

A New Communication Recipe for Going Global in the Recorded Music Industry: The Case of Anitta's Checkmate Project

Nicole Mallmann, Sangwoo Shin

Woosong University, Daejeon, Korea

Objectives: Numerous attempts have been made to penetrate the global music markets. A successful entry scales substantially up the profit stream otherwise generated, although the chance of success is very slim. It is thereby imperative to implement a well-designed globalization plan. This paper introduces one such case, Anitta's Checkmate project, and illustrates its major strategic constituents and well-coordinated marketing communication campaign.

Methods: The case of Anitta's Checkmate project described in this paper paves the way for going global in the recorded music industry. Our case analysis focuses on deciphering various strategic elements of the Checkmate project and forwards their conceptual underpinnings and practical implications.

Results: The Checkmate project makes Anitta's global debut seamlessly. This project is featured mostly by Anitta's collaboration with a thoughtful selection of internationally renowned artists. Other than this co-branding strategy, Anitta adopts a diverse array of communication tactics that together create both online and offline buzz for her global launch. Lastly, Anitta's never-ending investment in building her own personal brand stretches her successful globalization further to even today.

Conclusions: The case study in this paper showcases a new blend of marketing communication strategies for going global in the recorded music industry, thereby lending keen insights into what should be part of a well-designed globalization plan.

Key Words: Anitta, Checkmate Project, Globalization, Marketing Communication, Recorded Music Industry

Introduction

The recorded music industry has been steadily expanded in every geographical region across the globe. According to IFPI's

Global Music Report 2023, the global recorded music revenues in 2022 reach \$26.2 billion, 67% of which is contributed by streaming services via various digital music channels. Geographically, North America (i.e., USA and Canada) remains the biggest regional market representing slightly more than 40% of the global market. The sheer size of the global music industry has allured many talented local artists to make a global debut. This trend has been fueled further by the recent prevalence of digital music platforms that play a role in lowering entry barriers to the global market. In addition, the US market, thanks to its sizable market share, has been a main target for most globalization attempts made by non-American music artists. A successful penetration of the US market itself guarantees huge

Received: May 29, 2023 Revised: Jul 1, 2023 Accepted: Jul 2, 2023

Corresponding author: Sangwoo Shin

SolBridge International School of Business, Woosong University, 128 Uam-ro, Dong-gu, Daejeon 34613, Korea

Tel: +82-42-630-8547, E-mail: sangwoo.shin@solbridge.ac.kr

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Copyright © 2023 Korean Association for Business Communication.

fame and fortune and can be used as a bridgehead for a further worldwide expansion.

A plethora of successful globalization examples have been witnessed in the history of the music industry. Since the unprecedented success of the Beatles in 1960s, many British musicians have invaded the US market, including Rolling Stones, Queen, Elton John, Adele and many others. Although having their own musical flavor that thrilled American audience, these musicians played music that was not very different from contemporary American music. They therefore entered the US market with little adaptation of their music style. This also was the case for the musicians from other English-speaking countries such as Canada (e.g., Justin Bieber and Celine Dion) and Australia (e.g., Kylie Minogue). In recent years, the international debut of many local artists, thanks to the borderless prevalence of digital music platforms such as YouTube and Spotify, can happen luckily without any clear intention to go global. For instance, “Gangnam Style” by a South Korean singer Psy, though written in Korean and not internationally customized, successfully captured the attention of global audiences with its catchy melody and entertaining dance routine. This song hit more than 4 billion views on YouTube, breaking the previous record of Justin Bieber’s “Baby” and holding its record until Wiz Khalifa’s “See You Again”.

Musicians from the non-English-speaking countries, however, need to modify their original music style to become internationally successful. A composition of English-written songs, often in conjunction with a customized musical arrangement, is a minimal requirement. Two such examples include ABBA from Sweden and Modern Talking from Germany. Sometimes, an extra non-musical eye-catching item would be necessitated to increase the chance of getting through language and cultural barriers. A-ha, a Norwegian synth-pop band, made a number-one hit song in the US, “Take On Me”, with an aid of its billion-viewed animation music video. Los Del Rio, a Spanish duo, introduced an internationally mega-hit song “Macarena” together with its easy-to-follow dance.

Not all globalization attempts, despite the success examples mentioned above, have been fruitful. Much more failures than successes indeed exist. Most of the failure examples simply fade out without being recorded in the chapter of music history book. On the other hand, more successful global debuts in recent years rely on carefully crafted strategies. To name a few, BTS from South Korea, Shakira from Colombia and Daddy Yankee from Puerto Rico. For instance, BTS has utilized a comprehensive brand strategy that thoughtfully curates its image, music and content, leading to formation of a fully resonated and die-hard international fanbase known as ARMY.

