

Selecting new artists

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A qualitative study on the roles of various forms of capital in the selection system within the popular music industry

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Abstract

The academic (and popular) literature on the various forms of capital gives a clear message: it requires a combination of cultural, social and symbolic capital to make it through as a new artist in the music industry. However, it remains unclear how these capitals relate to each other in everyday life: the precise reasons why or the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence career development are still unclear. Besides this, the role of positive psychological capital has been largely ignored. This leads to the following research question: *How do the various forms of capital of popular music artists influence the decision-making process of intermediaries in selecting new artists in the Netherlands?* Subsequently, this research is a qualitative study in which the process of selection, the decision-making process of industry professionals, has been explored. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with intermediaries active inside the popular music sector in the Netherlands, including booking agencies, artist managers, and record labels, have been conducted to formulate an answer to the research question. To get in touch with these intermediaries, the ‘snowballing’ method has been used to get in contact with these informants who possess specific and relevant information on selection systems within the music industry. The recorded interviews have been transcribed and then a thematic content analysis has been conducted following the central themes – the various forms of capital – through coding and categorisation of the excerpts according to the various themes. When coming across, evaluating and eventually selecting new artists by industry professionals, cultural capital, social capital, and symbolic capital came out to be the most essential assets for an artist during the interviews. (Positive) psychological capital can be regarded as a plus, not as a necessity during the selection process, due to the changing nature of the corresponding states. Including this latter largely ignored capital, this research adds volume to tighten the research gap on the mobilisation and conversion of alternative capitals, the roles and functions of intermediaries in the music industry, and their effects on career development of new popular music artists in the Netherlands. Besides this, this research sheds light on the precise reasons why and the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence the decision-making process of selecting. In this manner, this research adds volume onto qualitative systematic studies on the demand for artists.

Keywords: music industry, social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital, psychological capital, selection system

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1. Introduction

According to Voogt (2017), in order to become a successful musician, developing your skills, creating a group of followers, making friends with the right people, being passionate, going to the right places, and marketing yourself is all what it takes, while maybe a little bit of luck is involved. According to Scott (2012), creating ‘buzz’ as a new artist, is the essential thing to get noticed by the big players in the world of popular music and to get higher up the chain in the music industry. These skills and abilities, or so-called assets, can be regarded as various forms of capital, namely cultural capital, social capital, symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Scott, 2012) and (positive) psychological capital (Luthans, Luthans and Luthans, 2004). Up until now, most research regarding the music industry was aimed at what characterizes the music market, such as the issue of novelty (Peterson and Berger, 1971; Scott, 2012), hits and superstars (Adler, 2006; Rosen, 1981), technological developments, copyright, the organisation of the record industry (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009), and a high amount of supply versus demand, just to name a few (Connolly and Krueger, 2006; Towse, 2006; Scherer, 2006). Besides this, the individual point of view, from the artist her-/himself has been investigated (Towse, 2006; Voogt, 2017) thoroughly. Next to this, a lot of research was aimed at intermediaries in the cultural field (Caves, 2000; Connolly and Krueger, 2006; Hracs, 2015; Scott, 2012; Towse, 2010). Contributing to this latter theme, this research sets the cultural intermediaries at the centre stage and thus aims to add onto this literature: do the various forms of capital held by popular music artists actually have an influence on how intermediaries, such as managers and record labels, select artists into their dossiers of artists? This leads to the following research question: *How do the various forms of capital of popular music artists influence the decision-making process of intermediaries in selecting new artists in the Netherlands?*

Subsequently, this research is a qualitative study in which the process of selection, the decision-making process of industry professionals, will be explored. Taking as a starting point the notions of use-value and exchange-value (Scott, 2012; Skeggs, 2004), the present study contributes to the academic research focussed on the various forms of capital. In-depth, semi-structured interviews with intermediaries active inside the popular music sector in the Netherlands, including booking agencies, artist managers, and record labels, have been conducted to formulate an answer to the research question. As these intermediaries are operating within the music industry as professionals, these informants are regarded as qualified when they reflect and comment upon questions about their selection criteria, clinging onto the various forms of capital held by popular music artist (Scott, 2012, p. 240).

This thesis is divided into five sections. The ‘Literature Review’ deals with some background and characteristics of the music industry, the role of intermediaries in the musical field and how the various forms of capital play a role in the selection of new artists according to the literature. After this, an elaboration on the aims and objectives grasps on the relevance and purpose of this research question and thus this thesis. The ‘Methods’ chapter elaborates on the choice for qualitative research and in turn for the interview format, the selection criteria of the interviewees and the use of the snowball-method. After this, the chapter on ‘Data Analysis’ explains how thematic content analysis was used onto the transcriptions of the interviews. To finalize, the ‘Results’ part touches upon the outcomes of the research, whereby cultural, social and symbolic capital came out to be most essential during the decision-making process. The chapter on “Conclusion and discussion” elaborates on the implications of the research findings, the limitations and some suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Background and characteristics

In this research, (commercial) popular music is defined by following the definition by Connolly and Krueger (2006) as: “music that has a wide following, is produced by contemporary artists and composers, and does not require public subsidy to survive” (p. 669). This definition of popular music is based on market values, being market-oriented with large numbers of listeners, and not on musical characteristics (Scherer, 2006). As musical talent and competencies are hard to measure, while different musical skills may be required within different genres inside of popular music (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2010), no qualitative musical characteristics of musicians are being dealt with inside this thesis. Following from this, this definition on popular music excludes classical music and publicly supported orchestras, but includes a large number of genres such as pop, rock and roll, jazz, soul, blues, electronic dance music and many other genres. However, there are examples of classical music that do not require public subsidy to survive, while having a wide following, such as classical music shows by Dutch violist André Rieu and his orchestra. In this way, the borders of the definition by Connolly and Krueger (2006) can be regarded as vague and unclear. To overcome this, the requirement of public subsidy inside this definition can better be withheld, which means that popular music is characterised by having a wide following and appeal and by being produced by contemporary artists and composers (Connolly and Krueger, 2006).

The main focus of this research is on pop, rock and roll and electronic dance music. The market of music has many players and complex contracts, on which the next section on the role of intermediaries focuses. Nowadays, through increasing prosperity and technological and organisational changes over the years, the access to music has been nearly universal. Through evolving sound recordings and the invent of radio, phonographs, compact disks, LPs and eventually MP3, all kinds of music became available for people who had otherwise just visited public concerts. Due to even newer technologies, such as streaming and downloading on the Internet, the issue of copyright becomes even more complex; the Copyright Act finds trouble to adequately protect copyrighted works (Connolly and Krueger, 2006; Smith, 2016).

The more popular forms of music are characterised by a short life span, whereby there is a constant search for new tunes; novelty is essential (Peterson and Berger, 1971; Scherer, 2006, p. 141). The smaller music labels and unknown upcoming artists embrace the new technologies and the search for novelty, while the big labels and stars experience difficulties from these changes because they form a threat for how things used to work (Voogt, 2017). Previously, access and exploitation of technologies were solely in the hands of the big players

– ‘the suits’ (Smith, 2016), which meant they occupied a position of power and predictability. Nowadays, ‘the girl next door’ can upload a cover on YouTube and become the next big thing (Van Stapele, 2017). However, intermediaries keep on occupying an important role inside the music industry as they have access to economic capital and professional networks (Hracs, 2015): “for pop musicians, being represented by a manager, booking agency, music publisher or record company directly leads to measurable career improvement” (Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2010, p. 18). This means that the big players are often in charge of which music artist gets funded and thus reaches a large audience (Smith, 2016). Next to this, the issue of superstardom is still evident: “the music industry is a superstar industry, where a small fraction of the performers earns a substantial share of the revenues” (Connolly and Krueger, 2006, p. 695). Rosen (1981) argues that the issue of superstardom arises due to small differences in talent and the reproducible nature of art (Towse, 2006), while Adler (2006) argues that the need of a common culture by consumers explains why superstars exist.

2.2 The role of intermediaries

The music industry is characterised by many players and complex contracts at local, national and global scales (Scott, 2012). This research sets the intermediaries at centre stage as they keep on occupying an important role inside the music industry and to provide a deeper understanding of “the interconnected gears and sprockets – the music industry professionals – that drive the careers of successful artists” (Voogt, 2017, p. 2). Connolly and Krueger (2006) depicted the organisation of the popular music industry as one in which relations between the different players become evident (Figure 1, p. 672). The band, composer and thus artist most often have a manager who represents him, her or them. If an artist starts making money, managers take a share of this in return for their managerial services. As artists get more successful, they often have contracts with recording companies (record labels), who actually produce and market CDs (Connolly and Krueger, 2006, p. 671-672). The record labels often employ A&R’s (Artist & Repertoire), who actually scout talent and listen to demos (Voogt, 2017). If artists compose their own music, a publisher comes into the picture to copyright the music. In turn, a publisher will form an arrangement with a performing rights organisation. United States’ examples are ASCAP, BMI and SESAC. In the Netherlands, BUMA/Stemra is the solely performing rights organisation, “which licences the music for radio stations, television and other users, monitors the use of the music, and collects royalties” (Connolly and Krueger, 2006, p. 672).

