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This article argues that moments of interaction between celebrities and audiences on Twitter are influenced by modes of intercommunication established in the traditional press interview. Through statistical analysis of the last 3200 tweets of the top 20 celebrity Twitter accounts in terms of followers as of June 2014, the article examines sustainability of celebrity performance on the site and levels of interaction. It shows how using constructs of the celebrity interview enables celebrities to articulate what it means to be an individual and a consumer within capitalist democracies. A discourse analysis of pertinent examples from leading Twitter celebrities demonstrates how these interactions are influenced by both thematic and linguistic patterns developed in celebrity interviews and how they now also occupy the space long held by the interview as a promotional performance. This article also examines how celebrities encourage their followers to participate in this performance through the reward of direct interaction and how this is then used to extend promotion and build celebrity brands.

Keywords: the interview; audience; micropublic; authenticity; performance; interactivity; promotion

Introduction

Micro-blogging website Twitter is central to the formulation and circulation of twenty-first-century celebrity. The social media site is unique, not only because of how it performs as a portal and aggregator for an abundance of digital content, but because of the opportunity it affords for 24-hour real-time interaction between corporations, public figures and multiple complex audiences. If we understand celebrity as an inter-textual performance practice through which stars articulate what it is like to be an individual (Dyer 1979, 1986, Marshall 1997, 2010, Turner 2004, 2013, Redmond and Holmes 2007) and understand public presentation of self as a 'staged activity' (Rojek 2001, p. 11), then the levels of performance for celebrity enabled by social media are vast and multifaceted. Thomas (2014, p. 2) argues that 'virtually all' Twitter performances by celebrities share characteristics of early paradigms of stardom by seeking to 'manage identity, image and reality'. There may be a diversity of performative practice, with some tweets striving towards interactivity while others perform a broadcast model, but the aim is to manage and maintain their public persona. This article examines an interactive model of communication on the site, building on Thomas' claim that the size and scope of Twitter use enables models of performance to show how celebrities, their promotional agents and their

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audiences draw on a familiar mechanism of the media machine – the celebrity interview – to construct interaction. Marshall (2010, p. 45) notes that textual dimensions of display of public and private self, such as within celebrity journalism, have provided templates for online celebrity. This study shows how the specific textual conventions and constructions of the celebrity interview in print, alongside the dominant thematic priorities displayed in the discourse of celebrity interviews across media, have provided such a template, allowing public figures to maximise the publicity potential of Twitter performance. Using the conventions of the interview means audiences are both offered and help to create focused moments among the seemingly infinite amount of discourse in their timelines. Through a statistical analysis of the top 20 celebrity Twitter profiles in terms of followers as of 16 June 2014, the study first establishes levels and sustainability of interaction with the audience, arguing this has the same aim as the celebrity interview, and demonstrates the significance of what Marshall (2014) has described as *micropublics* in establishing celebrity brands in digital spaces. The study then analyses the discourse of a series of case studies to demonstrate how interaction also draws on the conventions and techniques established in the celebrity interview to structure content and how they reflect the dominant themes of the interview as a promotional activity.

Rojek (2001, p. 15) argues that celebrity has emerged 'as a central mechanism in structuring the market of human sentiments' and this clearly extends to the celebrity interview. Interviews with public figures focus on revealing their 'authentic selves' through discussion of private lives and their ability to promote through discussion of products. Authenticity, in this context, should be understood as 'not a property *of*, but something . . . ascribe[d] *to* a performance' (Rubridge 1996, p. 217; emphasis added) and, as noted by both Dyer and Marshall, not fixed but changeable. A performance, as Goffman (1956, p. 13) argues, is 'a period marked by . . . continuous presence before a particular set of observers', which influences them in some way. If it is one that can be replicated, then a pattern or routine can be formed. These performances can either be sincere, where the performer believes 'the impression of reality which he stages is the reality' (1956, p. 10), or cynical, only aimed at influencing the audience to a specific end. Performances are 'moulded to fit into the understanding and expectations of society' (1956, p. 23) and will tend to 'exemplify the officially accredited values of the society' (1956, p. 24). In 'The Viewer Society', Mathiesen argues that journalists filter and shape information, placing topics on the agenda (1997, p. 226) with the aim of normalising behaviour that 'fits within a democratic capitalist society' (1997, p. 218). He describes journalism as part of the system of synopticism, where the many can see the few and regulate their behaviour (1997, p. 225), which he argues works in parallel with Foucault's (1977) concept of panopticism, where the few (such as the state) carry out surveillance of the many, as the pre-eminent means of social control. The importance of discourse developed in interviews and continued on Twitter therefore not only relates to the valorisation of celebrity within 'culture industries' (Adorno *et al*. 1979, Hesmondhalgh 2013, DeCordova 1990), but to our narratives of individuality within modern mass society.

