

**Re-defining Authenticity in the Modern Music Industry**  
“The Case of (Un)conventional Music Labels”

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## ABSTRACT

With the digital age and introduction of new developing technologies this research paper is based on the shifts such as streaming platforms, new business models and strategies that have been introduced in the modern music industry. As these introductions became more prominent the question of authenticity is highlighted as an integral concept within this research. Authenticity and its construction within the introduction of (un)conventional strategies within labels. By stating that, the research question of this paper is based on; *“How and for which aesthetic-political reasons is the term (un)conventional used by Rotterdam-based musicians in regards to, the construction of (contemporary) authenticity and its values?”* The theoretical framework will introduce the concepts that are relevant for answering the research questions and link existing theories of the music industry with the term (un)conventional.

The methodology of this research is based on a qualitative perspective using grounded theory and semi-structured interviews that delve into the music industry. Thirteen interviews were done with Rotterdam-based, DJ, music producer or a major stakeholder in the local music industry. The data collected from these interviews were analysed with open coding using the program Atlas ti. After the analysis, the results were presented in separate chapters that connect with the existing theory examined in the theoretical framework in order to realize connections and new angles for the research. One of the main results acknowledge was that the definition of authenticity is dependent on the artist's identity, originality and exclusivity. The identification of the term (un)conventional was also made in connection with authenticity and its values.

The concluding chapter revolves around fulfilling the sub-questions and research question in relation to the results and the theory examined. The sub-questions were *“how is authenticity in the modern music industry constructed?”* and *“does digitization have an influence on an artist's authenticity levels?”* Thus, the concluding statement is that the case of the term (un)conventional and its relation to the construction of authenticity is based on several variables that include digitization and its influence on artists. Moreover, several further research topics surfaced such as the successfulness of (un)conventional labels within real-life practices and how might one define successfulness?

Keywords: *Music Industry, (Un)conventional, Music labels, Digitization, Authenticity, Values*

## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>[PREFACE]</b>   | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                      | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b>                             | <b>10</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 1 – (UN)CONVENTIONAL; FABRICATING THE NEW</b> | <b>10</b> |
| UNDERGROUND  | 12        |
| HISTORICAL NARRATIVE                                     | 13        |
| IDENTITY   | 13        |
| <b>CHAPTER 2 – AUTHENTICITY AT ITS BEST</b>              | <b>15</b> |
| LEGITIMACY   | 17        |
| ORIGINALITY  | 18        |
| EXCLUSIVITY  | 18        |
| <b>CHAPTER 3 – DIGITIZATION; DID I RUIN IT ALL?</b>      | <b>20</b> |
| AM I POLLUTING THE INDUSTRY?                             | 20        |
| DID I REVIVE IT?   | 22        |
| BUT AM I INNOVATIVE?                                     | 23        |
| <b>METHOD</b>  | <b>24</b> |
| DATA COLLECTION  | 24        |
| SAMPLING   | 25        |
| DATA ANALYSIS  | 26        |
| OVERVIEW OF RESULTS                                      | 27        |
| <b>RESULTS</b>   | <b>28</b> |
| AUTHENTICITY – WHAT IS IT ANYWAYS?                       | 28        |
| LEGIT OR NAH?  | 30        |
| DO I REALLY WANT TO BE ORIGINAL?                         | 32        |
| EXCLUSIVE, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?                   | 33        |
| (UN)CONVENTIONAL – DEFINE ME PLEASE?                     | 34        |
| WHERE DOES THIS LEAVE US?                                | 37        |
| IDENTIFY ME, AUTHENTICATE ME AND RELEASE ME              | 38        |
| RE-DEFINING AUTHENTICITY?                                | 40        |
| <b>CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION</b>                         | <b>42</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES</b>  | <b>46</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES</b>  | <b>51</b> |
| APPENDIX (1) – MUSIC INDUSTRY VALUE CHAIN                | 51        |
| APPENDIX (2) – LONG TAIL ANATOMY                         | 52        |
| APPENDIX (3) – INTERVIEW GUIDE                           | 53        |
| APPENDIX (4) – CODE BOOK                                 | 56        |
| APPENDIX (5) – CONCEPT OF AUTHENTICITY                   | 58        |
| APPENDIX (6) – THE VALUE OF LEGITIMACY                   | 60        |
| APPENDIX (7) – THE VALUE OF ORIGINALITY                  | 61        |
| APPENDIX (8) – THE VALUE OF EXCLUSIVITY                  | 62        |
| APPENDIX (9) – QUOTES AND DEFINITION OF (UN)CONVENTIONAL | 63        |
| APPENDIX (10) – LABELS AND CONCEPTS                      | 64        |
| APPENDIX (11) – RELATIONSHIP OF IDENTITY TO CONCEPTS     | 65        |
| APPENDIX (12) – RELATIONSHIP OF AUTHENTICITY AND VALUES  | 66        |

## [Preface]

For this research project, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Niels van Poecke and our coordinator Michaël Berghman for all the support. I would like to thank all the interviewees for giving their time in this project. To my family who has always supported me to the end. And finally, to the music industry – may it always be interesting to work with.

## Introduction

The consumption of music has over the few decades shifted from buying CD's or Vinyl's from physical music stores to illegal downloading - *thank you Napster* - to moving increasingly fast to the Internet and online distributing platforms. This shift has made music, as a product, more intangible and to some extent more of a commercial service (Styvén, 2007, p.53). At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the remarkable way information technology and the Internet has opened various networks in the music industry is outstanding. Furthermore, the combined influence of digitization and the Internet presents a more radical change (Marathe, 2001) as the licensing and distribution has transformed into a service, in contrast to the sales of physical goods such as CDs. Within this shift, the more leading music labels perceived it as a threat “not only based on their ability to collect their own copyrighted products but also their profitable strategically useful domination of physical distribution networks” (Power and Jansson, 2004, p.426) <sup>1</sup>. The consumption patterns of consumers changed, (Throsby, 2002, p.2), on the basis that file-sharing became more prominent and that artists used direct online sale points to distribute directly to the consumer instead of going through various channels before reaching a consumer.

With the threatening shift of sharing music files, which compromised profits of major music labels, the Internet and digitization also offered advantages and opportunities for both labels and artists. There is an extensive amount of possibilities for artists to make and release their music through online platforms such as Deezer, Itunes, Spotify, Soundcloud, BandCamp, etc. These online platforms have made it easier for the accessibility and reachability of different genres and styles of music for consumers. This shift has aided artists in the continuously changing music industry by maintaining the pace of the digital era of trends, styles and various taste-cultures. Furthermore, music labels have also benefited from the shift, as their costs for inventory, manufacturing and distribution have decreased. Labels have the ability to find new music and artists faster than ever with a click of a button.

Moreover, through the digitization shift, artists have the ability to mix, cut, appropriate and challenge themselves to introduce new genres to the market. One example is “Rap Rock” which is a fusion genre that fuses instrumental elements of hip

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix (1) – Music industry value chain

hop and different forms of rock. However, it doesn't stop there, Rap Rock also includes sub-genres such as Rap Metal and Rap-core. Both intertwining heavy metal – and hard-core punk oriented influences. This is merely one example of “new” genres that are being introduced in the market by various artists. Therefore, appropriating different tastes and presenting an entire new taste-culture to be consumed. In Adorno's popular music, there was criticism over having standardised forms and interchangeable parts (1941). However, in the modern music age, the interchangeability of music genres such as Rap Rock is one of the ways in which artists are differentiating themselves from others. Appropriating different styles and ways of making music with the vast amount of resources available online in combination to “old-school genres” have hit the market and the audience is consuming it. These new fusions are also based on the underground music history of each separate genre. Before elaborating further on the aforementioned, “underground” is defined by Kai Fikentscher (2000), as being “a context in which certain activities take place out of perceived necessity for a protected and often secret arena that facilitates opposition, subversion or delimitation to a larger, more dominant, normative, possible oppressive environment” (p.9).

Before the introduction of file-sharing and online distribution platforms, the underground music scene was based on underground communities, often accessible through a website and made by a user for another user. The underground file-sharing communities are quite significant to highlight due to the fact that they have a longer history than public file sharing (Biddle et al, 2002). With the introduction of new genres, innovative platforms for distributing and novel business models. The connection between digitization and authenticity is of importance for this research. The definition of what authenticity might have been before the new digital era and its redefinition in its total essence within the modern industry. The pivotal shift of underground file-sharing communities such as the Gabber scene in Rotterdam to online labels and platforms. With that being said, this research is based on the novelty of such scenes and music genres. But also, the introduction of the novel term (un)conventional labels.

Returning back to the fusion of genres and specifically those that are highlighted as opposing the normative lifestyle, these genres are fused together with more mainstream characteristics in order for them to sell in the new music industry and to a wider audience. This way of appropriation may also inflict negative responses from the underground scene as being inauthentic and too commercial. Thus, the digitization and the resources that came out of it has also introduced some discussion

about the authenticity of its outcome. Firstly, the physical intangibility of the music makes it more abstract for the average consumer to understand it sometimes. In reference to Featherman and Wells (2004), digitization may increase abstraction and cause inauspicious reactions and beliefs that the musical content is artificial and hence inauthentic.

One explanation, that authenticity has manifested itself as one of the most crucial apprehension points in the modern music industry, is that it has become the vital pillar underlying the institutional landscape of the music industry. The commodification of music—transforming music as a good to be exchanged rather than an object of art to be appreciated as a single, one-off experience — (Askin & Mol, 2018, p.2) became a concern as soon as the first electrical reproduction of music took place (Adorno, 1941). Since digitization, the role of authenticity has become increasingly more important; however, to some extent it has become fragile as well. The fragility of authenticity is due to the popularity of mass produced/standardized music thus, the line of authenticity becomes thinner, making its criteria more fragile. The fear of genres such as underground and the basis of this thesis the (un)conventionality of music becoming popular due to the fragility of its constructed authenticity.

Therefore, the introduction of this research is based on the role of authenticity within the modern music industry as a concept that must be highlighted as a bond of institutional practice within the industry's players. Furthermore, some shifts that occurred through the digitization of the music industry has presented concerns of the use of genre classifications, as mentioned above. Shifts such as physical formats dying, the gain of social media in launching your music career, the introduction of streaming platforms and the role of the manager versus major labels. Additional concerns include data quality, habits and the identity between the artist and the audience in terms of identity and authenticity inference (Askin & Mol, 2018, p.4).

One of the key topics to highlight throughout this research is based on the theory of “Long-Tail”<sup>2</sup> (Anderson, 2004). The next few chapters will go into more depth about the theory of the Long-Tail. However, the notion of (un)conventional related to alternative or indie music is based on the characteristics of supporting creative freedom and expression. The term (un)conventional will be explored further by being

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Appendix (2) – Long Tail Anatomy

the next step for the industry. Alternative and Indie music offered different views on certain subjects and with that provoking mainstream music. However, many major labels took advantage of alternative musicians which lead to artistic differences. As major labels focus more on the bottom line rather on the artist's creativity. What needs to be highlighted is that the connectivity of the online platform in the music industry is higher than ever. In addition to that, the artists have the ability to take on economic roles that, traditionally, were out of their purview and exchange directly with their fans without having the presence of a middle-man or gatekeeper.

Authenticity is highlighted as a key concept in the research as it could be part of the process of keeping music from becoming a disposable good. Therefore, the research will also delve into the novel ways of music business strategies and models that artists and labels have adopted. In this matter, these novel ways are highlighted as (un)conventional with the definition that it is non-conforming to the norms of traditional strategies of the music industry. For the basis of this research this definition of (un)conventional will be used however, in the next few chapters the definition of (un)conventional will be explored through respondents and actors and what it means to them. The novelty of this term is underlined by being the next step for underground artists and that there will be another shift in the industry that will push the threshold of mainstream, giving space for (un)conventional strategies to take lead and provide artists a contemporary way of being part of the industry.

The strategies that might be included are; unique experiences for the audience such as exclusive content, intimate digital experiences and artistic expression released with no borders. By saying that, the research is also inspired by a Rotterdam-based music label called HardHeaderz. The label dubs itself as being (un)conventional in its strategies towards the modern music industry and in its business model. Where the artist is given a name of partnership, his/her own rights to the music, and 80 percent of sales and a 20 percent return to the label. The reason for choosing Rotterdam is for its diverse music scene. Which brings us to the main research question of this research; *“How and for which aesthetic-political reasons is the term (un)conventional used by Rotterdam-based musicians in regards to, the construction of (contemporary) authenticity and its values?”*

This research question is based on the concept of (un)conventional and the construction of contemporary authenticity and its values - legitimacy, originality and exclusivity. In order to delve deeper into the topics at hand, the introduction of sub-



questions is a key element in fulfilling the research. Based on the research question, these are the following sub-questions; *“How is authenticity in the modern music industry constructed?”* The sociologist, Richard Peterson (2005) who was inspired by the works of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) used the term ‘invented tradition’. Peterson was inspired by that term and examined the way meaning is manufactured through the agency of organizational process in the creative industries (Jones, Anand, Alvarez, 2005, p. 893). Peterson highlights that authenticity is socially constructed but also a regenerating source for attracting an audience and identifying oneself.

Additionally, by using the concepts of authenticity and the idea of “selling-out” within the music industry, which may also be referred to as fabricating authenticity or the aesthetics of failure, the next sub-question entails the connection of digitization and authenticating musicians with the use of novel tools to stay afloat and differentiated. Thus, the question is; *“does digitization have an influence on an artist’s authenticity levels?”*

The research will be based on a qualitative research method specifically using grounded theory. As the research is based on the main research question, the data collected during the research will aid in identifying further theories and patterns found in the analysis of the data collected. Within grounded theory (Bryman, 2012, p.568) there are tools to aid in gathering and analysing the data. Thus, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with Rotterdam-based musicians with the guidance of an interview guide prepared prior to the interviews. The data will be analysed using the qualitative tool Atlas ti. in order to perform open-coding.

The following chapters will look at research and theoretical frameworks based on the concepts aforementioned. The following chapter will define unconventional as a concept using three highlighted values that could be integral to the music industry: underground, identity and history. In connection to that chapter, a further definition of authenticity will be discussed using its three integral concepts: legitimacy, originality and exclusivity. The link between both chapters will also be discussed. The final chapter of the theoretical framework will revolve around digitization, a concept that initiated this research by linking it to the revival of different genres, the pollution of the market and the innovation that comes with it.

