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PERSONAL BRANDING IN HIP-HOP/RAP MUSIC INDUSTRY

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U skladu sa članom 54. Pravila studiranja za I, II ciklus studija, integrisani, stručni i specijalistički studij na Univerzitetu u Sarajevu, daje se

IZJAVA O AUTENTIČNOSTI RADA

Ja, Kerim Panjeta, student drugog (II) ciklusa studija, broj index-a 4090 na programu Management, smjer Marketing Management, izjavljujem da sam završni rad na temu:

PERSONAL BRANDING IN HIP-HOP/RAP INDUSTRY

pod mentorstvom Prof.dr. Melika Husić-Mehmedović izradio samostalno i da se zasniva na rezultatima mog vlastitog istraživanja. Rad ne sadrži prethodno objavljene ili neobjavljene materijale drugih autora, osim onih koji su priznati navođenjem literature i drugih izvora informacija uključujući i alate umjetne inteligencije.

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ABSTRACT

This Master's Thesis investigates the personal branding strategies and motivations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through interviews with five artists, including Shtela, Bogi, Frenkie, Danza, and Kontra, the study explores key themes in their personal branding approaches. Authenticity and differentiation emerge as vital elements, with a focus on presenting one's true self and establishing a unique identity. Core branding elements, particularly the product – music, are highlighted as essential for connecting with the audience. The significance of relatability, consistency, and personal drive in branding efforts is further emphasized. Social media platforms, like Instagram and TikTok, play a crucial role in brand promotion, enabling artists to showcase talent and engage authentically. Strategic platform selection, content quality, networking, collaborations, and brand partnerships are identified as rather important factors. The influence of role models, authenticity, and individuality on personal brand inspiration is explored. Overall, this Master's Thesis contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into personal branding strategies in the hip-hop/rap industry and provides theoretical and practical guidance for aspiring hip-hop/rap artists in building their personal brands in the ever-evolving music industry.

SAŽETAK

Master teza istražuje strategije ličnog brendiranja i motivacije hip-hop/rap umjetnika u Bosni i Hercegovini. Kroz intervju sa pet hip-hop/rap umjetnika sa bosanskohercegovačke scene – Shtela, Bogi, Frenkie, Danza i Kontra, studija istražuje ključne teme u njihovim pristupima ličnom brendiranju. Autentičnost i diferencijacija se pojavljuju kao vitalni elementi, sa fokusom na predstavljanje 'pravog ja' i uspostavljanje jedinstvenog identiteta. Osnovni elementi brendiranja, posebno proizvod – muzika, istaknuti su kao bitni za povezivanje sa publikom. Dalje je naglašen značaj povezanosti, dosljednosti i ličnog nagona u naporima za brendiranje. Platforme društvenih medija, poput Instagrama i TikToka, igraju ključnu ulogu u promociji brenda, omogućavajući umjetnicima da pokažu talenat i autentično se prikažu svojoj publici. Strateški odabir platforme, kvalitet sadržaja, umrežavanje, saradnje i partnerstva sa brendovima, identificirani su kao vrlo važni faktori personalnog brandinga. Dodatno se istražuje utjecaj uzora, autentičnosti i individualnosti na inspiraciju ličnog brenda. Finalno, ova master teza doprinosi postojećoj literaturi tako što nudi uvid u strategije ličnog brendiranja u hip-hop/rap industriji i pruža teorijske i praktične smjernice za hip-hop/rap umjetnike u izgradnji svojih ličnih brendova u muzičkoj industriji koja se kontinuirano razvija.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Personal branding has emerged as a means of attaining career success in today's fast-paced world of project-based work structures and short-term employment systems, according to those who would argue that personal branding sits at the junction of various fields including marketing, sociology, communication, psychology, organizational behavior, and accounting. The concept of personal branding has spread rapidly as a result of numerous reasons. Individuals have shifted their responsibility for employees' careers from organizations to themselves (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014).

Shepherd (2005) evaluated the popular literature on the subject and accepted the term "personal branding" as a widely accepted term. According to some researchers, self-branding is a synonym for personal branding. This review finds that the term personal branding is accepted and used by a wider group of people. The conceptual rapprochement attempted by Parmentier et al. (2013) posits that despite different names, the underlying premise of much of what has been written is that product branding concepts are sufficient for understanding how people can position themselves to be successful in any career pursuit.

While marketing definitions (e.g. Bendisch et al., 2013) use words like product, buyer, seller, market, added value, promise, differentiation, or meeting customer needs, other definitions, like Internet marketing definitions, may use words like website, visitor, client, potential customer, lead, or target. They compare personal branding to a product branding process and use similar terminology and apply marketing principles in a direct manner. Many studies define self-presentation as including such words as impression, reputation, individual strengths, uniqueness, image, self-promotion, or identity. A person-centric activity, focused on managing how others view the individual, is referred to as personal branding.

There are six related concepts to personal branding:

1. **Human branding** – Close et al. (2011) established the notion of a human brand as "a well-known or emerging individual who is the focus of marketing, interpersonal, or inter-organizational communications (p. 923). Marketing builds on branding literature and extends it from products to people (Thomson, 2006).
2. **Impression management** – The definition given by Kowalski and Leary (1990) is "the process by which individuals try to control the impressions others form of them" (p. 34). It is the vehicle through which image construction is accomplished professionally.
3. **Self-promotion** – Whilst still Molyneux (2015) uses an equation mark to denote the connection between personal branding and self-promotion, we believe it is necessary to

further clarify the relationship between the two. When actors are inclined to highlight their accomplishments, take credit for positive outcomes, name-drop important others, and downplay the severity of negative events to which they are connected, Bolino et al. (2016) view self-promotion as a distinct impression management technique.

4. **Personal Image** – Roberts (2005) offered an authoritative viewpoint on professional image, which contributed to our appreciation of personal branding by adding to our understanding of the desired and perceived components of the personal brand. Our goal, then, is to get rid of the “professional” definition, because image construction may occur outside of the company setting, thus resulting in the term “the aggregate of key constituents’ perceptions of one’s competence and character”.
5. **Self-Reputation** – Noble et al. (2010) and Schlosser et al. (2017) found notable variations in the definitions of reputation and personal brand. Based on the fact that reputation analysis is in its infancy, Zinko and Rubin (2015) offer a concept of their own: *“a personal identification created by the collective impressions of others, which is indicative of the complicated combination of prominent personal characteristics and achievements, displayed actions, and expected images portrayed over some period of time as witnessed explicitly and/or documented by secondary sources, which reduces doubt regarding potential behavior”*.
6. **Fame** – In their work (Zinko and Rubin, 2015), they contend that popularity equates to less-predictable credibility, as it can be brought on by one-time incidents and easily turned into a reputation by repetitive behavioral shows.

After recognizing the essential facets of the construct, we set out to explain its meaning. According to Suddaby (2010), personal branding is a ‘conceptual process of constructing, positioning, and sustaining a favorable perception of oneself, and it is achieved by a special combination of characteristics that signify a specific promise to the target audience and which broadcast a distinctive story and imagery.

1.1 Research Problem

As music consumption has always been driven by technological developments, the way people listen to music has evolved over time. Most Internet streaming platforms have replaced conventional radio broadcast outlets, and as a result, advertising during song breaks has become less prominent for the majority of Internet consumers. To continue the advertising through the

use of audio data as a means of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), the firms would definitely have to utilize other approaches, like product placement in songs. The presence of embedded marketing in movies and music videos is very popular, but product placement in music as simply the audio details are currently missing in academic analysis.

Much commercial hip-hop music is known for songs that contain comparisons to brand names in order to achieve a status that the artists receive through affiliation with those labels. Most artists endorse different labels for free, which is a fascinating phenomenon. The referred items are almost the most exclusive, but certain well-off service providers, food chains, and luxurious regions still get advertising. With this, hip-hop/rap artists affiliate themselves with a certain image that they are trying to represent with their looks, visuals, lyrics, beat, etc., with which they create their personal brand – a ‘something’ that they get recognized for.

Seemingly, this process of personal branding is worthwhile, as it usually positively impacts artists’ careers – meaning that they are more listened to, or streamed/viewed on YouTube. Some of the world’s most notable hip-hop/rap artists with strong personal branding include Kanye West, Travis Scott, Jay-Z, Migos, etc., who are regularly sponsored by various brands – but also have their own brand image proposed through their music, producing style, clothes they wear and other signature marks (e.g. ad libs). The research problem is connecting the theoretical basis of personal branding from the perspective of marketing, management, psychology, and sociology to personal branding in hip-hop culture.

In this sense, personal branding shows an artist’s distinct strengths and perspective, making it possible for them to connect with their target audience. As an example, musicians can develop successful personal branding while focusing on creating memorable concert experiences or exploring uncharted musical territory by utilizing personalized lyrics or unconventional instruments. To be successful as an artist, it is imperative that you know exactly what kind of career you want to pursue.

Hip-hop/rap artists should articulate their values, goals, and aspirations, and once they have done so, brand managers can utilize visual artistic campaigns to help audiences better understand who the musician is and what he or she has to offer. Hence, the research problem is to investigate what kind of personal branding strategies are used by hip-hop/rap artists – but with a specific focus on artists that originate from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1.2 Research Objectives

Some of the research objectives are:

- To define and discuss the concept of personal branding in marketing, psychology, and brand management;
- To connect the concept of personal branding to the hip-hop/rap music industry and culture by referring to the world's famous cases of personal branding;
- To discuss various personal branding strategies used in the hip-hop/rap music industry;
- To assess the impact of personal branding strategies on hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- To observe various examples of personal branding used by hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- To conduct interviews with hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina to scrutinize various personal branding strategies, but also to observe the impact of other, more world-famous artists.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions are:

RQ1: *What are the most notable personal branding strategies utilized by hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina?*

RQ2: *To what extent are hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina impacted by the personal branding of more famous artists from the same or similar branch of music?*

RQ3: *What are the most common strategies for personal brand image creation as a hip-hop/rap artist?*

RQ4: *Does a positive personal brand image implies success?*

RQ5: *What are the factors that influence the development of personal brand image in hip-hop/rap?*

1.4 Research Methodology

The primary research will be based on qualitative research. There are a variety of methods of data collection in qualitative research, including observations, textual or visual analysis (e.g., from books or videos), and interviews (individual or group). However, the most common methods used are interviews and focus groups. The primary aim of the research interview is to

obtain insight into the diverse perspectives, perceptions, values, and/or motives of individuals on particular issues. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a ‘deeper’ understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires. Where little is already understood about the research phenomena or where comprehensive observations are expected from participants, interviews are usually the most suitable method of data collection.

Interviews as a research method are chosen for this master’s thesis because they are the most suitable ones for the collecting of data that is needed to thoroughly answer the research questions aforementioned. Interviews will be comprised of a set of questions that will question the marketing, psychological, and sociological perspectives of personal branding application by domestic hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, for the sake of understanding the application and implication of various personal branding methods and strategies. Also, it is important to accentuate that the interview questions will be designed in order to answer the research questions aforementioned.

Planned interviews will be held with notable represents of the hip-hop/rap scene and community in Bosnia and Herzegovina – Frenkie, Kontra, Danza, Shtela, and Bogi. All mentioned hip-hop/rap artists have a unique personal brand image that they are recognizable for, and that is why they are picked as wanted interviews for this master thesis. This unique personal brand image might differ from one another in connection to certain brands, beats, clothing, rap delivery type, and generally style.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Personal Branding

Personal branding is a marketing strategy used by individuals to promote themselves in order to achieve business success (Nessmann, 2010). It assists others in recognizing individuals by presenting them across various networks (Molyneux and Holton, 2015). Personal branding was originally mentioned in 1981 in the book “The Battle for Your Mind,” which described the origins of personal branding for businesses, occupations, and individuals. Individuals must develop their personal brands in order to market their professional skills and garner the personal attention of corporate owners or employers (Montoya and Vandehey, 2008). Everyone has a personal brand, regardless of their age, position, or line of business. With the proper use of personal branding concepts, every individual may be transformed into a unique brand in any sector (Rein et al., 2006).

Personal branding is essentially the ongoing process of implanting a favorable image or impression in the minds of people toward an individual, group, or organization. Personal

branding frequently entails the use of one's name on a variety of products. Due to the rise of the Internet, branding has attained a new degree of fundamental importance. The growth of the virtual world necessitated the establishment of a system for monitoring online characters. Despite being explicitly virtual, social networking and online personas can have an effect on the current world. Because individuals are required to portray themselves in a particular light to their group of pals, they may work to maintain a particular image in their online networking places. Thus, internet networking enables the development of an online persona that may be inconsistent with the authentic self (Henley, 2019).

Personal branding has evolved into an effective method of communicating between an individual and their separate public, allowing them to differentiate themselves from competitors through their individuality and distinct ideals (Morton, 2011). Through personal branding, individuals may identify themselves beyond a résumé, defining who they are as individuals and how they can benefit various corporations. *"Selfbranding is about thinking of oneself as a brand – a product that can be strategically and creatively positioned in a competitive market to maximize value for an individual and their company"* (Barnett, 2010).

