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BRAND COLLABORATION BETWEEN ARTISTS AND COMPANIES

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Brand collaboration between artists and companies

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Abstract

This thesis aimed to investigate the cornerstones of effective brand cooperation, what factors influence the acceptance or rejection of collaboration, and does international cooperation have any unique features. The research was related to brand collaboration in the music industry and was carried out from the artist's perspective. The work aimed to obtain new research information on the topic, which could at the same time be provided to the commissioner. This commissioner for this thesis was a modern music company Family in Music.

The thesis was a qualitative study, using semi-structured thematic interviews as the data acquisition method. Artists were interviewed for the research itself, but due to the minimal database on the topic, experts in the field were interviewed in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Based on the interview results, significant factors in brand collaboration were compatibility with the artist brand, shared values, and reasonable compensation. In this manner, the artist and the partner company are satisfied, and the result of the work will benefit both involved. Research findings from international brand collaboration highlighted a careful review of contract terms, as practices can vary between countries and companies. Also, the partner company should have a broad overview of the working methods of the country and the artist in question to make the collaboration successful. The research findings inspired further research ideas, which could include, for example, researching brand collaborations by country or music genre.

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Nimike
Brändiyhteistyö artistien ja yritysten välillä

Toimeksiantaja
Family in Music Oy

Tiivistelmä

Tämän opinnäytetyön tarkoituksena oli tutkia mitkä ovat toimivan brändiyhteistyön kulmakivet, mitkä tekijät vaikuttavat yhteistyön hyväksymiseen tai hylkäämiseen ja onko kansainvälisellä yhteistyöllä joitakin erityispiirteitä. Tutkimus liittyi brändiyhteistöihin musiikkialalla ja toteutettiin artistin näkökulmasta. Työn tavoitteena oli saada uutta tutkimustietoa aiheesta, jota voidaan samalla tarjota toimeksiantajalle. Tämän opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana toimi moderni musiikkiyhtiö Family in Music.

Opinnäytetyö oli luonteeltaan kvalitatiivinen tutkimus, jonka tiedonhankintamenetelmänä käytettiin puolistrukturoituja teemahaastatteluja. Itse tutkimukseen haastateltiin artisteja, mutta aiheen hyvin rajallisen tietokannan vuoksi tietoperustaan haastateltiin alan asiantuntijoita, jotta aiheesta pystyttiin saamaan kattava ymmärrys.

Haastatteluiden tulosten perusteella merkittäviä tekijöitä brändiyhteistyössä olivat yhteensopiisuus artistibrändin kanssa, yhteiset arvot ja kohtuullinen korvaus. Tällöin molemmat osapuolet voivat olla tyytyväisiä ja työn tulos hyödyttää niin yritystä kuin artistiakin. Kansainvälisen brändiyhteistyön tutkimustuloksissa korostui sopimusehtojen huolellinen tarkistaminen, sillä käytännöt voivat vaihdella eri maiden ja yritysten välillä. Lisäksi tutkimushavainnointona partneriyrityksellä tulisi olla laaja kokonaiskuva kyseessä oleman maan ja artistin työskentelytavoista, joiden tulisi kohdata yhteistyön onnistumisen kannalta. Tutkimushavainnot innoittivat jatkotutkimusideoita, joita voisivat olla esimerkiksi brändiyhteistöiden tutkiminen maa- tai musiikkigenre kohteisesti.

Kieli
Englanti

Sivuja 31
Liitteet 3
Liitesivumäärä 5

Asiasanat
Brändiyhteistyö, artisti, brändäys, henkilöbrändi, vaikuttaja, vaikuttajamarkkinointi

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GLOSSARY

Artist	Generally, an artist represents anyone who creates art. Often the term artist is attached to visual arts, but in this thesis, the term denotes a singer who is influential in the field of music. Nowadays, the artist's work image is extensive, and the artist is often at the same time a musician, influencer, and most commonly a songwriter.
Independent artist	An independent artist is someone who is not under a contract with a record label. Therefore, their business is not dependent on others and they may have their own company or business name, for example.
Record label	Record labels, also known as record companies, are companies that manufacture, distribute, and promote affiliated musicians' recordings. Globally the biggest record labels, also called major labels are Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group.

1 INTRODUCTION

Unquestionably, many consumers have come across an ad featuring a familiar artist on TV, radio, social media, or even the streets. This enormously increasing way of marketing is called the brand collaboration between artists and companies, also known as music partnership, artist-, brand-, and influencer collaboration. As it is a relatively growing field of marketing, the topic's terminology is constantly changing, and different terms are used among different actors. Using artists in marketing itself is not an entirely new phenomenon, as influencer marketing has been around for decades. However, social media's explosive growth has brought new channels to influencers and made it possible to share opinions and experiences more visibly with consumers (Halonen 2019, 36).

This research delves into the phenomenon from the artist's perspective and examines what makes the artists accept or refuse the collaboration offer and the cornerstones of effective collaboration. Besides, the specific features of international cooperation will be reviewed. The study's empirical material consists of previous research data and results from expert interviews. The research itself utilizes interviews with two well-known Finnish artists.

The commissioner of this thesis is a modern music company called Family in Music Oy. In practice, Family in Music is an online platform that connects artists and music professionals globally and offers tools from distribution through career development to funding. Family in Music's mission is to take artists to the next level, towards artistic and financial independence – and success. This study will provide them valuable information about the artist's desire for collaboration. This specific information can become especially essential if the company decides to expand its marketing to brand partnerships.

The thesis proceeds so that the theoretical part is covered first, which includes what is meant by brand collaboration and how personal branding and influencer marketing are related to it. After this, the artist's brand collaboration is discussed in more detail, after which the research results will be analyzed. Lastly, there is the conclusion where the whole study is reviewed in aggregate and possible topics for further research are opened. The structure of the study can be better seen in the figure 1. on the next page.

