

The imaging of subject and audience personalities through the lens of technology-enhanced advertising

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In the previous chapter Gloria Moss appraised the impact of personality and user preference for design and advertising environments. Moss traced ways that personality and personal expression were understood in the creation of goods, communications and in the reaction of consumers, where she found evidence of congruity between the personality of the stimulus creators and the personality of the observer(s) in positive preferences.

This chapter follows on by demonstrating ways that personality types have been attracted to popular music artists online environments and motivated to active participation by like-minds in branded spaces. It shows two instances of congruity operating through commercial websites through what is often termed pull-marketing. In doing this it also illustrates how key visitors are targeted for specific web spaces by commercial agents, then retained in those spaces by content that is relevant to their tastes, values and modes of conversation (what adTech practitioners term ‘retargeting’).

A review of the cases then addresses the extent of congruity between the personality of artists and their niche audiences, as reflected in the co-opted input of site visitors. I contend that, more than like attracting like, congruity is reinforced by active participants – fans – who contribute to reinforcing existing values, aesthetic sensibilities and tones of voice already operating when they first land in artist’s web space. I unpack examples of viewers active co-generation and spreading of artists communications, to closely align themselves with site personalities (similar to that described by Putnam, 2000; Howe, 2009).

This type of marketing and advertising activity described in this chapter tends to be labelled as Neuromarketing (Steidl, 2014). It draws on big data sets from social networks and the other eighty percent of web link recommendations forwarded through one-to-one email (what specialist AdTech firm RadiumOne, who feature largely in this chapter, term Dark Social). Both cases are related to the music industry and show how marketers develop a tailored understanding of online consumers to predict subjects and sites they would be ‘naturally’ drawn to. These predictions have been determined by the social environments web users spend longer in and interact with and their habitual (and often disparate) click-through connection patterns. Predictions are also based on the types of content viewers share with friends and the frequency of such activity.

What I have described so far sits with the Homogeneity principle, described earlier by Moss, where a person of one type is attracted to another of similar type. In this case the motivating factor is a ‘personal brand’ – a musician or band, where web space they occupy has been (mostly) shaped by them, requires continued personal input but also relies on a wider community other than professional designers, a like-minded community of people to maintain the continuous flow of updated content in their image. It is the continuous sharing and re-adaption of original messages, I argue, that reinforces inherent personal characteristics of the artists, the identity of community and the individuals reflected within it, in a way that is unique to the particular community of self-opted followers.

Case 1: One Direction

At their peak of popularity in May 2014 the pop band One Direction announced an ‘On the Road Again’ 2015 tour to promote their new studio album. The first seven (of 80) shows were scheduled for Australia, in a tour that spanned 22 countries over an eight month period. The first leg of the tour was seen as crucial by their record label, Syco, in raising awareness and anticipation of the tour dates across the world. To fill venues around the world the first concerts needed to stoke enough demand, particularly via their potentially massive volume core followers, whose word-of-mouth sharing of branded communications through friend networks offline and on social media, had the capacity to make it a big event and highly relevant.

The challenge for the neurosocial marketing and audience research agency Nine Live was to ensure all venues sold out in Australia, then to ensure the ripple of publicity flowed into One Direction’s fans personally shared content. Although the record label amassed data on primary adopters from official One Direction subscription sites, these were not necessarily the followers who would actively talk or share the band’s content. Many followers were discreet – they didn’t necessarily want others to have the similar access privileges to content that they enjoyed.

So when tickets went on sale Nine Live used their data of online social habits to segment and re-target relevant audiences during the first wave of orchestrated groundswell activity. The first seven concerts sold out in hours. A second drive around the release of One Direction’s album (early November 2014) stimulated a huge volume of articles and social content sharing about the group which, with unique band information, was fed to selected active followers. Sharing activity then caused a reverberating spike in concert bookings and more global awareness in late November, which was rebooted by personal appearances when the band arrived in Australia to perform at the *Aria Awards*. Increases in social sharing behaviour in networks correlated directly with a spike in sales. Further exclusive information drips to active One Direction site users stimulated ticket transactions and content sharing, which ramped up steadily throughout the year leading up to their February 2015 tour.

