

“I HAVE TO BE IN THE ROOM WHERE IT HAPPENS...”  
AN EXPLORATION ON THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND DIGITAL MEDIA  
IN THE RISE OF *HAMILTON* FROM SIXTEEN BARS TO A CULTURAL  
PHENOMENON.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

In the summer of 2007, playwright and composer Lin-Manuel Miranda picked up a book before taking off on a vacation to Mexico. Little did Miranda know that that book would spark something, leading him to write a piece of musical theater that has been dubbed, amongst many other things, “the most unlikely cultural phenomenon in a generation.”<sup>1</sup> That book, written by historian Ron Chernow, held the biography of founding father Alexander Hamilton, whom, though unbelievably influential in the making of America, had been largely ignored in mainstream documentation regarding the creation of the nation. Upon reading Hamilton’s story, Miranda felt like he was reading a hip hop narrative. An immigrant from the Caribbean who was sent to America to get an education and worked his way to the (political) top that was responsible for the founding of the United States, that is the quintessential American Dream.

To me, my way into the story of Alexander Hamilton’s life was the fact that he wrote his way into every circumstance, he wrote his way out of his unendurable cruel early life, he wrote his way into Washington’s good graces, but then also he wrote his way into trouble with lots of the other founders, and sort of didn’t know when to stop writing. And so to me, that reminded me of the world of hip hop, when you are so good in putting words together that you can get out of that neighborhood, get out of that situation. That to me is the sort of thing that I love best about hip hop, taking everything you know and creating something new out of it. Making a new identity for yourself.<sup>2</sup>

Hamilton’s work ethic, his linguistic capabilities, and his “fatal failure to know when enough was enough,”<sup>3</sup> reminded Miranda of Tupac Shakur, who like Hamilton, got shot to death.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons,” *The New Yorker*, February 9, 2015, accessed on January 14, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/09/hamiltons>.

<sup>2</sup> “Hamilton Interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda,” *Jake Hamilton YouTube Channel*, September 26, 2016, accessed July 1, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ewlEIOPBcC0>.

<sup>3</sup> “Hamilton Interview with Lin-Manuel Miranda.”

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Similar to the hip hop artists Miranda admired, Hamilton wrote about his struggles and “thus transcend[ed] them.”<sup>5</sup> Hamilton’s personality and his way with words, caused “extraordinary dramatic potential[...]: the characteristics that allowed [Hamilton] to rise, also ensured his fall.”<sup>6</sup> Hamilton’s hindsight connection with hip-hop led Miranda to develop a concept album called *The Hamilton Mixtape*, using hip-hop as a narrative tool to tell the story of Alexander Hamilton.

In May of 2009, President Barack Obama and his wife Michelle organized an evening of celebration, focused on music, poetry and the spoken word.<sup>7</sup> Centered around the theme of dialogue and the importance of communication, the president and his wife invited a number of performers, amongst which Miranda. Though he was asked to perform something from his award winning debut musical *Into The Heights*, he took a chance and asked to perform the first (and at that time only) song he had written after he got the idea for *The Hamilton Mixtape*, even though he only had written sixteen bars when he requested to perform the *Hamilton* material.<sup>8</sup> When Miranda introduced his idea, the premise of a hip-hop album about America’s forgotten founding father was laughed at, but, as described in *Hamilton the Revolution*, this quickly turned into something maybe best described as awe:

As Lin began to rap, the first lady took up his invitation to snap along. President Obama didn’t snap: he watched, smiling. When the song ended, he was the first on his feet. The ovation owed a lot to the showbiz virtues on display: the vibrant writing, Lin’s dynamic rapping, the skillful piano accompaniment from his friend Alex Lacamoire. But something else was in the air, something that would become clearer in the years to come. Sometimes the right person, tells the right story at the right moment, and though a combination of luck and design, a creative expression gains new force. Spark, tinder, breeze.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Hamilton’ Behind The Scenes: Lin-Manuel Miranda One-One-One,” *Good Morning America YouTube Channel*, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7d10ewgLJ2o>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Jesse Lee, “Poetry Music and Spoken Word,” *The White House*, May 12, 2009, accessed March 27, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2009/05/12/poetry-music-and-spoken-word>.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution* (New York, Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 15.

Videos of the performance were put online and quickly gained nationwide exposure. Despite this momentum, it took Miranda another three years before he debuted the first songs of *The Hamilton Mixtape* at the Lincoln Center in 2012, and another year before the first version of what later would become *Hamilton*, showcased at Vassar College.<sup>10</sup> These performances rekindled the momentum surrounding Miranda's idea, causing him (and a newly added creative team) to rework the songs into a musical. In early 2014, Miranda announced the show's debut at the New York Public Theater, the first run selling out as soon as it went on sale. Without anyone ever having seen the show, the musical got extended for a second run before moving to Broadway.<sup>11</sup>

The connotation between the (online) attention surrounding the show and its corresponding popularity is one that piques my interest and requires further exploration. The way in which the *Hamilton* company, as well as the show's fans, have utilized (online) media to engage with each other and the show is unique. The relationship between musicals, specifically Broadway as an institution, and the Internet has always been a contested one. Largely because musical theater is dependent upon physical attendance by an audience. The online consumption of material can take away the necessity of a live experience, as it eliminates geographical and financial barriers. As *Forbes* editor Lee Seymour puts it: "Broadway is hyper-localized, and for musical to truly expand requires a rare combination of money, critical acclaim, and international appeal. Digital love doesn't count for much if fans don't visit New York to buy tickets."<sup>12</sup> Following this argument, the online engagement of musicals makes little sense, and contributed to Broadway resistance towards the potential

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10 Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton the Revolution*, 46.

11 Adam Hetrick, "Ticket Sales Prompt Second Extension for Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* Before Performances Begin," *Playbill*, January 14, 2015, accessed March 12, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/ticket-sales-prompt-second-extension-for-lin-manuel-mirandas-hamilton-before-performances-begin-com-339250>.

12 Lee Seymour, "As 'Hamilton' Rules Broadway's Social Media, 'Dear Evan Hansen' Digs Deeper," *Forbes*, May 17, 2016, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/leeseymour/2016/05/17/as-hamilton-rules-broadways-social-media-dear-evan-hansen-digs-deeper/#76d507aa105e>.

benefits of online media. *Hamilton* however, seems to contradict this. Just by looking at the show's presence on online platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Snapchat*, *Spotify* and *YouTube*, the way in which the show interacts with fans both on- and offline, and the way in which fans engage and interact with the show (by for example posting their offline experience with the show online), it is an easy, albeit in hindsight, observation that (social) media plays an important role in the *Hamilton* experience. Moreover, the widespread online presence of the show is simultaneously an important reason for the show's popularity, as it easily reaches a wider audience, simply because the number of individuals with access to Internet is larger than the number able to experience the show in person.

Taking in account the possible correlation between *Hamilton*'s success, the show's online presence, the interaction with its audiences and the engagement of these audiences as they themselves become the messenger of *Hamilton* related content, I wish to center my thesis around the following question:

In what ways did *Hamilton* utilize digital media to extend the show's experience, how are audiences interacting with, and reacting to, the show through digital media, and how can these different engagements potentially have contributed to the show's (inter)national success?

## **1.2 Status Quaestionis**

In this thesis I am explicitly bridging research on the field of theater with a media and communication perspective. By placing it within the realm of theater research, rather than basing it solely within media and communication studies, I hope my research will be considered in future academic work on musical theater and its relationship with online media, especially musical theater that is able to exceed the theatrical sphere and moves into

becoming part of mainstream culture. Because the relationship between musical theater and online media is a relatively new phenomenon, little research has been done on the specific interplay between the two. *Hamilton* can be regarded the first nationwide success story emphasizing the possibilities of online media. Therefore, placing my research within the existing academic discourse in theater, is placing it within the research that has been done on other musicals with a similar social and cultural impact, as well as existing research on theater audiences, reception and response. I wish to stress that my research can be considered as building upon both discourses (musicals with a wider impact and audience studies), but since *Hamilton*'s success is intertwined with online media, a direct comparison would neglect this key aspect of the show's success. It is not to say that existing research is not valuable or relevant, but simply that trying to explain the success of *Hamilton* needs a broader view, which is why I have chosen to create a link with communication and media studies, while still taking from the existing theater studies research. Taking *Hamilton* as an example of a notable success, I wish to bridge the existing gap in the research on the engagement of modern (theater) audiences through online media.

Looking at musicals with a similar cultural impact, two musicals that are fairly recent and have made their mark outside of the theatrical sphere are *Hair* and *Rent*. Both were made into a movie and their scores became part of mainstream music. Both musicals were coined as characterizing a generation (1960s and 1990s youth respectively) and revolutionized the musical industry by going against the norm (the accepted stylizations). *Hamilton* is argued to do the same,<sup>13</sup> so by devoting this research to *Hamilton* and its impact beyond the theater, it will automatically become part of the research that has been done on the above mentioned musicals. *Hamilton* differs from these two musicals in at least one significant way, namely

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13 Alisa Solomon, "How 'Hamilton' Is Revolutionizing the Broadway Musical," *The Nation*, August 27, 2015, accessed August 5, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/how-hamilton-is-revolutionizing-the-broadway-musical/>.

the relation between its success and online media. The absence of online media in *Hair* and *Rent* is logical, as the Internet became a phenomenon only in the mid 1990s, and thus provides an interesting object of study for this thesis, as there has not been a musical with significant societal influence in the digital age. However, the existing research on musicals as cultural phenomena, does provide interesting parallels that show that the characteristics of a successful piece of musical theater are similar throughout time.

Elizabeth L. Wollman, in her book *The Theater Will Rock*, wrote about the progress that *Hair*, amongst other rock musicals, made in incorporating rock music into musical theater. The rock genre was not only vastly different from the existing musical show tunes at that time, but also had vastly different “sociological, ideological and aesthetic” conventions.<sup>14</sup> Wollman moreover discusses the validity of rock as a musical genre by the approval of those established in the scene associated with rock. It also discusses *Hair*'s attempt to reach an audience beyond the regarded theater public by using popular music, and making this music available to the wider public through vinyl. This is a direct parallel to *Hamilton*, where different, popular genres are used to advance the story, as well as the availability of this music on a popular carrier of music. In the 1960s the popular medium was vinyl, in modern society, these mediums are online carriers such as *Spotify*.

Musical theatre scholar Scott Miller dedicated a chapter on *Rent* in his book *Rebels with Applause* in which he analyses the success of the musical and its impact on the (theater) community.<sup>15</sup> Similar to Wollman he argues that *Rent* was able to create a connection between pop music and musical theater, something that had been attempted before unsuccessfully. Miller discusses the musical's attempt to innovate and diversify the then sleepy Broadway scene, and the topics that enabled this cultural innovation. Miller addresses

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14 Elizabeth L. Wollman, *The Theater Will Rock: The History of the Rock Musical from Hair to Hedwig* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 1.

15 Scott Miller, “*Inside Rent*,” in *Rebels with Applause: Broadway's Groundbreaking Musicals* (Portsmouth, Heinemann, 2001).

part of the show's success to the sense of community and the communal belief in the show and its message: "the actors aren't just portraying [the sense of community and intense emotions]; they're actually living it on stage."<sup>16</sup> Miller lists the reasons the musical should not have worked and tries to answer why it *did*. These answers are mere speculations, because, as Miller says, [...]it's impossible to know."<sup>17</sup> He moreover addresses that *Rent* was not groundbreaking in terms of things-we-have-not-seen-before, but was successful "in bringing together what had gone before it, combining many past innovations all in one work, and doing it with great skill, and more important, great success."<sup>18</sup> I believe *Hamilton* has, rightfully so, been compared to *Rent*<sup>19</sup>. There are dozens of similarities to be found between the two musicals, both in form, reception, and impact. Though both are obviously products of their time they both carry a universality that is both fascinating as well as unexplainable.

In *The Making of American Audiences from Stage to Television* Richard Butsch looks at American audiences throughout the past two centuries up to the 1990s. He looks at all forms of entertainment and how audiences are positioned towards it, and the role they are expected to take. Butsch looks at the importance of public discourse and how this kind of discourse constructs audiences, determines their actions and how they perceive themselves.<sup>20</sup> He outlines the distinction between active and passive, and public and private audiences, and how certain texts (and different eras) ask for different audience attitudes. He moreover stresses the importance of contextualizing embeddedness, to further understand how audiences should be reviewed. With *Hamilton* one could argue all these audiences are present in some form or formation, as the availability of material allows audiences to consume the

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<sup>16</sup> Scott Miller, "Inside *Rent*," in *Rebels with Applause: Broadway's Groundbreaking Musicals*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Sokolove, "The C.E.O. of Hamilton Inc.," *New York Times*, April 5, 2016, accessed August 5, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/10/magazine/the-ceo-of-hamilton-inc.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Butsch, *Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750 – 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 2.

show both publicly and privately, as well as actively as passively. This creates an interesting albeit complicated dialectic of audiences, where *Hamilton* arguably succeeds to satisfy a large number of these audiences and their personal motivations for consumption and engagement.

Susan Bennett's book *Theatre Audiences* is key for anyone attempting to study audiences in relation to theater and performance. Inspired by Brecht, Bennett looks (in more detail than Butsch) at the underlying ideologies and context in which a text is created, and how this relates to audiences' perception and reception.<sup>21</sup> Brecht argued that innovation does not necessarily evoke a challenge in the existing modes of perception and reception, and that established modes (especially in Hollywood and on Broadway) do not challenge audiences to actively engage.<sup>22</sup> Brecht is also the one that coined the term 'Verfremdungseffekt,' used to refer to a style of theater that used certain stylistics to make the audience aware that they are looking at theater, rather than a duplication of reality.<sup>23</sup> In short, Brecht's way of looking at audiences is placing them in an ideological role. It does not just look at reception, but is to be studied in relation to the modes of production and socio-cultural issues. It is here that reader-response theory comes into play; looking at reading, experience, and interpretation of texts in context of the reader's knowledge and morale can establish and understanding of how audience interpret certain texts. Audiences of theatrical events should always be studied in context and can be seen as individual as well as part of a group. Theater always assumes a social contract between the text (and its performers) and the audience, and there is a connected reliance on passive spectatorship versus active decoding of the text in order to understand the story. Bennett argues that modern theater can no longer assume these above mentioned conventions, as theater often moves outside of the sphere that is considered traditional. She provides a model that looks at the relation between audience and theater and

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<sup>21</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (London: Routledge, 1997), 23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

the steps that are taken for a theatrical text to be interpreted.<sup>24</sup> Though essential, Bennett's study does not yet consider modern audiences, as it was written in 1997, thus not discussing the influence of mass media (especially the Internet) on audiences. Moreover, Bennett takes a fairly traditional (cultural) approach towards audiences in which she only considers audiences in direct relation to the performance. I wish to extend this by looking at the relationship between *Hamilton* and its audiences outside of the four walls of a theater. This automatically means that the dynamic between messenger and receiver change, creating a more dialectic or interdisciplinary reading of what it entails to be an audience.

### 1.3 Methodology

Before moving further into this research, I first wish to outline the discourse and direction of my thesis. I am interested in researching a phenomenon on which, as far as I asserted within the timespan this thesis was written, no other academic research has been done. In order to substantiate a clear and thorough discussion, I have deliberately chosen to study a wide variety of texts, not only due to the nature of my research question, but also because the widespread attention and popularity of *Hamilton* warrants a broad scope. I shall make use of material produced directly by (members of) the *Hamilton* company on platforms such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*, original content posted on *Spotify* and *YouTube* or quoted directly from cast members or the show's creatives. The latter includes works such as the PBS documentary *Hamilton's America* following Lin-Manuel Miranda as he develops the musical,<sup>25</sup> and *Hamilton: The Revolution*, containing not only the musical's book with notes from Miranda, but interviews and anecdotes from the show's creators and cast.<sup>26</sup> Other sources stem from third party media and have no direct link to the show (i.e. are not part of

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 210.

<sup>25</sup> *Hamilton's America*, Documentary, directed by Alex Horwitz, 2016: PBS.

<sup>26</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton The Revolution*.

the *Hamilton* company, or otherwise directly involved), but are reflecting on, or engaging with, the show. These sources include critically acclaimed media, such as *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Guardian*, popular blogs and magazines such as *Buzzfeed*, *Elle* and *Variety*, but also niche websites to reflect on the widespread popularity of the musical in, for example, the hip-hop community.

My research reflects upon *Hamilton* from the first public performance by Miranda at the White House in 2009, roughly up until he left the show in July of 2016. Exceptions to this timeframe can be found in my analysis of *The Hamilton Mixtape* and Miranda's social media impact, as material concerning these topics came out more recently than July 2016. I do clearly exclude *Hamilton*'s expansion to Chicago, Los Angeles, London and the national tour. However, the notion of expanding the show to include *Hamilton* companies in other cities, affirms the (inter)national popularity of the show. While I am aware of the scope of this timeframe and the abundance of material available within this timeframe, I have deliberately chosen to work with a broad time range because it allows me to better track the show's evolution into its current cultural status, the diversification of the audience, as well as the (growth of) the show through social media. Due to the chosen scope, this research automatically faces the consideration of large quantities of (written and visual) material, enabling me to create an empirical study in which qualitative data will lead to observations, argumentation and discussion. It is thus empirical in sense that it draws conclusions by the observation of a multitude of sources. I will make very little use of quantitative data aside from a *Google Trends* search I performed in order to assert the peaks in searches on (and presumed growth in popularity of) *Hamilton* between February of 2009 and July of 2016.<sup>27</sup> According to this data, interest in *Hamilton* peaked in February of 2016, where searches

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<sup>27</sup> Google Trends "Hamilton," <https://trends.google.nl/trends/explore?date=2009-02-01%202016-06-01&q=Hamilton>.

containing *Hamilton* as a keyword were the highest. Following the first wave of piqued interest came a second increase in searches mid to late that same year. It is my own assertion that most of the material that came out within that timeframe are either reflections upon the show's success or engagements with show due to its current cultural impact, really establishing *Hamilton* in popular culture. This data has helped to pinpoint significant periods of time within the larger scope of my research. Overall, about one third of all the material analyzed is used in this thesis, either grouped as a case study or as an example to clarify my observation and argument. Material that is not quoted or referred to in this research did play a role in the formation of my observations.

The method I have used to analyze different sources is a critical discourse analysis (hereafter CDA), which allows for an exploration of the discursive practices of production and consumption and focuses on these practices in cultural phenomena.<sup>28</sup> Looking at *Hamilton* in relation to my research question, CDA allows me to review texts<sup>29</sup> in the context of their production and their preconceived ideologies (i.e. the platform on which the text appears, but also their target audience and the way in which they approach this audience), but moreover lets me look at the specific text in relation to *Hamilton*. As Marianne Jorgensen and Louise J. Phillips put it in their book on discourse analysis:

[t]he research focus of critical discourse analysis is accordingly both the discursive practices which construct representations of the world, social subjects and social relations, including power relations and the role that these discursive practices play in furthering the interest of particular social groups.”<sup>30</sup>

Simply put, using CDA in relation to my research enables a reading of texts that looks at the ways in which a text on *Hamilton* influences the audience(s) of the platform on which the text

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<sup>28</sup> Marianne Jorgensen, Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2002), 61.

<sup>29</sup> The usage of the word text refers to the broad definition of the word. This means it includes literal texts, but also visual material and short messages.

<sup>30</sup> Marianne Jorgensen, Louise J. Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, 62.

occurs, but also allows me to look at how the appearance of a text on this platform may affect *Hamilton* and its audiences. I am thus looking at the context of production, the message itself, the receivers of that message and the social context in which those receivers are functioning. This creates grounds for an empirical assertion of the possible influence a text can have on audiences and *Hamilton*'s popularity.

To briefly discuss the further structure of this research: chapter two will be an introductory chapter providing an exploration on the importance and role of musical theater in American culture, how *Hamilton* builds upon that importance and how *Hamilton* might add to that importance through its innovative ways of communication, namely digital. Chapter two will moreover hold a subchapter defining different possible audiences, especially in relation to *Hamilton*. Chapter three and four will hold the actual analysis of my research question as mentioned in the introduction. Both chapters are structured into subchapters, all starting with the research objectives of the said subchapter. In the research objectives I shall establish both a brief outline as well as the relevance to the research question as posed in the introduction. Within the subchapter there are sections dedicated to either a single case study or a broader exploration of a specific topic using multiple examples. The most important and relevant observations will be presented in chapter five, where I shall reflect upon the research objectives of each chapter as well as other relevant findings.

Naturally, I wish to substantiate, clarify and contextualize my research through the use of existing theories and concepts. There are a multitude of theories that can be linked to this research, each giving a different emphasis and discourse. It is therefore that I have deliberately chosen to use two leading theoretical frameworks, as well as three supporting theories to provide more depth. I will briefly outline the theories in the theory section in this chapter and provide further depth regarding the theories at points the discussion calls for it. This is to provide more structure as it only provides the reader with information when this

information is actually of importance. I want to briefly clarify the structure and usage of these theories as part of the methodology.

The first part of my original argument (chapter three) shall focus on the use of (social) media by both the *Hamilton* company, as well as usage of these media by audiences. This chapter will both be an exploration of the different platforms the show uses, as well as the manner in which the *Hamilton* company communicates. Similarly, I will explore a few examples of how audiences interact with, or react to, the show on different social platforms. This setup allows for an exploratory stance, focusing on how the *Hamilton* company creates and develops material that seemingly aims to include very diverse audiences, and will briefly look at how different audiences engage with *Hamilton*. In this chapter, I will use the uses and gratification model as the main method to see how these communications on multiple platforms could satisfy different needs of consumers, dependent on the platform or way of communicating.<sup>31</sup> To support this theoretical framework, I will use Herbert Blumer's theory of symbolic interaction.<sup>32</sup> This theory aimed to explain why certain conventions (i.e. language of visuals) are used and what the possible effects of these conventions are.

Chapter four, or the second part of my original argument, focuses on how *Hamilton* was able to gain such a large and diverse following, despite the fact that such widespread success is highly uncommon for a piece of musical theater. First and foremost, this chapter will focus on the notion of social influence as a factor in the growth of *Hamilton*'s success and the diversification of the show's audience. In this, I will make use of the elaboration likelihood model, as posed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo, to determine how social influence can persuade consumers to engage with *Hamilton* related material, becoming part

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas E. Ruggiero, "Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century," *Mass Communication & Society* 3 (2000): 28.

<sup>32</sup> Herbert Blumer, "Symbolic Interactionism Perspective and Method," accessed November 11, 2017, [https://campus.fsu.edu/bbcswebdav/institution/academic/social\\_sciences/sociology/Reading%20Lists/Social%20Psych%20Prelim%20Readings/I.%20Classics/1969%20Blumer%20-%20Symbolic%20Interactionism.pdf](https://campus.fsu.edu/bbcswebdav/institution/academic/social_sciences/sociology/Reading%20Lists/Social%20Psych%20Prelim%20Readings/I.%20Classics/1969%20Blumer%20-%20Symbolic%20Interactionism.pdf).

of *Hamilton*'s audience.<sup>33</sup> To further conceptualize the notion of social influence in relation to *Hamilton*, I will use two secondary theories. The first one, social impact theory as developed by Bibb Latane, will help to provide a more in-depth discussion on the potential factors that may lead audiences or a specific individual to consume *Hamilton* related material after this individual shared *Hamilton* related material on (social) media.<sup>34</sup> An important factor in the process of getting an individual to consume *Hamilton* through recommendation or mention is credibility. Through Carl Hovland's source credibility model I wish to further investigate the role of credibility in the context of social influence.

