How do fan and celebrity identities become established on Twitter? A study of 'social media natives' and their followers

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This study explores the changing relationship in the digital era between celebrities and fans by examining a group of emerging celebrities and their followers on Twitter. Seven crime authors were chosen as a case sample, each of which published their first work after 2010 and might therefore be regarded as 'social media natives'. The authors' followers were categorized according to their self-descriptions into various professional and non-professional groups (e.g., 'publishing industry professionals', 'fellow crime authors'). In some of these groups, notably 'aspiring authors' and 'book fans/bloggers', the performance of fandom was not always found to be uni-directional. Microanalysis of authors' interactions with followers suggested that traditional media audience categories such as 'fan' have become looser in social media where all users are 'followers' and perform multiple identities. In particular, book bloggers seem to have carved out an important role as legitimizing agents within the crime fiction field.

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Introduction

Social media, in particular Twitter, have irrevocably changed the relationship between celebrities and their fans. The possibility of direct access to the fan object has altered what it means to be a celebrity fan, especially for those with aspirations to become celebrities themselves. The visibility of audience-fan interaction makes it possible, for the first time in history, to observe the moment-by-moment unfolding of celebrity-audience relationships, and in this paper I discuss the relationship as it evolves for a group of new crime authors whose careers began in the last decade and many of whose online followers have been with them from the start.

Although there is still some scepticism about the authenticity of celebrity-audience interaction on Twitter, most of this comes from the field of film studies, where Hollywood continues to be the frame within which celebrity is understood (e.g., Kehrberg, 2015; Thomas, 2014). Studies of slightly less stellar celebrities, such as UK television presenters, have found higher levels of interaction with followers on the platform that can even develop into quasi-conversational exchanges (Author, under review; Stever & Lawson, 2013, Usher, 2015). It seems clear that, for all but the biggest international figures, fans can hold reasonable expectations that their favourite celebrities might reply to a tweet, particularly one that flatters or challenges the recipient.

To date, the small but growing literature on celebrity use of Twitter has focused largely on celebrities who had become established before social media became valuable promotional tool for anyone looking to build a career in the entertainment industry. To some extent, this may have coloured the research findings, creating the impression that celebrities

are reluctant Twitter adopters (Thomas, 2014; Ingleton & York, 2016). Indeed, some established celebrities have found digital culture itself difficult to handle, unable to tolerate criticism from online fan communities (Giles, 2013). Even early and initially enthusiastic adopters of Twitter, such as the comedian Stephen Fry, have fallen out of love with the medium after receiving unwelcome communication (Lee, 2016).

The main objective of the present study was to explore the Twitter interaction between a group of crime authors whose careers have coincided with the rise of social media, making them effectively 'social media natives' (echoing Prensky's 2001 concept of 'digital natives'). –This generation of authors has embraced Twitter and other social media as important tools for building an audience for their work and for cultivating relationships with important figures and institutions in the literary field. Rather than traditional celebrities, these authors resemble the Swedish indie music artists researched by Baym (2011; 2012) whose careers rely on intensive symbiotic relationships with online fans, particularly overseas, who in some cases provide accommodation and arrange concerts for the groups.

One important difference between the crime authors in the present study and the musicians in Baym's study is that those relationships were formed through online fan communities, where fan identities are unambiguous and formalise the relationship with performers. Platforms like Twitter do not confer fan status on their members unless they self-identify as such, by forming special interest groups (e.g., the Justin Bieber Fandom), or referring to themselves as a particular type of fan in their profile description. As far as Twitter is concerned, fandom is something which is either performed (through sending adulatory tweets, for example), or inferred as a category where no other formal relationship (friendship, kinship, professional) can be discerned between followers and the Twitter member in question.

Claims about Twitter's 'democratic' potential have been often treated with scepticism, not without reason (Bruner, 2013; Fuchs, 2014). It is undoubtedly true that the wealth of statistical information attached to individuals promotes an unequal distribution of attention, with 20 per cent of Twitter members accounting for 96 per cent of total followers (Zhu & Lernan, 2016). However, as a medium Twitter affords its members a uniform status, which contrasts sharply with the subject positions available in traditional broadcast media (with producers on one side of the screen and the audience on the other). This uniform identity status allows, in practice, multiple identities to be performed, so that one can present as a fan but simultaneously as an artist or entertainer, or as an aspiring artist or entertainer (not to mention all the other identity positions available for an individual on social media).

