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DECONSTRUCTING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

Talita Chenet van Graan

2288623

A research report submitted to the School of Literature, Language and Media, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.A. Publishing Studies by combination of coursework and research. Ethical clearance certificate protocol number WSLLM-M20-05.

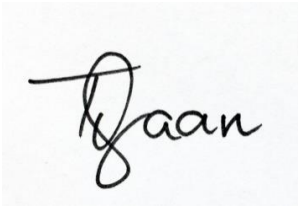
Johannesburg, 2021

Supervisor: Rhodé Odendaal

Department of Publishing Studies
School of Literature, Language and Media
University of the Witwatersrand

Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Publishing (by Coursework and Research Report) in the Department of Publishing Studies, School of Literature, Language and Media, University of the Witwatersrand. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university or institution. Ethical clearance certificate protocol number WSLLM-M20-05.



Talita Chenet van Graan

29/04/2021

SCHOOL OF Literature, Language and Media RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: WSLLM-M20-05**
PROJECT TITLE	Deconstructing the Impact of Social Media Marketing within the South African Publishing Industry
INVESTIGATOR	Ms Talita van Graan
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	SLLM/ SLLS
DATE CONSIDERED	September 2020
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved

This ethical clearance is valid for 2 years and may be renewed upon application.

EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the project report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE October 2020 **CHAIRPERSON**

Colleen Dawson

cc: Supervisor : Rhodé Odendaal & Colleen Dawson

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ _____/_____/_____

Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

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07 September 2020

CC. Ms Colleen Dawson

Dear Mrs Talita Chenet van Graan

DECISION ON RESEARCH PROPOSAL SUBMITTED FOR THE MASTER OF ARTS BY COURSEWORK AND RESEARCH REPORT

I am pleased to advise you of the decision reached by the reader/readers of the Graduate Studies Committee on your proposal entitled: "***Deconstructing the Impact of Social Media Marketing in the South African Publishing Industry"***

Reader's decision on proposal:

Accepted, but candidate should take note of warnings/ recommendations.

I confirm that Ms Colleen Dawson and Rhodé Odendaal have been appointed as your supervisor.

Please take note of the information on the Criteria for submitting research for examination which is attached and ensure that the Faculty is informed of any changes of address during the year.

Kindly note that all MA and PhD candidates who would like to graduate as soon as possible must ensure that they meet the ETD requirements within six (6) weeks of receipt of the examiners' reports by the supervisor. **A student is required to remain registered in the Faculty until his/her graduation.**

Yours Sincerely

M Ntseare

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To my darling wife Danielle: thank you for always expecting more of me, and for challenging and supporting me in every way on this journey of life.

Abstract

The objectives of this study are to determine if social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry has a measurable, direct impact on the book sales of two representative titles. Further objectives are to establish the reach, engagement and the corresponding impact on sales of social media marketing campaigns, which kinds of posts have the most impact, and which platform is the most effective. To gain a deeper understanding of this research study, theories relating to the traditional marketing mix, digital marketing, social media types, social media marketing, influencer marketing, and the South African digital- and publishing landscape are described.

In order to inform these questions, quantitative research using secondary data is conducted by collecting the total lifetime social media activity for each title by means of a manual data scrape of all mentions on all three major social media platforms namely Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These data points are manually categorised by the researcher in order to create a timeline of the social media activity for the two case studies. These results are juxtaposed to the lifetime sales data in order to establish any trends. The study replicates an existing study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2014 by Jamie Criswell and Nick Canty.

The most important findings of this study indicate that the title that garnered the most social media interaction overall did not result in the most sales. While social media marketing remains an invaluable marketing tool, it is not uniformly effective for all titles. Different factors impact on the success a social media marketing campaign for a book as relating directly to sales. These contributing factors include the age and social media presence of the target audience, whether the author is active on social media, and if there is an existing, established online core audience. Instead, the real value of social media appears to be its ability to converse directly with, and exploit established communities. Social media marketing is most effective if there is an established community. While examining only two titles cannot be deemed to be representative of the entire South African publishing industry including academic- trade- and scholarly publishing, the study attempts to provide a credible starting point in understanding the measurable value of social media marketing and the corresponding impact on book sales.

Keywords

Social media, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, digital marketing, book sales, trade publishing industry, books, viral marketing, social media marketing, influencer marketing

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background information

Viral marketing has become the key to marketing success in the digital age (Petrescu, 2014) and social media has changed the way in which organisations interact and build relationships with consumers (Plume et al., 2017). Likewise, the established publishing model that depends on the outdated relationship between publishers and readers must evolve to contend with a highly splintered new marketplace that includes brick and mortar stores as well as online communities. The underlying theme of social media marketing is to tap into or begin conversations on the medium, and to use them for commercial benefit (Criswell & Canty, 2014).

Therefore, while the social media connection between publishers and readers does not necessarily need to be dominated primarily by sales (Criswell & Canty, 2014), it stands to reason that publishers will benefit from having a better sense of the tangible impact their social media activity has on sales. This understanding will help to inform companies as to whether the bulk of their marketing resources and budget should be directed towards digital marketing, or if it might be better spent in other marketing efforts to ensure the best return on investment.

1.2 Purpose

This research report replicates an existing study by Jamie Criswell and Nick Canty titled *Deconstructing Social Media: An Analysis of Twitter and Facebook Use in the Publishing Industry* that was conducted in the United Kingdom in 2014.

This replication was done in order to specifically analyse the impact of social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry, following the same research principles and data analysis as the original work. The second study takes place six years after the original work, and specifically examines the digital marketing activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as the three major social media marketing platforms.

The research scrutinised the social media activity of two local fiction titles published by the same publishers in the last two years within the South African trade publishing landscape, and juxtaposed these online marketing efforts with the sales activity in order to determine whether a concrete causal relationship exists between the two factors: online marketing and sales.

While examining only two titles naturally cannot be deemed as representative of first the entire South African trade publishing industry, and second the South African publishing industry, the findings of this study attempts to provide at the very least a starting point in understanding the measurable value of social media marketing within the environment and limitations of the South African trade publishing industry.

Similar to the original research report, the findings were compared to the sales data from Nielsen BookScan in order to elucidate the value and impact of social media marketing as relating to book sales within the South African publishing landscape.

1.3 Problem statement

In the 21st century the lines between our physical and online existence, space and personas have become blurred to the extent of being nearly inseparable and indistinguishable from each other. Social media users now spend an average of 2 hours and 24 minutes per day multi-networking across an average of eight social networks and messaging apps (Chaffey, 2020; Kemp, 2020).

It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of the world's population is already online, and the latest trends suggest that more than half of the world's total population was using social media by the middle of 2020 (Kemp, 2020). Hootsuite, one of the leading social media management platform reports that social media growth has accelerated significantly since the outbreak of COVID-19. Social media user numbers increased by more than 13 percent over the past year, with nearly half a billion new users taking the global user total to almost 4.2 billion by the start of 2021. On average, more than 1.3 million new users joined social media every day during 2020, equating to roughly 15.5 new users every single second (Kemp, 2021).
It remains to be seen if this will be a temporary or permanent increase.

The findings of this study primarily seeks to answer the main question: does social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry have a measurable, direct impact on the book sales of the two titles examined in the study? Further objectives in addition to the above are expounded later in this chapter.

While this research paper only examines two trade publishing titles and is therefore limited in scope, the specific two titles were selected based on a number of attributes that sought to represent two diverse scenarios: one title and its author had a very limited online presence, while the other title had a socially active author and readership. As such, the results obtained may potentially be used as a valid starting point of further studies that seek to determine to what extent these assumptions are similarly applicable first to other trade publishing titles, as well as to both academic- and non-trade publishing.

1.4 Scope

The two books examined were *A Sin of Omission* by Marguerite Poland and *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes. Both of these are niche, local fiction trade titles published by Umuzi, the local fiction publishing imprint of Penguin Random House South Africa (PRHSA). Please refer to Chapter 3 for more information on each of these two titles.

Both books were published in the last two years within nine months of each other (September 2019 – June 2020), and as such the same websites and social media marketing opportunities were available to market both titles, with the exception of natural progression and accrual of social media users over time. The allocated digital marketing spend for both of these titles was also identical, so that significantly different marketing spend was not a factor with either. The in-house publishing team at Umuzi, the publicist responsible and the marketing department comprised of exactly the same team members for both titles. It may therefore be assumed that no turnover in staff, level of expertise or a different skillset was different in the marketing approach used on both titles.

These two titles were chosen specifically so that the variables mentioned above would be identical, and could therefore could be assumed to have no impact on the measured results when other factors were examined.

The main difference between the two titles was therefore that the author of the first title, *A Sin of Omission*, has absolutely no online presence, and the intended readership of this title is also not traditionally very active online, and therefore would be less susceptible to the effects of online marketing. Conversely, the author of the second title, *Afterland* has an active, vibrant social media presence, and her intended younger readership is typically very digitally savvy and active on most social media platforms.

By ensuring that it wasn't a difference in the marketing budget available, the expertise of the marketing team or even the logistical efficiency of the sales team in terms of sales representatives, relationships with bookstores, market share and size of the trade publisher that impacted on sales, it was possible to try and look at only the efficacy of social media marketing efforts on the sales of these two titles, and to try and establish if there was any correlation.

This research study focused solely on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as they are the three biggest social media platforms overall (Global Web Index, 2019) and they are also the three social media sites most used as marketing tools by the South African trade publishing industry, mainly due to the prevalence, effectiveness and relative affordability of each.

The total number of social media posts for both titles was collected by means of a manual data scrape of all instances on all three platforms. These data points were then manually categorised by the researcher in order to create a timeline of the social media activity for the two case studies. These results were then juxtaposed to the book sales of each title based on the sales data collected by Nielsen BookScan over from each book's publication date until the predetermined end date of 31 January 2021.

1.5 Objectives

The findings of this study was used to examine the impact of social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry, and the correlation this had on the book sales of the two titles in the study. By deconstructing all Facebook posts, tweets and Instagram posts in the lifetime of each title, and by examining the nature of each book's social media marketing campaign, the research will attempt to show whether social media activity noticeably impacts sales.

It was further examined what kinds of social media engagement had the most impact on sales, and the study seeks to establish whether there is a concrete correlation in the timeline of a publication and the duration of the social media activity as specifically relating to sales.

By knowing whether there is a measurable, direct correlation between social media activity on book sales within the South African trade publishing landscape, trade publishers in particular can be better equipped to make an informed decision on how best to apply their marketing efforts and budget to maximise their marketing effectiveness in order to sell the most books.

The findings of this study also endeavoured to shed more light on how the nature of a social media marketing campaign impacts on the effectiveness in terms of reach, engagement and the corresponding impact on sales, as well as highlighting which kinds of posts, and which platform is used the most specifically in marketing books in South Africa.

In summary, the objectives of this research study were therefore to determine:

1. What is the impact of social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry?
2. Is there a direct correlation between the social media activity, and the book sales of each of the two trade publishing titles being examined?
3. Did the social media marketing campaign noticeably impact the trade book sales in a clear, corresponding way?
4. What kinds of social media activity has the most impact on sales?
5. Overall, how do social media marketing campaigns impact the effectiveness on the sales of trade publishing titles in South Africa?
6. Which social media platform is used most effectively when marketing trade publishing books in South Africa?
7. Can these assumptions be generalised to be similarly applicable to the marketing and sales of other trade-, non-trade- and academic titles published in South Africa?

1.6 Limitations

A key variable that must be highlighted is that one of the titles was published before the COVID-19 pandemic, while the other was released two months after South Africa first went into lockdown. There was sharp and total drop in sales from end-March through April, when South Africa first went into Lockdown Level 5 in response to the global COVID19 pandemic. In an unprecedented event, all bookstores in South Africa, along with all non-essential retail, were forced to completely close down. While the hard lockdown was eased as the year progressed and bookstores were allowed to reopen and sales picked up, it is fair to say that life pre- and post COVID19 was completely different.

However, for the purposes of this study, it may be assumed that the prohibition of physical events to promote the second book in fact further negated the differences between the two titles, thereby making it possible to more accurately measure the effect of the different variables as set out in the objectives above. The advanced age of the first book's author typically prevents her from attending physical events, as was the case when she released both this novel, and her previous titles. If life could have continued as normal in 2020, the author of the second book, *Afterland* would likely have attended a number of real-world events that are typically very well attended by her hordes of devoted fans, as has been the case in the past when she released her previous novels. These well-attended events would naturally have resulted in sales as that is the main purpose of hosting book launch events, which could have skewed the data in terms of what was impacting on sales. Consequently, the pandemic inadvertently assisted with the conditions around this research paper as neither author could attend in-person book launches.

While the far-reaching effects of the pandemic cannot be excluded as impacting all areas of life, including access to bookshops, economic stability and the reading habits of society, it may be assumed that within the scope of this research study, the pandemic had a negligible effect on the specific variables being studied and reported on.

Secondly, by some incredible coincidence, the second title, which was five years in the making by author Lauren Beukes, deals in topic with a global pandemic that has swept the planet and killed the entire male population.

While the book's sales correspond not unfavourably with the sales figures of the same author's previous titles, it is possible that the very nature of the book impacted on the sales performance and reception by the audience. This inference can be made based on a number of posts mentioning specifically that the book's theme is 'too prescient', 'eerily timeous' and simply too real to be a comfortable read for many of the author's usual fans. Readers stated that they would 'maybe read this later, just not now'.

It is not possible to say how well this book would have sold if there has been no pandemic: the author's profile has grown steadfastly both locally and internationally in the five years since her previous book was published. As such it may be possible that, barring the pandemic, it would actually have outsold her previous titles by no small margin, whereas the book sales turned out to be merely on par with the sales of her previous publications.

As such, this study may in fact have been impacted by the pandemic more than is presumed when one simply theoretically considers the marketing conditions, marketing activity and budget remained largely the same in spite of the circumstances around one of the titles being published mid-COVID19. While on paper the two titles were published in roughly the same environment as the publication date was only nine months apart and not years or decades, the emotional and psychological impact the pandemic had on reader's ability to read in these times, and to read pandemic literature specifically remains to be seen.

This research study focused only on the data collected from the three biggest social media platforms used most by the publishers in South Africa. As there are a number of other social media platforms in use today such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube Pinterest and LinkedIn, the data collected will not fully represent all social media activity around the two titles in the study.

Furthermore, unless a review, interview or traditional media occurrence such as a television appearance, radio interview or publication in printed media was specifically shared on any of these three platforms, these marketing efforts were omitted from the data set. While most media outlets do to some extent mirror their activity on their social media pages in the form of reposting or tweeting a significant interview or television appearance, they do not necessarily share all content online.

This means that a review posted in a leading newspaper for either title could have had a significant impact on sales, but unless this same review was posted or shared by any party online, it would have been omitted from the data set included in this study. Nevertheless, it may be assumed that the effects of this omission will be negligible, since the publicist and digital marketer for both PRHSA and Umuzi actively try to source and collect all mentions in the media for all the titles published by the publishing houses, including paying for in-depth media tracking by third-party media monitors like Ornico specifically in order to share this online in order to convince the audience to buy the books in question.

For that reason, if a significant mention in traditional media mediums such as radio interviews, television appearances or printed newspaper or magazine articles did occur, it may be presumed that these instances would have been picked up by several sets of watchful eyes as this is part of the job description of the digital marketer and publicist alike. It may therefore be assumed that it would indeed have been shared online, and would subsequently have been included in the data collected. To clarify: the reach and impact of the original traditional media message still could not be accounted for even though the instance may have been duplicated online: if a newspaper review reached 100 000 readers, and it was shared online in an original post that received 1000 likes, only the online data point of 1000 likes would have been captured. It must be pointed out that omissions do occur, and there may be some other marketing activity not accounted for in the online data set that nevertheless had a real impact on sales.

In addition to social media marketing campaigns, publishers actively try to encourage word of mouth (WOM) marketing by sending out review copies, enlisting the help of social media influencers and by typically hosting real-world book events and launches. Concerted efforts are also made to encourage book displays in bookstores, the use of point of sale (POS) marketing material and hand-selling of books by enthusiastic booksellers. All of these marketing efforts contribute to the sales of any title, and by examining only the social media marketing activity, an incomplete picture is given of the marketing efforts that actively try to increase book sales.

A useful analogy of the marketing efforts that support any publication could be to presume that the sales success of any title rests on a table supported by four equally important legs: POS, publicity, digital marketing and the sales team. To omit or overestimate any one of these four marketing approaches would be incorrect and would subsequently result in erroneous assumptions regarding the efficacy of any of them.

As a result, aside from painting an incomplete picture of the marketing efforts around any title, by focusing solely on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, all data would not have been included in the study unless specifically reposted on any one of these platforms, even though it may have a significant impact on the sales of the book.

In addition to the possible exclusion of formal media mentions, an avid reviewer who runs a very successful blog could therefore have discussed one of the books at length, resulting in increased sales. As per the above relating to mentions in the media and in-store marketing efforts, it is however fairly standard practice for book reviewers and bloggers to share their reviews online in order to gain more traction and increase their followers. Bookstores also tend to have their own dedicated social media channels, and often engage in the online marketing of the books in their stores in just as dedicated fashion as a book reviewer trying to gain more followers.

The existence of possible bias or the halo effect due to the researcher's employment with the publishing house PRHSA should be mentioned. However, since the assumptions made in this research report are based on quantified data points juxtaposed with unbiased sales data captured by a third party namely Nielsen BookScan, there is little risk of a biased interpretation of results, as the inferences made are not subjective to any opinion held of the publishing company in question. A second potential bias that should be highlighted is that Penguin Random House is the biggest trade publishing company in the world, and therefore the results of this study may not be universally applicable to smaller or independent publishing houses.

While access to the Nielsen BookScan figures is an invaluable source of secondary data, it must be pointed out that these figures are reported on a weekly rather than a daily basis, and there is a delay of a week in each set of data.

Consequently, some inference will have to be made to compare any given week's total social media activity as pertaining to that particular week's sales figures. Conclusions on the correlation of the social media activity on the sales of the books should be considered over a longer time period as hourly or daily reporting is not possible. In addition to this, further sales may have occurred through channels that do not feed into the Nielsen database, such as third-party selling by independent book retailers.

The limitations of this research study can be summarised as follows:

1. One of the titles was published before the COVID-19 pandemic, the other during the first peak.
2. One of the books centres on a global pandemic, which negatively influenced the audience's desire to read the book.
3. For a time, the sales of non-essential items were entirely prohibited in South Africa. Even after bookshops could resume normal trading, the pandemic limited the foot traffic to bookstores, leading to much lower book sales. The economic impact of the pandemic affected the disposable income available for the sales of non-essential items such as books.
4. The pandemic had a widely reported psychological impact on readers' ability to read and enjoy books in these times.
5. Only data collected from the three biggest social media platforms was included in this study, thereby omitting any relevant data from other social media platforms.
6. Unless specifically shared on social media platforms, all instances of traditional marketing efforts such as newspaper articles and television appearances were not included.
7. Even if these marketing messages were reposted online, the original number of people reached would not be included in the social media statistics of the reposted items.
8. The positive effects of word of mouth marketing were not included as this could not be measured either online or in real life.
9. The effect of PRHSA sales team of representatives, in-store POS displays and hand-selling by booksellers cannot be calculated and is therefore not included in the data of this research study.

10. There is the possibility of subjectivity, bias or the halo effect due to the researcher's personal affiliation with the publishing house in question, as well as the global market dominance of the parent company that published both titles examined in the study.
11. The sales figures reported by Nielsen BookScan are reported on a weekly, not a daily basis and as such there is a delay of a week in each set of data.
12. Nielsen BookScan only captures the sales figures of registered bookstores: all sales by independent parties would not be included in the reported sales figures.
13. The research study focused only on two titles in the trade publishing sector, and without further studies these findings may not be presumed to be similarly applicable to non-trade and academic publishing.

1.7 Assumptions

While completing this research study, within the scope of the framework a number of assumptions were made. In brief, these are:

1. The effects of the pandemic as impacting on the book sales of *Afterland* were omitted as sales of the book is only compared to the marketing activity in the same time period, not with sales of Beukes's books pre-pandemic.
2. While lockdown had far-reaching implications on all sectors of life, for the purposes of this research project it will not be seen as a disruptive variable in terms of the data and trends under discussion. Further studies may seek to duplicate this study post-COVID-19 in order to determine whether the findings differ significantly.
3. When categorising social media posts, if no country-specific cover was included, and it was not possible to determine from either the geographic location or the timeline of the post which edition of *Afterland* was being referred to, it was included in the South Africa set of data.
4. As the two books were published within nine months of each other, and the marketing spend, publisher, publicist and sales team remained constant, the only variable was the online presence and digital activity of the author and the readership.
5. It is assumed that the absence of real-world events for both titles further reduced any disparity between the two titles, save the attributes being examined.

6. While ebook sales were possible throughout lockdown, this research paper omits the number of ebook sales obtained for both *A Sin of Omission* and *Afterland* are negligible and have therefore been omitted: only six copies of the ebook of *Afterland* have been sold, and 3 copies of *A Sin of Omission* (Nielsen BookScan, 2021).
7. Based on a substantial number of comments made online, the prescient nature of the second book that deals with a global pandemic was a real factor that discouraged even dedicated fans of the author to read the book at the present time.
8. It was assumed that significant traditional marketing events such as newspaper reviews and television appearances would be shared online, either by the publication or by the digital marketer, which would have resulted in its inclusion in the data set.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Background

As pointed out by Criswell and Canty in their original study in 2014, the intended end-result of the conversations between publishers and readers on social media is primarily for the publishers' commercial benefit. This engagement generates hype and word of mouth around the titles being promoted, and encourages people to buy the book (Criswell & Canty, 2014). The researchers go on to remark that the idea of social epidemics was first articulated by Simon Gladwell when analysing the exact moments when products go 'viral' (Criswell & Canty, 2014). According to Gladwell (2000), there are three rules that impact on this: the law of the few, the stickiness factor and the power of context (Gladwell, 2000). In order for anything, including a book, to achieve social popularity that spreads, "a product must be used by socially adept individuals, be memorable, and be released in the right environment" (Criswell & Canty, 2014).

While the existing literature on the efficacy of social media is both abundant in general terms, and limited as applicable to the publishing industry specifically, hardly any recent, peer-reviewed literature exists on the impact or application of social media as pertaining to the South African landscape first, and secondly as referring to the South African trade publishing landscape particularly. All research that is included in the following literature review must therefore be understood as referring to other countries as specified in each instance, and all similarities and inferences drawn to the local environment should be made with the clear understanding that our social-economic situation differs drastically from the examples given.

Out of necessity, non-academic sources such as global social media statistical surveys conducted by digital marketing powerhouses such as Hootsuite are included in the following research study, as these are mainly the only source of up-to-date information that have not yet been incorporated or verified by scholarly institutions.

2.2 Other disciplines

The traditional marketing mix used by organisations to help establish their brand offering depicted by McCarthy (1960) as quoted by Plume et al (2017), includes price, product, place and promotion. However, the explosion of social media alongside technological advances have resulted in the marketing environment becoming progressively more complex than originally conceptualised (Plume et al., 2017), and the marketing mix is now considered to have as many as eight different elements, including Packaging, Positioning, People and even Politics as vital mix elements (Constantinides, 2006).

Viral marketing is understood to be the key to marketing success in the 21st century (Petrescu, 2014). In order for South African publishers to remain remaining a viable presence in the new global and local economic landscape, these tectonic shifts must be identified, understood and utilised optimally going forward.

Social media is of particular benefit to marketers due to the incredible access it allows to consumers, as well as the potential for relationship development as a way of creating value for both parties (Plume et al., 2017). Some of the key characteristics of social media that makes it such a powerful tool include structure and networks, relationships, co-creation, user-generated content (UGC), electronic word of mouth (WOM) and social commerce (Plume et al., 2017).

Researchers are debating whether social media is merely an additional tool to the original marketing mix (Atkinson, 2013; Mangold & Faulds, 2009 as quoted by Plume et al., 2017), or if the rise of social media has led to a decline in the traditional communications channels such as television and radio (Bagozzi & Dholakai, 2006 as quoted by Plume et al., 2017), thereby detracting from the original marketing mix, rather than simply expanding it. Others like Fulgoni (2014) and Winer (2009) maintain that there is no evidence that traditional marketing methods are decreasing (Plume et al., 2017) even though it is clear that organisational budgets are shifting (Winer, 2009 as quoted by Plume et al., 2017).

Regardless of whether social media marketing is adding to the traditional methods, redrawing the lines on traditional media or simply offering a modern extension of the same models utilised before, the exponential rate of adoption of social media by both publishers and readers is substantial enough to warrant the close scrutiny proposed by this research report.

Digital technologies, digital media, and mobile technologies now shape and influence the nature and experience of everyday life in the Western world (Daniels et al., 2016) as well as increasingly in the rest of the globe. Gregory (2016) states that the different technologies in our shared environments have brought with them 'an era of ubiquitous computing, data gathering and data analysis', thereby ushering in a new onto-logic of sociality or the social itself (Daniels et al., 2016). Alexia Maddox writes that 'I would argue that the networked individual can be thought of as emitting a multi-modal digital signal that is evident in their sites of activity, leaving digital traces across the online environment' (Daniels et al., 2016), and by examining this digital footprint and the social engagement around a particular title, some inferences may be drawn as to the effectiveness of social media marketing as directly impacting on sales.

Most of the existing literature agrees on this: that over the last two decades, advances in digital technology have fundamentally transformed the way in which we do business, work and live. As new technologies emerge, they offer new possibilities in addressing increasingly complex economic and social problems (Pan & Sandeep, 2018), including the effective marketing and selling of books in the South African publishing landscape.

Conversely, Tom Standage argues that social media is not new, but instead illustrates that the uses of, and social media changes brought about by the evolving media landscape of the past two millennia mirror the uses of, and social changes brought about by the evolving media landscape of the past two decades (Standage, 2013). However, whether the implications of social media is purely a recent phenomenon or has long-standing roots, it remains imperative for organisations such as South African publishers to fully understand the changing behaviour of consumers, the variety and effectiveness of platforms and the changing culture (Plume et al., 2017) in order to create effective marketing strategies that will keep selling books in this dynamic online environment.

2. 3 Defining social media marketing

2.3.1 Social media

Social media can be defined as internet-based applications and websites that promote the sharing of user-generated content, communication, and participation on a large scale (Cooper, 2021). Starting in the early 2000s, social media started to rise to prominence on the internet. Social media applications include platforms such as personal or company blogs, social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and audio podcasts (Cooper, 2021). While the aim of social media was initially to make it easier for individuals to communicate and engage in conversations, over time it is increasingly being used for marketing, and many users turn to social media as an alternative source of news.

