

2023

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Edina Alix
Bridgewater State University

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Recommended Citation

Alix, Edina (2023). Olivia Rodrigo and the Twenty-First Century Personal Brand. *Undergraduate Review*, 17, p. 141-156.

Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol17/iss1/14

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Olivia Rodrigo and the Twenty-First Century Personal Brand

EDINA ALIX

Introduction

Olivia Rodrigo's overnight rise to mega fame astounded the entertainment industry. When Olivia released her debut single "Drivers License" on January 8, 2021, it skyrocketed to number one on the Billboard Hot 100, as well as reaching number one on twenty-eight other charts (Trust, 2021). As of October 2022, Drivers License has 1.5 billion streams on Spotify, which ranks it among the 100 most streamed songs on the platform (Spotify, 2022). When this occurred, entertainment industry professionals remarked on how different Rodrigo's rise to global success felt from other artists in the past. Rodrigo's chart-topping hit song and overall rise to fame are indicators of the power of social media platforms and the entertainment sector of the public relations profession.

While there have been previous academic studies conducted on national PR branding (Szondi, 2010), political PR branding (Surowiec, 2016), and personal PR branding (Shintaro, 2010), there is limited research about image PR branding and its role in entertainment public relations in a twenty-first-century context. Most preexisting research comes from a twentieth-century perspective. In "A Branded World: Adventures in Public Relations and the Creation of Superbrands," Levine (2003)

talks about Jennifer Lopez's rise to fame in the late 1990s. The timing of the release of Lopez's prominent projects is discussed as well as the controversy around the green dress worn by Lopez during the 42nd Grammy Awards in 2000. While these strategies may have been successful during the late 1990s, it doesn't consider the rapid acceleration of social media in the twenty-first century and the current state of artist engagement. There is a massive gap between those strategies and where we are now. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter have become the norm for launching not just projects, but the careers of popular artists such as Rodrigo.

On January 9th, 2021, Rodrigo posted a viral TikTok about her new single Drivers License asking her audience to promote the song, which has been played 67.4 million times (Rodrigo, 2022). There are a few reasons why this specific TikTok, and thus the song itself, went viral. Firstly, Drivers License is objectively a fantastic lead single. Upon its release, Billboard said "Drivers License" is a taut power ballad and soon-to-be smash... The range that Rodrigo displays on the track, oscillating between the stomp-clap harmonies of the crescendo and the choked-up balladry of the bridge, hints at a promising future following this red-hot start" (Ginsberg, 2021). The second reason it went viral is because of the public inspiration behind the song.

In the song, Rodrigo sings "...And you're probably with that blonde girl who always made me doubt" (Rodrigo, 2021). Fans of Rodrigo put together that the person she was allegedly referencing here is pop star Sabrina Carpenter, the new girlfriend of Rodrigo's ex-boyfriend, fellow co-star Joshua Bassett. This speculation was picked up by media outlets such as the New York Times which said, "Drivers License" was an immediate sensation... riling up both Disney fans and newcomers with speculation about the real-life breakup that inspired the lyrics" (Coscarelli, 2021). Rather than address it outright, Rodrigo and her team leaned into the buzz by neither confirming nor denying the root of the rumors. This strategy worked in Rodrigo's favor and helped to skyrocket the success of Drivers License, due to her promising talent and the gossip around the inspiration behind the release.

In the span of one month, Rodrigo went from being a Disney Channel star with one semi-popular promotional song ("All I Want" which peaked at 90 in the US) to having the number one song in the world and being called "the next Taylor Swift" (Coscarelli, 2021). As the hype of her debut single died down, Rodrigo and her team kept up with momentum by releasing two songs in succession before the release of her debut album *Sour* in May 2021.

The purpose of this paper is to help public relations practitioners understand how a personal brand comes to be formed, why creating a brand for public figures is relevant, and, most importantly, why brands can and should be effectively utilized to increase public awareness. Rodrigo's career will be used as an example of what an effective twenty-first-century PR strategy looks like, why it was effective in launching her career as an artist, and how the work of her public relations team sets her up for longevity and further success in the future.

