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**Essays on identity social construction,
multidimensionality, and its effect
on creative products' performance
in Electronic Dance Music**

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Ph.D. Thesis

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Essays on identity social construction, multidimensionality, and its effect on creative products' performance in Electronic Dance Music

A collection of three Research Papers

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Thesis Overview

This Ph.D. thesis consists of three research papers focused on actors’ identity as social outcome, its intrinsic multidimensionality raised by multiple identity-shaping sources, and the relationship between identity dimensions and market performance.

The first paper is devoted to offer an overview of the extant literature on identity, social identity, and two primary identity-determining tools – namely social categories and network relations. It discusses how identity emerges from multiple identifying social forces, and how the multiplicity of external observers determines identity’s multidimensionality. The paper overviews social identity theory, self-categorization, categorization theory, and social network perspective in order to introduce the

theoretical concept of multidimensional identity. Conclusions and possible directions are provided at the end in order to set starting point for future research.

The second paper explores the idea of multidimensional identity in an under-investigated setting, namely Electronic Dance Music (EDM). Through interviews with New York-based artists and producers, and secondary data analysis, EDM is firstly unveiled as a field in which complex interrelations and exchanges occur among its actors. This complexity is then transferred to identity, and the term *Sound* emerges as a vernacular term to refer to that multi-sided element that allows mutual recognition and collaboration – that is, EDM actors' socially constructed, multidimensional identity. Three propositions, plus a model on the identity-based two-step process of value creation in EDM, are developed in order to provide landmarks to navigate EDM complex landscape, and to set starting points for successive analysis.

Finally, the third paper tests four hypotheses relating EDM releases' performance to two identity-shaping dimensions and their interaction. Drawing from categorization theory and alliance portfolio perspective, regression models test: 1) the relationship between EDM releases' Grade of Generalism (the weighted number of spanned styles) and commercial performance, 2) the relationship between releasing artists' Relational Pluralism (the number of partner recording companies) and releases' performance, and 3) the combined effect of Generalism and Pluralism on releases' performance. Regression results show a curvilinear relationship between both Generalism and Relational Pluralism and releases' performance, and statistically confirm the existence and relevance of identity multidimensionality, especially from an inter-temporal perspective.

Overall, the main relevance of this dissertation is to have introduced the challenging – but surprisingly intuitive – idea of multidimensional identity, and to have explored it empirically both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Moreover, the empirical papers take Electronic Dance Music as investigation setting, presenting and unveiling a novel and relevant context for organization research. EDM features characterize this setting as variously puzzling and definitely worthy of additional exploration and analysis.

#1.

One, No One, and One Hundred Thousand: toward a multidimensional conception of identity

Abstract. The idea that social actors have multiple identities is not new in organizational field. Neither it is unexplored the fact that individuals and organizations develop their identity within social contexts characterized by a multiplicity of others. This study draws from social identity theory, categorization literature and social network perspective in order to expand on the idea of identity complexity in social environments. In particular, when multiple sources of recognition are at play, social actors' self that results from social reflection is intimately multidimensional. Identity as a social outcome mirrors the multiplicity of observers that permeate external environment. Arguments for a multidimensional conception of identity are provided, and an attempt to analytically manage multidimensionality is offered. The study discusses the implications of a refined concept of socially embedded identity, and proposes directions for future research.

I am the son of a black man from Kenya and a white woman from Kansas. I was raised with the help of a white grandfather... and a white grandmother... I've gone to some of the best schools in America and lived in one of the world's poorest nations. I am married to a black American who carries within her the blood of slaves and slave-owners – an inheritance we pass on to our two precious daughters... [This] story... has seared into my genetic makeup the idea that this nation is more than the sum of its parts – that out of many, we are truly one. ————— Barack Obama, President, United States of America.

(Ramarajan, 2014)

1. Introduction

Identity definition occupies the first place in the presentation (and representation) of any social entity. The focus on identity brings attention to the primordial element that firstly characterizes actors and items in social contexts. According to their identity actors behave, explore social spaces, make decisions, change, express themselves, interact with others. Identity also serves as a way to be recognized: actors are chosen, employed,

elected following the perception of their identity. And the same applies to items and artifacts, which are firstly identified and then bought, sold, traded, discarded.

Barak Obama's words, reported by Ramarajan (2014) in his review on multiple identities, notably work as perfect summary of the content of this paper – and interestingly go beyond the scope of Ramarajan's review. Far from being intuitively surprising, United States' president did not present himself simply as he thinks he is. Rather, he calls a number of other actors, concepts, experiences, historical elements, and social phenomena in order to fully account for his identity. His parents and grandparents, his ethnical mixture labeled as white and black, the time spent in rich and poor countries, his daughters, the slavery of his ancestors, the time that has passed, all these elements are evoked to point to his identity.

These aspects reflect the approach adopted here to discuss about identity construction. In fact, I conceptualize identity as emerging from social reflection – that process by which cognitive and social factors are embedded in a continuous dialogue. As plainly expressed by Obama's words, individuals develop their identity not just through self-reflection, but also – and perhaps primarily – through social reflection: who one is in a social space, and how the social space fosters self-definition. It is not just what others think we are, nor merely what we think we are, that completely defines ourselves. Rather, individual identity emerges from a constant reflexive interaction between an actor's "inside" and "outside".

The same applies to organizations. Any organization operating within social spaces is prone to the need for definition of its self. Unsurprisingly, a large body of research has focused on organizational identity and identification. As diffusely discussed in the following, scholars have investigated the processes through which identity emerges within organizations (e.g., Albert & Whetten, 1985; Gioia et al., 2010; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000), and how it is perceived and evaluated by external observers (e.g., Pontikes, 2012; Zuckerman, 1999, 2004). For organization members, identity is crucial for strategic decision-making, comprehension and sense-making of novel issues, structural changes, stakeholder management, and many other organizational events. For external audience, organizational identity is what audiences actually observe and evaluate in order to make decisions about where to invest money, which good or service

to purchase, whose product to reward or disregard. Identity, be it anchored to individuals, organizations, or items, is thus essential.

The overall picture is yet further complicated when one acknowledges that identity statements rarely consist of one single sentence. Each individual definition is composed by characteristics that pertain to different realms: nationality, race, religion, occupation, family, hobbies, needs, attachment to sport teams, eating habits, and so on. Although many scholars refer to this complexity by splitting it into “multiple identities”, there is little if no evidence that people effectively have multiple identities. Notably, when introducing Barak Obama’s statement of identity, Ramarajan (2014) misses one crucial aspect: that, among the multiple sources of identity he reports, the American president presents himself unitarily. Like America, he is more than the sum of his parts – recalling Obama’s words. Moreover, when referring to country’s identity, Obama says that “out of many, we are truly one”. His reference to the “United Selves of America” goes straight to the point: that out of multiple identity definitions, every single individual – and organization – is unique.

It surprises then that so much research on organizations has focused on disentangling individual selves rather than offering a framework to keep the unitariness of identity while accounting for its complexity at the same time. Ramarajan's (2014) effort is one of the few attempts in this direction. In fact, he presents a network-fashioned framework to discuss multiple identities, thus providing an organic, yet multi-sided tool to analyze identity complexity.

However, instead of considering multiple identities, this dissertation theoretically proposes the idea of *multidimensional* identity. Having stressed the socially embedded nature of identity, it is suggested here to conceive the several loci of identity formation (or sources of identity) as layers, whose aggregation describes one’s identity. Through multidimensionality, it is possible to depict identity as unique, yet multifaceted construct, whose multiple dimensions derive from multiple identity-shaping layers.

This study contributes to the current debate on identity – and identity complexity in particular. The outcome of this work is primarily addressed to research on organizations, economic sociology, and management literature. Three main ideas are discussed. First,

that since social actors are inevitably embedded into social structures of mutual reflection, their identity is inextricably socially constructed. Second, that since social environments are complex, the social construction of identity originates from multiple different loci at the same time. An actor's socially constructed identity should then be seized by considering different identity-shaping sources, and described accordingly. Third, that out of multiple sources of identity recognition and definition, identity is unique. Social actors, with their uniqueness, face a multiplicity of identity-configuring sources. Out of this interaction multidimensional identity emerges as a concept that encompasses singularity and multiplicity at the same time. In summary, the concept of identity suggested over the following pages has three main characteristics: it is socially constructed; it is unique; and it is multidimensional.

Extant debate on identity complexity and multiple identities can benefit from the idea of identity multidimensionality in two primary ways. First, multidimensionality allows for a combination of uniqueness and multiplicity, as briefly discussed in previous paragraphs. For instance, a tree is a unique entity in my perception. Although it can be identified as member of a forest, oxygen producer, soil-maintaining root system, apartment for animals, raw material for construction, and even street furniture, a tree is clearly one. Similarly, Richard Branson's Virgin Ltd. can undoubtedly be classified as drink producer, banking organization, space and air vectors' manufacturer, music recording company, and health care organization. However, Virgin is a single entity, as well as its founder and creator. When describing these entities' identity, no single identity-shaping aspect can be carelessly excluded, and thus the idea that identity is unique and intrinsically multidimensional comes directly to view.

Second, the theoretical path to the definition of multidimensionality combines a number of insights from literature. In particular, theories on social categories, external categorization, network affiliations and partnerships, self-categorization and social identity partially contribute to the development of the theoretical background. On the one hand, identity multidimensionality is therefore operationally informed by different perspectives. On the other hand, different perspectives find their place within the concept of multidimensionality. In plain English, the idea of multidimensional identity

seems to be theoretically able to reconcile different ways of approaching identity research.

Finally, the present study also generally informs organization research in dynamic settings; that is, those inquiries run within environments in which actors' identity is inevitably complex and evolving over time. Several examples come to mind: product differentiation within the same brand; party affiliations on the political arena; competence transfer between different job positions; need for coherence in organizations that operates in technology and face fast pace of disrupting development. In all these situations, identity is not simply something organizations and actors would like to acquire, but mostly a strategic resource to successfully perform on the market. Beside scholarly research, then, also practitioners in these and similar fields can get insights from the reasoning and results of this paper.

2. Organizational Identity: an established issue

In organization studies, identity has a long tradition. The power of organizational identity is largely undisputed: every single organization, aimed at producing profits or other benefits, needs some answer to the question "Who am I?" in order to establish and maintain long-term relations with other entities (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000).

Identity can operate at multiple levels of analysis within organization field. It can address individual-level identification or identity projection, organization-level processes of identity formation and disruption, product-level analyses on identity perception and construction. However, organization identity literature usually focuses on organizations as pools of sense-making actors (e.g., Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995). In other words, what is labeled as organizational identity is the organization-level result of processes of collective identity formation. Previous research on organizations has largely adopted identity as a framework to investigate a wide set of organizational phenomena. Studies on the founding of new organizations (Gioia et al., 2010), mergers and acquisitions (Clark, Gioia, Ketchen, & Thomas, 2010), spin-offs (Corley & Gioia, 2004), need for legitimacy (Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007; He & Baruch, 2010), recognition process and performance (Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Smith, 2011; Voss, Cable, & Voss,

2006; Zuckerman, 1999), work relationships (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007), diversification and status (Phillips, Turco, & Zuckerman, 2013; Podolny, 2001), and others have varyingly benefitted from considering identity as core element of organizations and organizational members.

Nonetheless, single-member companies also exist. These are organizations whose property is held by a singular individual, and “organizational” is a logically proper feature also for this type of identity. The term entrepreneurial identity (e.g., Down & Reveley, 2004) has been introduced to talk about entrepreneurial individuals within organizations; nonetheless, single-member organizations are comprehensively perceived by external observers as organizations tout court. Thus, it seems plausible to state that the organizational identity construct applies to all those social actors and items whose identity and identification are strategic resources to well-perform on the marketplace. For instance, motion picture movies have been previously used as unit of analysis to test theories originally developed to investigate listed companies (Hsu, 2006). Similarly, restaurant menus identification has been scrutinized and results ascribed to restaurants directly (Kovács & Johnson, 2014). This confirms the intuition that items’ identity can be used as proxy for items’ creator identity. And that movies and menus can be treated as organizations since they are produced and structured in order to achieve high performance on the market – not their own performance, but their creators’. Bourdieu's (1984) suggestion that classification of identities can be transferred from human-crafted items to humans themselves further justifies this point.

However, while the concept of organizational identity can be superimposed to different observational units, its definition is far from unique. In fact, identity has been approached from several disciplinary perspectives and adopting different theoretical lenses, giving rise to a body of literature characterized by extremely wide scope (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008). In organization studies, one foundational description offered by Albert and Whetten (1985) outlines three main characteristics of organizational identity: its *centrality* within the organization, its *distinctiveness* for the organization, and its *endurance* over organizational life. This definition has however been challenged by research showing that organizations undergo continuous adaptation, and their identity is therefore bound to *adaptive instability* (Gioia et al.,

2000). According to this latter perspective, organizational identity should be better described as an unstable and relatively fluid concept¹.

Moreover, a crucial aspect of identity is that it develops within social contexts. Weick (1995) makes a clear point on the social nature of identity: "Identities are constituted out of the process of interaction" (1995: 20). This quote, significantly reported in Gioia et al. (2000), is however partial. In fact, it continues: "To shift among interactions is to shift among definitions of the self". Identity definitions are therefore multiple. While social construction of identity will be diffusely overviewed during the larger part of the following theoretical discussion, it is worth at this point setting some crucial ideas about the meaning of *multiple identities*.

2.1. Multiple Identities

Instances of multiple identities are, similarly to identity per se, long-investigate phenomena². Different disciplines have approached the problem, each of them pointing at some particular foundation and consequence of identity multiplicity.

In social psychology, the seminal work by James (1890) set the starting point to discuss about individuals' multiple selves as reflection of social spaces populated by multiple others. Within this stream of research, multiple identities are hierarchically organized. At any time, one specific identity is made salient over other identities depending on the context in which it is activated (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, &

¹ Organizational identity partially overlaps and can however be confused with organizational *image*, whose definition is similarly mottled. Organizational image has been generally used to discuss strategic projection of organizational features to external observers (e.g., Bernstein, 1984). Fombrun (1996) pointed to the reputational benefits organizations can gain from stable, long-term external observers' judgment. In this sense, positive image is something to achieve in order to increase organizational reputation – and organizational image somehow reflect Albert and Whetten's seminal definition of organizational identity. While identity is something developed *within* organizations, image can be seen as external *perception* of an organization's identity. However, the two concepts are different, and the term identity can also be used to discuss how external observers seize organizational features and evaluate them. This is how, for instance, Social Identity and Categorization theories employ the construct – and to this point I will return in the following.

² The present overview on identity multiplicity largely draws from Ramarajan (2014), who thoroughly explores different streams of literature concerned with the idea of multiple identities.

Wetherell, 1987). Social identity complexity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002) supports the idea that multiple identities can sometimes overlap and co-exist at the same time. This is the case of ethnical combination (such as Asian and American people) in which two different identities varyingly sum one to another.

Identity theory, mainly rooted in sociology, has addressed the issue of multiple identities by introducing the idea of negotiation. Within the so-called “parliament of selves” (Mead, 1934), different identities stemming from one’s diverse roles within social contexts continuously negotiate in order to prevail. Special commitment to one particular identity helps the emergence of a specific self (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Developmental perspective and psychodynamic approaches (e.g., Erikson, 1980) share common attention to community context and relational ties as sources of identity development. Within social environments, individuals are constantly searching for cohabitation between identities that are likely to conflict.

Some other approaches – surely critical, perhaps heterodox – tried to address multiple identities (for a complete overview, see Ramarajan, 2014). Without presenting them in details, what matters here is to stress the commonalities between different perspectives on multiple identities. In fact, scholars in diverse disciplines have faced the issue of complexity when exploring identity questions in social settings. As intuitively expectable, individuals embedded in complex environments develop complex identities that mirror the forces to which they are prone.

As a matter of facts, the main and often unique way to conceptualize and organizing multiplicity and complexity in identity studies has been to split individual identity in several identities, and keep individuality by articulating multiple identities’ turnover. However, another conceptualization of identity – especially of that emerging from confrontation with social contexts – is possible. The following paragraphs are devoted to discuss the social nature of identity development processes, and to introduce the concept of multidimensional identity.

3. Defining identity as a social outcome

What has been defined by social-psychology as "social identity" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1972, 1974) is fundamentally the result of individual-context interaction. While being just one part of the theoretical perspective adopted here, the term "social identity" is a powerful one since it puts social context at the center of identity development. In fact, "organizational" is a feature that sets research boundaries within organizations, despite the fact that "organization" itself can refer to a broad range of actors. On the contrary, explicit reference to the "social" side of identity permits the extension of analysis' boundaries to a multitude of actors.

As in any discourse, individual-context interaction needs a common language to occur. President Barak Obama's statement, presented at the beginning, helps in shedding further light on this point: black, white, best, poorest, married, slaves, and other words are indeed labels that summarize and concisely define him. Such labels are categories, one-word names to express concepts (Smith & Medin, 1981): his ethnic origins, the people that surrounds him, the idea of time lapse, the genetic links to his family members, his being the president of a country. The utility of categories lies in the fact that other actors can understand them, because their meaning is agreed upon within the social space. Categories work then as a "cultural infrastructure" (Vergne & Wry, 2014: 59) that mediates the identity-shaping discourse.

The following paragraphs draw from and contribute to three perspectives on the social construction of identity: a) that concerned with individual self-definition (*social identity theory* and *self-categorization theory*, rooted in socio-psychology); b) that focused on an actor's external definition(s) (*categorization theory*, promoted by economic sociology and organization scholars); and c) that interested in the impact of environmental structure on an actor's features (*social network theory*).

These theories do not share a unique definition of identity. On the one hand, social identity and self-categorization theories see identity as the individual sense of belongingness to some social group defined on the basis of socially shared categories (Tajfel, 1972). Identity is therefore a matter of self-categorization and in-group/out-group comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Not only individuals, but also organizations

develop their own social identity as they belong to formal and informal groups (Gioia, 1998). On the other hand, categorization theory focuses on organizations since its first inception (Zuckerman, 1999). Here, identity is defined in terms of audiences' expectation about the membership of the organization to some sets of socially shared categories (Hsu & Hannan, 2005). An organization's identity can therefore be sharp (specialist) or complex (generalist) according to the number of categories its audiences ascribe it to. Finally, social structural theories contribute to identity definition by considering the position occupied by actors within their networks. Identity can then be the result of network relations (Huemer, 2004), of individual actions aimed at controlling network frictions (White, 1992) or change them (Castells, 2010), or of embodiment of group's features spread through relational ties (Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000).

Despite their differences, these theories pay common attention to social features and contextual elements, and their definitions of identity share at least two important aspects that support their combined consideration. First, they all refer to identity as a social construct, emerging from some degree of interaction between the individual (person or organization) and the environment. In order to avoid the risk that a concept "that explains everything, explains nothing" (Pratt, 2003: 162), this is indeed the understanding of social identity employed in the present study: identity as a social outcome, arising at the intersection between social actors and their context.

Second, the proposed definitions all account for the role played by categories as elements for identification. The concept of category dates back to Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE), who was concerned with the essence of entities and firstly introduced the idea of *predicates* in his text *Categories* (Κατηγορίαι). The Greek philosopher conceived categories as language tools through which it was possible to completely classify things in the real world, and thereby make order out of complexity. "Aristotle blithely assumes that the fabric of the world is accessible to us, disclosed by the range of predications people [...] have been disposed to make" (Craig, 1998: 231).

While some classificatory categories might be related to natural and physical laws, most of them are yet intimately social (Durkheim & Mauss, 1963; Foucault, 1970). The psychological and sociological literatures, among others, have then broadly developed on the idea that concepts – and corresponding categories – are processed in order to

make individual and social life manageable. “Without concepts, mental life would be chaotic. [...] They capture the notion that many objects or events are alike in some important respects, and hence can be thought about and responded to in way we have already mastered” (Smith & Medin, 1981: 1).

The functioning of categories can be conceptually organized into three levels. At the macro-level (philosophical), categories are the means through which order is made out of complexity. At the meso-level (sociological), categories constitute the classificatory system that enables individuals to group objects and make sense of complex social contexts. Finally, at the micro-level (socio-psychological), categories are the construct through which individuals develop their own sense of belongingness to social groups. Accordingly, categories are a powerful conceptual lens to explore the interaction between identity and the theories that constitute the theoretical pillars of this research.

3.1. Social Identity and Self-Categorization

The role of categories in determining individuals' self-concept has been explicitly recognized by Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1972, 1974). Being concerned with group collective action after the horrible effects of mass behavior during World War II, SIT proponents defined social identity as “the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership” (Tajfel, 1972: 292). In particular, they argued that interactions among individuals occur over a continuum between purely interpersonal and purely intergroup interaction. At the latter end of this relational continuum, categories are the basis for segmenting people into groups, and the “system of social categorizations '*creates and defines an individuals's own place in society*' (Tajfel, 1972: 293)” (Hogg & Terry, 2000: 122). An individual's identity is then the result of three stages: a) categorical *definition* of social groups, b) *identification* with one or some of them, and c) reinforcement of identity through in-group/out-group *comparison* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Some years later, Tajfel's scholars and colleagues published *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory* (Turner et al., 1987), in which they further developed

on the idea of social identity in respect to social groups. Introducing Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) as a refinement of SIT, the authors broadened the importance of the categorization process, stressing that self-categorization occurs at three different, yet related levels of self-conception: the *human identity*, which represents the superordinate level of the self as human being; the *social identity*, which defines an individual as member of a social group; and the *personal identity*, which lies in a subordinate position and stems from interpersonal comparison.

Turner and colleagues assumed a *functional antagonism* (1987: 49) between different identity layers, whose salience was ascribed to their *accessibility* (“if they are primed in the situation, [...] or frequently activated or if people are motivated to use them”, Hornsey, 2008: 208) and *fitness* (“perceived to reflect social reality”, 2008: 208).

Being common to all individuals within their context, categories are not only theoretically significant, but also procedurally manageable. They can indeed be used as a tool to investigate social phenomena from two symmetrical perspectives: the one from the individual to the context, and the other from the context to the individual.

3.2. Social Identity and External Categorization

In fact, while categories are the basis for self-conceptualization, they also allow external observers to classify and identify social actors. In sociology, categories such as race, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic class, language, have been considered since the discipline’s inception. More recently, organizational sociology has broadened the categorical spectrum by focusing on organizations rather than individuals.

In particular, Categorization Theory (CT) is concerned with the effects external categorization has on the organizational likelihood of being recognized, and thereby well performing on the market. The basic idea is that organizations that span multiple categories are overlooked by their relevant audiences, and thus suffer from a lack of recognition which makes them perform poorly (e.g., Zuckerman, 1999). Differently from SIT and SCT, CT does not focus on the socio-psychological process of self-categorization, but rather on the way an actor's social identity is perceived by external audiences according to their categorical expectations (Hsu & Hannan, 2005).

Here, social identity “is appropriately conceived of as a set of categorical identity claims [...] in reference to a specified set of institutionally standardized social categories” (Whetten & Mackey, 2002: 397). Hence, the process by which organizational identity is engendered follows a round-trip-fashioned path: from organizational features to audience's categorical processing, and way back. Two outcomes are then possible. On the one hand, if the perception of organizational identity precisely fits a specific category, the organization succeeds in acquiring the audience's recognition and attention, and attracting the strategic resources required to operate on the market. On the other hand, the perception that the organization spans different categories, that is, a failure in meeting the *categorical imperative* (Zuckerman, 1999), results in lack of recognition, which leads the organization to difficulties well performing.