According to the most recent global statistics published in January of this year (Kemp, 2021), there are now 4.20 billion social media users around the world. This figure has grown by 490 million over the past 12 months, delivering year-on-year growth of more than 13%. The number of social media users is now equivalent to more than 53% of the world's total population.

2.3.2 Classification of social media types

According to Patrick Cooper (2021), social media can be classified in various ways:

- A social network is any application that allows its users to create their own profile and build a list of friends. The most popular example of this is Facebook, launched in 2004.
- A blog allows users to generate a variety of content for publication on the internet.
- Forums are applications that allow users to voice their opinion on a number of topics. Users can then download and stream these recordings. WordPress is one of the biggest blog hosting platforms.
- 'Wikis' are collaborate websites that allow users to generation informational content on any number of topics. The most famous of these is Wikipedia, a crowdsourced encyclopaedia.
- Multiplayer online games are a form of social media that allows users to communicate with other players while participating in a virtual world, for example World of Warcraft.

2.3.3 Social media marketing

Over the last twenty years, social media has increasingly become a vital tool used in marketing. Companies can create inexpensive, timely advertisements to be shared directly with the social media users. The appeal of this inexpensive alternative to traditional marketing channels, paired with the staggering number of users who elect to be part of these online communities have resulted in most companies having at least some kind of social media marketing plan, and sometimes relying exclusively on social media marketing to communicate with their followers (Cooper, 2021).

On Facebook, companies can create branded social media profiles specifically for social media marketing purposes. Through a number of strategies such as online giveaways, incentives, engaging content and dedicated relationship-building with their target audience, they build up an online following. Users are encouraged to 'like' these corporate pages, effectively opting in to get updates on new products, special offers and general communications from them (Cooper, 2021).

2.3.4 Influencer marketing

In addition to posting both paid and unpaid advertisements on their platforms, companies are increasingly taking advantage of influencer marketing, which entails companies partnering with suitable individuals who eschew the values of the company and who, in return for some form of remuneration, whether monetary or sponsored articles, broadcast advertisements about the company to their typically substantial numbers of social media followers (Cooper, 2021).

2.3.5 Facebook

Facebook is by far the largest social media network in the world today, with more than 15.52 billion users worldwide, who spend an average of 23 minutes 25 seconds on the page per day, each visiting up to 6 pages each time (Kemp, 2021). In addition to being the biggest social media platform, Facebook is the third-biggest website in the world overall, outranked by only Google and YouTube in first and second place respectively.

Facebook was launched in 2004 by former Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg, and has since gone from strength to strength, bringing people together in unprecedented ways and provided innovative sharing and communication tools. Nevertheless, the site and its policies has in recent years been plagued by increasingly serious concerns about users' privacy and safety (Skemp, 2020). Facebook allows users to build a personal profile that includes pictures and cultural interests, to exchange messages, and to share thoughts, pictures, and videos (Cooper, 2021).

2.3.6 Twitter

Kerry Skemp (2021) defines Twitter as: "An online microblogging site where users can find and share information and messages in 280-character increments." One of the pioneering social media platforms co-founded in 2006 Jack Dorsey and Christopher Isaac Stone. Twitter enabled unprecedented real-time communication between people around the world, as well as widespread visibility into that communication. It allows users to share and find information and messages in 280-character increments. Today Twitter is an immensely popular social networking and microblogging website that grew exponentially since it was launched.
In 2021, Twitter had 3.24 billion users globally, each spending an average of 15 minutes per day on the network (Skemp, 2020).

Over the years, Twitter has proved to be an invaluable social media marketing tool, primarily as a content sharing and discovery application. Unlike Facebook where users mostly interact with a chosen, select group of close friends, Twitter is relatively open. Any user can follow another user, unless their account is specifically set up to be private by the user. Skemp remarks: "This makes the service almost as concerned with the flow of information as the identity of the people exchanging it, and has led to many beneficial uses such as political activism and citizen journalism" (Skemp, 2021).

The application is significant for the way it allows people to organize quickly. For example, Twitter was used to rally individuals for political protests around the world. Nowadays politicians utilize it as a way to garner support and interact with voters. This free flow of information that can be disseminated by one person to the masses is not without its problems and consequences, as has been made evident by the recent lifetime ban of the former

President of the United States Donald Trump, who incited his followers via Twitter to storm the Capitol in protest to the contested results of the US elections (Cooper, 2021).

2.3.7 Instagram

Instagram is a photo and video social networking platform founded in 2010 by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger. It was sold to Facebook in 2012 for US$1 billion in cash and stock. Users can upload content with or without custom filters, tag it with hashtags to connect to similar topics elsewhere on the platform, and either make their posts public, or share it only with a limited number of users. Users can like photos, and share other users' posts to their own timelines (Siegler, 2010). In the words of co-founder Mike Krieger, "I think that communicating via images is one of these mediums that you're going to see take off over the next few years because of a fundamental shift in the enabling technology" (Siegler, 2010).

Interestingly, while not the case in South Africa, on a global level Instagram outranks Twitter quite significantly, with 3.76 billion users who spend an average of 17 minutes 35 seconds on the platform per visit (Kemp, 2021).

2.4 Defining trade publishing

According to the Oxford Handbook of Publishing (Thompson, 2019), trade publishing can be defined as general-interest titles, both fiction and non-fiction, written specifically for a non-specialist readership, and sold through the general retail chains, such as Exclusive Books, Bargain Books, Readers' Warehouse and CNA. It is usually what the general public think of when they think of books: those fun, interesting or insightful books they can buy at their local bookstore.

In South Africa, publishing houses typically focus on three broad market areas: Academic, Education and Trade. According to the definition of the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA), these three focus areas can be described as follows:

- Academic (or higher education) publishing provides learning materials for the tertiary market. This means all material published for post-school levels of education.
- Education publishing is aimed at the school market, from pre-school to Grade 12, and provides learning materials for learners and support materials for teachers.

- Trade publishing provides the kinds of books that you will find at bookstores in your local shopping mall. Publishing houses generally specialise in one or two of these market areas (PASA, 2019).

In this research study, only two trade publishing titles were examined, even though it must be pointed out that the other two spheres of publishing in South Africa contribute significantly to the overall publishing market in the country.

2.5 The South African digital landscape

According to the most recent digital statistics available, in January 2021 South Africa had a total population of 59.67 million. The country has more than 100.6 million mobile connections, which is 168.5% of the total population. 38.19 million South Africans use the internet, and there are 25 million active social media users (Kemp, 2021).

The South African population currently consists of 50.7% females and 49.3% males, showing an increase in the total annual population of +1.3%. The average daily time that South African internet users aged 16 to 64 spend online is estimated to be as follows: 10 hours 6 minutes is spent using the internet for different reasons on all devices. Of this, 3 hours 32 minutes are spent on all social media platforms combined. The top websites in South Africa in terms of traffic in December 2020 were, in descending order: Google.com (349 million visits), YouTube.com (101 million visits), Facebook.com (75.9 million visits), and Google.co.za (38.9 million visits). In South Africa, Instagram only ranks in the 11th place (17.2 million visits) and Twitter is the 18th busiest website (11.4 million visits) (Constine, 2016).

It is estimated that 96.7% of internet users in South Africa use social networking apps, while 65.3% use shopping apps – making it clear that understanding the impact of social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry as relating specifically to sales is a metric that is of vital importance to this publishing sector now and going forward.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research methodology

The purpose of this research paper is to conduct quantitative research using secondary data collected from Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in order to analyse the impact of social media marketing within the South African publishing industry. It seeks to develop a better understanding of the direct value of social media marketing spend, both in terms of human resources and fiscal budget as impacting directly on the sales of a book.

Quantitative data was collected by gathering all Facebook posts, tweets and Instagram posts for both titles on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, from the first instance where either book is mentioned online, until the predetermined end date of 31 January 2021. The data was collected through a comprehensive manual data scrape by the researcher. All data points were then manually categorised, classified and analysed through numerical comparisons on the timeline as relating to the sales of the books (Hackett, 2019).

The statistics that were then inferred from analysing the data allowed the researcher to identify the causal relationship between different concepts (Hackett, 2019), in this case the impact of social media marketing on the sales of two local fiction titles within the South African trade publishing landscape.

By focusing on two titles published by the same publishing group within nine months of each other, a number of key variables were kept constant, which improved the accuracy of the research conclusions. While one title was published pre-COVID-19 and the other was published during the pandemic, the impact of the global situation effectively neutralised the one factor that noticeably differed in the marketing of the two titles, namely real-world author events.

For the purpose of this study, the pandemic unintentionally resulted in further levelling the playing field between the one elderly author who is unable to conduct a publicity tour for her books, and the other who famously has very well-attended real life book events that undoubtedly results in increased sales due to her popularity.

Both titles were published in the same socio-economic market in South Africa, by the same publishing company: the parent group PRHSA, and the local imprint, Umuzi. The same digital budget was spent on both titles, and all members of both the publishing and the marketing team were identical. The publicist responsible for the marketing campaign remained constant, as did the digital marketer responsible for the digital marketing campaign. Both authors have published a number of critically acclaimed titles and have an existing following, although they do differ in one of the key variables that will be examined: the one has a strong online following, while the other does not.

It remains to be seen if the unprecedented occurrence of the global COVID-19 pandemic had a noticeable effect on the long-term sales of the second title. While customers were initially prohibited from going to bookstores they could still purchase the book and e-book online via online retail partners such as Exclusive Books, Loot, Takealot and Bargain Books. Furthermore, the economic effects of the pandemic as impacting on this research study may be omitted within the scope of this report as the sales data of *Afterland* is not compared with the sales of the same author's books pre-COVID-19, but is only juxtaposed to its own social media marketing within the same period: comparing apples with apples.

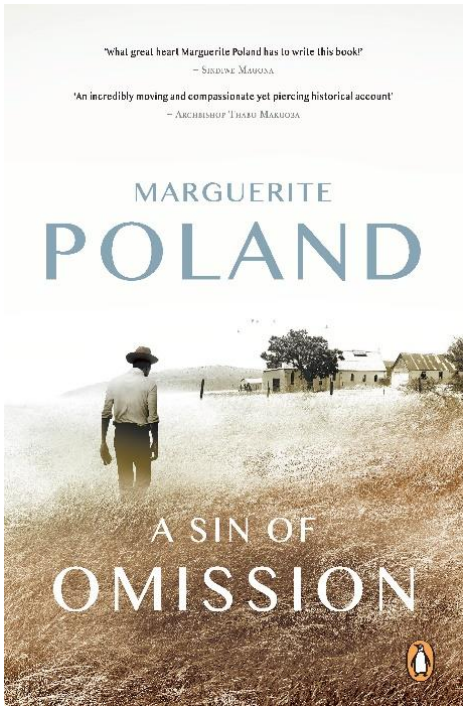
Therefore, although the lockdown undoubtedly has far-reaching implications on all sectors of life, for the purposes of this research project it will not be seen as a disruptive variable in terms of the data and trends under discussion. Further studies may seek to duplicate this study post-COVID-19 in order to determine whether the findings differ significantly.

3.2 The titles

The first title, *A Sin of Omission* by Marguerite Poland, is a work of historical fiction based on a true story. Set in the Eastern Cape, Stephen Malusi Mzamane, a young Anglican priest, who must journey to his mother's rural home to inform her of his elder brother's death. First educated at the Native College in Grahamstown, Stephen was sent to England in 1869 for training at the Missionary College in Canterbury. On his return to South Africa, relegated to a dilapidated mission near Fort Beaufort, he had to confront not only the prejudices of a colonial society but the discrimination within the Church itself.

Conflicted between his loyalties to the amaNgqika people, for whom his brother fought, and the colonial cause he as Reverend Mzamane is expected to uphold, Stephen's journey to his mother's home proves decisive in resolving the contradictions that tear at his heart.

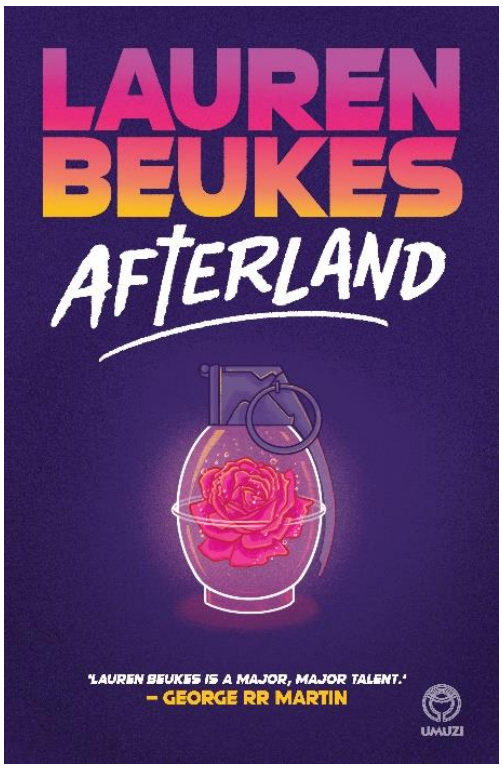
Figure 1 A Sin of Omission Paperback, R290. October 2019 (Umuzi)



The author Marguerite Poland has published a number of children's books and adult novels. In her career spanning more than 35 years, she has won or been shortlisted for the CNA Award, the M-Net Award, the Nielsen Booksellers Choice Award, the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, the Sir Percy Fitzpatrick Award for Children's Literature, a SALA Lifetime Achievement Award, as well as the Ingwazi Award and the National Order of Ikhamanga (Silver) by the South African President for her contribution to African languages.

The second title is *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes. It is a work of speculative fiction set in a future where most of the men are dead. As per the book's Title Information sheet, the story follows a woman named Cole and her twelve-year-old son Miles who are on the run from Cole's sister, Billie. Miles is one of the lucky survivors of a global pandemic, but in a world of women, that also makes him a hot commodity. The Department of Men wants to lock him away in quarantine, a sinister cult of neon nuns want to claim him for its own as the answer to their prayers, and boy traffickers are close on their heels, thanks to Billie, Cole's ruthless sister, whom Cole thought she left for dead.

Figure 2 Afterland Paperback, R290, June 2020 (Umuzi)



Lauren Beukes is the author of *The Shining Girls*, a novel that has been published internationally and translated into 26 languages. Her other books include *Moxyland*, *Maverick, Broken Monsters*, and *Zoo City*, for which she won the Arthur C Clarke Award. She's the author of five critically acclaimed high concept novels, a short story collection, and a pop-history on extraordinary women from South Africa's past. Her work has been hailed by the likes of Stephen King, Gillian Flynn, and George R.R. Martin. She has won several awards over the last ten years, including The Arthur C Clarke Award, The University of Johannesburg Prize, the Strand Critics Choice Award, The Kitschiest Red Tentacle, The August Derleth Prize, RT Thriller of the Year, Exclusive Books Booksellers Choice Award and the prestigious Mbokodo Award for women in the creative arts from South Africa's Department of Arts and Culture (Beukes, 2020).

3.3. Research design

In the original study, Criswell and Canty (2014) specifically selected two titles that allowed them to examine a number of variables that had the most impact on sales. Both of their titles were adult fiction titles in the 'fantasy' genre, both were published within 8 months of each other, and therefore the same websites and social media opportunities were available to both marketing teams of both titles. Contrary to the replicated study however, these two titles were not published by the same publisher, but one title was published by Bloomsbury, while the other was published by Hodder & Stoughton (Criswell & Canty, 2014).

The first title they examined was *The Song of Achilles* by Madeleine Miller, a debut author with no existing fan base at the time when the book was first published. The book was critically well-received and went on to win the Orange Prize for Women's Fiction in 2012. The original researchers concluded that *The Song of Achilles* highlighted the effects of social media on debut titles, and the impact of literary awards on social media activity and sales (Criswell & Canty, 2014). This debut author had no existing online fan base or social media presence when the social media marketing campaign kicked off.

The second title they examined was *The Wind Through The Keyhole* by Stephen King, which forms part of his Dark Tower series, consisting of eight books. Stephen Kings is a well-known, established author with a significant and dedicated fan base. As Criswell and Canty (2014) remark: 'with such an iconic author and with such an enthusiastic fan base, there was a reliable, passionate community around the upcoming title'.

In this research study, two suitable titles have been identified to reliably illustrate the same variables. *A Sin of Omission* by Marguerite Poland is a work of historical fiction, and although the author is highly regarded, her fan base consists of a niche audience. The author herself has no online presence whatsoever. A standard digital marketing campaign was launched for this title, and after the initial marketing online, almost all social media activity died down. The book was then nominated for the prestigious international 2020 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, and after first being selected for the longlist, and subsequently shortlisted, a renewed interest can be seen in the social media marketing around this title following the announcement.

While ultimately not being announced as the winner of the prize at the awards ceremony that took place online on 12 June 2020, it was interesting to track the timeline from the initial release, over the quiet period when social media marketing had mostly died down, and then to see the renewed interest online when the book made the shortlist.

The second title *Afterland* similarly resembles the Stephen King novel in the original study. Lauren Beukes is arguably one of South Africa's most successful contemporary writers, with some of her books being published both locally and internationally in 24 countries, with translations in more than 26 languages. *Afterland*, her most recent work, was published in May 2020, with the e-book version being released before the scheduled release date of the printed edition due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the printing and delivery of the physical copy. The physical book was published with a different jacket in the United States of America (USA) in September 2020. This book has been eagerly awaited by Beukes' loyal fan base in the five years since her last publication, and an extensive social media marketing campaign was planned to promote the book.

The table below highlights the key differences in the two studies examined in the original study, and the two titles that were the proposed study.

Table 1 Key differences between the original study (2014) and the replication (2021)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Original Study by Criswell and Canty (2014)</th><th colspan="2">Research Study (2021)</th></tr>
<tr><td>The Song of Achilles</td><td>The Wind Through the Keyhole</td><td>A Sin of Omission</td><td>Afterland</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Published in the UK</td><td colspan="2">Published in South Africa</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Award-winning authors</td><td colspan="2">Published by Umuzi, imprint of PRHSA</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Adult fiction titles in the 'fantasy' genre</td><td colspan="2">No real-world marketing events</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="6">Published within 8 months of each other</td><td colspan="2">Established, award-winning authors</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Published within 9 months of each other</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Similar websites and social media opportunities available</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Identical marketing team</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Identical publishing team</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Identical digital marketing budget</td></tr>
</table>

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing	Published by Hodder & Stoughton	Published by Penguin Random House (Umuzi)	Published by Penguin Random House (Umuzi)
Overall Sales: 98 569	Overall Sales: 55 183	Overall Sales: 2248	Overall Sales: 1368
Overall Value of Sales: £618,796,94	Overall Value of Sales: £477,630,35	Overall Value of Sales: R540739.45	Overall Value of Sales: R348461.14
Hardback Sales: 4499	Hardback Sales: 34236	N/A	N/A
Paperback Sales: 94,070	Paperback Sales: 20,947	Paperback Sales: 3018	Paperback Sales: 3025
Number of comments created by Facebook Pages: 42	Number of comments created by Facebook Pages:19	Number of comments created by Facebook Pages: 367	Number of comments created by Facebook Pages: 292
Number of Facebook 'likes' received: 970	Number of Facebook 'likes' received: 3476	Number of Facebook 'likes' received: 4478	Number of Facebook 'likes' received: 4301
Number of re-comments received: 145	Number of re-comments received: 1073	Number of re-comments received: 275	Number of re-comments received: 141
Debut author	Established author	Published before COVID-19	Published during COVID-19
Winner of one prestigious award	Winner of numerous prestigious awards	No real-world marketing events due to author's age and health	No real-world marketing events due to COVID-19 lockdown restrictions
No existing fan base	Massive established and devoted fan base	No existing online social presence	Established online following and social media presence
		Narrative historical fiction	Speculative science fiction

3.3. Research instruments

The data needed for this research study was readily available both in the public spheres of Facebook and Twitter that can be accessed at any time by anyone with access to these platforms. The data are also present in the metadata compiled by both platforms, accessible only to the administrator of pages such as the PRHSA and Umuzi social media pages which the researcher oversees in her professional capacity as digital marketer for PRHSA. Lastly, Nielsen BookScan provided the required data in terms of the book sales, and access to these precise figures was kindly extended by Penguin Random House South Africa for both titles. Express, written permission was granted by the company to allow the inclusion of these figures in this research report for academic purposes.

As such, a significant amount of verified, existing secondary data in the form of quantified, aggregated time stamped data was available that specifically addresses the research problem (Leedy, P.D; Ormrod, 2013).

Figure 3 The different covers of the South African, United Kingdom and United States editions of Afterland



While *Afterland* was also published internationally in both the United Kingdom and the United States, all sales data for these two editions were omitted in this study. As each edition has a distinctive cover, it was possible to identify the data points in the form of Facebook posts, tweets and Instagram posts that pertain specifically to each edition, thereby omitting incorrect data with some accuracy.

Where no cover was included in these data entries, it was possible to determine either by the poster's location (geocaches) or the timeline where they were based. Only data relating specifically to the South African edition of *Afterland* was included in this study. Where no distinction could be made as to which edition was being referred to, those data points were included in the data set as the users would also not be able to distinguish, and therefore the any marketing effect resulting from these posts may be assumed to refer to all three editions of the book.

After obtaining all the necessary data by means of a comprehensive manual data scrape, all data points were classified and categorised as will be elaborated in Chapter 4. A manual statistical analysis of the data was then completed in order to illustrate all patterns and variables in order to make inferences for the purpose of answering the problem statement and research questions stated in Chapter 1. This analysis will be presented in Chapter 5.

3.3.1 Social media platforms

For the purpose of this research report, only the data generated on the three biggest social media platforms namely Facebook, Twitter and Instagram was included. While a significant number of other digital marketing platforms exist such as reviewer's blogs, various online book discussion forums like Goodreads and The Good Book Appreciation Society, video streaming platforms like YouTube, as well as different platforms such as Pinterest, TikTok and Vimeo, these were not included or examined within the limitations of this research report. The nature of book marketing and the number of users indicate that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the three marketing tools most used by the publishing industry globally, and as such the research study focused only on these three.

Based on the incredible scope, pervasiveness and longevity, these three platforms warranted inclusion over all others: 2020 Facebook has 2.45 billion active monthly users, while Twitter has 330 million active monthly users while Instagram now has more than 1 billion monthly users (Newberry, 2021).

In South Africa specifically, 40% of South Africa's population are active on social media, totally 22.89 million people out of a total population of over 57 million (Barr, 2020).

There is a 62% internet penetration rate in South Africa, meaning there are 36.54 million internet users. According to Facebook, the number of South African people that can be reached on Facebook itself is 20 million, and 4 million South Africans use Instagram, which is also owned by the same parent company (Barr, 2020). Twitter reports that in 2020 2.28 million South African users could be reached on that platform (Barr, 2020).

According to Simon Kemp on behalf of Hootsuite (Kemp, 2021), of the 75.9 million monthly Facebook users in December 2020, each user spent an average of 21 minutes 46 seconds on the platform and visited 6.91 pages in that time. Of the 17.2 million users in the same month, each user spent an average of 16 minutes 44 seconds on the platform looking at 6.28 different accounts, and of the 11.4 million Twitter users, each spent roughly 13 minutes 51 seconds on the page, looking at 5.49 different Twitter accounts.

3.3.2 Facebook

Facebook is by far the biggest of all the social networks, based on nearly all measures including number of daily users, total time spent on the platform every day, global presence and pervasiveness, proving without a doubt that this monolith platform is still absolutely imperative for marketers in all spheres to use.

As of 2021, Facebook has 2.74 billion monthly active users, which is an increase of 12% year-on-year from September 2019. Facebook reaches 59% of the world's social networking population, and has the distinction of being the only social platform to reach more than half of all social media users. Facebook is the world's third most visited website overall, and is outranked only by Google and YouTube. Facebook users alone spend an average of 34 minutes per day using the platform (Newberry, 2021).

In South Africa specifically, in 2020 there were 20 million active users on Facebook. The South African Facebook audience comprises of 51.3% female users and 48.7% male users. The average engagement rate for any kind of post on a Facebook page is 3.13%, while engagement on video posts sit at 7.6%, photo posts at 4.13% and link posts result in an engagement rate of 2.18% (Barr, 2020).

While the original study by Criswell and Canty (2014) further limited the data they collected only to the Facebook pages officially run by the publishers of the two titles included in their research report, namely Hodder & Stoughton and Bloomsbury, this study includes all posts made by all interested parties on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram in order to present a more comprehensive representation of the social media marketing activity. The reason for this is that the Word Of Mouth (WOM) marketing strategy in the form of influencers and reviewers has in recent years become a key tool for publishers in the present climate: factors which was not as prevalent or crucial when the initial study was conducted in 2014 in the United Kingdom.

3.3.3. Twitter

It is estimated that in 2021 Twitter has 187 million daily active users, with a total audience of 353 million users. This number is up 8% since 2020, which is an increase of 27 million users. Twitter's user base is further predicted to grow another 2.4% in 2021 (Newberry, 2021). Additionally, Twitter generated a higher number of individual interactions than Facebook did in the original study (Criswell & Canty, 2014). South Africa has 2.28 million active users on Twitter, of which 38.3% is female, and 61.7% is male (Barr, 2020).

For this research study, all tweets about both titles were manually collected and analysed, regardless of who posted them. Instead of limiting the data collected on this platform to only PRHSA and Umuzi's official Twitter pages, all tweets about both books were collated from all comments and threads for both titles from the first mention until the end date. This provided a timeline of the total Twitter activity for all users.

While all tweets were included, specific care was taken to ensure that all subsequent comments on any tweet was omitted when the discussion strayed from the original topic, the books. Care was taken by the researcher to establish whether these additional comments continued to be specifically centred about the books in question, and if so, it was recorded and included in the data. This was done through careful reading and evaluation of each post, tweet and comment.

While no strictly scientific method could be followed in doing so, common sense was applied to gauge whether subsequent comments centred around the books in question, or whether it veered off-topic, for example when Lauren Beukes' book sparked numerous comments on the nature of transgender identity, what it means to be male or female, society's treatment or marginalisation of non-binary or transgender individuals and similar conversations.

Subsequent comments that were included revolved directly around the book or author, logistical enquiries about price and availability, comments on the reader's experience of the book, or anything that could reasonably be deemed to relate specifically to the book in question.