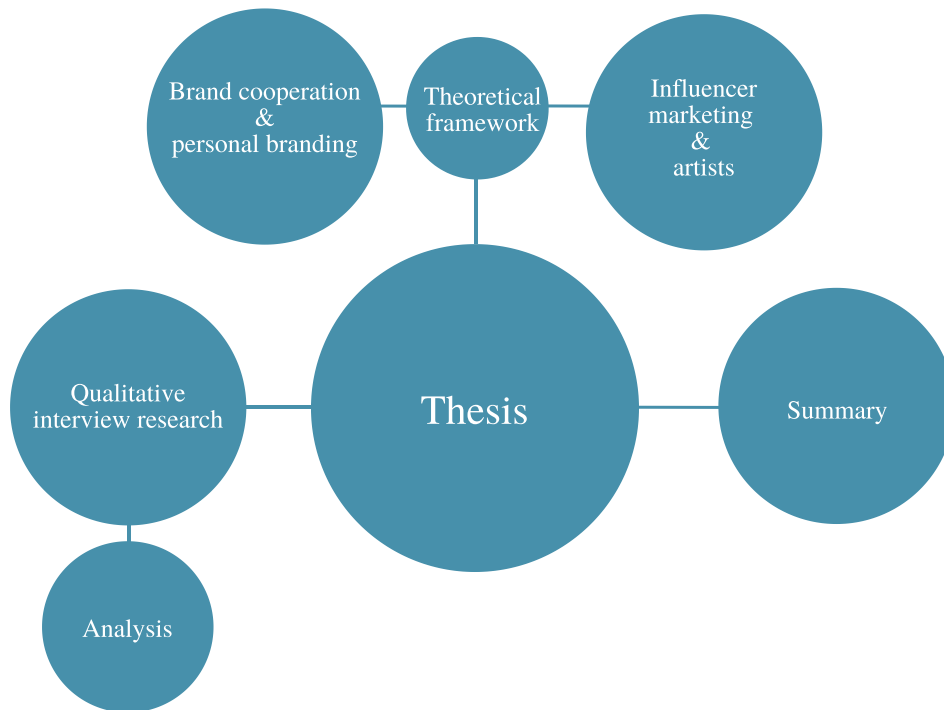


Figure 1. Thesis structure

1.1 Topic selection

It can be stated that the year 2020 and beginning of 2021 has been extremely difficult for the music industry all over the world. Live performances are commonly artists' main source of income, and during the past year, the covid-19 pandemic has cut almost all of them. Therefore, brand cooperation is becoming an even bigger part of the artist's cash flow due to decreased physical record sales in recent years. For example, in the year 2020, the U.S music industry's revenue, 85%, came from streaming, while still in 2016, the percentage was only 51,4%. (Friedlander 2016 & 2020). In practice, this means that artists have a harder time earning because physical record sales were more lucrative than streams. Now, other ways for artists to earn are highlighted, and brand cooperation can be one viable way to get income. Personally, this turning point in the music industry fascinated me and made me want to explore the subject with the focus on brand collaboration from an artist's perspective. Also, as an aspiring artist myself, choosing this topic would improve my professional competence more in this specific area.

1.2 Previous studies

As soon as the thesis process began, it was quickly noticed that there were not many previous academical studies or literature focusing only on artists' and companies' brand cooperation. For example, the *Art of Successful Brand Collaborations* published by Taylor and Francis 2020, was the only imprinted book I managed to discover directly related to this thesis's topic. Artists' brand partnerships had been mainly presented on the internet and news, and multiple non-academic sources were found on the subject. These were, e.g., various magazines and websites in the music field. In other words, there was a research gap that supported my decision to choose this particular topic. Lack of academic sources contributed to the difficulty of retrieving information and showed that this study is truly necessary and can also be considered interesting. However, the issues related to information retrieval were solved using expert interviews, described more later in this thesis.

Nevertheless, themes around the brand collaboration had been studied in the form of bachelor's and master's theses. There were several studies mainly on influencer marketing between social media influencers and companies. Perspectives were, among other things developing influencer marketing, selecting the right influencers, ethics, and various guides for companies. These studies were exciting to read as a researcher because artists can be identified as a part of today's influencers so that the same information could be utilized and applied in this study.

One interesting study was Elizaveta Riabochkina's (2020) master's thesis on the Execution of influencer marketing campaigns on social media. Her master thesis looked at how companies could optimize their working methods when working with an influencer. In other words, the researcher and I had a common interest in studying the growing marketing trend. In this case, Riabochkina focused more on how companies could work better to achieve successful cooperation with influencers while the perspective of my research is the view of the artist.

Since brand collaborations are strongly related to branding and personal branding, I investigated studies from this certain area too. To notice many students' bachelor theses were also found in branding and how to build them. This topic had been studied, e.g.,

from the perspective of the individuals and the companies. As, an example, in her dissertation, Alapeteri (2018) studied the brand, i.e., perceptions of business cooperation, and states that branding in international markets requires extensive communication and interaction skills. This is particularly emphasized in situations where neither party's first language is not English. Besides, from a branding perspective, the parties also need to pay attention to how they communicate because language creates images.

Honkala, (2016) in turn, had studied personal branding as part of corporate operations in his thesis. According to Honkala, personal branding strongly supported the companies' operations, as it enhances the company's image and, at the same time also its credibility. According to Honkala (2016), companies do not yet know how to utilize personal branding enough. However, this study was conducted more than five years ago, so the situation may have already changed in a more professional direction. According to a study by Honkala (2016), the financial investment in personal branding can be small if you know how to make extensive use of social media services. Thus, Honkala's (2016) research finding confirms the importance of utilizing social media while doing a brand collaboration.

Among many, one interesting observation was Jenna Nurme's master's degree (Nurmi 2009) in artist branding, which provided comprehensive information on branding in the music industry. The study did not directly address brand collaborations but provided good background information for this thesis. Another great thesis about artist branding was Rämö's (2018) study where the outcome was a guide on how to brand an artist. According to Rämö, there is no right or straightforward way to create a brand for an artist. It is crucial to think about each artist individually and how to start building the artist brand. According to Rämö (2018), one important aspect is the artist's authenticity, so it is not worth creating a brand if the artist does not naturally settle for it or against the artist's principles or musical style.

In addition to the data above, information directly about brand collaboration with artists in practice were found. There were several examples, but among them were found e.g. collaboration between Isac Elliot and Swedish functional beverage brand Vitamin Well (Vitamin Well, 2018) and world known collab with Beyonce and Pepsi (Sisario B, 2012). These were a useful source of information because these studies could be presented in

this thesis as a practical example and would provide inside information on cooperation and its benefits. One great source was an international partnership by Carly Rae Jepsen and Visit Lapland (House of Lapland 2020) which will be opened in more detail in this thesis in section 4.4. It served as a great example and showed that the topic had been studied in the past. In summary, all previous studies combine the substantial importance of branding in different contexts. What makes this thesis unique, in turn, is exploring the artist's perspective and hearing the artist's opinions.

