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## Original Article

# New-school brand creation and creativity – Lessons from Hip Hop and the global branded generation

Received (in revised form): 29th September 2010

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**ABSTRACT** Although academic marketing literature exists on the value of hip hop as a marketing tool, there appears to be less on hip hop's philosophical roots and why it proves to be so effective. This study attempts to fill this gap, investigating the apparent natural synergy with brand theory – in that they are both able to captivate and engage consumer-centric sub-cultural groups. Findings indicate that brands and hip hop weave themselves into the fabrics of society – creating social capital and providing a way for individuals to connect with the world. Through metaphor, slang, symbolism and *sampling*, they recycle and preserve aspects of culture; but in doing so, they also innovate. Two critical success factors in both appear to be the ratification of authenticity and an encouragement towards shared ownership. However in contrast, hip hop places precedence on overt and clear signalling of competitive intent. The methodology used is an Expert Delphi study – which also draws from a review of song lyrics, participant observation studies and in-depth interviews. This provides a basis for inductive reasoning and syllogisms. The aim is twofold: to present a new hip hop-inspired model for brand creation; and second to offer an innovative approach to in-depth qualitative studies, using 'Word Cloud' software.

*Journal of Brand Management* advance online publication, 8 April 2011;

doi:10.1057/bm.2011.7

**Keywords:** hip hop; brand creation; brand culture; creativity; brand management; brand communities

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## INTRODUCTION

Hip hop culture has reached the domain of mainstream consumption. It proves to be a fertile ground for many marketers,

drawing from Hip hop-orientated language, music, fashion, symbolism and ethea (Gibbons, 2007; Brace-Govan and de Burgh-Woodman, 2008; Cox Edmondson,

2008). Notably, Reebok have sponsored rappers as endorsers of their sportswear; HSBC have incorporated Hip hop terms such as ‘bling’ in their advertising copy; MacDonald’s have paid lyricists to incorporate references to ‘Big Mac’ into their chart songs; and artists such as Banksy have been able to reframe their once frowned upon artistic criminal practices, towards being seen more as objects of desire. In addition to this, mainstream business textbooks, journals and programmes now feature Hip hop artists exploring their commercial appeal and entrepreneurial flair (Sköld and Rehn, 2007). In tandem, observations and literature indicate that brands are not only shorthand for a gamut of product attributes, but also part of a collaborative negotiation process that serves to support the identities and personalities of individuals. Collectively, branding and hip hop have been successful in weaving themselves into rich tapestries of cultural and societal norms, and building bridges between global communities – providing social capital.

### Research approach adopted

The research approach follows three main strands:

1. Theoretical literature desk reviews of branding, hip hop and analyses of lyrics (Sections ‘Brand literature review’ and ‘Hip hop literature review’);
2. Ethnographic fieldwork, following participant observation methods (Section ‘Participant observation findings’). These provide the basis for the creation of a working diagrammatic model. This model forms the focal point upon which questions are formulated, in order to examine its validity and explore identified key areas and stages using:
3. a final Expert Delphi study.

Within these observations, the article focuses on the creative processes within

hip hop, in the interest of providing a model that outlines the key stages, in order to offer insight for brand creators and managers.

### ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY AND DELPHI METHODS

The method of data collection and subsequent analysis takes a cyclical hermeneutical approach (Figure 1).

A key challenge, having observed a phenomenon, is in developing a conceptual argument in the absence of a sufficient academic literature, empirical data and where an academic precedent has yet to be set. In an attempt to address these voids, the author chose to rely heavily on expert knowledge elicitation. Finally, syllogisms were used as the method for investigative structure formulation of the phenomenon (Wilson and Liu, 2009b, 2010; Wilson and Hollensen, 2010). Although four categories classifying the role of the researcher have been identified (Junkers, 1960; Roy, 1970; Vinten, 1994; Gill and Johnson, 2002), the aim was to occupy the first quadrant and become immersed as a complete participant. The journey from observer to participant is therefore circumnavigated in accordance with Junkers (1960) position. Namely, the author as a participant and observer makes overt investigations and makes it known that research is a core

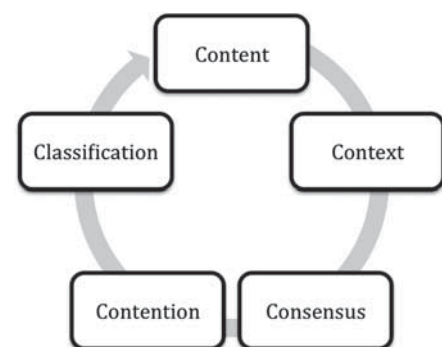


Figure 1: Hermeneutical cycle of data analysis.

interest. The value of this approach is that the researcher is not tied down and 'is free to move around as research interest beckons' (Junkers, 1960). Furthermore, this qualitative subjective sociological method offers a bridge towards concerns when collecting data, that:

*what is said* [by participants], *is not always what is done* [by participants]. (Jorgensen, 1989; Analoui and Kakabadse, 1992; Bogdewic, 1992; DeWalt *et al*, 1998; Gill and Johnson, 2002; Oliver and Eales, 2008)

Following on from this, in accordance with methods of Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson, 1998, 2000) and Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider and Srivasta, 1987), the researcher's values and assumptions are used to explore and analyse the similar experiences of others – as a hermeneutic lens, culminating in a hermeneutic cycle. Therefore, rather than bracketing the researcher's values and assumptions, as established in phenomenological approaches to research, Intuitive Inquiry begins both an iterative and interpretive cycle. This usage of a 'positive lens' extends position of Generative Theory (Gergen, 1978), which asserts that many assumptions of positivism cannot be applied successfully to studying human systems. Instead, the aim should be to challenge guiding assumptions of culture – to raise fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, challenging which is often taken for granted. From this, Appreciative Inquiry styles interview guides, to focus on gathering 'the best of stories', regarding phenomena of interest, due to their above normal capacity to be generative. Through the encouragement of capturing tacit dialogue, ideas and opinions are categorised – on the basis that these narratives will lend themselves towards the development of theories and models of best practice (Bushe and Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider and Whitney, 2005).

