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SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING OF THE “POPCORN” MUSIC WAVE: THE SUCCESS OF ROMANIAN COMMERCIAL MUSICIANS ANALYSED THROUGH THEIR PERCEIVED IMAGE ON FACEBOOK AND YOUTUBE

ABSTRACT. Internet changed dramatically the commercial music industry landscape: digitalization is the new standard, and the specific business models are in constant evolution. Thus, the industry has evolved from the traditional model of the big music labels to the much criticised peer-to-peer music file trading and, today, to the legitimate online downloading model (Vaccaro, Cohn, 2004). This last one is also changing, as there is a constant trend not to download music anymore, but to listen it directly through social media such as the older MySpace or the actual very popular YouTube, Facebook, and other similar national or regional networks (Mjos, 2011). With the social media opportunities, as never before, international success is possible for artists from small commercial music markets, such the ones of the emerging countries, who become rapidly well-known. The aim of this paper is to analyse the international success of Romanian “popcorn” wave musicians, a constant presence in the last years’ international commercial music charts, through social media – Facebook and YouTube. Our research is developed on the social media perceived image of two representative artists of the “popcorn” wave, Inna and Alexandra Stan.

JEL Classification: Z1, Z11, M30

Keywords: cultural industries marketing, social media, Romanian music industry, cultural industries representations

Introduction

Critics of popular culture such as Adorno and Horkheimer (1998, p. 171) believe that the movies, books and music that have global audiences must portray reality using filters that help governments keep the people in a state of gaiety, unaware of the more unpleasant socio-political aspects of their lives. But popular culture does not manipulate anyone by itself, nor does it reflect reality, as we all live through and by it, says John Street (1997, p. 4). We are

not compelled to imitate what we see, nor are cultural products compelled to imitate reality, although they do to some extent. Anyhow, popular culture products belong to the folklore of industrialized society, and some of the themes and characters they create and promote are sacred for the public... or at least for a part of it, as it is the case of movies and music stars (Grindstaff, 2008).

The culture industries approach the consumer in a behaviourist way (do-learn-like): the market is flooded with products that are – for the most part – standardized but seem to be ever changing; these products are heavily promoted using various media channels and promotions (free tickets, discounts, etc.), so that the consumer gets to buy them, hopefully in repeated turns (do). The selling gains an impetus from the promotions and the character of continuous novelty that the products seem to have. People get to know (learn) the products after buying them, but eventually they enjoy them (like) and return to buy again. The do-learn-like scheme (Iliescu & Petre, 2004, p. 119) works well for the culture industries because they address markets where consumer-brand relations rarely last a long time and new consumers have to be attracted continuously. This is the reason why promotional communication plays an important role for the culture industries, and the music industry offers a good place to start with when we try to understand the impact of mass promotion used in cultural contexts.

Let's begin by looking at the current state of matters in the global music industry. There are four big corporate players sharing the market: EMI, Universal Music Group (UMG), Warner Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment¹. All these popular music labels promote quite standardized formulas for the artists they represent, depending on the music genre they sing, but the audiences seem to find delight in identifying these formulas, as Adorno believed (2005, p. 56). There is still room for art for the sake of art, for non-commercial music, but the mainstream music labels that run the business have policies that mainly comprise recipes and heavy promotion use. In 2011, for example, UMG had 27.9 percent global market share, while Sony Music Entertainment had 21.9 percent and EMI 19.9 percent. These three major labels suffered small declines in global market share from 2010 to 2011, while the independent music industry rose to 25.2 percent in 2011, going up 0.2 points from 2010².

Speaking of standardized formulas, an American gangsta rap artist such as Snoop Dogg is expected to dress, speak and behave in a glamorous, flashy, macho way. A contemporary pop diva such as Lady Gaga is expected to be edgy, often even bizarre, in her appearance and to endorse a supposedly non-mainstream, system-challenging message: rebellion. She is expected to communicate continuously on her rebellion and all her public appearances, broadcasted, live or online, to become pseudo-events (Hampp, 2010). While the recipes for success prove their efficacy, success works exactly like the Superman myth: Superman is perfect, almighty and he fights evil in a quest to create the perfect American society (Eco, 2008). He does what people expect him to do: fight evil. But although he has superpowers, he chooses to solve local problems. Today's popular music artists follow the same rules: they might be able to do impressive vocal work but they do not have to. In fact, their best features should be endurance and the capacity to constantly reinvent their looks, sound and messages, with the help of an army of marketing specialists.

