

Darcy Blu - Breaking The Silence (EP)

Portfolio Commentary

IML Development M1L



Kristy Britt

2106888

It has been suggested that people make purchases for emotional rather than rational reasons. Gronlund (2013, p. 1-3) states, "Branding is not about selling products, it is a tool to make a connection with the customers. People buy products because they can relate to them and feel a connection with the brand." A 'brand' can be defined as an identifiable name or design, that's value is determined by how people perceive it. (Gronlund, 2013, p. 1-3) 'Branding', however, is a dynamic process that adapts and evolves to the changing needs of the market. (Mucundorfeanu, 2018) In relation to music, "Branding provides contextual clues to hook new listeners, which builds your audience." (Horsburgh, 2021) In other words, branding is a signifier that allows an artist to uniquely position themselves to prospective fans.

While streaming platforms and social media have made it possible for anyone to promote and distribute their music (Tschmuk, 2016, p. 13-14) streaming platforms lack storytelling. (Horsburgh, 2021) This is particularly problematic within the context of playlisting, where the listener is distanced from the curation process and a song's wider context is removed. (Horsburgh, 2021) In some instances, your music will receive plays but it is effectively background noise. "Most passive listeners turn on a playlist and leave it playing which is great for your streaming numbers but not helpful for building your brand". (Jax, 2020) As a result, a 'listener' doesn't necessarily equate to a 'fan' - meaning someone may be familiar with your music but unaware of you as an artist. Amber Horsburgh (2021) believes this lack of "a substantial forward-facing artist brand" is a threat to an artist's ability to build an audience outside of playlisting. Concluding, "If an artist has fewer than 1:20 followers to monthly listeners then you have a problem with branding and over-reliance on editorial support...".

A lack of social following, or brand awareness, becomes a real issue if you want to attain a record deal. "If the goal governing 99.99% of record campaigns is to reach millions of people and earn streaming/sales revenue, then followers suggest how aware people are of your artist". (Horsburgh, 2021) This situation recently occurred for dance-pop artist Darcy Blu, who currently has 11.2K monthly listeners and 384

followers on Spotify, and 1.7K followers on Instagram. (Chartmetric, 2022) When Darcy approached a label services company with her latest release they inferred suspicions surrounding the legitimacy of her monthly listening figures in comparison to her follower figures. (*Figure 1*)

I discovered this listener-to-follower discrepancy as a result of interviewing Darcy Blu, using Amber Horsburgh's (2019a) '21 Questions ...' framework. This interview helped me to understand Darcy's goals - to be signed to a record label within 12 months, to be taken seriously as a woman in the music industry, and to become a profitable brand. (*Figure 1*) In regards to the framework specifically, I deemed it to be successful in terms of qualitative data accrued, due to a balance of open/closed and direct/indirect questions. The interview gave Darcy the opportunity to give considered and detailed answers and provide insight into what drives her artistry as well as her audience. I was then able to translate Darcy's responses into a personal brand via brand values and her artist proposition.

Next, in order to assess Darcy Blu's current market positioning, I employed a SWOT analysis. Borg (2020, p. 21) defines SWOT as "a traditional marketing research tool that helps identify true business opportunities and needs." This process informed my release campaign by helping me to identify the opportunities that would align with Darcy's strengths, recognise and improve on her weaknesses, and reduce Darcy's vulnerability to external threats. (Borg, p. 21) By conducting a SWOT analysis prior to devising campaign ideas, I was able to use it as a referential framework and evaluate whether a campaign action was aligned with the artist and the needs of the market.

As a result, I noted that Darcy's strengths are her music community and network; wide industry knowledge; and her versatility as a pop singer, songwriter and producer who has access to quality equipment. The opportunities lie in her advocacy of mental health and feminism, utilising her network and developing her audience. Darcy's threats are primarily new technologies making the music industry more accessible to competitors, the continued fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic

and the so-called 'Cost-of-Living Crisis'. Lastly, Darcy's weaknesses are a lack of resources as an independent artist (no management, limited time, being self-funded and a lack of high-quality equipment at home), the quality of her social media content and lack of social media strategy and low brand awareness.

