

ABSTRACT

In recent years, social media has become an increasingly important part of the marketing strategies for many Broadway productions. Yet, many Broadway marketing teams do not take complete advantage of their social media channels, instead relying on traditional marketing methods to attract audiences. *Hamilton: An American Musical* is a recent Broadway production that has used an innovative social media marketing strategy to attract diverse audiences and create a dedicated fanbase. By analyzing the strategy across *Hamilton*'s Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, I determine what made its social media so successful and how other Broadway shows can learn from its strategy. The innovative social media tactics used by *Hamilton* and other shows like it have allowed Broadway to grow the theatre community, attracting younger and more racially and ethnically diverse audiences. These new audiences are the future of theatre and have growing power to dictate Broadway's future.

INTRODUCTION

Today, social media has become one of the most prevalent marketing tools for many businesses, often overtaking the use of traditional marketing tools and techniques. Many industries have been quick to adopt social media as a major player in their marketing strategies. However, the performing arts industry as a whole has been slow to catch on to the changing marketing trends. In recent years, the theatre industry has slowly begun to increase its social media presence, begging the question—what does this mean for the future of Broadway? According to Broadway social media manager Christopher Ketner, “for Broadway specifically, social media has really taken off and been incredible to help support shows and reach an audience beyond the traditional ticket buyer, and bringing a brand new audience to Broadway

shows” (Russo 2). Social media usage can have numerous positive impacts on the theatre industry including the ability to target specific market segments, reach populations that are not exposed to more traditional marketing materials, and produce content that has the opportunity to go viral (Craft 58). Social media also allows fans to have frequent interaction with the production, creating a word-of-mouth buzz that drives ticket sales (Birkner 22). In my thesis, I will explore how the increased prevalence of social media has impacted the marketing strategies for the theatre industry and how new technology has allowed it to target a younger and more ethnically diverse market.

In the modern age, audiences have more access to Broadway and theatre than they ever had before. “With digitally streaming cast albums, YouTube vlogs, bootlegs, and press interviews, people living thousands of miles away are able to now participate in the Broadway experience that used to be exclusive” (Engstrom 2). This has connected new populations to the industry that have not previously been included. Additionally, as the majority of Broadway tickets are now purchased online, engaging fans directly online has become more important than ever (Birkner 22).

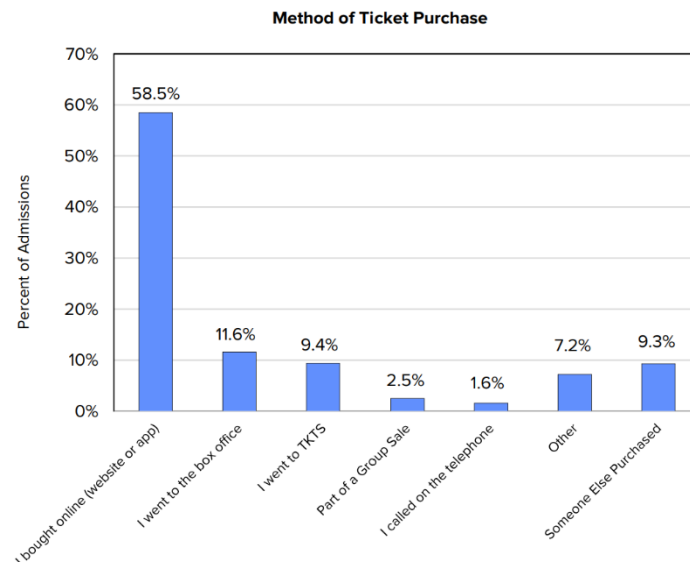


Figure 1- Method of ticket purchase for Broadway ticket buyers during 2018-2019 season. The Broadway League, 2019.

As our world becomes more digital, the benefits offered to Broadway productions by having a robust social media presence include increased exposure and direct communication with fans. While social media still makes up only a small percentage of many productions' advertising budget, many managers recognize it as a valuable tool in a time when a quarter of Broadway audiences are under 25 (Lunden 1).

Source	Under 18	18-34	35-49	50-64	65 or Older
The New York Times	8.8%	13.5%	12.2%	21.6%	34.4%
The New Yorker	4.3%	5.3%	4.8%	7.7%	12.7%
Time Out New York	3.4%	4.5%	5.9%	4.9%	3.6%
New York Magazine	1.8%	2.4%	2.7%	4.5%	5.8%
Wall Street Journal	2.7%	2.0%	1.3%	2.6%	3.8%
The New York Post	1.5%	1.4%	1.2%	1.3%	2.1%
The Daily News	1.5%	0.9%	0.5%	1.1%	1.0%
Newsday	0.8%	0.4%	0.1%	0.9%	1.5%
The Star-Ledger	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.6%	1.5%
Instagram	25.7%	22.5%	8.7%	3.8%	0.9%
Facebook	8.5%	16.7%	12.4%	8.9%	7.0%
Twitter	9.5%	10.6%	3.8%	1.9%	0.7%
Television	10.2%	7.2%	6.0%	9.2%	13.5%
Radio	6.5%	4.2%	3.8%	6.9%	5.3%
Other	8.6%	6.0%	6.2%	7.6%	7.7%

(multiple responses)

Figure 2- Where Broadway audiences reported getting their information about theatre during the 2018-2019 season. The Broadway League, 2019.

According to a report published by the Broadway League, in the 2018-2019 season, more Broadway ticket holders under the age of 34 got their information about Broadway productions from social media than any other platform. Notably, for audience members aged 35-49, their number one source of Broadway news was Facebook as well. This means that the majority of Broadway ticket buyers are now looking to social media as their number one source of information when researching Broadway productions (figure 2). This makes it more important

than ever for productions to have a meaningful presence on social media. As Charles Flateman, vice president of marketing at the Schubert Organization puts it, “[Broadway] was print-focused for a long time. Now... we’re seeing more social media, so the way we’re communicating has become more focused, but is just as aggressive, or more aggressive, in getting our message out than we’ve ever been” (Birkner 22).

