

Impression management through social media: impact on the market performance of musicians' human brands

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Abstract

Purpose – Human brands in the music industry use self-presentation tactics on social media to manage audience impressions. This practice has led to many posts asking followers to adopt behaviors favoring the human brand. However, its *effectiveness* in leveraging relevant performance metrics for musicians outside social media, such as popularity in specialized media, music sales and number of contracted concerts, needs further exploration. This study aims to reveal the effect of impression management tactics conveyed on social media on the market performance of musicians' human brands.

Design/methodology/approach – Secondary data research classifies 5,940 social media posts from 11 music artists into self-presentation tactics (self-promotion, exemplification, supplication and ingratiation). It shows their predictions on three market performance metrics in an annual balanced panel study.

Findings – Impression management tactics via posts on social media are mostly self-promotion, improving the musicians' market performance by increasing the number of contracted concerts. Conversely, ingratiation generated the most positive effect on the musician's popularity but reduced music sales. Besides lowering the musicians' popularity, exemplification also reduced the number of contracted concerts, while the supplication had no significant effect.

Originality/value – To the best of the authors' knowledge, the research is the first to use social media postings of musicians' official human brand profiles based on self-presentation typologies as a complete impression management tool. Furthermore, it is the first to test the effects of these posts on market performance metrics (i.e. outside of social media) in a longitudinal study.

Keywords Social media, Branding, Human brand, Brand performance, Impression management, Personal branding

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

When publicizing the activities of a human brand, music artists have resorted to creating profiles and posting on social media to increase the popularity and sales of their productions (Klostermann *et al.*, 2023; Nikolov *et al.*, 2023). These social media activities involve publishing content – generally texts, photos and videos (Kang *et al.*, 2019) – to influence audience behavior and achieve specific outcomes (Jacobson, 2020). Besides the gains in engagement (Frenneaux and Bennett, 2021) and monetization (Kopf, 2020), these artists are also concerned with moving up in the market through their productions. As such, their expected ultimate outcomes tend to escape the sphere of social media, requiring that posts produce effects beyond this context (Kwon *et al.*, 2022; Troilo, 2017), positively impacting relevant market metrics.

The effectiveness of social media disclosures is a central concern for social media managers, who must strategically select content to post to generate better market performance (Tafesse and Wien, 2018). They can select content using self-

presentation tactics (Kuznekoff, 2013; Schniederjans *et al.*, 2018), aiming, for example, to increase the popularity metrics of the musician's human brand, product sales and financial gains resulting from presentations (Levesque and Pons, 2020; Nikolov *et al.*, 2023; Scheidt *et al.*, 2020). However, doubts persist about the effectiveness of publishing various content on musicians' official social media pages and its impact on their brand performance (Saboo *et al.*, 2016).

While a few pioneering studies have explored social media content effects on market outcomes, not all delved into self-presentation tactics or focused on musicians. Some of them, for instance, reveal different types of content as predictors of market performance for corporate brands, athletes' human brands and online fashion retailers (Agyemang and Williams,

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2016; Bigsby *et al.*, 2019; Waltenrath *et al.*, 2022). Other studies approach social media content's effects on consumer level and within social media, such as attachment and engagement (Hanifawati *et al.*, 2019; Osorio *et al.*, 2020), to the detriment of the human brand's aggregated market outcomes. Hence, there is a need for more empirical investigations into the effectiveness of musicians' human brand self-presentation tactics in social media on market outcomes (Angelini *et al.*, 2023; Klostermann *et al.*, 2023; Scheidt *et al.*, 2020).

In this way, this research investigates the predictive relationships between self-presentation tactics used in social media posts and musician brands' market performance outside social media platforms. Advances in this realm can help artists and music marketers optimize their publications on social media through content that contributes to the commercialization and popularization of music productions and brands. These results are, ultimately, some of the main reasons why an artist in this field wants to become a brand (Osorio *et al.*, 2020).

To achieve this goal, the first step was to classify actual social media postings by artists in the music industry according to four types of self-presentation tactics. Afterward, the study analyzed the effects of the self-presentation tactics on the selected artists' market performance metrics, as adopted by official rankings from independent music bodies. Finally, predictive analyses via regressions on panel data revealed the effects, over time, on each performance indicator adopted. In brief, the investigation sheds light on the impact of impression management tactics adopted in the social media content of human brands, specifically musician brands.

Conceptual background

Human brand management and self-presentation on social media

Personal brands become human brands when they use the construction, leverage and support of the marketing of a brand that is a human being (Osorio *et al.*, 2020). By extending product branding for people (Thomson, 2006), brand managers apply it to human brands such as celebrities and artists (Levesque and Pons, 2020). Effective management of this kind of brand has brought visibility benefits, sales of endorsed products, differentiation from other human brands and improvement in the careers of artists, athletes, professionals and politicians (Porto *et al.*, 2021; Scheidt *et al.*, 2020).