Previous literature has empirically demonstrated in diverse settings that a generalist, ill-defined identity negatively affects the stability of listed corporations' share prices (Zuckerman, 1999), the appeal of feature films (Hsu, 2006), the rating of wineries (Negro & Leung, 2013). However, blurred and generalist identities have been proved successful for prototype-deviant, high-quality restaurants (Kovács & Johnson, 2014), actors facing competing claims (Padgett & Ansell, 1993), and novel organizations (Pontikes, 2012). Moreover, a recent study has demonstrated how candidates that received financial investment-specialized MBAs suffer from specialist discount in their ability to attract job offers (Merluzzi & Phillips, 2016). Hence, while strongly affecting audience's perception, the type of influence category-based identity exerts on performance is not unique. Before discussing the implication of this result for the present study, a complete reasoning about the social construction of identity has to explicitly consider also the space in which social identity-shaping interactions occur.

3.3. Socially embedded Identity and Network Position

From the seminal works by Granovetter (1973) and Burt (2002), a vast literature has arisen aimed at explaining social and economic phenomena by focusing on their *embeddedness* (Granovetter, 1985) within social contexts.

Social networks have been found responsible for two main effects (see Podolny, 2001). On the one side, some scholars (e.g., Burt, 2002, 2004; Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007; Granovetter, 1973) stress that social networks function as *pipes* through which information and novel ideas circulate among loosely connected nodes, thereby reducing the actor's egocentric uncertainty. On the other side, networks can work as *prisms* that foster the recognition of those actors that are tied to other similar, relevant peers, thereby mitigating the effects of altercentric uncertainty. In other words, network relationships provide an informational cue to the audiences and enable them to “make inferences about the underlying quality of one or both of the market actors” (Podolny, 2001: 34).

The link between network position and identity sounds then intuitive: network identity “captures the distinct identity that a firm obtains by its relationships [... *It reflects the*] perception of a firm's attractiveness (or repulsiveness) as an exchange partner” (Huemer, 2004: 254). More recently, Shipilov and colleagues (2014) reminded that identity inevitably originates in relation with other entities, and called for a renewed attention to the relational antecedents of identity formation. Moreover, Rao, Davis, & Ward (2000) suggested that network embeddedness can be seen as a source of categories that enables social actors to engage in economic action. In other words, the structure of social ties can be seen as a quasi-exogenous element that supports the external shaping of an actor's social identity.

Network embeddedness has also been described as a source of meanings through which actors develop their self-conception. According to White (1992), individuals are constantly engaged in control efforts in order to preserve their identity within relational spaces. Action within networks is then the primary forge of identity, and social frictions are the devices for identity construction. Similarly, Castells (2010) suggests the term *project identity* to depict the situation in which “social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (2011: 8).

In organizational settings, several studies proved that connections between organizations give rise to the development of new, affiliation-specific identity. For

example, Clark and colleagues (2010) outlined how a new so-called *transitional identity* is created during merge processes. Corley & Gioia (2004) showed how spin-off-specific temporary identities lead to the adoption of a novel organizational identity. At the individual level, Sluss & Ashforth (2007) analyzed how work relationships contribute to the development of individuals' identity by adding a relational component to its individual, interpersonal, and collective parts. Furthermore, Rao, Davis, & Ward (2000) discussed how organizations' movements between the NASDAQ's and New York Stock Exchange's networks are made in order to protect organizational in-group identity.

3.4. Combining network position and categories: the example of Google

Social network analysis and category-based identity have been jointly considered in previous studies (e.g., Burke, 2007; Rao et al., 2000; White, 1992). On the one hand, this is not surprising: both perspectives focus indeed on phenomena that are embedded within social contexts. On the other hand, however, it is bewildering that this integrative theoretical framework has not experienced broader development.

A not-so-recent-anymore digital tool – the search engine Google – offers a meaningful opportunity to further develop on this combined framework. Google's successful architectural features are by far the most blatant example of the bond between relational and categorical means of identity construction.

As Stark (2009) clearly posed it, "The search engine is the paradigmatic technology of our era" (2009: 170). Since the introduction of Archie, search engines have dramatically evolved. In particular, Google firstly moved from a pure category-based system of searching and classifying webpages to a relational logic for ranking the continuously increasing body of information, data, documents, over the Internet.

As Brin & Page (1998) stressed when introducing their prototype of a large-scale hypertextual search engine Google, "The web creates new challenges for information retrieval. The amount of information on the web is growing rapidly, as well as the number of new users inexperienced in the art of web search. [In this context] automated search engines that rely on keyword matching usually return too many low quality matches" (1998: 1). Their solution, firstly introduced in 1996, was to empower the

search function with a tool to organize webpages according to their “worth”. Worth, in their successful intuition, had to be derived from the Internet structure itself: that is, from links pointing to and from any given page. Google was then designed as a two-step engine: first, it classifies digital pages on the basis of searched keywords, then it builds rankings within each categorically classified set according to the number of citations from other web sources. The PageRank Citation Ranking (Brin et al., 1996) is then a network-based logic grafted within a category-based engine. “A page can have a high PageRank if there are many pages that point to it, or if there are some pages that point to it and have a high PageRank. Intuitively, pages that are well cited from many places around the web are worth looking at.” (Brin and Page, 1998: 4).

The functioning of Google was designed to respond to the Information Age challenges. The identification of digitalized objects was not possible through plain categorization anymore – some grouping process was required, one that delivered not only categorical groups, but also relational ones. As today’s evidence testifies, Google outperformed all other search engines. Because of the need for identification within highly uncertain, densely populated environments, Google’s two-step system proved to be superior.

In the framework of the social construction of identity, the case of Google represents a clear example of the enacting power of technology in society (e.g., Latour, 1990), and offers four meaningful insights.

First, an item's social identity in the digital era has to be conceived as emerging from the joined functioning of categories and network ties. It is not just in-group membership that defines the searched object, but also the relational links that point to and from it. This calls for a renewed attention to processes of identity construction.

Second, the digital, high-speed nature of the Internet suggests a function of networks additional to the pipe and prism ones – namely, diffusion. PageRank architecture does not only reward webpages linked to high-status sites, but also webpages that have many links pointing to them. In addition to quality, quantity matters. This is not something new, of course: word-of-mouth and buzzes have an effective impact on social and economic life (e.g., Carl, 2006; Dewan & Ramprasad, 2009; Dhar & Chang, 2009;

Wangenheim & Bayón, 2004). Yet, this element generates promising questions for network theory and the social construction of identity.

Third, beyond acknowledging that classificatory systems and relational ties operate jointly in today's identification processes, their interplay raises issues of temporality. As for Google, there is a clear temporality in the categorical and relational mechanisms. First, items are looked for within categorical barrels, with reference to anchor text. Second, selected items are presented according to their PageRank position. The user then visualizes a list of items that discounts non-ranked ones. Identification processes in social contexts can however follow a reversed temporality as well. Specifically, an actor could be firstly identified according to its relational ties, and defined in categorical terms only at a second stage. Reversed temporality also suggests some strategy implications: newcomers could indeed seek for a prominent affiliation, and then develop their self-identity in categorical terms and communicate it to the relevant audiences. Or, new market actors could pursue a multiple-affiliation, word-of-mouth strategy aimed at activating buzzes before defining themselves.

Finally, as long as social contexts become more and more complex, the relative role of network relations and categorical memberships calls for a rethink. A fruitful suggestion comes from Stark (2009). "Note that in the shift to search we have not abandoned the concept of 'category' but have highlighted that it refers here to temporary constructs rather than to already-stabilized taken-for-granted. Such short-term categories bridge together a number of possibly highly unrelated contexts, which in turn creates new associations in the individual information resources that would never occur with their own limited context" (2009: 172).

4. Multiple sources of identity: toward a multidimensional conception of identity

Self-categorization, external categorization, and network position have been discussed as sources of social identity thus far. This picture is however complicated when one considers multiple occurrences of self-categorization, external categorization, or network position – that is, when some degree of multidimensionality is added to the equation.

First, socio-psychological categorizations of the same actor can be multiple. In fact, the sense of categorical membership can depend on individual knowledge and world theory (Murphy & Medin, 1985), level of expertise and information processing (Cowley & Mitchell, 2003), different goals pursued by the categorizing actor (Barsalou, 1983), or higher or lower congruence between the categorized item and the self-conception of the audience (Ekinci & Riley, 2003). Moreover, psychology-driven marketing studies have also argued that the understanding of categories is unstable, depending on when and how the categorical set is activated (Kivetz & Tyler, 2007; Lamberton & Diehl, 2013). Consequently, different categorizing actors might end up with different categorizations of the same entity. Additionally, the entity itself might produce a self-categorization further different from external observers' ones.

Second, CT's identities have been mainly considered in two-sided contexts, in which the organization faces one single categorizing audience. However, different types of audiences (or *audience segments*; Hannan, Pólos, & Carroll, 2007) might be at play here as well, observing and categorizing the organization according to their own perception – or understanding of the categorical set. For instance, Cosimo de' Medici behaved unambiguously and sharply with each of his interlocutors, yet has been described as having a multivocal identity (Padgett & Ansell, 1993). Similarly, Pontikes (2012) showed that market-taker and market-maker audiences dramatically differ in their evaluation of unclear, generalist organizations. Again, the organization can be classified differently from each audience, and ascribed with a complex identity when diverse categorizations are simultaneously considered.

Third, multiple partnerships can also occur at the same time, activating different affiliation-specific identities. As Burke (2007) posed it, "This is reflective of William James notion that people have as many selves as they have relationships to others (James, 1890)" (2007: 1). In this case, the alliance-specific identity the organization develops with one of its partner inevitably affects the identity perception of other allied partners (e.g., portfolio management issues, Wassmer & Dussauge, 2011).

Fourth, not only different network affiliations can coexist, but also alternate over time. In Podolny's (2001) terminology, after having found novel opportunities through the pipe function of the network, an organization might decide to exploit the most

promising one, therefore pursuing a high-status position (prism function); and conversely. This situation is likely to affect the overall inter-temporal identity of the organization. More precisely, today's organizational identity is likely to be influenced by past affiliation-specific identities. This latter point has been studied in categorical terms by Leung (2014), who proved that candidates that moved between similar job positions are in general more appealing to employers than candidates who did not move or that moved between very different positions. Once more, past relational identities matter in the present definition of the actor's identity, which to some degree embodies historical paths.

The acknowledgement that people can have many identities has given rise to an impressive body of research aimed at understanding how these identities are related to each other. However, a recent review of this literature has outlined that multiple identities need a unitary way to be discussed about, and that scholars should try to examine more than one identity or identity pair (Ramarajan, 2014).

In this respect, the idea of multidimensional identity sounds more convincing than multiple identities. Indeed, while multiplicity calls for an approach that combines different singularities, multidimensionality already accounts for multiplicity within a single frame. The idea of multidimensional identity is therefore able to keep uniqueness and variety: it copes with identity as a multifaceted concept, while keeping the unitariness of the actor identity is referred to.

In addition to be intuitively persuasive, the conception of identity in multidimensional terms is also analytically meaningful, and interestingly resembles a property of the physical realm, namely superposition in quantum mechanics. In simplified terms, the concept of superposition holds that a physical element exists partly in all its theoretically possible states simultaneously. Moreover, when it is observed, it gives a result that corresponds to only one of the possible configurations it can have (see also Messiah, 1999). In other words, physical particles are simultaneously present in many different places and spaces, which reminds of the multiple sources that simultaneously define an actor's identity. In addition, experimental observation gives a unique yet partial configuration of the physical particle, a process that resembles organizational studies' landscape in which different theoretical perspectives provide diverse understanding of

the same social phenomena. Finally, the closer the observation is, the more alternative understandings are missed – both in quantum mechanics and in organizational field.

Out of previous discussion, three main situations can be identified as sources of multidimensionality: 1) a mismatch between self- and external categorizations – that is, when different typologies of categorizing actors disagree; 2) a mismatch between external categorizations, occurring when different audiences are simultaneously at play; and 3) a mismatch between social identities (defined in categorical and/or relational terms) spanned over time, and observed in the present. The idea that mismatches are sources of multidimensional social identity recalls Stark's suggestion that "Identity lies in the discrepancy between current position and other possibilities" (2009: 190). Here, from each side of the discrepancy comes one identity layer, and in-between lies the unique, multidimensional identity.

As concluding remark, even in presence of single affiliation, single categorical statement expressed by a single audience, and no past identities, actor's identity should be better described as multidimensional. In fact, categorization and affiliation represent two different dimensions of the same identity, and are inevitably interrelated within the same construct – the one of multidimensional identity, indeed.

4.1. Analytical treatment of Identity Multidimensionality

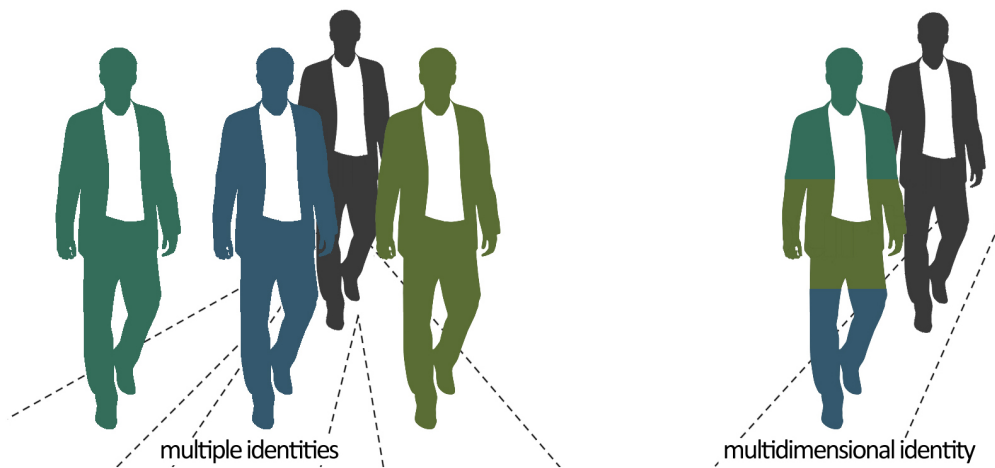
The concept of multidimensional identity can be described also in mathematical terms. While the analytical treatment presented in the following is barely the only possible one, it represents the effort of taking insights from extant theories and methodologies, and combining them in order to prime a reference model for future research. Moreover, the theoretical reasoning on identity multidimensionality can be further supported by its analytical formulation – a different language to discuss about the same issue.

Figure 1 attempts to graphically visualize the difference between multiple and multidimensional conceptions of identity³. On the left side, the individual is perceived as

³ The original image of the walking man come from:
<https://www.colourbox.com/preview/11618744-vector-business-man-black-silhouette-walk-step->

having multiple identities. For each context, the actor displays one of his or her identities, and is observed accordingly. Despite his or her uniqueness, actor's self is described as fragmented multiplicity. On the right side, conversely, the actor is univocally considered, yet several shaping layers compose his or her identity. Different external observers are likely to focus on one or some identity layers, thus giving rise to multidimensionality when actor's identity is fully described. Uniqueness is maintained, so does complexity.

FIGURE 1. GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF MULTIPLE VS. MULTIDIMENSIONAL IDENTITIES



From an analytical perspective, any description of multidimensionality might be slightly arbitrary. In fact, different identity-shaping tools can be identified, and multidimensionality articulated according to them. In previous paragraphs two primary social tools, namely categories and partnerships, have been largely discussed as means for social construction of identity. Thus, Figure 3 presents a mathematical model of identity multidimensionality that includes these two social tools.

Matrices in Figure 2 refer to category-based and partnership-based multidimensionality respectively. In both matrices, column account for categories spanned by the actor (K_1 to K_n), or partnerships established within actor's network (P_1 to

P_n). The description of variables included in the two matrices is made, in the following, just with primary reference to the categorical dimension. Tacitly, a small effort can be made in order to extend this explanation to the relational dimension.

FIGURE 2. MULTIDIMENSIONAL IDENTITY MATRIX

CATEGORY-BASED MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

	K_1	K_2	...	K_n	
S_1	GoM_{S_1,K_1}	GoM_{S_1,K_2}	...	GoM_{S_1,K_n}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_1}^K * Distance_{Kh,Kw}$
S_2	GoM_{S_2,K_1}	GoM_{S_2,K_2}	...	GoM_{S_2,K_n}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_2}^K * Distance_{Kh,Kw}$
...
S_m	GoM_{S_m,K_1}	GoM_{S_m,K_2}	...	GoM_{S_m,K_n}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_m}^K * Distance_{Kh,Kw}$
	\downarrow	\downarrow		\downarrow	
$DIST_{S_m}$	$DIST_{K_1}$	$DIST_{K_2}$...	$DIST_{K_n}$	\rightarrow Distance between Layers

PARTNERSHIP-BASED MULTIDIMENSIONALITY

	P_1	P_2	...	P_w	
S_1	GoP_{S_1,P_1}	GoP_{S_1,P_2}	...	GoP_{S_1,P_w}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_1}^P * Distance_{Pi,Pj}$
S_2	GoP_{S_2,P_1}	GoP_{S_2,P_2}	...	GoP_{S_2,P_w}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_2}^P * Distance_{Pi,Pj}$
...
S_m	GoP_{S_m,P_1}	GoP_{S_m,P_2}	...	GoP_{S_m,P_w}	$\rightarrow GoG_{i,S_m}^P * Distance_{Pi,Pj}$
	\downarrow	\downarrow		\downarrow	
$DIST_{S_m}$	$DIST_{P_1}$	$DIST_{P_2}$...	$DIST_{P_n}$	\rightarrow Distance between Layers

Following previous studies (Hsu, Koçak, & Hannan, 2009; Zhao et al., 2013), each cell contains the actor's (henceforth item's) *Grade of Membership* (GoM_{S_m,K_n}) to the corresponding category K_n as assessed by the respective source of categorization S_m . For instance, the cell at the cross between K_1 and S_1 (top-left) contains the GoM_{i,S_1,K_1} of item i to category K_1 according to the categorical assessment made by source S_1 . GoM_{S_m,K_n} assumes value 1 when source m does include the observed item into category n , and 0 otherwise. However, consistent with a fuzzy conception of categorical membership

(Hannan et al., 2007), this information can also be treated as continuous rather than dual. Specifically, the closer the GoM_{i,S_m,K_n} to 1, the more complete i 's membership to K_n as ascribed by S_m . In empirical studies, the choice between discrete and continuous values could depend on available data and actual functioning of the investigated setting.

S_1 to S_m are identity-shaping sources. Usually, these sources are different observers (such for instance experts of the field, the general public, peers...), but the matrix could also be articulated into time periods (from S_1 , time zero, to S_m , present time) or reflect self-conceptualization (for instance, S_n could be actor's self-perception). In fact, categorical membership and network partnerships can evolve over time, and self-perception may diverge from external observers' one. Each matrix row describes then the categorization or partnership vector of actor i according to observer S 's perception. It is what has been previously referred to as identity-shaping layer.

Out of each row a Grade of Generalism is computed (GoG^K and GoG^P respectively for categorical membership and partnership portfolio). Grade of Generalism is a weighted measure of spanned categories or partnerships. Each actor has a Grade of Generalism that reflects how complex his or her identity is compared to the most complex identity within actor's relevant network – or entire population, if plausible. Mathematically, $GoG_{i,S_m} = \sum_{n=1}^N GoM_{i,S_m,K_n} / N$. GoG assumes value in the interval (0; 1], with 1=pure generalist, and values close to 0=pure specialist.

$DIST_{S_m}$ is a vector that collects information about the difference between sources. Such a measure is needed in order to refine identity complexity. Different actors may have identities with different levels of multidimensionality. For instance, identity definition from source S_1 could dramatically differ from that of source S_2 , thereby increasing the overall multidimensionality of the observed actor. On the contrary, different sources may have the same definition of actor's identity, therefore contributing to lower multidimensionality. The vector practically gathers the category-by-category difference between identity-shaping sources, successively summed in order to build a coefficient that measures the *Distance between Layers*. This latter is obtained by comparing the vectors corresponding to each identification source using binary multidimensional scaling (Kruskal & Wish, 1978). This method recursively considers couples of sources (e.g., S_1 and S_2), and sets $Distance_{S_1,S_2,K_n}=0$ when both sources either

assign the focal item to category K_n / partnership P_w or not ($1 \cap 1 \rightarrow 0$; $0 \cap 0 \rightarrow 0$), and $\text{Distance}_{S1,S2,Kn}=1$ when sources' assessments conflict ($0 \cap 1 \rightarrow 1$; $1 \cap 0 \rightarrow 1$). In order to account for the fuzzy conception of membership, 0s and 1s are further weighted by the difference between partial memberships.

Finally, *Distance between categories or partnerships* is computed in order to adjust the $\text{GoG}_{i,sm}$ in case: 1) some categorical tags are sub-labels of other parent labels, 2) two diverse categories do not actually differ significantly, 3) two different partnerships are similar for some reasons – for instance, when they share the same Board of Directors. Following Leung (2014), distance is calculated as the inverse of the degree of similarity, where similarity between two categories or partnership is equal to the number of times both categories/partnerships occur in all actor's categorizations, summed, and divided by the total number of occurrences of the first category or partnership in the dataset. Mathematically, $\text{Similarity}_{Kw,Kh,Sm} = |w \cap h|/w$. The formula is expressed for categories, but a similar one is applicable to partnerships.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions

Identity is central to all types of social actors: individuals, organizations, and even items. Its construction, far from being related simply to what actors think they are, is inevitably socially embedded. It is through interaction with external environments that actors acquire a definition of self that encompasses multiple identity-shaping sources of recognition.

Multiplicity is however an undeniable feature of any social context. Environments are varyingly populated, and their members observe each other in ways that can be dramatically different one from another. Multiplicity of actors reflects then in a multiplicity of perceptions.

Additionally, actors are nothing but unique. Not only from a legal perspective, organizations are unified centers of action. Individuals, in a similar way, are observable units; the same applies to items and products traded on the market. Unitariness of actors and multiplicity of environmental perception are however compatible – and they have always been since societies, markets and types of products actually exist and

function (almost) properly. In identity terms, however, this combination has largely been addressed through the conceptualization of multiple identities. What has been suggested here is to move from a multiplicity-featured conception of identity to a multidimensional conceptualization of identity. Identity multidimensionality is in fact able to keep unitariness and complexity within the same construct.

Nonetheless, several additional steps are required in order to robustly set the idea of multidimensional identity in current debate.

First, qualitative exploration of the concept is needed. Evidence from real-world settings can help in shedding further light on the multidimensional feature of identity, and refining the overall idea. Many fields are promising for multidimensionality-based exploration – all those settings in which multiple diverse actors are at play, and in which identity is strategically crucial. For instance, many cultural industries present these elements.

Second, analytical investigations can help in establishing the multidimensional concept within organizational identity literature. In fact, statistics-driven research and quantitative approaches are powerful tools to infer large-data evidence of theoretically and qualitatively developed concepts. Moreover, this type of analyses can address issues concerned with the impact of a multidimensional conception of identity on many organizational phenomena – first of all, its effects on organization's performance.

Third, further refinements of the analytical treatment introduced in this study are essential. The discussed mathematical tool is indeed a first attempt to structurally conceptualize identity multidimensionality. Far from being complete, its goal is to express in mathematics' language the idea developed on a pure deductive basis. This aspect would however require multiple tests and reformulations in order to achieve completeness.

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#2.

Let's dance together! Identity, experience consumption and collective value creation in Electronic Dance Music

Abstract. This study explores issues of identity social construction and value creation in Electronic Dance Music (EDM), an unexplored setting in organization studies. Through interviews with New York City-based artists and secondary data analysis, the paper raises a number of points: 1) that the shift of music from a commodified good to an experience good makes value creation in EDM a collective process that involves a multitude of intertwined actors; 2) that value-creating interrelations are enabled by processes of mutual recognition through which actors' identity is shaped and continuously modified; and 3) that such multidimensional, socially embedded identity is a strategic resource actors need to acquire from their environments. Results and propositions of this paper inform research on identity, creative industries, value creation and business models, as well as practitioners in those settings in which identity is a strategic element emerging from social systems.

How do you think electronic scene evolved since you've become part of it? –
The point is that I don't feel I belong to that scene, I never belonged to it.
Thus I'm not the right person to answer to this question.