The study aimed to steer discussions towards five main areas:

1. What does hip hop mean to the participants and those whom they have observed?
2. What is unique about hip hop?
3. What can branding professionals learn from hip hop?
4. Which hip hop inspired skills could be used to create a brand?
5. Opinions concerning the diagrammatic model.

To this end, the Delphi instrument was structured as follows:

#### *Round One: Exploratory Delphi*

Data gathered from literature reviews, anecdotal evidence, personal observations and experiences, semi-structured interviews, and pilot participant observations were summarised into themes. These were then presented to a broad base of hip hop-involved participants in the context of wanting to stimulate discussions and elicit qualitative opinion-based feedback.

#### *Round Two: Expert Delphi*

Formalisation of the Delphi Hip Hop panel of experts, derived from convenience sampling. Expert knowledge elicitation was held to be valid, owing to the profiles of the participants and checks during participant observations.

#### *Round Three: Expert and Control Delphi*

Expert knowledge elicitation from an expanded sample, following the inclusion of additional participants (non-hip hoppers) – derived from convenience and snow ball sampling. This was held to be valid because of the profiles of the new participants and introductory discussions surrounding scope of study, with the intention of viewing their inclusion as a control mechanism.

#### *Round Four: Expert Delphi*

Disclosure of findings to hip hoppers and select subjects involved in the participant observation stage of the study, through semi-structured interviews. Following this a consensus was deemed to have been arrived at.

In the interest of priming participants by framing the scope of the study, in order to facilitate a measurable commonality of descriptions (Brakus *et al*, 2009), while not restricting views, a diagram with key was considered the most appropriate method. In addition, as the field of research centres on creativity with a high degree of visual stimulation and metaphors, diagrammatic models are well positioned to engage more of the participants' senses. Furthermore, a challenge to the researcher was to tackle the research question in a deep-structured manner, without alienating the participants, who had not been selected according to level of formal educational achievements. With this in mind, the researcher was also mindful of the fact that all participants were being encouraged to intellectualise something, which they would ordinarily not. Instead, it is hypothesised that the mechanics of hip hop and brand creativity to the panel had not been considered previously, nor are they a topic of prior interest in the same way as is framed in the research questions.

The methodological objective was to elicit both associated and disassociated expert opinions from the participants, regardless of their level of inclination towards hip hop, addressing the issues raised by Moore and Miles (1991). Through this the intention was to clarify key terms and encourage participants towards identifying critical success factors. By using experienced professionals, their ability to conceptualise and reflect upon creative processes, from a broad base of several schools of thought and supporting disciplines, proved to yield both insight and coherent commonalities (Ford and Sterman, 1997).

The use of Word Cloud software, *Wordle* [Appendix C] as Geographic Information System based Spatial Analyses, integrated within various methodological approaches is something that is being included in more and more websites and graphics in television news pieces (Cidell, 2010). It offers a quick and useful way to data mine and synthesise large amounts of text, in order to yield key and significant themes within one image. This meta-language approach to analysing data, achieved through blending network analysis and semiotic analysis produces network measures using qualitative data, to arrive at indicators such as knowledge domains, modality, paradigms and paradigm shifts (Süerdem, 2009). In this way, there is a natural synergy between this approach and that of Delphi – in that diagrams play a role in each and they attempt to filter information into a culminating form of consensus. The aim was to analyse the didactic relationship between concepts, presenting the mental map behind texts, in order to describe phenomena. This interpretive approach to identifying meaning is kept at paragraph level, where each paragraph is considered a statement connecting two concepts, according to sentence structures that use phrases such as 'refers to', 'is', 'signifies', 'makes', 'suggests', 'is in opposition to'. Discourses as judged according to proximity, frequency and terms of reference (positive and negative).

Upon completion of the Delphi study, the model was further refined and developed (Figure 3). Finally, an additional model was developed, which reflected upon the research process and observations concerning branding as a wider cultural phenomenon, within global societies and business (Figure 4). The milestone stages of the research exercise are further detailed below:

#### **Literature search**

- Hip Hop Creativity/Hip Hop Creation and Brand Creativity/Brand

Creation, as separate and interconnected disciplines.

- Online and magazine interviews, lyrics, supported by synthesis in Wordle [Appendix C] to identify themes.

### *Participant observation*

Semi-structured interviews with artists, songwriters, musicians and producers were conducted in 13 recording studios, during recording sessions in the United Kingdom. Location and participants were selected using convenience and snowball sampling, following a similar approach to that of Söderman and Folkestad (2004). The bio-data of the observer appears in Appendix B. In contrast to Söderman and Folkestad (2004) in addition to hip hop, the music genres observed also included Electronica, Asian Underground, Guitar (Indie, Metal, Rock, Alternative), Funk, Acid Jazz, Drum and Bass, Jungle, Pop. From interviews, although musical settings were favoured, it was felt that findings could be expanded to include the other elements of break-dancing and graffiti, based on the views expressed by respondents and those by (Wayne in Chang and Chen, 1998; Olsen and Gould, 2008).