Once enriched with the theoretical chapters, this paper will move to focus on the applied method of the research. Moreover, the gathered results will be discussed in greater detail in order to reach the analysis of the integral chapter; highlighting the

patterns, theories and data found within the semi-structured interviews using reference points to networks made by Atlas ti. Finally, based on the results and the applied method, a conclusion will be drawn that answers the previously-mentioned sub-questions leading to answering the main research question: *“How and for which aesthetic-political reasons is the term (un)conventional used by Rotterdam-based musicians in regards to, the construction of (contemporary) authenticity and its values?”*

## Theoretical Framework

### Chapter 1 – (Un)conventional; fabricating the new

This research is based on the term “(un)conventional” as being the highlighted topic within the modern music industry. How do musicians use or define the word unconventional within their profession? The word (un)conventional is defined as the “music that defies expectation” and may trigger compensatory responses (Maher & Tilburg, 2013, p.450). As the music industry is in constant change due to the development in technology, the strategies of the music business in a sense is continuously changing as well. Its formation of acceptance changes too; thus, it is constantly vulnerable to attacks that deem to be reputable. These attacks are prominent during institutional changes such as new technologies that coincide with new set of tools that deem to be jeopardizing the “status quo”. In Bourdieu’s research, he presents how the ‘social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds’ through ‘cultural products’ including systems of education, language, judgements, values, methods of classification and activities of everyday life (Bourdieu, 1984, 471). The term (un)conventional is one of the tools that will be highlighted in this chapter.

In Hibbett’s research “What is Indie Rock?” (2005), he explains that indie rock is not just an “aesthetic genre” but it is defined as a “method of social differentiation as well as a marketing tool” (p.55). The research is based on Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital and presents a continuing boundary between indie rock and high art. Thus, the integral aspect of this research is that both boundaries need specialized knowledge to be fully appreciated. In his article *Ethnicity, identity and music*, Stokes (1994) placed an emphasis on the notions of authenticity and identity as being closely linked. “Authenticity is definitely not a property of music, musicians and their relations to an audience. It is not even a Benjaminesque ‘aura’ of uniqueness that surrounds a

live situation as opposed to mechanically reproduced music, even though one frequently hears the term used in this way. Instead we should see 'authenticity' as a discursive trope of great persuasive power. It focuses on a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike 'this is what is really significant about this music', 'this is the music that makes us different from other people'" (p. 6).

The way (un)conventional is used within the music industry can initiate a certain authentic and identifiable characteristic that to a certain extent defy the normative view of traditional music strategies but give a sense of "reaffirmation". However, in their article, Maher, Van Tilburg, and, Van Den Tol, highlighted the power that music has in affecting individuals and social groups (2013). The article also introduces one of model; meaning maintenance coined by Hein, Proulx and Vohs (2006). The model underlines human beings as being meaning makers (Heine et al. 2006, p.89). Deviating from the "norms" or expectations of individuals might result in a source of feeling or being meaningless or meaningful to others. These individuals symbolically unite in order to respond to meaning threats that occur within the framework called "reaffirmation". With reaffirmation, if people's expected associations with meaning are violated, for example the introduction of underground music in festivals, therefore, the people try to reaffirm themselves with other expected associations such as music that they affiliate with or in another sense the so-called opposition of underground music; mainstream. Furthermore, what happens within reaffirmation is that it could manifest itself in different behaviours such as looking for other affiliations with other established social groups.

Therefore, as with music, deviating from the traditionalistic foreground of the music industry, the exposure to (un)conventional music that defies the expectation of the audience and the institutions may result in counteract responses towards the musician(s). Furthermore, the audience and musicians may fall back on creating outsider-groups or derogations due to the perception of the changes and meaning sources. For example, larger labels appropriating or copying parts of the underground style and re-using it through their mainstream channels. This would initiate derogations within the music scene.

In this research authenticity and the term (un)conventional are integral discursive concepts in regards to, the research question. The research will look closely towards musicians using the term (un)conventional in the production of their music and the perception of this deviation as being authentic or not in identifying oneself in

the modern music industry. In order to proceed with the research, the term (un)conventional is focused on three values that connect the term towards re-defining it within the modern music industry. The values are underground, historical narrative and identity.

### Underground

With reference to Bourdieu's theory of cultural production, "underground music blurs the boundaries of restricted and large-scale production, as represented by non-commercial and commercial music respectively" (Oware, 2014, p.60). Underground music can be seen as anti-corporate, politically-charged and social-conscious lyrics. However, "symbiotic relationships may exist between major record companies and underground artists (Lena, 2006; Watkins, 2005; Watts, 2012) to maximize their appeal to both alternative consumers and large, mainstream record labels. Underground music has always been a niche market within different music scenes, for example in Rotterdam the birth of Gabber was one of the initiating underground scenes. However, with the development of technologies and the movement of the music industry, underground music has become on the radar for commercial music labels and mainstream artists. As an apparent counterculture, a movement was developed in response to the mainstreaming of music such as rap: this movement was the underground movement. And in that scene underground rap was initiated in order for hip hop artists to distinguish themselves from major record labels releases.

Furthermore, the word underground became prominent in the mid 1990's with the introduction of independent music labels (Oware, 2014, p.64). "Independent labels were considered as artistically innovative and as fostering the creativity of their artists—that is, not dictating or limiting what one could or could not say. Underground artists, in the early years of the sub-genre, ostensibly challenged what they saw as insipid, stereotypical, and sterile music, arguing commercial/mainstream performers lacked 'skill' and 'integrity' (Oware, 2014, p.64). The innovative strategy of artists distinguishing themselves with their music style but also their business strategy was a refreshing view in the industry. Underground music is still a niche genre/ style that gives artists the opportunity to express themselves freely and defy the norms of mainstream music.

### Historical Narrative

The historical narrative of the underground music scene may be considered in connection with the term (un)conventional. As it is part of the institutional politics and aesthetics opposing popular culture. “The institutional intervention was achieved through a more reflexive understanding of the dynamics of the record industry. The commitment to independent production and distribution transcended romantic notions of musical creativity” (Hesmondhalgh 1999, p.37). The arrival of technology, lowered costs of studio rentals and less expensive instruments that gave artists the opportunity to self-express in their music but also experiment with it.

With underground music, the political activism was one of the basis for the initiation of the style of music. With the prominence of underground music, artists were able to creatively express themselves without the notion of being restricted within the conformities of the traditional music industry. However, what happened is some of the independent labels “professionalized” and created partnerships with major labels. The consequence of that is that the financial partnership of major labels entail the potentiality of control.

Hesmondhalgh (1999) highlights that the times have changed, due to various reasons such as the development of technology. He underpins the notion that there is a need for a different era with different cultural politics that would take into consideration the failures of the independent labels (p.57). Underground music is one of the genres that is still affiliated with niche markets. Thus, this research is based on the contemporary modes of strategies that could bring forth the underground style in a different perspective. The (un)conventional model that may induce the market with non-conforming music styles but still have the affinity with the rules of the industry. The underground music is a characteristic that entails the notion of elements of surprise, creativity and a lifestyle that elaborates on experiences.

However, before going deeper into a novel strategy that may influence the industry by pushing the threshold of its situated position between underground and mainstream. The third value that relates to the term (un)conventional is identity and will be discussed and elaborated on further.

### Identity

“A generation of digital natives has now had the majority of recorded music freely available for most of its collective lifetime. With Napster and iTunes, there was

no longer a need to search in a genre-specific area of a record store while worrying about being judged by other customers or the employees. Owing to this unfettered access, the geographic, cultural, and status-based boundaries that previously directed listeners' habits have become less relevant and perhaps even antiquated" (Askin & Mol, 2018, p.26). The audience and fans have an affinity with a certain type of music in order to craft their own identity (Frith, 1996). Defining your identity through music has changed within the development of the music industry, it's not solely based on the type of music but it's based on the expression that the artist gives to the audience.

There is a certain music-appreciation that indulges the idea of identity-formation. The underground music scene represents a certain amount of identity-formation as it builds a community in which the audience and the artists can be affiliated with each but still have the experience of proximity and indulgence. Furthermore, identity can also be interrelated to the authentication process of a specific genre in which the identity of the audience differentiates the selection process of what is trending and not. Therefore, there is a dangerous line between the audience and what is on the top charts. The (un)conventional strategy within this research is based on its meaning within the identification process of an artist but also the audience. In connection to that, authenticity also plays a role within that. Thus, (un)conventional and authenticity are two concepts that might be related to one another but also define one another to an extent.

The prominence of identity in music is especially integral when it comes to the artist him/herself. The identity of a musician expressed within their music can also be considered as artistic expression. Therefore, in terms of underground music, the identity of the music and the musician are relatable, that one can't exist without the other. As Firth (1996) highlighted, music is able to create and construct an aesthetic experience and make sense of that by taking on a *collective identity* (p.100).

The underground music scene also identified with the DIY cultural practices which will be discussed further in chapter 3. This act of experiencing identity represents a social process and a form of interaction within an aesthetic process.

## Chapter 2 – Authenticity at its best

In music discourse, the term authenticity is one of the most valuable terms within the industry. The term can be defined using various words including “real, honest, truthful, with integrity, actual, genuine, essential and sincere” (Moore, 2002, p.209). Moore discussed in his research (2002) that authenticity is based on who we are. In terms of music, he asks the questions of *who* authenticated the piece of music in opposition of *what* made it authentic. Authenticity is highlighted as a term defining a style or genre of a type of music. It also refers to the social standing of the musician. “It is used to determine the supposed reasons she has for working, whether her primary felt responsibility is to herself, her art, her public, or her bank balance. It is used to bestow integrity, or its lack, on a performer, such that an ‘authentic’ performer exhibits realism, lack of pretence, or the like” (Moore, 2002, p.211). The word authenticity is compared to a pendulum that swings from one extreme to another, giving it the ability to be re-defined within different discourses. In the modern music industry, authenticity is one of the pillars that keeps music from becoming a disposable good. However, in earlier narratives (Askin & Mol, 2018) authenticity was depicted to have a distraught relationship with technology by which it has the potential to heighten a consumer’s feeling of inauthenticity towards an artist and a product (cf. Adorno, 1941; Benjamin, 2008 [1936]).

The issue of authenticity was seen with a negative connotation with how modern reproductions take away from the “original” (Benjamin, 1968, p.214). In addition to that, Adorno has a similar response to mechanical reproduction and his objection of mass music production. Furthermore, Mary Douglas’ point about institutions doing the thinking for us when saying: “standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line doing their thinking for them” (Adorno, 1941, p. 25; Douglas, 1986). However, this research is based on authenticity being a fragile concept which needs to be protected within the modern music industry.

Referring back to Moore, he discusses authenticity in different perspectives; first person authenticity, third person authenticity and second person authenticity. First person authenticity revolves around the artist being recognized as authentic. There is a thin line between knowing if someone is being true to its identity, experiences and personality. Such as in Hip Hop, its performative highlights social change and we must

acknowledge that performative nature. “I also term ‘first person authenticity’, arises when an originator (composer, performer) succeeds in conveying the impression that his/ her utterance is one of integrity, that it represents an attempt to communicate in an unmediated form with an audience” (Moore, 2002, p.214). With the music industry constantly developing, social media may contribute to the first-person authenticity, as the new generation that looks at social platforms as “real-life experiences”. This can also be connected to the discursive course of the music industry and how it can be influenced by other intermediaries. Currently, contemporary media provides the opportunity to showcase artists’ first-person authenticity, whilst simultaneously increasing influence in the choices artists make to either present the authentic presentation they originally strived for or (partially) adapt and change to conventional ways that increases their chances of creating a bigger mainstream audience.

In reference to the audience, the third person authenticity is when the audience decides whether or not a cultural form such as music is “true” to a collective set of individuals of which in some cases the audience has no or little knowledge about. This is equally problematic as the music industry has an intense amount of history, knowledge and technical aspects towards a form, style or genre that an audience may interfere with its authenticity due to being biased or unknowledgeable. Perception can be linked to this form of authenticity as an audience can have various perspectives on a singular subject thus, musicians that express their form of individuality for instance, may be hindered due to the perception of what the audience thinks as being authentic. However, Moore (2002) coins the term *authenticity of execution* (p.218) in relation to his third person authenticity in which the musician in this case conveys the impression of representing accurately the ideas of another, using a specific genre for instance. An example of that is the fusion of genres mentioned before, some musician may have the skill but also the knowledge of both genres and convey accurately towards the audience.

“While the question of why particular (groups of) listeners give value to some musical experiences above others may depend on what music connotes or denotes, it also depends on how the musical experience is constructed around a basic distinction which may be summarised as mainstream/margin, centre/ periphery, or co-opted/ underground” (Moore, 2002, p.218). The second person authenticity puts emphasis on what Moore calls *the process of authentication* in opposition to an intrinsic or essential category of an artist. The foundation of the second person



authenticity is when a music performance achieves what he calls *authenticity of experience* by which the performance succeeds in expressing an impression to the audience that a specific life experience is being validated - “that the music is ‘telling it like it is’ for them” (Moore, 2002, p.220). This connotes to two highlighting aspects; firstly, that authenticity is inevitably recognized by an audience besides the performer. Secondly, that the recognition of authenticity can be provided through a music performance that potentially indicates both the authentication and the process of it.

Furthermore, an extension to the first definition is by E. Doyle McCarthy (Vannini & Williams, 2016); “authenticity is best grasped within the context of a distinct *modern culture of emotion* – principally Romantic in its origins and development – where feelings and emotions speak to us about who we are, telling us the most vital things about ourselves” (p.241). In this sense authenticity may be perceived as the language of the self, meaning expressing who you are in terms of your *identity*. Which in modern days, especially when the authenticity is thoroughly recognised, contributes to a manifestation resulting into an intense experience. It is intensified by the modern contemporary media by which the pursuit of what is *real vs. fake and what is natural vs. fabricated*? In contemporary media, saturated cultures such as the music industry it is inevitable to continuously ask the question of what authenticity is now? What was highlighted with Moore is important to take into account when looking at the development and innovations of music. However, in this research there is an extension to authenticity in relation to the previous chapter where (un)conventional is based on three values that co-exist together: underground, identity and history. As Moore stated his three states of authenticity. It is can also be highlighted that authenticity revolves around three key values that may be proceed in fulfilling the goal of this research. Those three values are *legitimacy, originality and exclusivity*. These three values will be discussed below in connection to authenticity and the research question.

