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Brand revitalization in the music industry: a case study approach

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to analyze how iconic brands in the music industry revitalize themselves in order to increase sales by making the brand active again.

Research questions:

- a) Why do brands have need for brand revitalization?
- b) What are revitalization strategies that help these ‘ageing’ music brands renew their image and positioning in the present and future?
- c) How has digital disruption affected the music industry? How has this affected ‘ageing’ music brands?

Design/methodology/approach: This paper will use an inductive approach, using secondary data and literature in order to create a qualitative research study. This is done in the form of two specific case studies of relevant music groups; ABBA and Queen. These case studies are later discussed, connecting the examined literature to these practical applications.

Findings: The findings of this paper show that brand revitalization in the music industry can increase sales and capture new target markets. This is done by using retro-branding with nostalgia or increase in brand awareness breadth.

Research limitations: The research method did not include primary data findings, due to a lack of accessible representation of the target group. The case studies are also focused on two specific examples, and do not provide an overall conclusion for the entire industry.

Originality/Value: This paper gives a unique insight into brand revitalization strategies, the ‘ageing’ of older music brands and the disruption in the music industry. It provides a solution to the gap of literature between revitalization and the music industry. The paper also proves relevant in the current context and trends of nostalgia and recent media communications.

Keywords: Brand Revitalization, Retro-Branding, Brand Awareness, Music Industry, Nostalgia, Disruption, Iconic bands, Ageing

Type of paper: Research Paper

Introduction

This research paper will illustrate the role of brand rejuvenation in the context of the music industry. The topic came to discussion when recent media communications of ‘older’ music groups rose in frequency and popularity. A link was created between this phenomena and existing brand rejuvenation theories.

In order to comprehend the reasoning behind brand revitalization of music groups, the paper analyzes the possible brand decay and ‘ageing’ that these brands go through in a disruptive and ever-changing environment. Afterwards, the theoretical perspectives on brand revitalization and retro-branding in existing literature are discussed. In addition, the element of nostalgia is studied as a factor which affects and influences these concepts. Furthermore, we analyze the influence which the disruptive landscape of the music industry has had and will have on brand revitalization processes. The iconic music groups, ABBA and Queen, will be used as case studies to discuss the concepts that are part of the literature review. Finally, a conclusion is drawn upon as it aims to summarise the concepts discussed.

The purpose of this research will be to analyze how iconic brands in the music industry revitalize themselves in order to increase sales by making the brand active again. Many scientific research papers discuss emerging theories in branding, such as brand revitalization, heritage, nostalgia and retro branding (Keller, 1999; Brown, Sherry & Kozinets, 2003; Kapferer, 2008). However, there is limited research and analysis to be found on the application of these perspectives in the music industry. For this reason, this research paper aims to fill the gap in current literature in regard to brand revitalization, specifically applied to the music industry.

Literature review

Brand Decay

Brands age. This is a natural process which can be stopped or accentuated by the management team. If the brand’s activity slows down or stops, the brand will not directly be forgotten, but the consumer might start to lose interest. According to Kapferer (2012), the concept of ageing has two different meanings. The first suggests a “slow but systematic decline over a long period of time” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 393). The brand will still be known, but its inactivity will inevitably have an impact on its market share. Also, the brand’s typical customer is ageing. These two meanings can be applied to the music industry. Indeed, each music industry actor could be defined as a brand. They have their own personality, identity, promise, purpose, and market position.

As a singer or band starts ageing, their activity might decline or stop. The artists might still be known, their music may still be played, but the interest of consumers might fade with a lack of activity; as a consequence, the audience will stop renewing itself. In order to recreate attention around their activity, music industry actors must innovate and find new ways to target a new audience. As suggested by Kapferer (2012), brands can use the dual logic of introducing relevant brand extensions in order to rejuvenate. This creates opportunities to capture new areas of growth and it extends brands towards potentially younger audiences. This can be achieved by reinforcing their brand authority and the status they previously held (Kapferer, 2012).

Anik and Tsay (2010) proved this theory when conducting a research study on branding of classical music towards new and younger audiences. They found that the

development of sub-brands and valued co-partnerships have led to an increase in revenue and attraction/awareness of younger and newer audiences. Babu (2006) reinforces this statement and claims that in order to retain existing consumers and 'sensibly' attract new ones, brands must utilise their core values and attributes. This brings their characteristics to new markets via "flexible key partnerships". Kapferer (2012), also categorized common symptoms of ageing brands, thus looking at the possible reasons for brand decline from an internal perspective. The most relevant aspects to correlate with this research paper are: insufficient preparations for future developments, insufficient capacity to capture new growth pockets as they emerge, insufficient vitality at contact (updates on design and look), and finally the possibility of brands having a lack of self-stimulation. As mentioned before, certain music bands may decline as there is no longer a need or desire to surprise and bring new life to their brands.

