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Handledare: Howard Nothhaft & Maria
Månsson
Examinator: Cecilia Cassinger

The value of communication in the pop music industry
The value communication practitioners provide for artists and the communicative
value independent artists provide for themselves.

Emma Gustafsson & Sanna Hansson

Lunds universitet
Institutionen för strategisk kommunikation
Examensarbete för kandidatexamen



Abstract

The value of communication in the pop music industry

In this study, we aim to examine communication, and mainly promotion, within the pop music industry. The purpose is to investigate the value communication practitioners provide for artists and what communicative value independent artists provide for themselves. It can be argued that the relevance of communication practitioners within the music industry is not as evident anymore because of new digital innovations that make it easier for independent artists to manage their own communication. Not much academic research has been conducted within the subject, and none of the studies we found focuses on value. Applying a qualitative method and conducting semi-structured interviews with both communication practitioners as well as independent artists, we have been able to pinpoint patterns and discrepancies in order to establish themes of value in our analysis. With support from our theoretical framework and empirical material we have created two new value models and drawn meaningful conclusions that contribute with knowledge to the field of strategic communication and digital media. Our results show that there is value in both receiving help from a communication practitioner and managing your own communication as an independent artist. We conclude that the main value of receiving help from a communication practitioner is the increased opportunity for exposure and success. The main value of managing your own communication as an independent artist is the feeling of full control, involvement and freedom.

Keyword: value, communication, promotion, music industry, digital, strategic

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Sammanfattning

Värdet av kommunikation i popmusikindustrin

I den här studien är målet att undersöka kommunikation, huvudsakligen promotion, inom popmusikindustrin. Syftet är att studera värdet som kommunikatörer bidrar med för artister och vilket kommunikativt värde independent artister bidrar med själva. Det kan argumenteras för att kommunikatörernas relevans inom musikindustrin inte är lika självklart längre på grund av nya digitala innovationer som gör det lättare för independent artister att hantera sin egen kommunikation. Det har genomförts få undersökningar inom ämnet och ingen av de funna studierna fokuserar på värde. Genom att applicera en kvalitativ metod samt genomföra semistrukturerade intervjuer med både kommunikatörer och independent artister har vi belyst mönster och diskrepanser för att kunna fastställa värdeteman i vår analys. Med stöd från vårt teoretiska ramverk och empiriska material har vi skapat två nya värdemodeller och dragit meningsfulla slutsatser som bidrar med kunskap till fältet strategisk kommunikation och digitala medier. Studiens resultat visar att det finns värde i att både ta hjälp från en kommunikatör och hantera sin egen kommunikation som independent artist. Vi drar slutsatsen att det huvudsakliga värdet av att ta hjälp från en kommunikatör är den ökade möjligheten för exponering och framgång. Det huvudsakliga värdet av att hantera sin egen kommunikation som independent artist är känslan av full kontroll, involvering och frihet.

Nyckelord: värde, kommunikation, promotion, musikindustrin, digital, strategisk

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1. Introduction and problem definition

The relevance of communication practitioners within the music industry, such as public relations agents and managers, has been debated in different forums. For example, the artist Philip Grey (2011, Sep 26) asks himself whether artists really need managers anymore. While managers are known for having impressive networks that might favor artists, he suggests that the sacrifice could be compromising with your own identity as a musician. Grey claims that new inventions have given artists more control and power, and that there are now many cost-effective ways of promoting oneself. On the other hand Heather McDonald (2020, Jan 30), an experienced practitioner within the music industry, highlights four benefits of having a manager to help you out as an artist or band. She argues that it is easier for managers to have discussions about the music with journalists, radio stations and similar. If an artist contacts these important actors, they might not respond because they do not want to let the artist down, but with a manager she believes they could be more direct and mediate their opinions even if it is negative. McDonald also points out that managers add credibility, seriousness and professionalism to the artist's image. She suggests that a professional manager can decrease internal fights within a band, but also confesses fights can emerge because of uneven relationships with the manager. Finally, she emphasizes the fact that hiring a manager will create more time for artists to make music and be creative. In these articles we can see two different perspectives on the benefits and disadvantages for artists caused by working with a communication practitioner, such as a manager.

The articles above come from digital magazines, but there are also academic studies that raise the subject. For example, previous research from the perspective of professionals within the music industry states that digital promotion solutions are growing and that traditional promotion tools are decreasing (Hartikainen, 2014). Another research by Aponte (2011) investigates the use of social media from the perspective of independent artists and states that even though social media has created new possibilities for promotion, record labels are still necessary for an artist to succeed. Olander's (2016) study aims to compare the characteristics of professional

managers with artists that manage themselves. She concludes that while there are many similarities, such as the tasks that should be performed, there are a few differences. These studies show that the academic interest for communication in the music industry has grown. However, while the communication practitioner's role is a hot debate topic in society, little attention has been devoted to the value of the communication practitioners that operate in the music industry.

The music industry is interesting since what is being communicated is an actual person and their music. This means that technically, the artist could manage their communication without the help of a professional communication practitioner. With the uprising of digital media independent artists have the possibility to spread their music worldwide cost-effectively and without the support of a record label which was necessary 20 years ago (Collins & Young, 2010). Back then, communication practitioners within the music industry were essential in order for the artist to succeed. However, because of the digitalization, it can be argued that the role and prerequisites have changed. Yet, not much research has been conducted to find out what the communication practitioners within the music industry are doing that the artists cannot do themselves. It appears that both parts now have equal access to platforms where relationships and image can be created. By interviewing people from both groups, we aim to explore if there is still value in employing a communication practitioner to help with promotion, or if the artists can thrive just as well on their own.

1.1 Purpose and research questions

The previous research found consists of theses and we have also discovered a collection of popular science articles published in digital magazines and similar. This implies that more academic research is needed within the subject, and this is where we wish to fill a gap. Our purpose is to provide knowledge about the value of professional promotion communication within the music industry. By exploring the need for communication within the music industry and investigating what a professional communication practitioner contributes with for an artist we aim to generate knowledge to the field of strategic communication and digital media. The value

aspect is important because it allows us to highlight essential qualities that communication practitioners need to possess in order to remain relevant for artists. Also, this aspect has not been a topic in previous academic research within the music industry.

The focus of our research will mainly be digital communication, since communication practices have changed because of the new media landscape as seen above. We believe this development is one reason why actors such as artists are invited to carry out the work tasks that would traditionally be assigned to communication practitioners. This is why the digital perspective is relevant throughout the research. The study will be carried out by exploring the perspectives of communication practitioners and independent artists to identify patterns and discrepancies in the perception of value.

We have a perception that different communication strategies are used within different music genres, and will therefore limit the study to the pop music scene. Our focus will be Sweden since we wish to integrate digital aspects and Internetstiftelsen (2019) reveals that 98% of the Swedish population has access to the Internet. However, we are aware that many digital media platforms are transboundary which means that the reach may be worldwide. Using a qualitative research method, we intend to answer the following questions:

- What value does the professional communication practitioner within the pop music industry in Sweden provide for artists?
- What is the value of managing your own communication as an independent pop artist in Sweden?

2. Previous research

In this section, we present three studies that we find valuable in relation to our research questions. We have done a thorough literature search, even broadening our scope to include other industries such as sports. However, as mentioned earlier there are very few academic studies. While the ones we will present below are relevant, none of them focus on value. The first one investigates different angles of digital promotion in the music industry. The second study focuses on social media from an independent artist's perspective. Finally, the last one highlights differences between professional management and DIY management. In the analysis, we attempt to point out where our findings intersect with and differ from previous research.

2.1 Digital promotion in the music industry

Hartikainen (2014) discusses various aspects of digital promotion with an aim to find the most effective tools for the music industry. The findings allow us to better understand the communication practitioner's role in relation to digital music promotion. Hartikainen (2014) states that digital developments mean that the environment of promotional functions is growing and therefore can intensify its effect. The study focuses on the perspective of professional experiences and personal opinions of media parties who are at the receiving end of the promotional channels. The researcher found that most promotional material within the music industry today is digital. It is concluded that the global digital networks have provided smaller and independent participants possibilities that have allowed smaller companies to intensify their business operations. This finding strengthens our choice of research focus, where we argue that digital solutions have opened up the field for independent artists. Finally, Hartikainen's (2014) study also shows a decline of traditional promotion, even if it still exists to some extent.

2.2 Social media and the music industry

Another research by Aponte (2011) studies social media within the music industry from the perspective of independent artists. The researcher discusses the new possibilities for independent artists that come with social media and digital solutions. This is relevant for our study since it gives us an understanding of how social media has created possibilities for independent artists which challenges the professional communication practitioner's role. Aponte (2011) calls this *Music 2.0* which implies the new possibilities for interaction between an artist and its audience as well as the new ways to share music. The study constructs a hypothesis concerning the need for record labels and argues that promotional aid might not be needed since the artist can create engagement through social media. In the conclusion it is stated that a majority of the participants believe that existing fans tend to reach out to the artists through social media rather than other channels. This is due to the easy access and the possibility to create relationships through different platforms. It is also concluded that the fan bases are growing by interacting through social media. Also, the independent artists rely on word of mouth which can be simulated through social media. Concerning the need for record labels, it is stated that the majority still see them as necessary in order to succeed. The reason is the financial backing, distribution purposes and wider promotion reach. Despite the increased use of social media for promotion and distribution, independent artists still consider record labels as relevant.

2.3 Professional management versus DIY management

Olander (2016) examines the differences between professional management and DIY management. DIY is an acronym for do it yourself, and refers to artists that are also their own managers. This study is the closest to our study, yet focuses more on comparing than actually establishing the value of communication. Furthermore, we have included communication practitioners that have different titles, not only managers. Olander (2016) argues that DIY managers have become more usual, which to a large extent is due to the development of new technology. The author establishes that the role of the professional manager has grown from the artists' need of having someone to coordinate the business aspects of their music. She has

found that the main tasks of a manager are to manage the business, look out for the artist's interests, manage and strengthen the artist's possibilities for succeeding, be a support in the daily work that affects the artist's career and push projects forward. She also concludes that management businesses look different from each other, due to different needs. The author continues by listing a few skills a manager, both professional and DIY, should have. Knowledge about the line of business, awareness of strengths and weaknesses, being observant of new opportunities, problem solving skills and being able to envision the bigger picture are important traits. Even though there are many similarities between the two groups, the author observes some differences. She points out that while the professional manager can focus on being a manager, the DIY manager has to handle both business-related tasks while making sure there is time to be creative. Further, she explains that while professional managers can always take an objective standpoint, this is not the case for artists managing themselves. Though the prerequisites are different, the two groups are still expected to perform the same type of work. Many educational conclusions are drawn in this study. However, we believe that we can develop the knowledge within the subject by adding a value perspective.