While I have specified the theories to their respective chapters, they will not be used exclusively for these chapters. I will refer to the theories throughout this thesis if the argument of discussion calls for it, albeit it be less exponentially. I wish to stress that the material used in this study are merely a fraction of all material written on *Hamilton*. The precise amount of material available is extremely difficult to assess as it includes a wide variety of sources. I accessed most of the sources by performing a *Google* search on *Hamilton* and including a number of different other keywords related to the topic of discussion. I then picked a number of sources (this number differs per subchapter) based on their relevance on the particular topic, as well as the variety it would add to my thesis, thus making sure the diversity of *Hamilton*'s audience is reflected in the sources used.

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Elaboration Likelihood Model," *Northwestern University*, accessed March 21, 2017, [http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/elaboration\\_likelihoood\\_model\\_-\\_okeefe.pdf](http://www.communicationcache.com/uploads/1/0/8/8/10887248/elaboration_likelihoood_model_-_okeefe.pdf), 1475.

<sup>34</sup> Bibb Latane, "The Psychology of Social Impact," *Ohio State University*, accessed March 24, 2017, <http://psycnet.apa.org/buy/1982-01296-001>.

## 1.4 Theory

As stated in the methodology I wish to conduct my research according to two main, and five secondary theories. In this section of the introductory chapter I shall further outline these theories and their relevance to this study.

### *The Uses and Gratification Model*

The leading theory of chapter three is the uses and gratification model, a theory that stems from communication and media studies, and aims to understand why people turn to specific media and why audiences turn to these media to satisfy specific needs.<sup>35</sup> The focus herein lies with the audience and looks at what individuals do with a certain message and the role of the platform through which the message is communicated. At the core, uses and gratification suggests that individuals consume certain media because it fulfills one (or more) of the following needs: identification, education, entertainment or social interaction.<sup>36</sup> These needs can be specified when looking at particular media. For example, the use of the Internet has been associated with fulfilling needs such as “[...] parasocial interaction, companionship, escape and surveillance.”<sup>37</sup>

Newer strands of research concerning the uses and gratification model put significant agency with individuals, because the availability of different media gives them a choice to engage with their preferred medium and the messages communicated on this medium.<sup>38</sup> Next to the agency of the individual, uses and gratification uses the notion of active audience, which in this research refers to the active engagement an individual has with *Hamilton* on a given platform, or the possibility of engagement within the medium. The latter is called

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<sup>35</sup> Zafer Erdogan, “Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Marketing*, volume 15 (1999): 297.

<sup>36</sup> “Uses and Gratifications Theory,” *Businessstopia*, accessed March 26, 2017, <https://www.businessstopia.net/mass-communication/uses-gratifications-theory>.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas E. Ruggiero, “Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century.”

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

interactivity.<sup>39</sup> For example, *Twitter* allows for the possibility of a more active audience than *Spotify* because interaction is easily established, but one has to keep in mind that both platforms also serve to satisfy different needs.

Linking the uses and gratification approach to the use of (social) media by the *Hamilton* company and audiences will help conceptualize research on why *Hamilton* uses certain types of platforms to reach different audiences; the significance of the message (i.e. what is being said and how); but also provides an opportunity to look at the agency this creates for audiences to pick their preferred platform; and how it allows them to become the producer of messages on *Hamilton* or create interaction with *Hamilton*.

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

Focussing mainly on the conventions of content, symbolic interactionism looks at the creation and evolution of shared symbols.<sup>40</sup> This theory has its roots in sociology and therefore focusses on centralizing the role of individuals (and the usage of shared symbols) in an interaction regarding a certain topic, more than for example semiotics, which puts the focus on linguistics. The way one interacts with other individuals is thus dependent upon their knowledge of certain topics and the linked symbols. To give an easy example, if a *Hamilton* fan were to interact with someone who has never heard of the show, the communication between these two regarding *Hamilton* would be vastly different than if this person would know of the show, and it would differ again if this person were a fan. The *Hamilton* company has created a variety of terms that are specific to the show, and I wish to use symbolic interactionism to understand the role of these shared symbols as well as the role

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas E. Ruggiero, "Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century."

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Blumer, "Symbolic Interactionism Perspective and Method."

of the audience in using and developing these symbols and the role of audiences in developing new symbols.

### *The Elaboration Likelihood Model*

In chapter four I will shift the focus from the use of social media to the notion of social influence as a possible key factor in *Hamilton*'s success and a potential reason for the show's diverse audience. Social influence is the idea that some individuals are able to influence other individuals because of their personality, reputation or popularity. Regardless of the content of the message, these factors might influence the receiver of the message and lead to engagement with the content of the message, purely based on the fact that the receiver has the producer of the message in high regard. The theory that looks at the notion of influence and persuasion in communication is called the elaboration likelihood model (hereafter ELM). ELM stems from the 1980s and has its roots in communication studies.<sup>41</sup> Elaboration refers to the degree in which a person engages with a message and its context, which consequently determines the amount of persuasion a certain message can achieve. Simply put, elaboration is dependent upon the interest the receiver of the message holds towards the topic of the message.<sup>42</sup> If someone has always advocated to dislike musicals, they are unlikely to engage with messages containing information on musical theater. ELM assumes all individuals are motivated to hold certain attitudes towards a message, based on earlier opinions. Similarly, if someone has a preference for musical theater, their engagement with the same message will be different, as this individual has a predisposed interest. Aspects such as the source of the message, the message itself and the channel on which the message was communicated, as well as the (social) surroundings of the receiver, are important variables in determining the

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<sup>41</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, (London, Sage Publications Ltd: 2010), 517.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Elaboration Likelihood Model."

degree of persuasion a message may hold. ELM argues there are two ways to arrive an active engagement with a message.<sup>43</sup> The first is central, where the individual engaging with the message holds a certain interest in the content, and will thus actively engage with that message. In case of *Hamilton* those with an interest in theater might be part of this group. The second route is peripheral and argues that the individual is persuaded by factors that have nothing to do with the initial message. Other factors then have such an influence that they are able to direct attention towards the message even though the consumer initially has no interest in the message. When *Hamilton* started to get attention (and approval) from the hip hop community and those individuals deemed influential in this community started publicly praising the show, many individuals with an interest in the hip-hop community directed their attention towards the musical. Simply put, if Kanye West or Jay Z enjoys a musical and publicly acknowledges it, it must have a certain appeal and thus becomes worthy of engagement by others in the community.

Especially the peripheral route is fascinating when looking at *Hamilton* both in relation to social influence as well as (social)media, as it can attempt to explain how initially uninterested audiences are introduced and likely to engage with a *Hamilton* message. In the peripheral route of persuasion, social influence can change the way an individual feels, behaves or thinks about a certain subject through interaction with other people. If an individual is persuaded to engage with a message through social influence one defines this as a peripheral cue. There are six different types of cues. First, reciprocation in which the receiver is obligated to agree due to past experience. Second, consistency, where opinion is formed through opinions expressed in the past. The third one is social proof (or peer pressure) in which the opinion of others leads to an adjustment in attitude. Fourth, liking, is related to

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<sup>43</sup> "Elaboration Likelihood Model," *University of Oregon*, accessed March 17, 2017, <http://journalism.uoregon.edu/~tbivins/stratcomweb/readings/ELM.pdf>.

the likability of the individual expressing a certain opinion. The fifth one is authority, where power relations determine the opinion of the person to be persuaded. The last one is scarcity and is based on the limited amount of interaction time with a certain message.<sup>44</sup> Note that none of these cues are directly related to the message but only focus on external factors.

### *Social Impact Theory*

Building upon ELM is the social impact theory, a theory with a psychological focus.<sup>45</sup> Social impact theory forecasts that change “might occur in an individual (physiological, cognitive, emotional, or behavioral) due to the presence or action of others, who are real, imagined or implied,”<sup>46</sup> and is always the “function of three factors: the number of others who make up that source, their immediacy, and their strength.”<sup>47</sup> *Hamilton* is both the object of messages as well as the producer of messages. Social impact theory can thus be used to assert how a certain social influencer reaches their audience and what the perceived impact of a message might be. But it can also be used to assert the impact a message by the *Hamilton* company might have based on popularity or likability, actuality and the reach of the message. Due to the time frame researched in this study, I am able to make hindsight observations, allowing me to make empirical assertions on the role of social influencers using the social impact theory.

### *Source Credibility Model*

Where the social impact theory places focus on a combination of external factors to evoke change or engagement, the source credibility model takes to the (perceived) credibility of the

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<sup>44</sup> “Elaboration Likelihood Model,” *University of Oregon*.

<sup>45</sup> Bibb Latane, “The Psychology of Social Impact.”

<sup>46</sup> Lisa Rashotte, “Social Influence,” *Sociology Encyclopedia*, accessed March 19, 2017, [http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/fragr\\_image/media/social,4428](http://www.sociologyencyclopedia.com/fragr_image/media/social,4428).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

messenger. The psychological model argues that: “the effectiveness of a message” is depended upon the “perceived level of expertise and trustworthiness in an endorser.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, if a source is deemed credible by the receiver, the receiver can, dependent upon their perceptions and expectations, accept the source’s influence and start to consider the endorsed subject. The credibility or status of the endorser is thus transferred upon the product merely because an individual has the endorser in high regard.<sup>49</sup> The perceived credibility of a specific source is created through a number of measures: competence (amongst which are expertise, openness and intellectual currency), character (kindness, sympathy, selflessness and virtue), sociability (friendliness, cheer and temperament), composure (excitability, calmness, tension and poise), and extroversion (aggressiveness, boldness, talkativeness and voice).<sup>50</sup> Naturally, these factors are subjected to personal observation and perception, and therefore, source credibility is heavily dependent upon individual opinion, and will thus differ between individuals. This is why I wish to use this theory in combination with the social impact theory, to be able to use both theories in a dialectic, considering both personal preference as well as overall impact of the source due to its nature (i.e. high number of followers or high authority).

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<sup>48</sup> Zafer Erdogan, “Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Marketing*, volume 15 (1999): 297.

<sup>49</sup> Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss, “The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness.”

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 2: THE AUDIENCE

### 2.1 The Role of Musical in American Cultural Identity

The American musical is a paradox. On stage or screen, musicals at once hold a dominant and a contested place in the worlds of entertainment, art, and scholarship. Born from a *mélange* of performance forms that included opera and operetta, vaudeville and burlesque, minstrelsy and jazz, musicals have always sought to amuse more than instruct, and to make money more than make political change. In spite of their unapologetic commercialism, though, musicals have achieved supreme artistry and have influenced culture as much if not more than any other form in America, including avant-garde and high art on the one hand, and the full range of popular and commercial art on the other. Reflecting, refracting, and shaping U.S. culture since the early twentieth century, musicals converse with shifting dynamics of gender and sexuality, ethnicity and race, and the very question of what it means to be American and to be human. The musical explores identity, self determination, and the American dream.<sup>51</sup>

This excerpt from musical scholar Stacy Wolf is taken from *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*. In only a few sentences Wolf accurately describes musical's complicated relationship with American society. Musical theater has a reputation of being unapologetically commercial while still being an art form driven by passion, and interestingly enough, also being socially influential. As will be discussed later, there have been multiple occasions in American history where a musical has had a profound effect on American culture. Culture in this instance refers to the body of texts that are of importance to a nation's (cultural) identity. Raymond Williams called this definition of culture the social definition, in which culture is "a description of a certain way of life."<sup>52</sup> In this subchapter I wish to provide some context on the relation between musical theater and American society and identity in order to better understand *Hamilton*'s potential influence. Note that this subchapter will not be an account of America's musical theater history but rather a brief exploration of ways in which the American musical is (and has been) part of American identity.

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<sup>51</sup> Stacy Wolf, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

<sup>52</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Analysis of Culture*, ed. John Storey (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1993), 48.

Musical theater as we know it today, though a historical derivative of European entertainment such as vaudeville, revues, burlesque and opera, has its roots in the United States and should thus be viewed as inherent to it. In other words, most Americans have been influenced by musical theater, whether positively or negatively. Musical theater scholar Raymond Knapp argues that musicals are associated with the United States rather than Europe because it developed into art form that really taps into the American experience, both as a consumable product in capitalist society as well as the narratives central to the storylines in the book (the term used to refer to a script in musical theater).<sup>53</sup> Like any other art form, musicals are a product of their time, reflecting on societal issues that are prominent at the time of production. Knapp suggests that this reflection is exactly the reason why Americans have a contested relationship with musical theater, as musicals have been an important creative outlet for minority narratives, especially those linked to the gay community: “we should realize that the strong gay presence in musical theater had much to do with an entrenched general reluctance to see the art form as contributing centrally to American culture, and thereby to our collective image of ourselves.”<sup>54</sup> In hindsight, the use of musical as a platform for minority discourses, is, of course, the reason why we can review the American musical (and arguably even more important: its context) as a reflection of American identity. In similar ways, issues dealing with race and ethnicity found a platform within musical theater. A great example is *The Wiz*, a retelling of *The Wizard of Oz* using musical genres largely associated with African Americans, such as soul and Motown for its lyrical book. Because of the predominately white audience of Broadway, tryouts were not well received. The show’s producer then (unconventionally) turned to television audiences to promote the show, resulting in an African American audience on Broadway, causing *The Wiz*

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<sup>53</sup> Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and The Formation of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

to become a successful musical.<sup>55</sup> Aside from the similarities considering ethnicity, *Hamilton* has a predominantly non-white cast, as did *The Wiz*, one could argue there is another distinct parallel between both shows. Both shows turned to an alternative medium marked by its accessibility and availability to further advance the show. For *The Wiz* this was television, for *Hamilton* this is social media.

The relationship between the American musical and the construction of American identity is fairly straightforward as musicals cater to an American audience whom will, more often than not, position themselves in relation to the story. Knapp argues that “if Americans see representatives of other lands and cultures on the musical stage, they will see them in relation to some sense of who they are as Americans.”<sup>56</sup> In a similar fashion, if they encounter “constituent groups of Americans, whether in the present or in a reimagined past, they will be aware of how congruent (or not) those representation seem to be with their own received notions of such groups and their history.”<sup>57</sup> *Hamilton*, in a sense, accommodates both. On the one hand, it introduces audiences to hip-hop, while on the other hand, it introduces new audiences to musical theater. On another level the musical functions as a frame of reference in which it teaches its audiences about hip-hop, musical as well as the historical tale of Alexander Hamilton. The combination of musical stylistics with the multiracial cast allows individuals from all races to identify with a story that, before *Hamilton*, was a predominantly white tale. By adding certain identifiers, especially the music, *Hamilton* creates a relatable story which in turn makes these historical tales more relatable. Leslie Odom Jr., who played Burr in the original Broadway production said in an interview *Hamilton* gave him the idea

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<sup>55</sup> Laurence Maslon, “Civil Rights Era on Broadway,” *PBS*, accessed on July 7, 2017, <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/broadway/essays/civil-rights-era-on-broadway/>.

<sup>56</sup> Raymond Knapp, *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, 103.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

that American history was also part of his legacy, while before he was never able to identify himself with the tales.<sup>58</sup>

*Hamilton* is laced with shout-outs to the traditions that birthed it, both hip-hop (DMX, Grandmaster, Flash and the Furious Five) and musical theater (*South Pacific*, *The Last Five Years*). These serve, in part, as invitations, a signal to people from diverse backgrounds that the show is meant for them. [...] In this show, though, the shout-outs have a subtle second meaning. They're another way of saying that American history can be told and retold, claimed and reclaimed, even by people who don't look like George Washington and Betsy Ross.<sup>59</sup>

Although American musicals are generally, in some way, a reflection of American identity, one should be aware of the fact that the average individual attending Broadway is not an accurate representation of American society. In the 2014/2015 season the average Broadway audience was in their forties, highly educated and white.<sup>60</sup> Notably, that this in itself is a reflection of the capitalist nature of America in which certain consumption is only available to those with sufficient means. It is thus important to keep in mind that, though *Hamilton* has reached a diverse audience through its online presence, the question remains how much of this diversity remains when one reviews the audience with the means to afford a ticket. As my research does not focus directly on the consumption of *Hamilton* in the theater, I will not elaborate on this issue much further, but I do wish to raise attention to the matter as it adds an (important) stance of criticism towards the relationship between musicals and American identity. It acknowledges a broader context that looks beyond the musical as a text, but the musical within the sphere of production. I moreover believe that one should differentiate between musicals that were commercial successes and are therefore present in American culture (for example *Mary Poppins*), and musicals that have had a socio-cultural impact on American culture by creating cultural dialogue around social or political issues next to being

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<sup>58</sup> *Hamilton's America*.

<sup>59</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton The Revolution*, 94.

<sup>60</sup> "The Demographics of the Broadway Audience 2014-2015," *The Producer's Perspective*, accessed July 7, 2017, [https://www.theproducerperspective.com/my\\_weblog/2016/02/the-demographics-of-the-broadway-audience-2014-2015.html](https://www.theproducerperspective.com/my_weblog/2016/02/the-demographics-of-the-broadway-audience-2014-2015.html)

a work of entertainment. Which it not to say that the first cannot be of importance when looking at personal or even American identity, as it is still a part of the cultural heritage, but I merely wish to stress that some musicals have made their way into a bigger socio-cultural dialogue, for example how *Rent* openly dealt with (the implications of) AIDS.

Another way in which musicals have been influential in American culture can be found within shows that moved beyond the theatrical sphere into popular culture through, for example cast recordings, movie musicals or even television. Logically such products allow for a broader audience and, to some extent, mass consumption. Many musicals, whether with a profound cultural impact (*Hair* and *Rent*) or huge, commercial success (such as *Wicked*), are often part of popular culture dialogue, as they are referred to in television series and in movies, or function as (obvious) inspiration for new narratives in film or television. This intertextuality shows that musicals are, in multiple ways, part of America's (popular) culture. Moreover, American culture has a rich history of adapting musicals for the big screen and even for television. Though these spheres can be considered another field of study entirely, I do wish to briefly discuss a few interesting elements in the movie- and televised musical (and its relation to stage musicals). These mass mediums reach millions of Americans and therefore cannot be ignored when looking at the American musical and American identity. In relation to *Hamilton* it is interesting to review these topics because they provide a framework of how musicals are normally consumed by those that are not in the position to get tickets to a Broadway show due to geographical or financial reasons.

Movies and musicals have an interesting albeit somewhat complicated relationship. According to Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Williams, "[...] almost all staged musicals that still hold significance for American audiences were created within film's 'sound' era."<sup>61</sup> Over

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<sup>61</sup> Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, "The Filmed Musical" in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, ed. Raymond Knapp et al (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 136.

the course of the following decades, many musicals have been adapted into a version compatible for the big screen, or the other way around. A handful of incredibly successful musicals started out as a movie and were adapted into musicals, such as *The Lion King*, *Kinky Boots*, *Mary Poppins*, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Once*, *Beauty and the Beast* and many others.<sup>62</sup> As this research focuses largely on audiences, it is interesting to consider what these remakes mean when looking at the audiences who are coming to visit these musicals.

The increasing tendency to adapt films to the musical stage intertwines with the parallel rise in revivals and ‘revisals,’ and speaks also to the importance of film adaptations in the building audiences for the latter. This co-dependency is especially evident when ‘revisals’ are remade to resemble more closely the film versions.<sup>63</sup>

The nature of this interplay is obviously highly commercial but its rich history, dating back to the 1920s, and the fact that musical-to-movie and movie-to-musical concepts are still relevant today, shows that both mediums have influenced each other, also in terms of audiences. These concepts allow musicals to enlarge the theatrical sphere, creating experiences independent of the location or budget of the audience.

Building upon this idea of the consumption of musicals outside of the theater is the relatively new trend of the televised live musical. From 2013 onwards, American television stations started to broadcast musical adaptations live at prime time. Televised musicals were popular in the 1950s, but are now again widely watched phenomena. A star cast, often consisting of pop stars, actors or other famous personalities, performs a heavily regimented version of hit musicals. Examples include *The Sound of Music*, *Grease* and *Hairspray*.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly enough, the televised version of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, which was not

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<sup>62</sup> Adam Feldman and David Cote, “The 30 best film-to-musical adaptations,” *Time Out New York*, August 14, 2015, accessed on July 10, 2017, [https://www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/moviemusicals#tab\\_panel\\_2](https://www.timeout.com/newyork/theater/moviemusicals#tab_panel_2).

<sup>63</sup> Raymond Knapp and Mitchell Morris, “The Filmed Musical,” 142.

<sup>64</sup> Neil Genzlinger, “After ‘Hairspray Live!’: 7 TV Musicals and 5 Lessons Learned,” *New York Times*, December 8, 2016, accessed July 9 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/08/arts/television/seven-tv-musicals-five-lessons-learned.html>.

performed live, had the poorest ratings of all televised musicals from 2013 onwards. Apparently, there is a certain allure to watching a live performance on television, as millions of people have watched the live adaptations of Broadway classics. It is again a way for audiences without the means to see an actual show to get the feeling of watching a live performance, albeit it in their own homes. It is these initiatives that allow a wider audience to enjoy and consume musical theatre because the geographical and financial boundaries are stripped away when watching musical theater on television. Although the percentage of American watching these televised shows is still relatively low, it is still a far bigger exposure for musical theater than an actual Broadway show can ever accomplish, simply because digital consumption of musical theatre does not have the restrictions of a physical theater. Essentially, *Hamilton* is doing the same. By allowing consumption on other platforms *Hamilton* could get far bigger exposure because there are no capacity restrictions, it moreover opens up the show to a far more diverse audience consuming the show. On another note, the popularity of televised musicals suggests a certain popularity of musical theater as an art form, which might have been beneficial for *Hamilton*.

In the 1950s, the Golden Age for the American musical, America saw the rise of vinyl, which proved a productive invention for the musicals' cast recordings. Goddard Leberon, president of Columbia Records from the 1950s onwards and one of the early pioneers of the cast album, saw the genre "as an opportunity to bring the theater into the home."<sup>65</sup> However, to make it a coherent experience, much of the scores needed adaptation to make the album work. Leberon aimed to create an experience for a "wider American the best possible experience of a Broadway score through only its LP."<sup>66</sup> Simultaneously, he wanted to preserve Broadway scores (in some form, since it was often not a literal recording of the

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<sup>65</sup> George Reddick, "The Evolution of the Original Cast Album," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Musical*, 185.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

show) after the show ended. In the late 1940s and early 1950s cast albums were widely popular amongst the American middle class. “[For those in American suburbs], New York musicals were for [...] sophisticated cultural products that were not easily available, except through cast recordings on LP, which allowed access to thousands of people who might never see a Broadway show in New York.”<sup>67</sup> However, when pop music started using vinyl as an outlet, the cast album fell into decline. With *Hamilton* there is an unexpected surge within the field of cast albums. Keith Caulfield, co-direct at Billboard, states that in the twenty-first century, normally, cast albums sell around five thousand copies a month (including digital downloads). In its first week, *Hamilton* sold 30,000.<sup>68</sup> The cast album plays an important part in the experience of those who are unable to visit the theater, and seeing tickets were sold out at the time the album came out, the high number of sales seems logical. If nothing else, the high number of sales suggests a potential (albeit short) growth in the popularity of musical theater (or rather musical scores), placing it in the sphere of popular culture like in the musical golden days.