3.3.4. Instagram

While the original work by Chriswell and Canty (2014) only examined Facebook and Twitter as the two biggest social media marketing platforms for book promotion, this research study includes Instagram as the third biggest online marketing tool.

In the years that have passed since the original study, Instagram has become a significant role player in online marketing in general globally, and trade book publishing in South Africa in particular, and it would be an oversight to exclude such an important digital marketing platform in any study of the effects of online marketing. The increased importance of this social media platform can be seen in the increase in the size of the platform's user base, which grew from 200 million active users in 2014 (Constine, 2016) when the original study was conducted, to 1.074 billion Instagram users worldwide in 2021 (Moshin, 2021).

While the back-end statistical information available for the page administrator for Instagram is not as detailed as that of Facebook – in spite of being owned by the same parent company – the visual appeal of books has become a key marketing angle that cannot be ignored in any online marketing plan, nor can the potential impact of Instagram marketing on sales be discounted without jeopardising the validity of the findings.

More than 1 billion users use Instagram every month (Newberry, 2021) and (Moshin, 2021), spending an average of 30 minutes per day on the platform, tapping on 130 million shopping posts every month. 81% of the 1 billion users use Instagram to research products and services, and 50% have visited a website to make a purchase after seeing a product being advertised (Newberry, 2021).

In South Africa, Facebook – the owner of Instagram – reports an average of 4 million users, consisting of 52.5% female and 47.5% male users in 2020 (Barr, 2020).

In addition to this staggering growth of Instagram as a marketing platform since the original study was undertaken in 2014, 2020 in particular was a year of new developments at Instagram, with some very interesting new Instagram statistics emerging along the way. Now much more than a photo-sharing platform, Instagram has launched a host of features to help businesses market and sell directly from the app (Newberry, 2021) and (Moshin, 2021).

3.4 Procedure for data collection

All posts, tweets and mentions on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram was collected through a meticulous manual data scrape, starting from the first mention of either title on any platform using the search functionality and built-in reporting tools provided by the platforms. Data points were obtained by searching the online platforms with a combination of key words, including the titles of the books, the names of the authors, all relevant user names, all possible permutations of all hashtags relating to either title, and from visually combing through social media feeds to include visual elements that may have no written description that would come up in a search, yet which would warrant inclusion as relating to the book. The latter was necessary as especially Instagram is a visual tool and users often post images without necessarily taking great care to include a full description or the relevant tagging.

After collecting every possible mention by taking a screenshot of each post, all the data elements were then manually classified and categorised into different tables for each book and each platform. This included making a note of the date and time on which a post was made, who was the author, what type of media was used, how many likes, shares and comments each post received and what the content was, such as a competition entry, an event invitation, a review or a press release.

Table 2 Categories to define user groups on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

All publishers	Individual publisher	Readers	Bloggers
Reviewers	Booksellers	Author	Libraries

In order to produce accurate data, all data was then sorted by date from the first mention of either title on all platforms. All duplicates and possible errors were removed, such as erroneously capturing the same post twice if it came up under different search terms. Where some data elements were absent or incomplete, a second review was undertaken in order to try and fill the gaps, such as going back to any post and applying various search techniques in order to complete the missing pieces. For example, if a video was posted by one of the booksellers, the total number of views would be added if this was not included in the first data collection procedure, or if the date of a post was missing, every effort was made to track the post and determine the missing information.

Once the fidelity of the data collection was established as much as could be achieved without having access to all the back-end platforms of the different users as is only available to each page's administrator, I proceeded to manually categorise each data entry into a database in Excel.

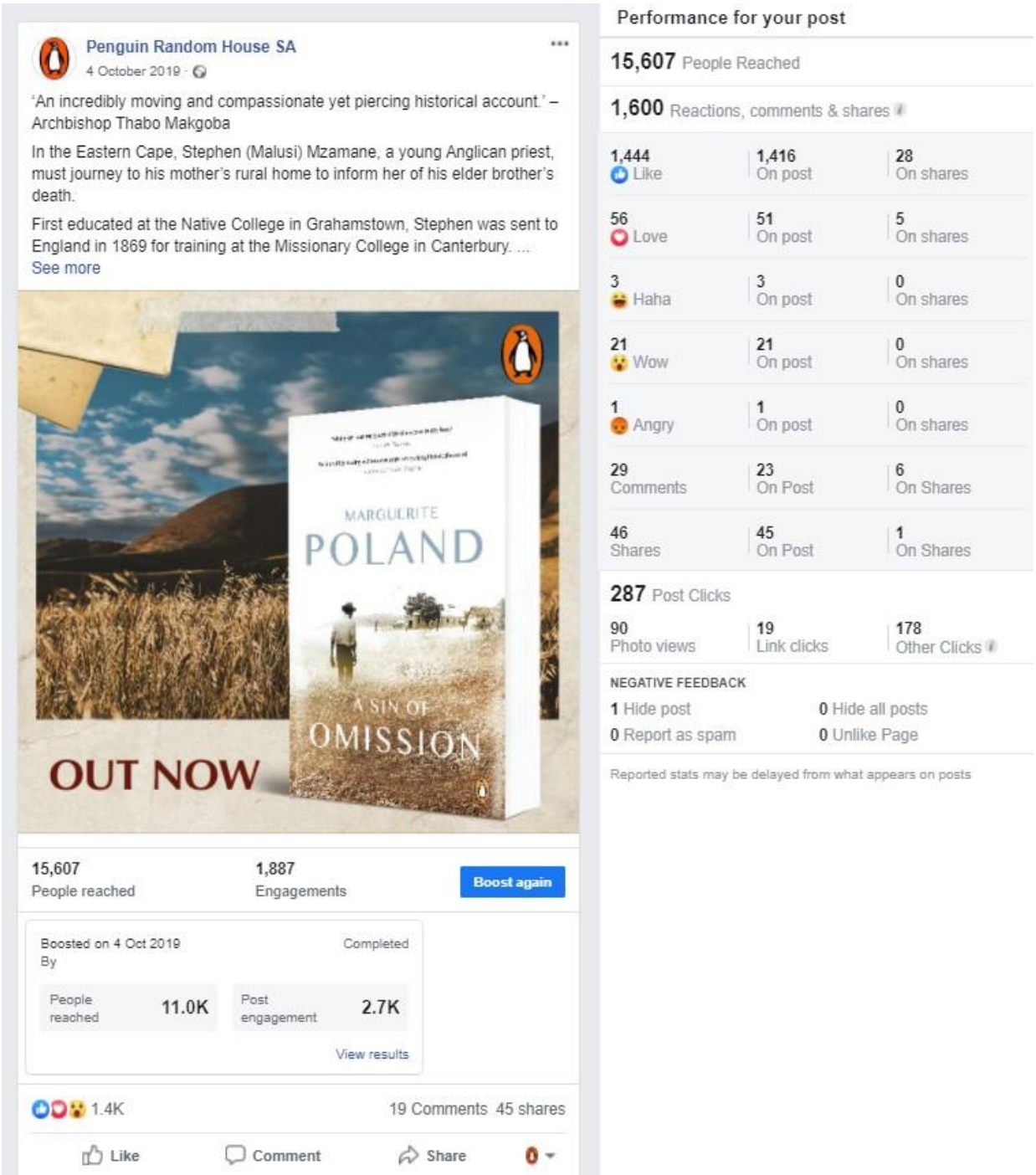
Table 3 Categories to define Facebook, Twitter and Instagram users and content types

Page	Readers	Booksellers	Publisher
Text	Image	Video	Library

The detailed spreadsheets compiled allowed me to track certain key identifiers predetermined as imperative to the study. The characteristics that were noted include who was the author of the post (the publisher, the author, booksellers, readers, reviewers or institutions like libraries), the date of the post, the number of likes, retweets and shares each post had received, the reach it obtained, whether the data entry was text, a video clip, a sound clip, an event invitation, a review or an extract.

Some of the characteristics mentioned above could be captured from the statistical information provided by the social media platforms themselves, such as the insights provided by Facebook and Twitter as a back-end function available only to the administrator of a business page. The researcher had access to this privileged information through their role as Admin for these business pages due to being employed as the digital marketer of both PRHSA and Umuzi.

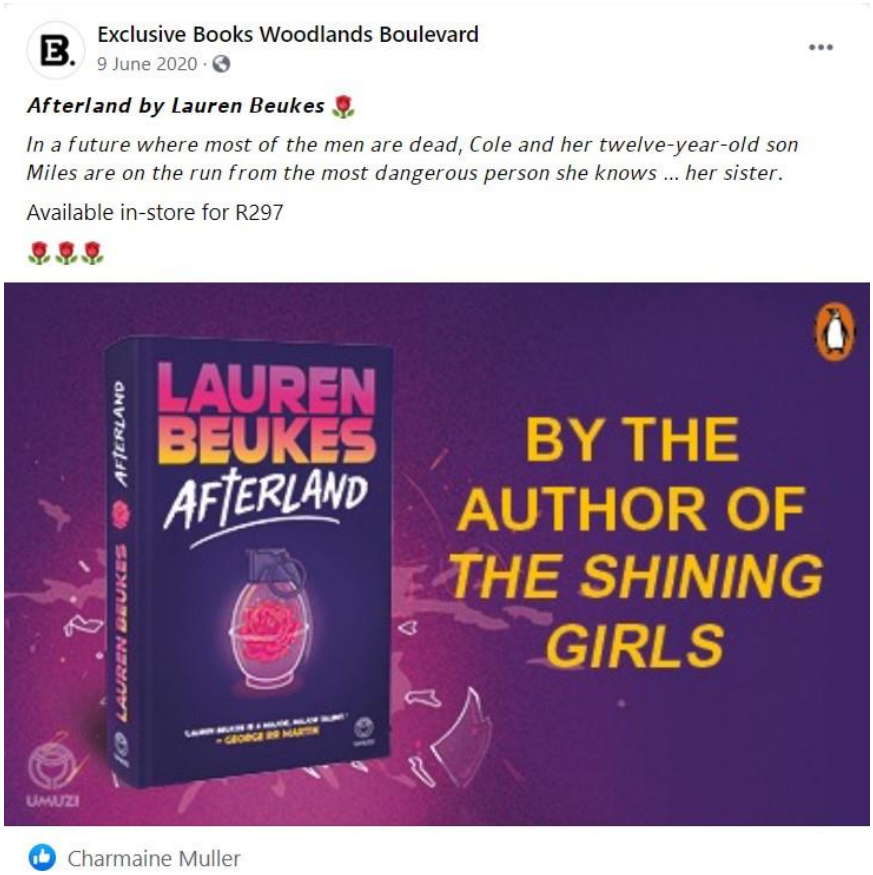
Figure 4 Example of the backend data available to the administrator of a business page



However, for all instances where data was collected from any source other than the publishers' official pages it was not possible to view the back-end statistics gathered by the platforms themselves, and inferences had to be made based on the public data that was available. For instance the reach of all other posts by booksellers or libraries could not be included as this is not shown to the general public. While interacting with any post made by another page but your own, only the publicly visible number of likes and shares any post achieved is usually shown.

While it might be tempting to therefore consider excluding all posts made by any parties other than the publisher as the back-end information could not be determined, the importance of multiple single Instagram posts by general readers, reviewers and fans of the authors in the effective WOM marketing cannot be excluded as pertaining to the overall online marketing effort of the two titles being reviewed. Therefore, although some of the detailed statistical information may not have been collected, as a whole the more significant omission would have been not to include the third party Instagram data in the research study.

Figure 5 Example of the limited data available to the public for social media posts



While the data collected therefore do not include all true figures for all posts, every effort has been made to provide as complete information as possible. In this regard, this research paper differs from the original work done by Criswell and Canty (2014) as they were not affiliated with either publisher of the two titles studied in their research work, but had to rely solely on data gathered from the public domain.

Therefore, while this research study is not without a number of limitations and shortcomings as outlined in Chapter 1, the data collection procedure of this duplicated research study attempted to be as complete as possible.

Table 4 Key figures for the titles (Note - all figures up to 31 January 2021)

	A Sin of Omission	*Afterland*
Author	Marguerite Poland	Lauren Beukes
ISBN	9781485904199	9781415210444
Publisher	Penguin Random House South Africa	Penguin Random House South Africa
Imprint	Penguin Random House	Umuzi
Publication date	30/09/2019	29/06/2020
Overall sales pbook South Africa	2248	1368
Overall sales ebook (global)	21,682	37,068
Overall sales ebook (Nielsen)	3	6
Overall value of sales pbook South Africa	R540739.45	R348461.14
Overall value ebook sales (Nielsen)	R317	R1,143
Number of tweets about the book	79	239
Number of retweets about the book	211	541
Number of likes on Twitter	475	2,344
Number of comments created by Twitter users	17	199
Number of Facebook 'likes' received	4,478	4,301
Facebook reach	75,076	71,290
Number of comments created by Facebook pages	367	292
Number of posts on Facebook	132	102
Number of shares on Facebook	275	141
Number of posts on Instagram	25	44
Number of likes on Instagram	1,446	1,881

Due to the researcher's current employment with the publishing house that published both titles examined in the research study, the researcher had full access to the official Nielsen BookScan sales figures for both titles and was given written permission to use this data and include it in the research.

This allowed for the inclusion of critical sales data that is usually impossible to obtain as a member of the public as it is of a sensitive nature and may typically not be shared outside of the organisation. This made it possible for the researcher to obtain and include the correct and complete sales information for the time period in question in order to determine what the correlation between social media activity and book sales are, if any.

3.5 Data analysis and interpretation

The quantitative data for this research study was collected sequentially (Creswell, 2009) starting from the first mention of either title on all three social media platforms. After collecting all data entries, the data were classified according to predetermined identifiers as explained above.

Once categorised, the manual data analysis involved data transformation into a number of tables, graphs and visual representations that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. This includes a tabulation of the key figures for each title, which includes the overall sales, the overall value of all sales, the number of tweets about each book, the number of posts, comments and likes for each book; a categorisation of the different Facebook users and content types such as readers, booksellers, publisher, newspapers, print media; pie charts to denote the distribution of tweets or posts per user group for each title and graphs showing the correspondence between social media activity and sales activity.

3.6 Conclusion

While every effort has been made to collect and present the most complete and accurate data set possible, it was not possible to obtain all relevant data as produced by parties other than the publishers of the books. The marketing effort put into the successful publication of any title is also a combination of various strategies executed by a number of invested parties such as the sales reps, publicists, authors, publishers, marketing team and digital marketer. The impact of digital marketing on sales must therefore be understood to have been supported in numerous ways by all the other marketing efforts undertaken in other areas at the same time, resulting in the total marketing effort for each title.

CHAPTER 4: DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the different sets of data obtained and analysed in this study will be presented and explained, while the data analysis and discussion of the results of the research study will follow in Chapter 5. This chapter includes a breakdown of the secondary data that exists online and in the form of sales reports which was obtained by manual data capturing by the researcher from a number of verified sources such as Nielsen BookScan South Africa, Facebook Analytics, Twitter Analytics and Instagram. The raw secondary data collected by the comprehensive data scrape across all platforms included in the study forms the primary data for this research study.

4.2 Overview of social media marketing activity for *A Sin of Omission*

The social media marketing campaign for *A Sin of Omission* by Marguerite Poland was proactive at first as the book received the standard digital marketing management treatment that is given to all new key titles published by PRHSA and Umuzi. This standard digital marketing plan entailed the following:

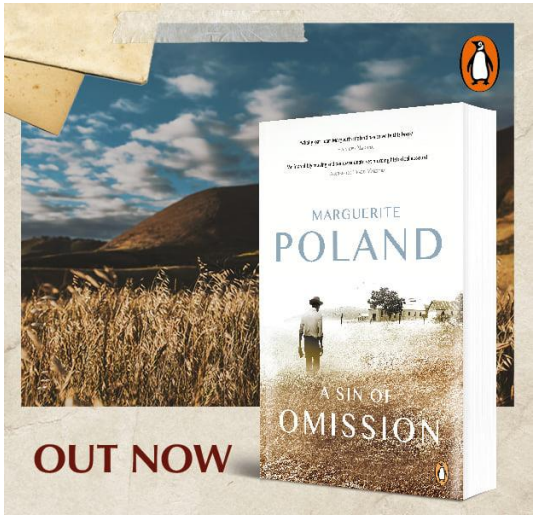
4.2.1 Digital Assets

The design and distribution of a variety of artwork elements which included an email signature banner, website rotating banner, a mailer focusing on only the one title which is sent out to the local fiction database, various social media banners, social media cards, extracts, competition banners, and online retailer banners. These assets were created by PRHSA's in-house designer and was used on PRHSA and Umuzi's social media pages. It was also shared with the author to distribute to her network of contacts.

Figure 6 Social media assets designed for A Sin of Omission: Facebook and Twitter header image



Figure 7 Social media assets designed for A Sin of Omission: social media cards for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



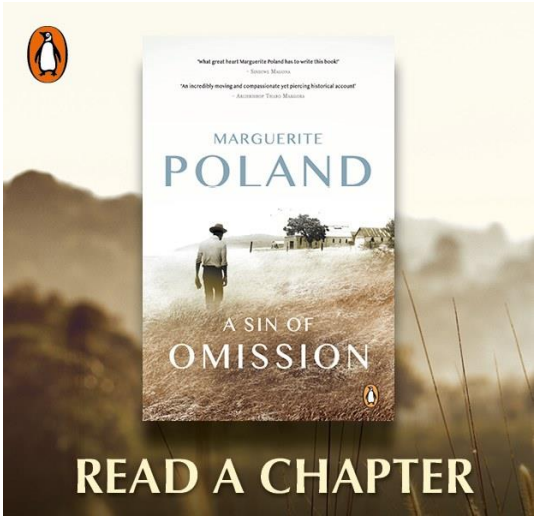
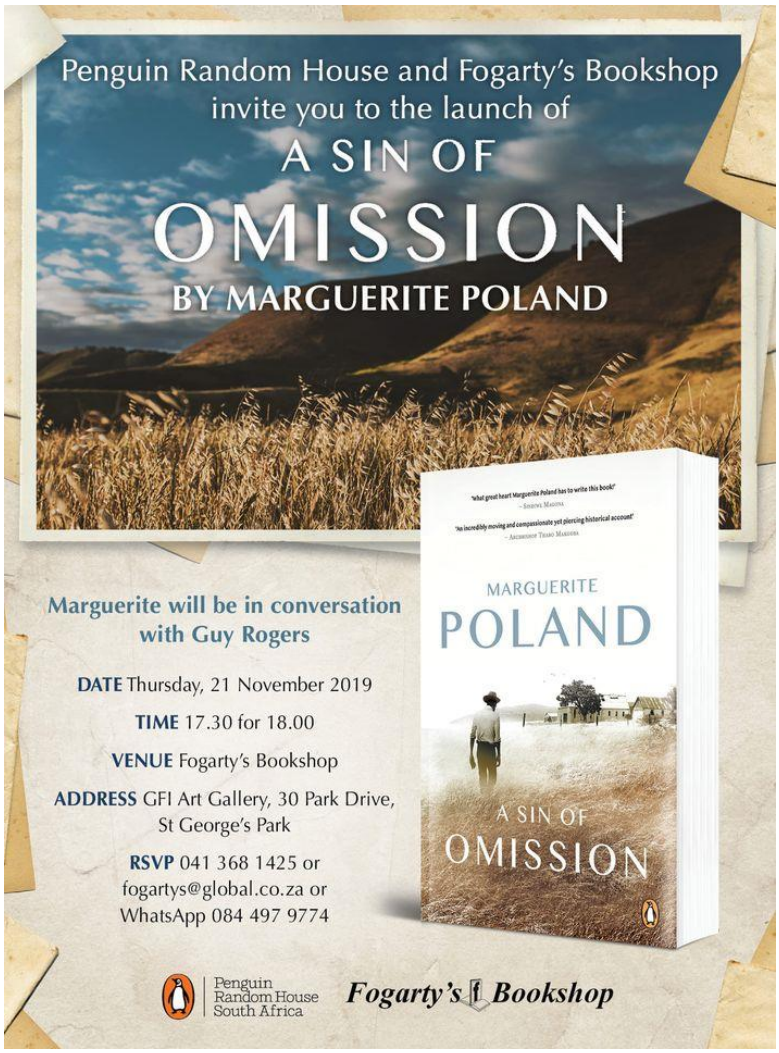


Figure 8 Social media assets designed for A Sin of Omission: competition assets for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



Figure 9 Social media assets designed for A Sin of Omission: event assets for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



4.2.2 Social media activity

Paid-for social media advertising (boosted posts) was scheduled during the month of release with a budget of R1000 each for both the PRHSA and Umuzi pages. The boosted posts ran for 10 days and each ad was shown to the entire audience of both pages. In 2020, the number PRHSA Facebook followers was 76546 and the number of Umuzi Facebook followers was 1808.

The Facebook and Twitter header images were featured during the month of release, and the social media assets were posted at regular intervals along with a description of the book, quotes and the retail link whereby readers could click and purchase the title.

4.2.3 Online partners and retailers

In addition to the planned social media activity on the publishers' own pages, every attempt was made to enable all bookselling partners in South Africa to help promote the book on their platforms as this benefits sales of the title. In order to do this, the digital assets were shared with a database of more than 150 bookstores so that they could post the content easily on their platforms if they wished to do so.

As well as distributing the marketing media to retail partners, the publishers has a number of monthly paid-for partnerships with key marketing platforms, namely Litnet, BooksLive (Sunday Times) and The Johannesburg Review of Books. For a monthly retainer, each of these media partners are obligated to post and promote the key releases per month, which in this case also included *A Sin of Omission.*

4.2.4 Email Marketing

An email signature banner was uploaded to all outgoing PRHSA outgoing emails during the month of release. This email banner also serves as a clickable link that directs users to the book's landing page on the PRHSA website.

A focused solus (single-title) mailer was designed with the full blurb of the book. This was sent out to the PRHSA subscriber database with 101,859 active subscribers. As PRHSA publishes a great number of titles each month, it is not possible to send out a mailer for each title. Different books are often grouped together in campaigns with up to eight titles. A solus mailer is a special, priority instance where only one key publication is featured on its own in order to ensure that it received as much attention and as high a click-through rate as possible.

4.2.5 Extracts and reviews

An extract from the book was uploaded to the PRHSA website, and social media posts were scheduled that invited users to click on the link in order to sample a piece of the text. In addition to sharing a piece of the book in the form of a chapter extract, throughout the month of publication a number of further extracts from media interviews, radio slots and television appearances were shared as individual posts in order to give users more insight into other users' opinion of the book, and to encourage them to buy the book.

4.2.6 Giveaway

An online competition was featured in the month of release whereby three readers could win a local fiction book hamper that included *A Sin of* Omission alongside two other new releases. The purpose of online giveaways is to draw attention to the book's release and create awareness and excitement with the online audience. Similar to the newsletters, it is not possible to feature one monthly competition per titles. In this instance, *A Sin of Omission* wasn't featured in a single-title giveaway, but was grouped together with two other local fiction titles released in the same month.

4.2.7 Website

The book was uploaded to the PRHSA website and featured on its own title listing page along with the cover image and title blurb. The title listing page acts as a portal where all online traffic is directed to for more information. From the title landing page readers are also directed to different elements around the digital marketing campaign, including:

- Links to online retailer websites to buy the book, including Takealot, Loot, Exclusive Books, and Reader's Warehouse.
- The extract which gives the reader insight into the content of the book.
- An author profile page which includes an author photograph and biography.

The book was also featured under the relevant categories like New Releases, Highly Recommended, Bestsellers, Book Club, as well as the relevant genre pages such as Local Fiction. A website rotating banner featuring the title information was displayed on the website's home page during the month of release.

In addition to the planned, proactive digital marketing campaign set out above, once it was announced that the book had been shortlisted for the 2020 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, a second, reactive social media campaign was undertaken in order to capitalize on the prestige of the prize and the added exposure. This included creating and posting new digital assets online detailing the book's inclusion on the shortlist. Press reviews, images and highlighted author events were added to maintain the hype caused specifically by the shortlist announcement.

Figure 10 Additional social media assets designed for A Sin of Omission: Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction



Table 5 below sets out the key dates in the social media marketing of *A Sin of Omission*, from 14 April 2019 where the first time the book is mentioned online in any form, up until the end-date of 31 January 2021. The first post was a photo of the author receiving advance proofs of the book from her publisher in a small informal handover ceremony.

Table 5 A Sin of Omission key dates

9/30/2019	Publication date
10/15/2019	Book Launch Event: Love Books
11/21/2019	Book Launch Event: Fogarty's Bookshop
3/10/2020	Walter Scott Prize Longlist Announcement
3/31/2020	Press release: Walter Scott Prize Shortlist Announcement
6/12/2020	Walter Scott Prize Winner Announcement
7/12/2020	Online Event: Life in a Garden
9/18/2020	First mention on Facebook
9/18/2020	First mention on Twitter
10/2/2020	First mention on Instagram
10/16/2020	Book Launch Event: The Book Lounge
11/28/2020	Online Event: Madibaland World Literary Festival

4.3 A Sin of Omission data presentation

4.3.1 Twitter

Table 6 below is a summary table of the accumulated Twitter research for *A Sin of Omission*, and tracks all Twitter activity on the title from its first tweet on 1 September 2019 to 31 January 2021. From the first mention on Twitter, up until 31 January 2021 a total number of 79 tweets were created pertaining specifically to *A Sin of Omission*, generating 160 likes, 70 retweets and 17 comments. In 2019 when the initial, main marketing for *A Sin of Omission* was scheduled on Twitter, the PRHSA page had 14 000 followers, and the Umuzi Twitter page had 2813 followers.