Trentemøller, interview with www.rocklab.it, last visit on May 16th, 2014

1. Introduction

As an electronic music lover, I was totally confused when I found out that one of my long time inspiring artists did not feel to be part of electronic music. In fact, while Danish producer and DJ Anders Trentemøller is acknowledged as one of the most influential artists in the northern Minimal-Techno electronic style, his answer puzzled me. Is it really possible to contribute to a field in such a successful and representative way and

feel no belongingness to it at the same time? How does such a discrepancy between external (audience's) and internal (artist's) perception of identity happens?

Moving from this anecdotic evidence, I developed two sets of questions about identity emergence and role within electronic music system. First, where artists' identity stems from? How do actors in the field recognize each other? Second, which is the impact of artists' identity on their creative and commercial practices? Does identity play a fundamental role in electronic music, or is it just an element whose clear definition does not really matter?

In order to give answer to these questions, I adopted a qualitative research design to explore the functioning and identity construction processes in Electronic Dance Music (EDM). This resulting paper is based on primary data collected through interviews with field actors, and secondary data coming from specialized books, websites, and articles. Two broad themes result from investigation. The first one regards EDM's articulate functioning, and is developed in the first part of the paper. It offers a structured overview of how actors interact within the scene, how they jointly contribute to music value creation, how information and money circulate within relational networks and make EDM valuable. The second theme, discussed in the central section of the paper, shows how intertwined relationships among EDM actors also determine actors' identity, and how, in turn, identity supports value-creating relationship. In fact, this socially constructed, socially embedded identity, vernacularly called "sound", is proved largely influencing business practices such as alliance formation, product development, and ultimately commercial and artistic value.

It is to note preliminarily that identity is a vanishing concept. In organization studies, identity research has a long tradition. Studies have approached organizational identity as a hub for sense-making (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995) that constitutes the basis for many organizational phenomena (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Sammarra & Biggiero, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Smith, 2011). In particular, organizational identity is crucial also because it can be observed, evaluated and legitimated by external audience (Curchod, Patriotta, & Neysen, 2014; Hsu, 2006; Negro, Hannan, & Rao, 2011; Negro & Leung, 2013; Pontikes,

2012; Zhao, Ishihara, & Lounsbury, 2013; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & von Rittmann, 2003; Zuckerman, 1999). In social network literature, identity and recognition have been addressed by focusing on ties as relational sources of legitimacy (Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014; Cattani, Ferriani, Negro, & Perretti, 2008; Huemer, 2004; Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Podolny, 2001; Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000), as pools of power and control over one's identity (White, 1992), and as providers of material for self-construction (Castells, 2010a, 2010b).

Moreover, identity has found not be unique. Actors can have multiple identities (James, 1890a; Ramarajan, 2014) and, within the so-called "parliament of selves" (Mead, 1934), different identities compete in order to emerge over one another. Some specific identities can be activated by different contexts (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), but diverse identities can also overlap (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

Central to the approach adopted in this paper is the idea that identity is intimately social. Identity as a social outcome is the result of the continuous interaction between multiple identity-shaping sources that populate social contexts (James, 1890b; Shipilov, Gulati, Kilduff, Li, & Tsai, 2014). It is through social reflection that actors come to understand who they are, and are recognized by external others. Recognition, in particular, is fundamental for any economic actor: only once they are recognized, organizations, companies, entrepreneurs, and even their products and items can start operate on the market. It will be discussed that EDM is a context populated by a high number of different actors for which recognition is more than fundamental. Accordingly, I moved to the field with this belief: that identity in EDM is primarily a social outcome, and that it has a role to play in the scene.

Music as well has a long tradition in sociology, economics, and organization studies. One the one hand, music has been approached indirectly as a meaningful setting to explore organizational issues, such as organization's right moment to act (Albert & Bell, 2002), organizational creativity and improvisation (Barrett, 1998; Weick, 1998), and co-evolution of firm capabilities (Huygens, Van Den Bosch, Volberda, & Baden-Fuller, 2001). On the other hand, scholarly studies have directly focused on music in order to unveil its functioning in contractual terms (Caves, 2003), its economic base (Connolly & Krueger, 2005), its role as field-configuring engine (Anand & Peterson, 2000; Dobusch & Schüßler,

2010; Schüßler & Sydow, 2013). Other research has applied a social network lens to describe and outline peculiarities of music in independent production (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010), jazz (Phillips, 2011) and post-punk (Crossley, 2009), and to offer insights into career trajectories (Kirschbaum, 2007; Zwaan, ter Bogt, & Raaijmakers, 2009) and cultural entrepreneurship (Peterson & Berger, 1971; Scott, 2012). Identity issues, as the one addressed in this paper, have also been informed by music. Music has been used to describe community identity-enacting tools (DiMaggio & Mullen, 2000), gender-driven and race-based identity discrimination (Donze, 2011) and product differentiation (Phillips & Kim, 2009), and identity membership and detachment (Negus & Velázquez, 2002). Music has also been used to understand processes of identity recognition through classification (Schmutz, 2009), legitimation (Kirschbaum, 2012), and to understand how genre categories operate in general terms (Lena & Peterson, 2008) and in domestic versus foreign markets (Hitters & van de Kamp, 2010).

For its peculiarities, EDM is a proper setting to explore issues related to the social construction of identity. It is possible here to anticipate some results of the following analysis, and make some general points about EDM functioning, value creation processes, and identity multi-sided formation – which I call identity multidimensionality.

Music involves a delicate and in-depth process of sense-making. It is an intangible good, whose value is difficult to assess, and whose goodness depends almost entirely of individual tastes. EDM is further complicated by the overwhelming abundance of artists, releases, and styles. Within this complexity, all actors involved in the scene are forced to make sense of who they are, what does a particular music style mean, which is the correct venue and way to present certain music tracks, and what people – the audience – would think about it. Indeed, EDM is a place where intense sense-making occurs.

Moreover, multiple actors are involved within EDM. Artists interact with labels, clubs and DJs, different audiences, critics, and festival organizers. All these actors actively contribute to EDM value creation. In particular, music acquires value through a two-step process that involves sharing practices between artists and recording companies, and audience's collective experience consumption in DJ-hosting clubs. However, both sharing and consumption are made possible only after mutual recognition among field actors. As for value, it is within a variously populated environment that identity

develops. Intuitively, since multiple dynamic actors are involved, identity in EDM cannot be conceived as uniquely recognizable, stable, and static over time. Diverse music-specific dimensions are involved in shaping actors' identity, such as genre and style membership, publish-oriented affiliations, and geographical attachment. Inevitably, multidimensionality shifts then from context to actors. And, since contexts are unavoidably multidimensional, resulting actors' identity should be considered in its multidimensional characteristic in order to grasp meaningful insights from identity analysis.

Through interviews with field actors, EDM system's micro-to-macro functioning is discussed, and social processes of value and identity creation are explicitly addressed. In fact, respondents drew some bright light on these issues, and the resulting evidence informs the development of some contextualized propositions. While the outcome of this study mostly contribute to the understanding of EDM and its actors, the general reasoning can also be extended with intuitive effort to other settings that have similar characteristics: multiplicity of connected actors, fast technological pace, strong need for sense-making and identity development, and products whose value can be assessed uniquely through experience consumption.

1.1. Background assumptions and methodology

As previously outlined, identity has been approached in organization studies from extremely different perspectives, for diverse purposes, and employing different research designs. Here, identity is conceived as a social outcome, and tackled accordingly. The basic question "Who are you?" is not concerned with self-conceptualization per se, but rather with the space and place from which such conceptualization arises.

Following research on identity's social emergence (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971; Tajfel, 1972; Turner et al., 1987) and social role (Hsu, 2006; Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Pontikes, 2012; Zuckerman, 1999), I focused on three socially-embedded elements as sources of identity: 1) social categories, 2) network relations, and 3) geography. First, social categories are words that help people organize the worlds in which they live, and make sense out of complexity through the categorization of social entities (Smith &

Medin, 1981). In music, categories are genres and styles, and artists and music tracks are classified and identified according to their belongingness to certain genres and styles (Lena & Peterson, 2008). Second, relations are powerful ways to aggregate actors and identify them as belonging to groups (Brin & Page, 1998; Rao et al., 2000). In EDM, groups are recording companies, which gather several artists under the same roster, and publish, promote, and support them collectively. Finally, geography and scenes (Lange & Buerkner, 2012) also play a role in value and identity construction, and geographical belongingness in EDM has long been a way to identify music and artists. Detroit Techno, Chicago House, and Berlin Minimal are renowned examples of the relation between EDM and geographical places (Reynolds, 1998).

In order to unveil patterns of identity social construction in EDM, an interview-based exploratory study has been elected as best means to the goal. Since meaning is contextually constrained (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), grasping sense from the field requires personal involvement with actors. Although I had some previous knowledge about EDM and its functioning, and had developed some theory-grounded intuitions about identity construction, I suspended my *a priori* understanding of the field and let respondents approach the issue with their own experiential baggage. In order to unveil new concepts or better understand them, researcher has to step back, avoid influence on his or her informants, and plainly rely on respondents' information (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

In-depth interviews have been chosen as primary tool for exploration. Interviews have been run in New York City between November and December 2014. Due to limited time and difficulties contacting EDM actors, only 4 artists (and label owners) have been directly interviewed, and 1 additional artist has shared with me his "Press Kit" that contains extended information about his past and present activity. Despite the paucity of respondents, similar points have been touched by each of them, and encouraged a structured analysis.

Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours, depending on informants' availability. What surprised me, and others before (Gioia et al., 2013: 19), was the extreme enthusiasm of contacted actors and their willingness to disclose a wide range of

information on themselves and EDM scene. All informants allowed me to tape-record our talks, and field-notes have been taken as well.

All interviews have been relatively open-ended. As reported in Table 1, a structured interview outline has been prepared in advance in order to define the main issues I was interested in. However, starting from my request of a 30-second self-presentation, respondents were allowed to navigate the broader research question (“Who are you as an artist?”), focus on aspects that were particularly salient to them, go back and forth, and suggest unexpected issues to further talk about. In the end, pre-scheduled questions have been used just to check uncovered issues. Not every respondent touched all points, and interviews generally turned into open-ended talks. Overall, this procedure offered me a broad range of insights that permitted – and forced – a multi-faceted description of the setting.

TABLE 1. INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Demographics
How would you describe yourself in 30 seconds?
Where and when did your career start?
Which technology do you use for producing?
EDM scene
Who takes part to music creation?
Who decides where you are going to play?
Who produces value? Who invests money? Who gets the value?
How much do you get per set? How many sets do you play a month?
Do you earn something by tracks' selling? (Beatport, iTunes, Amazon...)
How do EDM artists usually earn a living nowadays? And musicians in general?
How does the remix mechanism work and how important it is?
Do you personally know other artists in the scene? Do you share ideas and collaborate?
Labels
How does artist-label relationship work in EDM?
Which is the reason for you having multiple labels?
Which is the role of labels in EDM, now that everything goes through the internet?
Geography
Do you think cities have a role in shaping EDM scene?
Do you think cities play a role in supporting artistic success?
Do you think connections in EDM develop within cities?
Aliases
Why do you have multiple aliases? Which are the differences among them?
Which is the role of pseudonyms in EDM? Is it related to White Label?

Do other field actors know you have pseudonyms? What do they think about it?

Web

Do you take care of your profile on EDM-specific websites?

Do they contribute to scene creation?

External perception of identity

Do you think your labels, audiences, clubs know/got who you are?

Do you feel comfortable during your performance, or out of place sometimes?

Have you ever played in contexts that weren't definitely yours? (e.g., rock gig...)

Table 2 shows the list of respondents, alongside some features that helped me identify them as relevant informants for this study. In fact, moving from a sample arbitrarily composed by all the artists that released at least one music track with a Berlin-based recording company, I picked up those artists that were residing in New York, and among them those that spanned multiple EDM styles, or had multiple affiliations with labels, or released and performed music under different aliases. This selection rationale is consistent with the procedure of theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt, 1989), according to which cases are not randomly selected, but rather chosen on the basis of some characteristics' representativeness of the phenomenon. Aimed at extending the theory to different types of actors, theoretical sampling enhances analytical generalization of the results (Yin, 2009). Overall, the initial list included almost 50 artists. The most relevant ones (around 30) have been contacted via email, and more than a half replied. However, some were not in New York at that time; some others were too busy with production; and some of them simply did not show up at interview meetings. In the end, 4 plus 1 artists actively contributed to this research.

TABLE 2. LIST OF INFORMANTS

<i>Stage Name</i>	<i>Aliases</i>	<i>Labels</i>
Ivan Melnik (BY)	–	808 Recordings (Toledo, ES) Budenzauber (Stuttgart, DE) Chibar Records (Halle, DE) code2 (Berlin, DE) Kaleydo Records (Padova, IT) Miami Techno Chrome Records (Florida, USA)
Ezekiel Honig (USA)	Saidsound	Original Fake (London, UK) Pacha Recordings (Ibiza, ES) Share Records (Portugal) Tetritz (Moscow, RU) TLK REC. (IT) Magnetized (New York, USA) Anticipate Recordings (New York, USA) Fenou (Berlin, DE) Microcosm Music (New York, USA)

Adam Collins (USA)	Omni A.M. Low Cool Flight Risk	Bombis Records (UK) Crayon (London, UK) Euphoria Records (New York, USA) Fabric Records (London, UK) Faucet Music (New York, USA) USB Digital (Bulgaria)	Innerflight Music (Washington, USA) Midnight Social Recordings (UK) Stupendous (New York, USA) Subtrak (Berlin, DE) Techsound Records (Colombia)
Kike Mayor (PE)	–	Baile Musik (Frankfurt, DE) Bondage Music (Leipzig, DE) Heisenberg (Saint Petersburg, RU)	Monophonic Records (NY, USA) Nulogic Records (Berlin, DE) Saint & Dont Music (Lima, PERU)
Derek Marin (USA)	Derek Marin Sideview Modest D Platonik A Clock Punchers My Better Half Autopilot	530Techno (San Francisco, USA) Apollo (San Francisco, USA) Biatch Corp Recordings (NY, USA) Blaq Records (MEXICO) Bohemian Yacht Club (Toronto, CAN) De-Konstrukt (New York, USA) Dialtone (MEXICO) Different Attitudes (London, UK) Exotic Refreshment (POLAND) Fade (New York, USA) Family Grooves (CROATIA) Fantome de Nuit (Beirut, LEBANON) Faucet Music (New York, USA) Forward Education (CROATIA) Get Physical Music (Berlin, DE) Ill Bomb Records (New York, USA) Jyre Records (New York, USA) Modern Day Music (New York, USA) NOSI Music (New York, USA)	Pantamuzik (MEXICO) Parity Records (Illinois, USA) Plastic City (Mannheim, DE) Prisoner of Love (Florida, USA) Proper Slap Limited (PUERTO RICO) Recovery Tech (---) Sagol (Florida, USA) Sheik N Beik (New York, USA) Siesta Records (Los Angeles, USA) Smut Music (Scotland, UK) Sonore Music (New York, USA) Subtrak (Berlin, DE) Sullivan Room Records (NY, USA) Superfreq Records (Los Angeles, USA) Thoughtless Music (Toronto, CAN) Trapez Limited (Berlin, DE) Vibe-Rated (NETHERLANDS) Voltaire Records (San Francisco, USA)

Alongside first-hand data collection, other secondary data sources have been consulted for better informing my research (Gioia et al., 2013) and help me better understand EDM complexity. Reynolds' (1998) work on electronic music has been extensively referred to. The book goes through the birth and evolution of EDM in Europe and US, and offers a reasoned and grounded evidence of many issues in electronic music. Other articles published on the Internet have been consulted, and a short movie about Detroit producer Richie Hawtin further informed my understanding.

During data collection, an effort has been made not to superimpose pre-existing concepts on informants' description of the field. Since the aim of the research design of this study was to examine and possibly disclose meaningful themes from an underexplored setting, induction of concepts has been a process that took place after – and partially during – data collection. Two types of analysis are then available for discussing results. As promoted by Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), collected qualitative data have to be treated in a meaningful and reliable way by dividing the analysis into first-order and second-order analyses. Accordingly, I structured data analysis by alternating interviewees' citations with concepts directly derived from raw data. Hence, resulting discussion proceeds as DNA double helix, recursively moving from raw data to

conceptualization and the other way round. A multitude of relevant points have emerged from data analysis, and the adopted structure properly suits the need for articulating different research outcomes harmonically. Overall, this continuous interchange permits an easier comprehension of both reasoning and results as they appear.

In addition to excerpts from interviews, informants' words have also been used to explore recurring raw concepts. Figure 3 and Figure 4 show the "word clouds" emerging from combining four main interviews. Word cloud is a tool that graphically displays the number of occurrences of words within a given text. I refined each interview transcript by omitting common and too-specific words (Table 3 offers an overview of transcripts' cleaning process). Word clouds have been generated through the free web-based Java applet Wordle (www.wordle.com), created by Jonathan Feinberg (for in-depth description of the applet and its functioning, see Feinberg, 2010). Wordle computes the weight of each word and displays it with a size that reflects its importance. Common English words are automatically excluded from visualization. For readability purposes, 200 words appear in each cloud.

TABLE 3. INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS' CLEANING PROCESS

First Cleaning (city names and owned label names have been left)	Image 1
<p><i>Dropped Words</i></p> <p>with, been, oh, one, two, three, first, second, third, if, should, doesn't, has, have, I, I've, out, there's, that's, gonna, isn't, yeah, lot, I'm, you're, \$, €, no, don't, hei, he, he's, it, very, so, on, for, of, and, not, be, they, do, put, also, his, their, when, where, at, into, but, well, had, there, haven't, yet, whatever, much; know (often in the form of "you know"), going, always, super, come, came, take, all numbers.</p> <p><i>Dropped Names</i></p> <p>Richie Hawtin, Steve Aoki, David Guetta, BPD, Goldie Aphrodite, Kristal Mental, Jesus, Marty Star, Omni A.M., Mills, ADM, Plastic Man, Evolution, Mark, Marky, Miles Davis, Radiohead, Bjork, Other People, Jarrs, iTunes, Ilaria, John, Van Gee Gadavii, Louis Vega, Warner, Nick Fanciulli Martini Brothers, Steve Stroke, TBA, Techno Chrome Records, Pacha, Vladimir, Broadway Seventh, DJ Laurent Garnier, Underground Resistance, Electric Room Downtown, Monster Party, Luciano, Hot Creation, Minus Label, Radish, Ricardo Villalobos, Sven Svaas, Martin Butrish, Art Creation, Disavanto, Apalonia, Miami TreeHouse, Steve Troxx, Marco Carola, Butcher Recordings, Autreche, Izotope Ozone, Crocodiles.</p> <p><i>Transformed Words</i></p> <p>Plural to Singular Nouns: artists, tracks, DJs, sounds, vinyls, acappellas.</p> <p>Other transformations: New York into NewYork, playing into play, thinking into think.</p>	

Second Cleaning

Image 2

Dropped High-Frequency Words (# count)

label (146), good (71), music (164), play (108), people (135), think (66), big (58).

Other Dropped words (common verbs and nouns):

things (34), something (43), mean (31), everything (18), started (29), labels (15, missed from first cleaning), need (22), another (24), maybe (22), DJ (52).

After introduction and methodological note, the paper proceeds this way. First, a brief historical overview is offered in order to set EDM within broader history of music. Second, the systemic functioning of EDM is presented as emerged from interviews and secondary data sources. Here, first intuitions about EDM two-step value creation process are made evident. Third, a focused analysis of processes of identity creation within EDM is discussed. This section discusses the concept of Sound, a jargon term for identity as social outcome. Finally, propositions from inductive reasoning are introduced in order to set particularly salient concepts and to offer starting points for further analysis.

2. Electronic Dance Music (EDM): a systemic perspective

2.1. Brief history of EDM within music

As for most intangible goods, music is a product whose value is difficult to assess, and music industry is thus characterized by high levels of uncertainty on both artists' and external observers' sides (Podolny, 2001). One could determine a music track's economic value by computing the hours spent on production, the technical equipment required to record and finalize it, and the expertise of involved people; other elements, such as creative efforts, are yet difficult to evaluate. While all these parts have an undoubted worth, in a market economy the value of music can be traced primarily by considering patterns of its consumption.

Music consumption traditionally occurs in two slightly different ways. On the one hand, music can be consumed by purchasing and listening to it. For long time purchase has been the moment in which music production acquired economic value, granting

monetary income to music producers. On the other hand, music can be consumed as experience good (Nelson, 1970) during live performances. In this case, the economic value of music is – at least partially – revealed by the price of tickets, whose figure is however divided among all the actors involved in organizing, managing, and running concerts.

Since the birth of the music industry, the main and traditional source of revenue has been the physical release of music-related product: music sheets at industry's first inception, then followed by LPs, EPs, single tracks, and compilations as recording technologies allowed for the "commodification of sound" (Garofalo, 1999). Moreover, these products also activate a market for distribution and reproduction rights, royalties for radio and TV plays, fees for using the music itself or the image of composers, performers, producers.

In the traditional business structure, live performances – i.e., concerts – served primarily as channels to diffuse and promote new releases. Artists used to play live to present their work and induce the audience to buy it.

This scenario completely changed over the last decades. The advent of the MP3 file format in 1992¹, and its extreme easiness of illegal sharing (peer-to-peer, abbr. P2P), has undermined music industry's traditional value chain (Garofalo, 1999; Hracs, 2012). Recording companies' profit shares from selling releases have dramatically dropped, worrying producers about the downfall of the industry. Artists, whose economic sustenance depended on sold records, underwent a similar concern.

However, rather than coming to an end, the music business has entered a new era. In a natural way, the attention of field's actors has shifted toward the experience side of music consumption, namely live performances. While some mainstream artists have

¹ MP3 file, acronym for the compression/decompression algorithm *MPEG1 – Audio Layer 3* that makes audio files occupy one-tenth of their original size, was firstly invented in 1987 in Germany by the Fraunhofer Institut Integrierte Schaltungen and Dieter Seitzer from the University of Erlangen. MP3 was then ratified as a standard by the Moving Picture Experts Group (MPEG) in 1992, and completely won over the market as modems and computer clock speeds allowed users to share files over the Internet (Garofalo, 1999: 349).

started developing creative ways to respond to sales' crisis², other artists have simply reversed the relationship between music selling and music performing. Instead of playing live in order to promote their music, today's artists use their releases to gain access to stages and thereby earn their income. From a primarily commoditized good as it was before, music has significantly increased its experience component, thereby altering the structure of value creation.

Within music in general, electronic music has somehow anticipated this situation. Once left the academic and classical environment where it was born and moved to popular venues, electronic music has always been concerned with the experience it could bring to the audience (Reynolds, 1998). The term Electronic Dance Music (EDM), an umbrella concept commonly used in the United States to refer to non-classical electronic music³, literally embodies this experience side. Originally played by disk jockeys (DJs) at improvised and temporary locations, electronic music was aimed at offering a never-ending atmosphere for willing-to-dance people – marginalized minorities at the very beginning.

Although artists spent most of their time working on tracks in their studios, the moment in which their production turned substantial was during club-hosted dancing happenings. Since electronic music's inception during the 70s, music tracks were physically sold in vinyl format, yet artists were concerned most with dancefloor-oriented live performances. And most of their income was consequently deriving from performances.

What is of interest here is that the value structure in electronic music has walked through the "digital revolution" without much change. Thanks to its features, EDM

² As an interesting example, 2014 Wu-Tang Clan's record *The Wu – Once Upon a Time in Shaolin* was printed in one single copy, preserved in a silver box handcrafted by British-Moroccan artist Yahya, and later offered for ticket-based experience through tour-resembling happenings in museums, galleries and festivals. In addition to make music consumption unique by relocating live performances, Wu-Tang Clan introduced a new paradigm for music releasing: as if it was fine art, their one-copy release receive dubs up to \$5 millions (Florez, 2014).