A SWOT analysis proved a worthwhile exercise, highlighting areas where improvement was needed as well as areas for immediate growth. Subsequently, I ensured to implement the following tactics in my campaign to turn Darcy's weaknesses into strengths:

- A detailed GANTT chart - organisation and forward-planning will aid Darcy's lack of time and resources.
- Emphasis on strengthening visual elements - via a website, content creation and ample press shots (as is reflected in the large allocation of campaign budget).
- Batch content creation - focused content, reduced costs and lowered risk of artist burnout.

In order to understand the exact needs of the market, we must first define the target audience in no uncertain terms. I used market segmentation in order to define Darcy Blu's target audience - demographics, geographics, psychographics, technographics and behavioural - via data from Chartmetric (2022). Darcy's audience is predominantly 16-24-year-olds, 58% female, white, city-dwelling and educated - although with a low income due to age. They live in the USA, Australia, Germany, UK and Poland. Her audience is open-minded, socially conscious, outgoing and enjoys seeing live music every 4-6 weeks. They have moderate to high internet usage, primarily for connection and entertainment, and use technology for convenience, e.g. smart speakers, online shopping and food deliveries. I found market segmentation to be useful, revealing the attitudes and brand affinity held by those we are trying to target. This was especially useful in regards to developing an effective marketing strategy inclusive of advertising. One downside of using market segmentation with an emerging artist was the limited amount of information

available. This meant manually collating and analysing data, making it highly time-consuming and reducing the data's validity.

As well as audience characteristics, it is important to consider the socio-economic context of Darcy's target market, otherwise known as Generation Z, "... the post-millennial group born between 1996 and 2010." (Donham, Macy and Rolston, 2022, p. 47) This age group has been raised during a time of social upheaval. They have faced disruptions to long-standing social structures such as education, work, and religion, and traditional paths to success becoming overcrowded - or simply disappearing altogether. (Brooks, 2021; Spotify, 2022, p. 7) Due to their age, Gen Zers are likely to be in transitional stages of their lives - navigating studying, relationships and beginning their careers. Music is one way in which these complex life experiences may be processed. "[M]usic is known to be important in the social and personal lives of adolescents and as such many researchers have examined the role music has played in satisfying particular emotional needs (strategies for coping), social needs (belonging and identity) and developmental needs (the socialisation 'journey')" (Nuttall 2008: 401)

This led me to consider music within the framework of 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs'. (Donham, Macy and Rolston, 2022, p. 49) (*Figure 2*) At the base of the pyramid sit physiological needs. Until someone has met these basic needs, there is little or no interest in fulfilling higher needs, as the individual is in survival mode. The next level is love, approval and belongingness - where marketers believe music sits. An individual may occasionally sacrifice a lower-level need (e.g. skipping a meal to pay for merchandise) but this is not sustainable. (Donham, Macy and Rolston, 2022, p. 50) Of course, no one *needs* music in the Maslovian sense, so the challenge for marketers is to make the consumer *feel as though* they need music. (Donham, Macy and Rolston, 2022, p. 50) Extending this principle further, Borg (2020, p. 16) considered each musical genre in relation to Maslow's theory. (*Figure 3*) He proposes that pop music fulfills the needs of security and safety and intimate relationships and friendships through its thematic elements - love, romance and family. (Borg, 2020, p. 16) While 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' didn't have a direct impact on my campaign

decisions, it was useful to be reminded of music's purpose, particularly Borg's (2020, p. 16) interpretation which acts as a plausible link between music and the needs of a Gen Z audience.

