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*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Botswana music: Is personal branding the missing factor for growth?**

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**The music industry is a large and dynamic business environment, composed of many different creative individuals who assist in making music available to consumers in some shape or form. The reduction in the music sales has been a global concern and even nerve-wrecking is the uncertainty in the music demand. This study looked at branding as a way in which upcoming musicians may effectively sell their music and strategically position themselves and grow the industry. The results showed that music fans in Botswana are not satisfied with the relationship they have with their favorite local musicians as well as the image they portray. It is argued that personal branding could help musicians grow and likewise grow the industry.**

**Keywords:** Branding, Music, Botswana.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Music is an art form that spans a range of human activities, from entertainment to religious and social rites, political activism, and commercial interests. The music industry itself is a large and dynamic business environment, composed of many different creative individuals who assist in making music available to consumers in some shape or form. Attaching commercial value to music may seem intrinsically partial as it fails to reflect the whole breadth of values generated in the process of creating and consuming music. However, the existence of industries entirely dedicated to this process demonstrates the viability of engaging with the sector's economy as they affect local economies by providing employment, leading to the consumption of musical products, and supporting other industries (Ambert, 2003).

The industry at large has coped with a transition from tangible music products to digital, and accordingly, many players have been greatly affected. Demand remains uncertain, with ever increasing production costs and

plummeting sales (O'Leary, 2011; Kelley, 1999). In addition, there has been a discrepancy recorded between volumes of music consumed and that actually bought. It's recorded that seventy percent (70%) of all music consumed in the US, UK, France and Germany is from digital channels, while revenues from these digital platforms accounted for only thirty five percent (35%) of industry revenues (Karaganis and Renkema, 2012).

Southern African countries are also losing millions of dollars every year as a result of music piracy and the sale of illegal audio and video music. Tanzania is reported to be losing US\$9.4 million annually (Southern African Research and Documentation Centre, 2001). Botswana is no exception when it comes to low music sales. Music in Botswana appears to be adopting more and more listeners but this doesn't seem to translate into sale of music albums or increase show attendance (Chilisa, 2010).

One way of realizing this growth potential could be to

generate value from the behavior of the vast number of people who currently do not pay for the music they consume. This is why relationship management becomes ideal. Music businesses that have built strong relationships with their customers seemingly enjoy more revenue than those who do not have any relationship with their customers. Managing consumer relationships could, therefore, be essential in promoting a musician's career. Fostering relationships between artists and consumers is believed to be advantageous for the artist's career in the long run (O'Leary, 2011). It may take only one bad "moment of truth" in the music business to persuade a customer to go to a competitor. Therefore, musicians may incur high switching costs if they do not recognise the importance of customer loyalty and retention, as the effect of one relationship affects a wider spectrum of relationships.

Although artists have focal relationships with the label and consumers, they also have relationships outside the focal relationship that may affect the dealings in the focal relationship. It is therefore imperative for artists to orchestrate a bond with their audience and fans and establish a deep emotional connection. Many fans look to music to help get them through a rough time in their life or help to change their mood. In this regard, consumers look to their relationship with the artist to solve their problems. Moreover, having a bond with the target audience is essential in creating loyal consumers and guaranteed attendees at concerts (O'Leary, 2011).

Additionally, managing artist-consumer relationships is critical for the brand managers in the music industry as there is focus on the relationships and the level of personal identification a customer has with an artist. A successful artist (brand) is an identifiable person augmented through a coherent process, such that music consumers perceive unique, relevant, added value which match their musical/entertainment needs most closely (Egan and Thomas, 1998), and provide identity, direction, purpose, and meaning (Aaker, 1996) to the consumer's being. Successful artists create strong, positive and lasting impressions, all of which are perceived by audiences to be of value to them personally.

### Purpose of the Study

It is every musician's dream (particularly in Botswana), to have their presence felt in both the local and foreign markets. However, it is observed that only an insignificant number of musicians succeed in this regard. A majority of those that succeed are only able to penetrate neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe. Currently, little is known about the extent of relationship management amongst music marketers, and there are limited studies undertaken on music in Botswana and none whatsoever on branding and relationship management in the music industry. Hence

this study intends to explore personal branding as a plausible approach through which Botswana musicians can effectively market themselves so as to be able to infiltrate the local and international markets.