Perceptions of a personal brand might be influenced by conceptual marketing strategies. These strategies aid in the methodical transformation of an individual's image and its application to a more successful professional life. The material may take the form of a variety of various types of personal presentation, such as photographs, personal appearance, web design, or the style of communication on social media or traditional media, as long as everything is consistent, understandable, and coherent. Preferably, it fosters acknowledgment of the individual's personality and public comprehension of what makes him or her unique. Three characteristics define a personal brand:

1. **Consistency:** When developing a personal brand strategy, it is critical to prioritize consistency. A great personal brand must communicate a consistent, clear, and relevant message about one's vision, values, and mission statement.
2. **Distinctiveness:** A strong personal brand is all about expressing one's uniqueness and originality. The key is expressing one's individuality and identifying what distinguishes oneself from others.
3. **Clarity:** throughout private and professional platforms: Clarity is critical for successful personal branding, and any activities made to develop it should be consistent across both private and professional platforms.

Thus far, marketing has been extremely effective in integrating methodologies and conceptions from other disciplines into a coherent system for meeting demands through the development of

trade relationships. New marketing disciplines, such as branding, have emerged via experience and matured into independent academic fields in response to social changes and the expansion of the global economy.

Personal branding, which was born and raised in marketing, has made a decisive entry into management science. Personal branding has arisen as a technique for achieving career success in the context of more transitory employment systems and project-based work structures (Vitberg, 2010). Numerous factors contributed to the concept's inception and penetration into management discourse. Among the critical factors is a sweeping transfer of responsibility for employees' careers away from organizations and toward individuals (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014).

Indeed, corporate developments in previously stable sectors are displacing thousands of career workers, for example, as a result of the energy sector's "greening" or major job cuts in call centers, as well as advances in artificial intelligence. Increased professional changes necessitate the expansion and creation of new networks of contacts, which necessitates increased personal rebranding initiatives (Schlosser et al., 2017). With the ease of communication enabled by the Internet and multiple social media platforms, *"careers have evolved into personal brands that must be managed in a virtual age"* (Gioia et al., 2014).

Personal branding literature has indeed been rejected outright on the basis of its low quality and has been described as a *"highly structured diet of packaged optimism and connect-the-dot formulas backed by dubious amounts of substance and sold to "naive customers by "experts that range somewhere between corny and cultish"* (Conley, 2008). However, the literature on branding inanimate objects and organizations has been criticized as theoretically superficial and more akin to mythology than science" (Kay, 2006).

The practice of branding individuals has also been condemned on moral grounds. Even in the music industry, where artists are central to multibillion-dollar worldwide brands and mass marketing is acknowledged as a fact of life, personal branding is blamed for debasing culture and jeopardizing personal ethics and artistic integrity (Kubacki and Croft, 2004). Additionally, it has been defined as *"a mode of self-presentation that is singularly focused on attracting attention and acquiring cultural and monetary value through the valorized imposition of hyper individuality and image over substance and self-awareness"* (Lair, et al., 2005). However, mainstream branding has been morally admonished for being predicated on the erroneous notion that "the customer is not intelligent or even human" (Bazos, 2009).

Personal branding extends beyond the internet to include a self-portrait. *"Developing a strong personal brand is about projecting a consistent 'personal brand' image for oneself through the way they speak, the way they behave, their body language and sartorial, and grooming skills, and then taking control of their visibility to manage their own public relations"* (Everett, 2008).

Personal branding is a term that refers to the expression of an individual's personality through a multitude of mediums. What many individuals are unaware of is that with the advent of online media and the Internet in general, they may already have a personal brand. According to Bitti (2007), if someone types their name into a Google search box, they will almost certainly receive a list of multiple hits containing their name; this helps build their brand (Bitti, 2007). Regardless of whether an individual is actively seeking any form of profession, the value of developing a personal brand has grown exponentially.

Personal branding has been defined as a strategic process (Montoya and Vandehey, 2002), a process (Schawbel, 2009), a programmatic approach and proactive reaction (Lair et al., 2005), an indeterminate type of proactive behavior (Mobray, 2009), and a powerful instrument. It is argued here that merely referring to personal branding as a process is concise and compatible with contemporary marketing approaches that question the presumed formality and complete rationality of analysis, planning, implementation, and management. As with every process, it is composed of inputs, a technique, and desired outcomes.

Every human, in principle, possesses a unique imprint. However, not everyone understands the value of personal brand capital and approaches it strategically, consistently, and efficiently. In this context, it is critical to assume ownership and management of one's personal brand and name. The majority of branding strategies place a premium on marketing considerations such as image enhancement, product or service promotion, and prospective revenue. However, a personal tag should be genuine and accurately reflect the bearer's true nature. It should be founded on a sense of personal identity, life purpose, values, and the uniqueness of abilities and skills. If a personal brand is founded on these natural, honest, and comprehensive principles, it is expected to be long-lasting, consistent, and relevant. It balances market needs and the wearer's personal objectives, resulting in a complete and satisfying existence on both the professional and personal levels.

2.2 Concept of Personal Branding

Personal branding is an attempt to demonstrate to individuals how they may leverage their strengths and personality characteristics to maximize their career and personal potential. Everyone has a personal brand (Sweetwood, 2017) that distinguishes and identifies them. Personal branding is the process of distinguishing and differentiating an individual, a group of individuals, or the products they make. It is the process of presenting oneself in a positive light in order to attract and socialize via various communication channels.

Del Blanco (2010) identified five components of personal branding as follows:

1. Knowledge and experience demonstrate that an individual must be knowledgeable about a particular area in order to be effective with personal branding. A person must be acknowledged as possessing a skill that necessitates ongoing education.
2. Social context and values explain that developing an individual's personal brand reputation is related to a social system defined by values in a social and environmental setting. This setting is associated with social characteristics; hence, social value generation is malleable in response to societal change.
3. Social responsibility gives consumers guidance, ideas, assurances, and confidence in their relationships with audiences. Musicians must provide feedback to society in order to improve and establish a reputation.
4. Communication and connection with the audience help music artists connect their personal brands with relevant audiences by allowing others to learn about who they are and what they specialize in. This interaction relies on communicating through multiple media and the answers from the audiences to assemble the opinions of the public on the personal brand.
5. Organizational support confirms the member's ambition to develop a personal brand. The organization is critical in promoting, guaranteeing, and displaying results that must be reinforced on a constant basis using various marketing communication channels.

According to Molyneux and Holton (2015), musicians place a higher premium on personal branding than on the corporate branding of the organization with which the journalist is linked. Musicians also examine how their careers' evolving technology and culture affect their personal branding, although social media branding is distinct from traditional media branding (Khedher, 2015).

2.2.1 Personal Brand Identity

The personal brand personality can be deduced from the brand's primary concepts. As Kapferer (1997) puts it, "*the brand is the item as well as it gives the item meaning and characterizes its personality in both time and space.*" As defined by Aaker (1996), a brand's way of life is an arrangement of relationships designed to meet the brand's purpose and pass on brand guarantees to clients and partners. Furthermore, Aaker (1996) defines a brand way of life as a synthesis of traditional and expanded identity. The brand's central character exemplifies the brand's goal, for example, what the brand was originally and where/what it needs to be. The brand's central

character also conveys an image of the organization's method and attempts to distinguish the brand from its clients by incorporating the brand's extraordinary associations.

The internet environment offers a wide variety of stages for character development with the purpose of establishing or maintaining social connections, including informal communication locales, multiplayer gaming, chat rooms, and web dating, among others (Ribeiro, 2009). It is frequently asserted that the defined online identities differ from one another in light of the online stages and social online improvements.

As with the concept of individual brand personality, the concept of individual brand image should have been complemented by a hypothetical knowledge of "brand image" concepts. Keller (1993) defined brand image as "*discernments around a brand as reflected by the brand affiliation held in shopper memory.*" A brand image is about the brand's perception of its consumers; it is about the customers' thoughts and emotions about the company. According to the conventional brand-building theory, positioning is about establishing recognition for the brand in the buyer's psychology while taking into account the brand's product-related characteristics, such as value, quality, and durability (Roy and Banarjee, 2007).

Advertisers seek brand positioning methodologies to gain an advantage; thus, shopper advertising inquiries about broadly defined brand positioning methodologies to prompt a brand's utilitarian components. In any event, observers argued that brands should not be positioned just based on their product-related characteristics; rather, positioning a brand based on its common affiliation, for example, non-item-related characteristics, might provide a brand with an unmatched advantage (Poisez, 1989).

Impression management is defined as deliberate efforts to govern, direct, and control procedures in order to elicit a favorable impression from a targeted group of spectators (Rosenberg and Egbert, 2011). Communication is critical to image management; individuals engage in "critical activities" to create and maintain a desired image (Rosenberg et al., 2011). Individuals utilize a variety of self-presentation tactics to maintain a desired image in the eyes of others to fulfill short- or long-term interpersonal objectives. Individuals can be thought of as brands, and their self-presentation/impression management methods in various collaborations can be described as efforts to position their brands with the explicit end objective of enforcing a positive brand image.

2.3 Processes of Personal Branding

Individual branding is the process of developing personal branding for individuals in order to establish a brand that distinguishes them from others (Kotler, 2003). The personal branding process is comprised of six steps:

1. Self-discovery is an internal self-evaluation that is vital for individuals who need to be certain about their future actions (Scott, 2016). It comprises an external self-assessment to ascertain what peers and consumers say about someone and what piques their attention. It must provide an unmistakable distinction that others can observe (Montoya and Vandehey, 2008).
2. Consumer behavior and needs analysis enable musicians to ascertain the level of exposure their target consumers have and to deliver content that communicates as effectively as feasible (Ma, 2017).
3. Branding is the deliberate and intentional effort to establish and influence public perception of an individual as an authority in their field, thereby elevating their credibility and differentiating themselves from competitors in order to create a distinctive brand image and appropriately position their brand.
4. Brand communication is the process of informing target audiences about one's personal brand via the media.
5. Measuring and evaluating brand performance is the process of determining the impact of personal branding following communication.
6. Brand retention helps to keep the brand alive. When a personal brand is obvious and robust, it must be maintained as a consistent identity to ensure that it remains in the thoughts of target consumers.

Tarnovskaya (2017) proposed three distinct stages in the process of personal branding that are not consecutive. Rather than that, they were discovered to operate concurrently throughout time: loyalty to a personal brand profile, promotion of many social media profiles, audience engagement, and co-creation. Personal brand content includes personality, specialized topics, tone of voice, setting (environment), and product brands. Clarity, consistency, and authenticity are all crucial characteristics, similar to those of a product/service brand. This study demonstrated the applicability of classical product branding principles and typology of consumer-brand relationships and co-creation of brand meaning to the personal branding phenomenon, while also emphasizing the phenomenon's complex nature as "born global", purposeful, and highly interactive. Thus, personal branding may be viewed as a reimagining of traditional branding on an entirely new level of engagement and visibility. Individuals aiming to build a personal brand must closely watch and analyze what renowned people say about their brands online, as these individuals have the ability to impact consumers' impressions of brands and companies (Lorgnier and O'Rourke, 2011).

Self-awareness, introspection, and critical skills are considered necessary for uncovering the “inner self”. The “inner self” is defined as a “*collection of self-identity, personal values and beliefs, self-image, and personal goals*” (Kucharska, 2017). According to the examined literature, self-discovery is the most frequently assigned first task in personal branding courses, and experts appear to concur that self-awareness is the first step in the personal branding process (Cederberg, 2017).

Shepherd (2005) draws our attention to an apparent misalignment between the consumer-oriented approach, which advocates for ignoring one’s “true self” and focusing exclusively on the needs of the target audience, and personal branding researchers, who advise against changing oneself and relying on one’s inherent strengths. He proposes a consensus through self-reflection in relation to the target audience and rivals. Two further studies empirically examined the application of marketing concepts to personal branding in terms of audience emphasis and strategy selection.

According to Parmentier et al. (2013), it is vital to adhere to the concepts of brand positioning (creating both points of parity and points of differentiation) and person brand positioning in order to attain and signal one’s capital in a desired organizational area (both fitting into expectations of the field and standing out from competitors in the field). These strategies may be sector- and role-specific in nature. For example, Parmentier and Fischer (2012) assert that professional athletes’ personal branding techniques should include specialization, high-level playing opportunities, providing publicly accessible indications about self, and connection with the audience.

Impression management serves as the vehicle for promoting the personal brand (Khedher, 2015), which can be accomplished by combining online and offline techniques. Personal branding scholars place the highest emphasis on online actions, owing to the changing nature of the economic and social environment and the transition toward digital labor; “*branding is an unavoidable consequence of participation in an online environment*” (Labrecque et al., 2011). Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs, and others, such as YouTube, are the most frequently discussed social media and Web 2.0 technologies in the reviewed literature. As the role of social media in individual career management grows, digital storytelling emerges as a potent technique for communicating one’s labor market worth (Jones and Leverenz, 2017).

Roberts (2005) proposed two facets of the professional image when examining the construct: desired professional image and perceived professional image. We subscribe to this school of thought. A personal brand is made up of two critical components: the desired self and the perceived identity. The desired self can be comprehended through a dynamic examination of job identity (Alvesson et al., 2008). While McCall and Simmons (1978) defined the idealized self as how individuals regarded themselves in relation to their internal ideals and wants, we

define the desired self as how individuals wish to be perceived by their target audience. Developing a personal brand is thus comparable to what Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010) refer to as “identity play,” which they define as “the crafting and provisional testing of immature (i.e., as yet undeveloped) possible selves.”

Gandini (2018) defined personal branding as the process of acquiring reputation; therefore, it is critical to grasp the notion of personal brand as both what we aim to project to our target audience (desired self) and their reaction to it (perceived identity). The desired self and perceived identity will possess all of the brand image characteristics deduced from marketing science: attributes, attitudes, benefits (Keller, 1993), and personality (Aaker, 1997), which Manai and Holmlund (2015) refer to as the “brand core”, which consists of the core identity (education, skills, personality, values, and experience), the extended identity (abilities, attitudes, cultural aspects, and so on), and the value proposition (functional, emotional, self-expressive and relationship benefits).