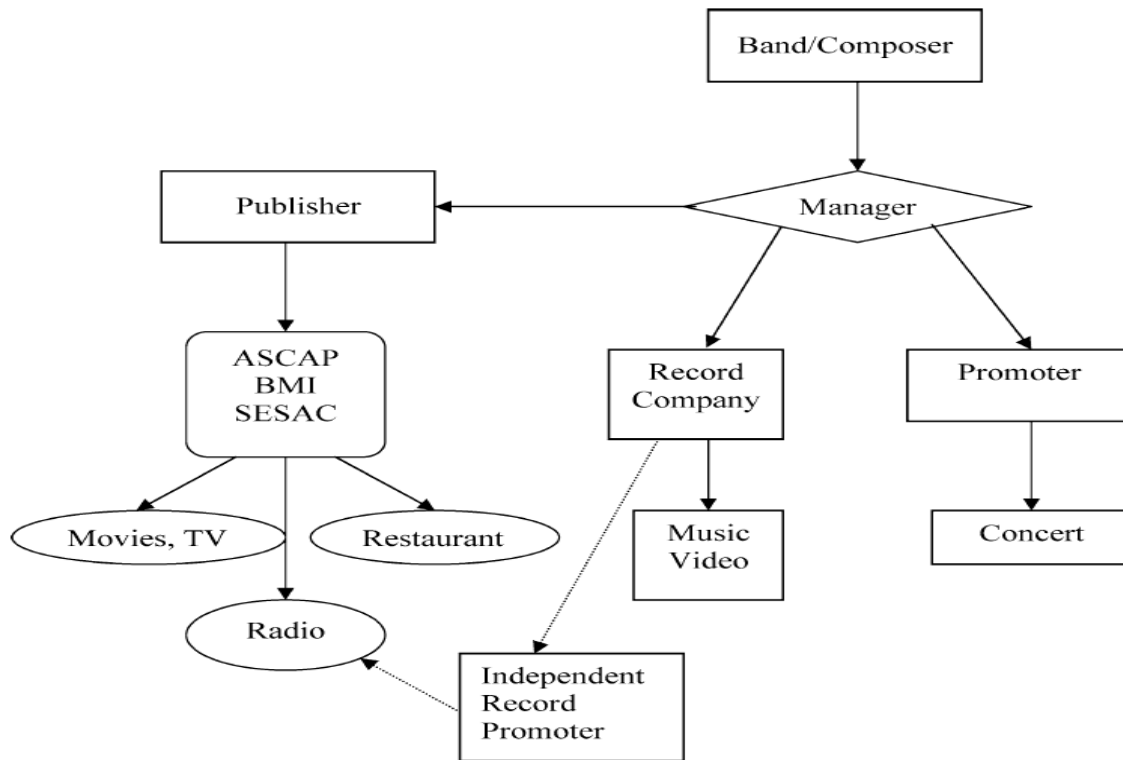


Figure 1. Organization of the popular music industry.

Figure 1. Organization of the popular music industry (p. 672). By: Connolly, M. and Krueger, A.B. (2006). Chapter 20: Rockonomics: The Economics of Popular Music, p. 667-719. From: Ginsburgh, V.A. and Throsby, D. (2006). Handbook of the Economics of Art and Culture, Volume 1. DOI: 10.1016/S1574-0676(06)01020-9

Contracts between for example artists, managers, record labels and publishers can take different forms; however, most of the contracts resemble the form of a book contract. Often there is an initial advance payment and when sales exceed a certain level, royalties come into play, often 10 or 15 percent (Connolly and Krueger, 2006; Towse, 2006). After these arrangements have been made, the artist has little control over his or her work. The licensing and thus copyright enable music artists to earn from their work – and thus their investment in human capital – however, it does not ensure if they do and how much they do (Towse, 2006, p. 889).

It is essential for the industry professionals to scout talented new artists early in their careers. This is because an artist does not have a lot of bargaining power at this beginning point, so professionals can still negotiate better deals for themselves. The professionals, the intermediaries, work with a profit-motive in the back of their heads; they have to make ends meet. Following from this, they want to sign artists that will make hits and money in the future. The contracts thus have to be “shaped to that these compensate for the inherent risk of their

business model, as well as to support their large organisations” (Voogt, 2017, p. 14). Eventually, there is no guarantee that a contract will be successful in the end.

Generally, upcoming artists want to get signed with these intermediaries, because they ease the way up and speed up the process. These professionals have the means (economic capital) for producing and promoting the music and have the connections to broaden their network (social capital) and get recognition (symbolic capital): “cultural intermediaries remain an important convention in the field of music production ... talent still needs to be sourced, assessed” (Scott, 2012, p. 243). The intermediaries, in this way, are gatekeepers of talent; they have to select artists by chance, in the hope they become superstars. Because intermediaries have the means and connections, artists need to gain the intermediaries’ interest towards them, they need to build excitement, enthusiasm, rumours and recommendations: which Scott (2012) has referred to as “buzz” (p. 239). Scott (2012) argues that this ‘buzz’ is created by the mobilisation and conversion of social, cultural and symbolic capital into the production of recordings, tours and videos, together with others. In turn, the artist becomes a ‘subject of value’: “ready and willing to be sold and re-sold in rapidly changing, fashion driven markets” (p. 239). The next section focuses on the perceived importance of these various forms of capital as exposed within academic literature.

2.3 The various forms of capital

Scott (2012) emphasizes the importance of the various forms of capital, because of the economic capital scarcity in the beginning of artists’ careers: “alternative forms of capital – social, cultural, and symbolic – are readily available resources to be mobilised and converted in the struggle to build a career” (p. 242). Aspiring artists need to produce cultural goods and events to gain attention and interest from the intermediaries, as these signal seriousness and prove ability. However, the economic resources and thus capital are often missing, so they ask fellow aspiring established or unestablished artists to help them out, most of the time without payment. As everyone is trying to achieve the same goals – image building, social contacts and networks, recommendations and attention – the use of favours is common. Of importance here, is if this mobilisation and conversion of capitals actually influences the decision-making process of selecting new artists by industry professionals. Taking the notion of economic capital scarcity as a given in the beginning of artists’ careers, this research focuses on cultural, social, symbolic and (positive) psychological capital instead of on economic capital (Scott, 2012).

Social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is argued to be the primary form of capital for aspiring, upcoming artists (Scott, 2012, p. 244). Putnam (2000, p. 19) gives the following meaning to

social capital: "... connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them..." (p. 885). Creating a network, making friends with the right people (Voogt, 2017), appears to be especially important in the music industry which is characterised by intermediaries and professionals with close links to each other (Scott, 2012). The professional context, being connected to key intermediaries within the musical field, is important for career success (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). As Voogt (2017) indicates, A&R's from record labels do not go through the sent demos that often: they look for, find and sign artists through their network.

However, social capital has little value if the artist lacks cultural capital (Scott, 2012): "in its embodied form, cultural capital includes dispositions or deportments – such as ways of speaking and acting that are manifestations of historically transmitted cultural knowledge" (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 47). Musical skills through self-improvement are an example. This cultural capital is argued to be the closest equivalent to human capital, "understood as cognitive knowledge leading to increased productivity" (Scott, 2012, p. 245) or "a combination of inherited characteristics, tacit knowledge, innate ability and acquired skills" (Towse, 2006, p. 868). Touched upon before, this cultural capital¹ can, in the physical and objectified state, be understood as the works of art (such as music) by artists (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 50). Next to ways of speaking and acting, cultural capital also entails the image of the artist, such as clothing, hairstyles and other body decorations. These images are said to play a significant role in the decision-making process by intermediaries, while the image of the artist often corresponds with genre expectations, expected popularity and thus attention: "what do they look like?" (Voogt, 2017).

Lastly, education is also part of someone's cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Scott, 2012), which is said to be not that important in cultural production (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). While it can play a role when an artist is up to date and understands the workings inside the music industry, economic success and talent do not depend entirely on educational credentials (Scott, 2012). Towse (2006, p. 881-882) notes that studies into artists' labour markets came to the conclusion that degrees and diplomas play a less significant role in the arts than they do in other labour markets. While having a good reputation for being professional, offering high quality and being creative are very important, certification by art

¹ For example, an artist creates a sound recording, using his musical skills and labor. Copyright makes sure that the artist has a number of rights protecting him and the recording. However, when these rights are assigned to the record company, they become its property, its possession. The record company in turn, can exploit or sell these rights of the sound recording when it is beneficial. This means that copyright is actually bound to the appropriation of human capital of the artist (Towse, 2006, p. 871).

education academies may not provide the right information about these characteristics for the industry professionals. This is partly because there is an overflow of students graduating from artistic academies, which makes graduating in general from these schools less 'special'. Other screening devices, apart from paper qualifications through education, are believed to give a better picture about new artists, such as symbolic capital (touched upon below). Experience is such an example; according to Towse (2006), this has an effect on perceived income in the future.

