



Becoming Someone Else: Identity Separation, Transmedia Strategy, and Brand Equity in Contemporary Music

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how stage-name adoption and deliberate identity separation shape transmedia strategy and brand equity formation in the contemporary music industry. The study draws on Keller's (1993) customer-based brand equity framework, Jenkins' (2006) transmedia storytelling theory, and Auslander's (2006) concept of musical persona. A comparative analysis is conducted across three case studies: Djo (Joe Keery), Joji (George Miller), and Tame Impala (Kevin Parker). Each case represents a distinct model of identity separation and transmedia engagement.

The study identifies two transmedia orientations: aesthetic transmedia, built on sensory world-building without narrative disclosure, and narrative transmedia, driven by story-based persona development. Findings suggest that the degree of identity separation moderates both the transmedia strategy used and the brand equity dimension formed. Pre-existing audience capital shows up as a significant moderating variable.

The study contributes an original typology of identity separation strategies and causal pathway model linking persona construction, transmedia orientation, and brand equity outcomes.

Keywords: stage-name branding, identity separation, transmedia strategy, brand equity, music industry, aesthetic transmedia, persona, Djo, Joji, Tame Impala

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Resumo

Esta dissertação examina como a adoção de nomes artísticos e a separação deliberada de identidade moldam a estratégia transmedia e a formação do valor da marca na indústria da música contemporânea. O estudo baseia-se no quadro de valor da marca centrado no cliente de Keller (1993), na teoria da narrativa transmedia de Jenkins (2006) e no conceito de persona musical de Auslander (2006). É realizada uma análise comparativa de três estudos de caso: Djo (Joe Keery), Joji (George Miller) e Tame Impala (Kevin Parker). Cada caso representa um modelo distinto de separação de identidade e envolvimento transmedia.

O estudo identifica duas orientações transmedia: a transmedia estética, construída sobre a criação de um mundo sensorial sem revelação narrativa, e a transmedia narrativa, impulsionada pelo desenvolvimento de personagens baseado em histórias. Os resultados sugerem que o grau de separação de identidade modera tanto a estratégia transmedia utilizada como a dimensão do valor da marca formada. O capital de audiência pré-existente surge como uma variável moderadora significativa.

O estudo contribui com uma tipologia original de estratégias de separação de identidade e um modelo de caminho causal que liga a construção da persona, a orientação transmedia e os resultados do valor da marca.

Palavras-chave: branding de nome artístico, separação de identidade, estratégia transmedia, valor da marca, indústria musical, transmedia estética, persona, Djo, Joji, Tame Impala

Título: Tornar-se outra pessoa: separação de identidade, estratégia transmedia e valor da marca na música contemporânea

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	2
2.1 Transmedia Storytelling & Jenkins' Principles	2
2.2 Transmedia Strategies in Music	3
2.3 Brand Equity.....	5
2.4 Identity, Persona, and Separation in Popular Music	6
3. METHODOLOGY.....	8
3.1 Research Design	8
3.2 Conceptual Model.....	8
3.3 Control Variables	10
3.4 Operationalisation of Keller's CBBE Dimensions.....	10
3.5 Data Collection and Analysis.....	10
4. CASE STUDY 1: DJO.....	11
4.1 Origin.....	11
4.2 Identity Separation	11
4.2.1 Protective Identity Separation.....	11
4.2.2 The Name	11
4.2.3 The Performative Persona.....	12
4.2.4 What Separation Enables	12
4.2.5 Evolution Towards Disclosure.....	12
4.3 Transmedia Strategy	13
4.3.1 Personal Storytelling as the Core Transmedia Text.....	14
4.3.2 Visual Output.....	14
4.3.3 Live Performances.....	14
4.3.4 TikTok and Audience Co-Creation.....	14
4.4 Brand Equity.....	15
4.4.1 Brand Awareness.....	15
4.4.2 Brand Image	16
5. CASE STUDY 2: JOJI.....	18
5.1 Origin.....	18