As work environments become increasingly decontextualized as a result of technology advancements, individuals feel an increased need to build their professional identities (Brooks and Anumudu, 2016). Cederberg (2017) is more explicit, stating that *“the purpose of a personal brand is to develop an identity that identifies an individual with specific emotions and perceptions while successfully managing these perceptions.”*

Individuals make sense of their surroundings through their identities. Given that identity is a set of meanings ascribed to an individual by both self and others, the intelligent career lays the onus on the individual to make sense of those meanings. In reality, both individuals and the intended recipients of their branding efforts engage in a mutual sense-making process (Gioia et al., 2014).

2.4 Building a Personal Brand

2.4.1 Vision and Mission

A personal brand provides us with a significant competitive edge and helps us stand out in the labor market. As a result, it is critical for an individual entering the labor market to have a certain level of self-awareness as well as the ability to organize their thoughts in order to build a picture of their unique personality within the context of a personal brand. It can be viewed as a representation of how we wish to be perceived by others, as well as how our professional and, to a lesser extent, personal lives should be presented. Patel and Agius (2017) also urge at this time that you create and construct a professional image, which is a critical component of developing a vision for your personal brand. The authors recommend concentrating on the following components in this context:

- **Consistency:** This entails a dedication to repeating ideals and the responsible discharge of all responsibilities. Consistency and uniform principles apply to the continual complementarity and fundamental features of personal branding, such as when developing one's identity on social media, in conventional media, in human contact, and other activities related to our professional lives.
- **Creativity:** A valued quality among coworkers and business partners. It fosters curiosity and increases the likelihood of interacting with and developing professional and business partnerships. Existing communication technologies and the Internet provide a unique area for the presentation of creativity. Individuals that actively construct and build their brands can creatively present their results on their websites or social media platforms.
- **Recall:** A applicant for a job position must be easily recalled by others in a related sector. In this scenario, a unique interest outside of work life may be relevant. These personal interests or stories are recommended for sharing with others who are critical to our professional careers.
- **Credibility:** It is created gradually through work references or collaboration with recognized organizations or generally respected individuals in the industry.

2.4.2 Target Group

Identifying and defining a target audience is critical in commercial activity. When developing a personal brand, it is critical to segment the market according to unique traits. We depend heavily on socio-demographic and psychographic criteria, supplemented by in-depth analysis of their motivational structures, decision-making processes, and information processes.

Individual target groups, which correspond to market segments, are defined by their demands and responses to our offer, as well as by features of the individual's occupational activity in the labor market. Internal homogenous segments are formed when criteria for the defined segments are selected. At the same time, each of these segments is distinct from the others. Market segmentation into target groups is a critical component of an effective and efficient marketing strategy, as understanding target groups' needs, their decision-making motivations, and information processes enables the creation and development of a personal brand, as well as planning and control tools.

2.4.3 Online Presence

Social media platforms provide us with a tremendous opportunity to increase online awareness of our own brand. Social media can be classified on a fundamental level into debates, blogs, microblogs, social networks, multimedia sharing, LSB (Local Based Services), and other social media. Patel and Agius (2017) use the phrase “personal brand assets” in the context of social media typology. According to their definition, these are strategic brand traits that, when combined in a unique way, establish a distinct brand personality both online and partially in an offline context. According to the aforementioned authors, a personal brand’s most valuable attributes are as follows:

- **Profile:** Currently, one of the primary qualities required when developing a personal brand in an online environment is the provision of a username or URL address consistent with a defined personal brand strategy. User accounts that are unique and identical across a broader range of social media sites have a competitive edge. Numerous possibilities exist for creating a personal brand name. When it comes to developing a personal brand strategy, it is advisable to start with one’s name. The brand name should be simple to speak and remember, and its applicability in various sectors of a company should be ensured.
- **Social networks:** When it comes to developing and promoting a personal brand, it’s prudent to select an acceptable combination of social networks. Each professional discipline may have its own set of preferred social media platforms. It is not always necessary to exhaust all possible choices. LinkedIn Social Network is given precedence. This network is considered to be the most comprehensive in terms of presenting work history, work experience, personal assumptions, and labor market references. Other social networks, particularly Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, play a vital role in developing a personal brand in the online environment. The problem with social networking is that it is insufficient to manage the content of individual users.
- **Domain name:** A domain name is a critical component of a personal brand strategy. The primary advantage is that the operator has complete control over both the content and the platform as a whole. In terms of a long-term plan, it is advisable to obtain not only the needed domain but also related or alternative domains and redirect them to the primary domain.

- **Website:** In contrast to social networking sites, the website operator has complete control over the content shown. The website's purpose in the context of personal brand development is to provide a platform that integrates the user's online and offline activities and serves as an effective referral system for social media. When creating a website, it is critical to have a clear strategic framework for a personal brand that will be mirrored in graphic design and content marketing.
- **Offline assets:** Offline personal brand activities should be accorded equal weight. They are crucial in intimate encounters and informal gatherings. The most frequently used offline asset is business cards, which, like presentation in an online environment based on a consistent layout, should be built around a unique strategic concept.

2.5 Importance of Personal Branding

Developing a personal brand ensures that an individual is not left behind during the occupation selection process and that they gain the advantage necessary to pursue the professional chances they deserve. With few job opportunities available in today's labor market, having a strong personal brand can open multiple doors to a variety of job opportunities. Personal branding has developed into a critical component of the job search process for candidates (Horton, 2011).

While various firms make use of web indexes and online networking to recruit future representatives, personal branding has developed into a crucial component of the hiring process. *"Personal branding has developed into a key marketing task for average folks as a result of online devices. Personal branding is necessary since everyone can be their brand, and a man's primary job is to be their advertisement"* (Labrecque, Markos, and Milne, 2011).

Considering this concept, job seekers have the opportunity to brand themselves into whatever they choose, as long as it falls inside their targeted interest group. Separating critical wordings within the branding range is a critical component in developing a personal brand. According to Labrecque, Markos, and Milne (2011), the initial step is to develop a brand personality and communicate it to a specific target group of people via brand positioning: *"Brand personality is characterized as how the advertiser needs the brand to be seen"*. By emphasizing critical aspects and components of the brand personality, brand positioning enables the individual to differentiate themselves from other rivals within their targeted interest group. The brand image is then recorded as an impression of the individual based on their social gathering. This response is *"by and large given obvious conduct, nonverbal conduct, and other noticeable prompts"*.

2.6 Personal Branding of Music Artists

Throughout its history, the music industry has undergone numerous changes. The most dramatic change over the last decade has been the decline in vinyl sales and the advent of digital music delivery (DeFillippi, 2016). This has altered the perspective on musicians' careers, emphasizing aspects of their careers that are unrelated to record sales. Artists earn money through a variety of revenue streams, including performances, various royalties, and even licensing their brand and name for various things (Tessler, 2016).

Additionally, the manner in which revenue is generated from these many revenue streams is constantly changing. New technologies provide new methods of music distribution, and hence new avenues for revenue generation. However, with the decline in physical record sales, it has become more difficult for an artist to earn a living exclusively from record sales. Online streaming services offer an effective platform for distributing and promoting music, without the requirement for an intermediary such as a record label or music publisher (Tschmuk, 2016).

There are an increasing number of independent musicians attempting to break into the industry, and they are all building their own careers and names. This is due to industry changes, which have transformed the function of record labels and managers in terms of branding and artist career development. While record labels continue to play an important role in the music industry, the Internet enables artists to become superstars without the assistance of a record label (Davis, Cochene, and Kettler, 2011). Signing with a record label is no longer necessary for an artist, as it is possible to reach an audience, even the masses, online and so generate commercial value (Tschmuk, 2016).

This means, however, that artists who choose to remain independent must establish their careers using their resources and abilities, and obtaining assistance is entirely up to them. Finding the appropriate contacts can be difficult, but so can attracting the appropriate audience. The issue, particularly for musicians at the start of their careers, is in creating a following and establishing a foothold in the music market (Davis et al., 2011). One may argue that storytelling is one of the most critical components of developing an artist's career and brand.

According to Karhumaa (2018), an artist's story is told through their profession and accomplishments, which require publicity in order to be noticed. At some point, an artist's story will garner enough attention to sustain itself without active narration. Communicating the tale is a critical component of narrating, and much of this occurs on various social media sites, such as Instagram and YouTube. However, because the Internet and various online platforms are so accessible, it becomes more difficult to stand out with a tale.

It appears as though the process of developing an artist's career has flipped on its head. To gain recognition in the industry, the artist must first establish their brand and fanbase. Several years

ago, an artist with no web presence or fans might have more readily gotten signed to a label. Nonetheless, this occurs nowadays as well, as long as an artist garners the industry's interest; however, an artist frequently must, but also has the ability, to strike out on their own (Karhumaa, 2018).

A career as an artist is sometimes defined as a personal set of objectives, packed with maybe lifetime desires. Creating an incentive for those assisting the artist is critical; otherwise, they would have no motive to work to advance the artist's career. A common mistake is to establish a strong foundation with capable professionals who assist the artist in setting up social media platforms and creating content, but then abandon the project as soon as something better comes along. In many instances, it appears as though the experts were unconcerned about the artist and their message (Karhumaa, 2018).

One cause for this could be that the artist did not consider their story deeply enough or was unable to present it in an engaging and clear manner. On the other hand, an artist rarely has the money to obtain expert assistance early in their careers, and they must seek out others who will support them in exchange for something other than immediate monetary recompense. I believe that the primary motivation for assisting a new artist should be a personal connection to and interest in the artist's story and vision.

Popular music artists are considered to be a part of the commercial, entertainment sector of the music industry, where monetizing an artist's brand and music is frequently a primary objective. While branding as a concept has existed in the music industry for a long period of time, there has been criticism over its use, as it is heavily associated with advertising and commerce. However, the process of branding an artist appears to be murky, with no clear path forward. Different online platforms play a significant role in the process, as they enable artists to freely promote themselves online while leaving the branding process entirely in the artist's hands. Nonetheless, the various facets of an artist's career are dispersed and are not always in the hands of a single team or individual. There is an increased duty on the artist to take command and have a clear vision for their work. Additionally, brand development is a holistic process that encompasses numerous creative facets of an artist's career.

While one could argue that artist brands and visuals have always existed, building and crafting them with the purpose of occasionally surpassing the music itself has just recently risen to the forefront. Technology has played a significant role in this evolution. In the 1980s, videos were an integral aspect of music production, and producing an image seemed to have taken precedence over the music itself (Negus, 1996). Since the advent of social media, it has been critical for an artist's career to create personal images. It appears that at times, the importance of music has been exaggerated to the point where attempts to establish artist careers on the

development of a brand image have been made. However, the importance of an artist's brand image should not be overlooked.

Harrison (2003) believes that it is critical for artists to develop a brand, as the public will always be interested in the stories of artists. An artist brand provides an insider's perspective and takes you behind the scenes. However, she acknowledges that other musicians are repulsed by the idea of branding themselves and would rather just make music. On the other hand, even artists who are averse to branding recognize that they must establish a name and reputation to attract listeners and generate cash through their music.

After all, an artist's ability to stand out and capture the public's attention is critical. Although the term "branding" might be revisited, presenting the artist's story may be a more effective strategy for some. Artist branding is frequently regarded through the eyes of emerging, youthful artists. Additionally, while social media has enabled anybody to pursue a career as an artist, musicians, and bands that existed prior to the social media era have had to grasp new communication tools in order to remain relevant. Many artists have begun to consider how to remain relevant (Christian, 2011).

Even established rock bands must rethink their artistic presentation and learn how to leverage internet platforms to their advantage and to attract new younger listeners. On the other hand, new musicians lack the luxury of an established brand name and must instead find out how to stand out and, more significantly, how to stay in the spotlight without being a one-hit wonder (Christian, 2011). As a result, older artists must rethink how they manage their brands, as they cannot rely entirely on strategies used before the advent of social media.

Social media platforms offer numerous opportunities for self-branding at a very minimal cost. At the start of the process, it may appear as though there are an infinite number of possibilities, and developing one's brand may be both enjoyable and fulfilling. However, online platforms such as social media are available to the public, making it nearly difficult to govern how other users interact with them. Thus, without the author's explicit permission, the information a person provides about themselves is vulnerable to interpretation and remark at some point during the process (Labrecque et al., 2011). Behind every brand is a story, which begins with the tale's author, but once the story garners enough attention, it can continue to exist independently (Karhumaa, 2018). The author may have no influence on the tone of the story or if it develops in the desired direction.

At certain stages of the brand-building process, the story might begin to take on a life of its own. Early on, attention can be captured, but it can also be lost as quickly as it was captured. Nonetheless, after a brand has garnered sufficient attention, the process of brand creation transforms into brand management. The brand's story no longer requires detailed narration;

rather, it demands steering in the proper direction and remaining consistent with the brand image.

Gheder (2015) defines impression management as the art of personal brand management and defines it as an activity aimed at information control. Personal brands convey a specific image, which is transmitted through the various bits of information conveyed by the brand. Impression management is a strategy for influencing how an audience perceives a person. Thus, impression management can be considered a subset of brand management, albeit controlling the brand image is more challenging than controlling the brand story.