Moving beyond cultural and social capital is (positive) psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2004). Where cultural capital refers to 'what you know' and social capital to 'who you know', psychological capital refers to 'who you are', the personality of the person (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 46). The word positive refers to a (research) focus on strengths instead of weaknesses, on what is right and good instead of what is wrong and dysfunctional about people (Seligman, 2002). This psychological capital addresses four positive psychological capacities: confidence, hope, optimism and resilience. Whereby Luthans et al. (2004) have focused on the effect of these attributes on work performance, such as higher productivity and preservation of employees (p. 46-47), this research looks into the influence of these capacities of new artists inside the selection process by music industry professionals. Firstly, confidence refers to an "individual's conviction ... about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context" (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47). Secondly, not as extensively researched as confidence, is the positive psychological capacity of hope, "a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful (a) agency (goal-oriented energy) and (b) pathways (planning to meet goals)" (p. 47). Thirdly, optimism can best be explained in comparison with pessimism in relation to permanence and pervasiveness as part of one's explanatory style: "whereas permanence has to do with time, pervasiveness has to do with space" (p. 47). Bad and good events can be regarded as temporary and specific (optimist) or permanent and universal (pessimist): "in that case, it did not work out for me during that time" (optimist) versus "it always happens to me when I am doing that" (pessimist). Last but not least, resilience refers to being able to 'bounce back', to be flexible and elastic and to improvise and adapt when changes happen (p. 47). As these positive psychological capacities are states instead of fixed traits, they are open for development (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47-48). This could mean that music industry intermediaries can get interested or even could see an advantage in a new artist 'possessing' these capacities, which could in turn influence the decision-making process of selecting.

Closely linked to these capacities is passion: being passionate about something inspires others (Bhansing, Hitters and Wijngaarden, 2016). It is to be expected that having a nice personality, being optimistic and passionate, has a positive influence on others. This is also the case for having a professional attitude and being perseverant, which clings to personality (Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2009). These human resources can even become a competitive advantage when comparing different persons on human traits (Luthans et al., 2004). Being virtually ignored by academia (Luthans et al., 2004), research into positive psychological capital traits can further enhance understanding of the human factor, especially within the decision-making process of selecting new artists by music industry professionals.

Finally, “symbolic capital denotes distinctions such as accumulated prestige, reputation, honour and fame” (Scott, 2012, p. 245). Forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986) in the music industry are for example: number of (online) sales, awards, placement in music charts, social media followers, website hits, winning talent competitions, having done successful (international) tours, peer-recognition by other (successful) artists, having performed at prestigious venues of events, et cetera (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). Caves (2000) emphasizes the importance of reputation, as the making of contracts between an artist and intermediary relies on reputation and the prospect of repeated contracts on the long term. It is a matter of “repeated transactions among parties who value their reputations” (Connolly and Krueger, 2006, p. 675). Besides this, sales and contracts in the future rely on the fact if an artist is ranked highly on the charts. Consumers use charts as a guideline for what to listen to or buy; radio stations play the music that is highly ranked in the charts (Connolly and Krueger, 2006). These charts able consumers (and professionals) to compare, value and order artists, so it acts as an indicator for market potential. The same goes for website hits, with their resemblance to charts and their indications of popularity (Scott, 2012).

According to Bourdieu, symbolic capital is the dominant form as it leads to economic capital: the symbolic capital corresponds with the ‘buzz’ artists want to achieve which potentially leads to the recognition by intermediaries, which in turn is followed by economic capital (Scott, 2012, p. 245). For example, an intermediary is triggered by having seen an artist performing at a (prestigious) event and wants to set up a contract with this new talent. This performance acted as the ‘buzz’, which led to the recognition by the intermediary. The contract resembles the economic capital that follows when the collaboration between the intermediary and the artist starts. Where social capital might open the doors, symbolic capital in turn gives the final push and in this way, can be regarded as the dominant form of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Scott, 2012).

Clinging onto this is another important factor, which emerged through new technologies: the power of independence. With new technologies such as online social media (and thus, networks) and other online tools, an artist can market and self-promote him- or herself easier than ever (Smith, 2016). Besides this, if an artist already has a fan base and good marketing, it might be more interesting for an industry professional to sign him or her. This is because the intermediary will not have to make a lot of effort to get this from the ground. Labels are increasingly looking for artists who already made it big and went viral without them, then they just have 'to pick them up' (Voogt, 2017). Two tendencies seem to be evident here: on the one hand, industry professionals want to scout new talent early before they go viral, to make better deals for themselves. On the other hand, independence is appreciated and searched for by industry professionals, so that promotion from the intermediary is less needed. As this independence is often manifested in having a fan base, a certain number of followers, among other things, the characteristic of independent power will be regarded as symbolic capital.

As this research looks at whether the mobilisation and conversion of capitals actually influences the decision-making process of selecting new artists by industry professionals, it is important to distinguish between the use-value and exchange-value of these capitals (Scott, 2012; Skeggs, 2004). The use-value refers to building a person's identity, while the exchange-value symbolizes how an artist becomes an object of exchange when an industry professional gets interested: "capitals emerge as both property of the individual and a mediator in their relations with the field" (Scott, 2012, p. 246). Taking recognition or reputation as an example, it builds onto a person's identity, while it also strengthens the exchange-value of the artist. When these various forms of capital are built into a product, such as a sound recording, involved others' capitals are converted into this form, which creates an exchange-value for the creators: "it is the potential symbolic capital these mobilisations can generate that opens avenues to transmute the sunken alternative capitals into economic capital or new accumulations of symbolic capital" (Scott, 2012, p. 246-247). This accumulated symbolic capital (through the mobilisation of social capital) thus leads to an improved reputation, which means that the intermediaries will more easily pick the artist up (Scott, 2012).

2.4 Aims and objectives

The academic (and popular) literature on the various forms of capital gives a clear message: it requires a combination of cultural, social and symbolic capital to make it through. However, it remains unclear how these capitals relate to each other in everyday life: the precise reasons why or the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence career development are

still unclear. Besides this, the role of positive psychological capital has been largely ignored. Actually, does having the right friends make sense? Or does having a big fan base make the difference? Or do other factors come into play during this selection process in early career stage development? This research aims to address the following research question: *How do the various forms of capital of popular music artists influence the decision-making process of intermediaries in selecting new artists in the Netherlands?* Taking the point of view from industry professionals, the intermediaries, will shed light on the issue.

As far as I know, not many systematic studies on the demand for artists have been conducted, while most of the research has focussed on the supply side (Towse, 2006). Besides this, Hracs (2015) hints at the vagueness and ambiguity around the functions of intermediaries in the music industry, in which case studies could offer more clarity and explanation (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). In addition, most qualitative studies of ‘creative labour’ have been insufficient and inadequate (Hracs, 2015; Scott, 2012), while actual empirical research on pop artists’ contemporary career development has been scarce and rare (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009), and the decision-making process itself has attracted little attention (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009). This research adds volume to tighten this research gap. Besides that, this thesis is aimed to be comprehensive in the way that it includes contextual and personal influences into the exploration of the decision process: “some studies have focused on background or personality traits while not considering the influence of social and institutional contexts, whereas other studies that did focus on the contextual influences often neglected the importance of background and personality” (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009, p. 253).

Additionally, this research could have its implications on curriculum policies of music academies. Towse (2006) touched upon this: human capital theory suggests that we should raise artists’ productivity through formal training, while social capital theory suggests that developing social skills and expanding your network through on-the-job experience does the job. This is because experience and social skills take precedence over schooling, as the credentials from schooling are believed not to give the right information towards industry professionals. If social capital turns out to be an important factor in the decision-making process of intermediaries in this research, this could mean that academies should pay more attention to this in the form of hands-on experience and expanding networks into the content of the training (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). Besides this, if educational credentials in the present state do not inform intermediaries in a proper manner, “it possibly also implies a policy of restricting the number of training places in college so as to raise the ‘exclusiveness’ and reputation of being accepted on a course” (Towse, 2006, p. 886).

To summarize, this research sheds light on the precise reasons why and the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence the selection of new popular music artists by industry professionals. These industry professionals, the intermediaries, will be set at the centre stage, while the selection and decision-making process will be the centre of attention. Including a largely ignored capital, the (positive) psychological capital, this research adds volume to tighten the research gap on the mobilisation and conversion of alternative capitals, the roles and functions of intermediaries in the music industry, and their effects on career development of new popular music artists in the Netherlands.

3. Methods

Subsequently, this research is a qualitative study in which the process of selection, the decision-making process of music industry professionals, will be explored. A qualitative approach has been chosen to answer the research question, as this approach gives space to subjective experiences and individual emotions. This qualitative research design is led by an interpretivist approach, to understand how “the research participants construct individual meaning around their experiences in the music industry” (Smith, 2016, p. 40). The research design itself can be regarded as a case study: “the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case” (Bryman, 2015, p. 66). A case study design is characterised by intensive examination, for example in the way of participant observation and interviewing. In this research, the community of music industry intermediaries forms the case and thus the unit of analysis, whereby in-depth semi-structured interviewing forms the chosen method (Bryman, 2015).