Music can also provide Gen Z with a means of exploring their personalities and expressing their individuality. (Spotify, 2022, p. 7) "Gen Zs are driving the "main-character energy" trend, in which people use social media or digital audio to make themselves feel like the centre of attention with all eyes (and ears) on them." (Chayka, 2021; Spotify, 2022, p.7) Additionally, Spotify (2022, p.2) suggests that Gen Z uses both music and brands to deepen their personal narrative. Consequently, they are not afraid to call out inauthenticity, believing "authenticity is everything." (Spotify, 2022, p. 17) Therefore, for Darcy Blu to resonate with a Gen Z audience, it was essential that all of the campaign elements embody her brand values - Feminist, Honest, DIY, Nostalgic and Fun. If I didn't believe that an idea covered all of these bases, it wasn't undertaken.

All of this research into branding, the target audience and how these relate to my artist helped me to develop my dual campaign goals - brand awareness and audience development. Before focusing on how these goals would be achieved, however, it was vital to strategise and implement Darcy Blu's brand identity. Firstly, I conducted a thorough audit of Darcy's owned channels: her website, social media accounts and streaming platforms. This revealed a motif of Darcy's - that she frequently wears blue clothing or accessories in her press shots and during performances. This, however, is not currently done consistently enough to be impactful. Therefore, Darcy should implement this in all of her music-related content. If, as Jensen (1971) suggests, your visual memory is stronger than your auditory memory (*Figure 4*), then we must ensure that blue is the most prominent colour in her press shots. This artistic convention will make her more memorable than her music alone. Gradually, Darcy's audience may even begin to associate the colour blue with her, acting as an external signifier for her artistry. Alternatively, filming video content (such as TikToks and Instagram Reels) against a blue backdrop may be a useful tactic.

In addition to creating 'a look', I deemed a new logo paramount for the next stage in Darcy's career. (*Figure 5*) Refreshing her logo subtly conveys the growth of Darcy's musical sound and will increase her professional standing. In more recent years, logos have moved away from iconography with a focus on impactful typeface. Inspired by other artists' logos I researched, particularly Charli XCX (*Figure 6*), I decided to pair a bold, all-caps typography with a softer, cursive font to show the multi-dimensional nature of Darcy's persona.

Following the logo design, I used the 'Marketing Funnel' (Make A Scene, 2020) (*Figure 6*) to develop my marketing plan. This framework was an important tool as it set clear guidelines for audience development. The first stage of the funnel is my initial objective, brand awareness, as, without brand awareness, no other communication effects can occur. An audience cannot form an opinion, and therefore, they cannot choose to invest. (Rossiter et al. 1991) As per this model, 'Brand Awareness' is generated by the creation of engaging content in order to generate 'Interest', e.g. website traffic, social media followers and subscribers. In order to reach the next stage of the funnel, 'Desire', audience data needs to be acquired. It is in this stage where audience development occurs, taking the form of increased engagement (likes, shares and saves), playlist additions, and newsletter subscriptions. The marketing funnel infers that without owned data you cannot have an 'active' audience; fans who go out of their way to have cross-platform interactions, and purchase music, merch and concert tickets.

Once brand awareness is achieved, audience development will in part be achieved through the advertising strategy. We will conduct an initial advertising campaign via Spotify to target 'light listeners' of Darcy's music during July and August (when the two singles are released). 2 weeks prior to the EP's release we will run a 'pre-save' campaign utilising Facebook and Instagram and once the EP has been released we will advertise that the project is 'out now' via all three platforms. Targeting 'light listeners' of Darcy's music is proven to be the most cost-effective way of working. (Horsburgh, 2019b) Another strategy that enables audience development,

while also gathering owned audience data, is a monthly newsletter, 'Darcy's Days'. Fans will be encouraged to sign up for the newsletter via a phone line (which will be discussed further later). The setting up of a newsletter was inspired by Lorde, who has had great success maintaining audience longevity. (Febelin, 2021) The newsletter could be Darcy's space to talk about spirituality, her vision board, and potentially collaborate with fans, brands and other artists. Through this method, we are both deepening relationships and reducing the artist's reliance on social media.

