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# Of Music and Media: A Producer Study of Promotional Encoding on Social Media Through the Lenses of Paratext and Medium Theory

Connor D. Wilcox

*Eastern Illinois University*

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Of Music and Media: A Producer Study of Promotional Encoding  
on Social Media Through the Lenses of Paratext and Medium Theory

(TITLE)

BY

Connor D. Wilcox

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

**Master of Arts**

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

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**Of Music and Media: A Producer Study of Promotional Encoding on Social Media**

**Through the Lenses of Paratext and Medium Theory**

**Connor D. Wilcox**

**Eastern Illinois University**

**Department of Communication Studies**

**2017**

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## Abstract

While music promotion has been an important aspect for musicians, bands, and musical organizations for well over a century, the rise of social media in the digital era has profoundly changed the way these promoters perceived and practice their commercial task of selling music. Paratexts (Gray, 2010a) offer an effective lens for focusing on these promotions while encoding/decoding (Hall, 1980) justifies producer studies to examine and uncover vital aspects of production shape the text and medium theory adds further focus by recentring the medium as being distinctly influential. Existing research on music promotion highlights the uniqueness and evocativeness of the musical product while historically-based music promotion practice dictates that a cohesive image should be crafted for promotion and that uncommercialized physical spaces should be sought out by promoters. The distinct symbolic traits and delineation of each social media have also been documented and researched. To uncover the perceptions, practices, and underlying ideologies of promoters, a representative sample of 22 independent North American musicians, bands, and record labels were interviewed. I found that these promotional producers consider the social media environment to be a free and egalitarian space of transparent communication and connectivity, but implicitly perceive the social media audience to be an inattentive, passive, and malleable mass audience. In emphasizing continual creation and circulation of promotions on social media, producers are implicitly devaluing their musical work. In addition, though producers state an awareness that social media channels are different, they approach social media monolithically and seek to distance themselves from overly commercial goals when creating promotions. The interviews with producers reveal deep, recurrent connections and ideologies underlying stated perceptions and practices of music promotion. Though music promotion and social media usage will continue to shift and change, the underpinning ideologies and implicit belief of promoters will remain and social mediated promotions will continue to eclipse the central musical text.

*Keywords: music promotion, paratext, encoding, medium theory, social media, producer study, independent, musicians, bands, record labels*

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Untold hours of work have finally culminated in a single, cohesive album. Each song crafted and recorded meticulously to stir minds, evoke emotions, and get toes tapping. The album cover and liner notes have been created with precision and care as the finishing touch. A provocative and evocative central musical text has been painstakingly concocted by the band. While the band may be exhausted and ready to relax, a new task emerges. It is not enough to celebrate the central text by seeking radio airplay or playing live shows to win new fans. No, now the band must enter into a complex and crowded media ecosystem to persuade digital passersby to connect with the new album. But messages and stories about music saturate social media. Amidst a sea of other musicians ultimately seeking to sustain their fanbase through constant additions of lively photos on Instagram or pages of intriguing Facebook copy, the band sees social media promotion as necessary. The central text, once the focus of so much energy and emotion, languishes as the band ceaselessly promotes their music across social media.

This experience and perspective is keenly supported through a representative sample of independent North American musicians, bands, and record labels promoting their music on social media. Producers of promotions, which are also known as paratexts, end up devaluing their central musical text through the aggressive and relentless creation of paratexts for social media. The central text is seen by these producers to lack the ability to continually keep fans engaged and interested, so paratexts are created to reencourage and remind fans of the central text. While producers mainly opt to pursue activity on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, the social medium YouTube is far closer to showcasing the central text. Furthermore, strong emphasis on paratextual creation and

circulation is due to the fact these producers view paratexts as powerfully extending the desired aesthetic or meanings of their central text. To account for this, producers keenly stick to creating promotions that fit in with the image of their perceived genre.

In attempting to motivate and remind fans by creating paratexts for social media, these producers are implicitly subscribing to latent, underlying ideologies that influence their perspectives and, in-turn, their practices as promoters. Due to this subscription to traditional social media logic that privileges emotion and connectivity, these producers conceptualize social media as a free, egalitarian space of transparent, controllable communication where relationships flourish. Despite this ideology, these producers implicitly come to view the social media audience as an inattentive, passive, and malleable mass audience. It is this perception of audience passivity and distraction that motivates producers to continually create new paratexts to remind fans of the existence of the producer and their music. And while producers report distinct awareness of disparities between social media channels, few meaningfully mobilize that knowledge to alter paratexts based on the medium. Much like the overarching traditional logic of social media, producers appear to unconsciously lump social media channels together to create a monolithic approach to social media.

Three salient factors situate the importance of this complex patchwork of perceptions and practices of promotional producers. Firstly, the audience is exposed to far less actual music to serve as enticement for listening to more of that music. Gone are the days of live shows and radio play as the primary means to engage new listeners. This is where paratexts come into the equation. Paratexts are the texts that surround a particular

central text, such as a record. An album cover or social media post about the music are both examples of paratexts. While they may surround and allude to a central text,

a paratext is not simply to the side of a text. Rather, paratexts do the work of texts and are functional parts of them. Sometimes they will represent a smaller, specialised component of the text; sometimes they are its elite edge. Sometimes they do everything the rest of the text does; sometimes they are entrusted to conduct very particular tasks and to play very particular roles in the construction of the text (Gray, 2015, p. 232).

This means that paratexts are far more important and nuanced textual extensions than they tend to be considered. Paratexts always carry the meanings of the central text within them and, as such, are essential textual extensions that branch out into different areas with specific goals. Paratexts also serve as both an enticing precursor to the unfamiliar audience and also as a supplemental continuation of the text to the already-engaged fans.

Secondly, the audience that utilizes new, interactive media like Facebook are massive. As of May, 2016, Facebook boasts a reported 1.65 billion active users and hosts the business pages of 50 million businesses worldwide (Walters, 2016). Other social media sites like Instagram host a smaller user base, but still constitute heavy amounts of general usage and brand interaction. Of Instagram's 400 million active users, 68 percent interact with brands regularly on the medium (Walters, 2016). Thirdly, 91 percent of U.S. Americans report listening to more than 24 hours of music per week (Music 360, 2015). This amounts to a great deal of music being listened to, but a small part of that is actually new music. The 2015 Nielsen Music U.S. Report found that "old" music, music that had been released for at least 18 months, had outsold new music for the first time ever in

history. This new reality places a higher degree of both pressure and importance upon the role of the music promoter who is simultaneously creating central musical texts and promotional paratexts to support those central texts.

In the pre-digital world of music promotion, the music of the artists themselves primarily served to attract fans via play on the radio, of widely available records in stores, and through live shows; the text itself was the central means of exposure. One was able to “stumble” onto new music while flipping through the FM band on the radio or making a trip to the local record store for a few new albums. At the micro level, independently-owned record stores and radio stations operated as unique cultural institutions that exposed listeners to musicians from both in and out of the local music scene, functioning as opinion leaders to disseminate music to local consumers. At the macro level, big music store chains and radio stations also offered a wide range of more popular music to turn listeners onto. Regardless of the scope of the business, the central means of exposure was still the actual music itself.

In the post-MTV era, there has since been a major shift in how people are exposed to new music. Record stores have been fast disappearing from the landscape with corporate chains, like Virgin Records, shuttering almost entirely while few independently-owned stores continue on. Radio stations still float their sonic materials through the air, but in a much different capacity than in the pre-digital age; not only is the radio audience vastly reduced from what it once was, but the actual ownership of radio entities has also changed drastically after the Telecommunications Act of 1996 that deregulated radio and allowed massive media corporations to come in and take over the previously regulated broadcasting market (Telecommunications Act of 1996, 1996).

Independent radio stations were bought up or driven out by media corporations, and thus their more widely varied music broadcasts went with them in favor of more profitable, narrower, mainstream musical fare. As a result of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a short list of media conglomerates currently own the vast majority of U.S. American radio stations. For example, iHeartMedia owns at least 885 radio stations nationwide while other notable corporations Cumulus Media and Townsquare Media own 454 and 291 stations, respectively (“Station Ownership,” 2016). However, despite this disappearance, or dramatic rearrangement of traditional cultural sites and media, all of the pre-digital age means of showcasing the text still do exist and serve the same purpose in the digital age; the crucial difference is that they have been resigned to the outskirts of exposure and paratexts have taken their place in the media ecosystem.

Paratexts in the form of promotional campaigns have taken their place as the dominant form of exposure. Specifically, these paratexts take the form of postings with text, images, videos, and links on social media. For example, a photograph of a band playing a live show along with tour date information is one of example of a paratext that seeks to expose audiences to information about the band. If we consider the industry, the text itself, and the audience, “then paratexts fill the space between them, conditioning passages and trajectories that criss-cross the mediascape, and variously negotiating or determining interactions among the three. Industry and audiences create vast amounts of paratexts” (Gray, 2010a, p. 23). In terms of producers on the industry-side, this paratextual promotion necessarily takes place at all levels of band/musician popularity. Thus, a well-known and established band with millions of fans may create paratexts and promote on social media the same as would a local band with tens of fans. Take for

example that revered and storied rock band the Rolling Stones. They utilize paratexts for the same reason that an unknown, local punk band does; for exposure and continued connection through promotion. The promotional need and process behind it does not simply stop at higher levels of ubiquity, but rather continues on as it still remains the primary means of exposure. Thus, specifically focusing on the industry-created paratexts that take the form of promotions allows for a close-up of this increasingly standard and undoubtedly important form of exposure in the digital age.

In the digital age, as the pre-digital age before it, the medium dictates the text. As famously stated by Marshall McLuhan, “the medium is the message” (1967). For example, the playing of a song on the radio was decidedly a different experience than the playing of that same song at a live show. Listening to a song through the stereo of a car in the middle of a traffic jam is a fundamentally different experience from listening to the same song crackling out of amplifiers amongst a sweaty mass of dancing people at a concert. In the current media ecosystem, this theory is more relevant than ever. Now it has become essential to examine the ways in which the medium dictates paratext surrounding central music texts. An example of this would be the difference between a succinct 140 character-long message on Twitter promoting a new album versus a more loquacious Facebook post detailing information about the same album. The medium itself informs expectations of both paratext creation and reception. These different expectations influence assumptions of each distinct social media audience, such as the perception that the Facebook audience is more proper and the Twitter audience is more casual. These differing perceptions and assumptions are also present within the difference between paratexts on social media and promotional advertising. For example, a paid promotional

pop-up on a music news site has a completely different reception from a promotional paratext populating on a social media user's newsfeed. Where the advertisement is promotional just as the paratext is, the advertisement is often disdainfully closed where the paratext is examined by audience members with a more neutral orientation.

This all amounts to the digital age of social media profoundly impacting how people interface with music and, in doing so, how promoters perceive of and account for this impact. The central text, quite simply, is no longer perceived as being enough to encourage and entice fans by itself. Instead, paratexts are ceaselessly and artfully crafted by promoters to grab a massive, inattentive social media. Careful to avoid overtly commercial messages and the capitalistic rhetoric of advertising, the producer seeks to foster relationships with their fans on social media through interaction and paratextual articulations of personality. In fearing that their central text is ephemeral, producers seek to create an endless stream of paratextual ephemera. Thus, in relentlessly considering the paratext, producers implicitly allow their musically dazzling and laboriously created central text to be cast aside and eclipsed by their promotions.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The four distinct theoretical areas of special relevance to my producer study are detailed below. The first, medium theory, serves to give a theoretical background when examining social media channels for the producer study. Secondly, encoding/decoding provides a comprehensive perspective from which I can thoughtfully investigate the role of the promotional message producers. Thirdly, paratextual study allows for a multifaceted and nuanced look into how promotional texts function. Lastly, branding/sign



construction provides additional context to the complex concept of branding as it pertains to producers attaching symbolic meanings to their promotional paratexts.

These theoretical areas, distinct as they may be, contribute to and function alongside one another. Medium theory gives specific understanding to social media as the media through which paratexts operate. Brands function as promises of experiences through symbols much like how paratexts function as promises for the central text. Encoding/decoding allows us to take a magnifying glass to the production of paratexts and to consider the influence of medium upon the producer as well. Questions of branding and sign construction are also necessary parts of the encoding process to examine. Thus, each theoretical area affords my producer study a deeper level of understanding by functioning together when examining the perceptions and practices of music promoters.

### *Medium Theory*

Marshall McLuhan's provocative and infamous phrase "the medium is the message" has far-reaching consequences for the media-saturated world we occupy today. Started in the 1960s, and extended to today, this theory puts forth that media have profound and distinct impacts on messages which, in turn, profoundly positions the audiences that interact with and utilize them. The resultant message is substantially and irreversibly altered by the channel it travels through which ends up influencing audience expectations of and interactions with that message. In his 1964 book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, McLuhan puts forth that the medium on which a message travels is actually more important and worthy of study than the message itself (1994). McLuhan is also keen to mention that "the 'content' of any medium is always another

medium” (1994, p. 8). To better understand this, consider someone posting a hyperlink to an album on a friend’s Facebook page. This is a decidedly different experience from that same person loaning their friend a physical copy of the album, yet the medium of recorded music serving as the content remains the same in both examples. This is not to say that content is irrelevant, but simply that “the way we communicate, often taken for granted, often determines what we communicate, and therein just about everything else in life and society” (Levinson, 2000, p. 19). Put another way, media exert a profound influence upon all communication and that influence is not to be disregarded in favor of the communication itself.

By structuring this particular study so that both content and medium are both considered as separate, but also very important components of promotional messages within social media, practices and patterns can be more clearly and cohesively understood. As social media is at the center of this study, the application of medium theory to better understand the current media ecosystem becomes crucial for exposing how and why particular promotional messages work within those particular channels. While there have certainly been medium theory forays into social media, this study would be able to contribute specific understandings of producers and social media messages.

### *Encoding/Decoding*

Originally created in order to theorize about television, media and cultural scholar Stuart Hall’s (1980) encoding/decoding model is a particularly powerful lens through which to look at the creation and dissemination of messages across media in general. Hall (1980) put forth that the first step of his model, encoding, consists of a complex of coded meanings that need to be tailored to fit the context and worldview of the audience. In

short, the encoder attempts to engender a specific reading of their message so that the audience will hopefully decode and understand that same reading. Unsuccessful messages are encoded in a way not easily understood, or decoded, by the audience. From this more critical perspective, audience receptions and meanings have been frequently and successfully explored, but it is also effective for examining producers as well as audiences.

It is important to note that much of the research that has been conducted focuses on the ways different audiences work to decode messages across various media. However, far less of a focus has been placed on the producers that function to encode the meanings in the first place. In his producer study, InCheol Min (2004) noted that producers have unique conceptions of the audience, which in turn provides rationale for future producer studies as a worthwhile means of examining producer practices and the perceptions that precede them. It is worth noting that certain media, such as television, have received a greater amount of producer-oriented scholarship (ex: Newcomb, 2000) than other media, such as music. Thus, my goal here is to draw more attention to understanding the role of the music promoter as encoder through a producer study.

Encoders construct a message with dominant design or wording in order to achieve a desired understanding and reproduction of the reading in that subcultural formation. However, decoders may decipher messages in a number of different ways based upon their different experiences and social situations. Thus, encoding and decoding alike take into account specific “frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructure” (Hall, 1980, p. 130). This means that, in addition to relying upon established frameworks of cultural knowledge and understandings that many pieces of

scholarship critique, Hall's encoding/decoding model also takes into account the message's production as well as the technology of the medium through which the message travels. As such, content of the encoded message is far from being the only salient factor at play when considering the part of producers. The path of transmission holds unique expectations and positions that thusly affect the encoding and decoding processes alike. For example, the expectations of messages broadcast into television sets are very different from those expectations associated with a message that is posted on social media. In this way, medium theory plays a pertinent role when examining how producers work to encode their messages and how they consider these mediated messages, especially when faced with the multitude of social media at the disposal of the producer.

Encoding/decoding is an effective model for studying and understanding media, and the realm of social media is no exception. As previously mentioned, while the decoding practices of various audiences is regularly targeted for scholarship, producer studies that focus on encoding receive far less attention. Certainly, studies that focus on both encoding and decoding (ex: Livingstone, 2007) as well as producer studies focused on specifically message encoding and production do exist (ex: Min, 2004; Barkin, 2006), establishing a precedent for another producer-oriented study in this under-developed field of communication research. Compounding on this under-development of producer studies is the fact that relatively few producer studies have ventured into music, and less still that consider music promotion. Thus, this study targets perceptions and practices within the dynamic yet unexplored area of music promotion.

*Paratext*

The concept of paratext was originally coined and theorized by Gerard Genette (1997) in order to better understand how the various media that surround literary works, such as the cover and title, work alongside the actual text itself. For example, Genette would argue the cover of a book is a necessary paratextual element of a book that presents the literary text inside to the world and, in doing so, serves to extend the author's purpose or vision for their literary work. For a further example of paratexts, those elements that surround a film such as posters, trailers, actor interviews, DVD covers, inserts, and bonus features are all paratexts. In particular, Genette was also keen to classify the properties of paratextual elements and make sense of their place in reference to the central text, thus referring to paratextual elements as thresholds between the text and the world beyond (Genette, 1997). However, the understanding of a paratext as an "airlock" that readers enter to get to the text was found to be far too limiting for modern media scholar Jonathan Gray.

Gray has expanded paratext to not only encompass a wide range of media, but also to consider the complex ways paratexts function in relation to the text. Each paratext holds the potential to change the meaning of the overall text and thus has dramatic implications for productions, organizations, and brands (Gray, 2010a). This means that each piece of paratext is simply pointing toward a central text beyond, but rather influencing audiences by extending the central text; paratexts are intimately and profoundly tied to the central meanings and understandings of the text being extended/promoted. Returning to the earlier example of film paratexts, a trailer for a film consists of a much shorter, chopped up version of the central text that summarizes some

of the film's story in order to entice viewers to come and witness the full story. The trailer extends the meaning of the film and is directly tied to a viewer's experience regarding the film. Considering that paratexts, then, may hold such power in regard to the central texts they "work for," the notion of promotional campaigns as paratexts is incredibly salient to my study.

However, even though paratextual study has been greatly expanded and developed since its inception, it has not been meaningfully connected to promotional campaigns as paratexts or music as texts. Scholars have studied the paratexts of literature (Fathallah, 2016), television (Gray, 2008), film (Klecker, 2015), and video games (Gray, 2010a), yet there appears to be no substantial scholarship that considers examining the extension of a central musical text through paratext. While film trailers and website tie-ins for television shows have each been thoughtfully analyzed subjects, promotional messages for bands or musicians have not received that same treatment; this current gap in the growing field of paratextual study can and should be filled in order for the theory to progress.