In order to demonstrate the ways that social media marketing can help productions reach new, more diverse audiences, I will conduct a study on the social media techniques of *Hamilton: An American Musical* leading up to and throughout its Broadway run. By studying its marketing tactics, I will extrapolate how social media’s “proper use and management may be uniquely suited to reach ticket buyers and event promoters using the power of ‘online word-of-mouth,’” and how the success achieved by *Hamilton* can be replicated by similar Broadway productions (Rothschild 101).

APPROACH SUMMARY

In approaching this complex topic, I decided that it would be best to analyze the social media strategy of one production that opened on Broadway within the past 10 years and that had a successful or unique use of social media. I chose to use *Hamilton* as a case study as it is arguably the most successful new musical to premiere within the past 10 years, and it has the largest online following of the productions currently on Broadway. After deciding to study *Hamilton*, I completed an in-depth survey of each of its social media accounts across Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok as well as the accounts of important people associated with the production (current and former cast members, members of the creative team, etc). I surveyed each of *Hamilton*’s social media accounts by exploring the posts on each of the

accounts since the time they were created to observe trends across each platform. I then chose to use recent examples in my analysis of each platform in order to provide the most up to date information about *Hamilton*'s social media strategy. I choose which personal accounts to survey by searching online blogs and articles to see which cast members' social media accounts people were discussing. The people most discussed were Lin Manuel Miranda, Daveed Diggs, Phillipa Soo, Amber Ardolino, Leslie Odom Jr., Renée Elise Goldsberry, Jasmine Cephas Jones, and Anthony Ramos. Since a major measure of success for social media marketing is buzz generated by the content, I then did a deep dive on what people were saying about *Hamilton* and its social media across the internet: ranging from blogs to newspaper articles dated between 2015 (when the show opened on Broadway) and March 2022. I took comprehensive notes on each of the articles I read and compared them to one another to identify trends. I also analyzed the social media content from other shows currently running on Broadway in order to point out areas that made *Hamilton*'s strategy unique. I surveyed the accounts of each show currently running on Broadway (as of March 2022) by scrolling through the accounts to identify consistencies and compared those to the trends I identified across *Hamilton*'s accounts. Additionally, I read several scholarly articles and studies on the success and use of social media marketing in the entertainment and Broadway industry to see what other scholars are saying about the topic. Finally, I used the annual report published by the Broadway League on the demographics of Broadway audiences to determine what impact, if any, social media has had on the types of people who purchase Broadway tickets.

BROADWAY AUDIENCES AND ADVERTISING STRATEGY

The history of Broadway audiences can be summed up by this quote from Elizabeth Craft: “The ‘Great White Way’ nickname has been sadly homonymic. The average Broadway attendee is a female, middle-aged, highly educated, and affluent tourist... Audiences are severely limited by high ticket prices (now over \$100 apiece for the best seats) and by accessibility to the theatres, even when shows go on tour” (Craft 53). The Broadway industry has been one that is historically stagnant in terms of the types of people that make up audiences. According to the Broadway League who conducts an annual study of Broadway audiences, the average age of Broadway ticket buyers has remained between 40 and 45 years old for the past two decades (Broadway League 5). The same study found that Broadway audiences are very largely Caucasian, with 74% to 80.6% of ticket holders being Caucasian from 1998-2019 (id at 22). Additionally, theatre-goers are consistently more affluent than the average American, with 44% of audience members reporting an annual income of \$150,000 or more (compared to 11% of the United States population in the same category) (id at 29).

While the demographics of Broadway audiences have remained relatively stagnant (figure 3), many producers are beginning to recognize the importance of attracting new

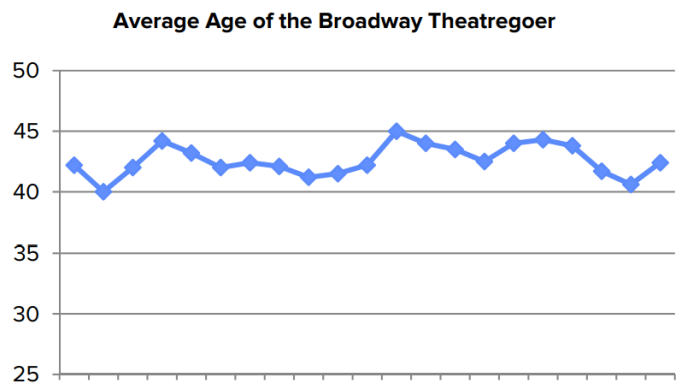


Figure 3- The average age of Broadway ticket holders 1998-2019
The Broadway League, 2019.

audiences to the theatre as this population ages and the costs of bringing a production to Broadway become more and more expensive. In discussing this importance, “Kyle A. Thomas writes that the survival of any art form — but especially one as fleeting and ephemeral as theater — is dependent upon introducing new generations to that form through the mediums they understand best” (Lewis 4). Since the creation of social media platforms, the medium best understood by more and more of the population has become social media.

It may seem as if social media marketing is no longer new, having been around since the early days of social media beginning in 2006, when Facebook expanded its platform to allow users worldwide to make pages. However, in the theatre industry, this is a trend that is just starting to be understood as the future of marketing. Many Broadway shows still do not take advantage of social media, instead choosing to rely on more traditional marketing forms like print, TV, and radio. With a few notable exceptions, most Broadway shows post infrequently to their channels and fail to develop a strategy specific to social media. Why is this?

Getting a production to Broadway is extremely expensive and requires significant investment from a large number of producers. Additionally, this investment is decidedly risky, with only 20% of productions recouping their initial investment (Davenport 1). This leads to producers being wary of making investments in newer, unproven, or risky marketing trends or techniques. Christine Birkner states “In the past, Broadway shows primarily were promoted via posters plastered throughout the New York metropolitan area; theater reviews in local and national media; and print ads in tourist brochures, in Playbill, the magazine given to Broadway theatergoers, and in local newspapers including The New York Times” (Birkner 21). These tried-and-true methods of marketing have been staples of the Broadway advertising strategy, and it is only within recent years that producers have been unable to ignore the growing power of social

media marketing and willing to invest in these new channels. Sara Fitzpartrick, SpotCo's director of interactive services, stated that she has seen an uptick in the interest of producers in online and social media advertising as its effectiveness has become better proven (Craft 57).

