

MA International Music Marketing

Module: Development in International Music Marketing

Term 2: Essay - Reflective Commentary on Artist Campaign Portfolio

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3/07/2022

Intro:

Within this commentary, I aim to thoroughly evaluate the marketing theories, strategies, frameworks and practices that have shaped my design and production of the Campaign Portfolio for Japanese Independent Hip-hop & Soul artist, **Kingo**. We will assess the value of the marketing theories of '*Social Currency & Social Proof*', and '*Trigger Cities*', the Framework I have designed based on the '*Berenschot Model*', '*Eisenhower's Principle*', '*Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*', and the trends surrounding '*Authentic Marketing Strategy*' discussed by John O'Brien and David Gallagher. Subsequently, I will be reflecting upon *the application* of these theories, strategies, frameworks, and practices used within the portfolio's artefacts, through the lens of the portfolio's primary focus - ***the campaign***. Ultimately, this commentary hopes to achieve two objectives: Firstly, to achieve a greater understanding of the most common contexts in which these theoretical elements are implemented - in order to ***sustainably, authentically, and meaningfully*** achieve a 'successful' campaign for independent artists. Secondly, I aim to highlight that despite the various 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' found in marketing theories and strategies - these pros and cons entirely depend on the contexts in which they are applied. Fundamentally, we are only capable of recognising the **true value** of these theoretical concepts through the lenses of our own objectives, following the live application of our own unique marketing campaigns.

Evaluations:

The value of these elements will be evaluated by examining their ability to positively contribute towards the overall *sustainability, authenticity, and meaningfulness* of an independent artist's campaign that works toward the objectives of: *'increased brand awareness', 'development of sustainable social media practices', and 'data collection and analysis to refine future targeting'*.

Social Currency & Social Proof

Background:

Social currency refers to the “resources gained from being a part of social networks and communities, both on and offline.” (Keyes, 2018). These resources “include gaining information and knowledge, helping form your personal identity, and increased social status and recognition.” (Keyes, 2018). An example of this would be when people are together and one of the members speaks about a film or television series they have watched, where another mentions a restaurant they have recently visited etc. “We share these things not just as conversation starters but to show our personalities and interests. We share to connect by trading social currency.” (Keyes, 2018).

The social currency wheel is broken down into six elements - Affiliation, Conversation, Utility, Advocacy, Information, and Identity. The objective of the social currency wheel is to “explain how customers' social processes and behaviours drive each of the conversions to three different outcomes” (Keyes, 2018), these outcomes being:

- Consideration
- Purchase
- Loyalty

Essentially, it is to enable the creator of the social currency to “engage with customers during these social processes and behaviours [in order to] influence the outcomes” (Keyes, 2018).

Social Proof refers to the phenomenon in which individuals assume the actions or behaviours of others in an attempt to “reflect correct behaviour for a given situation”, or more specific to the context of social marketing - individuals acting and communicating with the intention of reflecting their proclaimed identity in order to be accepted within a particular community or “tribe”, (e.g. a comic book fan taking a photo of a vintage comic book, and posting it on social media with the intention of having their outward identity recognised and approved of by the social group). (Keyes, 2018).

Evaluation:

These two concepts have been grouped together as they often work in tandem - and therefore will be evaluated together.

Social currency’s conceptual strengths seemingly lie in the regularity of which these social processes take place in every-day society. These natural, everyday processes seemingly lends itself to a sustainable, authentic, and meaningful approach as it allows the artist to create content that is aligned with their values, the values of the social group they are trying to be recognised by, and also allows those who align with the content to share it both in, and outside of the group. Seeing as the content has the capacity to hold meaning to the creator,

representing their values and identity (brand) - this allows for a lack of resistance within the artist while creating content, leading to a more sustainable content creation practice.

However, the weaknesses of social currency lay in its strengths - as it is a regular natural process, any content that is seen will likely result in a variety of responses or lack-there-of.

