TRIBUTE BANDS: WHEN ARE THESE BANDS THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE TO THE ORIGINAL BANDS?

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ABSTRACT
Tribute bands are a way to express music of another era. With the aging or the loss of the original group members, the importance of the tribute bands will likely increase in the coming years, even decades. However, it is not clear why people would prefer to attend now a show performed by a tribute band while the genuine members of the original band are still active. Using a sample of 313 respondents, results show that the tribute band option is the least preferred option among a list of three. This may be explained by a greater overall perceived risk, although ticket prices are usually cheaper than from other shows.
Keywords: tribute band; nostalgia proneness; risk; brand attachment; copycat

INTRODUCTION
According to different sources (Billboard's yearly Top 25 of the Year reports; Pollstar), the most profitable pop-rock concerts of the last decade were often those performed by artists and groups who have been at the peak of their popularity decades ago. In other words, a certain number of the big tours that generate the most revenue come from artists of the past. In 2011 for instance, names such as U2, Bruce Springsteen, Roger Waters (former Pink Floyd bassist) and Bon Jovi popped up. In 2012, you could count on Paul McCartney, Elton John, Journey, Rush and Motley Crüe to ring the cash register. Despite their commercial popularity, accessibility to these bands for the fans is not always possible (e.g. death or departure of key members; lost in interest in touring) nor their musical performance at the same quality level as it was when they were at their prime (e.g. loss of instrumental dexterity by some members; voice of the lead singer not as powerful, etc.). When the band as a whole is not performing anymore, two possibilities come to mind : the original group continues to perform without its leader (e.g. groups such as INXS and Queen) or the band leader is joined by new musicians playing the hits his former band is known for (e.g. Roger Hodgson of Supertramp; Roger Waters of Pink Floyd).

These trends are doomed to continue as those musicians are getting older. This leads the way to another trend: the increasing popularity of tribute bands. A tribute band is a band that reproduces, with a variable level of mimicry, the musical work of a reference band (from now on called « original group » or « original band »). These groups are "legal copies" of the original bands and in some cases, are even endorsed by the original band or members of the genuine band (e.g. The Queen Extravanganza).
The research question is to assess the possible reasons why consumers may prefer to consume voluntarily a show of a pure imitation product (e.g., a tribute band) rather than other alternatives that make also references to the past. Apart from a qualitative study done by Marticotte and St-Onge (2011), the academic literature on tribute bands is essentially inexistent. The present study is, to our knowledge, the first to focus on tribute bands using a quantitative methodology.

TRIBUTE BANDS

The longevity of bands goes beyond the longevity of the members who compose it. It is rare that a group does not undergo transformation in the membership over the years. Obviously, the older the group, the more likely that this group, if it is still performing on stage today, will do with a lineup that is different than the one at their beginning or at their prime.

One alternative to modified music bands is a tribute band. A tribute band is a copycat of an original band that mimicks the performance of the original band. With aging genuine members of the original band, tribute bands will eventually become the only possible way, on stage, to refer to the original group.

In addition to the unavailability of the original group, in whole or in part, the main reason for the popularity of tribute bands is the ticket price, usually lower than the one asked by the original group (Marticotte and St-Onge, 2011). However, this does not fully explain the craze for tribute bands as those performing in large arenas and/or touring internationally, ask for prices that are near the one of the original groups. Marticotte and St-Onge (2011) also showed that tribute bands are usually a second choice alternative to the original full group considering that the original group (1) may not be active anymore, (2) that has been amputated of some of its original members, or (3) it is composed of members underperforming compared to when they were at the top of their careers. When the original group is no longer available or no longer found in its original form, the copy becomes acceptable among fans of the original group if the following conditions are present: (1) the group is professional, (2) it operates in a large venue, (3) the ticket price is cheaper than what is asked by the original group (Marticotte and St-Onge, 2011). However, it is assumed that the consumer will prefer a variant of the original group (the original band members with or without its leader) rather than a pure copy (tribute band). This assertion is even more real for those who are attending the show because they can finally say that they saw, "flesh and bones" the real legendary members (Marticotte and St-Onge, 2011). In other words, consumers should prefer to see the genuine act, even though members are not as efficient as they were at their prime or their career or that some parts of the original lineup are missing. This leads us to our first hypothesis.

H_1: Consumers will prefer a genuine part of an original group rather than a tribute band that is a total copy of an original band.

