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Brand Repositioning and Diversity: A Case Study of Lucky Dube

Michael Mncedisi Willie 

 Council for Medical Schemes, Policy Research and Monitoring, Pretoria, South Africa

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Corresponding author.

 m.willie@medicalschemes.co.za

ABSTRACT	
Keywords: lucky dube; brand repositioning; reggae; cultural branding; global appeal; authenticity; marketability branding theories. Conflict of Interest Statement: The author(s) declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. Copyright © 2025 ABIM. All rights reserved.	Purpose: This study examines Lucky Dube’s brand repositioning from Mbaqanga to reggae, highlighting how it expanded his global reach while preserving his African identity. Research Design and Methodology: A qualitative approach, including a literature review and case studies, applies branding theories such as cultural branding and Aaker’s Brand Equity Model to assess Dube’s market expansion. Findings and Discussion: Key factors in Dube’s success include authenticity, audience engagement, and strategic communication, demonstrating how artists can broaden their appeal while maintaining cultural identity. Implications: The study offers branding insights applicable across industries, emphasizing authenticity, targeted engagement, and strategic communication to strengthen brand equity.

Introduction

Entities and individuals undertake brand repositioning as a strategic approach to augment their competitive edge, seize emerging market segments, and redefine their brand identity (Aaker, 1996). This process involves systematically altering multiple elements of a brand, including its fundamental identity, communication strategies, and overall value proposition, to ensure conformity with changing consumer preferences and current market trends. In the entertainment sector, especially the music industry, artists frequently realign brands to sustain relevance in evolving cultural and commercial environments. This strategic shift enables musicians to expand their audience, adapt to new genres, and enhance their market position (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

The music business is defined by rapid development, technological innovations, shifting audience demographics, and significant worldwide cross-cultural interactions (Negus, 1999). Artists often rebrand by diversifying their musical genres, changing their public images, or using new thematic ideas to remain relevant and impactful. These repositioning strategies enable artists to remain commercially feasible and to inspire creative innovation (Holt, 2004) concurrently. Initially recognized in niche genres, musicians sometimes venture into more general musical territory to improve their commercial viability and worldwide appeal. Renowned South African reggae artist Lucky Dube shows brand repositioning within the music business. Initially working in the mbaqanga genre, he switched to reggae in the middle of the 1980s, extending his audience outside of South Africa to include foreign markets (Onyebadi, 2018; Adekola, 2021). Mbaqanga, a genre rooted in Southern Africa and predominantly

performed in Zulu, traditionally resonated with local audiences. However, as Lucky Dube expressed, his aspiration was for his music and its message to transcend South African borders and reach a global audience (RastaLivewire, 2007).

Dube's artistic identity was profoundly changed by his inclusion of musical works emphasizing social justice, anti-apartheid activity, and pan-African solidarity, appealing to a range of listeners across national and cultural borders (Adekola, 2021). This deliberate change strengthened his reputation in reggae history and enhanced music's role as a vehicle for political debate (Rasta Livewire, 2007; Onyebadi, 2018; Adekola, 2021). Lucky Dube's brand repositioning illustrates how musicians can utilize cultural and thematic transformations to attain artistic and commercial success. His ability to integrate local and global influences enabled him to develop a distinctive identity that resonated across various cultural contexts. This study highlights the significance of brand repositioning as a dynamic strategy for maintaining relevance in competitive sectors, especially music, where innovation and adaptability are crucial for success (Hesmondhalgh, 2007; Bocheer & Kempegowda, 2019).

This study primarily seeks to understand how Lucky Dube's shift from Mbaqanga to reggae helped him gain international recognition and enhance his market appeal. It explores the evolution of his musical style, the socio-political themes he embedded in his work, and how these changes broadened the diversity of his audience. Utilizing branding theories, specifically Aaker's Brand Equity Model (Aaker, 1996) and Holt's Cultural Branding Framework (Holt, 2004), this study aims to elucidate how Dube's brand repositioning strategy has enhanced his artistic authenticity and facilitated successful engagement with international markets. Moreover, the study seeks to elucidate essential insights regarding implementing brand repositioning within the music industry, which may apply to other artistic and commercial domains.