The celebrity interview is a method within what Tuchman (1978), in her analysis of journalistic practice, describes as the 'consciousness industry', which aims to modify our beliefs and thoughts and thus our behaviour. It is a performance through which celebrities articulate consumption (Dyer 1979), propagating consumerist values and effectively articulating a free market capitalist ideology (Dubied and Hanitzsch 2014). In the interview, these values are constructed by journalists and performed by celebrities following certain conventions and patterns, and therefore pass through a model of

professionalisation. Similarly, Twitter users are governed by a series of patterns which use both embedded coded commands and typographical symbols to structure interaction, which has developed into questioning, information sharing and publicising. Celebrities, their promotional teams, and their audiences at times use these typographical symbols in a way which mirrors the conventions of the interview in print, in order to make content easier to engage with and to further its reach and promotional benefit. Just as Mathiesen (1997, p. 217) argues that sources for news have themselves become more professionalised, using public relations to reach certain goals and dominate news production, celebrities and their promotional agents have adopted the professional model of interaction of the interview to construct interaction on Twitter. Marshall (2014, pp. 160–161) argues that celebrity journalism – and therefore by extension the celebrity interview – are part of 'representational media', also encompassing film, radio and television, which attempt 'to embody a populace'. He claims this form is now in decline, supplanted by 'presentational media', which is 'performed, produced and exhibited by the individual or other collectives and not by the structure of representational media which is almost by definition large public and private media corporations'. Presentational media exists in the domain of Web 2.0 and social networks redirect traditional media so that it is 'blended with interpersonal chats, other images and a panoply of other kinds of content' (2014, pp. 160–161). However, his description of how content is 'mediated by the persona' and therefore framed differently to traditional media forms does not fully demonstrate the intricate intertwining of form and function. Celebrities and their audiences on the presentational platform of Twitter, as we will see, draw on the frameworks and structures of traditional representational media in order to structure content in a way which is familiar and accessible to audiences.

In 2011 Marwick and boyd established that the vast majority of celebrity Twitter accounts are produced by the famous people themselves, with only around 13% of the most popular 144 showing signs of authorship by a team of publicists and/or the celebrity. They built on Senft's (2008, 2013) examination of how techniques of 'micro celebrity' – using social media to maintain an audience viewed as a fan base – are used by both public figures and 'ordinary' people to gain status online and argued this has placed 'fame on a continuum rather than as a bright line that separates individuals' (Marwick and boyd 2011, p. 141). But their claim that the success of Twitter performance relies on the illusion of 'uncensored glimpses' into the lives of the famous overly simplifies audience understanding of the process. This suggests audiences need to believe celebrity discourse on Twitter is unstructured and spontaneous in order to accept it as authentic, which does not allow for how interaction can be understood in relation to, and use, the structures of marketing and celebrity journalism. Appearing authentic is therefore not only dependent on the illusion of backstage access (although there are times when that dynamic is at play), but also on how audience members support celebrities' construction of their online identities. Marshall (2014, pp. 160–161) also describes how the 'intersection of representational media forms and presentational media structures via social networks' is creating intercommunication, forming audience into 'micropublics'. There is continuous interplay between the self and a micropublic to construct persona and a 'massive collective desire to become part of the new social construction of identity and public display' (2014, p. 163). Micropublics are linked to content and one another via the celebrity and are part of the process of the creation and maintenance of their persona, but are also 'regularly and publicly updated and responded to in the tradition of broadcast and print media forms that make it a quasi-public network' (2014, p. 164). While Twitter followers can therefore be

more involved in the celebrity-making process, public figures are dominant – both having and being seen to have control over whom they interact with or which questions they choose to answer. As such, the 'older processes of broadcasting/receiving star images and the hierarchies of stardom/fandom prevail' (Thomas 2014, p. 2).

The interview has long been part of a process of promotion, but the removal of the interviewer allows celebrities to promote in a safer way, deciding what they will and will not answer. There is undoubtedly a similar power dynamic at play in the many traditional interviews, increasingly so over the past 20 years where managers and PR agents set rules about what celebrities will discuss (Turner 2004, pp. 36–37). However, those deals are brokered out of audience sight with demands sometimes publicly rejected by journalists, who refuse to carry out the interview without freedom to ask what they choose. This can give the illusion that the interviewer has control, whereas there is no question about who is the dominant force during Twitter interactions. Of course there are Twitter users who ask celebrities more difficult, or even at times insulting, questions. Indeed for Doyle (2011), one of the limitations of Mathiesen's (1997) argument of the power of Synopticism is that it presumes the audience will follow a pattern not allowing for 'currents of resistance', particularly in relation to Web 2.0. However, celebrities are far more likely to answer questions fitting their own agenda and this is clearly understood by those who tweet them. This power dynamic is shown during my exploration of a series of case studies and how these are influenced by the journalistic interview. First, I analyse an example of 'spontaneous' direct discourse with Jonathan Ross, instigated by a follower. This shows how interaction is influenced by the working patterns of the interview and how it is used by public figures to maintain elements of their image and to encourage the audience to accept them as authentic. Second, I analyse two case studies from the popular crowd-sourced interview format, often highlighted by #ask+nameofcelebrity where celebrities give a specific time to ask questions, usually as part of promotional activity in relation to product. The first, between Khloe Kardashian and one of her fans, demonstrates how heightened senses of intimacy influence the dynamics of these interviews and how this intimacy is also used as a means to promote. The second compares two crowd-sourced interview moments on Twitter with one in a magazine given by Britney Spears as part of the promotional launch of a new album and Las Vegas residency in 2013. This analysis demonstrates how the linguistic constructs and thematic patterns of the celebrity interview in print directly influence Twitter discourse, highlighting how using its form helps achieve promotional goals. Finally, I examine a 'spontaneous' moment of interaction between Katy Perry and her fans, this time instigated by her, which draws on the same processes as the #ask format and shows how the celebrity has power over the audience. Perry encourages fans to sublimate their own identity and reflect her own, through directly rewarding those who do so with direct interaction. These examples show how the press interview influences interaction on Twitter, but also that direct and publically visible contact between celebrities and audiences changes the promotional dynamic, removing the role of the journalist in establishing whether a particular performance of self by public figures is 'authentic' or not.