Table 6 Summary table of Twitter activity for A Sin of Omission

The total number of tweets	Tweets by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Tweets by readers	Tweets by bloggers and reviewers	Tweets by booksellers	Tweets by author	Tweets by libraries and institutions	Total number of likes	Total number of retweets	Total number of comments
79	18	11	34	3	0	13	475	211	17

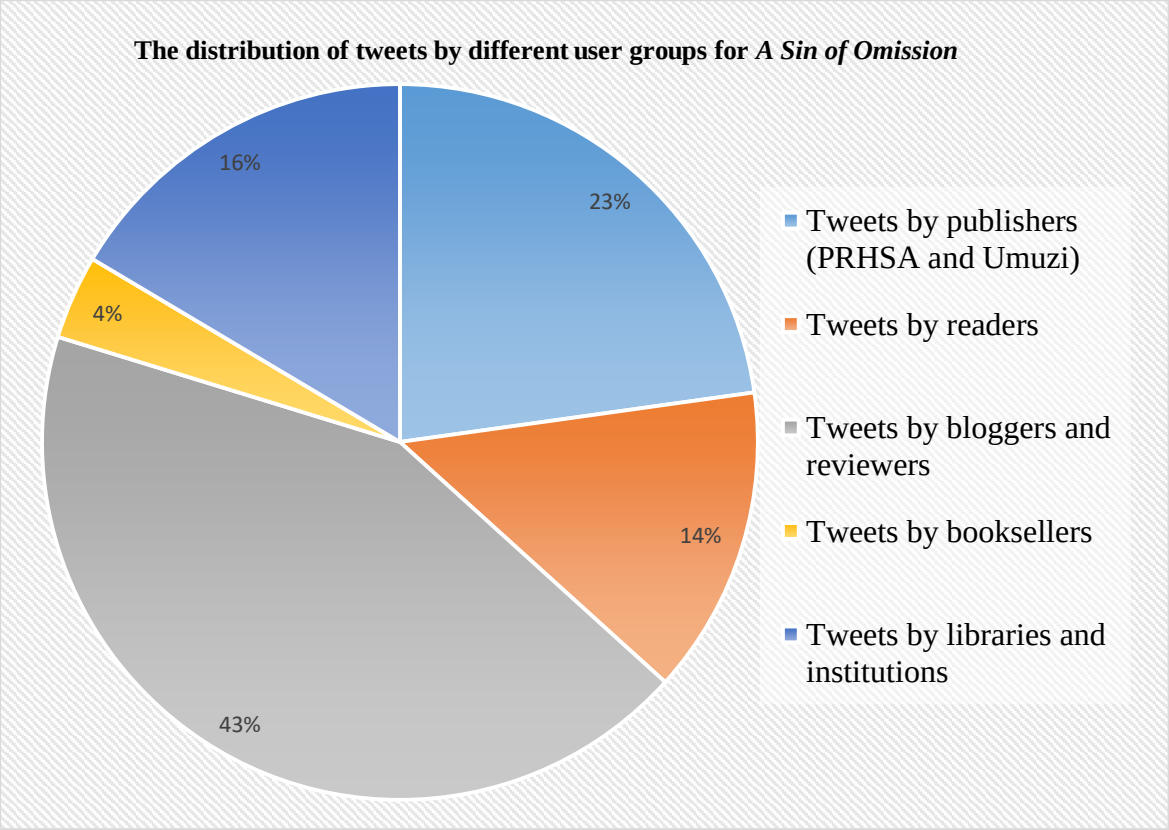
Different user groups posted about the book. Of these, the greatest number of tweets were made by bloggers and reviewers (43%), secondly by the publishers (23%). 16% of all tweets were made by libraries and institutions, which included the organisation running the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. The author herself has no online social media presence, and contribute 0% off all tweets. This is not unusual as many authors have no social media presence, either by personal choice, due to specifically wanting to maintain their privacy, or simply from not having the technological skills needed to maintain an online presence. As this author is in her seventies, it is no surprise that she has preferred not to venture online in order to help market her books.

Table 7 Summary table of Twitter activity for A Sin of Omission by user groups

The total number of tweets	Tweets by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Tweets by readers	Tweets by bloggers and reviewers	Tweets by booksellers	Tweets by author	Tweets by libraries and institutions
79	18	11	34	3	0	13
100%	23%	14%	43%	4%	0%	16%

Figure 11 below shows the distribution of tweets made by the different user groups as explained above. It was interesting to note that even though this is a well-know, established and highly regarded literary author, booksellers accounted for very few of the tweets (4%). Furthermore, these three posts were made by the smaller independent bookstores such as Love Books in Johannesburg and The Book Lounge in Cape Town, and not by the largest (and self-proclaimed most literary and discerning) book store chain in South Africa, Exclusive Books.

Figure 11 The distribution of tweets by different user groups for A Sin of Omission



While comments on Twitter are not as commonly used as on Facebook, users do still sometimes engage in tweet threads, which is an ongoing back-and-forth discussion linked to one original tweet. Table 8 below shows the breakdown of the comments made on Twitter for *A Sin of Omission*. Of the total number of 17 comments made relating specifically to the book, the most comments were made by readers (47%).

Four comments were made by the publishers (23%) which usually consists of answering a specific question posed, such as where can the book be bought or what is the retail price. As these are more logistical comments, they cannot be regarded as particularly contributing to a vibrant and lively discussion about the book, as one would hope is the case when posting about a title on a social media platform.

Table 8 Breakdown of comments made on Twitter for A Sin of Omission

Total comments	Comments on posts made by publishers	Comments on posts made by author	Comments on posts made by reviewers	Comments on posts made by readers	Comments on posts made by booksellers	Comments on posts made by libraries and institutions
17	4	0	3	8	0	2

While classifying the data, a manual evaluation was made of each post in order to determine in what format most posts appear on each platform. It is possible for one post to fall into two categories, for example a book review comment could accompany a photo taken of the book. For this reason, Table 9 below shows a breakdown of the format of posts that, when added together, shows a number greater than the total of 79 tweets posted. A distinction is also made between an image, which refers to a designed graphic such as those elements designed by the publishers and distributed to all booksellers, and photographs which refer to new photographic images created by the person posting it. Sound clips refer to a podcast link that is shared online, either from an interview or radio broadcast.

Table 9 The format of the posts made on Twitter for A Sin of Omission

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
4	2	9	4	14	3	2	3	66	1

As shown in Figure 12 below, sharing of reviews about the book – either original readers impressions posted by unique readers themselves, or from sharing of formally published reviews by readers – makes up the bulk of the format of posts – accounting for 66 of the 126 different formats posted (61%).

Figure 12 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Twitter for A Sin of Omission

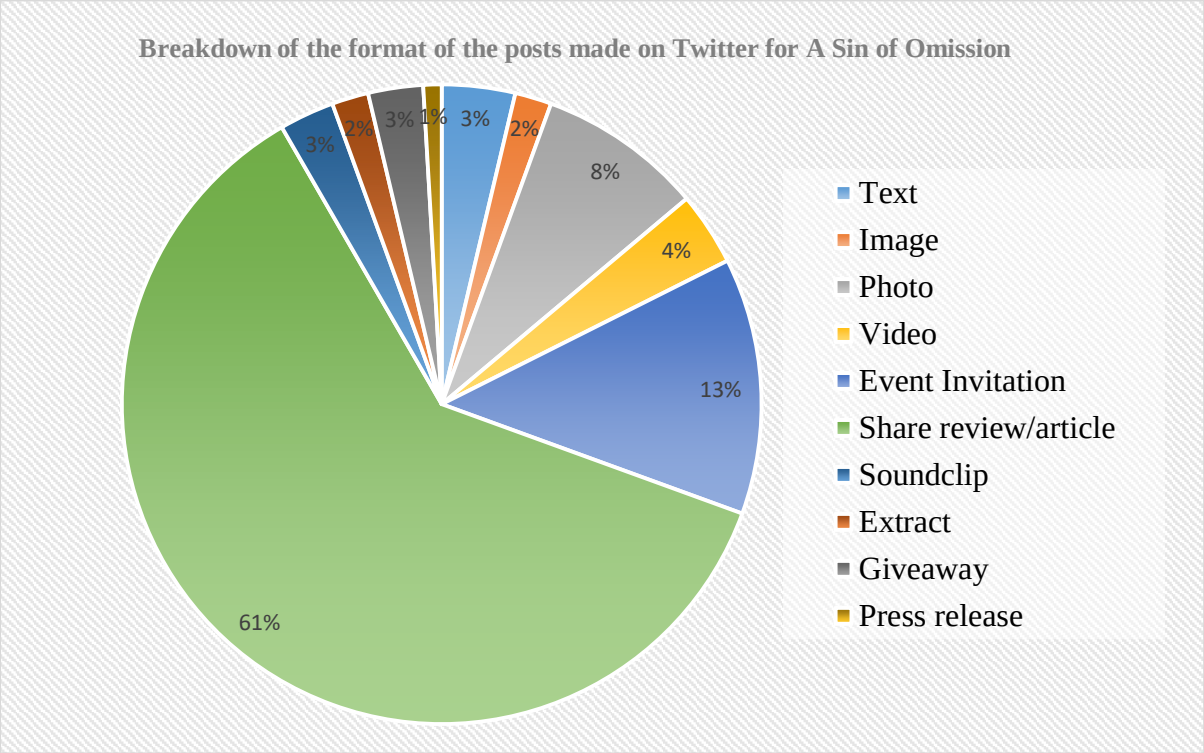
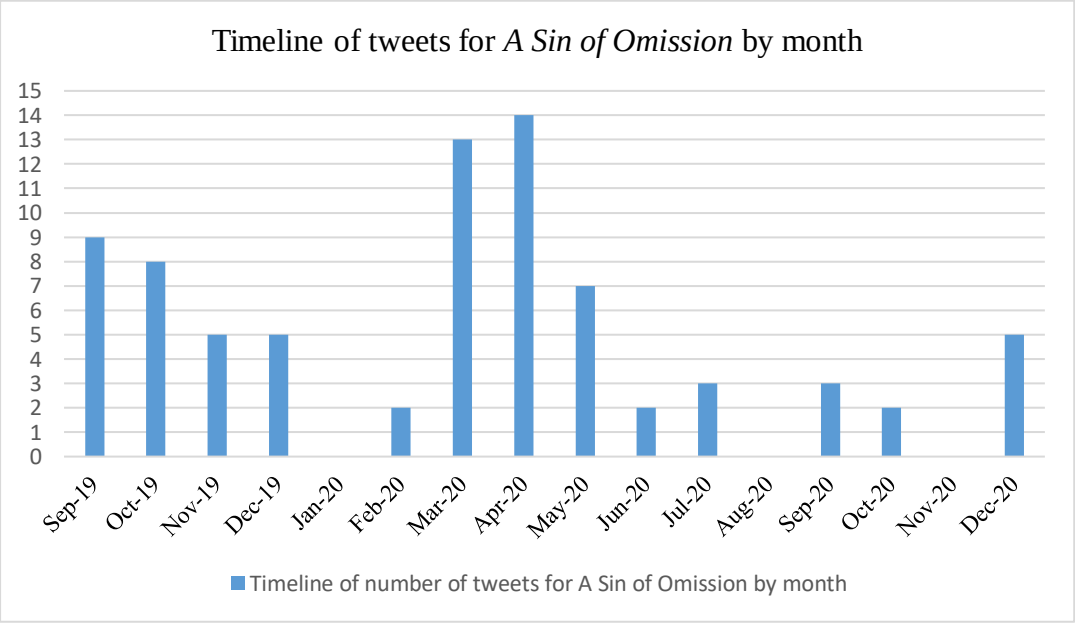


Figure 13 below shows a breakdown of the total number of posts received specifically about *A Sin of Omission* from the first tweet in September 2019 until 31 January 2021. The first spike from September-October relates to the planned, proactive digital campaign instigated by the publishers in order to announce the release of the book by this acclaimed author.

Figure 13 Timeline of tweets for A Sin of Omission by month



The number of tweets predictably reduce in the months following publication as new titles are released that get the most marketing exposure: due to the staggering number of new publications released every month it is rare for any book to be a spotlighted title for more than a few months after publication, even though extending this window of interest is certainly what the publishers take great efforts to try and ensure.

Interestingly although not surprisingly, the number of tweets increase significantly in March 2020, undeniably due to the announcement that the book had been shortlisted for the prestigious internationally recognised Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. The excitement around this announcement is evident in the higher number of tweets until June, when the prize was announced.

Even though *A Sin of Omission* did not receive first place, it is clear that the recognition offered by the prize caused renewed interest and wider recognition as would have been the case without the literary prize.

A final spike in the number of tweets can be seen in December 2020, which is due to the book being selected in both the annual PRHSA Advent Calendar campaign, as well as its inclusion in several of the booksellers' Christmas list highlight catalogues.

4.3.2 Facebook

The PRHSA and Umuzi pages both featured numerous posts for *A Sin of Omission* first in the month of publication, and then in the months following publication when the social media marketing campaign was purposefully extended by the sharing of appropriate reviews, media mentions and news about the Walter Scott Historical Fiction Prize in order to keep the book in the public eye.

The Facebook marketing also included the book being featured in the annual December Advent Calendar campaign that highlights the biggest releases of the preceding year, with only three local fiction titles being selected annually for inclusion.

As seen in Table 10, starting with the first post on 14 April 2019, until 31 January 2021 a total number of 133 posts were created pertaining specifically to *A Sin of Omission*, generating 4478 likes, 275 shares, 345 comments and a combined reach of 75 075.

In 2019, when the scheduled social media campaign for *A Sin of Omission* was first launched, the PRHSA Facebook audience totalled 65 546 followers, and the Umuzi Facebook page had 1808 followers.

Table 10 Summary table of Facebook activity for A Sin of Omission

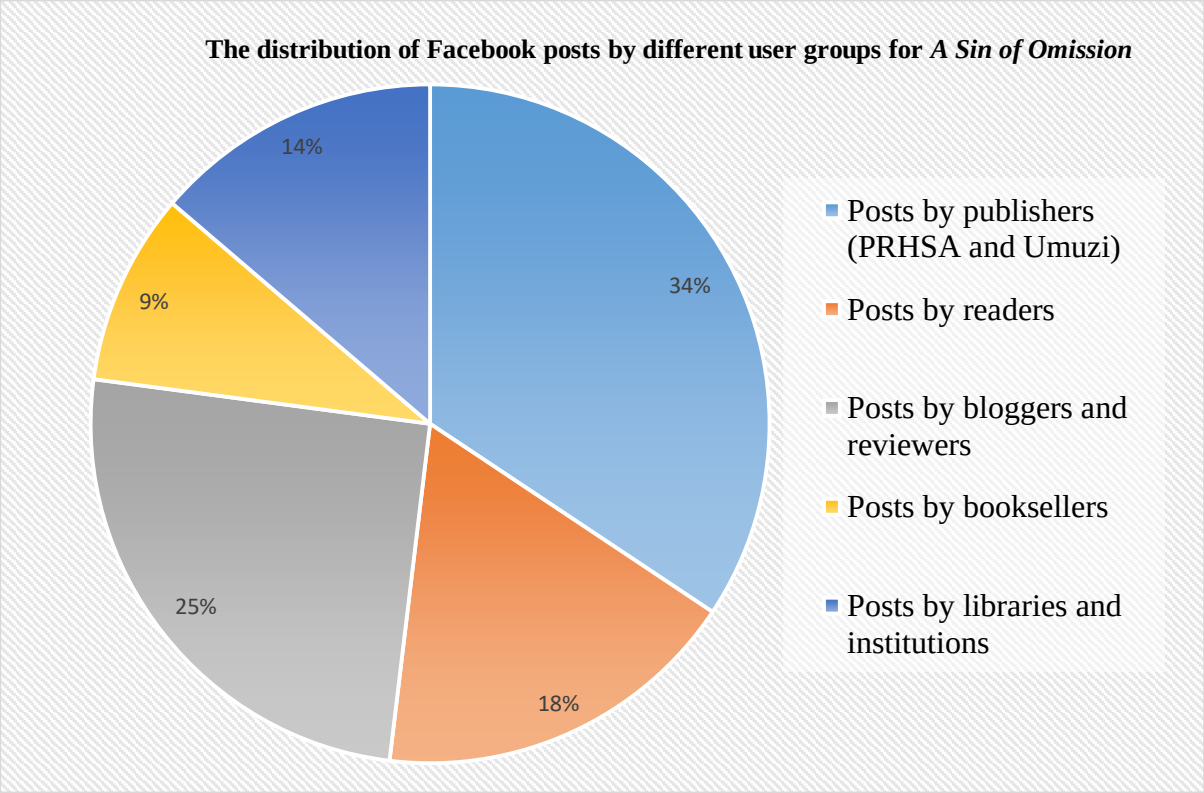
The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions	Total number of likes	Total number of shares	Total number of comments	Total reach
133	45	23	33	12	0	18	4478	275	345	75076

As show in Table 11 and Figure 14 below, different user groups contributed altogether 133 posts on Facebook. Of these, the greatest number of posts was made by the publishers (34%), then by bloggers and reviewers (25%), readers (18%) and libraries and institutions (14%). As the PRHSA and Umuzi Facebook pages are by far the publisher's biggest social media platform in terms of audience – 78264 combined followers on Facebook versus 16 813 combined followers on Twitter – it makes sense that the main bulk of the planned social media marketing plan was focused on Facebook, with 45 posts by the publishers versus only 18 tweets made on Twitter.

Table 11 Summary table Facebook activity for A Sin of Omission by user groups

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions
133	45	23	33	12	0	18
100%	34%	18%	25%	9%	0%	14%

Figure 14 The distribution of Facebook posts by different user groups for A Sin of Omission



Facebook as a social media platform typically generates significantly more comments than Twitter simply from the different ways in which the interaction on the two different platforms have been structured, is facilitated and continues to evolve. A total of 367 comments were generated from 133 posts – a significantly higher ratio of 2.8 for Facebook posts as compared to a ratio of 0.2 tweets to comments on Twitter.

As shown in Table 12 below, the highest number of comments was made by readers (44%), then by the publishers (31%) and thirdly by reviewers (18%). This is a favourable breakdown, as one of the objectives of social media marketing is to stimulate a discussion about a book with the key target audience: readers and book reviewers that can potentially translate into sales.

Table 12 Breakdown of comments made on Facebook for A Sin of Omission

Total comments	Comments on posts made by publishers	Comments on posts made by author	Comments on posts made by reviewers	Comments on posts made by readers	Comments on posts made by booksellers	Comments on posts made by libraries and institutions
367	116	0	69	163	9	10

Similar to the categorisation of the different kinds of posts made on Twitter as discussed above, Table 13 below shows a breakdown of the format of posts that, when added together (145), shows a number greater than the total of 133 posts. The same categorisation of the different posts was used on all three platforms.

Table 13 The format of the posts made on Facebook for A Sin of Omission

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
12	38	37	7	13	0	3	3	29	3

Figure 15 is a visual representation of the distribution of the different formats. Generated graphics (images) were posted most (26%) but photos were a close second (26%). Significantly less reviews and articles were shared on Facebook (20%) in comparison to 61% on Twitter. This could be because Facebook is a more visual medium, while Twitter as a platform leans more to sharing articles. Due to the character limitations on Twitter it has become commonplace to simply share the link to a full-length article hosted elsewhere, whereas users of Facebook prefer to stay on the main page and not click away, and the nature of posts best suited to each platform has evolved accordingly.

Figure 15 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Facebook for A Sin of Omission

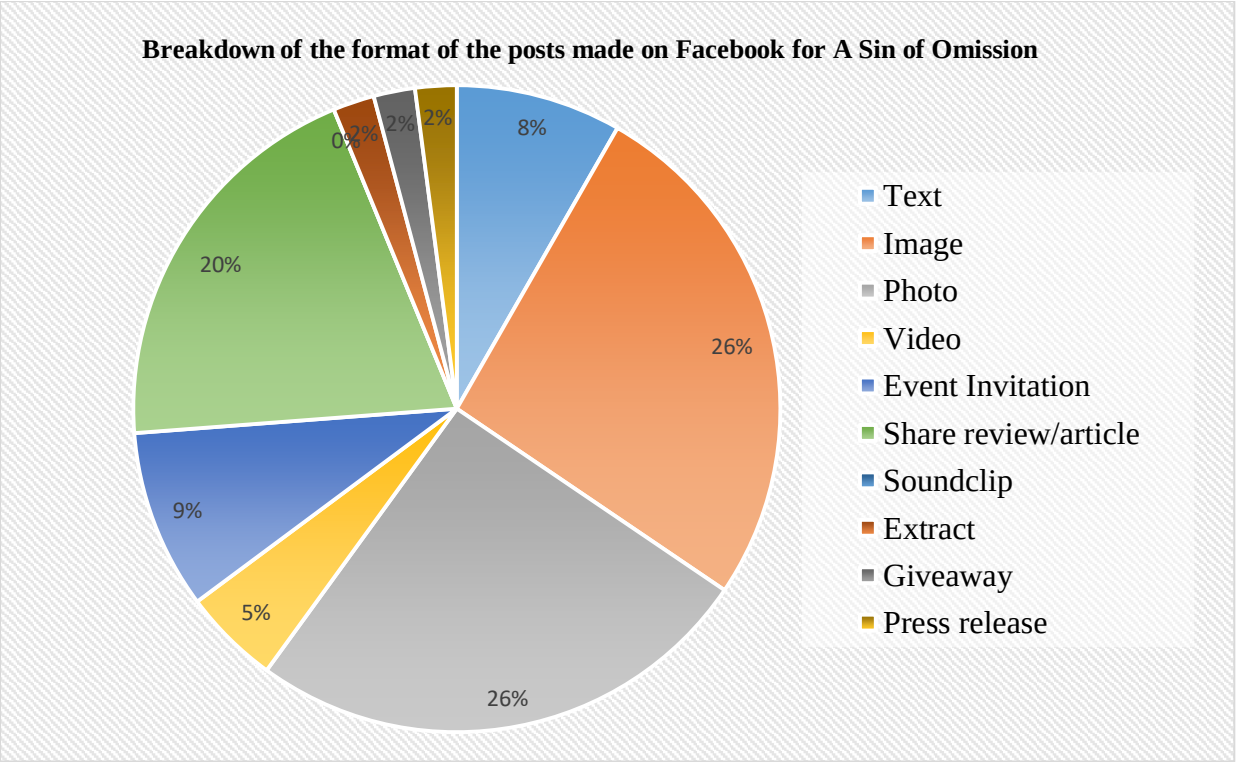
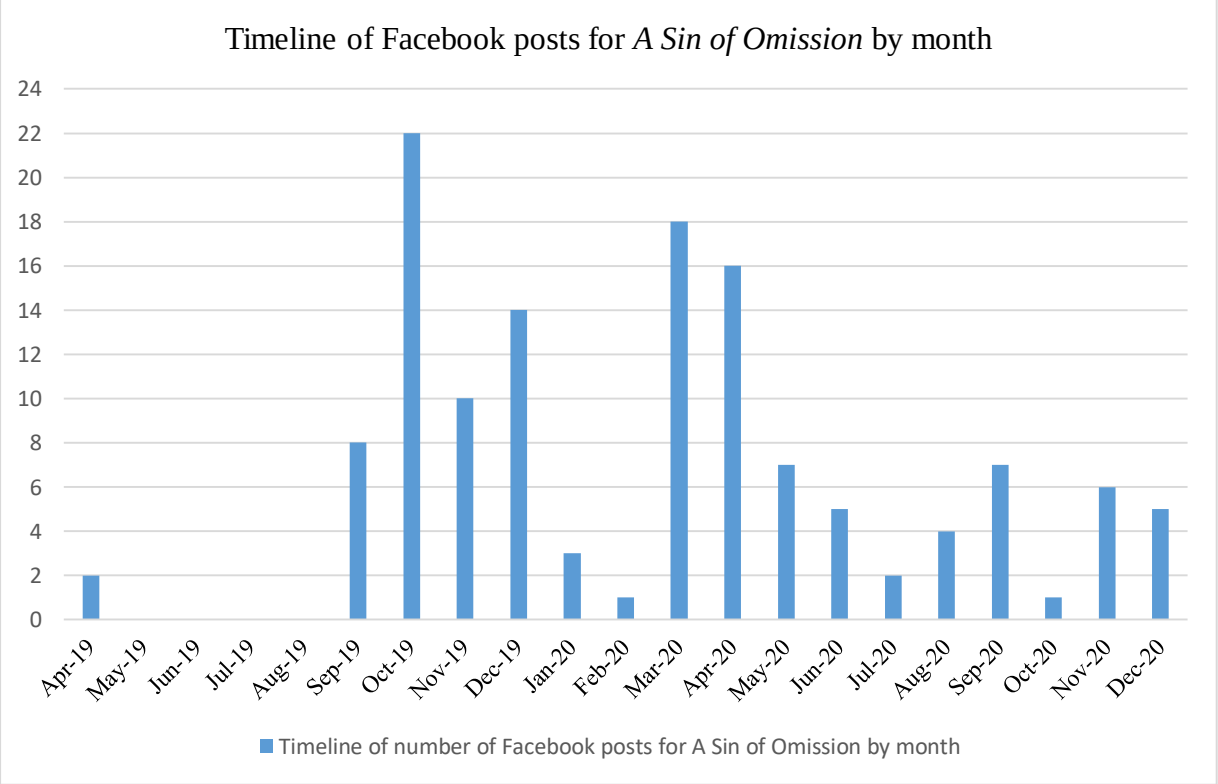


Table 14 below shows a breakdown of the total number of Facebook posts about *A Sin of Omission*, from the first post in September 2019 until 31 January 2021. Although the table shows that there was already a prior mention on Facebook, this was pre-publication and simply showed the author receiving proofs of the book. Therefore, the first real intentional post was in September, and the spike from September-October relates to the planned, proactive digital campaign instigated by the publishers in order to announce the release of the book by this acclaimed author. Similar to the trend seen in the number of tweets per month as above, the number of posts predictably reduce in the months following publication.

Similar to the trend seen on Twitter, the number of posts increase significantly in March 2020 due to the announcement that the book had been shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. Renewed and prolonged interest in the book following recognition by the Walter Scott institute can be seen in the second spike of posts from March to April.

A final spike in the number of tweets can be seen in December 2020, which is due to the book being selected in both the annual PRHSA Advent Calendar campaign, as well as its inclusion in several of the booksellers' Christmas list highlight catalogues.

Table 14 Timeline of Facebook posts for A Sin of Omission by month



4.3.3 Instagram

PRHSA only has one Instagram pages that features content from both the PRHSA and Umuzi lists. While two separate Facebook and Twitter pages exist that differentiates between the general PRHSA audience (showcasing all books from all imprints in the group) and the Umuzi page, which exclusively features local fiction titles. In 2019, the Instagram audience of the PRHSA page consisted of 5617 followers.

Due to the nature of the Instagram page, much less content can be posted than on either Facebook or Twitter – based on the researcher's own work experience, best practices prescribes that corporate pages post no more than once per day, if that. Therefore, since the PRHSA Instagram page has to feature all titles from both the PRHSA imprints and all local fiction titles, it is not uncommon for the page to post about any book once or twice only.