Other than a cheaper ticket price, we know very little about the possible reasons why consumers might prefer a total copy, that is, a tribute band, when there are other possible alternatives. Based on the qualitative study done by Marticotte and St-Onge (2011), this study focuses on three groups of variables with explanatory potential: (1) the emotional bond between the consumer and the original band, (2) the perceived risk of a copycat product and (3) the consumer nostalgia proneness.

The relationship between the consumer and the original band

The interest for the consumer to attend a live music show is to have an enjoyable experience through a stage performance by a musical band. Thus, it is assumed that since the consumer has a bigger brand attachment (to the original band), he/she will find it more acceptable, as an alternative, to attend a show performed by a tribute band that reproduces the original performance of the band rather than a variant of the original group because brand attachment is not limited to the relationship between the fan and the members of the group, but how he/she feels connected (e.g. affective evaluation) to the band's spirit and music (as performed by the tribute band). Since professional tribute bands usually try to reproduce the performance of the original musical group to a level close to the one of the glory of the original group and for some, it may also include a replica of stage performance of the original band. The copy might then blur the differences (Warlop and Alba, 2004; Miceli and Peters, 2010) with the original band and be more able to create confusion by reproducing an era cherished by fans. Furthemore, variants of the original group whose members have aged or are less interested in reproducing the experience of the glory years, or are less effective musically and vocally, etc., may be less able to do so.

H_2: The bigger the brand attachment to the original band, the more the consumer will prefer the tribute band as an acceptable alternative to the original group.

Notions of risk

It is assumed that the risk of using a copy will be bigger than consuming the original band even though the latter has been changed (e.g. with or without the band leader and/or new musicians). A cheaper ticket price can give the signal that the performance of the tribute band will be lesser than the one performed by some

original members. The genuine members of the original band are known, renown, revered and have made their proves for decades. The spectator knows more what to expect from the performance of these members of the original group. In contrast, the tribute band remains a copy, a good or a bad reproduction of the original, but still a copy, making it a higher risk to consume (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000; d'Astous and Gargouri, 2001; Warlop and Alba, 2004; Miceli and Peters, 2010). This risk may be on the high note if the consumer did not experience a show by this particular tribute band before. On the other side, the genuine members of the original group may not be now at their prime of their career. Because they are getting older, they might be less efficient (e.g. less powerful voices, decreased manual dexterity) than members of a tribute band. However, since the copy is overall perceived a riskier option than the original, this brings us the third hypothesis:
H_3: Consumers preferring tribute bands perceive them less risky than consumers preferring variants of the original bands.

There are different types of perceived risk that may be associated with attending a show. One of them is the risk performance. The performance risk might be perceived to be higher for a tribute band because this band may be associated with a lower level of professionalism compared to variants of the original group (Ward et al., 1986). It is likely to assume that a consumer cannot conceive that the tribute band is able to interpret the songs to a level equal to or better to the one who created them, that is, the members of the original group. However, the consumer who is thinking that this risk is not present might still prefer the tribute band.
H_{3a}: The risk performance associated with a tribute band show will be perceived as being higher for spectators who prefer other variants of the original band.

The risk of social disapproval is another risk that can be associated with attending a performance of a tribute band. Contrary to other forms of fake products, tribute bands are clearly promoted as a copycat version of the original. Spectators of tribute band shows who deliberately speak about the show to their peer make a statement that they consumed a byproduct and not the genuine one. Given that the tribute band can be seen as a byproduct of the original, referring to groups that are no longer popular or mainstream, or clearly deemed outdated, adverse judgments may be issued in respect to spectators of tribute bands. Conversely, the spectator preferring tribute bands will perceive this type of risk at a lower level than the audience who prefers variants of the original group.

H_{3b}: The risk of social disapproval associated with a tribute band show will be perceived at a lesser level for consumers preferring tribute bands than spectators choosing other variants of the original group.
Propensity for nostalgia

Given that tribute bands focus on music made popular years or decades ago, it is likely that the consumers' interest in those groups may feel nostalgia about the past (Holbrook, 1993). Opposite to genuine members, tribute bands are sure to perform hits and old songs of the original group. Furthermore, professional tribute bands tend to perform as close as possible to the original standards making their delivery of the show reminiscent of the original band when the original band was at the peak of its career. On the other side, the genuine members may gather on stage today to promote new material, to revisit their hits (e.g. play them differently), or play lesser-known songs from their repertoire. In all cases, references to the past would not be as strong. People wanting to live a part of the past would be better served with a show performed by a tribute band. Thus, it is likely that consumers preferring a tribute band maybe more prone to nostalgia than consumers preferring variants of the original group.

