2009). Recently, however, Facebook and Twitter have evolved into commercial platforms geared towards increasing the communication between entrepreneurs or businesses, and their consumers. Therefore, the inclusion of public and private information on online platforms is raising uncertainty around what is appropriate and inappropriate communication content for these predominantly public forums (Krasnova, Spiekermann, Koroleva, & Tildebrend, 2010; Ng, 2014; Vorvoeanu, 2009). For example, Glines' Twitter posts include a reference to how "my speeding husband just got pulled over" and later, how her son told his teachers that Glines' was "not really a people person". Similarly, Sorenson posted pictures of the outside of her house, Shirvington included among her many photographs, a picture of her couch where she chooses to proofread and Armentrout updated followers about how "I'm still in my pajamas" and "My dog has just systematically kicked everything off the couch", amongst many other personal insights.

By having mass media that possesses an interpersonal flavor, entrepreneurs can establish and maintain personal relationships with their followers, which could be beneficial. For instance, when Shirvington speaks of how "Self-doubt isn't always a bad thing. You can't just let it control you" or when Sorenson remarks that she is "so freaking excited for the stuff I have coming up in 2015...including in genres I haven't tried yet!" the writers are afforded the opportunity to negotiate their personal, role and social identities in 'conversation' with their audiences. Identity negotiation is predominantly social in nature (Beech, et al., 2012; Mead, 2004; Swann, 1987), and given that writing fiction is a secluded and isolating vocation (Bennett, 2005; Ede & Lunsford, 1990; Gouthro, 2014), social media exchanges can serve to validate the writers' creative identities, assuming they receive positive feedback on their books from their followers.

Despite social media encouraging the creation of a 'relationship' between writer and audience, this hyper intimacy is not always appreciated nor does it always inspire interaction or engagement with the audience. For example, when Jessica Sorenson asked her fans to support and raise money for a good cause, the post only received six likes from her over 47 000 followers. The followers of these writers were more interested in the creative products and they expected to be kept regularly updated about the writers' progress and to receive information about the products. Social media worked to benefit the audiences, then, because it was designed to permit instantaneous and frequent online conversation. Accordingly, the writers of this study were required to meet audience demand for posts and if this could not be achieved, to at least offer an apology or explanation for their absences. For example, Abbi Glines stated on her Twitter that she would be "...missing on here because I am finishing up a book that's due! I will return back full force and catch up on tweets when I'm done :)". Similarly, when Jennifer Sorenson explained that she would be away from Twitter for a while and followers were to tell her off if she popped on, a follower responded by saying:

I think you need to come out and eat and do other things. While you do that you can check up on us to make sure we are behaving. Then we will yell at you to get back to your cave with a smile on our faces :)

Both examples point to a perceived expectation that the writers are obliged to contribute to their social media, even at their busiest times. Therefore, as creative entrepreneurs, these writers are required to manage their creativity and administration to placate their followers.

4.3 Theme 3: Social Media and Promotion

It was not unexpected that the writers on these social media sites regularly promoted their work and themselves. We found that the writers advertised their existing range of titles, built hype for upcoming

ing releases, launched merchandise, or announced events they intended to attend, in order to remain visible and connected with readers. For example, Jessica Shirvington used her Facebook page to publicize her appearance at the “City of Sydney Library”, Sorenson regularly highlighted positive reviews of her work such as “In true Jessica fashion, don’t expect the end of their love story to be anything less than dramatic, breathtaking and beautiful”, while Abbi Glines ran a promotion for readers to get their copies of *Twisted* and/or *Simple Perfection* signed, provided they were received by post before the 25th of February 2015. This supports the contention of Fridey, et al. (2010) and Ryan and Hearn (2010) that entrepreneurs choosing to capitalize on technology need to embody new roles, namely publicist and marketer, all while still being creative.

Alongside marketing their own work, these writers also promote the work of other worthwhile writers in their network. For example, Jennifer L. Armentrout tweeted about the work of Katie McGarry, Veronica Roth, Cora Carmack, Abbi Glines, and Kristen Proby to name a few. Furthermore, she initiated conversations with these various writers on her Twitter page, thereby cementing her relationships within the publishing industry while indirectly raising the profile of her peers. This suggests a degree of networking is necessary in order to expand into alternative markets and that with publishing houses taking a less prominent role in promotion, writers are stepping in to assist one another in generating publicity.