And so, following the logic of do-learn-like, any music star needs to be present wherever the public is. This is why there seems to be no need in the current music industry for a new Mariah Carey but K-POP singers have so many fans. She was the voice of the MTV generation but even if she still sings the way she used to, her videos barely hit 10,000,000 views on YouTube. Korean pop singers, on the other hand, sell their records in countries where they don't even promote themselves and where people do not even understand the

¹ <http://comm350.web.unc.edu/2011/03/18/the-big-four-controlling-popular-music-and-artists/>

² <http://www.complex.com/music/2012/05/major-labels-see-decline-in-global-market-share-as-independents-grow>

language of their lyrics³. This type of success comes as an effect of massive online presence: Asian singers tweet, post on Facebook, upload their music on YouTube, are available on iTunes. Maybe none of them has the talent or the vocal abilities Mariah has but they don't have to display great vocal mastery in order to sell. Instead, they have learned to migrate from one field of the cultural industries to the other in a race to remain on top. That is the reason why Madonna linked her early years to breaking the trends in fashion (see Kellner, 1995), then starred in movies, be it as light as *Desperately seeking Susan* (1985) or erotica oriented, in the early 90s. She constantly improved her dancing abilities, worked hard to transform her body from that of a voluptuous young girl to a cyber-fitness guru as she aged, wrote children's stories, got into music production, directed films, and produced films. Her goal was to be where her fans could have been, so she went from a boy toy in the 80s, to a 50s diva in the next decade, then to a futuristic filmed character in *Nothing Really Matters*, to a "normal" American cowgirl, to an Asian manga hero, to a Bond girl and so on. Her hair has been blonde, black, red and anything in between. Her music always touched upon outrageous subjects. She lifted inspiration from various cultures, she mocked her previous images during shows and videos but now, even she got to lose the top selling position, perhaps as a consequence of aging, or perhaps because her team does not constantly use social media.

All music stars follow the consumer of their music, as we've presented above, and all music stars try to rest present in their consumers' perceptions. Actually, if we look to the marketing strategies used by the most aired music stars worldwide, we can see that, besides being always in process of reinventing himself or herself, the artist has to communicate intensively with the public about its music, fashion preferences, auxiliary personal projects and so on. This communication is no longer an MTV broadcasted interview-based strategy, but rather an online communication, since these music stars address a global market.

Litterature review. Facebook and YouTube uses for the music industry strategies of marketing

The growth of social media in the last few years has brought a series of obvious changes in how marketing is made, namely, making it interactive. People search the Web for information and entertainment, so the digital market develops in terms of search. People integrate computers into their everyday lives; firms have access to information regarding their proximity and have the impertinence to use it to intrude unchecked, which means the market can be described in terms of access and identity. People anonymously exchange goods and services, firms have to compete with these exchanges instead of participating, so the reputation and reliability become more important in the market. People build identities within virtual communities, firms can only co-opt or sponsor communities, so a community marketing, based on status, evolves. People participate and observe cultural production and exchange, and firms offer or sponsor these products, while competing in buzz markets (Deighton & Kornfeld, 2009, p. 5).

In an international study regarding the use of social media in marketing that involved 3,342 business-to-business and business-to-consumer marketers, Stelzner (2011) has found that 93% of the companies used social media, with 39% of them having used it for 1 to 3 years and 32% using it for less than 12 months. The research shows a direct correlation between the length of experience with the social media and the time marketers would spent weekly with it. Most of the respondents believed that social media marketing gives to the participating businesses the benefits of exposure, increased traffic and subscribers, improved ratings, that it resulted in new business partnerships, generated qualified leads, reduced the

³ <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2013227,00.html>

overall marketing expense and improved sales. 70% of the marketers nominated Facebook as the social media tool they would like to learn how to use better, while 55% nominated YouTube.

Social media has a stunning popularity: almost everybody is on Facebook and Facebook has already surpassed Google in traffic or is about to (Zarella & Zarella, 2011). Ever since YouTube was launched in 2005, online video content has proliferated, and in 2008 it led to a “video” turn in the music industry: online concerts, extraordinary concert events and video blogs have become a phenomenon (Holt, 2011), allowing no popular music brand to ignore the network. In essence, the social media *can enhance the power of viral marketing by increasing the speed at which consumers share experiences and opinions with progressively larger audiences* (Thackeray *et. al.*, 2008).

Although the general trend leans towards increased social media usage, the music industry both benefits from, and is affected by, the rise of technology and of the social media. On one hand, technological innovation can lower barriers to entry in an industry and stimulate new investments fostering the creation of new markets (Malerba *et. al.*, 1999; Henry & de Bruin, 2011), so it becomes easier for new artists to launch their careers, while entrepreneurs have to balance between capitalizing on existing capabilities valuable in known markets and efforts to identify new market opportunities (Henry & de Bruin, 2011, p. 203). On the other hand, the entrepreneurs in the music business find themselves in the situation where they have to compete with anyone who has something worth distributing in the social media networks. This creates possible difficulties to the professional artists, as these networks increasingly blur the distinctions between consumers and producers (Wikström, 2009).

