SIGNIFICANCE OF ALBUM COVER ART AS A BRANDING TOOL

CASE STUDY: 'HIM'

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This is my law, this is my system, this is my force,
my state, my mission
This is my way, this is my vision
And the voice inside my head says
Let the pressure
Let all the pressure out
Obey your pleasures
Follow your deepest pleasures
The things you treasure
Sacrifice the things you treasure
Life's a creation I wanna look back and feel proud

(Velcra – My Law)

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the development towards a completely digital business environment has affected the music industry in many ways. One major challenge for organisations in the music industry has been falling overall sales of music, and illegal downloading has been accused of being cause for this slump. In an attempt to go beyond this simplistic assumption, studies are gradually focusing on analysing these changes as constitutes of a new business environment that requires a specially tailored strategies. Marketing has been cited as one solution in increasingly diverse and competitive music markets. This research concentrated on one part of the marketing strategy, branding.

Branding in music is regarded important for economic success and yet album cover art is scarcely studied subject. Therefore, this research aimed to study the relationship between album cover art and branding theories, explored focused album cover creation and used a case study to define an example of such a cover art creation. The research also aimed to elaborate the importance of this component for success in the contemporary music industry.

On the one hand, the literature review investigated universal branding theories. On the other, it examined theories of how consumers choose what they purchase and how the identity of a product is created. The primary research, a semiotic analysis, focused on album cover art of Finnish rock-band 'HIM', whom have had commercial success and critical appraisal on an international level. Analysis aimed to showcase a successful use of cover art as a branding tool. Primary data and findings were elaborated with interviews with professional practitioners. All concluded in a triangulation of the data from literature review, semiotic analysis and interviews to acquire the significance of album cover art.

The main finding of this research indicate a need for thoughtful use of visual aspect in music and also showcase certain characteristics of branding that are useful while producing album covers. The changing business environment of the music industry requires new strategies, for which album cover art can be a platform to execute. In a post-modern society people buy the message, rather than the music, communicated through different methods of music, promotion, marketing and branding. Well signified album cover, operating like an advertisement, reflects a focused message that is easy for consumers to understand.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction and rationale

With the changes that communication and information technologies are imposing on the way society consumes music, it is hardly surprising that the debate over the future of the music industry is becoming increasingly diverse. Even less surprising is the feeling of uncertainty that music industry professionals are feeling as overall sales decrease, even though consumers are listening to more music than ever before. Culture journalists such as Darren Waters (2005), Alexa Baracaia (2004), and Imogen Tilden (2004) have analysed the implication of new media on the music industry, and the collective opinion seems to be that illegal downloading is causing the slump in music industry sales. However there are no proven evidence that downloading is the reason behind diminishing sales.

One reason for the problems of music industry could be found in the production methods. An argument by Theodor Adorno (1941) outlines how modern capitalism is burdened by the problem of overproduction. Markets can only be stimulated by creating needs, which are the result of capital rather than human logic and therefore, inevitably, false. The culture industry is a central agency in contemporary capitalism for the production and satisfaction of false needs (Frith, 1983). However some arguments, such as Baudrillard (1994), argue that the production of 'false' needs is accepted in the post-modern society as part of a good life. Any musical recording can be seen as a simulation. Therefore what is produced might not matter, and more important is how the music is produced.

As an action against falling sales some industry associations, such as RIAA, have started to blame the consumers actions of preferring to acquire music via the internet, and finally sued illegal distributors. However this method has not proven to be a practical solution and some standard adaptation for the new business environment is required. According to IFPI (2006), in 2004 over 100.000 album titles were released globally. This quantity and diversity of production requires differentiation from artist and records label to stand out. Marketing could provide a strategy to create what, how, when and for whom to sell the albums. Branding as a part of the marketing process could provide a measurable tool for differentiation (Kotler, 2001).

These developments and amount of discussions prove the necessity of an investigation into today's marketing strategies of the music industry. Yet with proliferation of articles, books, and conference papers on the discussion of the future of music industry, there appears to be a scarcity of work dedicated to examinations of the peculiar genre of album cover art (Gronstad, 2004). Therefore this research project is to study the significance of album cover art as a branding tool.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The main focus of this research is to explore the benefits of a focused album cover creation and its relation to contemporary branding theories. This will be done by providing a semiotic analysis of the album covers of the case study HIM, whom are a Finnish rock band and have an interestingly clear focus in branding of their music. In addition, HIM has an significant evolution on album covers use as a platform for branding.

1.1.1 Aims

This research project aims to examine the significance of album cover art as a branding tool, within the context of a changing music industry environment.

1.1.2 Objectives

- To analyse the visual imagery of HIM album covers

- To explore the importance of focused album cover creation

- To assess the album cover art's relationship to branding theories

Kotler (2001) argues that fast changing business environment forces organisations to rethink their strategies constantly. Therefore this research aims to offer a perspective on one strategy that might be beneficial in the 21st century.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 Literature Review

Literature review consists from range of industry definitions, economic data and current developments in the music industry to give understanding of the business environment. Furthermore marketing, branding and the value of branding in the music industry is reviewed.

2.1 The music industry

Authors such as Lathdrop (2003), Negus (1996), MMF (2003) and Shuker (1994) argue that the music industry is part of the wider cultural and creative industries and consists of three main operations: recording, publishing and performing. The recording industry involves composers, producers, recording studios, A&R departments and designers. These creative parties work in cooperation with the administrative parties such as marketing departments, legal and accounting affairs, touring agents and artist managers. Hutchison (et al. 2006) divides marketing departments further into artist relations, creative services, publicity, radio promotion and sales.

Artistic genres in music are defined by Hutchison (et al. 2006) as Country/Folk, Pop, Rock, Rap/Hip-Hop, R&B/Urban, Religious and Classical. These are rather standard definitions in the industry. The rock category has dominated the marketplace for many years, but the 35% market share has fallen to 25% over the past decade (see appendix 1). The major shift occurred in 1998 as rap and pop started to gain a market share from rock. These figures are from the U.S. market and the European market shares of genres are very similar. However it is important to note that the above genres and market shares define only western markets and cannot be applied to other non-western music markets.

Tim Wall (2003) defines popular music industry to similar categories of Soul, Rock, Metal, Pop, Electronic, Rap, Hip-Hop. For Wall the genre definition is a code serving two cultural roles. First it is a code by which music is categorised and, second, this process of categorising sets the rules by which popular music is produced, distributed and consumed. Tim Wall's arguments have been countered by Alan Moore's (cited in Wall, 2003)

musicologist perspective. Genre relates to the musical form and distinguishes the style that these forms are performed in from the audience's perspective. However genre definitions are often crossed in musicological terms. Therefore they are meaningful if they are seen in relation to commercial or cultural process, not in relation to academic analyse or musicological history (Wall, 2003). Consequent importance for production is to understand how the audience categorises the artist, not whether or not it is musically in a certain genre.

2.1.1 Rock genre

For the rock community the non-musical aspects of the art form are important. Frith (1983), Negus (1996), Shuker (1994) argue that rock has always been a particular ideology that Frith (1983) defines as an subculture where the art form arises from and talks back in direct, charged and organic ways combining different methods of communication. Therefore rock is not just music, but a complex way of presenting the ideology involving album cover art as well. In addition Keith Negus (1994) argues that diverse means of drawing and executing influences, so called synthesis, has been an important aspect in creation of distinct and unique identities in rock.

Negus continues that the peak popularity of rock is arguably The Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' (Parlophone, 1967) album and that 1960's and 1970's are considered as the 'rock era' in popular culture. These two decades coincide with cover art's rise to be part of music's production as defined by Shaughnessy (1999). However no studies have researched whether the rise of cover art is just a coincidence or due to rock's ideological execution of broad presentation methods.

2.2 The music industry in economic terms

2.2.1 Global

Music industry facts and figures are presented in annual releases by recording industry associations such as IFPI, RIAA, BPI; media organisations such as BBC; and by writers such as Hutchison (et al. 2006). According to 'Global music machine' by BBC World Service (2005), a special report covering issues of music's globalisation, over the last fifty years music markets have grown to support a global recording industry worth 30 billion US dollars annually.

Hutchison (et al. 2006) break the global market into regional market areas of North America, Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa. Top music markets in 2003 retail value were U.S. ($11,848 million), Japan ($4,910 million) and U.K. ($3,216 million). Overall top ten national markets for recorded music account for 85% of world sales in value (see appendix 2). In recent years the global music industry has slumped 17% in value since the peak in 2000, arguably due to the technological revolutions impact (Hutchison et al, 2006).

2.2.2 Finland

In comparison to the global size of the recording industry Finnish markets are small. IFPI Finland (2006) accounts the markets to be 110 million euros ($131 million). More over recent market trends correlate with global trends, and similarly the value of the market has come down over 10% in 2000-2005.

2.3 The music industry's business environment

Recent changes in the marketplace are in the structural and technological development, as authors Baker (2003), Burnett (1996) Kotler (2001), Moeltgen (2005) and Vaknin (2001) have considered. In a research project, 'What are the business strategies of London-based independent record companies in regard to the development of new technologies?', Pascal Moeltgen (2005) argued that saturated music markets and consequent increase in competition have lead to oligopoly. Small numbers of large companies, such as Clear Channel and Viacom in music broadcasting, and the major labels (EMI, Sony BMG, Universal and Warner Bros.) in music recording, control most of the marketplace. For example Universal and Sony BMG both had close to 30% market share of recorded music sales in 2004 gained mainly through acquisition of smaller record labels. Marketing specialist such as Baker (2003) and Kotler (2001) define these merges and acquisitions as a strategy to reduce competition and create benefits through economies of scale.

The domination has been allowed by increased deregulation as a BBC report (2005) outlines. Also the earlier mentioned large companies are often part of even larger media conglomerates, which are trying to benefit from synergy of different yet related fields of creative industries such as film, broadcasting and music. However the synergy is still to prove its benefits and this lead AOL Time Warner media conglomerate to sell its music unit,

Warner Music Group, in 2005 to private investors just a couple of years after acquisition (Hutchison et al., 2006).