1.3 Thesis research task and goals

The purpose of the research task is to determine the aim of the thesis and subject (Vilkkä 2015, chapter 3). This study will open up brand cooperation as a phenomenon, its pros and cons, and the potential impact of the covid-19 pandemic. Notwithstanding, the main research task focuses on artists' views on how successful brand collaboration is built.

Main research questions are the following:

1. What factors make the artist refuse or accept the brand cooperation offer?
2. When doing international brand cooperation, what aspects should be paid special attention to?
3. What are the cornerstones of effective brand collaboration from the artist's perspective?

Because the goal is not to get accurate numerical data, this study is implemented as qualitative research. Qualitative research helps to understand brand cooperation more broadly than quantitative can and also as a phenomenon. This research's chosen data method is half-structured thematic interviews since interviews are well suited as a data collection method when researching opinions, behaviors, or research areas that are not yet well known. In this case, the interviews with experts and artists can offer valuable insights from the music industry since there is not much academic literature. The interviews were sent via email.

The research task can change and become more precise as the research progress. Research questions can be accompanied into smaller research questions, which together form the research basis. The research task is also called the main question, and the sub-questions

purpose is to delimit the subject and help to stay in the chosen perspective. (Vilkka 2015, Chapter 3) It should also be mentioned that the aim of the study is not to confirm previous information but to create new research information through artist and expert interviews.

2 BRAND COOPERATION AND PERSONAL BRANDING

2.1 What is brand cooperation?

Brand cooperation is strategic management that allows two or more different brands to do marketing and advertising together. All the parties of the cooperation will share the benefits of the specific project or campaign. Brand cooperation will allow the companies to strengthen each other's brands, increase brand awareness, and open up new opportunities, such as a new customer base. (HubSpot n. d., 3-4.)

Before starting brand cooperation, few essential facts should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the fundamental goals must be defined. These goals can be, for instance, becoming associated with brand names in the field or expanding brand awareness to an entirely new target audience. In addition to goals, it is also imperative to define the potential partners and the best suitable campaign format. (HubSpot n. d., 6-9.)

A great example of a successful brand partnership is music-streaming app Spotify's and ride-hailing app Uber's cooperation in 2014. The service was launched globally in 10 different cities. (Zoe K 2014) Both of these brands own products from totally different fields but share a common goal: earn more users. The idea behind the partnership was that passengers waiting for the ride were asked to connect their Spotify to play their favorite music during the drive. With the help of this creative collaboration, fans of Spotify and Uber might be more likely to choose Uber instead of other transport options. (Bernazani S 2020)

Along these lines, it can be said that brand collaborations can be very inventive and creative, and at the same time, strengthen the image and reputation of both parties. However, brand cooperation is not limited only between services/products and companies but also with personal brands.

2.2 Personal Brand & Personal Branding

Today a brand is more than just a brand that everybody knows and can recognize. It means the whole package of its particular product or service and consists of the image and opinions created by other people. (Sounia 2010, 24) Besides products and services, people also have a brand, known as a personal brand. For this thesis, it is essential to present what personal brand and personal branding are because the existence of a brand is an integral part of being an artist. Can be said that every human being, at its narrowest, is a personal brand. A personal brand is created both at work and home in terms of dress, habits, and behavior. However, it is important to remember that person's brand does not define a person's entire persona. The formation of a reputation or image cannot be wholly determined by oneself, but it can still influence the brand of their choice. (Kortesuo 2011, 8)

According to personalbrand.com article;

The personal brand is a widely-recognized and large-uniform perception or impression of an individual based on their experience, expertise, competencies, actions and/or achievements within a community, industry or the marketplace at large. (PersonalBrand.com 2021)

Personal branding differs slightly with a personal brand. When doing personal branding, there is a conscious or intentional effort to influence an individual's perception by raising their credibility and differentiating them from the competition. In the music business, it is mainly talked about personal branding because few individuals brand themselves effectively. For instance, public figures, such as artists and record companies, do it systematically. (Kurvinen, Laine, Tolvanen 2017.) When referring to an artist's brand, one naturally speaks of the personal brand she/he represents. As with branding a product or company in general, a precise plan must be created. The same goes for artists. It is necessary to develop a clear vision and own substantial self-knowledge as the brand consist of the artist itself. (Aaker, D. & Joachimsthaler 2000, 38)

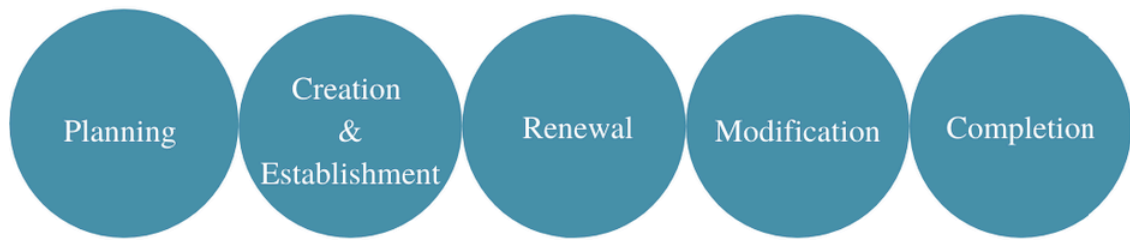


Figure 2. Steps in building a personal brand (Kortesuo, 2011, 23).

According to Kortesuo (2011, 23) five things should be considered when building a personal brand. Planning, creation and consolidation, renewal, modification, and completion. First, it is important to plan what kind of personal brand is suitable and the level of self-awareness should be right. To create an excellent personal brand, strengths and interests are thought through. However, it can take years to build a personal brand and the brand must be maintained at all times. Thus, brand collaborations are strongly related to the growth and development of the personal brand. Sometimes they act as an excellent way to reform it. They can also bring out new aspects and dimensions of an artist that can be used to reach new audiences or influence an already existing fan base.