Review of the Literature

For the literature review, pieces of scholarly research will be analyzed to utilize the effectiveness of Rodrigo's initial launch as a personal brand and identify gaps in research. The following themes will be outlined in the following paragraphs: an introduction to twenty-first-century personal brands, how parasocial relationships impact personal brands, what we do and don't know about the present & future of personal branding, online brand endorsements, characteristics of great personal brands, how businesses/brands use Twitter and third-party credibility.

For the purpose of this research, the word brand is defined as "a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to create awareness and identity and to build the reputation of a product, service, person, place, or organization" (Sammot-Bonnici, 2015, p. 2). A personal brand involves "a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery" (Gorbatov et al., 2018, para. 23). The "strategic process" uses elements of traditional and modern public relations outreach such as press releases, pitching journalists and posting to social media for the purpose of increasing media coverage to create widespread public awareness of a personal brand.

Twenty-First Century Personal Brands

Andres (2019) discusses how advancements in technology have introduced new forms of branding that afford celebrities more autonomy in the construction and marketing of their public identity. He examines different

case studies portrayed in a book to understand the implications of celebrity activism on popular culture. In July 2021, Rodrigo visited the White House to meet with President Joe Biden to promote COVID-19 vaccinations to the under-25 demographic. Andres concludes that the book could have benefitted from a discussion about the complicated relationship between celebrities and political activism. Since activism is a part of Rodrigo's personal brand, the move by Rodrigo's team to send her to the White House cultivates a well-rounded depiction of who she is as a person as well as a musician. In terms of specific activism, Capela (2021) revolves around personal branding in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rodrigo rose to fame at the height of COVID-19 and faced the unique challenge of having to establish her brand as an artist without doing any in-person promotional materials for her debut single Drivers License. Capela (2021) concludes that online personal branding will continue to grow in the future and will be influenced by the legal and technological restrictions that social media platforms and their users will be subject to.

Legal and technological restrictions present a set of future challenges that publicists will need to be wary of when establishing client brands online. These challenges can include but aren't limited to obeying legal precedents as set in place by social media platforms and abiding by potential technological restrictions. Certain websites can be banned in certain countries, which can result in information not being communicated the same way depending on user location. Publicists need to be aware of how to counter potential misinformation that can occur because of these discrepancies. These two articles show that celebrity activism in the 2020s has the potential to fall under any of these categories.

Ciszek's (2020) article focuses on French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's notions of habitus, capital, and field (field theory) to look at celebrity public relations from a sociological standpoint. Ciszek (2020) uses the case of Caitlyn Jenner publicly coming out as transgender as an example of how celebrity public relations creates an avenue for socio-political awareness. This connects back to the throughline of late 2010s-early 2020's celebrity activism as being an active part of a celebrity brand. Ciszek (2020) writes how Jenner's longtime publicist Alan Nierob utilized traditional media sources such as securing the cover of Vanity Fair to use Jenner's coming out to create a watershed moment for transgender rights rather than something to be used as tabloid fodder. The article reaches the conclusion that a gap in the literature exists and that traditional media can be used to promote a celebrity brand. Ciszek (2020) acknowledges gaps in existing research saying, "Although promotional work is central to celebrity...little research in public relations exists outside of studies on fandom, image repair, and sports" (Ciszek, 2020, p. 12).

Researchers have explored Rodrigo's use of TikTok to reach fans/develop a celebrity brand (Rauchberg, 2022). Rauchberg's (2022) explores tensions emerging between traditional platforms and the current iteration of Internet celebrities through the postmodernism angle. Rauchberg (2022) looks specifically at TikTok's user interface and how it allowed Rodrigo's content to go viral. However, the dissertation doesn't look at how Rodrigo utilized other platforms to promote her personal brand. This is important because, despite TikTok being one of the biggest platforms today, it doesn't consider how far Rodrigo was able to expand her reach, specifically within the first month of her career launch. While Generation Z

is active on TikTok, there are other social networks where Rodrigo promoted Drivers License in its first month. This research will explore a different platform by looking at Rodrigo's use of Twitter and will show the variation in themes in the month after Drivers License became a number one hit.

