

Dance Professionals in New South Wales and social media: Facebook groups in Self-promotion and togetherness in online communities

Abstract

This conference paper discusses the different dynamics between social media and communities. As the web 2.0 emerged, it challenged conventional barriers like physical and affective distance. To illustrate my point, I focused on dance and performance professionals that use Facebook for promotion and to build their online communities. As dance teachers in New South Wales are mostly freelance or self-employed, they count on Facebook's Groups features such as reviews and comments as an affordable way to promote their business. Apart from the economic perspective, Facebook is also capable of strengthening support and cooperation between followers of a dance practitioner's profile. Impression management is equally crucial to sustain a perception of trustworthiness and prestige within the dance industry. It is interesting that just as in real life groups, online communities are also impacted by hierarchy, status and dominant discourses. Despite that the dance professional in a social media group may never physically meet all their members, Facebook still provides ways for identity verification and instant exposure. Indeed, Facebook Group's instruments to self-promotion integrate the business with the social side of a dance business, allowing members to build rapport and representation, with a good prospect of further positive developments.

Introduction

Arts organizations, particularly the ones within the dance industry, are embracing technologies as never seen before. Dance companies and professionals around the world have been utilizing cutting edge tools to streamline customer's needs; from text messages and mobile phones to the virtual reality and instant connectivity of web 2.0. Avoiding those technologies would greatly undermine the survival of any business, more so, within the dance industry. Consequently, while witnessing the global transition to web 2.0, scholars theorize that the past rigid and homogenous society would become a 'global community of communication' (Delanty, 2018; Hampton & Wellman, 2018). This tremendous change in society has its origin in the Internet which is basically a network of computational devices connected via common protocols (Hunsinger, 2013). Just as in the real world, online communities are composed of users bonded by specific topics of interest which are meaningful to them; surprisingly, that is what current social media sites like Facebook are all about. In the arts, social media is particularly beneficial as a mediator of interactions not only at a social but at economic levels by the use of marketing mechanisms. For the almost fifty thousand artists in Australia, having a Facebook profile is a must no matter the size or geographical location of a business (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017). For the purpose of this conference paper, I will focus on the aspects that make social media unique while discussing that although all social media platforms are used by dance and performance professionals for promotion, the affordances provided by Facebook allow them to build and strengthen professional networks and communities.

Social media becoming a marketing tool

Since more than 70% of Dance and performance professionals in New South Wales are self-employed or freelance, they are relying more on social media for marketing purposes (Throsby and Petetskaya 2017). Given the massification of the internet, individuals who have never been in physical contact could still be bonded to the point of building what was called 'virtual communities' (Gruzd et al. 2011). Within the vastness of the internet, dancers are increasingly using social media sites, particularly FaceBook to reach geographically dispersed people who share their interest in dance. As a result, social media sites expanded rapidly, opening new areas of study where user generated content is overcoming old models of centralized information (Cooke & Buckley, 2008). A global survey of nearly 30,000 respondents suggests that less than 50% still trust traditional advertising, while 92% of participants rely on online word-of-mouth including social media reviews (Dijkmans et al, 2015). This shows that online communication is key for the customer's decision making and attitude formation which leads to credibility. Consequently, dance teachers, either free-lance or self-employed, are utilizing facebook to promote their businesses given that few clicks on a computer could connect them with students and/or followers. Creating the sense of community in a Facebook's fan page does not require all its members to post, instead, a small cluster of active participants would be enough (Aguiton & Cardon 2007). Hence, social media, also described by scholars as 'Networked Art', may open new frontiers for interaction and specially collaboration with the audience in the form of crowdsourcing for example (Sant, 2013).

Facebook's features: A bonding device

The affordances of Facebook in particular enable for complex methods of self-promotion and strengthening community support and solidarity. From its inception, Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg manifested his intention to make Facebook a social utility tool to connect people despite opposers who saw Facebook

as useful only for the privileged classes (Papacharissi, 2009). After fifteen years, Facebook became known as a widely available “Social Software” which paved the way for the revolution of ‘web 2.0’ (Murugesan, 2020). Some affordances of Facebook groups which are valuable for dance artists include: Live video transmissions, event scheduling and customer’s reviews. Although, its highest feature is creating a “virtual settlement” where collaboration and solidarity will benefit everyone in the group. For example, the Facebook Group Dance Teachers NSW accept posts of any member who may offer or request professional services, such exchange is effective in enabling self-promotion and reinforcing everyone’s sense of community while also building networks of like-minded professionals. Such elements are unique to Facebook as even the real world would not allow instant communication to geographically disperse individuals, thus, new opportunities for further cooperation are available. Conversely, Thomson et al. (2013) argues that despite that facebook is free to join, there are still costs associated in terms of training, equipment and marketing in order to self-promote dance services. For instance, Facebook announcements could range between seventy cents and ten dollars for a single banner not considering production and monitoring costs. The challenge more than acquiring new clients is to build a relationship with them via promotion.