5.2 Identity Separation	18
5.2.1 Complete Reinvention	18
5.2.2 The Name	18
5.2.3 The Strategic Challenge: Credibility	19
5.2.4 What Separation Enables	19
5.2.5 The Doppelgänger	20
5.3 Transmedia Strategy	20
5.3.1 The Sonic World as Transmedia Extension	21
5.3.2 Album Covers as Visual Extensions	22
5.3.3 Music Videos and Jojiverse	22
5.3.4 Live Performances	23
5.4 Brand Equity.....	23
5.4.1 Brand Awareness.....	23
5.4.2 Brand Image	24
6. CASE STUDY 3: TAME IMPALA.....	26
6.1 Origin.....	26
6.2 Identity Separation	26
6.2.1 The Name as a Deliberate Construct.....	26
6.2.2 The Band Illusion	26
6.2.3 The Dual Identity System	27
6.2.4 The Potential Shift Towards Personal Disclosure	28
6.3 Transmedia Strategy	28
6.3.1 The Sonic World as Transmedia Extension	29
6.3.2 Music Videos as Visual Extensions	29
6.3.3 Live Performances as Transmedia Extension	30
6.3.4 The Storytelling Dimension	30
6.4 Brand Equity.....	31
6.4.1 Brand Awareness.....	31
6.4.2 Brand Image	32
7. DISCUSSION.....	34
7.1 The Authenticity Paradox: How Identity Separation Enables Rather Than Blocks Self-Expression.....	34
7.2 Aesthetic vs. Narrative: The Transmedia Engagement Loop.....	36
7.3 The Pre-Existing Audience as a Moderating Variable.....	38
7.4 Synthesis: Identity Separation, Transmedia Strategy, and Brand Equity Formation	41
8. CONCLUSION.....	43

<i>APPENDIX</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>REFERENCES</i>	<i>49</i>

1. INTRODUCTION

A music artist's brand today is not just an album. It is a live show, visual identity, social media presence, a streaming profile, and a merchandise line, encountered simultaneously by audiences across multiple contexts. However, a multi-platform presence is not in itself a strategy. Artists who stand out are those who build durable brand worlds, rather than simply distributing content.

Currently, the most prominent tool for analysing brand worlds is Henry Jenkins' (2006, 2009) transmedia storytelling framework. Although this framework was originally built on fictional storytelling, music also occupies an ambiguous position within transmedia. Artists build worlds that extend across platforms, yet these worlds are often held together not by plot, but by mood, sonic texture, or visual atmosphere. When the organizing logic is sensory rather than narrative, Jenkins' framework becomes insufficient.

This thesis addresses this ambiguity through the lens of identity separation, which is defined as the strategic adoption of a project name distinct from an artist's legal name. It proposes that the degree of separation shapes whether an artist pursues a narrative or an "aesthetic transmedia" strategy. By evaluating these strategies through Keller's (1993) Customer-Based Brand Equity model, this research introduces the concept of "additive immersion." This is a mode of engagement where fans do not just consume a story but instead sink into the sensory intensity of an artist's world.

Consequently, this study is guided by the two research questions: how does identity separation through stage-name branding influence the type of transmedia strategy music artists adopt? And how do different transmedia strategies (aesthetic vs. narrative) contribute to brand equity formation?

Following a multiple case study design (Yin, 2018), these questions are examined through three distinct archetypes: Tame Impala (representing identity de-personalization), Djo (representing protective separation), and Joji (representing complete reinvention). Ultimately, this study provides the music industry with a necessary framework to understand how identity functions as the connective tissue of modern brand equity.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Transmedia Storytelling & Jenkins' Principles

Jenkins (2006) defined transmedia storytelling as a process in which integral elements of fictional worlds are systematically dispersed across multiple media platforms, with each platform making its own unique contribution to the overall experience rather than simply repurposing the same content (Jenkins, 2017). The concept developed primarily in the context of Hollywood franchises, such as *Star Wars*, whose narrative universe expanded through animated series, novels, comics, and video games, each offering new storylines (Jenkins, 2006). Jenkins later expanded his framework into core principles of transmedia storytelling, each capturing a different dimension of how content worlds are built and extended across platforms (Jenkins, 2009). The principles most relevant to this study are: continuity, the coherence of a world across platforms; multiplicity, which allows for alternative versions of the same character or events; world-building, the construction of expansive fictional universes that sustain multiple narratives; spreadability, the audience's capacity to circulate content across networks; and performance, which captures how producers design spaces for audience participation and how fans actively contribute to narrative expansion. The remaining principles — drillability (the extent to which a text rewards deep investigation of its hidden details and Easter eggs), immersion (the experience of entering the storyworld), extractability (taking story elements into real life), seriality (narrative unfolding across instalments), and subjectivity (exploring the storyworld through different character perspective) — presuppose a narrative logic: a plotline complex enough to dig into, characters whose perspectives can be explored, a story that unfolds in sequence, and a storyworld coherent enough to sustain overarching metanarratives. While the framework has been widely adopted as an analytical tool, it was developed almost exclusively within storyworld-driven contexts, and this narrative-centrism limits its applicability to cases where the organising logic is not a story (Jenkins, 2006; Scolari, 2013).

