Consumer Perceived Socially Mediated Authenticity of Human Brands

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Abstract

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By Lynn Mascha Schaeffer

The music industry has undergone drastic structural changes fuelled by recent technology developments providing independent artists with a growing number of opportunities to gain success, bypassing record labels. An important determinant of success is brand authenticity, which has become increasingly relevant in the past years. However, it is a complex construct and is influenced by strategic brand management choices as well as subjective consumer perception.

This study aims to address research gaps by assessing consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of signed/independent artists to explore if consumer perception differs across both types of artists. By doing so, the author aims to contribute insights into the effectiveness of independent artists' self-promotion on social media in terms of creating an authentic brand that has, according to the author's knowledge not been addressed as such.

The author employed an interpretivist, inductive qualitative research design based on phenomenology implementing grounded theory approaches within the data collection and analysis process to ensure cohesiveness with the philosophical stance taken. Six cases were identified through non-probability sampling with whom the researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews. To ensure that authenticity as a whole is addressed, a previously developed questionnaire guided through the research process. Meaning was derived through thematic analysis and data collected until saturation was reached.

Research results indicate a higher consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent artists based on consumer pre-beliefs, levels of engagement, and perceived content characteristics. Results also indicate that some constructs of authenticity as addressed by previous research in the field are subjective to individuals and cannot always be applied to groups or categories of individuals. Other limitations include that the research is non-generalisable. As such, results should be used to guide further research in the field.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Social media provides numerous opportunities for independent artists to promote themselves and their music or brand (Ansari, Stahl, Heitmann and Bremer, 2018; Butz, Stifel, Schultz and O'Neil, 2017; Leenders, Farrell, Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2015) along with distributing it online (Bernardo and Martins, 2014; Graham, Burnes, Lewis and Langer, 2004) without the help of a record label and professional team. Recent literature has investigated the effect that the digitalisation of music markets has had on the power of labels versus the opportunities for independent artists with differing results. Many researchers concluded that new online services and social media create opportunities for artists to distribute their music and promote themselves, and that major labels have lost their market dominance due to the demise of physical music distribution and record stores (Graham et al., 2004). While there is literature exploring how independent artists use social media to market themselves (Ansari et al., 2018; Butz et al., 2017; Graham et al., 2004; Leenders et al., 2015) no research was found by the author with regards to how social media presences are perceived for both types of artists in terms of authenticity.

Authenticity has become an important concept in consumer perception of social media presences and has been proven to be linked to, among other factors, brand trust (Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland and Farrelly, 2014) and brand loyalty (Fritz, Schoenmueller and Bruhn, 2017). It is a direct result of the marketing shift towards web applications which puts an emphasis on relationships between brands and consumers, and the focus on brand loyalty as a brand equity driver (Fritz et al., 2017).

As the effectiveness of social media presences in the case of independent artists has not been addressed as such, the author aims to identify possible differences in consumer perception of signed/independent artists on social media to determine if and how consumer perceived socially mediated brand authenticity is affected by whether an artist is signed or independent. To do so, the author will firstly discuss relevant literature in the field. Following this, research objectives addressing gaps in the literature and a detailed methodology will be presented, detailing all steps of the research

process. The researcher will then present findings collected from the data and connect these to the literature addressed within the literature review section of the thesis. Finally, conclusions, limitations, and possible directions for future research will be addressed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Marketing in the 21stCentury

The practice of marketing has undergone drastic changes within the last years due to the advancements in technology. Technological advancements that empower users to influence the content on the internet created the so-called Web 2.0, which stands for the move from static, provider-centred websites to websites with a more interactive focus (Erdem, 2017). An essential component of Web 2.0 is the increased ability of users to interact with one another to communicate information and opinions and thereby increase their knowledge (Erdem, 2017). This trend ultimately led to the formation of the social web, including wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites and enables users to bypass traditional intermediaries (Vinerean, 2017).

Web 2.0 has since been developing into Web 3.0 which is more concerned with meaning than with the structure of data and is working in combination with Web 2.0 applications and artificial intelligence (Vinerean, 2017). Hendler (2009) defines Web 3.0 technologies as "semantic web technologies integrated into or powering, large-scale web applications" (p. 111).

Practitioners of marketing had to adapt to the changes in consumer behaviour and consumer-brand relationships facilitated through these advances in technology: Marketing 3.0 emerged as a form of marketing focused on the search for meaning and value (Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan, 2010). It sees consumers as complex and multi-dimensional human beings that are highly aware and value-driven and therefore prefer choosing products and companies "that satisfy their deeper needs for participation, creativity, community, and idealism" (Erdem, 2017, p. 31). This shift in marketing thinking ultimately affects how marketing departments operate and focuses on "creating products, services, and company cultures that inspire, include, and reflect these basic values of their target consumers" (Erdem, 2017, p. 31).

2.1.1 Social Media Marketing (SMM) and User-Generated Content (UGC)

As addressed in the previous section, along with the technological advancements of Web 2.0, new opportunities in marketing were created. SMM is a subgroup of online and digital marketing that builds on the previously outlined technologies of Web 2.0. It uses them to communicate, deliver and exchange offerings that hold value for a firms' stakeholders and influence value creation, the enhancement of brand equity, and the creation and fostering of relationships between the brand and customers (Vinerean, 2017). According to Yadav and Rahman (2018), "social media offers marketers an opportunity to connect directly with customers, strengthen their communication and pitch supreme value propositions to their top customers irrespective of their locations" (p. 3883) in an authentic manner (Smith, Fischer and Yongjian, 2012).

The Web 2.0 scape, however, is dominated less by publishers and more by UGC which refers to content published by the general public (user-centric) rather than paid professionals (conventional media model) which is mainly distributed online (Daugherty, Eastin and Bright, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The internet and social media have empowered consumers to influence mass audiences through social media, blogs or video sharing websites and many other Web 2.0 applications (Daugherty et al., 2008). At the same time, it made the sharing of content less demanding (Smith et al., 2012). It has, therefore, become a central focus of brand marketing as "much UGC across various media is brand-related and has the potential to shape consumer brand perceptions" (Smith et al., 2012, p. 102). Moreover, essential data can be collected from UGC to forecast sales numbers, e.g., in the movie industry (Dellarocas, Zhang and Awad, 2007). Dhar and Chang (2009) also found evidence that data derived from UGC can forecast music sales which suggest that there is a correlation between the content and volume of UGC and the success of a specific product in some industries.

2.1.2 E-Commerce and Intermediaries

While one might assume that the advancements generated through Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 would have brought firms closer to their customers,

intermediaries between manufacturers and consumers have actually increased (Anderson and Anderson, 2002) and their value-adding functions cannot be easily substituted or taken over by firms themselves (Giaglis, Klein and O'Keefe, 1999). At the same time, even though the number of intermediaries is increasing, a number of cost elements in the traditional purchase process have decreased, including search, coordination, transaction and switching costs (Meck, 2001) and many of the intermediaries are accessible to the general public as opposed to being exclusively available for firms (Graham et al., 2004).

2.2 Transformation of the Music Industry

Similar to the practice of marketing, the traditional business model of the music industry has undergone several drastic changes in the past decade mostly fuelled by the increasing popularity and use of the internet as means of music distribution and consumption. The most important driving forces behind those changes are the format change from physical to digital sales (Butz et al., 2017; Moreau, 2013) and from digital sales to streaming services (Marshall, 2015), the unbundling of albums (Elberse, 2010; Papies and van Heerde, 2017) and the illegal distribution and consumption of music (Butz et al., 2017; Leenders et al., 2015; Papies and van Heerde, 2017; Peitz and Waelbroeck, 2004).

The digitalisation of music has had various effects on the music industry in terms of structure and power distribution along the distribution and value chains with some experts arguing that the traditional business model of the music industry is "broken or in 'entropy' – being total disorder" (Allen, Macy and Hutchison, 2012, p. 7). The internet has enabled music industry players to remove a number of "cost-adding activities while retaining those that add value" (Graham et al., 2004, p.1099) and has increased the speed and convenience of doing music business while making music products and services more accessible to consumer than they ever were (Graham et al., 2004). Many researchers have argued that the role of record labels has and will continue to change throughout the digitalisation of music (Allen et al., 2012; Bernardo and Martins, 2014; Butz et al., 2017; Elberse, 2010; Graham

et al., 2004; Leenders et al., 2015; Papies and van Heerde, 2017; Walzer, 2017). However, uncertainty remains towards the question of how the structural changes will influence the way musical artists generate revenue with their content with Leenders et al. (2015) arguing that there is no single best way of organising and that "different artist configurations may be viable [meaning that] record labels may play an important role in the future for specific artist configurations" (p. 1813). Allen et al. (2012) argue that the way record labels do business must be re-evaluated and innovated if they want to stay competitive, while Graham et al. (2004) add that the internet is changing the domination of the music industry by big labels as they heavily invested in controlling distribution channels by acquiring retail music stores, a dominance that will fade with the demise of music being sold in a physical format and the shift to electronic distribution. A shift in the music industry supply chain from a linear, fixed structure heavily relying on long-term relationships towards a flexible, network-oriented structure with frequently changing partners further puts the traditional business model in question and will likely lead to a reduced power of major labels due to their loss of control over the distribution channels (Graham et al., 2004). "Though the major labels still appear to prefer longer-term relationships, the likelihood is that in a fast-moving market where consumer tastes are constantly changing, these will be difficult to sustain" (Graham et al., 2004, p. 1101). Ultimately, anyone is free to use the new music distribution channels generated through technological advancements (Graham et al., 2004), and while the expected disintermediation did not happen, the industry is being transformed with new types of intermediaries appearing (Anderson and Anderson, 2002).

The shift in power distribution and the formation of new opportunities for different stakeholders in the music industry has led to an increasing number of independent artists. So much so that "independent music production has become the most significant model of production" (Bernardo and Martins, 2014, p. 8). Graham et al. (2004) contradict this statement arguing that while the distribution format of music has changed, "the distribution channels and the division of labour within the industry have remained relatively stable: artists create music, record labels promote and distribute it and the fans consume it" (p. 1087).

Most of the found literature on the subject acknowledges that at this point record companies remain relevant and powerful as they provide artists with initial capital and marketing know-how as well as established vital relationships with press and other media and the addition of value to the core product itself through the provision of expertise throughout the creative process (e.g., composers, producers, recording facilities) (Graham et al., 2004). This expertise and the financial means of major labels remain essential for musicians as consumer choices are influenced by the 'fame' of an artist which serves as a "proven track record of producing music with mass appeal" (Papies and van Heerde, 2017, p. 73). Research by Im, Song and Jung (2018) also indicates that a debut rank of a song in the charts has a strong influence on the success of the song over time as consumers use it as an indication of what is worth listening to. A finding that Leenders et al. (2015) supports by adding that record labels can have the resources to address the issue of visibility in a crowded market.

With regards to the relevance of record labels, the analysed literature does not provide a conclusive answer just yet. However, previous literature in the field shows that the development of digital music formats and distribution channels and several digital tools to help along the processes have created opportunities for a growing number of artists to independently produce, distribute and promote their music.

2.2.1 New Business Models in the Music Industry

Recent literature has identified disintermediation as one of the effects of the increased possibilities through web-based tools and electronic distribution. The disintermediation of the music industry business models is often referred to Music 2.0 and is built around the premise that major labels are unnecessary in today's music industry and that building on the communication and distribution potential of the internet, artists who apply a do-it-yourself approach and direct-to-fan approach can build a fan base and distribute their music independent of labels using a large number of available web tools (Bernardo and Martins, 2014). This matches the previously addressed trends in marketing that "social media offers marketers an opportunity to connect directly with customers, strengthen their

communication and pitch supreme value propositions to their top customers irrespective of their locations" (p. 3883) in an authentic manner (Smith, Fischer and Yongjian, 2012).

According to Allen et al. (2012), artists sit on top of the revenue stream in the music industry. By publishing music without a label, independent artists can reduce the number of intermediaries between them and the consumer and thus reduce the number of profit partakers (Graham et al., 2004) which allows them to set a lower final price at the same profit rate (Bernardo and Martins, 2014). Conclusively, both, the artist and consumer can benefit from the reduced number of intermediaries (Bernardo and Martins, 2014; Graham et al., 2004) as artists "retain more surplus value or generated profits, while consumers benefit from both a larger choice and lower prices" (Bernardo and Martins, 2014, p. 11).
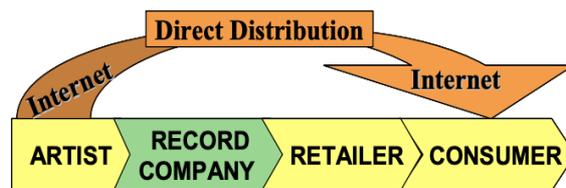
Figure 1: The Governing Mechanism, Graham et al. (2004)

Graham et al. (2004) argue that the digitalisation of the music industry has led to a restructuring of activities, actors, and governing mechanisms in the music business model and coordinating structures therein. Moreover, omnichannel approaches, facilitated through e-commerce technologies, are increasing the number of channels in commercial transactions while borders between them are decreasingly clear (Eiriz and Leite, 2017). Moreau (2013) adds that the digitalisation has led to a complete rethinking and re-innovation of the industry's value chains. According to Negus (2019), the record "is no longer central in determining the scope and success" (p. 379), musicians and music companies now pursue many different revenue streams, including merchandise and live performances. This has led to a division of the traditional music industry into different core sectors: "musicians, composers, songwriters and lyricists; recorded music; live music; music publishing; music

representatives; music producers, recording studios and staff. The core sectors are further broken down into 'sub-sectors'..." (p. 380).