This is also due in part to "traditional marketing methods... dwindling in usefulness due to cost, expansive product choice, dispersed populations, myriad media outlets, and consumer resistance to advertising" (Rothschild 109). It is clear to many Broadway professionals that it is becoming increasingly important to have a social media presence, yet few productions have been able to develop a truly impactful social media strategy to date. However, it is a puzzle that marketing professionals in the industry are determined to solve. According to a survey conducted of marketing teams in entertainment venues across the United States, 100% reported that they

anticipated spending more of their budget on new media (such as social media) in the upcoming years than previous years (figure 4).

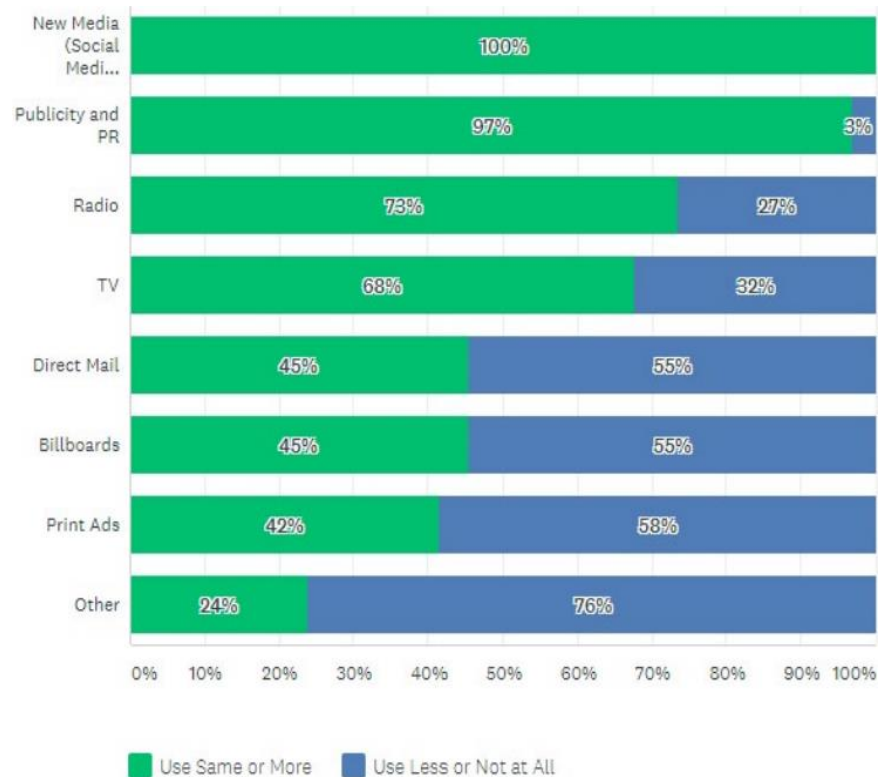


Figure 4- Anticipated use of advertising channels in upcoming years as reported by theatre marketing professionals.
Rothschild, 2019.

Even as many producers commit to having social media make up a larger portion of their marketing plans moving forward, many are still unsure what this looks like. As Elizabeth Craft puts it “Broadway advertisers agree that the days of relying solely or even primarily on print marketing and reviews are over, and that the relationship between the media of the Internet and live theatre is still being negotiated” (Craft 64). However, there have been a few Broadway productions within recent years that have been able to capture the social media craze and use it to their advantage. One such production is *Hamilton* whose social media strategy is the focus of this paper.

HAMILTON OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

Hamilton is arguably one of the most popular and successful shows on Broadway in the modern era. Interest in the musical has expanded beyond the boundaries of Broadway-lovers to the mainstream, and has begun a major pop culture phenomenon seemingly beloved by all.

Hamilton's prevalence makes it the ideal subject for a case study about its use of social media marketing—not only did the marketing team use innovative social media techniques to attract and engage fans, the large amount of buzz about the musical makes it discoverable which aspects of the strategy people were responsive to.

Before getting into the specifics of *Hamilton*'s social media strategy and why it was successful, it is important to understand the other factors that contributed to the musical's major success. To begin with, *Hamilton* is very much a product of its time: created during the Obama era, the musical captures the optimism and excitement felt by many people, especially people of color, from seeing a black man hold the highest office in the U.S. government for the first time. This sentiment took on a new meaning by the time *Hamilton* opened on Broadway on August 6, 2015, less than two months after Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign. The famous line from the show "Immigrants— we get the job done!" became a rallying cry against the Trump campaign's xenophobic rhetoric. *Hamilton* has never shied away from its political message, and it premiered on Broadway at an opportune time when audiences were eager to hear and embrace it. When creating the musical's social media strategy, *Hamilton*'s marketing team chose to lean into this aspect of the show. In an interview with Drury University about the show's social media marketing strategy, Mike Karns, the social media manager of *Hamilton*, stated "We've made it a goal to share not only... interesting stuff from the history, but also tie us into the larger conversation that is happening out in the world." (Bell 2).

Another key aspect of *Hamilton*'s success was its unique content. While *Hamilton* was far from the first to take historical figures or events and place them in a musical, it was the first to do this with an entirely diverse cast and modern rap and hip-hop music. When *Hamilton* opened on Broadway in 2015, it was one of the first Broadway shows to feature an almost entirely non-white cast and was the first to use a diverse cast to play historically white figures. This drew attention from people across the globe. "Not only is this to be applauded from a diversity perspective, but it also helped with the marketing. People were interested to see historical figures played against type" (Jurberg 4). *Hamilton* also captured the public's attention with its use of popular music styles. The use of hip hop and rap songs in a musical was still relatively new on Broadway, and these styles made the historical story relevant to modern and younger audiences (Jurberg 3). While the modern and rap-style music is frequently a topic of conversation when discussing *Hamilton*'s extreme success, it is important to note that *Hamilton* is not the first musical to be written in this style. Creator Lin Manuel Miranda's first musical *In the Heights* that opened on Broadway in 2008 features a remarkably similar score full of hip-hop and rap-inspired songs, yet it did not reach the level of massive success and hype that *Hamilton* has experienced. *In the Heights* closed after three years on Broadway, while *Hamilton* has already run for seven years and shows no signs of closing soon. So while *Hamilton*'s music has widespread appeal, its success cannot be attributed to that alone.

