

The Analysis of the Importance of Branding Elements in the Romanian Music Industry

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the multiple ways of building a brand in the current music industry, with a focus on Romania. The main idea of this paper is to determine the opinions of music consumers toward the brand of a musician, in general, and then to build different models and alternatives to the ones proposed so far, both while taking into account the elements and the characteristics proposed until now, as well as the answers given by the respondents. The research will focus on: the analysis of general attitudes and consumer behavior, with regard to music and the view of the consumers towards native Romanian singers and international ones. Moreover, the brand of a singer, from the perspective of associating the brand itself with the image created and with the primordial characteristics that must be respected by a singer, in order for them to be appreciated by the consumers, will also be discussed.

Keywords: brand, music industry, consumer perception.

JEL classification: M31.

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on how a music brand is built in the current music industry, with a focus on Romania.

The main idea of this work is to determine the opinions of music consumers towards the brand of a musical performer, and then build alternative models to the ones proposed so far, by taking into account the research which has been done up to this point, but also the answers of the respondents.

The first part of this paper will be an introduction to the branding term, starting from its link to marketing, moving to the its importance as part of the communication mix. We will touch important creative marketing models and adapt them to personal branding strategies. Moreover, we will give on point examples of romanian artists, in order for the readers to understand some good and bad decisions with regards to branding, endorsement and fame (important terms used throughout the entire paper).

The second part will refer to the music industry, focusing on its importance and evolution. The paper continues with the endorsement techniques used to improve the image of the musical personalities and to increase the number of consumers.

The last part refers to the research, following three main ideas: the general attitude and behavior of consumers, in terms of music; the attitude towards native and international singers; and the personal brand of a singer, from the perspective of the features which consumers think are

important in the creation and the association with a brand. This part sums up respondents' answers, aligning them to the dimensions of personality.

The paper ends with a series of conclusions, following the research.

2. Brand

Visual identity has become and continues to become increasingly important in the marketing sector. Viewed from the perspective of aesthetic representation and culture influence, this is an interconnection between art, global branding and consumer behaviors. This connection is, in my opinion, essential. The separation of art and business has become increasingly difficult, and, in this new context, art seems to be of major importance. We assimilate aesthetics in marketing and communication as an innovation, focusing on its potential creativity. Therefore, under this premise, greater creativity can lead to distinct communication, and distinct communication is good (Schroeder, 2006).

Art is a whole individual industry, based on money, status, value, imagination and investment. Under these circumstances, art brings a new dimension to a business by being a commodity, a history of consumer's cultural preferences, and an understanding of the evolution of these market preferences. If in the music industry, the product (business) was viewed separately from the communication (art), at first, because a good artistic product could be promoted on its own, not with special help, now, as mentioned above, the role of promotion plays an important role in visual and verbal culture (ZhiYan & Borgerson, 2008).

The three mega trends that dominate the market: the spectacular evolution of technology, the financial responsibility and the globalization, force companies to adapt to market requirements, both through marketing, as well as through branding (Kotler, 2003). In Romania, a former communist country, just like in the eastern part of Europe, the concept of branding has grown rapidly, but a bit slower than in the west. By definition, the brand requires business education because of intangibility character, hence the differentiation. The Eastern European consumer profile differs from the Western European one. The Romanian client's decisions are based on trust, a feeling that arose after the fall of communism (Bogdan, 2011). Also, the creation process (from choosing names, to visual elements), whilst following the global trend, is many years behind. Although an artistic evolution is being attempted, the target audience is difficult. Online marketing and digital branding attracts more young people, which is a small part of consumer basis.

Very few brands understand that this local competitiveness is closely linked to a global presence, and this global presence is in difficulty due to this communist past. (Bogdan, 2011). When the question "How do we differentiate one brand from another?" appeared, two key concepts emerged: consistency and differentiation. At the beginning, these two elements represented the identification of origin (differentiation) and the preservation of product / service quality (consistency) (Romanuik, Sharp, & Ehrenberg, 2007). After a series of new meanings, emphasis is placed now on other elements, such as the use of internet, the sustainability and the social involvement of companies, because it is intended to remedy the confidence that consumers have lost in companies (Fisher-Buttinger & Vallaster, 2011). Berger talks about how much power consumers have in terms of brand identity. He claims that people are buying products associated with brands that could show others who we are. Following this idea, we understand that our public identity has come to rely on what we consume, not on what we are. Moreover, we, as individuals, build our identity according to others (Berger, 2011).