The digital age has obviously created new opportunities for music labels and musicians to share their music with their audience, erasing geographical boundaries and stereotypes. Popular music stars nowadays rely heavily on the World Wide Web for getting famous or remaining that way. As the market is led by a small number of big corporations, the independent labels have very few solutions to become competitive, and the cheapest way open to them is to employ the online social networks. This means that artists should make their music available on iTunes and YouTube and use Twitter and Facebook to stay in touch with their listeners.

YouTube is now one of the most important social platforms in the world, heavily used by music artists, allowing users to share and to rate videos that they upload on the site, stimulating the coagulation of social communities and online communication through links. Facebook allows people to share their day-to-day activities, likes and happenings with friends. Twitter functions as a broad audience texting service. Before them, MySpace was the place to congregate people around their music preferences. All of these networks define “small worlds” in which time and space boundaries are broken. This means that certain individuals can meet each other through a simple link, if their interests are similar, and this way they form social communities (Milgram, 1967; Cheng, Dale & Liu, 2007). As a consequence, users are organized in several social communities, depending on their areas of interest.

YouTube offers the ideal means for musicians to reach the public: it is free. The second most important feature of YouTube consists of the fact that the music videos can be viewed by individuals from any geographical place, a feature that can be presumed to be called “space shifting”. The third characteristic of YouTube is its social use: it is a platform of communication and a place for social interactions, involving different emotions and attitudes of the individuals that connect to each other through a simple link, or by elaborating opinions towards certain videos, attitudes such as inclusion, affection and control (Haridakis &

Hanson, 2009). Fourth, YouTube is a major platform of promotion: there are over 800 billion unique users each month⁴.

For new comers, YouTube offers the possibility of gaining popularity signing publicity contracts with important companies; it is a social practice (Trier, 2007). Terra Naomi, a musician from New York, was perhaps the first artist to achieve fame using YouTube. In the summer of 2006, Terra broadcasted on her YouTube channel a virtual summer tour including videos of her home performances recorded with a Sony handy cam. Her *Say it's possible* song became⁵ a web 2.0 hit and since then many other independent artists have chosen to promote their music using this strategy. YouTube traffic also contributed to Justin Beiber's success. He was discovered in 2007 because his mother uploaded on YouTube videos of him performing R&B hits. His career bloomed soon after⁶.

Filipina singer Charice Pempengco began singing in competitions at the age of 7. In 2005 she joined Little Big Star, a version of American Idol in Philippines but did not win the competition. One of her fans uploaded her videos online and gained her over 15 million views that lead to her international success. In 2007 she signed a deal with Ten Songs/Productions and got to sing a duet with Celine Dion after being present on Oprah Winfrey's show⁷.

We could assume that the birth of YouTube gave a helping hand to the music industry, or to the performing arts in general, as more and more talented people have access to the public, eventually become famous online and then get into the mainstream music business. For the common user it generates meaning, so he contributes to the development of the industry. But YouTube also raises questions regarding the licensing and the intellectual property rights, as by losing the gatekeeper position, the record labels also lose money. Fans upload videos of their favourite artists, skipping the broadcasting rights, so what comes as a blessing for the consumers, also comes as a curse for the ones who could have gained more profit otherwise. Anyhow, all music artists need to be present on sharing platforms such as YouTube, even when their legal property rights are not taken into account, simply because it helps them keep in touch with an ever-changing audience... the youngsters who upload, comment and share their videos. Fans themselves do the "spreading" work: they write on their blogs, tweet, share on Facebook and other social media their opinions and feelings about the music they hear. And sharing artists' videos means caring about the product. So sharing is strongly cultivated by the means of using official artist Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and official YouTube accounts linked to VEVO, a music distribution site working with three of the four big players in the industry.

In a word, Facebook rates high on engagement, as Twitter rates high on interactivity and real time communication. The teams who manage the artists' presence on social media respond to fans, regularly post backstage photos and write about the star's current activities, such as TV appearances, or give fans a 'sneak peek' at the private life of the artist. This way they create and support a more personal relationship between the artist and the fans. Its aim is keeping alive the wires that draw the fandom close, so that fan engagement is kept alive. Given these facts, we can see how technological innovations have changed the way music and songs are bought and consumed today (Sen, 2010).