Communication management of brands on social media is one of the marketing mix practices most performed in human branding (Keller, 2013; Osorio *et al.*, 2020). Human brands undertake impression management activities, which consist of strategically controlling, selecting and displaying information to present themselves positively to the audience (Morelock and Narita, 2021). On social media, these activities involve creating posts (Gross, 2022) and managing people's images, often using self-presentation tactics (Jacobson, 2020; Pasternak *et al.*, 2017; Schlosser, 2020) to influence the audience (Li *et al.*, 2021).

The literature on impression management shows that researchers have investigated a range of self-presentation tactics (e.g. Cheng *et al.*, 2019; Michaelidou *et al.*, 2022; Peck and Levashina, 2017). Among them, a standout taxonomy categorizes tactics into five classes, defined by the motives driving their adoption (cf. Jones and Pittman, 1982). While

self-promotion tactics convey an image of competence, ingratiation relates to a quest for likeability and attraction. When the attribution of moral value and generosity are the goals, exemplification strategies play their role in highlighting these virtues. Conversely, intimidation tactics enforce fear by showing oneself as powerful and dangerous. Still, in the absence of other resources, one can embrace supplication by showing dependence and asking for other's help.

Aiming to regulate and control information or images according to their objectives (Goffman, 1959), social media managers may rely on some of these tactics. By posting content containing text, photos or videos (Kang *et al.*, 2019), they make edited versions of human brands (Doyle *et al.*, 2022; Klostermann *et al.*, 2023; Madden and Smith, 2010) that can self-present to the public, conveying a particular impression. The literature shows evidence of self-presentation tactics effects on the audience at more than one level of analysis, whether at the level of peer relationships (e.g. praise and job offer) or the organizational level (Bigsby *et al.*, 2019; Bolino *et al.*, 2008). Self-promotion and ingratiation, for example, have had a positive influence on some market metrics, such as company stock value (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013), crowdfunding success (Korzynski *et al.*, 2021) and athletes' payout (Agyemang and Williams, 2016; Bigsby *et al.*, 2019).

Social media posts also reflect impression management tactics when applied to musicians' human brands (Agyemang and Williams, 2016) to attract a more extensive fan base (Kim and McDonald-Liu, 2023). If well crafted, the human brand can improve the artist's performance in terms of social capital gains and even financial success through the reaction of followers of the artists' pages within their social media (Kucharska and Mikołajczak, 2018; Saboo *et al.*, 2016). However, some human brands of musicians may be interested not only in performance within social media platforms but also outside of them.

Musician brand performance on and off social media

Artists who manage themselves as brands can perform better in the market (Kucharska and Mikołajczak, 2018). While this knowledge may seem intuitive, few studies have systematically investigated the communication actions of artists' brands that lead to significant results (Osorio *et al.*, 2020). Nonetheless, some research has already been conducted in this domain. For instance, association with a successful product and increased frequency of media exposure significantly boost the popularity of artists' brands (Mathys *et al.*, 2016).

Artists have recognized the potential of social media in establishing their brands and achieving notable outcomes beyond the media landscape. Social media presence, for example, supports introducing new songs into the market (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2012). Moreover, it has been observed that increasing the number of followers and generating word-of-mouth on social media can significantly boost the sales of musical products associated with human brands (Saboo *et al.*, 2016). In addition, leveraging the popularity of human brands on social media platforms can enhance the sales of products linked to them (Kupfer *et al.*, 2018) and increase the financial value of their names in the market (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021).

Despite these findings, it is still an open question about how social media actions lead to human brand outcomes beyond the online environment. To address how activities in one context

can impact activities in another, a theoretical foundation is still absent. However, the behavioral analytic approach (Skinner, 1957) could provide a plausible framework to explain and interpret these phenomena.

A behavioral approach to social media actions and their impact on human brand

From a behavioral perspective (Skinner, 1957), the market performance of product brands is a consequence of relationships between companies (or brands) and consumers over time (Foxall et al., 2021). According to this approach, the economic exchange between a company (or brand) and a consumer has consequences for both. Through social media strategies, human brands of musicians can change the consumption setting to influence audience behavior. When the influence is effective, the audience gets closer to the musicians’ human brand, buying, listening to, or recommending their production. Aggregated, the outcomes resulting from relationships with the audience over time (Foxall et al., 2021) become performance indicators (e.g. sales volume, revenue, position in rankings) that provide feedback to brands, which readjust their practices to continue the relationship.

When the behavior of brands and the audience produces reciprocal results that promote the maintenance of exchange behavior, these results are called reinforcers. In contrast, they are punishers when they reduce the probability of maintaining the relationship (Foxall, 1992). In the case of relationship maintenance, utilitarian and symbolic benefits reinforce the audience’s and musicians’ behaviors (Foxall, 2016). For the audience, enjoying the sensory pleasure of listening to music is an example of utilitarian reinforcement. In contrast, social attention or praise from a social group that values the musician represents symbolic reinforcements. Considering the reinforcers for the musician’s behavior as a human brand, obtaining profit or continuing to work are examples of utilitarian benefits. Popularity or reputation, in turn, exemplifies the symbolic ones. Therefore, the relationship between the musicians’ human brands and their audience produces a feedback loop so that the behaviors of these actors reinforce one another, perpetuating the bonds between them.