## **2.2 Musical 2.0: Musicals in A Digital Age**

The American musical needs to evolve to accommodate the current digital landscape. Much of people’s day-to-day engagement with each other occurs through social media and other online platforms. In order to engage with audiences in modern day society, it would thus seem natural for musicals to also become a part of this way of communicating. Regardless, the theater community has been slow to embrace online platforms. One could even argue that

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<sup>67</sup> George Reddick, “The Evolution of the Original Cast Album,” 185.

<sup>68</sup> Jessica M. Goldstein, “Man, The Man Is Non-Stop: How ‘Hamilton Made Billboard History,’” *Think Progress*, October 8, 2015, accessed August 5, 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/man-the-man-is-non-stop-how-hamilton-made-billboard-history-d524acff1a14/>.

theater has, until recently, resisted the incorporation of social media.<sup>69</sup> A much heard anecdote against the use of online platforms comes from theater veteran Patti Lupone who took a cellphone from an audience member using the device during her show. In a reaction to her action she stated: “[...] I’m hired to tell a story, and it takes a lot of effort and work to do that convincingly. It’s a handful of people who destroy that experience for everyone. It’s heart breaking. Theater is not a social event.”<sup>70</sup> One could disagree with Lupone on her stance that theater is not a social event, as the witnessing of a live event is always, in some degree, social. As I will discuss in detail later on in this subchapter, it seems that theater can benefit tremendously from the popularity of digital platforms, provided the industry develops ways to engage with social and online media, so it enhances the experience, not disrupt it. Musicals thus need to adapt and evolve to accommodate an increasingly online audience, not in the least to remain relevant in the future. As theater historian Kyle A. Thomas argues:

Increasingly, more and more individuals see digital space as the home of their truest selves. And yet, most who attend the theatre are asked to remove themselves from [their truest selves]. But the whole concept of space and the ability to perform within it is being challenged in our ever-increasing digital age, where the intersection of digital and physical space sparks the impetus for performance creation.<sup>71</sup>

If online media has such potential, the question remains why the American musical has been so slow in incorporating it in their productions and marketing campaigns. In order to answer that question, it is interesting to note that the narrative of digitalization works twofold. Firstly, it would affect the storylines in shows, allowing digitalization to become the subject to which audiences can relate. Secondly, digitalization triggers development and might thus change the way musicals are made, how musicals engage with audiences and how audiences engage with

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<sup>69</sup> Kyle A. Thomas, “Theatre in a Mobile World: Critiquing Convention and Calling for Innovation,” *HowlRound*, accessed on July 7, 2017, <http://howlround.com/theatre-in-a-mobile-world-critiquing-convention-and-calling-for-innovation>.

<sup>70</sup> Julie Lewis, “How Social Media is Revolutionizing Broadway,” *Medium*, May 9, 2016, accessed July 9, 2017, <https://medium.com/digital-living/how-social-media-is-revolutionizing-broadway-3b5e8c3981eb>.

<sup>71</sup> Kyle A. Thomas, “Theatre in a Mobile World: Critiquing Convention and Calling for Innovation.”

musicals. In other words, digitalization can be seen as a part of the narrative, an extension of the narrative, as well as within the context of production (i.e. part of audience engagement). Arguably, established musical professionals might have been afraid of the implications of integrating online and social media into their productions (both in narrative as well as context) because they could not be sure about the effect. Sharing content on digital platforms could potentially hurt ticket sales as it would make a visit to the theater obsolete. Moreover, it seems likely that, since social media is a phenomenon that rose to prominence in the last decade, these professionals simply were unaware of the impact of digitalization, or unfamiliar with the workings of digital platforms, thus unable to engage with it. *Hamilton* is one of the first musicals to show the capabilities of social media, especially in relation to audience engagement. In addition, the 2016 musical *Dear Evan Hansen* is the first musical to really integrate social media into their narrative.

*Dear Evan Hansen* seems to be the first Broadway musical to understand the role of social media in the life of modern teenagers. The show deals and engages with (the implications) of social media, and is a huge (online) success. At the time of writing the show is a selling out on Broadway, and won six Tony's in June 2017.<sup>72</sup>

*Dear Evan Hansen* is set in our current world of 'fake news,' 'alternative facts,' and faceless and unaccountable internet/Twitter chatter. With laser focus and simplicity, the authors bring clarity to the basic human impulse to be heard and seen, to be understood, and, ultimately to love and be loved.<sup>73</sup>

As can be expected, the show engages with fans on a multitude of social platforms. It allows fans unable to visit the live performance to still engage with the show. But it is especially the combination of social media engagement and the show's narrative that seems to make the show such a success. As theater blogger Julie Lewis argues: "the use of digital technologies

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<sup>72</sup> Adam Hetrick, "The Complete List of 2017 Tony winners: Dear Even Hansen and Hello, Dolly! Lead the Pack," *Playbill*, June 11, 2017, accessed on July 8 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/the-complete-list-of-2017-tony-winners-dear-ewan-hansen-and-hello-dolly-lead-the-pack>.

<sup>73</sup> Steven Levenson, *Dear Evan Hansen* (New York: Theatre Communications Group Inc., 2017), 2.

can positively influence how people witness theater and, in turn, make theater more accessible to those who previously could not engage with it.”<sup>74</sup> *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Hamilton* are examples of how the social media narrative fits into the American musical both as a subject as well as a new way of marketing and audience engagement.

Naturally, the key to consuming a musical is the live experience surrounding it. There are two notable trends that theoretically would benefit the American musical, provided that shows embrace these trends. The first one is the rise of the experience economy, in which the (social) experience of a product is key.<sup>75</sup> In this, the product is not a material thing, but revolves around an experience. Of course, the entertainment business has always been about experience, but the rising popularity of the experience over material goods can be considered an opportunity for shows to further exploit their product as a must-attend experience, especially together with the second trend, the digitalization of society. The creation of an experience does not have to rely on the live-event (but remains the unique selling point) but can now encompass an (online) experience surrounding the show, reaching a wider audience, engaging them on other levels. As Thomas argues: “[theater] must tap into the potential of mobile platforms to extend the qualities of [the] art that differentiates it from other art forms. The online space should be considered for its ability to add another layer of a live performance to our experience.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, musicals can exploit the live experience by extending it on online platforms. Acknowledging this allows musicals to continue the experience outside of the theater and even move beyond the literal context of the musical. Through online engagement, musicals have the opportunity to interact with audiences on themes those involved in the show deem important. For example, on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017 the cast of *Dear Evan Hansen* posted a video participating in a (social media) challenge to raise money

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<sup>74</sup> Julie Lewis, “How Social Media is Revolutionizing Broadway.”

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Pine and James Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1998), 2.

<sup>76</sup> Kyle A. Thomas, “Theatre in a Mobile World: Critiquing Convention and Calling for Innovation.”

and awareness for immigrants.<sup>77</sup> The challenge, under the (viral) #*Ham4All* is another initiative related to *Hamilton*, and will be further discussed in chapter four. Such engagement on important (social) issues creates a new level of interaction which seems to speak to (online) audiences, and should thus be considered by musicals as an important part of their show, expanding the experience. Such engagement can be regarded highly beneficial commercially, as it can add economic value to the musical. However, the commercial side of musicals is not a topic explored within the context of this research, this will not be elaborated on any further.

Thus, the implementation of social content and the use of online media is necessary if the American musical wishes to remain relevant for a new generation. After all, “[...] the theater cannot cultivate new audiences if it continues to maintain its hostility towards a generation coming of age that has never known a world without the internet.”<sup>78</sup> *Dear Evan Hansen* is the first Broadway hit to really explore these themes, while I assert that *Hamilton* is a pristine example of the power of online media.

### **2.3 Defining *Hamilton*’s Audience**

In light of this thesis it would be counterproductive and oversimplifying to try and define an audience as one entity. It is largely because we are looking at a very diverse group of people and thus with a multitude of varying motivation motivations, which use several (social) media platforms. Therefore, this subchapter is dedicated to establishing a definition of audience applicable to *Hamilton* as well as a definition of audience in relation to the different platforms.

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<sup>77</sup> “#Ham4All Challenge| Dear Even Hansen,” *YouTube*, July 5, 2017, accessed on July 7, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk4Y\\_C0sKAc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nk4Y_C0sKAc).

<sup>78</sup> Kyle A. Thomas, “Theatre in a Mobile World: Critiquing Convention and Calling for Innovation.”

In *Mass Communication Theory*, Denis McQuail explains that the word audience was originally used to refer to a group of receivers in the outing of a message through a medium. Nonetheless, because the word is used to define “an increasingly diverse and complex reality, open to alternative and competing formulations,”<sup>79</sup> this definition needs a broader perspective. The above mentioned definition of audience implies that audience members are passive spectators in a public setting (of some sorts). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the importance of mass media, the diversity of consumed messages, and the blurring line between audiences and producers, the concept of the word audiences should be redefined to include the newfound interactivity, shifting behaviors (due to the aforementioned interactivity), increased media usage, and the mobility of consumption.<sup>80</sup> As such, audiences are always a result of a “social context and a response to a particular pattern of media provision.”<sup>81</sup> Seeing audiences as a product of these two phenomena (context and pattern), and the active role of audiences, is especially interesting in relation to *Hamilton* since much of the consumption takes place in an online sphere where audiences can actively participate in the (cultural) conversation. Another relevant assertion is the complicated interplay in which individuals are brought together in different social contexts and the specific appeal of the media. The overarching cohesion is naturally formed by the musical, but other social contexts are dependent on individual ideologies and can therefore change the relation to the musical in a way that a selected group of people will relate to it, but others will not, creating an interesting but complicated dynamic between social context and media patterns. In other words, the reasons of engagement with *Hamilton* might differ amongst individuals (i.e. some might like use of hip-hop, while others are more interested in the staging or social contexts), but they are brought together because they are involved in consumption of the same product. As the ELM

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<sup>79</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, (London, Sage Publications Ltd: 2010), 398.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

suggests, some might engage with *Hamilton* out of a predisposed interest in, for example musical theater, history or hip-hop, others might need the encouragement of others in order to come to engagement.<sup>82</sup> I will elaborate further on ELM in chapter four.

What is unique about *Hamilton*'s audience, is that many individuals that are in some way involved with the show, have never seen the show in person. But because these individuals are consuming messages related to *Hamilton*, for example, by listening to the cast album on *Spotify*, watching *YouTube* videos, reading blogs and articles about the show, or engaging with Lin-Manuel Miranda's frequent social media messages, they are part of an audience. However, being part of this audience is different from being part of the audiences in the Richard Rogers Theater watching actors perform the musical. McQuail argues that indeed audiences can be defined in several (overlapping ways): place, people, medium, content, and time. All of these categories can be filled in looking at any audience, but there are certain variables that can change the relation different audiences have to the musical, and is dependent on their place in the above-mentioned categories.

McQuail defines types of audiences according to their relation to the message. First there is the "audience as the people assembled," in which there is a group paying attention to a message as a passive spectator.<sup>83</sup> With *Hamilton* these are the individuals in the Richard Roger Theater as they are watching the performance. Consuming *Hamilton*'s cast album on a portable device could also be considered under this type of audience, though there is no 'assembly' as it is individual consumption. Second there is "audience as the people addressed," where the message is created for an imagined audience towards which the content is targeted.<sup>84</sup> All communication by *Hamilton*'s official outlets call upon this type of audience. Think for example about a video by a *Hamilton* cast member, addressing 'you,'

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<sup>82</sup> Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Elaboration Likelihood Model."

<sup>83</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 399.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

which refers to anyone watching that particular video. Thirdly he describes the “audience as happening,” where the audience receives the message during a live event, in which place and time are important commonalities.<sup>85</sup> The best example relating to *Hamilton* would be the live streams on social media, where members of the *Hamilton* company answers questions in real time. Lastly there is the “audience as hearing or audition,” which refers to an active, participating audience, provoked by the message or content.<sup>86</sup> I would argue this type of audience includes those individuals that are active in producing fan art, creating videos, or actively engaging with the show in other ways.

*Hamilton* calls to these four types at different points in their consumable outings, and an individual can, dependent on the context of consumption be part of different audiences. Of course, through the construction of texts by third parties, through user-generated content (these users can be anyone from companies, online magazines, to individual fans), the above mentioned types are not only activated by material put out by the musical, but also by these third party outings (that are at times validated by official *Hamilton* media outlets), and thus become part of a larger network of consumable material.

In short, the categorization of *Hamilton's* audience is dependent on the context surrounding the individuals consuming the musical. Naturally, the musical forms the overarching cohesion as it is the core around which the audience is formed, but motivations to start consuming can differ. Audiences are looking to satisfy certain needs and *Hamilton* created an atmosphere of consumption in which these different needs can be met. Throughout this thesis I will focus on the context of a certain message (and therefore the context of the audience consuming the message and in relation what binds them together) as well as how different (media) outlets fulfill different needs.

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<sup>85</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 399.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL MEDIA & DIGITAL PLATFORMS

“The *Hamilton* team has worked hard to cultivate a strong online presence to make up for the paucity of tickets. With so many shut out of the show, the internet has become a vital way to keep fans stoked.”<sup>87</sup>

There is no show on Broadway with a more extensive online footprint than *Hamilton*, nor are there many shows that carry a larger online following than *Hamilton*. The show’s online presence is an extension of Miranda’s vivid social media use as a way to connect with fans, but was mostly developed to allow those that were unable to obtain tickets to still interact with the show. Commercially speaking, the online content could be a way to keep fans engaged with the show until the next block of tickets would become available for purchase. However, in an interview with Penn State’s newspaper *Centre Daily Times*, *Hamilton*’s social media manager Mike Karns stated the contrary, explaining he wishes to create experiences that go beyond the commercial aspect, by letting fans engage with the cast in ways that would not be possible in the theater.<sup>88</sup> In February of 2016, *Hamilton* put up their first *Facebook Live* feed in which fans were able to ask questions to cast members; “even if you were in the theater, you wouldn’t have been able to have that cool experience. I want to give you an experience where you feel as though you can’t put a price tag on it.”<sup>89</sup> In an interview with *Wired*, Karns said that “*Hamilton* in and of itself is this unique, meteoric show that very easily could become unachievable. It’d be very easy for us to alienate our audience. [But

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<sup>87</sup> Issie Lapowsky, “Hamilton’s Savvy Plan to Keep Fans Stoked Even If They Never Get Tickets,” *Wired*, October 5, 2016, accessed on July 12, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2016/05/cant-get-hamilton-tickets-show-goes-online/>.

<sup>88</sup> Roger van Scyoc, “Penn State Grad Peels Back Curtain on Social Media, Broadway’s ‘Hamilton,’” *Centre Daily Times*, November 13, 2016, accessed on July 14, 2017, <http://www.centredaily.com/news/local/education/penn-state/article114578168.html>.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

online] we've been able to decrease the distance between the brand and the people who appreciate the brand.”<sup>90</sup> According to writer Issie Lapowsky, the social media strategy of *Hamilton* has a twofold effect:

*Hamilton's* online audience has its own language, its own inside jokes, and occupies some alternate universe in which YouTube comments are actually totally delightful to read. Of course, while these digital snippets may help quench the thirst of fans who'll never make it to the show, they also have another effect: they expose the show to a much broader audience that might never have been interested in Broadway before.<sup>91</sup>

It is clear that without digital media, *Hamilton* would have not been in the position to grow as exponentially as it would have been more difficult to reach the wide and diverse audience that online media allowed it to reach. It is commendable that the *Hamilton* company made such effort creating an online environment that is so viable, satisfying fans unable to see the show in person, by just consuming *Hamilton* through the material available online and through other media (such as television). With their extensive online presence, *Hamilton* is a pioneering force demonstrating the possibilities of digital media for audience engagement. Seeing as Broadway has not seen a show with such an online presence, I wish to dedicate this chapter to an exploration of the unusual but highly successful media strategy the *Hamilton* company has implemented surrounding the show. I will be looking at the ways in which *Hamilton* has created their unique way of communicating with fans, both by having a genuine passion to connect with audiences, but moreover by being aware of what audiences are responding to, and incorporating this into social media communication (for example the *Facebook Live* engagements). Though *Hamilton's* success is the cause of many different factors, the role of social media should not be underestimated. It is through the media that

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<sup>90</sup> Issie Lapowsky, “Hamilton’s Savvy Plan to Keep Fans Stoked Even If They Never Get Tickets.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

*Hamilton* was able to really create an experience that takes place outside of the theater, and largely taking place on computer screens, reaching millions of individuals.

### **3.1 The *Hamilton* Experience: consuming *Hamilton* in Online Spaces**

#### *3.1.1 Research Objectives*

This chapter will focus on the efforts by the *Hamilton* company to develop and create an online presence and the specific factors in this online persona that might have been of influence in *Hamilton*'s success. Throughout this subchapter I aim to find out how *Hamilton* uses different (social) media platforms to reach different audiences, but also how their way of communicating might play a role in engaging audiences and attracting new ones. I shall first take a look at the presence of *Hamilton* on social media and use the uses and gratification model to establish the role of these social media in relation to *Hamilton*. Next I will explore the notion of authenticity and likability as key factors in *Hamilton*'s (online) success. I shall make use of the uses and gratification to discuss the value of the above-mentioned key factors. Next I will turn to the *Hamilton* company's use of original hashtags, widely used by both *Hamilton*'s official channels as well as audiences. Here the notion of symbolic interactionism will play a significant role in establishing the importance of these hashtags when communicating about or consuming *Hamilton*. Lastly I will dedicate a section on *Hamilton* fans and how they engage with the show's online experience using uses and gratification as well as symbolic interactionism.

#### *3.1.2 Hamilton on Social Media*

When *Hamilton* first started previews at the Public Theater back in 2015, it did not take long for early fans of the show to upload available material on the Internet. According to Aja

Romano, in an article on the fandom surrounding *Hamilton*, individuals started to use *Tumblr* to upload bootlegs, chronicle “the lyrics, [make] hip-hop fan mixes, GIF sets, mashups, and fan art – all before the show had even been seen by more than a few thousand lucky New Yorkers.”<sup>92</sup> As more material became available, Miranda joined *Tumblr* in order to engage with fans, partake in discussions on *Hamilton* and to urge fans not to upload bootlegged material. When the show grew in popularity and moved to Broadway, Miranda started to share more exclusive material under *#Ham4Ham*, hoping it would deter from bootleg uploads.<sup>93</sup> In hindsight, the involvement of Miranda on *Tumblr* as a way of engaging with fans is signifying for the trajectory of the *Hamilton* company as being very present on social media as well as proactive in the engagement with fans on these media. However, at that time, it was uncommon for Broadway creatives to converse directly with fans, and it was even more uncommon for a musical to share original content with these fans on social media. It seems Miranda understood the potential of the Internet early on, and has cultivated the potential of digital media as *Hamilton* started to gain popularity, allowing the show to reach an even wider audience. This cultivation allowed audiences to move beyond passive spectatorship and into a more active role. This section of my research will specifically focus on *Hamilton*’s presence on social media. In order to better understand the digital reach the different *Hamilton* channels have, I shall provide numerical comparisons with the 2015 musical *Fun Home*. Dealing with LGBT issues, this show was considered a cultural milestone and received widespread critical acclaim by the theater community, which made it one of *Hamilton*’s top competitors for the 2015 Tony awards.<sup>94</sup> I will thus take a musical that was

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92 Aja Romano, “Inside the Fandom Behind the Runaway Success of *Hamilton*,” *The Kernal*, March 6, 2016, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://kernelmag.dailydot.com/issue-sections/features-issue-sections/16059/hamilton-fandom-tumblr/>.

93 Ibid.

94 Chris Jones, “Most Interesting Musical of 2015: How About ‘*Fun Home*?’” *Chicago Tribune*, October 26, 2016, accessed on June 28, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-fun-home-musical-jones-ott-1028-20161025-column.html>.

considered alongside *Hamilton* for the most prestigious musical theater awards in the United States, in order to assess how different their successes are, just by looking at the number of people engaging with both shows on social media.

At this point in time, *Hamilton*'s official *Facebook* page has almost 670,000 likes,<sup>95</sup> whereas *Fun Home* carries about 39,000.<sup>96</sup> *Hamilton*'s *Facebook*, remarkably enough, is used mostly to refer to original *Hamilton* content on other platforms such as *YouTube* and *Instagram*, and related material (mostly articles) posted on other websites. Some of the original content, though not exclusive to *Facebook*, are the merchandise section, posts containing historical facts related to the history of the United States, and a community page showing all posts containing *Hamilton* tags and a section where individuals can leave a review of the show.<sup>97</sup> Following my personal observation, I would argue that the *Hamilton Facebook* seems to function as a gateway to other platforms on which original content is posted - whether this is from official *Hamilton* outlets, the show's cast or creatives, third party media, or fans. The *Facebook* page has little exclusive content, aside from *Facebook Live* sessions with the show's cast. Though similar sessions are also held on *Instagram* and *Snapchat* it seems characteristic that *Hamilton* also provides a live experience on *Facebook* for those without access to the above-mentioned platforms. The *Facebook Live* sessions moreover allow for realtime engagement with the *Hamilton* cast through the comment section, providing the extra value of perceived one-on-one contact. Even if a thousand others are watching the session, the realtime element allows the company to immediately react on questions or comments, creating a personal experience, even though the audience is not visible to the person(s) on camera. Note here that audiences are both the target of the content (audience as the people addressed) as well as the audience as happening.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Hamilton Facebook* page, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonMusical/>.

<sup>96</sup> *Fun Home Facebook* page, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/funhomemusical/>.

<sup>97</sup> *Hamilton Facebook* page.

<sup>98</sup> Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 399.