Conversely, a social media campaign is still an essential component of this release campaign. Instagram and TikTok will be Darcy's focal social channels, with Snapchat and YouTube secondary points of interest. This decision was made following research that uncovered that TikTok is the most popular social media app among its Gen Z audience. (Ypulse, 2021) It is also the most popular way to discover new music (Ypulse, 2021) with pop music being TikTok's second most popular music genre. (TikTok 2021) In addition, 67% of TikTok's users are more likely to seek out songs on music streaming services after hearing them on the platform. (Whateley, 2022) In regards to Instagram, it's important that Darcy utilises all of the features available - hosting Lives, posting Reels and sharing Photo Carousels - to maximise engagement. Also essential is fostering a two-way environment and actively engaging with fans. "Gen Zs are revolutionising the creator-fan relationship, turning it from a one-way broadcast into a two-way exchange." (Spotify, 2022)

This idea of audience participation and collaboration is a key element of my release strategy. I decided to create multiple EP artwork options and Darcy's audience will be asked to vote for their favourite through a set of Instagram polls - the idea being to create a sense of ownership amongst her audience. In addition, I initially envisioned a strategy comprising three singles, however, ultimately felt that this would leave little incentive for fans to purchase the four-track EP as well as take up too much time. As such, I reduced the number of singles to two and added a remix campaign. This is inexpensive, will generate extra promotion and will give Darcy's fans the opportunity to have their music released alongside her, enhancing their relationship further.

Once the overall release strategy was decided, I developed ideas for each single. For the first single, 'Call Me Baby', we will set up a phone line and create suggestive stickers and business cards (*Figure 8*) that will be placed strategically, around London music venues and music businesses where Darcy Blu and her competitors frequent. Upon calling the number, a snippet of the song will play as well as a voicemail from Darcy with a Call To Action and her social handle. Afterwards, the individual will receive a text message containing a contact form so they can sign up for her newsletter. As an added bonus for early adopters and to create urgency, the first 50 people to register will receive an 8-bit ringtone version of the track. Once 'Call Me Baby' has been released the phone number can be repurposed throughout the campaign to advertise the other releases, the launch party and later down the line, tour information. This idea was partly inspired by 90s illegal raves, where 'party lines' were often used to reveal an event's location so as to avoid police attention (Barden, 2020). It was also adapted from the release campaign used by Birmingham rapper Jaykae, who increased his mailing list by 700% in 2021 by setting up phone-in and SMS communications, hiding clues in his tracks Spotify Canvases. (Routenote, 2022)

Placing stickers in unexpected locations is a form of guerilla marketing. Borg, B. (2020, p. 196) defines guerilla marketing as "any unconventional form of promotion that can be employed on a low budget to no budget." Nufer (2013, p. 1) states that trying "to achieve the greatest possible impact with a minimum investment" is a key characteristic of guerilla marketing. The purpose of Guerilla Marketing is to attract attention in an unconventional way, implementing outside-of-the-box thinking to help companies stand out from their competitors. (Gillert, 2021) There are drawbacks of guerilla marketing, however, such as the inability to accurately forecast the outcome of a campaign. This is in relation to its reach, but also to difficulties that can occur due to the operation outside of traditional advertising channels. (Gillert, 2021) Additional permissions may also need to be sought compared to traditional. Had there been an opportunity, in terms of increased resources, I would have liked to have extended this idea further. By incorporating ambient marketing, such as

building a giant phone booth in central London, the result would be more impactful. This combination of marketing would create a long-lasting and stronger impression within the recipient. (Hutter et al. 2013, 22-25, 59-71) Furthermore, brand partnerships such as a mobile network provider could have been explored.