The research question will be analysed through comments from conducted (recorded) in-depth, semi-structured interviews with intermediaries active inside the popular music sector in the Netherlands, including booking agencies, artist managers and record labels. As they are operating within the music industry as professionals, these informants are regarded as qualified when they reflect and comment upon questions about their selection criteria (Scott, 2012, p. 240). This means that the informant has to be responsible for this process such as an A&R within a record label, booking agency or management, or that the informant is part of a team of selectors, or that the informant works for, or is the owner of a smaller, independent record label, booking agency or management. These A&R-managers act as “crucial mediators between the interests of the creators of symbolic content (the musicians) and the companies that reproduce and circulate this symbolic content (the record label, booking agency or management)” (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009, p. 90). To get in touch with these intermediaries, the ‘snowballing’ method has been used to get in contact with informants who possess specific and relevant information on selection systems within the music industry (Bryman, 2015).

As Scott (2012) argues, the music industry is an insular field (p. 240), which means that access to this kind of information is often restricted and behind closed doors. Using the snowball method helped to get in touch with other informants through former informants, which in turn helped when touching upon soft issues during the interview. Ten informants have been interviewed this way. The snowball method itself is a great way to get in touch with new informants, however, the researcher is not in control of who will be the new informant and what is his or her function. This means that it was not known beforehand, how many managers, bookers or record labels would get interviewed. Still, the researcher tried to arrange an evenly

distribution of informants' functions as this research is aimed at exploring a general process: how (and if) do the various forms of capital of artists influence the selection process of intermediaries in the music industry?

As this research focuses on the reasons for selection, the interview method turned out to be appropriate. Questions during the interview touched upon the various forms of capital². The semi-structured interview format gave room for more reflection and elaborate discussion on certain issues, as the interviews did not follow a meant to be order or way (Smith, 2016). In this way, it was possible for the interviewer to widen or deepen certain topics with the interviewee. Besides this, the interview method allows for exploratory research into the process of artists' selection, which in turn complements official music statistics (Bryman, 2015; Scott, 2012). Most of the interviews lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, with some exceptions that lasted longer. While the researcher is located in the Netherlands, with a Dutch background, Dutch intermediaries have been interviewed out of convenience. Due to limited time and scope of a master thesis, no industry professionals from other countries have been questioned. However, according to Zwaan et al. (2010), the Dutch music market is a mature market with similarities to other countries with regard to a focus on Anglophone repertoire and a market domination by multinational major record companies (p. 18). Focusing on the Netherlands in a broad sense, the location of the informants has been varied. However, as most cultural industries are clustered and concentrated on existing infrastructure and audiences (Caves, 2000; Hracs, 2015; Preece, 2011; Towse, 2006), most of the informants were co-located in urban centres such as the region Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht.

² See Appendix 1 for the interview guide.

4. Data analysis

The recorded interviews have been transcribed³ and then a thematic content analysis has been conducted following the central themes through coding and categorisation of the excerpts according to the various themes⁴. Thematic analysis provides freedom and flexibility, while still guiding the researcher through the transcriptions (Smith, 2016). Central themes within this research are the various forms of capital (and other possible influences) that have an effect on why intermediaries in the music industry select certain new artists (over others). These themes will be adopted in a coding scheme, as they are used to analyse and organise the transcriptions of the interviews (Bryman, 2015; Smith, 2016). As such, “phrases describing recurring ideas present in the data will be the unit of analysis” (Smith, 2016, p. 46).

For example, if an artist manager tells about how the number of followers on social media of the new artist influenced his/her decision in selecting positively, this will be labelled as ‘Social media (followers)’, falling under reputation and thus symbolic capital. Another example, if a booker explains how having the right friends in the music scene as a music artist is very important for him while evaluating new talent, this will be labelled as ‘Friends with the right people’, falling under social capital. The intention of this thesis is not to indicate that one theme (and thus influence on selection) is more important than the other; it rather focusses on generating a general view on the why of selection and the possible interplay between capitals. For example, if ‘Appearance’ is mentioned more often by informants than ‘Image’, this does not directly mean that ‘Appearance’ is more important than ‘Image’. Another example, if ‘Social media (interaction)’ falling underneath symbolic capital, is mentioned more often than ‘Confidence’ falling underneath psychological capital, this does not directly mean that symbolic capital is more important than psychological capital. The fact that some feature is mentioned more often, does not mean that this feature is more essential or significant than another feature during the selection process. Because this thesis wants to provide a general view on the influence of the various forms of capital inside the selection process of music industry professionals, no hierarchy or rank classification of these various forms of capital will be given. Throughout the results, excerpts will be used to illustrate the different themes, which contributes to more understanding.

³ The transcribed interviews are in Dutch and available in the author’s archive. Whenever quotes are used, they have been translated into English. This translation could lead to some inconsistencies between the original transcript and the quote itself.

⁴ See Appendix 2 for the coding scheme.

5. Results

This research investigates whether or not and how the various forms of capital of music artists actually influence the decision-making process of intermediaries in selecting new artists in the Netherlands. Following the academic literature on these alternative forms of capital, it is expected that cultural, social and symbolic capital of artists play a significant role in this selection process by industry professionals. However, uncertain until now is if this is actually the case and if other factors also influence this decision-making process, such as positive psychological capital. All of the interviews were transcribed and then coded according to the central themes, the various forms of capital. Figure 1 (on page 34-35) shows the results in a schematic manner⁵. As indicated on the previous page, one should not read this figure in a hierarchical manner. The fact that some feature is mentioned more often (indicated with a cross), does not mean that this feature is more essential or significant than another feature during the selection process.

5.1 Social capital

Bourdieu (1986) argued that social capital is the primary form of capital for aspiring, upcoming artists. Most of the interviewed informants (8 out of 10 respondents) hinted at the importance of these connections amongst individuals, mostly between industry professionals themselves as they are in constant contact with each other, discussing and evaluating the potential of new artists:

(R10): “Look, I try to stay out of the gossips... But, I listen. Sometimes I also call colleague-agents and then I ask: Well, how did it go? And... Is there a reason why you do not work with each other anymore? You know? I do my background-check”.

(R4): “But, watch out: why did I start working with ChefSpecial? Because there was a manager here sitting on the couch, with a good story, who was enthusiastic. What I did thereafter, is to start calling some people... But I also called the programmer of the Patronaat: Well, those guys from ChefSpecial, is that something?”

Also, multiple examples passed by during the interviews (5 out of 10 respondents) that new artists were signed through their network, where ‘being friends with the right people’ became evident:

(R4): “Yeah, I think that, for a beginning act... It is always a little bit slimy, but it works like that. David Benjamin is an artist I am working on right now, a friend of ChefSpecial. They had a show, which was nice, and I joined them, where I met David. And he said: Well, I am also busy with music! He did the pre-program. Last

⁵ R1 refers to respondent 1, R2 refers to respondent 2, et cetera. The overview of respondents can be found in Appendix 3: Overview of informants.

week he also did three support-acts for Chef Special and you can see that the audience also likes him. Because, he is the friend of... It also works like that”.

(R9): “Yeah, we get demo’s from friends. All three of us are pretty deep into the music scene. So, I often speak to friends and then I ask, do you have something new? Send it to me”.

(R5): “Accidentally, they were friends from friends of us. The owner has a girlfriend, and it was her nephew, he really wanted to join our label. Well, the quality of the music production was hmm... But, when looking at musicality, it was there. So, if it were not acquaintances, we would just have said: Let’s do the next one”.

Also the importance of norms of reciprocity and social interaction (Putnam, 2000) became clear out of the interviews (6 out of 10 respondents), as future contracts and collaborations are essential:

(R2): “Well, I think that, what is even more important than having the network, is how you handle with that network. One of the best examples is Sunnery James. He has built on a big network, but it is way more important how he communicates and handles with these people. He lets everyone feel like they are his best friend. Not fake, but authentic. He is very social, *supergezellig* and fun. And with that, he reaches that every promotor, every club-owner, every festival-organisier, likes him and wants to work with him”.

Besides this, the issue of trustworthiness, was named multiple times by the informants (4 out of 10 respondents). Being trustworthy as an artist contributes to the agreements and eventual contracts that are being made, as well as to the willingness by both parties to work hard:

(R1): “Well, when I start working with someone, often there is no contract. It is then purely based on good faith”.

(R5): “We actually put a lot of money into the Travoltas. But we were so confident, and they were as well”.

Being friends with the right people and being trustworthy as an artist is important, while interaction and reciprocity between the figures within social (music) networks is also essential. Following these statements, it is evident that it is important for new artists to be connected with key intermediaries within the musical field, as it has a positive influence on the decision-making process of selecting by intermediaries, and thus in turn, on career success (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). This means that social capital of an (new) artist is essential during this decision-making process, which confirms the literature on social capital dealt with in the theoretical framework (Bourdieu, 1986; Scott, 2012; Voogt, 2017; Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009).

5.2 Cultural capital

Not touched upon in the theoretical framework, however multiple times mentioned by the informants, is the background of an artist. Hereby, one could think of age, family, romantic relationships, other occupations related to work, et cetera. Following Bourdieu (1986), the background of an artist should be considered as cultural capital, as it also clings upon the habitus of the artist. The habitus of an artist is formed through family and is made up out of intellectual dispositions, such as the degree to which someone is analytical, noticeable and imaginative (Bourdieu, 1986). However, the actual social relationships in the private life of an artist, could be considered as social capital. Besides this, the factor of age in itself does not really fit in either of the two capitals. Further in-depth critical research could offer more understanding about these factors in relation to the various forms of capital. However, in this research the background of an aspiring artist is considered as cultural capital. The background, these sort of intangible attributes of an artist, are being taken into account by the industry professionals (5 out of 10 respondents) when evaluating new artists, for example:

(R6): “Last week I spoke with an artist who was almost 40 years. So, that is a nice example. I really doubt about such an aspect. However, with someone of that age who has not reached it, but I see a lot of potential in it, there is doubt. Because you think, how much can I get out of it still?”