How Parasocial Relationships Impact Celebrity Brands

The term parasocial is defined by Um (2022) as “a psychological relationship experienced by an audience in their mediated encounters with performers in the mass media, particularly on television and on online platforms” (p. 1). Um (2022) suggests that the parasocial relationships that influencers and artists have with their public are positive as long as there is an authentic match-up between the brand and celebrity (p. 1). Researchers have previously explored celebrity brands on various social media such as Instagram (Um, 2022) and Tik Tok (Rauchberg, 2022). Um (2022) looks at how people who interact with brand endorsements view the celebrity in question and measure the parasocial interaction that takes place as a result. The main conclusion that came because of the study occurred because a real brand name was used, which the author posited could result in consumer bias in processing the message of the ad.

Eng (2020) demonstrates how consumer attachment to celebrity brands is driven by perceived narratives about celebrity personas, which can cause parasocial relationships between the consumer and the celebrity/brand. He suggests that relationship norms that are selfless in nature can conciliate the relationship between the type of narratives perpetuated and overall consumer attachment to the brand. This conclusion poses

a similar line to research as this paper because the working theory is that parasocial relationships can be selfless in nature. Publicists can create strong brands that can avoid this pitfall. Eng's (2020) theory is in direct contrast to Um's (2022) theory that parasocial relationships are inherently selfless. In the wake of the decline of traditional media sources, it's more important than ever for PR practitioners to use social media to organize brand endorsements that contribute to the personal brand of the artist. From Um's (2022) perspective, the parasocial relationships that audiences hold with brand names stand to help public relations practitioners understand how personal brands come to be formed.

The Present and Future of Personal Branding

Another aspect examined is what this all means for the present and future of personal branding. Jacobsen (2020) looks at how social media managers are responsible for managing and executing organizations' brands on digital platforms. Due to workplace uncertainty, Jacobsen (2020) argues that social media managers embody the mentality of being “always-on-the-job-market,” which is a driver for personal branding in their attempt to maintain employment (p.3). This article takes a different approach to identifying a need for research that examines how employee groups experience personal branding. It allows publicists to flip the narrative on themselves and examine how personal branding affects them personally.

The question proposed by this is whether the personal branding of publicists has an impact on the brands produced on behalf of clients. In relation to this question, Sammut-Bonnici (2015) looked at how the trend of branding is moving beyond what the customer perceives a brand to be and how this can turn into measurable

metrics of customer satisfaction throughout the chain of consumption. This is relevant to Rodrigo because her 2021 brand is different from what it would have been in 2015. This is because of how social media has turned a leaf in how quickly it can create instantaneous, two-way communication where celeb can speak and connect directly to fans without a third-party media outlet.

Sammut-Bonnici (2015) looks at how development in the value chain is based on the development of products and overall market development. Rodrigo's 2021 brand has been developed as a product in the market for musicians specifically in the Twitter sphere as the platform has turned into a metric of measurability. Scheidt's (2020) review of personal branding engages with interdisciplinary concerns. He argues that the practice is still in its infancy and that personal branding frameworks and theories cannot be identified yet. Throughout this paper, Rodrigo will be used as a case study for potential personal branding frameworks that she and her team used in her initial ascent that made her a household name. Different methods that future publicists can utilize personal branding theories to create successful celebrity brands that fans and consumers can create connections to will be proposed.

Gorbatov (2018) proposed a research agenda for future professionals to study personal branding as a career and the organizational behavior activity inherent in a modern working environment. An area of future research as outlined by Gorbatov (2018) suggests examining whether constructing a working identity through personal branding is a source of greater employee loyalty and an indication of a strong brand. By way of examining the audience's response to Rodrigo's Twitter posts, we can look at whether this is a strong indication of brand

loyalty. Transparency represents a qualitative element because it's true for Rodrigo's brand. Other qualitative elements that will be considered in the analysis include credibility, usefulness, and analyzability. Credibility is valuable because without Rodrigo's sign-off on her social media content, misinformation can become rampant, and audiences will not be able to tell who the credible source is. Rodrigo's Twitter posts represent usefulness in this content analysis because they will show how a twenty-first-century media strategy can be implemented.