3 INFLUENCER MARKETING

3.1 What is influencer marketing and who is an influencer?

Influencer marketing seeks the right influencers for the company in terms of its values and target groups. Through them, stories that are genuinely interesting to the target audience are told. (Pihgelsinki 2019) According to Influencer Marketing Hub's article, What Is an Influencer? The unifying factor of influencers is their power to affect consumer's purchasing due to their authority, position, knowledge, or the bond between their audience. In other words, they have built themselves a strong personal brand that can influence consumer buying behavior. But in practice, who they are? Influencers can be well-known people in social media, such as bloggers, YouTubers, artists, or athletes. Essentially, they all have their existing audience and desire to create professionally produced quality content. (Pihgelsinki 2019)

Because social media's development, influencer marketing, and brand collaborations are relatively new forms of marketing and the industry's terminology is continually changing, Emmi Lehtomaa, the influencer manager, and founder & CEO of influencer management FAMENT OY, was asked about how she sees the usage of terms. According to Lehtomaa, influencer marketing often refers to content created in the influencer's own social media channels. Still, it is a concept that lives on, and there can be many interpretations. Thus, the term brand cooperation also exists, which more clearly covers other forms of the whole collaboration—for instance, TV appearances and commercials on platforms other than social media.

3.2 Influencer marketing in social media

In social media, the influencer can be identified from active engagement with others in the chosen platform fundamentally by following a distinct niche. The number of followers is dependent on one's topic or specific niche in question. (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020b) In practice, the influencer signs a cooperation agreement with the partner company and advertises the products or services of that company on her/his social media channels. The end product can be, for instance, an video, audio, or image publication (KKV 2019).

According to influencer marketing agency Mediakix, social media influencers are usually categorized into two main tiers, which are micro- and macro-influencers. However, these categories can be broken down (Mediakix 2020). Figure 3 below shows the number of followers that each influencer tier requires.

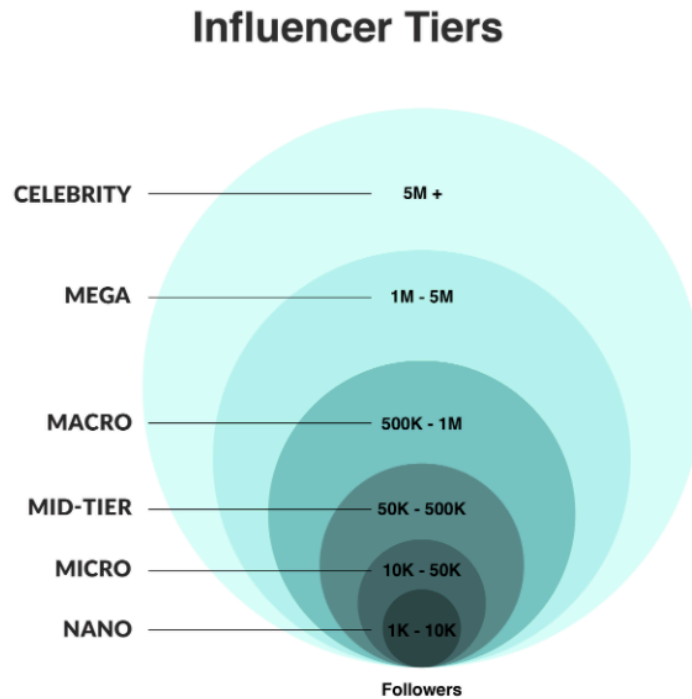


Figure 3. Influencer tiers

Withal, it is important to remember that figure 3 may not be necessarily universal. The numbers of followers can vary from country to country, and the figures cannot fully determine how influential that influencer is. For example, in Finland, very few celebrities have more than 5 million followers, but can have a significant impact on their target audience.

4 ARTISTS AND BRAND COOPERATION

Due to the minimal availability of information between artists' and companies' brand cooperation, expert interviews from the music industry were used to obtain additional information. Two brand cooperation specialists from records label companies and one entertainment manager were interviewed. All interviewees were professionals in their field from Finland, so the answers said a lot about Finland's industrial situation. However, brand cooperation is a growing trend globally so that the answers can also be interpreted more broadly.

Expert 1	Brand Cooperation Specialist from record label
Expert 2	Brand Cooperation Specialist from record label
Expert 3	Entertainment Manager

Table 1. Profiles of experts

As mentioned, interviews were conducted by e-mail, using a half-structured interview form. Experts for this research were selected based on their previous experience in the music field. They all have worked in the music industry for several years and are well acquainted with the development and current state of brand cooperation. Thus, they all own substantial expertise in brand cooperation and therefore up-to-date knowledge on the subject.

The experts' interviews addressed the concept of brand cooperation, its current and future state, and what steps it includes. All experts answered the questions extensively and expressed well different points of views. Yet, it must be remembered that the processes vary and can be diverse between different artists and companies. For instance, there are most likely differences when working with label service or independent artists. Also, constantly evolving forms of cooperation can affect the processes and now provided information might change or expire over time.

The first question was related to the current state of brand cooperation and how the experts perceive it. According to Expert 1, the state of artist brand cooperation is good, and it has evolved tremendously over the last five years. One of the biggest drivers of growth is the opportunities that social media has made possible. Expert 3 mentioned that although artists have done brand cooperation for decades, social media and its professionals have changed the game. Expert 1 stressed that, as well as other celebrities, artists are their own impressive media. They are loaded with a considerable impact, and their sayings, dress, and actions are closely followed. Thus, today's artists adopt brand partnerships as a part of their work and see them as extremely beneficial for them.

4.1 SWOT analysis

To gain better understanding of the topic this section introduces artists' brand cooperation through SWOT analysis. The main task of SWOT analysis is to identify core strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. SWOT analysis can be used to assess, for example, business performance, competition, risks, or potential. It can also be evaluated by only part of the company, such as a product line. (Investopedia 2020) In this thesis, SWOT analysis is used to assess artists' and companies' brand cooperation internal and external factors and their current and future potential. General information of artists' brand cooperation has been collected in the figure 4. on the next page.



Figure 4. SWOT analysis of using artist in marketing

4.2 The impact of the covid-19 pandemic on artists brand cooperation

The year 2020 had a powerful impact on the music industry all over the world. Due to the global pandemic, the concert trade publication Pollstar estimated in their 2020 Year-End Special report that the total revenue loss for the live event industry in the year 2020 was more than 30 billion dollars. In March 2020, when the pandemic began to spread worse, hundreds of artists announced that their agreed future tours have to be postponed or even canceled. While a small percentage of performers played built-in or digital concerts, most artists did not play live in year 2020. Along the lines, can be said that there were factors that also affected brand cooperation between artists and companies.