Through impression management activities on social media (Kang et al., 2019; Levesque and Pons, 2020), human brand managers hope to influence the audience’s behavior by programming utilitarian and symbolic reinforcements for behavioral reactions to approaching their brands. Although several consumer behaviors can exemplify this behavioral class (e.g. liking and sharing artists’ posts or songs), the ultimate objective of impression management activities on social media is related to results, such as improving the artist’s performance in the market (Kwon et al., 2022; Schniederjans et al., 2013; Troilo, 2017). In the music industry, human brand popularity metrics, volume of concert ticket sales and revenue from songs listened to or downloaded on streaming platforms, for example, express this result. Thus, social media managers operationalize their musicians’ human brand self-presentation tactics, social media users perform the requested behaviors (e.g. buying tickets and purchasing music) and the human brand can enjoy the gains arising from the behaviors of these consumers (Foxall et al., 2021; Oliveira-Castro et al., 1999).

Some research has paved the way by demonstrating these influences, despite not all focusing on artists’ or musicians’

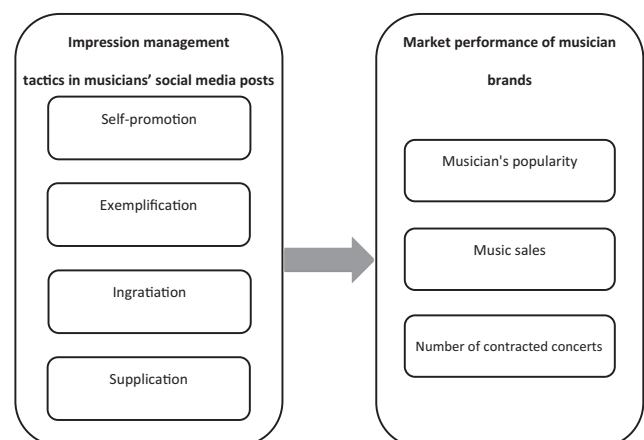
brands. One of the findings was that ingratiation and self-promotion positively influenced the number of offers a player receives (recruitment) (Biggsby et al., 2019). These offers are comparable to the artists’ contracted concerts. As well as ingratiation, the tactics of self-promotion and supplication posted on social media increased the market value of companies, while exemplification had no effect (Schniederjans et al., 2013). In this case, market value reflected improvements in companies’ share prices, as determined by social assessments from experts (investors). Analogously, the market value of artists might echo the price their audience believes their products are worth. Another discovery pointed out that sports celebrities use much self-promotion, ingratiation and exemplification to demonstrate popularity and celebrity status on social media (Agyemang and Williams, 2016). This finding suggests that these self-presentation tactics positively affect the targeted performance, which can also be the case for musicians’ brands.

However, despite the possible analogies, the available studies differ regarding the type of social media content studied, the types of brands analyzed (e.g. human versus nonhuman, musicians versus players), the adopted performance metrics (e.g. the company or athlete market value versus ticket sales or concerts) and the consumption contexts approached (e.g. investment versus entertainment). Nevertheless, the available studies about the influence of impression management tactics on market performance have produced enough evidence to inform this research’s conceptual model.

The proposed model, displayed in Figure 1, illustrates the impact of four different social media impression management tactics (self-promotion, exemplification, ingratiation and supplication) on performance metrics of music artist popularity, music sales (songs in the ranking of most listened to and purchased) and number of contracted concerts.

As shown, impression management on social media can encourage musicians’ audiences to engage in behaviors that generate market results for these artists, such as sales and increased popularity of the human brand. This way, aggregate market performance metrics express the consequences of musicians’ audience relationship actions on social media.

Figure 1 Research conceptual model



Source: Authors’ own creation

Method

Given the stage of scientific production on impression management and musicians’ human brands, this research embraced an explanatory approach, focusing on identifying predictive relationships between the impression management variables adopted by musical artists and respective market performance metrics. The research relied on a balanced longitudinal panel design using secondary data from three years of daily posts from 11 human brands of musicians on the social media Instagram and their recorded market performance metrics. The methodological path is in [Table 1](#).

The first criterion for selecting the sample was to limit it to a single musical style category to keep the market context relatively constant. The choice was the electronic dance music style due to the accessibility of its market performance metrics (outside of social media) and the target social media profile of these musicians – young people who access the social media Instagram and interact with artists frequently (Coelho *et al.*, 2016; Salman, 2023). Another criterion for forming the sample was to arrive at a set of artists with varying levels of performance over the three years analyzed, having access to all the metrics of all musicians since they should be present in the databases of all the metrics analyzed. The combination of criteria for sample composition limited its size. However, a set of 11 musician profiles met all the predefined criteria. Given the exploratory and inductive nature of the study, the obtained sample was qualitatively adequate and quantitatively sufficient to carry out the intended analyses.