Given the heightened competition in global music markets,

both success and failure cases underscore the importance of executing a well-designed marketing communication plan to increase the chance of success. One can learn what to do and what not to do for going global from the existing cases. A blind replication of the previously successful formula, of course, does not guarantee one more success of other artists. However, one can have a good sense of the key success factors, which in turn can be translated into customization and/or reinvention of his or her own globalization strategy. To this end, this paper introduces Anitta’s Checkmate project as a successful globalization case. This case showcases a new blend of marketing communication strategies for going global in the recorded music industry, thereby lending keen insights into what should be part of a well-designed globalization plan. In what follow, we elaborate on Anitta’s Checkmate project and illustrate its strategic details from a marketing communication standpoint.

Case Description

Backgrounds

Anitta, the stage name of Larissa de Macedo Machado, was born in 1993 and grew up in a poverty-stricken town (often called favela) just outside of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. Anitta, albeit living in an extremely poor neighborhood, dreamed of becoming a superstar and did her best in her teens to break into the music industry. In 2009, Anitta’s ascent to stardom truly began. Armed with raw talent and unwavering determination, Anitta uploaded a number of self-recorded videos on YouTube, captivating audiences with her mesmerizing cover song performances. It was through these self-posted videos that Anitta caught the attention of “Furacão 2000”, a prominent producer in the funk genre. This serendipitous encounter became the pivotal moment that propelled Anitta’s musical journey forward. Embracing funk as her main music genre, Anitta achieved unprecedented success in the Brazilian music scene within a remarkably short span of time. Starting with her first single “Eu Vou Ficar” in 2010, Anitta released a series of songs including “Meiga e Abusada”, “Show das Poderosas” and “Bang”, all of which dominated the charts in Brazil. Anitta became a national icon by 2015 and was invited to perform at the opening ceremony of the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

In March 2022, Anitta truly became the top artist in the global music scene as well. Her Spanish single “Envolver” was streamed more than 7 million times in a single day and topped the Spotify’s Global Top 50 chart, making Anitta the first Brazilian artist to do so with a solo song. A month later Anitta released her fifth studio and second multilingual album “Version of Me”, which made a record-breaking history. This album became the first Brazilian one to reach more than 1 billion streams

on Spotify. At the end of the year, Anitta was selected in a list of 2022's Iconic Record Breakers by Guinness World Records together with Adele, Billie English, BTS, Harry Styles and Taylor Swift.

Anitta in 2016 as a national top artist has been upgraded to Anitta in 2022 as a world superstar. What happened to her in between? It is her globalization project entitled "Checkmate" that bridges two Anittas at different time points. The Checkmate project made Anitta's global debut in 2017 seamlessly and served as a stepping-stone to her subsequent international success. More details of the Checkmate project follow in the sequel.

The Checkmate Project

Anitta's dream of becoming an international superstar had been growing more and more. After clinching Melhores do Ano (an annual singing award in Brazil) for a third time in 2016, Anitta revealed her firm intention to go global in an interview by saying "I don't like the road that lay ahead of me". The initial responses to her globalization plan were highly skeptical due mainly to a lack of any promising historical evidence. Only a handful of big musicians from Brazil had ever made an international leap and their cross-border success, if any, were all short-lived. This is partly because Brazil is the only South American country that uses Portuguese, instead of much more widespread Spanish, as a primary spoken language. In addition, Brazil has a domestic music market large enough to discourage its top musicians from taking the risk of going global. Nevertheless, Anitta had prepared things necessary to make her uncrushable dream happen. Anitta mastered English and Spanish, continued to learn French and even Italian, and traveled back-and-forth to broaden and solidify her international network.

It was a fateful day, August 22 in 2017, when a renowned celebrity blogger, Hugo Gloss, sent shockwaves through social media. A mesmerizing 10-second video on Hugo's Instagram profile, spoken in three different languages (Portuguese, English and Spanish), showed Anitta announcing the beginning of her

new project "Checkmate" and highlighting its key feature, that is, launch of a new song along with a music video every month from September. Later in the day, Anitta published the same video on her Instagram profile, further fueling the curiosity of fans and the media. The spoiler video was attention-catching enough to generate more than 2 million views.

In an interview, on the launch day of her project, Anitta said that all actions involving the Checkmate project were strategically thought out, including its name. The word "Checkmate" is originated from chess, meaning the last move that makes the opponent impossible to escape. This word also is commonly understood in different parts of the world, even with distinctions in its spelling and pronunciation. With this name, Anitta would like to deliver the symbolic representation of the different plays and actions she performed to ensure the victory of her globalization project.

