

From FLOTUS to “Yaaaas Queen”:

Transforming Social Media Identities into Book Sales

Introduction

Since the 2010s, two factors have continued to drastically change the publishing industry: political memoirs and social media. Social media continues to change and has become more than a platform to interact with friends and catch up with the news; it has become a factor for publishers to think about when marketing a book. Social media, as an entity of its own, has changed the playing field of how books are being marketed, and with the rise of political memoirs, the publishing sector is thriving more than ever.

Politicians, who wrote a memoir, like Stacy Abrams, Condoleezza Rice, and Susan Rice, have an edge on the competition by marketing their distinctive identities and combating their notorious ones. The main marketing strategy for their memoirs is how they utilize their social media.

Hillary Clinton is also one of those individuals who leveraged her social media platforms to attract potential readers to her memoir. Like many celebrities and politicians, Clinton has a social media management team that takes all of her political work into consideration when posting information to social media and it's very methodical. In her lifetime, Clinton has written three memoirs, *Living History*, *Hard Choices*, and *What Happened*. Each memoir details Clinton's distinct leadership role in politics within the U.S government (i.e the Senator of New York, The First Lady of the United States, and the first female presidential candidate of a major political party). But it was her recent memoir, *What Happened*, that made the most sales because of her presence on social media and the identity she curated on each platform. While social media

undoubtedly boosted the sales of her latest memoir, it was a certain marketing tactic that made the book even more successful.

Hillary Clinton Memoirs

Memoir	Released	List Price	RTD
<i>Living History</i>	04/19/2004	\$18	234,286
<i>Hard Choices</i>	06/10/2014	\$35	272,017
<i>What Happened</i>	09/12/2017	\$30	519,989

Note: Nielsen Bookscan. (2020). Sales Rank and History of memoirs by Hillary Clinton.

With the focus of Clinton’s most recent memoir, *What Happened*, book sales were affected by the marketing strategy of personal branding within social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

Leveraging Various Social Media Platforms

The three main social media platforms that will be focused on are Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Social media is known to be a great “promotional tool” for marketing a product (Rashed, 2017). The marketing team of Clinton’s memoir looked at social media platforms as an “effective mechanism[s] to interact [more] with [their] customers” (Alalwan, 2017). While her social media platforms didn’t focus on promoting her memoir, posts were geared toward her book enough to peak readers’ interests.

When Clinton published her first memoir, social media platforms were in the beginning stages of development. By the release of *What Happened*, Clinton solidified her presence on each platform and created an identity within each one that set up the memoir’s success, which is further discussed in the next section.

Clinton's Current Social Media Following

	Joined	Followers
TWITTER	2013	29.7 million
FACEBOOK	2015	9.8 million
INSTAGRAM	2015	5.2 million

2015 was a significant year for Clinton and her social media management team. While the main reason for creating social media accounts was for a political agenda, the book sales of her last memoir thrived in comparison to her previous memoirs. Social media allowed Clinton to interact with her followers on a completely different level. The simple creation of the social media platforms automatically gave *What Happened* sales leverage over *Hard Choices*. In the year and a half leading up to *What Happened*, it became clear that the audience and engagement differed with each platform. Facebook was used to announce book tours, Twitter was geared towards women empowerment and fighting social justice inequalities, and Instagram was geared to her personal life.

Facebook

Clinton's social media management team leveraged her presence on Facebook by notifying followers of author interviews, book excerpts, and book reviews. The interactions within Facebook were community-based and Clinton often asked the opinions of readers after her book was released. The unique aspect of Facebook is the ability to create "social groups" and forums to talk about various topics. The fact that Clinton's Facebook page is so community-focused sets up the foreground to talk about and promote anything that she does, including her memoir.