Since its introduction, Jenkins' framework has been applied almost exclusively to narrative-driven entertainment franchises. Scolari (2013) uses it to analyse *Lost*, a serialised drama about plane-crash survivors, demonstrating how the show's fictional universe expanded through novels, video games, and comics, distinguishing between expansion strategies. This adds new narrative information and compression strategies, in which each platform distils the same affective world.

Gray (2010) similarly examines how paratextual extensions surrounding franchises like *Star Wars*, from promotional materials to action figures, function not merely as merchandise but as narrative devices that deepen audience engagement with the story. In every case, what holds the transmedia system together is a shared fictional world anchored by narrative: characters, plotlines, and story arcs provide the connections across platforms. Jenkins' framework carries a built-in narrative bias, embedded in the word 'storytelling' in its name. This near-exclusive focus on narrative contexts reveals a structural limitation in the framework itself.

Ryan (2015) argues that what is commonly called transmedia storytelling would be more accurately described as transmedia world-building, since individual platform contributions do not tell a single unified story but offer multiple autonomous narratives set within a shared fictional world. Ryan (2015) distinguishes between narrative and lyric modes of transmedia organisation, where the lyric mode prioritises mood, sensation, and atmosphere over story, a distinction directly applicable to artists whose transmedia coherence is multisensorial rather than narrative. Scolari (2013) similarly acknowledges that scholarly applications of transmedia have centred almost entirely on fictional narrative productions, leaving non-fiction and non-narrative forms — texts organised by mood, sensation, or argument — largely unexplored. Dena (2009) argues that cross-media repetition and variation have value in themselves, and not every platform contribution needs to add narrative information. This narrative-centrism limits the framework's applicability to contexts where the organising logic is not a story, and music, as argued below, is one such non-narrative context.

2.2 Transmedia Strategies in Music

Music already operates across multiple channels simultaneously. It is, however, worth distinguishing this multi-platform reality from the proper transmedia strategy. An artist's multi-platform ecosystem spans albums, music videos, live performances, social media, and visual identity. Where multi-platform ecosystem refers to delivering the same content across different platforms, in transmedia strategy, each platform makes a distinct contribution to the universe (Jenkins, 2006, 2017). The selected cases show how platform presence reflects strategic transmedia logic rather than distribution efficiency. Brembilla (2019) argues that the music industry has embraced world-building and transmedia strategies, yet existing scholarship has largely overlooked it, partly because music does not necessarily involve the fictional worlds, characters, or plotlines

that Jenkins' framework presupposes. She notes, a song or an album is not transmedia simply because it can be consumed across multiple platforms; it becomes transmedia when the project functions as a spreadable concept that generates engagement with audiences across media. Yet the frameworks available remain rooted in story-driven entertainment, leaving a disconnect between the transmedia reality of music and the narrative-centric tools available to study it.

The scholarship that engages with music transmedia has tended to focus on cases where narrative or character serves as the organising principle. Brembilla (2019) examines how the music industry generates value through transmedia projects, highlighting cases like Beyoncé's *Lemonade*, where a concept album, visual album, live tour, fashion, and poetry were woven together by a personal narrative of betrayal and healing. Additionally, One Direction's transmedia storyworld was built around carefully crafted character personas for each band member, extending their personas through social media, documentary content, and fan-facing narratives. Bob Dylan's protest folk persona in the early 1960s was constructed across recordings, press interviews, and public appearances, with each context deepening a coherent narrative of social engagement rather than simply repeating it (Auslander, 2006). In each of these cases, a story or a character provides the connective tissue that holds the transmedia system together.

Yet there are artists who build cohesive brand worlds across platforms through sonic and visual consistency rather than narrative, which will be explored in this thesis. Bengtsson and Edlom (2021) acknowledge that the field of transmedia research in the music industry is still methodologically young, yet even the emerging work focuses on promotional campaigns rather than on such aesthetic strategies. The existing literature offers no clear framework for analysing this type of sensory, non-narrative transmedia coherence, which this thesis terms aesthetic transmedia, as distinct from the narrative-driven model that dominates the field.

Having established that artists can pursue transmedia strategies organised around aesthetic coherence rather than narrative, the question becomes how to evaluate their effectiveness, a task transmedia theory alone cannot fulfil; it explains how content is dispersed across media but does not measure the outcomes of that dispersal. Therefore, this thesis draws on transmedia as the strategic lens and brand equity as the evaluative one, assessing what an artist's constructed world is worth in audiences' minds.