In total, the Checkmate project assembles four awe-inspiring song releases, each accompanied by a distinct music video, spanning a four-month period from September 2017 to December 2017. Presented in Table 1 are the details of these four songs. The composition of the project is well-thought-out. The four songs altogether cover three different languages and four different music genres, highlighting Anitta's chameleonic versatility and increasing the chance of reaching out to the global audiences with different cultural backgrounds. A careful coordination of the release order is strategically motivated. Anitta started with the most American song, "Will I see you", and ended with the most Brazilian one, "Vai malandra". This seemingly radical transition is cushioned by two songs in the middle, "Is that for me" and "Downtown". Also noteworthy is Anitta's skillful execution of partnerships with a different set of internationally renowned artists. These collaborative releases garnered impressive results, including millions of views on YouTube and Spotify. In particular, the last two songs, "Downtown" and "Vai malandra", scored the 23rd and 18th positions in Spotify's Top 50 Global Charts, making Anitta the first Brazilian singer to make

Table 1. Details of four songs released through the checkmate project

Title	Release date	Music genre	Language	Collaboration	YouTube views		
					First 24 hours	First week	Total
Will I see you	September 3	Pop	English	Poo bear	1.9 million	9.5 million	52.4 million
Is that for me	October 13	Electronic dance	English	DJ Alesso	2.7 million	14.5 million	85.4 million
Downtown	November 19	Latin pop + reggaeton	Spanish	J Balvin	4.2 million	10.7 million	687.3 million
Vai malandra	December 18	Brazilian funk	Portuguese	Maajor DJ Yuri Martin Mc Zaac Tropkillaz	13.2 million	36.2 million	443.6 million

that achievement. Thanks to the success of the Checkmate project, Anitta could soft-land at the global music stage and leverage it to achieve a much wider and deeper international success in her following career.

Discussion

Strategic Constituents of The Checkmate Project

The Checkmate project has three unique characteristics that together differentiate itself from other extant globalization projects in the music industry. The diagram presented in Figure 1 concisely summarizes its key strategic constituents. Three major ones therein include 1) co-branding, 2) buzz marketing and 3) personal branding, all of which are elaborated further one-by-one in what follows.

Co-Branding

Co-branding, although no universally accepted definition exists, refers to any pairing of two existing brands in a marketing context (Leuthesser, Kohli, & Suri, 2003). Numerous examples of co-branding exist and include, to name a few, 1) Smart car by Mercedes and Swatch, 2) Hard Crocs by Balenciaga and Crocs and 3) Soundtrack for Your Ride by Uber and Spotify. A common form of co-branding in the music industry is the release of a duet song by two established musicians (e.g., “Endless love” by Diana Ross and Lionel Richie).

Co-branding indeed stands as the centerpiece of the Checkmate project with the association of renowned names in the industry, acting as the pivotal factor behind the singer’s skyrocketing international visibility. The partnerships 1) with Poo Bear, an American music producer with substantial brand value in the pop industry, 2) with DJ Alesso, an internationally recognized name in the electronic music scene, and 3) with J Balvin, an influential figure in the Latin music landscape, all lessened the entry barrier of new music genres. Anitta as a brand with lesser recognition aligned herself well with a brand of higher equity and leveraged this association to captivate a diverse set of global audiences and make a resounding impact on her brand’s perception within the domestic music scene. With each collaboration, she harnessed the power of co-branding, masterfully intertwined her essence with that of her partners, and created a harmonious blend that resonates with fans across borders. What sets Anitta apart from other musicians is this exceptional ability to curate synergistic partnerships.

Buzz Marketing

Buzz marketing is a promotional posture driven by word-of-mouth often with an aid of technology, media and creativity (Mohr, 2017). Online platforms, owing to the rapid technology advancement, have emerged as a main vehicle for buzz marketing in the music industry. Anitta also used the realm of social media as a primary battleground for promoting her globaliza-



Figure 1. Strategic Constituents of Anitta’s Checkmate Project. The center image is downloaded from last.fm website. Adapted from Last.fm website (<https://www.last.fm/pt/music/Anitta/Checkmate/+images>). Copyright 2023 by Last.fm.

tion project, with Instagram reigning as her premier platform. As described earlier, Anitta dropped an announcement video on Instagram to arouse curiosity and anticipation about her global debut. Days prior to the launch of the Checkmate project, Anitta tantalized her followers with enigmatic posts. Teasers of the first song intensified the already feverish anticipation among those eagerly awaiting the start of Anitta's visionary project. The sudden announcement, in tandem with mystery surrounding the launch, certainly contributed to online buzz creation.

To create offline buzz as well, Anitta employed a guerrilla marketing strategy defined as the use of atypical and non-dogmatic marketing activities to achieve the greatest possible impact (Nufer, 2013). Anitta placed a pair of chess pieces, a black standing Queen with Anitta's name on it and a white fallen King, in public spaces across major cities in Brazil. This unexpected experience inserted Anitta's Checkmate project into people's daily lives, arousing curiosity and creating a guerrilla marketing impact.