### Literature Review

The review of the literature reconnoiters viewpoints on personal branding, challenges of personal branding, and how to build a personal brand, and integrates these with relationship management concepts.

Interest in branding can be traced back to the 'Brand Management Memo' by McElroy (1931) (cited in Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000). Thus empirical and academic literature on branding is rich and vast (Ghodeswar, 2008; Jevons et al., 2005; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Aaker, 1996). However, the concept of branding people is quiet new, and not many studies have been done on this field. Despite this, literature seems to provide a general consensus that people can be legitimately considered as brands (Rein et al., 2006; Keller, 2002; De Chernatony and McDonald, 2003).

In an interview with Martin (2009), Arruda describes personal branding as permission to be yourself - your best self. *"It's knowing what's authentic to you, differentiating from your peers and relevant and compelling to your target audience."* Personal branding has become a necessity and a survival skill, instead of a luxury. Peters (2007), an advocate for personal branding compounds on this statement, adding that *"you're every bit as much a brand as Nike, Coke, Pepsi, or the Body Shop."*

At its general level, the rhetoric of personal branding argues on the verge of positioning oneself as a product that has to be packaged and accordingly presented to consumers. Branding makes people, products and services easy to buy because brands operate like magnets, in attracting customers.

Although Arruda (as interviewed by Martin, 2009) emphasizes the importance of personal branding, he acknowledges the challenges of being a strong brand and struggling to please everyone. Oprah Winfrey and Richard Branson are examples of strong personal brands that although much respected, it is not everyone who connects or even agrees with them. If one is to build a personal brand, it is crucial to stand out. The argument is that a strong personal brand should be willing to take a stand, and that means opening oneself to criticism from the outside world.

Despite the significance and wide acceptance of personal branding, it is faced by a number of challenges. At its core, personal branding seems to violate the marketing principle which stipulates that marketers should become market-oriented. That is, they should first seek the needs and wants of consumers then deliver them in the best way possible. The challenge for those aspiring to

brand themselves is to “discover how to offer themselves as a product that is shaped by consumer requirements” (Shepherd, 2005).

In personal marketing, individuals are encouraged to “sell” themselves in a way that best suits themselves, and not the consumers. Tom Peters, whom Shepherd (2005) cites as one of the authors who advocate for individuals to become brands, believes that people should ‘work with what they’ve got! ... And make it special,’ (Peters, 2007). Shepherd (2005) argues that this might seem to suggest that those who advise on personal branding are encouraging an approach that is based on an outmoded philosophy of marketing i.e., a product marketing approach. Hence, according to Shepherd (2005), this provides a clear conflict where individuals are expected to be in line with the marketing principle but at the same time are urged to provide an image based on their own unique set of traits.

In addition, and in most instances, when people try to brand themselves as individuals, they often end up in conflict with their employers/organization. If an individual emphasizes their personal brand over that of the organization, the two may result in a conflict.

### **Building a Personal Brand**

Due to its comprehensive nature, personal branding plays a pivotal role in the music industry. Every musician’s desire is to dominate markets for a very long time and branding would be vital in ensuring that. Hence the strategic goal of brand managers in the music industry should be to build a brand that a consumer can relate to and therefore last for years. In fact, managers of all types of organizations are now advised to think as if they are handling a branded product or service (Jevons et al., 2005).

Building a strong brand has become top priority for many organizations, and has become one of the most important goals of brand management (Keller, 2001; Keller, 2003; Aaker, 1996), as strong brands tend to enjoy customer loyalty, the potential to charge premium prices, which results in higher revenue streams (Ghodeswar, 2008), and considerable brand power to support new product and service launches. Additionally, strong brands increase customers’ trust of the invisible, enabling them to better visualize and understand the intangibility and reduce customers’ perceived financial, social or safety risks (Simoes and Dibb, 2001). Past researchers have argued that to win the customers’ loyalty, musicians need to have a good understanding of their customers’ behavior, beliefs, attributes as well as their competition. What this implies is that for a musician-consumer relationship to be sustainable, it has to transcend sales or profits. The “bottom line” is no longer enough to keep customers for an extended period of time. In many instances, brands are developed within the

national context (Ranchhod et al., 2011), creating a specific image which then determines the attitudes and expectations of consumers. Brands that then demonstrate a more universal appeal and offer a superior brand promise tend to transcend national boundaries and eventually go global.