(R7): “That is something I always want to talk about in the beginning. How is your private life? How do you get support from your family? Family, I think, is a really important part of the career of an artist. I always want to have a good connection with parents, with girlfriends, with everyone who is around the artist. Because, sometimes, the artist sees me more than his own family”.

One attribute, clinging onto the knowledge of an artist, was mentioned in every interview: musical skills and associated creativity. This cultural capital, “a combination of inherited characteristics, tacit knowledge, innate ability and acquired skills” (Towse, 2006, p. 868) is essential within the decision-making process of industry professionals:

(R2): “But, in the basis, it is... It still starts with the music itself.”

(R4): “Because eventually, live music is of course the base of all. That has to be good”

(R8): “Yes, quality of the music and of course DJ-skills.”

(R8): “The really successful artists do have some self-will, an own vision or own view of things. We are looking for performers, for people who know what music does and what music does to people and also know how to bring that to people.”

Experience of an artist was also mentioned during the interviews (4 out of 10 respondents), however with a side-note. Some of the informants explained that it was a conscious choice that

they only wanted experienced artists being part of their company, in connection with time-management and money⁶:

(R10): “Before, I used to work way more with young, young talent. I have to say that this did not work out for me anymore for a while, because it was too busy and too labour-intensive to take really small artists onto our roster. Now, I have a new colleague and with him we are also going to tackle the younger generation. I think that is important. However, I have to say, that we are still not going to welcome starting artists on our roster. So no starting DJs, they have to be somewhat further in their process. It is too much work, we also have bills to pay.”

While others actually welcomed unexperienced artists with open arms, as they are bigger companies with more known artists generating the bulk of the money and revenue within the company. In this way, there is space for investment trajectories with new artists:

(R6): “Well, it is dependent on how someone gets here, you know. It is partially important, it is dependent on the trajectory. If it is a talent, I do not think it is important. When I hear a very high potential in someone’s music, then it can be a trajectory which you start, where you guide someone, with shows, with pitfalls, how you can act upon it. Then it is a learning process... It happens a lot.”

(R1): “Yeah, I preferably work with people that have not worked too long on it and, even more preferably, people who are relatively young. And that is of course, you can form and shape them even more then.”

As expected from academic sources, having followed some type of education with degrees and diplomas as the ending product, seemed not to be that important for the informants. While having a good reputation for being professional, offering high quality and being creative are very important, certification by art education academies does not provide the right information about these characteristics for the industry professionals:

(R1): “Actually, I have to say that I almost, nine out of ten times, I can hear directly when a band followed the conservatorium, or is following it or not at al. Nine out of ten times, it is not a positive thing for me. If they have followed it, they are really skilled. This means that nine out of ten times, the control of instruments is great, or the vocals are great, but that all of the ‘own-ess’, the edge how they used to say it, has disappeared completely.”

(R8): “Musical angle of approach and creativity and talent have, I think, nothing at all to do with an education in which you maybe have been forced into by your parents.”

However, some of the informants (2 out of 10 respondents) touched upon the handiness of following some sort of music education in relation to musical skills⁷:

(R10): “Well, it is not a *must*, but if someone... Followed SAE [Creative Media Design] or something... Of course, that triggers a certain interest with me, for sure. Depends on which course. There are multiple... I say

⁶ Only informants that named experience as an important and/or positive asset of an artist during the selection-process have been given a cross in Figure 1.

⁷ Only informants that named education as an important and/or positive asset of an artist during the selection-process have been given a cross in Figure 1.

SAE, because that is really the production of music. And there is some technological knowledge attached to it. Which reflects upon their production-power. So, then I find it important.”

So, while it can play a role when an artist is up to date and understands the workings inside the music industry, economic success and talent do not depend entirely on educational credentials as these credentials are often not taken into account when evaluating new artists (Scott, 2012). Following from this, education as part of cultural capital, is (relatively) not important within the selection-process of new artists within the popular music industry. This confirms the literature dealt with in the theoretical framework (Towse, 2006; Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009).

When looking at the image of the artist, it is expected that this plays a significant role in the decision-making process by intermediaries, while the image of the artist often corresponds with genre expectations, expected popularity and thus attention and eventual economic success (Voogt, 2017). The image of the artist was mentioned only a few times by the informants (3 out of 10 respondents), however way more important than image and thus look of the artist, is his or her appearance (7 out of 10 respondents):

(R2): “You have to mean it. Stage-presence is important, but you do not have to be handsome for that or something. But appearance, yes, for sure.”

(R10): “Anyway, general energy, general picture of the person. Charism. Appearance.”

(R6): “Then I would rather say, appearance. Look is not... Personally, I think that is... You are not thinking then... If someone would pop out, I would think that is interesting. But that is, it is more about appearance than looks.”

Finally, the works of art – cultural capital in the physical and objectified state (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 50), were also reported by the respondents during the selection-process. Sometimes demos were looked at (4 out of 10 respondents), but most of the respondents could not recall that they actually selected an artist following a sent demo:

(R3): “I actually do get quite a bit of an amount of demos in my e-mail, but I never acted upon it. I never told someone: I want you in. Most of the time, you come across someone...”

In this way, Voogt (2017) appeared to be right: A&R’s (from record labels) do not go through the sent demos that often. More important are the (future) releases of artists (8 out of 10 respondents). For most of the informants, releases are a manner for an artist to stay up to date and to get attention:

(R7): “And also labels. Most of the artists I work with, all are signed with a label. And every week releases are popping out and you keep track of that. Does the label think that... Which artists are interesting?
You follow that.”

(R10): “An artist needs to be relevant enough, and we need to be to and also him or herself need to take care of that. And that means, for example, releases on good labels.”

To sum up, when looking at cultural capital, background, musical skills, experience, appearance and (future) releases came out to be the most essential assets for an artist during the interviews, whereby educational credentials, look/image and sent demos were less important (however, still looked at!). In this way, cultural capital in general can be regarded as an essential factor when coming across, evaluating and eventually selecting new artists by industry professionals.

5.3 Psychological capital

Moving beyond social and cultural capital is (positive) psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2004). Where cultural capital refers to ‘what you know’ and social capital to ‘who you know’, psychological capital refers to ‘who you are’, the personality of the person (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 46). This psychological capital addresses four positive psychological capacities, starting with confidence. While an (aspiring) artist is always in the middle of attention, confidence was mentioned multiple times (7 out of 10 respondents) as a positive attribute of an artist, however, always with a side-note:

(R2): “Confidence is positive anyway. I think the more confidence, you do not need to get cocky tough, but the more confidence you got as a DJ, the easier is it for yourself to get somewhere, to actually become a bigger name, and to get more bookings.”

Secondly, is the positive psychological capacity of hope. The informants referred to hope as in a positive mind-set, but mostly to hope encapsulated in a realistic expectation pattern (4 out of 10 respondents). The goals of an artist should be realistic and the planning to meet these goals should be thought through. Not only by the company or label, but also by the artist him- or herself. Most of the collaborations between an agency and an artist actually went wrong, because of unrealistic expectations:

(R4): “They had a vision that really connected with mine. They had really realistic purposes. Had a whole schedule. They really had their *shit* in order.”

(R6): “That is mostly the reason why a collaboration with an artist ends. You start a trajectory with one another and then you are on the same page. However, at some certain point, it can be the case that you follow another path.”

Thirdly, the capacity of optimism, was mentioned a few times by respondents (4 out of 10 respondents). While it was obvious that an artist should have a positive mind-set, most of the optimism-remarks were hinted at the enthusiasm and dedication of an artist in relation to eventual career success:

(R2): “When a DJ is really motivated and really enthusiastic, and people start believing in you and you can spin, that is one thing. But subsequently...”

(R8): “I think that being perseverant and believing in what you want to do and actually dare to pursue that and keep on pursuing that, that this... Is an important factor in the eventual success.”

Last but not least, the capacity of resilience refers to being able to ‘bounce back’, to be flexible and elastic and to improvise and adapt when changes happen (Luthan et al., p. 47). Most of the industry professionals thought of resilience as a plus, however not as a necessity during the decision-making process (5 out of 10 respondents). Being resilient became more important when an artist and industry professional started working together:

(R7): “In a healthy manner an artist should be flexible. An artists’ life is really bizarre. I would not stand it. Touring, interviews at moments you do not feel like it, a photoshoot when you are actually tired just out of bed or you just got out of the plane. You need to be flexible.”

As these positive psychological capacities are states instead of fixed traits, they are open for development (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47-48). This means that these states could change over time and that is exactly the reason why they are regarded as a plus, but not as necessities when evaluating and selecting artists:

(R6): “I think.. That something like that has two sides. I cannot see how such an artist has worked with a previous booker. I am convinced that we do good work and work professionally in this scene, in comparison with other booking agencies in our segment. So, I do believe that we can do things better than others. And that could have an influence on such an artist.”