All four researchers propose that the music industry's business models have changed throughout the digitalisation of music (Eiriz and Leite, 2017; Graham et al., 2004; Moreau, 2013; Negus, 2019). Graham et al. (2004) illustrate these changes in several models, most notably for this dissertation, the change in governing mechanisms as illustrated above the previous paragraph and the change in the choice of actors as shown below:
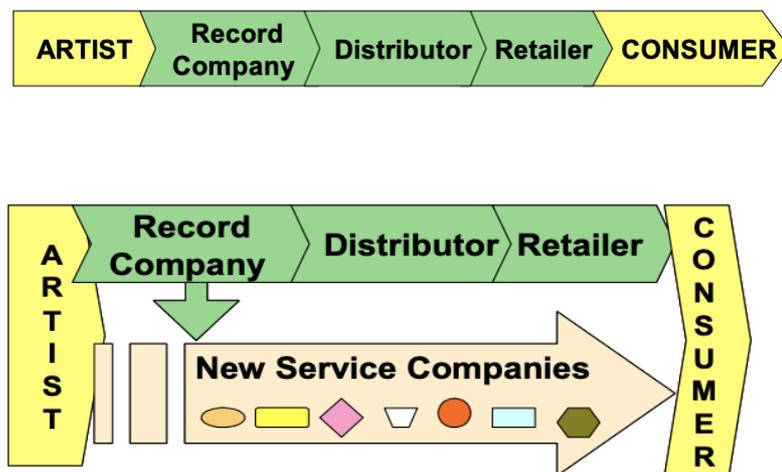
Figure 2: The Choice of Actors, Graham et al. (2004)

2.2.2 Promotional Focus of Today's Music Industry

"The transformation of the music industries has taken place in the context of a widening promotional culture, a well-documented phenomenon (...) that has extended the range and style of commercially-inflected, attention-seeking communication in everyday life" (Klein, Meier and Powers, 2017, p. 9). This promotional culture is dominated by capitalist forms of exchange over all other forms of exchange, prioritises the communication of promotional messages that are carried out by a growing number of professionals in the fields of publication, marketing, advertising, and branding consultancies, and has its strongest presence on social media. As a result,

musicians are not just trying to sell a product anymore, but they are a brand themselves that has to be marketed with a clear identity and has to engage in numerous promotional activities (Klein et al., 2017).

2.2.2.1 Relevance of Live Performances as a Promotional Tool

Along with the shift from physical to digital formats, the consumption of music has shifted from being a mere product to being an experience (Allen et al., 2012). The two major consumption formats of music as an entertainment good are live concerts and recorded music (Papies and van Heerde, 2017) with a growing importance in terms of marketing as well as generating direct revenue being allocated to live performances: While record revenue is decreasing, there is a "general upward trend if concert revenue" (Papies and van Heerde, 2017, p. 82).

According to O'Reilly et al. (2016), live music is "a unique form of musical experience spontaneously co-created by musicians and their audience" (p. 5) bringing together musical artists and music consumers and "often many of the relevant stakeholders, to a physically and socially defined space" (p. 5) and is as such a powerful way to reach audiences and increase sales. Primarily smaller artists depend on revenue and the marketing effects of live performances in the age of music piracy (Papies and van Heerde, 2017). Additionally, Mortimer, Noskov and Sorensen (2012) add that file-sharing in the music industry increases live performance revenue for small artists, possibly as a result of increased awareness among consumers, while its impact on popular artists' live performance revenue is not proven as such.

2.2.3 Independent Promotion in the Music Industry

According to Allen et al. (2012), artists are likely to succeed in terms of generating revenue if they make themselves a brand. While the needed capital and marketing expertise of labels can facilitate this process and deliver needed influence (Allen et al., 2012) as well as creating a certain level of fame and providing marketing support (Leenders et al., 2015), "the Internet as a distribution mechanism for music is open to anyone to use, whether smaller labels or artists" (Graham et al., 2004, p. 1101).

The continuous development of social media and increased usage among consumers creates many marketing opportunities for independent artists. According to Graham et al.'s (2004) supply chain model, artists are now able to skip record labels in the supply chain to directly distribute to consumers and undertake promotional activities through new online services, including communicating directly with them through social media.

Other opportunities of social media include that:

- There is a proven interdependency between live performances and CD sales for independent artists that are driven through social media and connected individuals (Leenders et al., 2015)
- 'Digital Age Independents' benefit from social media exposure (Leenders et al., 2015)
- Social media can help generate buzz (Butz et al., 2017)
- "Artists (...) can drive song plays over the long run by actively sending friend requests or comments to fans" (Ansari et al., 2018, p. 334); sending comments has a greater overall impact
- Communication with existing fans has a high impact on network cohesiveness and network size (Ansari et al., 2018)

While existing literature indicates some opportunities for independent artists as summarised above, there seems to be a lack of research around if and how consumer perception is influenced by whether artists are independent or signed, thus investigating the efficiency of social media usage for both types of artists. Examining this construct with a focus on the concept of authenticity could indicate whether or not independent artists can successfully use social media and if the fact that they are self-managing could be leveraged to build stronger brand-consumer relationships and brand equity in the long run.

2.3 Brand Authenticity

The search for authenticity is of great importance in contemporary marketing and has become a relevant concept associated not just with individual persons but with entire brands as overall brand success can often

be determined by a brand's perceived authenticity (Oh, Prado, Korelo and Frizzo, 2019; Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer and Heinrich, 2012). It is therefore relevant to the development of the music industry as addressed in Chapter 2.2 and to modern marketing, as discussed in Chapter 2.1.

Postmodern markets are brand-dominated hyper realities where consumers find it increasingly difficult to identify if something is real or not (Napoli et al., 2014). As a result, brands often struggle to create and maintain long-lasting relationships with consumers (Oh et al., 2019) which is essential to a successful business as the Pareto Principle states that typically 80% of revenue will be generated through 20% of a brand's customers (Weinstein, A., 2001). The postmodern consumer is known to purchase from brands that enable them to express their identity in an authentic manner (Napoli, Dickinson-Delaporte and Beverland, 2016), and, according to Gustafsson (2005), consumers increasingly expect brands to be authentic and trustworthy. Dwivedi and McDonald (2018) assume that these expectations are resulting from consumers' mistrust towards business that is characterising postmodern consumer behaviour. As a response to this development, brands today recognise positioning themselves as authentic as an opportunity to drive brand success (Napoli et al., 2016) and maintain long-lasting relationships with their customers (Hsu, 2019). To differentiate a brand as authentic and thereby form a clear brand image (Hsu, 2019), increase brand status, equity and corporate reputation (Gilmore and Pine, 2007), firms are required to align brand values and actions and make these transparent to consumers (Holt, 2002).

However, brand authenticity remains a complex construct: Oh et al. (2019) divided related literature in the field of marketing into two main investigation streams with the first approach focusing on "objective dimensions from the brand management perspective" (p. 232) that consumers use to inform themselves and judge the brand's authenticity: Within this area of research, Oh et al. (2019) argue that in order to be authentic brands have to establish a distinctive identity. This identity can be formed through a sense of history and the brand's connection to traditional cultures, regions and core beliefs, as well as, according to Moulard, Raggio and Folse (2016), rarity and stability of the brand. Approaching this stream of research presents an extensive list of attributes to brand authenticity,

including in the case of Beverland (2006) "heritage and pedigree, stylistic consistency, quality commitments, relationship to place, method of production, and downplaying commercial motives" (p. 251). Attributes associated by other researchers include the genuineness, truth or reality of something (Kennick, 1985); sincerity, innocence, and originality (Fine, 2003); as well as the naturality, honesty, simplicity and being unspun, genuine, unique, real and true (Napoli et al., 2014). Schallehn, Burmann and Riley (2014) established the three key attributes to brand authenticity as consistency, continuity, and individuality with individuality having the lowest influence on perceived brand authenticity. This contradicts other literature in that it downplays the relevance of 'being unique' in branding to achieve brand authenticity.

The large number of different attributes and their relevance indicates that there are discrepancies across different industries and brand settings when it comes to a clear definition of authenticity (Dwivedi and McDonald, 2018) and how brands can increase it. Some literature amplifies the role of corporate culture and consumer perception of the brand leadership team with Moulard et al. (2016) underlining the importance of transmitting the brand management's passion for their products or services, and Napoli et al. (2014) adding onto this by arguing that in order for a brand to be authentic, the firm has to encourage, foster and enhance authentic values through their culture as a whole as opposed to merely claiming that the brand is authentic. Authenticity needs to be implemented as a core of the brand from the consumer perspective to gain as successful positioning (Napoli et al., 2014). Nevertheless, "conceptualizations of brand authenticity lack sufficient precision to delineate the actual meaning of the construct" (Wymer and Akbar, 2017).

A second research stream focuses on the "subjective, contextualized and socially constructed nature of authenticity taking the consumer perspective" (Oh et al., 2019, p. 233): According to Holt (1998), consumers search for differing cues signalling authenticity based on their cultural capital. Authenticity is often a socially or personally constructed concept (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Harris and Deacon, 2011) and therefore subject to the consumer's knowledge, preferences and fields of interest of the consumer as well as their interpretations of the phenomenon (Grazian, 2005). Napoli et al. (2014) add that those connotations of authenticity shift over time and that

the construct is strongly connected to time and place. The range of cues utilised to identify authenticity is often dependent on the individual's interest in and knowledge of the subject (Grazian, 2005). "Authenticity judgments may be formed around indexical cues (a factual connection between the object and time) or iconic cues (the extent to which an object or event is a reasonable reconstruction of the past)" (Napoli et al., 2014, p. 4) and are self-authored and self-determined behavioural experiences by an individual (Napoli et al., 2014).

The above definitions show that brand authenticity is a complex and subjective construct that cannot be downsized to one single definition and may differ based on consumers, the product and services the brand provides, the industry it operates in, as well as other attributes such as time and place.

2.3.1 Effects of Brand Authenticity

While researchers have identified brand authenticity as a critical component to creating a successful brand (Oh et al., 2019), its direct impact on brand equity is as complex as its definition.

Firstly, there is a consensus among researchers that "brand authenticity is emerging as a key determinant in consumer-brand relationships" (Oh et al., 2019, p. 232). It "has a significant impact on brand trust and can help fuel firm growth within the market place" (Napoli et al., 2014, p.2) and is often used by members of niches to distinguish themselves from the mass by focusing on authenticity (Harris and Deacon, 2011). According to Oh et al. (2019), brand authenticity has an influence on self-reinforcing assets, which can promote closeness toward the brand, increase consumer purchase intentions and increase the likeliness that they will visit a store/webstore or recommend the brand to other people, essentially making brands with a higher perceived authenticity commercially more successful than others. At the same time, authenticity is linked to brand trust (Beverland, 2005; Eggers, O'Dwyer, Kraus, Vallaster and Güldenberg, 2013; Oh et al., 2019; Schallehn et al., 2014), emotional customer-brand attachment (Fritz et al., 2017; Oh et al., 2019) and word-of-mouth appeal (Oh et al., 2019). Fritz et al. (2017) add that a high brand authenticity can ultimately increase overall consumer loyalty "as well as consumer tolerance

for bad brand experiences" (p. 339). It is important to note that the impact of higher brand authenticity on consumer behaviour and brand equity is strongly dependent on the involvement consumers have with the brand: authenticity is found to have a stronger effect on brand relationship quality for low-involvement consumers than for high involvement consumers, possibly because low-involvement consumers use perceived authenticity as a stronger signal of the brand's quality as a relationship partner since they do not show brand preference (Fritz et al., 2017).

2.3.2 Human/Celebrity Brand Authenticity

The concept of authenticity, as discussed in the previous two chapters, also applies to the overall focus of this thesis, musicians. Another research stream addresses authenticity in the context of human and celebrity brands.

Rather than seeing celebrities as brand endorses, modern research views them as constructed human brands (Ilicic and Webster, 2016). An authentic celebrity brand is one that is perceived by consumers as being true to themselves in terms of their behaviour, reflecting its core values and norms (Fritz et al., 2017), as well as their interactions with consumers (Fine, 2003; Keriiis and Goldman, 2005; Moulard et al., 2016; Moulard, Garrity and Rice, 2015; Peterson, 2005). Schlegel and Hicks (2011), however, raise complexity to this statement as "the true self is a private entity that may or may not be reflected in one's behaviour" (p. 990). Therefore, one's true self is, in fact, unobservable to others which means that only the individual themselves can know whether or not they are authentic while outsiders cannot know with absolute certainty: "As such, celebrity authenticity is defined as the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self" (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 175) which is derived from inferring celebrities' motivations from available information, such as their behaviour.