For the second single, I decided that we would release 'teaser' trailers announcing the song title across all of Darcy's social channels during release week in order to create anticipation. On release day, a 24 hour loop of the music video will premiere on YouTube, and we will project the music video against a wall in a high-footfall area of London. In order to generate promotional coverage, passersby will be encouraged to share the content and use the hashtag '#DarcyBluOnRepeat'.. We can also use this opportunity to create long-form content for YouTube, filming the process and peoples' reactions to the track. Again, with additional budget, the projection could occur against a music institution such as Rich Mix. If we were to consider this route we would require either a Crowdfunding campaign or a brand partnership or sponsorship.

Overall, I believe I have created a release campaign that successfully meets the campaign objectives of brand awareness and development, while adhering to Darcy's personal goals and brand values. I think the budget, targets and timescale outlined are realistic and that the marketing strategies, principles and research tools used have enabled me to create an effective marketing plan.

APPENDIX

Figure 1 Darcy Blu, '21 Questions...' Interview (2022)

 ARTIST INTERVIEW - ADAD7012_LON / 2106888

Figure 2 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs' (Donham, Macy and Rolston, 2022, p. 49)



Figure 3 (Borg, 2020, p. 16)

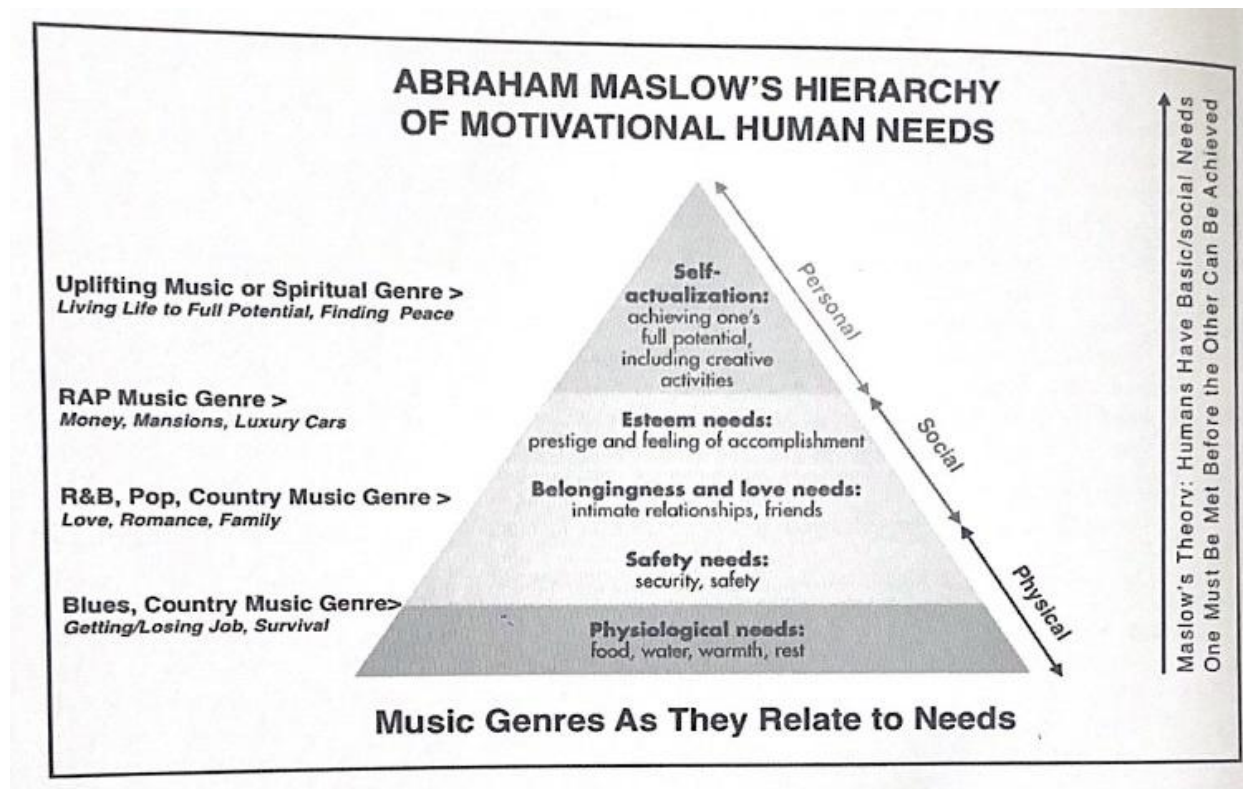


Figure 4 Jensen (1971)