The current situation is not without its critics. Hutchison (2006) states that economists differ in their evaluations as to whether the marketplace stifles product diversity or enhances it. According to the Future of Music Coalition (FMC, 2002) the development has led to a 'loss of localism, less competition, fewer viewpoints and less diversity'. The music industry cannot sustain this and therefore the acquisition strategy backfires in reduced interest from consumers. The FMC survey reported that consumers were in favour of governmental intervention into the situation that has developed, as fewer new artists have the chance of getting their music heard. In relation to this, Burnett (1996) argues that as only a few companies control the market there is no incentive to invest in research and development. Vaknin (2001) argues however that the larger size of organisations will increase the rate of innovation due to a better ability to finance development of new artists. In addition, as an album has a relatively short life cycle, 12-18 months (Hutchison et al., 2006), the recording companies are required to execute an efficient product development. For Hutchison (2006) the indie label environment has proven it's superiority in the development of innovative artists and this need has lead to recent trends such as joint ventures, distribution deals, vanity labels and imprints with major and indie labels.

On the other hand, the digital revolution seems to restructure music industry for the benefit of more diverse production. For the London based Association of Independent Music (AIM, 2005) digital technologies provide a better and cheaper possibility to produce, distribute and sell music globally. AIM reports that today in Britain as much as 25% of the music released is by the independent sector.

However, the business environment is not just affected by structural or technological developments. Production methods have a very important impact on sales as Adrian Shaughnessy (1999) argues that commercial brutalism in the music industry is driving an enduring depression. In his words, the forcing of a release, before the musical and non-musical aspects of the product are complete, results in poor sales as a consequence. The music industry must realise that most people buy records because they are emotionally or artistically engaged by them and album cover art plays an important part in formulating this response.

2.3.1 Changing marketplace

These recent developments in the marketplace have required the industry to concentrate on marketing as much as on music production. In an attempt to construct the importance of marketing in highly competitive markets, Nirmalya Kumar (2004), a marketing professor at London Business School, explains that higher costs of entering markets are due to a ever larger and more complex marketplace. The costs he points out are mainly financial. But the argument could also be related to a higher requirement for quality in every area of the production, including branding. To achieve a competitive edge in the contemporary marketplace, the artist must be able produce ever more innovative musical production, add a layer of visual identity and be able to perform these identities in public. AIM (2005) note that digital production and distribution is actually levering music production costs, competition is increased and that other, non-musical, factors should grow in importance.

2.3.2 Changing mediation

Studies such as Abercrombie and Longhurst (1999), Bolter and Grusin (2000), Dewdney (1995), DiCola (2000), Lister (2001), and Lovejoy (2004) understand the current digitalisation of the music industry as a sociological phenomenon. For Martin Lister (2001) new media has become a backbone of a technocratic, open and 'free' society. In relation to this, Peter DiCola (2000) argues that in the new business environment physical mediation of music, such as the CD, is gradually disappearing. This is because in a digital format, music's reproduction is unconstrained. For DiCola unconstrained development will ultimately lead music to become a public commodity, and commercial organisations to lose their interest to provide music. However Music Managers Forum (2000) argues that, instead of 'commodity', the music industry is emphasising the use of the term 'content' to describe what they produce. Though digitalisation homogenises music to zeros and ones, it does not mean that anything which can be digitised becomes mere 'information' and, by implication, a commodity in the public domain.

Whether creating public or private content, Lister (2001) points out that technology is not destroying the business model of the music industry but rather impacting upon the mediation between the artist and the audience. Cover art by being an inherent part of the product-package should gradually change into digital form with rest of the package. However there are no studies on how the role of cover art will change or whether it completely disappears. One solution is given by Trent Reznor, an artist recording under

the name Nine Inch Nails, who has approached the concern by not producing a traditional cover art at all. For the album 'With Teeth' (Interscope, 2005) he produced an electronic poster that could be printed on paper or navigated on a computer, having a similar function than traditional cover art.

In relation to this, Eamon Forde (2004) believes that the music industry will most likely influence on the development of music mediation. This is because without the mediator there is only a free floating mass of art that the audience cannot reach. However, Eamon Forde does not suggest how the music industry could adapt as a mediator.

2.3.3 Changing audience

The current change in the marketplace involves the audience as well. Abercrombie and Longhurst (1999) argue that many contemporary analysis link artist and audience as a cash transaction and ignore social relationships, focusing on consumption rather than reception. Contemporary audiences do not simply consist of a separated mass of individuals, rather they are complex and interactive social groups who receive information from many sources. Disperse audiences and modern decentralised communication networks abolish the traditional concept of audience and replace it by countless sets of consumers of unlimited variety. Dennis McQuail (1997) argues that the audience is not 'produced' only by using technological innovations, but also shaped by social factors of life, like age, taste, income and friends. Altogether these changes are reducing the homogeneity and simultaneity of the audience's experience. 'Audiences have become visible fragmented and media of mass communication seem less 'mass'-oriented' (Jones, 2000:226).

2.3.4 Adaptation to the new marketplace

The above arguments outline the forces for the music industry's adaptation to change. Audience fragmentation creates a need for a more complex branding approach to satisfy these complex requirements. Robert Dowling (cited in Butcher, 2005), President of Film and Performing Arts, VNU Business Publications and Editor of the Hollywood Reporter raises the argument that due to new media, the biggest change in the music industry will be the amount of choice for the consumers, whereas the mediation between the artist and consumer has a much smaller impact. Therefore in efforts to secure cash inflow, companies require new marketing strategies to reach increasingly diverse customers.

2.4 New consumption

In an attempt to go beyond the simplistic assumptions that 'online music thieves' are to blame for the slump, studies are gradually focusing on analysing the change as a new business environment that requires a specially tailored strategy. While the first reaction to illegal downloading, Copy Control Technologies (CCT), created technological restrictions on digital copying (IFPI, 2002), other strategies have sought to show marketing as a force to drive growth. Accordingly, the President of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) Gary Sherman (cited in BBC World Service, 2005) finally admitted in January 2003 that online peer-to-peer sharing (P2P) of music files is here to stay. Rather than trying to eliminate the threat, the industry will have to accept that there will always be some illegal activity. The record companies will have to find a way to compete in the digital arena and offer something that consumers are willing to pay for.

One good example of new music consumption can be seen in Peter DiCola's (2000) interview with teenagers about music and downloading. Overall the focus group felt that radio stations are playing too similar music; internet provided an alternative and a better channel to discover new music; CDs are too expensive; and they wondered why people still want to pay for music when it can be downloaded for free. The current situation is not valued as good enough and this is reflected in a slump in sales.

The music industry is in fact starting to adapt in the changes at the market place. As a result of technological development and marketing strategies developed for the internet, internet sales are growing at a high rate – 200% in 2005 (Moeltgen, 2005; IFPI, 2006). The future role of cover art as a branding tool is hard to predict, due to the speed of ongoing developments in music industry. However the importance of marketing and product differentiation should increase with the amount of choices available. As Kumar (2004) says the strategy of out financing competition through economics-of-scale is still to prove its potential in the internet age.

2.5 Marketing

Marketing is a widely written topic by authors such as Anderson & Narus (2004), Baker (2003), Bennett (1988), Boone & Kurtz (1999), Brown & Patterson (2000), Butcher (2005), Hennessy and Jeannet (2004), Hutchison et al. (2006), Kotler (2001), Kumar (2004) and Sarasvuo (2005). One of the most influential marketing theorists, Philip Kotler (2001) believes that changes in the business environment are forcing organisations to rethink their marketing strategies regularly. One basic strategy is to use tools to elicit the desired response from their target markets. These tools constitute the marketing mix.

2.5.1 Traditional marketing model

Traditional mix involves 4 P's: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Robert Lauterborn (cited in Kotler, 2001) suggested that the sellers' four P's correspond to the customers four C's.

Four P's	Four C's
Product	Customer solution
Price	Customer Cost
Place	Convenience
Promotion	Communication

Winning companies are those that meet customer needs economically and conveniently and with effective communication.

Hutchison (et al. 2006) adds to the above that new products introduced to the marketplace must somehow identify themselves as different from those that currently exist. This process is defined as the customer's perception of a product in comparison with the competition or in short 'product positioning'. Hutchison (2006) further notes that for the marketing mix to be practical it has to be combined with a marketing budget and analysis of markets to form the marketing plan or 'guide to growth and success'.

2.5.2 New ideas of marketing

Nirmalya Kumar (2004), a collaborator of Philip Kotler, states the marketing mix approach is old, and that marketing has to be involved in every part of the operations, not just for the four P's. In a post-modern society, companies must become market-orientated, market-

driven or customer-focused, though this does not mean that markets drive the company. True market orientation means that the entire company obsesses over creating value for the customer and views itself as a bundle of processes that profitably define, create, communicate, and deliver value to its target customers. Into this process the album covers have to be involved to deliver value as with any other part of the product.

Robert Dowling (cited in Butcher, 2005) argues that confused people won't buy something they don't know about. Therefore marketing, as a tool to create awareness, is due to become an increasingly important part of music industry operations. He also says there is a trend towards branded content because brands have built-in audiences, which can bring in a lot of cost effective awareness. A marketing consultant, Jari Sarasvuo (2005) elaborates: 'post-modern society is an economy where the ability to differentiate among the choices is the key to a commercial success. It is an economy where value is increased by the use of symbols, branding, marketing, and tensions.'

Hutchison (et al. 2006) argues that the traditional marketing mix is too general model for marketing. Consumers require increasingly personal advertisement that is less intrusive and more intuitive. The overload of information makes consumers reluctant to pay attention to messages that are not tailored to them. Marketing, under the new media, should fragment into ultimate niche marketing, where each niche consist of one person who is precisely targeted by their needs.

Musicologist and philosopher Theodor Adorno (1941), who is possibly the most significant theorist in discussions about popular music, argued that popular music is nothing but entertainment and far from music's true aesthetics. However Longhurst (1995) analysed Adorno's extremely critical approach to popular music as being not a criticism of musical content, but a concern between music that is market orientated and music that is not. In other words, Adorno raises the question if marketing and branding requirements limit the quality of music from musicological point of view. In relation to this, Brown & Patterson (2000) argue that marketing can be harmful for the artist. 'Pop-culture and pop-art could be related to the 'silent-disdain' heritage sites, as being entertaining rather than educating; displace decontextualised art; being all the same despite minor surface variations.' They especially point out that all art is in the hands of multi-national capital and mendacious marketers with logos, branding and promo stunts. In short, business orientation is

trivialising and twisting the truth. 'Worst of all they pursue lucre and profit maximation'. However, the Director of Barbican Art Centre in London, John Tusa (1999) says that even though art and marketing are distinct concepts, both have a similar goal of having an audience, which generates income to survive. So they have to live together in contemporary society.