### *Narrative, emerging themes and definitions*

Using a qualitative, interpretive and inductive approach, supported by Merriam (1988) and Powell and Dodd (2007), when looking within branding and creative industries, the author identified words, translated into language that could be understood by a mainstream audience and represented within a diagrammatic model and key. These were gathered during participant observations and from 'word cloud' searches, and subsequently cross-referenced against academic literature.

### **Expert Delphi study**

Although Chevron (1998) names his method for developing brands as the Delphi

Process, reflective of the introverted aspect of branding, Delphi offers a method by which a consensus of understanding can be reached in a wider context (Woudenberg, 1991). Delphi's epistemology focuses on soft data and soft laws, dealing with areas that do not lend themselves to more traditional approaches (Helmer, 1977; Mullen, 2003). Cavalli-Sforza and Ortolano (1984) observe that a typical panel has about 8–12 members (p. 325) and Linstone (1978) finds that a suitable minimum panel size should consist of seven members (p. 296). Goodman (1987) notes that the architects of Delphi 'tend not to advocate a random sample of panellists ... instead the use of experts or at least informed advocates is recommended' (p. 730). Beretta (1996) suggests that 'Representative sampling techniques may be inappropriate when expert opinions are required' (p. 83). However, Linstone and Turoff (1975) prescribe that validity of results is preserved through the heterogeneity of participants.

Five participants were selected and agreed to take part in the Delphi study, from start to finish. Each had a professional interest in hip hop and had taken part in the participant observation part of the research. The sample was then expanded to seven, with two other participants selected, again using convenience sampling and on grounds of their interest in hip hop, and in addition individually their professional exposure to design, creativity and branding (Respondent 6) and involvement in the music industry, sports branding and sponsorship (Respondent 7). As a control, after the first Delphi round, six further participants were introduced at the round two stage. These respondents had expressed having (1) no direct involvement in hip hop; (2) broad understanding and exposure to hip hop; (3) involvement in other music genres. In the case of Respondents 8, 10, 12 and 13 (4), no strong affiliation or liking for hip hop was expressed. (Biodata of participants listed in Appendix B.)

Skulmoski *et al* (2007) undertook a literature review that points to two to three rounds being a typical number before a consensus is reached, also supported by Wynekoop and Walz (2000). Although a broad-based sample of respondents was studied during the participant observation phase, and a heterogeneous sample of expert panel members took part in the Delphi study, in the interests of methodological rigour, a fourth round was introduced. This was done in order to ensure that data and tacit knowledge captured were reflective of the full phenomenon observed.

## BRAND LITERATURE REVIEW

### Brand architecture

When looking for a comparative frame of reference to house hip hop and branding, the brand architecture approach, as outlined by Petromilli *et al* (2002), offers such a lens. Within this, the consumer is central to a portfolio of overlapping entities, seeking to increase equity, associations, salience and reduce confusion. The reasoning behind this perspective is that hip hop artists profile themselves, as well as their creations. Furthermore, trends indicate the increase in brand-extension strategies being adopted by artists, once they have attracted a following. These have moved beyond simple merchandising and memorabilia, towards full-fledged high-street high-fashion brands such as *Phat Farm*. With this in mind, the strategic creative process necessitates both flexibility and a clear orientation, based on long-term value judgements. Muzellec and Lambkin (2009) identify this as being present in a dual approach that first follows an integration strategy, achieving image alignment; second, a separation strategy that shapes different images, for different stakeholders.

### Brand creativity and creation

In addition to the physical market positioning and architecture of brands, it is their

spatial relationship in the mind of consumers that is of significance, according to ownership and alignment with consumers' value systems (Ries and Trout, 1982; Marsden, 2002). As an extension of associative network mapping of the human memory (Galton, 1880; Freud, 1924; Deese, 1965; Anderson and Bower, 1973) and also drawing from Zipf (1965), Dawkins (1976) and Marsden (2002) ascribes the science of culture and creativity to a process of positioning *memetics* (genes of meaning). Within this process, the author asserts that brand creation aims to offer a transparent paper trail of heritage antecedents, which both attract and guide consumers on a path of assimilation. From this, a brand's essence housed within a cultural context and sustained by stakeholders maintains its strategic value (Holt, 2002, 2004, 2005; de Chernatony, 2001). Furthermore, the author observes that the same could be argued for hip hop and its very essence, as discussed below.

## HIP HOP LITERATURE REVIEW

### Defining Hip hop

Hip hop is considered to be more than a mere genre of music, but rather a culture that provides individuals with ways of connecting to the world (Brown, 2010; Emdin, 2010). Other terms often used in connection with hip hop that were gathered from interviews and lyric searches are that it is a form of self-expression, art-form, social commentary, philosophy and lifestyle – requiring active participation and it its most extreme, competitive *Battling*. Darling-Wolf (2008) describes this process as one that creates hyphenated identities and *mondialisation*. The cornerstones of traditional hip hop culture rest on four creative elements: 'deejaying' (sampling and scratching records), 'emceeing' (rapping), 'breaking' (break-dancing), and 'bombing' (graffiti art) (Rose, 1994; Hornsey, 2003;



Chang, 2005; Gibbons, 2007; Alim, 2009; Brown, 2010; Emdin, 2010; Ghandnoosh, 2010). Through its evolutionary process, further words that have been cited as elements, or compound suffixes are knowledge, fashion, slang and beatboxing (replicating musical sounds and drum patterns using one's voice). Although it is clear that some of the elements individually focus on the production of music, art or dancing, the authors take an approach that treats them collectively as demonstrating homogeneity, through their expression of rhythm and emotions (Wayne in Chang and Chen, 1998; Olsen and Gould, 2008). In support of this position, Gaunt (2006) describes the interplay and reciprocity between music and dance, which is manifest in 'oral-kinetic etudes'.