Closely linked to these capacities is passion: being passionate about something inspires others (Bhansing, Hitters and Wijngaarden, 2016). It is to be expected, that being passionate has a positive influence on the decision-making process of industry professionals, which is indeed the case. Most of the informants hinted at the importance of passion during the selection process, which also clings onto hope and perseverance (7 out of 10 respondents):

(R3): “Well, think of someone who only does it because he likes to make music. It is not that handy to take that person into your agency. Because, someone like that will never sell himself really. And that is really important for a DJ, that you can sell yourself. I cannot do magic tricks. And if the DJ does not want it himself, then it

becomes a problem. So, that is one of the first things I look at, the motivation, the effort, the reason behind it...
Why does he do it?"

Having a professional attitude (Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2009), was also mentioned as a relevant factor by the informants (9 out of 10 respondents). The results on social capital already showed the importance of the connections amongst individuals, mostly between industry professionals themselves as they are in constant contact with each other, discussing and evaluating the potential of new artists. This discussing of potential often had to do with the professional attitude of the artist. However, professional attitude in relation to career success becomes even more important when these music professionals actually started working with the artists:

(R8): "If you are an asshole, you will see really soon that certain promoters and festivals will not want to book you again."

(R7): "Professional attitude is certainly important. I think, if you not behave yourself professionally, your career will be very short."

Lastly, being perseverant (Zwaan, ter Bogt & Raaijmakers, 2009), has to do with eagerness, dedication and hard work. Especially in the beginning phase, with beginning artists, it was a plus when an artist already worked hard on his career. However, at the same time it was more important that an artist would work hard, when the collaboration between an agency and an artist already started (6 out of 10 respondents):

(R4): "I think it is really important that a new artist comes to you at the right time, with a good story and knows where he or she wants to go. My ultimate example is and stays Chef'Special, they had made an EP themselves, worked really hard on it, made a video with..."

(R3): "The guys who are making it big right now, are working really hard for it. It is becoming more and more a fulltime job."

This research looks into the influence of these capacities of new artists inside the selection process by music industry professionals. These capacities have a lot to do with the human factor inside this decision-making process (Luthans et al., 2004), and it was to be expected that these human resources could even become a competitive advantage when comparing different persons on human traits (Luthans et al., 2004). However, because of the changing nature of these states, (positive) psychological capital can be regarded as a plus, not as a necessity during the selection process. Examples of comparing different persons on these human traits, did not come forward during the interviews. Most of these capacities also turned out to be more

important when an industry professional actually started working with an artist, than during the evaluation and selection of an artist.

5.4 Symbolic capital

Finally, “symbolic capital denotes distinctions such as accumulated prestige, reputation, honour and fame” (Scott, 2012, p. 245). Starting with the sub-topic honour, peer-recognition turned out to be an important factor when coming across, evaluating and selecting artists (7 out of 10 respondents) as it more directly hints the attention from the music industry professional towards the recommended aspiring artist:

(R2): “That is where it starts. Knowing the network, and this is a DJ who really thinks the records from another producer are really great. If our DJ’s... For example, W&W who are part of our agency, they really like this young lad, Maurice West. Think the music which he makes is great, and they are all about him. Maurice West is now also part of our agency. They told us, that they really wanted to do more with this lad in the studio and that he joins them on tour. And those are the things that help.”

Besides this, having performed at (prestigious) events as an (new) artist, was named multiple times as an interesting factor by the respondents (9 out of 10 respondents), even more than having performed at (prestigious) venues (6 out of 10 respondents). Events (for example festivals) often offer multiple artists a stage or platform, while venues often have lessened possibilities or capacities to do so. In turn, it is more easy for the respondents at events to check out multiple artists at once, which in turn makes events more interesting than venues. This interest by industry professionals in ‘having performed at (prestigious) events’ mostly had to do with relationships that already existed between the artist and a promotor, which the industry professional could build on in the future:

(R6): “You have to look at it, because, imagine you are going sign him. Then you have to know which territories might be interesting, which period of time you maybe should stay away and then what is going be the plan to... What you want to do together, certainly in this beginning period.”

Awards (3 out of 10 respondents) and talent competitions (3 out of 10 respondents) were mentioned as minor factors during the selection process⁸, as the winning of an award is only a snapshot of an artists’ potential, while at the same time the quality of a talent competition depends on the (other) participating artists:

(R2): “There are enough guys in our agency, on which we earn good money, who never won or got an award”

⁸ Only informants that named awards and/or talent competitions as a positive asset (however, not essential!) of an artist during the selection-process have been given a cross in Figure 1.

(R4): “There are a lot of successful acts in the Netherlands without them ever joining a competition”

Still, the Popronde⁹ was mentioned by informants active inside the pop- and rock-music scene, as this festival is a great and easy way to spot new talent. The DJ Mag Top 100¹⁰ was mentioned only once, as being featured in this election as an artist, means the booking fee of an artist rises up, which is more interesting for the booking agency itself. However, this agency is one of the biggest in the Netherlands, and thus can be regarded as an exception.

In the case of fame, (previous) collaborations with other artist(s), was not really noticed as an important factor when coming across or selecting artists (4 out of 10 respondents¹¹). Most of the respondents never thought of this possibility of evaluating potential artists through (previous) collaborations between the artists themselves. Besides this, after reflecting on this thought, none of the respondents could recall that they actually selected a certain artist after hearing of a certain collaboration. While collaborations were thought of in a relatively positive manner, one should be aware of the influence on the image of the artist through a collaboration. Even when an industry professional started working with a certain artist, they are careful with collaborations between artists themselves in relation to reputation:

(R3): “Collaborations can be really good, but you always have to ask yourself: What is it going to do with my artist, that collaboration? If you collaborate too much, you lose your own identity.”

Placement in music charts, falling under reputation and prestige, was mentioned as an important factor (5 out of 10 respondents), however in relation to music genre and the size of the company. The informant from a punk- and rock-label for example, did not look at these types of charts, as the punk and rock types of music are less featured in it. Bigger companies, with bigger (more popular) artists in their roster, did take notion of these charts. Spotify for example, was mentioned multiple times as a tool for informants to keep track of artists and also as a tool for evaluating artists, as consumers use charts as a guideline for what to listen to or buy and radio stations play the music that is highly ranked in the charts (Connolly & Krueger, 2006):

(R7): “Well, I think one of the most important things right now are Spotify-numbers. Spotify is actually quite important when I look at the Netherlands.”

⁹ The Popronde is a national, travelling festival in 40 cities throughout the Netherlands. In every city, around 35 upcoming Dutch bands and artists, get the chance to perform on stages throughout the particular city (<https://www.popronde.nl/popronde>).

¹⁰ A worldwide election for DJs inside of the electronic dance-music scene (<https://djmag.nl/top100>).

¹¹ Only informants that named (previous) collaborations with other artist(s) as a (possible) positive asset of an artist during the selection-process have been given a cross in Figure 1.

(The amount of) social media followers was appointed as one of the most positive and important factors by most of the informants (8 out of 10 respondents), as the number of followers and likes resembles the (possible) interest of the audience and thus, in turn, as an indicator for future career success. However again, the amount of followers comes with a side-note: the amount of followers on social media can be defrauded nowadays, as the numbers of likes can be bought:

(R9): “Does it have added value if a DJ has a lot, let us say, thousands of likes? Yes. That also sells the record.

Thousand, or maybe ten-thousand likes, are in principle, ten-thousand fans. Not totally, but let us say so.”

(R7): “Numbers are not really... It does not mean anything. You can buy them nowadays. If someone says, well, I have one million likes! It is not right, it is just not true. It does not make sense anymore. And I think that is a shame on the whole social media thing, because what is already there, is really great. But all those numbers...”

While the amount of followers is deemed important, the interaction with these followers is even more important (9 out of 10 respondents). Informants hint at the fact that something needs to happen on a social media account; people do not automatically come to you, an artist has to attract them. Attention and ‘buzz’ need to be generated, likes, comments and streams is the way to go:

(R8): “We do not only look at the number of followers, but also, what is the interaction with the crowd? If you have ten-thousand likes and two comments, people are recognizing the fact that something is up. So, the amount of followers is something that is critically looked at.”

When coming across, evaluating and selecting artists, the number of previous record sales (3 out of 10 respondents) or the number of previous streams (2 out of 10 respondents) is hardly looked at, as this is something the concerned company needs to work on with the particular artist in the future, when they start working together. While the informants enjoyed it if an artist was already on its way, it is not a necessary factor in most cases. Besides this, the same goes for the number of sales as it goes for the number of followers: it is defrauded. In the example of Beatport¹² below, a concerned label often buys up an amount of an own release, so the release itself gets higher up the chain:

(R10): “I certainly look at release-history, on which labels. I do not look at how much something sells, because it is also not relevant in this time. Look, some agents bite into Beatport number-1. And of course, it is nice when it happens, but it is not a *must*.”