Expert 3 mentioned that pandemic slowed everybody down, and as marketing is often the first cost reduction, many companies started to focus on their brand's core marketing, and collaborations were postponed or even canceled. Withal, Expert 1 emphasized that there were also a lot of positive aspects in the past year. Such as new innovative and creative ways to collaborate with music. A good example is live-stream gigs in collaborations with

brands and smart usage of social media. Thus, Expert 1 believes that:” there is always another side to a challenging situation - it generates new ideas and solutions, and it has been such a pleasure to see it this year.”

4.3 Process of artist brand cooperation

Experts were asked a question related to brand cooperation as a process. In this study, the process meant how the cooperation is started, what steps it involves, and how it is followed. Expert 3 stressed that successful cooperation starts with a real interest in the product or service. Expert 2 emphasized that it is essential to find what kind of influencer the artist sees him/herself. Also, most cooperation can include social media presence or posts, so it is necessary to map whether doing social media is natural for the artist or not.

When a potential brand partner is found, a creative plan is the next step. In this plan, the angle and concept of cooperation are considered. All the experts agreed that the cooperation should be as natural as possible for the artist and bring value for both parties. Once the creative plan is done, a more detailed plan is made for the cooperation's progress. In practice, it means what happens during the campaign, what the artist does, where his/her face and name appears, and how. With the brand, it is crucial to plan the used channels and platforms for the campaign. After this, agreements between the parties are made. Contracts between the artists and companies are usually trade secrets, so in this study, there is no further information on what contracts contain and how much do artists get paid.

Next up is the actual implementation of the campaign. This can be, for instance, photo or video shoots or creating a specific song for commercial. Expert 3 highlighted that it is important to do regular checkups during the campaign to ensure that everything has gone according to plan. Lastly, when the campaign ends, reporting will follow. All the reporting from campaigns is done by the seller or a PR-company if there is one involved.

4.4 Case study: Carly Rae Jepsen & Visit Finland, Finnair

A case study has been added to this thesis to make the cooperation between artists and companies easier to understand. In practice, a case study is an in-depth example, and it's used to illustrate a particular argument or matter. In the more academic sense, a case study

is “a method for developing a complete understanding of a process, program, event or activity” (K. Newcomer, H. Hatry, J. Wholey 1994, 163).

This example focuses on Carly Rae Jepsen's cooperation with Visit Finland and Finnair. The aim was to present Lapland's summer in a new way and to new audiences. Thus, the House of Lapland invited Canadian artist Carly Rae Jepsen to Lapland in August 2019. The collaboration included a music video and recording for the song The Sound as well as behind the scenes video. The Sound of Lapland's album, SCAPES, launched in fall 2019, and at the same time, a multi-channel international marketing campaign started. This cooperation's and campaign's success was monitored by a study conducted by Universal Music Group Global Insight. The study was done as an online survey in United States and in the UK. Traveling adults who are interested in music were the chosen target group. The sample was 1,000 people before the campaign and 1,000 people after seeing the campaign. (House of Lapland 2020)

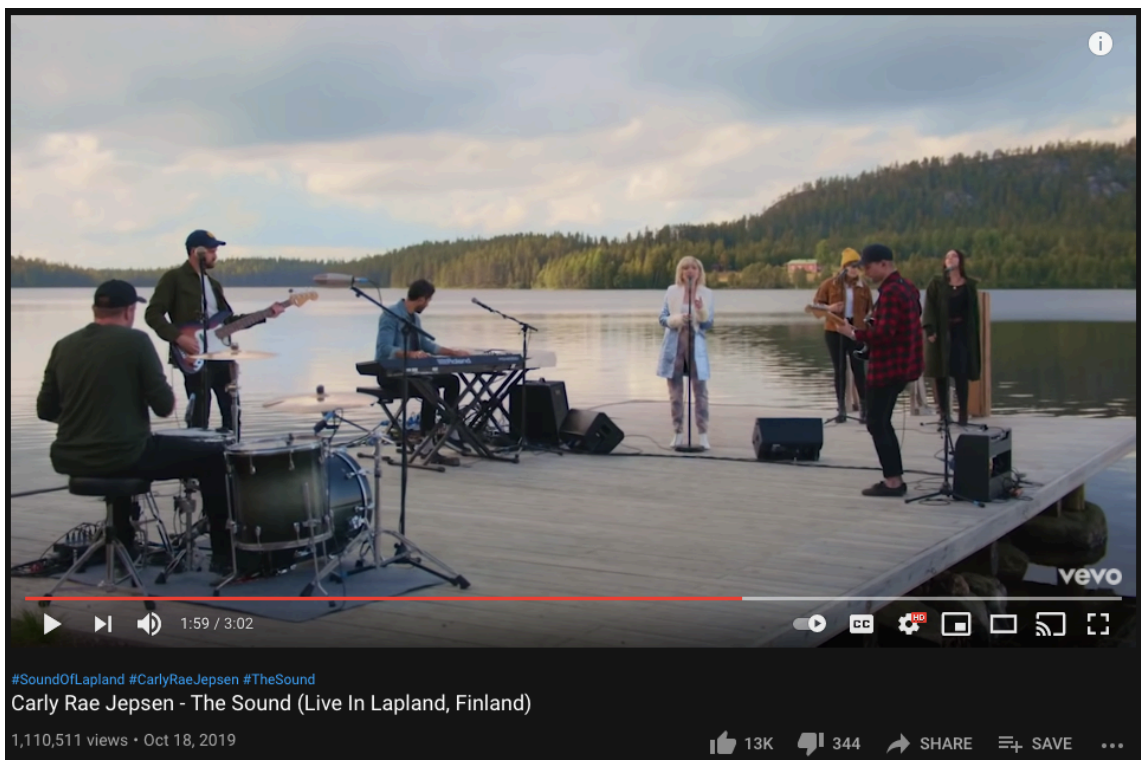


Figure 5. The Sound (Live in Lapland, Finland) music video

It can be said that the artist collaboration was truly interesting, as the music video on YouTube was viewed more than a million times, the song *The Sound* reached more than 5.7 million listening's and 36 different articles were made about Carly's visit to Finland. Besides, to the gained visibility, 60% of respondents rated the campaign innovative and informative. Respondents also were interested in seeing more similar kinds of music content from Lapland. Also, interest in hearing more about Lapland grew in the UK, from 73% to 81%, and in the US from 72% to 81%. What was great in the study was that seven out of ten respondents experience Lapland more positively after seeing Carly Rae Jepsen's artist collaboration campaigns. (House of Lapland 2020)

Frankly, with this example, it can be said that brand collaboration can be very diverse and include several different dimensions. Especially when working with creative people like, in this case, artists, the possibilities are endless, which makes brand cooperation an exciting way of marketing.