Babu (2006) outlines certain possibilities where brand rejuvenation might be needed for a brand, from an external perspective. As mentioned, the target market has aged and the brand has not been able to position itself in the mindshare of next generation consumers, who have not related with the brand throughout their life. The next point states that the offering of the brand does not meet the specific needs and customs of newer consumers, due to a shift in platform use for products/services. Lastly, Babu (2006) observes the possible lack of education that consumers might have of what the brand represents or is known for in the minds of others. Lack of knowledge might result in a detachment or lack of understanding of the brands core essence and reputation.

Nevertheless, in order to avoid brand ageing and decline, a variety of music groups are increasingly using nostalgia as a tool to stay afloat in the market through

carrying out a process of brand rejuvenation.

Perspectives of brand revitalization

The concept of brand revitalization is anything but consistent in existing literature. A variety of authors (Keller, 1999; Lehu, 2004; Zhang & Sun, 2012; Muller et al., 2013) link the concept to brand rejuvenation, which relates to refreshing the visual aspect of a brand. Furthermore, Babu (2006) associates brand revitalization with brand rejuvenation as this author considers the concept as a regeneration of brand identities. Nevertheless, Kapferer (2012) defines brand revitalization as "a process that consists of recreating a consistent flow of sales as well as making the brand alive again" (Kapferer, 2012, p. 395). This author also highlights that revitalization usually involves two parallel actions: keeping a well-known product in its original form and re-adapting it for a new audience. Therefore, it is obvious that literature (Keller, 1999; Lehu, 2004; Babu, 2006; Kapferer, 2008; Zhang & Sun, 2012; Muller et al., 2013) highly differs among authors. However, all the above mentioned authors agree that brand revitalization is necessary when there is a need to re-establish the brand's power and its visibility due to ageing. According to Kolbl, Ruzzier and Kolar (2015), three different revitalizing strategies exist: emotional branding, storytelling and retro-branding. Storytelling provides brands with a personality and a deeper meaning. Emotional branding emphasizes the relationship between the consumer and the brand, whilst retro-branding adapts past attributes of the brand to modern trends.

On the other hand, Keller (1999) argues that reversing a decadent brand's fortunes has to start from brand awareness. The author emphasizes that rather than increasing the depth of brand awareness, which is how

easily consumers can recall the brand, managers should focus on increasing the breadth of brand awareness (the consumption situations in which a brand comes to mind). Therefore, Keller (1999) stresses that a mean to achieve breadth in brand awareness is creating new sources of brand equity consisting of ways to increase usage. This is done by either expanding level of consumption (how much the brand is used) or by incrementing the frequency of consumption (how often the brand is used). Notwithstanding, Keller (1999) also highlights that it is essential to balance new and old target markets. Especially in mature markets, loyalty is extremely important although brands have to take into consideration that a part of consumers will inevitably dissociate from the brand. For this reason, Keller (1999) claims that acquiring new consumers is key in order to make a brand alive again; gaining a new audience usually implies shaping a brand to fit different generations, their habits and their lifestyles.

Nonetheless, nowadays the consumption of the past has become a common experience as many product categories have been influenced by products that consumers associate with the past; the music industry is among these categories. Hallegatte (2014) refers to this phenomenon as retro-branding, which can be defined as the relaunch of a brand associated with the past. Instead, Kolbl, Ruzzier and Kolar (2015) consider it as one of the three revitalization strategies previously mentioned. However, this concept has multiple definitions. According to Brown, Sherry and Kozinets (2003, p. 20), “retro-branding is the revival of a product or service from a prior historical period which is usually updated to contemporary standards of performance, functionality or taste”. In addition, Sullivan (2009) highlights that retro-branding is leveraging a brand history to strengthen the bond with consumers and the brand’s position in the market. Despite diverging definitions, Brown, Sherry and Kozinets

(2003), Sullivan (2009) and Hallegatte (2014) all emphasize that retro-branding and revived brands play a part on consumers’ personal and communal associations.

