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MADONNA'S FOUR-DECADE INFLUENCE: BRAND STRATEGY AND GLOBAL IMPACT OF THE CELEBRATION TOUR RIO DE JANEIRO

Abstract. Madonna, a well-known musician and entertainer who has remained at the top of her game for over 40 years, is also a marketing and brand strategist. This research explores the evolution of global perceptions around her brand following her 2024 Celebration Tour, culminating in a record-breaking closing concert in Rio de Janeiro attended by 1.6 million people. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of Aaker's and Keller's brand equity models, the study employs a quantitative methodology using a self-administered online questionnaire distributed among Madonna's international fan communities. The survey examined the most important components of brand equity. The results suggest that Madonna has a firm stronghold in the entertainment world. Notably, most respondents reported that the 2024 tour enhanced her brand's value on a global scale. This longstanding impact shows her capacity to continue to be an iconic cultural figure and confirms the longevity and power of her brand.

Keywords: brand perception, brand image, brand equity, Madonna's influence, online music communities

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1. Introduction

Since her rise to fame more than 40 years ago, Madonna, singer and cultural icon, has achieved unprecedented musical, material, and artistic success (Guilbert, 2020). She has established herself as a controversial and provocative thinker, consistently finding herself at the center of endless controversy (Alexander, 2010).

Much of this is owed to the ever-changing persona that accompanies her career. From her debut album to the present, constant changes in style, musical genres, artistic imagery, and how she presents herself to the world have occurred. This has awarded her the title *Queen of Reinvention*, many times shocking the world in the process. At the same time, she has revealed positive changes in culture, gender roles, social views, and innovations in the music business (Guilbert, 2020).

Although Madonna's reinventions are an emblematic constant aspect of her career, scholars have found them to reflect her own creative will rather than a coherent guiding theme (Mole, 2004). Madonna holds records for the highest-grossing solo tour of all time, the most consecutive Top 10 hits on the Billboard Hot 100, the most number one song on the United States dance chart, and the most weeks at number one on the mainstream Top 40 by a female artist.

From the time Madonna started her career, she has managed to transition from a sweetheart, pink, and innocent singer obsessed with sex to become an icon, a champion of minorities and the discriminated against, and fully engaged with the struggle for peace and the environment (Gaugler, 2000).

Madonna's unique branding, artistic, and business initiatives have enabled her to achieve the status of a brand with global mass appeal. This enduring success can be analyzed through the lens of brand equity and identity building based on the conceptualized work of authors Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993), which considers the added value that a brand name and its variables and implications bring to a product or a service, and the entertainment industry, to a Celebrity brand as the one Madonna has carefully built for the last four decades.

As a result, an important research question arises: How have global perceptions of Madonna's brand evolved following her 2024 Celebration

Tour? Through this study, we aim to explore the perception of Madonna's brand following her 2024 Celebration Tour.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Brand image and equity in the music industry

According to Aaker (1991, p. 7), brand equity is a category of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand's name and logo that contributes or subtracts value from a product or service. These include brand loyalty, brand reputation, perceived superiority, brand associations, and more.

Similarly, Keller (1993, p. 8) defines customer-based brand equity as the difference between brand knowledge and how the customer responds to its brand marketing. Brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and perception, both important to develop. In the music industry, these theories assume that a singer's brand equity is developed via brand building, brand recognition, good brand associations, and good perceived quality (Keller, 2003, p. 143). Brand image refers to the meanings and emotions a brand evokes for consumers, while brand equity refers to the additional value these meanings and emotions add to the brand (Shin et al., 2014, p. 2).

Creating a unique, strong brand image can be significant as it helps artists differentiate themselves, sustain long-term relationships with fans, and obtain long-lasting consumer loyalty and engagement (Ganesha & Aithal, 2020, p. 282). A crucial aspect of developing a strong brand image is the ability to trigger specific emotions and feelings in consumers' minds (Saleky et al., 2018, p. 174). Such emotional connections can be created through the artist's image, musical style, marketing campaigns, and interactions with their fanbase. By addressing their target audience's values and emotions, artists can create an enduring relationship and build a brand identity (Doyle, 2012, p. 465).

Today, branding has become more about personal and celebrity brands than product and company brands. With the rise of the celebrity phenomenon and the increasing importance of identity, personal branding and celebrity branding have emerged as important components of the marketing landscape (Scheidt et al., 2020, p. 1).

Celebrity branding is not new, as many individuals have used their identities as a vehicle for success (Scheidt et al., 2020, p. 1). Celebrities can be considered human brands (Thomson, 2006, p. 105), and managing their brand equity involves applying the same principles outlined by Aaker and Keller; for example, maintaining brand awareness, building positive and strong brand associations, and providing perceived quality are all key elements to their brand equity.

2.2. The impact of live performances on artist brand equity

From a marketing perspective, live performances help solidify personal brand equity for music artists, as their live shows affect brand identity (Auslander, 2008, p. 94). They allow artists to strengthen their brand promise and build brand equity over time. According to Keller (2001, p. 19), experiential marketing activities such as concerts can also create brand recall and consumer affinity through brand connection and consumer relationship building.

The more consumers enjoy a live performance and have a memorable experience when attending a concert, the more inclined they are to become valued brand loyalists (Thaler et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2020; Thornton & Burkhalter, 2015). Delivering inspiring live shows that provide memorable experiences for fans creates opportunities to enhance music artists' brand identity and brand promise.

Moreover, sharing feedback about the performance can influence brand perceptions among concert attendees and the public. This feedback benefits the brand through greater word-of-mouth, increased social media activity, and positive media exposure (Alves et al., 2018, p. 122).

Considering live performances as a form of event marketing—a type of marketing that has become one of the most effective ways to develop brand equity and make a strong emotional connection with an audience—celebrity and personal branding leave lasting impressions on audiences (Nufer, 2015, p. 15).

2.3. Madonna's brand image and equity building through the years

Throughout her career, Madonna has engaged in deliberate and methodical efforts to shape her persona and image, helping to ensure her status as a marketable artist and steering her seemingly unstoppable rise to become the most successful female artist in pop culture history.