2.3 Brand Equity

Keller (1993) proposed that brand equity resides not in the brand itself but in the mind of the consumer. He defined Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) as the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand; that is, a brand has positive equity when consumers react more favourably to its products, prices, and communications than they would to the same elements presented without the brand name attached. Brand knowledge has two components: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness encompasses both recognition, the ability to confirm prior exposure to the brand when encountered, and recall, the ability to retrieve the brand when given a product category or relevant need as a cue. Brand image is the network of associations held in the consumer's memory, evaluated along three dimensions: favourability (whether associations are positive), strength (how firmly and durably they are held), and uniqueness (whether they are distinct from those of competing brands). Keller (1993) further distinguishes between two types of association within brand image: attributes, which describe what the brand is, its intrinsic qualities such as sonic texture or visual atmosphere, and benefits, which describe what the brand does for the consumer, whether functional, experiential, or symbolic. This distinction is particularly generative for analysing aesthetic transmedia strategies, where the primary brand-building mechanism is sensory experience rather than narrative information. Attributes are the atmospheric and sonic qualities an artist maintains consistently across platforms, while benefits are the affective states those qualities reliably produce in listeners, a sense of intimacy, melancholy, or expansiveness.

Music artists function as brands in precisely the sense Keller describes, carrying names, visual identities, and reputations that generate differentiated audience responses independent of any individual release. Keller's awareness dimensions map directly onto artist recognition, for example, through an artist's tone, emotional register, or sound. Keller's image dimensions are equally applicable, with fan discourse revealing favourability through sentiment, strength through depth of engagement, and uniqueness through the perception that no other artist sounds or feels quite the same. For artists whose transmedia strategy is organised around aesthetic coherence, brand knowledge is built primarily through sensory and atmospheric associations, making Keller's consumer-perception framework well-suited to this analysis.

Aaker (1996) offers a complementary framework organised around five dimensions: brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and proprietary assets, but this model was designed with quantitative measurements in mind, and applying it qualitatively requires inventing evidence thresholds that introduce their own subjectivity. Keller's model, by contrast, asks directly what consumers know and feel about a brand, observable through the sources available for music artists: critical reception, streaming data, artist interviews, and fan discourse. Keller's CBBE model is therefore adopted as the primary evaluative framework throughout this thesis.

2.4 Identity, Persona, and Separation in Popular Music

Identity, persona, and stage-name branding are related but analytically distinct concepts. Auslander's (2006) persona framework establishes that all musicians perform a version of self-distinct from their private person, distinguishing three layers: the real person, and the musical persona, a performed identity that is neither a fictional character nor simply the performer's private self. This thesis extends that model by adding a third layer, the character, for cases where artists deliberately construct explicit performative roles distinct from their primary persona. This three-layer model provides the analytical vocabulary for mapping how each artist in this thesis configures the relationship between their private self and public artistic identity.

Not all stage names constitute identity separation as this thesis proposes. Identity separation is the strategic adoption of a project name meaningfully distinct from the artist's legal name, where the legal name remains publicly known but is systematically de-emphasised in favour of an independent brand. Name-altering practices in music are varied and serve different strategic functions (Formilan & Stark, 2020), and this thesis distinguishes identity separation from three adjacent practices with which it is sometimes conflated. A cosmetic stage name, for example Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta becoming Lady Gaga, involves a renaming in which the new name fully absorbs the public persona, leaving no functional distance between the person and the brand they project. An alter ego, seen with David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, involves a fictional character performed by a known artist, where the role is legible as distinct from the artist's primary persona and the artist is understood to be playing it. A pseudonym, like Daft Punk performing masked as Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo, involves active concealment,

where the real identities are withheld from the audience as a condition of the performance itself, regardless of whether those identities are discoverable outside it.

In this thesis, the cases examined, Kevin Parker (Tame Impala), Joe Keery (Djo), and George Miller (Joji), occupy a different position: the legal name is publicly known but the project name carries the weight of the artistic brand, with the two coexisting in separate registers.

The deliberate gap between legal name and project name creates structural freedom to build a sensory world or narrative architecture independently of the real person. This thesis proposes such freedom shapes transmedia strategy choice, investigating whether and how this structural condition leads to aesthetic modes of transmedia strategy.