This concept, in fact, relates closely to the definition of brand heritage which according to Aaker (1996) can be defined as a merger of associations related to the past in connection to a brand. These associations create a permanent link to the past and are constantly referenced in a brand’s communication (Hallegatte, 2014). In fact, collective emotions based on experiences and feelings concerning heritage play an important role in the communication strategy (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991; Westbrook & Oliver, 1991). Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) agree with Aaker (1996) as they claim that what separates retro-branding with brand heritage is that the first mentioned concept is often associated with a special period of time linked to elements of nostalgia. For this reason, any association usually carries emotional connections and this is due to a recurring theme often found in retro-branding, the theme of nostalgia. Therefore, the retro-branding strategy can be applied to brands that are placed between old and new trends, associated with elements of nostalgia (Cattaneo and Guerini, 2012). Merchant and Rose (2013) have been able to study the impact that nostalgia has to the perception of brand heritage. However, Urde, Greyser and Balmer (2007) add to this and state that relying solely on a heritage potential for continuity is not enough.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia is defined by Holbrook and Schindler (2003) as a preference towards objects that were more common when one was younger. On the other hand, Greimas (2002), after carrying out a semiotic analysis, expressed that nostalgia is a state

of decline and languor caused by an obsessive regret for one's native land. However, when nostalgia is applied to branding, this phenomenon is not general according to Davis (1979), as nostalgia can be distinguished between personal and communal. The former is associated with individual life cycles, as in reflecting upon the days of youth; whilst the latter involves the societal level in the presence of epochal changes. Brown, Sherry and Kozinets, (2003) highlight that although personal and communal nostalgia are different, they are interlinked and they both provide individuals with a sense of comfort through evoking a sense of a utopian past. Hallegatte, Ertz and Marticotte (2018) support Brown, Sherry & Kozinets (2003) as they also claim that nostalgia plays a reassuring and comforting role. This nostalgic concept bonds consumers with the past, a happier time where they did not have to worry about the present. Nevertheless, they argue that being nostalgic does not mean preferring something from the past. As a consequence, Hallegatte, Ertz and Marticotte (2018) talk about the notion of nostalgia proneness, explaining how this concept can affect the behavioral response to a stimulus that is linked to the past. By admitting this, the complexity of a good retro-branding strategy resides in finding the balance between the past and present when releasing new content. According to the same authors (Hallegatte, Ertz & Marticotte, 2018), nostalgia directs the attractiveness towards brands from the past that stimulate a pursuit for comfort from a past era.

In fact, nostalgic brands are more common to consumers as they are already familiar with it. Indeed, Kessous et al. (2015) argue that nostalgic brands are part of their personal or social lives, enabling these to maintain a special bond with consumers. According to Kapferer (2012) and the halo effect, once the awareness towards a brand increases, so will the trust in it. It is then

possible to claim that, as a nostalgia brand has been around for a long time, the awareness towards it is high and, as a consequence, nostalgia can help driving sales. For this reason, an increasing number of music groups are using nostalgia to differentiate themselves from their competitors through emotional attachment and connection to previous experiences. Hence, according to McAlexander et al. (2002), brands link people with the same interests into communities whilst older brands evoke past events. This process allows the associations of the event to become associated with the brand. This nostalgic reminiscence does not only make the consumer feel comfortable, but it also motivates the audience to increase their motivation and consume that type of nostalgic product. Thus, nostalgia can play a role of catalyst in the success of brand revitalization.

Nonetheless, in order to evoke nostalgia, a brand must touch upon the 3 factors that influence consumer behaviour: emotional reaction, cognitive reaction and behavioural reaction (Zhuo, 2011). In the emotional reaction stage, individuals awake their nostalgic senses by direct or indirect contact with stimuli that could be either visible (people, events and merchandise) or invisible. On the other hand, Zhuo (2011) states that in the cognitive reaction stage, individuals are influenced by either positive or negative nostalgia. Positive nostalgia typically involves individuals affected by a mechanism that makes them think that past events were better than they are in the present. In opposition, negative nostalgia contributes to an equivalent of "homesickness" as memories evoke sadness. Thirdly, behavioural reaction, is when the retro-branding process takes place and people switch their nostalgic thoughts into action; the higher the love of past experiences, the likelier the interaction with a brand of the past. However, despite the role of nostalgia as a key factor in retro-branding, Cattaneo and Guerini (2012)

emphasize that nostalgia alone cannot be the core of a retro-branding communication approach. Tangible product specifications also play an important part of retro-branding strategies and go hand-in-hand with nostalgia. Only through the combination of these two factors, brands will be able to see the results of retro-branding.