Sustainability of Twitter performance and levels of interactivity with micropublics

In order to establish that the interview is influencing Twitter interaction, levels of intercommunicative modes of performance on the site need to be established. The most recent 3200 tweets – the number stored publically by Twitter – of each of the top 20 celebrity Twitter accounts in terms of followers as of 16 June 2014 were coded using

Seartwi analytics. Zizi Papacharissi (2012, p. 2) argues that 'presencing' on the site – a term introduced by Couldry (2012) to describe the construction of a continual online existence for an audience – 'uses interaction . . . to pursue publicity, privacy and sociality'. She discusses the patterns and routines of performance as 'part of the performative repertoire marking identity' and uses Derrida's (1978) discussion of the conventions and customs of language as a way of analysing tweets. On Twitter, individuals 'are challenged to manage the persistence, replicability, scalability and searchability of their performances fluently, in environments that prompt (and in some instances reward) sharing' (Papacharissi 2012, p. 4). They are embedded into 'social routines essential for forming and sustaining connections between communities that are both imagined and actual' (2012, p. 5). As demonstrated in Table 1, sustainability of performance is a key component with all but one of the top 20 celebrity accounts averaging one tweet a day, although all have periods of inactivity ranging from a couple of days to several weeks. It is clear that public figures also recognise the potential of engaging with their micropublic and using participants to help construct and perpetuate their conversation as part of a 'participatory web based culture' (Beer and Penfould-Mounce 2009, p. 1). Public and direct replies (@+username) have the greatest currency for individuals hoping to interact with a celebrity on the site. These conversations are generally instigated by a member of the audience who tweets a question or comment in the hope of capturing attention. Statistical analysis of the top 20 Twitter accounts shows that all but three (85%) engage with their audience in this way, while all 20 interact with their followers by retweeting their comments. Five celebrities use more than 30% of their interactions to reply to tweets from audience members and 13 (65%) use more than 50% of their interactions to reply to the audience or retweet their comments. Interactivity, both through direct conversation and retweeting, is therefore a key part of popular models of communication on the site and a significant component of celebrity performance.

The statistics also show that broadcast methods of communication are a significant component of celebrity Twitter activity and in many cases are used more than an interactive model. Details of activities, products and thoughts are offered to the audience and these are often retweeted tens of thousands of times. Mathiesen's (1997, p. 225) argument that there is 'a dominant role for televised personalities such as journalists and celebrities', where 'personalities and commentators . . . actively filter and shape the news', therefore extends to Web 2.0. Celebrities opt into a voluntary system of Synopticism in which they help shape our desires and offer mediatised images that distract us from the reality of our daily lives. However, Doyle (2011, p. 287) argues that 'a degree of caution must be exercised concerning the extent to which the synoptic should be embraced as a totalising, deterministic space', particularly in online spaces, as 'media narratives embedded in complex discursive formations operate in fluid and often contradictory ways'. Table 1 shows that interacting with the audience through 'retweets' is the only consistent model of behaviour for celebrities on Twitter. Examining discourse on their timelines shows they behave differently at different times; for example, sometimes actively engaging directly with audiences through @+username replies and other times not; sometimes being quiet and at other times tweeting multiple times a day. Their relationship with the site is indeed fluid. It is also increasingly professionalised, with 65% (13 out of 20) appearing to be at least partially written by public relations agents or teams, with tweets written in the third person about the celebrity or including profession-ally produced promotional material about an event or product. This is a significant increase on the 13% that Marwick and boyd (2011) found and reflects the burgeoning field of social media marketing and optimisation. There is also a significant trend in the

Table 1. Statistical analysis of the top 20 celebrity twitter accounts 16 June 2014.

Celebrity (@+name)	Followers	Date joined	Tweets	Daily Average	Modes of tweeting (% of last 3200)			
					Interactive			Broadcast
					Reply	Retweet	Total	Status update
@katyperry	53,779,319	20 February 2009	5671	3	9	20.5	29.5	70.5
@justinbieber	52,320,242	28 May 2009	27,012	14	12.5	38.5	51	49
@barackobama	43,613,348	5 March 2007	11,891	4.5	0	19	19	81
@ladygaga	41,528,718	26 March 2008	4760	2	35	23	58	42
@taylorswift	41,376,078	6 December 2008	2231	1	1.5	51.5	53	47
@britneyspears	37,647,508	23 September 2008	3666	1.75	36	32	68	32
@rhianna	35,791,957	2 October 2009	8980	5.2	56.5	27	83.5	26.5
@justintimberlake	32,692,262	25 March 2009	2388	1.25	19.6	55	74.4	25
@thellenshow (Degeneres)	29,355,690	13 August 2009	8999	4	0	44.5	44.5	55.5
@JLo	27,906,956	27 October 2009	3908	2.3	6	85	91	9
@christiano (Ronaldo)	26,975,675	14 June 2010	1977	1.3	3.5	50.5	54	46
@shakira	25,597,172	3 June 2009	2981	1.6	2	72	74	26
@Oprah	24,501,093	23 January 2009	9308	4.7	46.5	36.5	83	17
@Pink	23,872,543	3 April 2009	5386	2.8	22	64	86	14
@ddlovato (Demi)	22,771,120	17 February 2009	11,496	0.8	8	53	61	39
@kimkardashian	21,632,300	19 March 2009	17,450	9	7	16	23	77
@HarryStyles	20,923,305	22 August 2010	4764	3.4	59	12	71	29
@SelenaGomez	20,676,904	8 March 2010	3256	1.7	7	14	21	79
@OfficialAdele	20,328,700	30 August 2010	323	<1	2	32	34	66
@Kaka	29,375,100	28 June 2009	3499	2	0	9.5	9.5	90.5