The social currency (the content) that the artist creates could strike up a negative sentiment surrounding the artist if it has not been executed responsibly, or it could simply not be particularly compelling - resulting in a lack of sentiment. This would be considered a significant weakness as a lack of external sentiment would result in a decline in visibility for the content on social platforms - resulting in less impressions, less data, and ultimately an unsuccessful campaign (based on the stated objectives). Fundamentally, the strengths and weaknesses of this concept lay in its execution and the context in which it is implemented - it depends entirely on the content that has been created, and what the intentions and objectives of the created content are.

Trigger Cities

Background:

The concept of Trigger Cities explains that “streaming algorithms reward the best-performing tracks by highlighting/playlisting them more [and unlike] physical sales, big media, or terrestrial radio [this is scaled globally, determining that...] Western listening habits are silently but intimately intertwined with the tastes of Latin America and South/SE Asia” (*Joven, 2019*). By targeting these ‘tastemaking’ cities, the idea is to ‘trigger’ an algorithmic advantage for the artist. It is noticeably less expensive to run campaigns directed to these target markets - and these trigger cities (especially in South/SE Asia) are often very welcoming of western and foreign music and content (however this comes with some caveats that will be mentioned in the evaluation).

Evaluation:

Implementing the concept of trigger cities into artist campaigns - especially with the intention of moving towards sustainability, authenticity, and meaning, while meeting the aforementioned campaign objectives - is a difficult balance to strike. Of course the benefits are highlighted within the background of the concept - however, the challenges must be acknowledged as they will certainly be a part of the process. The primary challenges involved in designing a campaign targeting trigger cities are as follows: Trigger Cities have their own genre and artist hierarchies - meaning that the music the population listens to will consist of a select few primary genres, and a select few artists. Western and foreign content is often welcomed (depending on the specific market), however - there are several key factors that should be taken into consideration and perhaps implemented in order to increase the likelihood of benefitting from campaigning in these markets. For example, just because a campaign is targeting a particular foreign market - “does not mean [that] cultures instantly forget their local preferences in language, attitude” etc. Therefore, there is value in taking measures to better appreciate and engage with the target culture’s preferences and experiences - for example, collaborating with local talent. However, it is important to note that these do not apply to all trigger cities. Every market is different, and there are various historical and sociocultural phenomena that have led to these differences - which should be appreciated when designing a campaign in these markets. Some things can be universally enjoyed - but this does not mean that a campaign for an artist who creates a style of music that is popular within a trigger city is destined to be successful - especially if the campaign activities lack tact and sensitivity to the individuals they are targeting. Afterall, it is safe to assume that fans and potential fans universally want to be treated with respect, and be made to feel special - not like a tool or stepping stone that is taken advantage of. Ultimately,

campaigns targeting trigger cities can be incredibly powerful and cost-effective, but in order to successfully implement them regularly - the project planning requires authenticity, meaning, and sensitivity for the respective markets and their cultures.

My Framework

Background:

The culmination of the knowledge and practices of O'Brien and Gallagher, B.M McKinnon, the Berenschot Project Management Model, Eisenhower's principle, and Maslow's Hierarchy of needs - the model I have designed and used within Kingo's campaign portfolio aims to act as a project planning tool that follows the values of ***Sustainability, Authenticity, and Intention***. Through these values, the framework guides all actions towards serving the goals of their respective levels, sequentially serving the objectives above them until the top objectives are achieved. This framework takes the berenschot project management model and expands upon it by widening the scope from just project management, and applying elements of its structure to an artist's lifestyle and career. We start by applying Maslow's hierarchy of needs to acknowledge what the artist requires in order to achieve 'success' (defined by them), following this we apply Eisenhower's principle to highlight the large-scale objectives that need to be achieved in order to achieve the Artist's requirements (discovered by applying Maslow's hierarchy), and organising them by levels of priority and urgency. Once these objectives are established, we then divide the objectives into individual 'projects' that can be organised through the use of the berenschot project management model (particularly through the project hierarchy). The values however (influenced by the teachings of O'Brien, Gallagher and McKinnon), are what define my framework as its own independent model. Without the values, it would not be a specialised framework designed with content creation, fan culture, and the music industry in mind. The practical application of these various models

and theories in conjunction with the values results in a framework that caters to the creative individual - who is not a business in themselves, but aims to have a creative career.