Literature Review

Lucky Dube's Brand Evolution

After beginning his career as a traditional mbaqanga artist, Lucky Dube transitioned to reggae in the mid-1980s. This marked a significant brand repositioning strategy that allowed him to expand his audience beyond South Africa and into the rest of the world. This strategic shift was more than just a change in genre; it was a deliberate realignment of Dube's artistic identity to appeal to audiences worldwide while maintaining cultural authenticity. As a result of Dube's decision to embrace reggae, a genre well-known for its socio-political messages, he connected with a wide range of listeners interested in topics such as resistance, unity, and justice (Onyebadi, 2018).

Musical Shift

Reggae was the primary musical genre that Dube chose to work with. He utilized this genre's rhythmic and melodic framework to convey concepts of self-empowerment and resiliency to his audience. As a result of this shift, he became associated with prominent reggae artists on a national and international scale, placing him within the context of a larger cultural movement advocating for social change.

Lyrical Content

Because his music addressed essential topics like apartheid, African unity, and social justice, he became more than just a musician; he became a voice for marginalized communities (Kraemer & Stern, 2022). Incorporating political and human rights themes into his lyrics, Dube deepened his bond with audiences who saw reggae as a vehicle for protest and liberation (Holt, 2004; Duhoe, 2020).

Visual Identity

Lucky Dube intentionally incorporated reggae aesthetics into the reconfiguration of his brand identity. He incorporated distinctive elements such as dreadlocks and Rastafarian motifs to forge a visually striking and culturally significant persona (Çeşan & İncü, 2023). To preserve the authenticity of his brand while effectively engaging audiences domestically and globally, he employed a systematic strategy that meticulously fused reggae elements with his African heritage (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). This careful adjustment enabled Dube to reaffirm his position as a distinguished international reggae artist

while preserving the cultural and social narratives essential to his earlier career. This case exemplifies the effectiveness of strategic brand repositioning in the music industry, showcasing how musicians can modify their image, sound, and messaging to align with audiences' evolving preferences and maintain their influence over time (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Bocheer & Kempegowda, 2019).

Diversity and Global Market Appeal

The repositioning of Lucky Dube's brand was a significant factor in diversifying his audience, making it possible for his music to transcend racial, cultural, and national boundaries. To solidify his position as one of the most well-known African reggae artists, he strategically aligned his artistic identity with the global appeal of reggae. His musical style and the universal messages incorporated into his productions were the foundation of his ability to connect with a wide range of audiences. Dube successfully leveraged key branding elements through his repositioning, which increased his accessibility and relevance across a variety of specific demographics.

Cross-Cultural Symbolism

Dube enabled listeners from diverse backgrounds to connect with his music by incorporating universal themes of resistance, hope, and social justice. His songs addressed issues beyond South Africa's apartheid context, resonating with global human rights movements by examining struggles against oppression and the pursuit of equality (Holt, 2004; Duhoe, 2020).

Linguistic Accessibility

Dube primarily utilized the English language in his musical works, in contrast to numerous South African artists who predominantly performed in their native languages. By employing this linguistic choice, he effectively expanded his audience, facilitating the distribution of his music to listeners in Africa, Europe, and the Americas. As English serves as a global lingua franca, he effectively conveyed impactful messages to a broader audience.

International Collaborations

His influence was expanded due to Dube's participation in international music festivals and his collaborations with artists from other countries. Through his performances on international stages, he strengthened his presence in the global reggae scene, placing him in the same category as legendary reggae musicians. According to Hesmondhalgh (2007), his ability to adapt to different cultural environments while still maintaining his African identity significantly impacted his popularity worldwide. By repositioning himself through these strategies, Lucky Dube was able to solidify his legacy as a global reggae icon and demonstrate how artists can cultivate diversity in their audience through strategic brand alignment. According to Kotler and Keller (2016), this situation highlights the significance of cultural adaptability and audience-centered branding in achieving international recognition in the music industry.