For this reason, the study of fandom on Twitter cannot be regarded as a 'window' on fandom as such, because this is fandom as it has never been before. It may mean that fandom as such requires reconceptualising, just as Jenkins's (1992) critique of media constructions of fandom recast fandom as creative labour rather than individual psychopathology. Indeed, Jenkins (1992:3) made the point that 'there is nothing timeless and unchanging about [fan culture]: fandom originates as a response to specific historical conditions'. This could mean that the levelling of the playing field in social media renders traditional, broadcast media-style fandom, obsolete. However it must be remembered that fandom comes in diverse forms (Duffett, 2013)[1], and the kind of fandom examined in this study is essentially the practice of following a single individual (as opposed to a TV series, football club, or broader cultural genre). .

Authors and literary celebrity

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[1] Indeed, more diverse than argued by Duffett, whose extraordinary dismissal of sports fans (2013: 3) cannot pass without censure

It is possible that some readers at this point might be wondering about the selection of a sample of crime authors to represent 'nascent celebrity'. The choice of celebrity genre was, admittedly, a little haphazard, being linked to a separate project on crime writing: nevertheless, there is a growing interest in authorship generally as a form of celebrity (Franssen & Honings, 2016; Mole, 2007; Moran, 2000; York, 2007), not to mention a recent special issue of *Celebrity Studies* (Braun & Spiers, 2016). Although less obviously glamorous (certainly in a visual culture) than fields such as music and screen media, best-selling authors such as J.K. Rowling, Dan Brown and E.L. James enjoy indisputable celebrity status. Furthermore, the practice of fandom among readers of fiction and other literature has recently come under the microscope, both in terms of literary genre fandom (Roach, 2014) and interest in specific authors such as Jane Austen and Elisabeth Barrett Browning (Eisner, 2007; Harman, 2009). As a genre, crime fiction has enjoyed a boom period over recent decades, to a point where it now accounts for one new novel of every three published (Knight, 2010). Therefore, it could be argued that the literary celebrities of the future are more likely to emerge from the crime genre than any other.Awards - typically in the form of prize winners chosen from a shortlist - are one of the most important ways in which literary work is legitimated in the field, and they are particularly important for genre fiction: one is not simply judged the best author but the best *crime* author. This might seem a back-handed compliment for someone with aspirations towards general ('literary') fiction, but genre fiction is so thoroughly branded, with a distinct iconography (e.g., cover art), dedicated bookstore shelving and website pages, annual festivals and prizes, and online network of blogs and other sites, that it is unlikely a contemporary crime author would harbour hopes of transcending the genre. Indeed, it could even be argued that 'literary fiction' (represented by prizes such as the Man Booker) is now a genre itself, rather than representing the pinnacle of achievement in the entire literary field. Above all, though, prizes and awards do the important

contemporary work of marketing authors and generating media exposure. As with the entertainment industry, authors are at their most newsworthy when at the centre of a scandal, and it is no surprise that most news footage of awards ceremonies has been generated through controversy (English, 2005). In this respect, authors have become indistinguishable from other forms of celebrity in what Rojek (2012: 12) has called the 'washing machine' of contemporary culture.

The present study: Methodological issues

Seven crime authors were identified for the present study, whose Twitter feed was analysed at two time periods over six months, and all interactions with other Twitter users downloaded and transcribed. The authors were selected because they had each published their first novel by at least 2010, at which point Twitter had been in existence for four years and had become established as an essential promotional tool for aspiring authors (and artists and entertainers in general). Six of the seven authors have published at least two books with a well-known mainstream publishing company. The other has self-published electronically, but with considerable success, one title receiving over 280,000 downloads. Number of Twitter followers, and critical success (based on press reviews and awards) is quite varied within the sample.

The seven authors are described below, along with some representative statistics relating to their Twitter use (average number of tweets sent per day over the period of analysis), to give some idea of their typical activity level on the medium.