### **Hip hop cultural heritage, membership and authenticity**

Cheyne and Binder (2010) raise two areas of relevance to this study. First, they assert that an evaluation of the authenticity of hip hop by consumers is central to its acceptance, which is also cited as being a critical success factor by Clay (2003); Kahf (2007); Pennycook (2007); Manivet and Richelieu (2008). This is achieved by the legitimacy of the creators, judged primarily by their heritage and location. Second, that hip hop evokes cosmopolitan omnivorism, which expands Bourdieu's (1984) concept of cultural objects being critiqued according to aesthetics and context-towards also including experiences. Bourdieu (1984); Cheyne and Binder (2010) pay particular attention to the social elite, who they argue embark on a social process of distinction that distinguishes them from others, and drives cosmopolitanism.

As a challenge to this, however, the author proposes that the concept of cosmopolitan omnivorism being only the domain of the elite, is the very *raison d'être* that hip hop was created. Esteem and the

pursuit of high-status cultural capital within hip hop, is in fact the pursuit of all participants and consumers – regardless of class, wealth, race and nationality. It is conversely argued therefore that Cheyne and Binder (2010) identified this in citing the acceptance and canonisation of hip hop across social classes within the mainstream. Furthermore, as hip hop is a high-involvement, emotive and experiential offering, which also affords high-accessibility, it appears to contradict the basis of Bourdieu's (1984, 1986) high-culture versus mass-taste construct.

### **Hip hop's critical success as both a cultural and commercial entity**

In addition, in what has been termed by Krotoski (2010) as *The Great Levelling* of the digital revolution, access to knowledge capital and social networking has the ability to empower and drive cosmopolitanism. Johnson (2007) also charts a change in mindset among corporations when engaging with consumers: 'Today's media is evolving beyond monetising audiences and more towards fostering dialogue and community – and monetising these interactions directly or indirectly'. Therefore, the author suggests that through the lens of diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1962, 1976, 1983, 1995; Strang and Soule 1998), the increasing acceptance of hip hop represents a convergence continuum, which is comparable to that observed by Dailey *et al* (2005) who present a 5 Cs model of convergence, when studying the collaborative practices of media newsrooms – namely: (a) cross-promotion, (b) cloning, (c) cooperation, (d) content sharing and (e) full convergence (pp.152–153).

It is perhaps for these reasons that hip hop has afforded itself as a powerful tool for advertising, marketing and brand managers, because it acts as a conduit for entry into the psyche of consumer-centric communities that have previously been thought

to exhibit heterogeneous traits. Wilson and Liu (2009a) cite Timberland's successes (Lelyveld, 2001) and Tommy Hilfiger (Dye, 2000) as an observation of this phenomenon. In further support, Holt (2002) lists the domain of hip hop as being within the 'arts and fashion communities, ethnic subcultures, professional communities and consumption communities' (Holt, 2002, p. 84). Although it might appear that these inroads are not unique to hip hop – in that other music genres, such as Electronica, Punk, Grunge and Indie have become the soundtracks to generations and an integral means by which individuals can ascribe meaning to their identities (Zaltman and Puccinelli, 2001; Hesmondhalgh, 2008) – what hip hop has been able to do is become the bedfellow of marketers by giving centre stage to brands. In addition, it can be argued that this trend has encouraged brand consumerism in other genres. However, a further differentiator is that hip hop lyrics contain numerous references to brands, often accompanied by descriptions, similes and metaphors, which reciprocally enrich the personality of both the brand and the hip hopper (Bryant, 2008). Furthermore, for an MTV generation that is used to seeing brands blurred out in hip hop music videos, along with weapons, this has become a badge of honour to the artist, encouraging them to increase their affiliations with brands, as a means of celebrating authenticity, edginess and rebellion.

From this, brand strategies benefit from low media-cost exposure, which attracts attention, encourages inquisitiveness and is accompanied by a narrative, akin to an extended esoteric infomercial. Viewers have been observed playing a guessing game with peers as to which brand appeared on the screen, which reinforces brand notoriety, recall and hyper-brand sensitivity. Traditionally, such blurring of logos would have been viewed as hampering promotional activities, but now the author argues

that this has become a gritty and offensive anti-branding strategy, which adds to a brand's personality, allure and edginess. An extension of this phenomenon can be seen in the thirst for authentic reality television and online user-generated content, which some marketers covertly attempt to replicate.

However, having made these points, although hip hop continues to be a loyal servant for the marketer, a polemical case is made that in it lies the potential to offer further benefits through researching its potency, *from the root to the shoot*, as opposed to simply plucking its fruit. By adopting an approach that seeks to understand its philosophy, nature and attraction, from the perspective of a marketer, it is hoped that those elements can permeate business, marketing and management thinking – in perhaps a similar way to the application of Sun Tzu's 6th century BC *The Art of War* text, from warfare to business strategy.

## PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION FINDINGS

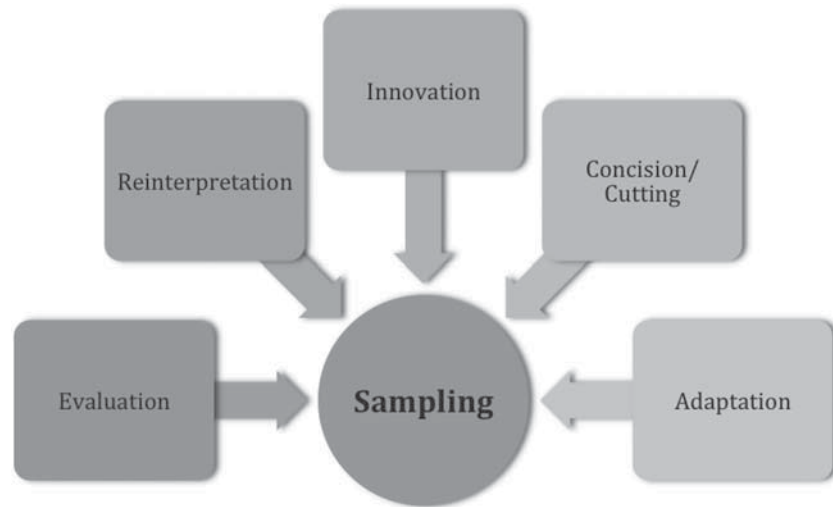
### Sampling – The bedrock of hip hop creativity and creation

A cornerstone to hip hop is the art of *sampling* (Figure 2). The author defines this as:

A systematic and qualitative process, often called *diggin' in the crates*; with the purpose of creating a memetic entities. Following this, the usage of memetic entities by the creator, leads to further adaptations and innovations culminating in the creation of a Hip Hop entity – which produces both discontinuous and continuous variations. Examples of which are songs, slang, dance moves and pieces of artwork.

An interesting point to note is that such an approach need not take into account ethnographic factors, with no requirement on the sampler to even understand anything





**Figure 2:** ERICA process of creating a *Sample* to be used in Hip Hop.

about the source material. And as such, authenticity can be achieved still in the absence of such knowledge – which almost profiles the sampler and audiences as being analogous to ‘magpies’, attracted to *bling* and eye-catching memetic artefacts. What is paramount is that the creator possesses a seal of approval and authenticity, through the emotions that they evoke and their philosophical code of conduct.

In this there are strong similarities between hip hop, design and brand creations. Where perhaps a difference lies between branding and hip hop is in the issue of contending ownership of an entity. As hip hop readily draws from other sources, where there is competition and contention, rather than dogmatically defending a position, hip hop is also ready instead to compete through further innovation. This then becomes a hallmark of true authenticity. Evidence of this can be seen in rappers changing their names and styles. Söderman and Folkestad (2004) discuss the informal collage building and intertextuality, which is present in the creative process. The tide has also turned with regard to external perceptions of the usage of samples.

Traditionally, artists such as Cypress Hill had to fight long court battles and pay exorbitant sample clearance fees to the artists whose music they sampled, at times without permission. Externally, a dim-view was taken, with low value being placed on hip hop’s approach to sampling and ownership. For these reasons, sampling was often viewed as a form of plagiarism, which at best necessitated a value-based legal remuneration agreement known as sample clearance, but at the worst demanded high fees as a deterrent to the *l’enfant terrible* of music.

Now, with hip hop’s popularity and its proven track record of being able to deliver commercial gains, the tide has turned, largely because of a cultural paradigm shift that has been recognised in legal precedents Arewa (2007). Many artists would welcome their work being sampled, as it is felt that this extends the product life cycle and exposes them to new segments of the market. Comparably, the same reversal has been observed in other emerging phenomena – such as the role of music and brands in video games (Bartlet, 2010; Wilson, 2010a) and the debates surrounding the higher consumption of paid-for music

by illegal downloaders (BBC News Online, 2005, 2009).

### Scope of sampling and its wider application within branding

Within the art of sampling also exists a dichotomous tension that has been summarised below, under six main themes:

1. *Evolution from Lo-Fi to Hi-Fi* – by which method barriers are reduced, in order to drive participation and empowerment. Hip hop's roots are based in customising cheap items of clothing; creating music without instruments, by overlaying records on top of each other; dancing in the street; and creating art using spray cans on the wall. Technology has especially supported these pursuits, with the creation of sampling machines, iPhone apps such as *Baby Scratch*, *I Am T-Pain* and video games such as *Guitar Hero*, *DJ Hero* and *Band Hero*. Furthermore, hip hop-inspired fashion labels now produce 'ready-made' outfits.
2. *From plagiarism to patronage* – The code of ethics that accepts the use of a sample.
3. *Innovation versus replication* – Whether reproducing something with distinct similarities fulfils hip hop's criteria for meaningful participation, ethics and ecology.
4. *Citation versus concealment* – Some artists celebrate and disclose their sample sources, whereas others safeguard these secrets, as both a form of social capital and attempt to preserve their distinct style.
5. *Consumption and consumerism* – Whether citations of brands enrich hip hop, or destroy and exploit its cultural fabric of communication and social commentary.
6. *Mainstream versus the underground* – whether hip hop authenticity and acceptance remains, when popularity increases.

The case chronologies listed in Appendix A highlight the following key themes,

which collectively through encouraging inclusion drive excellence and competitive advantage:

- Knowledge transfer and creation of social networks, through emotive multi-level experiences;
- continuous innovative mass-stakeholder creativity, across the globe;
- defining and seeking mass appeal, expanding hip hop's cultural frame of reference;
- welcoming reciprocal sharing of hip hop outside of the genre.

These case examples also lend credence to the argument that hip hop and branding appear to be inextricably linked in their ability to innovate, spearhead artefactual metamorphosis and act as conduits for cultural meaning and experiences – across consumer segments. Where they differ is that branding's objectives are largely transferred implicitly to consumers, whereas hip hop explicitly states its objectives and projects and forecasts its aspirational status. This appears to have served hip hop well and the challenge for brand professionals is whether this approach could wholeheartedly be imported into more brand communications.