3. Theoretical framework

Based on previous research and the empirical material, we have decided on three main areas in our theoretical framework. They are the evolution of the music industry, communication in the music industry and value. These areas will provide important knowledge in order to carry through and understand the analysis.

3.1 The evolution of the music industry

Collins and Young (2010) explain that during the second half of the 20th century, the music industry was built on the foundation of record labels. The authors state that the labels were essential for the artists since they identified, nurtured and marketed the music which the artist had no natural possibility of doing themselves. Hence, they pinpoint that labels provided the artists with tools and resources in order to record and distribute their music via radio and record stores. Sen (2010) argues that this made the music industry in charge of the fate of artists since they were in control of the market. Collins and Young (2010) state that this business model was very successful, both for the artists who gained the needed attention and recognition, but maybe mostly for the labels who gained the most profit. Ronkin (2013) further explains that the only way one could access music was to buy it, meaning that the artists could make a living by selling records and touring.

Sen (2010) describes that with the uprising of *Web 2.0* together with other new technologies, the music industry began a decline after 1999. The author explains that new technological innovations totally changed how music is bought and consumed today. Furthermore, physical releases became unnecessary since people could download music online and share it with others. Swanson (2013) explains that new on-demand music subscription services came to light between 2007 and 2010. The author further states that one of these was Spotify, a service that was launched in Europe in 2008 and has become one of the fastest growing streaming services in the world. She explains that one can register a free account that includes

advertising or a paid one which is free from ads and has a higher bit-rate among other benefits. Even though independent artists can use the platform to release their music, they need to go through record labels or other distributors (Swanson, 2013). Examples of distributors are Distrokid (www.distrokid.com) or Ditto (www.ditto-music.com). Swanson (2013) points out that Spotify then pays a pre-negotiated rate either per-play or per-percent of earnings for streams. The author argues that major labels have leverage over streaming services like Spotify that independent artists do not have since the platforms could not function without the record labels' enormous catalogues.

Furthermore, Swanson (2013) states that there are other new revenue streams for musicians today. These are, among others, digital sales, YouTube partner programs, ad revenues, streaming mechanical royalties and cloud storage payments. The author explains that all these can make it seem like it should be easier for an artist to make money today. The reason for this is that the interactive streaming services payment will proceed over a long time unlike selling a record once. However, this requires a growing fanbase of people listening to the music, buying tickets to concerts and actually engaging on an artists' social media channels which takes a solid image and a well-known reputation. As Collins and Young (2010) mention, before it was the record labels that took care of this kind of promotion. In contrast, artists today have new possibilities to create an image for themselves by using digital and mainly social media (Aponte, 2011). These possibilities open up for a deeper discussion about communication within the music industry.

3.2 Communication in the music industry

3.2.1 Promotion

With the discussion above in mind, promotion can be seen as an important aspect of communication in the music industry. Fill and Turnbull (2016) explain that promotion is a part of marketing communications and is used to communicate elements of an organisation's offering to a target audience. The authors state that this offering can be a product, a service or the image of the organisation itself. Hutchinson, Macy

and Allen (2010) describe that traditionally, the promotional mix within the music industry includes *advertising, sales promotion, public relations, direct marketing* and *personal selling*. They also point out that personal selling is one of the main activities record labels engage in. Radio promotion is a good example of this, where maintaining good relationships with gatekeepers that decide what music should be played on the radio is an important aspect. Fill and Turnbull (2016) argue that the main role of advertising is to engage audiences and that it should be used to create awareness, shape attitudes and build values. They also state that unlike advertising which is long-term, sales promotion can increase sales in the short term. Hutchinson et. al. (2010) explain that sales promotion includes various activities to stimulate consumers to purchase a product. The authors explain that in the musical context this could be a contest where the winner gets a meet and greet or a discount code for a certain album. Dahlquist and Linde (2012) emphasize that the mission of public relations in the music industry, as well as in other businesses, is to create strong relationships, and thereby a desirable image and reputation.

Having discussed different aspects of promotion, we now wish to elaborate on the different types of media that can be used for promotion purposes. Fill and Turnbull (2016) describe *owned media* as the assets that an actor already has, and that they can use to share messages with their target audience. Examples are the use of company websites. The authors continue by explaining that *earned media* is comments and conversations that take place both offline and online. In the music industry, this is mostly known as publicity (Hutchinson et. al., 2010). Lastly, Fill and Turnbull (2016) explain that there is *paid media* which is ads, billboards and similar. In this section, we have explored different aspects of promotion. These terms are valuable for the understanding of promotional efforts emphasized in the empirical material.

3.2.2 Digital communication

Stafford and Faber (2005) explain that when the World Wide Web was introduced during the '90s, it had some serious effects on the possibilities for advertising and promotion. With the current mix of traditional media such as tv and radio, as well

as new media such as social media, we argue that there are now more communication channels available than ever. Jakus and Zubčić (2016) describe the media landscape today as a complicated network of connected platforms that content is created and published on. The Internet has been the fastest growing new medium ever and has completely changed our way of communicating, reaching out and even living. Stafford and Faber (2005) point out that one of the main reasons for this growth is the possibilities for interactivity which other media do not offer. Interactivity means that everyone with access to the Internet, including independent artists, has the possibility to engage and create content that others can interact with.

Morris and Goldsworthy (2016) agree that the emergence of digital media has generated new opportunities for public relations. They mention clear benefits of cheaper and faster contact with media. For people operating in the music, game and film industry digital media provides opportunities to reach review-driven outlets. Examples are blogs and digital magazines. According to Morris and Goldsworthy (2016), reaching the right people also becomes easier thanks to rapid research opportunities where one can gain insights about customers and trends. However, they also point out that it is important to acknowledge that there is an endless number of actors that want to share their messages which makes it a challenge to actually reach one's audience. Rosa (2013) argues that we have more information to process today than ever before because of our digitalized world, and this makes it more difficult to reach through the noise. We believe that the difficulty of reaching through increases when actors do not have sufficient knowledge about the digital landscape. Young and Åkerström (2016) argue that there might be a certain part of the population that is better equipped. They coin the term *digital naturals*, which they explain are individuals that feel comfortable in the digital world since they have experience and the appropriate technological skills. We have discussed digital communication in this section since we argue that it is no longer an option, but a requirement to engage in online activities to communicate successfully in the music industry. As an extension of the digital communication discussion, we argue that it is important to dig deeper into the subject of social media. Therefore, this will be done in the next section.

3.2.3 Social media

Sajid (2016) states that social media is one of the best options today to get in touch with potential customers and consumers. The researcher discusses the opportunities for promotion using social media and concludes that it is essential to get engaged on various digital platforms in order to stay relevant and gain competitive advantages. Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011) present a framework called *the Honeycomb model* which explains seven functional building blocks of social media, including implications on how actors could use social media with the different blocks in mind. The first functional block is *identity*, which is how much of the actor's own identity that is revealed. This includes personal attributes, but also how people choose to portray themselves. The second block is *conversations* and refers to the degree to which actors communicate, or interact, with each other in the social media landscape. *Sharing* is the third building block, which has to do with exchanging, distributing and receiving content. For people to connect, the authors emphasize that there needs to be some sort of objects of sociality that they all share. The fourth building block is *presence* and refers to knowing if other users are available. The fifth block, *relationships*, is about how different users are related to each other. The relationship consists of at least two people that have something in common that in turn might lead to a conversation, sharing of content or following each other on social media. The sixth functional building block is *reputation*, which is described as the attitude different people have towards actors and how visible those attitudes are. Finally, the seventh building block *groups* is presented. This factor is about the possibilities of forming communities and sub-communities. The authors imply that different building blocks might correspond better with certain social media platforms than others. By keeping the Honeycomb model in mind throughout the analysis, we have been able to explore how different social media platforms brought up in the empirical material create value for promotion processes in the music industry.

3.2.4 Visual communication on digital platforms

When discussing digital and social media, we argue that it is essential to include visual communication. Frankowska-Takhari, MacFarlane, Göker and Stumpf

(2017) point out that images are powerful since they can transmit meaning effectively. As an example, Russman and Svensson (2017) explain that social media is known for being multimodal. This means that the platforms host images, videos, hashtags, emoticons and written text which all can be combined and used in different ways. Russman and Svensson (2017) further describe that the platforms allow the visual elements to be framed, filtered and edited. They mean that one thereby can elaborate the image of one's identity. This opens up for strategic and reflexive communication in order to present a certain impression of oneself or an object. We argue that this is relevant to the music industry since identity creation is an important aspect of an artist's brand.

3.3 Value

To create a foundation for our analysis, and pave the way for useful answers to our research questions, it is important to discuss value as a theoretical concept. Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) present *the theory of consumption values* which is useful for our study. While it focuses on explaining why consumers choose to buy and use particular products or not, we have found the concepts applicable in our study. Musicians can choose or not choose to employ a communication practitioner to help them, much like a consumer chooses to buy a product or not. Sheth et. al (1991) explain that the theory of consumption values consists of five elements that can affect the consumer's choice. The authors argue that a decision can be based on one or several of the value elements. The *functional value* is the first element, which is defined as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity for functional, utilitarian, or physical performance" (p. 160). The second element is the *social value*, which the authors describe as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's association with one or more specific social groups" (p. 161). The social value is connected to positive or negative feelings about stereotyped demographic, cultural-ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Therefore, this type of value connects to social image. The next element is the *emotional value*, which has to do with the alternative's ability to stimulate affective states or feelings. The fourth element is the *epistemic value*, explained by the authors as "the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity to arouse curiosity, provide novelty, and/or satisfy a desire for knowledge" (p. 162). Finally, the last element is the *conditional*

value. Here, the authors focus on which alternative is more valuable for the choice maker in a certain situation or based on the circumstances.