Brand Longevity - The Enduring Legacy of Lucky Dube

The longevity of the Lucky Dube brand provides a compelling illustration of how successful brand repositioning can extend beyond an artist's lifetime, thereby enabling continued relevance and influence. Despite the untimely passing of Dube in 2007, his music continues to enjoy widespread popularity, particularly in countries outside of South Africa. His legacy will continue to live on because of his ability to engage a wide range of audiences through genuine messaging and universal themes. Reggae has deep cultural roots in regions like the United States of America, Europe, and parts of the Caribbean, and its music is appreciated in these culturally significant areas. Not only has the Dube brand been able to maintain its current position in the international market, but it has also expanded its presence. This enduring popularity highlights the significance of brand equity in establishing long-term relevance and maintaining a loyal following, even after the original creator of the brand is no longer present (Aaker, 1996). It is particularly crucial to consider this when the individual who initially established the brand is absent. The enduring relevance of Dube's music can be ascribed to several pivotal factors intrinsic to his brand repositioning strategy. These factors comprise various attributes.

He effectively positioned himself within a genre celebrated for its themes of resistance, hope, and social justice, which remain relevant to global social movements (Gallo Music Group, 2007; Holt, 2004). He achieved this by situating himself within this genre. He accomplished this upon transitioning to reggae.

Dube's music has maintained its relevance over the years, which can be attributed to several essential factors in his brand repositioning strategy. By transitioning to reggae, he established himself within a genre well-known for its themes of resistance, hope, and social justice values that remain relevant to worldwide social movements (Holt, 2004). Furthermore, by consistently adhering to these themes and utilizing English lyrics, Dube ensured global accessibility for his audience, thereby enhancing the reach and longevity of his brand. Kapferer (2012) contends that cultural branding is a crucial element in creating a brand that is both sustainable and adaptable to evolving market conditions. This is demonstrated by the ongoing celebration of his music and its integration into various cultural contexts (Gallo Music Group, 2007). The Dube brand has exhibited cultural resilience akin to global brands through a deep connection with its audience. This has allowed the brand to maintain its prior influence over time. Dube's legacy illustrates the capacity of an artist or brand to maintain relevance through strategic repositioning and the provision of consistent value. This should be considered within the broader context of brand management. His passing does not alter the reality that his brand remains a symbol of resilience and cultural unity.

An example demonstrated here is how long a robust and authentic brand identity can be maintained. Kotler and Keller (2016) suggest that effective brand repositioning can establish enduring connections with audiences, extending beyond current market trends and the personal lives of the individuals behind the brand. Businesses and artists need to consider the enduring relevance of their work.

Implications for Brand Repositioning

Lucky Dube's success offers valuable insights into strategies for repositioning brands, which can be applied in various contexts, including artistic and business environments. The fact that he could seamlessly transition to reggae while successfully expanding his fan base and preserving his authenticity is an example of principles applicable across industries. His career trajectory shows that effective brand repositioning requires a meticulous equilibrium between strategic adaptation and maintaining core brand values (Holt, 2004; Bocheer & Kempegowda, 2019). This is evidenced by the fact that the brand must maintain its core values.

Authenticity Matters

There is a link between the audience's increased credibility and trust and fundamental transformation. Dube's switch to reggae was not just a business move but also an indication of his alignment with the genre's prevailing social and political themes. Kraemer and Stern (2022) and Duhoe (2020) both assert that he dealt with apartheid, unity, and human rights issues genuinely, contributing to his credibility and long-term success. Similarly, in corporate branding, repositioning initiatives must be based on authentic values and a consistent brand identity to prevent coming across as opportunistic or dishonest (Aaker, 1996).

Targeting Niche and Mass Markets

Dube struck a balance between general accessibility and specialized appeal. By adding universal themes and singing in English, he made reggae, a niche genre with strong cultural roots, relatable to audiences worldwide. This strategy is similar to business tactics in which companies target a particular market niche while maintaining a broad appeal to consumers. Businesses that successfully carve out a niche while still being relevant to the mass market frequently gain long-term competitive advantages (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Consistent Messaging

Maintaining brand equity requires balancing audience expectations with brand values. Since starting his career, Dube has consistently communicated themes of justice, solidarity, and resistance,

strengthening his brand identity. According to Hesmondhalgh (2007), brands can enhance audience relationships and brand loyalty by upholding a consistent narrative and coordinating their messaging with their values. This pertains to commerce and music. Dube's brand repositioning underscores the significance of authenticity, market positioning, and coherent messaging for global recognition (Bocheer & Kempegowda, 2019). His accomplishments serve as a paradigm for enterprises and creatives aiming to rejuvenate their brand identities while preserving integrity and audience engagement. These principles can assist companies in achieving a competitive advantage and ensuring brand sustainability (Kapferer, 2012).