2.6.1 Personal Branding in Hip-Hop/Rap Music Industry

Hip-hop is viewed as more than a musical genre; it is viewed as a culture that enables individuals to interact with one another and with the world (Emdin, 2010). Additionally, as gleaned from interviews and lyric searches, hip-hop is a means of self-expression, an art form, a social commentary, a philosophy, and a way of life – requiring active participation and, at its most extreme, competitive Battling.

Wolf (2008) characterizes this process as one that results in the formation of hyphenated identities and globalization. Four creative aspects form the foundations of traditional hip-hop culture: ‘deejaying’ (sampling and scratching records), ‘emceeing’ (rapping), ‘breaking’ (break-dancing), and ‘bombing’ (graffiti art) (Ghandnoosh, 2010). Additional words that have been cited as constituents or compound suffixes during the evolution of the term include knowledge, fashion, slang, and beatboxing (replicating musical sounds and percussion rhythms with one’s voice).

While it is obvious that some of the parts are concerned with the production of music, art, or dancing, the writers view them collectively as displaying uniformity through their rhythmic and emotional presentation (Olsen and Gould, 2008). Gaunt (2006) clarifies this stance by describing the interaction and reciprocity between music and dance as manifested in ‘oral-kinetic etudes’.

Hip-hop culture has always been about the glitz and glamour that come with success. Rappers are frequently linked with showy clothing, jewelry, and being more outspoken than other performers (Romero, 2012). Their temperament and popularity among their admirers contribute to increasing awareness of a developing trend. A case in point is the rise in popularity of the Japanese brand A Bathing Ape (Bape), which was fueled by Pharrell Williams’ collaboration with the brand (Highsnobiety, 2019) and Kanye West’s first shoe collaboration with the brand, which featured the iconic bear from his first album, a College Dropout (GQ, 2017).

These events prompted emerging musicians to capitalize on the trend by wearing Bape in their music videos and public appearances, and the brand has remained a part of streetwear culture to this day. Generations growing up during this period of change in popular culture are well acquainted with the popular faces of that musical genre, which makes marketing via these musicians advantageous. Rappers have traditionally served as ambassadors for lower-end, streetwear businesses, but this is changing. A\$AP Rocky, a Harlem native, was named the face of the high-end fashion company Dior in 2016 (Billboard, 2016). At that time, the narrative of having articles from such labels as a status symbol reserved for only the most successful artists shifted. Fashion firms were looking for hip-hop celebrities to pique the interest of this younger demographic in their market (Burkhalter, and Thornton, 2014).

Since then, Drake, Future, Travis Scott, Donald Glover, and others have been frequent participants in discussions concerning hip-hop's influence on fashion. The most notable development is arguably the ascension of Virgil Abloh, formerly Kanye West's DJ. After serving as creative director for Kanye West's agency, he founded Off white, a high-end streetwear brand (Vogue, 2018). His continuing success, whether in partnership with luxury labels such as Moncler or on his own, has led him to his current position as artistic director of the 'crème de la crème' of luxury houses, Louis Vuitton (GQ, 2018).

Popular (pop) culture is derived from media and social standards around what is seen as desirable by the general population (Katz, 1959). This culture is shaped by a variety of influences, including an artistic movement, a writing style, filmmaking, popular events, and music. Pop culture's standards determine how an age behaves and its ideals (Abercrombie, 1990). As is the case with pop culture in general, pop culture in music evolves with time, from Elvis Presley, The Eagles, The Beatles, and rock dominating the fifties to Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Britney Spears, and pop dominating the eighties to the early nineties.

Hip-hop music has seen a surge in popularity in the pop culture we are currently living in, with Jay Z, Kanye West, and Drake at the forefront. The dominant music movement in popular culture has been shown to impact fashion, whether their clothing adheres to specific trends to reinforce the movement or deviates from them to make a statement and start their movement (Power, and Hauge, 2008).

Hip-hop and fashion are more inextricably linked than ever before. Brand allusions are ubiquitous in lyrics, and rappers and hip-hop personalities are frequently invited to fashion shows, with some even making it to the main stage and serving as models. This phenomenon generated interest in examining the extent to which fashion firms, large and small, are now marketing themselves in collaboration with rappers. These superstars eventually appear in advertisements for well-known fashion brands, such as Travis Scott for Saint Laurent (Billboard, 2018).

The issue is that fashion firms must adapt to a new generation of customers that are social media savvy and exposed to a new form of advertising. A shift in their communication techniques may be necessary to rectify this situation by adapting their procedures to this new audience. Influencer marketing is a burgeoning approach that connects well with today's pop culture target audience (Childers, Lemon, and Hoy, 2018). Along with that method, introducing hip-hop personas into this exercise may be beneficial.

According to Aaker, a brand is *"a name or symbol, trademark, or packaging design that uniquely identifies and separates a retailer's products or services from those of competitors"* (Aaker, 1991). This is true for both the apparel manufacturers and celebrities featured in this study, as each has unique characteristics that set them apart from their competition and can serve as a selling point for a campaign. A brand name might be the company's name or the name of a popular product, or it can be a celebrity's given name or stage name.

Kwek, Lai, and Lau (1970) underline the importance of having a strong brand identity in attracting new clients and instilling confidence in them when it comes to purchasing their products. This is because a brand name contains extrinsic cues that cause customers to form an opinion about the product's quality regardless of whether they have used the brand's products previously.

According to Holt (2002), hip-hop falls under the category of 'arts and fashion communities, ethnic subcultures, professional communities, and consumption communities' (Holt, 2002). Although these inroads are not unique to hip-hop – other music genres such as Electronica, Punk, Grunge, and Indie have become the soundtracks for generations and an integral part of how individuals assign meaning to their identities (Hesmondhalgh, 2008) – hip-hop has been able to become the bedfellow of marketers by giving brands center stage. Additionally, one could argue that this pattern has aided in the growth of brand consumerism in other genres. Additionally, hip-hop lyrics contain numerous references to brands, frequently accompanied by descriptions, similes, and metaphors that mutually improve both the brand and the hip-personality (Bryant, 2008).

2.6.2 Examples of Personal Branding in Rap/Hip-hop

2.6.2.1 Kanye West

Ye, also known as Kanye West, is an American rapper, record producer, entrepreneur, and fashion designer who has had a significant impact on hip-hop music and culture. Born on June 8, 1977, in Atlanta, he moved to Chicago's south side at a young age. West rose to fame as a producer for Roc-A-Fella Records in the early 2000s, introducing the innovative "chipmunk soul" sampling technique and producing hits for various artists. He later pursued a solo career

and gained critical and commercial success with his debut album, "The College Dropout" in 2004, and went on to establish his own record label, GOOD Music. Throughout his musical journey, West explored diverse musical elements, such as orchestral arrangements, synths, and autotune, in albums like "Late Registration" (2005), "Graduation" (2007), and "808s & Heartbreak" (2008). His albums "My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy" (2010) and "Yeezus" (2013) achieved both critical acclaim and commercial success by incorporating maximalism and minimalism. West continued to expand his musical horizons with albums like "The Life of Pablo" (2016), "Ye" (2018), and his exploration of Christian and gospel music in "Jesus Is King" (2019). His ninth album, "Donda" (2021), faced mixed reviews but enjoyed financial success. He followed it up with "Donda 2" (2022), released exclusively through his tie-in audio speaker service. West has also collaborated on full-length albums with Jay-Z and Kid Cudi, titled "Watch the Throne" (2011) and "Kids See Ghosts" (2018), respectively.

Aside from his music, West has attracted significant media attention due to his outspoken opinions and controversial statements on social media, at award events, and on various subjects like music, fashion, politics, racism, and slavery. His personal life, including his Christian beliefs, divorce from Kim Kardashian, and mental health struggles, has also been extensively covered by the media. As a fashion designer, West has collaborated with renowned brands like Nike, Louis Vuitton, The Gap, and A.P.C., and he oversees the Yeezy collaboration with Adidas. He is the founder and CEO of Donda, a creative content firm. In 2020, West embarked on a failed independent presidential candidacy, focusing on a consistent life ethic. With over 160 million records sold, West is considered one of the world's best-selling musicians. He has received numerous accolades, including 24 Grammy Awards, tying for the tenth-most of all time and the most by any rapper alongside Jay-Z.

His contributions to hip-hop music have earned him recognition as one of the genre's greatest musicians. West has been honored with the Michael Jackson Video Vanguard Award, the Billboard Artist Achievement Award, and three Brit Awards for Best International Male Solo Artist. Rolling Stone featured six of his albums on their list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time in 2020, and he was named one of the 100 Greatest Songwriters of All Time by the same publication. West shares the record for the most albums topping the annual Pazz & Jop critics' poll with Bob Dylan, having achieved this feat four times. He also holds the fifth-most number of appearances on the Billboard Hot 100, with 133 entries. Time magazine included him in their list of the 100 most important people in the world in 2005 and 2015. Forbes projects his net worth to reach \$2 billion by 2022, making him the wealthiest musician globally. West's fame, as well as his marriage to Kim Kardashian, has played a significant role in his substantial social media following. He stands out from other musicians by constantly innovating and defying conventions in his promotional strategies. His album releases are highly anticipated events, often generating widespread attention and excitement. In addition to music, West has expanded into performance art, apparel and fashion, establishing a record label, and founding a creative

firm named after his late mother, DONDA. Each aspect of his brand incorporates new advertising and promotional initiatives. The scarcity of Yeezy products, limited stock releases, and distinctive design contribute to their popularity. West's partnership with Adidas and the recent collaboration agreement with Gap further expand the reach of the Yeezy brand, which has become a significant source of his revenue, estimated to generate around \$3 billion in recent years.

2.6.2.2 Drake

Aubrey Graham Drake, a Canadian rapper, singer, songwriter, and actor, has achieved remarkable success in his career. He holds numerous records, including being the most certified digital singles artist in the United States, according to the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). Drake has an impressive list of accomplishments, including the most top 10 singles, the most charted songs, the most simultaneously charted songs in a week, the most Hot 100 debuts in a week, and the most continuous time on the Hot 100 chart. He has won multiple Grammy Awards, American Music Awards, Billboard Music Awards, Brit Awards, and Juno Awards. In 2012, Drake co-founded the music label OVO Sound and became the "global ambassador" for the Toronto Raptors in 2013. He also ventured into business collaborations, including the creation of Virginia Black bourbon whiskey.

Drake's influence extends beyond music, as he popularized terms like "YOLO" and coined the nickname "The Six" for Toronto. His emotional and relationship-focused lyrics resonate with fans and have become popular references in photo captions. He has been recognized for his style and fashion choices, and his music videos, particularly "Hotline Bling," have gained widespread attention and spawned numerous remixes and parodies. Drake has faced criticism for his expensive clothing and product placements. He is known for his lavish lifestyle, extravagant birthday celebrations, and reputation as a successful gambler. His fame has influenced the music industry, popularizing the Toronto sound and contributing to the success of Canadian artists internationally. Drake's music has become synonymous with various activities and events, and his songs have been shown to affect runners' performance. He has even become a subject of academic study, with classes at Ryerson University examining his impact on the music industry and social issues. Through endorsement deals and business collaborations, Drake has further boosted his earnings and established himself as one of the highest-paid celebrities. His success is a testament to his talent, influence, and ability to innovate in the world of music and beyond.

2.6.2.3 Travis Scott

Jacques Webster, known as Travis Scott, has emerged as a highly influential and significant figure in contemporary popular culture. Initially starting his career as a producer, Travis gained

recognition when he joined Kanye West's G.O.O.D. Music label as part of the production team. Later, he signed with T.I.'s Grand Hustle label as a solo artist in 2013 and released several mixtapes and his debut album, "Rodeo," in 2015. Despite being more renowned for his production skills than his rapping ability at that time, Travis achieved success with his single "Antidote," which reached number 16 on the Billboard Hot 100. Travis's breakthrough came with the release of his third studio album, "Astroworld," in 2018, receiving critical acclaim. The album produced his first number-one hit on the Billboard Hot 100 with the song "Sicko Mode," featuring Drake. In late 2019, Travis's record label, Cactus Jack Records, released the compilation album "JackBoys," which topped the Billboard 200 chart. In 2020, he made history on the Hot 100 by having three singles debut at number one in less than a year, including the track "Franchise" featuring Young Thug and M.I.A.

Outside of his music career, Travis Scott has ventured into the realm of fashion and collaborations. He partnered with Nike in 2019 to release his Cactus Jack Air Jordan 1 sneakers, followed by a collaboration with Dior for a menswear collection unveiled in the summer of 2021. Travis also teamed up with McDonald's in September 2020 to offer "The Travis Scott" limited-edition meal, which became a massive success and sparked a trend of celebrity-endorsed meals at fast-food chains. He further extended his collaborations by joining PlayStation as a Strategic Creative Partner, promoting the PlayStation 5 system and releasing exclusive products.

Travis Scott draws inspiration from various artists, including Bon Iver, Kid Cudi, M.I.A., Kanye West, Toro y Moi, Tame Impala, T.I., and Thom Yorke, all of whom have influenced his musical style. His music is characterized by the prominent use of audio manipulation techniques such as Auto-Tune, phasing, delays, and intricate chorusing and harmony structures. Producers Mike Dean and Alex Tumay have played a significant role in shaping Travis's sound. Described as "ambient" and defying traditional hip-hop categorization, Travis Scott's music has been acclaimed for its dark, syncretic, and unnatural qualities. Travis Scott's impact on popular culture is undeniable, with his music, fashion collaborations, and cultural influence resonating with a global audience. His innovative approach to music production and his ability to transcend traditional genre boundaries have solidified his position as a prominent figure in contemporary music and popular culture.

