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#RockStar tweets: Exploring life narratives and identity

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‘Isn’t the end of anything really just the beginning of something else?’ Nikki Sixx

@NikkiSixx, 15 February 2014.

The seemingly direct connection between the fan and the rock star appears closer than ever with the introduction of Twitter. Here, the life narratives of the rock star can be monitored yet manipulated depending on time and space. In this essay I integrate auto/biography theory to argue that rock stars primarily use Twitter for instantaneous autobiography and self-life narrative. The rock star uses social media in order to represent aspects of their life and identity as it happens, on their own terms. Will Straw suggests that the history of music is the history of music *stars* and the industry is organised around star-making. He discloses that music fans are those who are fans of musicians that seemingly speak directly to them (Straw 2001, p. 74). Through social media platforms, including Twitter, the fan/follower can track the every move and every thought of the rock star as they upload content (including images, pictures, and music files) to their page.

I focus here on Mötley Crüe founder, Nikki Sixx, who announced in February 2014 that the rock group would disband after their final world tour. His featured Tweet suggests a new direction that his life (and public narrative) will take. Unlike some rock stars whose social media pages are clearly run by assistants/managers (in the first instance, they are

written in the third-person), Sixx's social media persona is convincingly operated by the artist himself. In an interview with Loudwire, Sixx talks through why he uses Twitter:

Because it's an artist doing it, because it's a human being doing it, it's not an assistant or the management company, or the record company tweeting for you. You're going to say s-t that's going to ruffle feathers or you're going to stay stuff that's really personal and other people can really relate to it. That's what I like about it, I've embraced it (Sixx in Wilkening 2012).

Whilst Sixx claims an element of autobiography in his use of social media, he does not hesitate to employ them as marketing and branding tools, such as the promotion of his band or radio show, Sixx Sense. Yet, ultimately, these factor into his public identity and become a part of his autobiography.

Laurie McNeill frames Facebook (which can be applied to Twitter) in terms of post-human auto/biography. She suggests that the profile is only a two-dimensional portrait, designed for a basic autobiography. Autobiographical performance is limited on the platform due to the technology utilised (2012, p. 70). One of the clear limits is space, in terms of length of posts and time: restricted by a certain number of characters, whilst older posts are buried by more recent updates. Linking this to Sixx's Twitter, it is by no means a detailed and complete autobiography (although, arguably, nothing ever could be), however it appears that it comes directly from the individual, as opposed to the more traditional media format where individuals including managers, publishers and ghost writers intervene. The avoidance of such interferences therefore promotes a seemingly more authentic relationship, which fans value.

The authenticity of Sixx's Twitter account is verified by the 'blue tick symbol' provided by Twitter for official accounts (see Twitter Help Center, 2014). Muntean and

Petersen say that the core reason for account verification is, 'a means to disclose their true interior state of being and to counter... narratives circulating about them' (2009). It appears that the celebrity uses social media to 'set the record straight' and clarify any unsanctioned media representations of them. For example, Sixx has confirmed rumours that his published autobiography, *The Heroin Diaries: A Year in the Life of a Shattered Rock Star* (2007), will be adapted into a Broadway play: 'I've been getting asked this a lot lately... The answer is: Yes, "The Heroin Diaries" book is being turned into a Broadway play' (posted on Twitter, 15 November 2012, 9:32pm).

In light of this example, José Van Dijck proposes that Twitter and its mediated practices have, generally speaking, six 'modes of addressing'. They include conversation and dialogue, collaboration and exchange, self-expression and self-communication, status updating and checking, information and news sharing and finally marketing and advertising (2011, p. 337). For the celebrity Tweeter, any of these 'modes' can come in to play. In the case of Nikki Sixx it is a conversation/dialogue between him and his fans, collaboration/exchange between him and fellow music artists in industry, status updating/checking-in to his private life and experiences, self-expression/communication of his deeper thoughts, information/news sharing on his career and finally the marketing and advertising of his own (new and old) ventures. Social media sites are powerful tools in establishing strong, intimate connections between the star and the fan and the music artist and the entertainment industry which, in turn, provides opportunity for marketing, promoting and branding the star beyond their musical persona.

In order to continue to expand the audience reach of Sixx's celebrity image (beyond Twitter) as well as being a commercial exploitation of that image, Sixx concurrently published his autobiography (cited above), his book of photography (Sixx 2011) and contribution to the band's autobiography (Sixx et al, 2002). Sixx's Twitter feed during these

phases becomes a promotional platform for the publications. The set-up of these social media sites, principally Twitter, lack detail, so the autobiography is stunted in its development. Regardless, there is enough material uploaded via Sixx for fans and followers to feel a great sense of connection to the rock star and they can refer to the published texts Sixx has authored for detail. The issue here is not just of limits in space but frequencies in time. The official merchandise of Sixx, including the autobiography and photo book, are longer and are more sustained in terms of time, than his Tweets. Perhaps Sixx's publications add the third dimension (another level of detail) to the two dimensionality McNeill (above) proposes that social media claims. With this in mind, Nikki Sixx's tweets need to be read in the context of other media forms (including social media, published works and radio appearances). If 'the medium is the message', as McLuhan proposed (McLuhan 1964, p. 7), then social media's form of engagement is instant and soon forgotten, unlike other mediums including the written auto/biography. The most recent posts are featured at the top of the page for all sites as these are of most interest for fans/followers.

Akin to other (celebrity) Twitter accounts, Sixx's Twitter provides a sense of autobiography that is instant and spontaneous, yet restricted by time and space. It is limited in time by the primacy placed on the most recent tweets, and in space by the 140 character limit per tweet. Social media sites do not flow like a traditional auto/biography would. They do not follow a simple linear narrative structure and in addition, are punctured with comments, replies and posts from multiple users. Also, it is difficult to compile all of the Tweets a celebrity account has ever posted, as the most recent ones take preference. The case in point here is that social media creates a stunted autobiography because of space and time limits. It also creates a promotional stunt (the idea that Twitter is stunted as a promotional tool). Twitter, as a tool for new autobiography, fuses this stunting while at the same time offering dialogic, interactive and continually expanding narratives of the self as celebrity.

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