

The influence of characters on commercial success in the music industry



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Module 5

1: Introduction

For over a decade now, innovations in the realm of digital media technologies have been commonly perceived as threatening the medium/long-term viability of the music industry. Digital file-sharing, duplication and storage technologies are widely regarded as producing a “crisis” for an industry that had grown exponentially on the back of the CD-boom throughout the latter decades of the twentieth century. This has influenced the media actions of musical artists (Preston & Rogers, 2011). Looking at the AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) model, this has mainly consequences on the ‘Action’ of the interested public. In order to realize the action, artists try to emphasize extra focus on the ‘Attention’ and ‘Interest’ to increase the ‘Desire’ of potential customers of music. Adding characters to a musical act might be one of possibilities to realize this.

Observing the music industry there is a clear difference in the openness of artists. Some artists prefer to show who they are to the audience and others keep elements close from the public, for example their identity or their faces. This essay focusses on characters in the music industry and explains what the advantages for unidentified characters in the music industry could be looking at media options.

Communication, media and advertising models and theories will be used to explain the benefits for closed characters in comparison to open characters in the music industry. First the Use and Gratification Theory will be used to explain that mysterious characters in the music industry give users more reasons to get ‘interested’ in a band or artist than open bands or artists. Second, the Construal Level Theory will explain that characters make musical artists far more abstract than open characters in social dimension. The level of abstractness can easily be used for transmedia purposes. The Transmedia Storytelling theory from Jenkins will explain that characters make it easier to build a transmedia story world around a band or artist. The AIDA model will be used to conclude the story and to show what the effects of the characters could be for commercial success.

A well-known example of characters in the music industry is the French dance duo ‘Daft Punk’, therefore these musicians will be used to apply the theories to in a case study. Daft Punk is formed in 1993 and since then has released four studio albums. The artists can be seen as pioneers of the French Electronic Dance Music (EDM) scene. The duo consists of Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem Christo, apart from the names there is very little known about the two musicians. The duo always appears as robot personas, by wearing helmets and gloves. The two keep the mystery alive by avoiding interviews and TV-appearances. Daft Punk always seeks the combination between technology and the human. Although their early efforts at exploring this relationship seem at best naïve — they initially claimed that an accident in their recording studio in September 1999 had transformed them into robots (Parkhill, 2009).

2: Theory

2.1 Use and Gratification

The Use and Gratification (U&G) theory is an approach that explains what people do with media, instead of what media does to people. U&G is largely intended to identify the psychological needs that motivate the use of a particular medium to gratify those needs (Ko. et al, 2005) It is a user centered approach and explains that there are several needs and gratification for people; they are categorized into five categories. 'Cognitive needs' – when individuals have a need for facts and information, 'affective needs' – when individuals use media to fulfil a need for emotions, 'personal Integrative needs' – when individuals use media for self-esteem and reassuring status, 'social Integrative needs' – when individuals have a high need to use media for social purposes and 'tension free needs' – when people want to escape from reality and use media for relaxation.

A study by Saarikallio & Erkkilä (2007) showed that music proved to be a versatile means for mood regulation. It offers people resources for increasing and restoring well-being, and made their emotional life more varied and colorful. The study succeeded in demonstrating the impressive capability of music for promoting emotional self-regulation. This suggests that music is mostly used for 'affective needs' from the users' perspective.

However, when a mystery is added to the musical artists, not only users high in need for affect may be attracted. Listeners of Daft Punk might listen to the music in order to solve the problem of a mystery, finding clues, facts or information to identify the personalities of the duo. This means that when a mystery in from of a character is added listeners may have other reasons to listen to the music than emotional self-regulation. Daft Punk may also attract people high in need for cognition; this idea is supported by Chaiken in 1987 who stated "some individuals have a high need for cognition, where they enjoy the effortful engagement of arguments, the evaluation of ideas, and the analysis of problems and their solutions. These individuals by their very nature are more likely to engage in high elaboration".