The rise of the Internet has created new means for music distribution, which is done today the old way, in physical stores, and by using digital means: online music providers where you can buy albums or single songs as iTunes, online music providers where you can get free membership or a premium account, like Spotify or Pandora and peer-to-peer networks such as Napster and Kazaa (Roest, 2012). In this context, piracy is very hard to eliminate,

⁴ www.youtube.com/t/press_statistics

⁵ <http://www.terranaomi.com/bio>

⁶ <http://www.justinbiebermusic.com/#/about>

⁷ <http://www.charicemusic.com/about>

although the big players in the industry try to limit the online availability of their products through legislation such as ACTA, in order to increase their revenues.

Piracy could be diminished by inserting something “extra” (unreleased songs) beyond the basic album in the physical copies, because the music lovers are enchanted to buy such music products (Bond, 2011). Selling could also benefit from conquering new markets, and when a musician wants to lead a new market, he has to innovate by referring to cultural touchstones (Henry & de Bruin, 2011).

If technology and social media prove to have damaging effects on the selling, they also create opportunities for artists to grow richer than before. Promotional communication implies today the use of different online tools, such as banners, sponsored ads, SEO and SEM (Bielski, 2008), so music artists also went online. Online marketing communications allow consumers to be just as efficient as a large organization in disseminating a message, both positive and negative, through the social networks (Owen & Humphrey, 2009). And at their time, The Beatles, David Bowie, Pink Floyd or Herbie Hancock showed how the access to emerging technologies and innovative networks can help artists to gain ascendancy in new markets, and this, in turn, often leads to further wealth creation (Henry & de Bruin, 2011, p. 205). In this sense, Alexandra Stan and Inna and artists such as Britney Spears, with her *Femme Fatale* album, are examples of prime social media usage (Kaplan, 2012).

Popcorn music and the research hypothesis

Following the traditional dance music stars from US, UK and Western Europe, a new wave of musicians from emerging markets gained popularity worldwide by using the social media opportunities, It was the case, for instance, of the K-Pop stars like Taeyang or 2NE1, who became globally well-known by tweeting, posting on Facebook and being on YouTube. In the last decade, a new wave of Romanian artists began also conquering the European dance scene, the Japanese music charts and the American market. The Romanian dance music revolution started, in 2003 with O-zone and their album *Disc O Zone*. By the end of 2005, the boy-band had already sold over 900,000 copies of this album in Japan, going nine times platinum, while in Romania they have been awarded the gold disc for the most rapid album sales. Their single *Dragostea din tei* became an international hit, reaching the top position in 27 national European charts and going three times platinum and one time gold in Norway, platinum in Germany and Belgium and gold in Austria and Finland. The song has been covered by amateur singers and also professional artists in twelve languages and has, by now, over forty versions⁸.

With O-zone, a new wave in the dance music was launched and it continued to constantly grow, especially through Romanian artists becoming internationally well-known. This new wave is today known as the “popcorn” music trend. “Popcorn” music is not a style in itself, or even a music genre of its own⁹. It is a digitally composed kind of music, with repetitive beats, electronic effects, catchy lyrics and exotic sounds, mainly of Arabic or Latin provenience. It addresses a young audience that wishes to dance and have fun in the club without engaging in deep message seeking within the lyrics. Some people criticize this kind of music, associating its sound with the popping of corn in the microwaves heaters, calling it a cheap alternative to trance, house and rave music¹⁰.

The Romanian “popcorn” musicians became worldwide famous especially through social media. For instance, the born in 2004 Morandi band gained massive international

⁸ <http://www.9am.ro/stiri-revista-presei/2006-01-07/in-japonia-o-zone-a-vandut-dragostea-din-tei-in-900-000-de-unitati.html>

⁹ <http://www.muzicabuna.ro/articole/popcorn---face-poc-tine-putin.html>

¹⁰ idem.

success in 2007, when their single *Angels* sold 1.45 million copies in Russia, went seven times platinum as ring-back tone and gold as real tone¹¹ and has, until now, more than 12 million YouTube views. Akcent, another boy band, released in 2006 the song *Kylie*, which peaked four times on German Singles Chart while the song *My Passion*, released in 2010, has been viewed 30.5 million times on YouTube. In 2009, the song *Stereo Love* of Edward Maya and Vika Jigulina peaked first on French, Irish, Spanish and Swedish charts, second on Swiss Music Chart, fourth on German and UK charts and was number 16 on Billboard Top 100. The album was certified gold in Belgium, platinum in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and US and twice platinum in Canada and Spain¹². Fly Project is another Romanian band that gained international success: the band launched in 2010 with the hit song *Goodbye*, which reached 18 million views on YouTube, followed by their *Musica* hit in 2011, which reached almost 14 million views on YouTube. During the same year, Allexinno & Starchild launched *Senorita*, a Latin pop song that garnered over 14 million YouTube views. Then Alex Mica released *Dalinda*, another Latin pop song which has already reached over 17 million YouTube views.