RadiumOne had provided Nine Live with data to locate prospective ‘super-fans’ from a data set of 900 million monthly online users, who had shared content relating to One Direction, band members or related pop acts. RadiumOne made particular use of information gleaned from their short URL ‘Po.st’ link, positioned at the end of news articles, which sharers used to forward information to family or friends. They also extracted from an social sharing survey they conducted with data analysts Tpoll in 2014, drawn from over nine thousand consumers in UK, North America, Europe, Australia and France. In this survey they found that;

- Eighty Four percent of people share content online globally;
- Thirty Two percent of people who share content online will only share via email and other closed-access one-to-one channels (termed ‘Dark Social’ by Marketers); 69% of all sharing activity takes place via Dark Social globally compared to 23% via Facebook;
- Thirty Six percent of personalised one-to-one sharing of content with close friends takes place on mobile devices globally.

(RadiumOne 2015)

For One Direction's tour campaign social media forums authored by the band and their team, and badged as official sites, became the primary environments for a central One Direction community. Information was released in waves on twitter, where it ran through a series of hashtags, primarily #1Dontheroadagain, and the central fan streams @onedirection, which had 28.8 million followers at its peak (with 9,830 tweets and 1,596 photo and video shares), and @1DFamily (1.26 million followers). This was a primary channel for breaking information. Instagram became the main repository for images of the group taken by band members and close entourage. Instagram site One Direction News (@1d.legendary.updates) attracted close to ninety thousand followers and seventy thousand posts at the time of the concert, and content badged as official on the *onedirection* site attracted close to fourteen million followers for over five hundred posts. Facebook became the main repository for new images of the One Direction. Their official Facebook site and One Direction: On the Road Again Tour site had over 21,000 active massagers sharing images of the concerts plus reminiscences, attracting 39 million Facebook likes.

Of all their channels the twitter stream #1Dontheroadagain most clearly characterises this niche community's personality type, based on their message traits and the tone of engagement. Comments attracting over fifty re-tweets tended to reiterate other statements of unbounded excitement for newly announced band activity, with happy expressions composed from the limited repertoire of emojis and affirmative punctuation keyboard characters available on most smart phones. Messages tended to recalibrate authored band news with little added information, just excited expressions. Hashtag message chains were comprised mostly of half-sentence additions to initial statements – especially following messages posted from countries not on the band's itinerary. In essence those that got tickets for the concerts emoted excited anticipation while those not able to go were wistful in tone. The consistency of short emotionally-charged messages contrasts with the types of long form sentences found on cause-related sites – for instance for charities or political organisations. Little actual information other than shared branded content was actually posted amongst the many thousands of viewer-generated messages. The messages were, consistently, (re)moulded around self-aware personal expressions that reinforced the primary motivations and the paradigm of the site.

It is worth highlighting here that it is positive personal traits that are being reviewed here rather than personal states. Clinical Psychologist Alan Carr observed that personality traits are transitory and situation-specific, much like the Goulding's web environment, and differ from states which are more enduring across a wider range of contexts (Carr 2011: 48-50). **In this web space participants are demonstrably like-minded and repeatedly reinforce their common 'passion point' of the band's live performances. However the flow of narrative in the series of viewer posts were steered when band members or the record label simply re-tweeted messages. Their personal involvement made some messages more shared (hence more relevant) than others. To this extent the band and their agents could curate the flow of messages about them on band-dedicated social media sites.**

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Table X.1 Coding: characteristics of #1Dontheroadagain' posts (based on 200 messages)

O = Original R = Re-appropriate F = Forward message, unmediated	Message type/example	hashtag	word length	Date	Symbols/emojis
O	Asserting involvement: <i>day2"" the best concert ever</i>	#1Dontheroadagain	6	24.03.15	!!!!!!! :)
O	Asserting connection <i>Can't wait to see you guys in Philippines</i> #1Dontheroadagain @Harry_Styles @zaynmalik @Louis_Tomlinson @NiallOfficial @Real_Liam_Payne	#1Dontheroadagain	8	15.03.15	kissing emoji
O	Anticipation Ahhh! Omg so close	#1Dontheroadagain; #onedirection	4	08.01.15	Smiley face emoji, confetti, party popper and heart
O	Demonstrating commitment <i>Now I just have to wait till September first to see my boys again</i>	#1Dontheroadagain; #onedirection	14	01.11.14	!!!!, tears emoji, gritted teeth emoji, heart emoji
O	Personal address @NiallOfficial Hai Niall, I want to see you in Indonesia	#1DOnTheRoadAgain	9	02.11.14	Emoji heart
O	Reach out/self-validation: <i>I GOT TICKETTTTTTTTTSSSSSSSSSS</i>	#1Dontheroadagain; #JOZI #SOWETO #SOCCERCITY	3	28.05.14	!!!!!!!!!!!!!! !
R	Self-positioning: @BigConcerts MOMENTS #1dontheroadagain	#1DOnTheRoadAgain	3	21.05.14	
F	Reach-out: <i>"If you're camping out for the #1DOnTheRoadAgain SA shows please let us know using #1DCampOut" - @TessShorten</i>	#1DOnTheRoadAgain ; #1DCampOut	15	22.03.15	Emoji smiley face
O	Dismay: <i>thinks its a bit unfair only telstra customers can only purchase pre sale tickets for #1dontheroadagain actually really unfairrrrr</i>	#1Dontheroadagain; #nothappy	20	18.05.14	-
F	@onedirection TICKETS SALES ON FRIDAY 9am MAKE SURE U GET TICKETS!!	#1Dontheroadagain	10	19.05.14	-