In the case of the music industry, where we are talking about the musical brand and the personal brand, the AIDA marketing model is slightly different. The first step could be cognition, through awareness of the existence of a musical artist. The second stage is represented by the affection, the interest or the desire to listen to the artist's creations. The third and final stage is

behavior, represented by the very action of listening to the songs. As we can see, the model is modified by fusing interest and desire, including them in the same stage, the stage representing the affection, what the consumer feels for the artist. We can also talk about an added stage, namely satisfaction, measuring the satisfaction of the consumer, in this case by the number of songs played by the same artist, the number of repetitions of the same song, the degree to which the respondent empathizes with the respected artist, etc. Not being part of the initial process, the latter stage is important because it can lead to a change, an improvement of the brand and an improvement to rebranding.

There are certain attributes that create value for the product, or, in other words, capture their attention, from the consumer's point of view. These include: emotion, aesthetics, product identity, impact, technological core and quality (Pamfilie & Procopie, 2013). If we talk about the music artist's brand, emotion can be transformed into lyrics and musical genre (through them the singers can awaken an emotion in the consumer or make them listen to the songs), the aesthetics changes in the artist's aesthetics (clothes, accessories, the way they behave), identity, quality and impact remain common characteristics, and the technological nucleus will signify the entire team behind the artist (from the tools needed to create new ones parts to the recording space and the hired personnel).

The Romanian singer Silent Strike, together with Monooka, associated themselves with the Romanian tourist brand, Explore the Carpathian Garden, the song of the two appearing in the country's official promotion video. Another example is the Subcarpati band that tries to differentiate themselves from others by combining Romanian folklore with hip-hop and electronic insertions, both in lyrics and sounds, as well as in their image, using elements and combinations of traditional colors and motifs.

Of course, many artists use products, other stars or shows to enhance their brand. In this category we have Puya associating himself with Chio Chips, appearing in the Chio commercials; Antonia and Alex Velea, two different brands (with similar target audiences, values and songs) who created a new brand together; Inna was a few years ago the ambassador for Pepsi and Delia started a collaboration with a new band, The Motans, from Chisinau (Delia's popularity benefits the band, and the band's musical capabilities help Delia develop even more on the musical stage). These are just a few examples that have shown that artists can collaborate with other artists, as well as with products, other people or social causes, given that these collaborations can benefit both parties.

This strategy is called brand endorsement and is an increasingly popular advertising strategy in many areas. Using a public figure or an artist can give more credibility to the promoted brand. As mentioned above, this brand endorsement is linked to consumer identity. The consumer's attention is not enough for success, but other features such as: the artist's affinity with the brand, the relationship between the artist and the celebrity of the brand, values, the similar target audience of the two brands, the popularity of the celebrity, his/her credibility, whether the star consumes or not the promoted product (for certain types of products), whether the star claims the cause (for social causes), etc. (Csaszar, 2012).

According to Richard Elliott, this idea is not new. Often, consumers think of a brand that has the characteristics of a person, even if it is a material product. Thus, by using the endorsement strategy, one face, a set of human and real features can be placed on a material product (Elliott & Percy, 2007).

3. Music industry

According to the definition, music is: "1. Art of expressing feelings and ideas, using sounds, combined in a specific manner. 2. The science of sounds considered as melody, rhythm and harmony "(DEX.ro).

With the evolution of marketing and brands, there has been visible change in the music industry. Now music being viewed more as a business, to the detriment of a simple experience. From the point of view of marketing, music becomes a very complex product, distinguished from the classic ones through: the place where it can be consumed (privately or in public), the unlimited number of consumes (it can be consumed as often as necessary), the method of consumption (active or passive), the lack of perishability (does not deteriorate over time), and the appeal only to the auditory sense (O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2010).