Before, I mentioned that the *Hamilton* company uses *Facebook* as a gateway to original content. This seems a logical choice, as the platform is predominantly used to quickly tag friends in content that might humor or interest them. In this, *Facebook* could be seen as a collection of different kinds of material, whereas other platforms are more specialized in specific content. It could thus cater to a wider audience, especially those that might not want to follow the show's every move, but are more interested to get general information and a variation of original material (on other platforms). In his article "Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century," Thomas Ruggiero bundles a number of scholars and their work on the uses and gratification theory. Ruggiero here argues that social media allows "each individual [...] to rely on easy-to-use media for low-interest topics and more complex repertoires for higher interest topics."<sup>99</sup> I would argue that *Facebook* is a medium which allows for easy use because it is quick in the circulation of content, and does not carry the goal of personal interaction with the *Hamilton* company, but rather with friends. Moreover the platform is easy to use due to the fact that individuals are not required to follow the *Hamilton Facebook* in order to be tagged, allowing those that do follow the page, to introduce *Hamilton* to new audiences by simply tagging their name in a post of interest. This makes the *Hamilton Facebook* a very general but approachable platform, as it is widely used across the planet, by individuals from different social, ethnical en political groups. This is relevant when reflecting on the uses and gratification theory, which states that audiences have a certain agency when it comes to the usage of different mediums. Taking in account the fact that *Facebook* can be considered a low threshold medium with an enormous impact due to the number of users, it is a commonly used platform that has the potential to introduce messages to a wide and diverse audience. Some posts by the *Hamilton* company get only a

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<sup>99</sup> Thomas Guggiero "Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century," 19.

few hundred likes, others get tens of thousands.<sup>100</sup> If an individual likes a post, this post might show up on their friends' feed, exposing them to the message. The same goes for tagging, where the post shows up on the timeline of mutual friends and possibly others. *Facebook* fulfills a number of needs as posed by the uses and gratification theory. First of all, many individuals will follow the page out of interest in the show - wanting to be entertained by *Hamilton* related material or inform themselves further about the show. But even more so, the *Facebook* page gratifies social interaction, as it enables individuals to engage with each other in the comment section of message. This function is especially important for exposure, as it has the possibility of introducing new audiences to the show when the message shows up in their timeline because a *Facebook* friend engaged with the message through liking, sharing, tagging or commenting.

*Instagram* is a far more specialized platform, as its main feature is the sharing of photographs accompanied by a message or hashtags. Nowadays, *Instagram* also allows users to post videos, engage in live streams and upload short term content through *Instagram* videos. With over 825,000 followers, the official *Hamilton* account has more followers than *Facebook*.<sup>101</sup> To compare, *Fun Home* has about 33,000 followers on *Instagram*.<sup>102</sup> Though the *Hamilton* company uses *Instagram* for general announcements (i.e. live feeds, ticket sales, new features or other news), most of the content is exclusive material, meaning it only appears on *Instagram*. This material offers followers an inside look through backstage photos and videos, a display of fan art and the it provides the occasional visual update of Miranda (who is not on *Instagram*).<sup>103</sup> Members of the *Hamilton* cast partake in *Instagram* takeovers

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<sup>100</sup> Hamilton Facebook page, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/HamiltonMusical/>.

<sup>101</sup> *Hamilton Instagram* account, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/hamiltonmusical/>.

<sup>102</sup> *Fun Home Instagram* account, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://www.instagram.com/funhomemusical/>.

<sup>103</sup> *Hamilton Instagram* account.

where they document their day through *Instagram Stories*.<sup>104</sup> This introduces audiences to the personal lives of these performers, their daily rituals, and of course a behind the scenes look at *Hamilton*. This exclusive look allows fans to identify with the cast, because followers get to know the cast personally through these live feeds. Next to the gratification of identification and entertainment, these engagements might be considered educational, because they allow an exclusive look into the world of Broadway, which might be of interest to prospective (theater) students and established scholars. Another added value of *Instagram* is the incorporation of hashtags. *Hamilton* has introduced their own hashtags to mention specific initiatives, lyrics or reference. These hashtags will be discussed in detail further on in this chapter, but I do wish to acknowledge their importance here, as this specific *Hamilton* lingo is widely used by both the *Hamilton* company as well as fans to communicate on social media. The usage of these hashtags does require a certain knowledge of the show in order to understand and engage with its meaning. In order to fully understand and engage with most of the content posted on *Instagram*, users would need to be familiar with these symbols and their meaning. It is interesting here to look briefly at symbolic interactionism. This theory poses that society creates meaning through the use of specific symbols, and that the (supposed) knowledge of these symbols change the way communication is conducted. To exemplify, *Hamilton* engages with a number of (charitable) initiatives. *Instagram* allows the company to visualize their cause and introduce hashtags, and in this, they can assume the interest of their followers, because they chose to follow *Hamilton* on a platform centered around visuals. Because the platform is fairly specific, most of the followers are likely to have a predisposed interest, and therefore knowledge, of the show, allowing the show to post more advanced material. With this I mean to say that the material on *Instagram* requires a

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<sup>104</sup> This platform is similar to *Snapchat*. I cannot access detailed information on *Snapchat* but I know that *Instagram Stories* largely carries the same content, as it is a similar platform. Of course *Snapchat* was there before *Instagram Stories*, but since the platforms are similar, the gratifications will also be the same.

certain knowledge of the show, the usage of *Hamilton* hashtags, and the current popularity surrounding the show. Interestingly enough these references do not require audiences to have seen *Hamilton*. Another potential benefit for fans to use *Instagram* to not only consume messages regarding *Hamilton*, but also share their own related material, is the fact that *Instagram* enables the review of posts using the same hashtag by clicking on the said hashtag. This allows users to use *Hamilton* related hashtags, which might lead to the engagement by other fans, or even *Hamilton* cast or creatives. The possibility of this acknowledgement, or the interaction with other fans, might be a significant gratification for some to actively engage with *Hamilton* on *Instagram*.

Many individuals involved with the *Hamilton* company are on the microblogging platform *Twitter* and actively engage with their followers. *Twitter* allows for quick communication (a message cannot be longer than 140 characters)<sup>105</sup> and thus requires fairly little effort. *Hamilton* audiences are also active on *Twitter*. The official *Hamilton Twitter* page carries around 593,000 followers (*Fun Home* has about 25,000)<sup>106</sup>, and mostly retweets fan posts containing fan art, personal *Hamilton* experiences, and other *Hamilton* related stories. Many of these tweets contain visual material, and many of them use *Hamilton*'s unique hashtags.<sup>107</sup> Though the *Hamilton* company has an official page, it is the show's cast and creatives that make *Twitter* an interesting medium in relation to *Hamilton*. Their active stance towards their followers creates a rewarding experience, simply because the medium allows for quick, but personal and meaningful interactions, more so than *Facebook* and *Instagram*. *Facebook* is more distant in the sense that the medium differentiates between personal and official fan pages (one requires a friend request, the other can be followed through liking the page), creating a distance, even though the official page might be managed by the subject of

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<sup>105</sup> Today this number is higher, but at time of research and within the timeframe researched this number was 140.

<sup>106</sup> *Fun Home Twitter* account, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://twitter.com/funhomemusical>.

<sup>107</sup> *Hamilton Twitter* account, accessed on July 18, 2017, <https://twitter.com/hamiltonmusical>.

the page. On *Instagram*, this interaction is easier but often en-masse (one photo can have thousands of comments), and though a like by someone from the *Hamilton* company might be meaningful to some, it is more an acknowledgement than an actual interaction. *Twitter*, unlike any other medium, allows for a quick, textual reply, and is moreover intended to be a platform for interaction. On *Twitter*, using the right hashtags and linking the company's cast in a Tweet could result in a reply by those involved with the show. Ruggiero argued that the degree of interactivity is related to the control individuals have over the discourse and that interactivity is a multidimensional concept in which the choice provided, the amount of effort exerted, the ability to add freely accessible information and the degree of interpersonal communication are key factors.<sup>108</sup> *Twitter* has a high degree of interpersonal communication, a high possibility of sharing information, and requires little effort to engage, which makes the platform highly interactive for those looking to directly engage with the *Hamilton* company and other fans of the show. Moreover *Twitter* allows audiences to be part of mass communication by following (members of) the *Hamilton* company, but there is also a possibility for interpersonal communication through one-on-one interaction with these members. This assertion is true for most social media, but with *Hamilton* it is especially *Twitter* which allows for this conscious choice, as a significant amount of interaction between *Hamilton* and its audiences is done through *Twitter*.

*Hamilton*'s official *YouTube* channel has almost 300,000 subscribers with a total of almost 30,000,000 views on the videos released via the channel.<sup>109</sup> The channel carries videos with material of the musical, the online *#Ham4Ham* shows as well as videos of the live performances, and live recordings of *The Hamilton Mixtape*.<sup>110</sup> *YouTube* provides the opportunity for the *Hamilton* company to provide audiences with audiovisual material, and

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<sup>108</sup> Thomas Guggiero "Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century," 15

<sup>109</sup> *Hamilton YouTube* account, accessed July 18, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKhSqWRvBtjlivrs\\_xeT5aQ/featured](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCKhSqWRvBtjlivrs_xeT5aQ/featured).

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

with the focus on live performances of the show, albeit in different settings, it comes closest to an actual live experience of the show. Like *Facebook*, *YouTube* is a very approachable platform, even though the content is restricted to video. *YouTube* does not require an account, making it easily accessible, but the opportunity for direct engagement with the show's cast and creatives is nearly nonexistent, as the platform is not centered around interpersonal interaction. Content posted on *YouTube* can easily be shared onto other social media, making it an interesting platform for both the *Hamilton* company as well as fans, because it also allows fans to upload and share their own *Hamilton* related material. Arguably, most of the *Hamilton* audience consuming *YouTube* material are doing so to entertain themselves, or to further educate themselves regarding the show. For those that are using *YouTube* as a medium through which they express themselves in relation to *Hamilton*, these needs may be different and more dependent upon the opinion or acknowledgement of others. *YouTube* thus also allows for both consumption as well as production, but seeing as the effort to produce content has a high threshold due to the video related content, *YouTube* has a lower interactivity than previously discussed media. I would moreover argue that *YouTube*, like *Facebook*, is a platform on which users do not necessarily actively pursue the gratification of needs, but are more likely to come across content by accident. This because the above-mentioned media also cater to users that are just looking to pass time, or be entertained by content generated based on their interests and earlier engagements with the platform. In this, *YouTube* (and *Facebook*) are interesting platforms for *Hamilton*, because these platforms are likely to introduce the show to new audiences simply because users might be subjected to *Hamilton* related content by chance and develop an interest, potentially leading them to the platforms with more specific content (i.e. *Instagram* or *Twitter*).

The last platform I wish to discuss is the streaming service *Spotify*. *Hamilton's Spotify* account has about 9,000 followers, and carries three playlists: the official recording, the

*Hamilton Mixtape* and a list by Miranda with songs that inspired *Hamilton*.<sup>111</sup> Though the number of individual following the account is fairly low, the *Mixtape* playlist has over 100,000 followers and most of the songs have been listened to millions of times. *Hamilton*'s title song *Alexander Hamilton* has over 47,000,000 plays (whereas *Fun Home*'s most popular song has about 600,000 streams).<sup>112</sup> The availability of the entire cast album allows consumers to experience most of the *Hamilton* songs as they appear in the musical. Moreover, the cast album as well as the *Mixtape* is accompanied by something called #*HAMthology*, where the songs are contextualized and explained by Lin-Manuel Miranda and others involved.<sup>113</sup> These tracks provide exclusive information only available on *Spotify*, providing incentive for fans of the show to turn to this platform. Similarly, music website *Genius* carries an account by Lin-Manuel Miranda where the cast recording is available (most songs carrying millions of listens) with an added feature where Miranda provides annotated notes to some of the songs, elaborating on the context of production.<sup>114</sup> Although *Spotify* is not an interpersonal or interaction based platform, it does allow *Hamilton* to provide specific content catered to individuals wishing to further educate themselves about *Hamilton*. *Spotify* does require users to have a (free) account in order to access the material available on the platform. The need for an account, plus the specificity of content (i.e. audio) makes *Spotify* a very distinct platform. While there is a possibility that *Spotify* users stumble upon *Hamilton* through other playlists or recommendation, it is more likely that users that engage with *Hamilton* are consciously turning to *Spotify* to satisfy certain needs.

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<sup>111</sup> *Hamilton Spotify* account, accessed July 18, 2017, <https://open.spotify.com/user/hamiltonmusical>.

<sup>112</sup> The amount of plays stem from the time of writing and were written down on August 9th. The information came through the respective *Spotify* accounts.

<sup>113</sup> "The Immigrant #Hamthology," *Spotify*, accessed July 18, 2017, <https://open.spotify.com/user/hamiltonmusical>.

<sup>114</sup> *Genius* account of Lin-Manuel Miranda, accessed July 18, 2017, <https://genius.com/artists/Lin-manuel-miranda>.

### 3.1.3 The Role of Authenticity and Likability in Hamilton's Success

In the previous section I discussed a few of the social media platforms on which the *Hamilton* company carries official accounts and how these platforms may appeal to audiences. But it is not just the mere presence of the company on these platforms that causes such widespread engagement. The positive associations surrounding *Hamilton*, both on- and offline, might, in part, be caused by the way in which the company, and those involved, communicate. In this section I therefore wish to explore the notion of authenticity and likability in *Hamilton's* communication. Authenticity here refers to a way of communicating that appears genuine and honest, where fans and their fandom are celebrated and the messages and engagements make audiences feel involved, just like to show itself attempts to do. Genuine communication towards fans is likely to result in likability which reflects well on *Hamilton* as a whole. In an article discussing *Hamilton's* marketing strategy, writer and brand strategist Dipti Bramhandkar asserts:

The beauty of all this activity is that while it keeps the show top of mind, it doesn't feel like marketing. It feels like a group of artists sharing what they love to do, and generously rewarding all their fans, not just ticket holders. This natural, authentic and deeply creative approach has eluded brands with considerably bigger marketing budgets.<sup>115</sup>

In their communication, the *Hamilton* company and those involved, do not differentiate between paying consumers and fans that are only consuming *Hamilton* through (free) online platforms. First by posting *Hamilton* material that explicitly allows those without the means to see the show to engage with the material, and second by discussing and engaging with material other than the show. By talking about other matters not related to *Hamilton*, the interaction becomes more personal, because audiences might be able to relate with a specific member of the *Hamilton* company on matters besides the show. This does not only make this

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<sup>115</sup> Dipti Bramhandkar, "5 Ways 'Hamilton' is Winning the Marketing Game," Campaign Live, May 25, 2016, accessed July 14, 2017, <http://www.campaignlive.com/article/5-ways-hamilton-winning-marketing-game/1396447>.

individual more likable, it also creates a more authentic experience. A positive interaction or engagement with a member of the *Hamilton* company reflects well on the reputation of *Hamilton* as a whole, simply because the two are associated with each other. All interactions between *Hamilton* and audiences play a part in the formation of an opinion around the show by these audiences. Bramhandkar provides an example by saying that, despite the show's success, *Hamilton* cast members are actively engaging with other Broadway shows, posting reviews and support on their own social media channels. According to Bramhandkar "[...] these interactions contribute to building the 'Hamilton' brand as a generous support of the theater community. While performers from other productions may mention a favorite show or two in their social media, it does seem that the Hamilton cast makes an effort to share its enjoyment more organically."<sup>116</sup> The engagement with other Broadway shows is an example of how discussions not directly related to *Hamilton* help create a sense of authenticity. It can moreover be reviewed as a uses and gratification on a more personal level, where the presence of the *Hamilton* company leads individuals to choose a certain platform based solely on the possibility of interaction. This idea can be seen as an effect of what Ruggiero defined as the demassification of mass media, in which the individual user "is able to pick from a large selection of media, previously shared only with other individuals as mass media."<sup>117</sup> Social media tailors to individual interests and interaction, enabling users to pick and choose not only the content with which they wish to engage, but also other individuals. This then enables public figures to provide the possibility of interaction with their fans, without the obligation as it would with a face-to-face interaction. In *Hamilton*'s case we could state that, from a purely commercial perspective, the show does not need to participate in this kind of interaction anymore, seeing the success of the show. However, by keeping up with personal

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<sup>116</sup> Dipti Bramhandkar, "5 Ways 'Hamilton' is Winning the Marketing Game."

<sup>117</sup> Thomas Guggiero "Uses and Gratification Theory in the 21st Century," 16.

engagement, the show reestablishes its reputation as genuine and authentic. As an article in the *Washington Post* states: “[...]it seemed only fitting to dominate social media as no previous show had, considering “Hamilton” was a mix of modernity and history.”<sup>118</sup> The continuous interaction with fans is a part of the *Hamilton* identity and is, regardless whether or not there is any commercial intent, part of what makes *Hamilton* such a (unique) success. I would argue that the notion of commercial intent has become somewhat irrelevant because of the reputation *Hamilton* has. Other than political or social causes, the company seems to not involve themselves in any commercial advertisement. But because the show, at large, is seen in high regard, the intent of the producer is less relevant. Simply put, if the *Hamilton* company were promote products or events for commercial reasons, given that these products are in character with the individual, it would take a while before it would hurt their character with their established audience, due to its solid reputation. This notion is related to the source credibility model, where the credibility of a message is linked to the perceived image the persona has in the eyes of the receiver of the message. I will provide a more detailed discussion on the source credibility model in chapter four, specifically in subchapter 4.3, in which I will look at Lin-Manuel Miranda, his presence on social media and his social influence.

On another level, in relation to authenticity and likability, the *Hamilton* company has to live up to the expectations of the show created online to reestablish *Hamilton*'s reputation, night after night. All individuals have a certain agency. This agency allows them to create their own opinion rather than merely adopting *Hamilton* as a musical masterpiece. Authenticity and likability play an important role, but in a slightly different manner than discussed above. The live experience needs to be in line with the online image *Hamilton*

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<sup>118</sup> Meghan R. Murray, “Runaway Success of Hamilton Shows the Power of Creating Buzz on Social Media,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2016, accessed July 17, 2017, t seemed only fitting to dominate social media as no previous show had, considering “Hamilton” was a mix of modernity and history,

created. Simply put, if the online engagement by the *Hamilton* company is lively and enthusiastic, but the real-time performance lacks energy and the actors come across as annoyed and uncaring, the online word-of-mouth will no longer be authentic or likable, because audiences know that the live experience is different. The fact that the online and real-time experiences need to match should not be confused with personal expectations, as these can differ from the show's intention. To exemplify, *The New Yorker* published an article on *Hamilton* written by Adam Gopnik, in which he writes about online buzz surrounding the musical. He outlines several of his online encounters with the show including an article commending Miranda's talent and genuine passion, a raving review about *Hamilton* at the Public Theatre, and the opinion of a friend's grandmother, who argued that *Hamilton* was the greatest thing she had seen on Broadway since *Oklahoma*.<sup>119</sup> All these positive messages about the show formed Gopnik's expectations, but because he had been unable to experience the show live until after he engaged with these positive messages, he was unsure if *Hamilton* would be able to meet his expectations:

What can survive that kind of build-up? Well, *Hamilton* did. It's even better than the praise implies: funny, moving, touching, original in its adaptation of hip-hop prosody and with a much larger emotional spectrum of sounds and feelings than the elevator pitch—a hip-hop musical about the birth of America—suggests.<sup>120</sup>

Gopnik, by arguing the experience was better than his expectations, might create even higher expectations with the readers of his article, some of which might be disappointed with the show due to the continuous build-up. Therefore, the *Hamilton* company needs to ensure that their online and offline communication (including the show itself) matches, but it cannot, and should not, actively pursue individual expectations. By ensuring that the praised features, among which authenticity and likability, that helped establish the shows success are present

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<sup>119</sup> Adam Gopnik, "'Hamilton' and the Hip-Hop Case for Progressive Heroism," *The New Yorker*, February 5, 2016, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/hamilton-and-the-hip-hop-case-for-progressive-heroism>.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

every night and in all (online) communication, the show can safeguard its reputation despite the occasional led down due to mismatched expectations.

### 3.1.4 #*Hamilton*: The Importance of Hashtags

An article on the *American Theatre* website, artistic director of the Public Theatre Oskar Eustis compares Miranda to Shakespeare in regards to his success with *Hamilton*. One of the reasons Eustis draws this comparison is because of Miranda's capability to elevate the language of the people in order to tell a story.<sup>121</sup> He here refers to the use of hip-hop in the show. But looking all the communication and interaction surrounding the show, one could draw a similar comparison. The *Hamilton* company has created a specific way of communicating through the use of hashtags. One of the first hashtags that was introduced to the online *Hamilton* audience was #*Ham4Ham*. An article in *Daily Dot's* magazine *The Kernel* explains: "#*Ham4Ham* featured unique performances from the cast and guest stars, but its real genius was the hashtag. #*Ham4Ham* established *Hamilton* as part of Internet culture."<sup>122</sup> From there onwards, dozens of hashtags were introduced. Some of them are literal references to songs that appear in the show, such as #*myshot*, #*storyoftonight* or #*waitforit*. Others refer to *Hamilton* related initiatives such as #*EduHam* and #*Ham4Ham*. #*Hamiltome* refers to *Hamilton the Revolution*, and #*HamilTunes* is used in posts discussing the (release of the) cast album. Creativity by *Hamilton's* audience has led to #*HamArt*, and also #*Hamilgrad*, where fans put *Hamilton* fan art on their graduation caps. #*Ham4Bam* was introduced when the *Hamilton* cast visited the White House.

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121 Suzy Evans, "How *Hamilton* Found Its Groove," *American Theatre*, July 27, 2015 accessed July 18, 2017, <http://www.americantheatre.org/2015/07/27/how-hamilton-found-its-groove/>

122 Aja Romano, "Inside the Fandom Behind the Runaway Success of *Hamilton*," *The Kernel*, March 6, 2016, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://kernelmag.dailydot.com/issue-sections/features-issue-sections/16059/hamilton-fandom-tumblr/>.

It is interesting to observe how hashtags have allowed *Hamilton* and the self-proclaimed #*Hamiltrash* to develop their own lingo, communicate about the show and about their lives using this lingo. The original symbolic interaction theory, posed by Herbert Blumer and known as the Chicago School, concerns itself with the formation of subjective meaning, or “how repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals come to define the makeup of ‘society’.”<sup>123</sup> Although society is not the right terminology, the hashtags and their connotations do allow individuals to establish *Hamilton* specific interaction and “constantly create and recreate experiences from one interaction to the next.”<sup>124</sup> Symbolic interactionism in relation to *Hamilton* would thus focus on the evolvment and role hashtags play in specific communication. Such a communication can only be established if both sender and receiver have the same knowledge about the possible meaning of these hashtags. The lack of knowledge or a misinterpretation of the hashtags would either result in a miscommunication or in the sender readjusting his wording to fit the understanding of the receiver. Blumer centralized three premises regarding symbolic interactionism; individuals act towards things based on their personal meaning, this meaning is constructed through social interaction, and these meanings are engaged with and modified through interpretation.<sup>125</sup> To exemplify these premises in relation to *Hamilton*, I wish to briefly discuss the evolution of the #*YayHamlet*, a hashtag which is now widely used by fans, the *Hamilton* company, featuring on social media as well as the show’s official merchandise. Early in 2015, Miranda tweeted about an encounter he had with a woman who congratulated him on his success with *Hamlet*. Miranda responded saying he’d wish he’d written *Hamlet*, but the lady replied with ‘Yay Hamlet’ and walked away.<sup>126</sup> Though Miranda initially did not use #*YayHamlet*, fans started responding

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<sup>123</sup> Michael J. Carter and Celene Fuller, “Symbolic Interactionism.”