Brown & Patterson (2000) draw attention also to the argument that marketing in a post-modern world is an attempt to fabricate false copies of reality as a pernicious strategy of simulation. Therefore recent years have witnessed the 'marketisation' of art and also the 'artification' of marketing. Although the art form of music is market orientated, the romantic concept of art still holds: that it is superior to reality, the artist being exceptionally gifted creating in for some higher ideal. However this can be seen as a marketing concept itself.

2.6 Branding

Branding is a widely recognised marketing method. Definitions by marketing theorists such as Baker (2003), Boone & Kurtz (1999), Hennessy and Jeannet (2004), Hutchison (et al. 2006), Klein (2000), Kotler (2001) and Kumar (2004) argue that a brand is the symbolic embodiment of all the information connected with a product or service. A brand is a proper visual, emotional, rational, and cultural image or symbol associated with a company or a product. It also encompasses the set of expectations associated with a product or service which typically arise in the minds of people.

Acclaimed critic of corporate world, Naomi Klein (2000) argues that use of symbols for marketing purposes were developed by marketing theorists in the 1980s: that successful ventures must primarily produce brands as opposed to products. Klein also suggests that the need for marketing strategies has arisen from the increasing amount of choice consumers have. Corporations had to personalise, in other words brand themselves to differentiate. The benefit of branding is its ability to be associated with positive emotions and consequently attach the same emotions to the product.

2.6.1 Branding in the music industry

The music marketing theories of Kemp (2000) Lathdrop (2003), Music Managers Forum (2003) define the marketing machine's purpose as generating sales. But that is not all as

Tad Lathdrop (2003) argues. Music marketing theories differentiate immediate short-term sales and long-term 'transactions' that are more lasting: the establishment of an ongoing relationship. Symbols and visual branding serve the latter. In the music industry this is also called building the audience. Tad Lathdrop's (2003) and Chris Kemp's (2000) arguments are very marketing orientated, such as that appropriate imagery should be repeated in packages and in other promotional tools as this will create audience loyalty. They define branding in music as a collection of goods (such as albums) identifiable through a unique name, logo or other symbolic elements. A distinctive branding makes it easy for customers to identify, at a glance, one album amongst others.

Music Managers Forum (MMF) (2003), London based association for the industry, relate branding in the music industry to long term image building rather than with product designing. This is the improvement process of overall public image with the introduction of fresh and professional image of an artist. MMF argue that the image of an artist is projected not only via a style of music but also by non-musical factors such as cover art, promotional photos, live performances and an important choice of the most suitable media for the occasion.

2.7 Value of branding

Meaning of the visual representation is discussed in studies of identity and symbols by such writers as Hakanen (1998), Benjamin (1936), Baudrillard (1994), Davis (1995), Karr (2000), Klein (2000), Goffman (1959), Bignell (2002). The cover art is branding the product through visual representation of values, which are identified with the product. Therefore the cover art should have a certain desired content that is related to the musical content (Baker, 2003).

The value of branding can be understood through an idea about post-modern society, raised by Ernest Hakanen (1998): the need to order the world into easily identifiable ranks and categories. Categorising the mass of choices is society's way to interpret, to contrast and compare signs. The values of a brand signify the person's identity and leads to an active enjoyment of the music. The value of a brand is, therefore, the emotional interaction in a world of free choices. Actually 'the free choice' is a choice between identities of different social categories or groups as the new consumer fetish is to collect repetitious

signs, to enjoy music that represents the personal identity. 'The consumer freely collects signs that signify the self' (Hakanen, 1998, pp. 99). In relation to this, Judith Williamson (1978), in her classic semiotic study 'Decoding Advertisements', argues that ads invite viewers to create meanings, but in the process they create the viewer. Therefore the artist's identity is related to the audience's identity.

The value of branding is its ability to create emotional loyalty, which emerges from the signification of the self (Baker, 2003; Kotler, 2001), and consequence of loyalty is a promotion tool word-of-mouth. After pricing, word-of-mouth ranked the 2nd most important influence on decision to buy (see appendix 3). The CEO of 'the ideas company' Saatchi & Saatchi, Kevin Roberts (2003) argues that emotional loyalty is an unlimited resource with unlimited power, because emotion always leads to action. Loyal audience will do anything to see the favourite artist gaining recognition as it signifies recognition for the individual audience member as well (Hakanen, 1998).

Simon Frith (1983) argues that the popular music audience appears to buy and listen to the same few records at the same moment. The series of apparently individual decisions about what records to buy thus takes on a collective force – everyone makes the same decision. The same phenomenon can be seen in a research 'Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market'. Salganik (et al. 2006) found that the musical quality was not the only determining factor for the song's popularity; people are more likely to like a song if they think others admire it. The research indicates that social influence is a major factor in explaining people's actions. For music production and marketing the research points out that content quality is not enough. Economic success is an rather unpredictable combination of social factors.

2.7.1 Branding in cover designing process

Historical development of album cover art points out that branding is part of the cover art's designing process. Adrian Shaughnessy (1999) argues that it was The Beatles' 'Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band' (Parlophone, 1967) that created the notion of the-album-cover-as-art. There were memorable album covers prior to this release, but it took The Beatles' unprecedented popularity to alert the world to the potential of this new platform for art. Up until the release of 'Sergeant Pepper', the commissioning of album cover was a function of the publicity departments of record labels. The Beatles were the

first major act to commission the album cover design themselves after being ensured that the cover art was an important aspect of the recording process (see appendix 4).

In the 1970's progressive rock groups, such as Pink Floyd and Led Zeppelin, lifted the art of cover design's importance to unforeseen heights. This era brought the production methods of advertising into cover art, yet retained the guerrilla aesthetics of earlier designers. In the 1980's and 1990's marketing theories of branding reduced the complexity of symbolic expression on cover art to comply with more coherent designing beliefs of the times. But the importance of visual factors has increased since the 1980s due to music videos popularised by MTV and other associated television channels (BBC, 2005). Adrian Shaughnessy (1999) says that currently album covers are fragmenting into different fine tuned trends and stylistic nuances. Moreover he emphasises that album covers are important for the identity of an album.

2.8 Construction of an identity

The creation of an identity is discussed in part by philosophical writers such as Goffman (1959) and Bignell (2002) and on the other hand by marketing specialist such as Anderson & Narus (2004), Baker (2003), Klein (2000) and Kotler (2001). Sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) argued that an individual reconstructs his or her identity and behaviour to fit their needs. Construction of identity is part of Goffman's theory of symbolic interaction; for him society is not a homogenous, but there are infinitely different interactions that are represented by symbols such as words. Therefore in case of albums, individuals need to have symbolic structures in order to distinguish one from another and to be able to judge does the album fulfil any needs. Cover art has an important role of representing the music as a visual symbol.

It is usual to assume that reality imposes upon us to name things. However, one of the most renowned academics in the field of the semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure (cited in Bignell, 2002) proposed that rather than reality imposing upon us, our perception and understanding of reality is constructed by words and other signs. We are required to give names to things in order to make them real. For reality to be understood every moment involves and requires interaction of signs, which also translate values, ideologies and other messages.

Therefore symbolic interaction and signs enable the traditions, style, values and discourses to create the identity of the subject. In relation to this, Bignell (2002) argues that visual, musical, and textual signs can create emotional ties. Therefore the use of signs will enable the artist to manipulate the public's perception of the identity. A good example of the dialogue between the artist and audience is the American pop-singer Madonna. One of her greatest achievements is not her music's excellence, but how she manipulated the media and the public with music, cover art, videos, publicity and other form of branding to construct her identity in the minds of the audience (Guilbert, 2002).

The strength of the symbols in marketing are always connected to society. Naomi Klein (2000) gives examples of the signifying ability of a brand. She is talking about brands that are able to disappear and become a simulation that signifies anything the marketer wants it to. It can be intelligent, futuristic or alternative – anything, but it has to create mental connections with the product it represents by using cultural metaphors. Hence, the brand reinvents itself as a cultural sponge, soaking up and morphing to its surroundings. According to Klein (2000) and Williamson (1978), consumers do not truly believe there is a huge difference between products, which is why good branding must establish emotional ties. Consequently brands do signify emotional aspects such as attitudes, values, looks and ideas.

Klein's ideas are reflected by both Baker (2003) and Kotler (2001) who argue that if there are similar products, they have to distinguish themselves by using positive branding connotations to emotional and abstract values. They also add that brands are rarely created by advertising, but by emotional connections created by quality, convenient acquiring, innovation and differentiation. Baker (2003) emphasise that the core of every brand is a tangible product or service, which meets the customers' need.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 Methodology

With the aim of identifying and analysing the significance of album cover art as a branding tool, this research has adopted a semiotic analysis of the visual and textual signs in the covers of HIM's five albums released 1998-2005. This is combined with secondary research of literature and semi-structured interviews with professional practitioners.

3.1 Research approach

Although current developments in the music industry and marketing have been extensively written about, texts concentrating on album cover art are scarce. Therefore this research cannot built upon a hypothesis and test it in the markets. Consequently the research will use an inductive approach to compare the findings of primary research with secondary data collected previously. The significance of other branding factors such as music, promotional pictures or live performances are not compared with the album cover art, due to constraints in terms of time and money. These constraints impact upon the potential to make wide generalisations and their suitability to be applied in a different context. On the other hand, Rose (2005) argues that semiologists choose their images on the basis of how conceptually interesting they are and there is no concern to find images that are statistically representative of a wider set of images.

The decision to impose this particular method is based on the visual and signifying nature of the topic. Shaughnessy (1999) defines cover art as representing the music as a visual symbol or sign. Authors such as Bignell (2002) and Rose (2005) define semiology as 'a study of signs'. Therefore the logical approach for cover art analysing is semiotics.

3.2 Case study

The case study was chosen because the band has a strong identity in its art, they are currently in a position of having both critical and commercial success, and HIM is the first Finnish and one of the few non-English speaking popular music artists to achieve a wide

recognition in all of the most important popular music market areas: Scandinavia, Central Europe, the UK, commonwealth countries and the USA.