Madonna's brand equity is the extra value her brand name adds to her products (Ganesha & Aithal, 2020, p 282). This manifests in how consumers think, feel, and act regarding her persona and artistic output, shaping whether they choose to stay engaged with her work (Chen, 2010, p. 309).

Given that highly subjective traits such as reputation, emotional connection, and perceived quality are often the primary purchasing criteria for consumers in the entertainment business—as well as in many other sectors of the creative economy—robust brand equity concerning these drivers is crucial to securing long-term profitability and success. Madonna has successfully built brand equity, and her brand management is in line with Aaker's and Keller's concepts.

2.3.1. Image, music, and public persona

The singer's image has played a profound role in the evolution of her brand. However, her music and public persona have also been significant factors. Audiences admire her ability to explore musical genres that are sometimes entirely different, ranging from mainstream pop and electronic to world music (Arranz, 2012, p. 179).

Moreover, the cultural meanings and significations—or myriad interpretations of attributes such as empowerment and transgressive sexuality (Waser, 2020, p. 1) – associated with the Madonna brand have also played a role in ensuring its longevity. Consumers often identify with Madonna, sometimes in opposition to authority and tradition, and appropriate her meanings as part of their own identity (Childs, 1993, p. 70).

The way Madonna carefully orchestrates her brand associations – empowerment, innovation, and controversy – is in line with Keller's (1993) insistence on the need for powerful, positive, and distinctive

brand associations to promote brand loyalty. Her relentless reinventions create brand resonance, the climax of Keller's (2001) Brand Equity Pyramid in which consumers experience a profound psychological connection with the brand.

2.3.2. *Cultural strategy*

Madonna's brand strategy has been anchored by developing substantial cultural brand capital and identity; her brand has been socially constructed to accommodate many cultural dynamics (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 575). This refers to creating and maintaining social and cultural capital to create a strong brand (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014, p. 110).

Her ability to take advantage of and influence cultural trends has enabled her to become a "cultrepreneur" – an artist who uses cultural capital to establish a commercial brand (O'Reilly, 2005, p. 582). Madonna has built her personal brand around the people who love her, carefully curating her image and employing music and art as outlets to build herself up as a cultural powerhouse that transcends the confines of the entertainment industry (Rodner & Kerrigan, 2014, p. 103).

The cultural aspect of Madonna's brand approach is also strong. She uses her music and public persona to express social issues, generating an aesthetic and culturally relevant brand image (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 67). She also reaches out to an array of different audience segments on multiple fronts.

Madonna's brand heavily depends on a robust cultural strategy that allows her to align with important social causes and cultural movements (Childs, 1993, p. 70). Throughout her career, she has been an outspoken proponent of the LGBTQ+ community, female empowerment, and autonomy, women's independence and self-expression, gender and power dynamics, HIV/AIDS awareness, fighting against racism and religious hypocrisy, minority advocacy, and addressing gun violence in the United States, spreading messages of acceptance and equality (Wilson & Markle, 1992, p. 82). This continual reinvention and adaptation reinforce her brand's alignment with significant cultural conversations and social movements.

3. Historical context and significance of Madonna's Celebration Tour

The Celebration Tour, which took place between October 14, 2023, and May 4, 2024, was a retrospective musical event celebrating the singer's 40-year career and back catalog. It started at the O2 Arena in London and concluded with a free concert at Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The tour played a record-breaking 80 shows to an audience of 1.1 million and grossed USD 225.4 million (Frankenberg, 2024). On the tour's closing night at Copacabana Beach, the show attracted an additional 1.6 million people.

The Celebration Tour, in its main run, had the following notable dates:

- London, The O2 Arena: The first four of six shows in the city grossed \$14.7 million, with a total attendance of 60,000 visitors (Askeroff, 2023).
- Paris, Accor Arena: Four shows grossed \$10.7 million, with 62,000 tickets sold (Askeroff, 2023).
- Mexico City, Palacio de los Deportes: Five shows grossed \$14.8 million, with 82,400 tickets sold (Askeroff, 2023).

- *The Rio de Janeiro Concert*

The Rio de Janeiro Concert was a free concert on May 4, 2024. More than 1.6 million people attended. This performance was the largest audience of her career and a record for the largest audience ever for a standalone concert—the largest all-time crowd ever for a female artist. According to Billboard, this free concert produced a USD 57 million economic impact for the city, far exceeding the USD 10 million spent on the concert investment. Madonna was paid over USD 3.4 million for her performance (Del Rosario, 2024).

- *Significance and Impact*

Both the Celebration Tour and the record-breaking performance in Rio de Janeiro solidified her as a pop culture icon and one of the most financially

successful touring acts of the time. Madonna was able not only to reflect on her career advancements but also to honor her influences and peers in the show's content and performances, reaching a high emotional level with her fans (Ganz, 2023). This deep emotional connection contributes to brand resonance, one element of Keller's (2001) Brand Equity Pyramid, where customers feel a strong psychological bond with the brand.

- *The Tour as a reflection of brand values*

The tour was representative of Madonna's wider influences. She has been the most visible public voice for LGBT+ rights, gender equality, and freedom of expression. The Celebration Tour was both a musical and cultural statement, reflecting all the themes of empowerment and social change central to her brand (Keller, 1993).

- *Media coverage and public reception*

News outlets worldwide covered the Rio de Janeiro concert with critical acclaim and on-the-ground reporting. The show featured seamless technical production and a remarkable performance from Madonna, boasting her usual energetic charisma. The setlist, featuring many of her timeless hits, among others, appealed to a wide and "multigenerational" audience, as one critic noted. Madonna's show was well-regarded and lauded for its slickness and spectacle (Snapes, 2023).

- *Brazilian media coverage*

Brazilian newspapers highlighted the cultural significance of the concert. They described the gathering as one of the most important cultural events for the community and emphasized the spectacle's position within popular culture. They focused their accounts on the artist's voice, her long-lasting relationship with Brazilian culture, the 1.6 million fans who attended the show, as well as the significance of the spectacle for both Madonna and the Brazilian audience (Peters, 2024).