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The immediacy of personal media - particularly mobile phones proved crucial for the record label, because they could drive rapid real-time action at will by triggering active followers to

share breaking band news. Followers seemed to act on impulse, which is borne out by the timing, brevity and immediacy of language used in posts. For instance it is noticeable that the first wave of messages from early sharers in the aftermath of new band content tended to be a re-tweet of the news simply tagged with an emotive expression of joy – most often ‘OMG’, a smiley emoji or simply ‘!!!’ (between three and ten exclamation marks seemed to be the norm). RadiumOne’s data intelligence and Nine Live’s management of breaking information stimulated an undercurrent of anticipation through those who self-determined themselves to be close enough and compelled to the want active participation. Clearly a split-second trigger was activated in viewers to ignite impulse. Whether or not biologists would question marketing’s adoption of their terminology, the notion of an ‘dopamine rush’ would certainly part-explain the personal urge to be seen as an early source of new information, before a more reasoned second or third-person form of communication kicked in (*Marketing News* 2014).

To a large extent this sits neatly with notions of the Homogeneity Principle described earlier, where active participants in One Direction’s network channels are being fed content then encouraged to mediate it by applying their own perceptions in order to re-affirm their affinity to the community. Ultimately it was the site community who flavoured the empathy between the live concerts, the perceiver and artists One Direction. Karande’s view is pertinent to this activity, that there should be congruence between the brand personality and ‘the consumer’s self-concept on the basis that purchases are thought to offer a vehicle for self-expression’ (Karande et al. 1997, also cited by Moss). This sits with a similar observation by American anthropologist and fashion writer Ted Polhemus (1996), who reasoned that consumers tended to adopt popular brands as ready-made identities, which served as short-hand communication for their own values – wearing dress codes and sharing in esoteric reference points as if to show association by proxy. Comments on One Direction’s branded website share a similar function. Posted comments do more than reaffirm belonging: they update their author’s affinity to their friends and wider One Direction community. Given that this requires followers to engage in task-related activity in a context where self-presentation is emphasized, from Hassenzahl’s perspective these are the conditions where closeness to the subject can lead to a level of consumption that is of a higher order than mere consumption (Hassenzahl 2007).

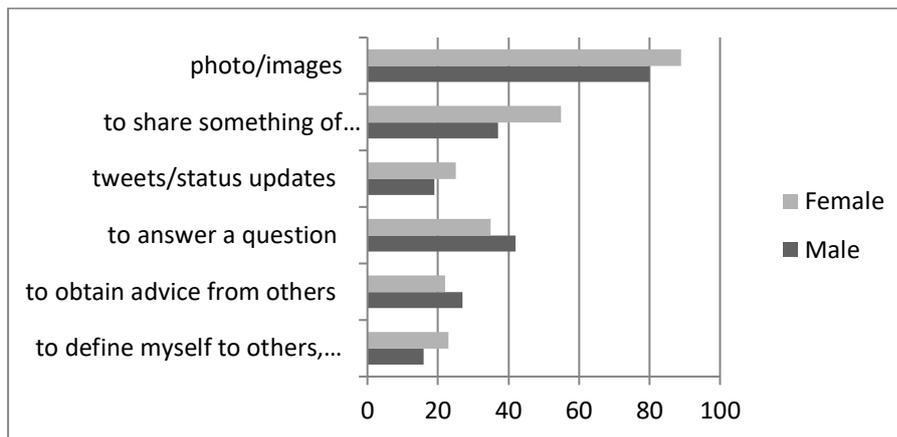
Context: behind-the-scenes mapping of One Directions core followers

The agency that shaped data on One Direction’s core followers, RadiumOne, leveraged their intent-based data on users to identify the most active fans, likely to act as ambassadors on the subject’s behalf. They employed Dr Peter Steidl, a specialist in Neuromarketing to examine the relationship between sharing online and consumer’s emotional state. They focussed on how and why Australian youth share content online and discovered that most tended to share immediate key moments of happiness or sadness – especially when related to events. Eighty nine percent of women and eighty percent of men were found to share images to capture a special the moment while fifty five percent of

women and thirty seven percent of men felt compelled to share something of emotional value (RadiumOne 2015) .