Regarding the market performance of musicians’ brands, the research adopted three metrics: artist popularity, number of contracted concerts and music in the best-selling ranking. The musician’s popularity came from DJ Mag magazine’s annual ranking of the 100 best DJs from 2015 to 2017. The three-year period occurred because there is high dynamicity (ups and downs) of musicians’ human brands and their songs released during a specific period, considering that it is rare for a successful musician to stay at the top of this ranking for more than three years. This metric guided the selection and period of

the two other market performance metrics, as musicians’ performances needed to be compared simultaneously. Thus, the number of contracted concerts came from the annual count of each artist’s performances on Bandsintown, a portal that records artists’ schedules in the same period. The metric for music in the top sales was the number of days the musician’s releases were in the general ranking of the 100 best sellers on the sales portal Beatport, which specializes in electronic dance music.

Over the three years, four of the 11 artists showed growth in their positions, two fell and five remained unstable in the DJ Mag magazine’s ranking. As for nationality, the musical artists include four Dutch, two Swedes, two Belgians, one American, one Russian and one Brazilian, all male. [Table 2](#) presents the chosen artists, their classifications over the three years analyzed and the nationality of each musician.

After defining the performance measures, each musician’s profile on the social media Instagram was identified. The analysis of published content followed a two-step approach to identify patterns and publications with the highest occurrence/relevance. The first step was a manual categorization of all 5,940 artists’ posts into six types, including subcategories within each of them:

- 1 photos (informal, professional, at concerts, with other artists);
- 2 videos (informal, professional, at concerts);
- 3 music promotion (of the artist, of the artist’s record company);
- 4 calendar (future concert dates, concert announcements);
- 5 awards (campaign, awards received); and
- 6 products (promotion of products).

[Table 3](#) summarizes the definition and description of each set of research variables, showing the high standard deviation due to the variety of sample selection, which chose artists at different career stages.

In the first stage, the photographic publications presented:

- informal photos, which are images compiled without the use of professional resources and prior preparation, in addition to having no relationship with the product sold by the musician;

Table 1 Methodological path of the research

Steps	Description	Output
1	Selection of musician performance records and pattern identification between performance metrics	Definition of the performance metrics (popularity, the number of contracted concerts, and music sales)
2	Definition of the musical style and musicians to compose the final sample	Electronic dance music artist with 11 musicians who varied their performances
3	Identification of each musician’s profile on social media	Official profile address of the musicians on Instagram
4	Recording of each musician’s published text, photo, and video content on social media (codification first step)	Post-first classification
5	Coding of content published on social media from the previous stage into self-presentation types (codification second step)	Classification of posts in a new classification according to self-presentation typologies
6	Judge analysis to verify the adequacy of self-presentation tactics and adjustments	Adjusted confirmation and reclassification of posts into self-presentation typologies
7	Registering annualized data and recording in an electronic data spreadsheet	Spreadsheet with annual data for all metrics for quantitative analysis
8	Statistical analysis of longitudinal panel data of the musicians’ human brand	Prediction of impression management tactics on annualized performance metrics

Source: Authors’ own creation

Table 2 Characteristics of the musician’s brand performance by popularity

Musician’s brand ^a	Evolution in the ranking	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Nationality
A	Growth	34 th	12 th	8 th	Netherlands
B	Unstable	55 th	34 th	62 nd	Belgium
C	Unstable	60 th	57 th	66 th	Sweden
D	Growth	101 ^{thb}	97 th	27 th	Russia
E	Unstable	100 th	101 ^{thb}	63 rd	Brazil
F	Growth	18 th	14 th	13 th	Netherlands
G	Unstable	101 ^{thb}	75 th	85 th	Belgium
H	Growth	101 ^{thb}	98 th	39 th	Sweden
I	Decline	36 th	50 th	81 st	Netherlands
J	Unstable	57 th	55 th	90 th	USA
K	Decline	17 th	37 th	96 th	Netherlands

Notes: ^aThe names of the musician’s brands were omitted due to confidentiality; ^bClassification 101 is used whenever an artist is absent from the top 100 rankings of the DJ Mag Magazine

Source: Authors’ own creation

- professional photos, which use advanced photography and image editing resources, in addition to prior preparation and stimuli involving the musicians’ brand;
- photos at concerts, which include images captured during the musician’s performances, whether informal or professional; and
- photos with other artists from any musical segment, whether informal, professional or at concerts.

Video posts included three categories similar to photos: informal, professional and at concerts, but presented in the form of videos. Informal videos are those in which the video does not depend on any professional filming/editing resources; professional ones are those in which the video has professional editing and filming and aims to strengthen the musician’s brand/product; and concerts, whether professional or informal, are those in which the primary purpose is to publicize a performance by the artist.