Managing perceptions to influence decision making

Impression management is vital for dance and performance professionals to build followers and for self-promotion. Facebook as a promotion medium has the advantage of being immediate, direct and easy to reach, the obstacle relies on how effective the dance professional manages their profile on social media (Baruah, 2012). Impression management is defined as the handling of an entity’s representation to the exterior; whereas the positive perception of others is critical (Leary, 2001). Specifically for dance practitioners, impression management acts either at a conscious and/or subconscious level once a customer interacts with a dancer’s Facebook profile. For example, a new customer who sees a dancer’s profile with thousands of followers, comments and who regularly posts will have a positive

perception which will ultimately open the opportunities for cooperation. That process started from a verification of identity where the viewer was satisfied that a real person was behind the facebook page, after, there is a reputation screening that Facebook facilitated by allowing comments, reviews and ratings (Donath & Boyd, 2004). One key characteristic of impression management is the dynamics of how status is acquired and preserved. Virtual communities, just as real-life communities, have hierarchies where active contributors are recognized and even followed (Labrecque et al. 2013). Another interesting phenomenon is that a Facebook user can be portrayed by an avatar that basically is a representation of a person. This impersonated character relies on its anonymity to create what Delanty (2018) described as a 'new intimacy'. Yet, the avatar must satisfy its viewers that they are dealing with a professional in the dance industry. In contrast, Donath & Boyd (2004) argued that avatars in social media, especially the ones focused on professional services, should be avoided, given that it could lead to a network of other false personas which defeats the purpose of offering a business services. In fact, impression management and self-promotion would require real people within its fandom in order to imprint to them their ideal ethos of participation, interaction, and reliability expected from them (Hunsinger & Senft, 2013). As a result, impression management is manifested to the audience in the form of a virtual avatar which embodies the creative proposal of the dance practitioner.

Physicality vs. online presence

Unlike many other professions, physicality is an important part of the impression management and online interactions for dance and performance professionals. That is backed by Trepte et al. (2011) who established that the benchmark for emotional and affective relationships within a community could only be achieved by physical interaction which means that the online world is external to our true self. Another advantage of the online world for self-promotion is that different social classes and geographically dispersed individuals encounter a common ground in dance which is known as 'convergence culture' (Hampton & Wellman, 2018; Baym, 2007). Thus, such merge of realities in the virtual world is described by Nathan Jurgenson (2012)

as an 'augmented reality' where the physical and the online do not replace but complement each other. For example, any contact on a Facebook group could freely engage at any point with others when needed. Conversely, technology may potentially become a danger to our freedom given that personal information could be subject to fraud or surveillance (Hunsinger, 2013). Physicality for impression in online Facebook groups could be promoted by posting actual photos of participants along with transparency on information such as age, location, interests and so on. By doing that, a form of contextual integrity will imprint interactions with a level of truthfulness that make up for the non physical interaction (Lange, 2007). Physicality then, as a Self promotion tool can be emulated by two processes: a) Identity verification by showing current and real photos and posts, and b) Ethical values to our interactions by respecting the Facebook community guidelines.

Social media's main feature: Bonding and togetherness

In addition to self-promotion, dance and performance professionals use social media and Facebook groups to strengthen peer solidarity and internal community. This is due to the emergence of Web 2.0 whose sociological aspects studies the dynamics between individualism and cooperativism. It is interesting to notice that in the virtual world cooperation does not require an ex ante altruistic intention, it is enough with using the features of the social media group within the guidelines of the community (Aguiton & Cardon, 2007). Solidarity and cooperation in Facebook's groups are also facilitated by the decentralization of information where even a new member could access previous posts and interactions. Hence, what started with a social media group membership, it could promptly end in an actual commercial exchange; such process is also known as 'social commerce' which:

'Refers to exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages' (Yadav et al. 2013, p. 312).

Decades before the Internet became massive, scholars like Rheingold (1993) informed us that the Internet would offer an alternate reality that could tangibly impact our personal interactions (as cited by Delanty, 2018). Consequently, social media in the form of Facebook groups constitutes an effective tool of self-promotion for dance professionals given that they encourage solidarity and build emotional bonds in participants.