Inna launched her international career in 2008 with *Hot*, a single that was certified gold in Denmark and Great Britain, platinum in Spain, twice platinum in Sweden and three times platinum in Norway¹³. Since then, she had ten singles to peak first position in the French charts and is a constant presence in the Spanish, German, Austrian, British, Czech, Slovakian, Italian and Dutch Charts¹⁴. Her albums sell very well in Mexico, Belgium and France. Among many other European and Romanian awards, Inna won, in 2011, the Best Website award at MTV Romanian Music Awards and has been nominated for the same award in 2012. Inna's biggest hits are very popular on YouTube: more than 66.5 million YouTube views for the *Hot* video and more than 55 million views for the *Sun is up* song.

Alexandra Stan is the other Romanian female star on the rise. Her debut single, *Lollipop (Param Pam Pam)*, launched in late 2009, impacted mainstream US radio stations in early 2010, peaking at eighteenth position. *Mr. Saxobeat*, her next song, has been a global hit, selling almost 1,000,000 copies¹⁵ and reaching the top five in over twenty countries, including number one in UK Dance Chart and US Hot Dance Airplay, for seven weeks. *Mr. Saxobeat* was also a major YouTube success, with more than 68 million views. Alexandra Stan's debut album, *Saxobeats*, released in 2011, gave two new hits: *Get Back (ASAP)* and *Million. Lemonade*, the single she released in June 2012, ranks first on the selling lists on iTunes in Japan¹⁶ and in August she has been present on the same stage with Rihanna¹⁷.

All the Romanian artists whose international success stories we have briefly presented above have two things in common: they use the Internet to reach and stay close to their fans and all of them became famous and stay famous at an international level without being represented by any of the big four music labels that rule the market worldwide. We assume that, along with the novelty they bring to the dance music scene, social media plays an important role in their careers. Our research begins, therefore, with the following question: how does online promotional communication using YouTube and Facebook help a musician become a global phenomenon? Are there any lessons to be learned from these artists' perceived image as expressed by fans through social media?

¹¹ www.2m-online.ru

¹² http://www.forbes.ro/Romanii-edward-maya-si-vika-jigulina-i-au-suflat-trofeul-lui-lady-gaga-la-billboard-music-awards_0_1357.html#

¹³ http://www.adevarul.ro/life/vedete/Inna-fenomen_afara-mai_putin_in_tara_0_483552215.html

¹⁴ <http://www.ziarulring.ro/stiri/37972/inna-vanzari-de-cinci-discuri-de-aur-in-2011>

¹⁵ <http://www.libertatea.ro/detalii/articol/alexandra-stan-lansat-album-saxobeats-356001.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.bestmusic.ro/alexandra-stan/stiri-alexandra-stan/alexandra-stan-summer-sonic-osaka-festival-118099.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.libertatea.ro/detalii/articol/alexandra-stan-va-canta-pe-scena-cu-rihanna-in-japonia-407957.html>

The main goal of this research is to reveal the ripple effect of social media use in the case of local music artists, as seen through the music consumers' online discussions. Without commenting on the quality of the artist' final cultural product, we estimate that the more the artist is promoted using social media, the more his or her international career blooms and the more the artists' team is paying attention to fans' feedback received online, the more the artists' marketing mix could be improved.

To test our hypothesis, we have chosen to analyse the presence on YouTube and Facebook of two of the most successful Romanian music artists on the international market today: Inna and Alexandra Stan, both representative of the "popcorn" music wave and with a marketing mix based on online communication and direct contact with fans through social media, wherever the fans might be.

The research methodology and sample description

In order to analyse the ripple effect of Facebook and YouTube to be taken into consideration in the marketing strategy of a musical artist using social networks, we developed an image analysis framework based upon two theoretical models: the model of social image analysis (Halic & Chiciudean, 2007) and the model of popular music performance (Auslander, 2004).

In sum, we have used an indices system that is constitutive to the grid analysis that allows us to quantify the image of the artists. In this system, an indicator system is composed of a variable number of indices and sub-indices that have relevance for the analysed image for a long period of time. They are relevant for the reference environment (the music industry), are measurable in a binary system of measurement (positive/negative), and cover different areas of interest that define the image. We have defined sub-indices from those elements that compose the indices and that refer to only a certain characteristic that is part of the grid analysis (Halic & Chiciudean, 2007). The image indices that we have chosen for this study are essential in shaping a viable indicators system targeting the most important aspects that must be taken into consideration by an artist's management when drawing the lines that define the artist as a product: the professional dimension (music quality, voice), the physical and personal appearance, and the relationship with its music consumers.