<sup>124</sup> Michael J. Carter and Celene Fuller, “Symbolic Interactionism.”

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Lin-Manuel Miranda on Twitter, February 18, 2015, accessed July 19, 2017, [https://twitter.com/Lin\\_Manuel/status/568243453206913024](https://twitter.com/Lin_Manuel/status/568243453206913024).

using that hashtag, confirming Blumer's first premise (individuals act based on personal meaning). #YayHamlet quickly became associated with any outing of excitement regarding *Hamilton*, and thus a part of the *Hamilton* lingo.<sup>127</sup> This establishes the second premise, the construction of meaning through interaction. Miranda picked up on the continued use by fans, and about four months after his tweet on #YayHamlet he announced the arrival of a limited edition of #YayHamlet merchandise.<sup>128</sup> This confirms the third premise, the interaction and modification of meaning through interaction. The hashtag developed into a shared symbol, in part because someone in the *Hamilton* company caught the popularity of #YayHamlet and decided to engage with this user-generated-content. Moreover, #YayHamlet is an inside joke, only available to those that engaged with *Hamilton* to such an extent they understand and appreciate this joke.

The use of hashtags has the potential to satisfy social and psychological needs because it enables specific interaction as well as personal engagement with original *Hamilton* material, the *Hamilton* company and other fans. It allows individuals to be part of the *Hamilton* fandom and in a way equalizes fans, because the use and understanding of the hashtags does not require them to have seen the show in person. The interaction and reaction enabled by simply using hashtags makes *Hamilton* easy to engage with because it creates a high interactivity. It does so in two ways; as #YayHamlet demonstrated it allows fans to control communication and interaction, and through the integrated hyperlinks that allows users to click on the hashtags and see other posts containing this hashtag.

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<sup>127</sup> Michael Gioia, "Hamilton' Selling #YayHamlet T-Shirts – What's the Story Behind the Hashtag," Playbill, July 21, 2015, accessed August 8, 2017, <http://www.playbill.com/article/hamilton-selling-yayhamlet-t-shirts-whats-the-story-behind-the-hashtag-com-353743>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

### 3.1.5 Only Online: Awareness of the Online Experience

When researching fan reactions of *Hamilton* one easily concludes that most *Hamilton* fans are aware of their online experience of a show that was originally intended to be seen in the theater, yet they feel fully included. As one blogger stated:

Maybe you're ready to accept that you won't see it in New York for a long time, until a new cast has been swapped in, or until it comes on tour to your town. It does not mean you can't have a fully immersive *Hamilton* experience RIGHT NOW by cobbling things together on the Internet.<sup>129</sup>

As has become clear throughout this chapter, *Hamilton* has created an online experience that does not require a physical witnessing of the show. There are a multitude of initiatives that are exclusively online (i.e. one would not be able to get this experience in the theater), such as the #Ham4Ham videos, live engagements on *Facebook*, or behind-the-scenes footage through *Instagram Stories* or *Snapchat*. One can define this online audience largely in three ways: the first one is the audience as happening, in which individuals gather on a particular platform at a particular time to engage with the show (*Facebook Live*), audience as addressed, where the messages consumed are created with the intended audience in mind (#Ham4Ham) or audience as hearing or audition where the content of the message evokes participation (*Hamilton* art or social media postings by fans). These kinds of experiences should be seen as different from the live experience, because while individuals are in the theater they are an audience assembled, because they are restricted to a passive engagement. As soon as these individuals leave the theater they are able to become part of the above mentioned audiences again. Essentially, due to the extensive availability of material, when these individuals turn to the online experience of *Hamilton* again, they are no different than the audiences that are only consuming the show online. A college student of the *Boston College* wrote a blog post on

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<sup>129</sup> Stephanie Hayes and Michelle Stark, "How to Experience 'Hamilton' Without Seeing the Show," *Tampa Bay Times*, June 12, 2016, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/media/how-to-experience-hamilton-without-seeing-the-show/2281432>.

*Hamilton*, talking about the way social media allowed her to experience *Hamilton* even though she is not in the position not see the show in person.

You don't need to be in the room where it happens to watch Broadway shows thanks to social media. Even I consider myself a *Hamilton* fan who understands the plot, characters, and knows all the words to the songs without having actually seen it in person. A big reason has to do with the entire musical soundtrack's availability on music streaming services like *Spotify*, *Amazon Music*, and *SoundCloud*. In fact, the musical also released a playlist on *Spotify* that lists Lin-Manuel Miranda's favorite songs that inspired him when composing *Hamilton*'s songs, giving even more content to people.<sup>130</sup>

In the comment section of her blog, people respond in agreement regarding the added value of *Hamilton*'s use of social media. User joeking5445 comments that he "feel[s] like *Hamilton* has been extremely successful creating a culture surrounding their musical. I was surprised to see that Lin-Manuel Miranda responds so frequently to fans on Twitter, but this would add to the *Hamilton* effect."<sup>131</sup> User Dannyng84 replied;

I think the success of *Hamilton* was almost a perfect storm of an excellent musical that appealed to a slightly younger and social media friendly demographic (hip-hop influences), an engaging social media presence, an almost ridiculous amount of media coverage (what comes to mind first are the countless late night jokes about the difficulty of getting *Hamilton* tickets), an extremely likable and extroverted leading man in Lin Manuel, and lastly the success of ticket buying robots keeping demand for tickets much higher than the supply. I'm not sure if other Broadway musicals will be able to replicate the all-around success of *Hamilton*, but I bet a lot of them have taken notes.<sup>132</sup>

In this individual case, the blogger consumes material surrounding *Hamilton* to better understand the musical as a text. She argues that the availability of the songs online, as well as material provided by Miranda help her to better understand the context (and references). It is clear here that *Hamilton* utilizes the tools of social media to create the possibility of satisfying individual needs to engage with the show. As Ruggiero argued: "the individual's

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<sup>130</sup> "Broadway's Not Throwing Away Its Shot," *Boston College, Carrol School of Management*, March 30, 2017, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://isys6621.com/2017/03/30/broadways-not-throwing-away-its-shot/>.

<sup>131</sup> "Broadway's Not Throwing Away Its Shot," comment by Joeking5445.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, comment by Dannyng84

desire for information from the media is the primary variable in explaining why media messages have cognitive, affective or variable effects.”<sup>133</sup> Following that logic, the satisfaction of *Hamilton*’s online experience depends on the expectations individuals have about consuming *Hamilton* on a certain platform. In a post on LinkedIn, advertising professional Jessica DiLugio shares her obsession about the show, and discusses the specific platforms on which she follows *Hamilton*. She refers to *Snapchat* because these posts allow her to get an inside look into the lives of the cast and the backstage happenings at the theater. She also comments on two *Facebook* features that, at the time of her post in 2015, were just introduced to the social media platform. Firstly, she discusses *Facebook Live* which *Hamilton* uses to engage with fans through real-time Q&As with the cast. She explains that the cast member and time slot are announced in advance, and fans are encouraged to tune in and ask questions. “These live streams acquire over 70,000 views, and around 9,000 comments of fans asking questions and interacting with the cast member.”<sup>134</sup> The second feature is that of the 360° video, which “allows the user to drag around the screen to see the surroundings while the video is playing. These are so cool!”<sup>135</sup> Dulugio has not seen the musical and attributes the show’s social media tactics as the reason that she has “[...] fallen in love with the musical and the cast without having stepped foot yet in the Richard Roger Theatre.”<sup>136</sup>

DiLugio consumes a lot of material that allows her an exclusive look behind the scenes, an exclusive look, only available online. Moreover, the content she mentions in her posts is only featured on specific platforms (such as *Facebook Live*, at the time of her post the similar feature on *Instagram* did not exist yet). These exclusive looks provided on social

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas E. Ruggiero, “Uses and Gratifications Theory in the 21st Century,” 8.

<sup>134</sup> Jessica DiLunglio, “Non-Stop: Five Ways Hamilton is Utilizing New Social Media Tactics,” *LinkedIn*, June 10, 2015, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/non-stop-five-ways-hamilton-utilizing-new-social-media-diluglio>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

media are part of symbolic interaction, in which the engagement with actors, but also references and jokes, require a certain understanding of *Hamilton* in order to fully engage with it. In this, the established interaction can fulfill a multitude of needs, dependent upon the individual goals the consumer or receiver has. These online engagements can be educational, as they provide more insight into the world of *Hamilton* and theater, but they, for the same reason, can be entertaining. The issues discussed during these interactions might lead individuals to identify with the cast member that is speaking, and with these live streams, there is also an important social interaction between the messenger and receiver. Notably, while and because of the dependency on the reasons and goals of the receiver, the content of these interactions can be interpreted differently. If one were to consume, for example, the *Facebook Live* streams by *Hamilton* for pure entertainment, the interpretation is likely to be different from those that view these videos for educational purposes. The multitude of ways in which one can engage with *Hamilton's* online content, and also the freedom in choosing the degree of involvement based on personal assertion (i.e. interest, available time) without really missing out, makes *Hamilton* interesting for a diverse audience. Moreover, the availability of online material is seemingly satisfying for many individuals, making the live experience, the ultimate goal, not a prerequisite.

## **3.2 Transcending the Genre: Side Projects & Hamilton's Audience**

### **3.2.1 Research Objectives**

The visibility of *Hamilton* outside of the theatrical sphere is likely to have been both a result of the show's success as well as reason for even wider exposure. A number of celebrities and organisations have linked their name to the show, and many individuals of the *Hamilton* company have linked their name to political or social advocacy. In this

subchapter I will take a look at three projects involving *Hamilton* that are likely to have opened up the show to a wider audience, because they allowed the show to move outside the theatrical sphere. The first case study concerns the #Ham4Ham videos. These videos were recorded by the original Broadway cast and contained musical collaborations with other (Broadway) stars, exclusive interviews, or a behind-the-stage peek. Using the uses and gratification theory and symbolic interaction I will explore the importance of these videos in creating and maintaining engaging audiences. Especially those unable to experience the show in person. The second case study looks at the educational program created by Lin-Manuel Miranda, #EduHam. This initiative allowed underprivileged high school children to explore American history using *Hamilton* material. Sub-consequently it introduced these individuals to musical theatre. Using the uses and gratification theory, but especially symbolic interactionism, I shall elaborate on the importance of *Hamilton*'s stylistics (i.e. hip-hop) as well as the show's online presence as potential triggers for these youth to be enthused and engaged with a piece of musical theatre. The third case study is *The Hamilton Mixtape*, a recording (produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda) where famous musicians perform their own rendition of *Hamilton* songs. I will make use of the uses and gratification model and the source credibility model to assess the role these musicians might play in introducing *Hamilton* to new audiences as well as keeping established audiences interested.

### **3.2.2. Hamilton Through Video: #Ham4Ham**

Seven hundred people showed up, and that was insane. I went outside, I got up in front of them, unplanned, and said, 'Thank you all! I love you. You won't all win, but

come back! Here's a thing we can give you in gratitude. We will be here if you keep showing up.'<sup>137</sup>

Although one cannot definitively mark the moment in which *Hamilton* moved beyond the theatrical sphere, it is possible to follow the trajectory that made the show available to all those without the opportunity to physically experience the show. One of the key initiatives in this trajectory are the #*Ham4Ham* performances. When *Hamilton* moved to Broadway, it started a last-minute ten dollar ticket lottery for a selected number of seats. Although it required physically waiting in a line for hours with very little chance of obtaining a ticket, hundreds of individuals showed up to the first lottery.<sup>138</sup> Miranda was so humbled by the unexpected turnout, he wanted to show his gratitude, so he went out to speak to the crowd. The following day he again made an appearance to cite a passage from Hamilton's biography by Ron Chernow.<sup>139</sup> From that point onwards, a couple times a week, mostly on Wednesdays and Saturdays, the cast of *Hamilton*, often accompanied by other (musical) stars, would do an original performance to entertain the waiting crowd.<sup>140</sup> Sometimes this performance would be a twist on *Hamilton* or other Broadway shows, other times it could be "a poetry reading, or a routine from the New York City Ballet [and] if it's Halloween, it could be a costume contest followed by Miranda and *Hamilton* dancers doing the choreography from 'Thriller'."<sup>141</sup> #*Ham4Ham* arose out of appreciation for the *Hamilton* audience, or rather those that were likely to not become an audience, due to the ticket scarcity. As theatre executive Howard Sherman observed, the #*Ham4Ham* performances, "[...] first and foremost [are] for the people who haven't bought seats, and very possibly can't get or can't afford tickets any other

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<sup>137</sup> Rachel Syme, "How 'Hamilton' Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda Is Building a Brand for the Ages," *Fastcompany*, May 16, 2016, accessed July 13, 2017, <https://www.fastcompany.com/3058967/how-hamilton-creator-lin-manuel-miranda-is-building-a-brand-for-the-age>.

<sup>138</sup> Forrest Wickman, "The Show is Nonstop," *Slate Magazine*, November 24, 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, [http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/theater/2015/11/ham4ham\\_lin\\_manuel\\_miranda\\_and\\_the\\_cast\\_of\\_hamilton\\_reward\\_ticket\\_lottery.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/theater/2015/11/ham4ham_lin_manuel_miranda_and_the_cast_of_hamilton_reward_ticket_lottery.html).

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> After Lin-Manuel Miranda left the Broadway show in July of 2016, the #*Ham4Ham* performances stopped.

<sup>141</sup> Forrest Wickman, "The Show is Nonstop."

way.” As videos of the #*Ham4Ham* performances were posted on social media, the number of individuals without the means to obtain a physical ticket but with the desire to engage with the show, quickly increased. Before long, the *Hamilton* company expanded #*Ham4Ham* to include vlogs by the cast, crew and guest stars from a multitude of fields. In hindsight, the evolution of #*Ham4Ham* into a digital series has been one of the key moments in the development of *Hamilton* as a show that extends far beyond the theatrical sphere and essentially enabled the path towards becoming a cultural phenomenon. It is moreover one of the first instances in which we can study the phenomena of *Hamilton*’s digital presence and the show’s likability. I am specifically referring to *Hamilton* as a company here because Miranda had been engaging with fans regarding the show before there were official media channels, or even a *Hamilton* company.

Ever since the beginning, #*Ham4Ham* has provided an inclusive platform, not limiting itself to theatrical renditions but incorporating an array of different art forms, celebrities and other influential figures. Although chapter four will deal with the relationship between *Hamilton* and celebrity figures in detail, it is interesting to already establish that the affiliation of famous individuals, such as *Star Wars* producer JJ Abrams, talk show host Jimmy Fallon and *Sesame Street* puppet Elmo,<sup>142</sup> creates the possibility of exposure to a wider audience. Especially by affiliating the show with celebrity names outside of theatre, such as JJ Abrams. The collaborative nature of #*Ham4Ham* together with the fact that the material is easily accessed and shared through social media makes that the initiative is likely to introduce new audiences to the show or existing audiences to new artists and art forms. *Hamilton*, and consequently #*Ham4Ham* profits from the possibilities that synergy offers. It introduces the show to a diverse audience by combining a multitude of ideas and art forms

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<sup>142</sup>Devan Coggan, “Hamilton: Ham4Ham performances ranked,” *Entertainment Weekly*, August 30, 2016, accessed July 19, 2017, h3/.

and showcasing these physically (through the *#Ham4Ham*'s outside of the Richard Rogers Theatre) as well as digitally. Consequently, one could argue that this content enlarged *Hamilton*'s recognition and therewith the acknowledgement within popular culture. In essence, this means the show and all connotations expanded to be included in mainstream culture.

Briefly falling back on the uses and gratification theory, we can state here that *#Ham4Ham* might function as a gratification for fans of the show looking to consume original content. Moreover *#Ham4Ham* might function as a gratification to those that are interested in the celebrities appearing on *#Ham4Ham* or hold an interest in the topic featuring the video. In the latter case the notion of agency becomes interesting because these individuals are consequently introduced to *Hamilton* by watching a video in which something else sparked their interest.

As stated, *#Ham4Ham* was one of the first initiatives where *Hamilton* established itself outside of Broadway. While the performances first started as a thankful nod to those hoping to get a ticket, it rapidly became public when the show started to feature *#Ham4Ham* on *YouTube*. Considering the fact that, at that point in time, tickets were sold out for the foreseeable future, *#Ham4Ham* provided the perfect opportunity for the show to engage with fans on a regular basis, possibly ensuring loyal, longterm commitment that might lead to these fans buying tickets for the next available block of tickets. But seemingly, the *#Ham4Ham* performances had little to no commercial intent to them. Sherman noted that *#Ham4Ham* should be seen as “[...] an act of generosity by Lin and the company, without a marketing message attached; indeed, it seems more an expression of gratitude to the fans than anything else.”<sup>143</sup> Sherman suggests that *#Ham4Ham* is a voluntary initiative by the *Hamilton*

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143 Howard Sherman, “The Generous Audience Engagement of Lin-Manuel Miranda,” Howard Sherman, August 5, 2015, accessed August 3 2017, <http://www.hesherman.com/2015/08/05/the-generous-audience-engagement-of-lin-manuel-miranda/>.

company, and that these performances do not carry ulterior motives (such as boosting ticket sales) but are in fact an authentic way of engaging with and investing in audiences that goes beyond most commercial producer-consumer relationships. *Hamilton* director Thomas Kail similarly stated that “most [individuals cueing for the lottery] will go home without a ticket, but each of them will have a story to tell and a sense of connection.”<sup>144</sup> As argued in section 3.1.3 there is a certain genuineness in the way the *Hamilton* company communicates that entices trust and likability.

#### **4.2.3 Hamilton’s Educational Program: #EduHam**

These kids are writing these incredible poems and dances and songs and scenes, not just from the perspective of George Washington but also Sally Hemings and Phillis Wheatley - it’s an incredible way to explore how history isn’t told.<sup>145</sup>

After Miranda’s performance at the White House went viral, he started to notice that comments regarding his performance often referred to teachers that introduced children and teens to his song as part of the educational curriculum. When the show moved to Broadway and became increasingly popular Miranda said he “[...] realized the need to prioritize kids in a real way, because this is going to be a tough ticket.”<sup>146</sup> But rather than just offering discounted ticket, the *Hamilton* company paired up with The Rockefeller Foundation and the Gilder Lehrman Institute to set up an extensive educational program for less fortunate

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<sup>144</sup> Janice Kaplan, “Why Has ‘Hamilton’ Become Broadway Gold?” *Daily Beast*, August 6, 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/why-has-hamilton-become-broadway-gold>.

<sup>145</sup> Ashley Lee, “Hamilton and Its Innovative Education Program Arrive in Los Angeles,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 10, 2017, accessed November 5, 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/eduham-hamilton-innovative-education-program-arrive-los-angeles-1027567>.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

students all over New York.<sup>147</sup> These students were given the opportunity to see a *Hamilton* matinee performance for ten dollars, the other costs were covered by the above mentioned initiatives. On selected afternoons, these high school students were invited up to the *Hamilton* stage to perform their original renditions of the material to the *Hamilton* cast. As Miranda stated in multiple interviews, *Hamilton* tells a historical tale using the music many of these children listen to, and moreover uses a multiracial cast which is far more representative of the society they are growing up in than most other shows.<sup>148</sup>

The success and impact #EduHam has on these high school students can in part be explained through symbolic interactionism. As Blumer stated: “central to symbolic interactionist thought is the idea that individuals use language and significant symbols in their communication with others.”<sup>149</sup> With *Hamilton* and the use of hip hop Miranda elevated the story to something that piques interest because it is similar to what they already know, and it moreover makes the story approachable because it is told through the language they understand and can relate to. *Hamilton* uses the language these youth use to talk to each other, which instantly makes the characters in the show more relatable, rather than a group of dead white men using fancy language to found a country hundreds of years ago. Symbolic interactionism aims to point out how individuals “[interpret] subjective viewpoints and how [they] make sense of their world from their unique perspective.”<sup>150</sup> By using hip hop and by presenting a multiracial cast, *Hamilton* creates an inclusive narrative where involvement is established through association and recognition. Through this, *Hamilton*’s audiences, in this case youth specifically, are able to identify with a story and its characters in away they normally are unable to, simply because there is little to relate to. As Blumer rightfully noted,

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<sup>147</sup> Bob Bullen, “#EduHam: Inspiring Young Minds Through the Power of ‘Hamilton’,” *The Huffington Post*, March 19, 2017, accessed August 2, 2017, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/eduham-inspiring-young-minds-through-the-power-of\\_us\\_58ce8b9ce4b07112b6472ec7/](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/eduham-inspiring-young-minds-through-the-power-of_us_58ce8b9ce4b07112b6472ec7/).

<sup>148</sup> Ashley Lee, “Hamilton and Its Innovative Education Program Arrive in Los Angeles,”

<sup>149</sup> Herbert Blumer, “Symbolic Interactionism Perspective and Method,” 1.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

individuals “act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.”<sup>151</sup> Through the addition of relatable factors, and the chance *#EduHam* provides by encouraging performances about history, these high school students are able to reinterpret a historical story to their own understanding, and moreover connect to history in a way that was hard to imagine before *Hamilton*. Simply put, because *Hamilton* uses language and conventions that are compliant with the symbols youth use in their everyday life, they might gain interest in a narrative (and an art form!) they had considered before. Through this, meaning is created and according to symbolic interactionism this meaning affects their interaction.

On another level, the involvement of the *Hamilton* company in the performances by these youth creates a special experience, and moreover insinuates a genuine interest in these youth, their story and their future. As *Huffington Post* writer Bob Bullen observed: “following the student performances members of the *Hamilton* cast came out to speak to students about their professional path and the hurdles they had to overcome to get work.”<sup>152</sup> This interest and investment by the *Hamilton* company might interest the *#EduHam* youth to further pursue performing arts, whether as participant or observer, but it is almost a given that it redefines the expectations of what performing arts and history can be. By providing these individuals with an opportunity to experience theatre for themselves, it can help to defy socially constructed expectations of what musical theatre is - namely an art form predominantly available for white individuals with a high income.<sup>153</sup> Looking at the *#EduHam* initiative Bullen notes that “this show, which blazingly cuts through cultural barriers, has sparked an interest in this next generation of theatregoers to understand the potential live performance can bring.”<sup>154</sup> But however *Hamilton* inspires the *#EduHam* participants, it is important to acknowledge the investment by the *Hamilton* company to bring

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>152</sup> Bob Bullen, “#EduHam: Inspiring Young Minds Through the Power of ‘Hamilton’.”

<sup>153</sup> Ashley Lee, “Hamilton and Its Innovative Education Program Arrive in Los Angeles.”