types of celebrities who use the site. Hollywood stars do not feature at all in the top 20, which consists of 14 pop stars, three reality/chat show TV stars, two sportsmen and one politician. All are famous as themselves, rather than for their ability to play a fictional character. This confirms James Bennett's (2011, pp. 168–189) argument that celebrities on Twitter rely on a similar system of public visibility as television personalities, with fame a reward for self enterprise and achievable by anyone through the performance of being 'ordinary'. The dominance of musicians could be explained by understanding it as an extension of already existing promotional practices for that genre. Discussing new material in relationship to personal life and inspirations has always been part of the promotional routine of popular music. If we understand their use of Twitter as an extension of this promotional process, then 'symbolically linking' these products to the 'whole world of social values' (Wernwick 1991, p. 22) and to discussions of private lives as manifestations of these values makes perfect sense.

The way interaction itself develops often depends on how users position themselves in relation to the public figure. Fan tweets to their idols, as we will explore later, are usually framed in models of praise, offering affirmation or asking questions fitting their idols' own agenda, while the questions of wider audience members are broader and more conversational, drawing on a wider range of material. For example, the following inter-action between British TV personality Jonathan Ross and one of his followers, who does not regularly attempt to interact with him, shows shared interest:

| @lennyukdeejay: | '@THR: Dark Knight returns' No 2 Cover features £478,000 at Auction #Batman @Wossy? You been splashing out again? [With link to hollywoodreporter.com story] |
| @Wossy: | @lennydeejay not me. Never liked that cover. Batman looks constipated. We've all been there. |

(Twitter conversation between @lennyukdeejay and TV personality Jonathan Ross [@Wossy], 3 August 2013)

The question from @lennyukdeejay is complex, pulling together a wide range of media material. Firstly, it demonstrates that he is aware of TV personality Jonathan Ross's extensive and expensive comic book collection. This has been covered across a range of mainstream media such as newspaper coverage of a £40,000 *Spiderman* comic Ross donated to charity Comic Relief in 2009 and has often been mentioned by Ross himself during his chat shows *Friday Night with Jonathan Ross* (2001–2010), *The Jonathan Ross Show* (2011–present) and the four-part documentary series *Comic Britannia* (2007). Secondly, it draws on a then-current news story about an auction of *Batman* comics which states that buyers 'did not want their names disclosed' (Associated Press for *The Hollywood Reporter*, 2 August 2013), picked up from the timeline of the publisher themselves (@THR). The way @lennyukdeejay draws together material, including stored knowledge, and then asks Jonathan Ross a specific question mirrors the techniques of celebrity journalism interviews: aggregation of associated materials, focusing of knowledge and then asking questions with a specific purpose in mind. It also draws on the thematic patterns of the celebrity interview as a site for the expression of individuality in capitalist democracies, specifically through discussion of consumer and leisure choices.

So why, out of the dozens of questions Jonathan Ross is asked every day, does this one prompt a response? For one, it offers Ross the opportunity to appear authentic. He has gained credibility as a television host from positioning himself as an aficionado of, among

other things, comics and graphic novels. Whether Ross really is so familiar with this one cover he can recall it instantly (a picture of which is included in the news story), his tweet shows he wants to be seen to have this knowledge. Indeed, much of Ross' career has been built on his positioning of himself as a self-proclaimed 'geek', with an intense interest in popular culture. He has drawn on this not only to create entire programmes but often as a way to position questions when he interviews celebrities. His response is therefore part of the inter-textual performance of 'Jonathan Ross: the popular culture fan' which is part of what has made him a success. The continuation of this element of Ross' public persona on social media makes it appear authentic. The way the initial question draws from techniques used by the interviewer offers Ross the chance to present himself as credible in the same way as the interview process.

This interaction is successful, with each achieving some credibility from it: Ross in terms of the authenticity of his performance of self, and @lennyukdeejay in prompting interaction from someone famous. This has associated rewards, such as the attraction of a greater number of followers. However, there is another dimension to their digital conversation – they tweet as if they know each other. @lennyukdeejay's question '… you been splashing out again?' is relaxed and familiar. It could be argued this is evidence of specific kinds of bonds of intimacy afforded by interaction on Twitter. Certainly Twitter allows the audience an unprecedented chance to interact with public figures. Ross is one of the most interactive celebrities on the site, with 90.5% of his tweets adopting an interactive model and 75% of all tweets @replies. He is also a prolific tweeter, with almost 22,000 tweets between when he joined on 30 November 2008 and June 2014 – an average of 10.6 a day – and it appears he is writing these himself. However, this interaction is similar to the easy relationship performed by interviewers and celebrities on television chat shows, rather than evidence of an intense affiliation identified in many studies of relationships between celebrity and fan (for example, Horton and Wohl 1956, Thompson 1995, Rojek 2012). Next we will see that there is a distinct difference between interactions of general audience members such as @lennyukdeejay and self-identified fans – distinguishable by the construction of Twitter identity in relation to public figures – and how this influences interaction as it draws on processes of the interview.