2.2 Construal Level Theory

The Construal Level Theory (CLT) describes the relation between psychological distance and the extent to which people's thinking. When an object, person, choice or concept (OPCC) is far, there is a high construal level, which means that the OPCC is abstract to the individual. On the other hand when an OPCC is close, there is a low construal level and means that the OPCC is concrete. (Trope & Liberman, 2010) The CLT divides the psychological distances in four categories; temporal, spatial, social and hypothetically. Looking at CLT and musical artists, the focus will be on the category 'social'. Listeners of music and producers of music are socially concrete from each other, this because the interpersonal similarity is high. Interpersonal similarity is a form of social distance, with similar others

being perceived as socially closer to one self than dissimilar ones (Liviatan, Trope & Liberman, 2008). Fans want to relate themselves socially with those musicians they listen to, because they feel a sense of “belonginess” (Heider, 2013).

However, when musician have hidden characteristics and have a very closed attitude towards its listeners – such as Daft Punk, it is much harder to feel the same sense of “belonginess” as with open identities. Therefore, the social psychological distance is more abstract when musical artists hidden characteristics and identities.

2.3 *Transmedia storytelling*

Transmedia Storytelling can be described as “telling a story across multiple media. Each medium does what it does best — so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don’t need to have seen the film to enjoy the game and vice-versa” (Jenkins, 2003).

At the most basic level, transmedia stories “are stories told across multiple media. At the present time, the most significant stories tend to flow across multiple media platforms” (Jenkins, Purushotma, Clinton, Weigel & Robison, 2006, p. 46).

Scolari (2014) questions in the article ‘Transmedia y musica’ if transmedia has the possibility to save the dropping music industry “According to some professionals like Robert Pratten transmedia narratives can bring added value to music and drive sales. Pratten compares the music market with perfumes “We do not sell perfumed water, but dreams.” Transmedia could add to this dream-narrative musical product dimension. The construction of narrative-centered music worlds would place the artist in a position of social catalyst in direct connection with the communities, to give them a reason to spend their money.” (Pratten, 2010)

It seems that Daft Punk expected this, *The Construal Level Theory* showed that Daft Punk has created social psychological distance from the audience, and that therefore the robot characters are abstract for the audience, however by creating this abstractness the duo have created starting points for a broader transmedia story world. This is recognized in the multiple media platforms the duo used, in which the robot personas are used. Therefore the ‘reader’ has multiple entry points to access their ‘story-world’ (Jenkins, 2003).

Music is the biggest component around the robots. So far the duo released four studio albums; Homework (1997), Discovery (2001), Human After All (2005) and Random Access memory in (2013), but besides the studio albums Daft Punk have also released one video album, two live albums, two

remix albums, one soundtrack; for the movie TRON Legacy (see figure 1: TRON), eighteen music videos and a movie about the robots trying to get human; named Daft Punk's Electroma (2006). In all the media the robots are shown, but meanwhile none of the media reveals the faces of the duo, which keeps the mystery still alive. It is clear that Daft Punk give multiple options for the audience to enter their transmedia story world, this goes even further in the active attitude on social platforms as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

The social platforms have another important function. The *Use and Gratification Theory* explained that people enter the story



Figure 1: TRON

world because of their need for affect or their need for cognition. But social media gives the user a third reason to enter the story world; the social integrative needs. One of the unique hallmarks of transmedia storytelling is 'interactivity' – back-and-forth communications between the audience and the narrative material (Miller, 2008, p. 4). Because of the buzz on social platforms people are interested in the story and enter the story world of the French dance duo. Internet use can result in decreased loneliness, decreased depression, decreased estrangement and isolation, increased self-acceptance, greater liking and acceptance by others, and widened social circles (Shao, 2009), for this reason people enter the story world of Daft Punk and use the social platforms to fulfill social integrative needs.