Music promotion covers all actions to publicize musical releases, based on images or videos, involving releases by the musician or other artists on the musician’s label when this musician has his label and countersignature with other artists. Calendar publications indicated future concerts with the artist’s participation, such as upcoming tours, concerts or VIP presentations at an event. These disclosures generally occur by publishing an image, calendar, brochure or flyer announcing upcoming events.

The awards category contained publications from award campaigns relating to the voting campaigns for which the artist competes. Awards received refer to announcements of awards, tributes or high placements in the rankings of musical artists. The category also included secondary data about the “number of musical releases by the artist” on the Beatport portal. Finally, product posts refer to merchandise such as t-shirts, hats, jackets and other products the musical artist sells.

In the second step, Jones and Pittman’s (1982) self-presentation taxonomy guided the classification of the social media post categories coded in the first step. Thus, the posts could be self-promoting, ingratiation, supplication, exemplification or intimidation, as shown in Table 4.

Seven judges reviewed the definitions of each self-presentation tactic, the descriptions and examples of the

categories of publications on social media (photos and videos). They pointed out their agreement or disagreement with the statement that the category of each publication belonged to the respective definition and category of self-presentation of Jones and Pittman (1982). These judges were five marketing academics and two social media marketers. According to the results, all categories fit the concepts (above 80% agreement), except intimidation, which did not present any post category for this purpose and was not used for the subsequent stages of the research.

After all the records, the final sample included 33 cases organized in a data panel of 11 musical artists for three consecutive years, using equation (1).

$$MMP_{it+1} = \alpha + \beta PC_{it} + MMP_{it} + e \quad (1)$$

where MMP_{it+1} means each musician’s market performance metric for a musician i at time $t + 1$, MMP_{it} means each musician’s market performance metric for musician i at time t , PC_{it} each self-featured post category for musician i at time t and “ e ” is the error term.

The collected data involved the categories of social media posts made by each musician daily for three years. This timeframe was necessary to capture the longitudinal data on the types of posts made by each musician and their corresponding performance measures. The total number of posts for each category per year was added to the data. To ensure the robustness of the estimates and address the model specification errors and endogeneity problems, it was imperative to control for the effects of the independent variables by lagging the dependent variable by one year. This lagged variable represents all other current-year influences on the dependent, except self-presentation post categories.

Preliminary analyses revealed that some data did not fit a normal distribution of errors (Kolmogorov–Smirnov $p < 0.05$) and presented autocorrelation (Durbin–Watson > 2.0). However, they did not present heteroscedasticity problems in models with explained variables (White test $p > 0.05$). In this way, all data underwent a transformation into Z scores.

The study executed three equation models with panel data tailored to a specific dependent variable. Using generalized

Table 3 Definition and descriptive analysis of the variables

Variables	Definition	Mean (per year)	SD
Musician's popularity	Musician's position in DJ magazine's popularity rankings each year	58.79	31.49
Number of contracted concerts	The annual sum of the number of paid performances released by the musician officially in Bandsintown, a web portal that keeps a record of artists' calendars	66.82	39.55
Music in the top sales	Quantity of days that the musician's releases were in the general Top 100 daily ranking of the Beatport sales portal, the main electronic music store in the world	8.55	10.87
Informal photos	Photos without professional resources, such as "selfies", photos with fans, showing attention or affection, or relaxation with the public	66.58	38.32
Photos with other artists	Photos with other artists, of equal or lesser recognition, with gestures to highlight them	14.88	15.34
Informal videos	Videos without professional resources, such as footage from the cell phone itself, footage taken by the fans and with them, showing attention or affection or relaxation with the public	7.45	7.61
Videos at events	Videos of the musician performing his (musical) professionalism during the event	7.91	6.56
Photos at events	Photos of the musician performing his (musical) professionalism during the event	56.15	51.19
Artist's label promotion	Photos or videos with announcements of releases by other artists on the musician's record label. The other artist is highlighted as produced by the musician or part of the musician's group	22.00	14.51
Award campaign	Photos or videos with requests for votes for a certain award/vote	1.24	1.66
Professional videos	Videos using professional resources. For example, the official video music of the musician	8.82	9.09
Awards received	Photos or videos with the disclosure of awards received	0.91	1.49
Professional photos	Photos with professional resources, generally used for official promotion of the musician (booklet, folder. . .)	26.03	33.15
Music release promotion	Photos or videos featuring musician song releases	1.30	3.34
Party future dates	Photos or videos disclosing the musician's participation in a party	8.00	7.67
Event future dates	Photos or videos with the musician's schedule of future events or appearances	3.73	4.67
Merchandise promotion	Photos or videos promoting products from the musician's official stores, such as t-shirts and caps	1.61	2.47
Music releases in Beatport	Disclosure of original song releases on the sales portal	7.15	4.68

Source: Authors' own creation

estimating equations (GEE) with a linear function enabled the analysis; these are semi-parametric regressions for longitudinal data that provide an average population estimate (Ziegler, 2011). The GEE (independent) correlation matrix enabled the establishment of instrumental variables, such as the Generalized Method of Moments. Finally, the Quasi-Likelihood under the Independence Model Criterion (QIC) was compared with previous alternative models.