Music is an important business at economic level. The music industry has profits of over \$15 billion on a global scale (Profit.ro, 2016). Technology development has led to an extraordinary expansion of markets, facilitating consumer access to songs, artists, and anything related to the music industry, in a fast, efficient and inexpensive environment (online and offline). People consume music every day, from what they listen to on the radio, on their way to work, to the musical background played shops, or even the jingles present in television commercials.

So, we can say that the music industry has reached a turning point, represented by the moment when it ceased to be an ancillary element, and has begun to become a product itself. In the same note, the role of the artist has also changed, becoming more and more important, to the point where the artist became a brand.

4. Celebrity and brand endorsement

According to definition, a celebrity is "a person who enjoys great reputation, prestige, fame". Fame and reputation are defining elements in the branding, as well, in the fact that a brand is successful when it differs from those of other competitors' and has come to be known by a significant number of consumers. The personal brand is significantly different from the product brand (it lacks color, logo, slogan), although both have this element of "celebrity" (DEX.ro).

This prestige, especially for musical artists, is ephemeral, changing. Famous people gain this status as easily as they lose it (which is not the case for material products). The singer's brand often suffers major changes and repositioning.

A rebranding comes with many changes, from the type of music being approached (at one point, overlapping with consumers' preferences as part of their external identity), to adding / removing members, changing names, etc. If the differences are, to a large extent, for material products, minor, here, in personal branding, they are major. The name change, almost every time, comes with a removal / addition of new member or a change of the musical repertoire.

5. Research Methodology

Qualitative research is based on the accumulation of information that has a greater and more in-depth value in marketing research. This adds complex attitudes, explanations and answers to the phenomenon studied, to quantitative research which is based, on the accumulation of as many answers as possible. According to Cătoi, qualitative research "allows a better understanding of the investigated marketing phenomenon, without resorting to quantification or quantitative analysis" (Cătoi, 2009, p.87).

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method. Some of the advantages of it are: collecting detailed information on the subject, reporting information to subjective experiences, applying additional questions if the information is incomplete, and a relaxing atmosphere, with only one respondent and an interviewer. Datculescu Petre argues that in order to study a brand, in-depth interviews are the best choice because "in the case of focus groups there is a risk that opinion leaders can influence the collective" (Datculescu, 2006, p. 216).

Since marketing research is necessary for market analysis in any field, in this case I will apply qualitative research to determine the importance of the artist's brand in the music industry. Qualitative research has been chosen because the desired information reaches deeper levels

through a holistic approach. The three levels, cognitive, affective and conative, each bring important information, especially at an unconscious level, impossible to reproduce by using quantitative research. The brand is a complex term, and the addition of the musical industry, along with all its features, will lead to opinions that can not be quantified by quantity.

The *purpose* of this research is to determine the opinions of young consumers about the brand of a musical performer.

The *objectives* were divided in main and secondary, as follows:

❖ Main

- General attitude and consumer behavior in music and the brand of the music artist;
- Determining how consumer perceptions are formed in relation to the image of a brand, in the music industry.

❖ Secondary

- Identifying the respondents' opinion about the values that make up a brand / brand;
- Determining the motivation behind buying a brand;
- Determining the link between a brand and a product.

Setting the sample and the target audience

A qualitative research was carried out through a semi-structured in-depth interview. 20 people, 10 men and 10 women were interviewed.

Selection criteria

The sample consisted of 18- to 30-year-olds with higher education, living in Bucharest. From a psychographic point of view, the people were open and interested in music. Behaviorally, they had to consume music, at least an hour a day. Moreover, the target audience understood the concept of branding, was aware of the evolution of the music industry, and was more or less concerned about image.

Segmentation: 5 women between 18-24 years old; 5 women between 25-30 years old; 5 men between 18-24 years old; 5 men between 25-30 years old.

The data was collected between 3rd and 19th of April, 2017.