Individuals do not always have the resources or teams etc. to divide up the responsibilities - which means that many frameworks and project management models and marketing theories that are designed for larger businesses in mind - can't be appropriately scaled to the creative individual. Therefore, in designing this - my intention is to make use of the strengths of the creative individual: their unique personhood, creativity, and authenticity, while allowing the artist flexibility in their approach so not to stifle their creativity, or their motivation.

Evaluation:

I think it is important to know my bias within this evaluation - as I have developed the framework, I will naturally believe it was the appropriate choice for the purposes and objectives within the context of the artist I work with. This framework is designed to be holistic in nature - meaning it isn't to be used solely in the context of a campaign - it is designed to operate on a much larger scale, acting as a foundation for campaigns. The framework's purpose is to allow the artist to freely create in an authentic way, while being highly organised - retaining autonomy over their entire creative process if they choose to. This lends itself to increased sustainable practices as it reduced the burnout felt by artists who lack teams, time, and lack resources - as it plays into their (aforementioned) strengths and allows them to tackle small, manageable objectives that ultimately serve a larger, long-term goal. However, in order to truly evaluate its value - I must also acknowledge its weaknesses. This is a framework that requires a lot of work and information to function properly. This means that it is time consuming to start with - so it is not ideal for individual artists who want to quickly run a campaign without any preparation. It must be used within its intended context, otherwise it could be perceived as an obstacle that drains resources and energy away

from short-term goals. Therefore, the value of this framework is in it's detail - as this front-loaded approach allows the artist to have a constant understanding of why they are doing what they are doing, it removes any uncertainty in whether activities are going to help them achieve their goals or not - as every action they take within this framework has an intended purpose that it serves, working as a well oiled machine.

Collaborations

Background:

Collaborations have often been used as a strategy to acquire a larger audience by sharing audiences with another artist.

Evaluation:

Using collaborations within an artist campaign can be an incredibly helpful practice - but it also comes with its risks if not implemented with proper insight and preparation. Its strengths and weaknesses lay within the interaction between the two contributors. The collaborators must have a good rapport - an interesting dynamic and sense of creativity that compliments one another while maintaining authenticity and a natural (unforced) feeling, otherwise their respective audiences could find the collaboration uninteresting, and not fit the brand that they align themselves with. Simply put, it could risk the brand sentiment of both of the contributing artists if conducted poorly or without thought. However, this does not mean it is inappropriate to take risks - as risks could bring an exciting element to the campaign - as long as the narrative surrounding the collaboration is appropriate and frames the experience in a way that shows it is intentional (for example, a bubblegum pop artist collaborating with a death metal band: an unlikely collaboration, a potential risk - however, if the narrative of the collaboration is to be subversive and experimentative - it could just as easily result in a highly

successful campaign). The takeaway should ultimately be that the success of a collaboration depends entirely on the narrative and the implementation of that narrative.

Pillar Method

Background:

The pillar method is a simple organisational method to content creation that aims to stretch the value of a large piece of content, by making smaller content pieces from the parent (for example, a fifteen-minute video for youtube can be broken down into fifteen, one-minute long clips, and these clips etc. could be repurposed etc).

Evaluation:

This method is incredibly helpful when trying to create a lot of content with a tight budget. Of course the weaknesses are that much of the content could spoil the larger piece of content depending on how it is used, or perhaps it could become repetitive - but this again depends on the context and implementation itself. Regardless, it allows the creator to amass various types of content from one large parent, resulting in a sustainable practice, an authentic one as long as the content itself is, and meaningful as it allows the main focus of content creation to go into a single, well considered concept - rather than dividing attention away from the main content to also make smaller - more regular pieces. Ultimately - it seems to have value in the context of individuals who do not have the ability to delegate tasks as well as a larger team would.