### FINAL DELPHI RESULTS AND SUMMARISING MODEL OF HIP HOP CREATIVITY

A model was developed that captured the essence of creation – in sequential, dynamic, reciprocal and interconnected elements. Also in keeping with the spirit of hip hop and branding collaboratively an acronym was arrived at which embodied the 'spirit' of the process (Figure 3):

Key:

1. Creation
  - (a) *Actor* – Avatar-esque-created identity and personality of the creator.



Figure 3: *Abracadabra* approach to creativity.

- (b) *Brand* – Product concept of the creation: co-branded/ingredient brand with the Actor and manifest in a distinct personality and identity. Actors will seek to cite and profile themselves within the product offering.
  - (c) *Rhythm* – Signature style: Visual/kinaesthetic/audio. Embedded into all creations.
  - (d) *Argot* – Encoded slang that restricts membership and creates sub-cultures. This helps to preserve and create unique cultural elements.
  - (e) *Culture* – Created hybridised sub-cultures that drive collective individualism.
  - (f) *Artefact* – Final creation, blending elements – which pay homage and reference to existing entities, while creating innovation through adaptation (think hip hop sampling, nostalgia and retro).
2. Marketing: Push/pull/profile
    - (a) *Delivery* – Deconstruction/diffusion innovation/convergence: supported by esoteric storytelling, which flips meanings, brings new perspectives and shows multiple perspectives. How the artefact is presented.
    - (b) *Audience* – Those intended for communication and offering.

(c) *Battle* – A signal of competitive intent, demonstrating skills, value, legitimacy.

(d) *Reaction* – Resulting from battling, reciprocating interacting and sharing creations.

### 3. Destination

(a) *Authenticity* – Achieved through the culmination of the previous elements.

Within this approach, the *Abracadabra* model shares a commonality with the Shannon and Weaver (1949) communication model, in that it is reflective of an *encoding-decoding-feedback* sequence of events. As an extension, owing to the emergence of creative reciprocity, through consumer-brand-centric models, user-generated content, social networking and a concept of legitimacy through shared ownership, the presence of the media is diffused throughout.

## Practical application of the *Abracadabra* model

### *Micro perspective*

The model presents a cyclical approach to the process of managing a brand, from its inception right through to embedding it within a sub-culture. In doing so, precedence is given to engineering a brand-centric community – whereby the attainment of authenticity is derived from a collective vote of confidence, which lies in every aspect, artefact and individual involved. To this end, the model serves as a stepwise mantra for brand managers. Furthermore, it offers a reminder of the fact that creativity should be a dynamic and diffused attribute, which nourishes a brand's existence – and when most affective, encourages reciprocity.

### *Macro perspective*

The final suggestion is that brand creators, designers and architects should consider their role, as being a necessary part of this process – as linked and associated branded

individuals. Global cultures, identities and interconnected communities create networks of tacit meaning, for which brands become conduits. This model (Figure 4) serves to highlight how brands can shape the agenda within not only marketing practices, but also the wider society.

Key stages:

1. Culture
2. Hybridisation
3. Authenticity
4. Nation branding
5. Global positioning/Game Theory
6. English hybrids
7. Surrogacy

The end goal of a brand is to achieve the role of a surrogate. Drawing from Transactional Analysis theoretical frameworks, professionals, consumers and organisations should look to go beyond nurturing relationships – towards adopting them as their own, or being adopted. These feed into the constant evolution of progressive and contemporary culture.

Perhaps, the most visible representation of this melding lies in charting Barack Obama’s ascendancy. Obama has been hailed by many quarters as the first ‘Hip Hop President’ – in spirit, approach and looking to the Hip Hop community for support, from fans and artists alike.

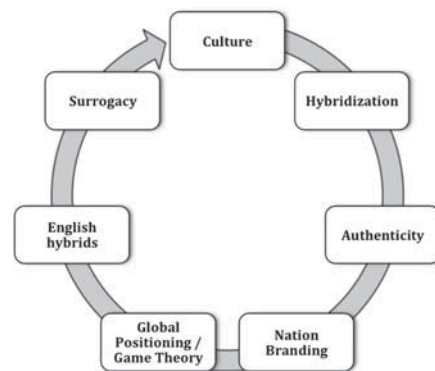


Figure 4: CHANGES model.

Relevant critical success factors of his rely on:

- the ancient tradition of classical rhetoric;
- cutting-edge technological social networking and hyper communication;
- controlled situation-specific culture and ethnicity – being a man for all: by drawing from American, African, Asian, Black, White and Mixed-Race classification reference bases; when the occasion arises.

Finally, a key consideration connected to authenticity and the cultural approach to branding lies in how Nations, individuals and organisations perceive themselves and are perceived. The bar has been raised so that those with multiple native language and dialect skills are in increasing demand – affording a competitive edge. However, there is evidence to suggest that with English becoming the lowest common denominator, communications remains problematic. In the quest to forge international partnerships and share knowledge, individuals are also having to learn several types of ‘English’: American-English, English-English, Indian-English, Malaysian-English, Arab-English, Australian-English, to name but a few. Therefore, if business, population and educational trends continue, it is worth considering whether those in North America and the United Kingdom will have to re-evaluate their role and approach in this process – as minority groups in a global context (Wilson, 2010b).

## CONCLUSIONS

Hip hop has become the bedfellow of marketers – through giving centre stage to brands. In addition, it can be argued that this trend has encouraged brand consumerism in other music genres. However, a further differentiator is that hip hop lyrics contain numerous references to brands, often accompanied by descriptions, similes

and metaphors that reciprocally enrich the personality of both the brand and the hip hopper (Bryant, 2008).