6. Research Results

6.1. Favorite music

To the question "what kind of music do you prefer?", most of the responses recorded the following predominant genres, in the following order: rock and hip hop, followed by jazz, pop and electronic music. There were also respondents who said they listened to almost any kind of music, but classical music or manele. Responses highlight the fact that respondents realize that their image can be built on the basis of the songs they listen to. Because of this, they delimit themselves by some negative global categories, such as the manele genre.

6.2. Music means

For the second question, regarding the significance of music for the interviewees, it was found that music represents, for the majority of the respondents, a way in which they feel at ease. The recorded answers show that music means "a retreat, a refuge, a lifestyle", "a way I can relax and a passion for me", "a way to relax" or "the soundtrack of my life" .

6.3. Out in the city music

For outings in the city, emphasis was placed on: where people are going out, the feeling the respondent has at that time and the people who accompanies him/her. Here, hip-hop and commercial music were used as answers. The others had answers like: "I really do not know, it depends on who I go out with", "I do not know, it depends on the club we choose", "at the cafe, classical music" or "any rhythmic song...it is not necessarily about the quality of music, but about the state I'm in".

6.4. When do they listen to music?

It is noticed that music is listened to and associated with almost any state. For some respondents, this is a way to focus: "I listen to music at work, before presentations", "I listen to music while I work," "I listen to music when I learn, when I write", or "I listen to music when doing college projects ". Many respondents appeal to it for almost everyday activities, from walking to driving: "I listen to music whenever I can".

6.5. If the Romanian music would have a house, how would it look like

For the next question: "If the Romanian music would have a house, how would this house look like?", the recorded answers show that Romanian music is devoid of identity. Some of the respondents described the house of romanian music as "a colorful old house", "a very kitsch palace", "a pink kitsch house...very badly divided", "only walls, naked behind the facade...the color would be neon or very strident" or "very disorganized, with both modern and old architecture...it would look like a house and an apartment building merged in the middle". From these answers, it is understood that our music industry is very disorganized, it does not pursue a global trend, it lacks its own identity, choosing to borrow elements that are found in international music, elements that are not overly coherent.

Other respondents described the house as "a dilapidated, dirty, obsolete house", "a wooden house...made by man's hand" or "a simple white house". These answers describe our music in terms of having its own identity, but being only at the beginning of the road. In these people's eyes, we haven't reached the level of the global industries.

The answers also lead to the conclusion that respondents do not consider this industry to be developed enough to assign a certain interpreter to it, because no one stands out. One respondent replied "no one would answer the door if I ring the doorbell", a sign that she does not yet have a firm opinion about this industry.

6.6. Appreciated Romanian singers

For the second part of the research, namely the analyses of the attitude towards the local singers, Smiley followed by Carla's Dreams, Delia and Subcarpați were the most mentioned artists, as answers to the question regarding appreciated singers. Other appreciated musicians were: Versus, CTC, Bean, BUG Mafia, Parazitii, Sișu and Puya, Moonlight Breakfast, Enescu.

Table 1. Description of the Romanian singers

Artist	Description
Smiley	„he managed to bring by his side a handful of people to help him...he really tries a lot”
Delia	„she makes really good music” „I like her music, she doesn't appear on the news, she is calm, not fake”
Carla's Dreams	„presents a trend which can't be necessarily fit in a particular style...they came with something new”
Subcarpați	„they are trying to merge lyrics with folklore”

Respondents appreciate, first of all, the artists' attempt to move in another direction, in attitude, through style, or songs. Identifying with them through the characteristics mentioned before, becomes a primordial element in the appreciation of an artist.

Of course, there were also respondents who appreciated a musical artist more as a person, and less as a musical performer. This is the case for Inna, who is seen "a good person for what she has done, but I am not a fan of her music", "Connect-R is a very good man ... I prefer him as a person, not necessarily for his music" or Smiley "I do not listen to him but I appreciate him". These responses show that some respondents, although appreciating certain artists as individuals, are indifferent to their music due to their not being identified with their song, genre or lyrics.