According to Moulard et al. (2015), two factors drive the authentic perception of celebrities: A unique behaviour to that celebrity and a stable presentation of this behaviour over time; rarity and stability, both segmented into several subdimensions. One subconstruct of rarity is 'talent,' which is "the perception that the celebrity demonstrates skill in his/her chosen field" (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 178). Consumers wish celebrities to display that they

possess an ability that enables them to become successful rather than merely having the status of popularity due to financial means or the family's status and level of popularity. A second subconstruct is 'discretion,' standing for celebrities being inconspicuous which relates to Gilmore and Pine's (2007) finding concerning over-commercialisation: a more limited exposure of the human brand will lead to a higher perceived authenticity (Moulard et al., 2015). The third subconstruct is 'originality' which is defined as "the perception that a celebrity thinks or acts in an independent, creative, or individual manner" (p. 179) and does not 'follow the crowd'. However, as discussed in Chapter 2.3, Schallehn et al. (2014) put the importance of originality as a driver of authenticity by arguing that "individuality has the lowest influence on perceived brand authenticity" (p. 192). According to Moulard et al. (2015), consumer authenticity perception is also influenced by stability with subconstructs including: 'consistency', defined as the perception that a celebrity's characteristics and personality are not changing, 'morality' which stands for the perception that the celebrity is demonstrating strong values and principles and 'candidness' which is "the perception that what the celebrity states is consistent with how the celebrity feels" (Moulard et al., 2015, p. 179). Within their study, Moulard et a. (2015) developed a questionnaire to measure the authenticity of celebrities from a consumer perspective, as illustrated below:

Construct (Cronbach Alpha, Composite Reliability, Variance Extracted[a])	Measure[b,c] (Item Loading[d,e])
Celebrity authenticity (0.87, 0.87, 0.70)	Is genuine (0.86)
	Seems real to me (0.84)
	Is authentic (0.81)
Rarity constructs	
Talent (0.88, 0.88, 0.79)	Is skilled at his/her craft (0.93)
	Demonstrates a natural ability in his/her field (0.85)
Discretion (0.83, 0.83, 0.62)	Prefers to stay out of the spotlight when not working (0.77)
	Tries to keep his/her private life private (0.84)
	Does not disclose much information about his/her personal relationships (0.75)
Originality (0.78, 0.77, 0.53)	Is unique in his/her ways (0.78)
	Has distinctive characteristics (0.70)
	Has something about him/her that makes him/her stand out (0.71)
Stability constructs	
Consistency (0.82, 0.80, 0.61)	Has stayed the same over the years (0.92)
	Looks the same every time I see him/her (0.62)
	Hasn't changed much (0.77)
Candidness (0.92, 0.92, 0.80)	Is known for being straightforward (0.87)
	Is known for being honest (0.91)
	Is up-front (0.90)
Morality (0.79, 0.79, 0.65)	Has been in and out of trouble[f] (0.84)
	Has demonstrated bad judgment in his/her personal life[f] (0.78)

Figure 3: Measurement Items, Moulard et al. (2015)

Ilicic and Webster (2016) add that authenticity fosters meaningful relationships and is perceived as such if a consumer believes that the celebrity's public image is constructed by themselves and consumers "accept what celebrities claim to be" (p. 411). To be authentic, a human brand must communicate their individuality, self, soul, be whom they appear to be and create an image of individuality, uniqueness, and differentiation. Essentially, human brands are required to create a persona and stay consistent with this persona's characteristics (Ilicic and Webster, 2016). Additionally, "consumer perception of celebrity brand authenticity focuses on the celebrity's need for the public to recognize and appreciate their true identity and values. Consumers describe the authentic celebrity as behaving in accordance with their true self, by projecting a transparent and honest image that people could form a relationship with" (Ilicic and Webster, 2016, p. 418).

For this study, it is important to note that the term 'celebrity' does not automatically apply to all artists. Celebrities are defined as individuals who are known for being well known. Consumers are obsessed and fascinated with celebrities that are both honoured for their distinctiveness and pretend to undermine their distinctiveness through e.g., celebrity-focused magazines (Kurzman, Anderson, Key, Lee, Moloney, Silver and Van Ryn, 2007). "Celebrity is a genre of representation and a discursive effect; it is a commodity traded by the promotions, publicity, and media industries that produce these representations and their effects; and it is a cultural formation that has social function we can better understand" (Turner, 2013, p. 10) with modern celebrities being in most cases a product of media representation. Based on these definitions it means that a musical artist, whether signed by a record label or not, is not automatically a celebrity but merely a human brand.

2.3.3 Authenticity in Marketing Communications

According to Dwivedi and McDonald (2018), marketing communication is said to have a substantial impact on brand authenticity in

two different ways: the first one is a direct effect that marketing communications have on brand authenticity due to the "meaning-transfer mechanisms, whereby cultural meaning is transferred by the marketing communication system into brands" (n.p.), and secondly through a mediated effect where marketing communication reinforces the brand positioning which then generates brand authenticity. "From a communication perspective, authenticity may indicate the perception of any combination of attributes such as authority, fidelity, origin, credibility, sincerity, and historical accuracy" (Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010, p. 259).

2.3.4 Online and Social Media Authenticity

Online and social media authenticity must be seen as another unique and essential subconstruct of brand authenticity (Marwick, 2013). Users of social networking sites often question whether the opinions and thoughts a person expresses online are authentic due to the presence of self-presentational behaviour in social media environments (Lim, Nicholson, Yang and Kim, 2015, p.134). Social media offers excellent opportunities for reach and is therefore often controlled by strategic self-presentation rather than reflections of the true self. Users hope to thereby avoid possible negative social judgement for expressing their authentic selves and instead prefer risking "negative intra-psychic penalties for failing to be authentic" (Lim et al., 2015, p. 141).

Similar to human/celebrity brand authenticity, authenticity online is composed of two parts: the identification of and with the authentic self as well as authentic communication that reflects the authentic self (Lim et al., 2015). According to Christofides, Muise and Desmarais (2009), gender and age are the two demographics that most significantly affect an online user's authenticity along with the user's need for popularity (Lim et al., 2015; Zywica and Danowski, 2008) as ordinary people often have a higher perceived authenticity since their audience members tend to find them more accessible (Coleman and Moss, 2008). Gilpin et al. (2010) add authority, with clarity and consistency of identity as subcategories, as another important factor that relates to institutional social media profiles: "Authority refers to the level of knowledge and expertise expressed by a blog author, with regard to the institution itself, its operating domain, or both" (p. 261) and is essential for institutional media channels to be perceived as authentic. Additionally,

building trust through open communication and transparency, which falls under the factor of engagement, heavily influences perceived authenticity in social media environments (Gilpin et al., 2010; Robinson, 2010). Authenticity in online environments is not only used to differentiate one human brand from another but to differentiate it from other forms of media (Marwick, 2013).

2.4 Conclusion

As discussed throughout the literature review, marketing in the 21st century has evolved immensely through Web 2.0 (Erdem, 2017) and Web 3.0 (Hendler, 2009) technologies such as social media. Marketing strategies are focused on fostering relationships between brands and customers (Yadav and Rahman, 2018) to be successful. In the music industry, Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 technologies have enabled independent musicians to directly connect with audiences (Bernardo and Martins, 2014) and promote their brand and music which is distributed through new online service companies as opposed to record label intermediaries (Graham et al., 2004).

To be successful as a brand or artist, the literature review underlines the importance of authenticity. Authenticity is a concept that is applied to both, brands and human/celebrity brands and is as such relevant to assess the success of new business models emerging in the music industry, such as the trend of independent musicians. Authenticity is fostered through brand management strategies as well as subjective consumer perspectives and attributes. Brand authenticity is an important concept in brand management, including marketing communications and marketing-driven activities on social media. The presented literature review includes an extensive list of attributes, though the researcher only approached core literature in the field. This shows that measuring authenticity is a complex undertaking as its definitions are unprecise and vary depending on industry contexts.

Nevertheless, musicians, regarded as human/celebrity brands in today's marketing world, need to create authentic brands to build strong relationships with consumers (Hsu, 2019) and have commercial success (Oh et al., 2019). Traditionally this was managed through record labels, but social media has empowered every consumer to reach large audiences (Daugherty et al., 2008).. Based on previous research in the field addressed in the

literature review, the business models of today's music industry including supply chains and communication (dotted lines) could look as shown below with brand authenticity playing a key role in all of the models.
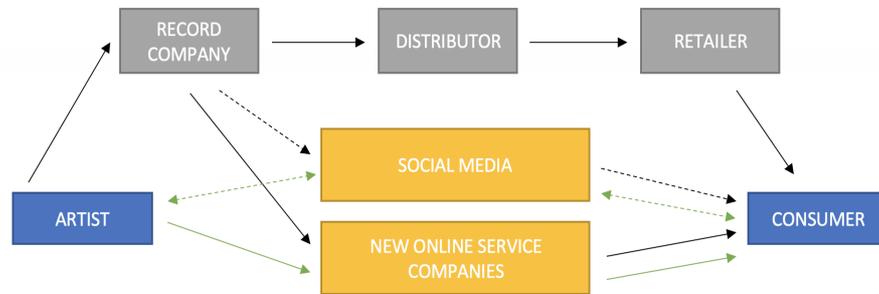
Figure 4: Music Industry Business Models

Chapter 3: Research Objectives and Methodology

T his section discusses the research objectives of this piece of research as well as the methodology the researcher chose to employ to address each research objective and the overall research question.

3.1 Research Question & Objectives

As presented in the literature review, two significant developments concerning the music industry can be observed: A shift to online distribution and promotion and the opportunity to become a successful artist through self-management rather than with the help of a record label. Many researchers have since addressed the possibilities of artists to manage themselves and succeed without a record label with the help of Web 2.0/Web 3.0 technologies such as social media. The amount of research found by the author on how effective the use of social media for independent artists is in terms of authenticity compared to signed artists, however, is scarce. At the same time, measuring authenticity, also in relation to social media activities, is an important concept as it provenly impacts brand trust (Napoli et al., 2014) and ultimately commercial brand success (Oh et al., 2019). It should, therefore, be investigated in order to assess the effectiveness of self-promotional activities on social media in the case of independent artists. When an artist is independent and manages their social media presence themselves, it takes time out of their busy day that could be allocated to creative processes or other promotional tools such as live performances (Papies and van Heerde, 2017). Therefore, an exciting and vital insight would be if the return-on-investment (ROI) in terms of consumer perceived brand authenticity and ultimately brand trust and brand success on time invested into social media management is higher, equal to, or lower than that of managed artists.

Therefore, the research question of this dissertation that will be addressed through a qualitative research approach is:

<div style="text-align:center; color:#4a7ebb">

Is consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity influenced by whether the artist is signed or independent?

</div>

Through this research question, the author aims to provide more insights into the opportunities of the growing number of independent artists. While this dissertation compares independent artists' consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity to that of signed artists, it is important to note that even independently working artists can outsource their social media management to agencies or artist managers. With this in mind, the results of this research could guide independent artists in their brand strategy decisions and allow a cost-benefit-analysis to make outsourcing decisions. By comparing the results to present findings in the field of brand and human/celebrity authenticity, the digitalisation's impact on the music industry and opportunities for independent artists, the author aims to make a connection between brand authenticity which has grown in importance as an antecedent of brand success and independent/signed artists.

Several sub-objectives can be formed based on the observed gaps and areas of interest previously presented in the literature review section:

1. Assess consumer perceptions of signed and independent artists
2. Assess consumer engagement on social media with signed and independent artists
3. Assess the motivations behind following signed and independent artists
4. Assess perceived sources of social media content in the case of signed and independent artists

3.2 Research Design

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the choice of methods and research design used to collect and analyse data to answer the proposed research question and investigate the outlined research objectives. Additionally, limitations and ethical considerations of the study as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods will be presented. In order to provide a piece of research that is high in quality, the author selected the research method, instruments and samples by adhering to the principles laid out by Saunders, Thornhill and Lewis (2009) in form of the Research Onion as a guiding framework and will discuss the philosophical reasoning for each of the addressed research methods and research instruments below.

3.2.1 Layer One - Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is represented within the outer layer of the Research Onion and "relates to the development of knowledge and the nature of that knowledge" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 107) which is why every research process should commence by defining it. It represents a specific view or perspective of the world taken by the researcher (Biddix, Renn and Roper, 2018; Saunders et al., 2009).
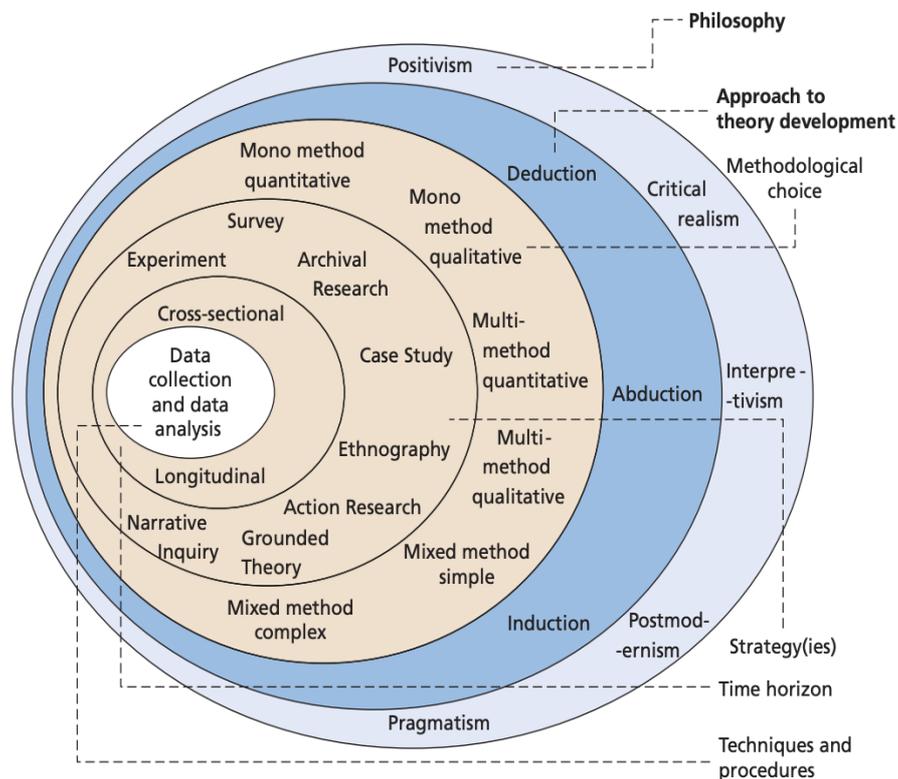
Figure 5: The Research 'Onion', Saunders et al. (2009)

The word 'research' is defined as the "systematic collection and interpretation of information with a clear purpose, to find things out" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 726). In the course of conducting research, the researcher develops knowledge in a particular field and makes different types of assumptions including, among others, assumptions about the realities encountered by the researcher during the research, referred to as 'ontological assumptions'; assumptions about human knowledge, referred to as 'epistemological assumptions', and lastly, assumptions about the extent and ways the researcher's values influence their research process, also called 'axiological assumptions' (Collis and Hussey, 2013). Ontology and epistemology are the two main concepts discussed in the literature in the field of research philosophy. Epistemology "regards what constitutes acceptable knowledge in an area of study" while ontology refers to the nature of reality and the researcher's worldview and how that ultimately influences how they see the world, society and everything else (Saunders et al., 2009).