Branding plays a significant role in the creative processes of hip hop and its supporting culture. To this end, hip hop has the potential to nourish the creative approach adopted by brand professionals not only looking to appeal to this target audience, but also as a philosophical and practical approach to creating brands in general. Here the argument is threefold: One that presents hip hop as a creative hot-house for germinating memetic brands. Second, it is the driving force of intertextual cultural reciprocity and hybridisation, which equip it with the ability to *go Global* and redefine what *Global* means to consumers and brand managers. And finally, its competitive backbone also affords a legitimate approach to brand creation, through the pursuit of acceptance and competitive success, according to economic factors. Key justifications for this are as follows:

- Hip hop has a proven track record of being able to deliver measurable gains;
- its culture hinges on a process of driving competitive excellence;
- innovation and adaptation are central to its ethos;
- the ability to link diverse consumer groups with comparably diverse subject matter and artefacts offers an attractive proposition to marketers; and
- sampling conceptually presents an ecological approach to creation, which reduces economic and participatory barriers.

The study showed that regardless of participants' interest or involvement in hip hop, its approach to creativity was largely understood by them and considered to have unique qualities. Those that were involved in hip hop felt that its philosophy and creative approach were something of value to brands and branding strategies.

Furthermore, there was a consensus that hip hop had the potential to inspire creativity outside of its context – owing to its balance of unifying, while challenging the status quo, through social commentary.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

It was mentioned that branding's main corporate objectives are largely transferred implicitly to consumers, whereas hip hop explicitly states its objectives – projecting and forecasting its aspirations. A suggested area for future research is to what degree brand professionals can communicate in a comparably explicit manner to hip hop, whether it remains an effective approach outside of hip hop-linked brands, what effect this has on the brand and whether brand creator/architects should also profile themselves with more prominence next to their brands. Similarly, the suggested instrument for this study is an expert Delphi method, but this time with brand professionals.

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## APPENDIX A

### Case example chronologies, which illustrate hip hop’s approach to innovation, through sampling

#### Case example 1:

#### Hip hop group run DMC

- 1977** Rock group Aerosmith released the single from their 1975 *Toys in the Attic* album called ‘Walk this way’.
- 1986** Run DMC covered Aerosmith’s song, adding their own rap lyrics.
- 1986** Following the success of Run DMC’s single ‘My Adidas’, they signed a US\$1.6 million deal with Adidas, which helped to reposition trainers as casual non-sporting footwear. Run DMC’s preferred model was the basketball shoe, called the *Superstar*, which they famously wore with no laces and nicknamed *the shelltoe*, owing to its characteristic toe cap design. Adidas now also have a Run DMC line

of street clothing. The following are extracts from their ‘My Adidas’ song, which demonstrate their deep-rooted love:

... wore my sneakers but I’m not  
a sneak  
My Adidas cuts the sand of a  
foreign land  
with mic in hand I cold took  
command  
my Adidas and me both askin P  
we make a good team my Adidas  
and me  
we get around together, rhyme  
forever  
and we won’t be mad when worn  
in bad weather

... Now the Adidas I possess for  
one man is rare  
myself homeboy got 50 pair  
got blue and black cause I like to  
chill  
and yellow and green when it’s  
time to get ill  
got a pair that I wear when I’m  
playin ball

with the heal inside make me 10  
feet tall  
my Adidas only bring good news  
and they are not used as selling shoes

- 1986** Aerosmith/Run DMC ‘Walk this way’ was the first hip hop song to hit the Top five in The Billboard Hot 100.
- 1987** Aerosmith/Run DMC ‘Walk this way’ won a Soul Train Music Award for Best Rap Single.
- 1999** Number 5 in MTV’s 100 Greatest Music Videos Ever Made.
- 2004** *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked Aerosmith’s original version as number 336 and the Aerosmith/Run DMC collaboration at 287, in their list of the 500 greatest songs of all time.
- 2007** Aerosmith/Run DMC ‘Walk this way’, was released as an official Comic Relief fund-raiser, covered by UK pop groups, Girls Aloud and the Sugababes.
- 2008** Aerosmith/Run DMC ‘Walk this way’ was ranked number 4 on VH1’s 100 Greatest Songs of hip hop.
- 2009** Aerosmith/Run DMC ‘Walk this way’ was named the 8th greatest hard rock song of all time.

#### Case example 2:

- 1982** Knight Rider US TV series appeared on television.
- 1998** US hip hop recording artist, Busta Rhymes released ‘Turn It Up(remix)/Fire It UP’, achieving gold certification. His vocals flow over an instantly recognisable adapted version of the theme music to Knight Rider.

- 1998** British Indian musician and **and** Bhangra artist Panjabi MC
- 2002** sampled Busta Rhyme’s ‘Turn It Up(remix)/Fire It UP’ instrumental, adding Punjabi language singing and bhangra instruments (dhol drums and tumbi strings) over the top – creating the song *mundianto bach ke* [Punjabi translation: *beware of the boys*]. This song enjoyed global successes outside of Punjabi language speakers; and included the usage of its instrumental by the BBC and as a ringtone.
- 2003** An updated version was released as ‘Beware of the Boys’, featuring the English language vocals of multi-platinum US artist Jay-Z.
- 2003** Panjabi received an MTV Europe Music Award, as the Best Dance Act; and a MOBO Award for Best UK Act.