2.4 Advertising

So Daft Punk has created the attention and interest from the public by creating abstract characters which are translated in a transmedia story world, these storytelling techniques can be applied to advertising and promotion in a great many ways, and these works can be highly entertaining and engaging (Miller, 2008, p. 225). The music of the duo should not be underestimated but is not the only reason behind the success (Van den Hout, 2013); to demonstrate this, the drip feed marketing campaign before the release of *Random Access Memories* in 2013 will be analyzed.

The advertising campaign completely fits in the values of the story world of Daft Punk; mysterious and outside-the-box. The campaign started with the creation of the mystery on the 26th of February 2013. The Facebook page of the band showed a picture of two half helmets, without any text or explanation, which created the first speculations and high interaction on social platforms. This advertisement is very open and therefore viewers have different interpretations towards the advertisement. (See figure 2: Facebook advertisement)



Figure 2: Facebook advertisement

The reason for using an open advertisement is not surprising and can be supported with tested research. Facebook was chosen as a medium for the distribution of the advertisement; this means that 'followers' of the Facebook page of Daft Punk receive the advertisement. 'Followers' of the Facebook page are already familiar with the story world of Daft Punk and know the semiotics used by the duo, (e.g. the helmets). Therefore it can be concluded that the receivers already have 'prior knowledge' and are 'involved' in Daft Punk. Research by Chebat, Charlebois and G elinas-Chebat (2001) proved that when there is involvement in the advertiser, the pleasure enhances in an open advertisement and not in a closed advertisement, the same research also proved that prior knowledge of the advertiser significantly enhances the intention to buy in an open advertisement, but not in a closed advertisement.

On 2 March, the curiosity further fueled by a mysterious commercial during the show Saturday Night Live (SNL), one of the most watched television programs in America. A 15 seconds-long advertisement is displayed and actually provides no more information than the placed image on Facebook. The ad created a lot interest. Firstly, because of the large range of SNL and the subsequent dissemination via YouTube and secondly by an important new piece, the first sounds of new material.

Also guerilla marketing was used by the duo, between the 7th and the 21th of March appeared billboards and posters with the same iconic helmets of the musical duo (see figure 3: Billboard). The

hype surrounding Daft Punk is, because of the Facebook updates and SNL advertising already so large that some strategically placed billboards in LA and New York massively photographed and shared online.



Figure 3: Billboard

On the 23th of March Daft Punk officially announced the new album with its name '*Random Access Memories*'. On the 16th of April the duo posted a video on Vine with all the titles of the songs, one of them is '*Get Lucky*' which was released three days later, On the 19th of April the single '*Get Lucky*'. The song '*Get Lucky*' is a collaboration of the robots, Nile Rodgers and Pharell Williams, these artists are all from a different music genre and therefore the song attracted the interest of different groups – which Daft Punk also does according to the 'Use and Gratification theory'. While the duo kept silence for a long period, Daft Punk finally started to talk in May in television shows and magazines.

This campaign is a clear form of drip feed marketing, which is a communication strategy that "drips" pre-produced set of material to potential buyers or prospects over time. The drip-feed marketing resulted in a buzz, because of the mystery and the unusual marketing strategy. It is clear that Daft Punk worked according to pre-set strategy; in which was thought of the advertisement and the advertising media. The abstract characters of Daft Punk helped in the openness of the advertisement. The semiotics of the duo are known, which allows Daft Punk to create open advertisement, which still will be understood by the receiver of the advertisement. When selecting the advertisement media, the reach and impact are clearly taken into account, the same can be said about the timing of the advertisements.

2.5 AIDA-model

The AIDA model will be used to explain the commercial success of Daft Punk. Obviously, there is a final goal linked to all the marketing actions of Daft Punk, which is to create enough 'Desire' for the products, so that people buy the products. Looking at the AIDA model (see figure 4: AIDA), this step is called 'Action'. But before this step, it is crucial to get the 'Attention' of the target group and to create 'Interest'. The AIDA model is a marketing model, which explains the crucial steps before the buyer purchases the products. This section explains how Daft Punk used these steps, with help of their robot personas.