Online Celebrity Brand Endorsements

Online brand endorsements are important not just because they can serve as a form of third-party credibility, but also because they reflect consumer perceptions of the brand. Kennedy (2021) examines the importance of celebrity brands in influencing perceptions of celebrity authenticity. Kennedy (2021) argues that this in turn drives positive consumer intentions toward the celebrity. Using the effects of endorsement versus celebrity brand, Kennedy (2021) concludes that when consumers are aware of celebrity investment, the celebrity is not viewed as authentic regardless of the situation with the brand. Using Rodrigo and her partnership with Glossier as an example, it will be shown that when it comes to celebrity endorsements, consumers have the capability of viewing both the celebrity and brand as authentic regardless of the nature of the brand deal.

Liu (2020) explored factors that contribute to online celebrity branding and improving the purchase intentions of fans. Liu (2020) found that the brand equity of online celebrities drives the purchase intentions of followers. The perceived quality of the products produces a positive reflection of the relationship between fans and

the celebrity brand.

Min's (2019) study looks at what happens when a direct link between a celebrity and a brand has been formed by a consumer. If any negative information about the celebrity has been circulated, that will reflect negatively back on the endorsed brand. Min concludes that retail marketers need to investigate celebrity endorsements more thoroughly to match with a brand image that can lead to a long-term partnership. This research will look at Rodrigo's image during her ascent and why her minimal usage of social media led to no negative information coming out about her. Rodrigo's brand image has the potential to lead her and Glossier to a long-term and sustainable partnership due to a fundamental lack of scandals on both their parts.

Characteristics of Great Personal Brands

A great personal brand is comprised of different characteristics. As defined earlier, a personal brand is "a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself, based on a unique combination of individual characteristics, which signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery" (Gorbatov et al., 2018, p. 23). Building a strong personal brand can help an individual establish credibility and create opportunities for career advancement. Some characteristics of great personal brands cultivated from academic findings include authenticity, consistency, clarity, and relevance.

According to Sierra (2019), authenticity in a personal brand is what makes you unique and helps you build trust with others. Rodrigo's personal brand, particularly her tweets, reflect who she is, what she stands for, and what she believes in. This is shown in her

tweets about social activism and calls to action for her followers to heed.

Sierra (2019) adds that you need to be consistent in your content and behavior to build credibility and trust with your audience. During the first month of the initial launch of Drivers License, Rodrigo tweeted 67 times. Her consistent posting strategy allowed her to build her community of followers and create personal connections with them. Rodrigo was able to remain persistent across all platforms, even upwards of a year in advance of the release of the single.

Another characteristic of a strong personal brand is clarity (Sierra, 2019). Your community should be able to easily identify what you do and who you are. Clarity helps people connect with you and understand what you can offer. In promoting Drivers License, Rodrigo was clear about what the single was, why she was releasing it, and in other ways, who the single was about. She placed "Easter eggs" across the song so her loyal community members would make the connection as to who the song was about.

Another characteristic of a great personal brand is relevance. Relevance is defined by Duckler (2022) as "the degree to which consumers perceive a brand and its products and services as relevant to their needs and wants. Brands need to maintain relevance to remain competitive and connect with their target audiences" (p. 3). Kleppinger et al., (2015) suggest that in order to use personal branding as a relevant asset in the digital age, textual and visual performances are vital to adding clarity to make the brand tangible and real. Kleppinger et al., (2015) cite digital examples such as LinkedIn profile photos, Facebook profiles, Instagram photos, YouTube channels, and Twitter activity. All these elements are

important to maintaining the relevance of the brand because as PR practitioners, we must be kept abreast as to what social networks are the most prevalent among consumers. In order to be competitive among target audiences, Rodrigo chose Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram as the three primary social networks on which to promote Drivers License.

According to Jin (2014), the impact of instantaneous Twitter-based electronic word-of-mouth on consumers creates a social identification with celebrities that impacts purchasing power. This means that the more relevant the brand, the more likely it is to result in sales for the product and objectives met.

How Brands Use Twitter

Twitter is a social media platform that brands can use to build strong personal brands. Some established ways that publicists use Twitter to create a strong personal brand for their clients include engaging with their audiences, establishing thought leadership, and creating conversations (Godey et al., 2016). A best practice according to Godey et al. (2016) is to respond to your audience. By issuing direct replies and quote retweets to the content sent to her, Rodrigo is shown to value the feedback and opinions of her target audience (Godey et al., 2016). This leads to a parasocial relationship between Rodrigo and her audience because this engagement allows community members to connect her opinions to their own.