Figure 5 Darcy Blu Logo (2022)



Figure 6 Charli XCX Logo (2022)



Figure 7 Marketing Funnel (Making A Scene, 2022)

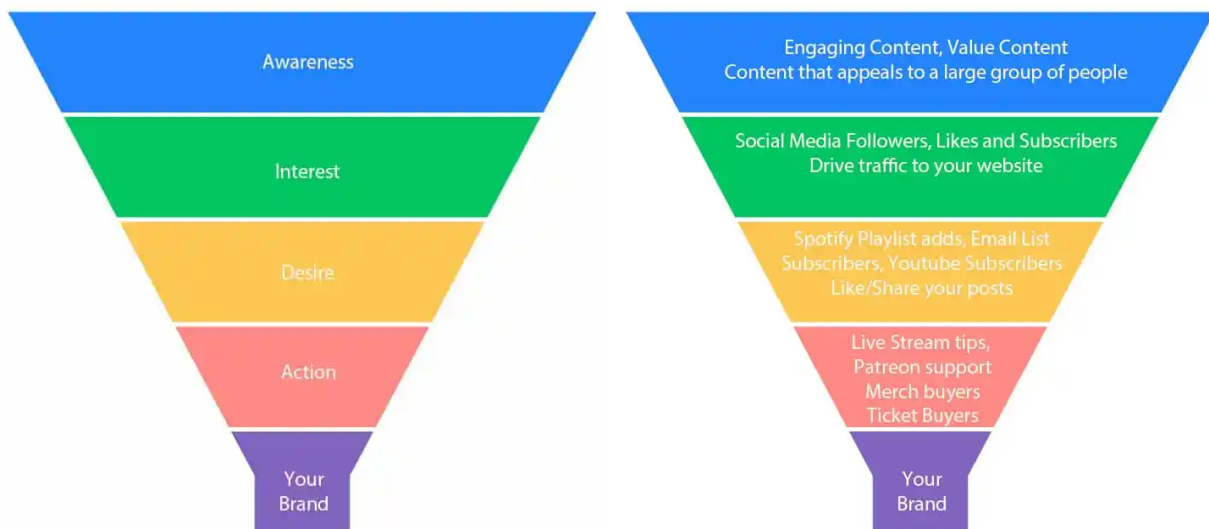


Figure 8 'Call Me Baby' sticker (2022)



REFERENCES

Barden, B. (2020) 'Why did raves become illegal?', 26th June. *BBC News*. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-53170021> (Accessed: 30th July 2022)

Borg, B. (2020) *Music Marketing for the DIY Musician: Creating and Executing a Plan of Attack on a Low Budget*. 2nd Edition. Rowman & Littlefield. London

Brooks, D. (2021) 'America Is Having a Moral Convulsion', *The Atlantic*. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/10/collapsing-levels-trust-are-devastating-america/616581/> (Accessed 5th July 2022)

Chartmetric (2022). *Darcy Blu*. Available at: <https://app.chartmetric.com/artist?id=3442991> (Accessed: 9th June 2022)

Chayka, K. (2021) 'We All Have "Main-Character" Energy Now', 23rd June. *The New Yorker*. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/infinite-scroll/we-all-have-main-character-energy-now> (Accessed 5th July 2022)

Donham, Macy and Rolston (2022). *Marketing Recorded Music: How Music Companies Brand and Market Artists*. 4th Edition. Routledge. New York.