Author A: Over 4000 followers. Debut 2012, two further novels since published. Few reviews in national press. Much interest shown by crime fiction blogs. Glossy personal website. Average of 24 tweets per day (19 of them retweets).

Author B**:** Over 13000 followers. Debut 2012; five further novels since, all self-published electronically. Has featured in the best selling e-book lists. No national press reviews. Average of 7 tweets per day (3 re-tweets).

Author C: Over 800 followers. Debut 2012; with some international success, though little coverage in mainstream press. Two further novels since. Long-standing blog (although initially documented previous career). Average of 9 tweets per day (2 re-tweets).

Author D: Over 7000 followers. Debut 2013; three further novels since published. No mainstream press reviews, but much interest in the blogs. Extensive personal website. Average of 64 tweets per day (36 re-tweets).

Author E: Over 1500 followers. Debut 2014, publication of second scheduled for late 2016. Positive reviews in most blogs but not really picked up by mainstream media. Average of 4 tweets per day (3 re-tweets).

Author F: Over 10000 followers. Debut 2011, an international best-seller, adapted as a successful Hollywood film. One further novel published, to mixed reviews in mainstream press. Very glossy, but rather quiet, personal website. Average of 56 tweets per day (6 re-tweets).

Author G: Over 8000 followers. Debut 2015. Two further novels published. Very favourable reviews of all books in the national press. Several awards, nominations, shortlists. Long-standing blog with links to much previous writing (mostly published short stories; much competition success). Average of 45 tweets per day (12 re-tweets).

Analytically, the study was informed by recent developments in the microanalysis of online data, whereby conversation analysis and related techniques have been modified for digital environments (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester & Reed, 2015; Paulus, Warren & Lester, 2016). This approach emphasizes the importance of cultural and technological

context, and the specific affordances of new media, and acknowledges the distinctions between synchronous talk and written (typed) communication in environments where data are archived and potentially available to an extensive online audience. In this sense, digital conversation analysis is ideally suited to satisfy Braun and Spiers' (2016:450) claim of celebrity studies' 'desire to find new conceptual and methodological approaches to the age-old study of human relationships'.

The paper employs techniques for data display and presentation as used in Giles (under review), which enable exchanges between Twitter users to be treated as quasi-conversational, consisting of identifiable turns that can be regarded as 'adjacency pairs' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). Twitter also assists in this exercise by threading together related replies to tweets in the form of a 'conversation'.

Ethical considerations

There are ethical concerns around the reproduction of verbatim text and visual material sourced from the Internet in published work resulting from academic research. Markham (2012) has argued that, even if anonymised, such material is potentially traceable through search engines and can constitute an invasion of privacy. This is particularly the case in social media (Markham was largely referring to forum data), where users' offline identities are prominent. Although the current paper does not include any material that might incriminate individuals, I have attempted to anonymise the data wherever possible, since none of the authors (or their followers) was aware that they were under scrutiny and might find intrusive the publication of their Twitter activity in an academic forum. Another reason for taking this approach in this particular paper is that it is not intended to be a study of specific authors: the authors under scrutiny are merely serving as a case study population, a proxy for nascent celebrity. Each individual Twitter user was treated simply as the member of

a designated social category, and for this reason I have labelled them, where relevant, as author A, B, C or [category] 1, 2, 3.

Partly for this reason, it makes little sense to present raw data in this paper. Rather than displaying the screenshot of the actual digital display, the interactions discussed in the paper have been converted into readable data tables. I have also taken care to remove, or distort, as much detail as possible in order to prevent individuals from being identified by their descriptions or (in one case) pictorial images.

Categories of Twitter 'followers'

One of the goals of the research was to break down the accumulated followers of each author into descriptive categories based on the self-descriptions provided in their profiles. This was done by doing an iterative analysis of the profiles of a sub sample of 200 followers of each author, coding the descriptions of each follower and, if necessary, examining their timeline. In keeping with the typical iterative coding practices of methods like thematic analysis and grounded theory (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006), the codes were refined and reduced to eight broad categories. These are listed below along with relevant examples.