6.7. Unappreciated Romanian artists

As for the unappreciated Romanian singers, they are: Alex Velea, Inna, Feli, Antonia, Pepe, Sore, Anda Adam, Akcent, Andreea Balan, Ruby, Connect-R and Andra. General features, which describe most of them, are: superficiality and too much similarity from one song to another. The lack of depth or even the inexistence of a message behind a repetitive melodic line seem to be disturbing to the respondents. These artists "seem to be false", "they have nothing profound to offer", "they have the same beat that you find in all their songs... they seem to have gone on an opportunistic trend."

6.8. Word association to the music artists from Romania and appreciated foreign singers

Some of the words mentioned are: "smile", "hair", "imperfect", "folklore", "beard", "pink", "green", "liberty", "black".

After an analysis, we notice that some words represent the songs of the respective artists, a sign that the identity comes from their songs (if the same song would have been played by another artist, the latter artist would most likely also be appreciated), and not from the artist as a person, as a brand, (we are referring here to Carla's Dreams). For other artists, the words describe their physical characteristics, the identity rather coming from their appearance, not from their attitude. Here, we mention Delia, through the use of pink and green words describing her, the colors of the wigs she wears, Subcarpati - beard, the physical characteristic of her soloist, Smiley - hair. The other words describe both the attitude of the artists, in general, as well as the feeling they raise in the respondents through their melodies.

Respondents appreciate the following elements found at foreign singers: "individuality", "originality", "song content", "effort" and "spontaneity". For the names of their favorite artists, they mentioned: Eminem, Rihanna, Kanye West, Ed Sheeran, Babylon Circus, The Cat Empire, James Morrison, Years and Years, Pink Martini, or Leonard Cohen.

6.9. Unappreciated foreign singers

For unappreciated international singers, respondents are bothered by the same unattractive features: the superficiality and lack of message, as well as the convenience, by creating simple songs, in order for them to be moved as quickly as possible on the market.

6.10. Criticism and advantages to the romanian music industry

The respondents identified what is missing from the Romanian music industry, when compared to the international scene. The differences between the two industries are presented in the table below:

Table 2. Criticism and advantages brought to the Romanian music industry

Advantages	Criticism
„we have nothing to lose...here, anyone can make music, and this represent the liberty of creation”	„attitude...the foreigners are more open minded”
„inclusion of folkloric elements” (having our own identity and history, as a nation, we could promote these core Romanian values, a non-existent possibility on the American market because of the lack of a common identity as a nation)	„many platforms which sustain music can be found abroad, many advanced instruments...the music has already passed through several cycles...we are many years behind”
„we have more talented people”	„opportunities”
„originality...our context is unique...instead of creating an industry for club music, it would be potentially better if it could reach the problems of our society ”	„authenticity”
„different kinds of audience”	„an extreme snobbism is found in our music industry”
„talent which hasn't yet been discovered”	„we are lacking the framework for development”

From these answers, we can say that Romanian music is viewed rather in terms of status and money, not from the perspective of a culture that would like to convey something new, to change thoughts. Regarding the strengths, we can say that attempts (both in terms of approaching a different gender, targeting another audience and assuming the risk) are seen as strong points in our music industry, being appreciated by respondents.

6.11. What is branding

The last part of the research focuses on the brand of a singer. Most of the respondents have associated the brand with the image: "the image that others have about you", "a set of qualities and values that define a company or a man", others have associated the brand with an ideal: "branding is the attempt to change the person / product into an ideal", others, with a way of advertising "the way an artist is being advertised".

6.12. Traits which characterize a musical artist

The important features that characterize an artist seem to be: voice, attitude, perseverance, talent, the ability to adapt to changes, the ability to preserve authenticity, originality, empathy towards problems in society, passion, innovation, independence, sincerity, eccentricity, "liking what he/she does" and respect for the public.

The first words of the respondents to this question were: attitude, adaptability, innovation, authenticity, character and originality. All are characteristics of a person, first of all, not of a singer (a singer is defined by features such as voice and music).

Taking into account these answers, along with the ones discussed above, in the earlier part of the research, we can state that originality appears to be an important feature in both hypostases. Though harder to encounter, it can be found in various forms, from the physical aspect, such as Carla's Dream, to the music (folkloric insertions, by combining completely different styles without altering their essence, which is what Subcarpati are doing). These attempts to be different are well received by the public and are appreciated. By combining the two questions, we come back to the conclusion where respondents, through attributes such as attitudes and behaviors, appreciate the artists, rather as people, and less as musical performers (actors on stage).