The business of businesses is getting and keeping customers (Drucker, 1973). It is therefore, important to any music business to attract customers and it is more important to keep these customers because if they stay with the business for a long time they subsequently become loyal. Loyal customers are far more profitable to keep than disloyal ones, who are usually price sensitive and perceive little differences among alternative offerings. Secondly, a musician (firm) who is successful in developing strong relationships with customers secures important and durable advantages that are hard for competitors to understand, copy or to displace (Hutt and Speh, 2001).

Hutt and Speh (2001) suggest that for the relationship between the music business and the customers to exist there has to be a mutual connection between the two parties. A relationship in its simplest form is based on feelings and emotions. Music customers establish the relationship through desiring and buying the music over a period of time. Since relationships take time to develop they must be nurtured, however, once they develop, customers feel a genuine, long lasting sense of loyalty to the brand. Moreover, Winer (2001) cites companies such as Oracle, which have developed Customer Relationship Management products that do everything from tracking customer behaviour on the Web to sending direct e-mail communications. Although these may seem advanced for a developing country like Botswana, local musicians may have to think along these lines in order to find success in their art and develop long lasting relationships. Researchers agree that building strong customer relationships is one of the main objectives of relationship marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002). The key goal of marketing is to not only to build but also to sustain strong customer relationships.

In conclusion, it is submitted that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Music fans in Botswana are not satisfied with the relationship they have with their favorite local musician.

H<sub>2</sub>: Music fans in Botswana are not satisfied with the image/reputation of their favorite local musician.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to establish whether personal branding and relationship management is used by musicians in Botswana to build successful brands. A survey instrument with two scales was developed to measure;

- i. How satisfied music fans are with the relationship they have with their local favorite musicians.

ii. How satisfied music fans are with the image/reputation of their favorite local musicians.

A screening question was used that established whether the respondent listened to local music or not, and only those that responded in the affirmative continued with the survey. All the items required participants to respond using 1 to 5 rating scales on which 1 represented the low end of the scale and 5 represented a corresponding high point. 200 University of Botswana respondents were randomly selected to participate in the survey. The importance of music is readily apparent to University students from the extent of their music consumption (North and Hargreaves, 1999) hence their convenient selection. 64% of the respondents were female and 36% male. 5% of the respondents were aged below 18 years, 75% were between 18 and 30 years, 15% aged 31 to 40 years, and 6% aged over 40 years.

Cronbach's reliability test was run on both scales to determine their internal consistency and dependability. Cronbach's alpha for the 9-item relationship management skills scale was 0.893, while that of the 11-item image/brand satisfaction scale was 0.886. An alpha of over 0.7 is usually acceptable (Allen and Bennet, 2012). None of the items would improve the alpha if deleted for both scales and therefore none were deleted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with statements that measured how involved they feel they are with their favorite musician and the music that is produced for them. Table 1 shows that in a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree) respondents are generally not satisfied with the relationship they have with their favorite musician.

One way-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was further used to investigate the impact that gender and age have on the overall satisfaction with the relationship that fans have with their favourite musician. Inspection of the skewness, kurtois and Shapiro-Wilk statistics indicated that the normality was supported for all the conditions. Levene's statistics for both tests were non-significant; gender and overall satisfaction was,  $F(1, 198) = .316, p = .575$ ; while that for age and overall satisfaction was  $F(3, 196) = 1.03, p = .379$ , and thus the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The ANOVA was statistically non-significant for both tests indicating that respondents' lack of satisfaction in their relationship with their favourite local musician was not influenced by their gender,  $F(1, 198) = .818, p = .367, \eta^2 = .004$ ; or age,  $F(3, 196) = 1.124, p = .340, \eta^2 = .02$ .

Respondents were also asked to rate their agreement with statements that measured how satisfied they are with the image/reputation of their local favourite musician. Table 2 shows that in a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = strongly

disagree; 5 = strongly agree), respondents are slightly satisfied with the image/reputation of their favorite musicians.