Feblin (2021) 'Lorde On Loneliness And Taking A Break From Social Media During The Pandemic In A Newsletter Sent To Fans', 27th October. *Women's Health*. Available at: <https://www.womenshealthmag.com/health/a38080562/lorde-social-media-break-pandemic-loneliness-newsletter/> (Accessed: 1st July 2022)

Gillert, V. (2021) The Benefits of Guerilla Marketing. Available at:
https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/502254/Gillert_Viktoria_2021_06_01.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y (Accessed: 2nd July 2022)

Gronlund (2013) *Basics of Branding: A Practical Guide for Managers*. Business Expert Press. New York.

Horsburgh, A. (2019a) '21 Questions to ask an artist before working with them', 8th May. Available at:
<https://amberhorsburgh.medium.com/21-questions-to-ask-an-artist-before-working-with-them-a9ddf2a90513> (Accessed: 19th May 2022)

Horsburgh, A. (2019b) 'How to spend \$100,000 to break an artist', 23rd October. Available at:
<https://amberhorsburgh.medium.com/how-to-spend-100-000-to-break-an-artist-c093cf2d67f7> (Accessed: 18th June 2022)

Horsburgh, A. (2021) 'How to brand my band', 31st January. Available at:
<https://amberhorsburgh.medium.com/how-to-brand-my-band-509ea95a609e>
 (Accessed 28th June).

Hutter, K. & Hoffmann, S. (2013) *Professionelles Guerilla-Marketing. Grundlagen, Instrumente. Controlling*. Wiesbaden.

Jax, J. (2020) 'How do Musicians Promote Music', 21st October. Available at:
<https://jacquelinejax.medium.com/how-do-musicians-promote-music-e29f409276d>
 (Accessed: 23rd June 2022)

Jensen, A. (1971) 'Individual Differences in Visual and Auditory Memory'. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. 62. 123-131.
<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Individual-Differences-in-Visual-and-Auditory-Jensen/ec774932b14b66b828a867603ec4636d4d8b3e0a?p2df>

Mucundorfeanu, M. (2018). The Key Role of Storytelling in the Branding Process. *Journal of Media Research*. 11. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323486441_The_Key_Role_of_Storytelling_in_the_Branding_Process (Accessed: 2nd July 2022)

Nufer, G. 2013. 'Guerilla Marketing. Innovative or Parasitic Marketing?' *Modern Economy*. Vol. 4, 1-6. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/275789552_Guerrilla_Marketing-Innovative_or_Parasitic_Marketing (Accessed 2nd July 2022)

Nuttall, P. (2008). 'For Those About to Rock: A New Understanding of Adolescent Music Consumption'. *Advances in Consumer Research*. 35. 401-408.

Rossiter JR; Percy L & Donovan RJ (1991). 'A better advertising planning grid'. *Journal of Advertising Research*. 11-21.

Routenote, J. (2022) 'The best artist's music marketing campaigns', 7th January. <https://routenote.com/blog/the-best-artists-music-marketing-campaigns/> (Accessed: 10th June 2022)

Spotify (2022) Spotify Culture Next 2022. Available at: <https://culturenext2022.byspotify.com/en-GB> (Accessed 30th June 2022)

TikTok (2021) 'Year on TikTok 2021 Music Report', 13th December. *TikTok*. Available at: <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/year-on-tiktok-music-report-2021> (Accessed 29th June 2022)

Tschmuck, P. (2016) 'From record selling to cultural entrepreneurship: the music economy in the digital paradigm shift', in Wikström, P. & DeFillippi, R. (ed.) 2016, *Business Innovation and Disruption in the Music Industry*. Edward Elgar. Cheltenham.

Ypulse (2021) 'This is How Gen Z & Millennial Social Media Usage Has Changed in 2021', 21st December.

<https://www.ypulse.com/article/2021/12/21/this-is-how-gen-z-millennials-social-media-use-has-changed-in-2021/> (Accessed: 21st June 2022)