Thought leadership is also important in developing relationships with your target audience (Scheidt & Henseler, 2018). Rodrigo used Twitter to share a major industry-related trend by promoting her best-selling new single. By establishing this line of credibility, Rodrigo was

able to position herself as an expert in her field and build her personal brand (Scheidt & Henseler, 2018). She was also able to engage in and create conversations with her fanbase (Scheidt, & Henseler, 2018). Rodrigo initiated a discussion by having a Q&A with her fans. By doing this, she was able to showcase her personality, create a community around her brand and build a personal audience connection (Godey et al., 2016).

Third-Party Credibility

Musicians can gain credibility from third-party sources. Third-party credibility is defined as “the human tendency to value the opinion/expertise of someone outside their circle of influence more than someone within (i.e., an outsider must know something we don't)” (Burg, 2009, p. 6). The aspect of third-party credibility can be important because the person with whom you are sharing this information is more likely to accept it as true and believable, thus leading to a continuing relationship with the source behind the information (Burg, 2009). In terms of Rodrigo, she was able to obtain the amount of popularity that she did in such a short period of time partially due to an overwhelming abundance of third-party credibility. Sources such as Taylor Swift, Gwen Stefani, and the Billboard Hot 100 were able to offer third-party credibility during the first month of Drivers License being an overnight sensation.

These credible endorsements came with an overlap of pop music fanbases, allowing Rodrigo's brand to translate across audiences. According to Swift (2017), third-party credibility is fundamental proof that public relations strategies still matter. She writes:

PR is all about perception and reputation – those are the hallmarks of credibility. While these

intangibles may be hard to measure directly, successful businesspeople will tell you (and so will I) that being seen as an expert in print, online and via the airwaves can pay big dividends over time" (Swift, 2017, pg. 14).

With this in mind, it is important to remember that third-party credibility is in itself public relations.

The elements of online brand endorsements, characteristics of great personal brands, and third-party credibility worked in Rodrigo's favor for getting Drivers License to number one on the Billboard Hot 100 for eight consecutive weeks. Twitter branding specifically allowed Rodrigo to grow her audience in a way that went together with the success of the single.

This research explores two questions: RQ1: What strategies did Rodrigo use on Twitter to create her personal brand after her Drivers License hit number one? RQ2: Were Rodrigo's strategies effective in establishing a durable personal brand?

Methods

This study uses qualitative content analysis to explore how Olivia Rodrigo's online presence helps public relations practitioners understand how a personal brand comes to be formed and why creating a brand for public figures is relevant. The researcher will analyze the posts on Rodrigo's Twitter and how the content was able to set her apart from her contemporaries.

The data consists of 67 Tweets posted to Rodrigo's Twitter account between January 18, 2021, and February 18, 2021. The tweets were selected for the month following the day (January 18, 2021) that Drivers License hit an unprecedented number one on the Billboard Hot 100. The platform Tweet Deck was utilized to gather

tweets posted to Rodrigo's Twitter account between those dates, the number of interactions for each post, the increase and/or decrease in those interactions, and familiar words/themes that the posts have in common.

The data was analyzed with inductive and deductive analysis on the social posts generating major themes of convergence and divergence. Tweets were reviewed and coded individually and then looked at collectively to determine major themes. The themes were verified by the primary investigator to ensure intercoder reliability and trustworthiness. O'Connor (2020) defines intercoder reliability as the numerical measure of the agreement between different coders regarding how the same data should be coded. While intercoder reliability is usually done in a group of three or more, in the case of this study, it was completed by two people. This worked for the purpose of the research because the themes established by Rodrigo's Twitter usage were coded by dissecting reoccurring concepts and verifying their validity & trustworthiness with the other researcher. Data was stored in a password-protected file that only the investigators have access to and will be destroyed within 6 months after the study is concluded.

Results

The number of tweets included in the data is 67. Rodrigo posted the tweets between 1/01/21 - 2/18/21. These dates were selected because this was the time period from the release of Drivers License to after the single hit a historic number one on the Billboard Hot 100. The collection of data was all found on Twitter.com, a social media site with 450 million monthly users. There were five themes found in the tweets.