These assumptions (Collis and Hussey, 2013) or paradigms (Lapan, Quartaroli and Riemer, 2011) whether made consciously or unconsciously, will influence how the researcher understands their research question, their research methods, and their data interpretation and will ultimately shape the research (Collis and Hussey, 2013). Being consistent with their assumptions will allow researchers to create a credible research philosophy underpinning their "methodological choice, research strategy and data" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 130) and is as such crucial to every piece of research as it conceptualises the researcher's work throughout all stages of the study (Biddix et al., 2018).

Different versions of the Research Onion can be found along with many research philosophies, not all of which are included in Figure 5. "Of the different theoretical perspectives available, positivism and various strands of interpretivism are, or have been (arguably) among the most influential" (Gray, 2013, p. 21). The paradigm of positivism, which falls into the philosophy of objectivism, is often contrasted with interpretivism or, in terms of epistemology, with constructivism.

Positivists believe that knowledge is an absolute truth that can be discovered, and problems can be addressed through singular answers (Biddix et al., 2018). The philosophy of positivism employed by natural scientists argues that new theory can be generated by identifying regularities and causal relationships within collected data that "is reduced to the least possible number of variables, factors, or causes that affect outcomes" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.). In positivist research theories are usually hypothesized, tested and verified or rejected (Biddix et al., 2018) through quantifiable observations (Saunders et al., 2009) based on calculated results as part of the data analysis (Biddix et al., 2018). Researchers are independent of the researched subject and remain objective throughout the study (Saunders et al., 2009; Biddix et al., 2018).

On the other hand, interpretivism is focused on "historically situated interpretations of the social life world" (Gray, 2013, p. 23) derived from culture as the complexity of human behaviour does not allow for the application of universal laws (Swanson and Chermack, 2013). According to interpretivism, there is no direct one-to-one relationship between subjects and objects, and the world is interpreted through "schemas of the mind" (Gray, 2013, p. 23). The concept of constructivism, which represents the epistemological side of

interpretivism further explains that "knowledge is based on the view that reality or truth is understood" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.). Therefore, it differs across situations and individuals' views and can lead to multiple meanings. Within this philosophy, the researcher is sometimes viewed as a co-creator of knowledge along with the sample of the study as they have a subjective influence along the entire course of the study (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.).

Pragmatism argues that knowledge is situational and uses "qualitative sources to explore meaning and quantitative data to explain it" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.) to generate and verify theories within the same study.

Biddix et al. (2018) summarise key distinctions between three different research perspectives, as shown in the table below.

	Constructivism	Postpositivism	Pragmatism
Knowledge	Understanding	Truth	Situational
Evidence	Multiple meanings	Reductionism	Holistic
Researcher	Subjective	Objective	Both
Theory	Development	Verification	Either or both

Figure 6: Comparison of Research Perspectives by Key Characteristics, Biddix et al. (2018)

This study's objective is to understand differences in consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity which is why an interpretivist approach seems most suitable as it emphasizes "the role of meaning in individuals' engagement with the social world" (Miller, Chepp, Willson and Padilla, 2014, n.p.). The interpretivist approach is widespread due to its characteristics outlined above and the characteristics of business and management, which fall into the field of social sciences. The table below summarises ontological and epistemological assumptions of interpretivism..

Ontological Assumptions
• Reality is indirectly constructed based on individual interpretation and is subjective
• People interpret and make their own meaning of events.
• Events are distinctive and cannot be generalized.
• There are multiple perspectives on one incident.
• Causation in social sciences is determined by interpreted meaning and symbols.

Epistemological Assumptions
• Knowledge is gained through a strategy that "respects the differences between people and the objects of natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman as cited in Grix, 2004, p. 64).
• Knowledge is gained inductively to create a theory.
• Knowledge arises from particular situations and is not reducible to simplistic interpretation.
• Knowledge is gained through personal experience.

Figure 7: Interpretivist Ontology and Epistemology, Mack (2010)

According to Mack (2010), the disadvantages of interpretivism include that the research is subjective, and its findings are non-generalisable to other situations which puts the entire benefit of interpretivist research in question. Moreover, the ontological assumption behind the interpretivist approach is somewhat subjective (Mack, 2010). However, Mack (2010) also argues that all research is somehow subjective as it is impossible for researchers to separate themselves from their perspective as a researcher. Nevertheless, this approach remains the most suitable to the purpose of this study as interpretivism sees each individual's worldview in each given situation (Biddix et al., 2018) as subjective, and this study aims to explore these views in the setting of socially mediated authenticity of independent artists compared to signed artists. Subjective opinions and experiences from

consumer perspectives will be gathered, explored, and analysed to present interpretational findings of the differences in consumer perception and will provide first insights into possible patterns or areas for future research.

3.2.2 Layer Two - Research Approaches

Reviewed literature presents two research approaches: Deductive and inductive. Deductive approaches produce hypotheses from existing theory and test said theory (Greener, 2008), meaning it is theory testing (Lapan et al., 2011). In contrast to that, inductive approaches aim to generate theory by investigating the subject of research through several research methods (Greener, 2008). While inductive approaches mostly employ qualitative methods using small samples, deductive research uses quantitative methods and larger samples (Saunders et al., 2009). This study's approach is inductive as it aims to investigate themes around the concept of differing consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent compared to signed artists which have, to the knowledge of the author not been explored yet.

3.2.3 Layer Three - Research Strategy

The previous chapters form the basis for choosing a research approach which can be quantitative, qualitative, or mixed. Quantitative approaches are primarily based on cause and effect thinking, measurement and observation, and the testing of specific theories, reduced to several specific variables and hypotheses. Strategies are focused on instruments that collect statistical data, such as surveys (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). "Quantitative research seeks to identify and explain reality as it exists" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.). On the other hand, knowledge claims in qualitative approaches are in most cases formed through constructivist perspectives or participatory perspectives, or a mix of both (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Lapan et al. (2011) add that qualitative research is focused on the study of specific phenomena from the perspective of insiders. Researchers often immerse themselves and understand the meaning as context- and time-dependent and in most cases as non-generalisable (Lapan et al., 2011). Collected data is usually open-ended in order to develop themes from it

(Creswell and Creswell, 2017). Moreover, "qualitative research seeks to explore and represent reality as it exists in its context and to enlighten the ways in which individuals experience that reality" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.). Quantitative research is deductive in its approach, while qualitative research is in most cases based on inductive approaches (Greener, 2008). Mixed method approaches entail that the researcher makes knowledge claims based on pragmatic grounds and "employs strategies of inquiry that involve collecting data either simultaneously or sequentially to best understand research problems" (Creswell and Creswell, 2017, p. 18). Mixed method studies seek to "explain, explore, or inform a research topic" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.) using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

3.2.3.1 Qualitative Approach

Multiple factors influence the choice of a suitable research approach. Creswell and Creswell (2017) make a sharp distinction between areas of study where much previous research has been conducted versus areas of study where little to no prior research exists or a topic has not been researched in the context of a specific setting or sample. Additionally, Saunders et al. (2009) identified research approaches and strategies as inner layers of the Research Onion whose selection should be based on the outer layer of research philosophy. As this study is of an interpretivist, constructivist, and inductive nature, qualitative research is deemed most suited. It will allow the researcher to explore consumer perspectives concerning the set research objectives in their own words and thereby understand their individual and subjective views (including feelings and beliefs) regarding the matter that is investigated (Saunders et al., 2009). Moreover, this study is exploratory as it aims to investigate and seek insights into brand authenticity of independent and signed artists, thereby providing new insights into the phenomena of artists' authenticity. Exploratory research will allow the researcher to adapt directions based on new data that appears in the data collection process (Saunders et al., 2009).

Previous research addressed by the author has had a different focus when exploring the concept of authenticity in the context of social media or human brands. To the author's knowledge, only little research has investigated consumer perceived authenticity by exploring consumer perspectives. Even less research has been found with regards to consumer

perceived authenticity in a social media environment, and the author has found no research at all addressing the topic of consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity in the case of musicians. As such, the researcher identifies this topic as a new phenomenon to be explored, which is why a qualitative approach is most suited.

Another factor that played into selecting a qualitative research approach was the proposed timeframe in which the study had to be completed. As unsigned, independent artists are typically less popular among the general public, identifying and gaining access to a larger sample (as required in quantitative research) would have gone beyond the scope of the proposed time frame.

3.2.3.2 Research Design

"The design encompasses all; methodology, methods, tools and techniques" (Sahay, 2016, n.p.). Several research designs are possible within a qualitative research design approach, as shown below.
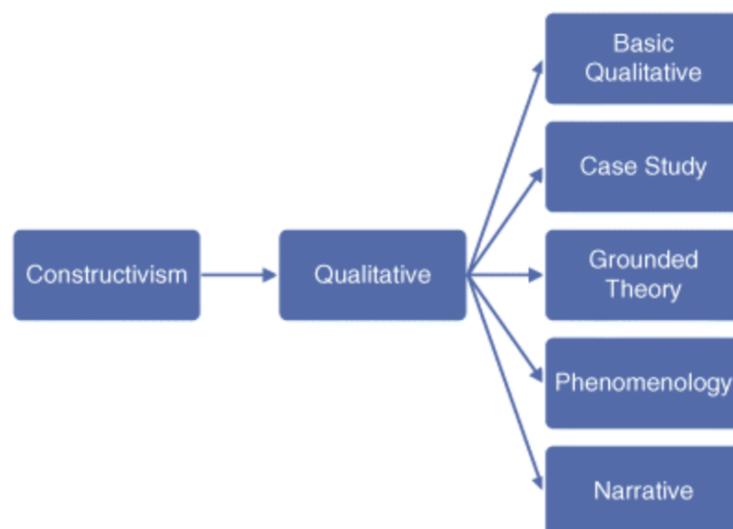

Figure 8: Common Qualitative Research Designs, Biddix et al. (2018)

The chosen research design of this study is based on phenomenology, which laid the groundwork for qualitative research in the

early 20th century (Lapan et al., 2011, n.p.). Phenomenology aims to explore how individuals experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand a specific phenomenon and how these perceptions can vary across different individuals (Biddix et al., 2018). Vagle (2018) defines a phenomenon as "something that shows itself in the lifeworld" (p. 12) and is not inexplainable or mythical as such but very concrete while at the same time not simple. Within phenomenological approaches, participants share their experiences and it is the researcher's purpose to identify core themes of that shared experience (Biddix et al., 2018), and to derive meaning from it (Lester, 1999, p. 4). Common difficulties with phenomenological approaches include that data collection and analysis are typically less formulaic, which can be difficult for researchers with limited experience (Biddix et al., 2018).

Phenomenology can be of a descriptive or interpretative nature. Descriptive phenomenology is an approach that assumes that the essence of the phenomenon to be explored can be described. Interpretive phenomenology, on the other hand, assumes "that the phenomenon manifests ontologically in particular situations and context and that understanding the phenomenon is an act of ongoing interpretation (Vagle, 2018, p.17). The author of this dissertation first considered an interpretative phenomenological approach which demands from the researcher to collect detailed data with regards to how participants live certain experiences and explore these further. These experiences are interpreted by the researcher and influenced by the their philosophical perspectives, which were explored previously (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). As this thesis' purpose is to understand how consumers form perceived brand authenticity in the case of signed and independent musicians, the researcher identified the interpretative phenomenological approach as most suited as it "is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of view of the participants" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 53) and will allow the researcher to explore the phenomenon at hand through the eyes of the participants to understand their point of view. However, Smith et al. (2009) underline that interpretative phenomenology is more concerned with each individual's experience in the sample while descriptive phenomenology is focused on "the general structure of the experience for the group under examination" (p. 27). At the same time, a descriptive phenomenological approach has necessary philosophical foundations that need to be considered and compared to the philosophical perspective taken by the researcher: Within

descriptive phenomenology, the researcher is required to separate all previously acquired knowledge in the field and it is often recommended, that for that reason, a literature review should not be conducted before the data collection process. Throughout the process, researchers are required to carefully assess any potential biases and separate any preconceptions from the process to not influences their sample (Lopez, 2004). These philosophical characteristics of descriptive phenomenological research strongly contradict the constructivist and interpretivist stance of the researcher as defined previously. Therefore, a descriptive phenomenological approach was deemed unsuitable, and an interpretative phenomenological approach was chosen for this study.

3.2.3.3 Interviews

Phenomenological approaches to research allow for several research methods such as interviews, observations, document review, and focus groups (Lester, 1999; Biddix et al., 2018).