Twitter

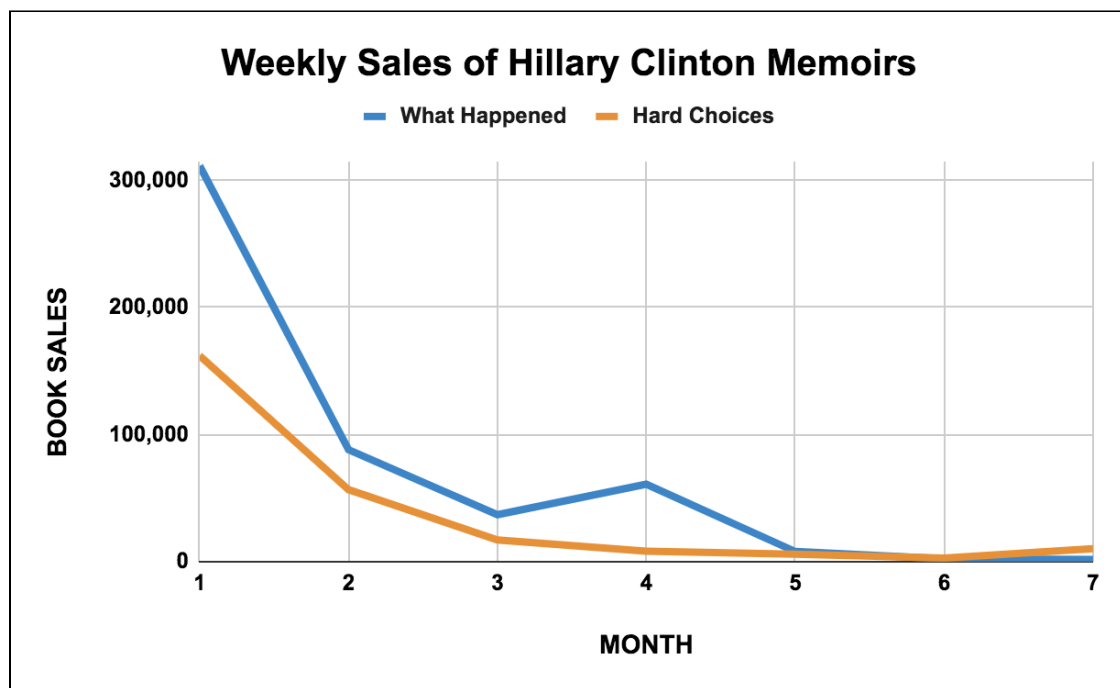
Twitter is the inventor of the hashtag and they're used to further promote or emphasize a tweet. Clinton is known for using many hashtags on different occasions, including when her memoir was released. The hashtag “#hillarywhathappened” trended for the weekend after her memoir was released. The purpose of the hashtag continued to promote her memoir and engage the community surrounding it.

On the flip side, her memoir was rarely promoted directly from Clinton's platform and instead was geared towards her announcing her work, combating rumors made by Donald Trump, and supporting other women in the political field. The emphasis on “women supporting women” was prevalent on Twitter leading up to the release of her memoir and even into the present day.

Instagram

Clinton took a very personal approach to her Instagram account by posting her fashion choices, family pictures, and her pets. This gave her audience a view into her personal life and attempted to connect with people on a deeper level that went beyond politics. On Instagram, Clinton really showed her “Millennial” side by using hashtags and common slang. Clinton also leveraged Instagram and her personal brand by featuring photos of her younger self. With these photos, she slowly highlighted her journey, struggles, and the choices she made that brought her to where she was. Aside from personal branding, Instagram formed its own niche for book-lovers called “Bookstagram” which targets book-influencers' favorite literature. While Clinton does not have her own “Bookstagram” or belong to any Instagram book clubs, her memoir benefits from this niche. When Clinton's memoir was released, “Bookstagramers” flocked to her memoir, and many captioned photos of her book with “Hillary = Queen,” which further highlights the influence social media had on her book.

In comparison to her second memoir, her third one skyrocketed in sales. Factors like the book's content and her political career at the time of each book's publishing are taken into consideration when evaluating the large gap in book sales, but Clinton was able to reach more of her followers through her social media platforms than ever before. The usage of social media platforms and how Clinton used hers attests to her book sales.