A more recent study by Zhang, Gu and Jahromi (2018) define customer value as “created when customers’ perceptions of benefits gained by the consumption of a product/service surpass the costs they incur” (p. 276). They continue by arguing that value can be created in two ways, namely through the use of the product or service, or through perceptions and a comparison between sacrifices and rewards. For our study, this allows us to investigate what value arises from the communication practitioner’s service itself, what perceptions the artists have about the service and finally what they feel they would have to sacrifice versus gain when receiving help with their promotion. In Zhang et. al.’s (2018) study, they develop a customer value proposition that includes four propositions that are similar to Sheth et. al.’s elements (1991). However, the knowledge added by Zhang et. al. (2018) allows us to improve our understanding of the empirical material. The first one is the *technical value*, where the customer is looking for convenience, problem-solving features and responsiveness. This value is almost identical to Sheth et. al.’s (1991) functional value. A decision has been made to use the term functional value in the analysis. However, when we refer to this value, we incorporate thoughts from both Sheth et. al. (1991) and Zhang et. al. (2018). The second value presented by Zhang et. al. (2018) is the *economic value*, which is the monetary benefits. Next, the *social value* is presented, which can be linked to Sheth et. al.’s (1991) study. However, Zhang et. al. (2018) present a valuable definition, explaining that the social value is based on “establishing social connections or seeking like-minded peers” (p. 278). The last proposition is the *emotional value*, which is also mirrored in the previous research by Sheth et. al. (1991). While both models discussed in this section present measures that can be used to investigate what affects repurchase intention, it is the stand-alone value proposition terms and their meanings that are relevant for our study and analysis.

3.4 Reflection on the theoretical framework

In the first part of our theoretical framework, we have provided an understanding of the business. It is essential to comprehend how the industry works and how the industry has evolved due to digital changes in order to fully understand the landscape where our study takes place. We have also defined the key concepts of communication in the music industry that we believe are important for the research. We conclude that it is of importance to keep a holistic perspective and be aware that the boundaries between different communication elements are fluid. We have therefore presented the angles of communication that we believe are the most paramount and that has allowed us to analyze our empirical material adequately. Lastly, two value creation frameworks with terms that are used in the analysis were presented. The models were chosen in line with the interviewees' thoughts on value.

4. Method

In the method section, we explain our work process. The scientific approach and choice of method are outlined below. We also present our selection and limitations as well as who the interviewees are. Next, the analysis method is laid out followed by a reflection on quality and ethics.

4.1 Scientific approach and choice of method

Åkerström (2014) emphasizes that the choice of scientific approach will have an effect on the way the empirical material is being interpreted. The author describes that ontology is our thoughts and ideas of how the world, people and reality are constituted. Further, epistemology is how we can reach knowledge within this reality. We have chosen a social constructive perspective. This implies that the world and knowledge are constructed through communication between different actors (Cassinger, 2014). Falkheimer (2014) explains that it is important to be aware of the fact that the researcher's understanding and perspective will have an impact on the result.

Furthermore, it is important to let the purpose of the study decide what method you should use (Trost & Hultåker, 2016). We have opted for a qualitative method. According to Björklund and Paulsson (2014), a qualitative method is suitable to reach a more nuanced understanding of a specific topic. This is what we have aimed to do by interacting with people within the music industry to better understand their everyday practices. In addition, Eksell and Thelander (2014) explain that a common approach within the field of strategic communication is to go back and forth between the empirical material and the theoretical framework in order to establish possible codes and themes. The authors state that this is called an abductive approach and allows us to use already existing concepts while also being able to develop new ones. In our case, when discovering something new in the empirical material we have gone back and complemented the theoretical framework.

At the same time, we have also had previous researchers' findings in mind when constructing our interview guides.

4.2 Interviews as a tool

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) point out that the use of interviews is an effective way for researchers to gain new knowledge within a specific area. They state that an interview is a conversation with a clear structure and purpose that reaches beyond the everyday exchanges. The authors further explain that by carefully asking questions as well as listening, the researcher can reach a profound understanding of a phenomenon. Through interviews, we have collected primary data, which according to Björklund and Paulsson (2014) means that the empirical material is gathered for the study in question.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) emphasize that by creating a semi-structured interview guide, the answers will be comparable, yet leave room for elaboration and more developed reasoning. They explain that a semi-structured interview often contains themes that should be covered in the interview, and suggestions for questions. Björklund and Paulsson (2014) describe this type of interview similarly but also suggests that this approach gives the interviewer an opportunity to shift the order of the questions so that they can be asked when it feels appropriate, for example with regard to the interviewee's answers or reactions. Before the interviews, we constructed an interview guide each for the two groups. They can be found in *appendix 1* and *appendix 2*. In line with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2014) suggestions, we have concentrated on translating our research questions into vernacular language to make them more fitting for an interview situation. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) mean that this can evoke spontaneous and rich descriptions. We have therefore embraced the informal nature of a conversation since this has given us more interesting empirical material to work with. Silverman (2017) also points out that presenting the research question directly to the interviewees might affect their answers. He further claims that it can lead to inattentive research, which means that the analysis process is not given enough attention. Another factor that we have considered is the use of follow-up questions. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) explain that follow-up questions are essential to the interpretation and analyzing process. By

asking the participants to develop their thoughts we have gained a better understanding of a phenomenon from their perspective and thereby made the research more trustworthy.

In line with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2014) suggestions we have begun the interviews with an orientation, where we have defined the situation, reviewed the purpose and informed about the documentation. We have also asked if there are any questions we can answer before starting the real interview. In the end, there has been a brief follow-up to make sure that the interviewees got the chance to say everything they wanted to. We have conducted all of the interviews together with the arrangement that one person had the main responsibility for asking the questions and the other person took notes. The reason for this was to not create confusion for the interviewees, yet the person that did not have the main responsibility for asking questions could cut in if necessary. We divided the interviews so that we had the main responsibility for 5 interviews each. The interviews were held digitally because of COVID-19. We offered the interviewees to choose their preferred platform, which resulted in interviews over Facebook Messenger, Skype, Whereby, Zoom and telephone. The interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) state that there rarely is a reason to transcribe the interview verbatim. The authors point out that if the study does not focus on the language that is being used but rather the meaning of what is being said, these types of expressions are not important. Since we have concentrated on meaning we have therefore excluded filler sounds like "hm" and "eh", in order to make the transcribed material easier to overview and analyze.

4.2.1 Selection and limitations

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) state that the number of people interviewed should be based on the purpose of the study. The authors claim that many qualitative studies would have gained from decreasing the number of interviews in order to have more time for preparation and analysis. Therefore, we have interviewed 10 people, 5 independent artists and 5 professional communication practitioners within the pop music industry. This has given us a reasonable amount of empirical material to process, and according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) places the study within the normal interview rate of between 5-25 interviews. We did not have any specific

criteria for the participants, other than that they had to identify with one of the two groups. In this study, we refer to an independent artist as an artist who manages their own communication. The communication practitioners have different professional titles, yet are all involved in different artists' communication processes. The selection was strategic since we needed to find suitable participants (Trost & Hultåker, 2016). In our case, suitable participants are people that match the criteria described above. We have strived to include people of different sexes and ages since a diverse selection is important ethically. To find participants, we contacted 23 people, whereof 10 were available for an interview. They were found through digital research or were previously known to us due to our interest and knowledge in the industry. To maintain the anonymity of the interviewees, we have decided to present the people in each group with a number from 1 to 5. A more thorough description of the interviewees can be found in *appendix 3*.

4.3 Analysis method

Backman (2016) describes the purpose of the analysis as giving the empirical material an appropriate and intelligible structure so that the observed outcome can be linked to the original research problem. Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) argue that the analytic work is a continuous process. This is why we started planning the analysis before collecting the empirical material. By paying attention during the interviews and asking follow-up questions, we were able to start the analyzing process throughout the collection.

Rennstam and Wästerfors (2015) suggest three activities, which are the sorting process, the reducing process and the argumentation. However, they highlight that you can move back and forth between the activities, which we have done. Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) claim that an analytical induction is the investigation of similarities and discrepancies within and between cases with the purpose to develop concepts, ideas and theory. We have approached this method by encoding the material in order to identify patterns and differences and potential explanations for these. Furthermore, we started by analyzing one case at a time and altered our conclusions every time we gained new insights, and then went back and forth between the cases to establish themes. After closely investigating the empirical material, we

were able to pinpoint key elements that became the foundation for our themes. Furthermore, we have also utilized terms from our theory section in this process. The themes form the structure of our analysis. In the analysis section, we have then summed up the interviewees' opinions by shaping shorter formulations and choosing significant quotations.

Backman (2016) explains that the analysis process is closely related to the interpretation phase. Through interpretation we have given the analysis result meaning, come to conclusions and have been able to point out implications. As we have explained before, we are aware that our previous understandings and knowledge might have affected the interpretation. Backman (2016) strengthens this statement by adding that data never actually speaks "for itself", and that the interpretation happens in a specific context. He points out that what you want to achieve is being able to offer a holistic description and understanding. This is what we have aimed to do in order to be able to contribute to the field of strategic communication and digital media in general.

4.4 Reflection

We have reflected on the ways that we can increase the quality of our study. Heide and Simonsson (2014) present four criteria that can be used for a qualitative study and we have used these as a foundation for our quality reflection. Heide and Simonsson (2014) describe that the four criteria are trustworthiness, transparency, transferability and reliability. They point out that by describing and reflecting on the work process in a way that is visible to the reader, trustworthiness and transparency can be achieved. Therefore, we have strived to be as transparent as possible and continuously control and question our work. Heide and Simonsson (2014) explain that trustworthiness also can be reached by collecting a rich empirical material. We have fulfilled this criterion by conducting enough interviews and investing much thought into the construction of our interview guides. We focused on open questions to not affect the respondents' answers. Follow-up questions have also been used to ensure that our material is rich. We are aware that the interviews with the communication practitioners are longer than the ones with the artists. A reason for this could be that the communication practitioners work with communication and therefore have more to say about the subject than the artists. Since the study is

based on Swedish participants, the interviews and transcriptions are conducted in Swedish. However, the quotations that are used in the analysis and discussion have been translated. An incorrect translation can damage the quality of the study (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). This knowledge has allowed us to make sure to translate the quotations properly.