As a matter of fact, for the image analysis of the pop dance artists Inna and Alexandra Stan, we have defined a system of thirteen sub-indices that correspond to the next three image indices: Professional Dimension; Relationship with fans; Physical and personal qualities. The Professional Dimension sub-indices are: the quality of the voice, stage presence, sound, choreography, stage clothing, and video production. The Relationship with fans Dimension has been quantified by counting the references to popularity, interactivity and active presence on social networks. Last, the Physical and personal qualities taken into account were charisma, modesty and special physical qualities.

We have chosen to analyse the comments and likes given by the listeners to the first three music videos on YouTube, as rated for the views and likes numbers, for each artist. For each YouTube video, we analysed only the first 30 pages of comments, because we noticed that the users were following a certain pattern of behaviour and attitude concerning both musical artists. We have also monitored the pages dedicated to each artist on Facebook, but retained for analysis only the ones with the highest number of fans for each artist.

Results and discussion

The artists we mentioned above have two things in common: they show average musical abilities in their performances and prove to have good marketing strategies that help them

achieve great mainstream success with popcorn music. Inna, Alexandra Stan, Edward Maya and the other artists mentioned above in this paper, as members of the international Romanian music revolution, are representatives of popcorn music¹⁸. The success of popcorn music can be related to the general European dance invasion lead by David Guetta¹⁹.

As a popcorn artist, Inna, for example, has a non-remarkable voice, is not a striking beauty and has limited dancing abilities, but you can find her everywhere: on the radio, TV and Internet, in the news, in commercials (for Pepsi), as an ambassador of the Romanian-French friendship and even as the main voice of a social campaign against domestic violence²⁰. There are several key-points of the marketing strategy behind her constant international success since 2008: first, the brand Inna has been created with the intent to win the international market. Her music has lyrics written in English, a language accessible to audiences in different countries. The distribution has been international since the beginning: the label she signed with in Romania, Roton, licensed her first song to partners in countries that are well-known as vacation destinations for Europeans, as Greece, Turkey, and Bulgaria. People heard the music while they were on vacation and that made them to be more receptive to the artist when they came back to their countries. Then, as the brand had to gain notoriety, Inna held concerts every two or three days, paid or for free, in clubs, festivals and in open air, in many countries.

The second point of the marketing strategy behind Inna is defined by constancy: Inna launched one hit after another, stressing on the right kind of songs, says Anca Lupes²¹, one of the pioneers of the music management in post-communist Romania. Third, as popcorn music is easy to forget and fans do not develop strong emotional relations with the artist, the Inna brand relies on image construction: her team constantly sent to the press all the information that could find use in articles – pictorials, live renditions of her music, images from gold discs awarding and also they constantly posted on social media. Fourth, the presence in the media has been well managed. The team did not expose her in shows or events that would have led her appearing in cancan press and the team has chosen very carefully the brands to associate their own with. She appeared on the cover of FHM in 2010, and the men's magazine stated that she was the sexiest woman. Later she signed for a commercial for Pepsi. Another key point in the media management is maintaining a constant relationship with fans using Twitter and Facebook: there is always someone who replies to the fans in her name. The management also used social media in innovative ways. For example, fans asked her to give them autographs by posting a message on Twitter followed by the hash tag #autographsonmywall. She wrote the autograph and then posted a photo of it. The hash tag became a trend making innovation in the first week itself after its launch. Then, for the Romanian MTV Music Awards in 2010, the team asked her to take photos with various flags and posted them on Facebook along with the call to vote message. Fifth, the Romanian image of Inna is a projection of her international image. She rarely speaks to her Romanian fans and rarely sings in Romania. Online, she only posted on Facebook a photo with the Romanian flag in 2010. Inna covered a song of Laura Stoica and in 2012, after almost four years of international career; she launched her first song in Romanian: *Tu si eu*. Sixth, Inna is a product intended to work on the long run, to sell in a Sandra Brown manner²².

There are currently 489 Facebook pages dedicated to Inna. The official fan page has 6,139,636 fans, while the alternative ones range from almost 70,000 to 10 fans. The official fan page had, since the beginning, significantly fewer Romanian fans than international

¹⁸ <http://www.decatorevista.ro/cazul-inna-dor-7-2/>

¹⁹ <http://www.davidguetta.com/#/bio>

²⁰ <http://www.decatorevista.ro/cazul-inna-dor-7-2/>

²¹ idem.