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

the show to these youth. James Baker, the president of the Gilder Lehrman Institute commented on #EduHam saying “the producers are forgoing millions of dollars in revenue so kids can get to the show. It’s not exactly traditional philanthropy, but these people wanted kids included, and this is the most efficient way.”<sup>155</sup>

### ***3.2.4 Reinventing Hamilton: The Hamilton Mixtape***

In December of 2016, Miranda released *The Hamilton Mixtape* in collaboration with a number of renowned names within popular music such as Sia, John Legend, Busta Rhymes, The Roots, Chance the Rapper. All collaborators on the album rerecorded (or even rewrote) songs from *Hamilton*, creating their own interpretation. The project went back to Miranda’s desire to create a concept album, not only honoring the life of Alexander Hamilton, but honoring hip-hop culture, “I wanted to make a concept album the way Andrew Lloyd Webber did Jesus Christ Superstar. Rockstars playing the figures of Jesus’s life. I thought I would do a hip-hop version.”<sup>156</sup> On multiple occasions, Miranda has spoken about the honor and the importance of working with hip-hop artists he himself admires, and how the approval (and collaboration) of these artists are a stamp of approval for *Hamilton* and its use of music. *The Hamilton Mixtape* allowed Miranda to create and experiment with hip-hop even more. Executive producer Tariq ‘Black Thought’ Trotter noted that Miranda had to keep in mind he was creating hip-hop within a musical theatre narrative when writing *Hamilton*: “[...] you can’t take for granted that the Broadway audience is going to be up on that culture, so Lin had to make it as understandable, accessible, inclusive as he could.”<sup>157</sup> With the *Mixtape*

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> Matthew Whitehouse, “Lin-Manuel Miranda talks ‘The Hamilton Mixtape’ Track by Track,” ID by Vice, January 9, 2017, accessed August 3, 2017, [https://i-d.vice.com/en\\_us/article/lin-manuel-miranda-talks-the-hamilton-mixtape-track-by-track](https://i-d.vice.com/en_us/article/lin-manuel-miranda-talks-the-hamilton-mixtape-track-by-track).

<sup>157</sup> “Why Some of the Biggest Names in Hip-hop Want to Cover ‘Hamilton’ Tracks,” *Newsweek*, September 26, 2016, accessed on July 17, <http://www.newsweek.com/revisiting-mixtape-hamilton-hip-hop-record-502315>.

these restraints were gone, allowing for an even deeper emersion into hip-hop and its culture. According to Riggs Morales, Vice President of A&R at Atlantic Records, and responsible for the A&R on records from Eminem, 50 Cent and D12, *Hamilton* really speaks to hip-hop audience because, “if you’re a hardcore hip-hop fan and you watch the play, you hear the Jay-Z references, you hear the Biggie and LL Cool J references and you are taken aback by how it’s mixed into this whole body of work that spans so many genres.”<sup>158</sup> Upon seeing *Hamilton*, Morales immediately understood the unique quality of the show, bringing together different cultures;

I’ve never seen anything like *Hamilton*. I hope it inspires more shows and projects like it. Lin’s secret weapon is perspective. Within the first three minutes, I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. I looked around the audience to see if anybody else realized what they were watching, and I saw people who weren’t coming from the same place but nodding along like this was a brand new art form they were enjoying. Meanwhile I’m sitting there saying, ‘Lin has taken the science of MCing in a way that only a few people on Earth – Jay-Z, Eminem, Biggie (Big) Pun, R.A [The Rugged Man] – can do, and wove it into a twoact musical.’<sup>159</sup>

However, he agrees that it is *The Hamilton Mixtape* that allows for a true homage. “Just to hear what some of these artists were able to do—they can take it out of the context of the stage, out of the time period and put it in a modern space.”<sup>160</sup> The mixtape allowed Miranda (and those involved) to utilize the full potential of the songs, not being bound by musical theatre conventions. Like, or rather because of, the musical, the mixtape was an instant success, entering on number one of the Billboard charts directly after its release.<sup>161</sup> The mixtape generated a lot of exposure, especially on music sites such as *Rolling Stone*,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Hugh MacIntyre, “The ‘Hamilton’ Mixtape Debuts at No. 1,” *Forbes*, December 11, 2016, accessed August 3, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hughmacintyre/2016/12/11/the-hamilton-mixtape-debuts-at-no-1/#3d40709c68f6>.

*Billboard*, *Hip-Hop XXL*, *The Fader*, and *NME*.<sup>162</sup> This diverse exposure is likely to have brought *Hamilton* to a new audience, and moreover allowed these new audiences to redefine expectations regarding musical theatre. The association between *Hamilton* and the artists participating on *The Hamilton Mixtape* might have created enough incentive for individuals to explore not only *The Mixtape* but moreover the original show. This exploration is enabled by the availability of (online) material regarding the show.

The case outlined above can be perfectly theorized through the elaboration likelihood model. Although this chapter largely focuses on the role of social media and the availability of *Hamilton* related material, it is relevant here to gain an understanding as to why initiatives such as *The Hamilton Mixtape* are beneficial to exposing *Hamilton* to a every diversifying audience. Simply put, ELM argues there are two routes one can take that lead to engagement with a message, the central route is followed by those with a predisposed interest about the message, the second one, the peripheral route, suggests engagement with a message through heuristic cues such as credibility, likability or consensus.<sup>163</sup> Though ELM will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, it is relevant to note here that musicians that have contributed to *The Hamilton Mixtape* might evoke these heuristic cues leading to engagement with *Hamilton* by the fans of these musicians. Individuals might employ a certain liking towards musicians involved with the *Mixtape*, or they might hold the musician in high regard. In both cases it has the possibility to lead to engagement. With the consensus heuristic, the individual is influenced by the reaction of others - and in this case it could be that established magazines are engaging with the tape, or that fans of a certain musician all claim to have enjoyed the material. Naturally these heuristic factors are not mutually exclusive, nor are the central and peripheral route, but exists in a dialectic or interplay.

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<sup>162</sup> One can Google the respective blogs and search for their *Hamilton* coverage.

<sup>163</sup> Daniel J. O'Keefe, "Elaboration Likelihood Model."

It seems a logical assumption to claim a relation between *Hamilton*'s success and the involvement and association of certain artists with *The Hamilton Mixtape*. Aside from a creative aspect, where artists truly feel connected to the product they are making, one could argue that *Hamilton*'s reputation and online presence, as well as the social causes the show is vocal about, might be seen as beneficial to these artists. By connecting their name to *Hamilton* they associate themselves not only with the show, but consequently also with the show's image and popularity, potentially benefitting their own image and popularity. *Mixtape* co-producer and Trotter's fellow Roots member Questlove said in an interview with *Vanity Fair* that his involvement with *Hamilton* has had a positive influence on the way people treat him: "*Hamilton* is the balance that hip-hop needed. It's changing the conversation. The amount of people in my apartment building treating me different now... This is a key moment for Broadway and for music."<sup>164</sup> The association between the artist, the show and the mixtape is thus beneficial for both. On the one hand, it gives the show a certain precedence, especially within the hip-hop community (it is this precedence that has led to the creation of the tape as it has associated hip-hop names with the show) but its popularity has also been valuable for the reputation of hip-hop within a mainstream audience. Moreover, as can be derived from Questlove's remark on the treatment he receives as an hip-hop artist, *Hamilton* has, in some way, changed the perception of hip-hop and its related culture within mainstream society. In this, the show has functioned as a social influencer, changing individuals' associations with hip-hop. Through heuristic cues such as likability and credibility *Hamilton* has seemingly popularized hip-hop with audiences that had, in some degree, a central preference for musical theater, but needed the peripheral route for engagement with hip-hop music.

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<sup>164</sup> Lisa Robinson, "Questlove and Lin-Manuel Miranda Give Details of the Hamilton Mixtape."

## CHAPTER 4: SOCIAL INFLUENCERS

When comedian and actress Amy Schumer visited *Hamilton*, she tweeted a photograph of herself with a caption that said she “love, love, loved” the show.”<sup>165</sup> With over two million followers on *Twitter*, her review of the show could possibly have great impact. As *Chicago Tribune* reporter Chris Jones asserts: “even if only a tiny percentage act on her effusive recommendation, that still represents a formidable reach: around twice the current Sunday print circulation for the *New York Times*, for example.”<sup>166</sup> In modern society, celebrity endorsements, especially on social media, can make or break product. Note that within this thesis celebrities are considered individuals with an amount of fame that makes them socially visible and often publicly known. All consumable products, material and immaterial, benefit from positive word-of-mouth. The degree of likelihood whether or not someone actively starts to consider a purchase or engagement is depended upon a number of factors, most prominently the likability and trustworthiness of the messenger.<sup>167</sup> This messenger can thus be anyone, but there is a correlation between the number of people respecting the messenger’s opinion and the amount of influence an individual can exert. With just one message an individual can praise and popularize a product, like Schumer did with *Hamilton*. Social media has the possibility to directly engage with audiences, allowing audiences to feel a sense of connection and closeness, which is related to the notion that social media allows for actual interaction between the messenger and the receiver. Celebrities that engage with audiences on *Twitter* “are often seen by their followers as fellow social media users, [...] therefore their [electronic word of mouth] about brands are seen as more credible and

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<sup>165</sup> Chris Jones, “In power-mad entertainment biz, Twitter followers are everything,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 30, 2015, accessed August 3, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/theater/ct-jones-twitter-casting-ae-1101-20151029-column.html>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Daniel J. O’Keefe, “Elaboration Likelihood Model,” 1477.

trustworthy than if they had appeared in television or print advertisements for the same brands.”<sup>168</sup> Of course, within the current climate of celebrity endorsement on social media this credibility and trustworthiness is not absolute, but can still be considered as more effective than other forms of advertisement, due to the immediacy of these social media platforms. Credibility is thus directly related to authenticity; if it starts to look like a sales pitch, one loses their credibility and trustworthiness. Moreover, credibility, thus social influence, can be strengthened when more individuals with similar influences on the same group (for example hip-hop fans), endorse the product, in this case *Hamilton*. Therefore, if multiple people within the same sphere endorse the musical, they validate each other, making their opinion more credible.

*Hamilton* has benefitted tremendously from social influence, welcoming the praise from celebrities and non-famous individuals alike. From the first public performance, *Hamilton* was embraced by the Obama family, and when the show opened off-Broadway, theater heavyweight, and creative director of the Public Theater, Oskar Eustis said that “*Hamilton* [was] the most exciting new work he [had] been involved with in years.”<sup>169</sup> The list of celebrities praising the show is long, diverse and impossible to ignore when looking at social influence in relation to *Hamilton*’s success.<sup>170</sup> Especially the association of those not necessarily involved with theater (pop stars, Hollywood actors, politicians), has undoubtedly been of importance for the evolvement of the show from piece of art to a nationwide cultural phenomenon. In this chapter I will use several examples to explain the importance of social influence (in relation to *Hamilton*).

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<sup>168</sup> Sueng-A Annie Jin & Joe Phua, “Following Celebrities’ Tweets About Brands”: The Impact of Twitter-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers’ Source Credibility Perception, Buying Intention, and Social Identification with Celebrities,” *Journal of Advertising*, volume 43, number 2, 182.

<sup>169</sup> Rebecca Mead, “All About the Hamiltons.”

<sup>170</sup> Kristina Rodulfo, “40 Celebrities Humble Bragging About Seeing Hamilton,” *Elle*, May 31, 2016, accessed August 4, 2017, <http://www.elle.com/culture/celebrities/news/g28313/celebrities-attending-hamilton-broadway/>.

## 4.1 The Role of Social Influencers

### 4.1.1 Research Objectives

*Hamilton*'s success can, at least in part, be attributed to the show's vivid online presence, as discussed in chapter three. However, I believe there is another important phenomenon that introduced *Hamilton* to a diverse spectrum of audiences, and allowed the show to settle within popular culture: namely social influence. In this subchapter I wish to explore the notion of social influence and how social influence might have impacted *Hamilton*'s visibility, and ultimately the show's success. The first section of this subchapter will make use of a case study, namely the first significant *Hamilton* advocates: the Obama family. Using ELM, social impact theory and the source credibility model I will assess how social influence works, and shall moreover use these theories to elaborate on the influence the Obamas have had on *Hamilton*'s success. To further assert the role of social influence in both ELM's central and peripheral route, I will dedicate a section on social influence in the realm of theater and hip-hop. Examples of the endorsement of *Hamilton* within both realms will hopefully provide a better understanding of how social influence differs within these two cultures, even though they both endorse the same product. Next to ELM, the source credibility model will be used in the discussion. Considering the fact that social influencers themselves are audiences, and can also be influenced by others, I will dedicate the last section of this subchapter to the notion of *Hamilton* as a status object. I will again make use of ELM, but will more so turn to the source credibility model and the social impact theory to reflect on *Hamilton* as a status object.

#### 4.1.2 *Hamilton's First Fans: The Obama Family*

“It was simply, as I tell everybody, the best piece of art, in any form, that I have ever seen in my life.”<sup>171</sup>

These words were spoken in March of 2016 by former First Lady Michelle Obama, as she, and her husband, President Barack Obama, hosted an event at the White House, where part of *Hamilton's* cast performed and discussed the show (and its influence) with a select group of high school students. Regardless of any political affiliations, one can allegedly conclude that Obama and his wife worked their way into popular culture during their time in the White House. Michelle Obama has appeared on multiple talk shows, often as an ambassador for education or health, while the former president engaged in singing, dancing, impersonating and even freestyling with Lin-Manuel Miranda.<sup>172</sup> An article on the Obamas' cultural impact states that, “in their engagement with pop culture, [they] have created the impression of edginess while also strategically exercising restraint. They've harnessed the entertainment-industrial complex without kowtowing to it.”<sup>173</sup> The Obamas were affiliated with *Hamilton* from the very start and kept involved throughout the evolution of the show into a Broadway musical. During the aforementioned event in the White House, Obama introduced the cast of *Hamilton* while subtly referring to his influence on the show's success:

[Obama] said while his family is obsessed with *Hamilton*, *Hamilton* needed Obama to happen. “Not to take undue credit or anything, this is definitely the room where it happened,” he quipped. It was a classic Obama one-line: a hip reference used for a dad joke, with the underlying punchline being less about

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<sup>171</sup> Yohana Desta, “Michelle Obama calls ‘Hamilton’ the best art ‘I have ever seen in my life,’” *Mashable*, March 14, 2016, accessed July 12, 2017, <http://mashable.com/2016/03/14/michelle-obama-hamilton/#50PkJxWHBGq1>.

<sup>172</sup> “‘Hamilton’ Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda | Miranda Freestyle Raps with President Obama | NBC News,” *NBC NEWS YouTube Channel*, March 15, 2016, accessed July 12, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4V1DuouwbZA>.

<sup>173</sup> Spencer Kornhaber, “Celebrity: The Obamas’ Smart Cultural Power,” *The Atlantic*, March 17, 2016, accessed on July 7, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/barack-michelle-obama-celebrity-hamilton-let-girls-learn-culture/474141/>.

the subject at hand than about Obama's own power. *Hamilton* is the biggest musical in the world, but he's not star struck. He's bigger than it. It owes him.<sup>174</sup>

Though one cannot measure to what degree the Obamas have influenced *Hamilton*'s rise to a cultural phenomenon, it is a safe assertion that their praise and approval has contributed to *Hamilton*'s visibility and thus its success. Regardless of politics, the former President and his wife have a certain status which allows for their opinion to influence others. On *Twitter* alone, Barack Obama carries tens of millions of followers, and Michelle Obama has over eight million follows.<sup>175</sup> This indicates their social capital. Social capital here refers to the extent of connections made through social media, thus creating a network of interrelation and is of great influence as it enables messages sent to these channels to be widely read. In a study on celebrities and their (online) influence on consumers, scholars Sueng-A Annie Jin and Joe Phua argue that the amount of followers on social media is related to the degree of social influence that an individual has.<sup>176</sup> Following Jin and Phua's assertion that, "tweets are broadcast to each and every follower, who may then retweet these posts on their own profiles, which then rebroadcast to thousands of other *Twitter* members,"<sup>177</sup> one can conclude that, logically, a larger number of followers correlates with a bigger exposure. Note that this merely refers to the degree of exposure, and does not yet take in account if receivers actively engage with the message (and whether this engagement leads to purchase or another predetermined goal). Within the boundaries of this thesis it is not relevant to concern ourselves with theories surrounding buying behavior, because this research is not looking at ticket, merchandise or music sales. Moreover, because much of the *Hamilton* material out

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<sup>174</sup> Spencer Kornhaber, "Celebrity: The Obamas' Smart Cultural Power."

<sup>175</sup> This information comes from the *Twitter* accounts of the Obamas at the time of writing, of course it is possible that both individuals had lesser followers when *Hamilton* hit the theater, this information is purely intended as an indication of their influence.

<sup>176</sup> Sueng-A Annie Jin & Joe Phua, "Following Celebrities' Tweets About Brands": The Impact of Twitter-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers' Source Credibility Perception, Buying Intention, and Social Identification with Celebrities."

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

there is accessible through free platforms, requiring nothing more than a mobile device and an internet connection, the commercial aspect is of lesser importance. I would argue that the goal of those praising *Hamilton*, as well as the media outings of those within the *Hamilton* company, is not to sell tickets, but is an honest expression of excitement and awe over a piece of art, not necessarily a commercial product. It is worth noting that, seeing *Hamilton* success, the association between an individual and the show might be beneficial to the reputation of both the show and the individual himself. However, regardless of motives, it is a fact that those that carry a large following on social media can generate a lot of exposure. Jin and Phua argue that, “when celebrities mention a brand of product in their tweets, extolling its virtues, their endorsements are broadcast simultaneously to potentially millions of followers, ensuring maximum exposure for brand messages.”<sup>178</sup> To be able to gain exposure beneficial to *Hamilton*, the said celebrity does need to carry a certain amount of likability, authority, trustworthiness and expertise. As Hovland argued, “the extent of agreement is usually higher when the statements are attributed to high prestige sources,”<sup>179</sup> meaning that the reputation of the endorser must be regarded as positive or high in order to have effect. Constructing a definition of positive (or high) is impossible because factors such as likability and trustworthiness are largely dependent upon personal ideologies, values and culture. I use the word largely here, because a sense of authority or a notion of trustworthiness can also be a societal construction. The Obama family is good example of this idea, as not everyone will review the President with the same sense of likability, but his status as the President does exert a certain authority, regardless of personal preference.

Closely related to these ideas is the social impact theory as posed by Latene. Latene proposed three factors that determine the probable impact of a message: strength, number of

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss, “The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness,” 635

sources and immediacy.<sup>180</sup> Relating this back to the Obamas, one could assert that, the statements made by Michelle and Barack acknowledging their appreciation of *Hamilton* are so powerful due to their reputation and position as the First Family of the United States, that their enforcement might be enough to evoke engagement by the receiver of the message. In other words, whereas engagement might only be evoked after multiple sources recommend *Hamilton*, the Obama's have such high prestige (strength) that the number of sources needed to arrive at persuasion decreases. If an average American family were to publicly recommend *Hamilton* their opinion would have far less impact (strength), putting more focus on the number of (other) sources recommending the show. However, if this family would be somehow closely involved with the receiver of the message, the factor of immediacy might give enough incentive to arrive at engagement. The factor of immediacy can encompass a multitude of definitions: it can refer to "the distance relationship that exists between a source and the object being communicated about, the target of this communication or the communication itself,"<sup>181</sup> and is thus an important variable in determining influence. Looking again at the Obamas, and taking immediacy as the relation between source and object, one can conclude that, since they engaged with Miranda and the show first hand, this creates a relatively high immediacy. Furthermore, the White House communication on *Hamilton* has been done largely through social media, allowing for quick and accessible consumption by audiences, establishing high immediacy of the communication itself.

The Obamas were the first public figures linking themselves to *Hamilton*. Their acknowledgement of the show can be seen as functioning as a base legitimizing other engagements and endorsements regarding *Hamilton*. One could state that the authority carried

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<sup>180</sup> Lisa Rashotte, "Social Influence," *Sociology Encyclopedia*, 4428.

<sup>181</sup> Rodrigo Perez-Vega, et al. "The Influence of Brand Immediacy in Consumer Engagement Behaviors: A Revisited Social Impact Model," *Research Gate*, published for AM Conference 2014, accessed July 16, 2017, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261596634\\_The\\_influence\\_of\\_brand\\_immediacy\\_in\\_consumer\\_engagement\\_behaviours\\_A\\_revised\\_social\\_impact\\_model](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261596634_The_influence_of_brand_immediacy_in_consumer_engagement_behaviours_A_revised_social_impact_model).

by the Obamas transferred onto other consumers when they praised the show. In other words, because the Obama voiced critical acclaim, others already applauding the show, given they are positioned within a similar ideology, profit from the authority of Obama's approval, strengthening their own opinion when they engage with the show.

#### **4.1.3 The Role of Social Influencers in Different Fields**

Looking at social influencers in different fields, it is a logical assertion that influencers exert this influence in ways that appeal specifically to the audiences in that respective field. That is to say different influencers are likely to use certain platforms, symbols and different ways of interacting even though they ultimately endorse the same product. *Hamilton* has welcomed numerous endorsements by individuals from different fields including politicians such as the Clinton and Bush family,<sup>182</sup> actresses Lena Dunham, Lupita Nyong'o and Emma Watson, *Facebook* founder Mark Zuckerberg, actors Robert Downey Jr and Will Smith.<sup>183</sup> talk show host Oprah, fashion designer Marc Jacobs, and hip-hop heavyweights such as Common and Chance the Rapper.<sup>184</sup>

In this section I wish to specifically focus on social influencers from two different fields, namely theater and hip-hop, or rather, a field in which individuals are likely to engage with *Hamilton* centrally, and a field where engagement is likely to happen through the peripheral route. Naturally, the predisposed likability of an individual to start engaging with a message changes the way in which social influence works, simply because there are different cues at work. As Daniel O'Keefe discussed in his article on ELM, the process of persuasion

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<sup>182</sup> *Hamilton's America*.

<sup>183</sup> Lydia Price, "Photos: All the A-Listers Who've Scored Tickets to *Hamilton*," *People Magazine*, January 26, 2016, accessed December 8, 2017, <http://people.com/celebrity/mark-zuckerberg-priscilla-chan-randi-zuckerberg/>.

<sup>184</sup> "43 Celebrities Who are Gushing Over 'Hamilton' On Social Media." *Buzzfeed*. November 5, 2015. accessed July 15, 2017, [https://www.buzzfeed.com/billylorusso/43-celebrities-who-are-gushing-over-hamilton-on-173d?utm\\_term=.cbGNbygPk#.nvzGK75VZ](https://www.buzzfeed.com/billylorusso/43-celebrities-who-are-gushing-over-hamilton-on-173d?utm_term=.cbGNbygPk#.nvzGK75VZ).

(ultimately the acceptance of the content of a message) in the central route involves relatively high elaboration, and is established through “careful examination of the information contained in the message, close scrutiny of the message’s arguments, [and the] consideration of other issue-relevant material.”<sup>185</sup> With the peripheral route there is generally a low degree of elaboration, and persuasion is therefore established through simple decision making based on the messenger’s likability or credibility.<sup>186</sup> In other words, the peripheral route has little to do with the actual contents of a message, but relies on external factors to come to persuasion.