Building Community

One of the primary emerging themes is building community. Building community is defined as creating pivotal connections with her emerging fan base. Rodrigo accomplishes this by creating relationships with celebrities who share a similar personal branding strategy, such as Taylor Swift, distributing exclusive Behind The Scenes content to members of her email list, and sharing important calls to action, such as change.org petitions. All of these things contribute to building her base of supporters through her personal brand. An example of a tweet where Rodrigo builds community is “omg do a twilight look I would die” in a reply to a few of her fans who were doing makeup looks to her songs. By tweeting this, she establishes a similar brand to a franchise that enthusiasts are already familiar with and creates a connection with her fan base.

Rodrigo builds community by understanding and targeting her main audience – Gen Zers – in her tweets. Characteristics in her tweets include her distinctly online sense of humor, specific emojis such as purple hearts and crying faces to signify excitement, all upper-case letters for emphasis, posting frequency, and her usage of videos, photos, and mentions puts her in a class with her peers who use similar verbiage on social media. An instance of this is when Rodrigo posted “Put some of my fav tunes on this playlist! Give it a listen if ya like 💜💜💜” in a quote tweet from Spotify where she announces in a video that she is sharing a heartbreak playlist with her fans. Her shortened abbreviations, usage of lowercase letters, and purple heart emojis in this tweet show that her Twitter posting strategy is both casual and geared towards Generation Z who can understand the message she is trying to get across.

Third-Party Credibility

Another emerging theme before Drivers License went number one is third-party credibility. Third-party credibility is defined as the value of an opinion of someone outside the main circle of influence. During the first month of the success of her debut single, Rodrigo is able to gain third-party credibility from sources such as Taylor Swift, Gwen Stefani, Jimmy Fallon, and Cardi B. A tweet from Rodrigo that shows this call to action from a third party is her reply to Cardi B who tweeted her praise for Drivers License. Rodrigo responded with “Girl i will pick u up and take u wherever u wanna go.” Another example is Rodrigo tweeting an anecdote from Gwen Stefani that was published in Time Magazine. The tweet reads “I’ve been a fan of Gwen for as long as I can remember. it’s so surreal to have her write about me. rllly honored to be included in this incredible group of people.”

Humility and Gratitude

Humility and gratitude are largely prevalent during the first month of the mainstream success of Drivers License. Throughout Rodrigo’s tweets, she continuously thanks her fans, critics, third parties, and outlets for covering and supporting the single. She also shows a tremendous amount of gratitude for the acknowledgment she has received from the general public while doing so. Rodrigo’s humility and gratitude show that her success is not something she has taken for granted. This makes her appear more relatable and grounded in her community as a result. An instance of this is when Rodrigo tweeted “homegirl went platinum in two weeks!!!!!! thank u guys so so much!!!!!!” in a quote tweet from the account @chartdata stating that Drivers License sold over 1 million units in the US.

Promoting Drivers License

A major reoccurring theme both before and after Drivers License went number one is Rodrigo's promotion of the single. While one could argue that every tweet during this time promotes Drivers License in one way or another, there are specific instances where the main goal of the Twitter content is to promote the single. Rodrigo began teasing Drivers License to her followers in December 2020 and released the single in January 2021. During the immediate aftermath of the release, Rodrigo retweeted a tweet from @TouchTunes stating "#OliviaRodrigo's powerful debut single #DriversLicense is here and we can't get enough! Check it out now on TouchTunes. 💜" After Drivers License went number one, Rodrigo quote tweeted "number one on the billboard charts 🥹🥹🥹 truly cannot believe this is real life. thank u thank u thank u" in response to Billboard's tweet announcing Drivers License's debut as the biggest song in the world. These tweets show that Rodrigo's primary goal in posting content during this time is to get the word out about the single to as many people as possible.

Social Activism

A large part of Rodrigo's brand before, during, and after the rise of Drivers License is promoting social activism initiatives. These can include Change.org petitions, online resources about the Black Lives Matter movement, and a video from the latest presidential inauguration. This shows that Rodrigo is aware of what is happening in the world around her and is passionate enough about these reforms to issue calls to action to her followers and build awareness around certain topics. By doing this, she establishes similar politics with her followers and the public. An example of this is when

Rodrigo retweeted a video of poet Amanda Gorman reciting "The Hill We Climb" at President Joe Biden's January 2021 inauguration at the height of Drivers License's popularity. This shows that Rodrigo's will to stand with her politics won't be swayed by any amount of attention and success she receives, another trait that she shares with her young, primarily female community.