How technological disruption has impacted the music industry

The music industry went through some drastic changes in the past ten years. Negus (2018) discusses that the major impacts that the music industry has faced in recent years are due to technology disruption, especially in regard to online music streaming services and downloading. In fact, Plasketes (1992) predicted that technology was going to become one of the primary factors that would lead to the change in consumption patterns and experiences in music. Beer (2008) emphasizes that advances in technology have posed real challenges to the music industry and this can be reflected in the fact that physical records account for less than half of total sales (IFPI 2015; Wagner et al., 2015). In fact, according to Beer (2008), the disruption mainly caused negative effects on the distribution of music. On the other hand, the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music (2003) argues that through the evolution of technology, music has become a commodity for the masses. Indeed, innovations linked with increasing globalization resulted in an accessible experience at home. Hence, the critical shift in consumption patterns provides older music groups with the opportunity to be available on a wider scale and as a result, it increases the chance of connecting to a younger audience (Datta, Knox & Bart, 2017). More specifically, bands' presence on music streaming platforms playlists have significant influence on consumption decisions. For this reason, Aguiar and Waldfogel (2018) highlight that by

appearing on Spotify "Hot List", a playlist with 18.5 million subscribers during the sample period, raises a song eventual stream to almost 20 million.

Nevertheless, the technology disruption caused by the internet did not only involve music habits, but it also played a role in the distribution process. Internet services have allowed the reduction/elimination of record label intermediaries and have changed the way in how music can be marketed straight to consumers. They act as an 'internet retailer' in a similar way as to how retailers have bridged the manufacturer/consumer gap (Kapferer, 2012). The disruption of a previously dominated record label environment facilitates the freedom of opportunity for artists as a brand to market themselves through increased communication and interaction with listeners (Hughes et al., 2016). Such interactions are made possible due to streaming websites such as Spotify. This type of online music streaming service provides a discovery section that allows subscribers to explore new bands which match their musical taste through a special algorithm (Chodos 2019), that creates further visibility for the artists.

Methodology

In order to analyze the methodology, it is essential to highlight that the choice of research strategy has been influenced by factors such as access to data, existing knowledge and time constraints.

This academic project will use an inductive approach through the use of qualitative research. A qualitative approach has been considered as the most appropriate for this study. This is due to the purpose of the paper that aims to investigate how music brands use revitalization in order to re-establish their brand power and visibility. Another reason for adopting a qualitative approach is that a quantitative approach would not be deemed appropriate due to its

focus on statistics (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, given that the research question requires delving into the concept of revitalization through real case studies, numerical data is not required. More specifically, this research uses an inductive approach as it sees theory as a result of an examination rather than a process that precedes it (Hair et al., 2016). In addition, an inductive approach is considered ideal when trying to gain an understanding on a not particularly researched topic. Moreover, in this project the researchers specifically used a case-based approach and collected secondary data through carrying out desk research.

The main challenge in this paper was time constraint. For this reason, in regard to choosing a sample, the researchers carried out a time effective approach, known as theoretical sampling through a case-based approach (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This enhances the connection between theory and practice without the need to collect primary data. Due to the research topic being a relatively new concept, Hair et al. (2016) suggest that using multiple case studies is preferred, especially when a topic is taking place in a real life context which the researcher has little influence on. Furthermore, through adaptation of a theoretical sampling, cases are selected in relation to the literature review. In fact, the researchers have chosen ABBA and Queen as these two bands have recently gone through a process of revitalization. The data in the two case studies above mentioned has been collected through existing journal articles and music magazines.

Nonetheless, this research also has limitations. More specifically, limitations concern the small sample as only two case studies are analyzed and as a result, this leads to more generalizations. Moreover, due to lack of prior revitalization research in the music industry, this paper had to generalize theories of brand revitalization in the literature review.

Case Studies

The brand and image of bands are destined to age as groups' activities decrease through time. As a music group, staying appealing towards a younger audience is a challenge, especially since the content is ageing as well, growing away from current music trends. Therefore, following the literature review, two iconic bands, ABBA and Queen, are evaluated on their processes of revitalization. These have been selected as samples for the case studies as they have managed to renew their brand image and fight ageing. In addition, this section describes the different revitalization processes that the two bands have gone through in recent years. Specifically with movies and musicals, ABBA and Queen conquered a new public that will allow them to remain as top-of-mind bands for the next few generations to come.