Results

Following equation (1), the results of the three regression analyses on panel data via GEE are displayed in Table 5. Model 1

shows the effects of impression management tactics in a current year on the number of contracted concerts in the subsequent year. Model 2 demonstrates the effects of impression management tactics in a current year on music in the top 100 sales in the subsequent year. Model 3 demonstrates the effects of impression management tactics in a current year on human brand popularity in the subsequent year. For all of them, the lagged dependent variable is also presented for control purposes and to avoid data endogeneity.

The results for the three dependent variables demonstrate that the three models are well-adjusted, with reduced QIC and good variance explained by R^2 (Table 5). In Model 1, the more the musicians promote themselves on social media, the better

Table 4 Classification of the post categories into impression management tactics

Impression management tactics	Definitions ^a	Post categories
Self-promotion	Engaging in behaviors (e.g. demonstrating your accomplishments or highlighting your skills) so that one sees you as a competent person	Awards received, videos at concerts, photos at concerts, professional videos, professional photos, music release promotion, party future dates, concert future dates, merchandise promotion, music releases in Beatport
Ingratiation	Engaging in behaviors (e.g. complimenting or singling someone out) to make the person see you as an attractive or likable person	Photos with other artists, informal photos, informal videos
Supplication	Propagating your limitation in an activity or achieving a goal (e.g. I'm not succeeding, can you help me?), demonstrating that you need the other person	Award campaign
Exemplification	Appearing as a model to be followed (or imitated), demonstrating that you have moral virtues (e.g. disciplined, professional, honest, charitable. . .)	Artist's label promotion
Intimidation	Adopting behaviors that demonstrate that you are a dangerous person (has resources to cause pain or discomfort) or that there is a threatening situation to get something done	–

Note: ^aDefinitions adapted from Jones and Pittman (1982)

Source: Authors' own creation

Table 5 Effects of impression management tactics on the musicians' brand market performance

Independent variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Number of contracted concerts _{t+1}		Music in the top 100 sales _{t+1}		Human brand popularity _{t+1}	
	B	Standard error	B	Standard Error	B	Standard error
Intercept	0.11	0.08	-0.21	0.09*	0.11	0.13
Self-promotion _t	0.19	0.06**	-0.01	0.05	-0.15	0.09
Exemplification _t	-0.09	0.02**	-0.06	0.03	-0.28	0.03**
Supplication _t	-0.07	0.05	-0.09	0.06	-0.02	0.05
Ingratiation _t	0.06	0.11	-0.23	0.12*	0.50	0.16**
Quantity of concerts _t	0.66	0.13**				
Music in the top sales _t			0.65	0.10**		
Popularity of the artist _t					0.92	0.26**
QIC	10.38 (reference: 23.16)		11.82 (reference: 15.10)		16.70 (reference: 30.87)	
R ₂ linear	69.40%		71.40%		83.70%	

Notes: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$

Source: Authors' own creation

the performance for the number of contracted concerts ($B = 0.19$; $p \leq 0.01$). Still, in Model 1, the more disclosure of the exemplification, the smaller the number of contracted concerts in the subsequent year ($B = -0.09$; $p \leq 0.01$).

In Model 2, the more disclosure of the ingratiation, the lower the music in the top 100 sales in the subsequent year ($B = -0.23$; $p \leq 0.05$). All other impression management tactics were not significant. In Model 3, the more disclosure of the ingratiation, the higher the human brand popularity ($B = 0.50$; $p \leq 0.01$). On the other hand, the more disclosure of the exemplification, the lower this performance indicator in the following year ($B = -0.28$; $p \leq 0.01$).

Graphs A, B and C (Figure 2) show the effect of joint independent variables on each brand market performance variable. The data showed reasonable adjustment, ranging