SOCIAL MEDIA STRATEGY

How was *Hamilton* able to build such a strong fanbase? While the musical itself inspires many, these fans would not be able to share their love for the musical or bring others into the group without *Hamilton*'s strong social media strategy across all platforms. For *Hamilton* and

other musicals like it, “social media is how most of these fans found out about the show and how they really dug their roots into the ‘fandom.’ Shows like [*Hamilton*] target young audiences not only with relatable content in the shows themselves, but with content on social media—blog and social media posts, sharing fan content, actors and actresses interacting with their fans” (Jones 2). This perfectly encapsulates the strategy developed by *Hamilton*’s marketing team for their social media channels. *Hamilton* uses a variety of content across its Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and, most recently, TikTok accounts to engage and grow a young and diverse audience of fans.

Instagram

Instagram is one of the platforms *Hamilton* uses most frequently to engage with fans, especially in the height of its popularity. Its account (@hamiltionmusical) stands at 1.7 million followers and over 2,100 posts as of March 2022. This follower count is significantly higher than any other show running on Broadway. The show with the next highest follower count as of March 2022 is *Dear Evan Hansen* with 504,000 followers, less than half the amount of *Hamilton* (“Broadway Social Stats” 1). What has *Hamilton* been able to do that other productions have not to create such a gap in engagement?

One of the key pillars of *Hamilton*'s Instagram strategy is the sharing of user-generated content. Rather than using their channel to push out marketing materials to Instagram users, the social media team uses the page to create a community of fans and give them a place where they can come to share their love for the musical. The willingness of *Hamilton* to share artwork and other content created by fans caused "the fanbase...to spread online, dubbing themselves "Faniltons" and creating even more hashtags. In 2017, #Hamilween started with fans dressing up as their favorite *Hamilton* characters for Halloween" (Jurberg 6). This idea started by fans was picked up by the official account, which each year reposts favorite *Hamilton*-inspired costumes under the hashtag "#Hamilween." (Figure 5) It is not just on Halloween

where *Hamilton* will engage with its Instagram followers in this way. The account will frequently share photos of fan's pets wearing *Hamilton* paraphernalia, fan art shared by other creators, or photos to celebrate holidays or milestones in fan's lives (figures 6-8).



Figure 5- An example of user-generated content posted on #Hamilween.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. Post for Halloween. Instagram, 30 October 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CVq7FyRPV7B/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Liked by kayla.wayla14 and 63,502 others
hamiltonmusical #WorldBakingDay, but make it Hamilton.

Figure 6- Example of user generated content to celebrate a lighthearted holiday.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. Post for World Baking Day. *Instagram*, 17 May 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CO-2bx7FOol/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Liked by regina_b_mcelroy and 70,898 others
hamiltonmusical All women are CREATED equal! Mind-blown by the details on this embroidery. (👏): @amelia_stitches
View all 196 comments
July 2, 2021

Figure 7- Example of fan art shared to the account.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. Embroidery Post. *Instagram*, 2 July 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CQ1QBGAh7C4/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>



Liked by artsyemma224 and 94,263 others
hamiltonmusical Can't wait to see how you blow us all away, class of 2021.

Figure 8- Example of celebrating milestones in fans' lives.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. Graduation Post. *Instagram*, 13 June 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CQE_MxYlyHM/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=

Hamilton has also utilized Instagram to champion different social justice causes, not only through its main page, but through an additional account created by the brand specifically for this purpose in February 2021 (@ham4progress). While this account has considerably less engagement than its main page with only 20,100 followers and 303 posts, it still represents an important piece of *Hamilton*'s marketing strategy. In its conception, *Hamilton* was meant to be a show that makes a political statement and aligns itself with many modern social justice movements. Creating an Instagram account dedicated to this cause allows *Hamilton* to stay current in the ever changing political landscape of the United States. For example, in 2020 after the death of George Floyd and the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement, *Hamilton* posted on its main account several Instagram stories (found under the "BLM" highlight on its page) and posts stating its support of the movement, providing resources for its followers to learn more, and encouraging fans to take action.

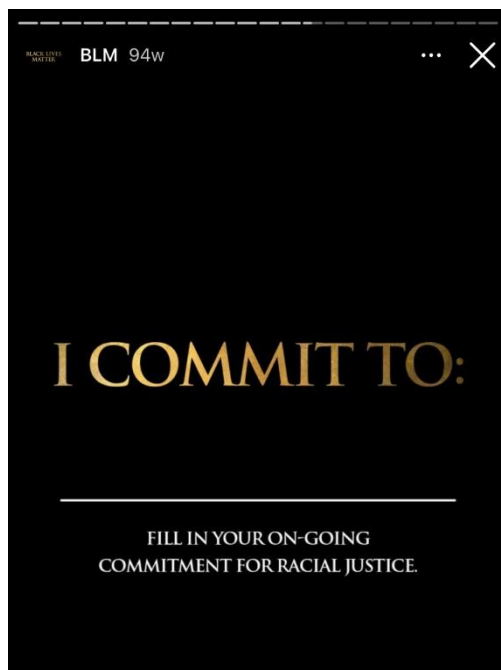


Figure 9- Example of story under "BLM" highlight calling fans to action.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. "BLM" Story Highlight. *Instagram*.



Figure 10- Example of post drawing connections between social justice issue and *Hamilton*.

Hamilton [@hamiltonmusical]. Rachel Cargle Post. *Instagram*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CCCAZ6EhTpJ/?igshid=YmMyMTA2M2Y=>

By connecting the Black Lives Matter movement to the content in the show, this strategy works to keep the musical and its message current, keeping audiences engaged even though the show premiered in 2017. Additionally, by aligning itself to a cause that is very important to many people of color, a key demographic for *Hamilton*, these people are more likely to have feelings of goodwill toward the show. According to a study conducted by the University of Washington in St. Louis and Vrity, 60% of individuals surveyed indicated that they have purchased products or goods from a brand because it aligns with values they believe in (Savat 4). By authentically sharing information surrounding causes that the *Hamilton* team cares about, people who care about those same causes are more likely to purchase tickets.