ABBA

Formed in Stockholm in 1972, ABBA is a Swedish pop band created by four friends, Agnetha Fältskog, Björn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson, and Anni-Frid Lyngstad. After winning the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974, selling millions of records and touring worldwide, the group eventually split in 1982. After their split-up, ABBA experienced a decay phase until their catalogue was purchased by the music record label Polygram in 1989 (ABBA, 2019). Three years later in 1992, the label released ABBA GOLD, a compilation album made out of the group's greatest hits. Combining with the sales of its re-release in 2008, over 30 million copies of the album have been sold, making it one of the best-selling albums worldwide (ABBA, 2019). Ever since, every tool they used to maintain the band's activity like musicals, movies, video games or expositions kept a high and continuous interest around the band and its brand while enhancing it. Indeed, the band has been able to stay acclaimed and influential throughout the years becoming

one of the best-selling bands of all time (Forbes, 2018).

Despite the fact that ABBA was successful in the 70's, it was somehow mocked by the music reviews (Variety, 2018). As a consequence, trying to remind an era where their costumes were teased, and their content judged was not the best option to make their heritage relive. In order to stay notorious towards a large audience, including the younger generations, ABBA has managed to revitalize its brand using different methods.

The musical "Mamma Mia!" premiered in London's West End back in 1999. Inspired by the band's biggest hits, the show has widely contributed to keep ABBA's songs in the current pop culture. Ever since, the musical has been seen by over 60 million people in 50 productions in 16 different languages according to the Official London Theatre (2017). Twenty years after its world premiere, Mamma Mia! is still played worldwide, making it respectively the fifth and ninth longest-running West-End and Broadway musicals. In the summer of 2008, "Mamma Mia! The Movie" was released, featuring worldwide known actors. Based on the musical's story, the movie was the fifth highest-grossing film of the same year, showing that the interest towards ABBA's related production was still going strong (IMDb, 2008).

The movie's soundtrack is composed of only ABBA's music hits performed by the cast of the movie. The album was nominated for a Grammy Award for "Best Compilation Soundtrack Album for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media" and peaked at #1 in the USA's Billboard 200 albums charts a month after the movie was released. The craze around the movie and its soundtrack created a whole new interest for ABBA's music. Mainly, it helped the younger generations to get familiar with the band's greatest hits.

Based on the sales track record, ABBA's music aged well (ABBA, 2019). As proof of that, in 2008 after the release of Mamma Mia! The Movie, the compilation of ABBA's greatest hits "ABBA Gold: Greatest Hits", originally released in 1992, returned to #1 in the UK album charts for the fifth time according to Official Charts. At the same time, the movie's soundtrack was #1 in the US Billboard charts, becoming ABBA's first US chart-topping album. As a matter of fact, ABBA's music reached better rankings for their re-release than when they were first issued. In 2018, ten years after the first movie, the sequel was released. The movie was a success, helping ABBA's sales rise of 57% right after the movie's soundtrack debut (Billboard, 2018).

At the beginning of the summer 2019, one of the group's members, Björn Ulvaeus, announced that five new ABBA songs would be released in 2020 as long as a digital entertainment experience involving ABBA's avatars (abbatars) will be issued in November 2019 (Billboard, 2019). As a band, the brand is ageing as the group's activity is decreasing through time (Kapferer, 2012). Staying appealing towards a younger audience is a challenge as their content is also ageing. Through the musical and the movies, ABBA managed to fight ageing and conquered a new public which will allow them to stay a top-of-mind band for the following generations to come.

Queen

In 1970, two years before ABBA became an official group, another band was created in London. Queen, a British rock band formed by Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon. By the early 1980's, Queen was already one of the biggest rock bands at the time and their performance at the 1985 worldwide famous Live Aid concert is still described as one of the best live performances of all time by

various sources (BBC, 2005; Rolling Stone Magazine, 2013; CNN, 2018). In 1991, Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury passed away. As the lead singer, his death deprived the band from its most iconic member, causing an early decay in the band's activity.