#askmeanything (but I choose what I answer): using the constructs of the interview to interact with audience

Twitter, like the media interview, is a place where celebrities sell their goods, articulate why they make consumer choices, discuss their private lives and express moral judgements. In turn, audience members distinguish themselves from others by using and publicising their similarities with the stars' expressions of their identity and the purchase of related product. Bennett and Thomas (2014, p. 502) observe that Twitter allows for the creation of 'intimate communities', which allow fans to build a sense of belonging created in relation to their idol. It also offers opportunity for the audience to increase its own cultural capital within these groups via interaction or acknowledgement from celebrities. The audience, like promoted goods, can be endorsed by a 'retweet', 'favourite', or a direct message, which can be then shared with the fan's own followers. However, the vast majority of audience members are unlikely ever to be spotted by their idol. Twitter is full of tweets from fans begging

their idols to notice them, regularly including personal details of their own private lives in a bid to get attention. Preorganised chats, often highlighted by #ask+celebrityname, increase the chances for fans to be noticed. These crowd-sourced interviews offer focused moments of interaction with huge commercial opportunities for promotion. As such they are a popular way to try to structure interaction for a wide range of public figures. Seventeen of the top 20 Twitter celebrities identified in my study (85%) have carried out question-and-answer sessions on Twitter, either using the popular hashtag #ask+celebrityname or a personalised variation, usually relating to the launch of product. On occasion the questions are sourced from audience members via Twitter, but then the interview process itself is moved to another platform, such as a video website like YouTube, or a site belonging to a media company or corporation, to enable them greater control over the content and how it appears.

The popularity of crowd-sourced interviews among fans has led to many celebrities using them as a direct incentive to model audience behaviour for commercial ends. For example, in July 2013 pop and TV star Miley Cyrus promised an #askmiley session during which she would reveal the name of her latest album, if she was followed by approximately 100,000 more people to hit 13 million. Her fans posted thousands of tweets pleading for extra followers to reach the target. Direct interaction is therefore given as a reward for supporting promotion of the celebrity. As such, these crowd-sourced interviews have an interesting new dynamic in terms of how they are presented. Traditional interviews are usually given by stars to promote products, linking the products to the private and authentic persona. Of course this is also the main purpose of these new social media interviews. However, they are often presented as a thank you to fans, who are often so grateful for the opportunity of interaction that they extend the promotional opportunity by retweeting and discussing the content on their own timelines.

If we examine interactions as part of these sessions between Khloe Kardashian (@KhloeKardashian), who stars in the large number of US reality TV series featuring the Kardashian and Jenner families, and one of her fans or 'dolls', the driving dynamic, as in most interviews, is the promotion of goods. The interaction includes the hashtag #KardashianKollectionChat, a preorganised opportunity on 5 May 2013 offering her audience the chance to ask questions in relation to the launch of the Kardashian clan's latest fashion line:

> @MinieKardashian: @khloekardashian #KardashianKollectionChat What is your favourite item from the Kollection? Xo
> @KhloeKardashian: @MinieKardashian Love the new mint and black dress I'm wearing in our campaign shoot. The color denim and the fab print leggings! What's yours?
> @MinieKardashian: @KhloeKardashian I love that dress! From the Kollection in our stories, I love the black and white spotted dress! Sophisticated&chic! Xx
> @MinieKardashian: @KhloeKardashian #KardashianKollectionChat Have you ever had a day when you just sat at home and relaxed?
> @KhloeKardashian: @MinieKardashian yes, those are my FAVOURITE days, LOL
>
> (Twitter conversation between fan @MinieKardashian and reality TV personality Khloe Kardashian [@KhloeKardashian], 5 May 2013)

In this instance @MinieKardashian's questions appear to be chosen because she has previously interacted with her idol and her name is recognised, as demonstrated by this conversation just two months previously on 12 March:

@MinieKardashian: @KhloeKardashian YOU are perfection koko! Post me some
of your beauty!! Xo
@KhloeKardashian: @MinieKardashian LOL love you
@MinieKardashian: @KhloeKardashian I love you more!!! Xoxo
(Twitter conversation between fan @MinieKardashian and reality TV personality Khloe
Kardashian [@KhloeKardashian], 12 March 2013)