3 Qualitative Study – Analysis of Interviews

3.1 Methodology

The research methodology employed in this Master's Thesis is qualitative research in the form of an interview. As the thesis investigates personal branding in the hip-hop/rap industry,

interviews with hip-hop/rap artists were assessed to be the most appropriate method of research in order to note their understanding of personal branding in the industry, as well as their approach to personal branding. Five interviews were conducted with contemporary and old-school hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely Shtela, Danza, Frenkie, Bogi, and Kontra; these are expert interviews, hence they are not anonymous – and every reader of this Master’s Thesis will be familiar with each and every detail of interviews. Interviewees were picked according to the appropriateness for the topic of this Master’s Thesis, thus their differences in music style, delivery, and personal branding preferences. It is important to state that I personally know all the interviewees, hence they are not picked at random. Interviews consisted of 10 questions that encompassed their personal branding style, methods, and preferences. Interviews were conducted in-person and over the phone and then transcribed – and can be delivered upon request. The average time per interview was 20 minutes. The section ‘Results of Interviews’ encompasses the presentation of answers of interviewees on a given question/topic of the interview, which are further analyzed and discussed in the Discussion section of the Master’s Thesis.

3.2 Results of Interviews

3.2.1 Personal Branding Presentation

In **Question 1**: “*How do you try to stand out on stage, compared to your colleagues from the hip-hop/rap scene?*”, interviewees were expected to accentuate what distinguishes them from the rest of the hip-hop/rap artists.

Shtela explains that as one of the pioneers of hip-hop/rap in Sarajevo, he did not feel the need to actively try to stand out on stage. During the early days of the scene, there were fewer performers, providing ample space for each artist to showcase their talent. Instead of seeking individual recognition, the focus was on collectively highlighting the talent and creativity of the entire Sarajevo hip-hop/rap community.

On the same note, Danza explains that he does not make a conscious effort to stand out on stage compared to his colleagues in the hip-hop/rap scene. Instead, he believes in staying true to his personality and current mindset. If his natural approach allows him to stand out, he embraces it, but he does not force it. His focus is on working honestly and expressing himself authentically in his music and performances.

Frenkie states that he does not think much about his overall presentation – but being authentic and true to himself. He supports a similar argument as Danza, as he stated that a natural, organic approach is very important when it comes to personal presentation – and not doing something too purposely or strategically. Furthermore, he points out a very important factor for him –

which is professionalism, stating that, besides music being a very creative process, it is business just as much, and that it is very important to view it as such.

According to Bogi, work habits and character is the most important distinguishing factor in the hip-hop/rap scene. He emphasizes the importance of individuality and uniqueness for performers. According to Bogi, an artist should not simply conform to existing molds or try to fit into predefined categories. Even if they share a genre with others, each artist should have their distinct style, characteristics, and personality. Bogi personally values maintaining a creative process that is true to himself and not influenced by others. He believes that his personal image, clothing choices, and daily behavior should reflect his individuality and help him stand out from the crowd.

Kontra expresses his primary focus on music as a means of standing out and connecting with his audience. He believes that everything else, such as visual aesthetics or external factors, takes a secondary role compared to the music itself. Kontra recalls a time when music videos were scarce and the appearance of artists was unfamiliar, highlighting that his love for music originated from the sounds rather than the visuals. Even in the present day, Kontra maintains that music remains his main and preferred method of communication with his audience.

In Question 2: *“Your opinion - why does the audience listen to your music and follow your brand?”*, interviewees were expected to present their views on why their audience listens to them.

Shtela believes that the reason why his audience resonates with his music is because they can relate to it on a personal level. He strives to depict the realities of life through her music, aligning with the essence of hip-hop since its inception. Shtela feels that this connection with his listeners is what keeps them engaged. He puts a great deal of effort into his music, ensuring that he gives his best and effectively conveys the message. Shtela emphasizes the importance of authenticity and relatability, stating that these factors are crucial not only in music but also in other forms of artistic expressions, such as stage performance and acting.

Danza believes that the audience connects with his music primarily because they can relate to the messages conveyed in her songs. He recognizes that his listeners find entertainment value in his music, although the level of enjoyment may vary depending on the specific song. Danza acknowledges the importance of creating a connection with the audience through relatable content, allowing them to find themselves within his music.

Frenkie reiterates that the primary reason people resonate with his music is because they recognize his genuine and authentic nature. He emphasizes that he does not pretend to be someone else, which allows his audience to connect with his lyrics and the messages he conveys

through his music. Frenkie believes that his authenticity is the key to establishing a logical and meaningful connection with his listeners.

Bogi believes that the question of why the audience connects with his music is better answered by the audience themselves. However, in his opinion, the reason lies in the fact that listeners can find a part of themselves in the music. Bogi describes most of his songs as battle music, reflecting their hunger and ambition to succeed. This hunger and relentless drive, encapsulated by his upcoming album called “Ambicije” (Ambitions), is what Bogi considers his personal brand. He believes that his music resonates with listeners because it represents the relentless pursuit of success without giving up, regardless of the duration it takes to achieve it, whether it be 5, 10, or 15 years. Bogi sees this determination as the primary factor that connects his music with the audience.

Kontra believes that the reason why people listen to his music is due to consistency in themes and lyrics, which have remained aligned with his earlier works. He has persisted in conveying a particular message throughout their career. However, Kontra acknowledges that he has also explored new musical directions and incorporated subgenres of rap, blending them with elements of electronic music and other experimental elements. Despite these musical explorations, Kontra feels that the main factor attracting listeners is his unwavering message and energy, which has remained consistent since the beginning of his musical journey.

3.2.2 Personal Branding Strategies

In **Question 3:** “*How do you build your personal brand? Do you use social media to present your views and preferences?*”, interviewees were expected to name and discuss the marketing techniques and strategies they use in creating their personal brand.

Shtela explains that as an older rapper, he does not actively consider himself as a brand or engage in extensive self-promotion. As an example, he states that he does not create merchandise like T-shirts or shoes to establish his brand identity. However, Shtela does use social media platforms to showcase his personal views and preferences. He does not frequently express strong opinions or delve into political matters, as he prefers not to judge or label individuals publicly. Shtela prefers to discuss deeper topics and engage in conversations about politics and various subjects with people he knows personally rather than on social media. Consequently, he has a less prominent online presence in terms of sharing such views.

Danza explains that he primarily builds his personal brand through social media platforms. He uses these platforms to present his views and preferences to their audience. Additionally, he also focuses on building his brand through real-life interactions, such as connecting with people in their city or engaging in conversations when he makes appearances. However, Danza

emphasizes that social media plays a significant role in shaping his personal brand, as it is a prevalent tool utilized by many individuals in today's digital age.

Frenkie acknowledges that social media is a crucial tool for musicians and artists in building their personal brands. He highlights that social networks have shortened the gap between musicians and their audience, enabling direct contact and real-time updates. Frenkie believes that social media platforms have replaced traditional media outlets like newspapers, allowing artists to present their work directly to the public with just a single click. He considers social media to be the most important tool for musicians and suggests that utilizing these platforms can be highly beneficial for them in terms of brand building and connecting with their audience.

Bogi admits to still being in the process of learning how to build his personal brand. He states that he mostly relies on social media platforms like Instagram and TikTok as the primary means of branding. Bogi is most active on Instagram, finding it the easiest and most familiar platform to use. He also explores other social networks and seeks guidance from individuals who understand how to create trends and reach specific audiences on platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Bogi believes that his music is the strongest expression of his attitudes and preferences. He strives to remain true to themselves, ensuring that his characteristics and attitudes shine through in his music and social media presence. He appreciates the opportunity to engage with the audience and inquire about their preferences, intending to provide content that resonates with his fans. However, Bogi emphasizes the importance of staying authentic and not compromising his own identity in the process.

Kontra acknowledges the importance of using social media platforms to build his personal brand. He recognizes the necessity of staying updated and not falling behind in the digital age. However, Kontra expresses his reservations about certain platforms, specifically TikTok. He feels that TikTok's focus on video content, challenges, and self-deprecating humor does not align well with his musical style, where the music should take precedence. Consequently, Kontra does not utilize TikTok as a social media platform. However, he utilizes other social networks, finding them to be the most valuable tools for promoting music. Kontra believes that anyone who neglects the use of social media in today's era is outdated and not maximizing their promotional potential.

In Question 4: *“Do you connect publicly or through lyrics/videos with certain brands and do you think that this brings you even closer to your desired audience?”*, interviewees were expected to express certain affiliations with local/global brands that potentially connects them to a lookalike audience.

Shtela explains that he primarily connects with local brands such as Molimao, Bosnian Kingdom, Revolt, and Brda. He states that he appreciates these brands for their creativity and the quality of their work. However, Shtela clarifies that he has never associated himself with

luxury brands like Gucci, Prada, or Balenciaga, as it does not align with his personal style. He respects those who choose to wear such brands and has no issues with them. However, Shtela personally finds it a bit excessive and flashy for his own taste. On the other hand, Shtela reveals that mentioning popular brands in songs, such as Rolex, Gucci, or Prada, can have an impact on reaching a larger audience through YouTube's algorithms. While Shtela prefers to support local brands like Molimao, he acknowledges that mentioning globally recognized brands in songs can attract more views and reach due to their popularity. He notes that this aspect of targeting specific keywords plays a significant role in YouTube views and audience reach. Ultimately, Shtela acknowledges that statistical factors influence decisions related to brand mentions and promotions.

Danza explains that he does not consciously promote specific brands, especially when it comes to clothing or related products, either in his videos or lyrics. He does not deliberately approach it with the intention of connecting with a particular audience. If there happens to be any mention of clothing or brands in their lyrics, it is more likely to be incidental rather than a deliberate strategy to appeal to a specific audience. Danza does not actively seek to associate himself with brands in order to establish a closer connection with his desired audience.

Frenkie explains that he does connect with various brands, but only those that align with his appearance and image. He believes that it is important for the brand association to look and feel natural when connected to him. Frenkie is happy to collaborate with brands that complement his music and persona. However, he emphasizes that he would never work with brands that do not match his image, as it would not make sense for him to promote something unrelated to his music or identity. Frenkie expresses his willingness to accept collaborations with brands that are relevant to him, but he sets a crucial rule: the brands must respect his artistic freedom – they cannot interfere with his message, or lyrics, or control what he can or cannot say in his songs or interviews. Frenkie places a strong emphasis on maintaining creative control and ensuring that his collaborations do not compromise his artistic integrity.

Bogi explains that he primarily connects with his desired audience through his music and the content he creates, stating that he is focused on creating music that resonates with him and his surroundings. If the people around him create something that touches him or aligns with his artistic vision, it helps bring him closer to his desired audience. While he acknowledges that connections with other artists or individuals in the industry can play a role in reaching their audience, Bogi emphasizes that the content itself is the most important factor. He believes that his music and the quality of his content ultimately determine how he connects with his audience. Bogi also highlights the camaraderie within the industry, where artists from different locations can listen to and support each other's work. He states that he views himself and fellow artists as colleagues, and through this shared community, they can all reach their desired audience to some extent.

Kontra explains that he is publicly associated with only one brand, which is Red Bull. However, the association is not merely a sponsorship but more of a partnership. Kontra values this partnership because it allows him creative freedom without any conditions or limitations. He believes that having such freedom is essential for long-term collaboration. When it comes to mentioning brands in his lyrics, Kontra does so if it fits within the context, not as a means of promoting a specific brand. He is conscious of the fact that his audience may perceive excessive brand promotion as a departure from his established ideals, potentially alienating them. Kontra prioritizes maintaining a strong connection with his existing audience and avoids overemphasizing brand endorsements in his music and lyrics.

In **Question 5**: “Which performers inspire you to create your personal brand (music style, dressing style, and general behavior towards the audience and fans)?”, interviewees were expected to describe the motivation and inspiration they draw from other hip-hop/rap artists.

Shtela explains that there are not many artists who serve as direct inspirations for his personal brand. However, he mentions that he strives towards the style of Slug from the group Atmosphere. He appreciates Slug’s humility and normal approach to people, which resonates with his values. When it comes to his style of dressing, Shtela emphasizes that he does not follow trends or change his clothes from year to year. He has a consistent love for certain brands, such as Jordans and Nike, which he has been fond of since he was 17. Shtela prefers to remain true to his preferences and does not feel the need to conform to changing fashion phases.

Danza explains that while there are many artists he listens to, he has moved past the phase of being an excessive fan. However, he does consider Jay-Z a role model when it comes to creating his personal brand. Danza views Jay-Z as a serious and accomplished artist, whose style in hip-hop, dressing, and general behavior toward the audience and fans serves as an inspiration to him.

Frenkie explains that he does not have any specific artists who serve as his inspiration for creating his personal brand. Instead, he follows the trends in the music industry and selectively adopts certain trends, moves, and standards that he feels align with his style and preferences. However, he also mentions that there are some trends that he chooses not to accept or adapt to.

Bogi draws inspiration from a variety of artists for creating their personal brand. He looks up to rappers who have been on the scene for a long time, particularly Future and 50 Cent. He also holds admiration for legendary artists like Biggie and Tupac, who had a certain marketing approach and represented a specific side of life that resonated with people. In terms of current inspiration, Bogi looks to Jay Z, P. Diddy, and Future for their branding, public image, style of dressing, and general behavior. These artists have influenced Bogi’s approach to fashion, behavior, and how he interacts with his audience.