Heide and Simonsson (2014) describe that in order to make the research reliable, it is beneficial to include several perspectives. We have done this by including two perspectives in our research. Moreover, Von Platen and Young (2014) argue that interviewees might practice self-promotion which can have an effect on the result. We therefore took measures to avoid encouraging this by asking open questions that were mainly focused on practical activities and values, as opposed to comparing their skills with other actors or professions. Although communication practitioners speak highly of their profession, we argue that this has not affected the result of the study. In addition to this, Heide and Simonsson (2014) talk about transferability, which means that the results of the study can be applied to another situation. We discuss this in our further research section, where we argue that our study could be transferred to other businesses where the “product” is a human being.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) state that there are different ethical considerations to be made. We have offered the interviewees anonymity and confidentiality. Therefore, we have only submitted their work title or other relevant background and sex in the study. In our interaction with the interviewees, we have provided clear information to avoid misunderstandings. Silverman (2017) strengthens this by stating that everyone involved in the study must be aware of the purpose, used methods and how the researchers intend to use the results. By having the themes in this reflection in mind throughout our work process, we believe that we have assured the quality of our research.

5. Analysis

With previous research, theoretical framework and method in mind we now move to the analysis. As explained, we have divided this section based on the themes established from the empirical material. Here, we analyze and discuss different aspects of value brought up by the interviewees.

5.1 The value of operational and strategic communication

A red thread throughout the interviews was the value of operational and strategic communication. In this section, we have divided the theme into four sub-categories to pinpoint the key aspects.

5.1.1 Productive work

“My daily tasks are writing press releases for our artists, biographies, I pitch to the radio. We have around one release a week so every week I work with pitching to the radio, pitching to magazines, blogs, everything like that. And if there is a tv program or something you work with that.” (Communication practitioner 1)

In the material, we identify a pattern of practical work tasks that we perceive as valuable for the artists. In the quote above we see some examples of the wide range of work tasks that communication practitioners carry through on a daily basis. Many are elements in the promotional mix described by Hutchinson et. al. (2010), and therefore facilitate artists’ opportunities for exposure. The tasks include building strategy, which comprises tasks such as general planning, situational analysis, the development of visual identities and images. The other main part of their role is operational tasks, which are more hands-on. Examples of this are the production of content, press releases, pitching by sending emails and developing relationships with important actors.

“My role as an artist manager today cannot be just as an advisor, there has to be a more productive role. What the productive role includes depends on what the artist is in need of. (...) I usually joke around that I do everything from guitar picks to taxes.” (Communication practitioner 2)

As we can conclude from this quote it is very important for the communication practitioner to be responsive and cater to the artists' needs. We interpret that the tasks mentioned by communication practitioners complement some of the wishes the artists have. For example, Artist 1 has a label that sends out her press releases, which she appreciates. Artist 2 mentions the downside of sending out one's own press releases, where sending out a big quantity of emails and still not getting any replies can be draining. This could be a sign that the artists appreciate getting rid of the workload. Seth et. al.'s (1991) term functional value offers an understanding of our reasoning. We interpret that when communication practitioners help out with productive work they offer convenience, problem-solving skills and responsiveness, three qualities that define the functional value.

“What we do, it is structure, keeping the conversations away from the artists. Since they have to perform it is not reasonable that they should get 500 emails a day.” (Communication practitioner 5)

“What one receives from getting help is really being able to focus on other things in order to do it well” (Artist 5)

Based on the quotes above, we identify value in someone else handling the more productive tasks, as it gives the artists more time to focus on their creative work. Communication practitioner 5 highlights the fact that his job is to structure the communication so that the artists can focus on other aspects like the foundation of the whole business, which is the music. He argues that without the product, the music, they have nothing. Here, a mutual value can be identified, where the communication practitioner would not be relevant without the artist and the music, and the artist would not have the same opportunity to create music full time without the communication practitioner.

5.1.2 *An external perspective*

“Producing bio, press releases and such can be pretty difficult from your own perspective when you have written the music. It becomes a thing in itself, it is another creative part that we do not have so much experience of ourselves really.” (Artist 4)

When asked about the advantages of receiving help with your communication, Artist 4 mention a range of productive tasks that they would appreciate getting help with. A difficulty with promotional communication as an independent artist seems to be communicating beneficially without the external perspective.

“It is sometimes difficult for the artists to see themselves from an external perspective, to see themselves as a fan sees them (...) One good example is that we can see data from streaming devices that clearly shows that people do not want depressing music today. (...) There is a client that has a great song named **song title** which is an epic, really nice song that she would like to release. But we have to put our foot down and say “It is not the right moment” and we have argued quite a bit about this. We want to optimize her career and this song as far as it can but this song will not get its rightful chance in today's media climate.” (Communication practitioner 3)

Communication practitioner 3 also identifies this difficulty with producing your own communication and that it can be of value to get a second opinion. We therefore interpret that an external perspective can be useful and important. Communication practitioner 3 states that the situational analysis is extremely important. He explains that if a song makes it or not can be dependent on timing, culture and current happenings in society. The quote above can be interpreted as the communication practitioner conducting situational analyses to optimize the artists' success. This goes hand in hand with what Morris and Goldsworthy (2016) mention as an important part of digital public relations. This type of strategic mindset is something that the professional communication practitioners can contribute with to add value for an artist.

5.1.3 Planned communication

“I have absolutely followed schedules and stuff very strictly. Especially in the beginning, every third post was a video where I had written something new and had a color scheme. I planned and posted twice a week but I do not have that kind of energy anymore.” (Artist 2)

From the quote above, we perceive that Artist 2 struggles with planning her communication. Artist 1 describes a similar scenario where she starts out with a plan but mentions that it is difficult to follow through. Artist 5 states that it takes a lot of self-discipline to make a plan and actually follow it. She means that it is valuable to have someone professional to help out with the strategic part who can be there to push you to go through with a plan. We see a pattern of artists talking about the value of planned communication, but not in the same nuanced way as the communication practitioners. This gives us the impression that while it is possible for artists to think strategically, the communication practitioners seem to have more knowledge and experience in this.

“To work strategically based on the goals we have, how can we reach those goals? That is the gist. (...) It is super important to be strategic and to plan long term to get a chance to reach through the noise. (...) The strategy is always the foundation.” (Communication practitioner 3)

The strategic mindset that Communication practitioner 3 displays can be seen as a valuable asset. As both an artist and manager for a band, Artist 5 reveals that she is more inclined to create detailed strategies for the band that she is managing than for herself. An external communication practitioner can therefore be an aid since they might have more energy and time to fully engage in strategic activities. From the empirical material, we can interpret that strategy is an important aspect and asset to succeed in the music industry. While Olander (2016) describes being able to see the bigger picture as an important trait for communication practitioners to possess, strategy as a concept is not discussed. We therefore believe that by developing this aspect, we have added a more nuanced understanding of her previous findings.

5.1.4 Visual communication and identity

“I think it is very good to have something visual and like, both image and video which you have control over yourself. Not only the music since you can give a much broader image of your music and your genre and your style.” (Artist 4)

Above, Artist 4 highlight the power of visual communication and the impact it has on how one will be viewed by others. This goes hand in hand with Russmann and Svensson’s (2017) explanation of the visual elaboration opportunities that make it possible to strategically form one's identity. Further, Artist 3 explains that he thinks a strategy for one’s visual communication is very important. The artist argues that strategically planned visual communication will make it look like you know what you are doing, which might attract both listeners and possibly record labels. Communication practitioner 3 also highlights that visual communication is essential due to the large number of new releases.

“What we put a lot of time on right now is visual communication. There are 40 000 songs being released every single day. (...) That makes visual communication even more important. How strange it may sound, sometimes I would say that the visual communication is more important than the music itself.”

(Communication practitioner 3)

We argue that the quantity of new music can be seen as a result of the solutions digital media offers. This reasoning is supported by Aponte (2011), who discusses Music 2.0 as a concept where it gets easier for artists to share music because of digital innovations. Connecting this to visual communication, we believe that it can be a tool to stand out from the crowd. Furthermore, Communication practitioner 3 argues that people judge artists in the same way even if their budget differs. Here we find a similarity with Morris and Goldsworthy (2016) and Rosa (2013) who both state that digitalization has provided opportunities as well as challenges. For example, it can be argued that an artist that just had their break in Sweden will be judged in the same way that an international superstar is judged. Therefore, it is important to consider how people will receive one’s visual communication. A pattern that we have found is that defining what the visual communication for an artist should look

like, is considered to be a part of the general strategy work for communication practitioners.

“Number one, I think you should have a strategy. (...) Identify what you want to say. If you are a new artist, what do you want people to say, what should they feel, what values should be associated with the band? (...) And I don’t believe in telling people stuff because you have to show it, you have to live it, you have to sound like it.” (Communication practitioner 2)

We interpret this as Communication practitioner 2 describing that strategy should be a facilitator for mediating who you are as an artist. The quote above brings up the importance of keeping the artist identity in mind when building a strategy. Artists also describe identity as an important part of their brand. A red thread in the discussions with the artists is that they have an image of how they want people to interpret them as artists. Artist 2 explains that her identity is something she has built herself, mostly on social media, based on what she thought was missing out there and what she appreciated with other accounts. We get the impression that having this control and power of your own platforms and identity is something that most artists want in order to feel like they own themselves.

5.2 The value of control and involvement

A recurring theme in our empirical material is the importance of being in control and involved in the communication as an artist. In this section, we discuss aspects of this subject from the perspectives of different interviewees.

5.2.1 Involvement in the communication process

“I want to present my own perception of who I am, and that is why it almost feels safer to manage everything myself.” (Artist 3)

Artist 3 continues this line of reasoning by explaining that he is scared to get run over by the opinions of an external communication practitioner. Based on this and the quote above, we interpret that Artist 3 sees control as a reason to not involve

another person or team in his communication. Artist 5 claims that she is a control freak and that she likes to manage everything by herself because she knows that she will be pleased with the results. We interpret the wish to not have to compromise with your ideas and opinions as an important reason to do your own communication work. We further link this to the emotional value explained by Sheth et. al. (1991) and Zhang et. al. (2018) since we understand that the artists feel strongly about their own channels. Artist 4 explain that an advantage of having full control is not having anyone change your ideas and interpreting you as an artist. Based on their reasoning, we perceive that while it is important for artists to be in control of their image, it could also be practical to be in control and not having to go through anyone else when making decisions. This could be understood as a functional value from Sheth et. al.'s (1991) perspective since they define this value as fulfilling a utilitarian need, meaning that it serves a practical function.