### Legitimacy

“Cultural producers seek legitimacy rather than profits alone” (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu highlighted three forms of legitimacy in the cultural fields such as the music industry, by which the audience assigns *popular legitimacy* on cultural products, *specific legitimacy* which is achieved through professional recognition and *bourgeois legitimacy* is where agents of the dominating class give legitimacy to an artist or work (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010, p.685). In this research, the three types of legitimacy are to

be explored if they correlate to what musicians' regard as authentic in the industry. *Popular legitimacy* may be seen as the audience and the trends that define a song or type of music as being authentic in a popular legitimate way such as Mainstream music for example. *Specific legitimacy* can be considered as the scene that the musician affiliates with the authentication of his/her music. Finally, *Bourgeois legitimacy* may be considered as the major labels that bestow authenticity towards a specific artist or even changes the artist towards their own belief of what is authentic.

### Originality

The second value is originality; in which it can be defined as “the deviation from given rules or generally speaking from common practices” (Williamon, Thompson, Lisboa & Wiffen, 2006, p.152). Research has suggested that originality as a form can become a threat to legitimacy and authenticity (Hughes, 2000, p.190). This connotes to the discussion if a product or a song for example deviates from given rules or conventions, its authenticity and legitimacy is taken away. However, for this research, the values of authenticity are evaluated within the reconstruction of their definition within the modern music industry. Therefore, musicians that defy the normative courses of the traditional music industry could redefine the outcome of originality in terms of authenticating it to a new level.

### Exclusivity

The final value in connection to authenticity is exclusivity and how it is perceived within the modern music industry. Within the industry exclusivity is defined as “generating attention and distinction” (Hracs, Jakob & Hauge, 2013, p.1144). The conventional way of exclusivity within the music scene is to overcome economic limitations, differentiate products and the collection of monopoly rents (Hracs, Jakob & Hauge, 2013). However, pushing against the boundaries of traditional ways of the music industry, this research will explore the idea that exclusivity can be re-defined once authenticity is as well, with the assumption that exclusivity is in correlation with authenticity.

Furthermore, in the age of digital technologies, the ability of accelerating the introduction of new ways of production, marketing, distribution and consumption, controlling exclusivity within the scene aids artists with limited economic resources to engage and develop their passion in an extremely hypercompetitive marketplace (Hracs, Jakob & Hauge, 2013, p.1146). Thus, in the circumstance of (un)conventional

artists and labels, the lack of financial resources may be balanced out with the use of creative exclusivity and a change within the structure of how they view exclusive products and individuals. Furthermore, in a hypercompetitive market, musicians are able to differentiate themselves by generating value through artisanal production techniques and as a result increase their exclusivity.

This chapter revolved around the identification of authenticity within three values; *legitimacy*, *originality* and *exclusivity* in order to further elaborate on the correlation between the concepts that are discussed in the next part, revolving around the notion of “symbolic boundaries” defined as “the lines that include and define some people, and things while excluding others. These distinctions can be expressed through normative interdictions, cultural attitudes and practices, and patterns of likes and dislikes” (Lamont, Pendergrass and Pachucki, 2001, p.850). These boundaries are intrinsic in the creation of inequality, and the exercise of power. Furthermore, symbolic boundaries are also in relation to classifying superiority, privileges in how dominating groups such as the major labels in the music industry define their own superiority. Therefore, they relate to what is called “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1977) which means that dominating actors enforce what is legitimate and by doing so also hiding the power relations that is the basis of the enforcement. “Through the incorporation of ‘habitus’ or cultural dispositions, cultural practices have inescapable and unconscious classificatory effects that shape social positions” (Lamont, Pendergrass and Pachucki, 2001, p.852). With the representation of cultural dispositions within the music industry, the use of the word (un)conventional may engage in a symbolic (social) boundary in the contemporary strategies of the industry. Furthermore, authenticity is a “relational institutional” practice (Askin, 2017, p.30) with the use of actors that are intrinsic in producing the boundaries of what is authentic. These actors are the producers, consumers and the music selectors.

This research revolves around drawing boundary between the (un)conventional music labels and the traditional music labels. What is important to highlight here is that there is also an affinity with the term social and collective identity in which it describes how the internal identification process must be recognized by third parties such as the audience for an objectified collective identity to emerge (Jenkins, 1996). In reference to the previous chapter, the connection of authentication is related to the word (un)conventional and in its essence of developing a sense of social identity.

### Chapter 3 – Digitization; did I ruin it all?

Since the introduction of the digital era, the discussion around the values that underpin musicians are being questioned through the exploration of popular music and the perspective of “selling-out” due to three prospective reasons; digitization, promotionalism and globalization (Klein, Meier, Powers, 2017). This chapter will concentrate on the age of digitization and its occurrences within the modern music industry. The term digitization is highlighted as the “changing process from analogue to digital form” (Bloomberg, 2018). The music industry has gone through a process of adaptations that has introduced artists to digital formats in producing, distributing and selling. However, an integral aspect of the modern music industry is the consequence that comes with this opportunity.

For this research, the word digitization was designated to being one of the concepts – in opposition to choosing digitalization for the reason that digitization was the act of moving from one era to another. Digitalization came to existence due to this movement. Thus, this research will be based on the starting point of that change.

Despite the opportunity of this change, there has been concerns about artists selling-out in the music industry due to the vast amount of online resources and platforms that provide a multitude of possibilities. However, these possibilities may affect the way musicians make their music as it has become too easy to do so. Moreover, there has been an influx of musicians entering the industry due to the various possibilities of being a musician – and defining themselves as musicians.

Therefore, this chapter will expand on the notion of “the polluted music market”, the revival of the DIY culture due to the change and the innovative changes that came with the change.

#### Am I polluting the industry?

“The risk accusations of “selling out,” is commonly understood as abandoning previously held political and aesthetic commitments for financial gain, alienation of a loyal core of supporters for a flash of mainstream success, and loss of affiliation with groups for whom such boundary maintenance is valued” (p.222). Throughout the shift, one of the repercussions of the digital era is the correlation between commercial affiliation and selling out. “Commercial placement, or a sync, has evidenced itself as the last unimpeded pathway to our ears—what was once considered to be the lowest form of selling out, of betraying fans and compromising principles, is now regarded as

a crucial cornerstone of success” (Klein, Meier, Powers, 2017, p.224). The industry has offered alternative business models for musicians which are in total opposition from before. These business models are a result of the wider shift between the music industry and technology. Therefore, a few years ago communication technologies and platforms were expressed as a liberating way for musicians to communicate with their audience, differentiate themselves and distribute their music independently. However, at the moment, the inevitable business structure of the industry has changed towards “musicians teaming up with corporations if they want any hope of success” (Klein, Meier, Powers, 2017, p.225). Therefore, the musician is made into a brand which for the industry “experts”, allows them to maximize the brand of the musicians in order to achieve full financial value.

This change may introduce the possibilities of polluted music being introduced to the market as musicians depend on the industry experts to tell them what is trending and transforming their original sound towards a sellable product – mainstream. Furthermore, musicians connecting themselves to larger and powerful entities such as major labels, include the possibility of losing control over their image, reputation and their own original ‘brand’. There is a vast amount of music in the market that the pollution of it is inevitable especially with the shift and trends of the digital world. Referring back to the previous two chapters, the authentication process has been re-defined within the walls of commercialization but also within the social trends that are encountered in every-day life. Moreover, the identity of the artist is based on a brand, which also suggests that the original and legitimacy of his/her music is tampered with due to the opportunity of financial gain.

However, within the concept of digitization also comes the concept of authenticity. “The industry prompts the examination of the digitization of music by investigating not only how music is commodified in novel ways, but also how the very institutional practices institutionalizing authenticity in music enables the commodification shaped by the relational pathways underpinning the process of authentication” (Askin & Mol, 2018, p.5). The digital production of music has influenced the way musicians make their music and find their sound however, it is integral to highlight more than ever how crucial it is to hold on the authenticity of your identity as an artist with this change. The goal of the industry, whether it is big or small, is to sell. Therefore, the image or identity that you create for yourself as an artist is crucial in this day and age as the competition due to developments such as, streaming and

online platforms, have generated an immense number of artists and music spreading globally. Thus, in order to “make it” it is essential to have an identity that distinguishes yourself from others.

### Did I revive It?

With the presence of the digital era, changes in the music industry are inevitable. However, the culture of the DIY scene – Do it yourself – such as underground music have re-surfaced as an expression of identity culture and a stance opposing the commercial sector.

There is a key point in this chapter which expresses the discourse of “contemporary underground cultures’ aesthetics between the digital, the retro and the nostalgia”. The modern music scene has instigated a connection with contemporary underground cultures that combine the old, the new and the borrowed in a sense. For example, in hip hop, musicians in that scene still have an affinity with being an underground style. It supports the appropriation of the old “boom bap” style of hip hop with the integration of novel digital productions whilst keeping it authentic and original. The digitization of the industry has revived a sense of nostalgia for the older scene by which younger generations are also experimenting with.

Furthermore, referring back to fusion genres, the underground scene provides the path for musicians to experiment and turn back to the DIY music culture in order to differentiate themselves from the mainstream sounds that are being thrown into the market. With reference to this, the theory of Anderson (2006) called the “long tail” is introduced. “The long tail means that the potential aggregate demand from the marginal markets in pop-rock music that individually were not profitable in the traditional market can, with online distribution, compete with the better-known artists. Successfully applying this strategy, firms can realize significant profits from selling small volumes of hard-to-find items to many customers, instead of only selling large volumes of a reduced number of popular items. The total sales of this large number of “non-hit items” correspond to the long tail. The long tail, which is also known as a heavy tail or power-law tail, has gained popularity in the last decade as a retailing concept that describes this “niche strategy.” (Coelho & Mendes, 2019, p.2). In addition, digitization has lowered the threshold for musicians to make music, find music from the past and distribute it themselves. But also deriving from Jenkins (2006) and Baym (2011) attested that independent firms deal with effective participatory culture more

major labels. So instead of looking at the audience as a market, independent labels looked at their fans on an equal level. This creates a larger community that can benefit both sides. They build the communities by giving away free sample, building a relationship through blogs or social media. By doing so they are building a relationship with their fans on the basis of sharing. Therefore, using this strategy Jenkins and Baym highlighted the re-adaption of the ideology and the practice of the gift economy which is based on trust, community and collective feeling (van Poecke and Michael, 2016, p.7).

These “niche strategies” allow for the path of regenerating contemporary underground cultures within a certain aesthetic. That aesthetic forms within the mixture of different cultures and historical narratives however, by also underlining the niche or (un)conventional strategy of breaking through the market. The threshold between underground and mainstream can be pushed using (un)conventional strategies such as re-making the long tail theory to the underground scene’s advantage.

Digitization has revived a sense of distinction through underground musicians wanting to prevail in the modern music industry however, with the condition of authenticity, originality and their legitimacy remaining intact.

#### But am I innovative?

There is always room for innovation with the flourishing opportunities brought forth by the digital realm. However, what is also an effect of the digitization of the industry is the re-introduction or the “coexistence of generations and sometimes obsolete technologies become useful again, especially in combination with a newer one” (Foucart, Wan & Wang, 2018, p.2). An example of that is the comeback of vinyl.

What is interesting to point out is a model called the “three-generation” which is a model that represents how a product that has been abandoned by a particular type of consumer can become attractive again in the presence of an innovation (Foucart, Wan & Wang, 2018, p.3). The conception of this model is based on the circumstance that a comeback may achieve attributes that consumers value and complement the new generation of technological advancements. An example of a comeback is vinyl which is an appropriate one due to the nostalgic attribute towards the previous generations with the added value of merging new music with a twist of

retro. This may entice the consumer to delve into a different way of consuming music as it also opposes the modern streaming method of consumption.

Furthermore, this also highlights the previous topics of authenticity and originality as the re-generation of older strategies combined with new ways of contributing to the modern music industry. This could increase those values within the underground scene and provide an opportunity to grow prominence in the music market. This will be further examined through the analysis in the results chapter.

In the next chapter, the methodology of the research will be presented in order to reach the goal of the research question and sub-questions.

## Method

This chapter outlines the methodology deployed for this research piece including; an explanation of the general research methods, a description of the type of data used, outlining the rationale behind research design decisions and finally, qualitative operationalization and instruments of analysis.

### Data Collection

To begin with, this research utilizes on a qualitative research method, specifically using grounded theory. Within grounded theory (Bryman, 2012, p.568), collected data is treated as concepts that represent a middle ground between theoretical considerations and understanding. Grounded theory, as an inductive study, is used to analyse the data and findings during this research piece to generate theories and conclusions. Furthermore, a deductive approach was not used as it is generally biased towards quantitative data (Bryman, 2012, p.70). Due to the qualitative and theoretical nature of this project's research question, grounded theory in combination with qualitative data allows the research to develop an open-ended strategy starting from scratch (Bryman, 2012, p. 428). This is especially useful when analysing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews that contain some of the interviewee's inherent subjectivity. Consequently, qualitative research with a basis of grounded theory represents the most suitable general research method to answer this project's research question.

In addition to utilizing grounded theory and qualitative research, the research is based on semi-structured interviews with purposeful sampling (Bryman, 2012, p.418). Semi-structured interviews are chosen in order to provide clear topics and questions



for the interviewees however, also providing them with the ability to speak freely and elaborate on the topics. Thus, semi-structured interviews provide reliable and valid research in order to reach patterns and newly formed patterns after analysis. Based on the theoretical framework previously outlined, analytical categories were identified.

### Sampling

These analytical categories were then used for purposeful sampling to select the most relevant and representative sample of 14 interviewees, representing the units of analysis at an individual level. For these units of analysis, the period under investigation totalled 10 hours over 3 weeks. The analytical categories or pre-determined filters for the purposeful sampling were; Rotterdam-based, DJ, music producer or a major stakeholder in the local music industry. Moreover, no gender or age restrictions were applied to the sampling. Also, the sampling focused on a mix of both artists that were considered underground or unconventional and mainstream or commercial. As this paper's research question attempts to uncover the connection between unconventional artists and authenticity, it was important to include both conventional and unconventional artists to get a holistic view of both types. The only sampling restriction applied was the requirement to be involved in the music industry for at least two years or more.