Facebook

Overall, *Hamilton*'s Facebook strategy is fairly similar to its Instagram. The majority of the posts on its Facebook page are also posted to its Instagram, with the exception of a few updates of where the touring casts are performing that do not make it to the Instagram page. Unlike *Hamilton*'s other social media channels, its engagement is fairly similar to other Broadway pages on Facebook. As of March 2022, the *Hamilton* page has a little over 1 million likes, less than *The Cursed Child* (1.2 million), *The Lion King* (2.7 million), *The Phantom of the Opera* (1.3 million), and *Wicked* (1.2 million) ("Broadway Social Stats" 1). The popularity of these shows on Facebook over *Hamilton* is likely due to the demographics of their target audiences. Each of these shows are Broadway mainstays whose audience mostly consists of the average theatre-goer (affluent, middle-aged, white women) and tourists. According to Hootsuite, a brand management tool for social media, Facebook is the most popular social media platform for people aged 35-44, the very demographic targeted by each of these shows (Beveridge 5).

While Facebook might not be the platform where *Hamilton* has the most unique strategy, there is one aspect of the platform that they take advantage of more than other Broadway productions—Facebook Live. When Facebook first launched this feature in 2015, “*Hamilton* immediately took advantage of this, and has had cast members go live for 30 minute periods for real-time Q+As. They advertise in advance who the cast member is, and when they will be live, and encourage fans to hop on, ask questions in the comments and watch them get answered.” (DiLuglio 11). Since Facebook was the first social media platform to launch a live function, this provided fans with a unique and exciting opportunity to see inside the show and the cast in a way they never had before. This also gave the social media team the opportunity to receive valuable feedback from their audience, as “by consistently engaging with your audience, you can not only engender feelings of goodwill within your audience, you can know in real time how people are reacting to what is currently on stage and what you've announced as upcoming” (Freeman 1). These live streams also worked to enable fans to get to know the cast members and production team as real people, not just the characters they play in *Hamilton*. This allowed followers to feel like they knew the cast members and become invested in their lives, making them excited to tune in for any new live streams or content featuring the cast members.

Twitter

Like its Instagram account, *Hamilton*'s Twitter account (@HamiltonMusical) has significantly more followers and engagement than all other Broadway productions. As of March 2022, *Hamilton*'s Twitter has almost 1.1 million followers while *Dear Evan Hansen*, the production with the next highest follower account, only has 193,000 followers ("Broadway Social Stats" 1). What is *Hamilton* doing on Twitter that every other show is not? Let's compare recent tweets from the *Dear Evan Hansen* account and the *Hamilton* one (figures 11-12).



Figure 11- Tweet relating *Bridgerton* Netflix series to *Dear Evan Hansen*

Dear Evan Hansen [@DearEvanHansen]. "Evan Hansen and Lady Whistledown...". *Twitter*, 25 March 2022, <https://twitter.com/DearEvanHansen/status/1507463379266711554?cxt=HHwWhMDRkZz9yuspAAAA>



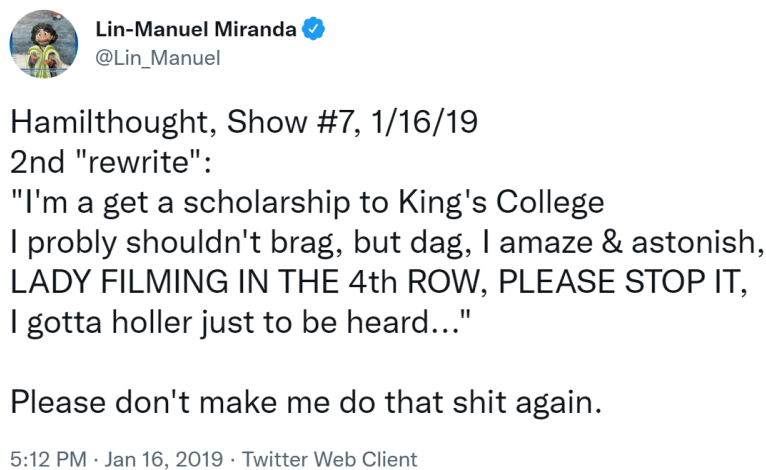
Figure 12- Tweet relating *Bridgerton* Netflix series to *Hamilton*

Hamilton [@HamiltonMusical]. "You see it right?". *Twitter*, 28 March 2022, <https://mobile.twitter.com/HamiltonMusical/status/1508530169945939973?cxt=HHwWioCzic6MsO8pAAAA>

Although both tweets address the same topic—relating a popular TV show to the Broadway production—they do it in very different ways. *Dear Evan Hansen*’s tweet feels like a piece of marketing from the way that the copy is written to the graphic used. It is simply trying to push a message out to its audience rather than engaging in a conversation with them. The tweet from *Hamilton*, on the other hand, seems more like a real interaction between two people rather than marketing. By choosing to reply to something tweeted by a fan, the social media team is able to address the actual interests of the musical’s fanbase and add to the conversation already happening while reminding people about their show.

While the *Hamilton* Twitter account is frequently used to interact with fans and share content, the place where *Hamilton*’s social media strategy really shines on Twitter is on creator Lin Manuel Miranda’s personal Twitter account (@Lin_Manuel). Since first beginning to write the musical in 2011, Miranda shared his process on Twitter with his fans (“Hamilton Hype: 4 Social Media Marketing Lessons From the Latest Broadway Hit” 2). Miranda was able to “leverage Twitter as the most widely available way for followers to touch the secret world of *Hamilton* and feel included. Miranda used Twitter to connect a broad cross-section of people who love rap, history and theater by soliciting fan art and poetry. He responded to questions one on one and treated his followers like pals” (Murray 1). Miranda’s interactions with fans were key in keeping fans connected to the musical. Miranda used Twitter to share tidbits about his life and other interests in addition to information about *Hamilton*. When he does tweet about the show, he shares backstage videos, information about his creative process, or other information *Hamilton* fans are unlikely to see anywhere else (Carson 5). This keeps fans interested and coming back for more, regardless of whether they have seen the show yet. When on social media, people are looking to connect with other people, not to be served advertisements from

brands. By positioning himself as a person behind the *Hamilton* brand, Miranda humanizes the show and makes his followers feel as if they are an important piece of the show and this process. This is even clearer when comparing the follow count and engagement across both Twitter accounts: the brand account has 1 million followers while Miranda's personal account has 3.6 million followers as of March 2022. By focusing the Twitter strategy around Miranda's celebrity, *Hamilton* has captured "the force of personality, the passion and the engagement with a real person that drive people to interaction on social media. There is a personal touch that comes with social media that is clearly connected to a real person. There's also naturally a more human interaction to this ethereal medium when it's attached to a person" (Peranzo 4).