Split Testing

Background:

Split testing is essentially the application of the Deming Cycle in the context of digital advertising - upon several simultaneous advertisements. This practice involves creating content for digital advertisements, running several advertisements simultaneously (each with one variable that is different), and analysing the success of the various advertisements over a trial period. Once the trial period is up, or if there is significant evidence that one advert is performing significantly better than the rest - the other adverts are cancelled, and then the advertising budget is assigned to the winning ad.

Evaluation:

This process is quite scientific, as it follows a cycle of experimentation. Therefore there are no guarantees, and the entire process relies on data. Because of this, the process itself doesn't have many weaknesses within the practice itself - but rather, the weaknesses are tethered to the marketer's ability to evaluate the data, draw conclusions, and take actions based upon those conclusions. Although, it should also be noted that this process can take time - as it is fundamentally a process of experimentation. This means that significant results may not appear in an ideal timeframe, if at all. Ultimately - it is an incredibly helpful process to follow, but requires a strong ability to interpret data, and develop creative solutions.

Reflection:

When reflecting on the application of the theories, strategies, frameworks etc., mentioned earlier - it is important to understand the context for which they were applied - the campaign objectives: Increased brand awareness, development of sustainable social practices, and data acquisition.

Brand & Business Strategy:

I designed the brand and business strategy with the intention of following the framework I designed - as Kingo is an independent artist who has no team and very little administrative support. Therefore he required a front-loaded approach to designing a campaign - one that helps him to achieve his goals of progressing his career. Therefore the brand and business strategies include the necessary artefacts to fulfil the requirements of my framework (Kingo's personal answers to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Eisenhower's Principle). Additionally, the brand strategy highlights the values and personality of Kingo as a person and as a brand - which are fundamental to the framework working as intended.

The brand and business strategies were designed holistically in order to illuminate clearly, the role in which the campaign is going to play in the overall development of Kingo's career in Music.

Marketing Strategy:

The marketing strategy acts as the complete summary of the campaign - from design to implementation. Reflecting on the artefacts of this section is the equivalent of reflecting on the overall value of the campaign that I have designed. As this is the case, I need to have a scale to measure the predicted value - which is impossible to objectively do as I have not implemented the campaign yet. Seeing as the campaign is the amalgamation of the theories, frameworks, and practices outlined in the previous section - I feel it is only natural to therefore define the value of this campaign by how well-considered the design is against the evaluations I have made about these theories, frameworks, and practices.

The evaluations I have made illustrated the strengths and weaknesses of each element that make up my campaign - however there was a consistent theme across each evaluation. The success of each element in achieving my campaign's objectives, ultimately depends on the context in which it is applied, as well as the actual content that would be created as well as how it was implemented. This means that the success of these elements are entirely subjective to how it is carried out.

I have not created any example assets, instead choosing to display case studies that were aligned with the content I had envisioned. Therefore, I can only make the educated assumption that, based on the case studies I had observed, and whether our content and digital ad campaigns match the style of those case studies (of course in a way that is aligned with Kingo's brand and objectives), that the campaign I have designed will likely meet the targets we have set, with the potential to surpass them.

Conclusion:

Through the evaluation and reflection on the various elements that make up Kingo's campaign - I believe this commentary has achieved the two objectives I had intended to address. Firstly, we now have a greater appreciation for the contexts in which these theoretical elements are implemented. We understand that in order to *sustainably, authentically, and meaningfully* achieve a 'successful' campaign for independent artists - it is of the utmost importance to recognise the unique value of the artist, their values, and the ideas that we as marketers generate to achieve our artists' objectives. Secondly, we can now acknowledge that, despite the various 'strengths' and 'weaknesses' found in marketing theories and strategies - these pros and cons ultimately depend on the contexts in which they are applied. Hopefully, this commentary has helped to take myself and whoever reads this - one step closer to recognising that the **true value** of theoretical concepts used in the design of artists' marketing campaigns (not just within the context of this examination) - can only be found through the lenses of our own objectives, through conducting our own experimental processes within our own campaigns.

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