These interactions fit clearly within the agenda of Khloe Kardashian. The driving dynamic
of *Keeping up with the Kardashians* and associated shows is how the women have gone from
relative obscurity to turn themselves into an international successful brand. Alison Hearn
(2008, p. 197) describes self-branding as a 'commodity sign: it's an entity that works and, at the
same time, points to itself working'. This describes precisely the action of both shows. The
female cast members, in particular, are portrayed first as successful career women who own
shops, fashion and beauty lines and whose image endorses a range of other products. As we
watch them work on the show, we also see them highlight the way they carry out their brand
building to their fans through interaction on social media. Hearn describes how the 'immaterial
labour involved in the construction of image brand is simultaneously enacted in reality
television's narratives and on their shop floors' (2008, p. 203). This now extends to narratives
on the shop floor of Twitter, which is used daily by the Kardashian women. Reality celebrities[1]
use TV and social media as parallel vehicles for mass promotion. Both platforms also
construct their performances to make it more accessible to audience and sustain promotional
benefits. On Twitter, the Kardashians offer regular crowd-sourced interview moments, both
pre-organised relating to specific product and 'spontaneous' sessions framed as a reward to
fans. They are extraordinarily successful at using Twitter as part of their performance of 'the
real' tied to promotion, in a way that was once achieved by the celebrity interview. By June
2014, the cast of *Keeping up with the Kardashians* had between them more than 85 million
Twitter followers, which would put them as a collective at the very top of our Twitter table.

Goffman (1956, pp. 13–14) describes the 'expressive equipment', such as the physical
setting where a performance occurs, or the 'personal', consisting of items we 'most
intimately identify with the performers themselves', as the 'front'. Twitter, as a virtual
performance space, melds both the setting and the personal aspects of a front. While the
broader page layout, timeline system and typographical systems are part of the setting, this
is also formulated by the page and avatar of the celebrity's image and profile information.
As this is a virtual setting, the audience are able to mimic the personal front of the
celebrity in order to make themselves an easily identifiable part of their micropublic. This
can be seen when we look at the other side of the interaction between Khloe Kardashian
and her fan, who performs the role of a journalist in an interview process given to promote
product. 'Yasmin Kardashian' (@MinieKardashian) is part of an interesting trend on
Twitter of users who construct their identity – or profile – on the site entirely in relation
to the public figure they admire. While she may have other versions of self on other social
media, on Twitter she uses the surname of her idols, a picture of Kim Kardashian as her
avatar, the Kardashian 'brand' of the mirrored 'K' as part of her screen name and her user
description is entirely based around the levels of direct communication she has enjoyed
with her idols. Marshall (1997, p. 248) argues that celebrity offers us an example to live
by through exemplification of our idea of individual perfection, and that fandom allows
formation of clear consumer groups. The celebrity interview has played a principle role in
the performance of 'individual' to sell, or as DeCordova (1990, p. 108) puts it, demon-
strating 'the idea that satisfaction is found . . . in consumption and leisure'. This extends to
how fans use Twitter as both a site for displaying consumption and of leisure: here a fan is

using techniques which are a familiar part of the thematic patterns of the celebrity interview – such as questions about a latest fashion collection or how they spend their leisure time – to support the celebrity in the construction of their image.

As she goes about constructing her on-Twitter identity as a projection of an off-Twitter life lived in relation to her heroes and asks questions which support the building of Brand Kardashian, @MinieKardashian is rewarded with 'love' from her idol. Thompson (1995, p. 223) argues that the social world of the fan is highly structured with 'its own conventions, its own rules of interaction and forms of expertise, its own hierarchies of power and prestige, its own practices of canonisation'. 'Yasmin Kardashian' has reached more than 15,000 followers as a result of this work and has been rewarded with the ultimate canonisation of 'love' from her idol. She is now the centre of a throng of other 'dolls'; a micro-celebrity in her own right or what Marshall (2014, p. 163) would describe as a 'cultural meme', who has reached a level of fame by supporting the creation of someone else's online persona. But this capital can only ever exist if she remains a reflection of their identities and continues to support their promotion. If she tried to separate her online self, it would vanish. Early discussions around para-social interaction essentially see audiences as passive. It is all one way, with fans gazing at personalities without the opportunity to interact and articulate their desires and needs. However, when examining @MinieKardashian's Twitter presence, it is clear she is actually an active and acknowledged participant in the Kardashians' construction of their image and that her role as interviewer on these occasions is part of a much wider range of voluntary promotional work. While examinations of how fandom have moved beyond Horton and Wohl's (1956) original argument of para-social interaction due to its two-way nature, such forms of interaction as discussed here suggest it has also moved beyond their argument that they are governed 'by little or no sense of obligation, effort, or responsibility on the part of the spectator' (1956, p. 215). Analogue technologies meant the fan was 'free to withdraw at any moment' (1956, p. 215), but social media has created a working model through which fans must demonstrate the quality of their relationship through constant publicity, affirmation and use of the processes of the publicity machine such as engaging in interview moments. The effort fans put into this 'digital labour' (De Koshnik 2013, Sholtz 2013) creates a sense of obligation not only to the famous figure, but to other fans, highlighted by constant interaction. This tempers their ability to 'withdraw' from the relationship, as described by Horton and Wohl. There are significant penalties if they pull away: the loss of social standing and position within a group, celebrity endorsed 'cultural capital', and the chance to be one of the chosen interviewers during promotional activity. This is highlighted across a range of interactions between celebrities and their micropublics on Twitter, particularly in relation to pop stars who are the most consistently followed type of celebrity (see Table 1).