8,598 Retweets 1,527 Quote Tweets 74.9K Likes

Figure 13- Example tweet from *Hamilton* creator Lin Manuel Miranda

Lin-Manuel Miranda [@Lin_Manuel]. "Hamilthought, Show #7...".
Twitter, 16 January 2019,
https://twitter.com/lin_manuel/status/1085661164422361090?lang=en

This tweet (figure 6) post-show in 2019 is a perfect example of how he gives fans an inside look into the production while still showcasing his personality. By telling his Twitter followers something unique that happened during a performance, he makes these people feel as if they were there actually experiencing it live. This also garners excitement for people to see the show even if they already have because the performance could be different every time.

Another important thing to note when discussing Twitter's role in *Hamilton*'s success is that this was the main platform that countless celebrities took to after seeing the show to share their pictures and praise. These posts had a massive influence on *Hamilton* ticket sales as these celebrities have large built-in followings that listen closely to their recommendations and take them seriously (YesBroadway 1). According to YesBroadway, a company that offers social media marketing consulting for the Broadway industry:

The real magic happens in engaging non-theater influencers...[They] can introduce your show to an entirely new audience via creative, genuine, and authentic content, giving you direct access to potential ticket buyers in that hard-to-reach Under 40 demographic.

These types of influencers are often followed by people who have never even heard of last year's Best Musical winner, thus introducing your show to a huge untapped market of new audience members. (YesBroadway 2)

While the sheer volume of celebrities sharing their praise for *Hamilton* may be difficult for other Broadway shows to replicate, productions can focus efforts on engaging with influencers and celebrities to capture the same kind of word-of-mouth advertising.

YouTube

Hamilton has been one of the only Broadway productions that has been able to make the most of its YouTube page. While today, most, if not all, Broadway musicals have a YouTube account, they are used very infrequently (only about one video every three or four months on average). *Hamilton*, in contrast, posts much more frequently averaging at least one video per month in recent years and as frequently as once per week when the show first opened on

Broadway. This strategy has worked well for them, having over 622,000 subscribers as of March 2022.

In terms of content, the *Hamilton* social media team creates content that can be found exclusively on its YouTube channel. In addition to the Original Broadway Cast Recordings of the songs in the show, the channel features light-hearted content from the casts of *Hamilton* (the Broadway, international, and touring companies) such as casual performances of songs from the show, performances of other Broadway or pop songs, and the #Ham4Ham performances its channel is most known for. Most importantly, its content took advantage of current events and the things fans were actively talking about online:

For example, when Jonathan Groff (King George) was leaving the show, and a new King came on board (Rory O'Malley), they held a coronation and shared pictures on their social channels. When fans were celebrating the 20th anniversary of *Rent*, they sang "Seasons of Love" in the same style as the original *Rent* cast to conclude a show. The beauty of all this activity is that while it keeps the show top of mind, it doesn't feel like marketing. It feels like a group of artists sharing what they love to do, and generously rewarding all their fans, not just ticket holders.

(Bramhandkar 3)

Not only does this keep the show top of mind, but these videos provide a public space for people to share their love for theatre in a way that is accessible for all and is particularly attractive for younger generations who consume much of their media online (Craft 65).

The most unique aspect of *Hamilton's* YouTube strategy is the #Ham4Ham videos that were posted once per week in the first two years of the show's run and briefly revived during the

quarantine period of 2020. The idea behind Ham4Ham is that every Wednesday the show would offer the chance for fans to win tickets to *Hamilton* for ten dollars (the bill that features Alexander Hamilton, hence the name “Ham4Ham”) and Lin Manuel Miranda would offer an impromptu performance often featuring other cast members or well-known Broadway performers outside the Richard Rodgers Theater before announcing the lottery winners. When these performances first started, the videos were not shared by the official *Hamilton* accounts, but rather by the fans who attended the show. When asked about this, *Hamilton* social media manager Mike Karns said “You’ll notice that most of the #Ham4Ham videos were not created or posted by us, and that was a very conscious choice. We wanted to get people to evangelize on our behalf. It was a different perspective each time.” (Bell 4). This made the content feel organic and like fans who stumbled across video footage of each Ham4Ham performance were witnessing something special. Karns’s strategy proved to be successful as “too much involvement from the marketing team would probably have been detrimental... since the YouTube medium thrives on the perception of authenticity – a grassroots, of-the-people for-the-people quality that... [is] essential for online audiences to respond” (Craft 58). Once word of these performances spread, hundreds of people would come to the Richard Rodgers Theater every Wednesday to see what would be performed that day, and many more tuned into the livestream of the event on the *Hamilton* YouTube channel. The viral nature of these videos spurred online word-of-mouth about the show and helped reach audiences missed by traditional marketing methods, namely younger people and people of color (Craft 58).

TikTok

In more recent years, TikTok has become the newest social media phenomenon on which every brand has been trying to capitalize. *Hamilton* has embraced this craze, and its account

(@hamiltonmusical) stands at 1.7 million followers as of March 2022, posting an average of one video each day. The unique way that *Hamilton* has been able to capitalize on TikTok is through content created by its cast and crew, both videos made and posted on the official *Hamilton* account and those posted on cast member's personal pages. Its videos often consist of the cast members backstage and in costume, participating in the latest TikTok dance trend, or showing their backstage routine. By giving fans a glimpse behind the scenes and showing the actors as ordinary people, *Hamilton* is able to form a bond between the cast members and the fans.