Discussion

Rodrigo's personal brand reflects who she is and what she believes in. The tweets posted on her official Twitter account reflect her personal brand and what she advocates for as a public figure. This is important because it relates back to why creating a brand for public figures continues to be a relevant public relations practice because establishing positive relations with the public builds your community and creates a strong reputation for the figure in question. By using her platform to speak on trending topics, incorporating Gen Z terminology into her messaging, and interacting with her audience, Rodrigo used Twitter to capitalize on her virality. Rodrigo's celebrity brand created a long-lasting partnership between her and her community that remains strong while her fans wait for her to release new music.

The first way Rodrigo builds a strong celebrity brand is by using social activism. This is a new form of branding, which supports Andres' (2019) findings that advancements in technology have introduced new forms of branding that afford celebrities more autonomy in the construction and marketing of their public identity. Rodrigo achieved authenticity by retweeting a link to a change.org petition to change the sentencing of a wrong incarcerated man with no caption to signify the importance of that cause. By not adding any caption, she

didn't speak about the cause, but instead simply used her platform to spread awareness. This action shows her community that she cares about these causes and is passionate about issuing calls to action, something that other people in her generation and community have in common with her.

Sierra (2019)'s study concluded that authenticity in a personal brand is what makes you unique and helps you build trust with others. Rodrigo used an authentic tone when using Twitter to build a relationship with her community. In her tweet, gonna have a viewing party for the drivers license music video 2nite if u wanna come!!! i'll be live before the premiere. gonna die I'm so stoked!!!!, she is honest about showcasing her excitement for the event and the opportunity to further connect with her audience. Rodrigo has a unique and earnest tone in the tweet which allows for her authentic self to come through to her community. Um's (2022) findings suggest that an authentic match-up between brand and celebrity results in positive parasocial relationships between artists and their public were confirmed by this study. In the case of Rodrigo, her personal brand matches up with her level of celebrity among her target audience of Generation Z. As a result of Rodrigo's authenticity, her level of celebrity has become synonymous with the early 2020's era of TikTok and Instagram engagement.

Duckler's (2021) findings are that evolving your brand and staying true to your core values is how to ensure brand relevance increases with your target audience. Duckler (2021) goes on to explain that the foundation of your brand should remain constant even as other aspects of your brand change. In Rodrigo's case, the biggest change to her brand during this time was her visibility. She experienced an increase in Twitter

and Instagram followers, not to mention an influx of press mentions. To connect with her audience, Rodrigo's platform of choice became Twitter. The goal for Rodrigo's Twitter activity during January 2021 is to promote Drivers License by interacting with her audience and to build her emerging fanbase with her unique posting style. This is shown in her tweets both before and after Drivers License hit number one.

Rodrigo clearly knows her target audience as evidenced by the content of her tweets, which helps her build a strong community. Her tweets include purple heart emojis and lowercase writing. In her reply to @hearthandsswift, Rodrigo wrote ur so gorgeous! im glad u liked it 💜💜💜. This kind of audience engagement shows that Rodrigo understands how Generation Z interacts with their favorite artists online and uses that to create a parasocial relationship. Her writing strategy extends beyond her Twitter account. Rodrigo's song titles follow the same pattern of grammatically skewed names. Drivers License is marketed as all lowercase without the apostrophe. This draws Generation Z in because, in this age of social media, many young people abbreviate their posts for convenience and accessibility. This brands Rodrigo as a peer and thus, someone her community can relate to. This connects back to Duckler's (2021) findings because he also mentions that the first step to increasing brand relevance is understanding your target audience. Duckler states "Once you understand your target audience, you can create messaging and marketing campaigns that resonate with them."

Burg (2009) defines third-party credibility as "the credibility in the mind of your prospect based on the recommendation of someone he or she already deems credible." To increase third-party credibility,

Rodrigo and her team partnered with the beauty brand Glossier in October 2022 to become their first official brand ambassador. Rodrigo created a limited-edition beauty collection under Glossier titled “You Look Good.” The line included lip glosses, a makeup bag, mascara, and skin care products (Tingley, 2022). This partnership helped to create third-party credibility because Glossier is a brand that was already deemed credible in the eyes of Rodrigo’s target audience. Glossier’s own branding strategy allowed them to become a beauty and skincare staple in the makeup kits of Generation Z. With Glossier recommending Rodrigo as a beauty ambassador and vice versa, the partnership validates Burg’s (2009) idea of third-party credibility.