First, I wish to focus the attention on social influence in the central route using the field of theatre as a case study. When *Hamilton* opened at the Public Theater at the beginning of 2015, many theatre critics were quick to catch a performance of a show that had already received so much media attention. Among them was *New York Times* head theater critic Ben Brantley. Brantley was quick to point out the accessibility of the show due to the use of hip-hop and rap, and considered it a good thing for the American musical.<sup>187</sup> In his review he repeatedly stressed how all aspects of the show just seemed to fit, telling the story in exactly the right way.<sup>188</sup> *Variety*’s theater critic, Marilyn Stasio attended the same performance as Brantley, and argued that “although the premise sounds outlandish, it takes about two seconds to surrender to the musical sweet of the sung-through score and to Miranda’s amazing vision [...]”<sup>189</sup> Both Stasio and Brantley acknowledged *Hamilton*’s brilliance early on. When the show moved to Broadway, Brantley attended another performance, and argued that, despite all the commotion, it still lived up to the hype. He wrote that “even I, one of the many critics who enthused about *Hamilton* in February like a born-again convert in a revival tent, was

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<sup>185</sup> Daniel J. O’Keefe, “Elaboration Likelihood Model,” 1475.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ben Brantley, “Review: In ‘Hamilton,’ Lin-Manuel Miranda Forges Democracy Through Rap,” *The New York Times*, February 17, 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/18/theater/review-in-hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-forges-democracy-through-rap.html/>.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Marilyn Stasio, “Off Broadway Review: ‘Hamilton’ by Lin-Manuel Miranda,” *Variety*, February 17, 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, <http://variety.com/2015/legit/reviews/review-hamilton-public-theater-lin-manuel-miranda-1201435257/>.

beginning to think, ‘enough already’.”<sup>190</sup> Although there is not definitive measure, a correlation between what Brantley called ‘the many critics,’ and the success and acclaim *Hamilton* received does not seem unlikely. Reviews can be seen as a way for theater enthusiasts to establish shows that are worth their time; a multitude of positive reviews can thus be of utmost benefit for a show. Even though avid readers of theater criticisms by writers such as Brantley are likely to already be in ELM’s central route when it comes to theater, the unusual combination of musical and hip-hop would still benefit from positive reviews by esteemed critics. It is here that the central route and the peripheral form a dialectic. As O’Keefe argued, both routes “represent idealized extremes of [a] continuum, but at intermediate levels of elaboration, complex combinations of central-route and peripheral-route processes can be expected.”<sup>191</sup> Although individuals with a high interest in theater are likely to engage with the message critically and show relatively high elaboration, they still might rely on heuristic cues as characteristic in the peripheral route to arrive at persuasion. Looking specifically at *Hamilton* and Brantley, *Hamilton* is the object on which an opinion has to be formed, but Brantley is the person conveying a message on which grounds persuasion might start. Brantley’s opinion, through his position at a critically acclaimed newspaper and his overall reputation, can be considered to hold a certain value to those that affiliate themselves with theatre. If, for example, the combination of musical theatre and hip-hop would negatively impact an individual’s thoughts on *Hamilton*, Brantley has the influence to evoke reevaluation. In his review of August 2016, Brantley wrote:

I am loath to tell people to mortgage their houses and lease their children to acquire tickets to a hit Broadway show. But *Hamilton*, directed by Thomas Kail and starring Mr. Miranda, might just about be worth it — at least to anyone who

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<sup>190</sup> Ben Brantley, “Review: ‘Hamilton,’ Young Rebels Changing History and Theater,” *The New York Times*, August 6, 2015, accessed August 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/07/theater/review-hamilton-young-rebels-changing-history-and-theater.html>.

<sup>191</sup> Daniel J. O’Keefe, “Elaboration Likelihood Model,” 1477.

wants proof that the American musical is not only surviving but also evolving in ways that should allow it to thrive and transmogrify in years to come.<sup>192</sup>

Words like these might spark reassessment of opinion. Still looking specifically to those largely in the central route of musical theater, it might be that these individuals first rejected *Hamilton* on the grounds that it centralized hip-hop as the main musical component, because their knowledge surrounding musicals dictates there certain stylistics central to musical theatre, and hip-hop is, historically speaking, not amongst these stylistics. It is then that heuristic cues such as credibility might convince these individuals to reevaluate their knowledge. Thus, social influences related to the central route of persuasion might evoke individuals to rethink their opinion, even though they did already establish this opinion through relative careful consideration.

Secondly I wish to look at the notion of social influence within the peripheral route, using hip-hop to exemplify. Where the theatre community on occasion doubted the use of hip-hop in a piece of musical theater, the hip-hop community likely has questioned the quality of legitimacy of hip-hop as the main musical stylistic within *Hamilton*. Miranda has, on multiple occasions, stated that acknowledgement from the hip-hop community would be the ultimate accomplishment, confirming for Miranda that he had written something that was true to the hip-hop culture and its history:

I never had any doubts about the idea [of *Hamilton*]. But the most nervous I was, was when the first hip-hop artist came to see the show at the Public Theater. It was Busta Rhymes; he sat in the front row – but even if he sat in the back I would have seen him. [...] So when he came backstage and said he was so moved by it, I thought, we're going to be O.K.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Ben Brantley, "Review: 'Hamilton,' Young Rebels Changing History and Theater."

<sup>193</sup> Lisa Robinson, "Questlove and Lin-Manuel Miranda Give Details of the Hamilton Mixtape," *Vanity Fair*, March 2, 2016, accessed, August 4, 2017, <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2016/03/questlove-lin-manuel-miranda-the-hamilton-mixtape>.

“To Miranda, the respect of hip-hop luminaries like Common, Queen Latifah, Busta Rhymes and Questlove, who came to see the show and accepted it as a hip-hop triumph just as Broadway had accepted it as a theatrical triumph, meant the world.”<sup>194</sup> The public acknowledgement by these members of the hip-hop community establishes *Hamilton* as a respectable piece of work, and moreover gives it a certain credibility and legitimacy as a work worthy of the hip-hop label. I do wish to quickly note here that many of the engagements between *Hamilton* and hip-hop professionals (such as Kanye West,<sup>195</sup> Andre 3000,<sup>196</sup> and Eminem<sup>197</sup>) were posted through the *Hamilton* company social media accounts, not by these individuals themselves. It is thus difficult to gauge the reaction by fans of these hip-hop heavyweights, as the photographs were posted and thus consumed by Miranda’s network. Nevertheless, the visits by international celebrities did not go unnoticed by mainstream press, thus presenting the association between certain celebrities and *Hamilton* to a wide audience.<sup>198</sup>

Looking again at the peripheral route of persuasion, the positive opinion on *Hamilton* as expressed by influential figures within the hip-hop scene, in a way legitimizes the engagement with *Hamilton* by those that associate themselves with the hip-hop community. Important to note here is that this assumes that musical theatre is not an art form with which hip-hop aficionado’s often associate themselves. Positive reviews regarding *Hamilton* by social influencers of the hip-hop community has the potential to dislodge connotations

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<sup>194</sup> “Why Some of the Biggest Names in Hip-hop Want to Cover ‘Hamilton’ Tracks,” *Newsweek*, September 26, 2016, accessed on July 17, <http://www.newsweek.com/revisiting-mixtape-hamilton-hip-hop-record-502315>.

<sup>195</sup> Lin- Manuel Miranda, *Twitter*, February 12, 2016, accessed December 8, 2017, [https://twitter.com/lin\\_manuel/status/698370261452718080](https://twitter.com/lin_manuel/status/698370261452718080).

<sup>196</sup> Madeline Boardman, “50 Celebrities Who Love ‘Hamilton’,” *Entertainment Weekly*, August 17, 2017, accessed December 8, 2017, <http://ew.com/gallery/andre-3000/>.

<sup>197</sup> Christopher Jackson, *Twitter*, January 29, 2016, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://twitter.com/chrisissingin/status/693083915104473091>.

<sup>198</sup> If one Googles the name associated with the show, for example Kanye West Hamilton Musical, it immediately comes up with at least a dozen articles on West’s attendance at the show.

surrounding musical theater. To exemplify, hip-hop magazine *The Source* published a review of *Hamilton*'s cast album, stating that:

For those who don't consider themselves fans, musical theatre conjures up certain... feelings. Primarily of contempt and disdain. Those people can hardly be dragged into a production of *West Side Story*, let alone listen to the soundtrack. However, if you were just to hear certain tracks from *Hamilton* in passing or out of context, you'd be excused for thinking it's a cut from a straight hip-hop album. Good music is good music, and while much good music has been written for the stage, many musicals don't successfully survive the transition from the boards to vinyl or MP3. *Hamilton*, however, effectively works as an extended concept album, reminiscent of many current and classic hip hop artists. (That's not to say, however, that it's derivative; just the opposite, in fact.)<sup>199</sup>

With over 1,8 million followers on *Facebook* it is remarkable that this magazine writes an unapologetic review, arguing that enjoyable music should not be disregarded just because one does not enjoy musical theater. Many other online magazines of this caliber only started to write about the show after word came out on *The Hamilton Mixtape*. This is noteworthy, as it seems to affirm that most individuals within the hip-hop and rap culture, including most online magazines, do not publicly affiliate themselves with musical theater easily, seemingly needing the link between established hip-hop artists and *Hamilton* before daring to positively acknowledging the show. As hip-hop magazine *XXL* states in December of 2016, a few days after the release of *The Hamilton Mixtape*: "Musical theater isn't the first thing rappers typically enjoy during their downtime, yet one man has enticed many of hip-hop's best and brightest to head to Broadway."<sup>200</sup> *Hamilton* needed the public and active involvement of established hip-hop names to be considered credible enough by these magazines to voice their positive opinion publicly. Even though *The Hamilton Mixtape* and those involved

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<sup>199</sup> Shaina411 "Album Review: 'Hamilton' Original Broadway Cast Recording," *The Source*, October 18, 2015, accessed August 5, 2017, <http://thesource.com/2015/10/18/album-review-hamilton-original-broadway-cast-recording/>.

<sup>200</sup> Georgette Cline, "Lin-Manuel Miranda Taps Hip-Hop's Biggest Names for 'The Hamilton Mixtape'," *XXL Magazine*, December 12, 2016, accessed August 5, 2017, <http://www.xxlmag.com/news/2016/12/lin-manuel-miranda-making-of-the-hamilton-mixtape/>.

furthered the credibility and acknowledgment within the hip-hop industry, the show had been successful and popular before those names connected themselves to *Hamilton*. Tenably, these artists connected their names to *Hamilton* because of its popularity. *Hamilton*'s success thus led to the mixtape, but in turn, the mixtape advanced *Hamilton*'s visibility and acclaim. Therefore, it is difficult to deny that, given the show's success, there must have been a group of hip-hop artists, and fans, that enjoyed the show, even though they did not make public statements acknowledging this. It moreover seems unlikely that established artists would risk their reputation by being connected to a musical, unless they themselves felt it was artistically sound. Within the hip-hop community one can argue there exists a complicated interplay between reputation, accepted conventions and public statements regarding *Hamilton*. However, heuristic cues, such as likability and credibility have opened up *Hamilton* to the hip-hop community, and, in hindsight, as more people spoke positively about the show, the consensus heuristic undoubtedly led to more engagement and maybe even persuasion. Consequently, as the number of people talking about *Hamilton* increased, the importance of the initial messenger(s) decreased due to the fact that people largely predisposed to follow the group, while the content of the message is still important. Hovland and Weiss touched upon a similar effect in their source credibility model, which they dubbed the sleeper effect: "individuals may be suspicious of the motives of the communicator and initially discount his position [...] with the passage of time, however, they may remember and accept what was communicated but not remember who communicated it."<sup>201</sup> This seems especially true for peripheral persuasion in which one recommendation might not lead to engagement, but the engagement of many might evoke a flashback to the contents of that one recommendation, nevertheless leading to engagement.

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<sup>201</sup> Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss, "The Influence of Source Credibility on Communication Effectiveness," accessed November 28, 2017, 636

#### 4.1.4 *Hamilton* as Status Symbol

Ever since the beginning of *Hamilton*'s New York run, Miranda (and later the official *Hamilton* channels) have been sharing posts about and photographs of celebrities coming to see the show, first off-Broadway and later, and in bigger numbers, at the Richard Rodgers Theater.<sup>202</sup> As *Esquire* editor Beejoli Shah stated: "during the show's Public run, nearly each celebrity selfie, regardless of whether it was taken with Miranda had one distinct characteristic: innocent, awestruck shock from the cast members in question."<sup>203</sup> Celebrities visiting *Hamilton* during the show's run at the Public could be seen as influential because their engagement with the show furthered *Hamilton*'s visibility and therefore its popularity. Consequently, as the show's popularity began to rise, celebrities started to share, not only selfies with the cast, but anything related to the performance, from the show's program to post performance videos, changing the dynamic:

Almost overnight, what was a steady, if moderately paced, amount of celebrity selfies—most tweeted out by Miranda himself—suddenly turned into a torrential river of A-listers jockeying for premiere position to sign the giant Fathead wall decal of (the real) Alexander Hamilton that hangs in the show's greenroom. [...] [*Hamilton*] has become America's most valuable social currency, with celebrities and plebeians alike clamoring for the chance to post anything from their physical ticket to the most exclusive show in the country, to a shell-shocked selfie next to Lin Manuel Miranda.<sup>204</sup>

*Hamilton* grew into a status symbol in which access to *Hamilton* has come to reflect the possession of certain means, seeing as tickets rapidly sell out. As Rachel Syme, writer at media blog *Fastcompany* asserted: "A ticket to *Hamilton* has also become a status symbol in Washington, D.C. Madeleine Albright, the Clintons, Bernie Sanders, Timothy Geithner, Dick

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<sup>202</sup> Jacob Bernstein, "Seen 'Hamilton'? No? You Poor Thing," *New York Times*, April 29, 2015, accessed July 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/30/fashion/the-musical-that-michelle-obama-the-clintons-and-madonna-couldnt-wait-for-broadway-to-see.html>.

<sup>203</sup> Beejoli Shah, "How the #Hamilbrag Became the Most Valuable Social Media Currency," *Esquire*, July 11, 2016, accessed August 3, 2017, <http://www.esquire.com/entertainment/a46596/hamilton-lin-manuel-miranda-hamilbrag/>.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

Cheney, and the Bush sisters have all attended the show.”<sup>205</sup> This notion of *Hamilton* being a status symbol suggest an individual either has access to money, a well-connected network or such a status that one’s name is deemed important enough to gain access to a ticket. The New York Times wrote that; “celebrity audience members, along with glowing reviews, have turned *Hamilton* tickets into status objects on par with a reservation at the *Polo Bar* or an early *Apple Watch*.”<sup>206</sup> But the social sharing surrounding *Hamilton* goes beyond the influencer-influenced relationship between celebrities and non-celebrities. Tracing it back to Latane’s social impact theory, one can conclude that the ‘number that makes up the source,’ or in other words, the number of individuals endorsing *Hamilton*, has been rising to include a long list of individuals with celebrity status. I would argue that the factor of immediacy started to play an important role, not only for these individuals as influencers, but maybe even more so for these individuals to revalidate their celebrity status: if one is able to get close to *Hamilton*, not only by obtaining ticket but by getting a one-on-one with the show’s stars (especially Miranda), it suggests a higher status. Simply because one is seemingly important enough to be given a ticket to a show that has been sold out its entire running. And moreover, seeing as *Hamilton* has become a status object, and Miranda is the face of *Hamilton*, a tête-à-tête with Miranda himself would be the ultimate solidification of that status. As *Fastcompany* editor Rachel Syme argues: “Miranda has become the one famous person whom every other famous person wants to know.”<sup>207</sup> Cosmopolitan editor Joanna Coles said that “everybody [she] know[s] has seen it or is screaming for tickets.”<sup>208</sup>

*Hamilton* has become the object of social action that determines celebrity behavior. In an *Esquire* article, writer Beejoli Shah observed that, “[*Hamilton*] turned the famous into the fan girls. What started as theater fans geeking out over a musical unlike any other slowly

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<sup>205</sup> Rachel Syme, “How ‘Hamilton’ Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda Is Building a Brand for the Ages.”

<sup>206</sup> Jacob Bernstein, “Seen ‘Hamilton’? No? You Poor Thing.”

<sup>207</sup> Rachel Syme, “How ‘Hamilton’ Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda Is Building a Brand for the Ages.”

<sup>208</sup> Jacob Bernstein, “Seen ‘Hamilton’? No? You Poor Thing.”

infiltrated the greater New York City entertainment scene—and just continued its exponential trajectory from there.”<sup>209</sup> Although individual examples would not prove my point, it is the total number of celebrities that have visited and engaged with *Hamilton*, that compels the definition of status object. It allows celebrities to become part of the conversation and reaffirms their celebrity status due to the fact they were able to obtain a ticket and, in most occasions, warrant engagement with the *Hamilton* company.

An example of an influential celebrity visit to the show was the attendance by superstar Beyoncé and her husband Jay-Z in October of 2015.<sup>210</sup> Both *Hamilton*’s official outlets and Miranda posted about the visit of the couple, but so did countless of other online media.<sup>211</sup> Even though the couple did not share their thoughts on the show on social media, through all the exposure on different platforms, the show had reached a wide audience through articles, blogs and television segments, and established an association between the musical and the superstar couple, and vice versa. The meeting between Beyoncé and Miranda could, given Beyoncé’s status, be beneficial for the reputation of the show (and Miranda), and can be seen in correlation with the revalidation of celebrity status. Simply put, Beyoncé can be considered an important social influencer, thus her visit to the show gives a certain status to the show, as does her meeting with the cast. As cultural scholar Murray Milner Junior asserted: “if [one] associates with those of higher status your status increases. [...] Social associations are relevant only if there is public awareness of one’s relationships with other high-status individuals.”<sup>212</sup> This is why the social sharing of *Hamilton* plays such a vital part, because it provides proof of interaction, which then, following Milner’s logic, may lead to an

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<sup>209</sup> Beejoli Shah, “How the #Hamilbrag Became the Most Valuable Social Media Currency.”

<sup>210</sup> Jeff Nelson, “Date Night! Beyonce and Jay Z Hit Up Hamilton on Broadway,” *People*, October 22, 2015, accessed July 19, 2017, <http://people.com/celebrity/beyonce-jay-z-see-hamilton-the-musical-on-broadway/>.

<sup>211</sup> “Beyonce Hamilton Visit,” *Google Search*.

<sup>212</sup> Murray Milner Jr., “Is Celebrity A New Kind of Status System?” *Symposium on Celebrity in America Today*, July 29, 2010, accessed December 9, 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/4b85/ad69ce9332b207ab6f9e36e2be6a1c21b303.pdf>.

increase of status for the party that is considered to have a lesser status. Although this thesis does not concern itself with determining individual social status in relation to *Hamilton*, I do wish put emphasis on the idea that status can increase with certain (public) engagements, and that *Hamilton* can be considered a status object because it can be used by celebrities to publicly confirm their status through social media posts regarding *Hamilton*. Note here again that *Hamilton* grew in status as its popularity increased, allowing to it to become a status object.

## 4.2 Lin-Manuel Miranda's Influence Through Social Media

### 4.2.1 Research Objectives

You know what's a great way of tricking people into thinking you're a genius? Write a show about geniuses! [...] And then everyone goes, 'Oh, my God, he's a genius! *Hamilton's* a genius!' They conflate the two. I'm not a fucking genius. I work my ass off. *Hamilton* could have written what I wrote in about three weeks. *That's* genius. It took me a very long time to wrestle this onto the stage, to even be able to understand the world views of the characters that inhabit my show, and then be able to distill that.

Whether *Hamilton's* creator Lin-Manuel Miranda is a genius is, of course, a personal assertion, but it would be difficult to disagree on Miranda's influence, not in the first place through his work. Though there is no sure assertion, I believe there is a correlation between Miranda's personality (both on-and offline) and *Hamilton's* success. In this subchapter I will further explore this idea, mostly using the two secondary theories: the social impact theory and the source credibility model. In the first section I will reflect on Miranda's online presence using the above mentioned theories as well as social action theory and symbolic interactionism. The second section builds upon the idea that *Hamilton's* success and Miranda's online presence has allowed him to become a social influencer himself, and how this might have furthered the show's popularity as well.

#### 4.2.2 Likable and Trustworthy: Miranda's Online Presence

Miranda's closest—and most important—relationship is with the hundreds of thousands of fans who have likely never seen the show. Ticket scarcity has motivated him to create an entire world around it, so that people, and especially young people, can feel like a part of the movement even if they can't get into the theater.<sup>213</sup>

As touched upon in various points throughout this thesis, Miranda has been an avid social media user during the entire *Hamilton* adventure, sharing his thoughts and ideas, and using this platforms to interact with his audience. In all public outings, including his social media correspondence, Miranda comes across as honest, humble and approachable.<sup>214</sup> Marketing scholar Meghan Murray dedicated an article to *Hamilton*'s success story in relation to social media and claims that Miranda's approachability is an important part of why *Hamilton* fans are so involved: “[Miranda] engage[s] directly with fans on 65 percent of Twitter posts, via tools such as retweeting and commenting, so fans come to love him even more. Miranda's Twitter feed is brimming with insight, connection and interaction with the online world.”<sup>215</sup> Arguably it is precisely Miranda's honest engagement, encouraging words and witty commentary that makes him so well-liked.

Miranda is busier than most, but he finds the time to interact up to 20 times a day on Twitter on a variety of topics. This makes "the *Hamilton* effect" more personal. At a time when Broadway leans on star power to attract audiences, this down-to-earth, approachable presence in social media stands out.<sup>216</sup>

Social media allows Miranda to directly engage with fans, and vice versa. This gives audiences access to social resources, in this case Miranda's insight, opinion and interests,

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<sup>213</sup> Rachel Syme, “How ‘Hamilton’ Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda Is Building a Brand for the Ages.”

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Meghan R. Murray, “Runaway success of ‘Hamilton’ Shows the Power of Creating Buzz on Social Media,” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2016, accessed July 12, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/runaway-success-of-hamilton-shows-the-power-of-creating-buzz-on-social-media/2016/09/15/4a6584fe-79e8-11e6-ac8e-cf8e0dd91dc7\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.78573c63dcf7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/runaway-success-of-hamilton-shows-the-power-of-creating-buzz-on-social-media/2016/09/15/4a6584fe-79e8-11e6-ac8e-cf8e0dd91dc7_story.html?utm_term=.78573c63dcf7).