- *International media coverage*

In the broader global context, international media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *Billboard* positioned the concert within the scope of Madonna's career and its significance as the conclusion of her Celebration Tour. They focused on her status as a pop icon. They envisioned the concert as part of her enduring brand legacy, offering a broader perspective on her impact on the music industry (Milhorane & Jacobs, 2024).

4. Methodology

A survey method based on exploratory research was designed to conduct this study. Exploratory research is often employed when the goal is to provide background information, familiarize researchers with a general subject, and explore some relationships between variables (Johnson & Christensen, 2020, p 72).

In this case, ideas more than conclusions were sought after, looking forward to diverse perspectives instead of representative samples. The goal was to obtain information about the beliefs, perceptions, personalities, and thoughts of the research participants about the Madonna brand across a broad audience.

Brand equity and consumer satisfaction related questions to celebrity branding and event marketing were carefully crafted adhering to the following criteria: This study was planned to take advantage of the existing loyal customers as this has many benefits, such brand equity, image loyalty, reputation, perceptions, associations, and more as fans' buying habits (Mao, 2010, p. 214). Customers who remain loyal tend to leave genuine comments and feedback that can help produce the best results. Their engagement is generally stronger and more focused, making their opinion useful and taking advantage of the loyal consumer's point of view (Agnihotri, 2023, p. 115).

This kind of segmentation was chosen to target the musician's fandom. Brand equity in the musical industry is mostly developed by close emotional relationships with the fans of an artist. Learning about what aspects of the Brand specifically makes fans feel closer to the musician, in this case, Madonna, could give us an understanding of how her brand is generally perceived (Thomson, 2006, p. 111).

Given the research goals and the theoretical framework outlined in Aaker's (1991) and Keller's (1993) theories of brand equity, we created a preliminary set of questions focusing on key constructs such as brand image, brand equity, brand associations, perceived quality, brand loyalty, and purchase intentions.

To ensure the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness, it was pilot tested with 26 Madonna fans worldwide via a Madonna fan forum. This pilot group provided valuable feedback on the wording and cultural adaptability of the items. They commented on how clear, relevant, and comprehensive the questions were. Based on their feedback, some questions were restructured, unnecessary items were eliminated, and additional response options were included to accommodate a wider range of answers.

Aware of Madonna's worldwide audience, the survey was translated into three languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese. This multilingual approach was intended to increase accessibility and encourage participation from fans across different linguistic backgrounds.

Participants were recruited via Madonna fan Facebook groups. Inclusion criteria required participants to be at least 18 years of age and self-identified as confirmed Madonna fans. Leveraging these online fan communities allowed us to reach a diverse and engaged audience who were likely to provide meaningful insights into Madonna's brand perception.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaire incorporated pre-existing scales from the literature: Brand Image was measured using items adapted from Aaker's (1997) Brand Personality Scale, Brand Equity was assessed based on Keller's (2001) Customer-Based Brand Equity Model and Purchase Intentions were measured using the scale developed by Spears and Singh (2004).

All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This scaling allowed for quantifying attitudes and beliefs, facilitating statistical analysis of the responses.

Data was collected over four weeks in June 2024, one month after the completion of the Celebration Tour. The electronic questionnaire-maintained anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with ethical research guidelines. Participants were informed about the study objectives before beginning the questionnaire, ensuring informed consent. No

personally identifiable information was collected, preserving participant anonymity. A total of 200 responses were received.

5. Findings

5.1. Sociodemographic profile in relation to Madonna brand perception

The sociodemographic profile of the participants (Figure 1) provides some context for understanding how the Madonna brand is perceived after the Rio de Janeiro Concert. With a significant majority – 72 % – identifying as male, this could reflect how Madonna's image, messaging, and evolution as an artist have resonated strongly with male audiences over the years. It may also indicate the influence of specific cultural or social dynamics, where male fans engage more actively in fan communities or feel a stronger connection to the brand. The age distribution further deepens our understanding of the brand's perception. The largest group of respondents falls within the 45- to 54-year-old age range, making up 45% of the sample. The second-largest group, aged 35 to 44, represents 27% of the sample.

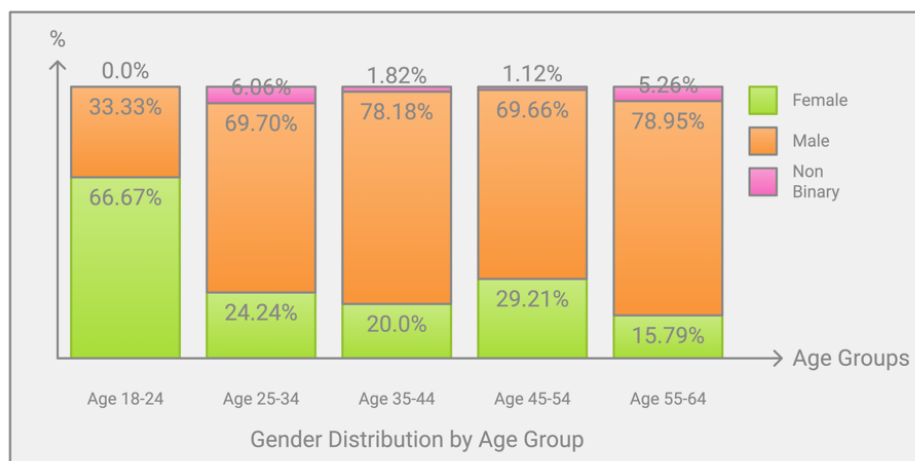


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by age and gender

These two groups, predominantly part of *Generation X*, grew up with Madonna's music during the height of her career in the 1980s and early 2000s. Their perception of the Madonna brand is likely influenced by a long-standing relationship with her work, viewing her not just as an artist but as a significant cultural moment from their youth, given that *Generation X* is characterized by bridging pre-digital and digital eras, political shifts, economic fluctuations and diverse social activism (Katz, 2017, p.16). As Bordes points out, generations have been "shaped by their common history and influences by common icons, events and conditions that become reference points for them, which ends in shared values and behaviors" (Derecskei, 2018, p. 109).