Regarding the location of the study, Rotterdam was selected due to four main reasons. First, the external image of Rotterdam is that it is based solely on two main music genres; being Drum & Bass and Gabber. However, with Rotterdam's dynamic and quickly- changing music scene, new hybrid music genres are emerging, allowing room to explore unconventional versus conventional music and artists. Second, the Netherlands is experiencing an emergence of unconventional labels across different cities and Rotterdam was selected as a representative example due to its mix of genres and types of artists. Finally, the network of artists and music stakeholders accessible to the researcher was strongest in Rotterdam. This allowed contacts to be leveraged for purposeful sampling and the application of semi-structured interviews that could support answering this paper's research question. Furthermore, the sampled group of interviewees are from the music sector therefore, it will be productive to use locations where they feel comfortable but also in their own comfort zone such as their music studio, label headquarters or home. Many of the interviewees that are

in mind are based at a music production school that offers studio spaces for independent musicians.

Regarding the operationalization of this qualitative research, the concept of authenticity, (un)conventionality, and exclusivity are the main concepts to be made into categories after the transcription of the interviews and the analysis of them. By performing interviews, the interview guide<sup>3</sup> is of importance as it consists of the main concepts that accompany the research question. Therefore, the interview guide will be structured in four sections. The first section will entail the general background of the musician, such as birthplace, age, previous studies and background on music genres and experiences. The second section will look over the digitization of the music industry and if it has affected their work and production of music. The third section will look over key elements that result in highlighting how authenticity plays a role in their career or doesn't. Finally, the fourth section will look over exclusivity and the impact of the digital era with various experiences as a musician. The interview guide will provide space for the interviewee to speak freely about topics that interest him/her and elaborate further. The part of the interview provides further patterns to be realized and generated.

### Data Analysis

The analysis procedure will be formed around axial coding, after the transcription of the interviews, the program Atlas ti. will be used to perform open-coding; "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data" (Bryman, 2012, p.569). This process is used to clearly mark the concepts mentioned previously within different categories of the interviews in order to find patterns that might lead to new results and contribute to existing theories with the influence the approach of grounded theory. Furthermore, in grounded theory, axial coding is used where the data is put back together in a different perspective after open-coding. Thus, in the second sample, the new data collected will then be compared to the initial coding and re-structured in order to provide connections between the various categories and concepts found.

Moreover, after the data is collected the analysis process will begin in order to analyse the patterns found by using an open code book within the software of atlas ti. When it comes to analysis of the information collected during the semi-structured

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<sup>3</sup> Refer to appendix (3) Interview Guide

interviews, certain indirect indicators have been chosen that allow for the evaluation or measurement of the three main concepts; authenticity, unconventionality and digitization. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, each main concept has three indirect indicators that are expected to have a causality or influence, allowing for the operationalization of the main qualitative concepts (Bryman, 2012, p. 207). By using these indirect indicators, analysis can be done on the three main concepts. To explore these indirect influences on the main concepts, the interview guide focuses on six main interview topics including interview background, music and management, digitization and the music industry, authenticating the new industry, exclusivity and the impact of the digital era and unconventional and music labels.

### Overview of results

To elaborate on these interview topics, the interviewee background focuses on questions revolving around the professional background of the musician or music professional, such as the place of study, background of their genre in music and where have they performed before. Music and management focuses on questions revolving around the status of the musician, whether they are independent artists or signed to a specific label and why they have chosen the focused genre in their career as a musician. For digitization and the music industry, questions were posed around the development of new strategies and platforms for making, producing and distributing their music and the effect on their career development. Furthermore, it will look at their choice for choosing their status as a musician. The fourth interview topic of authenticating the new industry explored the interviewees' definition of the music industry and how it has affected the way music is being perceived in Rotterdam. Moreover, the influence that digital music plays on their career path, either negatively or positively. The fifth interview topic of exclusivity and the impact of the digital era looked into how exclusivity has changed in the Rotterdam music scene and whether the interviewees think the change has improved or not. The last topic of the interview guide; unconventionality and music labels, attempted to uncover the definition of unconventional for the musician and if he or she has an affinity to the word or term within their music genre and experiences.

Once the link is found between the indirect indicators and the main concepts, a conclusion will be drawn that answers the research question; *“How and for which aesthetic-political reasons is the term (un)conventional used by Rotterdam-based*

*musicians in regards to, the construction of (contemporary) authenticity and its values?*

## Results

By using an open-coding method in the program Atlas ti. I was able to analyse the semi-structured interviews through a set of codes. The code book<sup>4</sup> is in reference to the concepts operationalized in the previous chapters; authenticity, (un)conventional & digitization with their added values of legitimacy, originality, exclusivity, underground, identity and historical narrative. By using the research based in chapter 3 regarding the pollution of the market, the revival of the older generations and the innovative strategies the interviews were based on the relationship between those chapters.

By using Atlas ti. I was able to generate different networks in relation to quotes in the interviews and the corresponding codes that would link between each interview. The following chapter will discuss the analysis of these results by using quotes from the interviews and the codes corresponding to the concepts.

### Authenticity – what is it anyways?

#### The Concept of Authenticity: <sup>5</sup>

The concept of authenticity was an integral part in the interviews as it is the basis of the research question and the foundation of the research. In the previous chapters, it was discussed that authenticity was based on Moore's perspective of authenticity being highlighted as first, third and second person.

During the interviews, some of the interviewees highlight the importance of stage presence and the authenticity of that; *“the question I’m asking myself, would they be losing my identity? Is their identity just what you see on stage or also where the money eventually is going and how that affects their future career? Um, I think that is an important aspect to look into...the choices that they are making”* (anonymous interviewee). The authenticity of stage performance in relation to the identity of the artist seemed to have an importance within the modern music industry as many more

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<sup>4</sup> Refer to Appendix (4) – Code Book

<sup>5</sup> Refer to Appendix (5) – Concept of Authenticity

live performances are being integrated within the career of artists. This refers to Moore's second person authenticity.

Furthermore, authenticity is also seen as the "new sound"; *"they want to do like the real, the purists...so you get new type of sounds"* (anonymous interviewee). It was indicated that with making art as a purist and "keeping it real" suggests new sounds coming into the market which in turn also differentiates the artist from others. Moreover, one interviewee highlighted the importance of authenticity; *"it's like the most crucial term in making art...just try to sound like yourself, whatever that may be"*. In order to make art not just music, the term authenticity is seen as being one of the integral characteristic in the production of the work but also in the personality of the artist.

Regarding the loss of authenticity, one interesting quote by an interviewee was; *"it doesn't have to be when you're big and popular, it's when you're focused on making profit that's when you lose it"*. This is interesting in regard to the previous theory discussed, as an artist can be popular in a sense and have high exclusivity however, that does not necessarily diminish their authenticity. It is financial motives that may lead to changing your style or your identity as a musician in order to make more money. However, as I analysed the interviewees, many of the artists show an interesting characteristic - patience, meaning they understand that taking a different perspective or strategy within the modern music industry needs long-term goal mind-set instead of losing authenticity or "selling-out". *"When you operate on a commercial level...but keep it like authentic and like original"* (anonymous interviewee).

In relation to the quote above, what I found intriguing is the appropriation of the commercial side of the industry and tailoring it towards the authenticity that you want as an artist; *"follow a set of rules that are applied by the big corporations and make a model for themselves"* (anonymous interviewee). Another interviewee highlighted the importance of the market and the position you stand in; *"I think it's important to find your own positioning in the market...that helps differentiate yourself"* (anonymous interviewee). The above mentioned is in connection to first-person authenticity by which the influence of other intermediaries such as the market position of the artist may influence the way his/her authenticity is defined by.

In addition, the motivation behind being authentic is an important aspect within the music industry; *"if you talk about authenticity, there are a lot of artists out there who actually use this as fuel and motivation to become more and more original and*

*stand out in their own way” (anonymous interview).* Other than being seen on stage as authentic, the motivation of the artist needs to be fuelled by authenticity in order to reach fulfilment. A label can give that motivation without restricting the artist’s authenticity and provide the development that they need. *“Those unconventional labels and artists who tried to stay true to their niche, but also kind of increased their authenticity and independency rather than uh, going with the mainstream, that they are actually motivated to take that extra step and in redefining what, what their art is to them and therefore bringing something fresher to the audience” (anonymous interviewee).* This perspective can be linked to the third person authenticity. When an artist brings a novel sound to an audience it can be perceived in various perspectives. The audience may change the way it moves through the market due to extensive or little knowledge about the sound.

In accordance to chapter 2 - Authenticity at its best - the next part of the results is from the perspective of the first value of authenticity; legitimacy. And how it is analysed within the interviewees.

#### Legit or nah?

##### The value of Legitimacy <sup>6</sup>

This section of this chapter is based on the theory of Bourdieu however, altered towards the (un)conventional strategy of labels and musicians. The value of legitimacy is deemed as an extension of authenticity, in reference to the abovementioned perception of Moore (2002) in which he extends authenticity in three perspectives. “Legitimacy is also seen as three perspectives. Bourdieu highlighted three forms of legitimacy in the cultural fields such as the music industry, by which the audience assigns *popular legitimacy* on cultural products, *specific legitimacy* which is achieved through professional recognition and *bourgeois legitimacy* is where agents of the dominating class give legitimacy to an artist or work” (Schmutz & Faupel, 2010, p.685).

The value of legitimacy is organized within three perspectives and this section will analyse the interviews within the three perspectives.

#### Am I popular & legit?

Popular legitimacy is based on the audience and trends that may define a certain type of music as being authentic in a popular and legitimate way. *“You get new types of sound, in like a traditional label, I, I don’t think that’s like, they don’t target that.*

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to Appendix (6) – The Value of Legitimacy

*They like...they look at what's popular right now. And make a model out of it and the artist's work in that model and generate money off it. It takes away authenticity, it takes away creativity" (anonymous interviewee).* The audience is one the key components when it comes to legitimacy and authenticity. The interviewee suggested that the model of becoming popular within a traditional label revolves around the targeted audience and how that can make money. However, what is important to focus on is that within traditional labels, creative freedom is taken away which in turn also removes authenticity. One of the examples of popular legitimacy is mainstream music, it is what the audience wants to hear and what trends are based on a specific type of music. Thus, artists are steered towards a path of being popular in order to be legit within the audience and trends of the industry at the moment.

#### Am I specific & legit?

Furthermore, specific legitimacy was found during the interviews as the scene in which the artists feel the most authentic such as the underground scene. *"Like if we're talking about in terms of commercializing your unconventional music, that's just, you just got to find a way to properly sell it" (anonymous interviewee).* One of the ways an (un)conventional artist can authenticate his/her scene is by finding the proper balance between underground and mainstream. Pushing the threshold of what is mainstream and re-define what it means to you. *"You have to realize that uh, these personal characteristics or, or you know extreme things in their personality, they just have to broaden that for the audience. And that's what it makes it authentic and what makes it legit. Um, so you're not, you're not selling, you know, you're selling not a story, but you're selling yourself. Uh, and this way it gets kind of more personal. But then again, it's also the best way I guess, cause it's the realest, realest thing which is out there instead of, Yeah. Instead of something else, I guess.... (anonymous interviewee).*

#### Am I Bourgeois and legit?

In connection to that, the final type of legitimacy was found in the interviews, the Bourgeois legitimacy. This type of legitimacy is allotting authenticity towards specific artist and/ or their own belief of what is authenticity. *"I mean like why this underground style isn't, uh, the most listened music to is because of these labels are focusing on the specific way of making artists or steer them onto this path" (anonymous).* Many traditional labels steer their artists towards what they think is legit and authentic therefore, moving them onto a path that does not necessarily keep their

original identity. *“When you start changing your sound because you want exclusivity, you're going down a wrong road goes down, then you're redefining yourselves in terms of marketing and I don't know, I'm not for that. Also, I'm sure there are people who do that, but not people I would want to put in my label”* (anonymous interviewee). The reason for bigger traditional labels steering their artists to a certain path is for the exclusivity of the label's image and what they think the audience wants to hear. The interviewee in the previous quote highlighted the fact that he would not include them in his recent label. His label revolves around the importance of the artists they sign in creating their own authenticity within a legit process of new sounds and their own identity. This idea takes us to the next value of authentication; originality.

### [Do I really want to be original?](#)

#### The Value of Originality <sup>7</sup>

In previous chapters, originality was defined within the context of deviating from normative rules. Research has also suggested that originality may become a threat to legitimacy and authenticity of a product such as music. Such as deviating from common practices of music and its trends that it may be labelled as unoriginal. However, this section highlights the ability of how originality is one of the value of authenticity within the modern music scene. *“The selling out part also motivates others to like increase our authenticity and therefore actually increase the quality of the original product”* (anonymous interviewee). During the interviews, the subject of being original came as a way to underline the music an artist makes in order to increase the quality.

Furthermore, the value of originality is seen as an extension of authenticity and legitimacy due to the re-definition of mainstream within the music scene. In other words; *“I want to say we will become mainstream, but like we will operate on a mainstream level. Yeah, and then it's on us to like, uh, have the same mind-set as to keep it like authentic and like original”* (anonymous interviewee). The idea of becoming mainstream is not seen as a frightening experience for underground artists. What is important is how (un)conventional models are applied to their music in order to keep the standard of their quality and originality. Within the underground or commercial industry, both correlate with the need to make money in order to survive however, it is important to highlight the importance of maintaining originality on stage and off stage.

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<sup>7</sup> Refer to Appendix (7)- The Value of Originality



*“Nowadays artists, if they really want to make money, they gotta be really original with selling their tracks or making money on stage, which is why I refer to the originality part earlier. It’s important to think of that on and off stage” (anonymous interviewee).*

Another interviewee focused attention on how commercial/mainstream artists are inspired by recycled products which culminates towards an unoriginal stage presence and musical product. *“They are inspired by something that is already very narrowed down and very unoriginal and very recycled. So, if people get inspired by a recycled product, then you’ve got a third hand cola bottle” (anonymous interviewee).* Those artists focus on one trend, genre or style of music that leaves them in a very narrowed path in the scene.

That being said another interviewee underlined a statement about (un)conventional labels; *“the nonconventional labels will, will survive because they, they’re not limited to one thing. And it also means that they push boundaries of genres and new music uh compared to the conventional ones that stick to one thing” (anonymous interviewee).* (Un)conventional labels push the boundaries or threshold of which they are not limited towards one specific norm but also give the freedom for the artist to choose how they would like to steer themselves. *“If you look at someone’s identity, you do not only look like how they perform on stage, but also at their past. And staying true to that. And, um, if you are, if you’re, if you’re signed to an unconventional label, you have much less chance of selling out unless you as an artist decide to do it yourself. But there lies the question. Is the artist able to make those decisions themselves? If they’re part of the big label? I do not believe they are” (Anonymous interviewee).* This brings the analysis to the next section, the value of exclusivity within (un)conventional labels and artists.