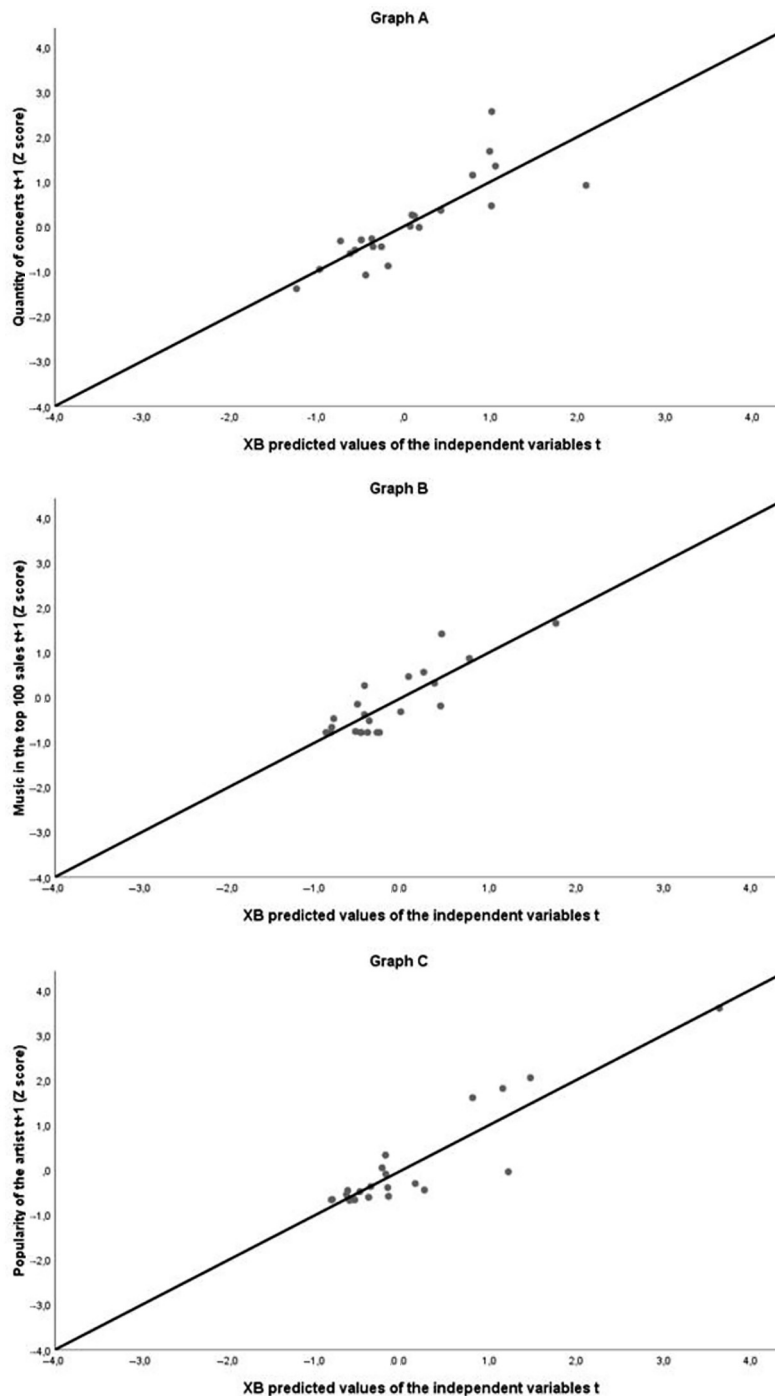
generally (but not exclusively) from -2 standard deviations below the mean to 2 standard deviations above the mean for each performance variable. This effect means that self-presentation techniques can improve a musician's performance. Thus, musicians' social media communication can enhance their human brand performance beyond social media.

Discussion

Theoretical contributions

The results demonstrate that adopting impression management tactics in social media posts influences the market performance of musicians' human brands (Hofmann et al., 2021; Kucharska and Mikołajczak, 2018; Kupfer et al., 2018; Mathys et al., 2016;

Figure 2 Graphs of the influence on musicians' brand market performance metric



Source: Authors' own creation

Osorio *et al.*, 2020). As performance metrics reflect audience behavior, the evidence found supports the theoretical argument, based on behavioral theory (Skinner, 1957; Foxall, 2021), that the type of content published on social media changes the audience's behavior outside of these platforms, affecting the performance of the human brand (Nikolov *et al.*, 2023).

From the perspective of behavioral theory (Foxall, 2021), this phenomenon demonstrates a relationship of economic

exchange of the human brand that involves reciprocal influences. Using impression management tactics, managers publicize musicians' human brand using social media (Levesque and Pons, 2020; Nikolov *et al.*, 2023; Scheidt *et al.*, 2020). Consumers, in turn, interact with the musician's brand on social media (participation in polls, likes or shares) and outside of them (e.g. purchase of tickets and music), producing aggregated outcomes into market performance metrics. These

metrics, in turn, can function as utilitarian or symbolic reinforcements for future impression management carried out for the musicians' brand on social media.

Even so, the effectiveness of these publications depends on the performance metrics that the music artist intends to leverage and the impression management tactics adopted (Kuznekoff, 2013; Osorio *et al.*, 2020; Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013). The greater the content posted with self-promotion tactics, the greater the number of contracted concerts presented by musicians in the subsequent year – the only performance metric in which this tactic was effective. This result is relevant because self-promotion was the type of tactic most frequently adopted on social media by the musicians participating in the study, and self-praise or self-reference has been a common practice in the music world in recent years (McAuslan and Waung, 2018).

Thus, this result demonstrates that this tactic goes beyond obtaining reinforcers inside the social media environment and can alter the market performance of musicians' human brands (Mathys *et al.*, 2016). Evidence also shows that, as in studies with human brands of sports players (offers by players, Bigsby *et al.*, 2019) and company brands (market value, Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013), the result of self-promotion tactics in social media for human brands of musicians (number of contracted concerts) was utilitarian. The contracted concerts are directly related to the musician's remuneration.