The 16% of respondents aged 25 to 34 may have a different perception of the Madonna brand, as they were exposed to her work during a period when her legacy was already well-established. However, her new releases may not have had the same cultural impact as earlier in her career. Their perception might be shaped more by her status as a pop culture legend rather than a current music trendsetter.

As Figure 1 shows, the gender and age distribution of respondents suggests that Madonna's Brand holds a powerful appeal among older male audiences who likely have a long-term connection with her music and what she has represented throughout their cultural lives. These demographic characteristics may value her as a symbol of reinvention in the ever-changing pop culture landscape. As it will be shown in the next section, this could be related to the nationality of the participants.

5.2. Geographic distribution in relation to Madonna brand perception

Just like the age and gender of the respondents, the geographic distribution of the respondents broadens the understanding of how Madonna's brand is perceived across different countries and continents. The data reflects participation from various regions, with a noticeable concentration in certain areas, as shown in Figure 2.

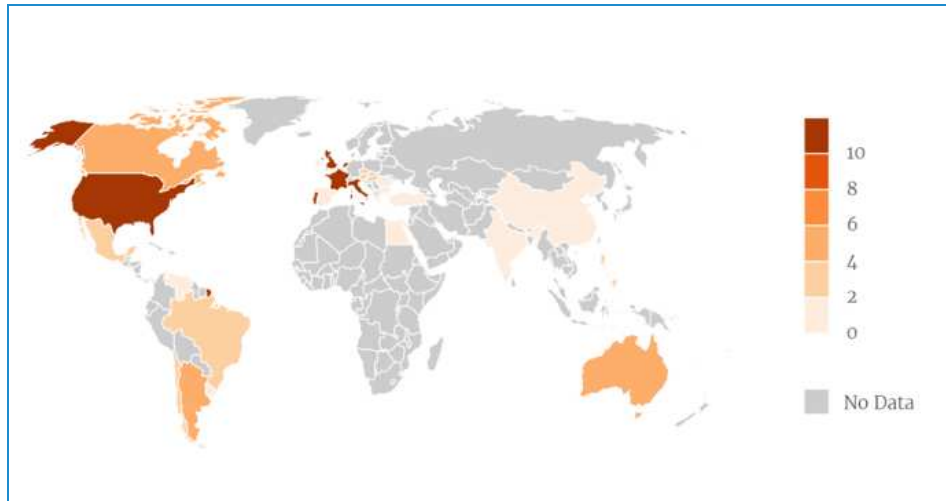


Figure 2. Geographic distribution of the study's participants

Survey participants originated from various regions globally, with a notably higher concentration in Europe and North America. Specifically, 50% of respondents were from Europe, and 35% were from North America, indicating more substantial recognition and engagement with the Madonna brand in these regions.

Europe had the highest representation among survey respondents, followed closely by North America. This pattern is likely attributable to Madonna's origin and her prominence as an American performer, which resonates deeply with audiences due to cultural proximity and the pervasive influence of American popular culture. As Straubhaar (2009, p. 51) highlights, cultural proximity implies that consumers seek out media in a culturally similar or familiar format. Western values, and cultural norms seem to better correspond to those represented by Madonna, American popular music and culture have always dominated audience tastes mass circulation.

5.3. Respondents' perceptions on Madonna's brand

As shown in Figure 3, the data illustrates a significant shift in the perception of Madonna's brand following the Rio de Janeiro concert. Positive descriptors

such as “Positive” (147 mentions), “Iconic” (147 mentions), “Memorable” (129 mentions), “Strong” (115 mentions), and “Relevant” (89 mentions) overwhelmingly dominate the responses. In total, these positive attributes were mentioned 627 times, accounting for approximately 96% of all descriptors used. This substantial affirmation underscores Madonna’s enduring appeal and the profound impact of the concert on her audience.

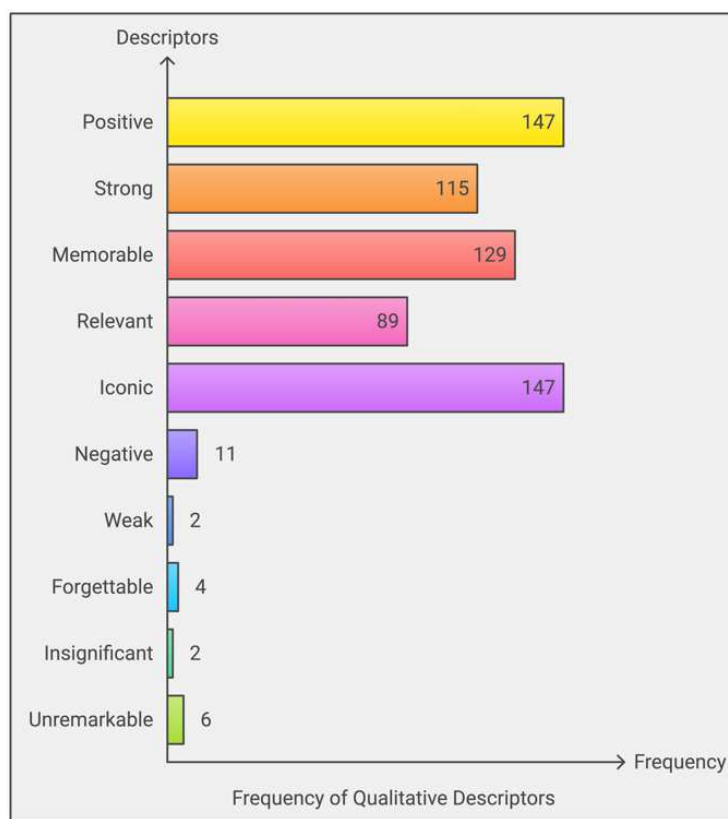


Figure 3. Contrasts in perceptions of Madonna’s brand after Rio de Janeiro concert

Conversely, non-positive descriptors are markedly less frequent. “Negative” was mentioned only 11 times, while “Unremarkable” (6 mentions), “Forgettable” (4 mentions), “Weak” (2 mentions), and “Insignificant” (2 mentions) collectively received just 25 mentions, representing about

4% of the total descriptors. This significant disparity indicates that the Rio de Janeiro concert was predominantly perceived favorably by the respondents.