Research Design and Methodology

This qualitative research project aimed to analyze Lucky Dube's repositioning and branding strategies using a case study methodology. The preliminary phase of the research involved scrutinizing the documents. Secondary sources, including interviews with media professionals, biographies, articles, and critiques of Dube's musical career, constituted the foundation of the investigation. This anthology offered a historical framework for his career, elucidating the transformation of his reputation from Mbaqanga to reggae. Analyzing critical moments in his career, such as the release of his reggae albums and collaborations with global artists, illuminated the development of his sound and reputation. This comprehensive brand analysis employed Aaker's (1996) Brand Equity Model and Holt's (2004) Cultural Branding Theory. These models aimed to analyze the impact of Dube's rebranding on his listeners' perceptions of his music, its cultural relevance, and the authenticity of his message.

This study examines how strategic brand transformation can enhance an artist's global reach by utilizing branding and repositioning theories, including Aaker's Brand Equity Model and the concept of cultural branding. Aaker's Brand Equity Model emphasizes the significance of brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and brand loyalty to enhance a brand's market position (Aaker, 1996). According to Holt (2004), cultural branding focuses on how companies can emotionally connect with their customers through cultural narratives. The music industry has widely used Aaker's Brand Equity Model to analyze audience engagement, artist repositioning, and brand evolution, as Table 1 illustrates. Extensive research indicates that the model has enabled the examination of how artists forge emotional connections, brand perceptions, and brand loyalty. Smit (2022) emphasizes the significance of cultural relevance in music branding, while Rasta Livewire (2007), Onyebadi (2018), and Adekola (2021) underscore how Dube's rebranding, centered around social justice and anti-apartheid themes, reinforced his brand. Other research includes Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell (2011), who employ the model to analyze celebrity brands and underscore the importance of cultural and sociopolitical relevance in establishing a durable brand identity. Aaker's model is infrequently utilized in the South African music industry, particularly for artists such as Lucky Dube. The impact of local sociopolitical dynamics on music branding, especially in post-apartheid South Africa, remains insufficiently examined in academic literature. Given South Africa's distinctive cultural and political landscape, which necessitates a nuanced comprehension of local identity, resistance, and pan-Africanism, comprehensive studies in this domain are scarce (Adekola, 2021). The aim of utilizing Aaker's model to assess Lucky Dube's brand is to rectify this discrepancy by analyzing how his music, linked to sociopolitical themes like pan-African unity and anti-apartheid resistance, resonated nationally and globally (Kraemer & Stern, 2022).

Beyond conventional branding ideas, this study also uses diversity management concepts to examine how Lucky Dube's metamorphosis created cross-cultural and cross-gender resonance (Adekola, 2021). Often used in corporate and organizational environments, diversity management stresses inclusiveness and the capacity to involve many stakeholders (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Artists who value cultural diversity in music can maintain authenticity while reaching a global audience. Dube's change from Mbaqanga to reggae shows a calculated action that embraced a genre with significant political and social relevance, enabling him to interact with listeners outside of South Africa. Along with a change in musical technique, Lucky Dube's repositioning intentionally aligned with social justice issues, anti-apartheid activity, and African unity (Kraemer & Stern, 2022). His credibility within the genre was strengthened by his ability to incorporate the core ideas of reggae into his brand identity, which also appealed to a broader global audience connected with his advocacy. Dube's unique and

long-lasting presence in the global music business was made possible by this kind of cultural branding. His success emphasizes the need to align brand repositioning efforts with culturally and socially relevant narratives.