4.5 Future of brand cooperation

Lastly, experts were asked how they see the future of artists' brand cooperation. All responses were very positive, and experts believed that brand cooperation will grow and develop in the coming years. It can be predicted that media will raise collaborations more, and, as has been said, artists already consider collaborations as a part of their work. Expert 1 mentioned that professional ways of cooperating abroad are landing in Finland, and brands are willing to take more risks and are not afraid of thinking outside of the box. Expert 2 added that she believes that cooperation between artists and companies will become more professional as collaborations increase in the field. Especially in a small country like Finland, developments and changes will be reflected quickly.

After all, there is still room for improvement. Expert 1 said one useful comment:

“On the brand side, it should be understood that artists and musicians can be utilized much more creatively and innovatively in marketing campaigns when compared to regular social media influencers. Artists are professionals of storytelling, so doing marketing with them can be more diverse.”

Storytelling is valuable part of the partnership and can increase brand value, grow the brand awareness as well as gain attention (Thompson 2017). Thus, this opportunity should be better exploited in the future. Nonetheless, brand cooperation will be taken forward in Finland, and continuous development work will be carried out in every field of work. According to Expert 3 can be said that the year 2021 looks much brighter compared to 2020, and many brilliant collaborations will be seen soon.

5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter looks at how the study was conducted. In practice, this means chosen research methods, the acquisition, and selection of interviewees, and lastly, the interviewees' backgrounds are opened.

5.1 Research method

There are often two different kinds of approach methods when doing research: qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative research is a fairly broad term, and it covers many techniques and philosophies. It is an approach that allows to examine people's experiences in detail by using a specific set of methods such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation, content analysis, visual methods, and life histories or biographies. (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey 2020, 10)

Quantitative research, in turn, focuses on conclusions from previous studies, hypotheses, theories, key concepts, and their definition. The data collection plan, the selection of the target group, and the sampling plan are essential. After this, the results are made into tables, for example, and the data are converted into a statistically workable format. Conclusions are drawn last, and the results can be described, for example, by various diagrams or tables. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2014. 63–140)

This research seeks to find out what makes brand collaboration work, how it is accepted or declined, and whether there are anomalies in international brand collaboration. In other

words, the aim is to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding, so it's conducted as qualitative research. This choice has been made because these are phenomena that quantitative analysis cannot respond to.

Semi-structured thematic interviews were the chosen data collection method because this kind of interviews could be used to produce qualitative information about interviewees' personal views on brand collaborations. In a semi-structured interview, the questions are planned and are similar for all interviewees. There are no ready-made answer options as in a structured interview. In this case, the interviews have a clear framework, and the questions can be divided into more minor themes. (Näpärä, 2017)

5.2 Acquiring the interviewees and the conduction of the interviews

As been mentioned earlier, the target was to interview artists influencing the music industry. Artists for this thesis were selected based on their knowledge with cooperation with companies. In practice, this meant that novice or less-known artists could not answer because brand cooperation is often done with artists with more engagement and a larger audience. The assumption was that the interviewees would be relatively easy to get. Nonetheless, it turned out that reaching out and receiving answers from well-known artists was more difficult than expected. Dozens of domestic and international artists were contacted, and also, several record companies and management companies were asked to pass the questionnaire forward to their artists.

I started approaching artists through social media. For the most part, I first sent direct messages on Instagram, after which I emailed them. Emails were relatively easy to access as they were visible on artist profiles. However, it was quickly noticed that there were almost nonresponses to my sent messages on Instagram or emails. I believe that many of my interview requests got lost, among other direct messages that artists receive daily. Since I have personally worked in the music industry, I also approached the artists from my network. When discussing with them, I noticed that their level of experience in the collaboration was insufficient, and they were not suitable interview candidates for this research. Record companies in turn mentioned that they received many similar requests and can't promise that their artists will respond to the interviews.

Despite the problems, I received filled questioners from two highly successful Finnish artists who have worked in the music field for over ten years and have experience working with international companies. I contacted both of them via email, and once I had received their approval, structured interview forms were sent. The forms are available in the appendices. (Appendix 3)

5.3 Profile of interviewees

The interviewees were given the opportunity to decide whether the interview would be conducted anonymously. Another interviewee wished to analyze the results anonymously, so in terms of the text's fluency, both of the answers were ended up analyzed without publishing the names. Interviewees' profiles are very similar as both of them represent the pop genre and have worked in the music industry for around ten years. They are fully employed, highly known in Finland, and own a large fanbase. Artist number one has a couple more years of expertise and has become first known through the TV singing competition format as artist number two has started her career as an independent artist. However, these factors have little impact, as both of these artists have high experience in collaboration and own strong knowledge when working with international companies.

Artist 1	Work experience + 10 years. First known from TV singing competition format.
Artist 2	Work experience 10 years, has become known as an independent artist

Table 2. Artist profiles

6 RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

This chapter discusses the artists' interview results. The factors that influence the acceptance and rejection of collaboration are reviewed first, and it's followed by the possible special features of international cooperation.

6.1 Matters affecting the acceptance or rejection of collaboration

Both artists responded that the service or product must be compatible with the artist's brand and values. Artist 2 emphasized that it is important to be able to stand behind the advertised product or service. Between the lines, it can be interpreted that the artist does not want to promote anything that she or he would not use or feel beneficial. What the personal values of the artists are was not a separate question. Still, when looking at the artists' previous collaborations in question, they are powerfully conveyed by, e.g., equality, nationality, and the status of women.

Another homogeneous answer between the artists was appropriate compensation. According to Artist 1, the payment has to be in line with the artists' requirements but both parties have to be satisfied equally. In the domestic market, these artists are very successful and represent to their audience as their own powerful medias, so the company's ad visibility, which is achieved with the artist's brand, requires input also financially. The artists did not specify what the right kind of compensation for the work done would be, but on the other hand, they were not explicitly asked or required to tell that, as it is not relevant for this study.