²² idem.

ones²³. The fans in Italy, Turkey, Croatia, France, Poland, Belgium, Romania, Macedonia, Russia, Argentina, Albania, Hungary, Germany, Iran, Sicily, Serbia, Portugal, Holland, USA, Bulgaria, Egypt, Algeria, Canada, Morocco, Ecuador, Spain, Lebanon, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Venezuela, Florida, Colombia, Finland, Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Greece, Slovakia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Iraq, Ukraine, Guatemala, Vera Cruz, Guadalajara, Israel, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kurdistan, Trinidad and Tobago, Australia, Denmark and Norway created alternative pages. The pages with the largest number of fans, after the official one, are also band pages and have 69,651 and 44,446 fans respectively. It is remarkable the number of countries where fan communities have emerged and the diversity of their cultural background: Inna is famous in Latin American countries, in European states and in Islamic countries. Inna's official YouTube account has 143,041 fans and some of her videos have been uploaded by label channels such as SpinninRec or UltraRecords.

Alexandra Stan's official Facebook page has, at the moment of this paper's writing (August 2012), 135,844 fans, while her German, Turkish, Italian, Russian, Mexican, Iranian, Croatian, Tunisian, Peruvian, Chilean, Colombian, Serbian, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian and Japanese fans have created alternative pages, counting a total number of 491 pages. The second largest fan community is linked to the Italian page (92,728 people) and the third is a Romanian page community (17,334 people). Her fans in Turkey have created over 10 pages dedicated to her, the largest community counting 11,502 fans. On Youtube, her music has been uploaded on various channels that belong to record labels, such as MediaProMusic, maanstudio (self-described as one of the top dance producers in 2011²⁴), blancoynegro (the leading dance music label in Spain²⁵) or egoitaly (one of the top three Italian dance labels²⁶). At the time of the realisation of our analysis, Alexandra Stan had not an official YouTube account.

Even though both these artists belong to the popcorn music wave, the Romanian fans perceive them as being quite different. Because Inna's career, as we have seen above, was intended from the start to rely on the international market and somewhat neglected the possible Romanian fans, her popularity in the country of origin is not as wide as it is elsewhere. Inna Romaniacom, the alternative Facebook page dedicated to her Romanian fans had only 10,049 likes in November 2012. Alexandra Stan's Romanian alternative fan page, on the other hand, had 17,394 likes. Both artists are perceived as Romanian, due to the activity of the Romanian fans on the social networks. Also, the artists themselves promoted their Romanian origin, for example by posting on Facebook messages addressed to their fans on the Romanian National Day. Inna posted a music video with a cover of a Laura Stoica song (Laura was a local artist who died in a car accident in 2006). The post gained 9,196 likes on Facebook and the video had 213,247 views on YouTube. On the same occasion, Alexandra Stan posted on Facebook a print with the slogan: "There's more to Romania than you think" that gained 3437 likes.

Table 1. The results of the image analysis given comparatively for the artists in percent per indices

Indices	Inna ratings		Alexandra Stan ratings	
	Positive comments	Negative comments	Positive comments	Negative comments
Professional Dimension	28,07%	-12,9%	60,1%	-20,4%

²³ http://www.adevarul.ro/life/vedete/Inna-fenomen_afara-mai_putin_in_tara_0_483552215.html

²⁴ <http://www.youtube.com/user/maanstudio>

²⁵ <http://www.blancoynegro.com/who.html>

²⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/user/egoitaly>

Relationship with fans	32,5%	0	12,4%	-3,06%
Physical and personal qualities	33,6%	-5,61%	27,5%	0

On YouTube, the public has viewed Inna's videos *Amazing*, *Hot* and *10 minutes* over 154,627,657 times, and Alexandra Stan's *Mr. Saxobeat*, *Get Back (ASAP)* and *Energy* videos, over 158,118,921 times. These videos have brought an important image capital to their rise on the worldwide music market, by being filmed and produced in a professional manner, similar to ones of international artists managed by the four big labels. The comments on YouTube refer, in the case of Inna, to the sub-indices "sound", "popularity", "interactivity", "active presence on social networks" and "special physical qualities". The sub-indices "sound", has over 18 negative comments, while the positive ones surpass the number of 34. This indicates that Inna's music isn't appreciated by all her listeners, being considered too popcorn-like by some of them. Although even her fans criticize sometimes the similarities between her hits, Inna is still popular. We interpret the "popularity" (18 comments on YouTube) sub-indices through the number of likes awarded to her videos, the number of alternative Facebook pages and through the YouTube comments from fans that express their love and appreciation for her. As the alternative pages on Facebook and the comments on YouTube show, her biggest fan communities are located in Portugal, Mexico, Eastern Europe, Great Britain and the United States, countries in which the artist has had several successful concerts. Inna's team tried to coagulate the audience by giving a generic name to her fans: "club rockers". Her last album is also called "Club Rocker". Labeling the fan community members is not an ingenious act, as Lady Gaga calls her fans "little monsters".