Crime author. Fellow author who has published a crime novel (or screenplay). Their published work is usually a significant feature of their profile, either through their verbal description or visual imagery (banner picture of book covers, for example). In many cases the crime genre is not explicit, but there are hyperlinks to other sites - personal website, reviews, online sales page (at Amazon for example) - from which it can be inferred.

Other author. Fellow author who has published work (typically a novel) in a different genre to crime. Again the genre may be explicit in the user's profile, or inferred through following links to other sites.

Publishing industry professional. Somebody other than an author who makes a living from the book trade. Their role is usually explicitly referenced in their description, e.g., literary agent, working for XX agency', with hyperlink to a professional site (which may also be a personal site).

Other professional. Someone whose self-description indicates a profession other than writing or publishing, and whose Twitter profile is primarily orientated towards their professional identity. Followers in this category include academics (particularly those with an interest in crime fiction), legal and forensic experts, television producers and journalists.

Commercial. A Twitter account belonging primarily to a business or other organization (e.g. educational) that is not directly associated with publishing. It is assumed that in most cases these members have chosen to follow the author for purely commercial (as opposed to professional) reasons.

Book fan/blogger. These followers usually refer to themselves using terms such as 'book lover', 'book addict', 'blogger', or 'reviewer', and in many cases include a hyperlink to a site where they post book reviews, and in some cases an invitation to be contacted for reviews (or a call for other reviewers to submit work). This is a diverse category because it contains self-designated 'fans' with very few followers as well as owners of very successful book blogs with several thousands of followers. Because of their increasing influence on the publishing industry, and because of their dual identities as fans and publishing industry intermediaries, special attention was paid to this group of followers.

Aspiring authors. Several followers described themselves as 'writers' but were clearly not yet published authors. Many of these were openly seeking a writing career and supplied much evidence of their efforts in this direction - with a personal website linking to published short stories (and some awards), articles, creative writing qualifications and personal blogs

narrating the ups and downs of their fledgling career. I have used the term 'aspiring author' here rather than 'writer' as such, because some were clearly full-time writers, but still seeking that elusive publishing contract.

Other. Followers without any verbal (or even visual) profile, or a largely non-professional identity (family-orientated, humorous, or fan of non-literary object). In some cases their description began with a professional term (e.g., teacher) but the Twitter account was not used in any kind of professional context (i.e., that member may have earned a living out of being a teacher but was not using Twitter to chat to their students, or even other teachers). This category included those who described themselves as 'writers' or even 'authors' but with no external links or visual evidence of any kind of writing, and no clear indication that they were seriously pursuing a professional writing career. In most cases it was assumed that the members of this category could be classified as 'fans' of the author since there was no reason to assume they had any professional purpose in following them. It must be noted that this is the category in which most family and friends of the author would fall, and it is unlikely that this relationship would be clear from followers' descriptions ('long-standing friend of best-selling author X').

Table 1 indicates the distribution of these categories across the full sample of authors.

Table 1: Percentage of authors' followers in each of the categories

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Crime author	7	3	12	6	9	4	9
Other author	15	16	13	22	19	12	17
Publishing industry professional	8	7	12	11	8	17	16
Book fan/ blogger	15	2	13	11	9	9	7

Other professional	7	12	6	7	4	6	8
Commercial	7	9	4	8	5	4	4
Aspiring authors	4	4	6	7	4	6	12
Other	37	48	34	28	42	42	29

In total, the category that most followers belonged to was 'other' (28-48%). Of the remaining categories the highest percentage for all authors was 'other authors' (12-22%). Note that relative percentages are related to some extent to number of followers: for instance, 12% of C's followers are crime authors but he has fewer followers overall, while only 3% of B's much larger following fall into this category (clearly, there is a limit to the number of crime authors who follow other crime authors). Of the remaining anomalies, the two most interesting are that A, despite her large following, has the highest percentage of book fans/bloggers (15%), suggesting that she is very highly regarded in the crime fiction reader/fan community (as well as being very active); and that F has a very much higher number of aspiring authors following her (she also has the most critical success, with effusive reviews in the national press and several major crime writing awards).