Undoubtedly one of the best-selling rock bands of all time with over 170 million records sold. According to Spotify (2019), 70% of Queen's listeners on the platform are under the age of 35. As a matter of fact, Queen managed to remain symbolic to younger generations and they keep on listening to their music. Recently, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a biographical movie about Queen's lead singer Freddie Mercury, was released worldwide (QueenOnline, 2019). The movie was a box-office success, becoming the sixth highest-grossing film of 2018 (IMDb, 2019). *Bohemian Rhapsody* also won many awards, including four Oscars from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Oscar, 2019). According to *The Guardian* (2018), Queen's record sales resulted in nearly \$18 million in revenue and tripled on-demand of Queen's music on streaming platforms, from 588 million to 1.9 billion streams, in the six months following the movie's debut (QueenOnline, 2019).

Just like ABBA, the release of this new movie allowed younger generations to get familiar with Queen's music. But more than that, as the movie is a biography, it also brought the audience closer to the band and its history by using storytelling. Unlike *Mamma Mia!*, *Bohemian Rhapsody* uses nostalgia to reach existing and new modern markets. For instance, the movie reconstitutes the 1985 Live Aid Queen performance, known as one of their best (BBC, 2005; Rolling Stone Magazine, 2013; CNN, 2018). One could argue that the reconstitution influenced individuals by connecting them to a previous experience, as stated in the nostalgia definition from the

literature review (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002). While ABBA's music was completely re-recorded by the cast of *Mamma Mia!*, the soundtrack of *Bohemian Rhapsody* only used original recordings and performances of Queen (QueenOnline, 2019). Unlike ABBA and *Mamma Mia!*, *Bohemian Rhapsody* revived a hype around Queen's original content. By doing this, Queen created further nostalgia and connected with their old target audience.

Discussion

In this chapter, the paper aims to link existing theory discussed in the literature review with the case studies analyzed in the previous section. All the data gathered through the case studies is analyzed to discuss or disprove earlier theories and possible explanations are given throughout this chapter.

The literature review highlights that the majority of brands go through a process of ageing. Nonetheless, some brands are more influenced by ageing than others; this is often due to brand management teams as they have the power to either accentuate or stop the ageing process (Kapferer, 2012). However, there are also other factors that play an impact on ageing. The case study shows the Queen brand suffered from the death of its lead singer, Freddie Mercury, as he was perceived as the leading force of the band (Hallegatte, Ertz and Marticotte, 2018). On the other hand, appointing another lead singer would have not been a sensible choice as Freddie Mercury was not only the voice of Queen, but also the face of the brand (Hallegatte, Ertz and Marticotte, 2018). Therefore, such factors can sometimes be uncontrollable to brands as demonstrated in the Queen case study. According to their sales track record (Billboard, 2018), Queen maintained a relatively strong positioning despite the disappearance of Freddie Mercury. This is partly explained by the originality of their style as well as the greatness of their hit

singles, live performances and showmanship according to IMDb (2019). In fact, Kapferer (2012) explains that brand ageing does not necessarily mean disappearance from the market; it can also refer to the brand still being known and recognized although its inactivity will impact on the market share. In parallel, as Babu (2006) explains, ageing affects the target market when a brand does not position itself in the mindset of new generations. For this reason, there comes the need of revitalization.

As stated in the case study, ABBA's sales kept on growing after the band's split. The reasons behind this popularity are various, but they all have to do with ABBA's successful brand revitalization strategy. When the band split up, everyone, including the members of the group, was expecting ABBA to fade into oblivion. Little did they know the sales from the upcoming years would make them one of the best-selling bands of all time. One of the main explanations behind this post-break-up craze has to do with how ABBA managed to stay in the public's mind. Throughout the years, they kept on reinvesting their content in diverse projects - like albums' reeditions, musicals, movies, video games, exhibitions, and very soon digital avatars. As stated above, Kapferer (2012) describes brand revitalization as a process meant to recreate a consistent flow of sales and making the brand alive again. Through all their projects, ABBA achieved to sell their content over and over, under different forms, creating a consistent and continuous flow of sales and staying omnipresent in the music scene.

As highlighted in the literature review, brand revitalization is a concept with many definitions (Keller, 1999; Lehu, 2004; Zhang and Sun, 2009; Muller et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, different brands approach it with different strategies as shown in the ABBA and Queen case studies. Whilst ABBA focuses more on refreshing the

image of the brand and increasing its awareness as seen with Keller (1999), Queen adopts retro-branding through the medium of nostalgia. However, it is apparent that both music groups are carrying out such revitalization processes in order to recreate a consistent flow of sales as well as contributing to make their brands live again, as discussed by Kapferer (2008). For instance, Queen evokes past memories with the tool of nostalgia, a concept that makes the old target market feel comfortable (Brown, Sherry & Kozinets, 2003); this process pushes to re-consume a product that has been consumed before and it creates economic value to the brand (McAlexander, Schouten & Koenig, 2002).