HIM is often pigeon-holed as a gothic metal band, however their main influences are said to be Finnish folk music and 70's rock. After forming in Finland in 1995, HIM (short for His Infernal Majesty) set out on the path with vocalist and songwriter Ville Valo as the band's founding member, alongside bassist Migé Amour and guitarist Lily Lazer. After a few changes, the line up of the band currently also includes drummer Gas Lipstick, and keyboardist Emerson Burton. The 1996 EP '666 Ways to Love' was the group's first recording. One year later their debut album, '*Greatest Love Songs, Vol. 666*' solidified their cult status throughout Scandinavia. '*Razorblade Romance*' was released in 2000, which secured their European fame. '*Deep Shadows and Brilliant Highlights*', the band's third album, arrived in 2001, followed by '*Love Metal*' in 2003 made their name known worldwide. In 2005, HIM's early albums were reissued in America through Universal; they also released '*Dark Light*', the first album for their current record label, California based Sire Records. (All Music Guide, 2006). Combined album sales of the band were 2,5 million after the fourth album and have most likely soared to over 3 million at the end of 2005.

Razig Rauf (2005), editor of London based webzine Drowned in Sound, described the band as follows: "Having endured a decade-long ascendancy to the level of hysteria they can now command, His Infernal Majesty – or HIM as they are better known – can hardly be accused of being fly-by-nights or not having worked their way to the top. Aiding their rise was the creation of the ultimate branding for the teen angst generation in the Heartagram. By blending the two key components of love and metal, HIM have the perfect backdrop to their powerful, goth-tinged rock 'n' roll".

The bands' trademark symbol 'heartagram' (a cross between a heart and a pentagram) deserves attention. A simplified version of the heartagram first appears on the second album cover. Since then the symbol has grown to symbolise the music of the band, Love Metal as they call it themselves. Today the cult symbol heartagram is living a life of its own, becoming mystified and celebrated among the band's fans. Heartagram is an important part of branding the band and was born on the album covers. An American music magazine Rolling Stone (2006) states that the band is "…known for their "heartagram," a pentagram half-formed with a heart".

3.3 Secondary research

The literature was fundamental to informing the methodology for the primary research, and could be regarded as a research practice within the methodology itself. The literature review built the foundation for primary research through largely qualitative data on the music industry, branding and cover art. The data included academic and professional books, publications, articles, unpublished interviews and related websites. Books and publications were sourced via library catalogues, electronic search engines and databases at London South Bank University. Examination of governmental publications was done with full recognition of any rhetoric or bias within their content. Bibliographies in books were also examined as an important source to locate further sources.

3.3.1 Limitations to secondary research

After an extensive research of literature, the researcher was able to find only one book which addresses specifically album cover art [Shaughnessy, 1999], and even this was written for design students, not for management students. Therefore, it was often necessary to address more general literature on the fields of marketing, branding and visual meaning.

3.4 Primary research

Primary data is the collection of precise information especially designed to answer the research topic. The researcher defines or eliminates, or at least monitors, the extraneous influences on the data as they are gathered (Saunders, 2000).

There are two different types of primary data, quantitative and qualitative. Denscombe (2003) and Saunders et al. (2000) argue that primary research can have range of methods such as observations, interviews, focus groups and questionnaires to collect the data. The main analysis in this research will consist of analysing signs and semi-structured interviews, as Gillian Rose (2005) argues that human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself. One major strength of semiology is its vocabulary for describing what meanings signs have. The descriptive breakdown of images enables them to be related to marketing and especially to theories on the

importance of branding. Semi-structured interviews provide an effective way to collect additional qualitative data to support the findings of the semiotic analysis.

The information is then interpreted independently and furthermore triangulated with the existing secondary literature review and qualitative interviews to meet the overall aim of this research project and to facilitate informed conclusions and recommendations

3.4.1 Semiotic analysis

Rose (2005) argues that semiology is an approach to visual images which has been much more prominent than either compositional interpretation or content analysis in the development of the debates about visuals. Its prominence is due in part to the fact that semiology confronts the question of how images make meanings. It is not simply descriptive nor does it rely on quantitative estimations of significance. Semiology is an analytical tool for taking an image apart and looking at it in relation to systems of meaning. The method of semiology draws influence from several major social theorists, such as Roland Barthes, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, Claude Lévi-Straus, Ferdinand de Saussure and Judith Williamson. Rose (2005) continues that even though there are many different analytical emphases within semiology, the common and most important tool is the sign.

Professor Daniel Chandler (2006) argues that social semiotics has moved beyond the structuralist concern with internal relations of parts within the self-contained system, seeking to explore the use of sign in specific social situations. Roland Barthes (1957), in Mythologies, states that semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits. These systems include images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and associations of all these. He also adds, that no use of signs can be separated from structures of ideology and power. Signs form the content, and the meaning arises from the interrelated discussion of signs. Acclaimed semiologists Umberto Eco and Charles Peirce (cited in Chandler, 2006) also elaborate that everything, even a thought, can be taken as sign. Therefore a certain value is associated with everything that an artist stands for through signs – musical or non-musical.

Chandler (2006) continues to define human experience as inherently multisensory, every experience is subjective with medium involved. Different media provide different frameworks for representing experience. When we use a medium for any purpose, the use becomes part of the purpose. It should be noted that the experience in question is not influenced only by visual or musical media, but also by the technological aspects of the media. In relation to this Levi-Strauss (cited in Bignell, 2002) argues that the process of creating something is not a matter of the calculated choice and use of whatever materials are technically best adapted to a predetermined purpose; rather it involves a dialogue with the materials and means of execution. As the means of execution change, so does the communicative functions. For instance, many contemporary theorists have remarked on the growth of the importance of visual media compared with linguistic media in post-modern society and the associated shifts in the communicative functions of such media.

Rose (2005) suggests that semiotic understanding of the sign depends in part on the work of 'the father of semiotics' Ferdinand de Saussure. Bignell (2002) points out that the most important contribution of Saussure was the understanding how language works. This work has evolved to mean more than just linguistic signs. Signs consist of two parts, which are only distinguishable at the analytical level. The first part is the signified and the second part is the signifier. There is no necessary relationship between a particular signifier and its signified. 'The distinction between signifier and signified is crucial to semiology, because it means that the relation between meanings and signifiers is not inherent, but rather conventional and can therefore be problematised' (Rose, 2005: 74). However Rose continues that semiotic analysis should not set out an interpretation, rather investigate how works are meaningful for the viewer looking at them.

The research will employ Dyer's (1982) model of understanding what signs symbolise.

1 Decide what the signs are
2 Decide what they signify 'in themselves'
3 Think about how they relate to other signs both within the image and in other images
4 Then explore their connections to wider systems of meanings, from codes to dominant codes, referent systems or mythologies
5 Then return to the signs via their codes to explore the precise articulation of ideology and mythology

In decoding of the signs the research used Rose's (2005) model of decoding a picture. The categories included were:

Representations of body (age, gender etc…)

Representations of manner (expressions, eye contact etc…)

Representations of activity (camera position, movements etc…)

Background and setting

3.4.2 Message board questionnaire

The researcher used message boards on rock-genre specialised webzines 'Noise.fi' and 'Rokkizine.com' as an inexpensive and time efficient way to gain qualitative data from music consumers. Although the method fitted perfectly for the time and money constraints on the research project, the amount of data failed to reach substantial amount and quality. Therefore the results of this research are not included in the analysis and conclusion. Most likely consumers would have required incentives for a deeper discussion on the cover arts of HIM.

3.4.3 Qualitative interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a good form of qualitative primary research, based on interactive communication. The level of interaction the researcher more freely to respond on the points of interest (www.marketingteacher.com, 2006).

3.4.3.1 Interview

In order to give more in-depth data for the objectives in this research, two semi-structured interviews were utilised. These interviews were designed to encourage the interviewee to enter a discussion with the author around the topics approached through the questions. Denscombe (2003) points out that the major advantage of qualitative research through interviews is the interview's adaptability and the possibility of finding out information that a questionnaire and quantitative measuring of information would otherwise conceal.

The six questions in the interviews arose from the examined literature review and did focused on cover art and branding in the rock-genre. The aim was to gain data from professional arts practitioners. The interviews were designed for a period of 30 minutes

and were conducted over the phone, due to the fact that interviewees resided in Helsinki, Finland.

3.4.3.2 Sample group

The interviewees for this study were chosen through their background; whether working closely with branding of rock bands or as cover art designers. Also the researcher wanted them to be Finnish, so that they have a good understanding of HIM's cultural background.

Saunders (2000) argues that to generate an effective semi-structured interview the sample group has to be small and purposely selected. Judgmental sampling enables to select interviewees that will best meet the objectives of the interview. However it is important to note that such samples cannot be considered to be statistically representative.

Subjects for the interview:

Ms. Jessi Frey – a media academic and the lead singer of the Finnish band Velcra. Has art directed and designed two album covers for Velcra.

Mr. Asko Kallonen – Head of A&R at Helsinki Music Company that releases HIM's albums in Finland. Former head of A&R at BMG Finland for whom HIM was signed during 1997-2004.

Also considered for the interview:

Mr. Seppo Vesterinen – Manager of HIM. Responsible for business issues of the band.

Mr. Ville Valo – Lead singed of HIM. Also founder and the main songwriter/lyricist. Could be considered as the artistic director of HIM.

Mr. Mikko Järvenpää – A marketing manager of Google inc. in London. Specialised on product differentiation.

Mr. Herra Ylppö – A rock singer and graphic designer.

It would have been very good to get interviews from the band itself, but the researcher failed to establish a contact. Phone interviews with Ms. Frey and Mr. Kallonen were conducted in April 2006.

3.4.4 Limitations to primary research

The data collected in the primary research is completely qualitative. Although it does provide some important insights into a certain topic, but in general the gathered data is less representative than well conducted quantitative research, since it does not necessarily represent opinions held by the majority (Saunders, 2000). Also in relation to this, the research analyses only one single case study in rock-genre. More representative results could be achieved by analysing the cover art of multiple genres and artists. Also, the significance of branding factors such as music, promotional pictures or live performances are not compared together with the album cover art.

Constraints in terms of time and money have prevented a sufficient scale of analysis. These constraints impact upon the potential to make wide generalisations and their suitability to be applied in a different context. Without case by case adjustment the results can only be applied on the case study. On the other hand, Rose (2005) argues that semiologists choose their images on the basis of how conceptually interesting they are and there is no concern to find images that are statistically representative of a wider set of images.

