This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

'By working she means tweeting' : online celebrity gossip media and audience readings of celebrity Twitter behaviour

Reference:

Van den Bulck Hilde, Claessens Nathalie, Bels Annebeth.- *'By working she means tweeting' : online celebrity gossip media and audience readings of celebrity Twitter behaviour*

Celebrity studies - ISSN 1939-2397 - 5:4(2014), p. 514-517

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/19392397.2014.980655>

‘By working she means tweeting’: Online celebrity gossip media and audience readings of celebrity twitter behaviour

Hilde Van den Bulck – University of Antwerp

Nathalie Claessens – University of Antwerp

Annebeth Bels – University of Antwerp

why the f*ck post that. [...] Seriously made herself look like the biggest begger with that tweet!!!!!!!,LOLLLL (JustJared 2013a)

Focused on online reactions to celebrity tweets, this contribution analyses celebrity Twitter use from an audience perspective. Twitter, and the wider use of social media by celebrities, has been heralded as a means to bridge the real and symbolic ‘distance’ between celebrities and media, fans and wider audiences, increasing a sense of authenticity and closeness through direct, ‘unmediated’ communication (McNamara 2011, Muntean and Petersen 2009, Hellmueller and Aeschbacher 2010). Twitter is thus argued to encourage a (further) shift, away from the once highly controlled access to and communication from celebrities, towards a celebrity culture in which performers interact ‘directly and authentically’ with media and audiences (Marwick and boyd 2011). Perhaps for this reason, many celebrities have decided not to maintain an online presence

I don't have Twitter and I'm not on Facebook [...] because if you go on Twitter and tell everybody what you're doing moment to moment, and then claim you want a private life, no one's going to take that request seriously (Daniel Radcliffe, Cosgrove Baylis 2013).

Certain academics, however, consider Twitter as just another medium in a marginally evolving celebrity culture and claim that its seemingly interactive nature does not alter the hierarchy between audiences and celebrities (Thomas 2014).

Reception studies of stardom largely agree that gaining knowledge on the authentic nature of a celebrity is an important motivation for audience activity. Yet authors like Gamson (1994) maintain that audiences prefer the guessing game, inherent in celebrity gossip, over certainty about the 'truth' behind the celebrity construct. Audiences that read celebrity tweets further differ in their level and type of closeness to the celebrity, ranging from 'passers-by', to adoring fans to hostile anti-fans and everything in between (Gray 2003), and may thus take different meanings from these tweets.

Adding empirical evidence to the debate, this contribution investigates how the construction of the celebrity self on Twitter is discussed and evaluated by online celebrity gossip media and their audiences. We propose that different users construct different readings of celebrity discourse. To illustrate this point, every article and comment mentioning Twitter or tweets posted on the celebrity gossip website JustJared was gathered during one constructed week in August 2013 and subsequently analysed. JustJared is a popular celebrity gossip website that has reached Yahoo's top ten Bloggers Roll. It advertises 'the fresh perspective it brings to the often harsh world of celebrity news' (www.justjared.com), resulting in an overall neutral to positive tone of its celebrity coverage, which is rather rare for celebrity news (Van den Bulck and Claessens, 2014). In total, 74 out of 380 articles and 76 out of 1901 comments mentioned Twitter or tweets. Using SPSS, data were coded and analysed for indications of (dis)like of a certain celebrity, perceived closeness or distance, and awareness of the celebrity construct, next to general content variables.

Analysing JustJared coverage mentioning Twitter or tweeting reveals that each article does so in a positive or neutral manner, and all but one mention Twitter as an authentic source

of information coming straight from the celebrity. What is more, the majority (81%) of articles uses Twitter to create a personal, engaging tone that creates a positive feeling of closeness to the celebrity. It appears that for celebrity gossip media, celebrity Twitter feeds provide a cheap and easy source of instant, personalised celebrity news, as McNamara (2011) suggests.

In contrast, only a small minority (14.5%) of audience reactions mentions celebrity twitter positively, while more than half (59%) discuss celebrity tweets as a source of negative closeness

I remember how Miranda the famewhore was so anxious to start exploiting her baby that she posted a picture of her breast feeding him at twitter just hours after having him (JustJared 2013b).

Additionally, celebrity tweets evoke negative feelings: whereas less than half (41%) of all (N=1901) audience comments on JustJared express a negative opinion about a celebrity, almost three quarters (72%) of the comments pertaining specifically to celebrity Twitter use are negative (N=76). Commenters often refer to celebrities' Twitter feeds as celebrities wasting their time, which contradicts the view of social media as part of their job: 'She goes to America (...) and tweets about a tv show (...). What kind of a career is that?' (JustJared 2013c).