In contrast, ABBA did not use nostalgia in their revitalizing process. Nostalgia, in ABBA's case, was probably not the ideal strategy to adopt due to the fact that they were judged, as seen in the case study. Therefore, it is important to highlight that nostalgia does not always have a prominent role in brand revitalization, as opposed to the theories expressed in the literature review (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003; Kessous et al., 2015; Hallegatte, Ertz & Marticotte, 2018). Nevertheless, the familiarity of the public towards the music helped the audience to easily connect with the refreshed versions of content. As Kessous et al. (2015) explained, nostalgic brands have a stronger relationship with consumers. This concept can explain the success of the brand's new story of Mamma Mia! created out of a content people were familiar with.

ABBA's revitalizing strategy focused more on refreshing their image and content through new projects. Instead of only trying to resell their original content, ABBA refreshed it with Mamma Mia! The Movie. The film's cast recorded the band's song and the soundtrack was a huge success, especially in the US. This process revitalized ABBA's content in the best

possible way. By modernizing the music and selling it through a box-office success, ABBA reached a whole new audience, depths and breadth wise. According to Keller (1999), brands can expand their awareness by increasing usage. Using musicals, movies, video games and their presence on different media channels, ABBA managed to make their content more available and, as a consequence, facilitate its usage. They acquired new listeners from older generation but most importantly they familiarized younger generations to their content, assuring upcoming active years to their music. Recently, they announced five new songs coming along a digital entertainment experience including avatars of the group. The inclusion of new technologies is part of their revitalization process.

Unlike ABBA, Queen used nostalgia as part of their revitalization. The rock band implemented retro-branding with the help of nostalgia by releasing the biographical movie *Bohemian Rhapsody* in 2018. In order to re-create a strong emotional attachment with the old target market, the film features original recordings of live and recording studio performances. Statistics (The Guardian, 2018) show that after the movie was streamed in cinemas, the traffic on online music streaming services in relation to Queen skyrocketed, as mentioned in the case study. For instance, *Bohemian Rhapsody* touched upon all the three factors that influence consumer behaviour: emotional reaction, cognitive reaction and behavioural reaction (Zhuo, 2011). The reason why it is clear that all three behavioural factors were touched upon can be demonstrated by the dramatic increase in consumption straight after the movie was aired (Spotify, 2019). This phenomenon can be referred to as behavioural reaction, the third factor affecting consumer behaviour (Zhuo, 2011). In addition, through the *Bohemian Rhapsody* biography, storytelling and emotional branding are also emphasized as

the movie makes the viewer feel like an active part of the history of the band. The movie can be considered storytelling in accordance to Kolbl, Ruzzier and Kolar (2015). Furthermore, the definition of emotional branding by Kolbl, Ruzzier and Kolar (2015) can also be applied to Queen as the biography creates an emotional connection between the consumers and the band, as it takes them back to when Freddie Mercury was alive.

Despite the differences between ABBA and Queen, the two different processes of revitalization these brands implemented would not have been as efficient without the use of technology. In fact, the availability of digital music exposes both brands to the masses, as the Garland Encyclopedia of World Music (2003) highlights. Nonetheless, this phenomenon dramatically increased with the development of online streaming platforms due to the fact that they provide interactions between consumers and bands. Therefore, the results of the case studies agree with Beer (2008) in relation to the distribution and how technology heavily changed the distribution system in the music industry. On the other hand, the case studies strongly disagree with the author in regard to the impact that technology disruption had on sales and brand awareness. The reasons for disagreement between theory (Beer, 2008) and practice is because the benefits of technology for ABBA and Queen outnumber the negative impacts of technological disruption.