One example of the interaction cast members have with fans through TikTok is former *Hamilton* cast member Amber Ardolino (@ambernicoleardolino). While acting in *Hamilton*, she frequently posted TikToks of her backstage antics with other cast members, teaching cast members trending dances, and other *Hamilton*-related content on her personal account. One series of hers that became popular was where she would ask TikTok users what dance she should perform on stage during "The Reynolds Pamphlet," and she would perform whichever dance got the most likes in the comments and post a video from the monitor backstage of her doing it. By encouraging cast members to engage with fans on TikTok in these ways, *Hamilton* is able to achieve its goal of "[giving] fans unprecedented access so that they felt as if they were in the room where it happened," as stated by social media manager Mike Karns (Bell 4).

POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE

While there are several key lessons that can be learned from *Hamilton*'s social media strategy, why would other productions want to make the effort to follow in its footsteps? What benefits can come from a production having a large social media following? For one, social media provides productions with real time access to what fans are thinking and saying about the

show rather than only relying on critics for tangible feedback. “In a social media-centric world where conversations about brands are no longer controlled by corporate led PR campaigns, one can see the importance of monitoring what consumers are saying about the brand as part of their marketing mix” (Rothschild 110). This allows Broadway productions to guide and shape conversations as they are happening.

A benefit that *Hamilton* experienced from the social media hype leading up to and during its Broadway run was high demand for tickets. When *Hamilton*’s Broadway run was announced, “it had over \$27 million in pre-opening ticket sales. Six years of slow build-up and intermittent snippets had worked to Miranda’s favor” (Jurberg 3). Building a following on social media when a production is in its pre-Broadway phase can make or break ticket sales for the first few months of a Broadway run. Additionally, building this early following can establish a basis for “young audiences [to] easily find a ‘home’ with shows...[and] a gateway into the theatre world. Social media makes it easy for young audiences to grow a passion for theatre, which is important for such an attendance-reliable, participation-reliable art like theatre is” (Jones 2).

Another benefit *Hamilton* experienced from its robust social media strategy was the engagement of populations outside of the average Broadway ticket buyer, namely younger people and people of color. As social media manager Karns states, “Because *Hamilton* has broken the confines of normal Broadway scope and audience, we’ve been able to build a really diverse fanbase in terms of age, location, etc” (Ladd 2). Although these groups have historically been underrepresented in Broadway audiences “new shows coming to Broadway have begun to see the advantages of engaging with a wide audience on social media platforms, even those who may not be a coveted potential ticket-buyer; by providing a digital space for fans to gather around a show, theatre-makers extend the experience of the show beyond the walls of the

physical theater” (Lewis 7). This gives the show a life outside of the individual performances and introduces new populations to the industry.

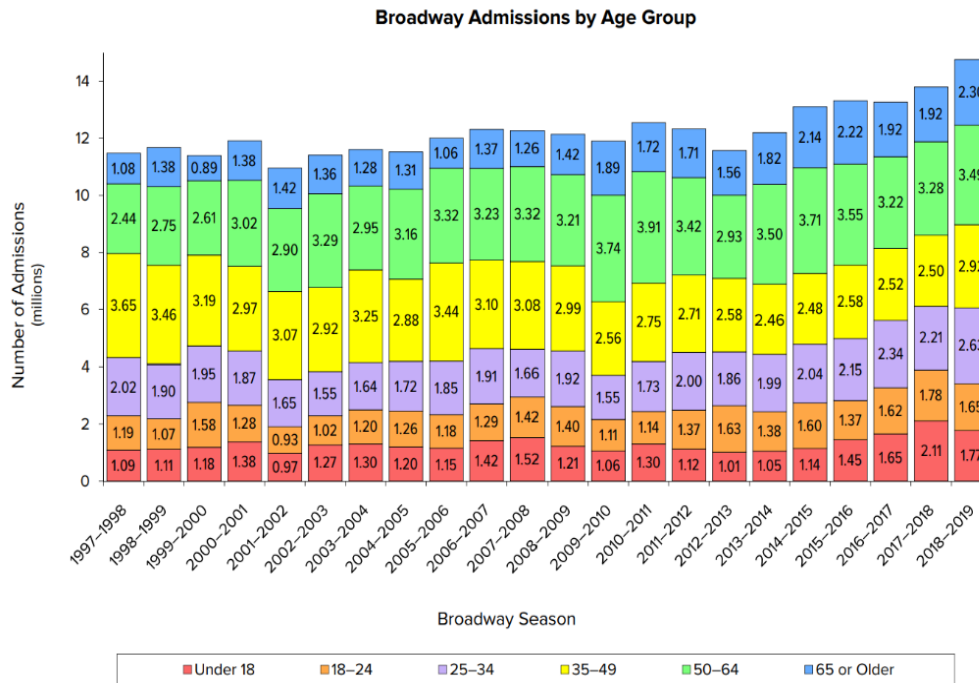


Figure 14- Broadway admissions in millions by age group from 1997-2019.
The Broadway League, 2019.

As this chart (figure 14) illustrates, the number of Broadway audience members under the age of 34 has been slowly but surely increasing since the 2009-2010 season. Since *Hamilton* opened in the 2015-2016 season, there have also been significant jumps in the number of young people coming to Broadway. Most notably, in the next season, the under 18 population increased by 200,000, the 18-24 population increased by 250,000, and the 25-34 population increased by 190,000. This is a significant increase compared to past seasons. It is likely that by attracting younger audiences through its social media efforts, *Hamilton* not only attracted this population to its show, but to Broadway as a whole. As a result of social media efforts, a larger percentage of young people are becoming invested in Broadway and the theatre industry.