This literature review has traced three theoretical strands. The first concerns Jenkins' (2006) transmedia theory, which is the dominant analytical toolkit for understanding how brand worlds are extended across platforms, but it presupposes narrative as the organising logic. The music transmedia scholarship that has developed in its wake has focused on narrative-rich cases, leaving aesthetic transmedia, the coordination of sonic and visual coherence across platforms without recourse to story, largely untheorized. Next, concerns brand equity: Keller's CBBE model offers a consumer-facing framework suited to the qualitative, perception-based data available for music artists. However, it has not been applied to transmedia strategy in music, leaving the question of whether and how transmedia coherence builds brand knowledge relatively unexamined. The third concerns artist identity: Auslander (2006) establishes that musicians perform identity as much as music and that the musical persona is a social construct negotiated between performer and audience rather than a direct expression of the private self. This thesis proposes that the stage name formalises the structural gap between private person and public persona. Yet, no existing scholarship connects the structure of that identity gap to the type of transmedia strategy an artist pursues.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative multiple case study design following Yin (2018), whose framework applies when research questions are explanatory "how" or "why" questions, when the researcher has no control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary real-world phenomenon, all of which apply here. A qualitative approach is epistemologically appropriate because the study concerns meaning-making, identity construction, and brand perception; phenomena that are context-dependent and interpretively composed. The multiple-case design follows a replication logic, in which each case either confirms or adds nuance to the patterns found in the others, making the overall findings more credible than a single case could support. The study is exploratory, aiming to develop theoretical propositions around a typology introduced in this thesis rather than test an existing one.

Cases were selected through purposive, theory-driven sampling (Patton, 2002), chosen because they exemplify the phenomenon under investigation. Four criteria guided selection: the artist performs under a stage name distinct from their legal name; the separation is strategic and demonstrable; the artist maintains an active presence across three or more platforms; and sufficient public data exists for systematic analysis. Label status was deliberately excluded as a criterion. Since the three cases span Universal, Sony, and Warner, observed variation in transmedia strategy cannot be attributed to differences in institutional resources, keeping the analytical focus on identity separation itself.

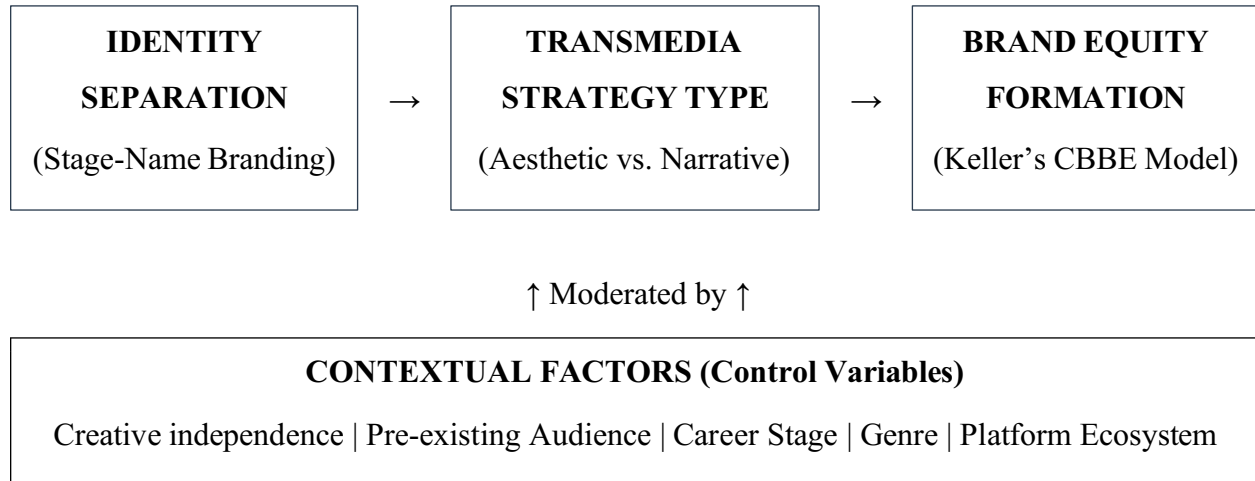
The three cases represent distinct motivations for identity separation: de-personalisation (Tame Impala), career-domain separation (Djo), and prior-identity incompatibility (Joni). A notable limitation is that all three are instances of demonstrable success, meaning the design cannot establish causation.

3.2 Conceptual Model

The relationship proposed among the three theoretical strands (Section 2.1, 2.2, 2.3,2.4) can be summarised in a conceptual model. This model has a direct pathway: identity separation,

implemented through stage-name branding, is suggested to influence the type of transmedia strategy an artist adopts, which in turn shapes how brand equity is formed in consumers' minds.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



The first relationship suggests that identity separation, as defined in Section 2.4, creates conditions that favour specific transmedia approaches, with the degree and nature of the separation, whether de-personalisation (Tame Impala), prior identity incompatibility (Joji), or career-domain separation (Djo), expected to influence which type of transmedia strategy will dominate. The second relationship proposes that transmedia strategy type functions as the mechanism through which brand equity is built, with different strategy types expected to activate Keller's CBBE dimensions with varying intensity depending on whether the organising logic is sensory coherence or narrative expansion.