³ Note that in Europe the term EDM is often associated with the mainstream pop-dance phenomenon that has disruptively arisen in the last few years. Since it is characterized by a strong orientation toward profits and a business-like approach, pop-dance EDM is thus criticized by the underground electronic scene and electronic purists.

business has not been dramatically damaged by the advent of mp3 and P2P illegal file sharing. Instead, since its core value activates through audience's dance experience, EDM has extremely increased its attractiveness in the last decades – as witnessed by the impressive growth of the number and scope of electronic music festivals (Langdon & Lai, 2013; Sisario, 2012), their impact on the overall local economy (Godard, 2013), and the income of performers and DJs (O'Malley Greenburg, 2013).

World-acclaimed electronic music producer Skrillex is a clear-cut example of this trend. As *Forbes Magazine* reported in 2012, "While Skrillex and his peers have gained popularity by producing their own music, they generally release it free, rendering piracy, the bane of traditional artists, irrelevant. Instead, they make their money from the road" (O'Malley Greenburg, 2012).

2.2. EDM actors

At the core of the field, five leading actors can be identified. Their roles are closely interconnected, and sometimes overlapping. A brief description of them is therefore required. Since any kind of exchange needs something to trade, artists are first presented. EDM artist has also been procedurally considered as starting point to unfold the graphs that will be presented in the following paragraphs. In other words, where different actors seem to be equivalent within charts, starting from artist's position can be a useful clue to easily understand intertwined relations.

Artist Often depicted as dreamers who believe in music and suffer hunger pangs in order to make a living, artists contribute to EDM creatively: they are those that produce and perform new music tracks. Today, no particularly expensive basic equipment is needed to produce a track: with less than 1000 USD for a cheap external sound card and legally bought audio-editing software any person can join electronic music production. In order to put their music on the market, artists act as entrepreneurs and self-managed individuals: they have to finalize their product, look around for financial supporters and partnerships, present

and discuss their work, bargain for release and property rights. The entrepreneurial role is crucial to develop novel ideas, arrange distinctive ways of promotion and exhibition, and try to stay on the faddist edge. While today's digital technologies allow anyone to release and promote music on the Internet, the role of network connections and collaborations with other artists is central to the entrepreneurial activity. To this respect, independent labels serve this need by acting as meeting point.

Label The role of labels is crucially evolving over time. Traditionally, the music industry has been dominated by a small number of big companies⁴ (so-called *major labels*) characterized by wide scope of release and high profits. However, cultural movements during World War II, and later in the 70s and 80s, have given rise to independent labels, usually less profitable and focused on releasing and promoting non-mainstream music. Independent labels were originally engaged in those genres overlooked by major business (e.g., African American hip hop and r&b; Ward, 1998), and have exponentially diffused thanks to technological developments that made tape recording machines accessible to almost everyone (Garofalo, 1999). It is mainly independent labels that populate EDM field, due to the underground nature of the genre and the easiness of producing music tracks with affordable tools (synthesizers, samplers, drum machines) or simply computer-based software. Electronic music labels have a dual role. On the one hand, they are quasi-traditional companies organized and managed in order to sustain processes of

⁴ **Big Six (1988–1999):** Warner Music Group, EMI, Sony (CBS Records until January 1991, Sony Music thereafter), BMG, Universal Music Group, PolyGram. **Big Five (2000–2004):** Warner Music Group, EMI, Sony, BMG, Universal Music Group (UMG absorbed PolyGram in 1998). **Big Four (2005–2012):** Universal Music Group, Sony BMG (joint-venture; in 2008 Sony and BMG merged into Sony Music Entertainment), Warner Music Group, EMI. **Big Three (2013–present):** Universal Music Group (merged with EMI recorded music division), Sony Music Entertainment (merged with EMI Music Publishing), Warner Music Group (merged with EMI's Parlophone and EMI/Virgin Classics labels); (Wueller, 2012).

music release and promotion. On the other hand, EDM labels also play an important role as communities of artists, in that they gather under a common roof artists from different geographical areas and cultural backgrounds. In this respect, labels work as network nodes, activating connections that would otherwise need time and personal effort to be established. Interestingly, the community role of labels has become more and more important after the advent of mp3s and P2P file sharing. In addition to bring artists together and activate connections among them, labels also serves as “search tool” for external observers. As American musician and producer Ezekiel Honig poses it, “It's funny how the more it seems a label is not important (because anyone can self-release), I think the more it is important, because there's so many people out there [...]; it's easier for consumers, for listeners, to try to find a way through things”.

DJ In technical terms, DJs are those that spin records during club happenings. From audience's and clubs' perspective, DJs' quality mainly resides in the right selection of tracks and the attention toward crowd's reaction to playlists, coupled with a sharp focus on genre/style and current hip. From artists' and labels' point of view, DJs are intermediate consumers, since they buy records in order to fill out their playlist. Within the broader picture, DJs also play the decisive role of gatekeepers of the field: selecting the tracks to spin in clubs, they operate as tastemakers, able to attract the attention of audiences and influence their desires. Similarly, DJs are also testers of upcoming tracks (the “White Label” process, described in the following paragraph). In today's music environment, DJs have achieved the social position rockstars occupied in the 60s' and 70s'. They are able to beckon impressive multitudes of dancefloor enthusiasts, as well as ask for extremely high fees for 2-hour performances. “They make their money from the road, and because even the best DJs travel light—often toting nothing more than a thumb drive—they take home the bulk of their gross pay,

sometimes more than \$100,000 for a few hours work, repeated nightly if they choose” (O’Malley Greenburg, 2012).

Club Clubs are the venues in which the audience can experience music through dancing. Clubs are landmarks of the local scene and build their identity and reputation by selecting the right performances and offering a consistent experience to their customers. In electronic music history, clubs emerged first as temporary, often illegal locations in which marginalized members of the local community (e.g., African Americans and homosexuals in the USA; working class youth and post-punk anarchists in the UK; Reynolds, 1998) gathered and collectively developed a shared sense of membership. After the deterioration – and consequent legislative limitations and prohibitions – of rave party movements caused by local mafias, racketeering, and drug-ascribed accidents, clubs progressively turned to legal, highly-supervised, all-night-pulsing places for dancing crowds. This opened the door to a more variegated audience, and marked a clear shift in clubs’ role: from places of underground, drug-induced, cultural buzz, clubs have progressively become “closer to corporations than the traditional notion of the club promoter; these are business with staffs, payrolls, profit margins, and long-term expand-and-diversify strategies that encompass merchandising, sponsorship deals, club-affiliated CD compilation series, and even the ‘club tour’ to other cities” (Reynolds, 1998: 381).

Audience The audience is the final consumer of the whole chain. Audience members buy tracks for their individual consumption, and attend clubs and live performances in a collective way. The audience is also involved in the process of consecration of artists, and contributes to the overall field construction through word-of-mouth and online websites, blogs, and forums.

2.3. Value Creation in EDM: Production and the “White Label” test

As commonly believed in the field, a music track is worth nothing without an executive producer that promotes and diffuse it. In electronic music industry as well, the first process by which a new track acquires value starts with the artist sharing it with a recording company⁵. The first sharing of the track is usually done for free, since it is used as demonstration (demo) of artist’s activity and style. Once the targeted label has expressed its interest, the track is tested during a club evening. This test is commonly referred to as “White Label⁶”, because of the plain white label glued on vinyl records⁷ in order to conceal artist’s identity and prevent DJs and audiences to form preconceptions about the track – a practice that reminds of the academic double-blind review process. Here, the label plays the role of editor: once the track fits the label’s editorial statement, it can proceed to the test. “White Label” feedback comes from the audience – and is interpreted by the DJ who spun the track – in the form of a behavioral reaction: either keep on dancing, or go for a drink. In case of positive feedback, the label gets back to the artist and release arrangements are made.

On the “White Label” process, Byelorussian DJ and producer Ivan Melnik gives an account of his experience.

⁵ Since the relationship between artists and labels is central to this analysis, self-release and self-managed promotion through the Internet are not explicitly considered. Cases of extremely successful self-managed release and promotion are however rare, although exerting great impact on the field.

⁶ Although the concept of “white label” is used here to discuss the pre-release test new tracks undergo, it is worth mentioning that the habit to attach plain white labels on vinyl also serves two other goals at different stages of music publishing. First, throughout the release process, some white-labeled copies are distributed to DJs in order to activate buzz around the upcoming release. The aim of during-release white labeling is to make people wonder about artist’s identity and generate waiting fibrillation. Second, after tracks are released, DJs sometimes attach white labels on their copies in order not to have other DJs buying the same vinyl. This habit is driven by strategic reasons. DJs spend long time on searching for tracks and building the playlist that defines their “sound” identity. Therefore playlist replication by competitors has to be avoided in order not to lose market positioning.

⁷ Clearly, no white label can be attached to any MP3 digital copy. Physical white labels are used today only for vinyl copies, but the overall test process is the same for digital copies – tracks appear unnamed on laptops and MP3-playback systems.

I sent (the track, ed.) to them and they replied me “Ok, we gonna play tonight in the club your track and will see the reaction of the people, if they’ll be dancing and listening we gonna release your track”. And I said “Ok”, and then they replied me after three days and say “ok, we gonna sign you for ten albums”.

American producer and label owner Adam Collins confirms this point.

We test (tracks, ed.) through parties and performing and Djing [...], and say “that is a great record! Other people enjoy this” [...]. Dancefloor is always a testing ground for new material and finding that perfect groove.

FIGURE 1. "WHITE LABEL" TEST PROCESS

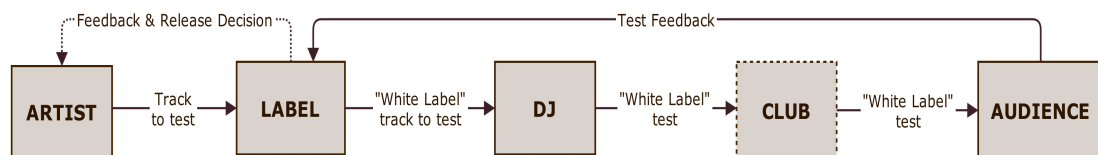


Figure 1 summarizes the “White Label” test process, at whose end music is firstly given economic value. The label can indeed buy the track upfront, negotiate for royalties and shares, or reciprocate the artist with some kind of benefits. There is no standard for compensation; it is up to the parties. One recurring element, however, is the status of the label and the non-monetary benefits it can offer to the artist. Peruvian DJ and producer Kike Mayor gives an overview of the exchange process he undergoes with different types of labels.

Actually, when I work with small labels, when they contact me to release my music, I charge them. [...] It’s like, you don’t pay me any royalty, but – let’s say – I give you two tracks for 700 USD. Which is not even worth to pay for the time, you know...

But when it’s a really good label I have to send my music and see. If they like it I would be more than happy they wanna release it. They don’t offer me like a real recording company contract; I don’t make money of that.

Labels can be targeted also as a strategy to enter new markets.

I'm actually releasing music with a couple of labels from Russia and another one from Switzerland, because next year I'm planning to go on tour in Europe, so [...] I just do a trade: I give you my music, don't pay me anything, but give me a gig.

Finally, no-compensation release with high-status labels also serves an additional goal; namely, increasing artist's status and the odds of signing contracts with important tour management agencies (so-called booking agencies).

The thing is that there is actually no money in making music; I just make music because I love it. And what you can earn from making music is just getting your name bigger and bigger and bigger. And record labels know that [...]. Big labels do showcases; so, there's where labels gets their artists to perform, and that's how you make your name bigger and bigger. And also, the thing is I really wanna make really big agencies, because agencies are the one that give you a complete schedule for a year [... Agencies] pick you because you're releasing on good labels, or have a lot of hip.

Overall, different types of compensation can occur depending on private arrangements. Since artists try to release their music with multiple labels⁸, different types of exchange can occur at the same time. Whether tracks are exchanged for money or not, it is at this stage that music firstly acquires value.

2.4. Physical Release and Commercialization: Commodity serves Experience

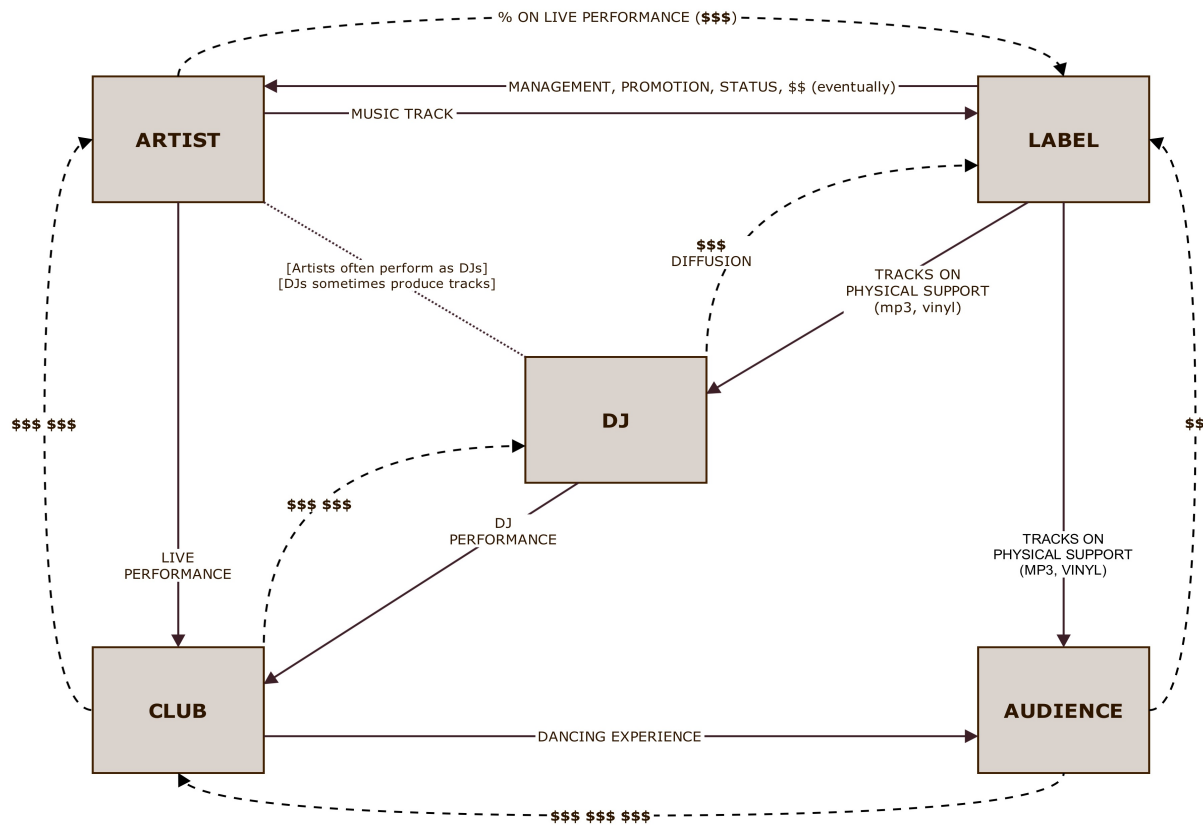
Once the music track is released, a second stage of value creation starts. Here, the same actors are involved in the process – plus other peripheral actors not directly related to the music industry, such as commercial agencies, motion picture managers, fashion events' organizers, and so on⁹.

⁸ The diffuse artists' habit of releasing music with multiple labels at the same time – not only in geographically distant countries, but also in the same city – will be recouped and discussed later.

⁹ In recent years, some labels have started to direct their attention toward pure commercial use of their tracks. This is especially relevant for those labels that have been considered underground-oriented for long time and whose music is now playing in the background of TV commercials. To offer

Figure 2 graphically shows this second stage. Blatantly, much more money circulates during this phase.

FIGURE 2. RELEASE AND COMMERCIALIZATION



The track is physically¹⁰ released and placed on the market. Two main different consumers have the chance to buy the track: regular audience and DJs. While the former represents final consumers of the overall production chain, the latter play the role of professional intermediate customers. In fact, DJs buy new tracks on a regular basis in order to keep their playlist updated. Due to P2P file sharing, however, digital copies do

an example, “Black Water” by Berlin-based artist Apparat is the soundtrack of 2013’s Baileys Chocolat Luxe TV commercial.

(full video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JFSXaET63eo>)

¹⁰ Note that with “physical” it is intended here the possibility for individuals to personally own a copy of the track, either on a physical support such as vinyl or compact disc, or in a virtual form, namely mp3.

not particularly contribute to monetarizing music tracks – especially on final consumers’ side. Earning from music sales comes primarily from vinyl-printed releases, which are but addressed mainly to DJs – although vinyl aficionados and faddists are making the scene again. Nonetheless, vinyl is the almost unique way artists and labels can make profits from sales, as stressed by Kike Mayor.

I’m starting my own vinyl this year. You know, vinyl is coming back very hard [...], and there is money. There’s money, at least to get back the money you invested.

DJs then spin the new track during club evenings, and make people experience music on the dancefloor. Here the biggest cash flow is generated. People pay high fees to access clubs – especially those located in highly attractive cities, or extremely influential in EDM scene. To give some example, the usual-night price for entering world-renowned Berghain Club in Berlin (once successfully passed the clothing/appearance selection at the entrance) is 15€; the average ticket for being admitted to Output Club in Brooklyn, New York, is 20 USD, while the nearby Verboten Club’s tickets not barely reach 30 USD for one night. Plus, clubs increase their revenues with overpriced drinks and must-pay coatrooms.

However, the distribution of club-generated value does not reward music creators. Indeed, DJs and club owners are the ones that gain the most out of music experience consumption. Artists and labels receive just a small part of the pie, represented by reproduction rights. For this reason, most EDM artists also perform as DJs, even if this is not their final goal. And labels work often as concert management and promotion as well, organizing release parties and dedicated evenings starring artists from their rosters. This way, artists and labels can grab the full share of economic value from released tracks.

In parallel, artists can also perform live – without DJ desks and records, but rather playing their music through human-machine interaction (a type of performance vernacularly called “live electronics” or “laptop live”). Economic value creation is here similar to the previous one, in which the roles of artist and DJ overlap. Of course,

because of joined efforts to release the track, a percentage of artist's cache goes to the label.

Music experience is therefore the "cash cow" of the business. In fact, while production and release typically require long time and great effort, they do not provide actual income – just crumbs. Los Angeles-based musician and producer Ezekiel Honig reports on the increased importance of live performance over music release as a source of income.

It used to be that people were going on tour to promote a record, and now it seems people put a record to come and go on tour, because this is how you get paid – for the show.

More than being interesting per se, discussion on value creation process within EDM is also a way to understand how dense relations are within the scene. Actors need to interact in order to make sense of their individuality. In other words, each EDM actor's activity becomes meaningful only in conjunction with others' activity. As for money-making, sense-making is therefore an intimately socially embedded process.

3. Social Construction of Identity in EDM

3.1. Identity in EDM: the concept of "Sound"

Identity as the outcome of social reflection is a ubiquitous element in electronic music. It is a keyword in any discourse about music, although it is not referred to with the terms identity or social identity.

During interviews, I tried several time to bring back identity at the center of the talk. However, with my disguised disappointment, respondents never used the word "identity": I had no clear reference to identity to include in this study. According to my perception at that moment, identity-related questions were poorly developed – or my action as brand new field researcher totally disastrous. However, as I listened again to tape recordings and started organizing what informants had told me, everything progressively made sense.



Moreover, Sound is not only something artists and labels seek to achieve. It is also the most salient trait that allows DJs, promoters, club managers, and the audience to distinguish among groups of music producers. In other words, the Sound is the basis for recognition. It is the infrastructure that makes producers and consumers meet and relate one to each other.

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First, artists and labels observe each other by looking at the Sound they produce. Clear Sound fitness between artist's work and label's releases is the key for establishing partnerships.

Ivan Melnik. If the big label doesn't wanna take me on board, maybe it's like my sound for them is not fitting to their music taste or something. I send music because I feel kind of this label can fit my music, because it's kind of familiar, like familiar vibe, sign, sound, or whatever.

Kike Mayor. I just send my music to a label...must be label that I really like, and this label must do the sound I'm producing...so, all these labels in Germany, I didn't check where they were from, I just sent my music because I really love their sound, they are like developing, contacting me back, so: "we like it, we wanna release it, so?" And: Of course!

The Sound, however, is not imposed now and forever. It also emerges from and is developed through the relationship between label and artist; differently stated, it is socially constructed. This point is clear in Ezekiel Honig's words.

[The label] could shape an artist, or the artist signed to a label can shape the sound of the label, all the other way. It's a sort of grey area.

Second, clubs offer Sound-based dance experience to their audience. Talking about a famous club based in Miami, Florida, Ivan Melnik stresses the importance of Sound as a distinctive brand.

They have a concept. You know, it's a place where you come there and everything is about the music. And they don't gonna play like bullshit music, because they have a sign on the field, on the market, and even should there be three people on the floor they're not gonna change their sound.

Third, the importance of Sound in performer-venue-audience relation is also crucial from artists' perspective. When asked about getting paid for performing in clubs that do not fit his Sound, Kike Mayor clearly expresses his concern.

Kike Mayor. When I play and the sound is not really my sound, I don't [ask for money]. Because it would be ridiculous, like, playing for people that don't understand what you're playing, you know.

DJs do the same, and are taken on by clubs on a Sound basis.

Ivan Melnik. Ok, Richie Hawtin [*a world-famous top DJ, ed.*] plays some vocal beauty house? It's not possible, it doesn't fit to his everything, his concept. So, they do, they look for the sound.

That Sound might be conceived as EDM expression for identity dramatically emerges from Ivan Melnik's word. When asked about some artists' practice of forcing themselves into specific styles in order to sign for important labels, Melnik's sensitive answer suggests how much vital it is to develop his own Sound and trust it.

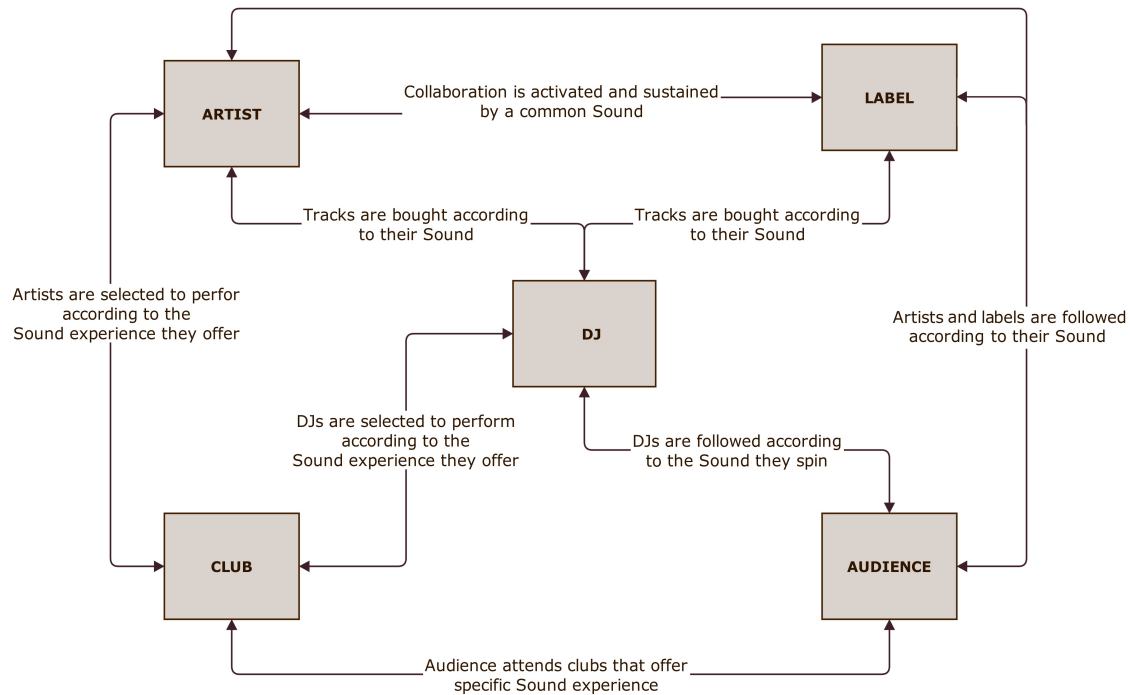
Some people they give up, just like they don't trust in [*what they do*]. They [*say*] "Ok, [*label's name*] doesn't take my track, so I don't wanna do nothing anymore, my production is bullshit", you know. No, your production is awesome, it's just you sent to the wrong people at the wrong time, and that's it. This is how it is. And if somebody becomes to the first position [*on charts, ed.*] this year, and maybe in five years he can be out of this top hundred, right? So, if he's out of top hundred, what you gonna do with your sound? What you gonna be? You gonna be: "Oh, I spent so many years to make this sound, and I'm not famous anymore! What's wrong with me?"... you know, so this way I don't wanna do this. I wanna do my own thing, you know. And this is music I make not only for me, there's a lot of people who also download and play this music and support [...]. I wanna build my own story, this is about me.