“If we get a request, we always go through the artists to see if there is something they want to do or if it is even interesting. You can always say “we think this would be really good for you”, like try to pull them in a certain direction. But in the end it is always their choice but we operate like some kind of... it goes through us first.” (Communication practitioner 1)

Communication practitioner 1 can be seen as expressing a very accommodating attitude towards the artists' opinions. Based on this, we find that an artist does not necessarily lose control by getting help from a communication practitioner. Optimizing the artists' possibilities is a common theme among the communication practitioners, although there are some discrepancies in the opinions about how this should be done.

“Everyone wants to speak to the manager because the manager has the power. I can say yes and no, a record label cannot do that. They have to ask me or the artist. But they never ask the artist.” (Communication practitioner 5)

The quote suggests a different perception of power, where it is seen as important to say no to propositions that do not suit the artists' lifestyle. Communication practitioner 3 thinks it is important to be able to say no to the artist if the timing for a certain release does not seem reasonable. On the one hand, this can be seen as the artist losing important control. On the other hand, this could be interpreted as the communication practitioner fulfilling an epistemic value, since they think one step ahead in terms of identity and timing. According to Sheth et. al. (1991) an epistemic value can be met with needed knowledge, which we interpret this as an example of. Continuing the discussion initiated by Olander (2016), we observe similar tasks such as looking out for the artist's best interest as important for the artist's career. With this in mind, we argue that while the quote above from Communication practitioner 5 can be perceived as sharp since he describes himself as powerful, there is also evidence that he has been in the business for a long time and has the proper knowledge about how the artist's interests can be served in the most beneficial way.

5.2.2 Uncertainty about the contribution

“If you were to hire someone you could not be sure that you will get the help you want. You do not know how big of an effort the person would put in either, so it is very difficult to know what to expect” (Artist 4)

The quote above suggests that there is uncertainty about what a communication practitioner can provide for you as an artist. This could imply that communication practitioners need to get better at communicating what they actually contribute with. It could also mean that the artists are reluctant to let go of their control if they do not know what they will get out of it. For people like Artist 5, who values control highly, this might also be a reason to keep managing one's own communication. At the same time, a repeated subject among communication practitioners is that they want what is best for the artist. It could be interpreted that they view their decision making as a way to facilitate and optimize the artist's career. Still, there is evidence that supports Artist 3's hesitation.

“Were you there when the album failed and no one showed up to the concerts? That is when you are supposed to be there. So these temporary managers, I am not very impressed by that actually.” (Communication practitioner 5)

Here it is revealed that artists might encounter insincere, opportunist inclined managers that only show up when the artist is doing well during their career. However, Communication practitioner 5 continues by explaining that he wants to be there for the artists for a long time, through both ups and downs. Based on this reasoning, we interpret that finding the right manager can be a bit of a gamble. This section suggests that an artist can have more or less control over the communication process depending on the practitioner they work with. We therefore argue that it is valuable for artists to find the optimal match based on their needs.

5.2.3 Social media presence

“I would not want them to have control over them (social media). It feels good to have control over that.” (Artist 1)

We perceive that the independent artists feel strongly about the control over social media, and state that if they were to hire someone to help them, they would still prefer to manage their own accounts. Artist 2 is the most enthusiastic social media user. She points out that she wants to run all of her social media accounts, and that she had a conversation about this before signing with her soon-to-be management. We interpret that there is an emotional value at stake for her and that an important condition is that the management understands how important her social media accounts are to her. Another point made by the same artist is that her brand is very close to her own personality and that it therefore would be strange to have someone else post on her accounts. Kietzmann et. al. (2011) mention identity as one of the building blocks in their Honeycomb model. Their study is situated in the social media world, which is where the interviewed artists communicate and maintain their identities. Based on this, identity construction can be seen as an important reason why the artists want to continue managing their own social media platforms with or without a management.

“For example with **Artist’s name**, she manages most of her social media accounts which I think is optimal (...) I do not know what artists you follow but it feels so much more intimate and honest, primarily on social media, if it is the artists themselves who do it.” (Communication practitioner 3)

This shows that Communication practitioner 3 works with artists that still manage their own social media presence and thinks this is beneficial. He also points out that by running one’s own social media accounts, artists get to own their own narrative and delete the bridge between them and the audience. An inference that can be made from this is that the functional building blocks relationships and conversations from Kietzmann et. al.’s (2011) Honeycomb model can be successfully implemented. The creation of closer relationships and meaningful conversations enables direct marketing, which is an important part of the promotional mix discussed by Hutchinson et. al. (2010). For independent artists, this could also mean creating meaningful bonds with important actors such as radio stations or other influencers which could facilitate personal selling. This is also an aspect of the promotional mix. The benefits of being in charge of one’s social media accounts as an artist are also highlighted by Communication practitioner 2.

“They (the record label) have the communication before the release and a little while after and then they do not give a damn. So the band needs to own that channel. Must own their communication (...) It must still be the band’s channel, the band’s voice and continuous communication.” (Communication practitioner 2)

In this quote, the importance of being in control of your own channels and owning your own communication as an artist even if you get help from an external actor is emphasized. Of course, this demands that the artist has knowledge about how to use social media. This can be linked to the term digital naturals coined by Young and Åkerström (2016), which can be applied to artists we have interviewed that know their way around the digital landscape. However, we interpret a confusion when it comes to deciding what digital channels you should use among the artists. New channels are constantly invented and it can be difficult to keep up. A red thread in the empirical material is that the artists feel pressure to be everywhere, even

though they do not necessarily know how to use certain channels. An understanding of this can be found in Jakus and Zubčić's (2016) research where they explain that the digital landscape consists of a complicated network of platforms. It is a fact that there are many platforms to choose from and we perceive that the artists who feel overwhelmed by this could benefit from getting help from a communication practitioner. An extension of this reasoning can be found in a quote from Communication practitioner 2.

“You need to monitor it and see what is working because no one would invest in building a presence on Myspace today (...) So it depends but it should be founded in authenticity towards the platform itself.” (Communication practitioner 2)

The communication practitioners have different opinions about what platforms are most effective, but it is a common understanding that one should be available on the platforms that suit one's image, lifestyle and audience. Therefore, we indeed find value in having someone professional helping artists navigate and choose from the big amount of options.

“But what I want to get out of a management is getting help with content because I do not have time for that kind of stuff. Photographing a lot and things like that.” (Artist 2)

In relation to social media, we have identified a need for support in coming up with ideas for content as well as producing it. Communication practitioner 1 tells us that she helps out with copy and images for social media and Communication practitioner 2 mentions that he often recommends content. Here, we interpret that the need can be met by the communication practitioners' competences. In this case, the competences treat practical purposes and we therefore interpret the value as functional. Zhang et. al. (2018) defines this value as a result of a service providing problem-solving and convenient features. We perceive that this is something communication practitioners do by recommending and producing content. However, not all artists require this help.

“I photograph and film quite a lot, both for us and for other artists and then it can be like music videos, live videos or album covers. And a lot of teasers and things like that for us (...) I really like creating all this material for Instagram and things like that, so I want to continue doing that.” (Artist 4)

Artist 4 tell us that they have a big interest in photography and film, and like to create content. In this case, we interpret that it is more valuable for Artist 4 to manage their visual communication on social media themselves. At the same time, Artist 3 admits he likes visual communication but not managing his social media accounts.

“My friends who have more knowledge than me tell me that I have to work more on it (Instagram). I do not think it is that much fun, but you have to expose yourself to people all the time.” (Artist 3)

Based on the quotes above, it is important to point out that if there are parts of the communication that an artist does not like to do, we interpret that they are less likely to dedicate the time. Therefore an interest is valuable, and if your interest is lacking a communication practitioner can fulfill that need. We interpret interest as an emotional value, which is included in both Sheth et. al.'s (1991) and Zhang et. al.'s (2018) value models, since we perceive interest as a certain feeling and attitude towards communication. We believe that if the artist feels that communication is fun they are more likely to do it and thereby more likely to get more exposure.

5.2.4 Spotify leverages

Another aspect of the artists' needs in relation to social media, is the platforms that are not so easily accessible and controllable as for example Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. When interviewing and asking communication practitioners about important social platforms, Spotify is mentioned as valuable.

“And I mention Spotify because in the music industry it is a social media service based on the fact that when we release new music, we communicate directly with our followers. They receive a notification saying “**band’s name** just released a new song”. There is a community which we very rapidly have contact with and very rarely but we can still use it to create a network and reach out to people.” (Communication practitioner 2)

Based on this, we can conclude that Spotify has features that fulfill several criteria from Kietzmann et. al.’s (2011) Honeycomb model. The quote above suggests that the platform incorporates the functional building blocks relationships and sharing, since it in some ways creates an opportunity for interaction between an artist and their listeners. This makes the platform a valuable tool. However, it can be argued that not all actors can benefit from Spotify’s full potential.

“It feels like Spotify is a special feature for music marketing. Because they have so much power and I do not think that anyone really knows how to get included in that. Is it algorithms? Is someone sitting there listening to things or how does it work? I do not know anything about that.” (Artist 1)

From the artists’ perspective, Spotify is seen as useful but complicated. The quote suggests that there is uncertainty about how Spotify really works and a lack of power in relation to the service. The fact that artists use Spotify and portray it as a necessary tool agrees with Swanson’s (2013) statement that Spotify has changed the music industry. Based on this quote we interpret that it could be valuable getting help from someone who possesses knowledge as well as leverage that can influence how Spotify uses its power. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, record labels have leverage over Spotify since the streaming service would not function without the music provided from the record labels (Swanson, 2013). This gives the record labels an advantage, which could lead to placements in editorial playlists with many listeners and that their signed artists are highlighted in a beneficial way. This aspect could be understood by discussing another building block in Kietzmann et. al.’s (2011) Honeycomb model, reputation. With the previous reasoning in mind, we argue that a record label or communication practitioner with a good reputation can provide benefits for artists.

“So we receive exposure from Spotify by doing something for them, playing at a party or so on.” (Communication practitioner 2)

This demonstrates a more practical exchange. However, even major record labels getting benefits from Spotify engage in some sort of exchange. They allow Spotify to host their music, and Spotify then in return places their songs on credible playlists and so on. Here, we identify another functional value since the communication practitioners provide a service for the artists by adding exposure on Spotify. However, just because you are a communication practitioner in the music industry, it does not guarantee that you have the contacts needed to receive these benefits.