3.5 Triangulation of results

Denscombe (2003) states that by referring to two or more other co-ordinates triangulation is a process of locating a true position. Therefore in order to enhance the results and conclusions, this research has examined different perspectives through qualitative data collection methods from semiotic analysis and interviews.

On the other hand, the researcher has remained cautious and critical of the notion that this is a single case study research within the context of the overall subject matter, which as the secondary research has identified, is a complex and multi-dimensional. Therefore the use of triangulation has been conducted in an informed manner, as opposite to a naïve

attempt to uncover a single truth within the music industry. Through the process of triangulation the researcher has attempted to assess the relationship between theories of branding and professional opinions.

3.6 Summary of objectives and the methodology

- **To analyse the visual imagery of HIM album covers.**

- Semiotic analysis of HIM album covers

- **To explore the importance of focused album cover creation.**

- Semiotic analysis of HIM album covers
- Semi-structured interviews with professional practitioners
- Triangulation of collected data

- **To assess the album cover art's relationship to branding theories.**

- Evidence from academic literature
- Analysis of semi-structured interviews

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Analysis

Album covers can be understood as advertisements that operate as branding tools of the product, in this case the album. In relation to this, Williamson (1978) argues that signifiers in an advertisement have an overt meaning which processes into another, a less obvious meaning. In addition, the creation of signs and signifiers in advertisements are purposely selected to construct an identity or image that will appeal to the consumer.

Advertisements demand that we decipher them to single out clues that are already laid out, creating an indirect method of what is insinuated. As Hakanen (1998) argues, our 'production' of meaning is in fact a 'consumption' of meaning. Some signifiers are stereotyped to enable consumers to decode the meaning as quickly as possible. Cover art provides an important iconic representation of both the album and what the album should stand for. Thus, analysis of all of the HIM cover's will strongly focus upon the ways in which the photographic imagery generates the appropriate signified concepts.

4.1 Greatest Lovesongs vol. 666 (1998)
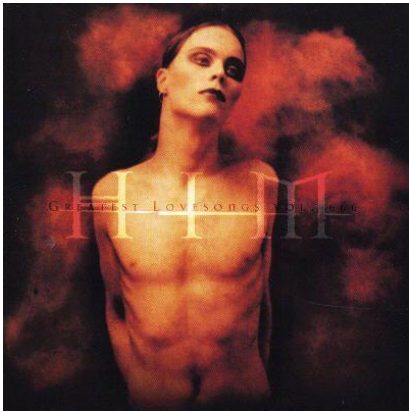
Original track list:
1. For You (intro)
2. Your Sweet Six Six Six
3. Wicked Game
4. The Heartless
5. Our Diabolic Rapture
6. It's All Tears (drown in this love)
7. When Love and Death Embrace
8. The Beginning of The End
9. (don't fear) The Reaper

In its way of signifying the music, the first album cover relies upon an iconic imagery. The first impression of the album is the stereotyped signification of 'Hell' through black and red colours in a smoky environment. The cover predominantly features a young adult man, in his early 20's on the foreground. He is the lead singer of the group, Ville Valo, and the cover art uses a variety of opposing signifiers to create him as the signifier of the band. The upper half of his body is shown without a shirt, representing sexiness, openness and innocence. However the look is very androgynous. He is clearly a man, but with feminine s aspects such as make-up, earrings and long hair. These feminine aspects are normal for musicians in rock-genre and female fans have considered Ville Valo as a sex symbol since the beginning of his career.

Picture 1
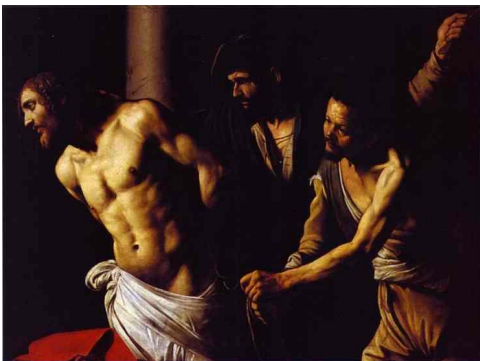
The body and rendering of the photograph are very similar to the traditional representation of Jesus Christ, such as Caravaggio's 'Flagellation of Christ' (picture 1). Even though the viewer cannot be certain, the man on the album cover seems to have his hands tied behind his back suggesting imprisonment and torturing. The eyes point upwards and the camera angle points him as inferior. On this level it is easy to relate these signs to sacrification and martyrdom. An interesting semiotic element exist in the name 'HIM' and album name that are printed on top the lead singer like scars, further signifying that he is the representation of the music. All these above elements combined create a notion of tortured Christ in hell – a position of contrasting sign of good and evil in western civilisations. The man is like the Christ suffering the pain of the listener. This contrast of good and evil is further included in the

album name, song names and lyrics, in which almost every sentence involves something that is associated with both good and evil. Music on the album is dark, distorted and extremely melancholic.

4.2 Razorblade Romance (2000)
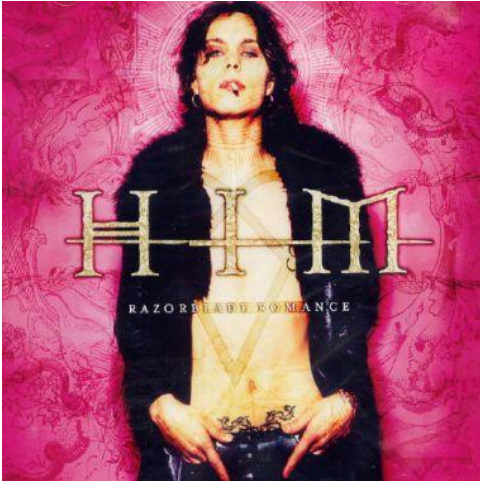
Original track list:
1. I Love You (prelude to tragedy)
2. Poison Girl
3. Join Me In Death
4. Right Here In My Arms
5. Gone With The Sin
6. Razorblade Kiss
7. Bury Me Deep Inside Your Heart
8. Heaven Tonight
9. Death Is In Love With Us
10. Resurrection
11. One Last Time

picture 2

The second album of HIM has the most significant reference to one of the major influences for the band: Jim Morrison. Mr. Valo's pose has similarities, such as mystical or dangerous, for the poses of the Morrison's most famous photos taken in 1966 (picture 2). Musically, the album is the most rock n' roll of all the band's albums. The rock-clichés of shirtless, skinny, tattooed and furcoat implicate the rock attitude of rebellion. The photograph is taken below the subject's eye level, giving him superiority over the viewer. The body's expression is not as defensive as on the first album; rather it stands out as offensive. Furthermore the rock and roll's rebellion is present in the cigarette and leather pant outlook. The androgynous outlook from the first album, with long hair, earrings and make-up is very present.

picture 3

To support the rock-god image Ville Valo has a saint like halo circling his head. However the rock-god image is the only reference to Jim Morrison as the cover art includes a mix of gothic romanticism as well (picture 3). Faintly printed patterns influenced from the era frame the whole cover. Furthermore the colouring of pink and black give out more a romantic than diabolic feeling. The pink colours are

uncommon in rock genre, and were purposely chosen to create controversy and to make the album stand out (Kallonen, 2006).

The set up is similar to the first album. HIM is printed on front this with a greater contrast, possible for the customers to see the name better. This album cover is important as it is when the bands trademark signifier Heartagram is seen for the first time. This time the singer is scarred with the symbol, implicating tortured soul associations. Altogether the cover art continues the central theme of the band: 'Love Metal' – good and evil together.

4.3 Deep Shadows and Brilliant Highlights (2001)

Original track list:
1. Salt In Our Wounds
2. Heartache every moment
3. Loose You Tonight
4. In Joy and Sorrow
5. Pretending
6. Close To the Flame
7. You Are The One
8. Please Don't Let It Go
9. Beautiful
10. In Love and Lonely
11. Don't Close Your Heart
12. Love You Like I Do

The softly focused quality of the photography and the album cover's colouring of gentle purple and deep black are signifiers that contribute to the melancholic gothic feeling;

however the film noir style contrasting lighting adds intelligent and ironic signifiers, such as in 1932 directed film 'Doctor X' by Michael Curtiz (picture 4). The cover art is also pointing towards the album name, which draws influence from Hollywood and film noir, filling the circle around the film noir theme. Musically, the album is more settled and thoughtful than the rebellious earlier ones.

picture 4

The man on the cover, still vocalist Ville Valo, is covered with a Victorian era gothic shirt and retains the androgynous signs familiar from the earlier album covers. The body's representation leans towards intellectual film noir. Mr. Valo leans a bit towards the camera, holding a cigarette with hands positioned as if in a polite conversation with the viewer. This

invitation to conversation also arises from how the camera is positioned, at eye level, suggesting equality with the viewer.

HIM's name is once again on the foreground, now framed with gothic ornamental patterns. Remarkably the cover does not have the heartagram logo, which at this point of the band's career has grown to signify them.

4.4 Love Metal (2003)

Original track list:
1. Buried Alive By Hearts
2. The Funeral of Hearts
3. Beyond Redemption
4. Sweet Pandemonium
5. Soul On Fire
6. The Sacrament
7. This Fortress of Tears
8. Circle of Death
9. Endless Dark
10. The Path

This album is a break in the band's album cover tradition. For the first time the cover does not include the singer. Instead there is the heartagram logo that by this time has overwhelmingly grown to signify the band. Asko Kallonen (2006) argued that this album was more a summary of earlier cover's signs; sealing the band's pigeon hole defining what their music is about. By now they can pitch their art in two words: 'Love Metal'. The pitching is well supported by the symbol of the band. The Heartagram symbol signifies the band so much that basically nothing else is needed on the cover. Noticeably not even the name of the band or album, acting as a good evidence of the power of the logo. Musically the album is very rock, while some tracks experiment with psychedelic sounds and arrangements common in the 1970s.

The cover retains ornamental patterns which frame the golden heartagram. The contrasts on the cover are very dark, making the cover almost black. The golden heartagram is printed in a way that light reflects from it differently depending of the angle. Consequently he symbol becomes be even closer for the viewer while shifting the angles for the light reflection. It is like a secret for what the viewer has the key. Black and gold colours are very royal, signifying the growing fame of the band.