Therefore, the word Sound can advisedly be used in EDM to refer to the concept of socially constructed identity previously discussed in theoretical terms. It is something that characterizes each actor in the field, but that originates from social interaction and mutual reflection.

Figure 5 shows how the Sound can be modeled as an element that links all the actors involved in EDM production, diffusion, and consumption. Sound is the basis on which all the relationships within the setting occur. It is the distinctive feature that allows artists and labels to work together, but it also represents the distinctive core of what performers offer to clubs and audiences, and that clubs and audiences generally look for. Artists look for labels according to their Sound. Labels select artists by checking their

Sound. Clubs focus their evenings on specific Sounds. Audiences attend venues that offer a certain Sound. DJs target clubs with whom they share the same Sound idea, and buy tracks from certain labels that release that Sound. In a sense, Sound is the good exchanged on the field. Differently stated, what people pay for is social identity.

FIGURE 5. THE "SOUND" CHAIN



The Sound is however a kind of “black box”, incorporating elements from categorical assessments, affiliations and partnerships, and geographical scenes. Clearly, unveiling how these elements contribute to the construction of Sound is a key goal to grasp some substantive understanding of its impact on identification and recognition, and artistic and commercial performance thereby.

3.2. Multidimensional Sound: notes on multiple labels and multiple aliases

The choice of electronic music as empirical field for this study is not accidental. While many other contexts may undoubtedly be fruitful environments for studying identity-

related issues, electronic music is the ideal setting to develop on the idea of identity multidimensionality.

As discussed thus far, the identity-approaching concept of Sound is intrinsically social. Not only. Since its origin is grounded in different loci, Sound can be ultimately defined as incorporating a certain level of multidimensionality. In fact, genre/style-driven categorization, network-based partnerships, and geographical anchoring are all elements that contribute to the practical definition of Sound. To further complicate the picture, electronic music actors span multiple social categories in most of the cases, as well as a number of affiliations and geographical belongingness.

While phenomena of multiple affiliations and multiple aliases have not been fully developed on throughout the analysis, is it worth outlining these EDM characteristics since they are potentially relevant for future research.

On artists' side, two common practices are particularly puzzling. Namely, the habit of releasing music with multiple recording labels, and being therefore associated to different communities simultaneously; and the widespread use of multiple stage names, that is, aliases.

Some first-hand evidence can illustrate these situations. Out of the artists I had the chance to interview, everyone released his music with several labels (Ivan Melnik: 14; Ezekiel Honig: 3; Adam Collins: 11; Kike Mayor: 6). As Derek Marin's¹¹ biography proudly states, he is "releasing productions and remixes on some of the most respected and legendary labels around the globe including: Plastic City, Dirtybird, Swag, Fade, Thoughtless Music, ATOC, Get Physical, Sleaze, Big Chief, Matterform, Hidden, Subtrak, Dialtone, Intrinsic Design & Biatch Corp." Overall, 35 labels are officially listed on his *residentadvisor.net*'s public profile.

On the aliases side, Adam Collins' records have appeared under four completely different stage names (Adam Collins, Omni A.M., Low Cool, Flight Risk; no variations of "Adam Collins" are counted, such as DJ ADM); Ezekiel Honig currently releases music

¹¹ Although I had no chance to meet with Derek Marin in person, he kindly shared a folder with promotional material he gives to clubs, promoters, and journalists. The folder contains his biography, photos, reviews, mp3 files, and other personal information.

also as “Saidsound”; and Derek Marin’s *Selected releases* biography section includes six aliases (Derek Marin, D. Marin, Modest D, Platonik, Sideview, Clock Punchers). As an extreme example, British producer and musician Richard D. James – world-acclaimed under the name Aphex Twin – has recorded and published music also as Blue Calx, Bradley Strider, Brian Tregaskin, Caustic Window, GAK, Karen Tregaskin, Patrick Tregaskin, Martin Tressider, PBoD, Polygon Window, Power-Pill, Q-Chastic, Dice Man, The Tuss and Soit-P.P., AFX.

Both phenomena can be read through different theoretical lenses. From an organizational strategy perspective, multiple labels and aliases can be seen as ways to explore and exploit different branches of the field (March, 1991). By releasing music with different stage names and diverse labels, artists can indeed navigate the market and focus on some niche without eroding other profitable positions. Differently stated, multiple labels and aliases can be seen as tools for product differentiation or market segmentation strategies (Smith, 1956) on a geographical basis. Expectations and tastes in different areas require major or minor changes in artistic products’ features. For instance, strong cultural differences exist between Europe and the United States in terms of consumption desires, music tastes, audience willingness to pay, and global environment. Berlin techno and Detroit techno fans conceive each other similar but exotic, as cousins that migrated long time ago and grew up in different contexts. Even more compelling is the divide between underground and mainstream scenes, generally perceived as incompatible since the different focus they have, respectively, on music and profits.

Nonetheless, from an identity perspective, the two habits do not lose their charm. As diffusely discussed, sharply defined identity generally outperforms blurred and generalist ones in their ability to attract audience’s attention (e.g., Zuckerman, 1999), although generalists’ status often mitigates this trend (Kovács & Johnson, 2014). In EDM, however, also low and middle-status artists pursue multiple affiliations and adopt different aliases. This might be consistent with Pontikes (2012), who shows that market newcomers can benefit from ambiguous identity that keeps the door open to influence from commercial partners.

Yet, identity ambiguity and shifts concern also other actors in the field. On the other side of music production, for instance, different labels tacitly agree to share artists in their rosters with other labels, even in the same city. This sounds contrary to strategic behavior, since successful artists are likely to bring attention, fame, and profits to the organization, and continuous mixtures might confuse the audience. As another example, DJs sometimes move from underground scenes to mainstream venues, giving their audience major concerns – yet surprisingly keeping on considering themselves as underground producers (DJ Tiësto, one of world’s top earning DJs, plainly stated that “when it starts in the underground and it crosses over, then it’s still underground (too), because it’s pure” (Tiësto, interviewed by Ryan Mac, Forbes Staff¹²).

In the end, however, EDM actors develop their own Sound, and do not seem to suffer from schizophrenia from multiple identities. Even when they explore different Sound domains, artists present themselves as unique entities: they released music with eleven labels, using four different aliases, and this is what they are. Again, since sometimes their Sound cannot be uniquely or sharply defined, a multidimensional conception of Sound/identity turns meaningful.

A direct explanation of the presence of multiple aliases and labels comes from “the official unofficial aphex twin faq¹³”, in which Richard D. James (Aphex Twin) sheds some light on his extremely high variance of used aliases.

They existed before I got into the music business. I used to make up little names on tapes and stuff when I used to catalogue my stuff, and that's why I made up most of the names. And then it sort of worked quite nicely when I got into the music business, 'cause I just gave different names to different record companies, and I thought that was quite cool. But now with so much music being out on the, sort of, scene, splintered up so much into different bits, and people have like five labels for different types of music and stuff. I thought it was quite a good idea at first, but now I really don't like it. I want it to be all back together again; I want to go out to a club and listen to all different types, not just one specialist type of jungle. I think having different names breaks it up, so that's why I'm sticking to two again, now, to keep it all

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VgQ5VGbNC0>

¹³ The full text can be consulted at <http://rdj.moto-coda.org/faq/afxfaq26.txt>.

under the same names.

Surprisingly, releasing and performing music uniquely as Aphex Twin (on Warp label) or AFX (on Rephlex label) is the strategy Richard D. James implements today in order to safeguard his generalist, blurred identity as a critical feature of his artistic personality. Rather than keeping multiple aliases and expressing Sound multidimensionality in nominal terms, Richard D. James opted for concentrating multiple categorical affiliations within the same names, thereby collapsing multidimensionality at categorical level.

4. From exploration to propositions

A number of informative issues emerged throughout this study. Interviews have shed light on the structure and functioning of EDM, and offered the word Sound as confirmation of identity's multidimensionality and social construction in the field. It is worth now summing up the main results and attempting to extend the generalizability of the findings through some propositions. Within EDM complex environment, the following propositions are suggested as landmarks that indicate the path for future research. As landmarks, they also offer time to rest and rethink about evidence and intuitions that emerged during the analysis.

4.1. On the multidimensional, social construction of identity.

Sound has been found EDM's vernacular term for describing socially constructed identity. Similar to identity, Sound is not univocally determined. It is not just a feature of artists, labels, clubs, and the related cultural movement. Rather, it stems from the interaction of different actors in different spaces and places. Sound as identity is then the result of multiple identification sources.

Social categories, for instance, clearly appeared from interviews not to be the ultimate way Sound comes to definition. In a similar way, affiliation with recording companies cannot occur without some category-specified match between artists' and labels' Sounds. This suggests that categorization should be better analyzed by considering its embeddedness in relational networks. Or, the other way round, that

social network studies aimed at discussing identity formation would benefit from explicitly including categorical statements in their analysis. Intuitively, this combination matters when identity as social construct is placed at the core of observation. In EDM indeed, Sound appears to be socially constructed, intimately multidimensional, and continuously evolving. In identity terms, actors' identity is the result of multiple identification sources, which are embedded in social spaces and whose interaction is metamorphic. These intuitions lead to the following proposition.

Proposition 1. Especially in creative settings, characterized by high uncertainty, multiplicity of actors, and pressing need for recognition, identity is intimately social and multidimensional. It emerges from contextualized interactions among diverse actors, and reflects identification efforts coming from a multiplicity of different sources. Within this generative process, social categories, network affiliations, and geographical references are powerful means to point to a refined conception of identity construction processes.

As for Google (Brin & Page, 1998; Page et al., 1998), categorization has to be coupled with barreling when identification is a strategic need. The more items on the market, the higher the need for grouping them into barrels. Recalling social network studies, aggregation of artists allows complexity reduction and sense-making (e.g., Podolny, 2001). Through grouping, artists have their identity sharpened and refined. Not only their categorical position matters, but also their relational position has a role to play in Sound's construction. Labels can then be conceived as pools of identities. The overwhelming complexity stemming from the number of actors, music tracks, events, trends, and tastes is made manageable through grouping. And identity shows its most social feature thereby, since no one is anybody without relations. As for the say "tell me who you go with and I'll tell you who you are", Sound creation is an ongoing circular process. On the basis of common Sound clues artists affiliate to labels, and both actors acquire Sound's refinement from affiliation.

The following proposition on labels' role is then offered.

Proposition 2. Labels are pools of similar identities. Affiliation fosters self-definition and external recognition by refining and sharpening identity traits. Identity is thus shared between affiliates and continuously transferred from one to another, and labels configure as identity-based communities.

4.2. On strategy implications of multidimensional identity.

As detailed in previous paragraphs, EDM value creation does not occur in a single, precise moment. Differently from other products, music value emerges from a chain process in which a multiplicity of diverse actors is at play. More traditional manufactured goods embody economic value in themselves: a chair's value is given by the amount of wood and fabric used to produce it, the hours spent by workers on manufacturing, the share of capital that contributed to its creation, and so on. Music, while requiring hours of work and some technical tools, does not have a similar reflection: no raw material has been employed, no traditional-contracted work, and the resulting product (the track) is ultimately intangible. However, music has some value – and EDM, especially in these days, is able to deliver extremely high profits. Rather than occurring at a precise, single moment in time, value creation in EDM occurs throughout two phases. First, initial value is given to a music track when artist and label agree on its release after the “White label” test. Second, music is further valued when collectively consumed by the audience during club evenings. Value creation is therefore a two-step process that involves multiple sharing practices. Similarly to what happens in Defense Contractor Business Model (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013), EDM value emerges from an articulated system of arrangements among a multitude of actors (artists, labels, producers, DJs, clubs, audience...) that interact in different moments and give rise to diverse, yet intertwined modules of value creation (Aversa, Haefliger, Rossi, & Baden-Fuller, 2015). In fact, EDM per se has no objective worth; rather, monetary value is acquired by way of collective dance experience consumption. The process is common to many Web 2.0 businesses like *Uber*, whose App (the artifact) is given for free, and experience becomes the moment in which consumers (the driver and the driven) meet, share, and make *Uber* valuable. EDM value creation works in a similar way. It is when consumers meet and share dance experience that most of EDM value is created. Any

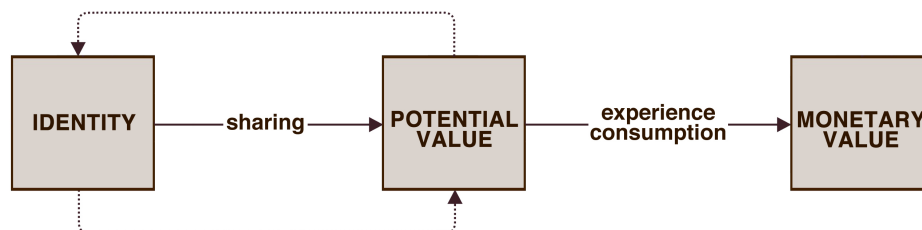
attempt to grasp meaningful knowledge from settings like *Uber* or EDM has then to consider complementarities and interactions between different models of value creation (Aversa, Furnari, & Haefliger, 2015).

This reasoning leads to the following proposition.

Proposition 3. Products whose consumption is based on experience face a two-step value creation process. During the first step, effectively invested-on and released products are shared with partners without necessarily generating monetary rewards. During the second step, products are offered to customers who, collectively or collaboratively, consume them and pay for experience. Within the overall process, identity works as basic requirement since it activates recognition and thereby allows valuation to start.

Figure 6 shows a formalization of this identity-based, two-step value creation process, involving identity social assessment, potential value, and monetary value.

FIGURE 6. TWO-STEP VALUE CREATION PROCESS



In a context populated by a multitude of actors, and in which products' value cannot be easily determined, the relation between identity and value-creating sharing is mutual and continuous. It is through sharing that identity comes to existence, and it is after some identity recognition that sharing can occur. This dilemma is the typical one between egg and chicken. But, differently from eggs and chickens, sharing is (almost) costless in EDM – at least if the initial investment and work required to produce the first piece is dropped from costs structure. This means that sharing as means to assess

potential value activates a feedback loop that helps actors refine their identity – and further define their products' value.

5. Conclusions and Future Directions

Given its relevance in socio-economic terms, EDM has proved to be an interesting setting to investigate several issues. While primarily focused on the social construction of identity, this paper delivers a number of other relevant insights.

First, the analysis has outlined a pattern of individual and organizational identity creation that is completely embedded within social environments. In organization studies, two streams of literature share similar points with the social configuration of identity resulting from this study. On the one hand, categorization and social network theories have described identity as emerging from processes of categorization by external audiences (Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Phillips, Turco, & Zuckerman, 2013; Zuckerman, 1999) and patterns of affiliation to other actors (Castells, 2010a; Huemer, Becerra, & Lunnan, 2004; Shipilov et al., 2014; White, 1992), respectively. Both perspectives direct their attention to the social context in which organizations and economic actors operate. From contextual characteristics, actors derive a sense of what they are, and are identified by relevant interlocutors. Differently from these approaches, this study has found that identity is a multidimensional element emerging simultaneously from a multitude of contextual elements. The characterization of identity as multidimensional collects this information: that categories, network affiliations, geographical attachment, and surely other social items in different settings, are different dimensions that contribute to the definition of the same actor's identity. On the other hand, the social embeddedness trait of identity construction is similar to the so-called *social identity* (Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel, 1974; Turner et al., 1987). Self-categorization and social identity have been firstly introduced by social psychologists, and efficaciously transferred to organization research. For instance, Rao and colleagues (2000) have showed that organizations move from NASDAQ to New York Stock Exchange in order to preserve their in-group sense of membership. In EDM something similar occurs: artists gather around labels that work as identity-pooling groups. However, rather than simply

reflecting in-group and out-group sense of belongingness, Sound-as-identity derives also from external identifying forces. In particular, it is within social reflection, rather than self-conceptualization, that identity as a socially embedded outcome fully expresses its generative power.

The second insight coming from this study is related to the fact that EDM anticipated contemporary business models and value creation processes that are proper of today's sharing economies. Since it is concerned with the experience side of consumption, EDM producers have always been deeply anchored to collaborative and collective ways of consuming their products. The relation between potential and effective value of products testifies of a two-step process of valuation, which producers have to be aware of in order to grasp monetary value from difficult-to-evaluate production. While similar types of value creation chain can be found in other settings (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013), the relevance of this study's findings lies in the crucial role played by identity in activating the valuation process. In fact, socially constructed identity is the basis of most EDM business practices that enable products to progressively go through potential and effective valuation. Identity, in this sense, becomes a strategic resource economic actors facing complex environments need to possess, refine, and leverage within relations to others. Talking about strategy and environments reminds of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) seminal work, according to which economic actors dramatically depend on the contexts in which they are embedded. In Resource Dependence perspective, the environment works as source of critical resources the organization may strategically need. Organization's ability to well-perform on the market is therefore prone to its ability to gather resources from the environment, and properly sustain them. In this study, identity turns out to be a strategic resource whose definition largely depends on external forces. Multiple stakeholders (Freeman, 1984) claim different, sometimes divergent visions over actors' identity, and what actors need to do is to strategically consider these pressures and mutually adapt to them in order to acquire definition and recognition. Once defined, identity is the element that allows value creation and, eventually, successful performance. In a sense, what actors need to do is to strategically devote their absorptive capacity not to value per se, but rather to the requests of multiple identity-shaping forces that surround them. Being able to navigate identity

traits in articulated settings and develop identity-capturing competencies can be seen as new dynamic capability contemporary economic actors are called for.

While social construction and multidimensionality of identity can be of particular interest to academic scholars, the strategy implications of this conceptualization of identity strongly inform field actors and practitioners that aim at improving their performance in complex environments. Other branches of music, the arts in general, as well as producers whose offering's substantial value resides in consumer experience, can gain fruitful insights and intuitions from the results of this study.

This paper also has some weaknesses. In particular, the most important action to take in order to make the analysis stronger and more reliable would be to extend the number of respondents. In particular, the analysis would benefit from interviews with club owners, DJs, and even members of the audience. These actors, dramatically involved in value creation, would surely complete the understanding of EDM functioning and increase the methodological robustness of contributions.

Several issues remain underexplored. For instance, the sketched role of aliases in EDM calls for further understanding – and suggests unexpected results. While confusion in consumers' mind generally penalizes products and producers, creative actors might benefit from a certain degree of blurriness. A mixture of multiple aliases and strategic revelations on the underlying artists can activate word-of-mouth and buzz that may help diffusion and fame (Carl, 2006; Dewan & Ramprasad, 2009; Dhar & Chang, 2009). As respondent Adam Collins put it: "It's good to create confusion, it's good to have people asking questions, wondering what's all about [...]. It's better to have people talking about that than not. Otherwise, they would just think where to get the taxi."

Some questions come to mind. Which is the effective market consequence of complex Sound on music releases? Does stylistic generalism equal complexity in identity terminology, or do multiple partnerships, diverse categorical memberships, geographical locations have a peculiar impact on performance? How does the audience ultimately evaluate complex Sounds of artists and music releases? A number of issues are open. The attention of future analyses might be fruitfully put on these – and surely other – questions.

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#3.

Do you note me? The impact of multidimensional identity on Electronic Dance Music performance

Abstract. Answering to a recent call for more holistic comprehension of the relationship between environmental complexity and identity, this study combines two perspectives on the role of identity on social actors' performance. Integration of categorization theory and alliance portfolio research leads to the concept of identity multidimensionality: one able to bring together identity uniqueness and multi-layered nature. Combined theories and the introduced concept are empirically tested on artistic products' performance in Electronic Dance Music (EDM) – a fruitful setting to explore identity multidimensionality. Results contribute to the current debate on the effect of categorization and affiliations on actors' performance, and show that an interaction exists between different identity-shaping dimensions – therefore preliminarily supporting a multidimensional conception of identity.

Who am I?

I am 46. I've been married for 22 years and we have 3 kids. And like anyone else, a lot of what I do and how I think has been shaped by my family and my overall life experiences. Many who know me say I am also defined by my curiosity and thirst for learning. I buy more books than I can finish. I sign up for more online courses than I can complete. I fundamentally believe that if you are not learning new things, you stop doing great and useful things. So family, curiosity and hunger for knowledge all define me.

Satya Nadella, 2014¹

1. Introduction

When Satya Nadella was named Microsoft's CEO in 2014, one of the first moves he did was to establish a contact with his current employees. Surely not by chance, his email was intended "to share some background" of himself, starting from a simple

¹ "Satya Nadella email to employees on first day as CEO", February 4th, 2014; retrieved on December 4th, 2014, <http://news.microsoft.com/2014/02/04/satya-nadella-email-to-employees-on-first-day-as-ceo/>

question: "Who am I?". In fact, all actors willing to successfully operate in social contexts have to initially introduce themselves and be recognized as relevant and legitimate interlocutors. Identity, in this sense, plays a determinant role in any social system. Far from being surprising, Microsoft's CEO did not describe himself simply as he thinks he is. Rather, he placed himself within a larger framework, whose boundaries define a social space populated by other actors, concepts, experiences, and opinions. The confrontation with external observers ("many who know me") and his most salient environment ("my family") crucially contributes to the definition of who he is.

Nadella's statement reflects two general elements that are the driving basis of this paper. First, identity is the first element any actor has to set in order to establish relations and successfully perform on the market. Second, actors' identity is intimately social, embedded in surrounding environments that contribute to the construction of who one is. Within environments, multiple dimensions jointly determine actors' definition. Therefore, since actors are unique, but different identity-shaping dimensions co-occur in their identity definition, identity could be meaningfully described as multidimensional construct.

In organization studies, the strategic importance of identity is largely undisputed. Scholars have focused on organizational identity as a hub for sense-making (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995) that supports a multitude of organizational actions, goals and processes (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000; Albert & Whetten, 1985; Clegg, Rhodes, & Kornberger, 2007; Corley & Gioia, 2004; Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000; Hsu & Hannan, 2005; Sammarra & Biggiero, 2001; Sluss & Ashforth, 2007; Smith, 2011). In particular, organizational identity is also something socially valuable – and ultimately socially constructed – that can determine organizations' ability to attract the attention of relevant audience and thereby acquire legitimacy to successfully operate on the market (Curchod, Patriotta, & Neysen, 2014; Hsu, 2006; Negro, Hannan, & Rao, 2011; Negro & Leung, 2013; Pontikes, 2012; Zhao, Ishihara, & Lounsbury, 2013; Zuckerman, Kim, Ukanwa, & von Rittmann, 2003; Zuckerman, 1999).

Social network studies have also examined the role of identity and social recognition by stressing the importance of network position, relational ties and socially embedded legitimation in achieving higher levels of performance (Cattani, Ferriani, & Allison, 2014;

Cattani, Ferriani, Negro, & Perretti, 2008; Huemer, 2004; Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Podolny, 2001; Rao, Davis, & Ward, 2000). Notably, external networks constrain individuals by activating games of power and control over one's identity (White, 1992), and provide material for self-construction (Castells, 2010a, 2010b).