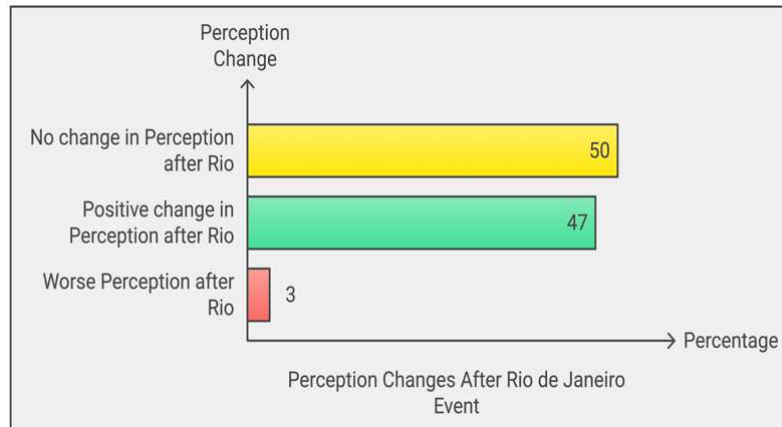


Figure 4. Changes in Madonna's brand perceptions after the Rio de Janeiro concert

As observed in Figure 4, 50% of respondents indicated that their perception of the Madonna brand remained unchanged after the concert, while 47% reported a positive change in their perception. Only 3% mentioned that their perception of the brand changed negatively. When contrasting this data with perceptions of Madonna's brand globally, it is notable that 89% of respondents believe there was a positive impact on the brand, 8% think there was no change, and only 3% feel that the concert did not have a significant impact on the global perception. For Keller (1993, p. 9), powerful experiences, like live entertainment, could increase brand resonance and customer-centered brand equity by creating heightened brand recall and consumer-brand engagement.

47% of participants perceived an improvement, which indicates that live concerts can help sustain or strengthen a brand's consumer impressions. Thomson (2006, p. 113) confirms this, concluding that close engagement with a celebrity or human brand can enhance emotional bonds and positively impact consumer impressions and attachments.

With only a moderate negative change of 3%, it is unlikely that the concert had a detrimental impact on Madonna's brand perception. Low negative sentiment is important to brand consistency because positive

and dependable consumer opinions lead to stable brand equity (Aaker, 1996, p. 11).

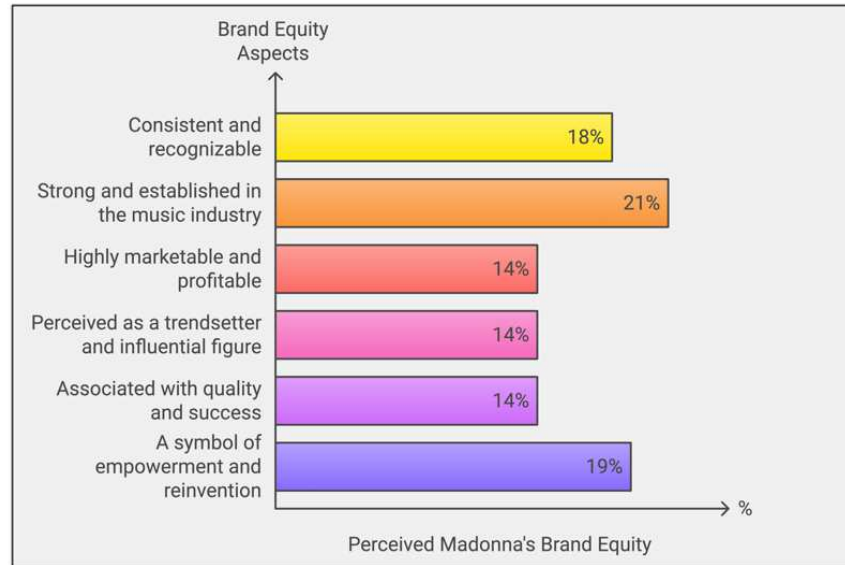


Figure 5. Perceived Madonna's brand equity

The respondents' perceptions of Madonna's brand highlight several key attributes contributing to her enduring success in the music industry (see Figure 5). The largest percentage of respondents, 18%, described Madonna as "strong and established in the music industry." The second-largest group, 16%, characterized her as a "symbol of empowering others and reinvention." Additionally, 15% of respondents indicated that her brand is "consistent and identifiable." Twelve percent viewed her as a "trendsetter and influential." At the same time, 10% perceived her as a "culture creator and innovator," suggesting that she continues to wield significant influence in cultural and social spheres.

Furthermore, 12% associated Madonna's brand with "quality and success," implying that she sets and maintains high standards in her work, leading to successful outcomes. Another 12% linked her brand to the commercial aspects of celebrity, describing her as "highly marketable and profitable."

As defined by Aaker (1997, p. 347), brand personality is the repertoire of human traits about a brand that may influence consumer preferences and brand loyalty. Madonna's strong, empowered, innovative, and consistent personality gives her brand equity and appeal to people. What is seen as a symbol of empowerment and reinvention was her resilience and willingness to change, mirroring Kapferer's (2008, p. 39) idea of brand identity: that a brand must be relevant, staying on the cutting edge of contemporary values and cultural developments.