Although the cover appears to be simple, its connotative meanings allow our interpretation of it to be pragmatic one, in that its signifiers have particular relevance with regards to the content of the music.

4.5 Dark Light (2005)

Original track list:
1. Vampire Heart
2. Rip Out The Wings of a Butterfly
3. Under The Rose
4. Killing Loneliness
5. Dark Light
6. Behind The Crimson Door
7. The Face Of God
8. Drunk On Shadows
9. Play Dead
10. In The Nightside of Eden

This continues the tradition started on the Love Metal album to use the strong logo of the band. On the official cover (released only in the US) the viewer recognises the familiar symbol projected on one side of a multi-story gothic style skyscraper, often founded in New York. On top of the building, but more as on the background, are HIM letters as part of the building. The name and the heartagram signify the building to as 'HIM'.

The building stands against stormy rain and rising waves braking beneath. Through this environment the viewer gets the feeling that HIM is the last resort and safety in a stormy world. The skyscraper also signifies wealth, centre and power – factors attracting people in

the states of fear and uncertainty. In relation to the protective imagery, the cover appears to be as out of the world of Batman – superhero and the Gotham City. This is clarified with gothic building, projection of the logo and dark colours that are familiar from such as 'Batman Begins' movie (picture 5).

picture 5

Interestingly in Europe the 'Dark Light' album was released with a simpler cover, similar to the earlier 'Love Metal' release (picture 6). The cover includes just a silvery heartagram, band's name and album's name on dark blue background. The band's fame in Europe being very high and heartagram well recognised, might has made this decision possible. In addition, as Europe does not have huge skyscraper culture the message of the US cover, security and wealth, might have been misunderstood. The real reason for two different album cover is not known for the researcher.

picture 6

4.6 Summary of the semiotic analysis

The album cover analysis reveals a continuous trend of images until the 'Love Metal' album, which saw the band change towards a more simplistic cover creation and labelling. This break in the continuum created a new trend that continued to the next album, except in the US which was a new market for the band. HIM's heartagram symbol has grown to signify the band very strongly and its relevance for the band is so important that they do not need anything else on the cover anymore. The value of the heartagram for HIM is similar to a trademark in any business.

Although the average consumer of music might not be aware of the complex signifiers the HIM album cover create, or the technicalities of this process, he or she will still be aware of the signification of good versus evil, most obviously through the Heartagram. This relationship not only ensures the album cover's uniform message, it also ensures the cover's plausibility: For it is the obvious contrivance between good and evil which allows the recipient to view the cover within its generic context. Within this it is acceptable for the band to sing soothing love songs and also be rock-credible by having the dangerous evil

side as well. Therefore it is arguable that this acceptability would not be guaranteed if one sign was not reinforced by the other. Especially important seems to be the love metal album. HIM was able to create focused album cover, which says in one symbol and in two words what their music is about. Such a clear definition makes the marketing efforts and consumer recognition easier (Hutchison et al., 2006), possibly being reason for their wide recognition.

By looking at the genre's current competition on the markets and HIM's earlier colleagues, the inclusion of focused album cover creation is clear, although these are just samples. As described in the literature review album covers in the 1960s and 1970s were more complex. Rock bands from that era, such as The Doors (from the USA) and Black Sabbath (from the UK) have album covers mainly without repetitive symbols or other signs except the band's name. The branding theories have not yet influenced the creation of album cover art. However the communication of certain messages are seen on the bands album covers. Especially Black Sabbath involves same good versus evil as HIM, but the visual representation is not as branded. Possibly due to the reason that visual aspect of music was not as important as it is today.

The Doors (in 1960s):


Black Sabbath (in 1970s)
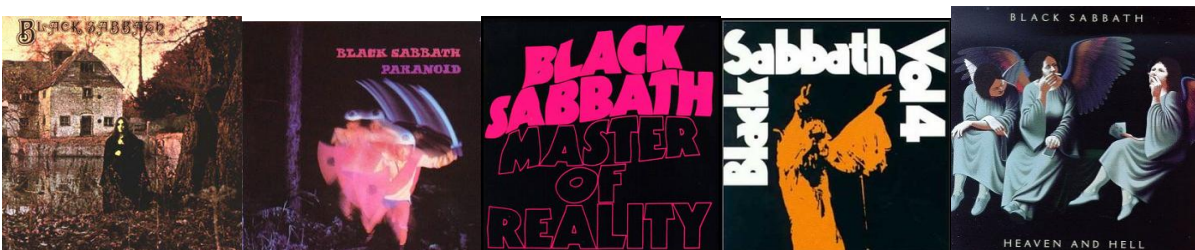
Major influencer of HIM, as argued by Rolling Stone (2006), are The Sisters of Mercy (From the UK) and The Mission (from the UK). Both started their careers during the 1980s and have remarkable similarities with HIM in both their music and album covers. These bands combine symbols and definitive signs to label their music into melancholic rock. In addition the development of symbols and branding has taken a couple of albums, similar to HIM.

The Sisters of Mercy (in 1980's)

The Mission (in 1980's & 1990's)
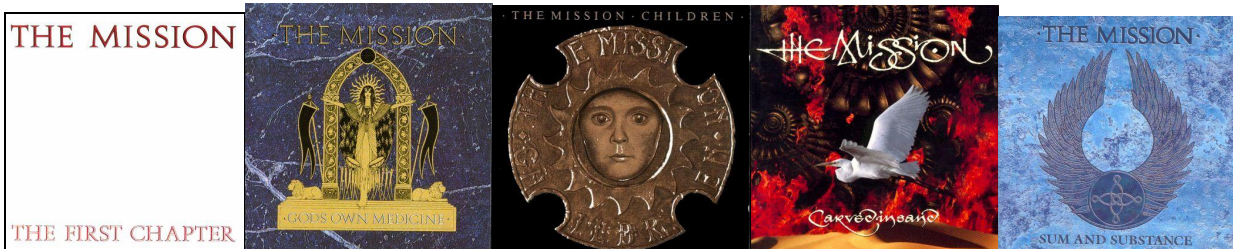
One of the current peers of HIM, hailing from the same city (Helsinki, Finland), are The 69 Eyes. They have very similar image as HIM (goth and rock) and some would even argue they are riding with the success of HIM. The 69 Eyes album covers have their logo clearly visible on them. Although their covers do not have a clear symbol, the colours and feelings are represented with uniform signs of dark settings. Another contemporary artist, whom are often musically pigeon holed with HIM are the UK based Placebo. Whereas they do not have a clear symbol as signifier, the band has evolved to employ anonymous naked human body to signify the albums for consumers. The grey colours and bodies are repeated in the latest releases of the band, similarly to HIM's use of the Heartagram.

The 69 Eyes (in 1990s & 2000s)

Placebo (in 1990s & 2000s)

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 Interviews

Asko Kallonen (2006) argues that in popular music the meaning for a consumer arises from the relationship of surface (photos, name etc.) and content (music). The surface has an extremely important role in crystallising essence of the content. He pointed out that, like in any product, branding is important for the differentiation purposes. Mr. Kallonen supported the notion by Hakanen (1998) and Kumar (2004) that brands create a relationship between the product and the consumer by representing certain values. Therefore branding is a way of differentiation. In relation to this Jessi Frey (2006) argued that branding is important in everything involving communication. This is because branding enables the communication to be focused. Branding in music is often misunderstood as an assembly line production strategy. For Ms. Frey branding in music could be better described as having a good understanding of the requirements in the art form.

Ms. Frey argued the meaning of the album cover art is to guide the consumer while they make their decision which album(s) to purchase. The more accurate and clear the guiding is, the better its function as an advertisement is fulfilled. The message can use different elements that support certain associations or clichés in a music genre. Kallonen (2006) argued that HIM deliberately broke certain clichés (such as pink colour) on their second album cover in order to create a more striking cover that a customer will not pass without noticing it.

Although album cover art is important for marketing strategy, Asko Kallonen disregarded the possibility of measuring cover art as a tool for generating sales. It is rather impossible to measure how much sales are affected by a certain album cover, because as they are created case by case comparisons are impossible. For research purposes a record label could release the same album with different cover's to measure the sales, but this would be impractical and results would still not be scientifically relevant.

In regards to the overall importance of album cover art for the current digital revolution in the music industry's business environment, Asko Kallonen (2006) believed there will not be a significant decrease. Because just the music is not enough; consumers will still want to see who is creating the music. He argued that people are buying values and music's purpose is mainly to transmit these values. In addition the internet, by increasing competition makes marketing strategies more important as the band has to differentiate amongst it peers. In comparison, Jessi Frey (2006) believed that visual aspects are still important in music, though actual album concept as the product might change, consequently changing the album cover art's standards as well. In the future, if album cover art is seen as representing the music visually, then this platform most likely moves into digital forms. Consequently becoming more complex through the possibilities offered by digital technologies. Ms. Frey argued that in the digital environment cover art's function might be taken over by the band's website, which can involve moving images, sounds, still images, animations and other possibilities for visual representation. It should be kept in mind however, as writers such as Bolter and Grusin (2000) and Dewdney (1995) argue, that same principles of meaning and interpretation as in the mechanical environment are valid. The digital environment mainly merges the methods of execution.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 Conclusion and recommendations

The issues raised in the interviews reflect the topics identified in the literature review. In addition, the interviews support the findings of the semiotic analysis, it becomes clear that the album covers of HIM have similarities to advertisements, and that the amount of choice consumers have require artist and record labels to carry out branding plans for an album. The study also identified cover art as a key component that arguably could be behind the commercial success of HIM.

6.1 Conclusion

This research has attempted to give an analysis of album covers whose signifiers were not only designed to give a favourable and appropriate image for the album, but also, these signifiers were shown to have a strong relationship with the contextual message in albums which the sign was located. In addition to this, as professor Chandler (2006) argues, signs receive their meaning only through their opposite. Good is not good without evil or warm is not warm without the feeling of cold. Regardless of the decade, similarities in the inclusion of opposites can be found in the cover art of successful rock-groups such as The Doors (1960's), Black Sabbath (1970's) or Guns n' Roses (1980's & 1990's). These groups pose the dangerous and mystical image of a rock god, but often sing about emotional tensions between two people.