	Broadway Audience	U.S. Population ¹⁰	Audience/Census Index
Under 18	12.1%	24.0%	50.0%
18–24	11.2%	9.9%	113.1%
25–34	17.7%	13.3%	133.8%
35–49	19.8%	20.7%	95.7%
50–64	23.6%	19.0%	124.2%
65 or older	15.6%	13.1%	119.1%

**Figure 15- Age group percentage for Broadway audiences, U.S. population, and Audience/Census index for 2018-2019.
The Broadway League, 2019.**

As you can see from this analysis of audiences from the 2018-2019 Broadway season (figure 15), people aged 18-34 make up a higher percentage of Broadway audiences than they do the U.S. population. In particular, the 25-34 age group indexes the highest, meaning a large portion of this population is coming to see Broadway shows. In order to fully capitalize on this trend, Broadway audiences should continue to communicate with the groups in a way they understand well— through social media.

Another group *Hamilton* was able to capture through its use of non-traditional marketing efforts and social media was people of color. Broadway audiences have historically been very white but, like younger populations, more people of color have been going to the theatre in recent years. When asked about the increasing diversity of Broadway audiences, Tom Greenwald, executive creative director of the Broadway advertising agency SpotCo, said “All you have to do is go to the theatre on any given night during the last couple of years and you can see it for yourself”(Craft 63-64). Greenwald noted that a similar trend to the increasingly diverse

audiences at *In The Heights* could also be seen at shows like *The Color Purple* and *Raisin in the Sun* (Craft 63-64).

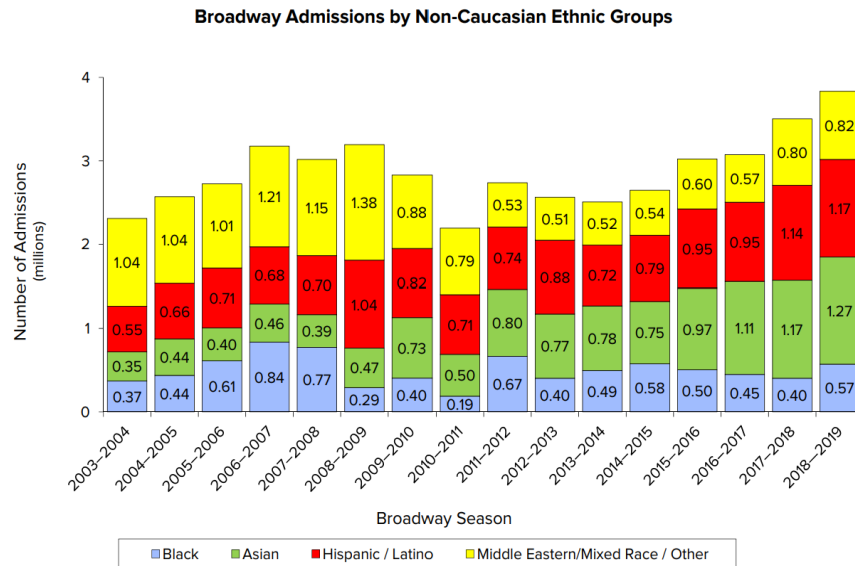


Figure 16- Broadway admissions in millions by Non-Caucasian ethnic group from 2003-2019. The Broadway League, 2019.

Overall, Broadway admissions of non-Caucasian groups has been increasing since the 2013-2014 season (figure 16). Between the 2014-2015 season to the 2015-2016 season, Broadway attendance by people of color increased from 2.66 million to 3.02 million. This dramatic increase over the course of one year, and further increases in the year since, show that people of color are responsive when they are reached out to by the Broadway community and see themselves both onstage and in marketing efforts targeted specifically towards them:

It has indeed been demonstrated that theatregoers who use the Web have more opportunities to find information and, consequently, the performance that suits their taste. Moreover, online communication has been demonstrated to be effective in both retaining existing audiences and attracting 'inexpert drama lovers', educating new audience members by means of their active participation. (Besana et al 1-2)

Not only has the prevalence of social media marketing helped to encourage more diverse audiences to purchase Broadway tickets, these audiences have had a growing impact on the types of productions that earn a Broadway run. When looking at the shows that have opened on Broadway since *Hamilton*, the majority are far from the classic Golden Age musical that defined Broadway for so long. With productions like *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Be More Chill* centering around the lives of high schoolers and *A Strange Loop* telling the story of minorities, it has become clear that “the active social media practices of Lin-Manuel and dozens of other theater professionals and fans alike demonstrate that audiences who had previously never been served by Broadway can now dictate the course of its future” (Lewis 7). Broadway has begun to cater more to these young, diverse audiences by prioritizing productions that they will enjoy and purchase tickets to. This can be by dealing with more timely or serious subject matters that confront today’s youth or featuring younger and more diverse headliners (Birkner 23). This effect creates a feedback loop—as more young and non-white populations purchase tickets and prove they are a valuable customer segment for Broadway, more productions will tell stories targeted directly at these groups, and more stories will be on Broadway that resonate with these audiences, leading them to purchase more tickets. This has been seen historically, as when “musicals like *The Color Purple* as well as *Rent* and *Avenue Q*... pushed [for more diversity, they brought] in younger audiences.” (Craft 53).

In addition to voting with their wallets by purchasing tickets, young audiences show their support for the productions that resonate with them through posts on social media. In recent years, producers have taken chances on shows that have massive support on social media despite negative critical reception, showing how “young people have also become tastemakers in a tangible way with the advent of social media, via Tumblr, YouTube, and Instagram... these

consumers of the show later converted into sold-out, screaming audiences” (Evans 30). Not only has this led to numerous tours and international productions of *Hamilton* but, more recently, *Be More Chill* received a national tour “because of social media and the outcry for a tour and the knowledge that each location would be met with the same outpouring of support from teens as is seen on Broadway, a tour was just inevitable” (Jones 2).

While it is still too early to predict the full extent of how the invention of social media will impact the Broadway industry, it is clear that productions can simply no longer ignore these platforms if they want to be successful. As Broadway producer Ken Davenport puts it, “tomorrow’s audience is going to demand an entirely different type of entertainment. Twenty-year-olds today haven’t known a world without cell phones. With this kind of interactivity... the shows they’re going to want to see in 10, 20 years are going to reflect that” (Birkner 22). The ever-changing dynamic of the internet and social media in our society will continue to have an impact on Broadway moving forward. Productions will have to put in effort to keep up with new trends and fully incorporate them into their marketing strategy, or they may find themselves left behind.

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