The number of website hits was expected to be an interesting factor for evaluating talent by the informants. However, website hits or blogs were only mentioned a few times (2 out of 10

¹² International website for dance music and culture, where artists can create, stream, and download music (<http://over.beatport.com/>)

respondents) as a positive but unnecessary factor, while the informants also indicated that social media become more and more important nowadays:

(R1): “Certainly, in the beginning phase of bands and artists, you often see that they do not have websites, mostly they do have something like Soundcloud. And a Facebook-page. So I do not think it is essential, certainly not in the beginning. But, at a certain point when you continue and it would not be there... I do not think it is...

You can find a Facebook-page in an instant.”

Following from this, it was regarded as a plus – again, not as a necessity – by the informants, if an artist already showed independence with regards to social media and other online tools during the selection process (6 out of 10 respondents). The two tendencies were evident inside of the interviews: on the one hand, industry professionals wanted to scout new talent early before they go viral, to make better deals for themselves (as one could see with industry professionals who want to work preferably with young talent, p. 24). On the other hand, independence was appreciated and searched for by industry professionals, so that promotion from the intermediary is less needed:

(R1): “In general, I do appreciate it if a band or an artist keeps track of things and arranges stuff themselves. A list with upcoming gigs and that kind of stuff. If you have to do that yourself for every artist, or need to pay attention to that, it is too much.”

(R2): “Regularly, people come to us and say that they want to work hard, but they do not have anything. Then we say: work on yourself, make sure you know what it is to work hard, to get disappointed, to want something really bad, and to work hard for it and eventually get it. Instead of sitting with us, lean back and think: Well, I have a good booker now, let’s bring it in.”

Finally, commercial potency came out to be an important factor for almost all informants during the interviews when evaluating artists (8 out of 10 respondents). With commercial potency is meant, the prospect of future revenue for the music company, when selecting, presenting and thus selling a certain artist. Because this feature was so often mentioned, and clings upon the symbolic capital characteristics, it is especially included in this section and in the coding scheme. As this research focuses on commercial popular music, it is no coincidence that the commercial potency of an artist is critically looked at during the selection process:

(R3): “I need to keep in mind, that I am the one who eventually needs to sell it. And if I cannot sell it, it makes no sense that a DJ is joining me.”

(R8): “If... Skrillex decides to start with *kneiterharde* [sic!] dubstep tomorrow and he is coming to us and we can sell it, I do not think we will say no to that.”

Concluding from this, symbolic capital is a necessary and dominant factor within the selection process of music industry professionals. Peer-recognition, having performed at (prestigious)

events and venues, placement in music charts, commercial potency and the number of social media followers and interaction came out to be the most essential factors for an artist during the interviews. However, other factors such as independence, the number of (online) sales, awards and talent competitions were regarded as a plus, not as a requirement. Website hits and blogs and collaboration(s) with other artist(s) were deemed least important.

Figure 1: Selection criteria, factors and sources mentioned by respondents

| | | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5 | R6 | R7 | R8 | R9 | R10 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Social capital | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Social networks | Connections amongst individuals | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| | Norms of reciprocity | X | X | X | X | X | | | | X | |
| | Trustworthiness | X | | | X | X | | X | | | |
| | Friends with the right people | X | X | X | X | | | X | | | |
| Cultural capital | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Background | Family/Other work | X | X | | X | | X | X | | | |
| Knowledge | Musical skills | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Experience | | X | | | X | | X | | | X |
| | Education | | | | | | X | | | | X |
| Image of the artist | Image | X | X | | X | | | | | | |
| | Appearance | X | | X | X | | X | X | X | | X |
| Works of art | Demo's | | X | | | | X | | | X | X |
| | Releases (future) | X | | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| Psychological capital | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Personality | Confidence | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | | X |
| | Hope | X | | X | | X | | | X | | |
| | Resilience | X | X | X | X | | | X | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Optimism | X | | X | | X | | | X | | |
| Passion | | X | | X | | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Professional attitude | | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| Perseverance | | | X | X | X | | | X | X | | X |
| Symbolic capital | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Honour | Peer-recognition | | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X |
| | Performed at (prestigious) events | X | X | X | X | | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Performed at (prestigious) venues | | X | | | | X | X | X | X | X |
| | Awards | X | X | | X | | | | | | |
| | Talent competitions | X | | | X | X | | | | | |
| Fame | Collaboration with other artist(s) | | X | X | X | | | X | | | |
| Reputation/prestige | Placement in music charts | | X | | X | | | X | | X | X |
| | Social media (followers) | X | X | X | X | X | X | | | X | X |
| | Social media (interaction) | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X |
| | Number of sales (records) | X | | X | | | | X | | | |
| | Number of streams (online) | | | | X | | | | X | | |
| | Website hits/blogs | | | | | | | X | | X | |
| Independence | | X | X | X | X | | | X | X | | |
| Commercial potency | | X | X | X | X | X | X | | X | X | |

6. Conclusion and discussion

To summarize, this research sheds light on the precise reasons why and the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence the selection of new popular music artists by industry professionals in the Netherlands. These industry professionals have been set at the centre stage, as “cultural intermediaries remain an important convention in the field of music production” (Scott, 2012, p. 243). At the same time, the selection and decision-making process of these intermediaries were at the centre of attention, which led to the following research question: *How do the various forms of capital of popular music artists influence the decision-making process of intermediaries in selecting new artists in the Netherlands?*

Firstly, social capital turned out to be an essential and positive factor within the selection-process. Being friends with the right people and being trustworthy as an artist is important, while interaction and reciprocity between the figures within social networks is also essential. It is evident that new artist should be connected with key intermediaries within the musical field, as it has a positive influence on the decision-making process of selecting by intermediaries, and thus in turn, on career success (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). Secondly, cultural capital in general can be regarded as an essential factor when coming across, evaluating and eventually selecting new artists by industry professionals. Background, musical skills, experience, creativity, appearance and (future) releases came out to be the most essential assets for an artist during the interviews, whereby educational credentials, look and sent demos were less important. Thirdly, (positive) psychological capital can be regarded as a plus, not as a necessity during the selection process, due to the changing nature of these states. Most of these capacities turned out to be more important when an industry professional actually started working with an artist, than during the evaluation and selection of an artist. Finally, symbolic capital of an artist can also be regarded as a necessary factor within the selection process of music industry professionals. Peer-recognition, having performed at (prestigious) events and venues, placement in music charts, commercial potency and the number of social media followers and interaction came out to be the most important attributes for an artist during the interviews. However, other factors such as independence, the number of (online) sales, awards and talent competitions were regarded as a plus, not as a requirement. Website hits and blogs and collaboration(s) with other artist(s) were deemed least important.

6.1 Implications of the research findings

Including a largely ignored capital, the (positive) psychological capital, this research adds volume to tighten the research gap on the mobilisation and conversion of alternative capitals, the roles and functions of intermediaries in the music industry (Hracs, 2015), and their effects on career development of new popular music artists in the Netherlands (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). Besides this, this research sheds light on the precise reasons why and the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence the decision-making process (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009), and thus in turn on career development. In this manner, this research adds volume onto (qualitative) systematic studies on the demand for artists (Towse, 2006). Contextual (social and institutional) and personal (background and personality) influences were included into the exploration of the decision-making process, to make this research as comprehensive as possible (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009, p. 253).

Following academic (and popular) literature on these various forms of capital, this research strengthens the value of the literature and theoretical perspectives on cultural, social and symbolic capital in relation to the selection of (new) popular music artists. When one looks at cultural capital and educational credentials in particular, it seems that industry professionals mostly do not take this factor into account during the decision-making process of selecting. Instead, as expected, social capital (and symbolic capital) turned out to be more important: developing social skills and expanding your network through on-the-job experience, does the job. In the future, this could mean that music academies should pay more attention to this in the form of hands-on experience and expanding network into the content of the training (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009). This is because experience and social skills take precedence over schooling, as the credentials from schooling do not give the right information towards industry professionals. However, “restricting the number of training places in college so as to raise the ‘exclusiveness’ and reputation of being accepted on a course”, as Towse (2006, p. 886) argued, did not come forward as a possible improvement during the interviews.

With regards to (positive) psychological capital, the possession of this capital turned out to be regarded as a plus, not as a necessity or requirement during the selection process. This is mostly because positive psychological capacities are states instead of fixed traits and they are open for development (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47-48). It was to be expected that these human resources could even become a competitive advantage when comparing different persons on human traits (Luthans et al., 2004). Still, examples of comparing different artists on these human traits, did not come forward during the interviews. Most of these capacities also turned out to be more important when an industry professional actually started working with an artist,

than during the evaluation and selection of an artist. In this way, this research adds volume to the theoretical perspective on (positive) psychological capital, as it is not regarded as an essential capital during the selection process of artists by intermediaries.

Following from this, this research could be used as a guideline for beginning and aspiring artists, who want to make it through. As the precise reasons why and the circumstances under which the various forms of capital influence the decision-making process in a positive (or negative) manner are being dealt with, artists could use this in their advantage. This could have a positive influence on the career development of an artist. Besides this, industry professionals themselves could use this research to reflect on their own decision-making process and to look at how and under which circumstances, other professionals select. This could lead to more understanding and background information.