Paratexts themselves are always rooted within the message function of encoding/decoding. They serve as distinct, meaningful, branded messages that refer to a central text. In this way, paratexts serve as a promise about the central text, a promise regarding what the central text will do for the audience. Returning to the earlier example of film trailers, these paratexts are meaningful in that they promise the viewer something if they go see the film, if they go *past* the paratext. Thus, a trailer for an action film that explicitly states that the film is the "must-see blockbuster of the summer" is making a promise to the viewer that encourages them to go and see the actual film.

Another relevant aspect of the paratext as the message is its dual roles as either precursory of the central text or as supplemental to it. Social media campaigns promoting new music serve both roles concurrently. They are created in order to reach new audiences, and thus to entice and motivate to action those new audience members that are not familiar with the music being promoted. However, they also serve to work as brand-building supplementary texts for those social media users that are already invested. This positions music promotion on social media as being more multifaceted and complex than advertising with the single goal of selling something. As such, promotional encoders may feel the need to construct messages in particular ways that consider both audience positions. Because paratexts play these two essential roles for audiences all while serving as the main form of exposure to new music, it means that a paratext has to be specifically encoded with these two roles in mind to be as effective as possible. It is important, then, to uncover ways that producers keep these two roles in mind as they design and execute promotional campaigns.

Despite not being specifically targeted for paratextual scholarship, recorded music and promotions have a rich and diverse history of paratextual usage. Everything from t-shirts to cardboard cutouts to the covers of albums themselves have served the dual roles of precursory and supplementary texts to interest audience members in the central text attached to the item. In the pre-digital age, these physical paratexts increasingly served as the entryway to the central musical text being referenced. For example, taking a trip to the local record store and seeing a provocative Elvis Costello cardboard cutout was a viable means of exposure. Furthermore, the records themselves do not *need* to be covered in images and text in the form of stylized album covers, but they have been for the past

seven decades in order to potentially generate some intrigue that could entice a viewer enough to purchase the album and give it a chance. Before this still, the actual musical text was the only means of exposure. Promotions have thus progressively pushed the music itself further away and expanded the image of that music. Now, while older, physical paratexts may still exist, promotional digital images and text serve as the indispensable paratexts to stimulate exposure for the digital age. Today, an endless selection of music is only one mouse click away. In response to this vast, cluttered collection of music on the Internet, producers have turned to promotional paratexts on social media as their primary means to differentiate and call attention to themselves. Promotional paratexts on social media have become the signposts serving to hopefully guide users back to a specific band or musician amidst the complex labyrinth of competing options.

### *Branding/Sign Construction*

As stated previously, paratexts are branded messages packed with meanings and symbolic connections that refer back to a central text and make a promise about it. A promotional paratext is specifically designed through the use of symbols that hold meaning in what Hall (1980) describes as our shared frameworks of knowledge. These promotional paratexts utilize these meaningful symbols to extend not only the central text, but also to extend the brand of the musician, band, or record label that produced it.

Just as paratexts serve as promises about the central text, brands are promises of experience. Where a paratext is essentially a doorway to encourage the audience to enter into the central text, a brand is an overarching promise that exists on both sides of the doorway. Thus, a brand is equally important before investment as well as after because it



serves as a continual promise of experience. Defined, brands are “mobile, reflexive and adaptable objects that enable corporations to capital. They are not monolithic monologues. Instead, they unfold within social space” (Carah, 2010a, p.2). What results from this definition is a loaded term which can refer from something as simple as choice of typography to far-reaching strategic planning decisions. However, brands and branding, no matter the scale, are generally ultimately concerned with making impressions, relaying meanings, and making promises in order to sell something. This concept of exposure leading to investment is referred to as conversion. Such is the case with the brand of musicians, bands, and record labels. The strategic choices to fashion the “face” of that musician, band, or record label in a particular way functions in order to entice possible listeners to become actual listeners, to open their ears and their wallets to the sonic and material goods of that brand. These strategic choices create the “face” that makes the promise of experience. Particularly, engagement and involvement with fans through social media is consistently mentioned as a key function of that music-based brands need to foster (Agrawal, 2016). As further evidence, musicians and bands may even achieve funding for a musical endeavor through interaction-oriented brand-building on social media in the form of “crowdfunding” (Evans, 2015). Thus, branding is a complex and ongoing process that begins always with the encoders of messages on behalf of the organization, creating paratexts that seek to invoke preferred meanings and connections, all while considering and accounting for the specific expectations of the social media channels they travel through.

**Research questions**

My research questions are crafted in order to effectively uncover the normative perceptions of music promoters in the current media ecosystem. By targeting the relationship between the paratext and the central text, I focus on isolating specific examples and extending theory. To specifically target underlying ideologies, I explore the recurrent, hidden ways of thinking that profoundly influence and impact how promotional producers operate on social media. And finally, in order to purposefully examine the effects of social media channel, I spotlight specific symbolic traits of social media as they influence the function of the producers. To reiterate, there is a need for this scholarship, as these critical decisions regarding music and social media usage have not been sufficiently analyzed in existing academic research. As such, my research questions here serve to guide my analysis of this intriguing intersection of promotional music message production in the modern social media environment:

*RQ1:* What does the extension of paratexts through social media do to the central text?

*RQ2:* What are the underlying ideologies about social media that underpin and influence the stated perceptions and practices of producers?

*RQ3:* How do the perceived symbolic traits and power of the channel impact the work of the producer?

## **Chapter 2: Review of Music Promotion and Media Literature**

As the goal of this thesis is to create a snapshot of how producers of promotional messages about music work to encode texts as they consider the social media ecosystem and its mediated audiences, in this chapter I situate my thesis firmly within the realms of music promotion, media studies, and advertising. In turn, each of these areas contributes distinct foundational insights and knowledge to my thesis. Existing music promotion scholarship provides that recurrent strategies and functions in promotion have been utilized effectively regardless of musical format or time period; these recurrent strategies include emphasizing the identity of the musicians (Suisman, 2009), seeking out uncommercialized spaces in which to promote, and building stories and experiences around the music (O'Reilly, Larsen, & Kubacki, 2013). This base of scholarship highlights the fact that music is a unique product that profoundly influences how people think of themselves and also how they use and purchase music (O'Reilly et al, 2013; Pinson, 2011; DeNora, 2006; Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). Media studies informs this study by providing the precedent of other producer studies that provide an understanding of the crucial encoding process of message creation and a basis for delineating and denaturalizing social media channels. Advertising contributes further concepts that are particularly applicable to examining and ultimately understanding the commercial logic and goals that underpin all promotion. These include the role of the salesperson in selling (Engineering News, 1912) and the powerful impact of advertising and branding on the lives of consumers (Aronczyk, 2008; Muñiz & Schau, 2007; Shields & Heineken, 2000; Schau & Gilly, 2003). Together, these contributions constitute trends that suggest consumers of music are strongly influenced both by music and advertising,

and the latter can be made even more effective when deployed in certain recurrent ways and with unique media attributes in mind. However, despite this substantial patchwork of knowledge, specific encoding strategies and perceptions related to music-oriented promotional paratexts on social media have not been explored. Another glaring omission in media and promotions scholarship alike is how promotional encoders consider the current social media to alter their messages and how they account for this impact. With this considered, this section serves to contextualize and situate my thesis while also pointing toward gaps in the research that my thesis fills.

### **Music Promotion**

Ever since music has existed, some form of music promotion has existed alongside it. Music was aggressively promoted even before playback technology like phonograph cylinders or gramophone records were widely purchased and used. The intersection where mass society and mass-produced music came together toward the end of the nineteenth century, a series of publishing houses in New York City known as Tin Pan Alley, serves as a logical starting point to begin examining music promotion as it was the first era where music became a mass medium. These publishing houses produced music in the form of popular sheet music. Suisman (2009) found that these publishing houses performed several essential functions through promotion:

[They] had to cultivate in consumers either a taste for more music in their lives, or for Tin Pan Alley songs over the other options. . . building a stable industry depended on high volume sales over time, not occasional flashes of activity, so producers had to promote a steady taste for the new among consumers. (p. 57)

Music producers worked to build and sustain a nationwide music audience for the first time through aggressive promotion. In fact, this emphasis on promotion that Tin Pan Alley pursued over a century ago remains in today's media ecosystem. Music promotion has only become more necessary and complex as music formats and viable promotional media have proliferated. Compounding on this promotion necessity is the sharp increase in the number of independent acts while the number of supported, label-employed musicians has fallen significantly (Masnick, 2013). This means that there are far more lesser-known musicians competing to sell music on a wider variety of formats. Now, instead of promoting sheet music that requires the buyer to have an in-depth knowledge of an instrument in order to recreate or attempting to sell songs for prohibitively expensive music-playback formats, promoters can share digital hyperlinks that instantaneously play recorded music. Where the access to the music has gotten easier, the promotion has become more nuanced. What remains consistent throughout is simply the need to promote these musical products so that people buy and listen to them, though not necessarily in that order.

One of the challenges of current-day music promotion is that the product is often intangible as a referent-less, downloadable digital file embedded on a website. Music is "one of only a handful of products that can be sold, distributed, and delivered all via the Internet" (Hutchison, 2008, p. 16). Of course, it is also true that music may come in a variety of formats like vinyl record or cassette tape, a tangible medium that holds the sonic contents of the music within. However, according to the 2015 Recording Industry Association of America Shipment and Revenue Statistics, only 28.8% of revenue came from consumers purchasing physical releases while digital downloads and streaming

services accounted for 68.3% of all musical revenue. Supporting this fact is the notion that promotions highlighting music recording or playback technology simply do not sell records. In the early twentieth century and late nineteenth century before, music promotion was approached conservatively by promoters with a technology-over-artist focus where the objects received more attention than the musicians recorded onto them. The Victor Talking Machine Company was one of the first to attach well-known and loved artists like Italian tenor Enrico Caruso to promotions instead of pushing the technology, which ended up generating more interest and selling more records (Suisman, 2009). People and experiences sell records by imbuing them with something provocatively human.

In addition to gaining an understanding of what sells music in the early twentieth century, Tin Pan Alley sheet music promoters realized that new spaces needed to be filled with the word of their product. In response to this, they sought uncommercialized spaces in the environment and inserted singers and musicians to play and discuss their sheet music in a practice that is referred to as plugging (Suisman, 2009). These uncommercialized spaces were simply areas where the means of selling the music were absent, such as street corners or stretches of sidewalk that were devoid of music. With the goal of the sale in mind, singers would show up to these music-less locales and commercialize the space by singing from sheet music and thus promoting that sheet music to passersby. This notion of producers seeking to fill vacant spaces with the image and sound of their product continues today in a digital format. Instead of on street corners or in front of businesses, promoters set to work to fill a virtual space with pictures, text, video, and sound in order to engage a potential audience. Music promotion seeks to

colonize spaces in this way and drench them with the music itself or, just as importantly, referents back to the music.

Before going on, it is important to note that some unique characteristics of recorded music as a product (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Firstly, recorded music is not destroyed or altered by consumption. This means that recorded music was designed specifically with repeated uses in mind, which contrasts with consumer commodities that need to be repurchased to be enjoyed again. Secondly, recorded music can be enjoyed in a variety of contexts. There is no one set designated context for recorded music, both socially and physically. However, due to the requirement of bulky playback machinery, physical formats like vinyl records do present physical limitations on where the recorded music is enjoyed. Thirdly, recorded music can be consumed with or without purchase. Individuals can play recorded music they purchased for others who have not purchased it. Increasingly common are digital formats of music being uploaded and shared freely on the Internet via various means such as full albums on YouTube. Finally, recorded music can be consumed actively and passively as well as publicly and privately. This means that recorded music can be both intently enjoyed by a single person in a private setting or played for a large ground as background music, which adds to its versatility as a product. In summary, where other products require specific consideration regarding purchasing and context of usage, music is diverse and open-ended in how people come to consume it and attach their identities to it. As such, Pinson (2011) puts forth that music is a rich, complex, and experiential product that should be considered unique from other products:

Links masses of people to certain visual, social, ideological, political, or musical attributes that each audience member believes to find in the music and/or image

of the band. We project our own influences onto the band or artist and identify with their music that fits our personalities and upbringing. (p. 188)

This means that music is anything but a simple commodity, as it comes to reflect and augment us as listeners and fans. Indeed, “music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is” (DeNora, 2006, p. 141). This power of music in defining one’s self means that music, as a product, cuts deeper into the personality and identity of the consumer than the majority of other products that are promoted and consumed.

This “power of music,” then, has distinct implications for promotion. The “brand” of the music, which includes the auditory and visual aesthetics of the music together, deeply impacts the self-perceived “brand” of the individual. O’Reilly et al. (2013) add further complexity to this notion by asserting that everything factors into the brand of music, including basic demographics (ex: sex and race) and ideological positions (ex: political beliefs), in addition to the more apparent aspects like genre and musical style. These factors add up to a complex responsibility for promoters to manage the identity of musicians so that audiences can be appealed to, reflected by, and identified with successfully. As such, promotion needs to consider the “whole package” of the musical product, not simply the recorded auditory component.

Again, music is a profound sonic product that can change us and it is the role of promotion to construct an image of the music to be sold. In supporting this point, Pinson (2011) is also keen to note that “we consume the image of music in addition to the sound” (p. 189), which means that the sounds and the images attached to it in the form of



album covers, music videos, and promotional pictures impact the listener together. These images are paratextual pieces that surround and alter the meaning of the text. Thus, in order for music to be sold, promoters must sell the *image* of the music. While listening to music is undoubtedly of prime importance to the consumption process, reading about and being engaged with the story of the music are also crucial parts consumption that cannot and should not be ignored (O'Reilly et al., 2013). As Danesi (2006) illustrates, "it is easier to remember things as words than to remember the things themselves. A word classifies something, keeps it distinct from other things, and, above all else, bestows socially relevant meanings to it" (p. 14). This naming and word association is critically important for the promotion of music in particular. The music itself is just an auditory component and relies upon promotion to translate the music into a cogent, enticing text. This again refers to the concept of constructing the image of the music to be consumed along with the music itself. Those promotional paratexts created for image construction, then, must employ language as well as visuals to constitute an image.

However, shifts in the media ecosystem used have come to impact the tactics of the music promoter. For example, directly prior to the widespread usage of social media within the past decade, websites were often seen as the single most important media presence to develop. Websites were seen by promoters as a way to expose the Internet to music, nurture a growing fanbase, provide a cheaper alternative to press kits, afford greater credibility to the musician, as well as provide a platform for advertising, information, and distribution (Gordon, 2005). While websites certainly still work to do all of the functions mentioned above, social media have since come to crowd the media ecosystem and seize the attention of promoters. Social media functions to connect the

constructed profiles of users within a system and, crucially, allows those users to communicate with others and form public connections with them (boyd & Ellison, 2007). Websites then, once seen as the killer platforms of promoting for musicians, are now seen by promoters as end destinations from which social media guides and entices users into visiting. The social medium appears open and interconnected whereas the website does not. As stated by Hutchinson (2008), the music market is changing:

Moving the market away from the ‘head’ consisting of the top-selling artists, writers, movies, and so forth and moving members of the market ‘down the tail’ by allowing them to discover new, less popular products easily that would, under previous circumstances, gone unnoticed in the marketplace. (p. 10)

This means that the current media ecosystem is, to a certain extent, providing the appearance of more equality in exposure than previous media ecosystems allowed for. Where radio stations have become viewed by current promoters as beneficial to well-known artists while simultaneously hurting lesser-known by denying them airplay, social media is viewed by these same promoters as an egalitarian space that benefits both the well and lesser-known musicians. Social media impacts this media ecosystem by appearing to allow for more musicians and their promotions to proliferate and find audiences, fostering perceptions of social media as equal and meritocratic. Dewan and Ramaprasad (2014) support this notion of “equality” by finding that online engagement, like blogging and social media activity, seems to more strongly impact lesser-known musicians than it does more popular, mainstream musicians. Which means that music promotion on social media appears to seem essential for those musicians without an established following.

From the late nineteenth century through to today, music promoters have utilized many different tactics under the strategic umbrella of exposure. Whether the specific tactic was street corner serenades to grab the ears of passersby or bright, alluring posts to catch the eye of the scrolling social media user, the goal of ubiquity through entering uncommercialized spaces is the strategy that underpins the actions of the promoter. While music is indeed an exceedingly unique type of good to be sold, promoters have come to understand how specific aspects of music can be constructed in order to sell records. One such understanding is that of highlighting the human stories and elements of the music as opposed to focusing on the technology utilized to record the music. While the various tactics of image creation are, for instance, wide and ranging, they hint at a continued strategic and logic theme beneath. The tactical “necessity” of social media for burgeoning bands is another matter of importance to the music promoter in the current media ecosystem. Together, this scholarship informs the way we come to understand how music promotion has been done and how it should be done.

### **Encoding/Decoding**

Encoding/decoding offers an effective theoretical position from which to break down and understand what happens inside of the process of media creation and dissemination. Hall (1980) structured encoding/decoding to provide important insights within that might have been otherwise ignored. As such, encoding/decoding casts a wider and more closely meshed net to capture matters of creation by the producers on one end and dissemination by the audience on the other. As such, this model is of great use for studying music promotion, as it allows the researcher to more thoroughly and intuitively conceive of how and why of the music promotion process. These producer studies, within

the encoding/decoding model, serve as strong ways of fostering new understandings of message creation, such as in the areas of music and advertising. In an example of a practical music-based producer study, Dunn (2012) explores the production process at work within different do-it-yourself (DIY) punk record labels that intentionally eschew traditional business models. This producer study is both industry-specific and critically oriented, examining the producer practices of a large set of DIY punk labels while also contrasting their practices with that of larger record labels. While focusing on advertising while employing rhetorical methods, Himmelstein (2000) combined a close reading of a Kodak television commercial in conjunction with phone interviews with the creative agency and client department that both were intimately involved with the production of the ad. The rich context of America's political scene alongside of the interviews and close reading of the ad led Himmelstein to a deep level of analysis and understanding that would not have been possible without data from the producers of the text. Both Dunn and Himmelstein utilize qualitative data obtained from practitioners and producers embedded in a particular field, which provide a strong foundation upon which to situate my own producer study. My thesis serves the dual roles of contributing to encoding scholarship while also filling a gap in ascertaining the practices and perceptions of music promotions producers as well as the underpinning ideologies that influence those practices and perceptions.