Note: Nielsen Bookscan. (2020). Sales Rank and History of "Hard Choices" and "What Happened" by Hillary Clinton.

The gap between the book sales of her second memoir, *Hard Choices*, and her third one, *What Happened*, provides insight into how social media can change the sales of a product. While Clinton's audience target is Millennials, and there is a lot of positive feedback, many criticize

Clinton for “trying too hard” with a younger generation than her own. This factor also translates to book sales because politicians are so controversial.

Repositioning Clinton’s Brand Image and Social Media Identity

Every publisher aims for their books to be bestsellers and Simon & Schuster is no different.

What Happened was on New York’s Bestseller’s list the week it was released. In the year and a half leading up to its publication, Clinton framed her social media identity into an “authentic self” and used that persona as a “source of material value” that was then capitalized in an attempt to gain a competitive edge in the memoir sector of publishing (Whitmer, 2019). The “profession ideology of being yourself” further plays into the marketing approach of a book’s identity (Tolson 2001). It is also theorized that a celebrity’s brand image and social media identity parallels the growth of social media technology (Khamis, 2016).

The driving force behind Clinton’s social media was her communication style and figuring out how to use it as a tool. Clinton’s social media following mainly consists of Millennials (currently 24-39 years old), to which social media content was designed for that generational group (Hess, 2015). Millennials “tend to spend more time using social media than interacting” and it was still true back in 2017 (Ardi, 2020). Clinton’s marketing strategy played into the Millennial generation by utilizing Facebook as a news source for her political career, which included her memoir.

Demographics of Social Media Users

	AGE	GENDER	ACTIVE USERS
FACEBOOK	25-29	75% women	2.44 billion
INSTAGRAM	18-24	43% women	1 billion
TWITTER	18-24	21% women	330 million

Note: Tran, T. & Sehl, K. (2020). 100+ Social Media Demographics that Matter to Marketers in 2020.

The language and voice in her social media posts vary from each platform. This is a more obvious and straightforward marketing technique, but in terms of a political memoir writer, this creates authenticity and credibility (Johns, 2016). A celebrity's credibility is necessary to "ensure the advertisement is successful" (Rashed, 2017). By first connecting to the audience, it makes it easier to gain readership when a book is published. In Clinton's case, the leveraging of social media platforms allowed her audience to familiarize themselves with her in a different light. Clinton's main connection with Millennials led to the successful sales of her memoir.

With the combination of Clinton's social media presence and her memoir, it allowed people to develop a more intimate relationship with her that is "akin to friendship" and these "'friendships' create influence in terms of [a] purchase" (Johns, 2016). This boils down to how Clinton represents herself on Twitter. She is known on Twitter for "writing like a millennial" and using slang and meme terms like "yaaaas" and "covfefe," so much so, that she was dubbed the "Yaaaas Queen" (Hess, 2015). The voice that Clinton encapsulates in her Twitter platform allows her to connect with the majority of her followers, which are Millennials (Hess, 2015). Being from a different generation, it's obvious that Clinton would not use slang words or phrases for any other purpose than for segmented marketing ("Social Media Strategy," 2017).

The “Twitter War” of 2016

2016 presidential electors, Clinton and Donald Trump, engaged in a “Twitter War” in the months leading up to the presidential election date. They disputed each others’ views on foreign policy, climate change, and minimum wage, to name a few. But above all, they took that time to make jabs and defuse any rumors each other was claiming. These moments really defined Clinton and her image. Some backed up her claims by retweeting memorable tweets and above all, made Clinton a trending subject on the platform. The logic of the celebrity or personal brand is reliant on “social intention and transformation” (Kerrigan, 2011). The sales of her memoir are reliant on her likability to the audience.