To promote their creative products the writers used the standard banners or pictures, but in a shift from the norm, the writers also promoted their books by presenting their lead characters as ‘real’ people. For example, Jessica Sorenson posted to her Facebook page that she loved “watching V [Violet] & L [Luke] fall in love”, and Abbi Glines wished the character of “Kate” happy birthday. It is not unusual for creative people to believe their characters are almost real, as the work of creatives

is often an extension of the self (Bain, 2005; Townley, Beech & McKinley, 2009). However, it is only a recent development, courtesy of social media, that they can share in this reality with their readers. Consequently, social media has offered writers the opportunity to engage in a new way of promoting their creative products: by getting the characters that audiences identify with to do the promoting for them. That said, the line between fiction and reality did not always extend into the offline world. For instance, Abbi Glines uses a number of actors/models for the covers of her books and even toured with one while promoting a recent release. Instead of referring to him by his character’s name during the tour, she was quick to acknowledge him by his real name, demonstrating that, while how creative products are being promoted is shifting in response to the abilities of online media, there are still expectations of how promotion is to take place offline.

Although social media has made promotion easier, that has not meant that it is an entirely acceptable practice or is always successful. For example, regularly tweeting a link to “a book is a way to quickly lose followers. Research into Twitter and Facebook users, found that too many ‘tweets’ and cluttering peoples’ ‘walls’ led to users unfollowing these apparent ‘spammers’” (Cha, Haddadi, Benevenuto & Gummadi, 2010, p. 16). However, avoiding excessive tweeting was not advice heeded by Abbi Glines or Jennifer Armentrout, as both writers had a total of 460 and 600 Twitter posts respectively. Their peers averaged only 93 posts. Whether this excessive posting had adverse effects on their brands and online presence is unclear from the study, but prevailing opinion is that over-posting should be avoided (Bontcheva, et al., 2013; Ramsay, 2010; Lovejoy, Waters, & Saxton, 2012).

Additionally, under-managed creatives not well versed in the practices of publicity can find they experience backlash from consumers who can use social media to instantly vent about displeasing and unsatisfactory promotions. For example, fol-

lowers who felt that the price of her new release novel was set to high lambasted Abbi Glines, despite her protestations that the price was outside of her control. Therefore, just as their social media sites could generate positive publicity, they could also produce negative publicity that entrepreneurs struggle to control, and which can spread much more quickly and widely (Leavesley, 2014), threatening the entrepreneurs' profitability and legitimacy (Elsbach, 2003).

5. DISCUSSION

It is clear that digitization has changed the publishing industry. Cost-cutting and focusing their resources on supporting marquee writers (Flahive, 2017), has led publishing houses to be less invested in their mid-list writers and consequently, has forced these writers to embrace an entrepreneurial mentality where they are not just writers, but marketers as well. Therefore, our research purpose was to explore how fiction writers use social media for communication and promotion with their fans and readership. Having used thematic analysis to examine the Facebook pages and Twitter feeds of four writers in the field of "new-adult" fiction, we found that the writers' social media presence reflected a strong marketing and promotional focus which was not entirely unexpected. As Wernick (1991, p. 3) claims "All our contemporary discourse...is saturated in the rhetoric of promotion...It is virtually impossible...to think beyond or outside such promotional discourse". The promotional nature was but one of our key findings and in the sections to follow, we consider how social media presence of the writers also impacted their creativity and connectivity.

5.1 Social Media and Creativity

We observed that social media did assist writers in overcoming common profit and sustainability issues. Additionally, by interacting with their readers, each of the writers could readily canvas public demand offsetting, to an extent, the sub-

jective nature of their products (Caves, 2000). Yet an argument can be made that in fact, these obvious advantages of social media mask bigger problems with its use. For example, instead of taking risks, creatives are able to source material from their audiences and could end up producing standardized creative products, instead of novel and useful products expected of those in a creative profession (Amabile, 1988, 1996). Our research thus supports Leadbeater's (2004) suggestion that the creative industries are increasingly becoming consumer driven, perhaps to the detriment of the writers' own creativity. We are not suggesting that this is inherently bad, rather, it suggests that in a competitive marketplace, more concern exists for what can be commercially and artistically successful.