However, within the field of encoding/decoding scholarship, much attention has been given to the decoding side of the communication process. This manifests in a wealth of audience-centered research that considers how audiences receive and interpret messages. Less attention has been paid to the initial communication step wherein

producers encode their messages. Barker (2000) echoes this realization by claiming that “discussion has been restricted almost exclusively to only one of these “determinate moments,” or, decoding. Indeed, the process of encoding, despite its homologous position in the model, has by comparison, been virtually ignored” (p. 169). Despite this dearth of encoding-oriented work, multiple producer studies have sought to uncover insights about specific areas of media and communication. Marris and Thornham (2000) assert that producer studies, though they cover a wide swathe of production elements, sufficiently embrace all relevant areas of production:

All the factors that contribute to the shaping and making of media output: economic and business, legal and regulatory, technological, managerial and organisational, employment patterns and divisions of labour, artistic skills and professional routines and understandings, including operational concepts of markets and audiences. These can be seen as the determinants of the text, all that is ‘prior’ to the text. (p. 118)

Producer studies are of paramount importance in that they examine various deep structures that shape the text. From disparate matters of organizational bureaucracy to technical equipment to message production, producer studies are unified in that they examine what happens before a text is made.

Overall, producer studies constitute an efficient and effective means of collecting and building vital understandings many diverse areas of production; specific producer studies have discovered a myriad of important findings in a variety of fields. For instance, Tunstall (2000) takes a direct, practical look at the producers of television in Britain. He examines the historical, managerial, departmental, and gendered look what informs the

texts created by television production organizations. He finds that British television is heavily centered around a producer that controls programming. Where Tunstall's producer study was more practical production-oriented, producer studies can also be critical: D'Acci (2000) as well as Byars and Meehan (2000) conduct critical, feminist explorations of televisual production. D'Acci specifically hones in on the production of the popular 1980s series *Cagney and Lacey* as it applies to female representation on the screen, also highlighting the struggle between the show's production team and the network executives regarding portrayals of the women on the show. Byars and Meehan focus on television production narrowcasting, which is programming specifically oriented to a demographic. In the case of their study, it was looking at the production context of the Lifetime channel and its portrayals of women in order to attract female viewers. Corner (2000) also provides another example in his study on televisual documentary production that producer studies can also be rooted in technical specifications. These producer studies provide specific insight into the production of media in various formats and styles, such as the documentary, breaking down each part for benefit of the practitioner. These producer studies afford insights that a textual analysis simply could not, as a textual analysis does not meaningfully factor in the specific actions and thoughts of the producer of the text. For understanding production from a simultaneously deep and practical position, producer studies stand alone. Thus, producer studies are adaptable to unique contexts and situations, which makes them an asset for any scholar seeking to understand antecedents that influence and alter the texts that follow.

**Branding/Sign Construction**

As established in Chapter 1, a brand is the overarching and continual promise of a desirable experience that exists both before and after consumption. This promise of experience can be structured and promoted in a wide variety of ways, but consumption itself is a symbolic practice: socially assigned symbolic meanings are bestowed on individuals by the consumption of goods (Krogman, 2011). In this way, enjoyment and consumption are highly symbolic in themselves. In this same way, promotional paratexts utilize symbols in order to assign meanings to the music being promoted. This complex use of symbols to create specific meanings and values to music is something that needs to be looked at and properly understood from the perspective of the producer. The standpoint of the producer is unmatched for unpacking and comprehending this usage of symbols.

In this section, I refer to and connect some of these recurrent structures of promotion as advertising strategies. These advertising strategies and findings all position my thesis by providing a foundation of persistent concepts of promotion. In addition, I examine Sarah Thornton's notion of subcultural capital because music promotion uses and appeals to subcultures within promotional paratexts by articulating genre-based aesthetics and meanings. As such, subcultural capital becomes an important concept to break down and understand key elements of promotional production. Finally, I explain characteristics of, differences between, and scholarly findings related to several of the most popularly-used social media: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

*Advertising Strategies*

Throughout modern times, advertising has been utilized in many different shapes and forms in order to motivate individuals to buy a specific product, service, or experience. At their cores, advertising and branding are very closely related. While a brand is the continual promise of experience before and after consumption, advertising is what explicitly builds up that initial promise to coax potential consumers into becoming actual consumers. Thus, advertising works as the first wave of branding, the enticing and exciting lure that reels in potential consumers. While this core function of advertising has remained unchanged, the tactics of paratextual creation in advertising have changed. For instance, advertising four decades ago consisted of print ads in newspapers, magazines, and in the form of posters and billboards; ads before films and during commercial breaks on television; and aural ads on radio. These advertisements were easy to spot and classify as advertisements. Jonathan Gray (2010b) found that the concern with this inherently recognizable format meant that:

Ads, after all, are seen as manipulative and as trying to get something out of us rather than to give something to us; they are seen as peddling stereotypes and as appealing to base instincts rather than addressing or even developing more noble instincts, and thus they are seen as more worthy of critique or scorn than of attention, much less engagement. (p. 55)

This assertion keenly points out the Achilles heel of advertising: advertising *wants* something from potential consumers. Advertising is unequivocally and solely interested in selling. Advertisers are only “sated” when the audience complies and buys their product. This view has given a particularly negative connotation to advertising. Not only



are these advertisements seen as manipulative, they are ubiquitous – permeating all physical and digital space. This blatant nature of advertising means that individuals who have lived their lives amidst constant barrage of advertisement can simply turn their backs on obvious, one-way promotion. Nava and Nava (2000) back this finding by asserting that young consumers regard the way an advertisement is constructed in traditional mass media advertising as far more important and worthy of interest than the product being pushed. Thusly, products can longer be promoted based only on their attributes. Instead, products require subtle, artful promotion to disarm critical potential customers and also attract the interest of discerning individuals in an advertising-saturated world.

In addition to the fact that the current media ecosystem has created nuanced consumers of advertising, music promotion is not without its own special challenges. Because music promotion is seen as a commercial discourse, it tends to be considered “tainted” by individuals that believe music is ideally and purely art (O’Reilly et al., 2013). The language of promotion and branding can be seen as coming directly from the ethically and artistically compromised system of capitalism that privileges money over art. As such, promotional messages are fraught with some degree of risk within the music scene that would not be present in the realm of consumer goods. In this same vein, music promotion has been critiqued as fostering a loss of value and meaning when music is produced primarily as a commodity instead of art. Kubacki and Croft conducted a 2004 study of the opinions of jazz and classical musicians from Britain and Poland regarding promotion and found that an astounding half of respondents felt that music promotion was demeaning while the other half felt that they should be involved in promotion just as

they were involved in music creation. This division shows that music promotion is not universally appreciated among musicians who can benefit from it. This ambivalence, and even hostility, toward music promotion compounds on the advertising-saturated mediated environment, making promotion of sound especially complex.

The entrance of the Internet into the media ecosystem has allowed promotion to become more diverse and, potentially, less blatant by fragmenting the audience. This fragmentation can be both a benefit and hindrance. As a benefit, advertisers may be able to better tailor messages to more specific groups of potential consumers. For example, advertising guitar amplifiers on a discussion-based website for experienced guitarists. On the downside, the mass audience of the past is no longer whole on the Internet. Instead broken into millions of subsections and scattered through different sites combining as market aggregates. Despite the specifics of the fragmentation fostered by new media, classic recurrent strategies and tenets of advertising can be applied in current social media promotion. Where the specifics of advertising tactics are always fleeting and situation-based, I assert that there are enduring advertising strategies at work that underpin all successful promotion. Despite the underlying negative viewpoint most people have toward advertising (Gray, 2010b) or the rise of younger, more astute consumers of media and advertising (Nava & Nava, 2000), advertising has persisted by continually coming back to some notions that are at the very heart of promotion. These are notions such as the importance of accounting for consumer apathy and competition in selling or always fixating on the ultimate goal of the sale are as critical and relevant to promoters today as they were a century ago. This situates my study to draw from classic

advertising strategies that have continued on throughout decades, regardless of the distinctions of the time period, medium used, or what is being sold.

Before fragmentation and the rise of niche groups fostered by the Internet, advertising served to push mass goods to a mass audience. For a century, advertisers built their logic around the concept of mass goods and a mass audience to appeal to. Thusly, the strategies that arose from this logic were considered universal for the application of selling any product to the audience at large. *Selling your product: The modern idea*, a 1912 book by the publisher Engineering News, articulates these timeless advertising concepts more than a century ago with the assertion that “You can no longer wait for the buyer to come to you. Demand for most things does not exist- it must be created out of the needs or potential desires of the people” (p. 1). This sentiment is not confined in time to the early twentieth century, as it applies to the current media ecosystem. It is not enough to simply create a social media page and expect widespread adoption, usage, and interaction of potential customers. The book goes further in providing that a message needs to push past two large barriers: apathy and competition. The first of the barriers, apathy, can be a surprisingly large obstacle to surmount. As evidence of this truth, even amazing technological marvels like electric light, the telephone, and the automobile were met with consumer apathy when they were introduced to the public (Stanley, 1982). Consumers, and even stated fans of brands, cannot be expected to manufacture their own interest in something. An external force, promotion, is needed to bring a consumer into motion toward purchasing. The second barrier, competition, means that organizations need to somehow stimulate demand for their goods, services, and/or experiences while there are, simultaneously, an abundance of other options available to the consumer

(Stanley, 1982). This aspect of competition is especially salient to the music ecosystem, as there are copious different genres, musicians, and songs available for Internet users to choose from at any given time. Furthermore, apathy and competition compound on one another to make promotion a challenging task.

Once apathy and competition are properly addressed and considered, the goal of motivating action remains the last, and most important, step in the process. In the eye of the salesperson, “the only thing that counts is action” (Engineering News, 1912, p. 3). Social media disguises this objective with notions of interaction and “brand personality.” An organization is on social media to ultimately get individuals to buy things, but this is always cloaked in messaging tactics. Paratexts are one such tactic. Advertising logic dictates that these messages must establish an explicit course of action for the receiver to take and thus “a clearly drawn relationship between taking action and receiving benefits from that action is thus a logical component for most promotional messages. This is not to imply that such a call for action must be a blatant one. However, if promotion is to achieve its objective of making the seller’s products or services meaningful to would-be buyers, the relationship between goal achievement and a clear course of action must be stressed” (Kernan et al., 1970, p. 176). An organization does not consistently create paratexts to post on their social media page for the fun of “joining the conversation” in digital space. Instead, that organization operates with the ever-present goal of improving their financial outlook, thus pursuing the goal of the sale by means both blatant and disguised.

Even the antiquated views of the past provide an understanding into the advertising strategies of today. In the early twentieth century, advertising was seen as the

first wave of the sales onslaught with the primary mission to inform (Engineering News, 1912). This means that promotion has to cover the ground of informing and, hopefully, also selling. This view of promotion as a sort of middleman that leads to the salesperson that then makes the sale continued clear from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century. Echoing the advertising sentiment of 1912, Kernan, Dommermuth, and Sommers (1970) clarify that their view considers promotion to hopefully bring possible consumers to a place of negotiation with sellers. Hence, the traditional view was that promotional paratexts simply do not do the actual selling. This separation from the promotion and the sale cannot, however, persist today in a media ecosystem that has collapsed the space between the two. This means that promotion now accomplishes more than it ever previously could. When individuals communicate “with others about the importance of the brand to their lives, consumers become promotional intermediaries themselves, working in the service of the brand yet without the financial remuneration that its owners enjoy” (Aronczyk, 2008). Not only can promotions directly link to places of digital sales, but they can foster the fans and avid consumers within reach to continue their brand message with their friends. In fact, advertising cuts much deeper into the meanings and lives of individuals than the average consumer may initially assume. In fact, advertisements are “powerful shared texts that structure and become intertwined with much social interaction” (Muñiz & Schau, 2007, p. 36). As such, advertisements can come to alter the self-definition and perceptions of the consumer (Shields & Heineken, 2000) and can even foster the merging of a brand into a consumer’s self-identity and thus influence the way they define themselves and even communicate (Schau & Gilly, 2003). This ability of advertising to deeply influence the consumers, combined with the

profundity of the musical product in shaping individual identity, appears to position music promotion as an especially effective agent of symbolic consumption.

While it is true that the age-old concept of promotion as a primarily informative step in to soften up a consumer for a salesperson to then make a sale no longer holds sway in a media ecosystem that has combined the place of promotion and the place of sales. While it is true that certain pieces of classic advertising logic no longer hold sway in this interconnected digital realm, there are some recurrent fundamentals of advertising that are strikingly applicable to current promoting practices. Consumers, past and present, respond to when unchanging needs and desires that can be tapped into by promotion. It is from these recurrent, ever-present advertising strategies that I draw from and consider.

### *Subcultural capital*

When considering music and its promotion, it also becomes important to understand social factors and concepts at play. One of these relevant social factors is subcultural capital. Specifically, subcultural capital is derived from social capital and cultural capital. Firstly, subcultures are pertinent due to the fact that “when people can no longer maintain face-to-face contact with more than a small part of the population, subcultures develop to help individuals satisfy their needs for more specific identities” (Stanley, 1982, p. 20). This is what social media does; it caters to subcultures by allowing the individual to cherry-pick their associated organizations and friends. Once this is understood, it is important to clarify where subcultural capital originates from. One antecedent concept, social capital, is understood to “mean all those resources that an actor can mobilize and/or profit from because of his embeddedness in a network of relations with other actors” (Esser, 2008, p. 23). This means that social capital is directly

contingent upon social relationships with other individuals and meanings derived from cultural referents. Social capital directly corresponds to the closeness, benefits, and value of being part of a group. Where the other antecedent concept, cultural capital, functions as the “lynchpin of a system of distinction in which cultural hierarchies correspond to social ones and people’s taste are predominately a marker of class” (Thornton, 2006, p. 99). Thus, to have cultural capital is to show ones’ level of class and to have social capital means to be embedded within a certain group. From these concepts, Thornton (2006) draws out what she refers to as subcultural capital, which is described as a display of cultural knowledge that elevates status while also distinguishing those subculture members from members of other groups. These displays can be objectified through a showing of desirable physical items or embodied through a communication that utilizes language and style that are privileged in the subcultural.

During the creation process, producers of promotional paratexts consider the group(s) they are seeking to appeal to when structuring their message. In doing so, producers are considering the subcultures that are salient to the thing being promoted. One effective way to appeal to subcultures is to integrate the aesthetics and meanings of the genre within the paratext. For example, if a promotional producer is creating a paratext for a new psychedelic rock album, that producer must first consider specific aspects of that psychedelic rock-loving subculture if the paratext is to be an enticing promise that also extends the meanings of central text. As the psychedelic rock musicians recurrently utilize bright, kaleidoscopic colors and countercultural concepts in their live shows and album covers, the promoter may consider these aspects and seek to include them in promotions so that the paratextual extensions articulate subcultural elements of

the psychedelic rock genre. In this way, promoters attempt to remain genuine to a genre through their paratexts. Thus, the visuals and the text of the paratext are somehow informed by the subcultures they were created for. The subcultures for Christian rock and psychedelic rock, for instance, might react very differently to the same style of promotional paratext. Thus, subcultural capital may potentially have commercial and financial benefits for musicians and music organization if it is utilized and appealed to successfully. Thornton (2006) explores this notion explaining the role of subcultural capital:

While subcultural capital may not convert into economic capital with the same ease or financial reward as cultural capital, a variety of occupations and incomes can be gained as a result of ‘hipness.’ DJs, club organizers, clothes designers, music and style journalists and various record industry professionals all make a living from their subcultural capital. Moreover, within club cultures, people in these professions often enjoy a lot of respect not only because of their high volume of subcultural capital, but also from their role in defining and creating it.  
(p. 100)

This means that subcultural capital is particularly salient in regard to producers within the so-called “cultural industries.” As music is a distinctly powerful and important cultural form with a wide range of unique genres and styles, subcultural capital is certainly a relevant concept to include within this producer study. Subcultural capital exposes the frameworks of knowledge against which messages are understood and judged. This concept of subcultural capital is an area that I build upon by understanding how music



promotions producers articulate this kind of capital in their own communication on social media.

### *Medium Theory and Social Media*

Every social networking site, or social medium, is distinct in terms of message production and audience reception. boyd and Ellison (2007) define Internet-based social networking sites in terms of three essential features. Firstly, the site allows individuals to create their own profile within the system. For example, Facebook users must first create a profile in order to communicate with the profiles of other users. An external message outside of the social medium cannot get to the recipient if the sender does not also have a profile within the medium. Secondly, the site allows individuals to group together on the basis of different connections. This can manifest in the form of friends finding each other within the medium or disparate individuals joining a group predicated on a shared interest. Finally, the site allows individuals to browse through the system in order to make connections to other profiles. This means that users can traverse the medium to view and seek out individuals' profiles. While these criteria sufficiently encompass the broad uses of social media, it does not explore specific medium traits that may impact encoding and decoding alike. Where social media has been considered monolithic in the past, medium theory would keenly assert that they are not. Medium theory provides that each medium fundamentally alters the messages that sent and received within them. This essential tenet of medium theory certainly also applies to the many social media channels that exist. In this section, then I seek to explore and delineate each of the social media that were studied. Specifically, I look at three separate social media: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

These specific symbolic traits inform the expectations of both encoders and decoders the social media. McLuhan (1994) puts forth the notion that each medium has distinct traits that impact how messages are both constructed and received. These symbolic traits are important aspects to look at for assessing and understanding different media. For example, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are all bidirectional because they offer a discussion section where two parties may interact with one another while simultaneously also being public because they operate in the view of the full mediated audience. However, even though each social medium is bidirectional, it is up to the producers of content whether to operate in one or two-way communication. For example, a Facebook user can either engage in discussion on their post and utilize two-way communication or simply post content while ignoring comments and discussions, thus opting for one-way communication. In addition, even though all of these social media messages exist on server space indefinitely after they are posted, the media display different levels of permanence. For example, content on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter all tend to be more ephemeral than permanent. This ephemeral nature is due to the fact that new posts and content are continually added while old ones are pushed further into the background and thus into obscurity; Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter posts from years ago tend to be of little consequence to current users. In addition, each social media has similar spatiotemporal characteristics in that they allow posted content to become available immediately for fans' perusal. Lastly, they each display different levels of transparency. For example, a Facebook post may inherently be seen as having a higher level of transparency and thus a higher degree of truth associated with it due to the fact that users are required to use their real names when creating a profile, in theory

making that user more accountable. Instagram and Twitter may have a lower level of transparency due to the fact that they allow users to create their own alias for commenting and posting content. Together, the symbolic traits of each medium dictate and alter the messages that travel through them.