In the last three months of 2013, pop star Britney Spears offered two #ask sessions to coincide with the announcement of her Las Vegas residency and new album. Spears, as demonstrated in the statistical anaysis presented in Table 1, is rare in terms of celebrity Twitter users in that she almost equally interacts with the audience via public replies (36%), retweeting other people's posts or interactions with her (32%) or creating status updates (32%). She also allows her promotional team to construct a significant number of her tweets, particularly during periods where she is releasing new material or performing on stage, evidenced by tweets written in the third person or using promotional material for text. When comparing these #ask sessions with another interview carried out in repre-sentational media – *InStyle* magazine (Gonzalez-Whitaker 2014) – which hit stands the same week as her second Twitter session, there are recurrent dominant themes of discourse constructed in a remarkably similar way across platforms:

@SofiaElmaOneDay: If you were to get coffee with a regular (not famous) person, what things would you like to talk about? #AskBritneyJean
@britneyspears: @SofiaElmaOneDay Skin care, parenting … shoes, exercise, yoga … #AskBritneyJean
@PartyDiscoLove: @britneyspears What is your biggest inspiration
@britneyspears: @PartyDiscoLove My boys of course!
(Twitter #askBritney session, 29 October 2013)

@ITunesMusic: @britneyspears Do your kids ever inspire your lyrics? #AskBritney
@britneyspears: @iTunesMusic Of course! I've recorded a few songs in the past specifically about my boys and they are my daily inspiration.:) #AskBritney
@ITunesMusic: @britneyspears Are you excited for your Las Vegas residency?
@britneyspears: @iTunesMusic SO excited!! I'm counting down the days to December 27th! I REALLY think this is going to be my best show ever … #AskBritney
(Twitter #askBritney session, 6 December 2013)

What do you do to relax? Penny Kelen, Los Angeles
Britney: I love Spa treatments, especially ones at the Four Seasons. It's like, there is a God …
Your sons are always smiling? What makes you a good Mom? Chelsea Moyer, New York
Britney: I have passion and I have humor but I'm a serious Mom too …
(Gonzalez-Whitaker 2014)

The dominant themes relate to parenthood, work, leisure time and relationship with consumer goods. During the interviews Britney is an 'identity marker', expressing herself as a model 'of standardised lifestyle', which Dubied and Hanitzsch (2014, p. 140) argue reduces social complexitity to a manageable array of options that are 'ready to apply'. The interview process has always offered celebrities the opportunity to construct their lifestyles and indentities in a way which offers models of social behaviour – not least in relation to consumerism – for the audience to emulate. In both the Twitter and the magazine interviews, other versions of Britney – schoolgirl, virgin, whore, shaven-headed madwoman – are ignored, with content focusing on two dominant identity markers: successful pop star and dedicated mother. While on Twitter there are a number of questions asking about her past breakdowns, alleged drug use and the fact she does not have full custody of her children, these are ignored. Thus, while Twitter appears an uncontrolled crowd-driven platform where everyone has equal access, these moments are actually like those of the traditional interview where certain areas of discussion are clearly off-limits. However, supportive questions that perpetuate promotional opportunity far outweigh the difficult ones. For example, in the October #AskBritneyJean session, dozens of followers asked when the new album would be released, despite the fact an Internet search would be a quicker (and more likely to be successful) way to find this out. Indeed it might be assumed that fans would already know. This is a similar process to one often seen on the chat show, when the interviewer will ask about release dates of new material, despite the fact they already know the answer, simply to afford the opportunity for the interviewee to tell the audience.

The construction of these crowd-sourced interviews on Twitter and the one which appears in *InStyle* magazine are almost identical too. Spears retweets the questions into her own Twitter feed, before answering, mirroring how magazine Q&As are constructed. The fact she does so offers real insight into her – or her PR and marketing team's –

understanding of this process. It highlights that the purpose is not the interaction with individuals who pose questions but, as with an interview, it is promotional activity. It also acts as a news source for journalists. For example, Spear's revelation that her favourite author is evangelical preacher Max Lucado was picked up by a journalist, Colette Fahy, working for the world's most successful news website in terms of unique users, MailOnline, who produced an article (Fahy 2013) suggesting Spears could face a 'homophobic backlash' as Lucado is outspoken about gay rights. The journalist is no longer the interviewer, but has shifted to the role of a spectator to an interviewing process conducted by fans, on terms dictated entirely by celebrities and their PR teams. As Dubied and Hanitzsch (2014, p. 146) argue, the celebrity news journalist now does not act as an 'old fashioned news gatherer' involved in a process such as interviewing, but a 'filtering agent', inverting the 'practices on which traditional models of news journalism have been built'.

Having used #ask format crowd-sourced interviews when launching new material, pop star Katy Perry – who is top of the Twitter tree in terms of followers – now offers (or contrives) impromptu moments where she answers questions from her fans. Even though these moments do not have a direct link to the launch of a specific product, the interactions still follow the patterns of the celebrity interview – asking her about her work, her private life and what inspires her:

@katyperry:	Okay: 5 questions: 5 answers. Go.
@KatyCompletesMe:	@katyperry are you going to change your icon & header any time soon? I think it's time babe.
@katyperry:	Everything's about to change @KatyCompletesMe
@piersmorgan:	When are you coming on my show? @katyperry
@katyperry:	Well it's nice to see you on my impromptu Q & A @piersmorgan
@katyeuteamo:	@katyperry What's your favourite music now?
@katyperry:	The Disclosure record! @katyeuteamo
@VIDALOKATY:	Do you not think you're taking too long to release this album we're almost during of anxiety, sad reality being a fan is hard
@katyperry:	@VIDALOKATY the journey is hard, but the destination is great. Chin up
@superrynatural:	@katyperry you've been working a lot lately?
@katyperry:	Working more than you know!