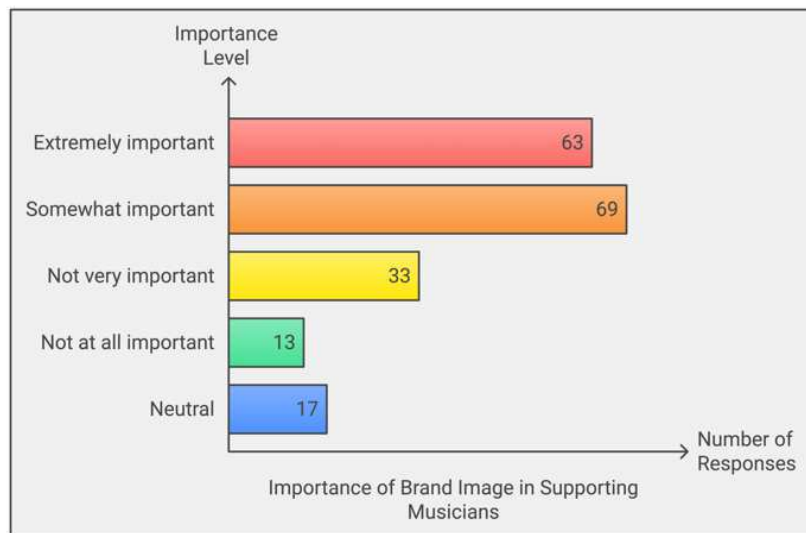


Figure 6. Importance of brand image to support a musician or a band

Regarding the importance assigned to brand image, as shown in Figure 6, it is notable that a powerful brand image is important for most respondents when considering whether to support a musician or band. Specifically, 67% stated that brand image is "extremely important" or "somewhat important." These findings suggest that brand image plays a significant role in consumers' decision-making process. Conversely, 24% of respondents attribute less importance to brand image. In this sense, Keller (1993, p. 3) states that brand image (or images of a brand represented in terms of brand associations in consumer memory) is an integral element of customer-generated brand equity.

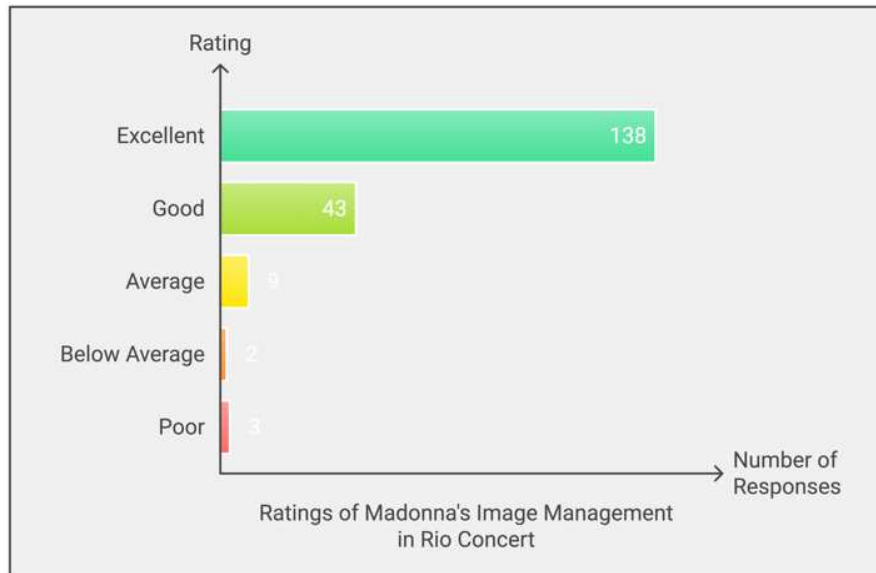


Figure 7. Management of Madonna's image during the Rio de Janeiro concert

As illustrated in Figure 7, most respondents rated the management of Madonna's image during the Rio de Janeiro concert as "Excellent" (71%) or "Good" (22%). These findings suggest that the event was perceived positively by attendees and may have significantly strengthened Madonna's brand image in the minds of her audience.

Herrmann et al. (2000, p.85) point out that positive word of mouth and brand loyalty can result from satisfied customers who experience good service, such as a concert. The fact that 80% of respondents gave the image management a score of "Excellent" or "Good" indicates that Madonna did a great job of leveraging the show to maintain her brand equity in a highly competitive industry.

Respondents perceived that the Rio de Janeiro concert substantially augmented international perceptions of the Madonna brand (Figure 8). Overall, 80% agreed that the concert was a positive enhancer of the brand's value, while very few respondents regarded its impact as neutral or negligible. Event marketing studies have revealed that performances improve consumer relationships and positively affect brand perceptions by establishing a close emotional connection (Close et al., 2006).

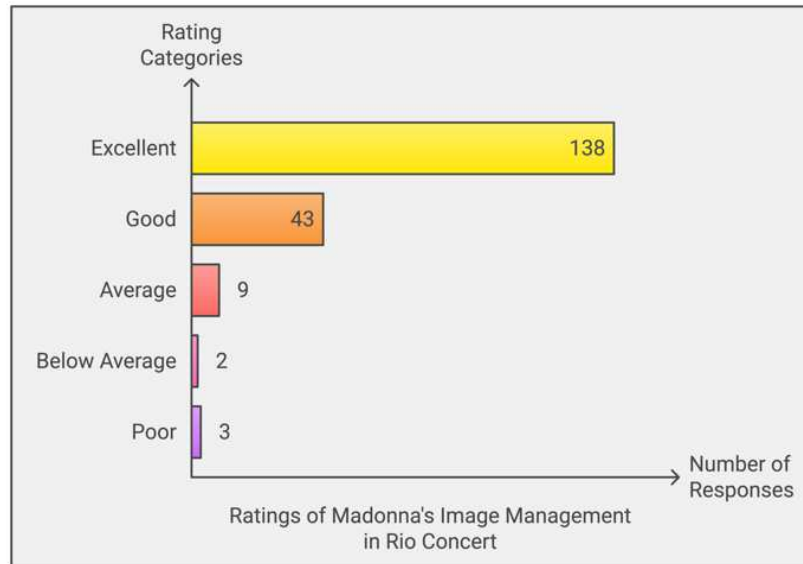


Figure 8. Global perception of Madonna's brand after Rio de Janeiro concert

When asked how authentic the Madonna brand became after the Rio de Janeiro concert, as illustrated in Figure 9, 79% think that it is "very authentic", cementing the idea of Madonna's genuine, truly-herself brand image. Another 13% find her brand somewhat authentic. A small, but still significant, minority of people remain neutral, 6% or thought that Madonna's brand became somewhat inauthentic after the concert, 2%. In the same way, about brand consistency, the 83% of respondents holding a positive perception is encouraging for any brand persona since most of her viewing/reading audience sees her own valuation of her brand as a top priority – and for a major brand celebrity like Madonna, it is.