Furthermore, while Instagram and Facebook are owned by the same parent company, the back-end analytics statistics for Instagram are less detailed than what is available on the Facebook page. When a post is boosted on Instagram, there is the option to include Instagram in the desired audience of the boosted post, meaning that the ad will be shown to more users on both Facebook and Instagram, as determined by the budget allocated to the posts. When feedback is given on a boosted post, the reach shown includes both the number of views achieved on Facebook and Instagram: the Instagram views are not recorded separately. Therefore while it is not possible to determine the reach of a boosted Instagram post specifically, the overall impact of boosted posts on this platform is recorded under the Facebook analytics.

Table 15 on the next page shows the breakdown of the different user groups contributing the total of 25 posts on Instagram. Of these, the greatest number of posts was jointly made by readers (24%) and institutions (24%), the latter of which was predominantly made by the organisers of the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction who seemed to prefer Instagram as their social media platform of choice. Reviewers and the publishers each contributed 20% of the posts.

Table 15 Summary table of Instagram activity for A Sin of Omission

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions	Total number of likes
25	5	6	5	3	0	6	1446

Table 16 Summary table of Instagram activity for A Sin of Omission by user groups

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions
25	5	6	5	3	0	6
100%	20%	24%	20%	12%	0%	24%

Figure 16 The distribution of Instagram posts by different user groups for A Sin of Omission

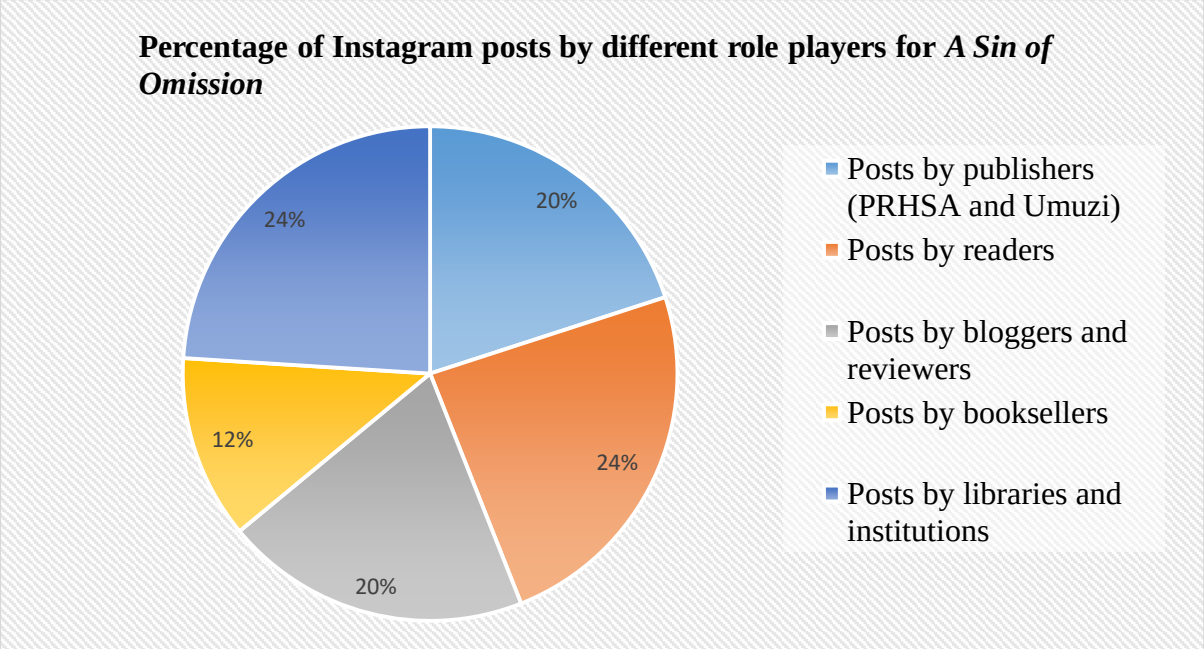
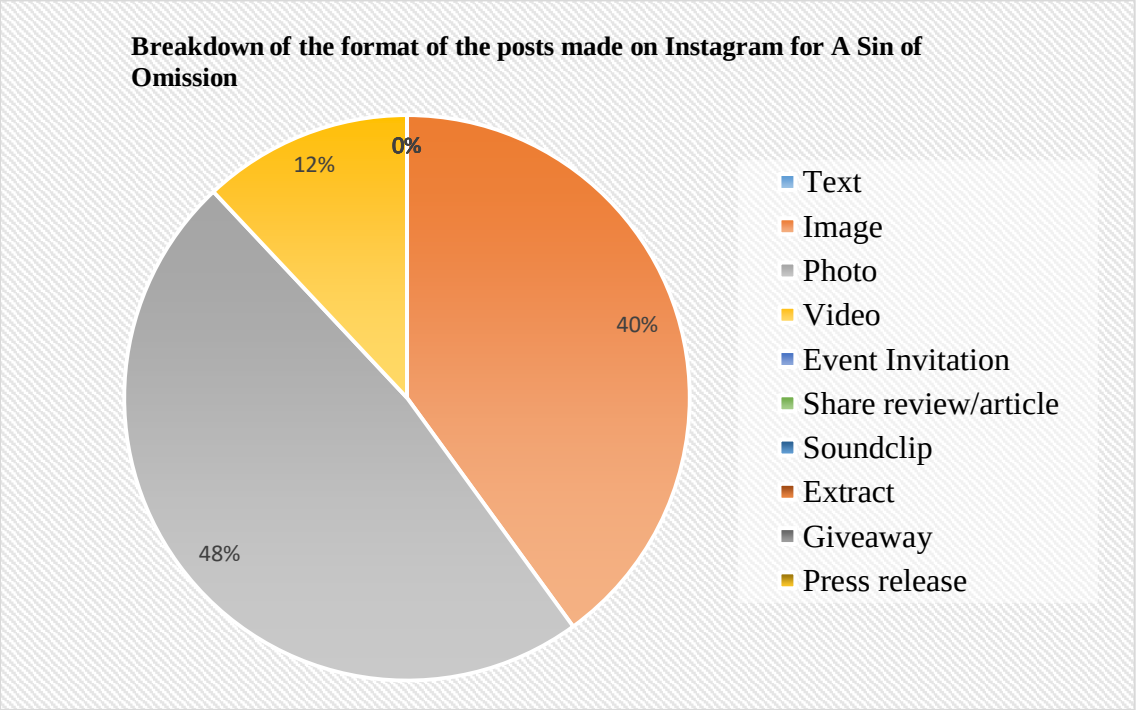


Table 17 and Figure 17 on the next page indicate the breakdown of the kinds of posts made on Instagram. As this is largely a visual platform, it follows that the data shows that a significant 48% of all posts were photos, which includes the stylized book photographs so typical of the Instagram book feed.

Table 17 The format of the posts made on Instagram for A Sin of Omission

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
0	10	12	3	0	0	0	0	0	0

Figure 17 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Instagram for A Sin of Omission



Another 40% of the total number of posts consisted of images, which includes both the designed digital assets produced by the publishers and distributed to booksellers, but also graphics generated by non-professional Instagram users with the numerous graphic-making social media platforms now in existence, such as Canva, Photoshop Express and built-in smartphone software.

Since Instagram does not allow one to post only text nor share links within posts – although it is possible to refer users to links posted in a user's biographical section – this is not surprising. As with Facebook and Twitter, the way in which the platforms set up posts purposefully shaped the user experience, which in turn creates the tone of the platform. Because you need some kind of graphic to add to your post text on Instagram, there was a rapid emergence of highly stylised 'flatlay' and lifestyle photography, which in turn became the norm for Instagram content.

12% of the posts on Instagram consisted of video content, and in this particular instance it refers almost exclusively to the author video clips produced by the organisers of the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction, who put together video clips of each author, including Marguerite Poland who otherwise has no online presence whatsoever.

Figure 18 Timeline of Instagram posts for A Sin of Omission by month

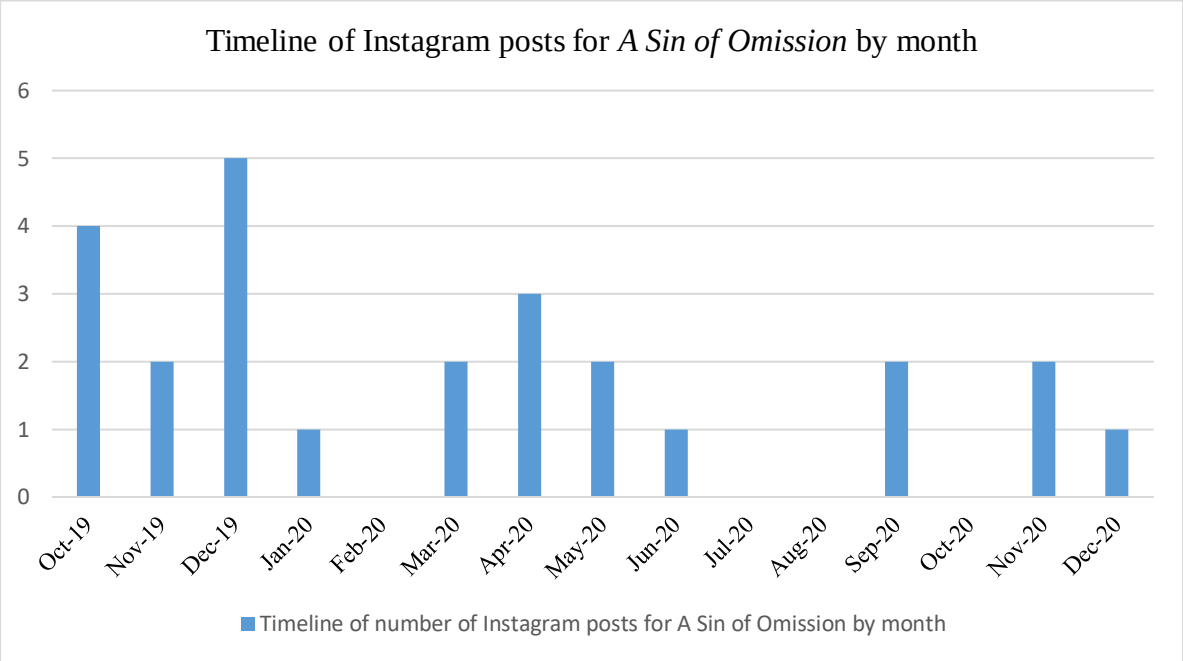


Figure 18 above shows the timeline of Instagram posts about *A Sin of Omission,* from the first post in October 2019 until 31 January 2021. Interestingly, although the book was published in September and both the timelines for Facebook and Instagram show that a significant number of posts were made in September and October as part of the planned social media campaign, the first post on Instagram is only seen in October, and the trend towards December 2019 is relatively speaking higher than that seen with Facebook and Instagram in terms of number of posts.

This is a predictable trend for Instagram as the social media platform is noticeably more visual and 'real life' photos are the biggest trend. This means that while marketing and social media engagement on Facebook and Twitter can start with just a graphic image or verbal descriptions of the book, or the sharing of articles, readers typically tend to wait until they have a physical copy of the book in hand to photograph before posting on Instagram.

The social media marketing tail on Instagram tends to be a month or two behind the curve on the other platforms, with reader reviews appearing much later than on the other platforms.

Similar to the trends seen on Twitter and Facebook, the number of posts increase significantly from March to May 2020 due to the announcement that the book had been shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. As mentioned above, most of these posts were made by the organisers of the literary prize themselves, who seemed to favour Instagram as their social media platform of choice, posting significantly more on Instagram than the other two platforms. The author's fans on Instagram were quick to share the official posts by the organisers of the page to their own stories, so that most of the high number of posts seen in these three months is actually the same posts, being reposted on different user's own timelines.

A final rise in the number of tweets can be seen in December 2020, which is again due to the book being selected in both the annual PRHSA Advent Calendar campaign, as well as its inclusion in several of the booksellers' Christmas list highlight catalogues.

The first Instagram post went live on 2 October 2019, and while only 5 posts were made by the publisher, this is actually more than the usual number of Instagram posts made for any title on this social media platform specifically. This was because in addition to the usual one or two posts made per title at most – typically one post to announce that the book is available, and possibly one further post recommending an extract – the announcement was shared that the book had been shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

Additional posts by the Walter Scott institution with author video clips and featured interviews with the shortlisted authors were then also reposted on the PRHSA Instagram page, which was shared as it was prestigious news, and novel content that is not usually available so it added interest to the publisher's feed.

4.3. Sales activity

Table 18 below shows the official sales data for the printed edition of *A Sin of Omission*. While the ebook is usually released either simultaneously or shortly after the publication of the printed edition, for the purposes of this research study ebook sales are not included in the analysis as the ebook sales for this title were negligible. From the book's publication date in September 2019 until 31 January, a total of 2248 physical copies have been sold, resulting in a total sales value of R540 739.45.

Table 18 Table of lifetime sales for A Sin of Omission (Nielsen BookScan, 2021)

ISBN	Title	Author	RRP	Binding	Publ Date	Week	Week End Date	Volume	Total Value
9781485904199	Sin of Omission,A	Poland, Marguerite	R290.00	Paperback	Sep 30, 2019	201940	31/01/2021	2,248	R540,739.45

Figure 19 on the next page illustrates the sales activity in number of copies sold over the book's lifetime. Not surprisingly, there is a significant peak in sales in the first four months of the book's release, with sales increasingly rapidly from September, and peaking over the 2019 Christmas period. This trend is not accidental, but the book's September release date was carefully planned in order to capitalise on the Christmas season. Sales taper down in the beginning of 2020, but begin to rise again in February, and would in all probability have mirrored the noticeable increase over March to May due to the announcement of the book's inclusion on the shortlist for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

Figure 19 Timeline of sales activity for A Sin of Omission



On Figure 19 above it can be seen that there is a sharp and total drop in sales from end-March through April. As mentioned previously, this was when it was first announced that South Africa had gone into Lockdown Level 5 in response to the global COVID19 pandemic. In an unprecedented event, all bookstores in South Africa, along with all non-essential retail, were forced to completely close down. While the hard lockdown was eased as the year progressed and bookstores were allowed to reopen and sales picked up, it is fair to say that life pre- and post COVID19 was completely different.

Both in people's emotional and mental states, and economically speaking, a paradigm shift had occurred which undoubtedly had a real impact on what people were spending money on, whether they were suddenly employed or facing financial difficulty and therefore had less disposable cash, and what they were reading.

While a heart-wrenching piece of historical fiction might have been the intended readerships' preferred reading material under normal circumstances, during the height of the pandemic people commented online that they seemed to either not be inclined to, or indeed be able to read at all, stating that they found it exceedingly difficult to concentrate on books. It further appears from comments online and in online discussion forums such as The Good Book Appreciation Society that many readers preferred light-hearted material that could divert their attention away from the seriousness and uncertainty of the global pandemic.

As yet there are no peer-reviewed or accredited academic sources available to substantiate these claims, since the aforementioned is an unusual side effect of a hitherto unprecedented phenomenon that certainly warrants further academic scrutiny before being regarded as substantiated fact. In the meantime, for the purpose of this research study the widely reported inability to concentrate on reading, or to be able to mainly read and enjoy only lighter themes in books warrants inclusion as it could impact on the interpretation of the results.

For example, bestselling author Marian Keys commented in an interview on this notion that has since become part of the pandemic folklore: "It's been weird – for the first several weeks I was doing a huge number of Zoom interviews and stuff but I couldn't actually do any writing because my head simply wouldn't work and it was really hard to read as well. And there's actually a reason for that. It's because we were all so frightened. We were all in flight-or-fight mode and when you're in that state your imagination is sort of disabled. It's to keep you alert and vigilant, scanning the horizon for danger. For the last three weeks or so I've been able to start writing decently but it's been a really strange, scary, awful time" (Vorster, 2020).

The sales trend shows some increase towards the end of the year, with people apparently getting more used to the effects of the pandemic, along with the gradual relaxation of the lockdown restrictions. The positive effects of the prestige and increased awareness caused by the literary prize can be seen in the rise in sales from June to July, although it is impossible to say how differently this graph might have looked if the COVID19 pandemic did not occur.

4.4 Overview of social media marketing activity for *Afterland*

The social media marketing campaign for *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes was both proactive and reactive. At first, the book received the standard, carefully planned digital marketing management treatment that is given to all new key titles published by PRHSA and Umuzi. This standard digital marketing plan entailed the following:

4.4.1 Digital Assets

The design and distribution of a variety of artwork elements which included an email signature banner, website rotating banner, a solus mailer sent out to the Local Fiction database, various social media banners, social media cards, extracts, competition banners, and online retailer banners. These assets were created by PRHSA's in-house designers, used on PRHSA and Umuzi's social media pages, and was shared with the author to distribute to her network of contacts, and to use on her own social media platforms.

Figure 20 Social media assets designed for Afterland: Facebook and Twitter header image

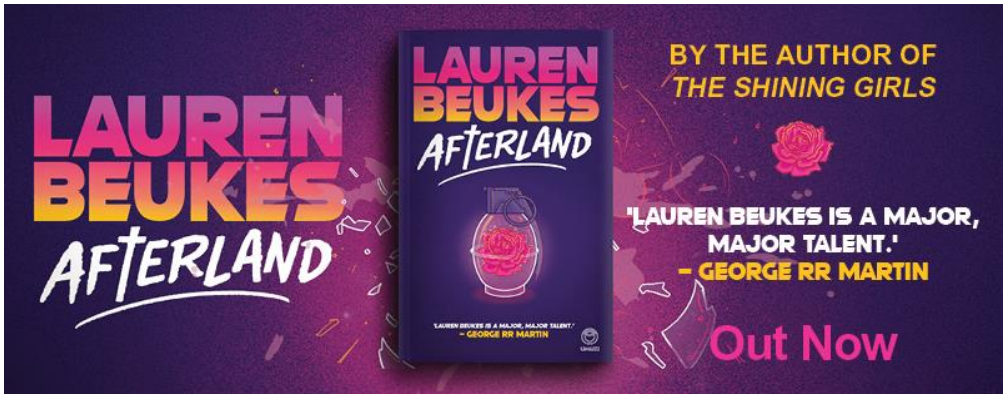
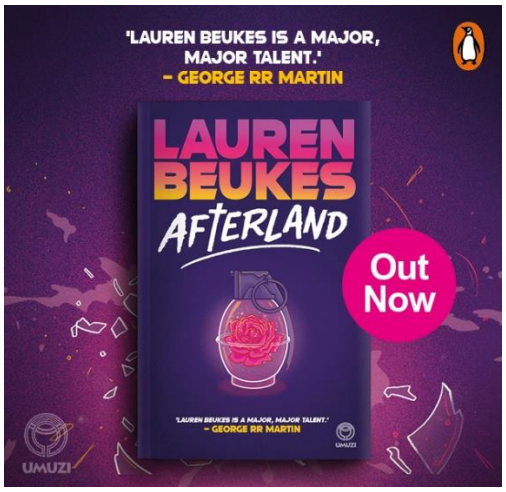


Figure 21 Social media assets designed for Afterland: social media cards for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



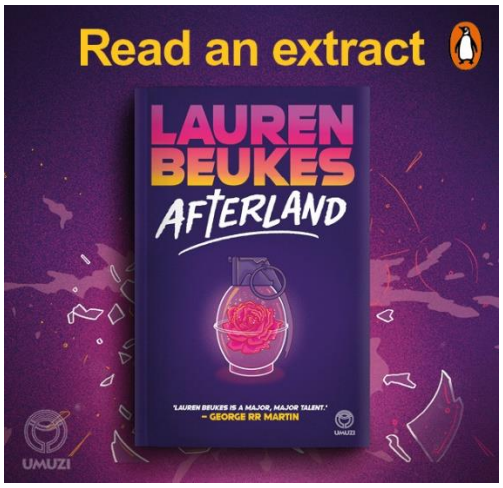


Figure 22 Social media assets designed for Afterland: competition assets for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram

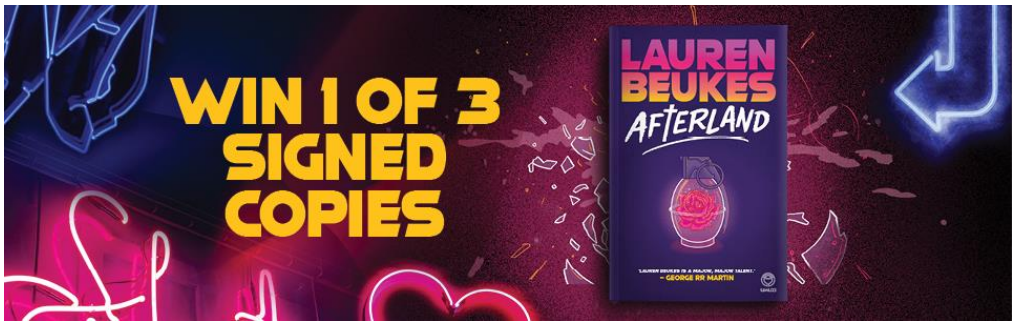
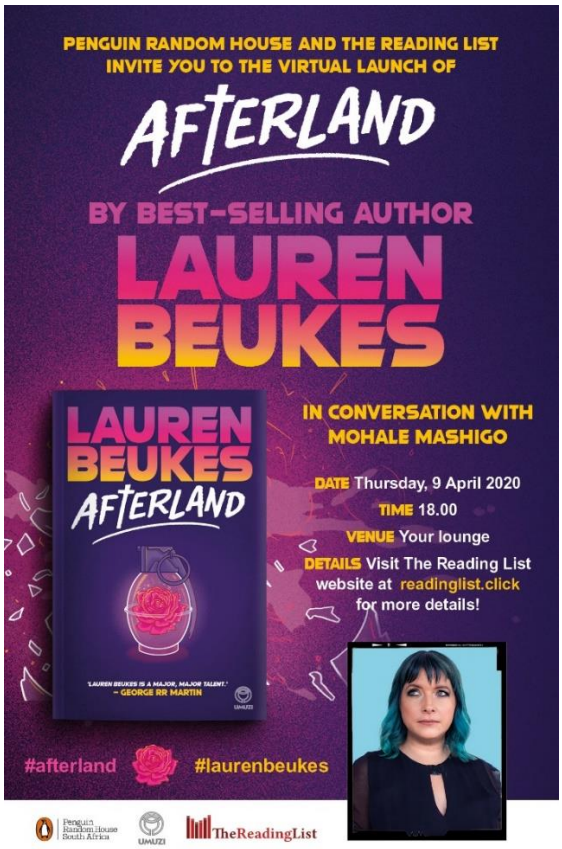


Figure 23 Social media asset designed for Afterland: event assets for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



Figure 24 Event invitation designed for Afterland: for Facebook, Twitter and Instagram



4.4.2 Social media activity

Paid-for social media advertising (boosted posts) was scheduled during the month of release with a budget of R1000 each for both the PRHSA and Umuzi pages. The boosted posts ran for 10 days and each ad was shown to the entire audience of both pages. In 2020 the number of PRHSA Facebook followers was 80278 and Umuzi's number of Facebook followers was 2279. In addition to boosting the 'out now' posts, the competition posts on both pages were boosted for a further R1000 each.

Facebook and Twitter header images were featured during the month of release, a featured website rotating banner was uploaded to the PRHSA website at www.penguinrandomhouse.co.za that is shown on the website's landing page.

4.4.3 Online partners and retailers

In addition to extensive social media activity on the publishers' own pages, concentrated efforts are made to enable all bookselling partners in South Africa to help promote the book on their platforms as this benefits sales of the title. In order to do this, the digital assets are shared with a database of more than 150 bookstores so that they can post the content on their platforms if they wish to do so.

As well as distributing the marketing media to retail partners, the publishers have a number of monthly paid-for partnerships with key marketing platforms, namely Litnet, BooksLive (Sunday Times) and The Johannesburg Review of Books. For a monthly marketing retainers, each of these media partners are obligated to post and promote the key releases per month, which included *Afterland.*

4.4.4 Email Marketing

An email signature banner was uploaded to all outgoing PRHSA outgoing emails during the month of release. This email banner also serves as a clickable link that directs a user to the book's landing page on the PRHSA website.

A focused single-title mailer was designed with the full blurb of the book. This was sent out to the PRHSA subscriber database with 101,859 active subscribers.

4.4.5 Extracts and reviews

An extract from the book was uploaded to the PRHSA website, and social media posts were scheduled that invited users to click on the link in order to sample a piece of the text. In addition to sharing a piece of the book, throughout the month of publication a number of further extracts from media interviews, radio slots and television appearances were shared as individual posts in order to give users more insight into other users' opinion of the book, and to encourage them to buy the book.

While the publicity for *Afterland* took place in Level 5 lockdown, it was nevertheless still possible to schedule a limited number of media appearances that were either pre-recorded, took place within the lockdown guidelines with limited contact, or which was aired later in the publicity cycle than would usually be the case once the lockdown was eased later in the year.

4.4.6 Giveaway

An online competition was featured in the month of release whereby readers could win one of three signed copies of *Afterland.* The purpose of online giveaways is to draw attention to a new book's release and create awareness and excitement with the online audience.

4.4.7 Website

The book was uploaded to the PRHSA website and featured on its own title listing page along with the cover image and title blurb. The title listing page acts as a portal where all online traffic is directed to for more information. From the title landing page readers are also directed to different elements around the digital marketing campaign, including:

- Links to online retailer websites to buy the book, including Takealot, Loot, Exclusive Books, and Reader's Warehouse.
- The extract which gives the reader insight into the content of the book.
- An author profile page which includes an author photograph and biography.

The book was also featured under the relevant categories like New Releases, Highly Recommended, Bestsellers, Book Club, as well as the relevant genre pages such as Local Fiction. A website rotating banner featuring the title information was displayed on the website's home page during the month of release.

In addition to the planned, proactive digital marketing campaign set out above, a number of key developments were shared in months following publication of the title as part of the reactive digital marketing campaign. Capitalising on marketing developments after the publication of a book in order to drive sales is standard practice, but in addition to this, the unexpected global occurrence of the COVID19 resulted in some planned marketing activities such as real-life events no longer being possible, nor could review copies be sent out as usual.

This included announcing the release of the UK and US editions of the book, and a glowing review in the New York Times by none other than Stephen King. Another key development was the announcement in that one of Lauren's previous books called *Shining Girls* had been acquired by Leonardo DiCaprio's production company, and would be turned into a miniseries starring Elizabeth Moss, star of *The Handmaid's Tale* miniseries based on the book by Margaret Atwood.