#### Exclusive, what are you talking about?

#### The Value of Exclusivity <sup>8</sup>

The term exclusivity was defined in previous chapters as the process of “generating attention and distinction” (Hracs, Jakob and Hauge, 2013, p.1114). Within the hypercompetitive music industry, artists need to differentiate themselves which includes the exclusivity of their identity and value of that. *“Exclusivity, I think, um, that’s um, a step further than what it means to make music. If you go like what, what do you do if you make music, you try to, uh, share a certain feeling, trying to make people feel*

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to Appendix (8) – The Value of Exclusivity

*a certain way, that's what it is and nothing more. And then there come some other terms attached after that like, 'okay, this person is famous, this is special, this is a hype, this is whatever'. But in the end, it's just about sharing a feeling. Um, and yeah, if you don't care about all the other things and focus on that and focus on how you can share that as much as possible in your market, that would be a much more profitable and successful path I would say"* (anonymous interviewee). The notion of exclusivity is linked to the personal experience that an artist may introduce to an audience thus, supplying them with an opportunity to distinctively set themselves apart from artists that are situated within the mainstream style.

*"When you start changing your sound because you want exclusivity, you're going down a wrong road, then you're redefining yourself in terms of marketing and I don't know, I am not up for that. Also, I'm sure there are people who do that but not people I would want to put in my label"* (anonymous interviewee). The re-definition of yourself as an artist is one of the key components that supplies the line between exclusivity and the term 'selling-out' for the market. Furthermore, the term (un)conventional appeared once again within the interviews as one of the choices artists may take part of when it comes to the values mentioned above, "unconventional labels can be very, uh, can have a very powerful effect if they just allow the artist to fully focus on crafting their art and just redefining its authenticity and exclusivity. Um, week in and week out, uh, so I think that is a very important aspect, if you ask yourself whether conventional label or unconventional label is better for an artist to choose from" (anonymous interviewee). As previously highlighted, authenticity as a whole can be described as a 'relational institutional' practice (Askin, 2017, p.30). These actors define the boundaries of what is authentic, thus, the next part of the results chapter will revolve around the definition of the term (un)conventional and how (un)conventional labels play a role in re-defining what authenticity is.

#### (Un)conventional – define me please?<sup>9</sup>

One of the most integral concepts of the research is based on the definition of the term (un)conventional from the various interviewees. *"It's a hidden scene that's not polluted yet by commercial, by the commercialization of dance music especially"* (anonymous interviewee). The term (un)conventional is based on the non-pollution of a scene within the music industry that is surrounded by hypercompetitive artists and

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<sup>9</sup> Refer to Appendix (9) – Quotes and definitions of (un)conventional

genres. Furthermore, one of the interesting results was the definition of (un)conventional as disregarding the trends however also finding your personal sound in between the past and the present. *“Unconventional music means the opposite to me, unconventional music means, uh trying to create something that is not following the trends nowadays but also not leaning too much on what was made back in the day, but trying to find your own sound in between”* (anonymous interviewee).

The power of the audience does not seem to be as powerful in (un)conventional scenes as in the more traditional sector. *“It’s like music that doesn’t have to appeal to the masses. It’s like music like the intent of the music, it’s not made to appeal to the masses per se.”* (anonymous interviewee). *“I mean everything that’s not on the radio for me is already unconventional music”* (anonymous interviewee). This also suggests the idea of trying to find new ways in which it is represented and distributed.

It was very important for one of the interviewees to highlight the essence of (un)conventional music as being hard to listen to; *“music wise, um, well it’s a grey area, let me put it that way. But for me, unconventional means, it is not the easy listening kind of stuff with a sample melodies and um, catering to bigger audiences. So, people that do their own thing...”* (anonymous interviewee). It is important to highlight here is the status quo that comes with the term (un)conventional. Furthermore, it can be underlined with Hibbett’s research (2005) in the previous chapter, as it being a process of social differentiation but also an (un)conventional marketing tool. *“Unconventional basically, there’s two sides of that as far as it goes for me. Um, first side is that, uh, well unconventional could be in the way you make music. I mean, there’s a lot of gear out there and it’s easy to everything in software. Uh but if you use weird sampling methods or unconventional ways to get results uh that would be interesting for me. That’s talking from a producer side”* (anonymous interviewee).

Furthermore, one of the interviewee’s based their definition on labels; *“If we’re talking about unconventional, I’m really thinking about, uh, unconventional for me would be a label which has, um, we’re going to invest money in you. Cause you know, turning the way around the way used to be, we’re going to invest money in you. We don’t want to have any money. There’s no kickback. Just make your music that would be unconventional. And we take 1% of everything you got”* (anonymous interviewee). There is a central discussion here that developed this entire project and that is the introduction of (un)conventional labels. Who are they? Why are they so different? “I think the biggest difference between traditional labels and HardHeaderz is the, is the

creative freedom. It's like a sure you're an artist and we try and operate on a mainstream level. Uh, if you operate on a mainstream level, there are certain restrictions. But like, uh, what the founder, uh, does really well is like he limits those restrictions. So, we have a lot of freedom" (*anonymous interviewee*). HardHeaderz is one of the (un)conventional label that provides artists a different model. Their model is based on creative freedom however, the founder relieves the partners (artists signed) from the mainstream restrictions. Such as re-defining their identity, losing their creative freedom and brand. *"I have friends of mine who are signed to big traditional label and, in the Netherlands and uh, and their freedom is very strict. So, like, uh, the label works very hard for them. They get like proper views, proper marketing uh, uh, the, that comes with a loss of creativity. I think that's why music mainstream music sounds the same because they like have a model. And they, they follow the model whether they look at what makes the most money, not like what sounds good and not if they created something with creativity being done well"* (*anonymous interviewee*).

Furthermore, (un)conventional is also defined and correlated to a long-term model that circulates with time and thus, comes financial support and recognition, *"when I signed with HardHeaderz, I, uh, the first thing the founder told me like, uh, if you sign here, we're gonna go for the long road. It's like, I can't offer you much right now. It's like, uh, we have to build this thing from the ground up. We have to build this together. Yeah. That's like, uh, he told me like, uh, between like, uh, five years, this and this and this will happen. I will make this and this and this happened. He made us promises and like the thing is with the founder, everything that he said, yeah, he did. So, like it's, I have actually no right not to follow him. Like cause he, he gives this like blood, sweat and tears for us. Yeah. Like, uh, yeah, he made sure that we can, uh, that we can operate on the level that like we deserve right now. But I strongly believe that, uh, that eventually, uh, we will make, like we will get the recognition that we deserve. I know it does take longer than normal artist, but that's fine with me because like eventually it will all be worth it, I strongly believed that it, it's definitely worth it"* (*anonymous interviewee*).

Finally, the word (un)conventional relates to the concept of authenticity and its values. (Un)conventional is the process of adapting to the environment within the underground style. Therefore, it shows an essence in which different models may be (un)conventional yet can also work with different rules of the mainstream/commercial scene in order to "normalize" them to an extent. Thus, the next part is the analysis of

how (un)conventional is also part of the re-definition of authenticity in the modern music scene.

### Where does this leave us?

#### Analysis of Labels & Concepts <sup>10</sup>

After the interviews were analysed, the corresponding codes were analysed as well. Labels can be associated with (un)conventional and traditional strategies. The (un)conventional labels may be associated with commercial labels as well due to the re-definition of mainstream itself within the underground scene. This Atlas ti. generated network will aid in answering the sub-question; “*does digitization have an influence on an artist’s authenticity levels?*”

The term digitization was previously defined as the change from analogue to digital. The act of moving from one era to another has its benefits however, also its disadvantages. “*The downside for me is that, um, when I used to buy records in a record store, it was even harder to find something obscure and different. Um, so, uh, it, it gave you a chance to really, uh, do your own thing and really make something interesting out of your DJ sets. Yeah. Um, and nowadays everything can basically be found online*” (anonymous interviewee). The shift has introduced the difficulty of being distinct in your choice of music whether its making it or listening to it.

However, digitization also aids artists in choosing their own path with the introduction of variety of models, distribution possibilities and streaming methods. “*that identification of a certain music genre, uh, really helps with, uh, shaping society and shaping an individual. So that has all been consequences. Those are all are all consequences of the digital era that all made the impossible made possible and for, uh, people to redefine themselves more in the way that they feel comfortable with it. And it's up to the artist to choose the path they feel comfortable with whether it's unconventional or mainstream*” (anonymous interviewee).

Moreover, the sub-question relates to how the market has been polluted with different genres and styles of music that the authentication process plays a role in re-defining what is authentic on the basis of the value of originality. “*So, the market is polluted with, uh, unoriginal, um, music that lacks originality and quality*” (anonymous interviewee). Another factor to be analysed is the audience, as previously mentioned one of the actors that define what is “good” music is the audience. However, with the

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<sup>10</sup> Refer to Appendix (10) – Labels & Concepts

constant change in the industry it is essential to look at how (un)conventional models can support artists staying true themselves towards their audience. But also give them the experience they want whilst working on the same level of mainstream music and redefine it within their own way. *“Like the theory states that, uh, there will be like a shift, I call it the shift. You would like unconventional music or like unconventional labels or unconventional artists are going to be the new mainstream. It's like they're going to be a shift. It's like that's why uh, the founder of HardHeaderz always still stay true to yourself. Because the shift is coming and when the shift is coming it's up to you to decide. To dictate what's good music and what's not. So, like I strongly believe in that theory. So, like, uh, and I slowly, I slowly seeing it becoming, not a theory anymore because like we have a lot of artists now whether they are unconventional artists and like they see that if they work together or like protect themselves from like traditional labels that they truly can operate on the same level”* (anonymous interviewee). The sub-question can be answered by presenting how artists and their labels aid in identifying the authentication process. Whether the label is traditional or (un)conventional, the way they perceive the music and the artist introduces different perspectives and influences on an artist's authenticity. *“It's like at the end of the day the consumer is like, uh, defines what is good. Cause like you can take an artist and uh, he's very big but he's not good. The audience don't love it. He's going to flop. Exactly. Exactly. So, uh, I think like the audience have a very big responsibility, uh, yeah, our generation is so easily tricked with like social media and how things are being perceived in a different way”* (anonymous interviewee).

This leads to the next section of how identity and corresponding codes within the interviews aid in answering the second sub-question.

#### [Identify me, authenticate me and release me](#)

#### Relationship of Identity to Concepts <sup>11</sup>

For this generated network, identity and corresponding codes give the foundation of how identity reacts to the construction of authenticity. This section will support in answering the sub-question; *“how is authenticity in the modern music industry constructed?”* As mentioned in previous chapters, an artist's identity is correlated with the commercial placement that he/she is placed in or chooses to be

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<sup>11</sup> Refer to Appendix (11) - Relationship of Identity to Concepts

placed in. It was once considered to be the lowest form of 'selling-out', betraying your fans and your principles, in the modern industry it is regarded as a crucial cornerstone of success (Klein, Meier, Powers, 2017, p.224). *"Like the online popularity of an artist is, is way more important nowadays for the, for the more commercial side. Yeah. Than the actual music, that may sound funny, but, um, that's the way it works because, uh, uh, people like artists, they like, uh, their vibe to what they, what they stand for"* (anonymous interviewee).

Referring back to the audience, they are integral in this process as well as. The digital shift has also affected the way we perceive things due to the introduction of social platforms and media, *"Um, so people become less critical I think sometimes, uh, when it comes to that, but at the same time, that's, that's always been, how the music business works. It's, it's a, it's a branding thing and it's a, it's about selling stuff as well. The only difference is that a lot of beginning artists think that, uh, getting signed and having music out there in the stores, that that is what is going to, uh, give them money. But, uh, you, you hardly make any money on that anymore. So, the, the, the brand as an artist or the, um, uh, performances and, and, and being noticed online, that is what actually makes you money"* (anonymous interviewee). The identity of who you are online is an incentive for artists to choose their own path. *"If you're part of an unconventional label, free to do your own choices. As an artist, you might find that you will increase in originality because first you have this confirmation that your music is liked, is listened to. And with that, the motivation and the support to actually, um, build further on your original products instead of decreasing and polluting it by modern day, uh, top hits, influences and the labels that are behind that and behind those artist's choices"* (anonymous interviewee).

A path of (un)conventional models that support creative freedom and the identity that an artist wants to build while using the construction of how authenticity is being redefined. The music scene is a sea of artists that are waiting to perform in the largest venues and become the most popular. However, as these traditional models are recycling the strategies of what is popular music. The underground music and (un)conventional method is becoming more prominent and the choice that the artists wants to construct for him/herself. *"The question I'm asking myself, would they be losing their identity? Uh, and what is their identity? Is their identity just what you see on stage or also where the money eventually is going and how that affects their further*

career? *Um, I think that is an important aspect to look into as far as the identity of the artist concerned with the choices that they're making* (anonymous interviewee).

Therefore, “accounting for the “frontiers” of the industry prompted the examination of the digitalization of music by investigating not only how music is commodified in novel ways, but also how the very institutional practices institutionalizing authenticity in music that enable commodification have been shaped by the relational pathways underpinning the process of authentication” (Askin and Mol, 2018, p.5). The establishment of authenticity and how it can render as the commodification of music and if the artist are evaluated on the basis of an artistic ground. *“If you look at someone's identity, you do not only look like how they perform on stage, but also at their past. And staying true to that. And, um, if you are, if you're, if you're signed to an unconventional label, you have much less chance of selling out unless you as an artist decide to do it yourself. But there lies the question. Is the artist able to make those decisions themselves? If they're part of the big label? I do not believe they are”* (anonymous interviewee). The identity of the artist initiates the construction of their authenticity within the music scene.

This brings us to the final section of the analysis which will be based on the concept of authenticity and its values. Has it been contemporary re-defined within the term (un)conventional.