Marketing Techniques for a Political Following

Storytelling

Clinton has a unique marketing strategy that inflates her following as a political leader which translated to sales. Social media is the “most dominant technology platform[s] for internet use” (Ardi, 2020). Her social media marketing technique heavily relies on storytelling and including the reader in the conversation (“Social Media Strategy,” 2018). By employing this strategy, her followers feel as if they are a part of the conversation. This transcribes into book sales by creating an emotional connection with the reader through social media.

Simon & Schuster and Clinton’s marketing team used customer-focused marketing as the focal point for sales. The crucial point of Clinton’s customer-focused approach was the publisher’s own engaging content (Nolan, 2018). This translated into Clinton going on a book tour and using special media to update readers about book signings and interviews.

Self-Branding

Clinton's memoir draws a lot of emphasis on female empowerment in a political space. Her social media platforms reflect a similar persona/attitude as that in her memoir. Clinton utilizes "self-branding" as a means of marketing her brand and her memoir (Whitmer, 2019). A "self-branding technique is used to develop relationships that can be leveraged for economic opportunities" (Whitmer, 2019). Clinton's social media platforms accomplish this branding technique through "careful audience management" by having a "selective disclosure of personal information" (Whitmer, 2019). Social media platforms allow for "multi-layered audiences" and a mass self-communication style that can reach people from all political backgrounds (Laing, 2017).

Clinton's previous memoirs paved the way for a chance for a personal connection with the reader and her latest memoir is no different. Clinton's sassy and blunt tweets gave a view into what her memoir is about and her marketing team fed into that. Leveraging Clinton's identity on her social media platforms, it allowed the marketing of her book to rely on that. This marketing tactic is smart because "different platforms impact how [we] can present ourselves to our audience(s)" and there are "many benefits from adopting a mixed-method approach" (Laing, 2017). Clinton's sales between her second and third memoirs attest to that strategy and the overall usage of social media.

Simon & Schuster Social Media Strategy

Simon & Schuster, one of the Big 5 Publishers, quickly realized the power of social media when it first came out in 2004 and has since leveraged various platforms for their authors. Overall, there tends to be a "weak link between social media marketing and sales conversions," which

tends to force publishers to turn “towards direct sales” and causes them to “think more like retailers” (Nolan, 2018). Simon & Schuster has been Clinton’s publisher for all three of her memoirs.

Clinton’s memoirs are some of the many celebrity memoirs that Simon & Schuster has published. Clinton’s memoir has strong left-wing views and a series of events based on her liberalism that isn’t popular with all readers. Leading up to its publication, Simon & Schuster only posted a handful of tweets/ Instagram and Facebook announcements about Clinton’s memoir on the company’s social media platforms and Clinton approached it the same way. In this instance, both Simon & Schuster and Clinton don’t rely on social media platforms and instead rely on Clinton’s image that she’s built up over the years. Using just a handful of tweets/announcements is enough because Clinton engaged in author interviews that did most of the work in promoting. Everything else posted is directly related to her political career and shutting down Donald Trump's claims.

Conclusion

Clinton’s identity as a woman, who is outspoken and resilient, is the persona that shines through on her social media platforms. That type of persona is what her memoir sales relied on. While Clinton’s social media platforms weren’t the main driving force of her book sales, they did play a significant role in branding her media identity and the books. The defining moments in Clinton’s social media posts are around female empowerment and women in powerful government positions.

Clinton's language and persona in each of her social media platforms allowed her brand to reach various audiences. This factors into the sales of her latest memoir being the most successful one out of all three. The ability to reach various audiences through her social media platforms attests to the power of social media marketing and personal branding a product.

The interconnections of social media platforms and personal branding play significant roles in book sales. For Clinton's case, her memoir thrived off of making those moves at the right time and in the right platform. Audiences were more interested in her determined nature of being the first female presidential candidate of a major political party than in her being the First Lady of the United States. What is prevalent through the research is that how someone carries themselves through the media and creates a social media identity is what can leverage book sales.

The future of social media marketing is heading in this direction as more celebrity writers, particularly politicians, are utilizing this tactic.

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