In addition to just representing the album, the covers are a surface for the artist to signify what their art is all about. Cover art is a message that is directed by the artist, though as Asko Kallonen (2006) elaborates, in co-operation with the record label. Appearances in other media are often a vision of creators such as video director or journalist. Furthermore Kallonen (2006) adds that promotion and branding materials evolve around the visual imagery of the latest album cover. Therefore cover art also can direct the branding process for the whole artist, not just for the album. However it is important to understand that in the case of a rock band, there are numerous amounts of other branding factors, which work in cooperation creating the image of an artist or a group (Hutchison et al., 2006).

As Hakanen (1998), Hutchison et al. (2006) and Williamson (1978), Kallonen (2006) and Frey (2006) argue that consumers are not anymore buying music, but rather they are buying the message that use music albums as its media. Therefore refined and streamlined identity on the cover, like any advertisement, enables people to better understand what the artist or band is about. The semiotic analysis of HIM covers show how album covers can be used as a branding tool, but its impact on their success would need more research.

Changes in the music industry's business environment have lead to requirements of new marketing strategies and adaptation attempts, such as economies-of-scale, are still to prove their potential. For branding, the cover art is one platform in use of a focused message transmission (see chapter 2.3). In the 4 P's of marketing, cover art's use fit in promotion for its communication abilities. In addition album cover is part of the product as well, however there are now evidence that consumers purchase albums because of the album covers (see chapter 2.5).

Branding of HIM has influences from universal marketing theories, as written by such as Kotler (2001). In addition HIM has skilfully involved branding in the album cover art. This research's semiotic analysis showcases how the band has created a focused message, which is represented on the album covers. This is very similar to what marketing theorist (see chapter 2.6) and interviewees said: a brand is the symbolic embodiment of all the information connected with a product and closely related to long term image building.

The significance of album cover art as a branding tool is this ability for a symbolic representation as consumers are choosing signs that signify themselves (see chapter 2.7). This evolves into emotional loyalty and recognition, which turns out to word-of-mouth promotion. Loyal fans will do anything to their favourite artist gaining recognition. However album cover art does not increase the album's content value, because the art form is rarely considered as the reason for a purchase. The value of it can not be measured in numbers, but in its qualitative ability to communicate and crystallise the essence of the music. Frey (2006) argues that successful branding of music should in fact be part of the art. Although cover art is not significant alone, it is the centre piece that influence visual imagery of other branding tools in the music industry.

The main findings out of this project have been summarised and related to the objectives as follows:

Review of academic resources, journals and other material in order to identify relationship between cover art and branding.

- Music industry is in need of innovative marketing strategies as the supply of music is increasing.
- Branding is an effective tool for differentiation through involvement of cultural messages.
- Cover art has signs that involve certain cultural messages.
- In a post-modern society people purchase the message, rather than the music, communicated through different methods of music, promotion, marketing and branding.

To assess the importance of focused album cover creation

- Focused album creation enables cover art to visually represent the cultural message that the artist wants to transmit.
- Well signified album cover creates a focused message that is easy for consumers to understand.

To analyse HIM cover albums

- Showcase of refined album cover creation
- The band has been able to refine their message into two words and one symbol. Consequently the message transmitted becomes very clear.
- In theory shows one key component for commercial success

6.2 Recommendations

Even though this study examines a case that executes cover art as part of the branding process, it is important to notice that the success of HIM's brand arises from a creation of a lifestyle. Cover art is just one tool in this creation of the lifestyle. The success of HIM does not derive from huge sums of capital spent on advertising or production, but from the

band's long term determination of inviting, involving and interacting their audience to be part of the 'Love Metal' culture.

Development of this research should include studies on meanings of the cover art, cross referencing genres and styles, and relating these to the level of success and musical content. Rose (2005) argues that images gain meanings not only from their own signs, but also from their relation with the signs of other images. Therefore it is necessary to consider what sort of relation is the most important for images under consideration. Is it a relation based on 'content'? Or on a shared location of display? Or on explicit cross referencing? Hall (cited in Rose, 2005) argues that most images produce a preferred meaning in a society/culture as trends impose classification of the world. These are so called dominant cultural orders. Therefore signs are mapped out into discursive domains, hierarchically organised into dominant and preferred meanings. Majority of the audience can be assumed to interpret these in ways that the preferred meaning is imprinted on them.

As album covers are not certainly the one and only branding tool for musical artist, there is a need to study cross promotional tool's impact on the consumers' understanding of the artists message. To gain a true significance as a promotional tool, album covers should be analysed in comparison to the other tools used in marketing and branding. Issues requiring more study are such as how much advertisement / music videos affect identity building? Or how much consumers recognise album cover versus other branding tools? The importance of tools might be different among genres; however the need for a message seems universal.

Any study or use of branding should keep in mind that it is important to address questions of cultural meanings and powers, to think the visuals in terms of cultural and social significance. For instance this research project should be taken further by looking into how the 'love metal' message is understood in non-western cultures. In addition, the overall significance of visual representation of music should gain more attention from academic and industry organisation. Because recently one lasting trend in music has been an increased visualisation, and this has happened in every single genre (Shaughnessy, 1999). Gordon Fyfe and John Law (cited in Rose, 2005) claim that picturing and seeing are features of the process by which most human being come to know the world as it really is for them. This does not mean that textual or musical context are not important in the

production of music, though visual representation might in fact be the most significant for an artists recognition because, as John Berger (1972) suggests, 'seeing comes before words'.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 (source: Hutchison et al., 2006:41)

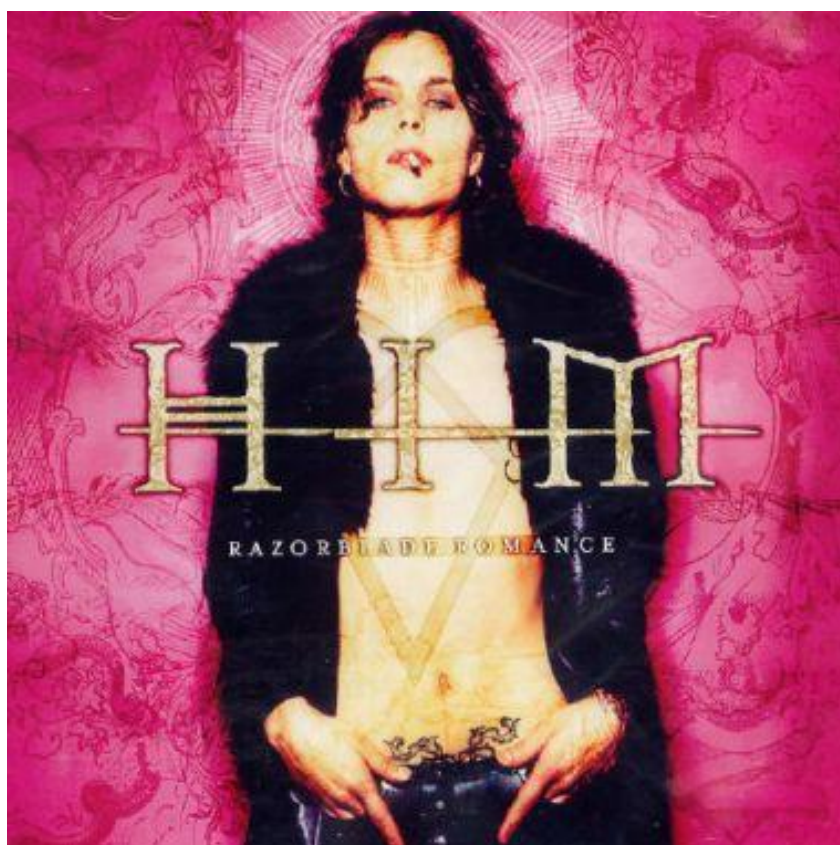## Genre market shares in the US
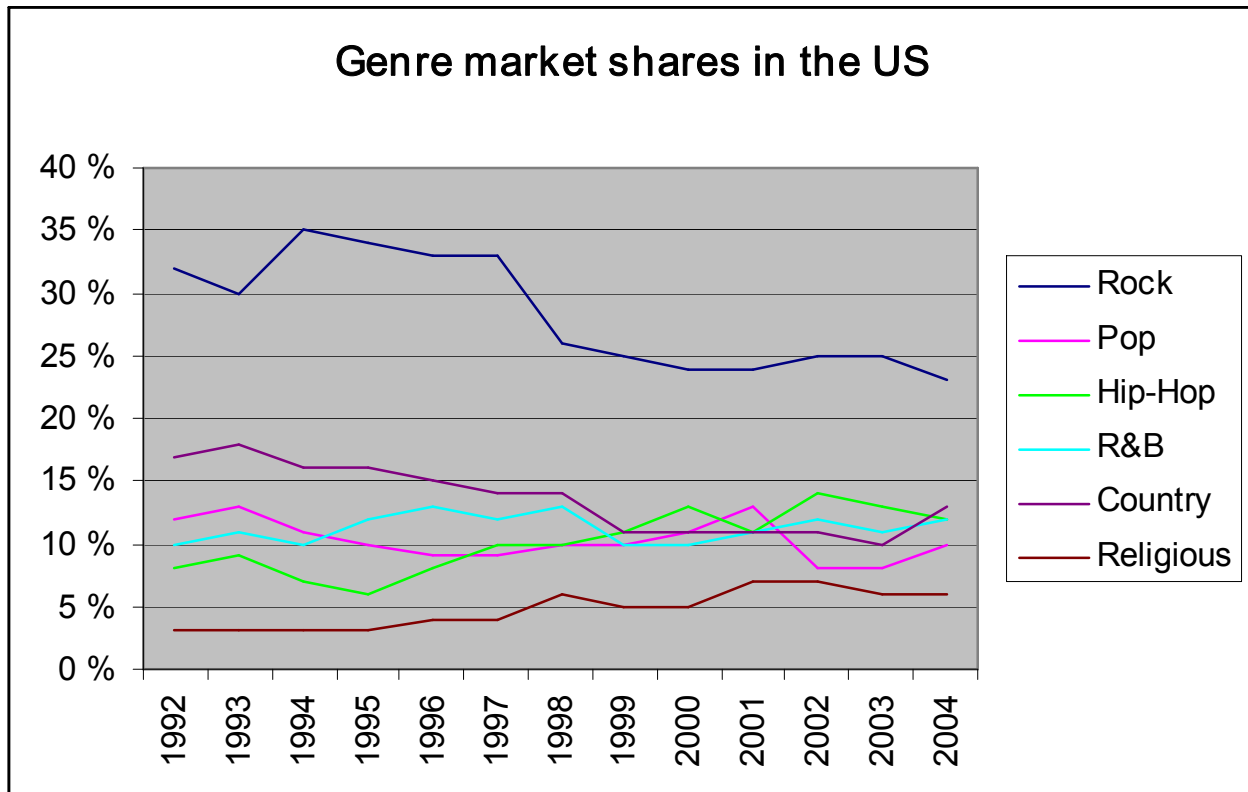
Appendix 2 (Source: Hutchison et al., 2006:288)