### Re-defining authenticity?

#### Relationship of Authenticity & Values <sup>12</sup>

This generated network is based on the focal concept; authenticity and its corresponding values explored in the interviews. The network suggests the association of re-defining authenticity within the values of: legitimacy, exclusivity and originality. Furthermore, the network highlights the importance of labels, whether major or smaller labels such as HardHeaderz or On Track Agency which is another label situated in Rotterdam that do not necessarily highlight themselves as (un)conventional but work with the essence of a ‘family bond’ and trust. *“It works really well for me so far because giving trust also gets you trust. Yeah. And, uh, I don't want to put my, uh, energy into, uh, lawsuits and all that crap. Yeah. And also, um, making sure that the artists feel like they can trust me is important for the vision of the label”* (anonymous interviewee). Based on the concept of trust is the bond that creates the

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Appendix (12) - Relationship of Authenticity & Values



social connections by engaging the public in the creative process and their participatory aesthetics. Thus, in relation to Bourdieu in the previous chapter, authenticity is a relational institutional practice by which actors such as the audience are inherent in creating what is authentic. *“I make music for myself and like I have like, uh, the luck that people gravitate towards my music. So, it's like I'm not making music with the intent that it will appeal to the masses or like get a lot of streams or anything like that. I make music purely for myself and I have like, I'm lucky that people like it. So, like if you have that, then you have uh, a core, you create a core fan base and with every project that you drop the core fan base grows bigger”* (anonymous interviewee).

In relation to that the re-adaption of the gift economy is of importance in the construction of contemporary authenticity as it grows a community towards your artists and provides them with the exclusivity and legitimacy that they would like to be defined with. *“Let's just say you would organize a festival called festival unknown and where you have all these stages and all these artists, uh, which, which are not really out there but really have that the underground sound you are looking for. I mean that is the way I guess to make something or that that would be a possibility to, to give them a stage to, to really earn some money as well. Cause that's the, I think just the difficult part about a lot of people who listen to unconventional music, they do want to spend money on that, but they don't have any place to spend it. Right. They spend it on the internet or whatever”* (anonymous interviewee). The normalization of the term (un)conventional can be considered by pushing the commercial threshold - *“a commercial threshold. Like you have 100 guys above the, that commercial threshold who are being picked up by the labels and who are, or being pushed through the radio and with the distribution and there are like 10,000 guys kicking at that threshold”* (anonymous interviewee) – that threshold may be re-constructed within authentication the strategies used by non-major labels such as the (un)conventional perspective. This may be possible by appropriating strategies from the commercial side and using it in the benefit of (un)conventional or distinguished labels, artists, managers etc. This can also be termed as re-defining the mainstream. Within the use of (un)conventional strategies and authenticating that construction, re-defining what is mainstream by pushing the threshold of the industry is a fundamental element of analysing the results in this paper. *“I think a bit to follow a bit of mainstream rules to get what we want and*

*still have that creative freedom with the unconventional, way of making music” (anonymous interviewee).*

Consequently, the construction of contemporary authenticity is based on the term (un)conventional that can be used in different settings of the industry whether a ‘mainstream’ or an ‘underground’ artist, the word (un)conventional is based on the strategies that are used to push a threshold of re-defining the market in a way that benefits all perspectives of artists. *“For instance, if you take an artist like Katy Perry, yeah, which is not my cup of tea. But, um, not only do I recognize, um, the quality, the production quality, the song writing quality, the quality of marketing or whatever quality. But I experienced a feeling of authenticity in that shit. Why? Because I believe it. Because it convinces me, and it's not my taste, so I don't listen to it, but if I look at it and like for instance, Madonna, I never believed her. It's not my taste. And I never believed her. It feels very authentic to me. It feels very much like searching for the format that works without any, um, desire of creating this music. It feels like an analysis” (anonymous interviewee).*

As a result, fabricating strategies that are tailor-made for artists in constructing their contemporary authenticity within the modern music industry can be the threshold that is pushed towards authenticating artists to a whole other level. (un)conventional labels, strategies or platforms that instil guidance for artists that would like to distinguish themselves but also push the boundaries of conventionality with re-appropriating conventions of the industry.

## Conclusion and Discussion

This research paper was based on the research question; *“how and for which aesthetic-political reasons is the term (un)conventional used by Rotterdam-based musicians in regards to, the construction of (contemporary) authenticity and its values?”* With the guidance of previous theories explored in prior chapters, it has been concluded that the term (un)conventional is a novel term used within the music industry for the basis of reviving the construction of (contemporary) authenticity. The construction of authenticity includes the values that were previously discussed using various theories. Legitimacy, originality and exclusivity extend the boundary of what authenticity is acknowledged as within the framework of (un)conventional strategies.

Furthermore, due to the theories previously explored, connotation between (un)conventional and authenticity became clearer with the basis of the interviews.

Some of the interviewees highlighted the importance of distinguishing themselves whether they are 'mainstream' or 'underground' artists in order to keep their identity constructed within what authenticity is meant for them. At the very end of the line, the music industry is based on generating an income however, what has been highlighted is that a long-term mind-set is crucial in order to keep authenticity for yourself as an artist but also your audience. Consequently, major labels are still prominent in the industry due to their own authenticity as being the 'originals' of the industry. Also, their exclusivity is defined differently as being the bigger players that have an affinity with undermining smaller labels such as (un)conventional labels. And for that reason, many artists, managers and labels tend to go forth with the 'originals' because of being cornered or convinced with short-term income.

Also, the construction of authenticity and in turn the term (un)conventional is based on the actors that are in the industry such as the audience. They have a huge impact on constructing authenticity and its values. Moreover, as they are one of the key components of trend-setting, the term (un)conventional may be normalized to the extent that it becomes conventional in a sense. Bringing artists that are distinguished and pushing the boundaries towards a semi-balance in the industry. Thus, the term (un)conventional was defined within the theory as music that defies expectation and may trigger compensatory responses. However, in the analysis of the interviews (un)conventional is also based on generating new sounds, being ahead of trends and maintaining aspects of commercial strategies but using it for your own benefit such as the development of your identity and fan base.

Thus, during this research paper new insights were developed with the aid of the previous conclusions. In the modern music industry authenticity and (un)conventional strategies are based on trust as well. The family bond that instigates a connection with one of the crucial actors in the industry; the audience. Furthermore, an adaptation of the traditional marketing strategies of the music industry may be generated differently for (un)conventional artists and labels in order to create a new perspective including an audience without having their consumption being mass commercialized but (un)conventionally attained through different channels. The (un)conventional lifestyle defined as a 'family bond' that gives artists the creative freedom and trust in their success and talent is another insight that came up through the analysis of the interviews.

As for theoretical implications of this research, it entailed various theories of what might be considered normative for the music industry. Additionally, the novelty of this research is based on the term -(un)conventional- that has been generated within the music scene following contemporary insights and perspectives on how to remain authentic and move away from the aesthetics of failure. Thus, in reference to Moore's three perspectives on authenticity, (un)conventional may also have three perspectives that are based on the extension of Moore's theory. The audience's bond, the artist's identity and the label's trust. Having explored the various theoretical frameworks in comparison to the results, this research has indicated that artists view authenticity within an (un)conventional setting as the freedom to create their own sound and their identity around that. By doing so, the audience is bonded by originality and social connections. Furthermore, the label/managers give their trust using a long-term success model to the artists. Hence, this research contributed towards existing knowledge of the music industry however, it has adapted different societal and practical indications that may induce a novel strategy within the industry such as educational programs for artists, strategies that adapt the 'original' models used to promote artists and finally customizable (un)conventional strategies that may integrate previous theories with adjustments for the construction of contemporary authenticity.

Some practical implications of the research is how to introduce these novel strategies in the familiar industry environment that artists reside in. Will it be accepted in a practical sense or does being underground rely on staying unknown for some artists with that mind-set? Therefore, initiating this research into real-life practice would be an interesting action plan however, it may rely on further generating the strategy to coincide with the familiarity of models and theories residing in the industry. Furthermore, as for social implications, the novelty of this model would be confronting for audiences that remain in the mass-produced mind-set thus, re-defining what mainstream is. Also, audiences remain in touch with what is familiar therefore, there is a need for a new social connection with this novel model in order for it to be successful.

As for the limitations of the study, the research was based on the novelty of the term (un)conventional and the construction of authenticity. By stating that, the theoretical research was based on previous theories and their adaptation in order to reach the fulfilment of the research question. For further research, it would be integral to have more articles based on this novel term, that could generate further findings

and comparisons. By evaluating the research findings, it, there is the implication of cultural bias which indicates that some artists might be affiliated with the underground music scene more than others. Thus, it would be a suggestion for future research to include the 'originals' such as major labels in order to compare the findings thoroughly. The above-mentioned limitations and future research are based on the practicality of this research paper. In consequence, there are also questions that arise from this research due to the findings and theoretical frameworks in previous chapters.

Due to the findings of the research and conclusions, some further future research surfaced. Firstly, the term 'trust' came up in multiple interviews that may suggest a fourth value of authenticity that needs further theoretical research but also examination within interviews and the (un)conventional scene of what is meant by trust? What is the difference between the term trust in smaller labels and major labels? Furthermore, the model that can be generated with (un)conventional strategies may be examined further with the question; will the (un)conventional model become successful within the modern music industry and how? This future research would be based on field research with a longer time period in order to examine the successfulness of this model. In that research it would be integral to look at what does success mean to artists and labels? And how does that intertwine with the (un)conventional model? Moreover, another future research that may include a different perspective is the gender role of producers, artists, musicians etc. in the (un)conventional model. As most of my interviewees were male, it triggered a question of why are most (un)conventional artists male dominated and would this model surpass the reason for that and include more female producers in the (Rotterdam) scene?

This research was based on the modern music industry exploring the novel use of the term (un)conventional and how its aesthetics may construct a contemporary definition of authenticity for artists. The threshold that upholds the music industry may induce the connotation of artists mimicking one another, sampling one another and therefore, losing the thread of what is authentic. Therefore, this research was based on existing theories adapted towards a novel perspective of a model that might ingrain a new shift within the industry of mainstream and commercialization. The case of (un)conventional labels and re-authenticating the threshold that withholds the identity, exclusivity, legitimacy and the originality of artists.

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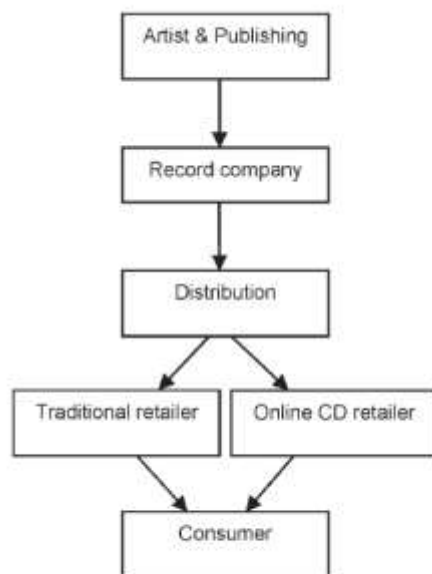
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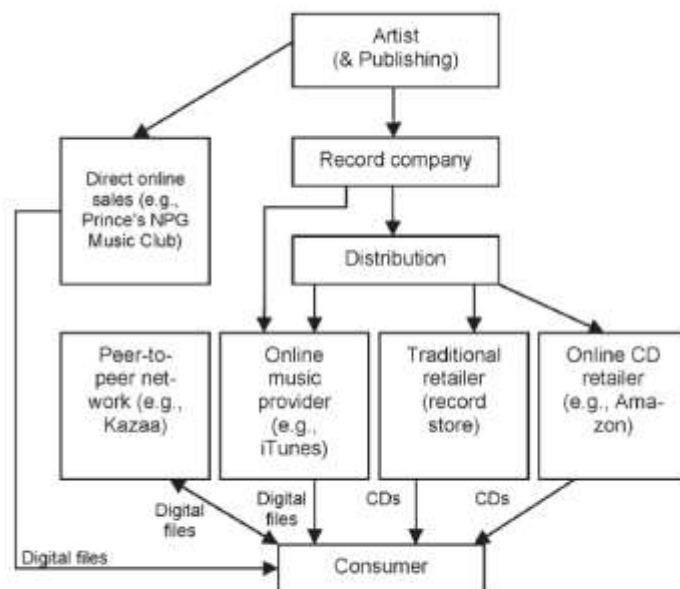
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## Appendices

### Appendix (1) – Music industry value chain



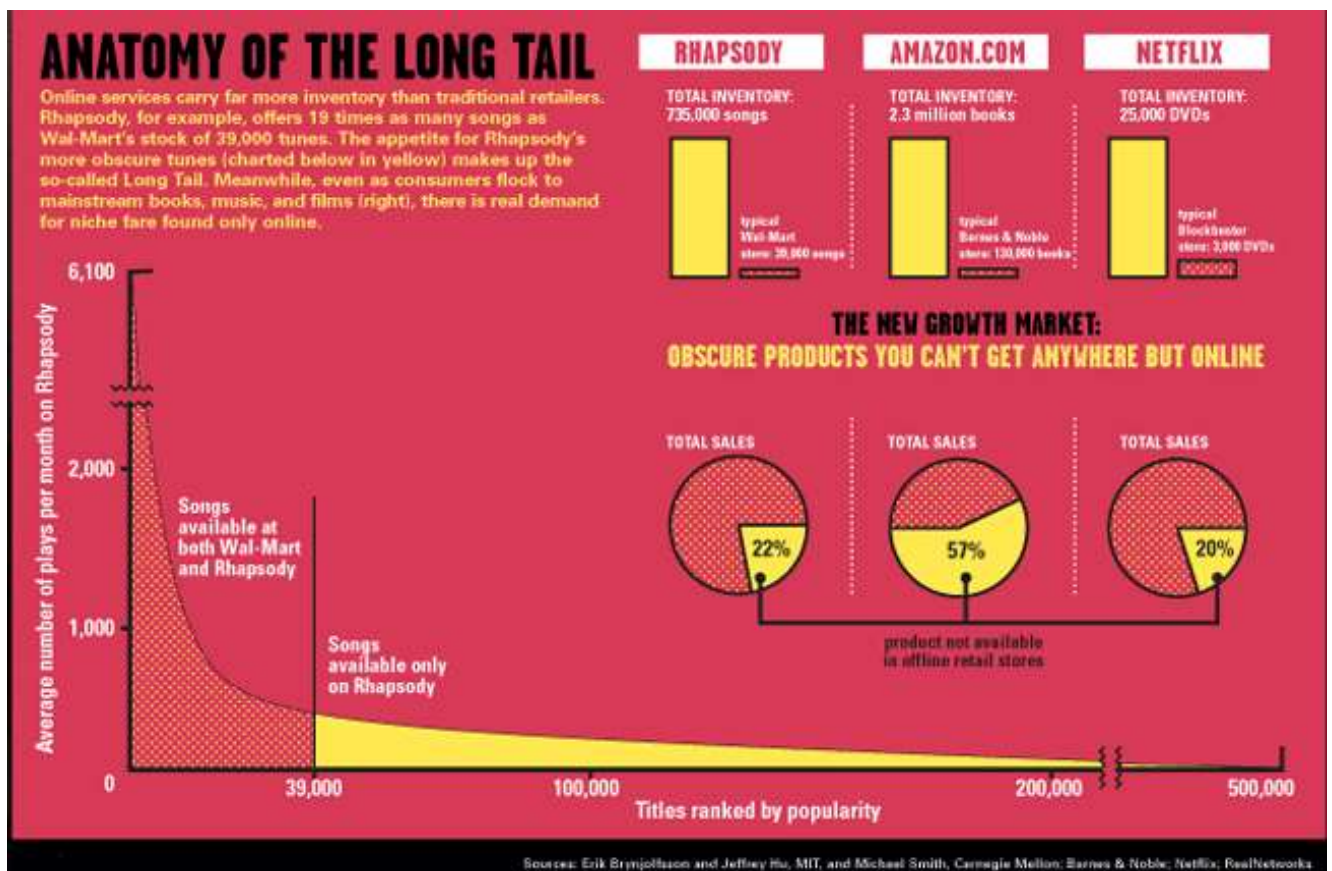
**Figure A1** Traditional Music Value Chain