In regard to universal usage, considering the finding that people and their experiences are more salient to selling records than the technology behind it, it is no surprise that fans of music in the current media ecosystem expect their favorite musicians to be a part of their world (Nevue, 2011). Audiences are not content to view their favorite musicians from afar, but rather seek to engage with them and incorporate them into their lives, a phenomenon fostered namely by social media. Supplementing this key finding are a growing number of studies that seek to explore and explain the mechanics of how content circulates on these media and how audiences come to then use that specific medium. In terms of Facebook, Salo, Lankinen, and Mäntymäki (2013) conducted a study of personal usage of the site as it pertains to music. They found that all of their 28 participants had a Facebook profile and liked various Facebook pages of lesser-known and famed musicians alike through either seeking them out themselves or being invited to like the page by a friend. The study also goes on to mention that lesser-known musicians' pages were often liked by fans to indicate support whereas more widely known musicians' pages were followed for information. Because Facebook is viewed with a higher level of transparency due to actual names and identities being used, fans can readily and apparently express their support for a musician by liking and commenting on their paratexts. However, regardless of their level of fame, fans also liked the pages in order to signal their musical tastes to others in order to reinforce their constructed social

identities. This information demonstrates the relevance and specific uses of audiences in utilizing Facebook to “support” and keep tabs on musicians, but also evidence of Facebook’s symbolic traits influencing audience practices and expectations.

Like Facebook, Instagram has its own unique applications and nuances regarding music. In March of 2016, Nielsen Music conducted a poll that found Instagram users reported to spend roughly 42 percent more money on music than individuals in the general population (Rys, 2016). Not only does it appear Instagram users seem to spend more on music, but one out of four users on the medium follow a music-related page (“Instagram offers music,” 2015). Medium theory puts forth the notion that media dictate the uses and expectations of the audience, therefore the structure of Instagram must in some way foster these factors. Instagram, for instance, privileges visuals by making that the key component of user posts. Considering this, Instagram can be seen to put a compelling premium on promotional posts with a distinct visual flair. While these are exciting factors for music promoters to consider, text on Instagram posts tends to be peripheral while the pictures are the primary area of focus. This is compounded on by the fact that hyperlinks cannot be added to captions (Rys, 2016), which creates a powerful roadblock for the linked paratexts that music promotion can strongly benefit from.

Finally, Twitter has its own specific mediated nuances and traits that inform usage. Of Twitter’s 313 million active users, 82% of those active users login and operate on the medium through their mobile device (Twitter usage, 2016). This prevalent on-the-go mobile usage by Twitter users combined with the frequency and compact, 140 character or fewer size of Tweets positions Twitter at the more ephemeral than Facebook and Instagram. While the messages on Twitter may be both plentiful and ephemeral, 49%

of those active Twitter users follow brands or companies through the medium (Walters, 2016). This is directly related to the vast majority of Twitter users reporting to use the medium to stay abreast of news and updates (Rosenstiel, Sonderman, Loker, Ivancin, & Kjarval, 2015). This usage indicates that, while messages on Twitter may not last long, the medium dictates a particular audience emphasis on connecting with organizations in order to be informed. This influence of the medium certainly impacts the likeliness of music promoters to utilize Twitter for their own promotional updates.

It is also important to stress that, as music is often considered a key aspect of an individual's self-identity, it is no coincidence that one of the primary motives for utilizing social media is to reinforce social identity (Dholakia, Bagozzi, & Pearo, 2004). While these identities are certainly constructed and reinforced outside of social media, social media is an important site of maintenance. Each medium may function distinctly and hold their own specific symbolic attributes that inform how they are utilized, social media in the current media ecosystem play a critical role in strengthening an individual's social identity. Thus, the importance of music in shaping identity and social media in reinforcing that identity should be considered in music promotion in the same way distinct symbolic attributes are.

Thus, from examining the specific symbolic traits and distinct usages tied to each social medium, I can form a foundation upon which to build further insights and understandings of how promoters seen and use these social media. The tenets of medium theory are as relevant today as they were half a century ago. Even though the media used may change drastically, jumping from one technological advancement or fad to another,

the understanding that each media fundamentally impacts and alters the messages that travel through them is as crucial a concept to my producer study as it is applicable.

### **Conclusions**

Within this chapter, I have invoked theories and brought in a wide range of studies as they pertain to the concept of promoting music, including recurrent advertising concepts, an application of medium theory to specific social media, and subcultural capital as a key notion for promotional success. These pieces of literature all combine to verify the study of music promotion as an important and worthy endeavor. Going forward, then, it is essential to consider several key understandings. Firstly, promotion is deeply nuanced. While potential consumers may shrug off promotions, promotions still have the capacity to influence, especially when coupled with the recurrent advertising strategies, like apathy compensation, that have underpinned advertising logic for over a century. As consumption is symbolic, promotional paratexts do the work of strategically structuring those symbols to foster a desired meaning for the central text. Secondly, music necessitates specialized promotional practices. As an auditory component with the ability to profoundly impact consumers, music is a unique product that requires distinct promotions. An image, replete with text and visuals, must be created by the promoters in order to more effectively sell that music. In addition, music promoters have found distinct messages and strategies have worked over the years, such as building humanistic stories around the music and seeking out uncommercialized spaces where music can be promoted. Finally, music promotion on social media has been found to have some particular, salient aspects. However, different social media are used for decidedly different things based upon the unique set of symbolic traits each medium possesses.

These traits may inform the way music promoters use each social medium for posting promotional paratexts. In addition, music promotion on social media has its own distinct set of advantages, such as the allowance of both one and two-way communication, and disadvantages, such as overabundance, when compared to other media. Together, this chapter forms on strong foundation for understanding music promotion and building upon that information. The next chapter will outline the methodology of my thesis.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This thesis seeks to understand how producers of promotional messages about music construct their messages and how they conceive of both the audience and social media as a channel. In other words, I attempted to understand what the recurrent themes underpin the producer's perceptions when creating their promotional messages. I also looked for how promoting music as a unique experiential product influences both the conceptualization and practice of promoting.

In order to accomplish this, I set out to conduct a producer study that works to examine and explore the considerations and practices of producers who encode and create messages. To advance this understanding of production of promotions about music, I procured interviews with active producers of promotional messages. I selected data collection through interviews because they allow for the collection of valuable firsthand producer data that provides actual, concrete examples and descriptions of experiences and perceptions. The 22 producers I interviewed are either musicians who construct their own social media promotions or individuals at record labels who promote their signed musical acts on social media. By utilizing interviews driven by practical questions that consider the experiences and perspectives of the interviewees, the promoters candidly spoke for themselves and their unique mindsets. I applied constant comparative analysis to this collected data, which served as a valid and effectual foray into answering key questions about the producers of promotional messages about music on social media.

I extend encoding/decoding scholarship, producer studies, and work to bring oft-ignored matters of textual creation to light by focusing attention distinctly on the role, practices, and perceptions of the encoder. Producer studies, thusly, are particularly



effective and applicable for delving into the production of mediated messages, such as promotional paratexts. In terms of structure, producer studies, such as InCheol Min's 2004 study of producers at a Texas-based alternative newspaper, have set a precedent for small sample sizes to allow for a more detailed foray into the data obtained from the producers and also because there are simply less producers to interview than there are decoders. Specifically, Min's producer study sample size consisted of seven employees of the *Texas Observer* for reasons of depth but also due to the amount of the producers available (2004). In structuring this thesis, I considered all of these salient and beneficial aspects of the nature of producer studies. Specifically, my sample size consists of 22 participants. This keeps in-depth interviews with producers still achievable and effective in answering my research questions.

### **Sampling Strategy**

As I set out to understand the effect paratexts have on the central musical text, the underlying ideologies that shape social media promotion of music, and how the symbolic traits of the social medium factor into promotional encoding, my sample is specifically made up of those individuals who work with social media to promote music. As stated previously, these producers are all either solo musicians, members of bands, or social media promoters at record labels. These individuals have experience with and firsthand knowledge about structuring messages, social media, and the specific music they promote, which makes them ideal participants to answer specific questions about promotional perspectives and strategies. As such, this sample represents current independent, North American musicians and record labels who actively create promotions to circulate on social media. These individuals represent a slice of actual

producers of promotional messages about music, providing a snapshot of current social media music promoters.

I bound my sample to independent musicians, labels, and other musical organizations that operate within either the United States or Canada. For this thesis, I conceive of independent as those musicians and labels not associated with a major record label such as Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, or Warner Music Group. Thus, independent connotes a level of success that is not widespread, but more niche-oriented in relation to geographical location or genre. To promote a variety of different viewpoints and backgrounds in this particular area, I utilized maximum variation sampling (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) in order to widen the scope of the study to encompass different viewpoints and levels of notoriety. This type of sampling seeks to find exemplars with a wide range of characteristics in order to build conceptual understanding. Thus, maximum variation sampling allowed me to accrue maximum procedural encoding insight into a wide variety of campaigns, experiences, and understandings to explore in this producer study. However, to bind the sample in a manageable way, I did not examine major record labels, such as Sony Music Entertainment, on the grounds that they may incorporate too many individuals on a promotion campaign to supply meaningful data. For this same reason, I also excluded independent musicians that have attained a prominent status, such as the band Radiohead, due to their level of fame impacting their role as producers of promotions. Though I steered away from particularly popular and/or large exemplars on the high end of the sample, I still considered relatively unknown independent exemplars as valid for my

study due to the fact that these lesser-known artists promote just as much or even more than more well-known artists.

In binding my sample to exclude major record labels and bands as well as those producers outside of the United States and Canada, my sample specifically reflects independent musicians, bands, and record labels operating within those two countries. By including producers who range from local middle-Atlantic area musicians with a small following of fans to Canadian musicians with an established role in their respective genres to independent record labels operating within the Midwest, my sample of producers represents a clear-cut collection of independent North American encoders of promotional messages. Furthermore, all the producers within the sample represent musicians, bands, and record labels that specifically create and handle their own social media promotions, which reflects those other independent musicians, bands, and record labels also doing the work of encoding paratexts themselves.

### **Design of Study**

In order to effectively uncover recurrent themes of perceptions and practices, I applied constant comparative analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to make sense of the firsthand accounts and perceptions. The end result of constant comparative analysis is the discovery of core concepts, composed solely of data, that then answer research questions. As my goal for this thesis was to identify the perceptions and practices of music promoters as they pertain to my research questions, constant comparative analysis allowed me to arrive at that goal by delving into the firsthand data, continually referring to and expanding examples from that data, and coming out with clear evidence. Ultimately exposing common threads and linkages across the data that answer my key

questions about music promotion was only allowed through utilization of constant comparative analysis.

### **Interviewing Process**

Interviews offer an excellent strategy of data collection for interrogating and understanding concepts from the point of the interviewee. Because interviews are “particularly well suited to *understand the social actor’s experience and perspective*” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173), utilizing interviews to acquire a clearer and more accurate description from a producer is sensible. Specifically, interviews are an effective means of ascertaining actual participant viewpoints and understandings. As the goal of this thesis is to provide a detailed and nuanced look into the practices and perceptions of individuals who promote music, this choice to make use of interviews provided a compelling window into the encoding strategies of and perceptions held by promoters.

In properly utilizing interviews, the researcher must employ bracketing to shelve their own “vested interests, personal experience, cultural factors, assumptions, and hunches” (Fischer, 2009, p. 583) to guard against tampering. In this way, I employ bracketing to shelve my own perspective so that the interviews let the experiences and thoughts of the promotional producers speak for themselves to answer my research questions. By contrast, data collection such as ethnography or netnography can allow the unstated assumptions of the researcher to enter into the data and influence data analysis. Interviews correct this problem of unstated assumptions by shifting the emphasis on providing data from the researcher to the actual participants. With this in mind, bracketing during interview analysis kept my beliefs and thoughts about promotion from skewing the data.

Additionally, interviews allow for a high level of rich, qualitative data to be collected from each participant. In his producer study of the *Texas Observer*, Min provides that “the in-depth interview provides a natural context of meaning production between the interviewer and the respondent” (2004, p. 453). While Min’s producer study to examine writer viewpoints inside the context of a specific physical organization necessitated that his interviews were conducted in person to more accurately reflect the natural environment of the participants, my producer study does not require interviews to be conducted face-to-face. Because the production of promotions by the musicians, bands, and record labels within my sample are all explicitly created and conducted within boundary-less digital space, conducting my interviews via digital means through the Internet provided the most effective way of reaching and collecting their experiences and perceptions. In addition, because this data is oriented specifically around the self-report of interviewees, conducting interviews in person to acquire further details about the interviewees was unnecessary. Furthermore, as the discussion of the interviewees revolved around conceptions and practices of promotions that are structured and circulated digitally, conducting the interviews digitally reflected a key similarity with the focus of the questions.

As interview protocol, I contacted a varied group of music promoters and I offered to get in touch with them for interviews via varied means. I initially reached out to them through personalized email or Internet text-based correspondence such as Facebook messenger and then offered to send over my specific interview questions in a computer-based text document if I received a positive response. From there, the interviewee would return their completed questions back to me whenever was convenient

for them. The specific nature of the questions combined with the convenience of being able to type answers directly on a computer document from the comfort of their own home created a context where interviewees might have felt more comfortable and forthcoming in stating their answers.

The interview questionnaire consisted of two different variants: one tailored to bands and musicians and another tailored to record labels. Each version was similar to promote the connection of related themes across interviewees, but differed in terms of wording and the occasional additional question. Each version contained a set of approximately twenty main and follow-up questions. After an initial grand tour question (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002) to gear the interviewees toward the subject of music promotion, the following questions were structured to elicit responses that were grounded in concrete terms and practices. Different types of questions were constructed to encourage participants to elaborate about distinct aspects of their explicitly-held perspectives and practices. The questions consisted of different types that each sought to invite responses that considered the areas of practices of promoting, the possibilities of promotion, different social media, and conception of the audience. More specifically, questions were tailored to expose key firsthand knowledge such as who participants perceived their promotions are reaching through social media, understandings of how important music promotion is for their musical product, and detailed viewpoints and practices regarding the differentiation of social media.

### **Analysis**

As stated previously, I sought uncover the promotional practices and perceptions of producers. The goal is to learn of practical functions and conventions of promoting

while also ascertaining insight into perceptions that reveal how those producers understand their role as a promoter, their audience, and the media they communicate through. Constant comparative analysis brought out distinct connections in the data. From those initial connections, constantly integrating and collapsing them changed “the nature of categories from mere collections of incidents into theoretical constructs. Even as one pushes the categories to higher levels of abstraction, the categories are still grounded in data” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 222). More specifically, this was done through isolation of emergent findings within the interviews, coding those findings, and arriving at essential conclusions about the implicit and explicit perceptions and practices of promoters. Constant comparative analysis also specifically allowed for my system of active, continual coding as data came in because new data and experiences continually alter the analytic framework of the study.

Constantly locating, comparing, and analyzing specific insights across the approximately 100 pages of typed interview data revealed a trove of connections and exemplars of producer perceptions and practices. The interviews provided an abundant source of both explicitly stated and, perhaps more importantly, implicit evidence of practices and perceptions. The interviews served to allow for essential firsthand expression and explanation, but also for a deeper level of analysis to uncover inherent, unstated ideologies within the data. These overarching explicit and implicit ideologies running through the data were brought to light through isolating emergent themes and theorizing about the internalized connections between them. In this way, important recurrent themes running through the data were brought to light. From there, specific conclusions were constructed about the explicit and implicit understandings and

ideologies that inform producer's conceived possibilities of promotion of social media, practices of promotion, and understandings of social media as channels for promotional paratexts.



## Chapter 4: Analysis

As established in this thesis, producers of promotional paratexts about music face a complex task in creating and circulating their messages on social media. As such, it is crucial for me to examine how the mediated practices relate to these producers' perceptions about social media. Thus, the focus of this thesis is to examine the perceptions of producers that inform their practices. In doing so, I uncovered unstated, recurrent ideologies that underpin the stated perceptions of producers. I reiterate my research questions, as each one specifically targets a salient aspect of perceptions and practices:

*RQ1:* What does the extension of paratexts through social media do to the central text?

*RQ2:* What are the underlying ideologies about social media that underpin and influence the stated perceptions and practices of producers?

*RQ3:* How do the perceived symbolic traits and power of the channel impact the work of the producer?

In exploring each one of these questions within the firsthand experiences and stated viewpoints of various bands, musicians, and record labels, I uncovered key understandings of active producers within the current media ecosystem, such as the perceptions of overwhelming clutter and practice of selecting social media primarily based upon perceived popularity to counter perceived oversaturation. In the media ecosystem, producers also perceive themselves as walking a line between artful paratexts and commercial goals in their role as an encoder of promotional messages. In digging further, I theorized and explored the ideological underpinnings of these understandings,

which includes the importance producers implicitly place on extending their central musical texts through promotional paratexts. I also uncovered several contradictory concepts, where stated producer responses differ from implicit perceptions and practices. These contradictions include the privileging of control over promotions while ignoring the medium which provides for the highest degree of control. In this chapter, I broke down the perceived possibilities of producers regarding promoting music on social media, the actual practices and process employed by producers to promote music on social media, and distinctions and differentiation of social media by producers. Furthermore, I analyzed how producers perceive of the social media audience and examined the implications of those perceptions.

### **The perceived possibilities of music promotion on social media**

The producers interviewed all indicate different views and thoughts regarding the possibilities of promoting music on social media. These perceptions of possibilities are important because they reveal both explicit perspectives and implicit, internalized ideologies regarding the use of social media as a vehicle for music promotion. There are numerous common threads that run throughout the data and implicit beliefs in social media promotion that underpin answers as well as several notable dissenting distinctions. This section examines those producer viewpoints as they pertain to the perceived necessity of social media for promotion, possible results of social media promotion, and the possibility of promotional paratexts shaping the identities of those promoted. Promoters interviewed all implicitly view social media as essential for promotion, as social media allows for a general audience to be specifically targeted and is also ascribed positive communicative characteristics. Even more specifically, social media promotion

has the possibility to sell and “go viral” so long as the paratexts are artfully crafted, not overly commercial, not posted too frequently, and consider the image of the central musical text.