However, appropriate compensation does not look at all collaborations, as Artist 2 also raised a fascinating perspective that affects the acceptance of cooperation – charity. While charity campaigns don't bring in an artist's actual salary, they can bring credibility to an artist's brand. Charity work is often associated with advocating for minorities and helping the disadvantaged, which, when properly implemented, can make the artist more approachable and caring.

The artists were also asked to specify a situation in which they refuse to collaborate. Artist 1 commented briefly that "if the requirements mentioned above don't actualize." By this,

she meant the unfair monetary compensation, conflict of values, and incompatibility with an artist brand. Artist 2 opened up the reasons for refusal in a little more detail. In addition to artist one, she mentioned that the duration of collaboration is something to take into consideration. She favors better long-term partnership, and for example, doesn't find one social media post very worthwhile. Also, the reputation and unethical news of the partner company can result in refusal.

6.2 Aspects to consider in international cooperation

One of this thesis's goals was to determine if any special features should be considered while artists are working with international brands. Due to this, artists were asked to specify what factors they pay special attention to while working internationally.

Artist 2 answered this question very briefly. She mentioned that the companies she has worked with are, as a rule, all international. She pays the same attention to certain things as she does when work with companies in the domestic market. For instance, these things were the suitable brand image, the cooperation's duration, and the compensation as mentioned in the previous section. However, her response can be assumed that she has maybe not faced significant challenges while working internationally because she did not point out any special factors or terms that would require more consideration.

The Artist 1, in turn, had more to say about international collaboration and its possible challenges. She said that firstly it is crucial to pay special attention to the cooperation terms. Practices regarding the terms of the agreement may vary from country to county and from company to company. This is particularly important to pay attention to, especially in international agreements, as there may be a language barrier between the parties. Thus, any translation work must be done before the parties' names are written in the agreements. These should be made clear so that both parties know what kind of collaboration they are involved in and what it entails.

Secondly, company's expectations about the Finnish market and work with a Finnish artist should be clear. It is good to ensure that the chosen market area, in this case, most often Finland, is at some level familiar, and the partner company understands what works for the target audience and what does not. As a challenge, for example, the artist mentioned that expectations about social media posts' reach can sometimes differ significantly. This

may be due, for example, that the company is following the influencer tier model mentioned in the theory section of this thesis. As mentioned, the tier model may not be universal and in smaller countries reach is not in line with ad performance.

Besides the differences in expectations, Artist 2 said that sometimes it takes time to get the final approval, and the communication pace can be slower than with domestic partners. This can be assumed to be due to many different factors. There may be time differences between countries that slow down the progress of cooperation. In addition, the schedule of large international firms may have many marketing campaigns and influencer collaborations at the same time in different countries. Due to this, a possible language translation may take more time than communicating in the mother tongue.

7 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This section reviews the results of the artist interviews. In other words, what indeed are the cornerstones of successful domestic or international collaboration from an artist's perspective.

In summary, many aspects need to be taken into account for the success of the brand collaboration. Brand collaboration is a multi-staged and multifaceted process that requires specific issues to be encountered. On top of the responses, there was compatibility of the partnership with the artist brand. In this case, the values are especially emphasized. It is extremely important for the artist that the company and the service or the product go hand in hand with the values that are influential for the artist. When the brand ambassador's in this case, artists' values meet with the company; it is talked about value alliance. It is imperative that values are not invented on a whim but are strategically considered (Tuominen, Oksanen & Kalmari 2018, 10, 40). Collaboration cannot succeed if the brand values quarrel with each other. In addition to the parties the quarrel can also be visible to the consumer and does not convince the potential buyer to purchase the service or product. In addition to a possible reduction in the purchase, a company's or artist's brand may suffer, which in turn can lead to a longer-term boycott.

Another clear point was reasonable compensation. According to the answers, artists knew their value on the market and comprehended their positive impact on the advertisement. Thus, it is understandable that artists require to receive proper compensation for the work they do. However, it must be remembered that the artist's compensation may not always be monetary. For Artist 2 mentioned that she is ready to participate in charity. As known, volunteering is mostly perceived as good among consumers, so it can naturally enhance an artist's brand in the public's eyes.

In addition, it is essential to clarify that the companies most often do not sponsor early-stage artists with large sums of money, as investing in them would not yet be profitable. In this case, the artist can for instance, access the company's clothes or musical instruments for gigs. Depending on the contract, the instruments can either be donated, or the artist can buy them for themselves at a more affordable price. Such an agreement is called an endorsement agreement which means, in other words, a product placement. (Johanna Ahonen 2021)

Of course, on a Finnish scale, the artists interviewed for this specific study were very influential in their genre. With an endorsement agreement alone, it could be assumed that the collaboration would hardly be possible. Thus, it can be said that financial compensation plays a significant role in the approval of cooperation.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the responses indicated the duration of the cooperation. Artists prefer to engage in long-lasting collaboration than, for instance, random social media advertising. When the partnership is more extended, it is often talked about being a brand ambassador. A brand ambassador tells, introduces, and markets the company and its products and services to the audience it reaches (Indieplace 2017). By being a brand face, the artist chooses to invest their time with larger entities rather than smaller campaigns. This, of course, saves time when working for a long time with the same company and with the same co-workers. Also, brand-wise, it is desirable for an artist to advertise, for example, a particular coffee for a longer time than to switch to an advertisement for a juice drink in the following month. In addition, brand ambassadors are often more engaging to consumers than random advertisements with different brands. Thus, long-term cooperation aims to engage consumers in the company and create long and lasting customer relationships (Indieplace 2017).

8 RESEARCH ETHICS

This thesis topic choice was already an ethical choice in itself, as it considered worthy and current. I believed that music professionals, brand collaborators, and the commissioner Family in music, could truly benefit from this research. In addition to them, I thought that this research would be compelling to others interested in the topic or consider doing brand collaboration.

This study paid particular attention to good practice and ethics in interviews with experts and artists. As mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted by email and the interviewees were not met physically. In addition, all the interviewees were of legal age, so there was no need to ask the guardians for permission to attend this research. Thus, I had a more considerable ethical responsibility for what and how information is produced for research.