According to Moulard et al. (2015, p. 174), perceived authenticity in celebrities is an important boost to brand equity, which in turn increases emotional attachment and fan loyalty. In the same vein, Schultz et al. (2014, p. 426) emphasized that consistency of a celebrity brand identity was essential to building and maintaining brand equity, as a consistent brand message creates consumer trust and recognition.

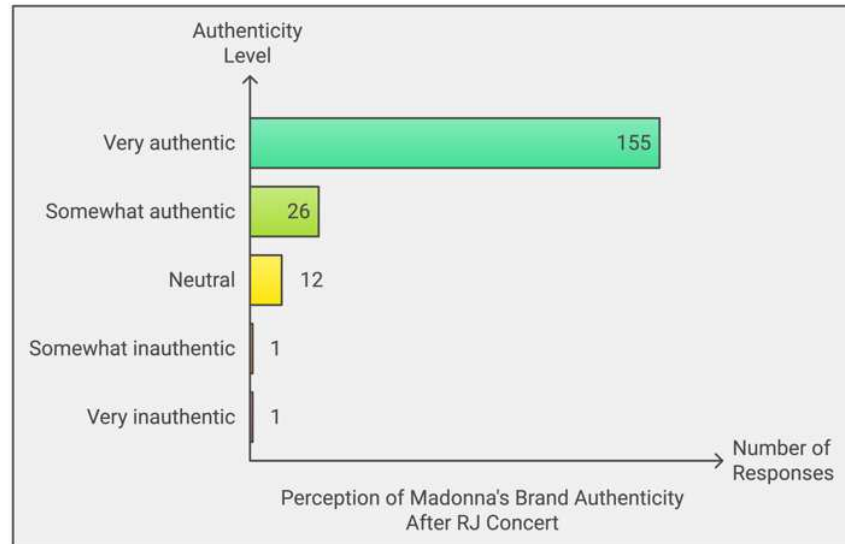


Figure 9. Authenticity of Madonna's brand after the Rio de Janeiro concert

In other brand-related questions in our analysis, the primary factors contributing to Madonna's brand equity were her ability to engage with the audience and her talent, with additional contributions from her public image and role as a spokesperson. Compared to other iconic musicians, 67% of respondents believed Madonna's brand equity was much stronger after the event.

The concert also had impact on purchase behaviour: 64% of the respondents reinforced by the concert, while 13% made new purchases, 23% reported no change in their buying habits. Thomson (2006, p. 105) mentions that fandoms grow attached to their admired celebrity, building brand loyalties, and influencing buying decisions. Seno and Lukas (2007, p. 125) further note that a well-managed celebrity brand might even seem more desirable if they can communicate their brand value proposition consistently well.

All the previous data highlights the concert's success in strengthening Madonna's brand, boosting fan engagement, and reinforcing her influence in music and popular culture.

6. Discussion

The influence of Madonna's brand among an older audience, specifically Generation X (aged 45-54), who witnessed her rise to stardom, can be attributed both to her longevity in the music business and her ability to foster strong brand loyalty over decades. According to Aaker (1991, p. 39), brand loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity, representing a consumer's commitment to a brand; this loyalty contributes to the stability in brand perception among this group, with many reporting a positive change after the concert. Madonna's ability to curate and cultivate a strong brand identity aligns with Keller's (2001) concept of brand resonance, where consumers feel a deep psychological bond with the brand (Anderson & Kupp, 2006).

An examination of the distribution of responses reveals the stronghold that Madonna's brand currently holds, mainly in North America 57% and Europe 35%. These are the regions where the star experienced most of her success, and the media has covered her most intensely (Canavan & McCamley, 2020). This extensive exposure has contributed to high levels of brand awareness, a fundamental component of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). Her brand plays a particularly central role in the world of pop culture. Described as a "global multimedia phenomenon" (Arranz, 2012, p. 173), Madonna's brand crosses over generations – appealing to the youth of the 1980s and 2000s and to the parents and grandparents of today's consumers. This intergenerational appeal reflects strong and favorable brand associations, which, according to Keller (1993, p. 9), enhance brand equity by creating positive attitudes and feelings toward the brand. It still holds special meaning in the countries where she had her most successful career; her iconic status and the cultural significance of her brand retain their most forceful impact in these regions over the most extended period (Jesús, 2021, p. 29).

In addition, the high percentage of fans in North America can be explained by what Qyll (2020) calls "Madonna's Americanism," rooted in "Madonna's biographical roots in the Midwest of the USA and in the diverse references to American culture within her world of brand imagery" (p. 63). These strong brand associations with American culture enhance her brand equity in these regions, aligning with Aaker's (1991) emphasis on the value of brand associations in building brand equity.

Moreover, Madonna is proposed as the pinnacle of the fading postmodern era in pop music ages (Canavan & McCamley, 2020, p. 225). Her songs and lyrics are highlighted as markers of this cultural phase, offering insights into how these themes resonate with and influence consumer behavior. Her ability to adapt and remain relevant across different cultural phases enhances her brand image, contributing to strong brand associations that influence consumer behavior (Keller, 1993). Madonna is an artist who has traversed different eras, from pre-postmodernism to the present, which explains why her fan base spans such a wide range of ages (Canavan & McCamley, 2020, p. 225).