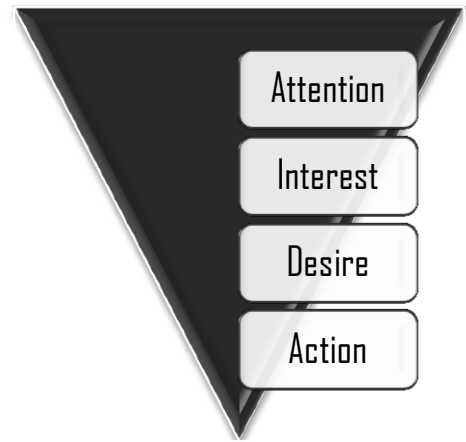


Figure 4: AIDA

Attention: Daft Punk created interest in the target group by creating a mystery. The mystery is created and therefore Daft Punk succeeded in get the attention different user groups, *The Use and Gratification Theory* showed that people do not only enter the story world of daft punk in order to fulfill affective needs, but the characters created a mystery which people wanted to solve and thus fulfill also cognitive needs.

Interest: *The Construal Level Theory* showed that Daft Punk has created social physiological distance by creating abstract characters. These characters are translated in a transmedia story world. Every medium in the transmedia story world has its own contribution to the overarching story. Transmedia stories have proven to create high interaction and thus increase the interest of the target group.

Desire: The transmedia story world is used in marketing campaigns. The elements of the story world are translated in a drip-feed marketing campaign, to create the desire of target group. Multiple social platforms are used to create an extra buzz and social interaction. The abstract characters and the story world the French duo has created have created the perfect tools to be translated in marketing campaigns.

Action: All the actions of Daft Punk clearly paid off. The album '*Random Access Memories*' debuted on nr 1 sales in 20 countries, including The United States and Great Britain. On the 7th of February 2014, the label 'Columbia Records' announced that the album has been certified Platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America. This concludes that the characters used by Daft Punk, which are translated in a transmedia story world and used in advertisements have paid off.

3: Hypotheses

The internet is widely regarded as having produced a “crisis” for the music industry (Preston & Rogers, 2011). However, Daft Punk seems to have found a way how to beat this crises, by the closed and abstract characters and their music. This resulted in high commercial success. There are two issues that need more testing; The first issue is linked to the characters; the essay have shown that Daft Punk succeeded in creating a successful transmedia story world; but it is not proven if the characters are the reason for this creation of the transmedia story world or Daft Punk also could have created a story world without the characters, but without open personalities instead. The second issue is the contribution of the transmedia story telling to this success. This essay showed the advantages of the transmedia story world which helps when advertising commercial products for musical artists, but it is not tested yet if this desire is created because of the quality of the music or because of the mysterious transmedia story world around Daft Punk. This lead to the following 2 hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Closed abstract characters are a more likely to succeed in a transmedia story world than open concrete characters.

Hypothesis 2: Closed and abstract characters translated in a transmedia story world, in the music industry increase the desire and lead to bigger commercial success.

Hypothesis 1 will be tested by creating a small transmedia story world and present it in 2 versions, one version will have closed and abstract characters and the other version will be exactly the same story but then the characters will be replaced by open personalities . Than a big group will be divided in two groups, one group will see the transmedia story world with the characters and one group will see the version with the open persons, an attitude-measure-test will conclude if characters or open personalities are preferred in a transmedia story world.

Hypothesis 2 will be tested by creating attractive, closed and abstract characters around an unfamiliar artist. This unfamiliar artist will release a single and create the single in two different manners; in the first version of the single the artist will have an open and concrete identity, the viewers of the this version will see a short interview with the artist afterwards, in which the same artist keeps this open identity. The second version of the single will be exactly the same song, but instead the artists will have a closed and abstract character, afterwards the viewers will also see short interview, in which the artist will create a bigger mystery. One group will see the open version of the song and interview and the other group will see a closed version of the song and interview, afterwards the desire will be tested by a questionnaire. This means that the music is not a variable but only the character becomes the variable.

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