However, the more a musician uses the exemplification tactic, appearing on social media with other artists from the same record label, the lower their popularity and the number of contracted concerts for the following year will be. Thus, if the music artist has other work (e.g. independent production; Cassidy, 2021), it is likely that he will disperse efforts to improve his market performance. By promoting another human brand, he loses the opportunity to promote his work (concert booking) and his brand, dispersing the audience's attention and losing notability. Therefore, using the exemplification tactic reduces utilitarian (number of contracted concerts) and symbolic (popularity), reinforcing consequences often desired by artists' human brands (Agyemang and Williams, 2016; Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013).

The ingratiation tactic (Cheng *et al.*, 2019) generated an ambivalent effect on the brand's market performance metrics. On the positive side, the more a musician pleases other artists (to receive more praise later), the greater their popularity will be the following year. This result suggests that the ingratiation tactic of signaling oneself as a friendly person signals symbolic reinforcement (Foxall, 1992) for friendly behaviors on the part of the audience. Thus, by voting for the musician's brand in surveys (an example of publishing posts with ingratiation), the audience contributes to increasing the artist's popularity (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021), a kind of symbolic reinforcement (Foxall, 2021).

On the negative side, posting ingratiation messages generates fewer days in the successful sales ranking. This result is probably due to content posted on social media that demonstrates the musician's life (informal photos and videos or with other artists) rather than their work performance. Presenting himself informally and intimately makes him likable, gains charisma and improves his reputation (Jones and Pittman, 1982). However, the post with ingratiation does not

signal utilitarian reinforcements for access to the artist's musical productions and, instead, directs the public to behaviors maintained predominantly by socially symbolic reinforcements. This result suggests that the cause of ingratiation is positively related to gains in company value (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013), crowdfunding (Korzynski *et al.*, 2021), or value of the athletes' pass (Agyemang and Williams, 2016; Bigsby *et al.*, 2019), which is due more to the social relations caused by the human brand than to the capital gain itself. Then, market valuations imply expert judgments (Hofmann *et al.*, 2021) and are based on social relations.

Impression management through supplications has been accomplished little and has not affected any musician's brand market performance metrics. Therefore, supplications did not prove to be symbolic or utilitarian reinforcers (Foxall, 2021) outside the media environment, not corroborating findings of effects on market performance (Schniederjans *et al.*, 2013). Supplicating consumers to do something can generate engagement effects on the artists' social media pages (Frenneaux and Bennett, 2021) but only sometimes on metrics outside them.

Managerial contributions

This research demonstrated the prediction of social media content posts under the umbrella of impression management on the market performance of musician brands outside of social media platforms. It also highlighted that, through content posted on social media, the human brand of musicians converts into metrics that represent utilitarian and informational reinforcement for these artists' branding practices. By assessing the effectiveness of these tactics on market metrics, managers can receive feedback on the results achieved by social media marketing activities. This feedback can help them make better choices and align their tactics with their target performance.

The study's findings illustrate how social media managers of musician brands can improve market performance by encouraging self-promotional posts, such as images, photos, videos or text, demonstrating what the human brand is doing and gaining on social media. These posts can include pictures of concerts, awards received or future concert dates, making the audience more interested in attending live shows.

Social media managers should also increase ingratiation posts, such as photos with other artists or informal photos, as they can increase the popularity of the human brand by suggesting that the musicians are close to their fans, which can increase their charisma. However, managers should be careful to do these posts sparingly, as they can reduce online music sales and leave the brand with more of a pop star image than a musician.

Finally, managers should reduce posts with exemplification, such as artists' label promotions or demonstrations of activities competing with the musical artists' main activity. These posts can reduce the number of contracted concerts and the human brand popularity. Therefore, managers should instead focus on promoting the musicians' events or disclosing what they do best (e.g. playing music) to maximize their performance in the market.

Limitations and directions for future research

Despite cataloging all musicians' social media posts for three years, the low sample size in the estimation investigation due to annual data aggregation is a limitation of the research. This characteristic of this research reduces confidence in the stability of predictions. Even so, it was possible to determine the trajectory of influence since the study is exploratory. Thus, this study points to a path researchers can explore with larger samples and in other segments of human brands.

The fact that the sample of musicians was from a particular musical sector may have provided insight into the frequency of posts made on social media. Different musicians may have different upload patterns on social media and, consequently, present differences in effectiveness. Therefore, expanding the variety of artist samples can bring about other classifications, leading to a complete picture of impression management tactics in social media publications.

This research used brand market performance metrics as proxies for reinforcers (financial gains and artists' status). However, direct reinforcers (income gain) metrics may yield different results than those found here. Therefore, future research may reveal, with more direct indicators, the increase or decrease in human brands' earnings as a performance metric. Other research may show situations in which supplication can bring gains to musicians. The agenda is also open for comparisons of the effects of impression management tactics between different segments of human brands of musicians and other artists.

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