Furthermore, rather than underlining a feeling of authenticity and direct communication, a majority (60%) of the Twitter-related comments explicitly express an awareness of media stretching the truth and manipulating the public persona of celebrities, as well as of celebrities managing their image. Such awareness correlates with negative audience appraisal of the celebrity, as a vast majority (85%) of the comments showing such awareness also express dislike for the celebrity in question. Interestingly, this awareness sometimes

coincides with commenters using other (un)official communications (other celebrities' Twitter profiles, other social media, interviews) to construct views on what they believe to be the celebrity's (un)true image.

@aquarius64: but that's what blogs do all the time... they say things that are lies like they were true. We have to learn to not trust everything. (...) that's what celebrities life are (Just Jared 2013d).

Agreed!!!! last month the moron was alone and tweeted out something like 'silence is a source of strength' this month she gets some shots in of her and this new dude she's bangin and tweets out a rant about 'not paying the paps'...this chic is so transparen!! (JustJared 2013a).

Analysing comments, it appears that what is at stake for a large part of the audience is not so much authenticity or realness in the literal sense of the word, but rather the coherence of the celebrity performance. Celebrities, media and audiences all work to construct a coherent image of a celebrity and some sections of the audience care less about knowing the authentic nature of a celebrity than about a coherent, believable performance. They enjoy pointing out 'plot holes', as Gamson (1994) suggested, with conflicting information providing opportunities to spot inconsistencies, and they express a mix of glee for 'seeing through' it and frustration over being underestimated by media and celebrity.

So, while JustJared is keen to include celebrity tweets in articles to personalise news, its readers are more critical about celebrities' Twitter activities. Together, the data suggest that even more than interacting with traditional media, for a celebrity to dabble in Twitter is a hazardous balancing act.

References

Cosgrove Baylis, S., 2013. *Daniel Radcliffe: Why I Avoid Twitter and Facebook* [online].

People.com. Available from:

<http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20758938,00.html> [Accessed 21 March 2014].

Gamson, J., 1994. *Claims to fame: celebrity in contemporary America*. Los Angeles:

University of California Press.

Gray, J., 2003. New audiences, new textualities: anti-fans and non-fans. *International journal of Cultural Studies*, 6 (1), 64-81.

Hellmueller, L.C. and Aeschbacher, N., 2010. Media and celebrity: production and

consumption of “well-knownness”. *Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture*, 29 (4), 3-35.

JustJared, 2013a. *Kaley Cuoco Walks Arm in Arm with Ryan Sweeting* [online].

JustJared.com. Available from: <http://www.justjared.com/2013/08/05/kaley-cuoco-walks-arm-in-arm-with-ryan-sweeting/> [Accessed 21 March 2014].

JustJared, 2013b. *Adriana Lima: Family Lunch with Valentina & Sienna!* [online].

JustJared.com. Available from: <http://www.justjared.com/2013/08/13/adriana-lima-family-lunch-with-valentina-sienna/all-comments/> [Accessed 20 May 2014].

JustJared, 2013c. *Rihanna Hails a Cab in New York City* [online]. JustJared.com. Available

from: <http://www.justjared.com/2013/08/13/rihanna-hails-a-cab-in-new-york-city/> [Accessed 20 May 2014].

JustJared, 2013d. *Taylor Lautner & Marie Avgeropoulos: Romantic Walk in NYC!* [online].

JustJared.com. Available from: <http://www.justjared.com/2013/08/03/taylor-lautner-marie-avgeropoulos-romantic-walk-in-nyc> [Accessed 21 March 2014].

- Marwick, A. and boyd, d., 2011. To see and be seen: celebrity practice on Twitter. *Convergence*, 17 (2), 139-158.
- McNamara, K., 2011. The paparazzi industry and new media: the evolving production and consumption of celebrity news and gossip websites. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14 (5), 515-530.
- Muntean, N. and Petersen, A.H., 2009. Celebrity Twitter: strategies of intrusion and disclosure in the age of technoculture. *A Journal of Media and Culture* [online], 12 (5). Available from: <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/issue/view/disclose> [Accessed 21 March 2014].
- Thomas, S., 2014. Celebrity in the 'Twitterverse': history, authenticity and the multiplicity of stardom. Situating the 'newness' of Twitter. *Celebrity studies* [online]. Available from: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/ref/10.1080/19392397.2013.845962> [Accessed 21 March 2014].
- Van den Bulck, H. and Claessens, N., 2014. Of local and global fame: a comparative analysis of news items and audience reactions on celebrity news websites *People, Heat*, and *HLN*. *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 15 (2), 218-236.