News of the film adaption was formally announced on the publisher's pages by way of a formal press release, which is a rare occurrence and is usually only reserved for significant events. While the press release post itself only totals as one instance, the weight carried by this post is somewhat more significant than any other standard post. These international accolades were shared and tied to the release of Lauren's latest book, *Afterland* in order to help drive awareness and sales. Press reviews, images and highlighted author events were added to maintain the hype.

It should also be mentioned that although revolving predominantly around the US edition of *Afterland*, the author and book was the topic of a controversy that raged online concerning the book and the author's handling of transgender roles in the book. While the publishers and author did not share any of these comments or comment on the discussion which was largely negative, the furore online did receive significant attention which placed the book and author further in the spotlight, albeit in a negative light that may have had some impact on sales.

Figure 25 the press release announcing the film adaptation of The Shining Girls

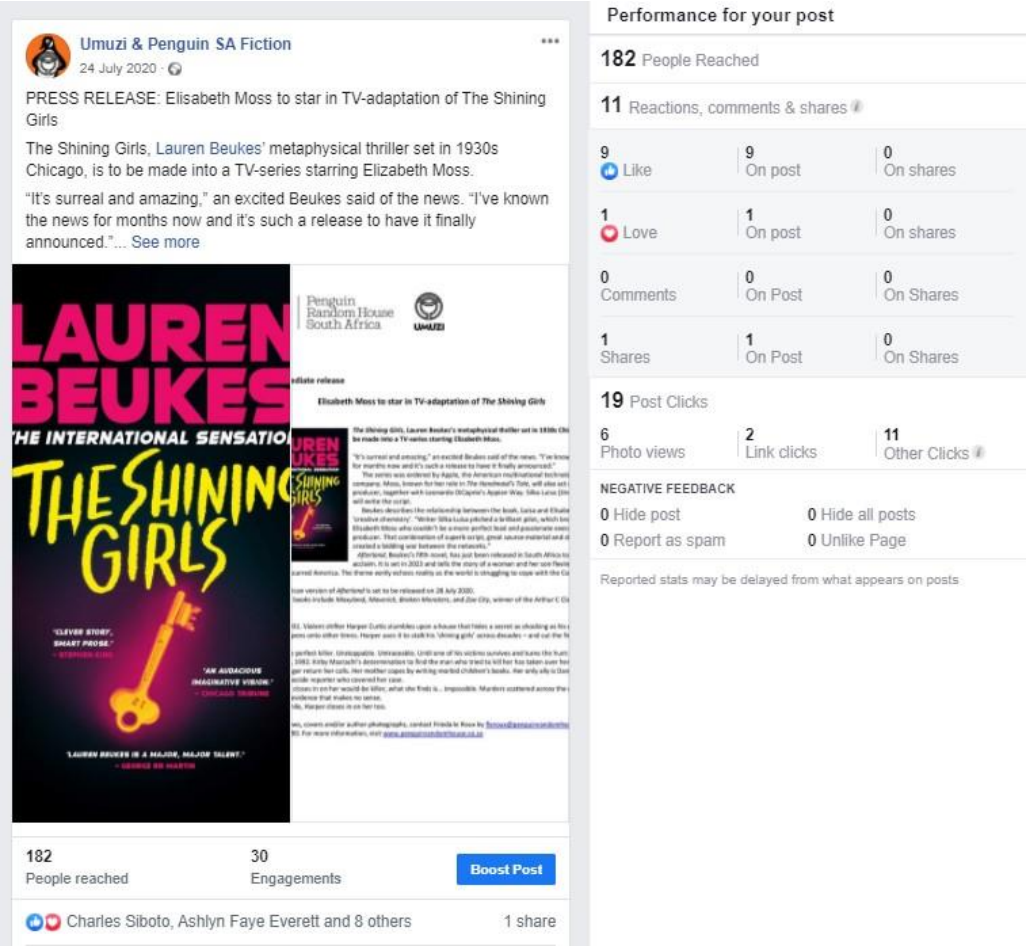


Table 19 on the next page sets out the key dates in the social media marketing of *Afterland*, from the first time the book is mentioned online in any post, up until the end-date of 31 January 2021.

The first mention on 12 September 2019 on Twitter was a pre-publication post made by the author where she mentions her upcoming book, *Afterland*. The early mention on 27 January 2020 on Facebook refers to a post where the author shared a photo of herself receiving a first proof of the book from her publisher.

The planned social media marketing campaign started in April 2020 where, due to the sudden and unplanned onset of the global COVID19 pandemic, the book's planned April publication date had to be postponed due to the Level 5 lockdown that directly halted the planned distribution of the book.

Table 19 Afterland key dates

Date	Key event
12/09/2019	First mention on Twitter
27/01/2020	First mention on Facebook
06/04/2020	First mention on Instagram
07/04/2020	ebook Publication date
09/04/2020	Book Launch Event: Facebook Live Event
05/06/2020	Publication date
02/07/2020	Online Event: Exclusive Books Homebru
22/07/2020	Afterland released in USA with a different cover
24/07/2020	Stephen King reviews in New York Times
24/07/2020	Press Release: Beukes' book The Shining Girls to be made into TV series
29/07/2020	Online Event: Fairlady Webinar
09/08/2020	Online Event: Life in a Garden
09/11/2020	Online Event: Open Book Festival

4.5 *Afterland* data presentation

4.5.1 Twitter

Table 20 below is a summary table of the accumulated Twitter research for *Afterland*, and tracks all Twitter activity on the title from its first tweet on 12 September 2019 to 31 January 2021. From the first mention on Twitter, up until 31 January 2021 a total number of 239 tweets were created pertaining specifically to the South African edition of *Afterland*, generating 2344 likes, 541 retweets and 199 comments. In 2020 when the initial, main marketing for *Afterland* was scheduled on Twitter, the PRHSA Twitter page had 15 600 followers, and the Umuzi Twitter page had 3065 followers.

Table 20 Summary table of Twitter activity for Afterland

The total number of tweets	Tweets by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Tweets by readers	Tweets by bloggers and reviewers	Tweets by booksellers	Tweets by author	Tweets by libraries and institutions	Total number of likes	Total number of retweets	Total number of comments
240	40	108	30	10	24	25	2344	541	199

Different user groups posted about the book. As shown below in Table 21 and Figure 26, of these, the greatest number of tweets were made by readers (46%), with the publishers posting the second largest number of tweets (17%). Interestingly, as this author has an active social media profile and a rather sizeable following on Twitter with 28 200 followers, posts by Lauren Beukes herself accounted for 10% of all tweets on this book, which is the same as the number of posts made by libraries and institutions (10%). As seen with *A Sin of Omission*, the number of posts by booksellers is disappointingly low, contributing only 4% of all tweets.

Table 21 Summary table of Twitter activity for Afterland by user groups

The total number of tweets	Tweets by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Tweets by readers	Tweets by bloggers and reviewers	Tweets by booksellers	Tweets by author	Tweets by libraries and institutions
240	40	108	30	10	24	25
100%	17%	46%	13%	4%	10%	10%

Figure 26 The distribution of tweets by different user groups for Afterland

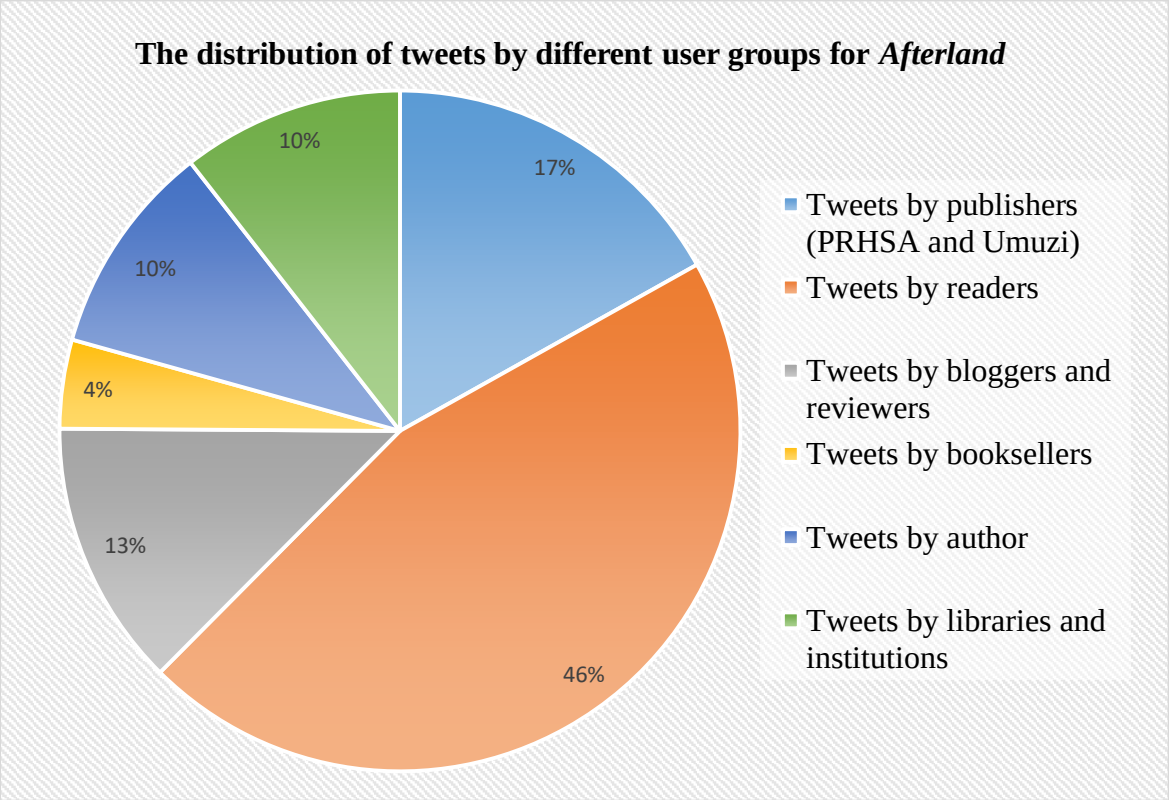


Table 22 below shows the breakdown of the comments made on Twitter for *Afterland*. In comparison with *A Sin of Omission*, significantly more comments made relating specifically to the book: 199 comments on *Afterland* compared to only 17 comments on *A Sin of Omission*. The most comments were made by the author (59%) and the readers (31%).

Table 22 Breakdown of comments made on Twitter for Afterland

Total comments	Comments on posts made by publishers	Comments on posts made by author	Comments on posts made by reviewers	Comments on posts made by readers	Comments on posts made by booksellers	Comments on posts made by libraries and institutions
199	3	118	8	62	2	6

This is not surprising, as the author maintains an active social media profile and is known for engaging directly with her fan base by replying to posts, comments and tweets about her and her books. This ratio is ideal in terms of book publicity, as a more lively debate and real-time discussion on a book naturally increases awareness around the book, which has the potential to turn into sales.

Only three comments were made by the publishers (1.5%) which likely consisted of answering a specific question posed, such as where can the book be bought or what is the retail price.

As mentioned in the previous section, when classifying the data, a manual evaluation was made of each post in order to determine in what format most posts appear on each platform. It is possible for one post to fall into two categories, for example a book review comment could accompany a photo taken of the book.

For this reason, Table 23 and Figure 27 below shows a breakdown of the format of posts that, when added together (241), shows a number greater than the 199of tweets posted. A distinction was also made between an image, which refers to a designed graphic such as those elements designed by the publishers and distributed to all booksellers, and photographs which refer to new photographic images created by the person posting it. Sound clips refer to a podcast link that is shared online, either from an interview or radio broadcast.

Table 23 The format of the posts made on Twitter for Afterland

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
90	20	28	9	25	4	7	8	48	2

It is interesting to note, that out of all the social media platforms, Twitter is the only platform that shows a significant number of text-only posts (37%) whereas both Facebook and Instagram show a much lower percentage of text-only posts. While one might assume that the 280 character limitation of posts on Twitter might have resulted in users choosing to supplement these short posts with visual elements as is often the case, the platform did not evolve this way.

Instead, on Twitter it is entirely acceptable to post numerous times every day, often posting just a line saying 'Now on page xxx of *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes' as was the case with one user who posted details of his progress in reading the book no less than 8 separate times.

For *Afterland*, the breakdown of types of tweets was text (37%), sharing reviews or articles (20%), photos (12%), sharing details of events around the book (10%) and sharing extracts from the book (8%).

Figure 27 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Twitter for Afterland

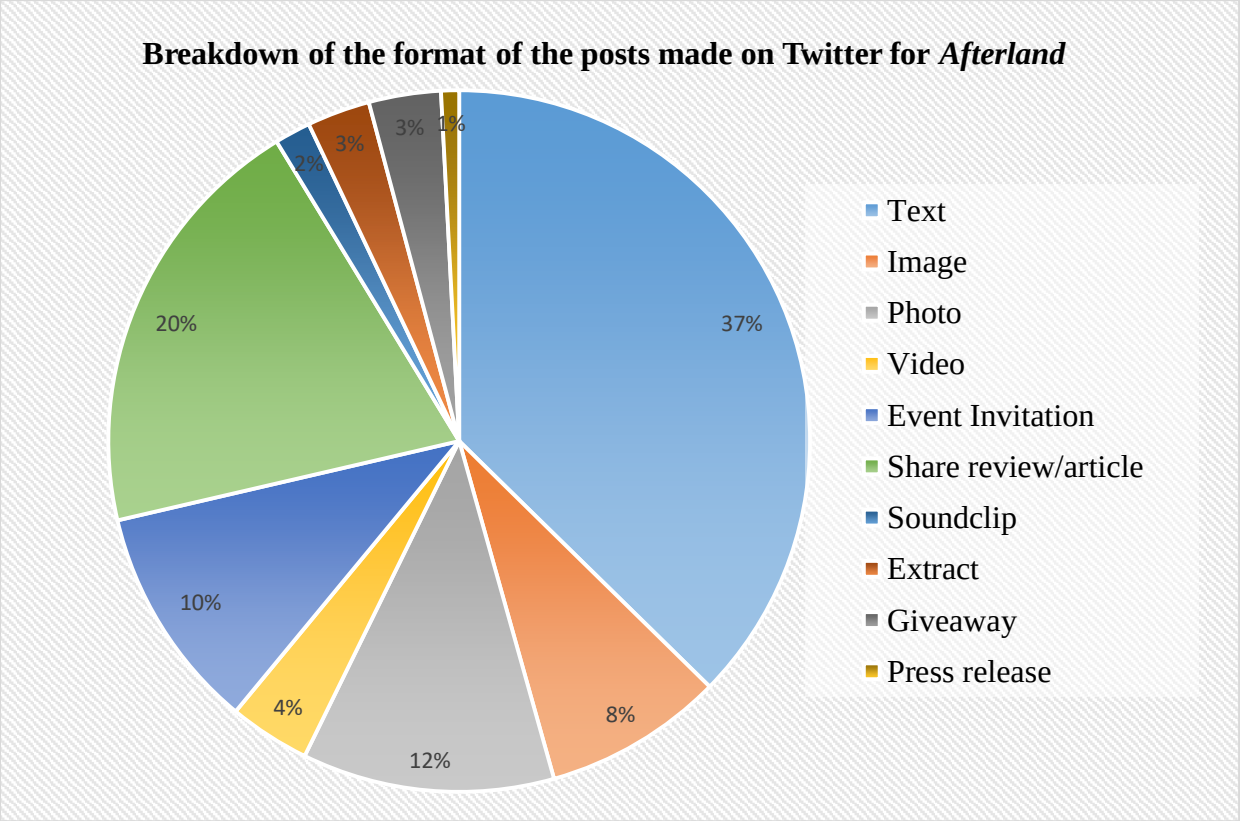
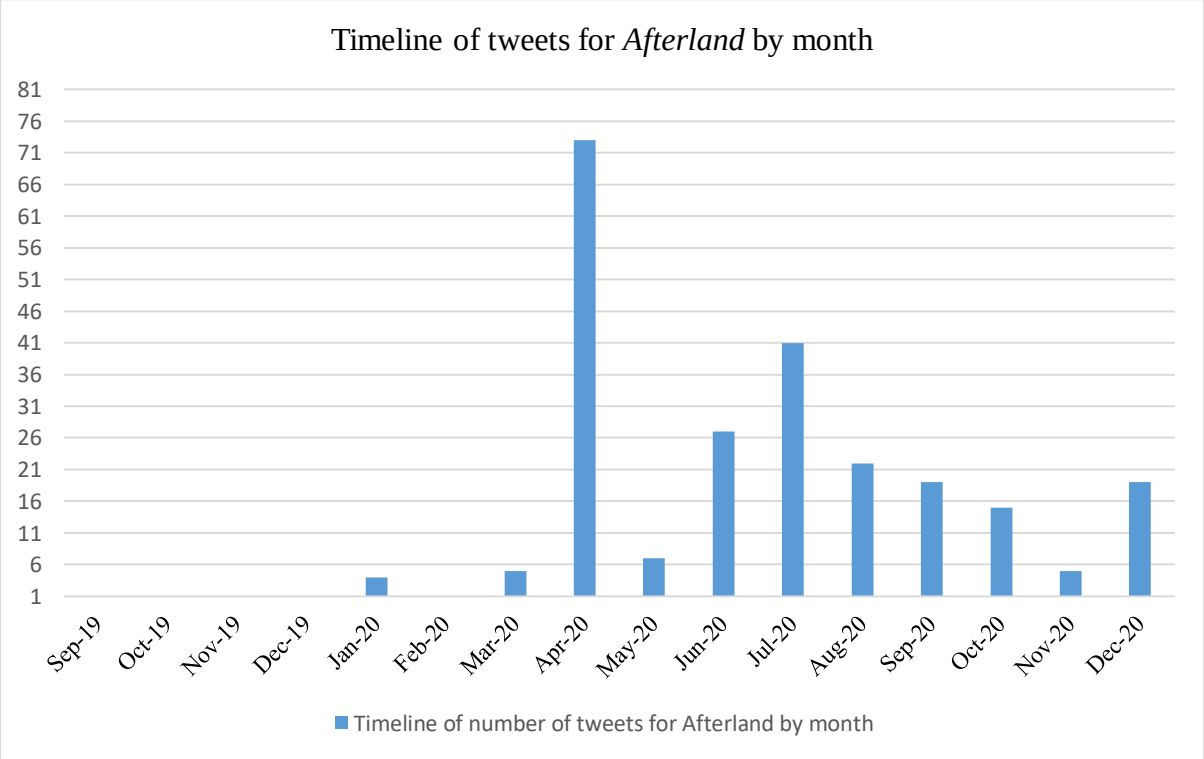


Figure 28 below shows a breakdown of the total number of tweets referring specifically to the South African edition of *Afterland*, from the first tweet in September 2019 until 31 January 2021. The first spike from April relates to the planned, proactive digital campaign instigated by the publishers in order to announce the release of the book by this acclaimed author.

The number of tweets predictably reduce in the months following publication as new titles are released that get the most marketing exposure: due to the staggering number of new publications released every month it is rare for any book to be a spotlighted title for more than a few months after publication, even though extending this window of interest is certainly what the publishers take great efforts to try and ensure.

The second spike in June-July can be ascribed to the release of the UK and US editions of the book that naturally gave the book more publicity overall, even though data captured for this research report specifically only relates to tweets about the South African edition. Marketing events such as Stephen King reviewing the book for the New York Times, and the announcement that one of the author's previous books has been acquired to be turned into a high profile miniseries resulted in increased and prolonged media exposure.

Figure 28 Timeline of tweets for Afterland



4.5.2 Facebook

The PRHSA and Umuzi pages both featured numerous posts for *Afterland* first in the month of publication, and then extended the social media marketing in the months following publication by sharing appropriate reviews, media mentions and news about the UK and US publications, favourable international review and the *The Shining Girls* film adaptation.

The Facebook marketing also included this book being featured in the annual December Advent Calendar campaign that highlights the biggest releases of the preceding year, with only three local fiction titles being selected annually for inclusion.

Table 24 Summary table of Facebook activity for Afterland

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions	Total number of likes	Total number of shares	Total number of comments	Total reach
102	59	12	7	9	4	8	4304	141	292	71290

As shown in Table 24 above, starting with the first post on 27 January 2020, until 31 January 2021 a total number of 102 posts were created pertaining specifically to the South African edition of *Afterland*, generating 4304 likes, 141 shares and a combined reach of 71290. It is interesting to note that there was more social media activity for *Afterland* on Twitter rather than on Facebook, as was the case with *Afterland*. This can be understood when one takes into account the profiles and audience of the two different writers: Marguerite Poland appeals to an older audience, who favours Facebook, while Lauren Beukes' dystopian novels typically appeals to younger readers, who are more active on Twitter.

In 2020, when the scheduled social media campaign for *Afterland* was first launched, the number of Facebook followers for PRHSA was 80278, and the Umuzi Facebook page had a total of 2279 followers.

Table 25, Table 26 and Figure 29 below show the breakdown of the different user groups that contributed the 102 posts on Facebook. Of these, the greatest number of posts was made by the publishers (60%), then by readers (12%), booksellers (9%) and libraries and institutions (8%). As the PRHSA and Umuzi Facebook pages are by far the publisher's biggest social media platform in terms of audience – 85 456 combined followers on Facebook in 2020 versus 19 365 combined followers on Twitter – it makes sense that the main bulk of the planned social media marketing plan was focused on Facebook, with 59 posts by the publishers versus 40 tweets made on Twitter.

There was a noted increase in the number of posts made by booksellers for *Afterland* in comparison to posts made for *A Sin of Omission*. Booksellers seem to either find Lauren Beukes easier to market online, either due to the author herself having an online presence, or because the perceived readership is younger and therefore more likely online. The book was also included in Exclusive Books' annual Homebru campaign, which accounts for a number of the additional posts. Lastly, as all marketing for this book mostly had to take place online due to the national state of lockdown, it follows that booksellers would turn to social media as one of the few remaining avenues available with which to market their books during the global pandemic when foot traffic to stores was either completely prohibited, restricted or advised against.

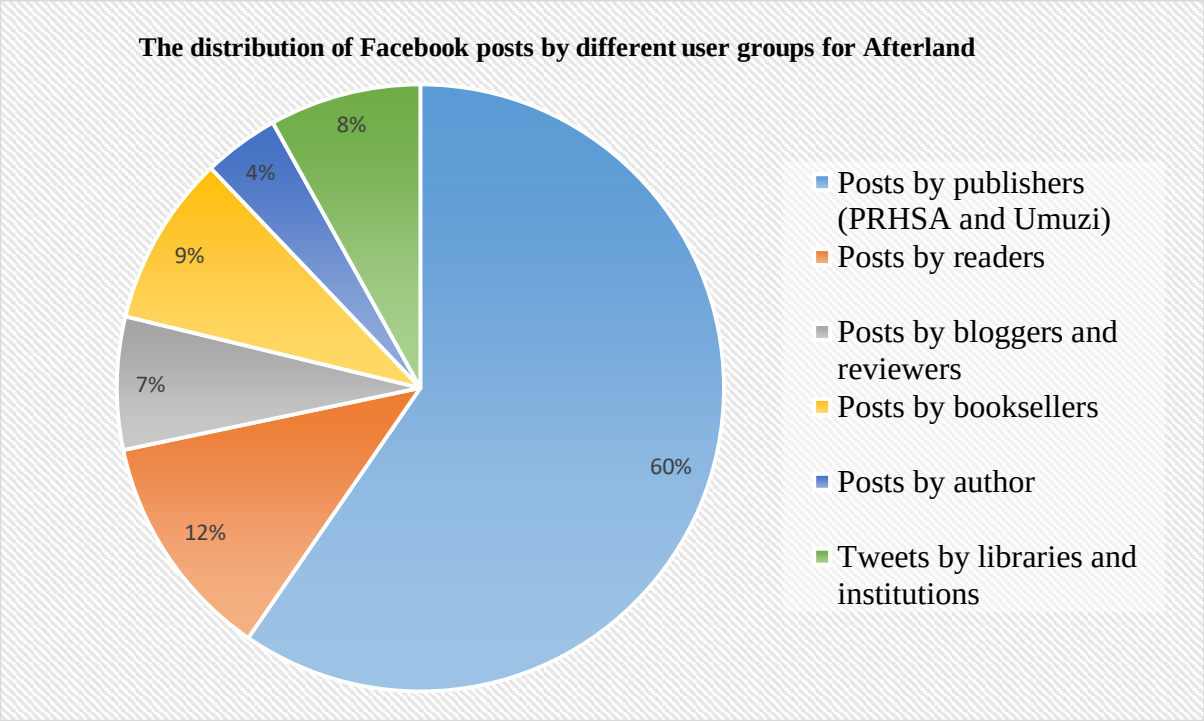
Table 25 Summary table Facebook activity for Afterland by user groups

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions
102	59	12	7	9	4	8
100%	60%	12%	7%	9%	4%	8%

Table 26 Breakdown of comments made on Facebook for Afterland

Total comments	Comments on posts made by publishers	Comments on posts made by author	Comments on posts made by reviewers	Comments on posts made by readers	Comments on posts made by booksellers	Comments on posts made by libraries and institutions
292	54	28	18	27	17	148

Figure 29 The distribution of Facebook posts by different user groups for Afterland



As mentioned in the previous section, Facebook as a social media platform typically generates more comments than Twitter simply from the different ways in which the interaction on the two different platforms have been structured, is facilitated and continues to evolve. For *Afterland*, a total of 292 comments were generated from 102 posts – a significantly higher ratio of 2.8 for Facebook posts as compared to a ration of 0.8 tweets to comments on Twitter.