Moreover, identity has found not be unique. Multiple identities (James, 1890) can pertain to the same actor, and different psychological and sociological perspectives have explored the issue (e.g., Phillips & Kim, 2009; Ramarajan, 2014). Within the so-called "parliament of selves" (Mead, 1934) different identities compete in order to emerge over one another. Contextual characteristics can support the activation of one specific identity (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), or different identities can sometimes overlap and coexist simultaneously, as in the case of ethnical combination (Roccas & Brewer, 2002).

In this study, I focus on two socially embedded dimensions of identity, namely categorical and relational dimensions. These dimensions have been previously described in organizational studies by employing the tools of social categories and network relations, respectively. Here, I combine these tools and suggest the idea of multidimensional identity, a conceptualization that allows to simultaneously consider the uniqueness of the identified actor and its identity's multisided characteristics. Two broad questions guide the analysis. First, how do different identity-shaping dimensions affect actors' ability to well-perform on the marketplace? Since there is no unanimous agreement about categorizations' and multiple relations' effect on performance, this question can further inform the current debate. Second, is there a joined impact of identity dimensions on actors' performance, or are different dimensions' effects independent from each other? To category-based and network-anchored research this question is particularly salient, since processes of recognition are likely to involve categorization of partnerships and gathering of similar categories into groups, and to be influenced by multiple-partnerships and multiple-network practices.

I investigate these issues in Electronic Dance Music (EDM), a creative setting that, for its peculiarities, is particularly appropriate for introducing the idea of multidimensional identity. A reference from old times can help introduce identity multidimensionality. In his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, John Locke (1632-1704) proposed a

classification of reality nature. In his view, color is a dispositional, secondary quality. Differently from shape, weight, and other objectively measurable items' characteristics, color is subjectively perceived. Since observers can be multiple and different, an item's color can be described in different, multiple ways. The parallelism between identity and color is further suggestive: any color is given by the sum of its primary components, red, yellow and blue. Precise tonalities emerge then through an "additive" process by which multiple color layers are superimposed. Interestingly, music tonality production occurs in the same way, since any timbre is the result of different over-layered frequencies. The idea of multidimensional identity is similarly characterized. It emerges from an additive process in which identity-shaping layers coming from different sources are combined in order to reach a unique, yet multi-sided conceptualization of organizational, individual, or item's identity. Differently from multiple identities, the concept of multidimensionality is one able to keep the unitariness of the identified actor and the multifaceted nature of his or her identity. It is therefore a suggestive term to reconcile actors' uniqueness with their selves' multi-layered characteristics that emerge from social construction.

Identity multidimensionality is also an attempt to integrate different theories pointing to the same direction (Mayer & Sparrowe, 2013). Both theoretical perspectives I draw from in this paper – namely, categorization and alliance portfolio literatures – aim at describing the impact of socially embedded features on actors' performance on the market. On the one hand, categorization theory is concerned with the performance-related effects actors experience from spanning multiple categories. In its original formulation (Zuckerman, 1999), generalists are penalized because external audiences difficultly understand their category-spanning identity, and therefore tend to overlook them. On the other hand, research focused on alliances has suggested a portfolio conception of firms' partnerships (e.g. Jiang, Tao, & Santoro, 2010) that influences organizational ability to operate and successfully perform. Network relations activate alliance-specific identities, and so-called *relational pluralism* (Shipilov, Gulati, Kilduff, Li, & Tsai, 2014) stresses the fact that organizations develop complex identities from multiple network relations. Hence, the combination of these theoretical perspectives allows approaching performance-related effects of identity by explicitly considering

different identity-shaping dimensions simultaneously.

As it will be discussed in the following paragraph, the exploration of these issues in a creative setting like EDM is furthermore engaging. Music has always been a fruitful context to gather intuitions and evidence about organizational phenomena (Albert & Bell, 2002; Anand & Peterson, 2000; Barrett, 1998; DiMaggio & Mullen, 2000; Kirschbaum, 2007; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Phillips, 2011; Weick, 1998). EDM, in particular, has some features that call for understanding. As most creative professionals, EDM artists and producers are constantly pushed toward developing and releasing novel music products. In doing this, they typically try to combine different music styles and publish tracks with a multitude of recording companies. While not explicitly addressed in empirical analysis, EDM artists also commonly publish their music with different aliases, sometimes hiding their own identity (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Puzzling questions about these practices and the performance-related effects they generate inevitably arise.

Given the theoretical combinatory nature of this study, results inform different theories. Categorization literature can gain further insights into how categories ascribed by external observers influence creative products' performance. Although used variables are all but sophisticated, regression outcomes are sharp and interesting: category-spanning is not linearly affecting performance, rather a moderate combination of categories supports better market outcome – unless spanned categories are too cognitively distant. There is no univocal evidence in extant literature of the role of category-spanning practices in supporting or penalizing performance. This study pushes then in the direction of a non-linear relation suggested by Leung (2014). Alliance portfolio research also benefits from this study by finding confirmation of the fact that increasing number of partnerships are beneficial to performance, yet till a point in which redundancy of resources provided by partners enters the game (e.g., Wassmer & Dussauge, 2011) and, especially in creative settings, causes stagnation of ideas (e.g. Zhou, Shin, Brass, Choi, & Zhang, 2009). Finally, the combination of categorical and relational multidimensionality informs identity research focused on multiple identities and the impact of identity on performance. Contribution is twofold. From a theory perspective, identity multidimensionality is a useful conceptualization of identity structure in complex settings. It is able to account for multiple theoretical approaches,

to reconcile them, and to support more articulated research designs. In fact, it contributes to the current debate on relational pluralism (Shipilov et al., 2014) that makes an effort toward linking multiple network relationships, organizational identity and performance. From practitioners' point of view, the recognition that identity is intimately social and related to multiple dimensions can help refining their own perspective on external audiences' action and reaction, and sheds some light on the role of identity-shaping dimensions on their ability to well perform on the market.

2. Research Setting: Electronic Dance Music

As for most creative settings, EDM is characterized by high levels of environmental uncertainty (e.g. Podolny, 2001) caused by the difficulties people have to evaluate intangible products like music. To make this situation worse, EDM is currently overpopulated by artists, recording companies (labels), producers, DJs, venues, and competition to emerge is substantial. Just in Berlin, known worldwide as EDM hub, website *residentadvisor.net* reports that there are more than 800 EDM labels and around 5505 artists that release music with them. All actors (and artists and recording labels in particular) are therefore constantly prone to the need for being recognized by the audience, and identity plays a determinant role in fostering recognition.

As background for this study, I conducted interviews with EDM artists and label owners in New York City. EDM is an under-explored setting in organization studies, and meaningful contribution to theory can be delivered only once unveiled setting-specific functioning. Three main puzzling points emerged during interview sessions, and sustained the development of three related questions.

First, artists establish multiple partnerships with labels on a regular basis. Rather than signing exclusive, binding contracts with a single recording company as typical to other music genres (Caves, 2003), EDM artists maintain publish-oriented partnerships with a multitude of labels. Out of the artists I interviewed, everyone released music with several labels (Ivan Melnik: 14; Ezekiel Honig: 3; Adam Collins: 11; Kike Mayor: 6; Derek Marin: 35). The primary reason for this practice is that multiple partnerships allow for faster diffusion of artists' music, quantitatively and geographically. As reported by Kike

Mayor, “I’m actually releasing music with a couple of labels from Russia and other one from Switzerland, because next year I’m planning to go on tour in Europe, so [...] I just do a trade: I give you my music, don’t pay me anything, but give me a gig”. Particularly in EDM, music is given monetary value through live performance rather than sales, as testified by *Forbes Magazine*: “While Skrillex and his peers have gained popularity by producing their own music, they generally release it free, rendering piracy, the bane of traditional artists, irrelevant. Instead, they make their money from the road [...]. They take home the bulk of their gross pay, sometimes more than \$100,000 for a few hours work, repeated nightly if the choose” (O’Malley Greenburg, 2012). It seems that multiple partnerships are a common way to extend the possibilities of being recognized and making money out of music production. However, is there any optimal number of partnerships that supports artists’ commercial performance at best? Is there any identity over-complication from multiple partnerships that makes the audience face difficulties in recognition processes? Or do complex relational identities simply benefit from visibility and diffusion sustained by multiple partners?

Second, the Internet plays today a determinant role in supporting recognition processes. Interestingly, Google’s classification and barreling search procedure (Brin & Page, 1998; Page, Brin, Motwani, & Winograd, 1998) perfectly reflects how EDM artists are looked for by the general audience. Categories and affiliations are powerful tools to help people make order out of complexity and identify EDM producers. During interview session, Ezekiel Honig made a remarkable point.

“It’s funny how the more it seems a label is not important (because anyone can self-release), I think the more it is important, because there’s so many people out there [...]; it’s easier for consumers, for listeners, to try to find a way through things”.

In this context, the combination of barreling and classification is further meaningful because EDM artists span multiple categories on a regular basis, giving rise to a multitude of competing generalists. In fact, EDM is a music genre that gathered – and still receives – influences from many other genres. Style-spanning is therefore a common praxis rather than an exception. In a similar setting, how does categorization

influence artists' performance? Since being generalist is a common habit, how does the audience value category-spanning practices?

Finally, socially constructed identity is the basis for establishing partnerships. Interviews made the idea of socially embedded, multidimensional identity explicit through the vernacular term *Sound*. On a Sound basis actors (especially artists and labels) recognize each other and establish alliances. This point has emerged several times in informants' words.

Kike Mayor. I just send my music to a label...must be a label that I really like, and this label must do the sound I'm producing.

Ivan Melnik. If the big label doesn't wanna take me on board, maybe it's like my sound for them is not fitting to their music taste or something. I send music because I feel kind of this label can fit my music, because it's kind of familiar, like vibe, sign, sound, or whatever.

Ivan Melnik (on clubs). You know, it's a place where you come there and everything is about the music. And they don't gonna play like bullshit music, because they have a sign on the field, on the market, and even should there be three people on the (dance)floor they're not gonna change their sound.

The Sound is socially constructed, and fluid over time. It is not imposed now and forever, rather emerges from and is developed through label-artist relations. As stressed by Ezekiel Honig, "[the label] could shape an artist, or the artist signed to a label can shape the sound of the label, all the other way. It's a sort of grey area". Moreover, similar to identity, Sound is nothing but a black box. In particular, it can be related to categorical (i.e. Techno Sound), relational (i.e., BPitch Control Sound), and geographical (i.e., Detroit Sound) dimensions.

How then do multiple identity-shaping dimensions influence actors' performance? Since Sound is multidimensional, can a multidimensional approach to identity deliver meaningful performance-related insights? In other words, can the combination of different dimensions add something new to our understanding of how identity influences performance?

Investigating issues of identity's social embeddedness, multidimensionality, and effect on releases' performance in EDM was therefore promising – and it proved to be.

3. Background Literature

As repeatedly noted in previous paragraphs, the two core elements of this paper are social categories used by the audience to tag and catalog music, and alliances established between artists and recording labels in order to release music. These elements define how actors' identity is shaped and perceived. Individually, they determine what can be called categorical and relational identity, respectively. Jointly, they can be conceived as different dimensions of unique identity, which can be unitarily defined as multidimensional.

In organization studies, both identity-shaping social dimensions have been separately addressed in order to unveil organizations' patterns to successful performance.

Categorization theory is concerned with the effect audience's categorization has on organizational likelihood of being recognized, and thereby well performing on the market. The basic idea is that organizations that span multiple categories are overlooked by their relevant audiences, and thus suffer from a lack of recognition which makes them perform poorly (e.g., Glynn & Navis, 2013; Phillips, Turco, & Zuckerman, 2013; Zuckerman & Kim, 2003; Zuckerman, 1999). Previous literature has empirically demonstrated in diverse settings that generalist, ill-defined identity negatively affects the stability of listed corporations' share prices (Zuckerman, 1999), the appeal of feature film (Hsu, 2006), the rating of wineries (Negro & Leung, 2013). However, generalist identities have been proved successful for prototype-deviant, high-quality restaurants (Kovács & Johnson, 2014), novel organizations (Pontikes, 2012), and financial market position-aspiring candidates whose excessive MBAs' specialization discounts their ability to receive multiple offers (Merluzzi & Phillips, 2016). Similarly, actors facing multiple competing claims can benefit from multi-faceted identity (Padgett & Ansell, 1993). In a recent study, Leung (2014) developed a time-dependent research design, and showed how freelance candidates listed on a web-based market benefit from medium degrees of erraticism – that is, moving between categorically different job positions over time. While static workers and extremely erratic ones are considered respectively poorly flexible and dilettante, medium-erratic candidates are conceptualized as eclectics and flexible, and hence receive more job offers. Overall, while strongly affecting audience's perception, the type of influence category-based identity exerts on performance is not

unanimously agreed upon. The investigation of this issue in EDM can help further enlightening the relationship. As a methodological note, categorization has been ascribed in previous research to individuals, organizations, or items – yet results generally addressed to the underlying actors. This is consistent with the suggestion of Bourdieu (1984), according to which the classification of identities can be transferred from human-crafted items to humans themselves. In this paper, while classification regards music releases, conclusions can be moved to their creators.

Multiple partnerships have also been addressed by organization scholars. In particular, alliance portfolio literature has proposed to handle multiple alliances by considering them as a unified portfolio (Jiang et al., 2010). Portfolio treatment of multiple alliances proved to be able to grasp performance-related effects of the sum of characteristics pertaining to different organization's partnerships. The size and features of alliance portfolios have been coped with as source of knowledge the organization access in order to deliver new products and services to its customers (Arora & Gambardella, 1994). Multiple alliances portfolios have been found generally enhancing firm's performance. Previous research has showed how features of alliance portfolio in biotechnology support organization's absorptive capacity and thereby performance (George, Zahra, Wheatley, & Khan, 2001). Rather than constant, the relation between alliance portfolio features and performance has been proved non-linear. Some studies found a U-shaped relation between alliance portfolio and performance, determined by initial costs of managing multiple partnerships that are progressively attenuated as firms develop portfolio management skills that make them overstep cost threshold and start benefitting from multiple relations (Goerzen & Beamish, 2005; Jiang et al., 2010). However, Wassmer and Dussauge (2011) suggested that a threshold is likely to exist beyond which additional partnerships do not provide marginal benefit, rather risk to become redundant. In fact, substitutability between resources provided by different partners generates a redundancy cost that penalizes the focal actor. The organization should keep different alliances only if the benefits associated with maintaining redundancy are higher than the related costs.

The combination between categorical and relational dimensions of identity delivers further complication. As a unique element, organizational identity has been found

affecting organization performance in several ways. As outlined in the introduction, most studies have focused on organizations' internal effects of identity. Those scholars that have addressed the role of identity in respect to actors external to the organization (i.e., the audience) have been primarily concerned with prototypes, categorization, and conformity. For instance, Smith (2011) discussed the impact of conformism and non-conformism on audience's evaluation of organizational performance. Unexpectedly, he found that nonconforming funds that well-performed on the short-term are more likely to receive capital from investors, and are less penalized when they achieve poor levels of performance. "Positive atypicality" has been explained through investors' *commitment* (investment in nonconforming organizations requires additional costs in terms of search and trust, and therefore are more likely to persist even in poor-performance situations, Staw, 1997) and investment *substitutability* (investments in more typical organizations can be easily moved to substitutes, while investments in nonconforming organizations can be transferred only with additional search costs). Smith's findings are symmetrically different from the idea of institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), a term that describes that environmental force that pushes organizations toward adopting homogeneous, broadly diffused organizational structure and functioning.

A few attempts have been made to combine categorical and relational dimensions of identity – yet no one has focused on the performance-related impact of this combination. Social psychology-rooted identity control theory (Burke, 2007), social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) all involve both categories and social relations as sources of identity. However, these theories focus mainly on individuals and social groups rather than organizations and performance on the market. Deaux and Martin (2003) drew from identity theory (Stryker, 1980) and social identity theory and introduced a framework to combine categories and social structure in order to gain a refined conceptualization of how identity emerges. Through the review of three antecedent studies, they show how relations and categorization mutually affect each other, thereby underlying the intertwined functioning of these two identity-shaping dimensions. Again, however, their

approach is rooted in social psychology and offers no information on categories' and network's combined effect on performance.

Taking suggestions from categorization theory and alliance portfolio perspective, I propose a multidimensional conception of identity similar to that proposed by Deaux and Martin (2003) – yet oriented toward performance. As outlined in the introduction, identity as a general construct has been found crucial for organizations and their successful functioning. Similarly, categorical membership and alliances have been independently assessed as factors influencing performance. A combination between these two factors is then at the core of the idea of identity multidimensionality: identity stems from multiple identity-shaping dimensions and, differently from the idea of multiple identities, is multi-layered and unique at the same time. Intuitively, dimensions of identity are likely to affect actors' performance in a combined way. In the following paragraph devoted to hypotheses development, I propose a measure of identity multidimensionality based on two identity-shaping dimensions (number of spanned categories/styles, and number of alliances), and mathematically expressed as interaction term between them.

4. Hypotheses

In EDM, artists are continuously pushed toward novelty and experimentation. In order to emerge, artists have to develop their own Sound, which has to embody some established style-based elements alongside other characteristics that make it distinguishable from other Sounds. However, while style-spanning Sounds are likely to stand out and be awarded by the audience, developing a sharp categorical Sound helps artists find labels, concert venues, and ultimately ways to extract monetary value from their music. In fact, top earning DJs have extremely defined Sounds – anyone knows what to expect from attending their night parties. It seems that a moderate grade of style combination can be beneficial to artists' production – especially to those emerging artists that are still running for recognition and fame. However, substantial style experimentation can be detrimental for releases' performance, because audiences

are looking for something new but partially familiar at the same time. Spanning too many EDM styles can therefore penalize artists' performance on the market.

This qualitative information is consistent with Leung (2014), who showed that medium erratic candidates are more likely to receive job offers than static and extremely erratic colleagues. While static workers and highly erratic ones are considered respectively poorly flexible and dilettante, medium-erratic candidates are conceptualized as eclectics by employers, and therefore awarded through more job offers. Consistently, I expect a curvilinear relationship between releases' grade of generalism and performance. In particular, low and high levels of generalism might be seen respectively as signs of artistic stagnation and inconsistency, while medium rates of generalism are awarded as efforts to differentiate and deliver interesting products.

Moreover, the cognitive distance between spanned categories also plays a role in identity evaluation. In particular, while moderate style-spanning releases are more attractive to the audience, high cognitive distance between spanned styles can undermine the benefit of categorical combination. In other words, the cognitive distance between categories moderates the positive effect of experimentation. Again, this is consistently similar to Leung's (2014) concept of erraticism, which embodies paths between spanned categories that can have different length.

Hypothesis 1. There is a curvilinear, inverted U-shaped relationship between EDM releases' Grade of Generalism and their performance on the market.

Hypothesis 2. Cognitive Distance between spanned categories negatively moderates the relation between Grade of Generalism and performance.

As emerged from background qualitative investigation, establishing multiple publish-oriented partnerships with labels is a common practice of EDM artists. Multiple partnerships allow for faster diffusion of artists' music, and for facilitated entrance in

new geographical markets. However, EDM labels are institutionally similar. They offer almost the same services (music publishing, management, organization of tour and concerts, advertising, scouting), and differences between recording companies mainly reside in their Sound, their geographical position, and their status within the system. Therefore, there is a certain point at which an additional label is likely not to offer new services and opportunities to the artist. While a label based in Los Angeles and another based in Berlin can help the artists enter the American and European EDM scenes respectively, three labels based in Brooklyn, New York, are likely to provide overlapping opportunities. Redundant services per se may not be problematic to the actor. However, continuous increase in the number of partners can give rise to two problems. On the one side, excessively numerous partners can generate overwhelming costs of alliance portfolio management, and distract artists from production and live performance. On the other side, increasing number of Sound-based alliances can cause fragmentation of artist's Sound, or overblown single-style attachment. Both situations can be detrimental to artists' attractiveness and performance.

Hence, I expect an inverted U-shaped relationship between the number of labels an artists collaborates with (that is, his or her alliance portfolio size) and releases' performance. This type of relation is similar to that suggested by Wassmer and Dussauge (2011), who outlined a curvilinear relationship between substitutability of resources coming from different alliances and firm's performance. Differently from more variegated alliance settings (George et al., 2001), I expect that multiple labels support release performance till the point the resources they provide become redundant. Substitutability is likely to emerge when artists establish publish-oriented relations with labels located in the same territory, focused on similar Sounds, and connected to overlapping sets of other actors.

Here, I consider the impact on releases' performance of alliance portfolio size as mediated by releasing artist's identity. This means that large alliance portfolio size determines identity's relational pluralism (Shipilov et al., 2014), while small size reduces pluralism. Up to a certain point, artist's relational pluralism can be beneficial to release performance because it allows the release to be more quickly and broadly diffused. However, there is a threshold after which the higher the identity relational pluralism

observed by external audience, the higher the penalties the release receives due to difficulties understanding artist's identity complexity.

Hypothesis 3. There is a curvilinear, inverted U-shaped relationship between releasing artist's Relational Pluralism (alliance portfolio size) and release performance.

As outlined in empirical setting's description, multiple partnerships and memberships to multiple style categories are a common feature of EDM artists. Multiple partnerships are a way to support music diffusion and access new markets, while spanning multiple styles is a way to come up with distinguishing Sound. Identity multidimensionality activated by multiple partnerships and styles might complicate audience's process of recognition, yet it is not considered necessarily disadvantageous by artists. As reported by Adam Collins during interview, "It's good to create confusion, it's good to have people asking questions, wondering what's all about [...]. It's better to have people talking about that than not. Otherwise, they would just think where to get the taxi".

Nonetheless, some artists I interviewed progressively narrowed down their identity multidimensionality over years – for instance, reducing the number of aliases. While accounting for past multiple stage names, collaborations, affiliations, and experimental style-spanning practices, they tended to present themselves as unitary artists. On this point, Adam Collins continued: "I had a great advice from my mentors and the people that I learned and watched in Chicago where I first started, and they just said "just use your name, don't make it confusing" [...] was perfect". Richard D. James, British worldwide acclaimed EDM producer, makes the reducing-aliases point further explicit. Known for having published music under more than 15 different aliases, in 2000 he clearly stated: "I thought it was quite a good idea at first, but now I really don't like it. I want it to be all back together again; I want to go out to a club and listen to all different types [of music], not just one specialist type of jungle. I think having different names breaks it up, so that's why I'm sticking to two again, now, to keep it all under the same names" (Screwtape, 2000).

The tendency to reduce audience's confusion through reduced multidimensionality sounds symptomatic of the negative impact this latter has on artists' identity and on external processes of identification and recognition. Excessive identity multidimensionality is, in turn, likely to penalize performance – audience's confusion can activate word-of-mouth and be rewarding sometimes, but it can also make understanding more and more complicated. In commercial terms, artists seem to be inclined to exit some partnerships and focus on those labels that are more rewarding or successful than others. This helps them sharp their multidimensional identity (that is, their Sound) by keeping multiple style-based characteristics and exploiting them within fewer commercial partners. Performance can benefit from reduced multidimensionality since labels, clubs, and audiences have been found to interact with artists on a Sound basis, and overcomplicated Sounds can cause difficulties in comprehension.

Within this framework, time has a role to play as well. In general, the more an actor is on the scene, the less his or her identity's high multidimensionality penalizes external perception and commercial performance. As an anecdotic example, world-renown EDM duo Daft Punk has been releasing music since 1987 and continuously changed its style-based Sound over time. Daft Punk started with *house* tracks ("Homework", 1997), moved to *pop* ("Discovery", 2001), *rock* ("Human After All", 2005) and even *orchestral* composition ("Tron: Legacy", 2010), and still their 2013 *disco-funk* track "Get Lucky" has become a popular phenomenon. While the French duo surely knows how to deliver the right mood to the audience, their long-time career undoubtedly helps their new production be legitimized more easily. This is consistent with the economics-rooted concept of reputation: Daft Punk's acclaimed past production supports easier acclaim for future releases. However, differently from pure reputation in economics (Sorenson, 2013), music is a product whose objective valuation is extremely difficult – if not impossible. In this situation, keeping on being on the scene can help artists develop reputation in terms of prominence in their fans' minds (Rindova, Williamson, Petkova, & Sever, 2005). Reputational prominence is then expected to work as moderator of the penalties deriving from high identity multidimensionality.