Another example of third-party credibility is the approval gained from music industry sources. Rodrigo’s astronomic rise from Drivers License helped to establish herself as a pop leader in the music industry. Drivers License topped the US Billboard Hot 100 and made Rodrigo the youngest artist to debut on top of the chart. Drivers License also spent eight consecutive weeks at number one (Trust et al., 2021). It has been certified five times platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), one of only 525 songs to hold the honor (Hissong, 2021). These sources are all legitimate avenues of proven success. For Rodrigo to achieve these career milestones so young shows a pattern that her career is on the rise. This third-party credibility allows Rodrigo, her brand and her music to be taken seriously by the public. It goes back to Burg’s definition of “the credibility... based on the recommendation of someone he or she already deems credible.” Since the Billboard Hot 100 is the music industry’s standard record chart in the United States, it is hard to refute that level of self-built success. Thus, this bolsters Rodri-

go’s third-party credibility.

For a year and a half prior to the release of Drivers License, Rodrigo had been building her personal brand on Twitter. Rodrigo’s posting consistency paid off upon the release of Drivers License because she had already built a reputation among her community built during her Disney days. During this process, Rodrigo’s humility and gratitude were a consistent theme throughout her tweets before, during, and after the rise of Drivers License. Tweets such as me and mom on the Apple music chart. cryin in the club rn in reference to her song’s association with singer Taylor Swift and SHUT UP I LITERALLY GOT MY DRIVERS LICENSE BC OF UR APP OMG THANK U THIS IS SO FUNNY in response to the app that she got her driver’s license from reiterate her humility, an emotion that cements her relatability among Generation Z. Rodrigo’s ability to remain humble despite her rapid success in a short period of time remains one of the traits that define her personal brand. To answer the RQs, the strategies Rodrigo used on Twitter to create her personal brand after Drivers License hit number one were targeting Gen Z, social activism, promoting Drivers License, humility and gratitude, third-party credibility, and building community. Based on her engagement increase, we can determine that the strategies were effective in establishing Rodrigo’s durable personal brand.

Conclusion

The characteristics of great personal brands have worked in Rodrigo’s favor. The techniques that Rodrigo has used to build her personal brand include specific posting strategies designed to target Gen Zers and build a strong community such as lowercase lettering & slang, partnering with major brands such as Glossier that res-

onate with her target audience, tweets that encapsulate her ability to remain humble, third-party credibility from major sources such as the Billboard Hot 100 and using all of the above to build her core community. Rodrigo's career is the prime example of what an effective twenty-first-century PR strategy looks like. The strategy was effective in launching her career as an artist and the work of her public relations team sets her up for longevity and further success in the future.

Limitations and Future Research

Because this is a qualitative study, the research may prove true for Olivia Rodrigo specifically. The information gained through this study nevertheless provides interesting insights into how to build a celebrity brand, which may be employed by other individuals trying to establish a personal brand. For future research, it may be important for practitioners to look at other platforms such as TikTok and Facebook. This research also did not look at specific media outlets. A more comprehensive overview might include other media outlets or social platforms. This research only dealt with Twitter and did not go into detail about other social networks. It may also help to have quantitative survey research as many of these results can be generalized because of their qualitative nature.

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EDINA ALIX

Communications Studies, Public Relations Concentration

Edina Alix is a 2023 graduate and Departmental Honors student, and she majored in Communication Studies with a public relations concentration and a minor in film studies. Under the mentorship of Dr. Lisa Bergson, Assistant Professor in the Communication Studies Department, Edina was inspired by how storytelling in public relations can shape the way we view artists. Edina wanted to do a deep dive into Olivia Rodrigo's rise to fame and what public relations practitioners can take away from the strategies utilized by her team. After graduation, Edina attended the Cannes Film Festival and worked as a Film Publicity Intern under the DDA Group. A week later, Edina made the move to New York City to begin her public relations career as a Fellow with Small Girls PR.