H_4: Consumers preferring a tribute band tend to be more nostalgic than those preferring variants of the original band.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through an Internet questionnaire with a sample size of 313 respondents mainly composed of French and Canadians. The dependent variable in this study is the consumer's preference to go see a rock show that is not performed by the original group full lineup. Three types of groups were then presented to respondents: 1) tribute band, 2) band leader performing with new members, 3) original members performing without the genuine band leader. The respondent had to select his/her favorite setup among these three scenarios.

TABLE 1
THE INDEPENDENT VARIABLES MEASUREMENT SCALES

CONSTRUCT	ORIGINAL AUTHORS	NUMBER OF ITEMS	CRONBACH'S ALPHA
Brand attachment	Park et al. (2010)	4	0.914
Overall perceived risk	Laroche et al. (2005)	4	0.776
Performance risk	Gurhan-Canli and Batra (2004)	3	0.481
Risk of social disapproval	Keller, Lipkus and Rimer (2002)	6	0.719
Nostalgia proneness	Holbrook (1993)	5	0.642
Musical decline	Holbrook (1993)	3	0.722

Table 1 shows the information related to the measurement scales of the independent variables used in this study. Indexes of internal consistency showed Cronbach's alphas ranging from a weak 0.481 (performance risk) to a high 0.914 (brand attachment). Following a factor analysis, the nostalgia proness construct was found to be a 2 factor variable tackling (1) a comparison between the past and the present and the future (nostalgia proneness) and (2) an attitude toward the current music compared to music of the past (musical decline).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As their favorite alternative to the original group is concerned, respondents prefer the band leader performing with new musicians (n = 167), followed by the original group composed of all members of the original group without the leader (n = 94) and finally, the tribute band (n = 52). The alternative "tribute band" is the least preferable option to the original reference group. These results lead us to accept H_1. This preference can be explained in many ways. First, the leader of the band is usually the front man or in some cases, the founder of the band. Consumers may find it more natural that the leader pursues his career under his former band's name. Thus, the blend between the leader and the band in which he used to play would be more natural. Since the leader is often the song writer of the band's hits, it may sound legitimate that he's performing under the band's name. Third, this scenario seems to be more prevalent in the musical industry, so consumers may be accustomed to and comfortable with it.

Table 2 shows the results of the independent variables (brand attachment; perceived risk, nostalgia proneness) on the dependant variable, which is, the consumer's preference between the live performance of (1) the leader without the other original members, (2) the original group without the leader, (3) the tribute band. Independent variables were measured on a Likert scale from 1 (totally agree) to 5 (totally disagree).

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

	Leader without original group	Original group without leader	Tribute band	F	sig	Hypothesis
Brand attachment	2.6994	2.6129	2.5094	0.798	0.451	H2 not confirmed
Overall perceived risk	2.5670	2.3790	2.2689	3.463	0.033	H3 confirmed
Performance risk	3.6577	3.6237	2.9906	14.381	0.000	H3a confirmed
Risk of social disapproval	2.1698	2.0376	2.1726	0.992	0.372	H3b not confirmed
Nostalgia proneness	2.9494	2.8602	2.9481	0.549	0.578	H4 not confirmed
Musical decline	3.4147	3.2581	3.4151	1.096	0.336	H4 not confirmed