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Table X.2 What and why Australians share content online (percent, drawn from a sample of nine thousand)



(RadiumOne, 2015, 5)

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After this, Steidl then focussed more closely on the sensation of message sharing. He addressed what prospective followers were feeling at the time of sharing and receiving stimulating content and what motivated them to share content with their own networks. He hit on the idea of ‘dopamine’, a biological term associated with an inherent organic chemical that stimulates brain and body activity. Dopamine is thought to stimulate a heightened emotional states of desire and drives pleasure-seeking behaviour, when motivated into positive activity around the subject-matter. Dopamine (in 2016) is a popular reference point for marketing and crops up in Consumer Planners because it gets to the dichotomy of motivations that prompt people to buy goods or share messages. Figuring *why* people become active participants will help marketing practitioners work out how to apply their data and creativity most purposefully.

According to RadiumOne and Steidl’s account of dopamine in their research findings:

‘We know that consumers go through a number of phases when:

- They experience a dopamine release which makes them feel good about their sharing initiative
- Not long afterwards, as the released dopamine dissipates, they will feel a desire for another dopamine hit

- This makes them more receptive to any proposition they hope might deliver a dopamine release (note that this process takes place in the non-conscious so consumers are typically not aware of why they are more receptive), and;
- If the message we deliver is aligned with the content they shared earlier, we know that they are more open to our offer than consumers who have not shared relevant content'

(Steidl & RadiumOne 2015, 5)

Neuroscientist Mauricio Delgado extended this application to communications, where social networking stimulus can have the same neurological effect on consumers as offline staples of living – ‘The same brain areas’ he claimed, ‘that are activated for food and water are activated for social stimuli’ (Balleine, Delgado, Hikosaka: 2007).

Music is clearly a similar stimulus that many fans are prepared to happily share with their friends. Music stimulates an emotional response that has a history of connecting with lifestyle preferences and value systems. Companies like RadiumOne tap in to such passion-points, re-connecting users by reinforcing shared values at key motivational moments. This activity has proven to heighten the scale and reach of a niche community around artists as a focal point.

Case 1: Ellie Goulding

British pop singer Ellie Goulding’s website was also shaped as the focal point to drive message-posting by her core followers. Goulding’s record label, Universal Music Group, manage a diverse portfolio of artists spanning a wide spectrum of music genres. The label actively supports its artists’ activity through public sharing channels including Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat and LinkedIn.

Universal manage Ellie Goulding’s website, www.elliegoulding.com, where centrally authored and managed content is posted. Links to videos, merchandise and tour dates are posted. It is a subscription site and, unlike One Direction’s social platforms, there is little scope for viewers to co-created content. However viewers can engage in two ways - on the official site as responses to content, posted in a message stream at the foot of news releases, or by forwarding the pages via one of nine links to social media on offer.

The links on pages that enable viewers to post content through their own online sites was crafted between Universal and RadiumOne. Quick-link domains such as ell.li (Ellie Goulding) were created to simplify viewer sharing. In practice using the links also served to identify the most active key individuals from the artist’s followers, then designate them as a seed audience which could then be supported with exclusive news and content on Goulding. They were then motivated to share messages and inspire their own friend communities. So followers were using the quick links www.elliegoulding.com as a repository to draw and share content from, while the label were using data this activity accrued to determine who their best seed audiences were.

Messages posted on official sites tended to assume the space was the space to contact Goulding directly - artist's epicentre. Messages were speaking directly to her (as the table illustrates below). Questions about the tour (*Is there an opening act for tonight*) and direct messages to the artist (*I am excited to see you tomorrow night in Orlando, FL! I absolutely love listening to all your music! I can't wait!!!! :)*) were direct address. The majority of messages were simple variations of 'I love you Ellie'.