Perspective	>	Type	>	Design	>	Method
Constructivism		Qualitative		Qualitative + Basic Qualitative + Case Study + Grounded Theory + Phenomenology + Narrative		Qualitative + Document Review + Observation + Interviews

Figure 9: Four Core Components of Methodology, Biddix et al. (2018)

This study uses basic semi-structured interviews as a mono-method to answer the research question and address the research objectives. This will allow the researcher to explore perspectives through direct interaction (Biddix et al., 2018) and provide a more in-depth understanding (Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick, 2008) of differences in consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity from the consumers' standpoint. Moreover, it allows uncovering detailed information that might not have been

gathered through other techniques such as questionnaires or observations (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Basic interviews are characterised "as an in-depth focus aimed at eliciting perspective and meaning" (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.). At the same time techniques from phenomenological interviewing were implemented which focus on collecting perspectives and experiences from the different cases to enable the researcher to describe the phenomenon in detail (Biddix et al., 2018, n.p.).

Disadvantages of interviews include a certain complexity as "what people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked" (Hammersley and Gomm, 2008, p. 100). Additionally, captured perceptions are based on only one moment while they may change over time and adapt to changing circumstances. Moreover, incomplete insights could be caused by a lack of knowledge or incomplete memories of both interviewer and interviewee. Interviews can also result in large amounts of data that can be hard to analyse (Fine, 2003). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of interviews as a research method tool is defended by Dörnyei (2007) who argues that a primary benefit of interviews is that mutual understanding of questions can be ensured as the interviewee and interviewer/researcher are present at the same time, meaning the researcher can rephrase and simplify questions if they are not understood which differs from other possible tools. The advantages and disadvantages of interviews are summarised in the below figure.

Advantages	Disadvantages
high return rate	time-consuming
ewer incomplete answers	small scale study
can involve reality	never 100% anonymous
controlled answering order	potential for subconscious bias
relatively flexible	potential inconsistencies

Figure 10: Advantages and disadvantages of interviewing, Alshenqeeti (2014)

3.2.3.3.1 Interview Structure

There are three different types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Gill et al., 2008). Within this study, interviews were conducted as semi-structured, where a list of themes and questions is predefined, but additional questions may be asked, or the order of questions changed (Saunders et al., 2009). The reasoning behind this is that structured interviews do not provide enough depth into the investigated research objectives and were deemed unsuitable due to the complex phenomenon to be explored. At the same time, unstructured interviews do not reflect any preconceived theories and are only suited when there is little or no prior research available in the area of study as they are highly time-consuming to conduct and analyse. Semi-structured interviews "are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents (...) and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers" (Barriball and While, 1994, p. 330). While literature in the area of brand authenticity is vast but little research was found by the author with regards to human/celebrity authenticity and no research was localised that relates authenticity on social media directly to independent artists and how it differs from that of signed artists, semi-structured interviews are employed using prior theories in the field to guide the data collection while at the same time allowing for more in-depth insights and the exploration of consumer perceptions in relation to the set research objectives. Additionally, according to Smith et al. (2009), most interpretative phenomenological studies use semi-structured interviews as they allow researchers to modify initial questions based on previous data provided by interview participants, thereby allowing the researcher "to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 57).

3.2.3.4 Sample

3.2.3.4.1 Sampling Technique

"Sampling is a practical way of studying people and their activities, thoughts, attitudes, abilities, relationships etc in relation to business" (Greener, 2008, p. 47). It allows researchers to only collect data from a small selection of the study's target population. The complexity in sampling is that

the researcher must evaluate whether or not results can be generalised for the population or if they only apply to the selected sample with the goal being that results should be as generalisable to the population as possible (Greener, 2008). A clear rationale for the selected sample is important (Mason, 2002) and will be given in this section.

Several sampling techniques exist and are broken down into two types: non-probability and probability sampling. Non-probability sampling means that researchers selects specific participants whom they believe to be valuable in terms of providing insights into the studied topic (Morse, 2007). This type of sampling is highly subjective and therefore fits into the philosophical nature of this study. A sample selection guide provided by Saunders et al. (2009) guided the researcher in their sampling technique selection, as shown below. Guiding questions were answered based on the research philosophy and design addressed previously and the overall purpose of this study.

"Must statistical inferences be made from the sample?"
(Saunders et al., 2009, p. 234) → No → "Must it be likely
that the sample if representative?" (Saunders et al., 2009,
p. 234) → No → "Is the purpose just exploratory?"
(Saunders et al., 2009, p. 234) → Yes → "Use self-
selection sampling" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 234)

Based on the illustrated selection process of a fitting sampling technique, self-selection sampling was selected by the researcher. This type of sampling is deemed most suitable for the chosen research design, while the likeliness that the sample is representative is low. As part of the self-selection sampling process, the researcher communicated their need for cases through internal communication channels at their workplace, allowing colleagues willing to participate to identify themselves. At the same time, the researchers provided personal contacts with a brief outline of the study's purpose and waited for cases to identify themselves (Saunders et al., 2009).

A number of individuals identified themselves throughout this process as possible cases. The researcher captured information such as age and social media usage from those individuals to select suitable cases. It

emerged that there were some differences in the social media platforms used to follow musicians and the frequency with which individuals use these. The most used platforms were identified as being Instagram and Facebook. The researcher, therefore, decided to focus on these two platforms to limit possible discrepancies within the collected data caused by the social media platform used by each case. Following this, the researcher identified the age of the majority of identified possible cases as being between 21 and 35 years old and decided to focus on this age group by excluding individuals whose ages did not fall into this bracket. Details of each participant are captured in Appendix 8.2.

This study's target population are female and male young to mid-aged adults who follow both signed and independent artists on at least one social media platform (Facebook or Instagram) and access that platform at least once per day. Therefore, the sample consists of members of this target population that actively follow independent and signed artists on social media, which was reconfirmed at the beginning of each interview.

3.2.3.4.2 Sample Size and Saturation

Phenomenological approaches can be applied to single or multiple cases. Single cases can be used to discover discrepancies and draw attention to 'different' situations but "positive inferences are less easy to make without a small sample of participants" (Lester, 1999, p. 1). Multiple-participant research, on the other hand, allows the researcher to develop themes and make connections once specific themes emerge across multiple cases (Lester, 1999). A common misunderstanding among inexperiences researchers is that increasing the sample size will make results statistically reliable (Lester, 1999). However, within purposive/theoretical sampling strategies, researchers should not be concerned with finding a sample size that is big enough to make results generalisable to the target group (Mason, 2002). The researcher's focus should lie on whether the sample size provides access to enough data to address the research question and objectives (Mason, 2002) and unlike probability sampling, there are no clear rules (Saunders et al., 2009).

Within phenomenological studies, it is often recommended to collect

data until data saturation is reached. This means that additional data is collected, meaning in this case additional interviews are conducted, "until the additional data collected provides few, if any, new insights" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 235). This is confirmed by (Ness and Fusch, 2015) saying that data saturation is achieved when "the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained [and] further coding is no longer feasible" (p. 1408). Building on this concept, the researcher collected data until several new insights were collected, and additional data did not provide any additional themes. The researcher terminated data collection after six interviews when a number of themes had emerged, and no new themes or insights relevant to the research objectives were found.

3.2.4 Layer Four - Research Method

There are two primary choices in research methods: Mono Methods and Multiple. Single or mono methods can be either qualitative or quantitative while multiple methods can be either one or a mix of both (Sahay, 2016). This study's data collection is based on a qualitative mono method, interviews, due to its philosophical nature and time restrictions placed on the completion of the research process.

3.2.5 Layer Five - Time Horizon

Time horizons can be cross-sectional or longitudinal. Cross-sectional research looks at a phenomenon at a specific point in time from various individuals' perspectives while longitudinal research looks at a phenomenon over a specific period of time (Greener, 2008). Within this dissertation, a cross-sectional approach is used based on the research objectives, the limited amount of time to complete the thesis as well as limited resources as longitudinal studies often require external funding (Greener, 2008). Data was collected during two weeks in July 2019 on one single occasion with each participant.

3.2.6 Layer Six - Data Collection and Data Analysis

As this study implemented a qualitative approach using interviews to explore perspectives through direct interaction (Biddix et al., 2018) and

provide a more in-depth understanding (Gill et al., 2008) of differences in socially mediated perceived authenticity from the consumers' standpoint, data collection and analysis are highly complex and vital (Fine, 2003) and will be discussed within this section. While details are discussed within the following sub-chapters, it should be mentioned at this stage that while this piece of research employs an interpretative phenomenological research design, data collection was based on principles set out by grounded theory. Data analysis, on the other hand, is conducted employing a thematic analysis approach that is suitable for both grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological research designs. Justifications for this choice are laid out in Chapter 2.5.1.

3.2.6.1 Data Collection

Even though this study's research design is of an inductive and phenomenological nature, it is important to note that within interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the author is required to bracket, meaning separating all prior knowledge and assumptions that were previously made with regards to the researched phenomenon before commencing the data collection process and only using prior knowledge during the data analysis process (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the philosophical perspective taken by the researcher, this was deemed unsuitable which is why a grounded theory approach was taken with regards to data collection and analysis. "The inductive logic of grounded theory means that researchers begin by studying individual cases or instances from which they eventually develop abstract concepts" (Lapan et al., 2011, n.p.). Researchers conduct data collection at the same time as data analysis in order to ask "successively more focused questions of their data and nascent analyses" (Lapan et al., 2011, n.p.). While this matches the data collection process in phenomenological research, an essential key differentiator led to this choice of data collection and analysis method: a constructed grounded theory design is highly flexible as a method and "acknowledges the standpoints, positions, and situations both of the researcher and research process and of the participants; and moves the method further into interpretive inquiry" (Lapan et al., 2011, n.p.). As stated earlier, the author of this study employs a constructivist paradigm to their research process which underlines the reasoning behind choosing a grounded theory data collection and analysis method.

This dissertation aims to establish consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity as opposed to self-perceived authenticity and aims to investigate how consumer perceptions are influenced by whether artists are believed to be independent or signed. As the author could not localise any research data on consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent compared to signed artists, the author aimed to develop themes in that field. To do so, consumer perceptions about signed artists are compared to those of independent artists to explore if and how they differ and provide first ideas as to why consumers perceive artists as independent or signed to explore possible interrelations between those beliefs and perceived authenticity. While a questionnaire by Moulard et al. (2015) was used in the development of the interviews, the aim of this study was not to test said theory. It was simply used as a tool to guide in the formulation of interview questions and capture all constructs of authenticity. As literature concerning authenticity is vast, and a large number of attributes are related to it, this questionnaire helped to capture a full view of authenticity. It is important to note that the questionnaire is aimed at measuring celebrity authenticity. As previously addressed, not all artists are celebrities. For this reason, the researcher decided to exclude morale as a construct as it was expected to be unmeasurable for unpopular artists.

Construct (Cronbach Alpha, Composite Reliability, Variance Extracted[a])	Measure[b,c] (Item Loading[d,e])
Celebrity authenticity (0.87, 0.87, 0.70)	Is genuine (0.86)
	Seems real to me (0.84)
	Is authentic (0.81)
Rarity constructs	
Talent (0.88, 0.88, 0.79)	Is skilled at his/her craft (0.93)
	Demonstrates a natural ability in his/her field (0.85)
Discretion (0.83, 0.83, 0.62)	Prefers to stay out of the spotlight when not working (0.77)
	Tries to keep his/her private life private (0.84)
	Does not disclose much information about his/her personal relationships (0.75)
Originality (0.78, 0.77, 0.53)	Is unique in his/her ways (0.78)
	Has distinctive characteristics (0.70)
	Has something about him/her that makes him/her stand out (0.71)
Stability constructs	
Consistency (0.82, 0.80, 0.61)	Has stayed the same over the years (0.92)
	Looks the same every time I see him/her (0.62)
	Hasn't changed much (0.77)
Candidness (0.92, 0.92, 0.80)	Is known for being straightforward (0.87)
	Is known for being honest (0.91)
	Is up-front (0.90)
Morality (0.79, 0.79, 0.65)	Has been in and out of trouble[f] (0.84)
	Has demonstrated bad judgment in his/her personal life[f] (0.78)

Figure 11: Measurement Items, Moulard et al. (2015)

Questions were directed to participants experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the researched subject (Groenewald, 2004) to develop themes through the collected data, as required in a grounded theory approach (Biddix et al., 2018) as well as in phenomenological research design (Smith et al., 2009). As interviews are semi-structured, the author addressed all constructs through varying questions depending on the interview flow and the insights provided by each participant. Questionnaire items, as proposed by Moulard et al. (2015) were not copied as such.

3.2.6.1.2 Data Collection Procedure

The research consists of six semi-structured face-to-face interviews employing a question guide with fifteen items as attached in Appendix 8.1. The actual interviews consisted of a mix of open, probing and specific questions (Saunders et al., 2009) as questions were often rephrased during the interview depending on the participant's understanding and previous explanations provided. In relation to that, it is also important to note that the attached question guide was revised following each interview for reasons discussed in detail in Chapter 2.5.1.

All interviewees were interviewed individually in a quiet setting, and a laptop and smartphone were used to record interview findings in audio format, thus providing a backup audio file in case of technical failures of one of the devices. Additionally, the researcher took handwritten notes during each interview to transmit interest to the participant and their responses, to stay concentrated and focused and to capture any non-verbal cues (Saunders et al., 2009). Directly after each interview, all related audio files were safely stored on a hard drive within a password-protected folder and deleted from all other devices. The average duration of interviews was about 35 minutes.