The level of brand attachment towards the original group (H_2) does not explain a significant preference for one band over another. Consequently, H_2 is ruled out. The emotional bondage between the original crew (the leader or the other genuine members) and the fan does not seem strong enough to deter him/her from the tribute band. However, we should note that the overall brand attachment mean score is low at 2.64. This could mean that the selected band among a list of eleven former active groups may not be a true favorite of his/hers.
The third hypothesis focuses on the perception of risk associated with attending a show performed by a tribute band. As far as the overall risk is concerned, fans who did not select the tribute band as their favorite alternative (e.g. people who had chosen either the "leader without the original group" or the "original group without the leader" option) feel that the tribute band has the highest overall risk. This validates H_3. More precisely, two types of risk were assessed: the performance risk (H_{3a}) and the risk of social disapproval (H_{3b}). Results from Table 2 show that the performance risk (albeit with a very low reliability index) is perceived to be at its highest among those who did not prefer the tribute band option to the original group. Thus, H_{3a} is confirmed. There were no significant differences in the perception of the risk of social disapproval associated to tribute bands among the three groups of respondents. The H_{3b} hypothesis is rejected.
The last hypothesis is related to the possible impact that nostalgia could have in explaining the choice of the respondents regarding three bands playing music from the past. The propensity for nostalgia proved to be a two dimensional construct. Both of its factors, "nostalgia proneness" per se and "musical decline" did not manage to be explanatory of the preferences made by the fans, which is leading us to not support H_4.

Conclusion, managerial recommendations and future research

These preliminary results show that the tribute band is the least preferred alternative to the original group out of the three scenarios presented to respondents (H_1). The highest overall risk associated to this option (H_3), and more specifically, the performance risk (H_{3a}), might explain this result. Given that tribute bands usually ask for a cheaper entry fee than the ones by genuine members, this might impact on the perception that the consumer has towards the delivery that he/she is expecting to receive from the tribute band. A low ticket price may infer a lousy performance. In other words, tribute bands may be associated to a byproduct of an already modified (or impaired) product of the original. This a major challenge for managers of tribute bands who must persuade fans of the original band that their performance is not lessened compared to the one of others and thus, not more risky.

An emphasis should be put on the band members' qualities such as their experiences and their professionalism. The perceived professional level of the group is also linked to where the show takes place (Marticotte and St-Onge; 2011). For consumers, the size and the reputation of the venue where the tribute band plays influence the expectations that the fans have about the tribute band. Thus, tribute bands performing in large arenas are deemed to be more professional and with more technical facilities (e.g. more stage artefacts; more sophisticated lightning system, etc.) than those playing in bars and local joints. When appropriate, this information could be clearly disclosed while promoting the show.
Meanwhile, the presence of genuine members (whether the band leader or less well known members) seems to lessen the perceived overall and performance risks related to an amputed original band. One way for tribute

bands to take advantage of this is to create a more explicit bond with those genuine members. This can be done by different forms of sponsorship, endorsement or support. Legendary Pink Floyd's lead guitarist, David Gilmour, attended many shows of the *Australian Pink Floyd Show*. Roger Taylor, drummer of Queen, is one of the producers of the *Queen Extravanganza*, a tribute band to Queen. Jason Bonham, leader of the Led Zeppelin's tribute band *Led Zeppelin Experience* and the son of the late Led Zeppelin's drummer, John Bonham, performed on stage with the remaining Led Zeppelin's crew for their last appearance on stage at the O2 in London in 2007. Benoît David, frontman of the Yes' tribute band *Close to the Edge*, even replaced the genuine singer, Jon Anderson, in the Yes lineup for four years! Those associations with genuine members of the original band can give a greater credibility to tribute bands.

According to the results of this study, referring to the past and evoking nostalgia (H4) do not seem to be a strategy to focus on for tribute bands. This recommendation may look at odd considering that, by definition, tribute bands exist and live for reproducing old music that is reminiscent of another era. Promoting a tribute band without a time frame related to the past may be difficult. On the other hand, we should be cautious about this particular recommendation since respondents seem to have a rather moderate level of nostalgia proneness. This calls for a study with a sample more prone to nostalgia. On the same token, an overall low level of brand attachment might explain why H_2 did not find support. Future research should be done with true fans of the original band.

These results are the first tackling the tribute band concept with a quantitative analysis. Therefore, caution is required. More specifically, the study of nostalgia deserves further investigated given that tribute bands refer to the past. Indeed, what could push consumers to pay attention to these groups if they are not marked by nostalgia or recalling some positive elements of the past? A cheaper ticket price might induce consumers to prefer a show performed by a tribute rather than any other alternatives of the original group. Price sensitivity of the consumers, for instance, has not been taken into account in this study.

In all cases, with the aging and eventual disappearance of the original members of the iconic groups, particularly those from the 70s, tribute bands will eventually be (in addition to reproduction by electronic means) the only way to reproduce, on stage, the musical work of the past. Managers will gain advantage to better know the tribute band's consumers and find ways to encourage them to discover this form of expression of the past.

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