<sup>216</sup> Dipti Bramhandkar, “5 Ways ‘Hamilton’ is Winning the Marketing Game.”

otherwise unavailable to them.<sup>217</sup> The sharing of exclusive information on social media has made these platforms an interesting and viable outlet through which *Hamilton* fans can consume information: “[Miranda] is an expert at starting memes and using hashtags to make his followers feel included in a secret world where those who “really get” *Hamilton* go to hang out.”<sup>218</sup> It is exactly the availability of such information that has allowed *Hamilton* to expand so widely in terms of its audiences, as this ensures that individuals are likely to remain interested, engaged and frankly keeps them financially invested (potential paying consumers) even though they are not currently in the position to acquire a physical ticket to the show. Miranda’s online involvement should not be underestimated in this process. His (digital) personality has gained him, and the show, a loyal following, and essentially makes him the face of the show. When asked about the motives regarding his avid social media use, Miranda himself “insist[ed] that there is no gimmick to it, just a raw desire to connect to other rap, theater, and history nerds.”<sup>219</sup> But regardless of intent, Miranda’s engagement with fans can be considered a marketing goldmine as it creates the possibility for longterm engagement. But as stated before, Miranda leaves an impression of authenticity, which is exactly what seems to have led him to expand *Hamilton* outside of the theater, a genuine desire to have *Hamilton* enjoyed by as wide an audience as possible and to not deny these audiences the *Hamilton* experience because they are not in the position to experience a live performance. As *Fastcompany* writer Rachel Syme argued: “*Hamilton*, the stage show, may be a work only a few have access to, but Miranda has created an equally special club for everyone else.”<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Sueng-A Annie Jin & Joe Phua, “Following Celebrities’ Tweets About Brands”: The Impact of Twitter-Based Electronic Word-of-Mouth on Consumers’ Source Credibility Perception, Buying Intention, and Social Identification with Celebrities,” 182.

<sup>218</sup> Rachel Syme, “How ‘Hamilton’ Creator Lin-Manuel Miranda Is Building a Brand for the Ages.”

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

When *Hamilton Mixtape* co-producer and Roots member Tariq ‘Black Thought’ Trotter, was asked about working with Miranda in an interview with music platform *Billboard*. Trotter responded:

Lin is amazing to work with; he's brilliant as a writer, a performer, an MC, he's a great free-styler. But I think above all else, he's personable, he interacts with people well, he's likable. I feel like that likability is a quality that you rarely see in a genius; he's not high on himself, he's very humble. My go-to phrase to describe Lin is that he's a bright beacon of hope and brilliance. I've never seen him upset or irate or drop his cool, you know what I mean? I've never seen him less than enthusiastic about the amount of work he has to do or how hard it is. And I feel like that speaks volumes to his constitution as a person. He's just an honest-to-goodness good guy. And I think that works in his favor.<sup>221</sup>

Many that have worked with Miranda confirm his genuine personality. Artistic director of the Public Theater, Oskar Eustis called Miranda “earnest and warm and generous and loving and open.”<sup>222</sup> Talk show host Jimmy Kimmel called Miranda “a brilliant human,” *Orange is the New Black* and social activist Laverne Cox tweeted that she was “still in awe of the genius of Lin-Manuel Miranda,” and *Modern Family* and Broadway actor Jesse Tyler Ferguson reacted “Lin-Manuel Miranda, you are a genius!”<sup>223</sup> Alexis Soloski, a journalist working for *The Guardian* interviewed Miranda, and noted that he is “[...] almost pathologically disposed to give credit and praise to others, which may be a result of some very effective media training or a consequence of a true and rather humble big-heartedness that accompanies his fierce ambition,”<sup>224</sup> but later confirms she believes the latter to be true. The extensive praise regarding Miranda’s character creates a certain suspicion which partially disregards the opinion, influence or credibility of the messenger and requires the establishment of the

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<sup>221</sup> Dan Rys, “The Roots’ Black Thought on Lin-Manuel Miranda, Perseverance & ‘The Hamilton Mixtape,’” *Billboard*, November 30, 2016, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/hip-hop/7595776/hamilton-mixtape-the-roots-black-thought-on-lin-manuel-miranda>.

<sup>222</sup> Alexis Soloski, “Lin-Manuel Miranda: The Bard Behind Broadway’s Hamilton,” *The Guardian*, November 20, 2017, accessed July 17, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/nov/20/lin-manuel-miranda-musicals-hamilton-broadway-disney-hiphop>.

<sup>223</sup> “43 Celebrities Who are Gushing Over ‘Hamilton’ On Social Media.”

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

individual's own opinion of Miranda, based on their own experience. And although the above mentioned public figures might still exert peripheral cues, the individual has a certain agency to establish for themselves if they consider Miranda to be genius or humble or big-hearted. Referring back to Soloski's encounter with Miranda; she doubted Miranda would be able to live up to the expectations created by all the stories regarding his personality, and because she might have had a predisposed idea of what fame and success can do to one's character (and these predisposed notions are the opposite of Miranda's personality as sketched). But by having her own experience she established for herself that Miranda is, in fact, how he is portraying himself to be.

#### ***4.2.3 Miranda as Social Influencer***

Arguably, *Hamilton's* success, Miranda's key role in this success and his positive reputation, has resulted in a large following, turning Miranda himself into a social influencer. In an interview with media blog *Fastcompany*, Miranda said that indeed one of the biggest advantages of having *Hamilton* succeed, is that it enabled him "to divert attention toward issues he cares about."<sup>225</sup> At the time of writing, Miranda's latest activism supporting immigrant rights is a viral hit accompanied by the *#Ham4All*.<sup>226</sup> It challenges everyone to record themselves singing a *Hamilton* song, donate at least ten dollars and challenge others to do the same. The proceeds go to the *Immigrants: We Get the Job Done Coalition*, a collective of twelve immigrant rights organizations providing immigrants with legal (and other) assistance.<sup>227</sup> Dozens of public figures have joined the *#Ham4All* challenge,<sup>228</sup> just like

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<sup>225</sup> "43 Celebrities Who Are Gushing Over 'Hamilton' On Social Media."

<sup>226</sup> Discussed in further detail in chapter 3.

<sup>227</sup> "Immigrants: We Get the Job Done #Ham4All," *Emerson Collective*, June 2017, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://www.emersoncollective.com/articles/2017/6/26/hamilton-immigrants-get-the-job-done-coalition/>

<sup>228</sup> Note that at the time of writing the *#Ham4All* had only just started.

thousands of fans.<sup>229</sup> Not only does this example show the power of social influence, it moreover establishes Miranda's position as a social influencer; "when [influencers] speak, others listen and act accordingly."<sup>230</sup> Although a small percentage of the #Ham4All challenge might have engaged with the foundation regardless of Miranda's participation, most individuals participating in the challenge are likely doing so through peripheral persuasion, where heuristic motives, such as Miranda's likability or his perceived credibility regarding the cause are the primary cues. There are a number of interlinked cues that can lead to persuasion and any of these cues can function as the prime motivator for participation. The exploration of these cues does not only help to understand how Miranda's social influence works in different ways, but moreover proves the popularity of *Hamilton* as provides an explanation as to what motives individuals to participate. The first cue, reciprocity could refer to the fact that individuals might want to give back to Miranda because Miranda gave them the musical. In this case, they oblige to Miranda's request to donate. Secondly, by attaching a social campaign through a participate-post-and-tag concept, it adds a peripheral cue named social proof. This is exerted, first through the fact that one posts their participation on social media and then challenges friends to the same, adding a certain social pressure. Not participating could reflect badly on one's image, this ring especially true for public figures. The third cue, consistency, leads back to Miranda's earlier charitable efforts where individuals could also participate for a donation of only ten dollars. If participation in the previous efforts was experienced positively, this could lead them to also engage this time. The fourth cue, authority, can reflect both on Miranda as well as the large number of celebrities that are participating. Their status can lead people to be persuaded. Moreover, if

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<sup>229</sup>Joyce Chen, "Lin-Manuel Miranda's 'Ham4All' Challenge Has Stars Singing 'Hamilton' songs," *Rolling Stone*, June 29, 2017, accessed July 16, 2017, <http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/lin-manuel-mirandas-ham4all-challenge-stars-sing-hamilton-w490441>.

<sup>230</sup> Neil Howe, "Brands are Under The (Social) Influence," *Forbes*, March 31, 2016, accessed July 15, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/neilhowe/2016/03/31/brands-are-under-the-social-influence/#7b051eaa5f49>.

Miranda is considered an authority figure, his choice of the immigrant cause might be accepted as a good cause simply because individuals trust Miranda's authority. The sixth type, scarcity can be connected to the prize that is connected with the participation, namely an all-expense paid trip to Los Angeles to see the opening of *Hamilton*, hang out backstage and meet Lin-Manuel Miranda. This is an opportunity that will present itself only once, and might be a factor for people to participate; in order to qualify for the reward.

#### **4.4 *Hamilton's* Brand Ambassadors**

##### **4.4.1 *Research Objectives***

Diving deeper into the notion of social influence, I will differentiate between social influencers and brand ambassadors. As *Hamilton* grew in its success, in part of course through the social influence as discussed in the previous subchapter, the show moved beyond being merely an artistic text and became a brand in which all communication surrounding *Hamilton* became part of a brand experience. In this subchapter I wish to provide a definition of *Hamilton* as a brand, and how a continuous engagement by social influencers can lead to brand ambassadorship. I shall moreover expand upon brand ambassadorship in the second section section of this subchapter, using ELM, social impact theory and the source credibility model to differentiate between central and peripheral ambassadorship to discuss possible audience reaction to these ambassadors. By way of these discussions, I hope to determine how the position of *Hamilton* as a brand, as well as the interlinked brand ambassadors, both further the exposure of *Hamilton*.

#### 4.4.2 Defining *Hamilton* as a Brand

Musicals have always existed within a realm of art and commodified entertainment. But whether commercial or artistic, the success rate of American musical theater is about one in five.<sup>231</sup> Despite the significant chance of failure, many pieces of musical theater have been created with commercial profit in mind. This does not necessarily mean it cannot be art; after all the etymological meaning of the verb commodifying refers to the practice of transforming things into commodities, but one could question the artistic motives if the goal is to maximize profit. There are also musicals that started out as purely artistic pieces (though Broadway is often considered the ultimate goal), and moved on to become great, commercial, success. *Rent* is such an example, but also *Hamilton* can be considered within the latter category. *Hamilton* started out as a project by Miranda with questionable chance of success, due to the controversy of using hip hop music to tell a historical tale.<sup>232</sup> Only its success allowed (or rather, forced) *Hamilton* to become a commercial brand. In this case, a brand refers to the definition given by Sarah Banet-Weiser in her book *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, where she defines a brand “to refer to the intersecting relationship between marketing, a product, and consumers.”<sup>233</sup> She argues that brands interact with other brands, leading to brand cultures, referring to “the way in which types of brand relationships have increasingly become cultural contexts or everyday living, individual identity and affective relationships. There are different brand cultures that at times overlap and compete with each other.”<sup>234</sup> Though this relationship used to be of a largely capitalist nature, Banet-Weiser asserts that in contemporary society, “brands are meant to invoke the

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<sup>231</sup> Joshua Rogers, “Invest in The Next ‘Hamilton’? Broadway’s Odds Look Like Silicon Valley’s,” *Forbes*, May 31, 2016, accessed August 6, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuarogers/2016/05/31/invest-in-the-next-hamilton-broadways-odds-look-like-silicon-valleys/#4c6a1c237ed3>.

<sup>232</sup> Anita Elberse, “Hamilton: An American Musical,” *Harvard Business School Case*, July 2016, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/pages/item.aspx?num=51451>.

<sup>233</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

experience associated with a company or product,”<sup>235</sup> and are thus not necessarily related to economics anymore; and even capable of moving beyond the consumable product, exceeding materiality. “More than just the object itself, a brand is the perception – the series of images, themes, morals, values, feelings, and the sense of authenticity conjured by the product itself. The brand is the essence of what will be experienced; the brand is a promise as much as a practicality.”<sup>236</sup> *Hamilton* should be seen as a brand, and despite its connection to economics and the commercial nature of Broadway musicals, *Hamilton* should be seen as a brand that concerns itself with experience and connection. Note that *Hamilton* thus refers to the entire experience surrounding the show, and no longer only refers to just the actual show. Banet-Weiser asserts that contemporary society has a need for “[...] spaces [...] driven by genuine affect and emotions, something outside of mere consumer culture, something above the reductiveness or profit margins, the crassness of capital exchange.”<sup>237</sup> In other words, consumers are looking for authenticity; interaction without (obvious) commercial undertones.

When *Hamilton* started to engage with audiences outside of the theatrical sphere, the notion of *Hamilton* as a brand became relevant, because it helps create a unified understanding of what *Hamilton* entails. This includes the visuals posted on social media, the use of specific lingo in the form of *Hamilton* related hashtags, the use of references in textual posts, and social values linked to topics such as race- and gender equality and historical preservation. By having all these associations that make up the *Hamilton* brand, it allows other *Hamilton* shows (like the national tour or the West End version) to build upon the existing values as the *Hamilton* brand is already established, and has already created certain expectations. It moreover allows those in the *Hamilton* company, as well as the brand

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<sup>235</sup> Sarah Banet-Weiser, *AuthenticTM: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 5.

ambassadors (introduced in the next paragraph), to work on affiliated projects, while carrying *Hamilton*'s reputation with them.

#### ***4.4.3 The Role of Brand Ambassadors***

In chapter 4.1 I discussed the role of social influence and its impact on *Hamilton*'s success. As stated before, any consumable product (both material and immaterial), can benefit from the approval of authoritative figures. As with *Hamilton*, the (online) engagement of celebrities with the show allowed the word to spread, and it moreover increased and diversified *Hamilton*'s audience. However, in commercial advertising surrounding brands, the distinction is made between social influence and brand ambassadorship. Although my reading of *Hamilton* within the boundaries of this thesis does not require a commercial point-of-view, I do wish to specify the difference between social influence and brand ambassadorship, and add brand ambassadorship to my analysis of *Hamilton*'s success as a distinctive layer. Generally, the social influencer is seen as a celebrity figure, blogger or other digital heavyweight promoting a certain product, brand or service. Note that the definition of promoting here is not necessarily commercially driven. Because of their status, the opinion by social influencers can be very effective to reach potential audiences. The nature of social influence, however, is often a short (if not one time) engagement, and in case of a mismatch between the subject and the endorser, the message can be received with skepticism or even lead to a decrease in credibility for the endorser.<sup>238</sup> Therefore, more and more brands are relying on brand ambassadors (aka actual consumers) to create lasting engagement and thus sales.<sup>239</sup> Brand ambassadorship develops when a social influencer takes their engagement

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<sup>238</sup> "The Role of Influencers and Brand Advocates in Social Media Marketing," *Raging Creations*, accessed July 11, 2017, <http://ragingcreations.com/pages/the-role-of-influencers-and-brand-advocates-in-social-media-marketing.html>.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

beyond the passive act of just attending the performance, but is really interacting with the show on multiple levels.

Relating this back to *Hamilton* it is important to note that brand ambassadors have, at one point, been social influencers. As *Hamilton* grew into being a brand, some social influencers were able to grow into brand ambassadors. I would argue there is a relevance in distinguishing between a social influencer and brand ambassador because there is a difference between the short term engagement affiliated with social influence, and the longterm investment through brand ambassadorship. Think for example of the artists that appeared on *The Hamilton Mixtape*. They donated their time and effort in order to create a *Hamilton* related song, and moreover permanently linked their name to the *Hamilton* experience.<sup>240</sup>

Brand ambassadors actively link their names to the show, and dependent on the status of the said ambassador, the association between the individual and *Hamilton*, can be beneficial to both reputations. First, the connection between *Hamilton* and the brand ambassador can open up the show to new audiences as the ambassador constantly, publicly and positively reaffirms the show. Where a one-time engagement might not be enough to trigger receivers through the peripheral route, the continuous validation could move them to reassess. Second, the connection between the ambassador and *Hamilton* means that the ambassador gets to associate themselves with the reputation of *Hamilton*, the related brand values, and the existing audiences. To illustrate the role of brand ambassadors, I have outlined two examples of *Hamilton* brand ambassadors in the upcoming paragraphs.

A great example of a brand ambassador of *Hamilton* can be found in talk show host Jimmy Fallon, who has been a *Hamilton* enthusiast from the start. He has interviewed most of

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<sup>240</sup> I do not know if there were financial rewards linked to participation on the *Mixtape*. I assume there was, but regardless it does not change the affect that brand ambassadorship can have, it merely might influence the motives to participate.

*Hamilton*'s original cast on his *The Tonight Show*, all available on his *YouTube* channel.<sup>241</sup> The best watched *Hamilton* related video posted by Fallon was a segment called "Wheel of Freestyle," where Miranda freestyled to three random words. The *YouTube* clip of this freestyle has over 7,5 million hits<sup>242</sup> next to the 3,8 million people that watched the show as it aired in November of 2016.<sup>243</sup> Fallon moreover appeared on a #*Ham4Ham* video, impersonating singers doing a *Hamilton* song and created his own rendition of the same show for *The Hamilton Mixtape*.<sup>244</sup> Fallon also created a series of web exclusive interviews called "Tales from Backstage" where *Hamilton* actors are interviewed about their favorite backstage stories.<sup>245</sup> It is especially the creation of original consumable content that really establishes Fallon as a valuable brand ambassador. Original content not only allows *Hamilton* fans another opportunity to engage with the show, it moreover gives new, potential, audiences a glimpse of *Hamilton* and its company that might pique their interest in a way that a (simple) textual or visual recommendation will not. Moreover, Fallon's position as a nationally known, and widely watched, talk show host allows him to introduce a peripheral audience to *Hamilton*. It is worth noting that Fallon often promotes the Broadway musical and that it is likely that part of Fallon's audience consists of musical enthusiasts that were already interested in the musical. This is where Fallon's relation to the show benefits his own reputation, as the diverse and ever-growing fanbase of the show might start to associate *Hamilton* with Fallon, and start watching *The Tonight Show* because of that association.

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<sup>241</sup> *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon YouTube Channel*, accessed August 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/user/latenight>.

<sup>242</sup> "Wheel of Freestyle with Lin-Manuel Miranda (from 'Hamilton')" *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon YouTube Channel*, November 6, 2015, accessed August 7, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkWR59-VRFI>.

<sup>243</sup> Rick Porter, "Late-Night Ratings: Nov. 2-6, 2015: 'Jimmy Kimmel Live' sneaks Ahead of 'The Late Show,'" *TV by the Numbers*, November 12, 2016, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://tvbythenumbers.zap2it.com/weekly-ratings/late-night-ratings-nov-2-6-2015-jimmy-kimmel-live-sneaks-ahead-of-the-late-show/>.

<sup>244</sup> "Digital #ham4Ham 1/20/16 – Jimmy Fallon, "You'll Be Back," *Hamilton: An American Musical YouTube Channel*, January 20, 2016, accessed August 6, 2017, <https://youtu.be/Uwws81f18vA>.

<sup>245</sup> "Broadway on Fallon," *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon YouTube Channel*, accessed August 7, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyKzf464sU9\\_Cyb9S\\_1JH5HYB5RuiKAor](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyKzf464sU9_Cyb9S_1JH5HYB5RuiKAor).

# CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In what ways did *Hamilton* utilize digital media to extend the show's experience, how are audiences interacting with, and reacting to, the show through digital media, and how can these different engagements potentially have contributed to the show's (inter)national success?

An answer to my research question is not found in a single sentence, as *Hamilton*'s success is the result of a multitude of factors, a number of which I have outlined in this study. It is thus this entire body of work in which the above mentioned question is answered. Provided one has read this text, I can provide a concluding summary that will steer towards answering this question.

The *Hamilton* company uses different social media which all allow for a slightly different interaction with audiences. Platforms developed to hold general content are often platforms that are widely used by diverse groups of individuals. *Hamilton* uses these platforms to share a general but wide variety of content, allowing individuals to engage with little knowledge about the show. Media specific platforms are used to extend a more in-depth look, catering to individuals with an predisposed interest. Key to the social media experience of *Hamilton* is the possibility of one-on-one or realtime engagement with the company. Platforms that allow for little interaction are used by *Hamilton* to post original content, allowing an extension of the experience and an extension of knowledge surrounding the show. Together, all these platforms allow audiences to educate them regarding *Hamilton*, engage with the company (especially the cast) and get an insiders perspective, to voice their own experiences; but most of all social media allows for all of this to be publicly available to everyone with a computer or smartphone. And while the Richard Rogers Theater can only

accommodate *Hamilton* to a limited amount of people per night, the Internet does not put a limitation on the *Hamilton* experience. It moreover allows individuals to customize their experience according to their interests, as the uses and gratification model dictates will determine the degree of engagement. In other words, *Hamilton's* social media presence allows for audiences to actively and passively consume the show, dependent upon their needs.

The *Hamilton* company is known for their genuine and positive communication, which creates the expression of an honest, non-commercial, drive to connect, and share, *Hamilton* with anyone that is interested. This exerts a certain trustworthiness, and although the notion of trust and likability might not immediately relate itself to success, it is important to note that *Hamilton's* reputation has indeed been key. As more individuals started to engage with the show, the *Hamilton* company has been able to confirm its reputation both as a genuine and likable company but also as a astonishing piece of musical theater.

Through the side projects discussed in this thesis, *Hamilton* moved beyond the theater, associating itself with other art forms, introducing itself to different social groups and mingling with numerous celebrities. Through this, the show opened itself up to new collaborations, it also expanded the range of individuals interacting with the show. It moved outside of the theatrical sphere in the sense that it popularized itself within cultures that normally would not be associated with theater, whether due to social, economical, political or cultural reasons. Together with the online availability of *Hamilton*, the company ensured that all these individuals are able to interact with the show. Moreover, the above mentioned notions of likability, authenticity and trust have played an important role in the development of these projects as well as the engagement of these individuals.

The above mentioned ideas are the ways in which *Hamilton* ensured the availability of the show. But as this thesis has demonstrated there is an interplay between the ways in

which *Hamilton* itself created a setup for a success reaching far beyond musical theater, and ways in which others have helped *Hamilton* get there. This specific type of *Hamilton* audience are individuals with a certain public status, making them social influencers. Through their reputation (source credibility) they are able to exert their opinion onto others persuading towards engagement. Through a dialectic between centralized interest and heuristic cues individuals that otherwise showed no interest in musical theater or individuals that showed no interest in (for example) hip hop, are persuaded to engage with *Hamilton* based on recommendation or opinion. I stated that *Hamilton* should be seen as a brand. Understanding the definition of a brand in modern culture helps understand how the creation of an experience the way the *Hamilton* company did can clarify why individuals are reacting so well to the show. Creating an experience with positive associations and interaction is deemed a successful strategy in modern society and is exactly what *Hamilton* created.

Due to the number of public figures that visited, and recommended the show, I argued that *Hamilton* became a status object with which many celebrities wish to be associated. Celebrities influenced each other, and with it, enlarged *Hamilton*'s exposure. The term status object moreover suggest *Hamilton* reached a certain nationwide popularity and linked involvement with the show (whether one is regarded a celebrity or not) with a certain sense of status or accomplishment.

In short *Hamilton*'s success has thus been a combination of multiple factors. First the role and popularity of social media in modern society. Secondly, the *Hamilton* company's rightful identification of the possibilities of social media. Third, the momentum gained early on in *Hamilton*'s evolution, before it even was a musical. Fourth, the eagerness and enthusiasm with which public figures engaged with the show. And lastly the fact that *Hamilton* is, as this thesis has hopefully made clear, a brilliant piece of theater.

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