As recommended by Saunders et al. (2009), the researcher avoided "comments or non-verbal behaviour, such as gestures, which indicate any bias" (p. 333) in their thinking, adopted an open posture and facilitated interview flow using an encouraging tone of voice. Moreover, the researcher listened carefully to research participants' explanations allowing them

enough time to develop their responses. In addition to that, the researcher tested their own understanding by occasionally summarising answers provided by the participants to allow them to comment on it, thereby enabling the researcher to evaluate their interpretations and correct where necessary during the course of the interview (Saunders et al., 2009).

Following this, the researcher listened to the audio files and transcribed them manually to produce accurate renderings of the recordings. Transcripts were saved as a Word file with a name that ensured the anonymity of each participant. Grammar was corrected where necessary and stuttering or repetitions left out as most participants were not native English speakers to allow for a better data analysis process. However, the researcher was careful not exclude repetitions if they provided meaningful insights and therefore listened to the recording repeatedly to ensure that everything relevant is included in the transcriptions (Saunders et al., 2009). Fisher (2007) validates this type of transcription as full transcriptions can often be too time-consuming in dissertation work.

The researcher took observational and methodological field notes directly after each interview to summarise key observations and reflect on the methodological process in order to adjust for the next interview. Within the process of taking field notes, the researcher maintained "a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, impressions, feelings, and so on" (Groenewald, 2004, p. 48). Taking field notes enabled the researcher to reflect on the interview items and adjust where necessary to optimise the flow of the following interview, thus ensuring that participants are provided with explanations where necessary and that the data collected provides relevant insights into the set research objectives (Groenewald, 2004). Additionally, 'memos to self' were written whenever an epiphany occurred and revisited during the different stages of the data collection and analysis process (Fisher, 2007).

3.2.6.2 Data Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was deemed appropriate for this study due to several reasons. Firstly, data analysis in phenomenological research was described by Biddix et al. (2018) as difficult

for inexperienced researchers. As the author of this dissertation has no prior experience with collecting and analysing primary data, they were careful to choose a data analysis method that fits within the overall methodology of the study while at the same time minimising the risk of errors to maximise the validity of the results. While a descriptive phenomenological approach does not fit into the overall methodology based on the researcher's philosophical perspective, as previously described, IPA approaches do not require the process of bracketing. While bracketing must be applied to both forms of phenomenological data collection, descriptive and interpretative, it is not required in data analysis processes employing IPA. The aim of IPA "is to explore in detail the participant's view of the topic under investigation" (Smith, Jarman and Osborn, 1999, p. 218). These views are then linked to results from other interviews. IPA, as described by Smith et al. (1999), is a thematic analysis approach commonly used in inductive research to determine, analyse and report themes within large amounts of text and is similar to approaches used within grounded theory research design (Lapan et al. 2012). It helps theorise across different cases to establish common patterns across research participants and is suitable for complex phenomena (Mohamed, Ragab and Arisha, 2016).

To carry out said analysis, each interview was transcribed and read after its termination to seek out key ideas, phrases and concepts that became apparent across the different interview transcriptions (Saunders et al., 2009). This process is described in Chapter 2.5.2.1. In order for the collected data to be useful for the overall research process, it has to be analysed, and meanings have to be understood by the researcher. This is achieved through a number of different qualitative data analysis procedures. As previously mentioned, this study is of an inductive nature, which is why an inductive approach to data analysis was used. Data was collected through interviews until saturation was reached. Throughout the process, emerging themes were identified to ensure that future interviews followed up on these (Saunders et al., 2009), as recommended for IPA (Smith et al., 1999).

3.2.6.2.1 Coding

During the data analysis process, each interview was coded using a thematical approach following its transcription. Coding enables the

researcher to separate irrelevant from relevant material. By doing so, correct coding enables the researcher to present research findings easily and connect these to the existing literature in the discussion section of the study. Themes were identified by reading both, literature and collected data and were of a substantive nature, meaning that they "concern the subject matter of the research" (Fisher, 2007, p. 182).

During the initial coding process, the researcher stayed as close to the data as possible and open to explore what meaning they could derive from this data (Lapan et al., 2011). Coding was executed manually by using printed versions of each interview transcript, highlighting different themes in different colours and using margins to add notes where necessary.

Codes were then organised hierarchically and cross-referenced to illustrate how "some codes are subsets of others" (Fisher, 2007, p. 182) and make connections between different elements (Fisher, 2007). This means that all relevant codes and sub-codes were organised by identifying key themes through a process of focused coding and writing key themes and subthemes down on separate sheets of paper adding subsets of these codes onto them during the coding of the next interview to identify shared themes. If new key themes emerged, those were added on a separate sheet of paper and explored throughout the next interviews if relevant. This is comparable to what Smith et al. (1999) referred to as creating a table of themes.

Through this data analysis process, the author created a list of shared themes identified across the different cases. This list was then analysed again in an effort to reduce the number of theme clusters and create more general categories of shared themes. After identifying these broader categories, the researcher reviewed all transcripts to ensure that no data with regards to these themes was overlooked (Smith et al., 1999).

3.2.7. Ethical Considerations

During all stages of the described research processes, ethical considerations were taken into account. "In the context of research, ethics refers to the appropriateness of [the researcher's] behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become subject of [their] work, or are affected by it" (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 184). The researcher's university provided a code of ethics which the researchers adhered to, and the research ethics committee approved the proposed research.

According to Saunders et al. (2009), typical ethical issues arising throughout the research process include, but are not limited to

- the privacy of participants
- the voluntary nature of participation
- the consent of participants
- the possible deception of participants
- the maintenance of confidentiality of data provided by participants
- the reaction of participants to how the researcher seeks to collect data
- the effects on participants on data usage
- the behaviour and objectivity of the researcher

While some ethical issues were already addressed in the course of this thesis. The below list summarises main efforts undertaken by the researcher to address them:

- All participants were given the option to stay anonymous before the start of the interview. All participants chose to do so. Therefore, participants are referred to as Interviewee 1-6.
- All participants were instructed that they can change their minds about participation at any stage before, during or up to two weeks after the interviews.
- All participants signed a consent form (attached in Appendix 8.3) with detailed information on the purpose of the research, the usage of the data, and their rights.
- All participants were provided with a written summary of the research purpose prior to reading and signing the consent form.
- Data privacy was ensured by storing interview recordings in a password-protected folder on a hard drive and erasing it from all other devices immediately after the interview was conducted. Additionally, transcripts were anonymised.
- Interviews were conducted in a friendly and professional manner without pressuring any of the participants at any stage.
- Reporting of collected data is clear and honest.

3.2.8 Research Limitations

A number of limitations were already addressed throughout the different chapters addressing each layer of the research onion. To summarise, the proposed research design imposes several limitations, especially in terms of generalisability. Due to its interpretivist, constructivist, and inductive nature as well as its qualitative approach using interviews as a mono-method and the sampling method employed, results are expected to be non-generalisable. The author acknowledges these limitations but defends the overall purpose of the study as it investigates a new phenomenon and could potentially guide future research in the field by exploring insights and patterns in consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent and signed artists.

Chapter 4: Research Findings

This study's objective is to explore if consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity on social media in the case of independent artists differs from that of signed artists. The aim is to thereby provide insights into the trend of more and more artists working without record labels as a result of opportunities developed through the digitisation of the music industry and a number of distribution and marketing activities. Precisely, the author aims to investigate if independent or signed artists are perceived as more authentic on and through social media as authenticity is an important key determinant of brand success and increasingly important in social media environments. Interviewees were asked a number of questions regarding their perceptions of content on artists' social media profiles, both signed and independent as well as their general interest in artists on social media and perceptions with regards to their social media platforms. The author aimed to identify common themes in consumer perception of both types of artists to provide insights into the topic and guide possible future research.

Previous research guided the researcher in the formulation of the research objectives presented in Chapter 3.1 that address gaps in the analysed literature and therefore played a crucial role in the formulation and structuring of the interview flow. Additionally, Moulard et al.'s (2015) proposed measurement items were used to explore all relevant constructs of perceived authenticity. This section addresses relevant themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Both, related directly to the framework set out by Moulard et al. (2015) and additional themes relevant to the overall purpose of this thesis.

4.1 Entertainment and Live Performances as Key Motivational Drivers to Follow Artists on Social Media

In the course of the interview, participants described why they are following musicians on social media. The aim was to identify differences in

motivational drivers to follow independent and signed artists. This interview section also provided insights into what type of content consumers perceive artists to be posting and what type of content they expect and wish to see. Several key reasons for following artists, both signed and independent, emerged throughout the interviews: These include obtaining new creative content in the form of songs or videos, an interest in live performances and the announcements of local live performances, as well as generally being entertained through the artists' content. One participant described social media as the best way to get new content as early as possible, which is something they desire. Another interviewee also mentioned an interest in the artists' personal life as a reason to follow them, while others indicated that they have no interest in that. The theme of live performance was strongly present across all interviews.

Interviewee 4: "I follow closely to see if they have some new songs coming or just to get a bit closer to their personal lives."

One key differentiator in motivational drivers to follow independent artists emerged as sharing a common interest with a small circle of friends and being able to share this interest through artists' social media content. Additionally, nostalgia was found to be an emotion linked more often to independent artists and a reason for consumers to stay connected through their social media presences.

Interviewee 1: "Some independent bands are very nice and me and my friends like them. So, we usually listened to them a lot, a long time ago"

Interviewee 6: "If [my friends] know that artist it's something we have in common and not many people know this artist"

4.2 Professional and Self-Managed Social Media Presences

During the interviews, themes emerged as to whom consumers believe to be behind the content on social media, meaning who they believe to be posting content on artists' social media presences. Participants shared thoughts on whether they believe artists manage their social media presence, and if these beliefs differ based on whether or not the participants believe the artists to be independent or signed. Interviews revealed that all research participants believe independent artists to be managing their social media presence themselves while they believe signed artists to have professionals managing it for them.

> *Interviewee 4: "I think [social media presences of signed artists are managed by] their agents or the people who work with the artists. Not them."*

One participant indicated that signed artist might still have some influence on their social media presences along with professional help.

> *Interviewee 3: "Definitely themselves. Whereas, signed artists might do something but they definitely have a personal assistant or someone working for them."*

4.2.1 The Mediating Factor of Perceived Popularity

Interview results reveal that consumers generally think of independent artists as artists who serve a niche audience or artists who are just starting in the industry. Participants often referred to them as small artists or artists who are just starting in the industry which indicates that they tend to link an artist's popularity to whether or not they are signed by a record label. Interviews revealed that the perceived source of social media content does not only depend on the belief of whether or not the artist is independent but also on their perceived popularity and financial success. The collected data indicates that the more popular or successful an artist is believed to be

(e.g., based on follower numbers), the less likely they are believed to manage their profiles themselves.

> *Interviewee 2: "I think [independent artists] do it by themselves. I think if they've come to a certain level of money then maybe somebody does for them it but I think in the majority of the cases they are doing it themselves."*

4.2.2 Ownership of Creative Processes

Due to the influence of perceived popularity on beliefs regarding self-management versus professional management of artists' social media presences, the researcher added and refined questions throughout the interviews. These changes aimed to explore differences between popular independent artists and popular signed artists to avoid only capturing differences between popular and unpopular artists and thereby failing to address this thesis' objectives. Participants believe that independent artists who have hired social media professionals have more influence on their social media content than signed artists as they employed the professional themselves as opposed to being provided with professional help by the record label. Independent artists employing a team or professional to take on social media related work are still believed to be the owner and guide of any creative processes linked to social media content.

> *Interviewee 6: "I would say that the artist who is not signed will have more influence on their content because they chose their social media manager. Maybe it's somebody personal to them or somebody who shares the same opinions, and maybe they can talk to them because it's not a record label, so they don't have to represent the opinion of the record label (…) If you're signed you don't have that much influence left."*

4.2.3 Summary

The results laid out in this chapter are important findings as the perceived source of content influences a number of other perceptions as addressed throughout the following chapters. To summarise, consumer perceptions differ based on three different business models in relation to artist:

1) Signed Artist: Social media presences are managed by professionals
2) Independent Artists: Social media presences are managed by the artist
3) Highly Popular Independent Artist: Social media presences are managed by professionals hired by the artist. The artist has, however, a higher perceived influence on their social media presence than signed artists

4.3 Perceived Social Media Content Characteristics

Another aim of this study was to identify any differences in how consumers perceive social media content of independent artists versus that of signed artists. The researcher aimed to identify characteristics that consumers generally assign to one or the other type of artists' content to uncover characteristics that can be linked back to perceived authenticity without directly inquiring about it. Throughout the interviews, participants referred to signed and independent artists differently. Meaning was derived through direct statements and indirect comments.

4.3.1 Authenticity and Genuity

Participants generally believe independent artists to be more authentic and genuine on social media. Several reasons for this perception emerged throughout the interviews. Firstly, several interviewees mentioned that independent artists are thought of as having more freedom to do exactly

what they want and how they want it, which is further addressed in Chapter 4.4.1.

> *Interviewee 1: "I believe the small artists are more authentic in general"*

Additionally, consumers perceive them to be the source of social media content, which makes content shared through their social media presence and the artist more genuine and authentic. Results regarding this topic were previously addressed in Chapter 4.2. Due to the absence of restrictions and strategies consumers believe record labels to apply to artists' social media presence, social media content and communication of independent artists is perceived as more transparent and honest, making them more genuine and authentic. Additionally, being different and transparent in their content emerged as a reason for perceiving an artist as authentic. This will be addressed in detail throughout Chapter 4.3.2.