Interactions between crime authors and followers

Twitter as a forum for soliciting approval

One of the most common functions of Twitter for authors seems to be as a platform for announcing professional milestones. Typically these include publication ('my new book XX out on Monday') or the receipt of awards or nominations ('just been shortlisted for the XX prize'). These are 'tellings' (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008) that are designed to elicit positive responses from the author's followers, and are usually successful.

11:53 Author G: Dead chuffed that XX won XX [hyperlink to announcement]

12:32 Book fan1: congratulations :)

15:03 G: Thanks!

15:19 Other1: Oh wow, G, that's awesome! Congratulations!

15:29 G: Thanks, [Other1]!

17:37 Other2: sounds great - have put it on my wish list [emoji]

17:43 G: Thanks

This rather mundane set of exchanges is very typical of author/fan interaction across the sample. It must be noted that author G is quite generous with her replies (although not the most generous in the sample). With over 8000 followers, she takes the trouble to thank 10 of the 12 followers who reply to her announcement, even Other2, who does not actually offer congratulations (and has clearly not read the book). Several are thanked by name.

While these exchanges, and G's replies, might suggest that authors' 'tellings' function as 'gifts' to fans (Baym & Burnett, 2011, use this type of interaction as an example of the 'gift economy' of Swedish indie music), it is equally possible that announcements of new work, and particularly prizes and other accolades, are designed chiefly for the benefit of other authors and professional followers. Here we need to consider the 'addressivity' of tweets: namely, to whom are they addressed (Giles, under review)? Unless otherwise indicated, any posting in social media can be regarded as 'doubly articulated' (Bou-Franch, Lorenzo-Dus & Garcès-Conejos Blitvich, 2012) - simultaneously designed for both an intended addressee and the general Twitter audience (all the author's followers). G may thank most of the followers who responded to the announcement, but these are only 12 of over 8000.

Conventional artist/fan dialogue

One of the reasons for using a sample of nascent celebrities (social media natives) for this study was to examine how fandom emerges in a medium where all users are ostensibly equals (as far as their designated identity is concerned). This means that fandom needs to be practised (and inferred) rather than explicitly labelled. As Marwick and boyd (2011) have argued, celebrity is also a practice, and there are several instances in the present data of authors and followers engaging in the kind of dialogue one might expect to find in traditional celebrity/fan encounters, or Twitter interaction between established (pre-social media) artists and fans. In the first extract, a book blogger wishes her husband a happy birthday, and is evidently surprised to find an author adding her own greeting:

Book fan 2: Happy Birthday to lovely [husband], my main man for ever [emojis]

Crime author 1: happy birthday to [husband]!Have a great day!

Book fan 2: Thanks [Crime author 1], he will be thrilled by this Tweet!

Book fan 3: Happy birthday to [husband]. Enjoy your trip away x

This exchange mimics traditional celebrity-fan interaction in Book fan 2's response that her husband 'will be thrilled' to receive birthday wishes from an author whose work he presumably admires. Note that no such response is made to the wishes sent by a fellow book blogger (Book fan 3). The irony of this exchange is that Book fan 2 has over twice the number of Twitter followers of Crime author 1 (and Book fan 3 is only 100 short of Crime author 1's figure).

If follower numbers are unreliable indicators of fan-celebrity hierarchies in Twitter, then it is necessary to identify fandom when it occurs on Twitter in terms of its performative qualities. The following example, displayed in Figure 1, also features Book fan 2, and concerns the timeless fan practice of having one's photograph taken along with an idol, in this case author E.

Figure 1: Selfie of book fan 2 with 'favourite author'

Once again, the disparity between the Twitter followings of these two members makes the act of fandom, on the face of it, seem almost absurd: the blogger has three times the following of the author, and is clearly a much more important figure within the crime fiction community as a whole. Nevertheless, even in the digital era, the traditional social roles of artist/celebrity and fan/critic define the relationship and its associated practices.