5.3 The value of credibility

Spotify is a clear example of a platform where credibility in the form of contacts, experience and reputation is important. However, there are also other areas of communication where credibility seems to play an important role.

“If you send an email from artist2@gmail.com, they are like “yeah right sweetheart”. (...) I have reached out to a management because I need that kind of credibility.” (Artist 2)

Artist 2 means that it is more likely to reach through with a professional email and signature. We interpret that she believes she would be taken more seriously if a credible person vouched for her. Morris and Goldsworthy (2016) mention that technological innovations have made it easier to contact the right people, which we believe has created opportunities for artists to manage their communication. However, we understand that there is a perception that you need credibility in order to reach through.

“I think that it shows 100% if someone knows what they are doing when they send out these things. Some independent actors might know this and can produce really good press releases while at the same time a professional public relations practitioner can sound like a child. (...) There is a huge difference when emails are sent directly from a band and it is written in first person or if it is a signature that looks professional.” (Communication practitioner 4)

This quote shows that communication skills do not necessarily come with the job title. Artists can be sufficient in their communication and do a good job reaching out. However, Communication practitioner 4 also mentions that the point of view in an email matters. It can be interpreted as more credible and professional when another person sends an email telling actors such as music critics, radio shows or similar how talented the artist is than if the artist is doing it themselves.

“When emailing I see myself as my own manager, and then I do not write in the press release that “I am interested in playing” but that the artist is interested in playing. I think that as soon as you sound professional you already stand out a little.” (Artist 5)

This suggests that a solution to sound credible and do one’s own communication is to write about oneself in third person. However, based on the other quotes above we understand that one needs good communication skills in order to sound professional. Artist 5 has an education in communication which might be the reason she possesses this knowledge. The same artist points out another perspective and states that she perceives the music and communication as more credible and genuine if the artist is behind it themselves.

“There is something special about being self-made today” (Artist 5)

“This experience has been great, but what I have learnt from spending this much time in these DIY circles is that you unfortunately have to leave them if you want to reach out. Because it is very unusual that an indie artist, without any help, makes it. That is pretty sad because you want to remain in these “No, but we are supporting each other, we do this ourselves”. But it is easy to settle. So you have to compromise.” (Artist 2)

Artist 5 describes it as beautiful and cool to create everything yourself from the bottom up and that it adds weight. This insight could mean that it is valuable to do everything yourself as an artist. Looking at Sheth et. al.'s (1991) and Zhang et. al.'s (2018) models, this could be identified as a social value since it allows the artists and others to identify their belonging to a social group of self-sufficient artists. In the same way, getting help from a professional communication practitioner can put the artist in another social group. Here, the social value could be interpreted as being a part of a group of professional and successful artists. Based on the quote above, this is the group we interpret Artist 2 is striving to be included in, even though she has valued being a part of what she calls the DIY circle. Therefore, depending on one's personal values, we conclude that there is a social value in being part of either of the groups. The wish to belong to a certain group might also depend on the artists' capability to further their career on their own. For example, Artist 5 might value being self-made since she believes she has the right prerequisites to make it on her own, while Artist 2 feels like she lacks the experience and knowledge needed to become successful.

5.4 The value of experience and knowledge

We perceive that the communication practitioners provide knowledge and experience that can be beneficial for the artists' careers, and therefore fulfill an epistemic value. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Sheth et. al. (1991) describe this value as being met when the desire for knowledge is satisfied. In relation to experience and knowledge, having contacts is mentioned as beneficial.

“And then I do not have the contacts, which my soon-to-be manager has. So I can benefit from the fact that she has credibility and knows people” (Artist 2)

We interpret that Artist 2 perceives that there is a value in her manager having many contacts, which makes her more likely to succeed in her communication. A classical perception of someone working with public relations, which according to Hutchinson et. al. (2010) is a part of the promotional mix in the music industry, is that they have the capacity to build strong relationships (Jakus & Zubčić, 2016). In

line with the theory, interviewing Artist 4, we understand that it is expected of communication practitioners to have more contacts and experience and therefore know whom to get in touch with and how.

“You notice that the longer you work in the business, and the more you work with people, you learn that these people only want two sentences and then it is done or just a link to the music and “here is this song”. And some people want that whole biography with a story. That depends on whom you are pitching to and whom you are pitching about.” (Communication practitioner 1)

“Generally I can take my experience from how I have worked with other bands for example and apply it to the current situation.” (Communication practitioner 4)

The quotes show that experience provides knowledge about how to create and manage relationships with meaningful actors. It also proposes that the experience of knowing what efforts have been successful in the past can be beneficial when encountering new projects. From what has been said in this section previously from the artists’ perspective, this suggests that the artists’ expectations can be fulfilled by a communication practitioner. Our reasoning confirms Olander’s (2016) previous finding where she states that knowledge about the line of business is an important trait for communication practitioners.

“And if you have learnt that, writing that press release, understanding the angle, how to angle a press release, what do they go on and what is the purpose of this press release. What do we really need this for? I mean, that is artist development.” (Communication practitioner 5)

From another perspective, it is perceived as a valuable aspect to get knowledge and experience as well as creating relationships and contacts by managing your own communication as an artist. We therefore argue that it is valuable for independent artists to build experience and knowledge in relation to the music industry in order to communicate successfully and comprehend how the business works.

5.5 The value of emotional support

“We talk to everyone (artists) every day. It is human lives. There are people breaking up with their girlfriend, getting sad. (...) Me and **artist’s name** have been working together for a long time (...) I know exactly what I can and cannot do, what she needs and if I do not know I can ask her about anything. And that is a way to keep people inspired, that they know that they can depend on you.” (Communication practitioner 5)

The quote shows that being an emotional support is one of the most important aspects of the communication practitioner’s job. In the music industry, a unique feature is that the “products” are humans, which might be the reason that this support is so important. A marketing manager working with food would not have to consider this factor in relation to their products. Communication practitioner 1 expresses some opinions that can be linked to this, meaning that the artists appreciate having someone that can support and accompany them at gigs and on-site of media appearances. She talks about the “invisible tasks” that mean a lot to the artists functionally, but also emotionally.

“I actually believe that it is not only about me as a person but to have someone, someone that is not a part of the band for example but still cares as much as if they were a part of it. I really want to believe that it adds some kind of emotional boost. Also, to be in contact with someone who believes in what you do. I think that is the key to kick start the confidence and focus more and more on creating and performing.” (Communication practitioner 4)

“As a manager you are closest to the artist through ups and downs. I think that it is important to have someone who supports you but not always agrees with you.” (Communication practitioner 3)

As can be understood from these quotes, the relationship with the artist is seen as an important part of the communication practitioner’s role. We interpret that trust, honesty and understanding is the foundation for a good relationship. Sheth et. al. (1991) and Zhang et. al. (2018) describe the emotional value as the ability to stimulate feelings. Since we have found a pattern in the communication practitioners’

wish to encourage feelings of trust, confidence and inspiration we argue that they fulfill an emotional value. Here an observation can be made, arguing that this type of emotional support could be seen as internal communication between the artist and the communication practitioner. We argue that it is important that the artist gets the right prerequisites in order to feel well and healthy. Furthermore, we perceive the support as a way to help the artist perform better. This makes this value special since it supports the artist's career in a more indirect way than for example external promotion efforts mentioned in the promotional mix by Hutchinson et. al. (2010). In the promotional mix the goal is that actions will lead directly to publicity and exposure while in this case, we argue that emotional support gives the artist better prerequisites to perform and therefore succeed in the long run.

On the other hand, none of the artists interviewed mention this emotional support as a need or a reason to get help from a communication practitioner. A reason for this could be that this aspect is not the primary purpose to look for a management or similar. However, since the communication practitioners are convinced that this is valuable for the artists, this need is perhaps more indispensable later on in the career or more appreciated when received. To come to a final conclusion on this matter, it would be necessary to interview artists that already receive help from a communication practitioner.

5.6 The economical value

One of the values brought up by Zhang et. al. (2018) is the economical value. With new innovations, like streaming services, it is more difficult for people within the music industry to earn the same kind of money they did in the late '90s (Collins & Young, 2010). However, in this study we strive to discuss the economical value from a communicative perspective.

“Because I need a budget. And I absolutely feel like this indie thing is so much fun and I wish I could continue doing it. But I have bills to pay, I do not have a budget, I do not have any major contacts in like radio marketing, playlisting and billboards.” (Artist 2)

We perceive that Artist 2 sees money as a facilitator for better communication. She explains that she has been enjoying the responsibility of taking care of her own communication but that she does not have the resources necessary to reach any further. She sees a management as a step towards a record label where the “real” money is. The value of having access to monetary resources seems to be that they can help her grow as an artist.

“We do not pay to do anything if you understand what I mean. There might be operating costs that we might have to cover if you think the promotion thing is worth it or if you need to travel to Norway to do a radio appearance. Then you might have to pay for the travel, you know everything related, but you do not pay for the promotion thing itself. But otherwise, I suppose we mostly work with earned media.” (Communication practitioner 1)

This quote shows that there could be an economical value in having someone taking care of operating costs. Communication practitioner 1 emphasizes economical support that could be valuable to promote an artist. In relation to Artist 2, we perceive that a part of her economical need could be fulfilled by a communication practitioner. In our theoretical framework, we refer to Fill and Turnbull’s (2016) explanations of paid media, owned media and earned media as ways to work with promotion. A common theme among the communication practitioners is working with earned and owned media. However, it is stated that earned media takes up most of their time. This is often referred to as the classical way of working with public relations (Morrison & Goldsworthy, 2016). In this case, it includes third-parties vouching for the artist. While Communication practitioner 1 does not work with paid media, she explains that there is a digital team at her workplace that is responsible for ads and similar, which is the advertising part of the promotional mix described by Hutchinson et. al. (2010). This means that the artists that are signed to the record label can still benefit from the advantages of paid media.