Kontra finds inspiration in Pusha T for creating their personal brand. He admires Pusha T's attitude toward the audience, his styling, and the clothes he wears. Pusha T's brand is seen as a great combination of values from the 90s and modern styles, which resonates with Kontra and influences his approach to hip-hop style, dressing, and general behavior toward the audience and fans.

3.2.3 Effect of Foreign Hip-hop/Rap Scene on the Domestic Hip-Hop/Rap Scene

In **Question 6:** *“Do you think that foreign hip-hop/rap artists have a great influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina? If so, in what way?”*, interviewees were expected to discuss the extent and type of influence of foreign hip-hop/rap artists on domestic hip-hop/rap artists.

According to Shtela, foreign hip-hop/rap artists have a significant influence on artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He points out that there has been a notable impact from the era of boom bap and artists like DMX and Onix, where some artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina attempted to replicate their styles. However, Shtela emphasizes the importance of maintaining a connection between the influence of foreign rap and the reality of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is crucial for Shtela to avoid sounding like a mere copy of artists from outside the region. He believes that the thread between foreign influence and the local context should not be lost. Shtela also raises concerns about performers in Bosnia and Herzegovina creating a facade or “faking it till they make it” without a genuine creative drive. He observes that this trend has become more prevalent with the rise of fast internet connections. Shtela perceives this approach as empty and lacking creativity, and he expresses a preference for authenticity and maintaining a connection to the local reality.

According to Danza, foreign hip-hop/rap artists have a significant influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The larger markets, such as those in America, Britain, Germany, France, and Italy, generate a larger audience and set trends in the industry. He states that as a result, these trends naturally spill over to Bosnia and Herzegovina and impact the local hip-hop/rap scene. The influence of foreign artists affects various aspects of music, including style, sound, and overall trends.

According to Frenkie, foreign hip-hop/rap artists, particularly those from America, have some influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Frenkie personally feels that the influence has become less significant as he has grown older and matured. While there may have been a stronger impact when he was younger, he suggests that the influence is not overwhelmingly large in his experience.

According to Bogi, foreign hip-hop/rap artists do have an influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but the extent of the influence varies among performers. Bogi believes that foreign rap has a stronger influence on the audience in Zagreb compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, he notes that Bosnia and Herzegovina has a distinct style characterized by its hospitality and local storytelling, which sets it apart from the patterns of American hip-hop. Bogi suggests that the influence of foreign rap may be felt in certain aspects such as fashion trends, but overall, Bosnia and Herzegovina tends to look more towards Europe for inspiration, particularly in the wave of drill music that has spread across the continent.

According to Kontra, foreign hip-hop/rap artists, particularly those from America, have a significant influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The influence is primarily observed in the music itself, with many local artists incorporating certain styles and elements from American performers. Kontra expresses a preference for more influence from America or Great Britain in terms of music while suggesting a desire for less influence from Germany.

In **Question 7**: “*Do our hip-hop/rap artists follow current trends on stage?*”, interviewees were expected to discuss the current global and domestic trends in the hip-hop/rap industry.

According to Shtela, hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina do follow the current trends in the scene, sometimes to the extent of losing their own identity and becoming copies of foreign performers. However, he points out that the creative aspect is often left behind, with repetitive lyrics and themes. Shtela expresses concern that following these trends can lead to the essence of hip-hop and rap disappearing, as older artists in the genre have spoken about the importance of addressing relevant and meaningful topics. He also mentions the impact of censorship on platforms like YouTube and the focus on superficial aspects rather than addressing real issues.

According to Danza, hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina do follow the current trends in the global hip-hop/rap scene. However, he expresses that he personally does not embrace these trends excessively. He may adopt certain elements of new sounds or styles when they emerge, but he emphasizes the importance of considering cultural differences. Danza specifically mentions the trend of copying American hip-hop/rap culture and highlights the challenges that arise due to significant cultural disparities. He suggests that it is easier for him to connect with artists from British, Italian, or French hip-hop scenes, as their cultural context may align more closely with his own.

According to Frenkie, there are hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina who do follow the current trends in the global scene, while others strive to be original and avoid direct imitation. He believes that neither approach is inherently good or bad. Frenkie acknowledges that as artists, they have been influenced, either directly or indirectly, by foreign hip-hop/rap artists, considering that they are not the first to engage in this genre of music. It is natural for

artists to draw inspiration from others and incorporate elements from different trends and styles into their work. Overall, Frenkie sees the influence of foreign artists as a normal part of the creative process in hip-hop/rap, without assigning a value judgment to whether artists should or should not follow current trends.

According to Bogi, there are hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina who attempt to follow current trends in the scene. However, he believes that not all of them succeed in doing so or reach a substantial audience. There are artists who are good at copying trends and have a dedicated following, but Bogi questions the authenticity and originality of that audience, suggesting that they may simply jump from trend to trend. Bogi, on the other hand, expresses a desire to create his trend and leave his own mark. He aims to be known for his unique style of dressing, talking, and interacting with people. He values hard work, passion, and dedication, and believes that by relentlessly pursuing his passion, something meaningful will eventually happen. While he acknowledges that following trends can have its place, he emphasizes the importance of each artist creating their trend and fostering a collaborative environment where trends can naturally emerge and influence one another, without resorting to mere copying.

According to Kontra, hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina are indeed following the current trends in the scene. He mentions the emergence of emo trap, a popular subgenre, which has gained popularity worldwide. Kontra notes that in his 15 years of experience in hip-hop, it is the first time that they are in trend with the rest of the world. Typically, he mentions that their music scene tends to be a few years behind in adopting global trends. However, with the rise of emo trap, it seems that they are now staying more up-to-date with the current trends in hip-hop.

3.2.4 Personal Brand Strength

In **Question 8**: “*Kanye West or Jay-Z? Describe their personal brands. Who has stronger personal branding? Who invests more in personal branding? Who is more successful and why?*”, interviewees were expected to distinguish between two of the most prominent global hip-hop/rap personal brands, and compare their personal brands from their own point of view.

According to Shtela, Kanye West invests more in personal branding and has always made scenes and done things to be remembered throughout his career. He mentions his notorious incident at an awards show where he interrupted a speech. On the other hand, she describes Jay-Z as a businessman who works smart and prefers his approach. He appreciates Jay-Z’s strategic moves and highlights his success in the industry. Ultimately, Shtela leans towards Jay-Z, considering him to have a stronger personal brand due to his business acumen and less overtly attention-seeking behavior. However, it’s important to note that personal branding preferences and opinions can vary among individuals.

Danza expresses a personal preference for Jay-Z over Kanye West. He appreciates Jay-Z as a lyricist and songwriter, considering him to be more successful in those aspects. However, Danza also acknowledges Kanye West's artistic versatility and views him as one of the greatest artists of the 21st century. While Kanye explores various types of art and is known for his artistic approach, Jay-Z stands out as a skilled lyricist and songwriter. Ultimately, the preference between the two artists and their personal branding may vary based on individual tastes and perspectives.

According to Frenkie, Jay-Z has a stronger personal brand compared to Kanye West. Frenkie appreciates Jay-Z's image of stability, continuity, and lack of excessive scandals or erratic behavior. Jay-Z's consistent and reliable brand persona makes him a more suitable representative for a company. On the other hand, Frenkie perceives Kanye West's personal brand as more popular but unstable and insecure. In terms of success, it can vary depending on individual criteria and perspectives.

According to Bogi, Kanye West and Jay-Z, both have distinct personal brands. Kanye West is known for his creative genius, controversial situations, and unique approach to art and fashion. His branding is influenced by his frequent controversies and the perception of him as an unstable individual. On the other hand, Jay-Z is seen as a business giant, known for his strategic mindset and ability to turn visions into successful ventures. He is admired for his ability to create wealth and elevate those around him. While Kanye West's branding focuses more on his artistic endeavors and personal struggles, Jay-Z's branding emphasizes his business acumen and sophistication. In terms of personal branding, Bogi believes that Jay-Z has a stronger presence due to his business-oriented mindset and refined style. Jay-Z's image as a successful businessman and gentleman stands out more prominently, whereas Kanye West's branding is influenced by his controversies and mental health issues.

According to Kontra, Jay-Z has a stronger personal branding compared to Kanye West. Jay-Z is seen as more casual and focuses primarily on his music to build his brand. He is known for his longevity in the rap game and has established a successful career without relying on scandals or controversy. In terms of investment in personal branding, Kontra does not provide a clear distinction between the two artists. However, it can be inferred that Jay-Z's branding strategy is more focused on his music and career, while Kanye West may invest more in creating a buzz through his public persona and controversial actions. As for success, Kontra implies that Jay-Z is more successful, although the specific reasons are not mentioned. It can be assumed that Jay-Z's longevity, consistent musical output, and strategic approach to his career contribute to his perceived success in the industry.

In **Question 9**: *“Which hip-hop/rap artist has the strongest personal brand right now? What makes it the strongest/most popular?”*, interviewees were expected to name a hip-hop/rap artist

that they consider to have the strongest personal brand at the moment on the global hip-hop/rap scene.

According to Shtela, Kanye West currently has the strongest personal brand in hip-hop/rap. She attributes this to his constant promotion and marketing efforts, as well as his outspoken nature. Shtela also mentions other artists like Drake and Future who are well-rated in terms of branding and marketing. The combination of their musical output and effective marketing strategies contributes to their popularity and strong personal brands in the industry.

According to Danza, the hip-hop/rap artist with the strongest personal brand currently varies depending on the region. In America, he mentions Lil Baby as being objectively strong but notes that his personal brand is similar to other American rappers, just more famous and successful. In Europe, Danza expresses admiration for Dave from Britain, highlighting his class, versatility as a musician and actor, and his skills as a songwriter. Danza personally resonates more with Dave's personal brand.

According to Frenkie, it is difficult to single out one specific hip-hop/rap artist with the strongest personal brand right now. However, he suggests that the strength of a personal brand lies in being professional, working continuously, being stable and responsible, and being open to accepting new trends and changes in the industry. Artists who have successfully maintained their careers over a long period of time and have demonstrated longevity are considered to have strong personal brands.

According to Bogi, Drake is currently one of the hip-hop/rap artists with the strongest personal brand. Bogi believes that Drake's popularity surpasses even that of Jay Z and Kanye West. Drake's branding is characterized by his ability to create singable and melodic music that appeals to a wide range of audiences. His versatility allows his music to be played in various settings and enjoyed by different groups of people, whether they prefer R&B, rap, or motivational tracks. Bogi considers Drake's ability to commercialize and cater to diverse tastes as a key aspect of his successful branding. Additionally, Bogi mentions that Kanye West also has a strong personal brand and marketing strategy due to his distinctiveness and colorful approach.

According to Kontra, two hip-hop/rap artists with the strongest personal brands right now are A\$AP Rocky and Travis Scott. Kontra believes that A\$AP Rocky particularly stands out as a fashion icon, not only within the rap genre but in a broader sense. He has successfully created an aesthetic and style that resonates with fans and garners widespread admiration. On the other hand, Travis Scott is recognized for his significant influence on aesthetics and his ability to seamlessly integrate them with his music. However, Kontra mentions that Travis Scott's personal brand may have been impacted by a scandal that occurred during one of his concerts,

which could have affected the strength of his overall brand. Nevertheless, both artists possess a strong presence and exert considerable influence in their respective realms.

In **Question 10**: “*What personal branding advice would you recommend to the upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina?*”, interviewees were expected to give direction to upcoming hip-hop/rap artists when it comes to creating their personal brands.

According to Shtela, his advice to the upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to pursue what they love and truly enjoy the creative process – whether it’s graffiti, rapping, making music, or designing clothes, he emphasizes the importance of finding passion in their chosen endeavors. However, Shtela also highlights the need for effective marketing and promotion. He advises aspiring artists to understand that simply creating a product, such as a T-shirt or a song, is not enough. They should invest time and effort in developing a strong promotional campaign to ensure their work reaches a wider audience. Shtela encourages persistence and dedication to their craft, recognizing that without proper promotion, their creative pursuits may not receive the recognition and fulfillment they desire.

According to Danza, his advice to the upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to prioritize originality and authenticity in their personal branding. He emphasizes the importance of being true to oneself and expressing one’s unique style, thoughts, and beliefs. Rather than trying to copy others or conform to popular trends, Danza encourages artists to embrace their individuality and present their perspectives. Finally, he concludes that by staying true to themselves and avoiding imitation, artists can contribute to a more diverse and vibrant hip-hop/rap scene.

According to Frenkie, his advice to the upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to approach their music and creative work professionally and responsibly. He emphasizes the importance of treating it as a job and being willing to make certain compromises and agreements for the sake of their careers. Frenkie also encourages artists not to complain or blame others for any setbacks they may encounter, but rather to work even harder and strive for improvement. He highlights the significance of every successful collaboration and project, as it serves as evidence of their professionalism and reliability, attracting future partners and opportunities. Frenkie reminds artists that their actions and work are observed and registered by others, even if they may not realize it, and that maintaining a professional and responsible approach can lead to new and promising ventures.

According to Bogi, his personal branding advice to upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to believe in themselves and embrace their uniqueness. He encourages artists to stay true to their image, their inspirations, and their desired music style. Bogi emphasizes the importance of authenticity and finding one’s voice to stand out from the

crowd. He acknowledges that the journey to reaching the audience may be challenging, but it is crucial to stay dedicated, love what they do, and continuously learn from how other artists promote themselves. Bogi values earning recognition through genuine talent and hard work rather than relying solely on controversy or gimmicks. He advises artists to surround themselves with like-minded individuals and to leverage their creativity, environment, and friendships to support their artistic journey. Bogi believes that staying true to oneself and developing a distinct style or perspective will naturally attract attention and pave the way for successful personal branding.