The relationship with the fans is well appreciated. Inna's music is perceived as "cool music", made for the people who embrace the clubbing lifestyle. Their interest in her music is proven by the number of gold and platinum discs she received worldwide. As we have seen above, Inna is very popular among her international fans not only because she sings catchy lyrics put on infecting tunes, but because of her active presence in the market, on shows and most of all – on the social networks. The connection with her fans is constantly maintained, although she is always on the move. Her Facebook account is always updated with news, photos and videos that keep her in touch with her fans every day, so the social distances between Inna as an artist and her fans are dissolved. The comments on her Facebook page don't leave any room for interpretations: her most active fans support her in everything she does and they continuously express their appreciation to her music and her looks. Through her own posts on her official Facebook page, Inna leaves one with the impression of modesty, genuineness and a real implication in the relationship with her fans.

The image analysis based upon the comments of her fans on YouTube shows that her physical aspect plays a major role in her popularity. In fact, most of the comments concerning her music videos relate to her special physical qualities and good production of videos, detrimental to her music and her voice. Perhaps not surprisingly, as long as Inna did not show too much interest in her Romanian audience, most of the Romanian YouTube users criticize her looks and talent. Alexandra Stan's team did learn from this mistake. Alexandra has been present in Romanian radio shows and has sung in Romania. As a consequence, she has more Romanian fan pages on Facebook than Inna and the largest of them has almost twice as many fans as Inna's largest Romanian Facebook fan community. She is more appreciated by the Romanian fans than Inna and the fans involve on YouTube in discussions that promote Alexandra Stan as a Romanian artist. This type of discussions has degenerated on YouTube in a series of controversies between fans of different ethnicity (Serbian, Dutch, etc.) that posted racial comments concerning the Romanian people and, implicitly, Alexandra Stan.

By associating herself with Calprit, an American artist, for the single 1,000,000, Alexandra places herself better in the David Guetta lead European music phenomenon that has helped most of the other popcorn Romanian artists gain popularity. Interestingly enough, the commenters on YouTube concentrate on “sound” (52 comments) and perceive her music as a new style of music, with electronic influences, which are best appreciated on *Mr. Saxobeat* and *Energy*. The most positive comments about her music come from the United States of America, Japan, Romania, and the Great Britain. Along with this new sound, Alexandra is appreciated for her looks, even if in a smaller percentage than Inna. There are a large number of comments on YouTube regarding her “special physical qualities” (27 comments) and few about the quality of her voice.

Final conclusions

The popcorn music phenomenon draws its worldwide success from the music product itself but also from the wise use of the social media: artists make themselves known by being present through official pages on Facebook and YouTube or through their labels’ YouTube channels; fans form easier communities around the artists and have more tools to share the music they like with other people.

Social media plays sometimes an important role in the making of an international music star, through what we call today “world of mouth” (Qualman, 2013). Social media, namely Facebook and YouTube, allow people to gather around their favourite artists and music, share ideas and share the music with other people, raising the artist’s visibility in places where he or she could have not had access otherwise. As we’ve observed through our analysis presented above, in social media, people tend to engage in emotion driven discussions, such as the nationalist ones or the looks-based ones and that might give them a sense of belonging to the community formed around the artist. This might lead actually to a stronger engagement with the music and artist and a stronger will to endorse the artist. Heavy use of social media keeps these communities functioning, feeding the devotion of fans.

As a matter of fact, social media has a remarkable impact on the capacity of an artist to survive and even grow in an industry where big labels have long been dominant, if he or she can draw the correct conclusions from its direct online contact with fans. The ripple effect of social media is real and allows artists’ music to become viral and, finally, well-known. However, our analysis show the fact that through social media, artists can find out in real time their perceived image by fans, their weaknesses and what could make them (or keep them) stars. Feedback has never been more direct and immediate and, in the case of the “popcorn” music artists analysed in this paper, positive comments have a bigger frequency than negative ones. In our opinion, the constant analysis of the perceived image through social media could actually give the directions to be taken into consideration in the future marketing strategies of the artists. In our opinion, at least for these two musicians, according to the analysed image through Facebook and YouTube, their future marketing strategies should strengthen even more the already existing personal appearance, music quality and direct communication with fans.

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