(Twitter Q&A between fans and Katy Perry [@katyperry], 18 July 2013)

For Freud it is only the leaders of tribes – here applied to celebrity – who are completely individual. Everyone else must sublimate their own desires and allow the leaders' desires to speak for them (Freud in Marshall 1997, pp. 22–25). When we look at this interaction between Katy Perry and her fans, four out of the five questions she chooses to answer have used her name – part of her personal front (Goffman 1956) – to construct their own Twitter user identity. Perry is 'central to the formation of both collective behaviour and the process of identification' (Marshall 1997, p. 24). These people have formed themselves into an easily identifiable consumer collective or, as Marshall would describe, a micropublic. The only person who Perry answers who is not part of this micropublic is someone else who has achieved the state of an individual – another celebrity. She does not answer former CNN host and celebrity interviewer Piers Morgan's question, but simply acknowledges his presence. Morgan's decision to publicly ask this question is interesting. He is using Twitter to both

bypass the usual method of setting up an interview and to prompt a response from Perry in order to reinforce his own celebrity status

There are also specific lessons the audience can learn from this opportunity to be part of a crowd-sourced mini-interview. For one, repressing their own identity and constructing another in relation to Perry makes fans more likely to be noticed by her and offers a greater chance for interaction. Crowd-sourced interviews also give Perry access to this consumer collective and a way to use them to support the creation of her identity. The chances to appear authentic and formulate image are similar to those given in the interview process. However, even with the influence of press agents and their attempts to control interviews, there is still unpredictability, not least because it relies on direct human interaction, which at times can go spectacularly wrong. Here, Perry has heightened control of the image of her identity she wishes to project as she can pick which questions she answers and which to ignore. Twitter allows her to control the interview process, moving it out of the hands of other areas of the media machine – such as risky journalists – and into her own. She has power over the audience, rewarding those who promote her through using elements of her 'personal front' and choosing questions that allow her to articulate the elements of her identity she wishes to highlight as important.

Conclusion

It is clear the constructs of the interview are used to structure interaction between celebrities and fans on Twitter, transforming it from unmediated to mediatised performance. Audiences are encouraged to be part of this process and the continuous interplay between 'the self and a micropublic' to construct persona, and a 'massive collective desire to become part of the new social construction of identity and public display' (Marshall 2014, p. 163), has resulted in structure and forms that sustain promotional activity. As such, the influence of representational media persists because its structures are being used in presentational spaces. Micropublics are linked to content and each other via the individual celebrity's performance and are part of the process of the creation and maintenance of persona. The use of the celebrity interview to construct interaction melds the audience as creator and journalistic practice. As such the audience, in following established constructs during direct access, has gained a greater understanding that the glimpse it is getting into the 'real' life of a public figure is a construct, and also values its role in constructing it. Equally the celebrity and his or her promotional team sees its benefit, demonstrated not least by the high number of crowd-sourced interview moments offered to fans. This enables the site to supplant the traditional celebrity journalism interview as the principal platform for promotion, through enabling audiences to 'see' the authentic person behind the celebrity image. Like the interview it is also a performance, with clear parameters and boundaries. The celebrity and his or her promotional agents create the space and set the rules of engagement for these crowd-sourced interviews – without ever explicitly doing so – giving the performance greater authenticity through the illusion that nothing is off limits.

However, is this Twitter interaction also able to fulfil the key role of the interview as a mechanism for checking the authenticity of this performance? Using the structures themselves may mask the void created by the absence of interviewers as cultural mediators or arbitrators of authenticity, but ultimately as the celebrities and promotional teams choose which questions to answer, the process is one almost entirely on their terms. Indeed, as they are able to present promotion as reward, publicly performing bonds of intimacy as a way to increase the capital of their brands, we have to wonder whether these

performances are entirely cynical or sincere (Goffman 1956, pp. 10–12). While the interview process has always been a highly constructed performance, the role of journalists has been one of arbitration, checking the authenticity of the person in front of them. The arbitration element of interviewing through crowd-sourced moments on Twitter is often limited by celebrities choosing to only answer questions from an easily identifiable fan base and ignoring more difficult ones, particularly if these are something which could either damage the version of self they are presenting at that moment or their brand. The audience is not simply embracing the opportunity for unfettered glimpses into the real lives of the famous when engaging with Twitter, but also the opportunity to be part of constructing celebrity performance, and often behaves in ways which support celebrities' promotional activities in order to participate. For Goffman, repeated engagement with a performance – such as these Twitter interview moments – makes it less cynical as it moves through a 'cycle of disbelief to belief' (1956, p. 12). Thus, while these interactions may aim to influence consumer behaviour and despite audiences understanding that they are highly constructed, they may nevertheless be accepted as authentic. As such we may question whether audience acceptance of the authenticity of celebrity performance on Twitter is dependent on the illusion of unstructured glimpses into real life at all.

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Note

1. I have deliberately omitted the term 'television' from this description to demonstrate how this construction is networked/multi-platform and therefore also happens beyond the boundaries of TV shows.

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