According to Kontra, his personal branding advice to upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina is to embrace their authenticity and not be afraid to try new things. He emphasizes the importance of being comfortable with oneself and not forcing a certain image or style simply because it is popular or trendy. Kontra believes that success lies in finding a balance between who they are as individuals and who they aspire to be as artists while staying true to their comfort zone. He cautions against blindly following the latest trends without incorporating something unique and personal into their branding. Kontra advises artists to invest in developing their own distinct identity rather than solely riding the waves of popular culture. By being true to themselves and infusing their personal touch into their branding, they can create a lasting and meaningful impact on their audience.

3.3 Discussion

The interview responses provide valuable insights into how hip-hop/rap artists approach standing out on stage and developing their personal brands. These insights can be connected to various theoretical concepts related to personal branding strategies and motivations. One recurring theme is the emphasis on authenticity and being true to oneself. This aligns with the concept of authenticity in personal branding, where individuals strive to present their true selves to their audience. The interviewees stress the importance of staying genuine and avoiding forced or insincere strategies. The concept of differentiation is also evident in the interviews. By highlighting the importance of having a distinct style, characteristics, and personality, the interviewees recognize the value of standing out from the crowd and not conforming to existing molds or categories. This concept helps artists establish their unique identity and create a memorable personal brand. The interviewees also emphasize the importance of core branding elements, particularly the music itself. While visual aesthetics and external factors play a role, the interviewees recognize that the music is their primary means of communication with the audience. This aligns with the concept that core elements, such as talent, skills, and artistic expression, are essential components of a personal brand. Professionalism is another aspect mentioned in the interviews. Artists are encouraged to approach their music as both a creative process and a business, aligning their personal brand with their career goals and demonstrating

professionalism and responsibility. This connects to the concept of strategic intent in personal branding. In summary, the interview responses reflect various aspects of personal branding strategies and motivations. The concepts of authenticity, differentiation, core branding elements, and strategic intent can be observed in the interviewees' approaches to standing out on stage in the hip-hop/rap scene. By being true to themselves, embracing their uniqueness, emphasizing music, and maintaining professionalism, these artists shape their personal brands in a way that sets them apart from their colleagues and resonates with their audience.

The interviewees' responses highlight the significance of relatability, authenticity, consistency, and personal branding motivations in the hip-hop/rap scene. These concepts can be connected to theoretical frameworks related to personal branding strategies and motivations. The emphasis on relatability and authenticity aligns with the concept of emotional branding, where artists establish an emotional connection with their audience by evoking relatable emotions and experiences. By presenting their music as a reflection of real-life situations and personal truths, the interviewees create an authentic and relatable persona that resonates with their listeners. Consistency in messaging and themes throughout their careers is another aspect mentioned by the interviewees. This connects to the concept of consistency in personal branding, where individuals maintain a cohesive and recognizable brand identity over time. The interviewees' ability to evolve while staying true to their core message demonstrates the balance between evolution and consistency in personal branding. Personal branding motivations are also evident in the discussion. The mention of hunger, ambition, and the pursuit of success as driving forces behind the music aligns with the idea that personal branding motivations can stem from a desire for achievement, recognition, or personal fulfillment. The broader scope of personal branding strategies is highlighted through references to stage performance, acting, and overall artistic expression. Personal branding encompasses various elements beyond the music itself, including stage presence, image, and the overall artistic experience. In summary, the interviewees' responses reflect the importance of relatability, authenticity, consistency, personal branding motivations, and the broader scope of personal branding strategies in the hip-hop/rap scene. By establishing an emotional connection, maintaining consistency, understanding their motivations, and incorporating various elements into their performances, these artists shape their personal brands to engage and captivate their audience.

One common thread among the interviewees' strategies is the emphasis on social media as a tool for self-presentation and brand promotion. They recognize the significance of platforms like Instagram and TikTok in building their personal brands by showcasing their talent, engaging with the audience, and creating authentic content. This aligns with the concept of self-marketing on social media, where individuals leverage these platforms to promote themselves and connect with their target audience (Matar, 2019). Another key aspect of personal branding discussed is the importance of maintaining authenticity and aligning brand identity with chosen platforms. The interviewees emphasize the need to present genuine views, preferences, and

experiences to create a connection with their audience. This aligns with the concept of selective self-presentation, where individuals carefully curate their online presence while staying true to themselves (Goffman, 1959). By being cautious about expressing strong opinions publicly and focusing on deeper conversations with known individuals, they maintain a certain level of privacy while still using social media to present aspects of their brand. The interviewees also demonstrate a strategic approach to platform selection. They recognize that different platforms offer distinct advantages and align their choices with their brand identity and objectives. This aligns with the concept of platform selection in personal branding, where individuals choose platforms that best suit their needs and help them achieve their goals (Hearn, 2008). For example, some interviewees prefer to focus on specific platforms while excluding others based on their strategic fit and promotional potential. Overall, the interviewees' strategies encompass selective self-presentation, self-marketing on social media, authenticity, and platform selection. These strategies align with theoretical concepts in personal branding, highlighting the significance of social media as a tool for self-presentation and brand promotion, as well as the importance of maintaining authenticity and aligning brand identity with chosen platforms.

The interviewees' responses shed light on the diverse approaches to brand connections and their impact on the desired audience within the hip-hop/rap industry. The theoretical concepts of brand alignment, brand authenticity, and audience engagement provide a framework for understanding these dynamics. One aspect discussed is strategic brand alignment, where artists strategically incorporate popular brands in their content to attract more views and reach a larger audience, as exemplified by Shtela (Kline, 2005). This approach leverages the algorithms of platforms like YouTube to enhance visibility and engagement. The concept of brand authenticity is evident in the interviewees' responses, particularly in Danza's approach of prioritizing authenticity over explicit brand endorsements. Artists like Danza focus on maintaining their genuine identity and message rather than using brands as a means to connect with their audience. This underscores the importance of staying true to oneself and resonating with the audience through authenticity. Brand congruence is another key concept discussed, highlighted by Frenkie's emphasis on brand associations that feel natural and align with his music and persona (Kim et al., 2018). This reflects the significance of collaborating with brands that complement an artist's image and identity, enhancing the overall brand message. The interviewees also address the centrality of content quality and artistic vision in personal branding. Bogi emphasizes the importance of creating meaningful and resonant content as a primary means of connecting with the desired audience, aligning with the concept of content-driven branding (Labrecque et al., 2013). This underscores the need for artists to prioritize their artistic expression and connect with their audience through compelling content. Networking and collaboration within the industry are mentioned by Bogi, highlighting the importance of building a supportive community and collaborating with fellow artists to reach the desired audience (Hearn, 2008). This aspect of personal branding emphasizes the role of relationships and alliances in expanding one's reach and influence. Kontra's association with Red Bull as a

partner rather than a mere sponsor reflects the concept of brand partnership. This type of collaboration allows artists to maintain creative freedom and artistic control while aligning with their established ideals (Kim et al., 2018). It showcases the value placed on preserving artistic integrity within brand collaborations. Lastly, the caution expressed by Kontra regarding excessive brand promotion in lyrics reflects an awareness of the potential impact on brand authenticity and audience connection (Hearn, 2008). This demonstrates the need for artists to strike a balance between promoting brands and preserving their authentic connection with the audience. In summary, the interviewees' responses reveal a range of strategies employed in the hip-hop/rap industry to connect with brands and impact the desired audience. The concepts of strategic brand alignment, brand authenticity, brand congruence, content-driven branding, and brand partnership provide a theoretical foundation for understanding these strategies and their complex interplay within personal branding in the industry.

The discussion on the performers who inspire the interviewees' personal brands can be analyzed through theoretical concepts such as role modeling, authenticity, and individuality. The interviewees' responses reflect the influence of role models in personal branding, where artists draw inspiration from established artists who embody qualities and behaviors they admire (Cheney et al., 2014). Shtela, for instance, is inspired by Slug from the group Atmosphere, admiring his humility and normal approach to people, which aligns with Shtela's own values. This exemplifies the concept of role modeling in personal branding. Authenticity and individuality are also evident in the interviewees' discussions. Shtela emphasizes the importance of remaining true to his own preferences and not conforming to changing fashion trends, highlighting the significance of authenticity and individuality in personal branding (Hearn, 2008). Similarly, Frenkie adopts certain trends, moves, and standards from the music industry that align with his style and preferences, showcasing the concept of individuality in personal branding, where artists create their unique brand identity by incorporating elements that resonate with them (Labrecque et al., 2013). Frenkie's choice to accept or reject certain trends further emphasizes the importance of authenticity and staying true to one's artistic vision. Moreover, the influence of multiple artists in shaping an artist's personal brand is evident in Bogi's approach. Bogi draws inspiration from various rappers, such as Future, 50 Cent, Biggie, Tupac, Jay Z, P. Diddy, and Future, for their marketing approaches, representation of specific aspects of life, branding, public image, dressing style, and general behavior. This demonstrates the impact of multiple role models in creating a unique personal brand by combining various inspirations (Cheney et al., 2014). Bogi's approach to fashion, behavior, and audience interaction reflects the importance of role modeling and incorporating elements that resonate with their own vision. Kontra finds inspiration in Pusha T for their personal brand, appreciating Pusha T's attitude towards the audience, styling, and clothing choices. This reflects the influence of a specific artist in personal branding, where an artist's brand identity is shaped by the characteristics and behaviors of another artist (Cheney et al., 2014). Kontra's appreciation of Pusha T's combination of values from the 90s and modern styles further showcases the

integration of different influences to create a unique personal brand (Labrecque et al., 2013). In summary, the interviewees' responses highlight the significance of role models, authenticity, and individuality in shaping their personal branding strategies. The concepts of role modeling, authenticity, and individuality are observed in their discussions, showcasing the diverse sources of inspiration and emphasizing the importance of staying true to one's preferences and values in the hip-hop/rap industry.

The responses from the interviewees provide valuable insights into the strategies employed in the hip-hop/rap industry to connect with brands and engage with the desired audience. These strategies can be understood within the framework of brand alignment, brand authenticity, and audience engagement, supported by relevant theoretical concepts. One strategy discussed is strategic brand alignment, which involves artists strategically incorporating popular brands into their content to increase visibility and reach a larger audience (Kline, 2005). This approach takes advantage of platform algorithms, such as those on YouTube, to enhance visibility and engagement. The concept of brand authenticity is emphasized in the interviewees' responses, particularly in relation to Danza's approach. Danza prioritizes maintaining a genuine identity and message, focusing on authenticity rather than explicit brand endorsements to connect with the audience. This highlights the importance of staying true to oneself and resonating with the audience through authenticity. Brand congruence is another important concept discussed, as exemplified by Frenkie's emphasis on natural brand associations that align with his music and persona (Kim et al., 2018). This highlights the significance of collaborating with brands that complement an artist's image and identity, enhancing the overall brand message. The interviewees also address the importance of content quality and artistic vision in personal branding. Bogi emphasizes the need to create meaningful and resonant content as a primary means of connecting with the desired audience, aligning with the concept of content-driven branding (Labrecque et al., 2013). This underscores the importance of artists prioritizing their artistic expression and connecting with their audience through compelling content. Networking and collaboration within the industry are mentioned by Bogi, underscoring the value of building a supportive community and collaborating with fellow artists to reach the desired audience (Hearn, 2008). This aspect of personal branding highlights the role of relationships and alliances in expanding one's reach and influence. Kontra's association with Red Bull as a partner rather than a mere sponsor exemplifies the concept of brand partnership. This type of collaboration allows artists to maintain creative freedom and artistic control while aligning with their established ideals (Kim et al., 2018). It showcases the value placed on preserving artistic integrity within brand collaborations. Lastly, Kontra's caution regarding excessive brand promotion in lyrics demonstrates an awareness of the potential impact on brand authenticity and audience connection (Hearn, 2008). This highlights the need for artists to strike a balance between promoting brands and maintaining an authentic connection with their audience. In summary, the interviewees' responses reveal a range of strategies employed in the hip-hop/rap industry to connect with brands and engage the desired audience. These strategies can be

understood through the theoretical concepts of strategic brand alignment, brand authenticity, brand congruence, content-driven branding, brand partnership, and audience engagement. These concepts provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the complex interplay of personal branding strategies in the hip-hop/rap industry.

The discussion on whether hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina follow current trends on stage offers insights that can be connected to theoretical concepts in personal branding strategies and motivations. The interviewees' perspectives highlight the importance of authenticity, cultural fit, leveraging external influences, differentiation, and trend awareness in the context of personal branding within the hip-hop/rap industry. Maintaining authenticity is crucial in building a strong personal brand (Aaker, 1997). Artists risk diluting their unique style and voice by blindly imitating trends, which weakens their brand identity. Understanding cultural context and resonating with the target audience is essential for personal branding success (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Recognizing the challenges of copying foreign hip-hop/rap culture due to cultural disparities demonstrates the need for cultural alignment in personal branding. Leveraging external influences can enhance an artist's personal brand by infusing fresh and innovative elements (Marwick, 2011). Drawing inspiration from others and incorporating different trends and styles while maintaining a unique artistic voice can be beneficial. Standing out from the crowd is crucial for building a distinctive personal brand (Kaputa, 2012). Creating a unique brand identity by establishing one's own style and approach helps artists set themselves apart from others. Staying up-to-date with industry trends and adapting to them is important for remaining relevant and appealing to the target audience (Hollenbeck, 2017). Awareness of current global trends and aligning with them can contribute to maintaining relevance in the music scene. In summary, the interviewees' perspectives provide insights into the personal branding strategies and motivations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The discussion emphasizes the significance of authenticity, cultural fit, leveraging external influences, differentiation, and trend awareness in building and maintaining a strong personal brand within the hip-hop/rap industry. These theoretical concepts (Aaker, 1997; Hatch & Schultz, 2003; Marwick, 2011; Kaputa, 2012; Hollenbeck, 2017) can guide artists in effectively navigating the evolving landscape of the industry and communicating their unique identity to their audience.