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Table X.3 Coding: characteristics of visitor messages posted on the site www.elliegoulding.com

Original (O), Re-appropriated (R) or unmediated Forward (F) message	Message type	typical word length	Days following/ before a key event (typically)	Symbols/ emojis	instances (from sample of 100 posts)
O	Direct question/request	13	-5	!!!	8
O	Direct praise		1	;) , heart	22
O	Concert critique	43	1	:)	11
O	Emoting (<i>I Love you</i>)	5	sporadic	X, !!!	30
O	End-of-tour reflection	13	7	:)	3
R	Reciting song lyrics	40	sporadic		2
O	Recount meeting artist	25	sproadic	-	5
O	Praising performance	15	3	:)	14
O	Comment on awards	32	1	:(2
	On appearance in press	8	2	-	3

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Most messages tended to address the singer as the focal point rather than the community (which was often the case on One Direction channels). The more considered posts, usually critiquing concerts or praising performances, stood out from the majority of emotive comments and were longer. Most messages however were short, featured emojis, which seemed less adult and more in keeping with juvenile dialogue. This may point to the roots of wanting to attach to the artist 'in' the website. Carr (2011) considered that people choose friends who are broadly similar to themselves in terms of attributes, skills and values (2011, 279 - citing Swann 1983). Adult attachment and maintaining stable relationships is rooted – Carr states – in childhood attachment experiences. For followers on Goulding's site (and younger followers in One Direction's web spaces), this personality trait consists of;

'... extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability facilitate the development of friendships, and environments that facilitate the development of friendships offer opportunities for meeting with people who have similar attributes, skills and values. These environments may be associated with education, work, leisure, or family activities'.

(Carr 2011, 279-282)

While these are rather sweeping environmental contexts, in an online environment such meetings around what marketing terms ‘passion points’ makes for the basis of an idealised basis for friendships, removed from the hassle of education, work and family environments that Car described.

Context: persuasive impact of Ellie Goulding’s online community

According to Steidl in RadiumOne’s report (2015), There are a number of principles at play in such web spaces that make the persuasiveness of a pro-artist community emotively powerful;

‘We have ‘mirror neurons’ that allow us to feel the emotions that other people feel. This is how we can feel the anger, fear, happiness and other emotions delivered by entertainment experiences. Our mirror neurons are more likely to be activated when we are looking at people and content we relate to... We also know that the brain is designed to take shortcuts... One of these shortcuts is to follow what others are doing. Behavioural economists call this ‘social validation’: when many consumers engage with or buy something we assume it is worthwhile doing the same, eliminating the need to carefully consider the activity or offer’.

(Steidl 2015)

Steidl’s assertion of a biological drive does not sit at odds with the ‘homogeneity principle’ described by Moss in the previous chapter. The buzz of self-selecting a community that shares a core interest is the basis for attraction – driven by a shared motivational point. To this extent Steidl reinforces notions that people tend to prefer other people similar to themselves. In the case of viewers messages posted on Ellie Goulding’s website the tendency of ‘self-reference criteria’ at play is clearly evident in the comments on concerts, tour recollections and praise. Such self-references embellish the marketing content by adding first-hand accounts that add testimony by way of endorsement.

From the perspective of Hassenzahl (2007) engagement with Goulding’s web space can have a task-related context – the ability to share content on Goulding, which allows participants scope for self-presentation or personal identity by co-opting the collective personality and views of the site, and views and values associated with Goulding herself. To this extent there is clear congruence between the brand personality and the consumer’s self-concept on the basis that attending gigs, events and buying branded merchandise offers a vehicle for self-expression (Karande et al. 1997).

Steidl (2015) goes further in reasoning that social sharing activates the rewards system of the brain, providing a release stimulated by pleasure-seeking activities similar to those triggered by sex, food and exercise. While those triggers may be more physical the importance for marketing of acting in the "now" moment was reinforced by RadiumOne’s statistic that 34% of sales through social activity occurs within twenty minutes of the sharing event and advertising message being viewed (2015).

Conclusions

Social sharing is more than an indicator of interest or receptiveness, and has become a focal point for marketers to connect with consumers in their ultimate moment of openness, where emotive rather than reasoned responses tend to be at play.

A second observation from the two cases is that once web users have found an online community there is a tendency to belong and reaffirm beliefs that drew them to the site in the first place. In both examples viewers communities reinforced existing personality types and reaffirmed traits through a continuous use of localised and colloquial communication. A shared and common outlook and repeated points of reference created a 'shared own world' within sites. It is worth noting that the most liked and re-tweeted viewer-generated messages (the ultimate sign of community approval) fitted with the positive tone of artists. The tendency for participation centred on updating the frame of reference, to redefine what was important at any given moment. This also reaffirmed existing empathies between artist and fan-follower by reinforcing like-minded views.

For members of niche fan communities this made it difficult to remark against the momentum of the sites. Not to participate at all was to miss out. So for marketing this constant coerced flow of messages is an opportunity to step closer in harnessing the innate preferences of people within like-minded communities.

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