One way-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was further used to investigate the impact that gender and age have on the overall satisfaction with the musician's image/reputation. Inspection of the skewness, kurtois and Shapiro-Wilk statistics indicated that the normality was supported for all the conditions. Levene's statistics for both tests were non-significant; gender and reputation was,  $F(1, 198) = .505, p = .478$ ; while that for age and reputation was  $F(3, 196) = 2.349, p = .074$ , and thus the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. The ANOVA was statistically non-significant for age and reputation indicating that respondents' age did not influence their satisfaction with their favourite musician's image/reputation,  $F(3, 196) = .490, p = .690, \eta^2 = .01$ . However, it was statistically significant for gender and reputation indicating that respondents' gender influenced their perception and satisfaction with their favourite musician's image/reputation,  $F(1, 198) = 5.488, p = 0.020, \eta^2 = 0.03$ . It should, however, be noted that  $\eta^2 = 0.03$  could be characterised as small.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate a fairly high level of displeasure with the relationship that musicians have with their fans. Such dissatisfaction cannot be attributed to gender ( $\eta^2 = 0.004$ ) or age ( $\eta^2 = 0.02$ ) as their influence, if any at all, is highly negligible. It may then be concluded that fans feel neglected by their favourite musicians and as such do not feel they have any bond with them. Interestingly, previous studies have argued of the importance to foster relationships with consumers (Keller, 2003; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000) if musicians are to prosper (O'Leary, 2011). Therefore, this lack of intimacy between local musicians and their fans could explain poor music sales and low music show attendance in Botswana despite high numbers of music lovers in the country (Chilisa, 2010). Musicians can forge relationship with their fans by frequently sharing information and integrating their fans' experiences in their music. For the relationship between the musician and fans to exist and flourish there has to be a mutual connection between the two parties, based on feelings and emotions. Despite relationships taking long to develop, once they develop, customers feel a genuine, long lasting sense of loyalty to the brand which would translate to more sales and better show attendance.

In addition, fans are generally not satisfied with the image/reputation of their favourite musicians and this cannot be attributed to the age of the fans ( $\eta^2 = 0.01$ ). Even though there seems to be some difference as a result of gender, this difference only explains a negligible percentage ( $\eta^2 = 0.03$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded

**Table 1.** Mean Satisfaction Ratings for Musician-Fan Relationship

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Fans are involved in music production	2.71	3.00	.959
Musician treats fans with care	2.95	3.00	.986
Musician makes an effort to find out fans' needs	2.85	3.00	1.003
Musician frequently exchanges information with fans	2.83	3.00	.964
Musician seems to be concerned about fans' needs	2.69	3.00	.904
Musician shares information across all contact points	2.76	3.00	.927
Musician lives to the promise	3.06	3.00	1.038
Musician delivers as expected	3.09	3.00	.991

**Table 2.** Mean Satisfaction Ratings for Musicians Image/Reputation

	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Their music is readily available	3.11	3.00	1.091
Is easily reachable	3.01	3.00	1.051
Is prompt when responding to our requests	2.96	3.00	.926
Information about them is readily available	3.10	3.00	1.061
Adequately promotes themselves	3.33	3.00	1.047
Their music is sold at reasonable prices	3.56	4.00	.996
Produces good quality music	3.62	4.00	1.064
Value for money	3.48	3.00	.935
They value me	3.08	3.00	.994
Makes concerted efforts to satisfy fans	3.39	3.00	.970

that generally Botswana musicians do not portray themselves in a manner that can build/enhance their brand. In order to build a reputable brand it is important to create an image that is meaningful to music recipients and relate to them at a personal level. Musicians ought to understand what is perceived as authentic to fans and use that to differentiate themselves from their peers such that the musician remains relevant to the target market. As such, issues of the price, the quality of the music, and availability of the music, should embrace and manifest the musician's personal brand.

All in all, local musicians have a long way to go in building their personal brands and be able to delight their fans. There could be a number of reasons for this lack of satisfaction by music fans, ranging from the music industry being in its infancy to lack of support structures for the industry. However, for the industry to grow, firstly consumers have to be satisfied with what they are offered. Similarly, for support structures to be put in place and be developed musicians should be seen to know what they want, and one of the ways to show this is effectively building their personal brands and understand the needs of their fans.

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