Networking

While it is usually assumed that celebrities are motivated to use social media for largely promotional reasons (Page, 2012; Thomas, 2014), there is little research on the use of the platform as a promotional tool for aspiring artists and celebrities. By studying the interaction patterns of 'social media natives' we can see how the categories of artist/celebrity, fan, and aspiring artist/celebrity blur once users begin to cultivate networks of followers for multiple social and professional purposes. In the following extract, a book blogger (Book fan 4) responds to an author's (D) tweet about some lost notes. Book fan 4 is coded as 'book fan/blogger' in the sample because this is her primary Twitter identity, but her personal description also alludes to her work as a journalist (thereby making her eligible for the 'other

professional' category) and to her status as an aspiring author. In this extract it is the third

identity category that becomes salient as the exchange progresses.

(Earlier*) D: Sitting on a train to London and have no idea what happened to the notes I

made earlier.

Book fan 4: Just seen this. How frustrating.

D: Ha! Scribbled on the back of a few receipts in my bag. Where there's a will...

Book fan 4: Of course there is (although my husband would add...there's a

lawyer...instead as he IS a lawyer!)

D: Lol! Mine used to be a lawyer. Know the feeling [emoji]

Book fan 4: A few 100 words left and I'm done [emoji]. Probably finish tomorrow

night. Never actually thought I could get this written.

Crime author 4: You're almost done, [Book fan 4]? Wow - that is great!

Book fan 4: Yep feel too scared to actually finish it! But I will do tomorrow night and

I'll post a photo to prove it [emoji]

Crime author 4: Finishing is very scary!

Although the timestamps are unfortunately missing for this particular interactional

chain, Book fan 4's initial response was tweeted over an hour after D's initial post (which

generated several other sympathetic responses from her followers). It might be thought that

such latent responses have no right to be replied to, especially if the moment has effectively

passed, although see Giles (under review) for a similar exchange between a comedian and his

followers where the responses at least were conducted in the original spirit. In some respects this kind of activity is akin to 'bumping a thread' in a discussion forum (Giles, 2016) - reactivating an old topic, sometimes successfully - but Twitter's interactional patterns are usually more bound to their time-frame than the threads on a forum. Nevertheless D, a very responsive author, does find the time to reply, and follows Book fan 4's joke about wills and lawyers with a second, appreciative reply. At this point, Book fan 4 signals an abrupt change of topic (and register) by alluding to a piece of writing that she has almost finished. It is ignored by D, probably because of its low relevance, but could be read as a piece of 'fishing' by an aspiring author, capitalising on the fact that a (fairly successful) published author has replied to her twice, hoping for a bit of professional advice or assistance. Ironically, the tweet gets picked up by another crime author (Crime author 4), albeit a somewhat less successful one, who does offer a couple of messages of encouragement.

Is it too presumptive to accuse Crime author 4 of fishing here? As in the previous section, authors' motives for replying to or ignoring specific tweets may be solely the result of competing activity (perhaps D logged off Twitter after her second reply and failed to spot Crime author 4's further response). But judging from Crime author 4's activity alone, and her status as an aspiring writer, the unprompted reference to her own writing activity does have an air of opportunism about it. One might even query Crime author 4's motive for (belatedly) responding to D's tweet about lost notes: was it an excuse to prompt an exchange that would allow her to publicise her novel (hoping, perhaps, that D might offer to read the draft or even recommend an agent?) If Twitter is a valuable promotional tool for aspiring authors it would seem that such opportunities are worth the risk.

How should established authors respond to 'fishing' from aspiring authors? It would not be surprising to find a lot of this kind of activity on Twitter (although this was the only obvious example in the present data). Simply not replying would be a viable strategy for an

author who does not want to open herself up to a flurry of similar approaches from other aspirants. Crime author 4, who does respond (without even being addressed), and who has fewer followers than D, offers sympathy rather than anything more helpful, probably out of friendship rather than professional curiosity.

The role of book bloggers in the Twitter era

Perhaps the most notable feature of the interaction observed in the sample of seven authors is the unexpectedly high level of activity and elevated status of book bloggers in the crime fiction industry. Book bloggers typically are amateur enthusiasts - i.e., not employed within the traditional media or by the publishing industry - who manage websites dedicated to critical reviews of books, interviews with authors, and news of literary events such as festivals. Authors sometimes offer personal contributions to book blogs: in recent years the 'blog tour' has become a regular event, where popular authors 'visit' a series of blogs, publicised in the style of a rock group's tour dates.