The model uses the language of "influence" and "shape" rather than strict causation. The aim is not to prove that identity separation causes a specific transmedia strategy, but to demonstrate, through cross-case comparison and pattern matching (Yin, 2018), how identity separation creates conditions that favour particular strategic choices. Contextual factors are documented across all three cases and revisited in the Discussion chapter alternative explanations for observed patterns.

3.3 Control Variables

This study identifies and accounts for alternative explanatory factors across cases to distinguish outcomes attributable to identity separation from those shaped by context (Yin, 2018). These are documented in Appendix A.

3.4 Operationalisation of Keller's CBBE Dimensions

Appendix B provides the operationalisation of Keller's CBBE model for qualitative analysis. The analysis is primarily deductive, though it remains open to patterns that fall outside the framework boundaries.

3.5 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection draws on two tiers. The primary tier comprises the transmedia texts: music videos, album artwork, and live show recordings, supported where relevant by researcher observation of publicly available footage and platform-specific content. The secondary tier comprises contextual materials, including streaming metrics, press coverage, critical reviews, and artist interviews, providing evidence of authorial intent and reception framing. All materials are publicly available; ethical approval is not required.

Fan discourse is treated as a distinct third layer: brand awareness surfaces in how fans name and differentiate the artist, while brand image surfaces in the evaluative language and comparative judgments of community discourse. In the case analysis, a platform contribution is treated as transmedia when it adds to the world in ways unavailable through other platforms; multi-channel distribution of the same content is documented as brand awareness evidence.

Each case follows the same four-step protocol, provided in Appendix C. Applying the same protocol in the same sequence ensures analytical comparability.

4. CASE STUDY 1: DJO

4.1 Origin

Djo is the musical project of Joe Keery, an American actor best known for his role as Steve Harrington in *Stranger Things*. Before his casting, Keery studied in Chicago and played guitar and keys in a band called Post Animal (Davies, 2025). Under Djo, he has released three albums: *Twenty Twenty* (2019), *Decide* (2022), and *The Crux* (2025), with the single 'End of Beginning' from *Decide* becoming a viral hit on TikTok and topping music charts globally (Davies, 2025).

4.2 Identity Separation

Keery's separation is protective in nature, designed to shield an emerging musical identity from an already famous and culturally loaded acting persona. The separation was both strategically motivated and personally necessary and has evolved significantly across the project's three albums.

4.2.1 Protective Identity Separation

When *Stranger Things* became a global phenomenon, Keery found himself publicly identified with the character of Steve Harrington in a way that felt limiting. He has described the realisation that he might be defined by that role for the rest of his career as one of the key motivations for establishing Djo as a separate identity (Horowitz, 2026). The separation served multiple purposes. It was protective of the music: Keery left Post Animal partly because he did not want the band associated with *Stranger Things*, recognising that the celebrity connection could overshadow the music itself (Horowitz, 2026). It was also a form of risk mitigation, ensuring that if the music failed, it would not attach to Keery, the actor (Horowitz, 2026). And it was driven by a desire for the music to be evaluated on its own terms. Keery has reflected on his earlier statement that the name came about because he did not want to be 'a dumb actor who releases an album', clarifying in retrospect: 'I think I just really wanted to be taken seriously. I was just trying to give myself the best shot at that' (Davies, 2025).

4.2.2 The Name

Keery has described the name as: 'like my name but not my name', noting that it was a last-minute decision (Horowitz, 2026). Unlike a completely invented stage name, Djo maintains a sonic link to its creator while creating enough distance to function as a separate searchable identity, a proximity

that reflects the nature of the separation itself: close enough to be authentic, distant enough to be independent.

4.2.3 The Performative Persona

The identity separation in Djo's early era extended beyond the name into a fully constructed visual and performative persona. Keery wore a wig and sunglasses during early performances, with the entire band also dressed in costume, creating a collective character that obscured his recognisable appearance (Q With Tom Power, 2025). Keery has attributed this partly to his theatre background and an attraction to the performative dimensions of persona construction, citing Marc Bolan, David Bowie, and Andy Kaufman as artists whose use of persona shaped his thinking (Horowitz, 2026). The strategy was effective: Keery has confirmed that audiences did not immediately connect Djo to Keery or Steve Harrington in the project's early period, allowing the music to be encountered without the weight of the *Stranger Things* association (Q With Tom Power, 2025).

4.2.4 What Separation Enables

The protective separation created by the Djo name and persona enabled Keery to operate as a musician independently of his acting fame, giving the project space to develop an audience on musical rather than celebrity terms. Keery has described the experience of being a musician as fundamentally different from acting, as being 'in the driver's seat' rather than 'the violin player in an orchestra' contributing to a larger production (Davies, 2025). The separation also allowed him to finance the project through his *Stranger Things* income, without the music needing to be commercially viable from the outset, giving him creative freedom over the project's direction (Zach Sang Show, 2025). The protective separation mechanism operates by placing the music in a register entirely distinct from Keery's acting identity, removing the *Stranger Things* association as a framing device and creating the conditions for the music to be encountered and evaluated independently.