“We have to start off by finding a third party to tell people why this is the best thing since sliced bread. (...) But, to do paid marketing from the beginning is doomed I think. (...) All my clients have some kind of pathos. They have something to say. You have to spread that message. (...) And then it is all about getting the

attention span to a certain level where you start reaching other segments and then you can do paid marketing.” (Communication practitioner 3)

We interpret that Communication practitioner 3 has fixed opinions about when to focus on earned, owned and paid media. He gives the impression that it can be damaging to implement paid media from the beginning. Looking at the artists’ responses, a mentioned benefit of having more money is being able to reach more people. As seen above Artist 2 talks about being able to pay her bills, but other than that she does not mention getting a higher salary as the main focus of the economical value. One reason for the artists’ valuing the attention more than an economic income, might be that the artists we have interviewed are at the beginning of their careers. Swanson (2013) establishes that in order to make money, you have to reach a crowd. This might be why communication for attention rather than a salary is the main focus. In other words, the economical value for the artist is that money is a facilitator for communicative actions that lead to exposure.

5.7 The value of getting help at the right time

We have identified that the need for a professional communication practitioner varies throughout different phases of an artist's career. This is pointed out by both artists and communication practitioners in different ways. Applying Sheth et. al.’s (1991) concepts of different values, this could be interpreted as a conditional value which means that the situation and the conditions are important factors in the decision making process.

“It takes a lot of work as an individual if you want to do everything yourself. So it depends on what you want with your career.”

(Communication practitioner 1)

“You do not need a manager until you have something to manage.”

(Communication practitioner 2)

We interpret that the need for help could depend on the artist's career goals. From Communication practitioner 1's quote, we understand that when artists reach a certain level in their career there will not be enough time to do the communication work successfully. The amount of work can be difficult to handle on your own as an artist. At the same time, Communication practitioner 2's quote suggests that it could be valuable for artists to get the project going before reaching out for help. As previously mentioned, there are valuable outcomes of managing one's own communication in the beginning in order to learn about the industry and get knowledge and experience.

“But what I think is that you need some kind of partner. Because I do not believe that you can do everything on a professional, good level, by yourself.” (Communication practitioner 3)

As we can see, an opinion among communication practitioners is that an external partner can be a valuable asset if one wants to appear professional as an artist. We interpret that one needs some kind of support, not only to handle the workload but also to do the communication well. There is also an understanding among the artists that getting help from an external partner can provide benefits.

“I have reached out to a management to get that credibility when I look for a record label.” (Artist 2)

In the quote Artist 2 mentions credibility as one of the benefits one gets from a communication practitioner. We interpret that the connection to the conditional value in this case could be that the artist feels like this is the right time in her career to reach out for help. As mentioned before Artist 2 has been an independent artist and has now signed to a management that she will start working with soon. We interpret that she views her career path in steps where independent is the first one, having a management is the second one and being signed to a record label is the final one. This finding supports Aponte's (2011) reasoning about record labels still being relevant. We can thereby confirm that there are still independent artists that share this belief, even though Aponte's study was carried out several years ago. From this section of the analysis, we see that an artist's need for a communication

practitioner varies during different stages of the career and depends on the career goals.

6. Discussion and conclusions

In this section, we present two new value models for the music industry as well as a discussion and conclusions based on the findings in our analysis. The models are created to make our findings easy to overview and compare. Their purpose is to clearly answer our research questions about the value of managing your own communication as an artist versus receiving help from a professional communication practitioner. The models should be treated as a complement to the more nuanced discussion and conclusions, which will be presented further on.

6.1 New value models for the music industry

As Olander (2016), we have found that communication practitioners work in different ways. Many of our interviewees point out that there is no manual. However, with this study we have aimed to identify patterns and discrepancies in order to better understand the value for artists brought by professional communication practitioners versus the communication they can accomplish on their own. We have identified artists' needs as well as important qualities for communication practitioners. This shows what communication practitioners in the music industry need to offer to stay relevant in today's digitalized world. We will begin by presenting our two value models and then develop their content by discussing, summarizing and drawing conclusions based on our analysis.

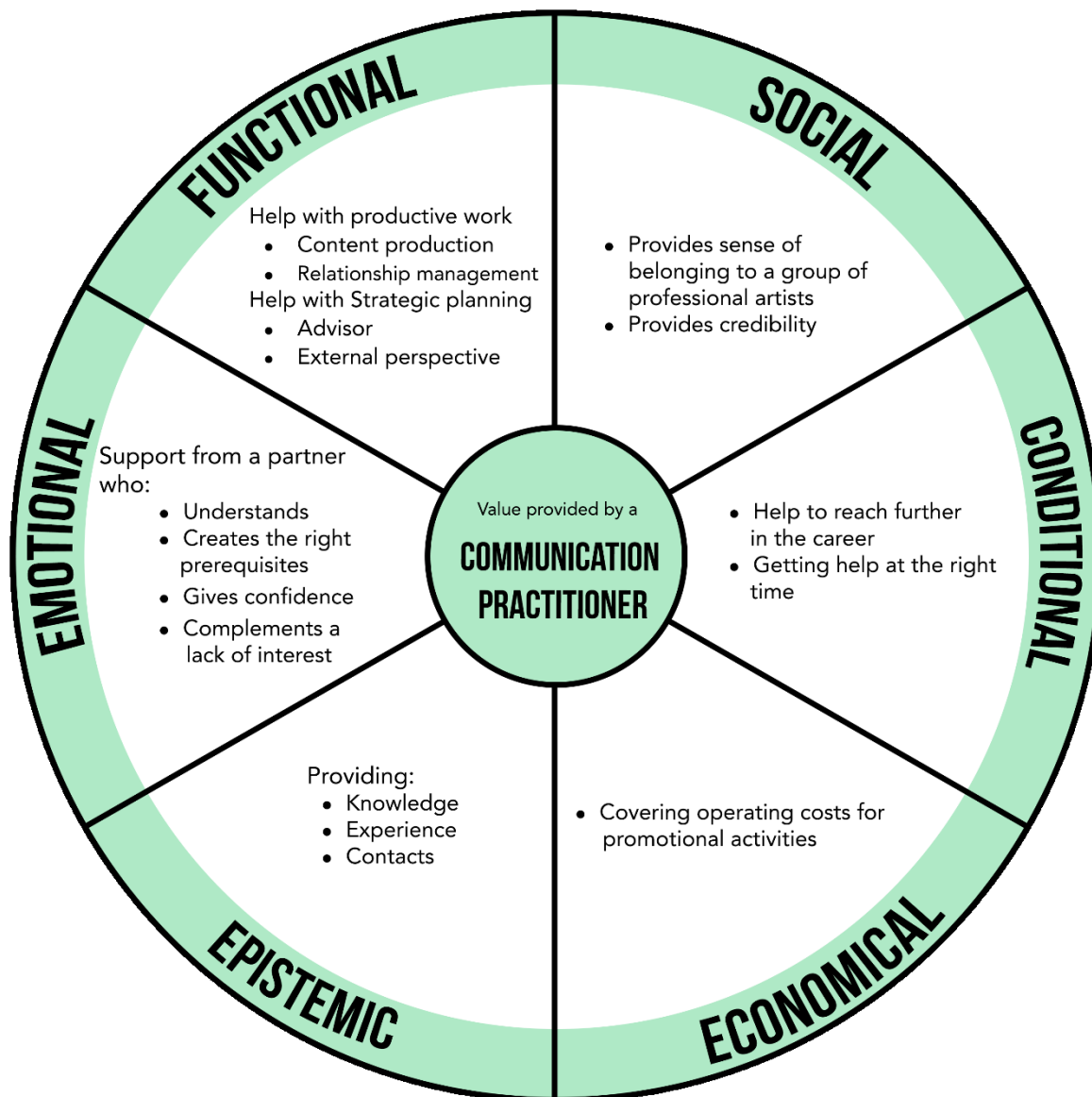


Figure 1. The communicative value provided for an artist by a communication practitioner in the music industry.

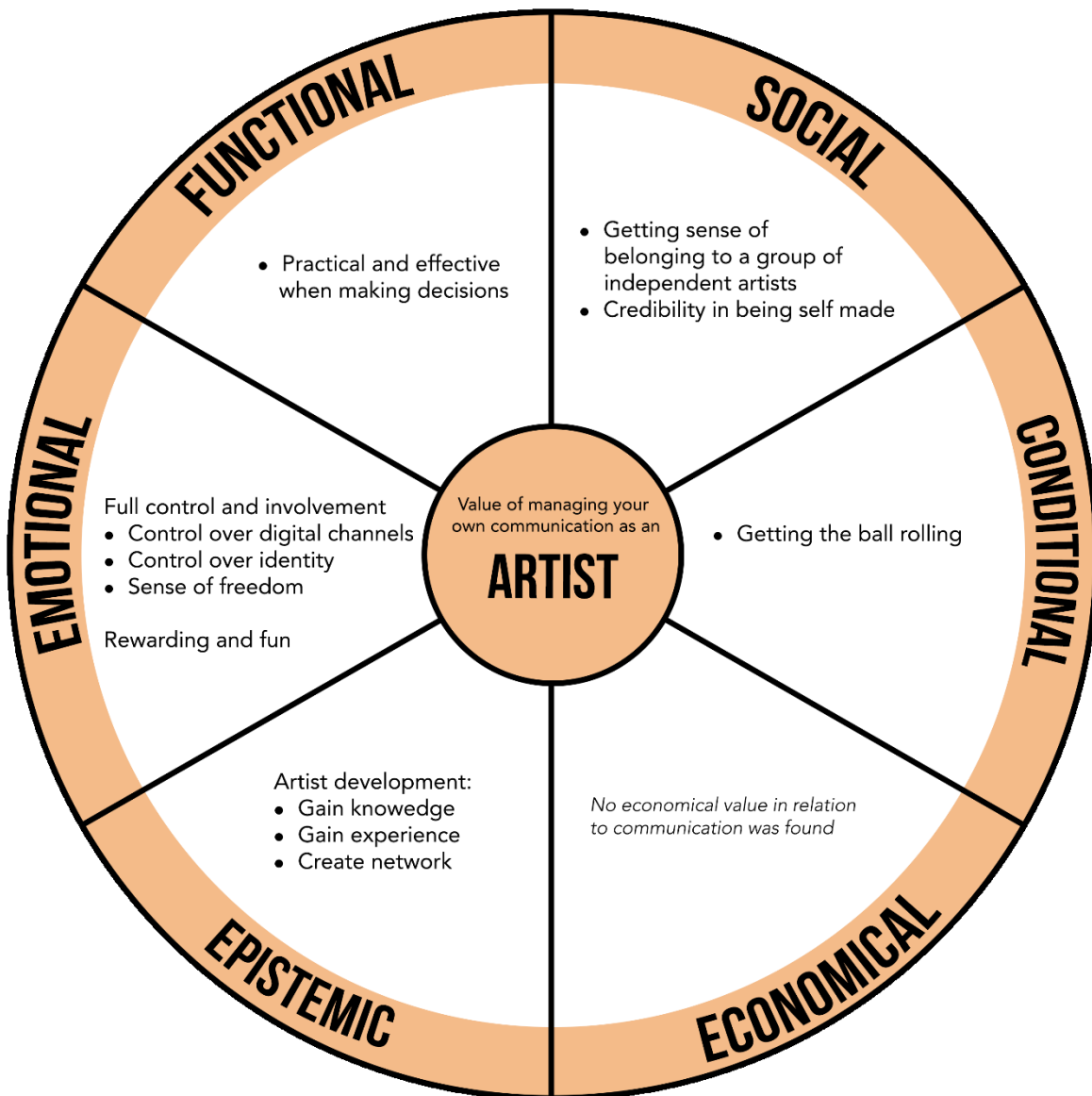


Figure 2. The communicative value of managing your own communication as an independent artist.