> *Interviewee 3: "I would think the unsigned are more genuine in the sense that its more likely them behind the things they're putting up (…) I think that the unsigned artists are somehow more underground and therefore have more authentic content."*

4.3.2 Originality

A clear theme emerged concerning the originality of independent artists compared to that of signed artists. The content of independent artists is generally perceived as more unique for several reasons. One being that they target niche audiences and choose to be without a label to serve that niche in their own unique way. Another key reason was the perceived rarity of their content. Other vital differentiators were addressed under the previous two headings and can be linked to the increased perceived originality.

Research results reveal that participants find independent artists' content generally more enjoyable than that of signed artists as there is a greater variety of content. Additionally, participants described their content as more creative, which makes it more enjoyable for them. Another participant described independent artists' content as having more 'soul' and being more personal. Overall, participants' answers indicate that independent artists' content is perceived as more unique than that of signed artists.

4.3.3 Simplicity of Content

An essential component of perceived authenticity is related to the production of content: Independent artists are, according to research results, posting more simplistic content with less editing. One participant mentioned the content being more amateur, natural, and intimate as reasoning for a higher perceived genuineness. Another participant agreed that the unedited and intimate nature of independent artists' content, as well as the difference in content compared to that of signed artists, leads to a more authentic perception of independent artists in general. A third participant mentioned that the unedited nature of videos also allows for a better representation of the artist's talent.

4.3.4 Discretion

Findings from the collected data show that participants generally perceive independent artists to be more discrete than signed artists. According to interview respondents, independent artists' content is focused on their music and promoting it while sharing less content from their personal lives, especially compared to signed artists.

> *Interviewee 5: "I think the independent artists post less private things and more content so that they can bring the content up and get that out there. They don't do that with their private life."*

4.3.5 Ungeneralizable Constructs

Participants described several artist characteristics as being unassignable to one or the other category of artists. Participants believe that a strong identity and the consistency of that identity throughout the content and compared to other sources of perceived identity (e.g., live performances, personal conversations, other media formats, and channels) are highly dependent on each artist. Generalisations as to whether one type of artist, signed or independent, has a more consistent identity are, according to participants, impossible to make.

> *Interviewee 5: "Some of them, yes. I think that they are exactly how the portray themselves on social media (…) It's dependent on every artist."*

One participant added that while identity is depending on each artist that the identity they perceive of independent artists through their social media content so far matched their real identity when meeting them or seeing them live at a later point, while perceived identities of signed artists often change based on the media and type of content. However, they underlined that they would not want to generalise this for all independent and signed artists.

While consistency is, similar to identity highly depending on each individual artist, one participant added that signed artists' content can often change a lot while another participant observed something similar in relation to one signed artist but agreed that as this person is known to change, so that it somehow does fit their identity and does not come across as inconsistent.

> *Interviewee 6: "[Signed artists] have some controversial content. One year they say this, then the other year they say something else, that is not really fitting in."*

4.4 Perceived Characteristics of Independent Artists

The interviews indicate that consumers have certain pre-formed beliefs about independent and signed artists which influence the perception of their social media presence as well as the perception of the artist in general. These beliefs are not generally based on their social media presence but rather persona knowledge, bigger pictures of artists.

4.4.1 Commercialisation of Signed Artists

Participants generally perceive independent artists as being freer to do what they want and how they want it. This theme was very present across different sections of the interviews. Consumers believe independent artists to act less based on financial motivations and more based on the music and content they want to produce. Moreover, they are often focused on niche markets as opposed to mass markets and driven by a passion for what they do. In contrast to that, participants think of signed artists as being more commercial and focused on reaching mass markets to maximise profits for the record label and the artists themselves. An artist's talent is perceived as being an asset that record labels acquire and shape to serve bigger audiences and ultimately increase profits. Research results reveal that participants believe independent artists who choose to be independent do so

as they do not want their content and music filtered or shaped by the commercial motives of labels.

Interviewee 1: "[Independent artists] want to show their talent, music and content and they do it exactly how they want to. That's why they don't have a label (…) If you take a big label band you know that you basically cannot do what you really want. You always have to change and adapt to the market and your audience. You sell yourself to the label. You sell you talent to a big brand and they're going to shape you for a specific audience (…)"

Interviewee 2: "In general, in independents you can see that sparkle and that freedom better."

Participant's beliefs towards signed and independent artists in terms of freedom and commercial motives were found to have a mediating effect on consumer engagement as there is a belief across participants that signed artists have enough marketing means in place provided by the record label and do not 'need' the users' engagement. Engagement is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

4.5 Engagement with Artists on Social Media

Levels of engagement can be an essential indicator of perceived authenticity as they help measure perceptions towards the artist's willingness to communicate openly, engage in dialogues and be transparent, all of which are directly linked to perceived authenticity (Gilpin et al., 2010; Lim et al., 2015). All participants were asked several questions about engagement to explore whether engagement is higher with one or the other type of artist and to explore motivational drivers for engagement for both categories. Engagement was defined to all participants as commenting under a post, sharing it on their social media profile or their social media stories, tagging a friend in a comment or sending a post on in a private message. One participant answered that they do not engage unless the artist is a friend in which case they would share their posts to support them. Across participants

who do engage, a number of common themes emerged that provide insights into their social media engagement as summarised below.

Results show that participants engage with independent artists' content more often, including both, commenting and sharing.

Interviewee 5: "With independent artists, I would always [share], naturally, like, 'check this new artist out'."

Main themes with regards to motivational drivers for engagement that emerged during the interviews are:

- perceived artist's need for engagement
- perceived popularity of artist
- perceived potential for engaging in a dialogue with the artist
- perceived approachability

Research participants indicated that they are more likely to share content of independent artists to increase the artist's visibility, while a common theme was also the perceived 'need' for sharing that consumers believe independent artists to have.

Interviewee 2: "I think [signed bands] don't need my comment. I don't feel the need to comment or that my comment means anything to be honest. But for independents, I think that every push helps (…) I think it means more to them. For the other ones it's just statistics. They don't care."

Another driving force behind consumer engagement with artists' social media content is the perceived popularity of the artist and again the resulting need for sharing or not sharing.

Interviewee 4: "[Signed artists] already have other ways to reach the public, they invest a lot in advertisement. So, I don't need to share(…)"

A further common theme that emerged during the interviews is the potential for two-way communication as a motivational driver of engagement with independent artists on social media being described as more approachable.

Interviewee 4: "(…) it's easier to approach them. And somehow talk to them."

Interviewee 2: "I think they are definitely more approachable."

Participants shared a common belief that comments directed at independent artists are more likely to reach them than in the case of signed artists. According to research findings, participants are more likely to comment on the content of independent artists than that of signed artists as they feel that the comment would not reach the signed artist themselves.

Interviewee 1: "For independent artists its completely different because you know they have the highest probability to see the message so you have a straight connection. But in the case of signed bands, you post it to another person and you don't reach the band directly."

4.6 Relationships and Emotional Attachment

Research results also show that emotional attachment is a variable that is highly dependent on engagement and two-way communication as well as the perceived source of communication and genuineness in that communication. The more approachable the artist is the closer the consumer feels to them. It is important to note that open communication and engagement of the artist is only perceived positively if the consumer believes the artist is engaging themselves. Participants would generally doubt any communication is coming from a signed artist as opposed to independent artists with similar beliefs towards popular and unpopular artists. While the excitement was described to be higher in the case of signed artists engaging through personal comments or re-sharing of a user's content, participants

described a general suspicion towards whether or not this was done by the artist personally. Therefore, the excitement was found to be linked rather to the exposure gained than to having engaged in communication with that artist.

Interviewee 4: "(…) the easier it is to approach the artist, the more connected you feel."

Interviewee 6: "[Independent Artists] don't have quite that much of a community that follow them so it feels kind of special if they post something and it's not that many people who connect with it (…) but with the signed ones, it's just too many people following them, trying to connect with them."

Chapter 5: Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate authenticity in the case of independent and signed musicians to uncover possible differences in consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of these two types of musicians. Research results revealed a number of important insights to be linked with existing literature in the field, as addressed in Chapter 2, as well as foundations for possible future research. The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings summarised in the previous chapter to address this study's research objectives.

5.1 Assessing Consumer Perceptions of Signed and Independent Artists

This research objective is one key component of the dissertation and as such, provides several important observations. Consumer perceptions of independent and signed artists and their social media presence were explored to identify key differences in consumer perception and relate these to literature in the field of brand authenticity uncovering potential areas of differences across both types of artists' consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity. It is important to note that it emerged during the data collection process that consumers struggle to separate perceptions of signed and independents in general with those of their social media presence. While the researcher aimed to separate these perceptions throughout the interview, a complete distinction is impossible. This was anticipated in the research preparation and is reflected in the methodological choices made by the author.

5.1.1 Freedom

During the course of this thesis, it emerged that independent artists are thought of as having more freedom than signed artists in the sense that they make decisions regarding their music as well as their social media

content themselves while signed artists' content is shaped by the label to serve a specific and often bigger market. Consumers perceive independent artists' content to be driven by their core beliefs which, based on Oh et al.'s (2019) research means that they can establish a higher authenticity by establishing a distinctive identity formed through these core beliefs. This distinctive identity directly relates to what Moulard et al. (2015) identified as the construct of originality which is "the perception that a celebrity thinks or acts in an independent, creative, or individual manner" (p. 179). Additionally, Fine (2003) identified originality as a critical driver of perceived authenticity. Moreover, this perceived freedom influences consumer engagement, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.

While several consumer perceptions revealed throughout this research were found to be influenced not only by whether an artist is believed to be signed or not but also by their popularity, the construct of originality was not found to be influenced by the artist's popularity. This means that both unpopular artists believed to be managing their social media presence by themselves as well as popular signed artists believed to be supported by a social media professional are perceived as more unique, different and original through their social media content.

5.1.2 Commercial Motives

According to the results of this study, independent artists are perceived to be less commercialised, and consumers perceive them to be driven not only by financial motives but by a passion for what they do. According to Beverland (2006), downplaying commercial motives is attributed to a higher perceived authenticity, while authenticity also requires transmitting the brand management's passion for their products (Moulard et al., 2016). It can also be connected to what Fine (2003) described as innocence. As a result, the lower perceived commercial motives in the case of independent artists and the consumer perceived passion for what they do lead to a higher consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity. In contrast to that, records labels were described to be solely driven by commercial motives. As such, it can be assumed that the moment an artist is believed to get signed, consumer perceptions will be affected and authenticity will be lower.

5.1.3 Nature and Perceived Source of Content

Content of independent artists on social media was found to be simpler, with less preparation, less editing, and generally more natural. Both the factor of simplicity and naturality are attributes associated with brand authenticity (Napoli et al., 2014) and are, according to research results, reflected in the perceived characteristics of independent artists' social media content.

Additionally, research results reveal that consumers believe independent artists to be managing their social media presence themselves while signed artists are believed to have little to no influence on theirs as consumers believe social media presences are managed by professionals provided by the record label. Popular independent artists are believed to have professional support but remain influential in the management of their social media presence. By connecting these assumptions to the perceived stronger passion for what they do and the intimacy transcending through the simplistic and unedited nature of their content as well as the small audiences that independent artists serve and engage with, findings can be connected to two items within Moulard et al.'s (2015) authenticity measurement scale. In can be assumed that the presence of honesty and perceived natural abilities of independent artists is higher due to the nature of their content and the perceived content source as well as the perceived passion for what they do as addressed above. Natural ability falls under the construct of talent, while honesty falls under the construct of candidness. While evidence for a higher candidness of independent artists is strong, the construct of talent is instead based on assumptions derived from the research findings and not conclusive.

Moreover, interview results reveal that independent artists are perceived as more discrete in their social media content as signed artists are. Content from independent artists is, according to research participants, less concerned with sharing private matters and more focused on the music itself. This theme falls under Moulard et al.'s (2015) discretion construct.

5.2 Assessing Consumer Engagement on Social Media with Signed and Independent Artists

Perceived possibility of opening a dialogue as well as perceived approachability as motivational drivers were found to be higher with independent than with signed artists. According to Gilpin et al. (2010), open communication and engaging in a dialogue influences perceived authenticity, which allows for the assumption that independent artists possess a higher consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity. Additionally, communication should be authentic and reflect the authentic self (Lim et al., 2015). Concerning this, research results show that independent artists are believed to be able to communicate more freely. While this is mediated by the perceived popularity of the artist and thus their reach, signed artists are generally believed to be somewhat controlled by the label in their communication even if the content seems to be personal. As such, communication of independent artists on social media compared to that of signed artists is perceived as more authentic, more personal or intimate and more truthful, as it is not influenced or filtered by a record label. It can, therefore, be assumed that based on these factors, perceived authenticity is higher in the case of independent artists as they are generally perceived to communicate more openly and engage in dialogues more frequently. In addition to that, research results with regards to engagement show that independent artists are often found to be more approachable and accessible which is according to Coleman and Moss (2008) directly linked to a higher perceived authenticity.

A third theme emerged throughout the research, which is the perceived need for consumer engagement in the form of comments or sharing. Results indicate that consumers believe that signed artists do not 'need' consumer engagement as they have sufficient marketing support from the label. This finding can be indirectly linked to Moulard et al. (2015) who argue that a higher perceived authenticity can be achieved if an artist is believed to possess an ability that enables them to become successful as opposed to having a status of popularity due to financial means and a level of popularity. While not conclusive, research results allow for the assumption that record labels' financial means lower the perceived presence of that

ability which falls under the construct of talent within Moulard et al.'s (2015) measurement scale.

It is important to note that perceived popularity is a mediating factor of the perceived possibility to engage in two-way communication. Therefore, findings might not apply to independent artists that have reached a certain level of popularity in the consumers' eyes.