Despite the enormous number of book blogs now operating, there has been surprisingly little academic research on the phenomenon. Two exceptions are Steiner's (2010) overview of various types of book blogs in Sweden, and Gijón's (2014) more recent discussion about the influence of blogs on Spanish literature. The former concluded that amateur blogs of the sort described above are largely social networks with little influence, while Gijón (2014) argued that blogs were, despite the opposition of traditionalists, beginning to challenge the institutionalised literary field. As far as a specific genre like crime fiction is concerned, the research in this paper suggests that book blogs are now well and truly anchored within the frame of the literary field. Authors and readers alike seem to treat them as a vital element in the production of literature, possibly according them more importance

than the traditional legitimizing agents of mainstream media (e.g., newspaper and magazine review sections).

In order to investigate the phenomenon further, the Twitter activity of the five most popular 'book fan/blogger' followers was analysed separately. The most striking feature of these Twitter accounts is the very high level of activity. All but one of the bloggers sent more tweets per day than any of the authors: the most active sent an average of 238 tweets (only 90 retweets), with two others averaging close to 200.

As has been noted in several places already, those book fans with their own review blogs can attract as many social media followers as the most successful (new) authors, and yet their relationship with the authors themselves is still recognisably based on fandom. Much blogger/author interaction consists of bloggers congratulating authors on book launches, cover designs, awards or positive reviews in other sources, or discussion about forthcoming appearances at events. Usually the fan performance is unidirectional. However, two exchanges from the dataset suggest that the blogger/author relationship is closer than the traditional fan/celebrity relationship. In the first exchange, Book fan 2 opens up a dialogue with a successful crime author.

> Book fan 2: Look at this [picture of Crime author 5's new book cover]. How bloody gorgeous is this?
>
> Crime author 5: Thank you, [Book fan 2] x
>
> Book fan 2: I'm so pleased for you. Was reminiscing about the [publisher] launch, you've come so far [emoji]

Crime author 5: A lot of water under the bridge. But good times. And look what you've done too!

The first adjacency pair in the exchange is what we might expect from a dialogue between a blogger (as fan) and author (as artist/celebrity). Book fan 2 offers an effusive congratulation on the cover of Crime author 5's new book, to which the author reacts appreciatively (the added 'x' suggests, however, that the pair have an established relationship within which it is acceptable to make affectionate gestures). Book fan 2 then ratchets up the congratulations further by complementing the author on her career success. Crime author 5's fairly modest response is then tempered with a return complement - 'look what you've done'. This final remark (which book fan 2 does not respond to) is quite surprising given the apparently unequal status of the two individuals. A celebrity does not normally complement a fan on their fandom. This suggests that, in developing a blog (whose success can perhaps be deduced from her number of Twitter followers), Book fan 2's accomplishment has come to be ranked alongside that of the successful author.

In the second exchange, the blogger again tweets first, performing fandom in the traditional sense - she has finally met an 'adored' author and wishes to communicate her delight.

Book fan 5: Am in my element that I met you this evening [Crime author 6] Adored [book titles] SO MUCH!

Crime author 6: Feel I can rest easy now I've met you because I've loved you on line for so long! #justasgorgeousinreallife

Book fan 5: xxx

We might expect a celebrity to respond to such a greeting by thanking the fan, or even returning the compliment, but Crime author 6 goes further. She, in her next turn, performs a reciprocal act of fandom, admitting that she has 'loved' the blogger 'on line', even adding the kind of hashtag a fan might use in deference to a celebrity. Book fan 5 replies appreciatively, with a flirtatious row of kisses.

While both these exchanges are initiated by the subject in the traditional 'fan' position, they receive the kind of responses one would normally expect only as a fellow artist or celebrity. The fact that authors construct bloggers - on occasion, at least - as fellow celebrities suggests that they are gradually moving into positions within the crime fiction field as significant figures, recognisable and celebrated intermediaries between publishers/agents and writers.

Discussion

This study of crime authors' Twitter activity was designed in order to explore the experience of what I have called *social media natives* - individuals whose professional, or aspirational, activities have been associated with social media from the beginning. This contrasts with established celebrities who have had to incorporate social media, often reluctantly,into their already-existing nexus of relationships with readers and critics, and whose interactional status with their audience was always already on an unequal footing. Here, the crime authors are starting off on the same footing as their followers, who have - it is fair to assume - increased steadily in number as the books are published and they become established in the crime fiction field as new writers (and potentially famous ones).