Framework

A conceptual framework (see Fig.1), has been formulated in order to visualise the process behind this paper, thus providing a conclusive overview of the concepts and the case study discussion. As mentioned in the literature review, the 'symptoms' of brand decline - internal issues - (Kapferer, 2012), in combination with the external needs for revitalization, provide situations

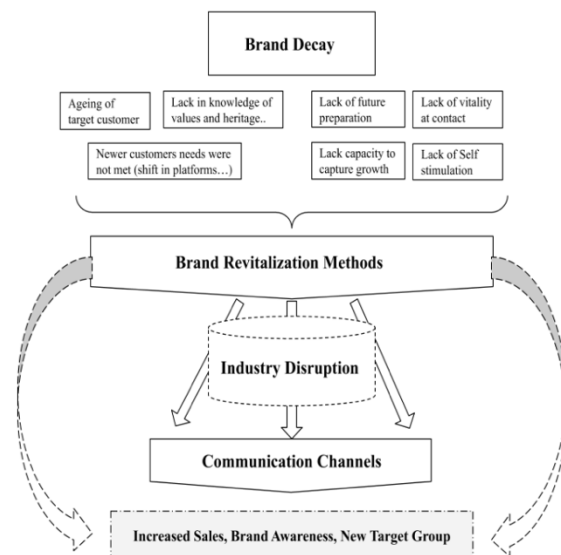
where a brand should recognize the need to revitalize themselves (Babu, 2006). The starting point in the revitalization process of ABBA was mainly due to the ageing of their main target market, together with the reduction in activity. ABBA also needed to find a way to ‘refresh’ their look in communication. Whilst, in the case of Queen, a catalyst in brand decay was the death of the iconic face of the brand, Freddie Mercury. This leads to a lack of self-stimulation, where the needs of newer customers were not met at all, due to this sudden crisis (lack of activity).

In order to revitalize, the paper analyzed various relevant methods. Nostalgia is seen as a perfect catalyst in the success of brand revitalization and it is unique in its differentiation by creating emotional attachments to the past. This is the primary factor in a retro-branding strategy (Brown, Sherry & Kozinets 2003). Other concepts such as storytelling and emotional branding are also relevant concepts in retro-branding (Kolbl, Ruzzier & Kolar 2015). Queen used Bohemian Rhapsody as a biography to tell their story and educate new viewers of their history and values through emotional appeal. Refreshing the external look of the brand can also be considered as a unique method, ABBA managed to do this to a great extent through their revamped ‘Mamma Mia’ films and their musicals for example. Lastly, it was seen that brand awareness can be used as a revitalization strategy by creating new ways to increase usage.

The disruption of the music industry and more importantly, the technological influence, has a significant impact on the way that these revitalization methods are communicated in their respective channels. It was discussed that although disruption causes some negative implications (Beer, 2008), the positive effect that disruption has on brand revitalization methods comes in various forms. One form can be considered as an increase in brand awareness and reach

(Keller, 1999), whilst another can be an overall increase in sales (Kapferer, 2012). Also, disruption allows these ‘ageing’ brands to utilize new methods to capture new target groups and revitalize their brand at the same time. In the case of ABBA, technological disruption paved the way for their use of digitalization, in the form of their ‘abbatars’ for example. In any case, Queen and ABBA both benefited greatly from streaming platforms for the above-mentioned reasons.

The eventual end goal of this revitalization process is increase of financial value. An expansion in audience will result in an eventual increase in sales. The other goals are dependent on the situation of brand decay and the brand itself. Therefore, the increase in positive brand awareness, while capturing new and growing audiences, is considered an overall priority as well. As seen in the case studies, ABBA and Queen have managed to achieve this through their strategy and communication channels, with the help of disruption.



(Fig.1: Developed framework)

Conclusion

As shown in the paper, brand revitalization plays an important role in the eventual increase of sales, brand awareness. As a result, it provides an opportunity to capture newer generations and target new markets. By analyzing possible reasons for brand decline or 'ageing', certain brand revitalization strategies were shown to be able to create positive results in brand performance and portray a 'renewed' perceived image. This could be seen through the perspective of ABBA and Queen, two iconic music brands that showed 'ageing' symptoms and managed to turn their brand around through the mentioned strategies. The paper also manages to show the disparity of perspectives on the impact technological disruption has on brand performance after revitalization. Many sources of literature (Beer, 2008), emphasize that this has a negative impact, while our practical case studies prove otherwise.

This paper has also been able to successfully apply the branding concepts in previous literature, such as brand decay, nostalgia and retro-branding to practical cases in an industry that is underrepresented academically.

Finally, this provides a gateway for future research into similar or other branding topics applied to the music industry. Limitations concerning the research method could be tackled differently in future studies. As mentioned previously, there was no accessible method of primary research to be done regarding the authors resources and time constraints in the current context. Therefore, other studies in the future will be more able to provide extensive research methods and data, resulting in a potentially broader perspective on future discussions in this field of research.

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