Because of the nature of social media, and specifically its ability to assist creatives in sharing written and visual content (Hvass & Munar, 2012), it was expected that creativity would have potentially flourished. However, this was seldom observed in the Pages and Twitter feeds of the four writers. In fact, the preference seemed to be to share snippets from their published books, rather than to offer anything particularly new. The 'new' products that were plugged on social media were often purchasable merchandise, including but not limited to, t-shirts, jewelry, songs, art-work, pens and candles. For instance, in what appears to be an attempt to capitalize on the success of her *Rosemary Beach* book series, Abbi Glines had manufactured a line of *Rush Crush* underwear (named after the title character), which served as what Oberholzer-Gee and Kolman (2010, p. 46) refer to as a complementary product. Complementary products are designed to increase an artist's income (Oberholzer-Gee & Kolman, 2010), perhaps signaling Glines' commercial motivations. The straddling of both creative and commercial agendas indicates that the writers continue to act in ways typical of creative entrepreneurs, despite having publishers, and although they hold to artistic values, they are

also driven to earn an income in a project-based industry (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006).

5.2 Social Media and Connectivity

Before the development of new media and its offshoots, business communication, and particularly written communication, was expected to be formal, generalized, standardized, professional and complete. The emergence of email, for instance, (Gimenez, 2000) has altered written conventions, so that the personal is encouraged and online exchanges are expected to be in-line with those observed in offline interpersonal communications (Barnes, 2003; Tidwell & Walther, 2002). That is not to say that a modicum of professionalism is not still expected. Yet the Pages and Twitter feeds of these writers show a manifestation of the marked shift in communication that technology has had, particularly on accepted written conventions and content (Gimenez, 2000; Lewin & Donner, 2002; Mackevic & Mamin, 2010). The self-disclosure of the writers is supported by the work of Vorvoeanu (2009), who found that, while students opposed corporations using Facebook, they encouraged small businesses and entrepreneurs to get involved and expected them to communicate at a personal level.

Despite the apparent expectation that the writers should be offering personal information and communicating about content other than their work, the audience did not always embrace these other parts of the writers' identities. For example, when the writers attempted offer their perspectives on social issues or garner support for charities, the level of engagement amongst followers was markedly reduced. It might be that the followers are suffering from compassion fatigue (Kinnick, Krugman & Cameron, 1996; Moeller, 1999), but another explanation might be that their followers actually resisted seeing the writer as a 'whole' person and were more interested instead in validating the writers' role-identities. Additionally, such reactions, or lack thereof, also offer insights into the identities of the followers. Our observations reveal

that the followers of these writers were content to just be fans: that is, passive followers (Cleland, 2010; Costello & Moore, 2007) enthralled by the creative work, but less interested in being involved in the creative process or issues that veered away from the novels and their characters. This was unexpected given the active audience perspective promoted by media scholars (Blumler, 1979; Levy & Windahl, 1984; Rubin, 1984).

In trying to establish a connection with their followers, the writers of this study tended to post material to their social media on a regular basis. The constant need to produce content for their social media could be problematic for the writers. Essentially, producing social media content can pull the writers away from their key role as writers and this might produce internal tension as they try to fulfil their intrinsic motivations, but at the same time struggle to interact with their audiences. If an identity conflict does not emerge, there are still other negative consequences that could occur. For instance, the expectation can push people toward becoming addicted to work (Rowlands & Handy, 2012) and over-identifying with their role-identity (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Parekh, 2009), because to not regularly assert that they are writers and contribute to their social media might have adverse effects, including the loss of followers or unfavorable publicity shared among users. Additionally, the project-based nature (Blair, et al., 2010; Bridgstock, 2005, 2008; Christopherson, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010; McRobbie, 2002; Neff, et al., 2005) and evolving trends and preferences of audiences (Abrahamson, 2011; Leadbeater & Oakley, 1999, 2001; Sproles, 1981), means that creative people need to remain current, and consequently, they cannot afford to be not maintaining their social media.

Therefore, in an industry characterized by frequent changes in tastes and preferences and inconsistent work, staying current becomes necessary for creative entrepreneurs looking to be profitable. Consequently, social media sites that permit cheap

and widespread marketing by drawing on social capital (Scott, 2012), have become advantageous for entrepreneurs trying to break into the marketplace or simply remain relevant once in there.