4.2.5 Evolution Towards Disclosure

Over time, the Djo project has undergone a notable shift toward greater personal disclosure. By *The Crux* era, Keery had abandoned the wig and sunglasses entirely, describing the change as a deliberate move towards vulnerability: 'In the past, I'm wearing a wig. I'm wearing these glasses. It was kind of like a concept project, but now I feel like I'm putting myself out there a little bit with

this music. And the songs are all very personal ... The album's personal for me' (Coachella, 2025). This shift was partly informed by the reception of 'End of Beginning', which taught Keery that personal and unfiltered expression deepens rather than weakens audience connection: 'the more you are yourself, the deeper people can go and connect to it' (Q With Tom Power, 2025).

This shift is visible across the project's album cover art. The *Twenty Twenty* cover features no human presence. The *Decide* cover features Keery in deliberate visual camouflage that makes him unrecognisable. *The Crux* has Keery on the cover without camouflage, small but present. The visual arc across three albums maps the trajectory of the identity separation itself: from concealment to partial concealment to full personal exposure.

4.3 Transmedia Strategy

Djo's transmedia strategy is best understood as narrative-leaning aesthetic transmedia. The music carries personal storytelling across the three albums, with songs rooted in specific experiences, relationships, and emotional moments from Keery's life. Following Jenkins (2006) principle that each platform contribution should add a distinct piece to the overall world, Djo's world-building operates primarily within the songs themselves rather than across platforms, placing the project within the narrative-leaning aesthetic category: the lyric mode Ryan (2015) describes, in which mood, sensation, and biographical specificity rather than narrative sequence proves the organising logic.

This platform-light approach is not incidental to Djo's scale or career stage but is structurally consistent with the protective separation logic itself. Since Keery's purpose in establishing Djo was to create distance from an existing public identity, rather than to build an elaborate new world, the separation needed to be sufficient to allow the music to be evaluated on its own terms, and not to draw attention to the construction itself. A transmedia strategy that is emotionally direct, platform-light, and anchored in the music rather than expanded around it is the natural expression of that logic, protective in its restraint as much as in its intent.

4.3.1 Personal Storytelling as the Core Transmedia Text

The narrative dimension of Djo's transmedia strategy is most clearly evidenced through the songwriting itself. Across the discography, songs are rooted in specific people, places, and moments. 'End of Beginning' draws on Keery's experience of leaving Chicago, where he studied drama and played with Post Animal, to film *Stranger Things* in Atlanta, capturing the emotional weight of that transition (Levine, 2024). 'Charlie's Garden' is a direct tribute to *Stranger Things* co-star Charlie Heaton's home in Atlanta and the community that formed around the cast during filming (BBC America, 2026; Davies, 2025), a notable instance of the two worlds briefly overlapping, filtered through personal friendship rather than used as a commercial hook. Songs on *The Crux* include tributes to Keery's sisters and friends, a love song for his family, and an exploration of anxiety and self-doubt drawn from his own experience (Davies, 2025).

4.3.2 Visual Output

Djo's visual output is limited. The project has released official visualisers for *The Crux*, which use animation and motion graphics to reinforce the retro aesthetic of the music, functioning in what Scolari (2009) terms compression mode: each visual extension distils the same emotional atmosphere as the music rather than expanding the world beyond it. The visualiser platform here is a channel of distribution; its transmedia function lies not in what it adds but in what it consistently reinforces.

4.3.3 Live Performances

The Djo live show contributes a distinct platform layer to the transmedia world by staging the identity-separation arc in real time. Early performances were costumed and concept-driven, consistent with the protective persona of the *Twenty Twenty* and *Decide* eras, making the character layer of the three-layer model (Section 2.4) physically visible. By *The Crux* era, the show had shifted to a more open and personal stage presence, reflecting the broader movement towards disclosure (Coachella, 2025). This evolution means the live platform adds something to the Djo world that no other platform provides: a live record of the separation itself being dissolved.