*Necessity and control*

Across all bands, musicians, and record labels, the interviews carry the recurrent notion that social media promotion is necessary for any organization seeking to promote music. This notion is explicitly stated and emphasized keenly by both producers in bands and those operating on record labels. For example, in asserting the importance of social media, Indiana-based folk rock band Thunder Dreamer state that they realized a social media profile was necessary “immediately,” adding that they “had a facebook page before [they] even had recorded music.” The Philadelphia-based instrumental rock group Square Peg Round Hole further support this belief by declaring that they realized the necessity of social media promotion “essentially from [their] inception.” This perceived necessity is also not limited to musicians as the independent record label We’re Trying Records state that “besides developing the label’s operating plan and finding bands, creating social media profiles were the first items to do.” Together, these examples illustrate the recurrent belief of social media as a crucial and necessary space to tap into, a belief that runs throughout the majority of the interviews.

While this notion of explicitly-stated necessity is supported by most of those interviewed, it also implicitly underpins those responses that do not explicitly mention social media promotion as being necessary. While some bands assert that social media is helpful, but not explicitly necessary, they all still report to utilize promotional paratexts to drum up fan interest in live shows, music releases, and important news about the band.

For example, Lonely Trailer, an eclectic central Illinois rock band, assert that while they do not view social media promotion as “necessary,” they recognize that “it is helpful.” In this same vein, even when producers state that promotion was not something they enjoy doing, these same producers also make sure to note that they recognize it is a vitally important practice to engage in and that any “help” is welcome.

Bolstering this widely-held belief in social media promotion as a necessity, producers operate under the implicit understanding that social media allows for highly beneficial and important direct control over messages. Wisconsin garage rock band Locksley discuss how social media promotion is a form of promotion that they in the band have direct control over:

It’s a very easy and convenient way to disseminate information to people. It cannot be the only promotion tool we use but it is the tool we can handle and control ourselves . . . Social media can be 100% the artist’s voice.

While Locksley makes use of public relations firms for important events and releases, they always hold the reigns of their social media accounts for everyday promotion and utilize it to directly control their own “voice” as a band. In this explicit statement, Locksley purport to view social media communication as directly controllable, transparent, and convenient. These three key aspects are all inherently positive in nature. Thus, in explaining their social media usage, Locksley implicitly suggest that they perceive no downside of utilizing and operating on social media. In explaining the virtues of social media as entirely positive, the band reveals an implicit subscription to the ideology that social media allows for transparent communication. Despite the fact that Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are owned, operated, and tightly-controlled by billion

dollar companies, the ideology of social media as an egalitarian and meritocratic space of transparent communication appears to recurrently underpin the statements of producers interviewed. This theme of explicit positivity when discussing social media also runs throughout many other interviews with interviewees commonly describing social media as “great” and “effective.”

Producers state that social media made both the producer’s job of promoting and the audience’s job of finding and following musicians they like easier. Salt Creek, an independent rock band hailing from Nebraska, state that social media promotion makes it easier “to push outward without having to play as many shows.” In this statement, the band suggests that due to social media allowing fans to easily become involved on social media, the need to play live shows in order to secure fans is diminished. Within this response, the ideology of the hypodermic needle model of mass communication is present. This outdated model suggests that mass mediated messages directly influence the audiences who view them (McQuail, 2010). Thus, within the model, mass media becomes the “hypodermic needle” that directly injects a message into a passive audience. While this model of mass communication has rightly been disregarded since its inception in the 1930s, the direct effects ideology of the model makes a surprising reappearance within the stated perspectives of those contemporary producers interviewed. Instead of playing live music that viscerally showcases the central text, many producers appear to believe that paratexts will do the work of directly influencing the audience. Traditional social media logic that privileges interaction as the unique, defining feature also obscures the reality that social media is actually mass media concealed under seemingly attractive and empowering notions of “connectivity.”

Social media's ease of use is often jointly mentioned with the notion that social media promotion is either "cheap" or "free." In asserting that a big positive aspect of social media is that it is free to us, producers further support the perceived necessity of social media as essential promotional outlets for music. Because social media is perceived as such a simple and cost-effective means of broadcasting information to fans and possible fans, bands and labels create and sustain the perception that social media promotion is crucial. Virginian independent band The Talkies perhaps best sum up this recurrent perception with the statement: "You really cannot have a successful band in 2017 without social media."

Thus, social media promotion is commonly seen by interviewed producers to hold distinctly positive, promising possibilities without major downsides that could interfere with promotion. In fact, several producers go so far as to assert that not utilizing social media for promotion is harmful. The guitar-heavy post rock band I Hear Sirens explicitly state that "with the popularity of social media, you're only hurting yourself if you don't have a presence online." This view puts forth the notion that lacking a social media presence ends up negatively impacting the popularity of the central musical text and, in doing so, reduces or "harms" the musician or band's chance for success. Not only is social media seen to be easy, important, and effective, but not operating on social media is perceived to actually do damage to a musician. Combined with the notions of necessity, lack of downsides, and harm in abstaining, social media is perceived by interviewees to be an imperative, almost mandatory promotional resource.

*Motivating the sale*

A crucial belief of social media promotion for producers stems from the possibility of motivating fans to buy things. Much like the totalizing explicitly and implicitly held subscription to the belief that social media promotion is necessary, the perception that social media promotion can motivate sales underpins all producer interview responses. While relatively few producers pointedly admit this hope of possibly motivating a sale on social media, the belief that social media promotions can sell records and live show tickets runs recurrently beneath the statements of all interviewed producers. Saddle Creek, an Omaha-based independent record label, explicitly bring this recurrent belief to light:

We wouldn't spend time or money on it if we didn't feel it would lead to sales or at least awareness of our artists. It might not be immediate, but if we create a meaningful social media presence for a band, the sales/streams will follow. . .

Ultimately, we hope people check out the artist/album/song we're promoting and eventually stream or buy the music.

Saddle Creek indicate here that their paratexts on social media are created with the goal of sales motivation clearly behind them, as the organization would not be engaging in this form of promotion if no gain was expected as a result. Also explicitly stated in this response is the recurrent notion of encouraging an audience to "check out" something as a function of paratexts. This consistently utilized "check out" phrase indicates a casual or easygoing suggestion to actively consider and consume something. In this way, to suggest an audience check something out is an articulation of subcultural capital that distances the producer from an overt and uncool emphasis on commerce. To nonchalantly

recommend an audience check out some new music preserves the view of the producer as attractively detached and not overeager. Pop rock band Middle Distance Runner add clear evidence to this by noting:

We typically just post content without an explicit call to action, but one that is implied. . . We operate this way in order to not come off as pushy. Nobody likes to be told what to do, or at least that's what we assume. Plus, rock bands are supposed to be cool and aloof!

This assertion hits directly on subcultural capital by showcasing an embodied style of communication that privileges the "coolness" strived for in the rock music subculture. As subcultural capital is used to distinguish and elevate status (Thornton, 2006), producers who attempt to weave perceived subcultural values into their promotions seek to elevate their subcultural status. Thus, for a band or label to suggest an individual "check out" their music in a paratext is an articulation of subcultural capital.

Of all producers interviewed, all actively engage in social media promotion and thus expect some form of gain from it. "Awareness" is often specifically mentioned by producers, which implicitly hints at motivating the sale as a result of gains in popularity. However, this emphasis on continual awareness as an essential function of social media promotion also implies that the audience is passive and easily distracted. The implicit view of producers' present here is that the audience needs to be continually grabbed and led around or else they will float off. This underpinning view of the social media audience as passive and inattentive is implicitly referenced by many of the producers interviewed. In this way, the implicit subscription to the outdated hypodermic needle



model of mass communication mentioned earlier provides further support to this producer-held perception of the social media audience as passive.

In this same way, all answers regarding the necessity of social media explicitly or implicitly return to these paratexts motivating sales. This means that the producers interviewed perceive, either explicitly or implicitly, that putting messages out onto social media will have some beneficial commercial effect. None of the interviewees mention that operating on social media is something that they do just for fun or leisure, meaning that all producers interviewed hold hopes of achieving something through continual social media promotion. This internalized belief in social media promotion motivating the sale is made possible by the supporting belief that the social media audience is large, diverse, and immediately available. The band I Hear Sirens clearly summarize this recurrent perception of the social media audience:

With social media, the people are already there, and there are tools in place to promote to your target audience. . . . Social media can be more targeted to a specific demographic.

This response uncovers two underpinning perceptions held by interviewees: the general social media audience can be targeted specifically and that the social media audience is “already there.” The first of these perceptions, the belief in breaking down the general audience into more applicable groups, is persistently referred to by interviewed producers. Carlos Danger’s Inbox, a central Illinois rock band, state that on social media “you’re also advertising to a specific audience comprised of friends as well as friends of friends” adding that a producer utilizing social media is “more likely to reach people in [their] area.” In this way, the specific audience offered by social media can be

geographical and specifically tailored to certain areas. Kyle Krone, a Los Angeles-based pop rock musician, adds depth to this notion of being able to carve up and single out pieces of the general audience on social media by explicitly stating that “targeting your audience is common sense to a degree,” mentioning that he can target exact age ranges through “social media data.” Thus, social media allows the producer to divide up the massive general audience of social media users into more salient, marketable chunks via varied criteria.

The second belief, the perception that the social media audience is “already there,” lays the foundation for the notion that promotions can possibly motivate some individuals in this large audience to buy music, merchandise, or tickets. Again, the recurrent notion of the passive social media audience reappears and is further detailed in this possibility. In addition to being passive, the overarching belief that this audience may make purchases based upon social media promotion suggests the producer-held perception that this audience, because of their perceived susceptibility to direct effects, is easily-influenced and malleable. This provides for the perspective that, while the audience requires constant reminders, they can be lead to purchase from producers on social media. In explaining why they consider social media to be important, band Middle Distance Runner cites the perception that “people spend a lot of their time these days on devices.” Garage rock band Criminal Hygiene support and subscribe to this belief by asserting that social media promotion is “definitely very important” because the band perceive that people are now increasingly “staring at their damn phone all day.” Thus, interviewed producers view social media as a fundamental promotional tool because of the possibility to divide a passive and malleable mass audience and the perception of

widespread heavy usage. This paints a picture that even though the audience is seen as being distracted both by and on social media, producers interviewed perceive this social media audience as massive and readily influenceable.

Contingent on the belief in a massive and receptive audience is the expressed hope of the producers that fans of musicians on social media would share paratexts with their friends. Because the audience is perceived as being so available and susceptible to paratextual influence, several bands explicitly stated their hope that promotional materials would travel by socially mediated word of mouth. The band Carlos Danger's Inbox specifically mention this possibility for their social media promotion several times:

Social media gives us a chance to share things quickly with a large audience. . . If some are excited about your show or are particularly struck by your advertisement, they'll share it with others. . . The hope is that it will catch the attention of someone who might not have been aware of the show or song.

There's also the hope that it'll be shared by someone and a friend of a friend will become interested.

These social media promotions become particularly important to producers when considering the possibility that they can be actively shared among a vast social media audience, thereby increasing the chances of motivating a sale. This underlying perception is directly tied to the cultural myth of virality, which provides for the possibility of rapid and widespread circulation through social media. Importantly, subscribing to this myth of virality perpetuates the idea that any piece of content on the Internet has the chance to be shared widely over a short period of time. Virality also assumes that the audience can be easily influenced or "infected" by a particular message and spread it throughout the

Internet via digital communication. The recurrent view of the audience as a malleable and highly influenceable mass group of social media users is at play again, underpinning the cultural myth of virality. Several interviewed producers even specifically reference the attractive but elusive notion of virality by name. Musician Kyle Krone is quick to attach virality to the belief in fostering awareness through social media:

Largely on social media from the first person point of view (artist to following) its simply about getting the word out. From there it becomes a very valuable and potent way for others (in this case the fans) to share and promote your work themselves with really no limit on how fast and how much word can spread. Going 'viral' for example is driven by the audience naturally.

In explicitly stating the goal of "getting the word" out to fans through continually posting and engaging on social media, Kyle Krone connects the perception that social media has "no limit" on how quickly or how widely a message can be shared. In explaining, he brings in the myth of virality as evidence of a profound and tantalizing possibility of utilizing social media. The band Middle Distance Runner also subscribe to this alluring myth by stating that virality "can be quite a shortcut to success that's really only possible because of social media." In this way, virality is not only a highly prized possibility of social media, it is also unique to social media as well. This myth, then, provides further perceived reason for producers to utilize social media to promote their music.

#### *Promotions shape musician identity and image*

When creating social media promotions, many producers specifically consider how to communicate their overall image through paratexts. These producers labor to create promotions that they perceive "fit" with their music, taking pains to create a

musical and promotional image that they perceive as unified. One such band, the now-defunct folk jam band The Weathered Heads, express this careful consideration regarding their constructed promotional image:

Giving our group a “personality” was key. Having posts consistent with the “personality” of the group led to more successful posts (according to numbers/interaction) than if it was a simple posting of information. . . Every style of music (and even region that a band is based) seems to have a “feel” to its promotions . . . How you promote is directly related to how you create and maintain your image as a group. What you show people through promotion is how they are going to shape their view of your group.

The band clearly indicates that paratexts that they have carefully crafted to foster a cohesive image are more successful. The band perceives that audience members look at both a band’s promotions and music to determine how they view the band’s image. This focus on identity communicated through promotions is echoed within the answers of the majority of the other musicians and record labels interviewed and also lends specific support to Gray’s (2010a) assertion that promotional paratexts extend the central text. Where studies before have focused on different types of central texts, this commonly held assumption held by producers extends the theory of paratext to include music as a central text. This is important because producers interviewed consider their promotions as essential extensions of their musical works. When producers indicate that they consider the “vibe,” “identity,” and “image” of music when constructing paratexts, they are in-turn providing evidence of the understanding that paratext impacts and extends the central text.

Only one rock band, Criminal Hygiene, report to hold a dissenting view by stating that they are not concerned with image coming across in their paratexts:

I guess [creating rock and roll music] just means we have the freedom to promote things with a certain level of creative freedom. We can be ourselves, whatever that may be at the moment. If we feel like being sarcastic and self deprecating, or sincere and thoughtful, we can do either. . . . Luckily for us, we've never been interested much in image or identity. We are who we are. You get what you pay for. . . .sometimes the good, sometimes the bad. That could be our downfall, but hey, it's just rock n roll right?

In explaining this avowed lack of consideration, they refer to their perception of rock and roll as an expressive, anything-goes genre music. Thus, the band still implicitly considers the image of “rock n roll” as it comes across in their promotions. Despite alleging to disregard image, the band implicitly works to extend meanings of a rock and roll image in their paratexts. The mediated image of not caring about image by citing the freedom inherent in rock and roll still suggests that the band cares about image by considering how they extend the genre. In this way, all interviewees explicitly or implicitly consider how their promotions extend the image of their music.

As further evidence of paratextual extensions of meaning for musical central texts, certain musicians and record labels are quick to mention avoiding behaviors and encoding strategies that they perceive as negatively impacting their image. One of these strategies is to avoid posting and sharing too much promotional content. The Abominable Showmen, a Missouri-based instrumental surf rock band, explicitly refer to this phenomenon as oversharing:

There is such a thing as oversharing. We like to update any shows we have coming up, whether we have new music written, pictures/videos of us recording the music or “on the way to the show” type things. That way it’s relevant and if we post something, it’s for a reason and we’re not going to flood your feed just to make sure you remember us.

Posting as much promotional material as possible is clearly referred to as a negative by the band, and as such, they take care to not overwhelm or “flood” the social media accounts of fans. We’re Trying Records lends support to this notion by stating that there is a definite line between staying active and posting an “annoying” amount of promotional content. In addition, over a fourth of the musicians and labels clearly mention their wariness posting promotional material an amount they perceived as being excessive. Key to all of these references is the assumption that the social media audience enjoys a certain frequency of new paratexts, but not too a high frequency. This recurrent theme suggests that interviewees perceive that too many paratexts can devalue the central text. Too much activity on social media is perceived to negatively impact the music being promoted, which provides further evidence of producers considering the impact of their paratexts on the central text.

Compounding on the wariness toward frequency of promotional posting on social media, a substantial selection of producers report avoiding messages that are perceived as being too commercial. These are message, according to producers, that are too visibly and dryly promotional. Loscil, an ambient electronic musician operating out of Vancouver, discusses this aversion to overtly commercial paratexts:

As a niche artist, it is important not to come across as a salesperson as this can turn of the audience and make the project seem cheap. . . [social media accounts of musicians] cannot appear to be too manufactured that they don't seem like a person. Personally, it turns me off when I see artist pages clearly run by management. . . While I enjoy being informed about my favourite artists, I also want at the illusion they are there, representing themselves. So I try to be that with my own accounts. A split of personality, real person and accessible but also informative and a hub for information, news, links and updates.

In this statement, Loscil articulates the line that he must walk as a producer of promotional messages and also as a musician. The promotional producer as a musician must balance their commercial work as a promoter with a humanistic approach that downplays any overtly commercial aspects of promotional encoding. However, despite this awareness of the line between art and commerce, he describes social media with the rhetoric of business as “a hub for information, news, links and updates,” language that belies not coming across as a “salesperson.” Thus, producers interviewed generally seem aware of a perceived divide between art and commerce, and a balance that must be held by the producer in the middle. The band Middle Distance Runner and label We're Trying Records both explicitly support this awareness of balance. Middle Distance Runner states that they are keen to avoid coming off as “pushy” in attempting to sell things, adding that “money is real and people won't spend it as easily as they'll click a Like button.” We're Trying Records states that “anything to do with selling merchandise” has “not worked.” A paratext, then, is considered art insofar as it has to be in order to extend the image of music. The trouble for producers is working to motivate sales while still appearing artful



through their promotions. In this way, paratextual creation for social media is not seen to be as simple or direct as advertising, but something perceived to be more artful and personal. Furthermore, as social media presences are updated continuously by producers, the paratext is in constant flux while the central musical is chopped up and transformed into various pieces of promotional ephemera for a passive, inattentive, malleable mass audience.

### **Music promotion producer practices and processes**

In addition to beliefs about the possibilities of music promotion on social media, producers also each have their own established processes and practices when approaching music promotion. These processes and practices all were directly related to and shaped by conceptions about music promotions and the current media ecosystem. This section explores how producers conceived of music as a product that impacted their promotional practices, how producers seek to structure and plan their promotional messages, and how producers understand and measure promotional success. Producers interviewed seek to account for music and media ecosystems they perceive as being congested, encoding in order to counter the oversaturation of music and wide range of musical tastes of the social media population. Producers interviewed are also strongly impacted by the traditional logic of social media as a place of interaction and, in being impacted, tend to imagine their promotions as being shared within the social circles of already ingrained fans. Finally, while measuring success is not explicitly stated to be the same among producers interviewed, the theme of promoting for commercial gain implicitly ties the producers together.