6.2 Limitations

One of the challenges and limitations of this research relates to the choice for conducting qualitative research, and thus interviews. Because qualitative research is time-consuming, while at the same time sample sizes are often small, it is more difficult to make broad generalisations about a phenomenon evident in a large and far-reaching industry like the popular music industry. Especially considering the size of this thesis. The sample of this research only included (ten) Dutch key intermediaries, which could have implications for the generalizability of the findings (Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2010). To overcome this, it should be clear what the goal of this research is: the thesis does not provide a complete overview of the phenomenon, but rather a detailed and temporary snapshot (Bryman, 2015; Smith, 2016).

Besides this, performing thematic analysis also has a disadvantage: the risk of projection. On the one hand, the interviewer should not put words into the interviewees' mouth during the interview. On the other hand, the researcher has to be careful with projecting own values and feelings upon the transcriptions of the interviews. The interpretation of the data could be affected by the emotional state of the researcher. Next to this, while the multiplicity of approaches following from thematic analysis is an advantage, the researcher should constantly be aware of the research question and the goal of the thesis. Otherwise the outcomes of the research could eventually be un-clear and non-specific (Bryman, 2015; Smith, 2016).

Another limitation is related to the selection criteria and factors mentioned by the informants. Not taken into account in the theoretical framework, however important, were the background of an artist (cultural capital), appearance of an artist (cultural capital) and the commercial potency (symbolic capital). During the data analysis, these factors were included

in the coding scheme, as they were not directly noticed during executing the interviews. This could mean that not enough attention during the interview has been given to these factors.

To conclude with, a limitation of this study is “the possible inconsistency between the selection criteria described by our respondents and their actual practice” (Zwaan and ter Bogt, 2009, p. 97). It could be the case that the respondent gave ‘the right answer to the right question’, because information was sensitive or not known out in the open.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

Firstly, one suggestion for future research is hinted at the open-for-development attribute of psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2004, p. 47-48). Because positive psychological capacities are states instead of fixed traits, this capital turned out to be not an essential factor during the decision-making process. However, some of the attributes of social capital, cultural capital and symbolic capital, were regarded as important, while they can also be worked upon and thus subsequently, can also be regarded as states instead of fixed traits. For example, social networks can be further broadened, musical skills can be improved, and the number of social media followers can increase over time. Future research could be aimed at this open-for-development attribute of the different capitals.

Secondly, while the background and appearance of an artist and the commercial potency turned out to be unexpected important factors during the selection process, other factors also might come into play. Most important during the interviews, however not directly falling under one of the various capitals dealt with, was the personal connection between the industry professional and the artist, the *click* between an artist and intermediary. This personal connection clings onto the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (social capital), while it also has to do with the personalities of both parties (psychological capital), however not directly to one of the four capacities which were part of psychological capital. Future research could be aimed at this personal connection between the two parties, and consequently could add volume to the research on psychological capital and social capital.

Thirdly, intermediaries were set at the centre stage in this research to look at the demand side for artists. Matter of course, the generalizability of the findings could be strengthened by extending the number of people interviewed, while also taking into account foreign intermediaries. Besides this, using the snowball method meant that it was not known beforehand, which informants with different functions would get interviewed. Future research could take this manner into account, further specifying and classifying functions in advance. Moreover, future researchers could consider the importance of conducting this type of research

inside of other musical genres such as classical music or even inside of other cultural sectors, such as the performing arts. Still, also important is more research aimed at aspiring artists themselves and how they are aware, make use of and exchange these various forms of capital. This can add onto the theoretical perspectives aimed at these phenomena (Scott, 2012; Towse, 2006; Voogt, 2017; Zwaan, ter Bogt and Raaijmakers, 2009).

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Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Ensure the interviewee that answers will be treated confidentially

Ask if the interviewee agrees upon recording the interview

Name of interviewee:

Age of interviewee:

Gender of interviewee:

Position in company:

Numbers of years employed:

Numbers of years involved in music industry:

Place of interview:

Setting of the interview: busy/quiet, many/few other people around, new/old building etc.

Date of interview:

Questions

| | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Can you tell me something about how you got involved in the music industry? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Previous education• Previous work experience |
| 2. | What is your specific role / what are your responsibilities in this position? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A&R• Other... |

| | |
|----|---|
| 3. | Can you tell me something about how you come across new talent? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you go through sent demos? If so, how often do you go through sent demos? Does this influence if an artist gets selected (or not)?• Social media channels / videos• Live performance / concerts / tours• Through personal contacts / network / recommendations / rumours• Other... |

| | |
|----|---|
| 4. | Can you tell me something more about how you get in contact with new artists? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media channels / website |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone / e-mail • Through personal contacts / network • Other... |
|--|---|

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 5. | Can you tell me something about how this process of selection works? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First contact to appointment • Contract agreements • Other... |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 6. | Can you tell me something more about what kind of role your network plays for you? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does your own network influence your interest in certain artists? • If so, how? Do you often attend network events for example? |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 7. | Do you think that having a network as a new artist influences his or her career? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If so, how? Can you name an example? Own experience? • Social contacts • “Friends with the right people” |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 8. | Can you tell me something about if educational background is taken into consideration when evaluating artists? If so, how? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical skills / musicality • Educational credentials (degrees and diplomas) • Did this ever influence you? |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| 9. | Do you think appearance of an artist is important? If so, how? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clothing, hairstyles, body decorations • Did this ever influence you? |

| | |
|------------|--|
| 10. | Can you please tell me about if and how experience of a new artist plays a role when selecting this artist (or not)? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Musical skills • Performing for an audience |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did this ever influence you? |
|--|--|

| | |
|------------|--|
| 11. | What kind of role does the personality of a new artist play? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence • Hope • Optimism • Resilience • Passion • Professional attitude • Perseverance • If so, how? Can you name an example? Own experience? |

| | |
|------------|--|
| 12. | In what way does the reputation / recognition of the artist play a role for you? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honour / fame • Number of sales / tours • Peer recognition |

| | |
|------------|--|
| 13. | Do you think that awards and prizes signal something? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality? Or something else? • Talent competitions • Performed at prestigious events / venues • Is this something you take into consideration when evaluating artists? |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 14. | Do you think that being featured in the charts as an artist means something? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does being featured in the charts catch your attention? • What does this mean? |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 15. | Do you think that social media influences the selection process? How? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media followers • Website hits • Independence / self-promotion • Did this ever influence you? |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 16. | Many artists collaborate with other artists to create music. What do you think is the main reason for this? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think collaboration signals something? • Quality of some sort for example? • Did a collaboration between artists ever influence you? |

| | |
|------------|--|
| 17. | To what extent does personal taste influence this selection process? |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial versus underground • Potential of the artist |

Extra: “Can you tell me more? / Could you say some more about that?”

Ask if the interviewee has any questions regarding the interview and if the interviewee wants to add something or elaborate on a specific topic

| |
|------------------------------|
| Social capital |
| Cultural capital |
| Psychological capital |
| Symbolic capital |

Appendix 2 – Coding scheme

The elaborated coding book can be found in the author’s archive.

| Main theme | Subtopics | Key words |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---|
| Symbolic capital | Honour | Peer-recognition Performed at (prestigious) events Performed at (prestigious) venues Awards Talent competitions |
| | Fame | Collaboration with other artist(s) |
| | Reputation/prestige | Placement in music charts Social media (followers) Social media (interaction) Power of independence Number of sales (records) Number of streams (online) Website hits/blogs |
| | Independence | |
| | Commercial potency | |
| Social capital | Social networks | Connections amongst individuals Norms of reciprocity Trustworthiness Friends with the right people |
| Psychological capital | Personality | Confidence Hope Resilience Optimism |
| | Passion | |
| | | |

| | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|---|
| | Professional attitude | |
| | Perseverance | |
| Cultural capital | Background | Family |
| | Knowledge | Musical skills Experience Education |
| | Image of the artist | Image Appearance |
| | Works of art | Demo's Releases (future) |

Appendix 3 - Overview of informants

| | Name | Age | Gender | Company | Position (R&A) | Date of interview |
|-----|-------------------|------------|---------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| R1 | Job Smit | 32 | Male | Caroline Transmit Music | Booker Promotor | 14-03-2018 |
| R2 | Tony Dekker | 38 | Male | David Lewis Productions | Booker Artist manager | 19-03-2018 |
| R3 | Justin Kuijt | 25 | Male | The Absurd | Booker Artist manager | 22-03-2018 |
| R4 | Henkjan Onnink | 48 | Male | Agents After All | Booker | 26-03-2018 |
| R5 | Mart Lier | 24 | Male | White Russian Records | Marketing | 06-04-2018 |
| R6 | Nick Silva | 27 | Male | Meanwhile | Booker Artist manager | 13-04-2018 |
| R7 | Marloes Donath | 32 | Female | Sorted Management | Artist manager | 13-04-2018 |
| R8 | Bjorn Sensen | 31 | Male | ANNA Agency | Operational Officer | 13-04-2018 |
| R9 | Tom Stigter | 29 | Male | Depth over Distance | Legal Officer | 16-04-2018 |
| R10 | Manuela Budimilic | 39 | Female | AD Bookings | Booker Artist manager | 03-05-2018 |