Another example of offline buzz creation is Anitta's collaboration with a renowned Brazilian retail chain C&A. This retail company joined forces with Anitta, playing a pivotal role in the entire "Checkmate" journey. Not only did C&A contribute to the production of the music videos, but the company also designed the iconic costumes worn by Anitta. Capitalizing on the project's momentum, all the outfits featured in the videos were made available for sale across C&A's extensive network of stores.

Personal Branding

Personal branding refers to a strategic process of creating, positioning, and maintaining a positive impression of oneself with an intention to signal a certain promise to the target audience through a differentiated narrative and imagery (Gorbatov, Khapova, & Lysova, 2018). The Checkmate project is well-aligned with this definition. The release of four differently styled songs is not intended to merely increase the chance of success for at least one song. The main objective is to collectively form a brand identity of Anitta as an artist with chameleonic versatility. A masterful execution of various communication tactics also contributed the self-promotion of who Anitta is to both domestic and global audiences. At the end of the Checkmate project, it was Anitta herself, not her individual songs, that caught most spotlight.

Anitta recognized the importance of personal branding from her early career, epitomized by an anecdote about how she became "Anitta". Inspired by a character in the enthralling TV mini-series "Presença de Anita" aired in 2001, Anitta strategically altered her artistic name to build a multi-faceted image encompassing romantic, sensual, intelligent, and crazy

all at once. Even after the success of the Checkmate project that enables Anitta to realize what her name signifies, she has made a never-ending investment in enhancing her personal brand. Anitta has continued to collaborate with an endless list of top artists (e.g., Madonna, Snoop Dogg, and Cardi B), amplifying her brand image established by the Checkmate project. This lifetime effort pays off. Anitta's achievements have extended to other industries. In addition to being a top musician, Anitta is now a successful businesswoman, actress and spokesperson for major international companies like Adidas, Samsung, Burger King and so on.

Practical Implications

The case of Anitta's Checkmate project forwards three major practical implications. First, co-branding can serve as a main entry strategy for global music markets. Although co-branding has been used mostly between two established products with a power balance, the co-branding example herein illustrates that a brand with lesser recognition (i.e., Anitta) can forge multiple partnerships with more internationally renowned brands to ease off the entry barriers. From an implementation standpoint, Anitta's well-designed co-branding strategy shows 1) how to maximize its synergetic benefits without diluting either party's brand image and 2) how to use it as a main vehicle for innovation (Bouten, Snelders, & Hultink, 2011). Second, the skillful implementation of various communication tactics is highly recommended to create both online and offline buzz. The Checkmate project shows not only a few of such examples but how to execute them in a coordinated way. This underscores the role of integrated marketing communication (Schultz & Barnes, 1999) in launching a globalization campaign in the music industry. Lastly, the focus of a globalization plan should be placed more on the artist rather than on his or her music. Although what should be more focused can be contextually dependent, the globalization plan with an emphasis of the artist, if successful, is more likely to guarantee a long-lasting and sustainable success. The Checkmate project clearly indicates how a successful globalization plan based on personal branding leads to a subsequent much bigger success.

Conclusion

Only a few portions of globalization attempts have been successful in the recorded music industry. The potentially monstrous profits, despite the narrow chance of success, lend impetus to the design and implementation of a well-thought-out globalization plan. This paper introduces the case of Anitta's Checkmate project as a successful globalization example and

illustrates its new recipe of marketing communication strategies for entering the global music markets, that is, a blend of co-branding, buzz marketing and personal branding. Although its mere replication does not guarantee a successful international debut of other artists, one can benchmark this new recipe to invent and/or customize their own globalization plan.

References

- Bouten, L. M., Snelders, D., & Hultink, E. J. (2011). The impact of fit measures on the consumer evaluation of new co-branded products. *Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 28(4), 455-469.
- Gorbatov, S., Khapova, S. N., & Lysova, E. I. (2018). Personal branding: Interdisciplinary systematic review and research agenda. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, Article 2238. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02238>.
- Leuthesser, L., Kohli, C., & Suri, R. (2003). 2 + 2 = 5? A framework for using co-branding to leverage a brand. *Journal of Brand Management*, 11(1), 35-47.
- Mohr, I. (2017). Managing buzz marketing in the digital age. *Journal of Marketing Development and Competitiveness*, 11(2), 10-16.
- Nufer, G. (2013). Guerrilla marketing: Innovative or parasitic marketing? *Modern Economy*, 4(9), 1-6.
- Schultz, D. E., & Barnes, B. E. (1999). *Strategic brand communication campaigns* (5th ed.). Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Business.