*The impact of promoting music as a product*

When approaching music as a product to be sold, either through record sales or live event attendance, producers of promotional messages about music primarily indicate that promoting music is an especially difficult task. This line of thought continues on from the perceived division of art and commerce mentioned in the previous section. Two additional key factors are brought up by interviewed producers as evidence of the difficulty of promoting music: oversaturation of music and the subjectivity of musical taste. Together, these perceptions suggest that producers interviewed see the music ecosystem as a crowded and widely varied environment wherein musicians struggle to define and separate themselves. In addition, these producer-held perceptions imply that the paratext has come to eclipse the central text in terms of importance for securing fan interest and attention. The central musical text is no longer seen as enough to entice and appease. Many producers interviewed also seek to foster friendships with fans on social media despite the producer's ultimate goal of sales from those fans.

In terms of oversaturation, producers explain the perception that there is simply so much music already being promoted and circulating on the Internet that it is hard to establish interest in their promoted music. In explicitly facing this concern, Sower Records, an independent folk label based in Omaha, seeks to make every music release and live show seem like a truly unique "event" that should not be missed, adding that the producer should incorporate "an angle, and a special reason" in order to "give the audience a reason to come." This strategy counters the perceived issue of oversaturation with promotions that articulate the specialty of this one-time event and, in doing so, articulate a threat of missing out on something. While social media promotions can be

accessed any time, the events they promote cannot. In this way, Sower Records demonstrates the concepts of exclusivity and specialty being highlighted in order to negotiate the crowded music and media ecosystems. This strategy also implicitly suggests that good music and performances of that music are no longer enough to warrant interest. Thus, the record label perceives this problem of oversaturation as important enough to take into account when structuring all promotional messages.

The other explicitly-stated difficulty regarding promoting music as a product is the perceived subjectivity inherent in music choice. Several producers are keen to point out that what is considered enjoyable music to some is certainly not considered enjoyable by all. Where this may also be true of commercial goods, producers interviewed articulate the perception that it is a more salient and problematic concern for music as a product. In acknowledging this perceived difficulty, the record label Saddle Creek contend that working within the bounds of genre is a way to capitalize on the specificity of musical taste:

Musical taste is a very subjective thing. You have to know your audience very well and understand the connections between different people and different types of music. . . These genres attract a specific audience and it's our job to tailor the promotions of our music in order to reach that audience in the most efficient way possible.

Though Saddle Creek views music as being somewhat complex to promote because of the wide range of tastes associated with different types of music, they flip this aspect to their benefit by structuring promotions specifically to fit with the genre of the music. This also provides further evidence of subcultural capital (Thornton, 2006) articulations. By

structuring messages in order to fit the aesthetic of a particular genre, producers must consider salient subcultural aspects to emphasize. While several producers explicitly refer to the wide range of musical taste as a complicating factor for music promotion, many more producers explicitly acknowledge the perceived promotional benefit of working to encode paratexts to fit within their particular genres and thus invoke subcultural capital. The majority of producers mention that they perceive either a strong audience-genre connection or that working within their genre impacts their promotions. In this way, many producers are implicitly seeking to combat a perceived, but unstated, high level of subjectivity in musical taste by sticking to the trappings of a particular genre. Little Boy Jr., an indie rock band located in Chicago, serve to illustrate this connection to promotional encoding and genre:

[We play] Power Pop/Garage Rock. . . Pop music is supposed to be fun, catchy, and danceable, because of that much of our promotions are usually pretty goofy, we want to project the image that we don't take ourselves too seriously (even though we work hard). This tends to work well for us.

The band clearly connect their created promotional style and image to their perception of what fans of pop music seek when they listen to the genre. Despite a desired “goofy” and carefree aesthetic attained by not taking themselves “too seriously,” the band adheres to regimented on-brand posting. While the band’s stated perspective highlights their crafted image, the underlying practice points to a distinct business-oriented approach. In this way, the artful and personal side of paratexts are privileged while the latent business side of promotion is left unremarked upon. As mentioned earlier, the band Criminal Hygiene also supports this connection to genre-oriented image by implicitly seeking to imbue their

paratexts with the aesthetics and sensibilities of “rock n roll.” In this way, even if perceptions of the difficulties of music as a product are implicitly held by producers, producers may still use explicit promotional strategies to counter these unstated, internalized concepts. This heavy emphasis on considering and incorporating perceived genre-specific elements when creating promotions provides further evidence of paratextual extension to the central text. These producers do not haphazardly piece together paratexts to promote, but rather are constantly explicitly or implicitly aware of the hypothetical effect their promotions have on their central musical text.

Another pattern emerges among the way interviewed producers considered the role of paratexts that serve a central musical text. Specifically, the twin ideologies of using promotion on social media to “get the word out” and to remind fans that the band still exists runs throughout a substantial amount of producers’ stated perspectives. As mentioned previously, musician Kyle Krone is keen to mention that he orients his promotions around the goal of “getting the word out” to fans. Alternative rock band Uh Oh support this notion by asserting social media promotion of music effectively allows for “friends and people who like our music to help us spread the word.” Even more prevalent among producers is the idea that music promotions are necessary to remind fans that the musician and, by extension, the musical product, is still existent. Salt Creek clearly sum up this awareness of remembrance:

Unless we are pushing new media content and staying consistent (playing shows, news updates etc) no one will talk about us and we are forgotten.

This fear of being forgotten combined with the perceived logic of continually needing to get the word out about music suggests that producers view music as a product that

necessitates constant reminders and promotional upkeep. This indicates that continued paratext encoding and circulation on social media serves to momentarily quell a fear of ephemera. By feeding further ephemera into the medium, producers assure themselves that their central musical text has value. This means that the central text is no longer seen by producers to possess enough inherent value to keep fans interested. This implicitly devalues the central text in the mind of the producer, which necessitates the persistent creation of paratexts on social media to remind fans that the central text is still worthy of attention. The recurrent view of the audience as a malleable but fleeting, passive mass audience is further supported by this emphasis on the paratextual: fans need to be reminded and led around by producers, or they will simply drift elsewhere. This connects to the concept that music is an oversaturated product area: because there is so much music out on the Internet, producers feel pressured to aggressively remind their passive social media fans of the existence of their music. This view holds distinct implications for interviewee perceptions of both the current media and music ecosystems. Specifically, this means that the interviewed producers are consistently seeking to differentiate themselves within music and media ecosystems that are perceived as overflowing with other music and social media posts alike. These teeming twin ecosystems foster the perceived necessity of staying salient and remembered by fans and, thus, “active” as music promoters on social media.

#### *Structuring and planning promotional messages*

In encoding their paratexts, producers of promotional messages purport to hold perceptions of who their audience is composed of, how that audience will use their paratext, and what design elements and circulation strategies that audience appreciates.

While it may seem that the views of the audience stated by producers critically impact the encoding process for promotions about music on social media, practice and stated perception appear to occasionally contradict. Like in the previous section, while interviewed producers may explicitly state something, they may implicitly perpetuate and subscribe to a different ideology. With this stated, generally producers reported to consider the audience their paratexts are reaching on social media to mainly consist of existing fans who already know about and listen to the music of the producer. Fewer producers explicitly consider that their paratexts may reach a hybrid audience of existing, ingrained fans as well as potential fans unfamiliar with the music being promoted. No producers interviewed purport to believe potential fans to be the mainstay of their audience on social media. However, despite the claim that appealing to potential fans is not considered to be an essential goal of social media promotion, many promotional producers interviewed purport to encode messages primarily for existing fans with the hope that those fans will share those paratexts amongst their friends on social media. In addition, the beliefs in the possibility of virality and the recurrent notion of putting messages “out there” for individuals to discover suggest that producers do implicitly consider potential fans as essential to social media promotion. While exposure through social media promotions is not conceived of as directly oriented to potential fans, it is considered tiered in that fans will do the work of sharing and exposing. Implicitly, then, these producers consider that there are two essential steps to exposure on social media. In doing so, the two-step flow model of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1944) is on display. This media theory puts forth the notion that opinion leaders will receive mediated messages and then pass this information on to other individuals, thus

constituting a two-step flow of information. Unknowingly, the producers interviewed all subscribe to this theory as it pertains to the perceived circulation of their paratexts. The traditional logic of social media as a site of interaction and connection is maintained and perpetuated implicitly among producers. This assumes that paratext is, in fact, more powerful than the central text in the current media ecosystem. In subscribing to the belief in continued paratextual circulation among social media channels as essential to promotion, the producer privileges the paratext while simultaneously devaluing the central text. The central text now requires support in order to be considered relevant. Without these continual, commercial paratexts to drum up interest from a passive audience, producers assume that the art of the central text would not be shared, focused on, or last.

In considering this perceived audience, producers make conscious decisions whether to foster a one-way style of communication where information transfer is emphasized and interaction is downplayed, a two-way style of communication that emphasizes interaction with fans, or some combination of the two styles. Most producers attempt to combine the two, fewer seek a more two-way style, and slightly fewer seek a more one-way style. The band I Hear Sirens sums up the rationale for attempting to incorporate both styles of communication within their promotions:

We try to do both. We want to build relationships with our fans. If they feel like you are friends they are more likely to support you. That being said, one-way promotions can be exactly what you need to get a message out.

The band acknowledges that both styles of communication each have their own specialties in promoting music. Two-way communication fosters audience connections



whereas one-way communication relays important information. Interestingly, producers who report utilizing more two-way communication used optimistic, collective language like “encourage,” “connect,” and “share.” These producers did not feel the need to mention why they did not prefer one-way communication that eschews interaction, a fact that offers support to the prevalent traditional logic of social media as a space for interaction. However, despite this avowed use of two-way communication that builds “relationships” with fans on social media, the underlying view of the audience as passive and easily distracted suggests that these are not meaningful relationships. The passive audience is perceived to drift off if not reminded and engaged, which means that two-way communication serves as a more effective means of holding their interest. In addition, the context of these social media interactions is never entirely personal, but always occurs against an ever-present commercial backdrop.

By contrast, producers who report opting for one-way communication often included their rationale for not engaging in much interaction on social media. For example, the band Carlos Danger’s Inbox report that they would utilize more interaction if they figured out a good way to use it, the band The Blank Tapes state that two-way communication is simply too time-consuming to focus on, and the label Saddle Creek mention that they end up using more one-way communication because of the constraints of having a small staff to work social media promotions. Even when producers perceive that engaging in interaction on social media will not work for their promotions, they still feel the need to explain why they are not utilizing this key aspect of social media. Thus, producers who purport to use one-way communication are still keenly aware of the

traditional logic of social media and seek to defend their choice against the backdrop of that logic.

Another relational aspect of special importance to several producers is the concept of friendship. In their previous quote explaining the rationale to attempt to weave both one and two-way communication into their promotions, I Hear Sirens state that if the fans “feel like you are friends they are more likely to support you.” The band Uh Oh back this notion by stating when fans are interacting with their promotions “it creates a cooler type of bond because it feels like we’re all in it together, rather than having us as the band just speaking at people to tell them to like our music.” Post-punk musician The Switchblade Kid also concurs by imagining he is “talking to friends” when encoding promotions. Most specifically of all, the band Thunder Dreamer seek to foster “a more personable approach to [their] postings” in order to “be friendly and genuine,” which hopefully has the effect of making the band “seem more approachable at shows, or provide fans with a sense of friendship between us.” These recurrent notions of friendship as they pertain to paratexts suggest that producers, filled with understandings of the traditional interaction-oriented logic of social media, set out to foster relationships with fans. Again, underlying these stated altruistic goals of social media promotion is the ultimate goal of motivating the sale. Traditional social media logic also conflates friendship and interaction. Thus, in the eyes of producers, interaction is seen as equivalent to friendship, despite lacking relational depth. As mentioned previously in this chapter, producers interviewed universally engage in social media promotion with commercial ambitions somewhere in mind.

Producers also emphasize the perceived importance of certain encoding strategies and patterns of social media use. There is a recurrent theme among producers interviewed to stress the efficacy of utilizing visuals like photographs, artwork, and videos within promotional paratexts. The majority of producers clearly indicate that these visual aspects of paratexts are perceived to be especially good ways of grabbing the attention of a social media audience. Sower Records, for instance, mentions that videos are great for extending the interest in and life of social media promotions several times and encourages the use of images in posts as well. In addition to being passive, the social media audience is seen to be better engaged by and controlled with slick, attention-grabbing images. Many more bands respond to have experienced that images and videos in conjunction with informational text serve promotional goals far better than text alone. In this way, where promotions like physical fliers and posters about town pushed people toward live shows where the act witnessing the live musician(s) would build relationships, social media promotions now do the relationship building themselves. The artwork is no longer seen as something to view and disregard, but now producers importantly perceive that these pieces of promotional artwork can be interacted with, discussed, and shared digitally and immediately. The majority of promoters interviewed also accentuate the perceived need to stay continually active on social media. This theme is one of the changes wrought by social media promotion, as the producers now have the ability to stay continually connected to their fans. To illustrate this, Salt Creek reports that they have a set paratext circulation schedule:

[We] try to stick to a schedule for instagram / twitter posts. I've learned if you post once every day via instagram, twice everyday via twitter, and one every other day on facebook we get the best results.

This emphasis on regular, disciplined promotional activity runs throughout much of the interviews. This discipline inherent and implicit among the interviewees highlights the business-oriented side of promotion that is perceived to oppose the concept of promotions as art. Again, despite avoiding explicitly commercial rhetoric, the impact and importance of paratexts as serving commerce runs recurrently within the stated practices and perceptions of those producers interviewed. In addition, while some producers may opt to primarily utilize a one-way style of communication in their promotions and eschew social media's allowance for interaction, remarkably few eschew the ability to regularly post content and "connect" with audiences.

#### *Measuring promotional success*

The perception of what qualifies as successful promotion is not uniform across producers. A substantial amount of those producers interviewed consider sales and/or live show attendance to be the way that they know promotion is successful, while a similar amount of producers report that interaction with promotions by fans on social media together with sales statistics indicate promotional success. Interestingly, several producers report that that fans interacting with promotions is enough to qualify as evidence of promotional success. This is particularly interesting when considering that all producers interviewed explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the commercial hopes and goals of their promotional endeavors. Thus, purporting to use measurement of interaction

as the sole evidence of promotional success contradicts the ultimate commercial goal of social media promotion and privileges traditional social media logic.

The producers who held sales and/or live show attendance up as primary evidence of promotional success all share a perception that statistics and numbers have the final word. The band The Weathered Heads, for instance, assert that rising sales, show attendance, and merchandise numbers are a dead giveaway of promotional campaign success. In this response, the Weathered Heads note that the paratext accomplishes this rise in sales, not the central text. Again, the musical central text remains perceived as something that needs to be propped up by slick paratexts. The band Locksley support explicitly back this emphasis on numbers as the best way to determine success:

A ground-swell is very evident when it's working. Everything surges. Spotify plays, YouTube plays, random emails, the various metrics we receive from our distributor. This day in age the coloration between an action and a reaction is easy to track.

This numerical and easily measurable understanding of promotional success assures producers that their efforts are not in vain. If a campaign is working, the numbers will reflect that success and the producer can continue with their current promotional trajectory. If a campaign is not working, statistics will indicate stagnancy or decline and the producer can change their course. In promoting a notoriously subjective and complex product (Pinson, 2011), many producers of promotional messages about music seem to draw on analytics for concrete reinforcement. In doing so, these producers privilege the notion of populism: their promotional art is only deemed good if it is popular. The balance between art and commerce reach this final stage of measurement, commerce,

ultimately, becomes the yardstick by which the art is measured. Thus, the negatively-perceived business side of promotion visibly and explicitly appears as a major form of promotional success measurement and is even seen to determine the quality of the promotional art. This adds further to support the notion that producers are somehow always conscious of their ultimate commercial goal, despite any explicit statements to the contrary.

While the desire to seek measurement and reinforcement within statistics of sales ran through the viewpoints of many producers, the band Criminal Hygiene points out that higher numbers of sales and attendance may not correspond with promotion:

If you start seeing more people turn up to shows, it could be because you got better at reaching people on social media, or maybe you just wrote better songs and actually started practicing at playing better. I'll never know really. Promotion can be a mystery like that.

Criminal Hygiene is rare in that they do not seek reassurance in any form of metric, but instead insist that promotion is not simply or easily measurable. Similarly, producers who look to perceived nonnumerical interactions often judge the prospect of measuring promotional success as being more ambiguous. The band Uh Oh, exemplify this more ambiguous, murky perception of measurement:

There isn't a specific number or surefire thing we look at to know if something worked. It's too hard to judge that closely. If we see that people are retweeting or sharing or commenting on our original post, it feels successful.

To achieve a sense of encouragement, the band chooses to eschew sales statistics in favor of looking to fan interactions as evidence and encouragement. However, in stating to view music and promotion as nonnumerical, these producers who gauge success from interaction still seek reinforcement by looking at the numbers of interaction. Thus, the recurrent theme among producers is to explicitly or implicitly lean on some form of metric or statistic as clear evidence of success, even if that success is conceived of differently. Only one producer explicitly states that an unspecified third variable may be responsible for higher statistics and thusly higher perceived success. This means that, while measurement of success may not be explicitly agreed upon by producers, the consideration of measuring promotion is something all interviewees purport to consider in different ways. Despite different avowed measurements or admission of doubt when picking something to measure, all producers interviewed somehow recurrently consider that ultimate commercial goal of promotion or else there would be no reason to promote.

### **Differentiation of media in music promotion**

The producers interviewed all actively use social media, though there are both recurrent themes and decidedly different perspectives regarding the specific social media utilized. Some producers opted to operate on certain social media where other promotional producers chose to eschew those same media for different reasons. This choice of social media usage based upon producer perceptions combined with the wide divide producers perceived between traditional media and social media further complicate notions of media usage. This section examines those salient notions of media held by producers of promotional messages. Specifically, producers consider popularity and user-friendliness when considering on which social media to operate, but opt to avoid

social media such as Snapchat that are perceived to incorporate too much two-way communication and amateurishness. The producers interviewed consider Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to be the most important social media and perceived YouTube to be more of a medium for numerical measurement of content views and content storage. Producers purport to draw distinctions of between Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram based upon their perceived level of formality, yet often disregard these distinctions by posting very similarly constructed messages across the social media. While social media is alluringly perceived to be free by those producers interviewed, the monetary cost of Boosted Posts and the cost of time are not meaningfully internalized. In this same vein, producers report to strongly value control on social media despite the fact that social media platforms are owned and operated by corporations. These producers also disregard websites as a more static, less engagement-driven, and thus more of a traditional medium despite the fact that websites offer the highest degree of control over paratexts and information.