Throughout the analysis, we have found aspects that could be interpreted as functional values. Looking at the value communication practitioners can contribute with, we see that they can help with strategic planning, content production and relationship management. They also function as advisors, help with discipline and handle so-called invisible tasks. An implication for this is that the artists get more time to create music. From the artists' perspective, the main functional value is not having to go through anyone else when making decisions. In other words, it can be seen as more practical and effective. Discussing this value, we are also able to legitimize the value of strategizing communication in order to reach optimal results. We interpret that the communication practitioners have a deeper understanding and commitment to strategy which could be a building block for success.

The main social value can be perceived as belonging, which can be found on both sides. On the one hand, an independent artist can be a part of a group of other independent artists where they support each other and find a sense of community. Some portray this as credible since the artist is self-made. On the other hand, artists can also find belonging in being signed to a management that can be described as another community of professional artists. Here, the credibility lies within having someone else vouching for the artist. This value depends on what group the artist wishes to identify with. We interpret that some of the artists are happy being part of the first group, while some aim to reach the second one. It is not only connected to the will to belong to a certain group but also the need for professional help in order to reach further in one's career.

This brings us to the epistemic value, which we have connected to knowledge, experience and having contacts. In conclusion, the perceived value of getting help is getting support from someone with these qualities. This point of view implies that all communication practitioners automatically have a useful network, valuable wisdom and a successful background. We argue that this might be problematic for new communication practitioners entering the industry since these aspects are seen as the foundation of credibility but take time to build. Knowledge can be taught, but the other two qualities have to be built up over time. From the perspective of independent artists, the value of managing one's own communication could instead be gaining knowledge, experience and contacts for oneself.

The conditional value is mainly about how the artists want their careers to develop. We find that there is a belief that it is important to learn the business and build a foundation for the communication. This is referred to as artist development and getting the ball rolling oneself. Therefore, it can be meaningful to manage one's own communication at the beginning of the career. Even so, there is an opinion that in order to be able to make a living from one's music, the artist will eventually need some sort of partner to ease the workload and contribute with professional insights. From this, we can conclude that the communication practitioner is a valuable asset in the music industry.

In the analysis, we have found that while the emotional value is obvious for the communication practitioners, the artists' do not mention the emotional support as a need in the same literal way. We can conclude that the internal communication perspective is important, and that understanding, confidence-boosting and creating the right prerequisites are valuable building blocks. In relation to promotion, this value could be seen as a facilitator since artists need to feel comfortable in order to create music. Without the music there would be nothing to promote. The emotional value is also meaningful since the music industry deals with humans as opposed to things. We therefore argue that it might be valuable to make internal relationship management a natural part of communication education. Since the independent artists are not aware of this particular value, we suggest that communication practitioners could benefit from finding new ways to communicate this in order to gain new clients. Another emotional value we have brought up is interest. This study points out that it is more valuable to manage your own communication as an artist if you have an interest in it. If one's interest is lacking it is valuable to hire someone to do the communication since it is less likely that one will carry through the communication work tasks.

The last value is the economical value. There is a belief among the artists that they will get a bigger budget for marketing if they sign to a management or record label. The artists do not mention earning money as a primary goal, but rather highlight the value of reaching out to a bigger audience which can be facilitated by having a bigger budget. We have found a discrepancy, where the artists believe they will get more paid advertising by signing to a management. At the same time, the communication practitioners favor earned and owned media. This does not imply

that the artists will get less attention, but their expectations about paid media might not be met. Nevertheless, as seen above, the communication practitioners can pay for operating costs which can facilitate more promotional activities.

There are some other valuable findings in our empirical material worth mentioning. Before this study, we did not view Spotify as a social media channel. However, throughout the research we have found that Spotify can be used as an interactive platform through the interviews. We later confirmed this to be accurate by applying concepts from the Honeycomb model. Yet, Spotify is not a democratic platform where everyone has the same prerequisites since some actors have leverage. This kind of power can be seen as another value artists get from receiving help from a professional communication practitioner. However, this power is reserved for certain actors and not all communication practitioners.

To conclude, there is value in both receiving help from a communication practitioner and managing your own communication as an independent artist. We have found that while the value categories can be used for both groups, there are different needs for the artists depending on their ambitions and where they are in their careers. Some artists are satisfied with managing their own communication, while others cannot fulfill their communicative needs themselves. It is important to point out that not all values need to be fulfilled in order for the artists to perceive the options as valuable. This is emphasized by Sheth et. al. (1991). We perceive that the main reason for hiring a professional communication practitioner to help you as an artist is the opportunity for increased exposure and success. The main reason that artists want to manage their own communication seems to be the sense of full control, involvement and freedom. As explained, we have focused on a communicative perspective and mainly on promotion. This means that there might be other values that we have excluded from our study.

Our hope is that the results could be meaningful both theoretically and practically. This means that the models can be used for further research in order to develop the knowledge even more, both within the music industry and other similar industries. Also, it means that the models can be useful to legitimize the value of professional communication. In other words, we believe that our results can be viewed as a contribution to the field of strategic communication and digital media.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

Even though we have concentrated the study on the pop music industry we believe there are some valuable findings that could be applied to other parts of the music industry that promote other genres. The results could be interesting for other industries as well, especially within entertainment and sports where communication practitioners manage people. We suggest applying a similar method to confirm if the internal relationship management is as valuable in other situations. Since we have conducted a qualitative study, it could be interesting to investigate the same research questions using different methods to gain new insights. Another suggestion is including artists that are already receiving communicative help to discover their perceptions. Do they see the same values as the communication practitioners, and are their expectations being met? We have found unique insights about Spotify and believe it could be interesting to explore if other streaming services implement the same power system.

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8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interview guide for communication practitioners in the music industry.

Orientering/Orientation

Vilken titel har du? (Vad innebär det)

Vilken utbildning har du?

Hur länge har du arbetat med kommunikation inom musikbranschen?

Vilka artisters kommunikation är du involverad i?

Hur involverade är artisterna i kommunikationsarbetet?

Vilka är dina huvudsakliga arbetsuppgifter?

Vad innebär dessa mer konkret?

Hur tänker du kring strategi? Alltså planerad kommunikation? /Vad ser du för värde i att planera kommunikationen strategiskt?

Vi har förstått att det finns tre huvudsakliga tillvägagångssätt för att få publicitet i media, då man pratar om ägd, förtjänad eller betald media. Hur arbetar du med dem?

Hur har framväxten av digitala/sociala medier påverkat ditt arbete?

Vilka digitala plattformar tycker du är mest värdefulla?

Vilken uppgift i ditt arbete anser du vara viktigast?

Vad gör du som får störst effekt för en artist?

Hur ser du på att independent artister kan sköta mer av sin digitala kommunikation själva?

Vilket värde anser du att ditt yrke tillför?

Är det något du vill tillägga?

Avslutning/Closure

Appendix 2: Interview guide for independent pop artists.

Orientering/Orientation

Hur länge har du varit aktiv som artist/band?

Vilken relation har du till kommunikation? (Utbildning, erfarenheter)

Hur sköter du din digitala kommunikation? Vilka arbetsuppgifter tycker du ingår?

Vilka plattformar tycker du är värdefulla att finnas på?

Hur tänker du kring strategiskt planerad kommunikation? /Vad ser du för värde i att planera kommunikationen strategiskt?

Vilket värde ser du i att sköta din egen kommunikation?

Har du en budget för din kommunikation? Varför/varför inte?

Vill du ha hjälp av en kommunikatör med den digitala kommunikationen?

Om nej, varför? Om ja, varför?

Vad anser du att man som artist får ut av att få professionell hjälp med sin kommunikation?

Vad tycker du är svårast med att sköta din egen kommunikation/promotion?

Tycker du att din digitala kommunikation ger effekt, varför/varför inte?

Om ja, vad av det du gör får störst effekt enligt dig?

Är det något du vill tillägga?

Avslutning/Closure

Appendix 3: Presentation of the interviewees.

Interviewee	Professional title	Sex	Interview duration	Date
Communication practitioner 1	PR/promotion manager	Woman	00:40:35	08/04/2020
Communication practitioner 2	Artist manager	Man	01:10:27	08/04/2020
Communication practitioner 3	Music management founder and music director	Man	01:16:02	16/04/2020
Communication practitioner 4	Manager, music journalist and active musician	Man	00:57:27	22/04/2020
Communication practitioner 5	Manager and CEO of an A&R and music management company	Man	00:53:28	27/04/2020

Interviewee	Situation	Sex	Interview durance	Date
Artist 1	Signed with a record label which provides some guidance for the communication, however she still manages most of her communication by herself.	Woman	00:28:03	06/04/2020
Artist 2	Just started a collaboration with a management, however they have not started working together yet and she is still responsible for her communication.	Woman	00:29:42	08/04/2020
Artist 3	Completely independent which means that he manages his communication on his own.	Man	00:36:13	13/04/2020
Artist 4	A duo, completely independent which means that they manage their communication on their own.	1 Woman and 1 Man	00:23:13	16/04/2020
Artist 5	Both an artist as well as an educated and active communication practitioner within the music industry. She takes care of both her own as well as other artists' communication.	Woman	00:38:13	24/04/2020