5.2.1 Emotional Attachment

Emotional customer-brand attachment is, according to Oh et al. (2019) and Fritz et al. (2017), a direct result of higher perceived brand authenticity. As such, the results of this study revealing a higher socially mediated emotional attachment of consumers with independent artists serve as an indicator of a higher perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent artists. Research findings also revealed that said emotional attachment is strongly connected to open, transparent communication and the ability of consumers to engage in two-way communication with the artists themselves as well as the nature of their content as addressed previously. As engagement was generally found to be higher with independent artist, this finding in relation to emotional attachment does not only allow for the conclusion that independent artists are perceived as more independent, but it also validates the connection between higher perceived authenticity and emotional customer-brand attachment as made by Oh et al. (2019) and Fritz et al. (2017).

5.3 Assessing the Motivations Behind Following Signed and Independent Artists

Research results revealed that motivations for following musicians on social media do not generally differ in the case of signed and independent artists. Key motivations behind following artists, according to the research results, are obtaining creative content in the form of songs and videos, a keen interest in information on live performances and content from live performances and entertainment through creative content. These results provide several insights when connected with the literature addressed in the literature review section of this thesis. Firstly, live performances have

become a significant revenue stream for artists since the digitalisation of the music industry (Negus, 2019) with music shifting from being a product to being an experience (Allen et al., 2012). Direct revenue, as well as marketing functions, are assigned more and more to live performances, especially for smaller artists (Papies and van Heerde, 2017), bringing stakeholders together "to a physically and socially defined space" (O'Reilly et al., 2016).

Results from this research show that with consumers being very interested in content from live performances, social media platforms can function as a tool for artists to widen this space and bring in more stakeholders into the experience. As consumers wish to see content about live performances on social media, it can function as an effective marketing tool.

Key differentiators in motivational factors to follow independent artists that were identified are a sense of community and friendship and a feeling of nostalgia or reconnection with memories. This finding underlines the importance of a bands' connection to their core beliefs and a sense of history which are attributes of brand authenticity (Oh et al., 2019) and suggests that by creating these emotions in consumers, independent artists possess a higher perceived brand authenticity than signed artists do. Additionally, participants described that interest in independent artists is commonly shared with a small circle of friends which suggests that they are perceived as more unique which falls under the construct of originality as defined by Moulard et al. (2015).

5.4 Assessing Perceived Sources of Social Media Content in the Case of Signed and Independent Artists

Consumers' socially mediated perceived authenticity is influenced not only by what they see but also by beliefs about whom the person managing the social media presence and posting content is. The results of this study indicate that consumers strongly believe that social media content by independent artists is created and managed by the artist(s), while content on signed artists' profiles is believed to be managed by professionals. Notably, consumers believe that even in the case of independent artists with

high popularity, strong success story and financial means, the artist themselves or one 'creative brain' of the band will still have a strong influence on social media content. In contrast, signed artists are believed to have low to no impact on social media content and content is believed to be shaped to fit current marketing needs determined by the label's strategic management of that artist's brand. This has several effects on the perceptions of artists' social media presences, which were addressed throughout Chapter 5.

By linking these findings to existing literature, new key insights emerge. Authenticity in social media environments is driven by a number of factors. Firstly, social media profiles should be managed with authority, clarity and consistency to ensure that they are perceived as authentic (Gilpin et al., 2010). As signed artists' social media presences are perceived to be managed by someone different than the artist, it can be assumed that perceived authority will be lower than for that of independent artists which will have a lowering effect on perceived authenticity.

Perceived source of content also has several mediating effects on various authenticity constructs as previously discussed.

5.5 Summary – Moulard et al.'s (2015) Authenticity Measurement Items

This study aimed to explore themes in relation to the set research questions and research objectives. To do so a questionnaire developed by Moulard et al. (2015) to measure brand authenticity was used as a guideline in the data collection process to enable the author to capture all proposed authenticity constructs throughout the data collection and analysis process. The researcher's aim within Chapter 5 was to connect findings to the existing literature in the field, and Moulard et al.'s (2015) proposed constructs of authenticity (Moulard et al., 2015). A number of key findings emerged by connecting themes derived from the collected data to the measurement items as proposed by Moulard et al. (2015). While these were previously addressed throughout Chapter 5, they are summarised below.

1. **Authenticity** (being genuine, real, authentic): <u>Higher for independent artists</u> due to perceived source of content, perceived nature of artists' motives and nature of content.

2. **Rarity Constructs**
   a. *Talent*: Assumed <u>higher for independent artists</u> due to nature of content and perceived financial means of record labels, <u>not conclusive</u>.
   b. *Discretion*: <u>Higher for independent artists</u> whose content is perceived to be related to music and less revealing of private matters.
   c. *Originality*: <u>Higher for independent artists</u> due to niche market, perceived creative influence of artist, lower commercial motives and higher passion for what they do.

3. **Stability Constructs**
   a. *Consistency*: <u>Not conclusive</u>, highly dependent on individual artist.
   b. *Candidness*: <u>Higher for independent artists</u> due to nature of content, perceived source of content, artist's motives and higher perceived freedom and less restrictions due to absence of label
   c. *Morality*: Not measured.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Limitations

6.1 Conclusions

This dissertation aimed to explore differences in consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent and signed artists by assessing the research objectives laid out in Chapter 3.1 and answer the research question. To do so, the researcher used a qualitative approach to explore themes related to the laid-out research objectives. The results were linked to existing literature identified by the author before the commencement of the data collection process and provide valuable insights for practitioners as well as foundations for possible future research.

Overall, the research indicates that consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of independent artists is higher than that of signed artists, and that it is influenced by whether an artist is signed or independent. Reasonings behind this can be broken down into categories: the consumer perceptions of social media presence of these artists and the general beliefs of consumers towards signed and independent artists that influence the perception of artists' social media presence.

*"A celebrity brand that is authentic is one that is perceived
by consumers as being true to oneself in terms of their
behaviour as well as their interactions with consumers"*
(Moulard et al., 2015)

This study reveals that independent artists are generally believed to be truer to themselves, which is also reflected in their social media presence. Precisely, the researcher found evidence for higher perceived authenticity of independent artists on social media for all authenticity constructs as defined by Moulard et al. (2015): Authenticity, rarity, and stability. Two subconstructs of rarity (discretion, originality) and one subconstruct of stability (candidness) were found to be higher in the case of independent artists, leading to the conclusion that perceived authenticity is higher for independent artists. However, the subconstructs consistency (stability) and talent (rarity) were

found to be highly subjective and non-generalisable to one specific type of artist, while results allow for the assumption of higher perceived talent in the case of independent artists, though not conclusive.

The research also revealed perceived popularity to be a mediating factor in terms of perceived authenticity, meaning that perceived authenticity is not only dependent on the belief of whether an artist is independent or signed but also on their popularity. Interestingly, it emerged that consumers believe that popular independent artists choose to be independent to keep their freedom, and as a result, still influence their social media presence heavily. Professionals hired by independent artists themselves are believed to be chosen by said artists and are less driven by commercial motives. As discussed in the previous chapter, perceived socially mediated authenticity of popular independent artists is lower than that of unpopular independent artists but still higher than that of signed artists.

In conclusion, it can be said that consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity of human brands is influenced by whether or not an artist is signed. Firstly, because consumers have certain pre-beliefs with regards to record labels' motives and thus signed artists compared to independent artists, and secondly because social media presences are perceived and engaged with differently based on the assumed ownership of that presence, and thus the assumed source of content as well as certain content and engagement characteristics and perceptions.

These insights provide additional meaning to statements made in previous literature in the field and confirm the effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool for artists while underlining the importance of authenticity in social media environments. It adds on to the extensive list of opportunities created for independent artists through social media technologies and emphasizes the role of social media user perception in building authentic brands. It provides first insights into return-on-investment in building authenticity through social media which can be assumed higher for independent artists for each hour invested due to the effect of content source on authenticity perception. It also confirms literature in the field of socially mediated brand authenticity in general, in that it underlines that more approachable users are perceived as more authentic as they are less driven by a need for popularity. Ultimately, this study indicates that independent

artists have a unique opportunity to exploit their consumer perceived characteristics to gain a competitive advantage in postmodern markets.

6.2 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations are linked to the results of this study. Firstly, due to the research methodology, results are not generalisable. Therefore, further research must be conducted to investigate the identified themes emerging from this piece of research in order to make generalisable conclusions. Additionally, authenticity is a "subjective, contextualized and socially constructed" (Oh et al., 2019, p. 233) concept and is influenced by consumers' interpretations, knowledge, interests and personal tastes (Grazian, 2005). Additionally, literature and definitions of authenticity attributes and effects are vast. As such, the findings of this dissertation cannot be generalised to a wider population but are simply meant as an exploration of themes in relation to the subject at hand to guide further research.

During the study, it emerged that measuring the authenticity of groups or categories of individuals using Moulard et al.'s (2015) questionnaire is limited in its possibilities as consistency and talent were measurement items found to be assignable to individual human brands only, rather than groups of human brands. The validity of applying this particular measurement scale to this study can also be put in question as it is aimed at measuring celebrity brand authenticity while a celebrity status does not necessarily apply to the artists that participants referred to during the data collection process. Future research should therefore differentiate between celebrity and human brands when measuring authenticity.

Moreover, with regards to the collected data, this study failed to prove if artists whom participants believed to be independent or signed were, in fact, independent or signed. Insights provided by participants throughout the interviews are relying on the perception or participant's knowledge of whether or not an artist is signed or independent. The researcher did not verify if artists that participants believed to be independent were, in fact, independent. Moreover, it was not identified which artists participants were following, meaning the researcher was unable to identify whether all participants follow (some of) the same artists or not. Additionally, this study

does not provide any findings as to how consumer perceived socially mediated authenticity differs across different social media platforms as participants were using either Facebook or Instagram and the researcher did not differentiate between the both. Therefore, the author recommends that further qualitative and quantitative research be conducted to generalise results.

Furthermore, the impact of higher brand authenticity on consumer behaviour and brand equity is strongly dependent on the involvement consumers have with the brand: The relationship between brand authenticity and brand relationship quality has a "significantly stronger effect for low-involvement consumers than for high-involvement consumers" (Fritz et al., p. 338), possibly because low-involvement consumers do not possess as much brand knowledge and have a low awareness of other brand attributes which is why "perceived authenticity of a brand is more strongly used as a signal of a brand's quality as relationship partner" (Fritz et al., 2017, p. 340). While engagement with independent artists was generally higher, future research should focus on differentiating between low- and high involvement consumers in their sample selection process to accurately measure how brand authenticity influences brand relationships.

Overall, the researcher struggled to differentiate pre-beliefs formed concerning independent and signed artists from perceptions in relation to their social media presences. While several mediating factors were identified and discussed, their influence should be explored in detail by conducting further research and they should be taken into account when preparing for research in this particular field. Researchers should also consider differentiating between three different business models: Self-managed independent artists, professionally managed independent artists, and signed artists.

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Chapter 8: Appendices

8.1 Interview Participants

	Gender	Age	Social Media Platforms*
Interviewee 1	Male	35 years	Facebook
Interviewee 2	Female	32 years	Facebook
Interviewee 3	Male	27 years	Instagram
Interviewee 4	Male	29 years	Instagram
Interviewee 5	Male	28 years	Instagram
Interviewee 6	Female	21 years	Facebook, Instagram

*daily

8.2 Proposed Interview Flow and Questions

Interview Flow

Musicians on Social Media

01 Do you follow any musicians on social media (signed and independent)?

02 What encouraged you to follow them?

Enjoyment

03 Do you enjoy content from one category more? And why?

Source of Content

04 Who do you think posts social media content in the case of signed/independent artists?

Engagement (Commenting, Sharing)

05 How likely are you to actively engage with content on accounts of signed/independent artists?

Communication

06 How likely are you to start a conversation in form of a comment or message with an account of a signed/independent artist?

07 Do you feel like you can have a dialogue through social media with signed and independent artists?

K. Measuring Authenticity of signed vs independent artists

08 Do you perceive SM content of one or the other as generally more genuine or authentic?

09 Do you perceive SM presences of one or the other as generally more discrete? (Personal Life, Over-Sharing)

10 Do you perceive SM content of one or the other category as generally more unique?

11 Do you believe one or the other to generally stays more consistent over time in their SM content?

12 Can you see a clear identity through SM content? Does that differ for both categories?

13 Do you generally feel that social media profiles of artists match with their public image and image you have of them?

14 Do you think one or the other showcases their talent better through SM content? (Comes across as more talented?)

15 Do you feel closer to one or the other on social media? Why?

8.3 Consent Form

Consumer Perceived Socially Mediated Authenticity of Human Brands

Consent to take part in research

- I……………………………………… voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.

- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.

- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

- I understand that participation involves answering questions about my social media usage and interaction with social media presences of musicians.

- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.

- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.

- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous. This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.

- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the dissertation submitted to the National College of Ireland by Lynn Schaeffer as part of her MSc in Marketing.

- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm they may have to report this to the relevant authorities - they will discuss this with me first but may be required to report with or without my permission.

- I understand that signed consent forms and original audio recordings will be retained in a password protected folder on a hard drive with only Lynn Schaeffer having access to it until the exam board confirms the results of her dissertation.

- I understand that a transcript of my interview in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for two years from the date of the exam board's confirmation of results.

- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.

- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Researcher: Lynn Schaeffer, MSc in Marketing, National College of Ireland,

lynn.schaeffer94@gmail.com, 00353892382883

Academic Supervisor: Fabián Armendáriz, Lecturer at National College of Ireland, fabian.armendariz@gmail.com

Signature of research participant

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Signature of participant   Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

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Signature of researcher   Date