In order to test this real world-grounded intuitions, and in an effort to answer to Shipilov and colleagues' (2014) call for integration between identity and relational

pluralism, I expect that the interaction term between Grade of Generalism and Relational Pluralism (usually constructed as multiplication between the two regressors, $Interaction\ Term = GoG * Rel_Pluralism$) is negatively related to performance. The negative impact is however affected by the number of years an actor has been active on EDM scene (that is, his or her career length). The multidimensional effect is thus expected to be particularly significant for those artists that have shorter career in EDM, and to progressively narrow down as reputational prominence develops due to longer presence on the field. If statistically significant, this interaction would confirm the idea that categorical and relational identity-shaping dimensions are interrelated. If supported, the hypothesis would preliminarily suggest that high identity multidimensionality penalizes performance via confusion in audience's perception, unless the focal identity is long-time established within the scene.

Hypothesis 4. Grade of Generalism and Relational Pluralism jointly undermine performance: as artists' identity (Sound) becomes more and more articulated in multidimensional terms, its difficult understanding negatively affects releases' performance. In particular, this effect is stronger for those artists that have shorted career lengths on the field, and progressively moderated by longer careers.

5. Research Design: Data and Methodology

5.1. Data

Data used in this study have been gathered from website *discogs.com* (from here on, Discogs). All data, except from performance-related information, have been kindly shared with me by Simone Santoni (Cass Business School, UK). Discogs is a user-contributed database of information about audio recordings². Its servers are property of Zink Media Inc., Portland (Oregon, US). While the site lists today any kind of release in all

² All Discogs feature description and figures come directly from the website, <http://www.discogs.com/about>.

genres and on all formats, it was firstly born as a database for electronic music primarily released on vinyl media. According to the information on Discogs, the site contains today over 6.5 million releases, by 4.1 million artists, across over 743,000 labels, and contributed from more than 260,000 users. However, these figures are growing on a daily basis as users continually add new or previously unlisted releases.

The data I collected gather information on electronic music discographies of artists that released at least one track with a Berlin-based recording company. Starting from Berlin labels, sample construction has firstly considered all the artists that released music with those labels, and then all the labels artists published their music with. This sample initially listed 5915 artists, 15465 labels, and 96159 releases. However, I was able to access only one-third of releases' performance-related data. Moreover, some cleaning has been run. First, those releases that span more than 36 styles have been dropped from the sample. The number of these releases is definitely small compared to the whole initial sample (34 out of 96159) and is composed by extreme outliers. This fact was not an issue per se, but caused an over-complication of the understanding of some variables' construction steps. Second, releases published before 1974 have been excluded from the analysis. 1974 is considered the birthday of techno music (Reynolds, 1998), when Düsseldorf-based Kraftwerk released LP *Autobahn* and set electronic music in popular culture. Similarly to that of extreme category-spanning releases, this figure is negligible. Releases with no performance-related information have been kept out as well. After cleaning, the final sample included 3100 artists, 5063 labels, and 26494 releases, published between 1974 and 2007.

Three additional sub-samples have been computed by splitting cumulatively the full sample at first, median, and third quantiles. These sub-samples are used to test Hypothesis 5 on the moderating effect of artistic age (the number of active releasing years) on the negative performance-related impact of identity multidimensionality. The first sub-sample includes 1937 artists that have been releasing music for less or equal that 11 years; the second sub-sample adds those artists that have been active on EDM scene for at least 16 years, and is composed cumulatively by 2443 artists; finally, the third sub-sample includes 2807 artists that have a career length shorter or equal to 22 years.

Data cleaning and management have been performed using the statistics open-source software R (<https://www.r-project.org/>), which is a leading program in social science and statistics. Data preparation lasted between April and October 2015 due to the amount of information to process and the slow learning curve that characterizes R.

Table 1 shows a summary of the information gathered from Discogs. Each artist's profile lists all published releases, with dedicated pages that report in-depth details of each release (year, releasing label, format, related market, and so on). Table 2 presents the first 6 entries of the data used for variables' construction.

TABLE 1. INFORMATION GATHERED FROM DISCOGS

Variable	Description	Descriptive Statistics
<i>Release</i>	Releases are Albums, EPs, Single, Compilations, Remixes	N: 26494
<i>Artist</i>	Artists that published at least one release with Berlin-based label	N: 3100
<i>Label</i>	Labels that published Artists' music (not only Berlin-based)	N: 5063
<i>Year</i>	Release Year	Time Lapse: 1974-2007
<i>Country</i>	Release Country (geographic market)	N: 72
<i>Commercial Performance</i>	Sum of users that declared either to own or to desire the release	Min: 0 1 st Quartile: 47 Median: 103 Mean: 180.9 3 rd Quartile: 217 Max: 5098

TABLE 2. DISCOGRAPHY INFORMATION FROM DISCOGS (FIRST 6 ENTRIES)

ID	Artist name	Title	Label	Year	Country	Genre	Style	Rating	Comm
2	Mr. James Barth & A.D.	Knockin' Boots Vol2 Of 2	Svek	1998	Sweden	1	2	0.22	478
3	JoshWink	Profound Sounds Vol.1	Ruffhouse Records	1999	US	1	3	0.211	201
2	Mr. James Barth & A.D.	Knockin' Boots (Vol1 Of 2)	Svek	1998	Sweden	1	3	0.347	794
59	Kerri Chandler	Digitalsoul (Session One)	Large Records	1999	US	1	5	0.442	821
59	Kerri Chandler	Digitalsoul (Session Two)	Large Records	2000	US	1	5	0.371	659
55	DJ Rasoul	Soul Searching Vol.1	Large Records	1998	US	1	5	0.299	619

3.2. On Discogs classification

Discogs' data comes from users' contributions. In order to submit a release, each user has to register an account on the website. After some changes since its birth, today's Discogs' submission policy is quite simple: any new submission is immediately available and visible on Discogs, but it is tagged as "Unmoderated" and needing "Votes". Users are asked to submit releases directly, not artists or labels. It means, link to artists and labels are created through release submission. Users receive a vote for their submission according to the level of completeness, and all registered users can refine release information. Once release's details are considered complete, the release is tagged as "accepted"³.

Since categorization is central to this study, it is worth recalling Discogs' categorization process. As reported in the website's Quick Start Guide, "*In Discogs, the genres are large, general categories that should be reasonably easy to select. Remember you can select more than one if needed. The styles are a drop down list that can be selected after the genre/s have been ticked. Try to choose the closest style for your release. Again, you can add more than one style if needed*"⁴. The process is therefore guided and based on socially-accepted music categories. In fact, users have a bunch of categories to classify their submission, and pick genre and style from premade list. Discogs currently contains 15 different genres, and 423 styles among them. However, users can suggest new genres and styles, for which a formal procedure is required. The following screenshot is taken from Discogs forum, and lists all the information required to submit any new genre/style.

TABLE 3. DISCOGS NEW GENRE/STYLE SUBMISSION TEMPLATE⁵

<u>Style Name</u> (required). <i>The style must be internationally accepted - no regional names for styles if possible. No micro-styles. There are some styles that are too specific or denote a minor style element. Adding these styles at this point would clog up the system. These micro-styles often denote only a small change from similar</i>
--

³ Further information on Discogs submission process can be found at discogs.com/help/doc/contributing.

⁴ <http://www.discogs.com/help/doc/quick-start-guide>

⁵ <http://www.discogs.com/forum/thread/368197>

styles, for example, a specific lyrical or musical theme, or simply add an adjective onto an existing style. Some examples of this can be found in the metal and electronic genres.

Alternative Names.

Genres (required). *Genre/s that the style falls under must be included.*

Description (required). *The style request must come with a full description of the style. Look at http://wiki.discogs.com/index.php/Style_Guide for examples. Include a musical description, common instruments and sounds, dates, example artists etc.*

Examples (links to at least 3 releases) (required).

Associated Styles (this should make links to existing styles). *Other styles that relate the requested style must be listed.*

External citations - *The style request must come with at least three trustworthy external citations of its use.*

Notes.

Style requests that do not include the required information or go against the above rules will not be added, and may be deleted from this thread. I reserve the final say in whether a style is added or not.

3.3. Regression Variables

The following paragraphs describe, for each type of variable (regressors, dependent variables, and control variables), the rationale and mathematics for their construction.

{Preliminary Computation} Number of Spanned Categories. In music, styles are sub-genres, those streams of sound that pertain to the same main category. Styles can be treated here as clearly identifiable and independent categories since EDM is a genre that gathers together multi-sided, highly differentiated influences. For instance, *trance* and *techno* styles have features that set them sharply in different sound domains; the same happens for *tribal*, *chill out*, *drum'n'bass*, *trip-hop*, *dubstep*, and so on. The validity of using styles as stand-alone categories is confirmed also by Discogs' submission rules: "*Style is only required when using the Electronic genre*"⁶. Without style specification, EDM is an excessively general denomination, and style becomes then an effective distinguishing element. Each release's number of spanned categories has been computed by summing up all the styles ascribed by the audience to that release.

⁶ <http://www.discogs.com/help/doc/submission-guidelines-general-rules>

{Regressor} Grade of Generalism. The number of spanned categories has then been used to construct each release's Grade of Generalism. In general terms, generalists are those items, organizations, or individuals that span a high number of different categories. On the contrary, specialists are those items, organizations, or individuals that have single-category membership. In this setting, for instance, a released categorized as *techno* has been considered as specialist, while a different release categorized as *techno-house-minimal* has been treated as generalist. However, since the number of spanned categories varies largely between releases, it is weakly meaningful to split releases into generalist and specialist per se. Therefore, following Hsu, Koçak, & Hannan's (2009) suggestion, a Grade of Generalism (GoG) has been calculated rather than a binary variable. GoG takes value close to 0 for specialist releases, and value increasing up to 1 for more and more generalist releases. Mathematically, $GoG_i = n_cat_i / \max(n_cat)$, where n_cat_i is the number of categories spanned by release i , and $\max(n_cat)$ is the maximum number of categories spanned overall. In fact, this is an unsophisticated measure, but effectively allows not only to treat category spanning as a continuous variable, but also to weight each release's Grade of Generalism on sampled releases' features. Specialism and generalism are indeed relational measures, in which a specialist (or generalist) prototype is matched to the observed item and categorical identity-related assessments are made on the latter (Glynn & Navis, 2013).

It is worth noting that some releases are categorized as genre-spanning and style-spanning as well. According to *discogs.com* long-format data structure, these releases are presented as having a number of spanned styles that results from multiplying styles for the number of spanned genres. For instance, a release categorized as belonging to *rock* and *electronic* genres, and to *techno*, *house* and *indie rock* styles will have a number of spanned styles equal to 6 (*techno*rock*, *house*rock*, *indie_rock*rock*, *techno*electronic*, *house*electronic*, *indie_rock*electronic*). This information has however been kept since it is consistent with the overall idea of generalist and specialist. Indeed, multiple genre-multiple style spanning releases have the most multidimensional identity, and therefore can be considered hyper-generalists.

{Regressor} Distance between Categories. Nonetheless, not all generalist releases have the same effective level of generalism. While two releases A and B that span the

same number of styles enter the model with the same Grade of Generalism, the true meaning of their generalist identity depends on how truly different the spanned categories are. Accordingly, cognitive distance between styles has been computed. Since it was impossible to contact *Discogs* users and ask them about their perceived similarity between categories, a quantitative method has been employed in order to grasp this information. This method has been used previously (Leung, 2014) and proved its efficacy. First, the relational matrix between releases and styles has been set. For each entry, the matrix reported the release ID and the long-format list of styles ascribed to it. For instance, a 3-style spanning release would occupy three rows, one for each spanned style. From this type of data presentation, the style-by-style matrix has been calculated as the cross-product of the relational matrix. Having set the diagonal to 0, the style-by-style matrix has been used to store the number of times each couple of categories occurred in the overall dataset. For instance, matrix cell $M[2,4]$ contains the number of times styles 2 and 4 occur in the whole dataset. Third, an additional matrix has been constructed, and each row filled in the following way: $M[i,1] \leftarrow$ release ID, $M[i,2]$ to $M[i,T] \leftarrow$ co-occurrence of category couples $(i, i+1)$ to $(n-1, n)$, with $i \in n$. The number of cells filled with co-occurrence value follows the Gauss formula for triangular numbers, $T = [x(x + 1)]/2$. Finally, each release's categorical range has been computed as $[1 - (\sum cat_dist_{i,k,h})/\max(cat_dist)]^4$, where $cat_dist_{i,k,h}$ is the distance between categories k and h spanned by release i , and $\max(cat_dist)$ is the maximum distance between covered by any couple of styles. Power 4 has been used to further differentiate the resulting values and simplify visual comparison between them.

{Regressor} Relational Pluralism. As discussed, Relational Pluralism is determined by multiple partnerships between the focal actor and recording companies. Again, the measure of Relational Pluralism is far from sophisticated. It simply considers each artist's label portfolio size, that is, the number of labels each artist releases (and released) music with.

{Regressor} Multidimensional Interaction Term between Grade of Generalism and Relational Pluralism. As discussed previously, the interaction between Grade of Generalism and Relational Pluralism collects information on the combined effect of categorical and relational dimensions of identity, and it is expected to affect releases'

performance. In particular, more and more complex identity multidimensionality is expected to penalize release's performance via confusion created in audience members' minds. In order to account for this interaction, the simple multiplication between the two (mean-centered) variables has been introduced in the model.

{Dependent Variable} Preliminary Overview. At early stage of this study, two dependent variables were explicitly considered. Both of them collected information about releases' performance on the market, and derived from the combination of four interrelated figures: 1) the number of users that declared to own the release, 2) the number of users that expressed their intention to buy the release, 3) a rating score, and 4) the number of users that submitted the rating. These figures are user-contributed and reported in the "market place statistics" table of each release's Discogs profile. Together, they informed the construction of two dependent variables⁷, one focused on rating scores (artistic performance) and the other collecting sale volumes (commercial performance). Regressions have been run by considering both variables separately, and results were almost identical. Similarity between regressors' coefficients was probably caused by the fact that rating scores and sale volumes are assigned by the same group of users. Since Discogs users are probably professionals in the field, yet this information cannot be validated at this stage of research, I opted for commercial performance because it collects behavioral information that can be disentangled from users' features.

{Dependent Variable} Commercial performance. The dependent variable is the commercial performance of each release on the market. It has been derived from the number of users that own or would like to own the release – as declared through their

⁷ However, it is worth stressing the first limitation of these data. Unfortunately, it was impossible, at this stage of research, to access data about temporality of release voting, buying, wishing, and tagging. This results in two main issues. First, releases are not categorized at the time they appeared on the market. This means, in particular, that categories associated to them might have been used retrospectively. However, since electronic music market "exploded" during the last two decades, and given Discogs' birth in 2000, this problem might be partially mitigated. Further refinement and temporality information would be however welcome. Second, gathered performance information is cumulative; that is, it is impossible to set temporal windows to follow release performance over time. This is particularly crucial with very old, seminal, and today-acclaimed releases, and with brand-new possible taste-maker ones. Release age would surely assign different weights to more and less remote releases. Again, however, due to the youngness of the genre, this problem might be partially reduced. Yet it remains one of the most salient issues to address in following research.

Discogs' user profile. In fact, each user has a dedicated form on his or her profile to fill with the discography they own, their wishing list, and other contributions. Crush-test models have been run over the number of owned and wished releases independently. Results were highly close to the combination of owned and wished figures, but the overall power of the models was lower. However, the decision to combine owned and wished figures is not only statistically significant. In fact, it includes both the actual and approximating (or at least potential) market share of releases, and therefore hides information about any buzz surrounding the release. Therefore, the sum of "owned" and "wished" figures has been chosen as dependent variable. Operationally, $perf_COMM_i = N_OWNED_i + N_WANT_i$, where i is the focal release.

{Control Variables}. Eight control variables have been included in order to avoid a number of statistical biases. *Label Betweenness* accounts for the relative position of the releasing label within Berlin-anchored EDM network. According to previous studies, (Burt, 2004; Cattani et al., 2008; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008; Zhou et al., 2009), the importance of actors within their network largely affect actors' performance. *Label Size* controls for production volumes of each recording company, and is a common control variable in most organization studies. It has been operationalized as the sum of releases each label published over time. Any release's performance could indeed depend, to a certain degree, on the amount of activity of the releasing label. *Major vs. Indie Label* is a binary variable aimed at distinguishing different types of labels. Extremely central labels are indeed likely to be closer to regular companies, with copious staff, important revenues, and strong orientation toward profits. On the contrary, independent labels are often small organizations, sometimes not even legally registered as companies, with few collaborators and low revenues. Since it was not possible to divide labels into two groups on a qualitative basis, I computed this control variable by coding with "major" those labels having a centrality betweenness score higher than 133.30 (3rd quantile threshold), and with "indie" the remaining ones. This measure partially overlaps with Label Betweenness control variable, but is structured as a dummy variable rather than a continuous one. Finally, four additional variables have been included as factorized controls. *Career Length* controls for those artists that have been active on EDM scene since a very long time. It is computed as dummy variable separating artists that have

been active for maximum 22 years (3rd quartile) and those that have longer career lengths. This dummy variable enters only those models run over the full sample. *Release Year* divides releases into 45 subsets (one for each year between 1961 and 2007), and is aimed at removing the influence of year-specific features from main regressors' effect. *Release Country* works in a similar way, avoiding country-specific biases. *Release Main Style* (the style that appeared first in the list of assigned categories) has been added in order to extract the inevitable differences between styles having larger and smaller market niche. Finally, *Artist's Career Begin* controls for the number of years the artists has been on the scene, which can influence regressors' role since more established artists benefit from long-range careers. Each control variable significantly contributed to increase models' explanatory power (R^2).

3.4. Regression Models

In order to reach strong and consistent results, nine models have been developed to test hypotheses and the robustness of results. Model 1 considers only control variables. Models 2 and Model 3 analyze the impact of category-related variables on performance. In particular, Model 2 tests Hypothesis 1 uniquely, while Model 3 tests Hypotheses 1 and 2. Model 4 focuses on the role of Relational Pluralism, and tests Hypothesis 3 individually. Model 5 tests Hypotheses 1 to 3, and Model 6 adds the multidimensional interaction term as well. Finally, Models 7 to 9 refine Model 6 by testing the whole set of hypotheses on the three sub-samples respectively. These models do not consider the Career Length dummy variable, and are aimed at eliciting the moderation effect of career length and reputational prominence on the multidimensional interaction term.

Table 4 shows the mathematical structure of the complete model (Model 6), while Table 5 presents the composition of each model. Some control variables enter the regression models as dummies with a multitude of levels; for readability purposes, regression output tables just report their presence (marked with Yes).

All models are log-linear. The dependent variable in each model has been logged in order to correct skewed distribution. Original distribution followed a quasi-Poisson frequency distribution, as typical of real-world data. Regression models specifically

developed to cope with non-normal distribution (namely, generalized linear models and Poisson-specific models) have been compared to pure linear model; however, resulting coefficients were similar – and often identical – to the log-linear model. Interpretation of results from log-linear regression follows the standard rule: a $+\Delta 1$ change in θ_a coefficient results in an $+\Delta e^{\theta_a}$ change in the dependent variable.

TABLE 4. MAIN EMPIRICAL MODEL (MODEL 5)

Dependent Variable	Regressors	Type of Variable
$\log(\text{performance}) =$	$\alpha + \theta_1(\text{grade of generalism}) + \theta_2(\text{grade of generalism})^2 + \theta_3(\text{distance between categories}) +$	Category-related
	$B_4(\text{relational pluralism}) + \theta_5(\text{relational pluralism})^2 +$	Affiliation-related
	$B_6(\text{grade of generalism} \times \text{relational pluralism})$	Multidimensionality
	$B_7(\text{label betweenness}) + \theta_8(\text{label size}) +$	Control
	$B_9(\text{career length}) + B_{10}(\text{major vs. indie}) +$	
	$B_{11}(\text{artistic career begin}) + \theta_{12}(\text{release year}) +$ $B_{13}(\text{release main style}) + \theta_{14}(\text{release country})$	

TABLE 5. LINEAR REGRESSION MODELS' STRUCTURE

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9
<i>Sample</i>									
Full sample (N=26494)	•	•	•	•	•	•			
Cumulative 1 st Sub-Sample (N=7541)							•		
Cumulative 2 nd Sub-Sample (N=13662)								•	
Cumulative 3 rd Sub-Sample (N=20997)									•
<i>Regressors</i>									
Grade of Generalism		•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Grade of Generalism ²		•	•		•	•	•	•	•
Distance between Categories			•		•	•	•	•	•
Relational Pluralism				•	•	•	•	•	•
Relational Pluralism ²				•	•	•	•	•	•
Multidimensional Interaction Term						•	•	•	•
<i>Control Variables</i>									
Label Betweenness	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Label Size	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Career Length (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•			
Major/Indie Label (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Artistic Career Begin (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Release Year (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Release Country (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
Release Main Style (Dummy)	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•

6. Results

The following tables and images describe the outcome of quantitative analysis.

Table 6 shows descriptive statistics and Table 7 the Pearson correlation matrix among variables.

TABLE 6. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (N=26494)

	Mean	Min	Max	SD	Skew	Kurtosis
1. Commercial Performance	4.606	0	8.537	1.127	-0.19	0.137
2. Grade of Generalism	0.059	0.028	0.556	0.042	3.694	23.296
3. Distance between Categories	0.987	0.288	1	0.027	-6.241	74.744
4. Relational Pluralism	23.012	1	201	33.09	3.744	15.98
5. Multidimensional Interaction	0.152	-11.765	67.833	2.096	13.295	272.118
6. Label Size	98.709	1	1051	202.835	3.54	12.62
7. Label Betweenness	84.1	0	296.771	63.88	0.059	-0.80

TABLE 7. PEARSON CORRELATION MATRIX (N=26494)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Commercial Performance	1					
2. Grade of Generalism	0.025	1				
3. Distance between Categories	-0.054	-0.673	1			
4. Relational Pluralism	-0.040	0.109	-0.042	1		
5. Multidimensional Interaction	-0.013	0.258	-0.237	0.247	1	
6. Label Size	0.057	0.133	-0.09	0.498	0.152	1
7. Label Betweenness	0.118	0.055	-0.103	0.173	0.024	0.466

Table 8 and Table 9 report regressions' output. Table 8 shows the results of Models 1 to 5. These regressions mainly work as robustness checks and will be discussed in the following paragraph. Table 9 displays the outcome of the remaining four regressions, which independently and jointly test Hypothesis 4 and 5. All relevant coefficients are significant at low p-values ($0.000 < p < 0.01$), therefore allowing for hypotheses confirmation.