Top Ten music markets retail value, 2003

Country	In millions USD
U.S.	$ 11,848
Japan	$ 4,910
U.K.	$ 3,216
France	$ 2,115
Germany	$ 2,041
Canada	$ 676
Australia	$ 674
Italy	$ 645
Spain	$ 596
Netherlands	$ 499

Appendix 3 (Source: Hutchison et al, 2006:233)

Factors Influencing Purchases
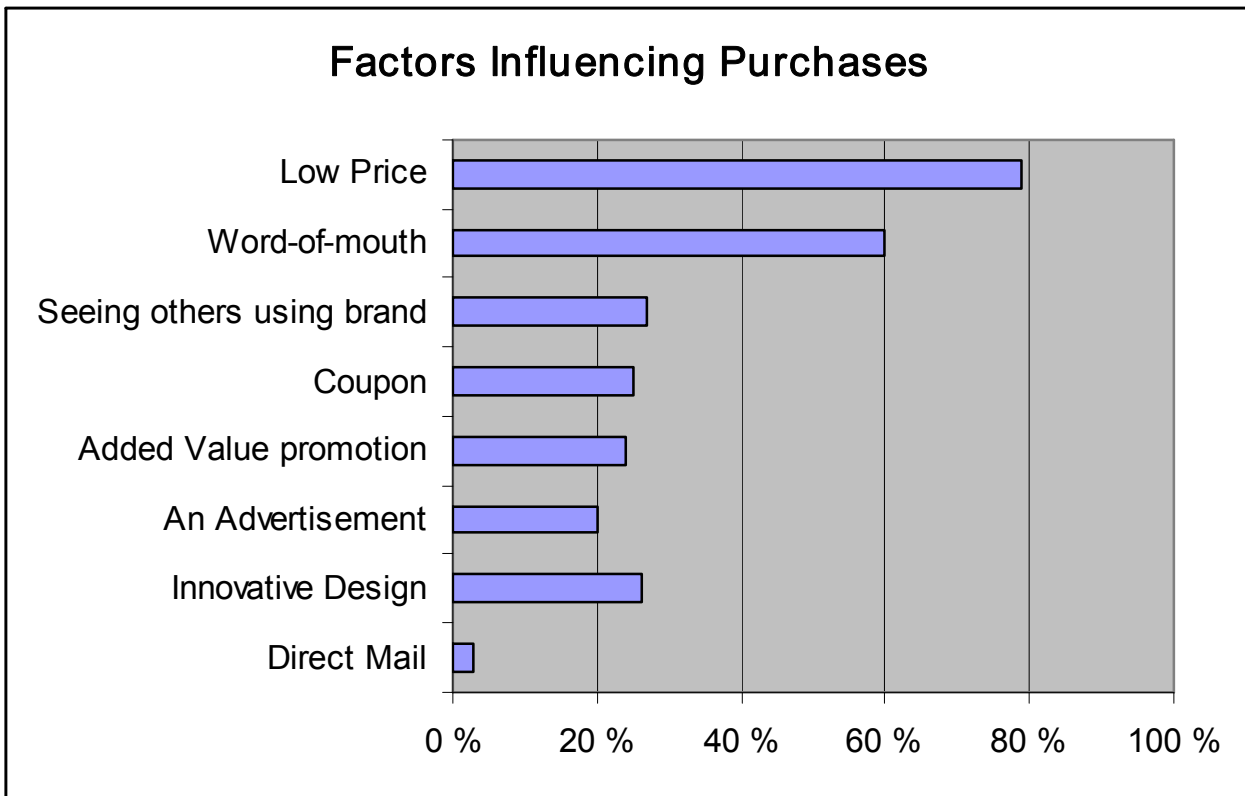
Appendix 4
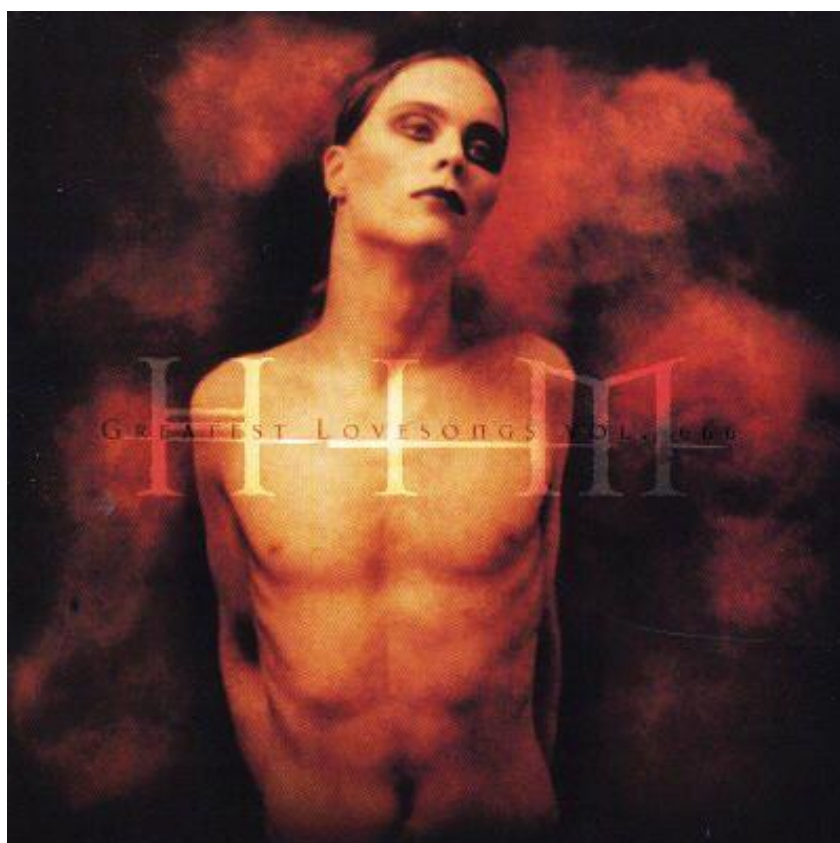
Appendix 5

Appendix 6 – Questions prepared for the semi-structured interviews:

- Is branding important in rock-genre?

- In which ways can an album cover art increase the value of an album?

- Is cover art a measurable tool for generating more sales?

- Will the changing business environment impact on marketing strategies concerning album cover art?

- Is band logo on album cover significant for the album's recognition?

ABBREVIATIONS

AIM: Short for 'Association of Independent Music'. AIM promotes and protects the UK independent record companies on a national and international level. AIM is a trade body. They negotiate with the biggest players in the industry and government. AIM helps companies of all shapes and sizes that are faced with a variety of problems on a daily basis. They collect and disseminate information.

BPI: Short for 'British Phonographic Industry'. The BPI is the British record industry's trade association. Has represented the interests of British record companies since being formally incorporated in 1973. Its membership is comprised of more than 320 companies including all four major record companies, associate members such as manufacturers and distributors plus hundreds of independent music companies representing literally thousands of labels which together account for over 90% of recorded music output in the UK.

CCT: Short for 'Copy Control Technology'. Technology used to prevent music on a CD to be copied on a computer hard-drive and distributed over the internet.

IFPI: Short for 'International federation of Phonographic Industry'. IFPI is a trade body, representing the recording industry worldwide with over 1450 members in 75 countries ad affiliate industry associations in 48 countries.

P2P: Short for 'peer-to-peer'. A method of distributing files over a network. Using P2P client software can advertise, send, or receive files with an another client

RIAA: Short for 'Recording Industry Association of America'. Is trade group that represents the U.S. Recording industry. Its mission is to foster a business and legal climate that supports and promotes their members' creative and financial vitality. RIAA members create, manufacture and/or distribute 90% of all legitimate sound recordings produced and sold in the U.S.

GLOSSARY

Independent record company: A record company that is not affiliated in any way with a Major Label, and uses distribution to their releases sold. Indies control 28.4% of the world wide market share.

Major record company: A record company that commands a high percentage of the annual sales of records, and had their own distribution system. The music industry is dominated by four major companies who control about 70-80% of the world music market. The major labels, that are often referred as 'the four big ones' are:

- Universal Music Group: is the largest of the major labels with 25.5% market share. The company controls about 25 labels, including Interscope, Island, Def Jam, Mercury, Motown and Geffen. UMG is a subsidiary of the French telecommunications giant Vivendi Universal. UMG has operations in 71 countries.

- Sony BMG Music Entertainment: is the second largest recording company in the world with 21.5% market share. Jointly owned by German media giant Bertelsmann and Japanese consumer electronic giant Sony. Best known labels include Arista, RCA, LaFace, Columbia and Epic. Sony BMG has operations in about 60 countries.

- EMI Group: Ranks third with 13.4% market share. Is based in the UK and owns the worlds largest music publishing company. Home to labels such as Blue Note, Capitol and Virgin.

- Warner Music Group: has a 11.4% market share and was purchased from American AOL-Time/Warner media giant by a group of private investors in 2005. Owns labels such s Atlantic, Elektra, Reprise and Rhino.

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<u>Picture 1</u>
Caravaggio. *Flagellation of Christ.* c.1606-1607. Oil on canvas. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Rouen, France.

<u>Picture 2</u>
www.laser-etch.com/images/designs/d015w.gif (author unknown)

<u>Picture 3</u>
Photography: Joel Brodsky. Jim Morrison 1966 in 'The Young Lion' photo session.

<u>Picture 4</u>
Doctor X (1932), Director: Michael Curtiz

<u>Picture 5</u>
Batman Begins (2005) Director: Christopher Nolan

<u>Picture 6</u>
Sire (2005) HIM: Dark Light – The European version of the album cover

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