The first objective of the study was to classify these authors' Twitter followings in terms of their relationship to the author. Why are other Twitter users following them? In several cases there are clear professional reasons - the followers are fellow writers, publishing industry professionals and so on. Others seem to be following them for aspirational purposes (they hope to join them as published crime authors). In the majority of cases there was no clear professional reason for them to be followers, so (leaving aside the possibility that they could be long-standing friends or family) these followers could be reasonably interpreted as *fans*. At the same time, it could easily be argued that the category of 'aspiring authors' fits neatly within the traditional category of fans: as Roach (2014) argues, romance writers invariably start out as 'rogue readers' – fans of participatory culture – and increasing numbers of newly published authors began as writers of fan fiction. Nevertheless, I preferred to keep the two categories separate in the present study since, effectively, fandom was defined by *lack* of status, which rather conflicts with the way it is conceived in the fan studies literature (which is largely concerned with groups of people who identify primarily as fans).

Analysis of the interaction on Twitter during the data collection phase identified a number of instances that could be interpreted as performances of celebrity and fandom in the traditional sense - authors seeking approval for announcements about forthcoming books, inviting fans to contribute to their work by suggesting things like names for new characters, and fans taking 'selfies' with their favourite authors. Aspiring authors used the medium for seeking professional advice and support in their attempts to get published. One group of followers elicited more unusual patterns of interaction, however. Book bloggers (sometimes calling themselves 'book fans'), highly active Twitter users, were held in seemingly high esteem by authors, who occasionally performed reciprocal fandom, suggesting that, at least in

the crime fiction community, they might be regarded as 'micro-celebrities' (Marwick, 2013) in their own right.

       To some extent, it could be argued that book bloggers are simply the twenty-first century manifestation of traditional book critics. Allington (2016) has discussed important ways in which consumer reviewers and online reading groups have started to challenge the dominance of the traditional, authoritative reviewers employed by national newspapers and literary periodicals. But the book bloggers in this study differ from both traditional critics and consumer reviewers in three important ways. First, they are firmly rooted in the crime genre: while other types of book occasionally slip through the net, they position themselves within the subfield in terms of the authors they showcase and the events they advertise. Second, the reviews they publish tend, in general, to be positive appraisals of the authors and their work. Seemingly the worst fate that can befall an author in this community is not to be reviewed at all. Thirdly - although this point may explain the first - there is a high level of interaction between bloggers and authors, which would seem to make the relationship more symbiotic than with traditional authors, often remote figures protected by an institution such as a powerful news outlet. Book bloggers, in this respect, are more like PR agents or publicists than journalists, and their reviews resemble marketing blurb more closely than literary criticism. One might argue that their success depends on the support of authors, and vice versa. Either way, they represent a formidable force in digital culture, one of whose features is, as Graeme Turner (2016: 103) has argued, 'the mutation of previously ancillary industries into fundamental structural components of the contemporary media'.

More generally, it could be argued that, apart from a few exceptions such as J.K.Rowling, authors do not generally attract the same level of attention as other artists or performers. Their rise to fame is not as meteoric as that of, say, a YouTube vlogger who risks losing contact with many followers as their sheer number escalates. With relatively modest followings (nobody in this sample has reached 10,000 at the time of writing), there is still time to nurture existing relationships, take time to respond to fan tweets, build up dialogues.

Finally, it is hoped that the study has documented some useful methodological tools for investigating the interactional dynamics of social media. The classification of Twitter followers outlined here might, for example, be helpful in analysing the followings of other types of artist or celebrity (musicians for example). In the absence of determining labels like 'fan site', the treatment of fandom as a practice has potential value for the burgeoning field of fan studies, as does the identification of intermediate categories of fans who are either aspiring artists or celebrities, or, like the book bloggers, new forms of cultural intermediary thrown up by digital media, who have arisen out of the affordances of social media, and who are themselves emerging as new types of (micro) celebrity.

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