In the case of interviews, the data protection regulation applied to the processing of the interviewees' persona data, which included the answers given in the interview. In qualitative research, the role of the researcher has a significant impact on the research results. To ensure ethics, good scientific practice is followed at all stages of research. The most important ethical principles are confidentiality, privacy protection, and informing the interviewees (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 200).

On a practical level, ethical actions meant that an information letter had been sent to both experts and artists before responding to the interview. (Appendix 1) In this way, the interviewees knew why the study was being done for and why their input to the study would be valuable. In particular, the letter emphasized that attending is voluntary, interviews can be discontinued at any time and received info from the interviews can be utilized in the study not to identify individuals. Besides, the interview forms also contained guided instructions on filling in the form if they would like to provide the answers anonymously.

I found it an ethical dilemma that the artists were already familiar to me, but I didn't know them on a personal level. This was reflected, for instance, in how the interviewees were

presented and how responses were analyzed. Due to this, I had to be particularly careful not to reveal indirect identification information such as record company, age, or exact address information. However, I did not experience familiarity affecting negatively, but on the contrary, I felt that familiarity created trust between us. I set the most significant ethical value towards the interviewees and the received information from them. Lastly, I thanked the interviewees, and by doing this, I try to show my appreciation towards them.

9 CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to find out what are the cornerstones of successful artist collaboration. More specific research questions were which factors make artists accept or reject a co-operation offer and whether there are any special features in international co-operation. The study was conducted from artist's perspective.

Overall, it was great to explore brand cooperation and get answers on how to build a successful collaboration between an artist and a company. The subject is very topical, and I believe that artists' preferences can help companies invest and create increasingly creative solutions. In particular, I believe that the commissioner Family in Music will benefit from the research as the thesis's thematic interviews provided very timely information. As Family in Music's business is focused on the music industry, using artists, as their brand ambassadors, could be an effective way to influence other aspirant in the industry.

The thesis's progress went largely well and on schedule, although getting the interview forms back took a lot of time. The artists were often hard to reach, and I had to send several reminder messages. Understandably, reaching out to great artists can be challenging, especially if they are not known personally. Artists and record companies can get hundreds of similar queries, so I am grateful to receive the general data for this thesis. In the future, it would undoubtedly be better to network in the field better before starting to do similar research again.

The topic of brand collaboration in the music field was challenging, as there was not much research data on it before. The information was largely based on non-theoretical articles and news, and it sometimes felt that the information was partly under the stone. Thus, the

interviews with the experts on the topic were extremely essential and helped create a good information basis. It was great to note, as the interviews helped me as a researcher to understand the subject better. Experts were also easier to reach, and their responses were more comprehensive than those of artists. Thus, I got to write a literature review very quickly after sending the questions, and I didn't have to wait much for answers to arrive.

Despite the challenges, I experienced the thesis process very interesting, and my professional skills have developed well while working on this study. Knowing the field and its concepts in advance made the research work much smoother and made the whole research more valid. Besides, I rely on my professional skills due to the fact that I have worked in marketing tasks in the music industry, and I am also a singer-songwriter myself. Although the information was obtained well from experts and artists, it must be remembered that this research is only an individual thesis, and its answers cannot be generalized in the whole field of music or brand cooperation's. The target number of artists in the study was around 8-10, but the sample was, after all, only two. However, artists' professionalism in the industry gave a lot of information, and in this regard, the study data can be considered reliable and the study successful.

For the future it would have been interesting to get more international artists and artists from different genres involved in the study. It could open up whether the cornerstones of brand collaboration are different in other countries and between different music styles. This could therefore be a great further research idea. As said, artist collaborations are a growing trend both in Finland and abroad, so the topic could be developed with several different studies from different perspectives. Personally, I hope that researchers would focus more on the subject so that the activities can develop to grow in a more professional direction, especially in Finland, and give artists and companies new ingenious ways to implement marketing.

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Appendix 1 Information letter



Dear research participant

This interview is part of Karelia University of Applied Sciences' thesis related to my International Business studies. The aim of the thesis is to find out how partnerships between artists and companies are built and what are their cornerstones from artist's point of view.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and may be discontinued at any time. If desired, the information raised in the interview can be published in the study in a way that does not identify individuals.

Best regards,

Veera Vento

If you have any questions from the survey, I will be happy to answer your inquiries.

vento.veera@gmail.com or 050 591 9858

Appendix 2 Expert's interview questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR EXPERTS

If you want to participate in the study anonymously, please leave the background information (name) blank.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name:
Professional title:

Age:

Gender:

City:

WORKING LIFE

- a) Tell me a little about your work background. What jobs have you worked in and how you ended up in your current position?
- b) What are the best aspects of your work?
- c) What are the biggest challenges of your work?

ARTIST'S BRAND COOPERATION

- a) From an expert's perspective, how would you describe the current state of artist's brand cooperation?
- b) Several different terms can be used to describe brand cooperation between artists and companies. What do you think is the best term?
- c) Would you open up brand cooperation as a process? For instance, what steps does it involve?
- d) What are the most common forms of brand cooperation? For instance, brand ambassador, social media campaign, or advertising campaign?
- e) Based on your experience, what has been the most impressive cooperation you've been involved in?

- f) How has the covid-19 pandemic affected brand cooperation?
- g) How do you see the future of brand cooperation?

ARTIST'S INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- a) If you have been involved in international brand cooperation, what factors do you pay special attention to?
- b) What challenges have you faced in international brand cooperation?
- c) How would you describe a successful international brand cooperation?

Appendix 3 Artist's interview questions

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ARTISTS

If you want to participate in the study anonymously, leave the background information (name, artist name) blank.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name:

Artist name:

Age:

Gender:

City:

ARTIST STATUS

- a) How long have you been working in the music field?
- b) What music genre are you representing?
- c) Do you work as a full-time or part-time artist?

BRAND COOPERATION

- a) If you have done a brand collaboration, what form of collaboration was it? For example, brand ambassador, social media campaign or advertising campaign?
- b) What kind of companies have you collaborated with?
- c) What factors lead you to accept the cooperation offer?
- d) What factors, in turn, make you refuse to cooperate?
- e) What kind of image do you want consumers to have about you?

INTERNATIONAL BRAND COOPERATION

- a) If you have done international brand cooperation, what factors do you pay special attention to?
- b) What challenges have you faced in international cooperation?
- c) How would you describe a successful international brand collaboration?
- d) Do you feel that it's important to highlight your nationality in international brand cooperation?