#### *Choosing certain social media and avoiding others*

Producers face a major choice before even creating promotional messages: deciding social media on which to operate. However, there is no one set criterion that producers all utilize in determining which social media to use and which to avoid. Two recurrent criteria for social media choice do emerge from the viewpoints of producers of promotional messages about music. One criterion for choosing a social medium is popularity. This criterion was the sole reason a number of producers opt to use certain social media. Several producers point to MySpace as an example of this logic. The label



Saddle Creek, in explaining the choice to abandon MySpace, clearly mention diminishing fan usage as their rationale:

We've definitely abandoned platforms, MySpace for example. It becomes pretty clear when a site is no longer worth the investment of time when you see the amount of traffic to/from the site drop to almost zero.

Ultimately, Saddle Creek and several other producers refer to popular usage, either through perceptions or statistics, as reason for either adopting or dropping a social medium. While Saddle Creek refers back to actual numerical statistics as their criterion for what qualifies as being popular, other producers are less specific. The band Carlos Danger's Inbox assert that MySpace as a social medium was abandoned by the band "when it looked like people were slowly switching exclusively to Facebook." The band Salt Creek respond similarly regarding popularity by stating that they "abandoned Myspace when everyone did" even though they had booked some of their first shows through the MySpace messaging service. In this way, far more interviewees report basing the concept of popularity solely on their perceptions without relying on actual numerical data like Saddle Creek does. Despite these differences of how popularity is defined, these producers still all subscribe to the view that if a promotional paratext is to do its job of promoting, it should be placed on social media where a large number of people actively visit. Producers, in essence, are attempting to ride the wave of popularity in selecting social media. Producers seeking to locate new, popular social media to share promotional messages is similar to the early twentieth century music promotion strategy of advertisers seeking to fill uncommercialized physical spaces with their musical product (Suisman, 2009). However, where the early twentieth century promoters continually arrived at

locations without music, promoters today remain in those popular digital spaces after they have become commercialized. So long as people are actively logging onto the social medium, many producers seem content to remain promoting there, no matter how much competition comes along.

Equally as common among producers is to consider user-friendliness when selecting a social medium on which to operate. These producers hold popularity to be critical, but also keenly assert that the medium needs to lend itself to a range of usages in regard to promotion and upkeep. The band Thunder Dreamer apply these two criteria to equally to their choice of medium:

It's usually pretty obvious which medium is more popular and user friendly. . .

We've opted out of Twitter until only recently, mostly just because I've never been a fan of how it functions.

Thunder Dreamer is one of several other producers who seek to operate on both popular and user friendly social media. This often manifests in producers using social media with the highest amount of users, but eschewing one or two because of perceived issues with ease of use. Some producers went so far as to state that user-friendliness was their primary criterion for choosing a medium, leaving popularity out of their response entirely. However, popularity still implicitly runs through the decision-making of these producers.

In keeping with the recurrent criteria of perceived user-friendliness and popularity, the "Big 3" social media of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram emerge as the ones most frequently utilized by music promoters. This usage of the most popular social

media strongly validates the recurrent, and occasionally implicit, criterion of popularity. It is also important to note that while many of the interviewees clearly mention the importance of video as a promotional tool, YouTube is not mentioned or referenced in the same way that the Big 3 are. YouTube appears to be referenced by interviewees more as medium for hosting videos than social medium in its own right. The bands Locksley and The Switchblade Kid both state that when measuring promotional success, they look to YouTube “views” and “plays” as evidence. Bands The Abominable Showmen, Middle Distance Runner, and the label We’re Trying Records all simply mention that they have YouTube accounts, but go into far more detail regarding the Big 3 social media. In this way, the producers interviewed appear to view YouTube as a medium that is not run on interaction and, thus, does not require the same level of upkeep, usage, and thought as the other social media they utilize. YouTube is, however, far closer to the central text than the Big 3. For instance, a band can post their own filmed and recorded texts directly onto YouTube, pieces of media that showcase the central text. Despite this closer proximity to the central musical text, YouTube is still often considered as supplementary by the producers interviewed.

While producers frequently mention the Big 3 social media, several producers hold interesting perceptions pertaining to choosing social media the current media ecosystem. One of these perceptions is that some producers simply feel that there are too many social media to be consciously aware of. While only a few producers explicitly state this feeling, the act of applying criteria to narrow down options and decide upon social media to use seems to indicate that producers implicitly perceive that there is an abundance of media options to choose from. Another interesting perception regarding

social media is the fact that Snapchat, a social medium that is incredibly ephemeral and geared toward two-way communication, is universally unused by the producers interviewed. While the traditional logic of social media provides that more interaction is better, there appears to be a limit or threshold to this level of socially mediated interaction in the minds of those producers interviewed. Furthermore, several of the producers mention Snapchat negatively. Criminal Hygiene explicitly state their perception that Snapchat is simply not right for music promotion:

Some bands are using Snapchat, and that just seems like overkill to me. Save that for your personal life. It's a fun app, but I don't see its use in the music promotion world for now.

While the band describes the medium as being fun, the heavy emphasis on new content and two-way interaction from producers strikes the band as being “overkill.” The band The Blank Tapes concurs with this specific assertion by stating that Snapchat engages the user “too much.” These responses show that while social media is predicated on the ability to interact, producers will avoid a medium that fosters a level of interaction that is perceived as excessive. This recurrent theme is ironic considering that a number of producers interviewed purport to emphasize two-way communication to make a perceived personal connection with their audience. These same two-way communicating producers consciously eschew using the most two-way social medium with the highest amount of interaction. This is especially curious considering the fact many of the producers interviewed implicitly conflate interaction on social media with friendship. To ensure a strong perceived connection strong with fans on social media, a producer might actively reply to fan comments. In this way, producers are likely to implicitly conceive of

relationships and connections on social media as something akin to watering a plant: to give them a bit of attention every now and then is enough to sustain that perceived personal connection. In this way, the relationships are as ephemeral as the paratexts, despite that many producers explicitly cling to the view of occasional interaction on social media as equal to a personal connection or friendship.

*Perceived differences of social media*

Producers hold views of the distinct perceived traits of each social media and these traits come to impact how producers design messages for those media. A number of producers specifically focus on the range of perceived informality and formality across social media. Of the Big 3 social media continually referred to by producers, Facebook is seen as the most formal social medium, Twitter as the more informal, and Instagram falls somewhere in between the two. This division of social media based upon the perceived level of formality is important because it is the salient distinction that producers interviewed consider when approaching different social media. Instead of focusing on other specific aspects of social media as a means of differentiation, producers adhere to formality as a determining factor. Specifically, the band Little Boy Jr. explicitly state this perceived spectrum of formality:

We have content that we will post across the board but also have found that specific platforms do better on different types of social media. Facebook being the most formal, then Instagram and finally twitter.

In this assertion, the band is referring back to the notion of McLuhan (1994) where each medium has traits that influence both the processes of creation and reception. Facebook has symbolic traits that lead producers to come to the perception that the medium is less a

place for casualness and more a place for proper and precise sharing of information. This perception is flipped for Twitter, which producers see more as a place for informal thoughts and stylings. The band Salt Creek doubles down on this explicit connection by asserting:

Basically we post random less serious posts on our Twitter, Instagram is half way serious, where Facebook is pretty dry and not jokey at all.

Salt Creek and Little Boy Jr.'s substantial similarity in conceiving of proper message structuring is also shared by a number of other producers interviewed. This suggests that these producers alter message structures for different social media in order to best communicate to the audiences perceived to operate on each. While the desired outcomes of sharing and interaction for successful promotions run the gamut of social media, these producers conceive of different messages as a means to better tailor content to reach and appeal to different audiences. This perception of altering messages for different social media is directly connected to the perceived amount of time a post stays relevant on a particular social medium. Producers report that new content on Twitter has by far the shortest "shelf life" of the Big 3 social media whereas Instagram content is thought to last roughly a day longer and Facebook content longer by a day or two. Thus, this connection hints at a relationship between perceived formality and perceived shelf life of new content: the shorter the shelf life of a paratext on the social medium, the more informal the social medium is perceived to be and vice versa.

While the central musical text remains constant after being recorded, producers perceive that artful paratexts need to continually and exhaustively created in order to encourage fans to remember the central text and possibly share the paratexts. Thus, far

more time ends up being spent encoding, circulating, and interacting with paratexts on social media than time spent with the central text they are promoting. And while producers attempt to remain artful in their construction of interesting, attention-grabbing paratexts, the specific channel is perceived to require changes to best showcase that paratextual art. However, despite this clear understanding of altering messages for different social media, the majority of producers interviewed report to use the same overall promotional message across social media, opting to only change it in order to fit that medium's formatting. The band The Abominable Showmen are aware of this connection, but do not apply it in their promotions:

I remember in a class learning that each social media platform should have its own voice, but it hasn't worked out that way for us. The only limiting factors are keeping things to 140 characters on Twitter, and mostly keeping text to a minimum on Instagram. But the messaging style is usually similar.

While the band may acknowledge the perception that each social medium might benefit from different messages that stem from differences in symbolic traits, the band still opts to keep messages relatively uniform. The only paratextual elements altered are to account for basic formatting traits of the medium, such as posting under 140 characters on any given Twitter post. This recurrent theme appears to indicate that many producers internalize the concept that social media are monolithic and interconnected despite stating the opposite regarding the differing levels of formality.

As stated before, the majority of bands interviewed operate in a similar fashion in choosing not to substantially change messages for each social medium. Of course, this is not to say that some producers do not change their messages. Several producers purport

using different strategies to alter their messages in order to best fit the social media they utilize. Little Boy Jr., the band explicitly aware of a perceived difference in formality across social media, have specific types of posts in mind for each medium, such as “official videos” for Facebook, “photos, live shots, and fan shot videos” for Instagram, and “thoughts or just upcoming gigs” for Twitter. The band’s content is different based upon which social medium they are operating through, which shows a specific level of consideration for each social medium. A few other producers interviewed make similar changes based upon the traits of the medium. The band The Weathered Heads assert, when announcing a tour, they will post a “larger detailed post on Facebook” but “may just include the tour poster” on Instagram. We’re Trying Records supports this by mentioning that they use Instagram for specific promotional photos and did not post them on Facebook because “Instagram just gives more attention to the photo over the caption.” The band Square Peg Round Hole will also opt to post special “photo grids” to Instagram to make the “make the most” of the different social media traits. However, these producers who alter messages with new content are in the minority. This divide between producers who pointedly consider the perceptions and symbolic traits of social media and those who do not seems strange when considering how deeply producers consider their promotional paratexts to impact and extend their central musical texts. This contradiction shows that, while producers may explicitly or implicitly put a premium on the notion of paratexts extending the central text through encoding in a subcultural and artful manner, they may not consider the impact of channel upon their messages as being particularly important. Producers interviewed all appeared aware of different symbolic traits between



social media, but few chose to weave this awareness into their paratextual encoding strategy.

*Social media versus traditional media*

In perceiving the differences between social media and traditional media such as television, producers of promotional messages about music are keen to assert the positive qualities of social media while simultaneously downplaying the value of traditional media. Specifically, producers bring up the recurrent perceptions that social media is cheap or free, serves as a means to access and target a more specific audience, and is able to be directly and immediately controlled by the producer. While on the surface, account creation on social media is free, these producers report often spending money to increase their reach on social media. Most often, this takes the form of Boosted Posts on Facebook, which is paid service offered by the social medium allows increases the prominence of the post on user's newsfeeds for a fee. While Twitter and Instagram both also have paid boosting or promoting services, Facebook's Boosted Post service is the one mentioned. In being the most popular social medium globally (Walters, 2016) and most formally perceived social medium among producers interviewed, Facebook appears to require more consideration from producers. While a producer can be more "candid" and "silly" on Twitter, their Facebook presence must remain organized and updated with carefully constructed posts. While the producers interviewed ardently refer to the fact that a social media account is free to use, many of them also either ambivalently or begrudgingly discuss that they have paid the social medium for boosts in promotion. The bands Uh Oh, Salt Creek, The Abominable Showmen, and the label We're Trying Records explicitly mention that using targeting specific cities and users based upon

specific interests through Boosted Posts has increased their reach and engagement, though each appears to remain unenthused at the prospect of paying on a “free” social medium. The Abominable Showmen describe the mixed feelings of paying for this feature:

Boosted Posts on Facebook are a huge help, while also being a huge ripoff. It’s one of those things that is obviously a scam (we basically have to pay Facebook to rework their algorithm in a way that will show our post to people) but it’s just accepted as necessary. All of our most successful posts have come from that.

Where social media is at first discussed positively as a free means of promoting and circulating paratexts, digging into specific practices on at least one social medium reveal that producers are all too aware that money greases the wheels of their promotions. This payment to the social medium for more views and wider distribution is to the paratext as bribing a DJ or club owner is to the central text. Where paying the DJ or club owner serves as a “pay to play” strategy that gets the central text heard, paying the social media is a “pay to promote” strategy that expands the reach of the promotions. Thus, Facebook Boosted Posts put further emphasis on the paratext where the central text is left out. Comparatively, many of the same producers who ambivalently use “pay to promote” services on social media immediately argue that traditional media, specifically promotion on television, is prohibitively expensive. More so than not, these producers counter by referring back to social media as free within the same paragraph. While “pay to promote” services are optional, a substantial portion of producers interviewed consistently utilize the paid, reach-expanding services offered by the social media parent companies. The

perception of social media as entirely free and traditional media as expensive is widely held, despite the prevalence of Boosted Posts and other “pay to promote” services.

Another matter of cost not broached by the majority of those producers interviewed is that of time as a cost. While many producers either explicitly or implicitly suggest an emphasis on activity and “staying busy,” the price of the producer’s time is recurrently left out. The band The Blank Tapes, in negatively mentioning Snapchat as a social medium for promotion, states that “it’s too time consuming” while Middle Distance Runner also caution that “at a certain point, you have to stop from letting promotion take up more time than making music.” However, these two explicitly stated considerations of time as a cost were the only references among the producers interviewed. While social media may initially seem free to sign up for, producers end up spending a considerable amount of time creating paratexts for social media, monitoring those paratexts, and interacting with fans through social media. Thus, while this cost of time ends up impacting producers, it is not meaningfully considered by the majority of the producers interviewed. Furthermore, this means that these independent producers interviewed in the current media ecosystem end up spending more time on paratexts than on the central musical text. When the central text is recorded and finished, producers fill their time with continual paratextual encoding and updating without meaningfully considering the cost of their time and effort.

In addition to being more expensive, traditional media is also seen by producers to reach a much wider audience. However, instead of interpreting this as a key benefit to promoting, producers perceive that this wider traditional media audience may offer a smaller chance of promotional success than a social media audience due to the fact that it

is not as specific and targeted. As none of the producers interviewed have promoted on television, this perception of the traditional media audience being large but less effective may serve as reassurance. Just as social media promoting is positively tagged with the term “free” despite many producers paying for its promotional features, the social media audience is tagged with the term “specific” despite the admission that a traditional media audience is larger.

Producers also operate under the perception that all promotional messages and planning on social media are controlled entirely by the producer. Locksley, the same band that argues the musician gets ultimate control over their messages on social media, further underscores the importance of control on social media by pointing to the perceived contrast of control regarding traditional media promotion:

Promotion on television is never up to you. Whether it’s through a show (who have their own agendas) or through a paid ad (restriction of time and content) the message cannot be controlled by the band. . . You’re speaking through someone else.

While Locksley is one of the few producers to explicitly come out and discuss this perceived lack of control that runs throughout traditional media, the majority of producers interviewed, at one time or another in their interviews, implicitly reference both the opportunity and freedom to completely control and structure paratexts on social media. For example, being able to structure and alter messages across social media connects to the ability for producers to control all of their own messages. While most producers do not explicitly come out and state how important it is that they can control their own social media presence, their practices and perceptions all point toward this

appreciation of the control that social media is perceived to allow. However, while this notion of control over online presence on social media is a concept recurrently clung to among interviewees, they do not own the platform nor do they have control over the structure of their message. Instead, the Big 3 social media are all owned and operated by multibillion dollar corporations in the form of Facebook, Inc. that owns both Facebook and Instagram while Twitter, Inc. owns Twitter. While producers are quick to claim that they control their messages, they are ignoring the fact that their controllable platform on the medium is not actually theirs. The control mentioned positively by many of the interviewees is not actual control, but customization, settings, and features offered by the owning organization on the medium.

In an interesting turn, producers interviewed generally disregard the practice of utilizing a dedicated website to aid in promotional endeavors. Despite the importance producers interviewed explicitly and implicitly place on control, a website that can be absolutely controlled, altered, organized, and customized by the producer is recurrently referred to as unnecessary. Indeed, where websites were once seen as essential elements of digital promotion that aided exposure, fan connections, information, and distribution (Gordon, 2005), producers in the current media ecosystem either apathetically refer to or openly disparage the use of websites. The recurrent apathetic view of websites that producers paint is expressed by the musician Loscil:

A website, assuming it's not a blog or interactive site, is primarily a relatively static thing. It generally contains static information that changes infrequently. My site is basically an "artistic business card." Social media is much more evolving, real time and immediate.

Though he employs the use of a website, Loscil perceives that social media is a far more of a boon to his promotional efforts due to the fact that it is interactive, immediate, and everchanging. His summation of a website as an “artistic business card” is shared by several other producers. In this way, websites become more closely linked to traditional media than the interaction and activity-oriented social media. The traditional logic of social media underpins this perception of websites as unfavorable, static traditional media by placing importance and value squarely on interaction. Similarly, the band Salt Creek refer to websites as “more or less just a showcase or an electronic press kit” that does not allow for anywhere near the level of engagement as social media does. Producers interviewed perceive of engagement as interaction through liking, commenting on, and mediated sharing of content by fans, which suggests that these producers consider this engagement to be part of that important paratextual extension of the central text.

Furthermore, socially mediated interaction is associated with immediacy and emotion, which traditional media cannot offer. Thus, social media is implicitly privileged as a more effective channel for evocative and artful promotions by producers where more information-oriented traditional media are considered unfavorably emotionless. The band The Talkies add further support to this connection by expressing that, as “promoting art is so much more personal than anything else,” when people do not respond to social media promotions “it hurts.” This means that the band perceives that lacking engagement and interaction on social media promotions has a negative impact on both the central text and the emotion of the producer. As traditional social media logic conflates interaction with friendship, posting a paratext that does not receive interaction from fans is perceived as failing to make friends or being ignored by existing ones. In this way, interaction on

social media paratexts impacts the perceived worth of the central musical text and also holds a distinct level of emotional power that other traditional media and websites lack. While websites offer an effective medium for a wide range of information and content that can be controlled and owned solely by the producer, the perceived lack of interaction that privilege emotion and the elusive chance for “going viral” tantalizingly held by the engagement-oriented logic of social media prove far more salient and important to those producers interviewed.