6.13. Singers who do not identify with the traits

The artists who are placed at the greatest distance from the above mentioned traits are: Inna: "I do not think she has any talent, just attitude", Ștefan Banică Jr: "although he has a voice, somehow the attitude must come hand in hand, his snobbism is exaggerated", Andra, Sore and

Alexandra Stan, among others: "about everything you can hear on the radio...they all have the same rhythms, the same lyrics".

6.14. Ideal singers

We give the people taking part in this research the opportunity to create an ideal singer, by completing the sentence "An ideal singer...", the respondents once again mentioned some of the features they appreciate in a musical artist. The answers were varied, from "I do not think there are any ideal singers", to "should have a great voice, stage presence...", "has a good voice and a positive attitude". Contrary to the answers provided so far, it is noted that the voice was mentioned by the majority of the respondents, as the first characteristic of an ideal singer. Unlike the qualities that a singer, as a person, should have (originality and positive attitude, amongst others), a musical artist as a performer (actor on stage) must have a good voice.

6.15. Buying products associated with favourite singers

As a general rule, most respondents take into account brand associations (endorsements). Asked if they would buy a product advertised by an artist they appreciate, the answered: "yes, to a certain extent", "yes, I tend to buy products promoted by the artists I appreciate". Almost all respondents mentioned that they are also looking at the quality of the product, this being more important than any kind of association with an artist "I'm more interested in the characteristics and the price, and less on who promotes it". The possibility of spending a larger amount of money on the same product: "yes, I would also be willing to pay more for certain products, precisely for them being promoted by my favorite or one of my favorite artists", "If I really think the product is what it should be, I'd spend more on it".

6.16. Buying products associated with artists who are not appreciated

There were respondents who said they were not influenced by this endorsement technique: "I'm not really influenced by advertisements", "if it does not identify with my values, I do not buy it, no matter who is promoting it or vice versa". Most respondents said they would refuse to purchase a product promoted by an artist that they do not appreciate: "I can change my opinion about a brand that chooses a certain singer to be its image", "if the brand identifies itself with the singer, and if I do not like him/her, yes, I would refuse to purchase such a product". Taking into account the answers given to the last two questions, a brand that is not necessarily appreciated on the market, but associated with a highly appreciated singer, will have no impact on the consumer's buying behaviour. The artist's image, however, could be negatively affected by this kind of collaboration.

7. Conclusions

An important conclusion for this paper, with a deeper understanding of music consumers is the obvious difference the respondents seem to make between the musical performer and the singer. These two references, although intended to represent the same person, are divided into two distinct things: the singer, as a person in the day to day life and the musical performer, as a musical artist, an actor, the one present on the stage. So, the performer must have a voice in order to reach the level of an ideal one and, at the same time, in the backstage he/she must be original and display a pleasant personality through a positive attitude and proper behavior.

A brief analysis of the association between the brand of a music artist and the one of a material product was also sought. While the endorsement theory has been tracked, this analysis highlighted the effects of such partnerships and respondents' actions behind them. Thus, the image of an artist can positively influence a product brand as often as a product brand can negatively influence an artist (depending if the two share or not the same traits and values).

The convenience found in Romanian music, the repetitive sounds and the inspiration from internationally renowned artists, along with the arrogance encountered by some artists, represent a big negative point in the way they are perceived by the public, though this is not a general rule ("generally a good artist can be anyway, there are very good artists who were not good people, for example"). Moreover, respondents associated, to a greater or lesser extent, the success of the Romanian bands with the lack of originality. Thus, they believe that the recipe for a successful career in the music industry comes from appearing on radio or on the T.V: "If you want to be successful, you have to become commercial".

We can conclude that the Romanian music industry has no identity, but is on its way to acquire one, through talented and original singers - referred to as "ideal" (where an ideal singer "is" and "would focus more on quality than quantity").

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