Table 1. Application and Limitations of Aaker's Brand Equity Model in the Music Industry

Author(s)	Year	Focus	Application to the Music Industry	Findings
Aaker (1996)	1996	Development of the Brand Equity Model	Established the foundational principles for understanding brand equity in various industries, including music.	Brand equity is built on brand loyalty, awareness, perceived quality, and associations.
Spry, P. & Cornwell (2011).	2011	Brand equity in the entertainment industry	Focused on music as part of the broader entertainment sector, analyzing how brand equity is built and maintained in celebrity figures.	Music brands, like those of artists, depend on cultural relevance and consistent brand messaging.
		The role of celebrity branding in the music industry	Applied Aaker's Brand Equity Model to examine the relationship between artist branding and fan loyalty.	Celebrities use their public image, consistency, and authenticity to enhance brand equity.
Çeşan & İncü (2023)	2023	The role of brand image in music industry success	Investigate how an artist's brand image and emotional appeal influence fan loyalty and success.	Emotional connections and the authenticity of an artist's brand significantly affect its value.
Alleyne (2019)	2019	Case study on Bob Marley's brand equity	Investigate Marley's music brand using Aaker's model to examine how his legacy became intertwined with cultural movements.	Marley's authenticity and cultural relevance gave his music a lasting, global brand identity.

Findings and Discussion

Redefining one's identity, whether at a personal or organizational level, reaching new audiences, and strengthening one's competitive edge are all made possible by the strategic approach known as brand repositioning. The music industry's evolution enables musicians to broaden their audience and adjust to shifting trends. The late, famous South African reggae performer Lucky Dube switched from Mbaqanga to reggae in the 1980s. He was able to engage with global audiences through this project and link his music to anti-apartheid, social justice, and pan-African themes. Dube's ability to combine local and international influences to create a unique identity that appealed to various cultural audiences solidified his significance in South African and global music history. Dube's repositioning strategy included a complete rebranding and a genre shift. By embracing reggae, a genre known for its socio-political themes, he participated in a cultural movement promoting empowerment and transformation. His body of work concerning marginalized communities explored African solidarity and apartheid. Incorporating reggae aesthetics, such as Rastafarian symbolism and dreadlocks, enhanced the authenticity of his brand. These initiatives maintained Dube's brand relevance for local and international audiences, illustrating the efficacy of cultural branding in forging robust emotional connections and enhancing an artist's market presence. Dube passed away in 2007; however, his brand persists, illustrating the profound impact of strategic brand repositioning. His music enjoys global popularity, particularly in regions such as the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States, which exhibit a significant affinity for reggae culture. His ability to use universal themes like hope and resistance to maintain cultural relevance has ensured the enduring appeal of his work. Dube's success underscores the significance of brand equity in maintaining relevance and influence over time, exemplifying how effective brand repositioning, authentic messaging, and cultural relevance can establish a legacy.

Conclusion

The effective brand repositioning of Lucky Dube offers crucial guidance to corporate and creative brands on adjusting to new markets and maintaining sustainability. Organizations can cultivate brands that emotionally resonate with consumers by preserving authenticity, ensuring consistent messaging, targeting diverse demographics, and achieving global relevance through cultural branding. Dube's music continues to thrive posthumously, exemplifying the enduring quality of brand longevity.

The enduring significance and influence of companies and brands depend on prioritizing authentic and meaningful engagement with their target audience. Businesses must implement two critical strategies, strategic repositioning and value-driven branding, to secure the long-term sustainability of their legacy in a constantly changing market.

Given Lucky Dube's brand repositioning and success, corporations and other brands aiming to establish and maintain a strong presence in highly competitive markets are offered several recommendations. Brands must be authentic and coherent with their vision and values before undergoing repositioning. This illustrates how genuine repositioning can foster client loyalty and trust. Dube shifted to reggae music because he believed in social justice. Secondly, target diverse markets. This allows brands to broaden their audience while preserving a connection with their primary supporters. Like Dube, he harmonized reggae's specialized allure with optimism and defiance. Dube's unwavering emphasis on social justice and unity reinforced his brand's significance. Thus, it is crucial to uphold brand consistency across all interactions to cultivate enduring trust. Cross-cultural branding enhances a product's global appeal, constituting our fourth point. Dube illustrates the importance of remaining global by tailoring messaging and offerings to diverse cultures. This is achieved through the use of universal themes and English lyrics. Organizations should prioritize longevity by creating lasting value through ethical conduct, innovation, and commitment to core principles. This is the final point, yet it is not the least significant. Thus, this will guarantee the longevity of their brand as Dube's legacy persists.

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