Regarding Madonna's brand perception after the Rio de Janeiro concert, both personal and global, many respondents' answers echo the strong and favorable impact of the event: Positive, Iconic, and Memorable perceptions were the most notable among other associations. This significant shift in perceptions made her brand more positively perceived afterward, and Madonna maintained her position as a prominent music icon following the concert. The quality and consistency of a live performance can significantly contribute to improving perceived quality and brand loyalty, key components of brand equity (Swarbrick et al., 2019, p. 2).

The dual perception of consistency and reinvention – 'consistent and recognizable' versus 'empowerment and reinvention' – might seem like opposing principles, but Madonna's enduring appeal as a brand rests precisely on her success in balancing both. This balance reflects Keller's (2003) notion that strong brands must stay relevant by adapting to changing consumer needs while maintaining a consistent brand identity. Her longevity comes from the coherence of her brand, existing in productive tension with her capacity for reinvention. Madonna's brand is known by fans for its capacity for innovation, which strengthens her brand equity by keeping brand associations fresh and engaging.

Respondents described the Madonna brand following the Rio de Janeiro concert as mainly Positive, Iconic, Memorable mentions overwhelmingly dominate the responses. of brand personality, which contributes to brand equity by fostering trust and emotional connections with consumers (Aaker, 1997). It is her 'authentic voice,' symbiotic with her skills as an influencer, cements her role as the cultural arbiter par excellence. This strong perception of authenticity enhances her brand equity by creating favorable brand associations and deepening brand resonance (Keller, 2001).

She has cultivated a repertoire that balances authenticity with reinvention, taking charge of her messages and communications across all media. In terms of cultural influence, this mastery of authenticity has been a vital factor in allowing Madonna to continue as an agent of meaning.

The closing concert strongly reinforced fans' purchasing decisions – 64% of respondents agreed that the Rio concert further cemented their decision to purchase merchandise and music. This increase in purchase intentions reflects the impact of enhanced brand equity on consumer behavior, consistent with Keller's (1993) model where strong brand equity leads to more favorable consumer responses. This emphasizes live performance as a moment of contact that helps solidify fans' connection with the brand while providing economic activity for the artist. The live concert served as an experiential marketing event that deepened brand resonance, encouraging fans to engage more actively with the brand. The study shows that during and after the show, the brand could convert passive listeners into active consumers.

Madonna's brand equity is perceived to be stronger than that of other iconic musicians after the Rio de Janeiro show. The fact that 67% of respondents believe her brand is "much stronger" than that of competitors indicates that the show did not just maintain her place in the industry; it also created more separation from her contemporaries. This perception of superior brand equity gives Madonna a competitive advantage in the industry, as strong brand equity enhances customer loyalty and reduces vulnerability to competitive actions (Aaker, 1991). This is the ultimate endorsement of her legacy, confirming that her brand not only remains relevant today but continues to surpass those of her peers. As Canavan and McCamley (2020, p. 227) state, "Madonna will continue to find large audiences as long as she represents and combines the postmodern aspects of critique of the marketable commercial sensationalism of the fragmented spectacle".

Through this study, it becomes evident that brand image continues to be an important element for Madonna's music fans as a means of retaining and sustaining their enduring connection with her. By continually managing her brand image and nurturing long-term relationships with fans, Madonna exemplifies effective brand equity management, ensuring sustained brand resonance and loyalty (Keller, 2001). Indeed, she continually manages her brand by building long-term relationships with them.

7. Conclusion

This analysis of Madonna's brand equity, with special reference to the buildup to her 2024 Celebration Tour and the closing in Rio de Janeiro, illuminates the mechanisms perpetuating her status as a global cultural icon. It shows that Madonna's brand is not just enduring but continues to evolve in ways that resonate profoundly with a broad and diverse audience. The concert in Rio de Janeiro was a powerful brand amplifier, augmenting global perceptions of Madonna and the personal perceptions of her fans.

This study employed quantitative methodology grounded in established theoretical frameworks by Aaker (1991, 1996) and Keller (1993, 2001). Our questionnaire was developed and pilot-tested with international fans to ensure clarity and relevance. By utilizing validated scales from existing literature, the study aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the measurements.

The Rio de Janeiro concert can be regarded as a benchmark in maintaining Madonna's brand equity, which may have been instrumental in spreading her brand globally. The concert likely reinforced her standing among fans who had followed her musical and acting career while elevating her status among new fans.

Hence, it is conceivable that live performances continue to play a significant role in her brand strategy. The ability of the concert to promote purchase intentions while positively affecting global perceptions attests to the economic and cultural impact of her live performances and speaks to the effectiveness of her strategic brand management. This finding supports Keller's (2001) emphasis on experiential marketing activities in fostering brand resonance and deepening consumer relationships.

Another significant aspect is authenticity. It is a testament to her brand's developed strength that Madonna is one of the most commercial brands in entertainment yet is considered to have an authentic image in a culture that increasingly values authenticity. This correlation lends credence to the notion that Madonna's brand is based on an identity commensurate with her performance and music foremost. Authenticity enhances brand equity by fostering trust and emotional connections with consumers (Aaker, 1997).

8. Limitations and recommendations for future research

Recognizing the descriptive nature of the research, acknowledgement of the methodological choices presents limitations. While effective in reaching a geographically dispersed audience of Madonna fans, the self-administered questionnaire may not provide a fully representative picture of her global fan base. The descriptive findings offer valuable insights but need more depth than probabilistic sampling and inferential statistical analysis might provide.

There is also a geographic concentration in Europe and North America, which, while significant regions for Madonna's fan base, means that the perspectives of fans from Asia, Africa, and parts of Latin America outside Brazil and Mexico are underrepresented. This limitation may affect the generalization of her brand equity in a genuinely global context.

Future studies should consider employing probabilistic sampling methods to enhance representativeness and generalization. Expanding the sample to include a more racially and culturally diverse group of fans from a broader geographic selection would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Madonna's global brand perception. Additionally, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups could offer deeper insights into the underlying reasons for fans' perceptions and the cultural nuances influencing brand equity.

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