Table 27 Breakdown of comments made on Facebook for Afterland

Total comments	Comments on posts made by publishers	Comments on posts made by author	Comments on posts made by reviewers	Comments on posts made by readers	Comments on posts made by booksellers	Comments on posts made by libraries and institutions
292	54	28	18	27	17	148

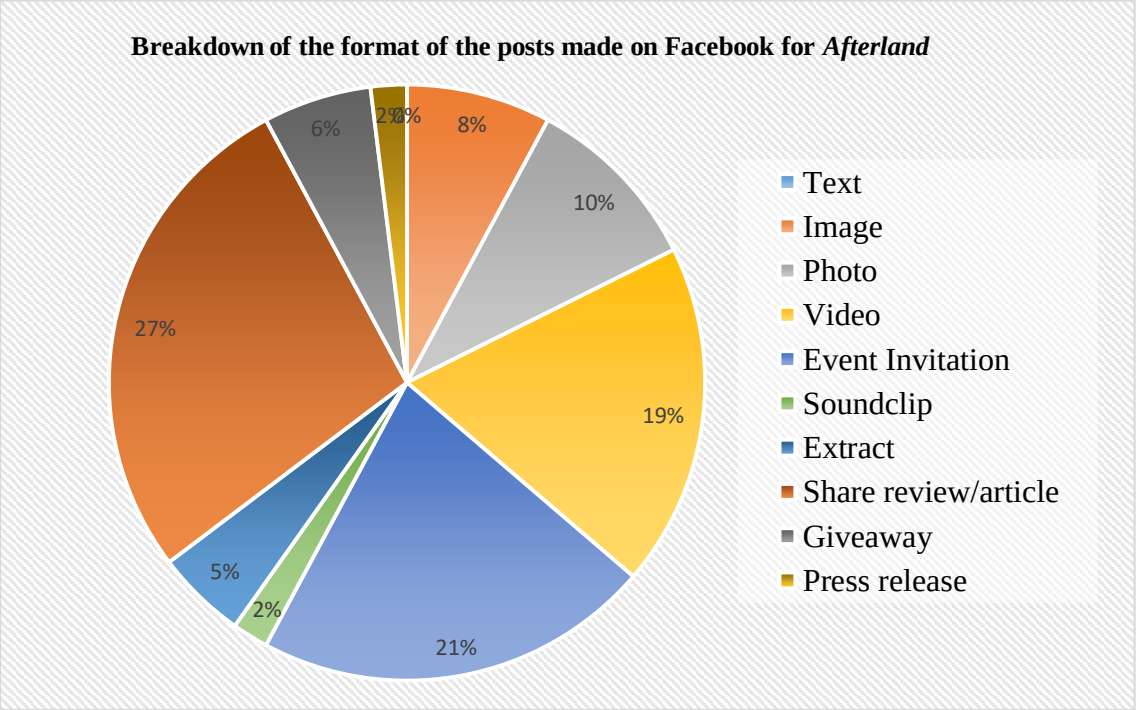
As shown in Table 27 above, the highest number of comments was made by libraries and institutions (51%) which included libraries, newspapers, media outlets or any kind of formal institution that were not booksellers, readers or reviewers.

Afterland therefore attracted noticeably more media attention than *A Sin of Omission*, which is great for book publicity and potential sales. The publishers contributed a further 18% of the comments, the author added 10%, readers 9% and booksellers and reviewers each commented 6%.

Table 28 The format of posts made on Facebook for Afterland

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
0	8	10	19	22	2	5	6	28	2

Figure 30 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Facebook for Afterland

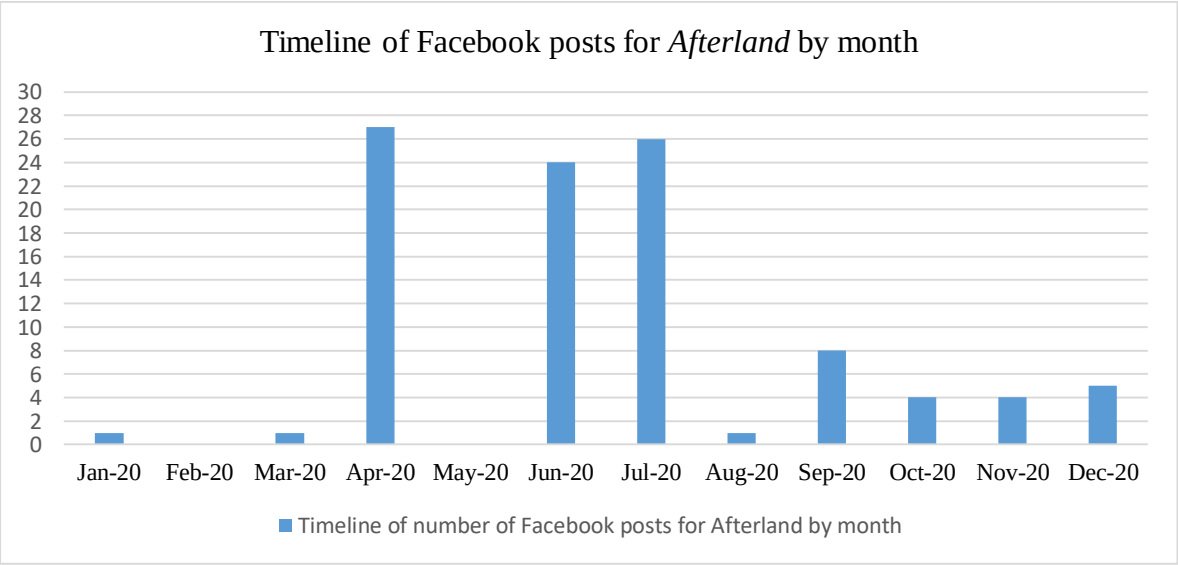


As shown in Table 28 and Figure 30 above, the breakdown of the format of posts used on Facebook. Generated graphics (images) were posted most (27%), with event invitation posts being used second most (21%), video content thirdly (19%) and photos being the fourth most used medium at 10%, instead of being the second-most used post type as was the case with *A Sin of Omission*.

This could be because even while Facebook is a more visual medium, video content typically does even better than static images. Lauren Beukes created a number of video clips that could be used online with great appeal, whereas Marguerite Poland only recorded a video clip much later at the insistence of the organisers of the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

Table 29 below shows a breakdown of the total number of Facebook posts about *Afterland*, from the first post in January 2020 until 31 January 2021. Although the table shows that there was already a much earlier mention on Facebook in January, this was pre-publication and simply showed the author receiving proofs of the book. Therefore, the first real intentional post was in March when the early release of the ebook version of *Afterland* was announced in lieu of the release of the printed edition. The late delivery of the physical edition was directly related to restrictions imposed due to lockdown. The spike in April relates to the planned, proactive digital campaign instigated by the publishers in order to announce the release of the book by this acclaimed author.

Table 29 Timeline of Facebook posts for Afterland by month



The second spike in June-July can be ascribed to the release of the UK and US editions of the book that naturally gave the book more publicity overall, even though data captured for this research report specifically only relates to tweets about the South African edition.

Marketing events such as Stephen King reviewing the book for the New York Times, and the announcement that one of the author's previous books has been acquired to be turned into a high profile miniseries resulted in increased and prolonged media exposure.

A third spike in the number of tweets can be seen in December 2020, which is due to the book being selected in both the annual PRHSA Advent Calendar campaign, as well as its inclusion in several of the booksellers' Christmas list highlight catalogues.

4.5.3 Instagram

PRHSA only has one Instagram page that features content from both the PRHSA and Umuzi lists. While two separate Facebook and Twitter pages exist that differentiates between the general PRHSA audience (showcasing all books from all imprints in the group) and the Umuzi page, which exclusively features local fiction titles. In 2020, the Instagram audience of the PRHSA page was 7812 followers.

Due to the nature of the Instagram page, much less content can be posted than on either Facebook or Twitter – social media best practices prescribe that corporate pages post no more than once per day, if that. Therefore, since the PRHSA Instagram page has to feature all titles from both the PRHSA imprints and all local fiction titles, it is not uncommon for the page to post about any book once or twice only. While Instagram and Facebook are owned by the same parent company, the back-end analytics statistics for Instagram are less detailed than what is available on the Facebook page.

When a post is boosted on Instagram, there is the option to include Instagram in the desired audience of the boosted post, meaning that the ad will be shown to more users on both Facebook and Instagram, as determined by the budget allocated to the posts. When feedback is given on a boosted post, the reach shown includes both the number of views achieved on Facebook and Instagram: the Instagram views are not recorded separately. Therefore while it is not possible to determine the reach of a boosted Instagram post specifically, the overall impact of boosted posts on this platform is recorded under the Facebook analytics.

Table 30 Summary table of Instagram activity for Afterland

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions
41	7	12	16	2	1	3

Table 30 above and Table 31 below shows the breakdown of the different user groups contributing the total of 41 posts on Instagram. Of these, the greatest number of posts was made by bloggers and reviewers (41%), readers (31%), the publishers (18%), libraries and institutions (8%) and the author (2%).

Table 31 Summary table of Instagram activity for Afterland by user groups

The total number of posts	Posts by publishers (PRHSA and Umuzi)	Posts by readers	Posts by bloggers and reviewers	Posts by booksellers	Posts by author	Posts by libraries and institutions
41	7	12	16	2	1	3
100%	17%	29%	39%	5%	3%	17%

It should be pointed out that the author does have her own Instagram page with 3171 followers, this account is private and users have to request access to view posts made by this Instagram profile. While the author did post more than once on Instagram, only 1 of these posts was visible in the public domain by being reposted by another user. While it follows that the Instagram audience the author has amassed on her Instagram profile would consist of loyal fans ideally placed to view posts about the new book by an author they choose to follow, as posts by the author were not seen by the general public, any additional posts were omitted from the data used in this research study.

Lastly, while the author did in fact post more often than the single indicated in Table 31, she did not post a significant amount more, clearly preferring to use Facebook and Twitter for the bulk of her self-promotion. As such, not including her private posts does not have a significant effect on the results obtained in this research study.

Figure 31 The distribution of Instagram posts by different user groups for Afterland

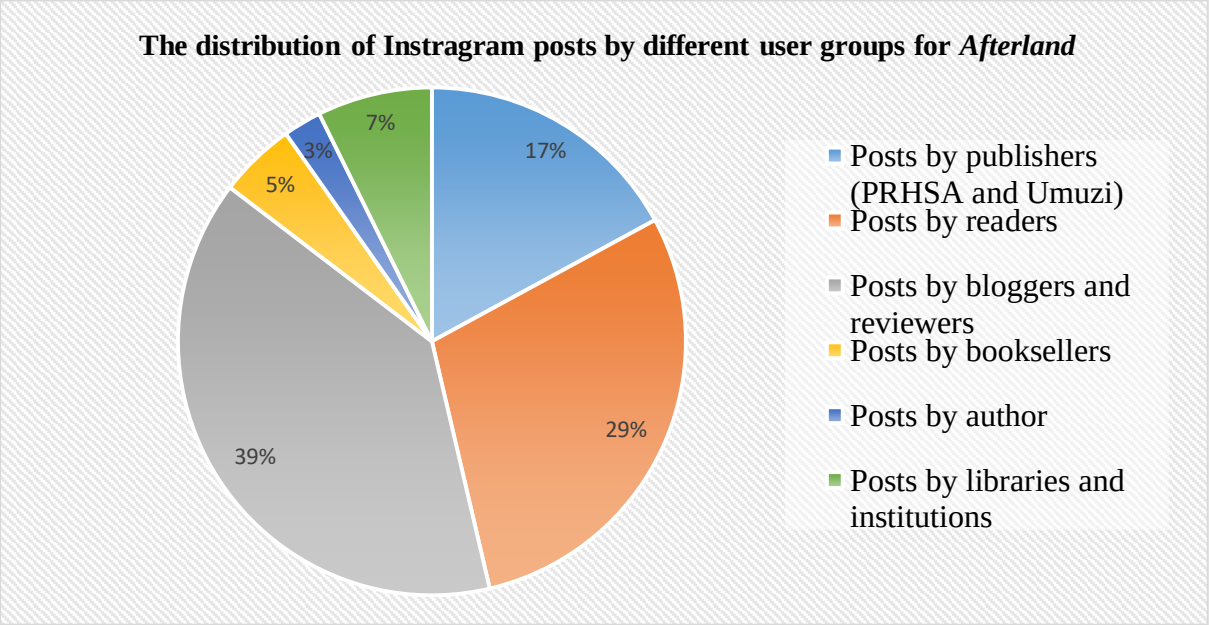


Table 32 and Figure 32 below details the breakdown of the kinds of posts made on Instagram for *Afterland*. As this is largely a visual platform, it follows that the data shows that a significant 52% of all posts were images, and another 30% were photos, which includes the stylized book photographs so typical of the Instagram book feed. 7% was sharing of reviews including the significant review in the New York Times by Stephen King, 5% event invitations and only 2% video clips.

Table 32 The format of the posts made on Instagram for Afterland

Text	Image	Photo	Video	Event Invitation	Sound clip	Extract	Giveaway	Share review/article	Press Release
0	23	13	1	2	0	1	1	3	0

Figure 32 Breakdown of the format of the posts made on Instagram for Afterland

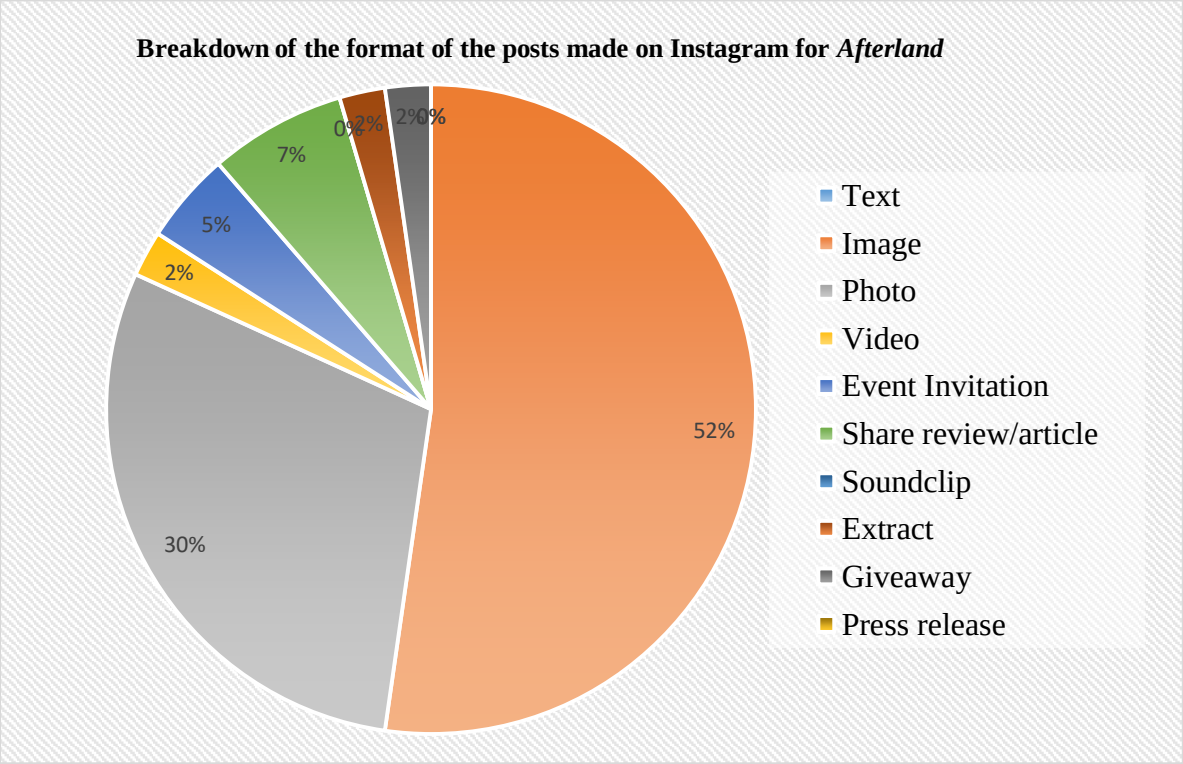
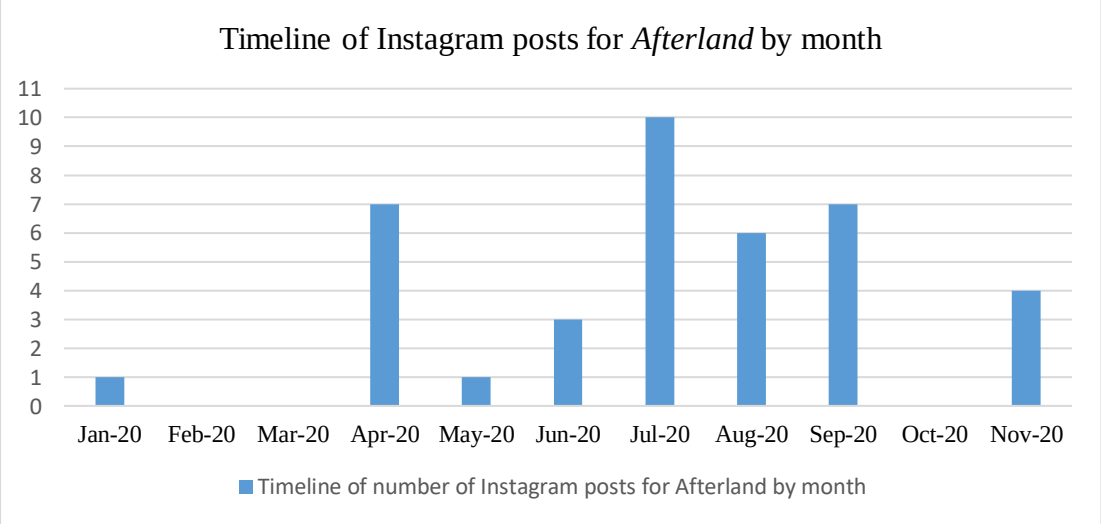


Figure 33 shows the timeline of Instagram posts for *Afterland.* The first Instagram post went out in January 2020, and while only 7 posts were made by the publisher, this is more than the usual number of Instagram posts made for any title on this social media platform specifically.

Figure 33 Timeline of Instagram posts for Afterland by month



This is because in addition to the usual one or two posts made per title – one post to announce that the book is available, and one post recommending an extract – the review by Stephen King was shared, along with several events invitation that sought to help publicise the novel idea of an online launch due to the restrictions of lockdown.

4.4 Sales activity

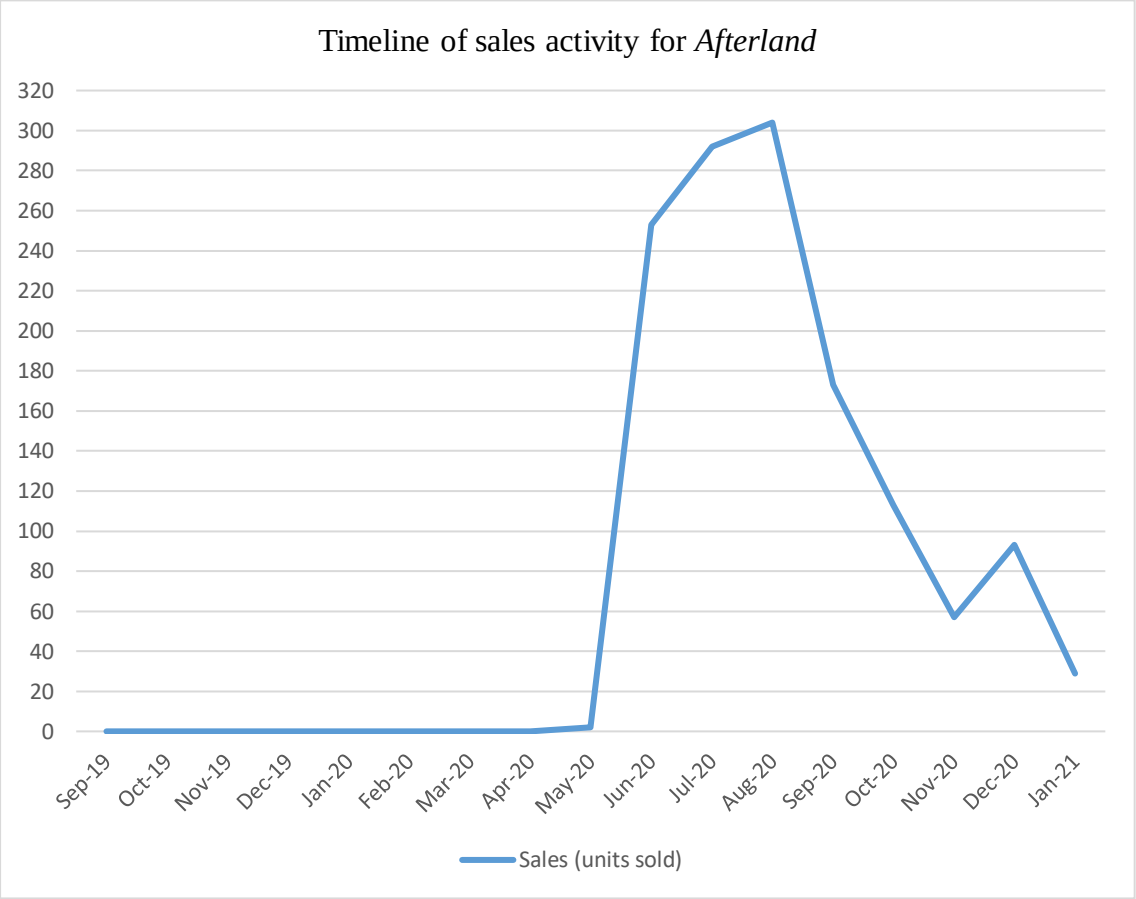
Table 34 below shows the official sales data for the printed edition of *Afterland*. While the ebook was released before the publication of the printed edition due to delays in distribution caused by lockdown, for the purposes of this research study, ebook sales are not included in the analysis. From the book's publication in June 2020 until 31 January, a total of 1369 copies have been sold, resulting in a total sales value of R348 461.14.

Table 33 Table of lifetime sales for Afterland (Nielsen BookScan, 2021)

ISBN	Title	Author	RRP	Binding	Publ Date	Volume	Value
9781415210444	Afterland	Beukes, Lauren	R290.00	Paperback	Jun 20, 2020	1,368	R348461.14

Figure 34 on the next page illustrates the sales activity in number of copies sold over the book's lifetime so far. There is a significant peak in sales in the first months of the book's release, but it is interesting that the sales peak does not last for three or four months after publication as is usually the case. This might again be ascribed to the COVID19 pandemic that firstly had a direct impact on people's desire and ability to read during such a stressful time, secondly affected the amount of disposable income available to spend on books as a result of the significant economic stresses caused by the measures imposed due to lockdown.

Figure 34 Timeline of sales activity for Afterland



Thirdly, it is rather unfortunate that the very nature of the book directly impacted on the sales performance. This inference can be made based on a number of posts mentioning specifically that the book's theme is 'eerily prescient', 'impossibly timeous' and simply too real to be a comfortable read for many of the author's usual fans. Readers stated in as many words in comments online that they would "maybe read this later, just not now".

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Discussion of results

Similar to the study conducted by Jamie Criswell and Nick Canty titled *Deconstructing Social Media: An Analysis of Twitter and Facebook Use in the Publishing Industry* in the United Kingdom in 2014, this research report provides insight into the effects of the social media marketing surrounding the two chosen titles, *A Sin of Omission* and *Afterland*, and also showed the impact of contributing factors such as existing readerships and literary prize nominations. In this chapter, the results obtained from the data analysis set out in Chapter 4 will be discussed in more detail.

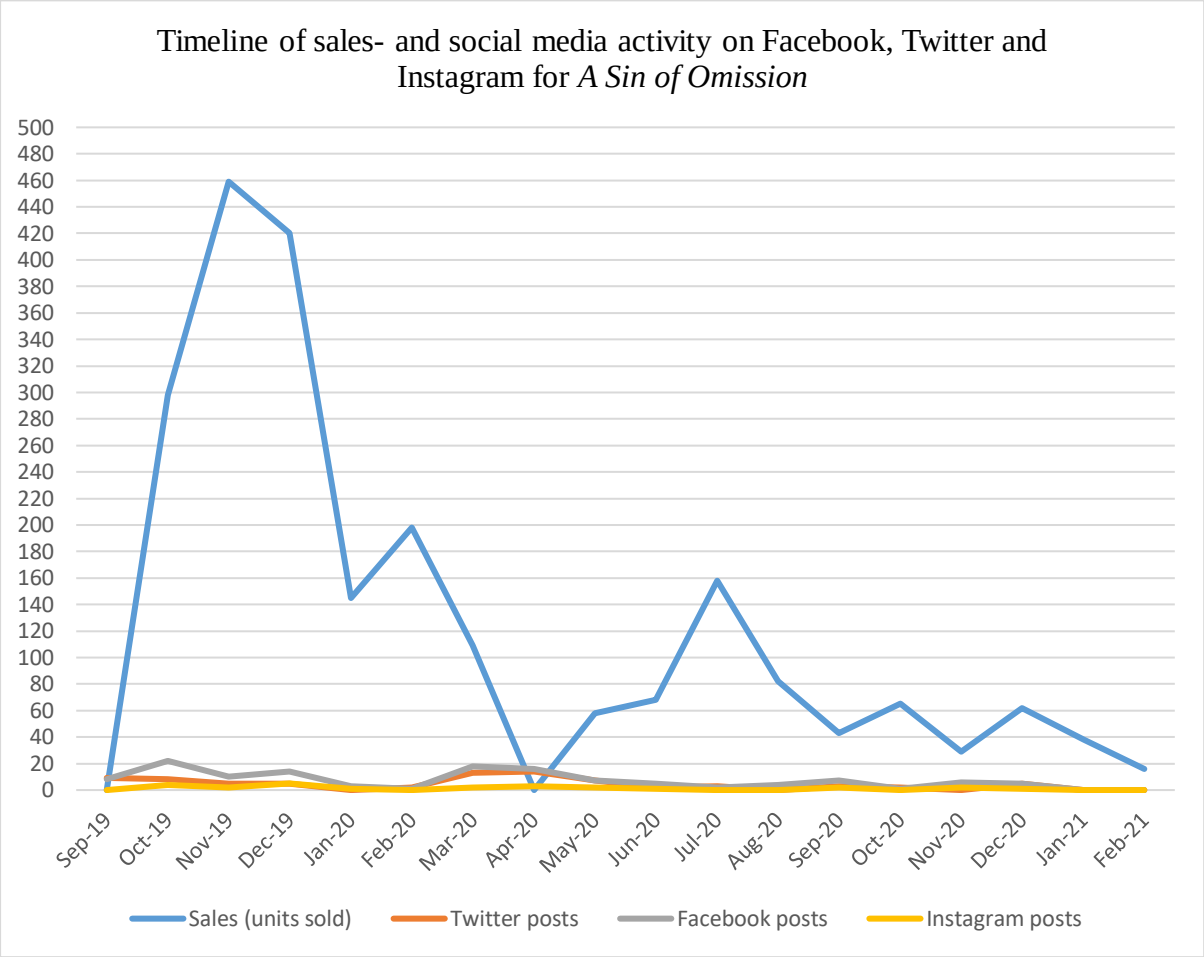
5.2 Comparisons between the results for *A Sin of Omission* and *Afterland*

5.2.1 All sales- and social media activity: *A Sin of Omission*

When looking at the first title on its own, Figure 35 on the next page shows the correspondence between all sales- and social media activity for *A Sin of Omission*, from the first mention on any social media platform, until 31 January 2021. A significant sales peak can be seen in the first four months after the book's release, with another increase in sales in 2020. Although there was no sales activity for late March to May 2021, this is due to external factors such as the lockdown regulations around the global COVID19 pandemic. If we assume that the international media attention given to the title from April-June 2021 had been allowed to be translated into sales, one can reasonably assume that sales would have increased over this same period. However, as circumstances turned out, one can only take an estimated guess in the absence of concrete sales data.