5.3 Social Media and Promotion

In playing the game of promotion, the writers often posted generic, repetitive and frequent comments to their social media about current and upcoming book releases, where to purchase their books, book signings, and book reviews. Such content decisions suggest that writers are required to engage in much of their own publicity, to not only establish a following, but to assist in meeting other pragmatic objectives, such as income generation. However, the promotions that did take place were not always well executed or received positively by the audiences, engendering negative responses instead of the common “likes” and “shares”. Additionally, Glines rarely cross-posted content, suggesting that pertinent information available via Twitter was unseen by her Facebook followers. When successfully used, social media can generate buzz for a product with little financial input needed (Scott, 2012), but it can also potentially adversely affect product sales when audiences are dissatisfied with the communication. Thus, social media poses a new series of dilemmas for effective marketing communication and perhaps indicates the need for training and understanding in order for social media to be positively harnessed.

Admittedly, creative people are stereotypically under-managed, preferring to focus on the creative components of their work as opposed to the administration (Leadbeater, 2004), which perhaps accounts for some of the ‘faux pas’ observed. Yet, new media is pushing creative people to be more concerned with the business side of their work and to adopt a number of different roles (Fridey, et al., 2010), particularly as they attempt to make names for themselves instead of relying on publishing houses. In other words, it is not enough to write the next bestseller: these

writers also have to expend energy ensuring they are regularly connecting with audiences and effectively promoting their work.

It was also found that writers actively promoted the work of their peers. In other words, these writers also functioned as agents and gatekeepers when it came to the work of other creative writers. This could be understood as an attempt to influence the tastes of their audiences in a way that big publishing houses used to, but is perhaps more indicative of the capabilities of social media and how it limits the role of big business in the production and distribution of creative products (Fridey, et al., 2010; Ryan & Hearn, 2010; Vlieghe, et al., 2016). Therefore, although big business can still dominate in the creative industries, it seems that their reach and influence has altered.

For writers, getting their name out there is made easier with social media because, by liking, sharing, or commenting on the writer’s posts, followers are spreading the work of the writer across their own networks, potentially widening the entrepreneur’s audience and appeal (Coulter, & Roggeveen, 2012; Kapoor, Jayasimha, & Sath, 2013; Smith, Fischer, & Yongjian, 2012). The flow on effect is that more people may see the creative products, which could lead to profile building and profit. However, increased exposure is not a certainty, because as McLean, et al. (2010), Ryan and Hearn (2010), and Spencer (2008) believe, new media removes some of the barriers to entry into creative markets, which implies that more people compete for the eyes and ears of audiences. Nevertheless, the four writers of this study are active promoters, and if they are marketing their products effectively, they could obtain personal and commercial gain.

5.4 Limitations

As with any research that has such a small sample size, our research findings cannot be generalized to explain the social media activity of all writers, nor do we necessarily expect that other creative

entrepreneurs will use their social media in the same ways as writers. Nevertheless, our research has generated an initial understanding of the online social media presence of writers, which could be extended and developed in subsequent research. Additionally, as this research only considered the Facebook and Twitter presence of the writers, further research might explore how Instagram or writers' blogs with their different structures and constraints might expand on the findings outlined here. Finally, because our purpose was to explore how writers were using social media to remain current and promote themselves, it was outside the scope of this research to analyze all of the comments posted by their followers. That said, future research might consider whether the interactions occurring on the writers' social media pages and feeds offer insights into the effectiveness of the writers' efforts.

6. CONCLUSION

It is clear that being affiliated with a publishing house is not enough to make it in the publishing industry. Writers need to take a proactive approach to getting their content into the market, which is made all the more possible by social media platforms. Social media allows writers to develop their creativity, while inspiring others. Social media assists in the forging of relationships with target audiences and ensures the work of writers is regularly promoted to maintain relevancy in a highly competitive marketplace. That is not to say that a social media presence alone will necessarily lead to deep market penetration or commercial success, but it appears to be a sound option for writers who are increasingly operating alone and as entrepreneurs. More research needs to be undertaken to consider how both writers and followers perceive the social media relationships that are formed, and it is clear that social media can be problematic if used ineffectively. What this research suggests is that technology affects the stereotypical roles occupied by creative

people and businesses in the creative industries. In this research we determined that the writers were using social media platforms to create relationships with their audiences, to sell their products, and in some cases, to inspire creativity in their fandom. However, notably, whether overtly or covertly, the writers' main objective was promotion. Their online activities seemed designed to generate attention, particularly as they were not receiving much marketing support from their publishing houses. In essence, the writers were frequently posting to social media to remain current and relevant as they competed for audiences. This research, then, signals that with an increasing number of creative entrepreneurs turning to social media for exposure, those in the publishing industry are not an exception to the rule, and could perhaps be more reliant on social media as the industry continues to change.

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