## APPENDIX B

### Biographies of participants

Method/approach: Biodata was requested from all participants using a standard template. In some cases, additional questions were asked subsequently to gain further information: where either it was considered that insufficient data had been provided, or more was needed in order to allow for greater cross-comparisons. In addition, as a result of interactions during the study, it became apparent that other relevant facts were disclosed – and therefore these were also included. The biodata served as a means to ratify the significance of the qualitative personal opinions, expert knowledge elicitation and experiences, anecdotal evidence and participant observations.

The data below indicate that the sample of hip hoppers collectively hold 75 years of work experience, over 600 songs produced and over 12 million copies sold. Comparably, the non-hip hoppers also boast similar work experiences, and in some cases more music sales.

### Participant observer/researcher

Brand, Advertising and Marketing Communications consultant. Senior Lecturer.

Live touring vocalist and bass guitarist, throughout Europe and parts of Central Asia, at major music festivals (Rock, Asian Underground, Electronica).

Songwriting (hip hop genre) and performance credits on a video game series, which have collectively grossed in excess of 70 million copies and \$120 million worldwide.

Session bass guitarist credits on a critically acclaimed World Music studio albums.

### Hip hoppers – Professional interest

*Respondent 1.* Globally acclaimed songwriter, music-producer, vocalist, guitarist and drummer for record labels, film, adverts and video games.

Music genres: Hip hop, R'n'B, Pop, Electronica, Guitar, Reggae, Dance, World Music.

Over 16 years of professional experience.

Over 600 songs written and/or produced.

Worldwide, multi-platinum, gold and top 40 album/single achievements, for major and independent record labels: 8 million tracks sold individually and 4 million as part of a collective.

*Respondent 2.* Songwriter, music-producer, club DJ, independent record label owner.

Music genres: Hip hop, Drum 'n' Bass, Asian Underground, Electronica.

Over 14 years of commercial and professional experience, in the United Kingdom, Europe, India and North America.

*Respondent 3.* Songwriter, music-producer and vocalist.

Music genres: Hip hop, Drum 'n' Bass, Asian Underground, Electronica.

Over 20 years of professional experience, in the United Kingdom, Europe, India and North America.

*Respondent 4.* Music-producer, club DJ and Radio DJ for the world's largest and autonomous public service broadcaster independent record label owner.

Music genres: Hip hop, Drum 'n' Bass, Asian Underground, Electronica.

Over 10 years of professional experience, in the United Kingdom, Europe, India and North America.

*Respondent 5.* Music-producer, songwriter, club DJ and award-winning radio DJ/television presenter for the world's largest and autonomous public service broadcaster independent record label owner.

Music genres: Hip hop, Drum 'n' Bass, Asian Underground, Electronica.

Over 15 years of professional experience, in the United Kingdom, Europe, India and North America.

### Hip hoppers – Personal interest:

*Respondent 6.* Graphic designer, illustrator, web-designer and brand consultant.

Over 12 years of professional experience, in the United Kingdom.

Personal non-professional interest in: Hip hop, Drum 'n' Bass, Jungle, Dance, R'n'B, Reggae, Disco, Electronica, Guitar.

DJ-mixes and Plays Guitar Hero for pleasure.

*Respondent 7.* Former music contract lawyer, handling several major label recording artists.

Currently a sports agent, managing some of the world's top title-holding UFC/MMA fighters (Ultimate Fighting

Championship and Mixed Martial Arts), attracting viewing figures of over 20 million in Asia alone.

Personal non-professional interest in: Hip hop and Jazz.

### Non-Hip hoppers:

*Respondent 8.* Portrait artist, Major-label signed songwriter, Rock guitarist and vocalist.

Over 24 years of professional experience, in Europe and the Far East.

Music genres: Guitar and World Music.

*Respondent 9.* Company-owner and executive music producer for TV, film and chart. Music composer, music programmer, club DJ, marketer, marketing lecturer.

Over 10 years of professional experience in the UK.

Over 170 songs produced.

20 million tracks sold for international record labels.

*Respondent 10.* Former bass guitarist and songwriter in a world renowned rock group, advertising executive for the world's largest communications services group, music recording and promotions company director.

Over 8 years experience.

Music genre: Guitar.

Global music sales in excess of 40 000 units.

*Respondent 11.* Digital Manager responsible for online and social networks at a UK museum, which charts musical experiences in the United Kingdom.

Strong personal interest in music, in all its forms.

*Respondent 12.* Professor of Management and Entrepreneurship.

Personal interest in Pop and former Club DJ.

*Respondent 13.* Solicitor.

Personal interest in Guitar (Indie/Grunge) and 1960s music.

Portrait painter and hobbyist guitarist.

## APPENDIX C

Below are select exhibits of song lyrics fed into *Wordle* [www.wordle.net/]. *Wordle* is a tool that generates 'word clouds' from text that is inserted into a field. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text.

Artists work was selected from the period of 1985–2008, according to:

1. Notoriety – Owing to: sales, awards, magazine reviews and fan polls
2. Lyrical content that discusses Hip hop. Songs with themes that did not address hip hop culture in any significance were rejected.

*Note:* Following this, argot/slang verbs and nouns were subsequently translated and synthesised, supported by adverbs and adjectives – in order to allow for grouping under key themes. It was apparent that although some slang shared a commonality amongst artists, others created their own meaning and usage of words, according to context.

Examples:

- *Dog:* Hip hop friend (human).
- *Shaolin:* is used initially by the Wu Tang Clan to describe Staten Island, New York; but has subsequently been adopted by other artists, as a show of solidarity and affiliation.
- *Shit:* has multiple meanings, ranging from musical tracks, to skills, and clothing. Its use as a noun, often denotes ownership of a positive possession; as opposed to its use as an adjective – which is used to classify something as being of poor quality.

See Figure C1–C4.