When comparing the personal brands of Kanye West and Jay-Z, the discussion provides insights into their personal branding strategies, investments, and perceived success. These perspectives can be connected to theoretical concepts related to personal branding and its components. Kanye West's investment in personal branding is highlighted, emphasizing his tendency to create memorable scenes and incidents throughout his career. This aligns with the concept of creating a distinctive brand identity through memorable actions or events (Kaputa, 2012). On the other hand, Jay-Z is described as a strategic businessman who prefers a more subtle approach, reflecting the concept of strategic branding, where individuals build their personal brand

through calculated moves and long-term planning (Aaker, 1997). The discussion also touches upon the importance of consistency and professionalism in personal branding, with Jay-Z being perceived as having a stronger personal brand in this regard (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). This aligns with the concept of maintaining consistency and professionalism in personal branding. Personal preferences based on individual tastes and perspectives play a significant role in evaluating the success of personal branding. The expertise and specialization of Jay-Z as a lyricist and songwriter are appreciated, connecting to the concept of expertise and specialization in personal branding (Marwick, 2011). Kanye West's artistic versatility and multifaceted personal brand are also acknowledged, aligning with the concept of showcasing diverse talents and skills (Hollenbeck, 2017). The influence of public perception on personal branding is discussed, with Kanye West's personal brand seen as more popular but unstable and insecure. This reflects the concept of the impact of public perception on personal branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Frenkie considers Jay-Z to have a stronger personal brand due to his image of stability, continuity, and lack of excessive scandals, highlighting the importance of consistency and reliability in personal branding (Kaputa, 2012). Bogi distinguishes the personal brands of Kanye West and Jay-Z based on their unique characteristics. Kanye West is associated with creative genius, controversies, and a unique approach to art and fashion, aligning with the concept of differentiation and uniqueness in personal branding (Kaputa, 2012). Jay-Z, on the other hand, is seen as a business giant with a strategic mindset, reflecting the importance of strategic thinking and entrepreneurship in personal branding (Aaker, 1997). The perception of Jay-Z's stronger personal brand is also attributed to his longevity, consistent musical output, and strategic career approach. This aligns with the concept of long-term planning and career management in personal branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Jay-Z's specialization and focus primarily on his music are seen as contributing factors to his perceived success, emphasizing the importance of specialization and expertise in personal branding (Marwick, 2011). Although not explicitly mentioned, it can be inferred that Kanye West may invest more in creating a buzz through his public persona and controversial actions, reflecting the concept of attention-seeking behavior in personal branding (Kaputa, 2012). In summary, the discussion on the personal brands of Kanye West and Jay-Z provides insights into their personal branding strategies, investments, and perceived success. The concepts of creating a distinctive brand identity, strategic branding, consistency, professionalism, expertise, specialization, differentiation, strategic thinking, longevity, and attention-seeking behavior all play a role in understanding and evaluating their personal branding approaches (Hollenbeck, 2017). By examining these concepts, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics and elements that contribute to successful personal branding in the music industry.

The discussion revolves around identifying the hip-hop/rap artists with the strongest personal brands, and their strengths are analyzed using theoretical concepts related to personal branding, marketing strategies, versatility, longevity, and influence. Kanye West is recognized as having the strongest personal brand due to his constant promotion and marketing efforts, highlighting

the importance of effective marketing strategies in personal branding (Aaker, 1997). The personal brands of Drake and Future are also acknowledged, emphasizing the combination of musical output and marketing strategies that contribute to their popularity (Marwick, 2011). The concept of differentiation and uniqueness in personal branding is discussed in relation to Lil Baby, who is recognized as objectively strong in America but similar to other American rappers. In Europe, Dave's personal brand is admired for its class, versatility, and skills as a songwriter, highlighting the importance of multifaceted personal branding and artistic versatility (Kaputa, 2012; Hollenbeck, 2017). The importance of professionalism, continuous work, stability, responsibility, and openness to trends and changes in the industry is emphasized as contributors to a strong personal brand. This aligns with the concepts of consistency, reliability, and adaptability in personal branding. Longevity and maintaining a successful career over time are also considered indicators of a strong personal brand (Kaputa, 2012; Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Drake is identified as one of the hip-hop/rap artists with a strong personal brand due to his ability to create singable and melodic music that appeals to a wide range of audiences. This reflects the concept of connecting with diverse target audiences and effectively commercializing music. Kanye West's distinctiveness and colorful approach are also mentioned as contributing to his strong personal brand and marketing strategy (Kaputa, 2012). A\$AP Rocky is recognized as a fashion icon, indicating the influence of personal style and aesthetics in personal branding. Travis Scott is noted for his significant influence on aesthetics and the integration of visuals with his music. However, his personal brand may have been impacted by a scandal, emphasizing the importance of reputation management in personal branding. Both artists possess a strong presence and exert considerable influence in their respective realms, highlighting the significance of influence and impact in personal branding (Hollenbeck, 2017). Overall, the discussion highlights the role of effective marketing strategies, differentiation, versatility, longevity, reputation management, commercial appeal, aesthetics, and influence in shaping the strength of personal brands in the hip-hop/rap industry. By examining these concepts, we gain insights into the factors that contribute to the success and strength of personal brands in this genre.

The discussion further provides valuable advice for upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, focusing on concepts and theoretical background related to personal branding. The recommendations from interviewees center around passion, originality, professionalism, authenticity, self-belief, and embracing uniqueness. As according to Shtela, aspiring artists should pursue their passions and enjoy the creative process, while emphasizing the importance of effective marketing and promotion. This aligns with the concept of passion-driven personal branding and the significance of marketing strategies. Danza highlights the importance of originality and authenticity, encouraging artists to stay true to themselves and express their unique style, thoughts, and beliefs. This aligns with the concept of differentiation and authenticity in personal branding. Frenkie advises upcoming artists to approach their music and creative work professionally and responsibly, treating it as a job and dedicating themselves

to continuous improvement. This aligns with the concept of professionalism and reliability in personal branding (Hatch & Schultz, 2003). Bogi emphasizes the significance of self-belief and embracing uniqueness. Artists are encouraged to stay true to their image, inspirations, and desired music style, highlighting authenticity and genuine talent. This aligns with the concept of authenticity and developing a distinct style in personal branding. Kontra advises artists to embrace their authenticity and avoid blindly following trends. Finding a balance between individuality and aspirations while staying true to one's comfort zone is emphasized. This aligns with the concepts of authenticity, uniqueness, and staying true to oneself in personal branding (Kaputa, 2012). Overall, the advice encourages upcoming hip-hop/rap artists to be true to themselves, pursue their passions, embrace authenticity, professionalism, and uniqueness, and invest in effective marketing strategies. By following these recommendations, artists can develop strong personal brands and make meaningful impacts in the industry.

4 Conclusion

This Master's Thesis investigates the role of personal branding in the hip-hop/rap industry in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the theoretical marketing scope, based on an analysis of expert interviews of five hip-hop/rap artists from Bosnia and Herzegovina – Shtela, Bogi, Frenkie, Danza and Kontra. The interview is consisted of 10 questions that explore various aspects of personal branding, including methods, strategies and overall approach to branding in hip-hop/rap.

The discussion of the interviewees' responses provides valuable insights into the personal branding strategies and motivations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These insights can be connected to various theoretical concepts in personal branding, shedding light on the complex dynamics of building and maintaining a strong personal brand within the industry.

Authenticity emerges as a recurring theme in the interviewees' responses, highlighting the importance of presenting one's true self to the audience. This aligns with the concept of authenticity in personal branding, where individuals strive to create a genuine and sincere connection with their audience. By being true to themselves and avoiding forced or insincere strategies, these artists shape their personal brands in a way that resonates with their listeners. Differentiation is another key concept emphasized in this Master's Thesis. It is recognized that the value of having a distinct style, characteristics, and personality, as well as the importance of standing out from the crowd create a memorable personal brand in the hip-hop/rap industry. This concept helps artists establish their unique identity and create a memorable personal brand, setting them apart from their colleagues and capturing the attention of their audience.

Furthermore, the significance of core branding elements is underscored, particularly the music itself. While visual aesthetics and external factors play a role, it is acknowledged that the music is the primary means of communication with the audience. This aligns with the concept that core elements such as talent, skills, and artistic expression are essential components of a personal brand. By focusing on their music as both a creative process and a business, these artists align their personal brand with their career goals, demonstrating professionalism and responsibility.

Relatability, consistency, and personal branding motivations are additional aspects that are highlighted in this Master's Thesis. The discussion emphasizes the importance of establishing an emotional connection with their audience by presenting music that reflects real-life situations and personal truths. Consistency in messaging and themes is shown to demonstrate the balance between evolution and consistency in personal branding. Furthermore, personal branding motivations, such as hunger, ambition, and the pursuit of success, drive these artists in their branding efforts.

The significance of social media as a tool for self-presentation and brand promotion is a recognized powerful tool for personal branding in hip-hop/rap industry, especially platforms like Instagram and TikTok – for showcasing talent, engaging with the audience, and creating authentic content. By leveraging these platforms, hip-hop/rap artists can engage in self-marketing, carefully curating their online presence while staying true to themselves. Strategic approach to platform selection is suggested, choosing platforms that best align with artists' brand identity and objectives.

The strategies to connect with brands and engage with the desired audience align with the concepts of brand alignment, brand authenticity, and audience engagement. One of the conclusions is to strategically incorporate popular brands into content, prioritize authenticity over explicit brand endorsements, and seek natural brand associations that align with music and persona. The importance of content quality and artistic vision, networking and collaboration within the industry, brand partnerships, and maintaining an authentic connection with the audience are also highlighted.

Finally, the interviewees' perspectives on the performers who inspire their personal brands reflect the influence of role models, authenticity, and individuality. Artists draw inspiration from established artists who embody qualities and behaviors they admire, while also emphasizing the importance of staying true to oneself and creating a unique brand identity that incorporates elements that resonate with their own vision.

To conclude, interview responses provide a comprehensive understanding of the personal branding strategies and motivations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The theoretical concepts discussed, including authenticity, differentiation, core branding elements,

relatability, consistency, platform selection, brand alignment, brand authenticity, audience engagement, role modeling, and individuality, offer a solid framework for analyzing and interpreting these strategies within the context of personal branding in the hip-hop/rap industry. These findings contribute to the existing literature on personal branding and offer practical insights for aspiring artists seeking to build their personal brands in the ever-evolving music industry.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

In Bosnian

1. Na koji način pokušavate da se istaknete na sceni, u odnosu na vaše kolege sa hip-hop/rap scene?
2. Vaše mišljenje – zašto publika sluša vašu muziku te prati vaš brend?
3. Na koji način gradite svoj personalni brend? Da li koristite društvene mreže za prezentiranje svojih stavova i preferencija?
4. Povezujete li se javno ili kroz tekstove/spotove sa određenim brendovima te da li smatrate da vas to dodatno približava vašoj željenoj publici?
5. Koji izvođači vam služe kao inspiracija za kreiranje vašeg personalnog brenda (stil u hip-hopu, stil oblačenja te generalno ponašanje prema publici i fanovima)?
6. Da li smatrate da inostrani hip-hop/rap izvođači imaju veliki utjecaj na hip-hop/rap izvođače u Bosni i Hercegovini? Ukoliko da, na koji način?
7. Da li naši hip-hop/rap izvođači prate trenutačne trendove na sceni?
8. Kanye West ili Jay-Z? Opišite personal brand navedenih. Koji ima jači personal branding? Ko ulaže više u personal branding? Ko je uspješniji i zašto?
9. Koji hip-hop/rap artist ima najjači personal brand trenutno? Šta ga čini najjačim/najpopularnijim?
10. Koji personal branding savjet bi uputili nadolazećim generacijama hip-hop/rap izvođača u Bosni i Hercegovini?

In English

1. How do you try to stand out on stage, compared to your colleagues from the hip-hop/rap scene?
2. Your opinion - why does the audience listen to your music and follow your brand?
3. How do you build your personal brand? Do you use social media to present your views and preferences?

4. Do you connect publicly or through lyrics/videos with certain brands and do you think that this brings you even closer to your desired audience?
5. Which performers inspire you to create your personal brand (hip-hop style, dressing style, and general behavior towards the audience and fans)?
6. Do you think that foreign hip-hop/rap artists have a great influence on hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina? If so, in what way?
7. Do our hip-hop/rap artists follow current trends on stage?
8. Kanye West or Jay-Z? Describe their personal brands. Who has stronger personal branding? Who invests more in personal branding? Who is more successful and why?
9. Which hip-hop/rap artist has the strongest personal brand right now? What makes it the strongest / most popular?
10. What personal branding advice would you recommend to the upcoming generations of hip-hop/rap artists in Bosnia and Herzegovina?