However, even if we assume that under normal circumstances there would have been an increase in sales as shown in Figure 35, it is interesting to note that while there is some correlation between the total social media marketing done in the same timeline, the direct causal relationship is relatively minor. When all the data is analysed, the results do not imply that there is an undeniable, direct relationship between the social media marketing that took place for the title, and the corresponding sales curve.

Figure 35 Timeline of sales- and social media activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for A Sin of Omission



This may be due to a number of factors, of which the age of the author and the estimated older readership might be the most significant. This is a segment of the reading market who are not as active on social media, nor are they influenced in their buying behaviour as much by social media marketing as their younger, more digitally active counterparts may be.

This is a target audience who possibly still prefers to go into tangible, brick-and-mortar bookstores, read printed reviews and marketing material and who choose books based on past releases and personal recommendation. This assumption can be made because even though there was very limited social media activity around this title, the sales in the months directly after the book's release was significant. From this we can infer that the audience was therefore aware of the publication of the new title in a timely fashion, and the only avenues that remain are traditional marketing channels such as printed ads or reviews, in-store promotions and marketing material, and the display of physical copies in bookstores.

In the absence of corresponding massive social media engagement, they must have learned about the book's publication by more traditional marketing methods such as set out above: book reviews in printed media, radio appearances, and WOM recommendations by friends and booksellers that directly translated into substantial book sales.

We can therefore come to the conclusion that for this title specifically, social media marketing within the South African publishing landscape was not a critical success factor that influenced sales directly.

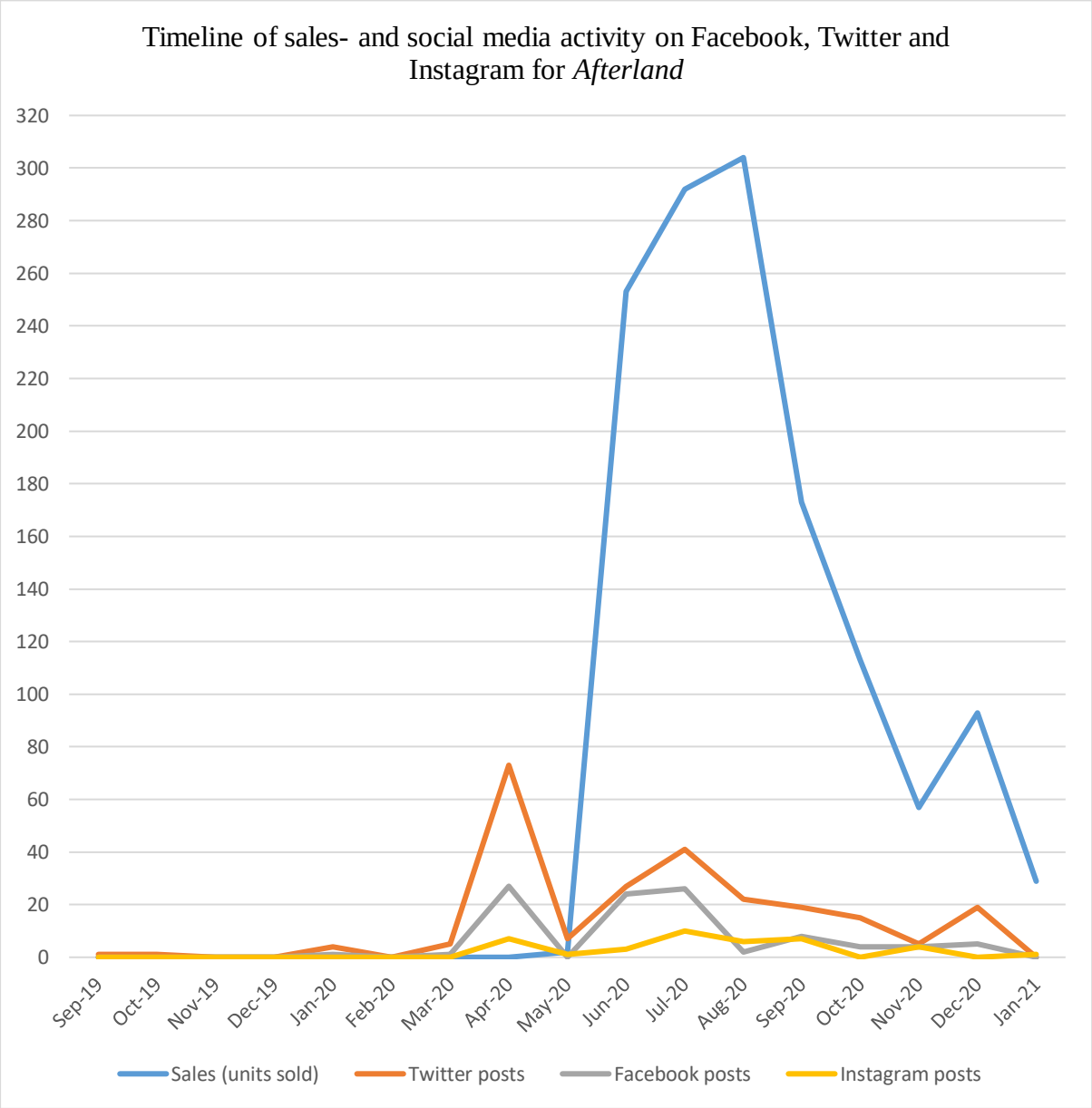
As set out at the beginning of this study, the author has no social media presence at all, nor is her typically older readership known to be overly active on social media. She is an elderly writer, and although she has a firmly established readership, this may be ascribed mostly to the nature and quality of her work rather than aggressive marketing of the author herself in the form of substantial press tours and media appearances.

5.2.2 All sales- and social media activity: *Afterland*

When looking at the second title on its own, Figure 36 on the next page shows the correspondence between all sales- and social media activity for *Afterland*, from the first mention on any social media platform, until 31 January 2021. A significant sales peak can be seen in the first four months after the book's release. The peak of social media activity in March-April 2020 can be presumed to have increased awareness of, and interest in the title, which resulted in the following sales peak from May to October. Although there was a sharp decline in sales from September to October, there was an increase in December, both fluctuations which correspond directly with the same curve in the social media activity.

From this we can assume that there is in fact a direct causal relationship between the social media marketing and sales activity for *Afterland*.

Figure 36 Timeline of sales- and social media activity on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for Afterland



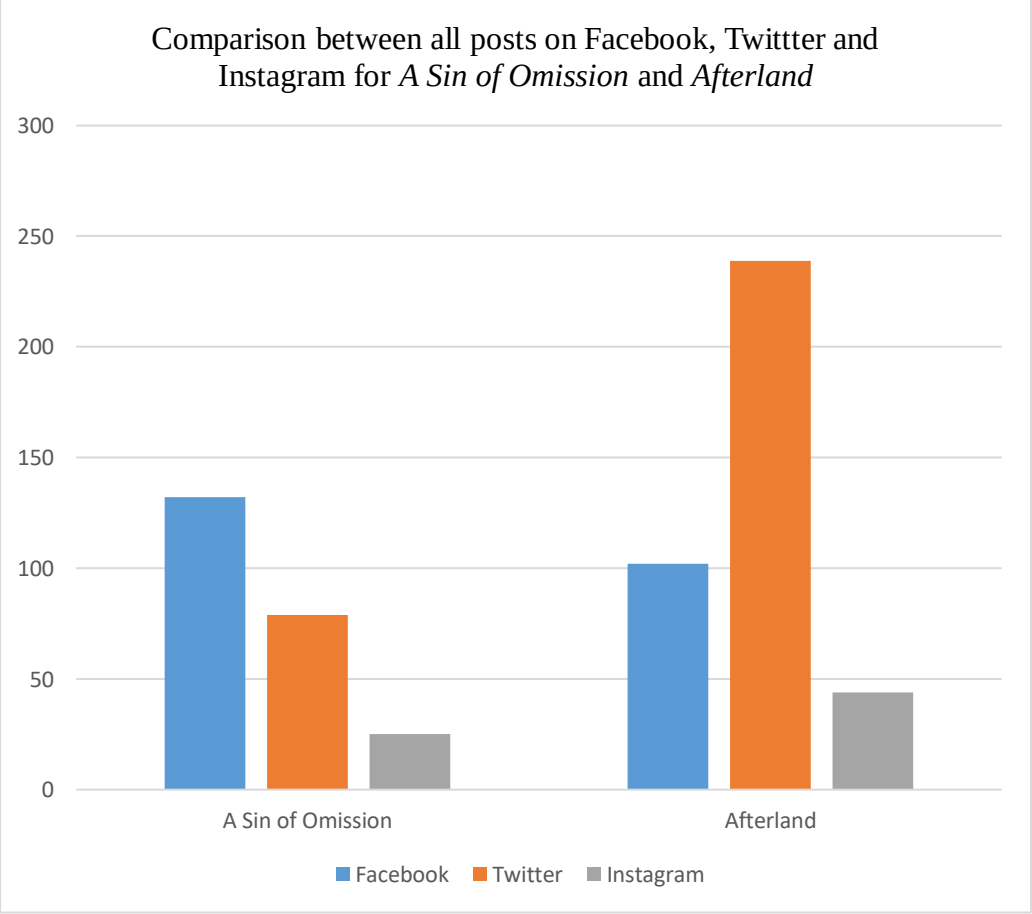
Where we assumed that the absence of the author's online presence with *A Sin of Omission* explains why the social media marketing activity had little direct impact on the sales of the first title, the same may be assumed with *Afterland*. This author has a substantial online presence, and since her younger readership can be presumed to be more digitally savvy than the older market segment, they also proved to be influenced more by the social media activity for a book in their corresponding buying behaviour.

5.3 A comparison between *A Sin of Omission* and *Afterland*

Overall, *A Sin of Omission* gained more sales in its lifespan than *Afterland*, selling a total of 2248 copies where *Afterland* only sold 1368 copies. Even with a nine month head start in being published earlier, this is still a considerable difference of 880 copies.

This was achieved even though *A Sin of Omission* generated far less social media activity with both the planned and reactive social media campaigns. *A Sin of Omission* achieved a total of 132 posts on Facebook, 79 tweets on Twitter, and 25 posts on Instagram. This is an impressive tally, especially considering that the book was mainly aimed at an older readership that is not typically very active on social media, as well as the fact that the author has no social media presence whatsoever. Though not inconsequential, these results are nevertheless insubstantial compared to the 102 posts on Facebook, 239 tweets on Twitter, and 44 posts on Instagram amassed by *Afterland* (Figure 37).

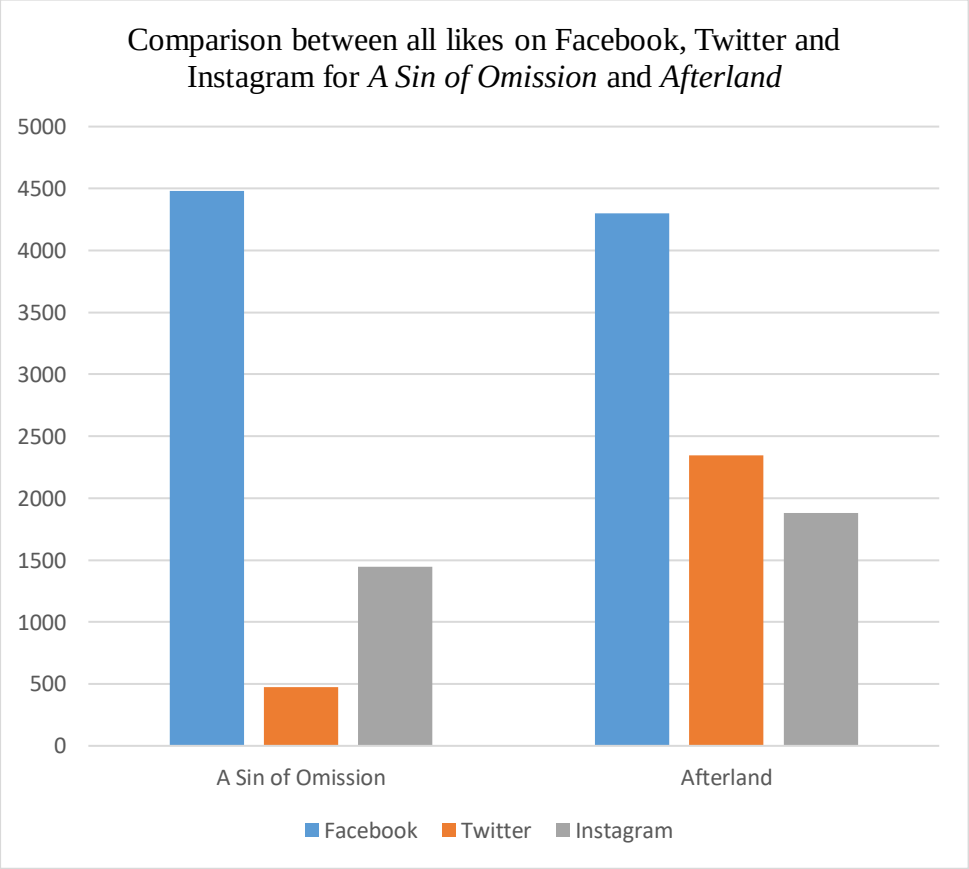
Figure 37 Comparison between all posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for A Sin of Omission and Afterland



In addition to the number of posts each title received, the engagement from the online audience is a key aspect that needs to be considered as an indicator of success – it is possible to generate innumerable posts, but if this does not elicit some form of engagement in the form of likes, comments and shares from the intended audience, it is clearly not as effective as a marketing tool with the potential to convert publicity into sales.

Therefore, as seen in Figure 38 below, the total number of likes received for *A Sin of Omission* and *Afterland* are compared side by side. It can be seen that even though there were less social media activity for *A Sin of Omission* than *Afterland* (Figure 34), both titles received nearly as many likes in total on Facebook: 4500 likes for *A Sin of Omission* and 4301 likes for *A Sin of Omission*. *Afterland* received significantly more likes on Twitter than *A Sin of Omission:* 2344 to 475. This is not surprising, as Facebook tends to be more popular with older users, while Twitter enjoys greater popularity under a younger audience, which corresponds directly to the readerships of the two titles being discussed.

Figure 38 Comparison between all likes on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for A Sin of Omission and Afterland



Overall, *A Sin of Omission* received overall less social media engagement in terms of the number of post made by all interested parties for the entire lifetime of the book, and the total number of engagement received. This indicates that while social media marketing was part of the overall marketing strategy of *A Sin of Omission*, it was not the key determining factor that impacted on the overall sales of the title. Conversely however, the social media marketing done for *Afterland* impacted directly on the sales activity of the title.

CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS

6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is interesting that the title that gathered the most social media interaction overall did not gain the most sales. The dominant user groups for both titles was the publishers themselves, as well as readers, reviewers and bloggers. Booksellers contributed very little in terms of social media marketing, although it may be presumed that they do contribute significantly to book marketing in other forms not necessarily measurable on social media, such as window displays, in-store activations, point of sale and personal recommendations by booksellers.

The social media marketing for *A Sin of Omission* was both proactive and reactive, with the publishers giving book the full social media marketing treatment from its release. While there was steady but limited interaction online with the book, the book's profile and level of social media engagement increased and continued beyond its normal span due to the book's inclusion on the shortlist of the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. However, since the bulk of the intended readership can be assumed to not be overly active on social media due to age factors, the efficacy of the social media marketing was limited. In can even be said that the book's substantial sales cannot be attributed to the social media marketing done for this title. While all publicity and awareness campaigns do contribute in the bigger picture, it can be concluded that this the audience and buyers of this book did so regardless of the social media marketing activity.

The planned social media marketing for *Afterland* was a success, having gained significant traction and engagement online as shown in the substantial number of posts, shares and likes. While the sales were impacted directly by the social media activity, overall sales of this title did not exceed that of *Afterland*, in spite of the author receiving international accolades and widespread media coverage. Taking the bigger picture into account, this may be due to the very unusual period surrounding the publication of this title, namely the unprecedented global circumstance of COVID19. In addition to external measures directly impacting on the sales and distribution of the title, less measurable effects no doubt impacted on the sales success of the book, such as the emotional and economic upheaval caused by the pandemic.

It must also be considered that through some fluke, the book itself deals with the topic of a pandemic, something that readers have personally commented and said to have found nearly impossible to believe, and very hard to read while living through something very similar in real life.

While the inclusion of sales data or a call to action such as a 'Buy Now' button, 'Click Here to Buy' or a trackable sales pixel – a simple line of code that tracks how many clicks a post receives as relating directly to online book sales – may have resulted in a more tangible relationship to prove any causal relationship between online marketing efforts and the resulting sales activity and sales performance, it was not possible to do so within the scope of this research project, for the reasons set out below.

First, this research report examines two real-world marketing case studies as they actually occur in the digital marketing of two books within the South African trade publishing environment, rather than examining the data obtained from an engineered case study set up with specific trackers as the above set in place from the start.

Secondly, while Buy Now buttons are naturally included in many of the online posts made when marketing a book on social media, due to the nature of the social media marketing, best practice advises that one should be careful to sometimes camouflage the sales aspects of posts in order to steer clear of an incessant buy-buy-buy message to a social media audience. The idea with a social media marketing campaign is rather to curate a bigger conversation and to pique readers' interest in the book, which could then lead to sales.

Thirdly, this research study attempts to include the data points of all social media activity around the two titles, which includes all mentions of the books by third-party users such as publishers, booksellers, readers and reviewers. Even if the study was set up to specifically include the trackable calls to action, the third party contributors would not have included the same in their posts, resulting in incomplete data.

6.2 Answering the objectives

In conclusion, in answer to the objectives of this research study set out in Chapter 1, the following results have been obtained through this research study:

6.2.1 What is the impact of social media marketing within the South African trade publishing industry?

Overall, the title that garnered the most social media interaction overall did not achieve the highest sales figures. while social media marketing remains an invaluable tool in the arsenal of publishers trying to increase awareness, and corresponding sales of their titles published in the South African publishing landscape, it is not uniformly effective as a marketing tool for all titles. Different factors impact on the success a social media marketing campaign for a book has as relating directly to sales, namely the age and social media uptake of the target audience, whether the author themselves are active on social media, and if there is an existing online audience, or whether publishers are trying to grow a new online audience from scratch. Instead, the real value of social media seems to be its ability to converse directly with, and exploit established communities.

The findings set out in this research paper show that social media is most effective as a marketing platform if there is an established community – findings that correspond to the conclusions made in the original study by Criswell and Canty (2014). In this research paper, the title with less engagement from readers on social media sold more titles due to outside factors such as the author's established, non-digital audience, and the prestige conferred upon the book by its inclusion on the shortlist for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

6.2.2. Is there a direct correlation between the social media activity, and the book sales of each of the two trade publishing titles being examined?

As presented in the data analysis in Chapter 5, the corresponding curve of the sales figures of *Afterland* as juxtaposed with the total social media activity for the title indicates that there is indeed a direct causal relationship between the social media marketing and sales activity for *Afterland*. However, the same cannot be inferred from the sales- and social media activity for *A Sin of Omission*, where the sales activity and the social media marketing activity have no discernible correspondence.

We can therefore come to the conclusion that there is no uniform direct correlation between the social media activity and the book sales of any title, and it may differ from one title to the next, impacted significantly by the social media presences of the author and the intended readership. Furthermore, social media activity apparently has the most corresponding impact on the sales of a book when there is already an established online audience for the title before the digital marketing campaign is undertaken.

6.2.3 Did the social media marketing campaign noticeably impact the trade book sales in a clear, corresponding way?

Yes, but only in one of the two titles examined in this research study. There was a definite link between the frequency and magnitude of the social media activity for *Afterland* and the corresponding number of sales achieved in the same time period. A significant sales peak can be seen in the first four months after the book's release. The peak of social media activity in March-April 2020 can be presumed to have increased awareness of, and interest in the title, which resulted in the following sales peak from May to October. Although there was a sharp decline in sales from September to October, there was an increase in December, both fluctuations which correspond directly with the same curve in the social media activity.

The social media marketing campaign undertaken for *A Sin of Omission* did not noticeably impact the trade book sales in a clear way. The older readership of this title were presumed from the outset to be less active on social media, and therefore less susceptible to digital marketing efforts than their younger counterparts. Instead, this audience seem to have been made aware of the publication of this title by other means, most likely traditional marketing strategies such as reviews in printed media, bookstore displays, hand-selling by enthusiastic booksellers and POS in bookstores. We can make this assumption, because there is a sharp increase in book sales directly after the book was released, even though this spike in sales is not due to a spike in social media marketing immediately after the book was published. The audience therefore definitely knew about the book's release, but gleaned this knowledge through other marketing efforts instigated by the publisher.

The seasonality of book sales should also be acknowledged. New releases generally sell the most copies when it introduced to a market – therefore within the first few months of publication; during Christmas time or special holidays, and if a newsworthy event occurs,

such as the author winning a prize or receiving a nomination. Therefore the peak in sales of *Afterland* over the Christmas period might not necessarily be due to social media activity, but rather the general sales pattern of books.

6.2.4 What kinds of social media activity has the most impact on sales?

As there is no direct correlation between the social media activity as impacting on sales in the first title researched in this paper, the following section will discuss only the social media activity relating to the title that did show a direct causal relationship with social media marketing, namely *Afterland* by Lauren Beukes.

On Facebook, 27% of the activity was sharing a review or article about the book, while 21% of the posts were the sharing of invitations for online events. Combined, it seems that what other readers are saying about a book has the most impact on sales, meaning that reader reviews, articles appearing in publications and influencer reviews are crucial in influencing the sales behaviour of social media users when it comes to a trade title.

The significant number of posts with event invitations might be an uncharacteristic occurrence particular only to the timeline around the pandemic, as the novelty and uncertainty around virtual events resulted in numerous posts and reminders, much more than is typically posted for any event, where the standard is 3-5 mentions per event at most. Simply put, this was new territory, and the publishers and organisers may have flooded their social media pages with events notifications from inexperience and some pressing need to try and get attendance up for the – at the time – new phenomenon of virtual book launches, of which *Afterland* was one of the first subjects.

Further studies could examine whether the same distribution of the kinds of social media activity in a non-pandemic era would remain consistent, or whether one of the more likely categories such as images or video content wouldn't prove to be more prevalent and effective.

On Twitter, 37% of the activity was textual, followed by 20% sharing reviews and articles, and 10% sharing event invitations. For the latter, the same reasoning may be inferred as for the number of Facebook tweets reminding users about events.

However, the statistically significant number of text-based tweets is interesting: these tweets were strictly about the book itself, or about the author having written a new title.

It can be inferred that here WOM marketing was the most impactful in influencing the sales activity of the book. When more people are talking about a book: about being busy reading it, wanting to read it, planning to read it, what they thought after reading it, the more sales activity is achieved as a result.

6.2.5 Overall, do social media marketing campaigns impact the effectiveness on the sales of trade publishing titles in South Africa?

Yes, but only if there is already an existing, substantial social media audience for a title online. If either the author or the intended readership is not already present and active, any new social media campaign cannot create a receptive social media environment within the course of a standard digital marketing campaign in time to directly impact sales of that title. While it may go some way to establishing an online audience for future publications, within the scope of this research study, there is no direct correlation of present social media activity on the present sales of a title, unless there is already a pre-existing active online audience before the social media marketing campaign is launched.

The area of social media can be an unruly one, in which there are a number of complex limitations to be taken into account when both gathering the data and analyzing it. The very nature of social media will never allow for a total, complete data gathering and any analysis will have to rely on some extrapolation. While admittedly not faultless, within the scope and limitations of this research study, a concerted effort has been made to take the first steps in trying to understand the direct, measurable effect of social media marketing on sales within the South African trade publishing industry.

Social media marketing cannot be relied on alone to market books effectively, especially when such a significant increase in sales can be influenced by external factors such as a prior readership or a literary prize. Social media marketing’s reach is limited by the communities it is used to access.

Despite being a crowded market, social media "offers a creative platform for publishers to exploit as they wish, and once established, a title's social media platform can be used as a platform to exploit any future social media activity that can occur" (Criswell & Canty, 2014).

6.2.6 Which social media platform is used most effectively when marketing trade publishing books in South Africa?

For *Afterland,* the only one of the two titles showing a direct correlation between social media activity and sales activity, both Twitter and Facebook posts and tweets had the most impact on the corresponding sales of the book. However, out of both of these two social media platforms, Twitter was still the more effective by a large margin. This may be due to a number of factors: the author herself is very active on Twitter and less so on Facebook.

The users on Twitter are typically younger than the users on Facebook, which matches the younger intended readership and fans of Lauren Beukes. Younger readers use the 'younger' platform, therefore marketing on Twitter was the most impactful.

Further studies might shed light on whether the same would be true for a slightly older readership with a very active Facebook presence, perhaps someone like Sally Andrew or Mike Nicol, where it would be interesting to determine if Facebook would have the most impact on sales, when social media marketing does indeed have a definite effect on sales.

6.2.7 Can these assumptions be generalised to be similarly applicable to the marketing and sales of other trade-, non-trade- and academic titles published in South Africa?

It is not clear whether the assumptions and conclusions made in this research paper can be assumed to be similarly applicable to the marketing and sales of other trade-, non-trade- and academic titles published in South Africa.

Social media remains by definition just that: social. Trade titles lend themselves by their popular and mainstream nature to effective social media marketing, but the same cannot be said for subject-specific or academic texts without conducting specific and focused research in order to determine the efficacy of social media marketing in South Africa on the other publishing sectors.

6.3 Recommendations for further research

It would be interesting to see whether a similar study recreated in a time post-COVID19 would deliver the same results in the absence of the disruptive factors that impacted this research study due the outbreak of the global pandemic. Future research could also potentially further investigate the effect of literary prizes, both local and international, on the sales success of a South African title. This research study could also be replicated to determine whether social media marketing have a measurable, direct impact on the book sales of other trade-, non-trade- and academic titles published in South Africa.

[word count: 27 347]

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