Conclusion

I argued that despite numerous social media websites tailored to the promotional needs of dance professionals, Facebook is unique in allowing the creation of professional networks that led to diverse virtual communities. Although conventional groups have not been replaced, social media as web 2.0., comprised the major advance in societal changes for the past millennial. Particularly Facebook, played a prime role in producing and disseminating information of dance practitioners into specific groups. Also, I argued that self-employed and freelance dancers rely on promotion to succeed in the arts, thus, maintaining a professional online presence is crucial to engage a virtual community despite geographical or cultural separation. Furthermore, the affordances of Facebook are capable not only to connect to others but to stimulate community support and solidarity which is a highly regarded asset in the dance industry. For that, impression management is important for two reasons; either to build a virtual community and to engage with current members. Yet, web 2.0 is plagued with concerns of privacy and security along with the possibility that anyone could produce misleading fake profiles. It is clear that dance is an essentially corporeal practice, then, physicality is the centre of impression management, for

that, Facebook offers tools to share videos, pictures and real time communications that would emulate the sense of being present and current. Overall, Facebook's social media dynamics outlined before, effectively conduct their members to cooperate and relate to each other for the benefit of the dance practitioners and the group as a whole. This paper is significant to evaluating how the dance industry is impacted by new technologies in terms of building an online community, more importantly, it proposes strategies to successfully engage followers into consuming our professional dance services.

REFERENCE LIST:

- Aguiton, C., & Cardon, D. (2007). The strength of weak cooperation: An attempt to understand the meaning of web 2.0. *Communications & Strategies*, 51-62.
<https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f882/0a56c071d4c5f2e156e495bc67fa8f306a0d.pdf>
- Baruah, T. D. (2012). Effectiveness of Social Media as a tool of communication and its potential for technology enabled connections: A micro-level study. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 2(5), 1-10.
- Baym, N. K. (2007) "The new shape of online community: The example of Swedish independent music fandom." *First Monday*, 12(8).
- Cooke, M., & Buckley, N. (2008). Web 2.0, social networks and the future of market research. *International Journal of Market Research*, 50(2), 267-292.
- Delanty, G. (2018). Community 3rd edition. *Community* (forthcoming). Taylor & Francis.
- Dijkmans, C., Kerkhof, P., & Beukeboom, C. J. (2015). A stage to engage: Social media use and corporate reputation. *Tourism management*, 47, 58-67.
- Donath, J., and Boyd, D. (2004). Public displays of connection. *BT Technology Journal* 22, (4) (10): 71-82.
<https://search-proquest-com.dbgw.lis.curtin.edu.au/docview/215202769?accountid=1>
- Gruzd, A., Wellman, B., & Takhteyev, Y. (2011). Imagining Twitter as an imagined community. *American Behavioral Scientist*, Vol 55 (10), p 1294-1318.
<https://www.dhi.ac.uk/san/waysofbeing/data/communities-murphy-gruzd-2011.pdf>

Hampton, K. N., & Wellman, B. (2018). Lost and saved... again: The moral panic about the loss of community takes hold of social media. *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol 47(6), p 643-651.

https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3a9e/0705b4e84bc368f43f90779c08c9e2ed5d32.pdf?_ga=2.139374896.209617756.1588072528-110238389.1586699073

Hunsinger, J, and Senft, Theresa M, eds. (2013). *The Social Media Handbook*. London: Routledge. Jeremy Hunsinger and Theresa M, Senfit

Jurgenson, N. (2012). When Atoms Meet Bits: Social Media, the Mobile Web and Augmented Revolution. *Future Internet*, 4, 83-91

Labrecque, L. I., vor dem Esche, J., Mathwick, C., Novak, T. P., & Hofacker, C. F. (2013). Consumer power: Evolution in the digital age. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 257-269. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.002>

Lange, P. G. (2007). Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 13(1), 361-380. doi:10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00400.

Leary M.R. (2001). Psychology of Impression Management. *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* 7245-7248.

Murugesan, San. 2020. Handbook of Research on Web 2.0, 3.0, and X.0: Technologies, Business, and Social Applications. 1st ed. Multimedia University, Malaysia & University of Western Sydney, Australia: San Murugesan. doi:10.4018/978-1-60566-384-5

Papacharissi, Z. (2009). The virtual geographies of social networks: a comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. *New media & society*, Vol 11(1-2), 199-220.

https://zizi.people.uic.edu/Site/Research_files/VirtualGeographiesFacebook.pdf

Sant, T. (2013). Art, Performance, and Social Media. *In The Social Media Handbook* (pp. 53-66). Routledge.

Thomson, K., Purcell, K., & Rainie, L. (2013). Arts organizations and digital technologies. *Pew Research Center*, 4.
https://blog.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/PIP_ArtsandTech.pdf

Throsby, D. and Petetskaya, K., (2017). Making Art Work: A summary and response by the Australia Council for the Arts. *Department of Economics*. Macquarie University.

Trepte, S; Reinecke, L; Juechems, K. (2011). The social side of gaming: How playing online computer games creates online and offline social support. *Computers in Human Behavior*, volume(28), pp 832-839.

Yadav, M. S., De Valck, K., Hennig-Thurau, T., Hoffman, D. L., & Spann, M. (2013). Social commerce: A contingency framework for assessing marketing potential. *Journal of interactive marketing*, 27(4), 311-323.