The other even more prevalent recurrent perception held by producers is that websites are unnecessary in the current media ecosystem. The band Criminal Hygiene explicitly conceive of this perceived irrelevance of websites:

Websites are dead to me. They usually just take you back to the social media sites. It's like the weird middleman on the internet now. I think we stopped paying for our official website a while back because it just seemed redundant. Its only good for seeing a long list of tour dates in one organized section. But again, that can happen elsewhere on social media as well.

In discussing the prospect of a website, the band indicates that websites now act as middlemen that steer fans back toward more frequently updated and utilized social media accounts. In clearly lending support for this perception, the band Mode Moderne states that they utilized a website for their last record release, but eliminated the page when they felt that it simply served as a link back to their various social media accounts. Many other producers lend support for this perception by referring to websites as pages that need to be explicitly searched and thus appeal only to dedicated fans. However, websites are an essential piece of legitimation with traditional media and other outlets within the music

industry. It is for this reason that well-known bands such as The Black Keys and Foo Fighters still own, operate, and consistently update their websites. Where the proliferation of social media within the media ecosystem has devalued websites through the pervasive privileging of mediated interaction, websites still perform all the information-based and legitimizing functions (Gordon, 2005) they did over a decade ago. The perception of social media, by contrast, is a continually updating space where both dedicated and potential fans are already there in the audience. This suggests that, in the eyes of the producers of paratexts about music, social media has displaced websites in the media ecosystem by more effectively allowing for producers to promote.

### **Conclusion**

While the producers interviewed clearly state a variety of perceptions and practices in regard to promoting music on social media, recurrent and implicit ideologies run beneath what is explicitly mentioned. Furthermore, contradictions often arise in the avowed explanations and rationales of producers. Together, this patchwork of answers given by a representative sample of independent musicians, bands, and record labels suggest a number of key perspectives and understandings about operating as a paratextual producer in the current media ecosystem. I return to my research questions to provide specific answers:

*RQ1:* What does the extension of paratexts through social media do to the central text?

The emphasis on paratextual encoding and circulation within the current media ecosystem ends up devaluing the central musical text. After completion of the central text, paratextual creation and upkeep is aggressively pursued by producers across social media. Producers seek to encode a desired aesthetic of the central text, such as genre, in



the paratexts to fit the aesthetic of the central text and make the paratext as artful and visually appealing as possible. These paratexts are perceived as necessary extensions because the central text is implicitly viewed as lacking value in keeping fans interested and engaged. Thus, the paratext, the doorway to the central text, seems to have become more relevant and important to producers than the central text.

*RQ2:* What are the underlying ideologies about social media that underpin and influence the stated perceptions and practices of producers?

The traditional logic of social media as an egalitarian space of transparent communication, interaction, and friendship pervades the stated perspectives of producers interviewed. However, the most popular and utilized social media channels are all owned and operated by billion dollar companies and thusly do not allow for total control. This view privileges social media as a site where interaction is conflated with friendship and readily associated with evocative emotional connections. These positive views of social media contrast with the negative view of traditional media as static, emotionless, and prohibitively expensive channels. Despite the legitimizing power and unparalleled level of control offered by websites, producers perceive websites as being an unfavorable traditional medium due to its lack of immediate connectivity. Inherent in producer perceptions of social media is the assumption that the social media audience is large, available, passive, and malleable. Producers operate with the ideology that the inattentive social media audience needs to be continually reminded or else they will forget all about the central text and producer.

*RQ3:* How do the perceived symbolic traits and power of the channel impact the work of the producer?

While producers are aware of the different symbolic traits of social media channels, relatively few meaningfully alter their messages for different media. Aside from small formatting changes, most producers keep messages relatively uniform despite a perceived awareness of different levels of formality and other disparate traits. While social media are also seen as ephemeral in that they require consistent, regimented updates, they are viewed as powerful and necessary channels for music promotion. While the Big 3 social media of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram account for the mainstay of focus from producers, YouTube is considered a supplemental medium for hosting visual content and analytical information despite the medium allowing for interaction and being much closer to the central text than the Big 3.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions**

In this thesis, I have collected and analyzed the stated practices and perceptions of music promotion on social media held by a representative sample of independent North American musicians, bands, and record labels. In doing so, I have uncovered the implicit and recurrent ideologies and understandings that underpin the explicit practices and perceptions of these promotional producers. It is through this process that I discovered the deterioration of the central musical text in the face of a continuous stream of paratexts encoded for social media. Based on the interviews with producers, I theorize that paratexts are no longer functioning as the doorways that swiftly usher potential fans toward the central text. In the current media ecosystem, producers have come to privilege these paratextual doorways on social media as crucial central text extensions and downplay their role as guides to the central text. This suggests that potential fans appear to be getting stuck in the doorways, admiring the liminal promotional texts instead of crossing through the threshold. In music and media ecosystems that are perceived as oversaturated, this emphasis on the paratextual only adds more and more mass to the crowd.

### **Promoting music on social media**

Promoters of music on social media in the current media ecosystem face a perceived balancing act between the artfulness of their message and the overtly commercial goals that underpin their promotions. Producers view that the social media audience will disdainfully ignore commercial messages about music but will accept artful and personal messages. While this yields clear support to the perspective that commercial discourse “taints” music (O’Reilly et al., 2013), it also means that producers view that

they must privilege emotion in their promotional messages. Instead of directly appealing to the discourse of business and commercial logic, the social media environment is seen to encourage the evocative and personal. Producers disregard the totalizing assertion of the early twentieth century salesperson: “the only thing that counts is action” (Engineering News, 1912, p. 3). While action is desired by producers, it must take a backseat to emotion and art when promoting music on social media because to them, social media is both artistic and personal. This means that producers attempt to ignore the commercial when encoding and circulating paratexts, seduced by the traditional logic of social media as a site for expressive connectivity and interaction. However, solely tapping into the emotions of the audience has never been and never will be the goal of promotion. In the same way, producers do not operate on social media purely for the “fun of it,” promotions are not created purely to entertain. No matter the personalized, humanistic-sounding blanket laid over the practice of promotion, the goal has always been and will always be the sale.

Moving forward, it is important for producers to consider their role to their fans. While the notions of friendship and developing relationships with fans through social media promotions are keenly and positively mentioned by many interviewed producers, this view cannot sustain a commercial endeavor. Despite the shared perception that music is a transcendent, artful product above cold, dirty capitalism (Kubacki & Croft, 2004) that implicitly ran among those producers interviewed, to play live shows and sell records is ultimately a commercial enterprise. While the music is certainly imbued with affective power to shape identity construction (DeNora, 2006) and to articulate personalities and experiences (Pinson, 2011), it is not free from the pressures of commerce. As such, for

producers to consider interaction with fans on social media to be displays of friendship and true connection is faulty. Because producers' implicit adherence to a traditional social media logic that privileges digital interaction as a form of true connection, producers conflate interaction with friendship. Dispelling this assumption matters because this recurrent ideology of practicing promotion on social media bogs producers down into a draining relationship with their promotional role. It is not enough to subtly and artfully craft messages for the audience as the producer may very well feel the need to continually engage with the audience under the assumption that they are fostering beneficial friendships. In this way, promoting music on social media always asks for more time and effort of the producer than the producer consciously realizes.

### **The influence of the social medium**

While nearly all interviewed producers purport to understand that social media have decidedly different symbolic traits and uses, relatively few made any meaningful alterations to their promotional messages based upon the perceived symbolic traits of the social media channel. This means that, while producers may be aware of distinct differences between social media, they may not implement that knowledge in any meaningful way. This matters because, despite statements to the contrary, social media is often utilized by producers in a monolithic way. While the differences of print and electronic media may be plain to see and implement, the differences of social media channels perhaps appear too similar to be meaningfully considered for promotional practice. This reveals a sort of recurrent, unconscious, universal approach to promotion on social media. It is easy to discuss abiding by Twitter's 140 character text limitations and emphasizing images on Instagram, but much more difficult to create meaningful

promotional plans based on a specific social medium. What pervades and connects all social media is the overarching belief in traditional social media logic that glorifies digital interaction. This traditional logic of social media lends specific support to the associating and lumping in of all social media together. This latent lumping of social media together when promoting is something that will almost certainly continue as new social media come and go.

In addition, as producers view the social media audience as a passive, inattentive, readily available mass of individuals, these producers are making assumptions of the audience based upon the medium. Despite the promise of social media as an emotional and enlightening source of instant connectivity and interaction, the audience is perceived as a mass audience directly susceptible to promotional messages. This unflattering and simplistic view of the audience underpins the belief that simple interaction on social media can make an audience member buy or do something. This matters because the supposed interactive panacea that is social media is approached as a mass medium in disguise. While the Big 3 social media will inevitably fall in popularity and become abandoned, these ideologies and recurrent approaches to social media will continue to shape producer practices on future social media.

### **Paratextual extension through music promotion**

Through the eyes of music promoters operating on social media, promotional paratexts are seen to hold a defining role in extending and continuing the central musical text. By considering and encoding paratexts to fit the “vibe” or aesthetic of a particular genre, producers hope to fuse a deeper connection between their central musical text and the aesthetic of a particular type of music. This specific consideration on behalf of these

paratextual encoders constitutes a unique deployment of branding. When producers design their paratexts to fit within the perceived bounds of a genre, these producers are attempting to construct a promise that assures the audience that the central musical text will faithfully uphold to the meanings and sonic qualities of that particular genre. In addition, a paratext that is overtly commercial and undisguised in its attempt to sell is perceived to cheapen or weaken the art of the central text. This matters as clear evidence of the theoretical extension of paratext into the realm of music. Paratexts had not been meaningfully applied to areas outside of literature (Fathallah, 2016), television (Gray, 2008), film (Klecker, 2015), and video games (Gray, 2010a). My thesis expands the theory into the social media and recorded music portion of the media ecosystem.

In the music ecosystem, conditions are perceived as overwhelmingly cramped, with musicians, bands, and labels fighting for the last shreds of uncluttered space. To make matters more dense and difficult, producers view the current media ecosystem as being jammed with endless content. Faced with a staggering amount of musical and paratextual alternatives, producers internalize pressure to persistently and endlessly encode new paratexts to retain existing fans as well as to hopefully encourage those fans to spread the promotional message on social media. With new, slick paratexts continually flooding digital space on social media, the focus is rapidly shifting away from the central text and toward the paratexts. Considering this current situation where the ephemeral and peripheral dominates the primary, the question for producers of paratexts becomes this: how does one make the music matter again? Reclaiming the central text as a site of primary importance and worth is the way to counter a ceaseless process of social media posting and updating. It is not the regimented social media posting schedule nor the hours

of surface-level interactive commenting with fans that creates worth for the central text. The current practices of promotional producers continually build up the doorway to the central text while the central text itself is neglected. The quality and diversity of these doorways are so exhaustively considered that they end up becoming the primary focus of producers. Because despite the fear of being seen as ephemeral and being forgotten about by fans, producers chose to consistently focus their efforts on the creation and recreation of ephemeral paratexts instead of honing in on the central text. Ironically, too much emphasis on the paratextual does not compliment and serve the central text, but rather eclipses it. Thus, the onus is on producers to reevaluate the effort and time they spend creating endless paratextual doorways. Simply put, if producers want an audience member to traverse the paratextual doorway, they need to make sure that the central text on the other side of the doorway is worthy of entry.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

While the sample for my thesis was crafted in order to obtain a sufficiently representative example of North American independent musicians, bands, and record labels that seek to promote on social media, there were several limitations at play. The first limitation is that the independent music scene is a wide-ranging and nebulous descriptor, as many different genres of music and types of musicians fit into this broad category. As such, future research could potentially isolate and focus on the specific practices and perceptions of music promotion held by producers within more specific genres, geographical scenes, or organizations. For instance, perhaps record labels have a unique approach to promotion that bands and musicians do not. The second limitation is that the U.S. and Canada offer only a specific slice of producers of music promotions



worldwide. Considering expanding to a more global view or narrowing down focus to other nations for future research could yield some additional unique and interesting findings regarding music promotion on social media. The third limitation is that of data collection method. While interviews worked very well for providing candid responses that clearly indicate the stated perceptions, perspectives, and practices of producers, actually monitoring practices and functions of producers in their environments could yield more specific evidence of distinct practices. Future research could seek to develop further the contradictions and connections between professed functions and actual practice.

### **Final Conclusions**

When those untold hours of work do eventually coalesce into a poignant and gripping musical text, the musicians finally hurl themselves headlong into the crowded maelstroms of the music and media ecosystems. As opposed to those hours in the studio working toward a specific, defined endpoint, the role of the musician as promotional producer on social media does not end. Instead, those producers face a perceived pressure to push, shove, and carve out a digital space from which to continually remind fans that the musical text exists. Enchanted by the traditional logic of social media as a monetarily free, heavily populated space for transparent, emotional, and instantaneous connection and interaction, the producers focus their attention and energy on crafting paratexts. Instead of pointedly selling this brilliant new musical text, the producer conceals any commercial motives under the veneer of personality and art. Those untold hours of musical creation pale in comparison to the amount of time and effort the producer will spend encoding, circulating, updating, interacting, and, ultimately, promoting.

As social media channels rise and fall through the coming years, the recurrent underlying ideologies currently and deeply held by these promotional producers will continue to shape their practices. While stated perspectives and avowed understandings will certainly change, those underpinning conceptions of traditional social media logic will remain beneath. So, too, will the clinical extension of the central musical text through the paratextual promotions of the producers. However, what must, and hopefully will, change is the role of the central text in the mind of producers. Producers of promotional messages must take the charge and start stepping away from the unending social media stream to refocus on what truly matters: the central text.

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## Appendix

### Musician/Band Promotion Interview Questions

- Overall, what types of strategies do you employ to promote your music?
- How do you think promoting music is different from promoting other goods?
- What type of music is it that you promote?
  - How does this type of music impact how you create promotions?
  - On the flip side, how do you think your promotions impact your band's identity/image?
- How important do you think promoting your music is on social media? Why is this?
  - What do you think social media does for your promotions?
  - What are your goals when utilizing social media to promote music?
- When did you decide that social media was necessary to promote music?
  - Do you believe in social media as a motivator for sales or is it something you feel you *need* to do?
- When you create messages, who do you imagine your messages are reaching? Is it for people who might stumble across the message or fans who are already ingrained in the scene?
  - How do you imagine this audience then interacts with your promotions? Do you think the promotions end up as more of a gateway into the music or supplementary content to keep fans engaged?
- How do you view promoting on social media as being different from promoting on television?
  - Along those same lines, how do you view promoting on social media as being different from promoting on a website?
- Do your social media promotions use a two-way communication style that emphasizes interaction or a one-way communication style where you simply post content? Why do you operate this way?
- Some social media, like MySpace and Friendster, have not survived while others, like Facebook, have. Have you ever decided to abandon a social medium? How did you make this decision?
  - Are there any current social media you opt not to use? Why?
- Do you tailor specific messages and content for specific social media? For example, do you make different messages for Facebook than you would for Instagram?
  - Could you give me an example of a time where you altered a message to fit a medium?
- What would you say is the “shelf life” of a post on social media? How often do you feel the need to post and why?
- Have you found certain strategies or style of promotions to work better than others?
  - Do you have any examples for what has worked and what has not?
- What specific strategies do you employ to grab the attention of potential listeners and motivate them to listen to your music?
- How do you know a promotional campaign or strategy has “worked?” What results tell you this?

**Record Label Promotion Interview Questions**

- Overall, what types of strategies do you employ to promote the music on your label?
- How do you think promoting music is different from promoting other goods?
- Generally, what type of music is on the label?
  - How does this type of music impact how you create promotions?
  - On the flip side, how do you think your promotions impact the identity/image of the musician(s) being promoted?
- How important do you think promoting music is on social media? Why is this?
  - What do you think social media does for your promotions?
- When did the label decide that social media was necessary to promote music?
  - Do you believe in social media as a motivator for sales or is it something you feel just *needs* to be done?
- What are your goals when utilizing social media to promote music?
- When you create messages, who do you imagine your messages are reaching? Is it for people who might stumble across the message or fans who are already ingrained in the scene?
  - How do you imagine this audience then interacts with your promotions?
- How do you view promoting on social media as being different from promoting on television?
  - Along those same lines, how do you view promoting on social media as being different from promoting on a website?
- Do your social media promotions use a two-way communication style that emphasizes interaction or a one-way communication style where you simply post content? Why do you operate this way?
- Some social media, like MySpace and Friendster, have not survived while others, like Facebook, have. Has the label ever decided to abandon a social medium? How was this decision made?
  - Are there any current social media the label opts not to use? Why?
- Do you tailor specific messages and content for specific social media? For example, do you make different messages for Facebook than you would for Instagram?
  - Could you give me an example of a time where you altered a message to fit a medium?
- What would you say is the “shelf life” of a post on social media? How often is it necessary to create new content?
- Have you personally found certain strategies or styles of promotions to work better than others?
  - Do you have any examples for what has worked and what has not?
- What specific strategies do you employ to grab the attention of potential listeners and motivate them to listen to your music?
- How do you know a promotional campaign or strategy has “worked?” What results tell you this?

**IRB Approval**

February 10, 2017

Connor Wilcox  
Communication Studies

Thank you for submitting the research protocol titled, "Of Music and Media: A Producer Study of Music Promotion Through Paratextual Encoding on Social Media" for review by the Eastern Illinois University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has approved this research protocol following an expedited review procedure. IRB review has determined that the protocol involves no more than minimal risk to subjects and satisfies all of the criteria for approval of research.

This protocol has been given the IRB number 17-020. You may proceed with this study from 2/9/2017 to 2/8/2018. You must submit Form E, Continuation Request, to the IRB by 1/8/2018 if you wish to continue the project beyond the approval expiration date. Upon completion of your research project, please submit Form G, Completion of Research Activities, to the IRB, c/o the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs.

This approval is valid only for the research activities, timeline, and subjects described in the above named protocol. IRB policy requires that any changes to this protocol be reported to, and approved by, the IRB before being implemented. You are also required to inform the IRB immediately of any problems encountered that could adversely affect the health or welfare of the subjects in this study. Please contact me, or the Compliance Coordinator at 581-8576, in the event of an emergency. All correspondence should be sent to:

Institutional Review Board  
c/o Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
Telephone: 581-8576  
Fax: 217-581-7181  
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Thank you for your assistance, and the best of success with your research.

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