**Figure A2** Music Value Chain with Online Distribution

Source: Rupp & Esther (2003)

## Appendix (2) – Long Tail Anatomy



Source: Michael Smith, MIT, Real Networks (N.D)

## Appendix (3) – Interview Guide

### **Interview Guide**

This research is for the Master Thesis of Arts, Culture and Society at the Erasmus University. The research is based on the Rotterdam music industry and the discursive line between unconventional and authenticity. The various concepts in this research is highlighted within the development of the digital age of music and the industry. Thus, the main concepts of the research revolve around digitization, authenticity and unconventional. The questions below follow a form however, it may evolve into other follow-up questions that may be initiated by the interviewer or interviewee.

### **Background**

1. What is your age?
2. Where did you study?
  - a. If no previous educational background; where did you learn or get experience with making music?
3. What kind of music do you make?
  - a. What influenced you to make this kind of music?
4. For how long have been in the music industry?
  - a. Do you consider yourself as a full-time or part-time musician?
  - b. Why do you consider yourself that way?
5. Where have you performed in Rotterdam?

### **Music and Management**

6. What is your status as a musician?
  - a. If signed to a label; why did you choose that path?
  - b. If he/she is an independent artist; why did you decide to become that?
7. How have you experienced being a musician as the status answered in question 6?

8. Have you experienced changes in management styles during your path as a musician?
  - a. How has it affected your path?

### **Digitization and the music industry**

9. Have you always been a digital music producer?
  - a. If not, what other strategies did you use for making, producing and distributing music?
10. How has the development of the digital era affected your career?
  - a. And your development as a musician?
11. What is your opinion about moving from traditional ways of management to more unconventional strategies?
  - a. How has it affected your music and path as a musician?

### **Authenticating the new industry**

12. What is your definition of the present music industry in Rotterdam?
  - a. How would you define yourself within the industry?
13. How do you think music is perceived differently in Rotterdam compared to several years ago?
14. What are your thoughts about the digitization of music?
  - a. How would you describe it in terms of authenticity of a musician?
  - b. Do you think it affected the authenticity of different music genres?
15. In your opinion, do you think authenticity has been re-defined in how its role plays in the music industry?
  - a. Do you think authenticity has changed the way musicians make music these days?

### **Exclusivity and impact of the digital era**

16. Within the digital era, how have you experienced the change in exclusivity of the musician?
17. In your opinion, do you think the role of exclusivity has been redefined within the framework of the new music industry?
  - a. In what ways has exclusivity changed the music scene?
  - b. In what ways has exclusivity diminished the way music is made?

**Unconventional and music labels**

18. Can you define what unconventional music means to you?
  - a. Have you heard of unconventional music labels?
19. Do you have any affinity with unconventional music strategies in your career?
  - a. How has it affected your way of making music?
  - b. How has it affected the way you define yourself as musician?
20. Have you experienced any other artists, labels, or collectives being defined as unconventional?

## Appendix (4) – Code Book

### **ATLAS.ti Report**

#### **MA - FINAL THESIS - Network Analysis**

#### **Codes**

Report created by Samiha Awad on 24 May 2019

- Age
- Audience
- Authenticity
- Band vs. electronic music
- Brand
- Commercial
- Consequence
- Control
- Creative Freedom
- Credibility
- Cycle
- Definition
- Development
- Digital Producer
- Digitization
- Duration in industry
- Education
- Example
- Exclusivity
- Experimentation
- Full-time
- Genre / Style
- Identity
- Image of Rotterdam
- Independent
- Labels
- Legitimacy
- Long-term mentality
- Mainstream
- Modern Day Scene
- Money vs. duration

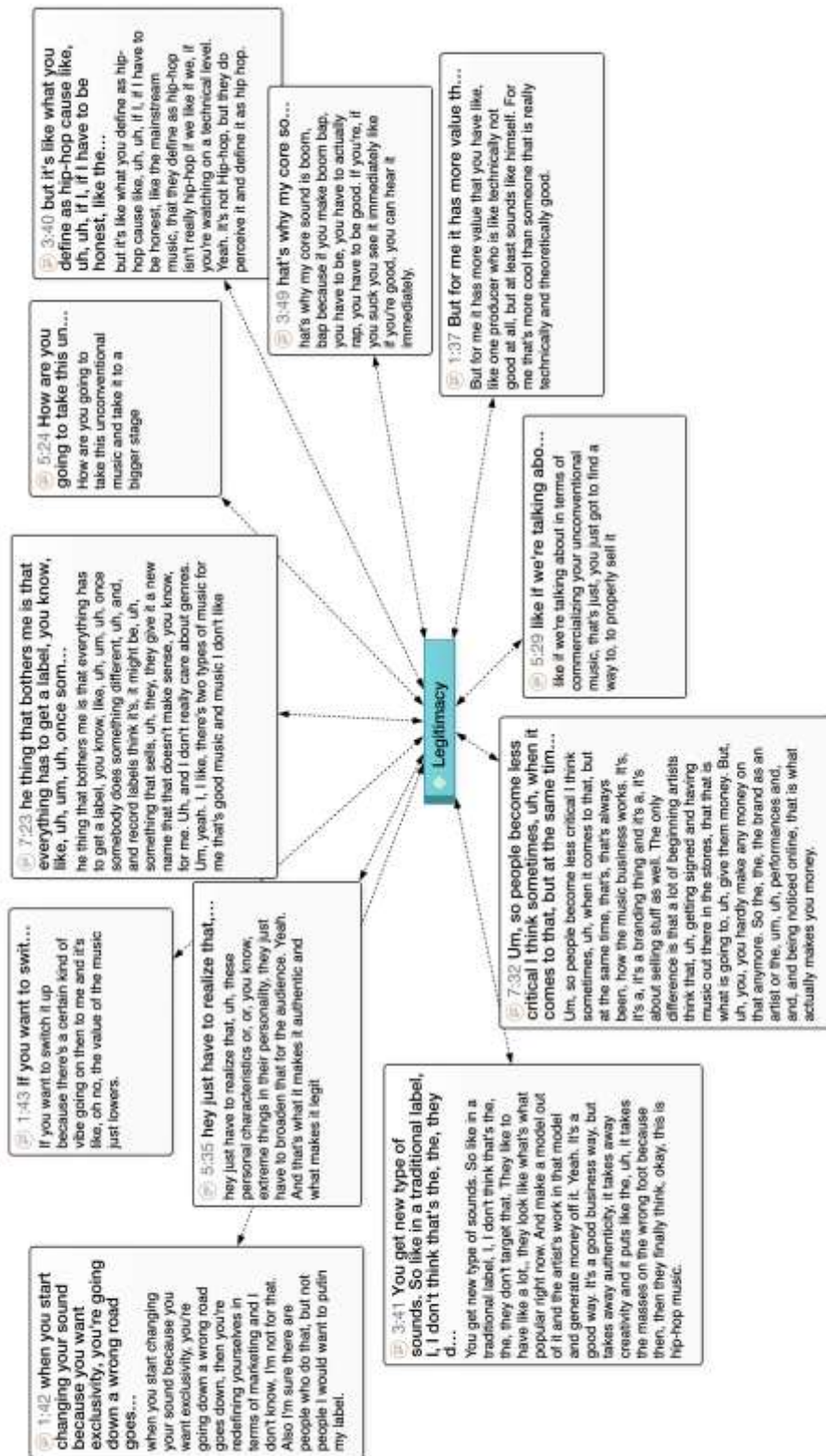


- Negative - Independent
- Negative - Signed
- Normalized
- Originality
- Part-time
- Partners
- Polluted
- Positive - Independent
- Positive - Signed
- Protection
- Push boundaries
- Quality
- Re-definition of mainstream
- Restrictions
- Rights
- Selling-out
- Signed
- Status
- Support
- Talent development
- Traditional
- Trends
- Trust
- Unconventional
- Unconventional vs. Independent
- Unconventional vs. mainstream
- Unconventional vs. traditional
- Underground
- Venues / Locations