TABLE 8. REGRESSION TABLE #1

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	Control Variables	Categorical Effect	Cognitive Distance	Relational Effect	Complete Model
<i>Regressors</i>					
Grade of Generalism		0.119*** (0.009)	0.067*** (0.011)		0.071*** (0.011)
Grade of Generalism ²		-0.079*** (0.008)	-0.084*** (0.008)		-0.085*** (0.008)
Distance b/Categories			-0.074*** (0.008)		-0.073*** (0.008)
Relational Pluralism				0.096*** (0.020)	0.103*** (0.020)
Relational Pluralism ²				-0.163*** (0.019)	-0.172*** (0.019)
<i>Control Variables</i>					
(Intercept)	-0.369 (0.381)	-0.329 (0.380)	-0.295 (0.379)	-0.398 (0.381)	-0.326 (0.379)
Label Size	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.016* (0.008)	-0.017* (0.008)	0.013 (0.008)	0.007 (0.008)
Label Betweenness	0.121*** (0.008)	0.120*** (0.008)	0.118*** (0.008)	0.116*** (0.008)	0.113*** (0.008)
Career Length (D, ≤ 22)	-0.276*** (0.028)	-0.278*** (0.028)	-0.275*** (0.028)	-0.316*** (0.029)	-0.316*** (0.029)
Major/Indie Label (D)	0.004 (0.019)	0.005 (0.019)	0.004 (0.019)	-0.005 (0.019)	-0.006 (0.019)
Artist Begin Year (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Year (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Main Style (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Country (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R ²	0.226	0.231	0.233	0.230	0.237
Residual SE	0.880	0.877	0.876	0.878	0.873
F-statistics	24.103***	24.636***	24.861***	24.445***	25.246***
N	26494	26494	26494	26494	26494

Heteroskedasticity-robust Standar Errors in parentheses

Signif. codes: ***p<0.000, **p<0.001, *p<0.01

TABLE 9. REGRESSION TABLE #2

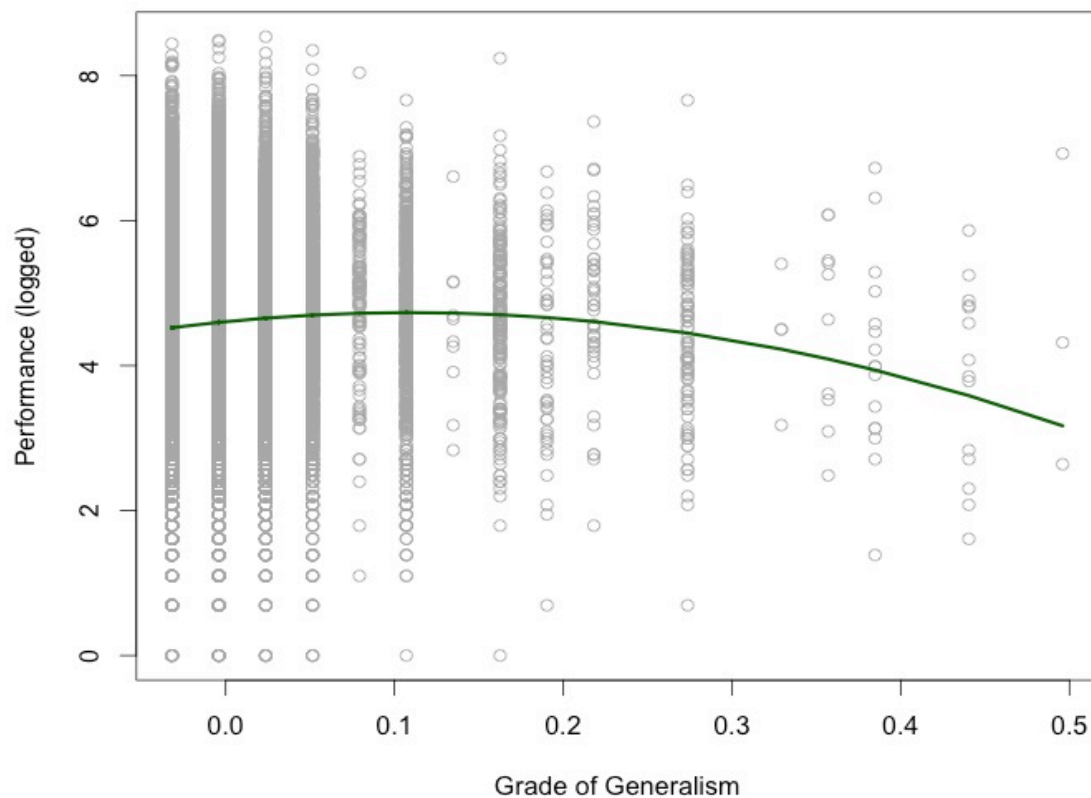
	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 6
	Multi_ID (Career ≤ 11)	Multi_ID (Career ≤ 16)	Multi_ID (Career ≤ 22)	Multi_ID (Full Sample)
<i>Regressors</i>				
Grade of Generalism	-0.036 (0.046)	0.044* (0.020)	0.065*** (0.013)	0.071*** (0.011)
Grade of Generalism ²	-0.076*** (0.015)	-0.090*** (0.012)	-0.081*** (0.010)	-0.087*** (0.009)
Distance b/Categories	-0.078*** (0.016)	-0.052*** (0.014)	-0.065*** (0.011)	-0.072*** (0.008)
Relational Pluralism	0.007 (0.032)	0.003 (0.019)	0.084*** (0.016)	0.105*** (0.020)
Relational Pluralism ²	-0.016 (0.030)	-0.021 (0.018)	-0.085*** (0.015)	-0.176*** (0.019)
Multidimensional Interaction	-0.096* (0.044)	-0.064*** (0.015)	-0.017* (0.008)	0.009 (0.006)
<i>Control Variables</i>				
(Intercept)	-1.592 (1.054)	-1.570 (0.221)	-0.136 (0.182)	-0.333 (0.379)
Label Betweenness	0.152*** (0.015)	0.138*** (0.011)	0.128*** (0.009)	0.113*** (0.008)
Label Size	0.019 (0.014)	0.008 (0.011)	0.015 (0.009)	0.007 (0.008)
Major/Indie Label (D)	-0.022 (0.038)	0.016 (0.028)	-0.030 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.019)
Artist Begin Year (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Year (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Main Style (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Release Country (D)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Adjusted R ²	0.222	0.226	0.245	0.237
Residual SE	0.882	0.880	0.869	0.873
F-statistics	10.875***	16.730***	25.127***	25.179***
N	7541	13662	20997	26494

Heteroskedasticity-robust Standar Errors in parentheses

Signif. codes: ***p<0.000, **p<0.001, *p<0.01

Hypothesis 1 is supported. Releases with Grade of Generalism up to a certain point benefit from moderate category spanning, while the relationship between Grade of Generalism and release performance turns negative after this threshold. As displayed in Figure 1, threshold is around 0.12. This finding confirms the intuition that actors and products benefit from some degree of category spanning in creative industries, since some level of experimentation is awarded as creative effort. However, an excessive number of spanned categories may be interpreted as trait of dilettante, and therefore be detrimental for performance.

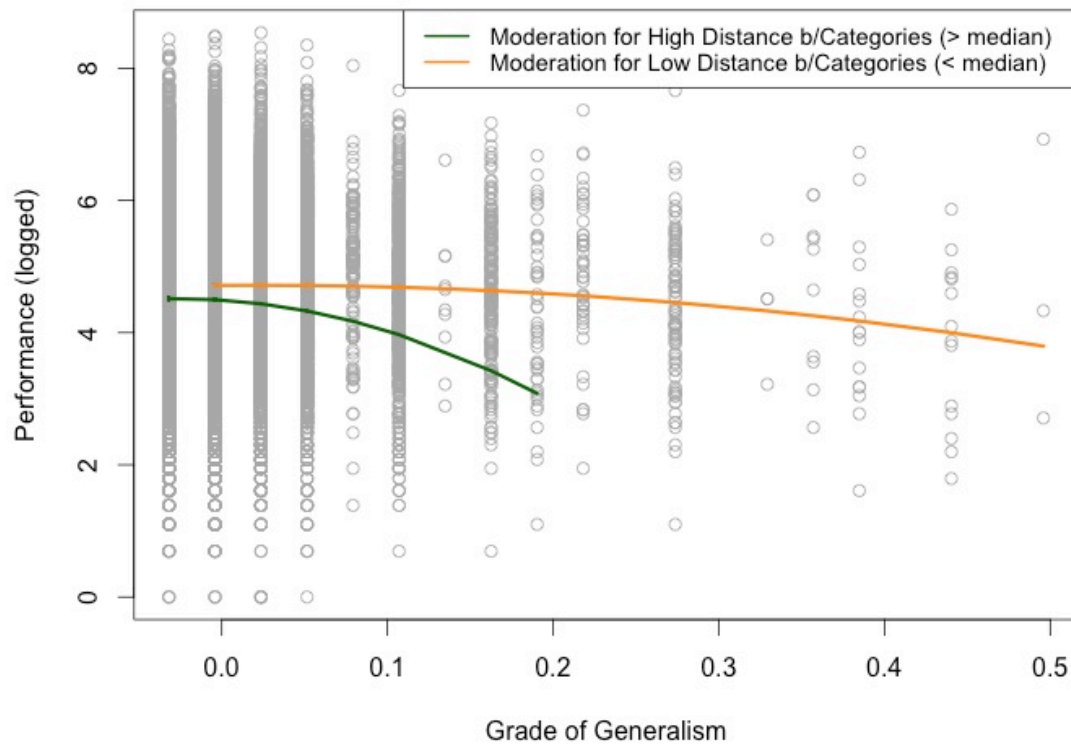
FIGURE 1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GRADE OF GENERALISM AND PERFORMANCE



Hypothesis 2 is supported as well. The higher the cognitive distance between categories, the lower the category-spanning release performance. In particular, high cognitive distance between spanned styles causes releases' performance to dramatically fall, even for a relatively small number of spanned styles. On the contrary, releases that span cognitively close styles are able to increase their Grade of Generalism without

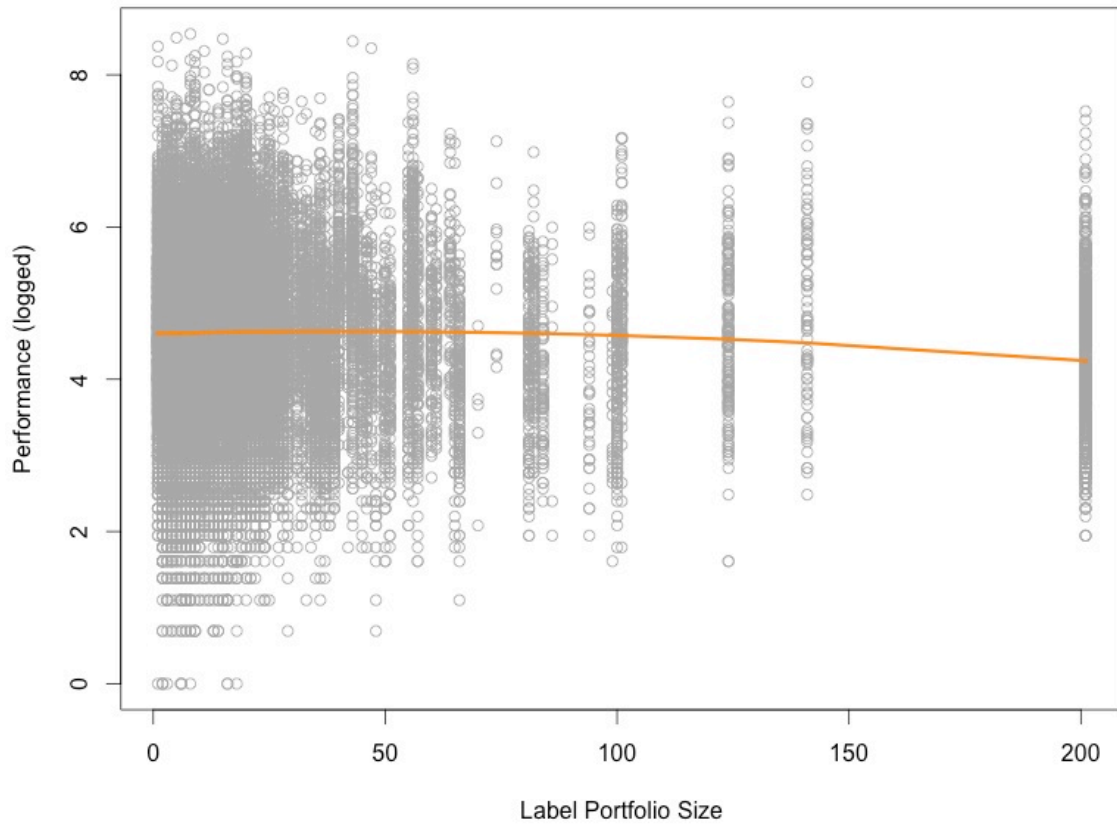
facing additional penalties. As depicted in Figure 2, releases that span cognitively close styles (yellow line) have a category-spanning range much higher than those that combine styles with high cognitive distance. Moreover, give any certain Grade of Generalism, high distance between spanned styles strongly lowers the Performance-Grade of Generalism slope.

FIGURE 2. MODERATION EFFECT OF DISTANCE BETWEEN CATEGORIES



Hypothesis 3 also finds support. Increasing Relational Pluralism supports better release performance till a point (around 40-50 relations to labels) in which two penalties are likely to activate. One the one hand, excessive alliance portfolio size causes redundancy of services and information offered by allied partners, which increases coordination costs and undermines performance. On the other hand, growing number of relations fragments artists' identity, thereby making audience face difficulties in sharp identification. As depicted in Figure 4, however, the shape of this relationship is lightly curvilinear, and the performance difference between the two extremities of Relational Pluralism (1 and 200 labels) is definitely small.

FIGURE 3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LABEL PORTFOLIO SIZE AND PERFORMANCE

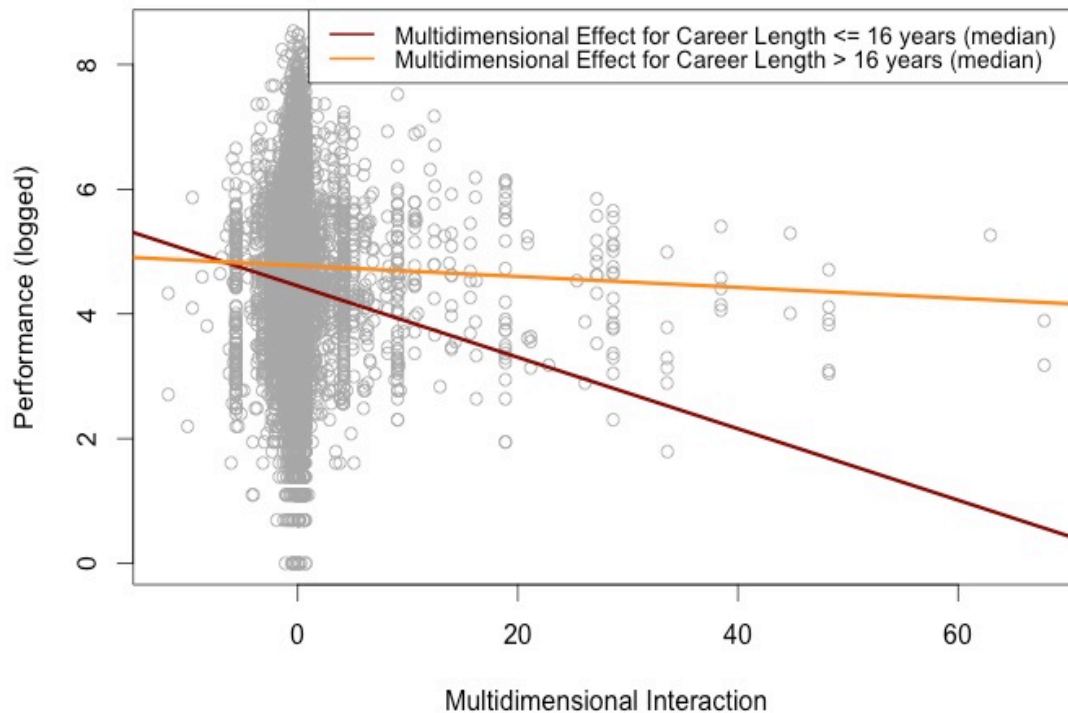


Hypothesis 4 is also supported by jointly considering Models 6 to Model 9. As previously discussed, Model 6 tests the full set of hypotheses on a sub-sample composed by those artists that have careers on the field shorter than 23 years, while Models 7 and 9 cumulatively consider also those artists that have been active since 16 and 22 years, respectively. Finally, Model 6 is run over the full sample. The multidimensional interaction term is statistically significant in Models 7 to 9, and loses significance in Model 6. Moreover, multidimensionality's coefficient progressively increases (from -0.097 to -0.017, $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) as artists with longer career lengths are included in the model – till the point it turns positive (but non significant, 0.009) when the full sample is considered.

Figure 4 shows the effect on performance of the Multidimensional Interaction Term at two different artist's career length (above and below the median value). Figure 4

graphically confirms that artists with shorter career lengths suffer from Identity Multidimensionality more than their colleagues with longer presence on the field.

FIGURE 4. MULTIDIMENSIONAL INTERACTION EFFECT BY CAREER LENGTH



7. Robustness checks

Regressions' output has been checked in several ways. First, since all models are log-linear, the two primary conditions for using Ordinary Least Squares have been checked.

Table 10 presents the result of Multicollinearity Test performed via vif test included in R package {car}. The Variance Inflation Factor's (VIF) square root expresses the difference between each variable's standard error in the model and what this error would be if the variables were completely uncorrelated. With an acceptance threshold of $VIF=10$, multicollinearity is ignorable in this case. It is to note that those regressors that enter the model as degree 2 polynomials have been mean centered in order to avoid collinearity between them and interaction and squared variables.

TABLE 10. MULTICOLLINEARITY TEST

	Variance Inflation Factor (VIF)	Df	$GVIF^{(1/(2*Df))}$
Grade of Generalism (degree 2 polynomial)	1.967	2	1.184
Distance between Categories	1.877	1	1.37
Relational Pluralism (degree 2 polynomial)	1.43	2	1.094
Multidimensional Interaction Term	1.196	1	1.094
Label Betweenness	1.307	1	1.143
Label Size	1.676	1	1.294
<i>Threshold = 10</i>			

Table 11 displays the outcome of the Breusch-Pagan test for homoscedasticity, a central condition for the validity of OLS linear models. Breusch-Pagan test computes a score test of the hypothesis of constant error variance against the alternative that the error variance changes with the level of the response (fitted values). Null hypothesis is H_0 : *constant error variance* (homoskedasticity), and $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ rejects the null hypothesis. For Models 8 and 9 heteroskedasticity has been found, and standard errors have been corrected in regression output tables. Methodologically, robust standard errors have been computed in R using `vcovHC` function in package `{plm}`. `vcovHC` function estimates a heteroskedasticity-robust covariance matrix of parameters according to the White method (White, 1980). `vcovHC` results in a matrix that contains the estimate of the asymptotic covariance matrix of coefficients. This matrix is then used to perform z-test of estimated coefficients (using `coefTest` in package `{lmtest}`).

TABLE 11. HETEROSKEDASTICITY BREUSCH-PAGAN TEST

	Chi-square	Df	p-value	
Model 1	1.860848	1	0.172527	Homoskedasticity
Model 2	0.067791	1	0.794581	Homoskedasticity
Model 3	0.271367	1	0.602416	Homoskedasticity
Model 4	3.209839	1	0.073197	Homoskedasticity
Model 5	0.558920	1	0.454696	Homoskedasticity
Model 6	0.706324	1	0.400667	Homoskedasticity
Model 7	1.207806	1	0.271767	Homoskedasticity
Model 8	4.383517	1	0.036288	Heteroskedasticity
Model 9	5.729107	1	0.016686	Heteroskedasticity

Finally, Models 1 to 5 also function as robustness checks. In fact, Model 1 does not include any regressors, therefore offering a basis for confirming the increase of explanatory power (adjusted R^2) of the overall models as further variables are included. Model 2, Model 3 and Model 4 separately test Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3, respectively; while Model 5 tests the three hypotheses jointly. Separate tests allow for confirmation of the robustness of regressors' coefficients when some other variables are omitted. As emerging from regression output, the sign and significance of coefficients remain the same when additional variables are considered. Overall, these models testify for the robustness of constructed variables, expected relationships, and significance of regressors in increasing the explanatory power of the models.

8. Conclusions

Identity is unanimously considered a crucial element that can affect the functioning and performance of any organizations and social actors. In particular, identity plays a strategic role in the processes of valuation, evaluation and recognition that external audiences continuously undergo in order to make order out of complexity and understand social environments. Previous research has focused on categories and network relationships as tools for interpreting and classifying social actors. In this study I have combined these social tools in order to contribute to the current debate and explore how identity traits in Electronic Dance Music (EDM) influence releases' performance. In addition to considering the two dimensions separately, I have also suggested a multidimensional conception of identity emerging from the combination of categorical and relational dimensions. Several points resulted from the analysis.

First, findings show that the Grade of Generalism of a release – that is, the weighted number of spanned categories – is non-linearly related to its performance. In particular, a moderate Grade of Generalism can be beneficial to release's performance since some degree of experimentation is awarded in creative fields. However, a threshold exists after which excessive category spanning penalizes release's performance. Similarly to Leung (2014), the negative slope of the inverted U-shaped relationship between Grade

of Generalism and performance can be due to external audience's feeling that the observed actor or item is nothing but dilettante. This result is corroborated by the moderating effect exerted by the cognitive distance between spanned categories. In fact, releases that span highly different categories are further penalized – a sign of the confusion created in observers' minds by trying to combine too cognitively distant categorical features.

Second, results show that multiple relationships established with different partners also supports better performance, yet till a point in which two phenomena are likely to occur. According to alliance portfolio perspective, an excessive number of partners can generate resources' redundancy which increases management costs and penalizes performance (Wassmer & Dussauge, 2011). From an identity perspective, however, high Relational Pluralism (Shipilov et al., 2014) can cause a deep fragmentation of the relational dimension of identity, thus making audiences' evaluation and recognition more and more complex.

Moreover, this point is supported by the introduction of the idea of Identity Multidimensionality. When considering categorical and relational features as two interrelated dimensions of the same identity, regression outcomes show how the interaction is significantly and negatively affecting performance. Although far from sophisticated, this result preliminarily confirms the existence of a significant interaction between different identity-shaping dimensions. This also supports the idea that identity should be meaningfully treated as a multidimensional construct, and that external audiences observe and evaluate identities according to multiple dimensions, not just their categorical membership or network partnerships. The connection between multidimensional identity and social evaluation is further telling since empirical analysis has showed how career length progressively moderates penalties from multidimensionality. As expected, reputational prominence is likely to enter the recognition and legitimation game as artists continue their activity for more and more years. Before prominence has been established within the field, however, the audience penalizes those releases whose artists display identity's high multidimensionality. This finding is not totally surprising. Previous research has found that organizational status mitigates the effects on performance of category-spanning practices (Phillips et al.,

2013; Phillips & Zuckerman, 2001; Podolny, 2001). Although status and reputation are not synonyms, they both relate to some degree to social interaction and time lapses: reputation needs long-time exchange to develop, and multiple social ties as well.

Alongside theorists and researchers, also practitioners might be interested in the results of this study – especially professionals in creative settings where experimentation and multiple partnerships are common habits. The acknowledgement that identity is intimately multidimensional, and that external audiences are aware of this multidimensionality, can support more integrated efforts toward balanced mix of category spanning, multiple partnership and overall multidimensionality, especially from an inter-temporal perspective. For instance, while moderate experimentation in categorical terms is particularly rewarding, it also increases identity's overall multidimensionality which, especially during initial years of activity, penalizes audience evaluation and thereby performance on the market. Unfortunately, some degree of experimentation is required in creative settings, and professionals have therefore to carefully consider the right balance between spanning multiple domains on different dimensions and keeping coherent identities.

This study also has a number of limitations – some of them of critical importance. First, the overall research design would strongly benefit from explicitly considering time. It was not possible to access data on temporality at this stage of research, yet additional analysis focused on inter-temporal windows and time series models would increase findings' strength and reliability. Second, a major limit exists when reverse causality is taken into account. In fact, it could be that performance and categorization are not the consequence and the cause, but the other way round. This could happen because more acclaimed releases attract more attention and additional categorical refinement than less acclaimed ones.

Overall results are therefore suggestive, but they need further development both in theoretical and empirical terms in order to find their place in current debate on organizational and social identity.

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