## Appendix (5) – Concept of Authenticity

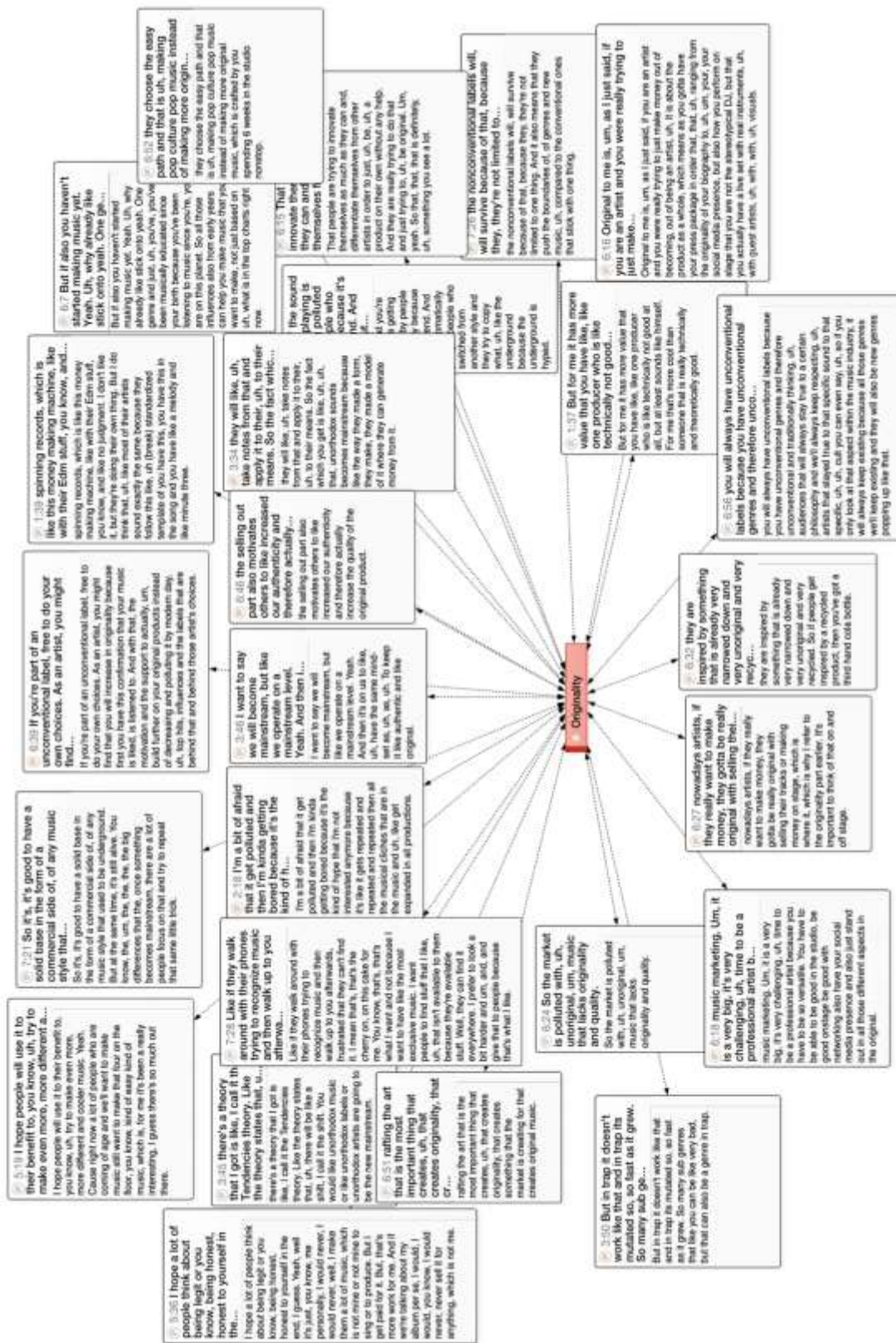


## Appendix (6) – The Value of Legitimacy

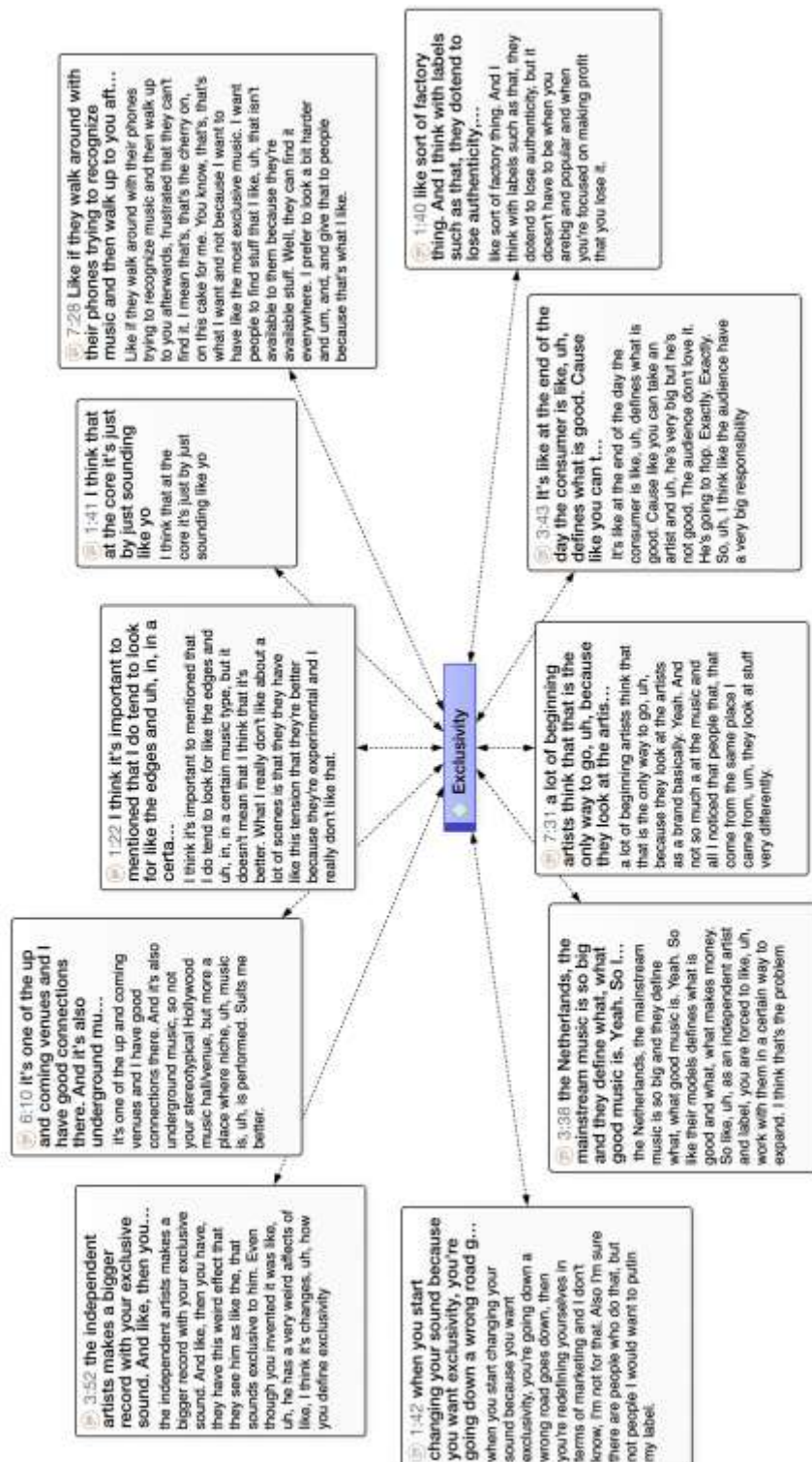




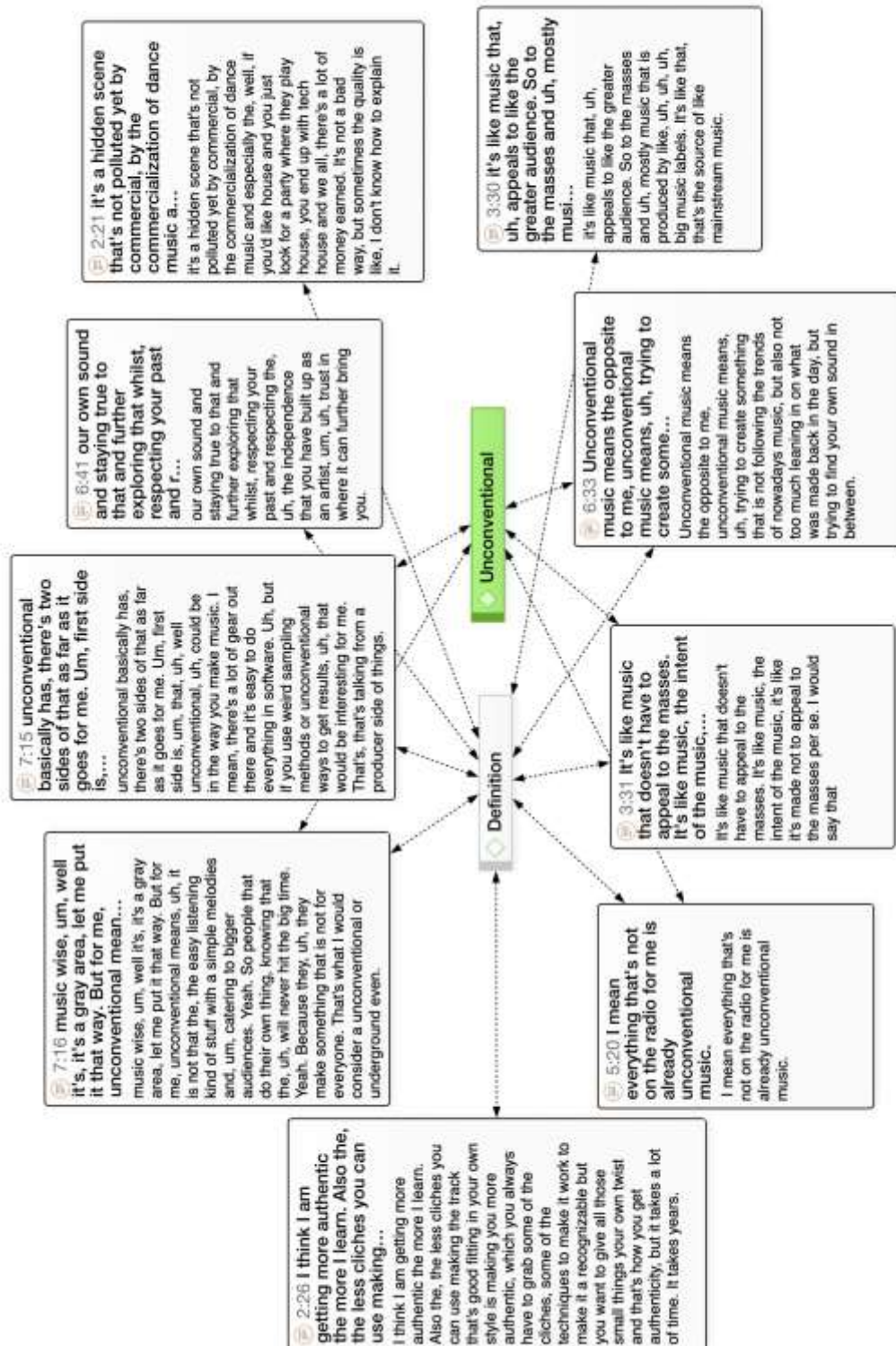
## Appendix (7) – The Value of Originality



## Appendix (8) – The Value of Exclusivity

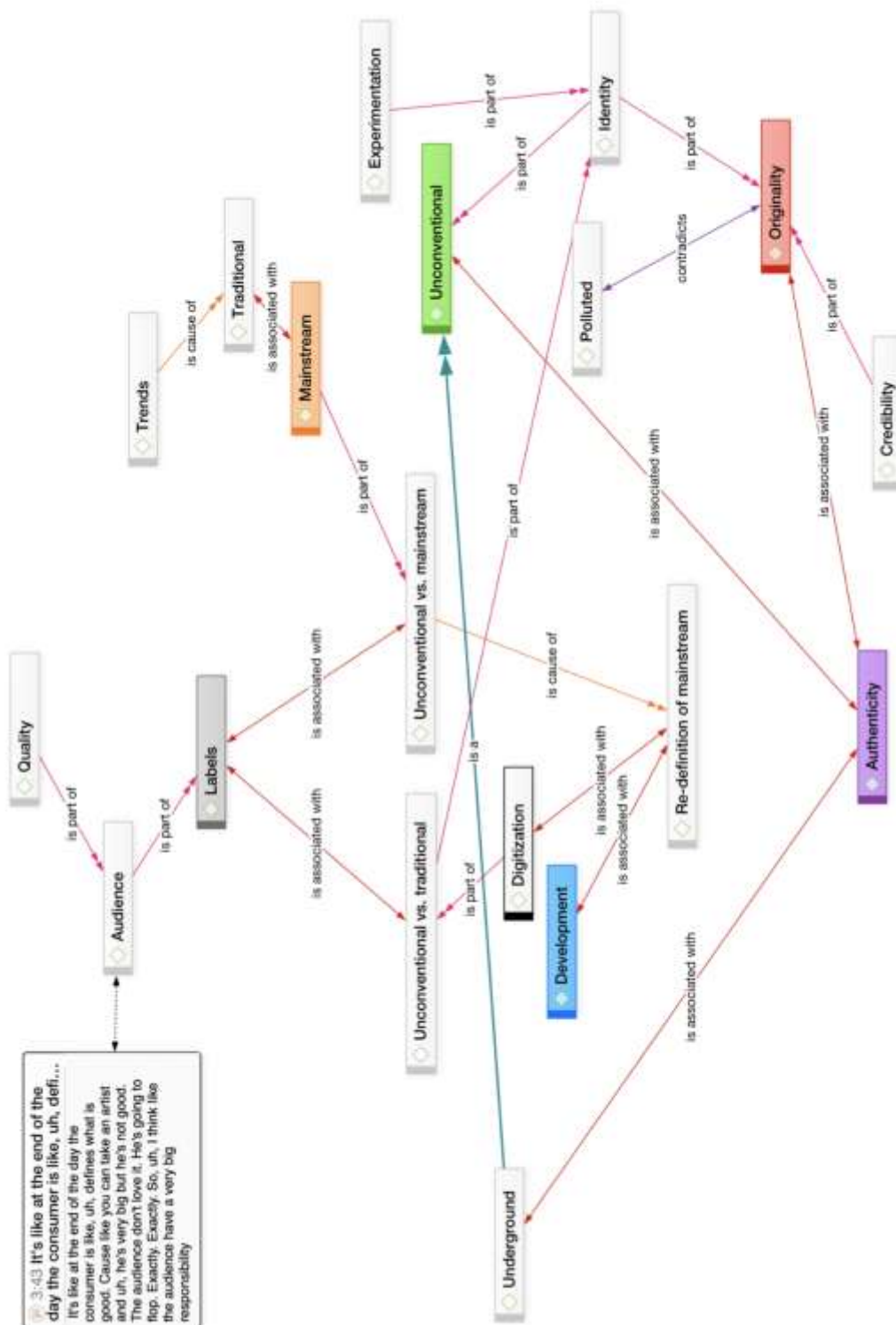


## Appendix (9) – Quotes and definition of (un)conventional



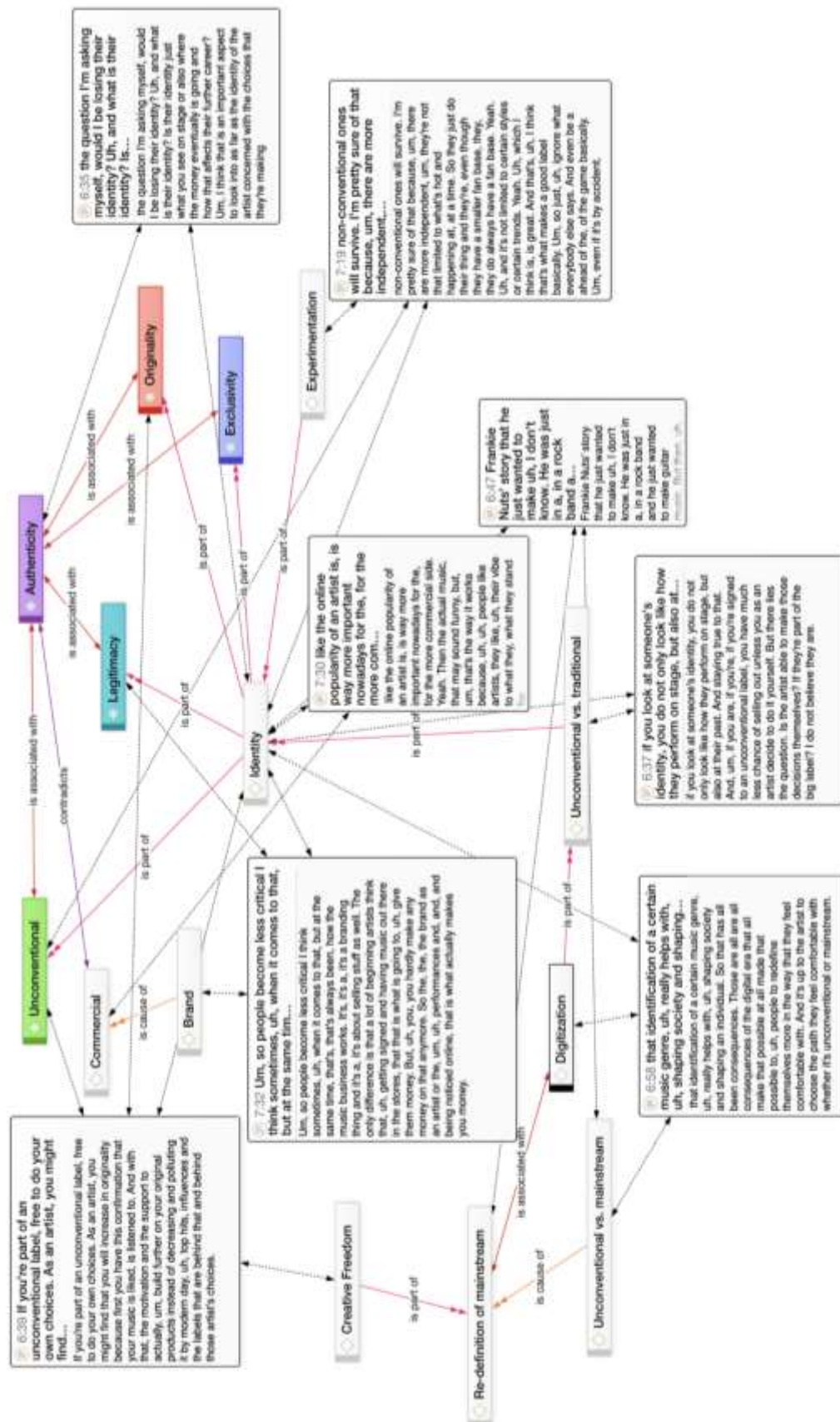


## Appendix (10) – Labels and concepts





## Appendix (11) – Relationship of identity to concepts



## 66