4.3.4 TikTok and Audience Co-Creation

A defining feature of Djo's transmedia presence is audience co-creation, most clearly demonstrated by 'End of Beginning'. The song began going viral on TikTok when users soundtracked videos of

their hometowns with it, mapping their own experiences of place and departure onto lyrics originally specific to Keery's time in Chicago (Davies, 2025; Levine, 2024). Its reach extended further in 2025 when it went viral again following the election of Illinois native Robert Francis Prevost as pope, with users overlaying the lyrics over footage of the new pope (Davies, 2025). In both instances, the transmedia extension occurred entirely outside artist-controlled platforms and without authorial intent: audiences activated Jenkins' (2006) spreadability principle, circulating the track across contexts in ways that generated new meaning rather than reproducing existing content. The song did not expand into new narrative territory; it expanded into new emotional territory, becoming a shared reference point for experiences of departure and transition that Keery had not anticipated and could not have planned. This represents the most significant transmedia extension in the Djo case, notable precisely because it was not artist-produced, and illustrates a mode of audience co-creation in which biographical specificity becomes universally applicable across contexts the artist never authored.

4.4 Brand Equity

4.4.1 Brand Awareness

Depth of Awareness

The depth of Djo's brand awareness is heavily concentrated around a single track, reflecting strong recognition in one context rather than across the full discography. As of April 2026, Djo has over 3.6 billion streams on Spotify across 54 tracks, generating approximately 4.8 million daily streams. However, 'End of Beginning' alone accounts for 2.5 billion of those streams, nearly 70% of the project's total catalogue (Kwordb, 2026). The song dethroned Taylor Swift's 'The Fate of Ophelia' from the top of Spotify's global charts in January 2026 after 78 consecutive days at number one, reaching 6.5 million streams on the day it topped the chart (Jones, 2026). Manager Nick Stern has acknowledged this concentration, noting that while many people discovered Djo through the viral moments, 'it's been a slow and steady growth for him even though it feels like overnight success to a lot of people' (Coachella, 2025). Live performance reach has grown alongside streaming: Djo performed at Coachella 2025 and Glastonbury 2025, with further dates across 2026, including festival slots and as an opening act for Tame Impala in the US (Djo Music, 2026).

Breadth of Awareness

The breadth of Djo's brand awareness spans several distinct contexts, though recall remains uneven across them. Within the indie and alternative music world, the project has built a following through its three albums and growing live presence. Within the broader pop culture world, the name is frequently encountered in connection with Keery's acting career. The *Stranger Things* finale in January 2026 triggered another viral surge for 'End of Beginning' (Jones, 2026). On TikTok and other social media, Djo is best known for the viral track and its associated user-generated content. The project also reached mainstream music industry recognition through Taylor Swift's unsolicited endorsement of the track before it broke commercially (Jones, 2026).

4.4.2 Brand Image

Strength of Association

The Djo brand image is built around personal authenticity, earnestness, and emotional directness, associations that have strengthened as the project has evolved toward greater personal disclosure. Keery has described his approach to songwriting as trying to 'be as unfiltered as possible and just create' (Levine, 2024) and has articulated a principle of directness: 'Why not just say exactly what you mean' (Zach Sang Show, 2025). The retro aesthetic, drawing on influences from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, is a further consistent association across the music, visual output, and live show (Coachella, 2025). The project is also associated with slow, earned success rather than manufactured celebrity. Despite Keery's existing fame as an actor, Djo built its audience gradually before 'End of Beginning' went viral, an arc that reinforces the authenticity associations at the core of the brand image.

Favourability of Associations

Critical reception of the Djo project has been mixed. Pitchfork awarded The Crux a score of 5.9, describing it as 'performed with care and craft' but criticising its 'frictionless blend of styles' as feeling 'a bit uncanny, like music you could imagine in a faux Urban Outfitters at Starcourt Mall,' a direct *Stranger Things* reference suggesting the identity separation has not fully landed in critical circles (Cohen, 2025). Keery responded plainly: 'You kind of can't really let it get you down or affect what you're doing too much' (Davies, 2025). Audience reception has been considerably more positive. The viral success of 'End of Beginning', reaching number one on Spotify's global chart

and accumulating billions of streams, reflects strong audience engagement that diverges significantly from critical consensus. Despite the critical mixed reviews, his festival bookings, for example Coachella and Glastonbury in 2025, show that he attracts an audience in these live events.

Uniqueness of Associations

The most distinctive aspect of the Djo brand image is the actor-musician dual identity. Keery is a globally recognised actor who has built a credible music career under a separate name, with an audience that spans both worlds. The viral trajectory of 'End of Beginning', a three-year-old track from a second album that reached billions of streams through audience co-creation rather than label promotion, is itself a distinctive brand story that reinforces the project's perceived independence and authenticity. Keery has acknowledged the unusual nature of his position openly: 'I've been incredibly lucky, so I do have a pretty heavy sense of impostor syndrome-slash-gratitude' (Davies, 2025). This public honesty, rather than confident self-promotion, has become a recognisable quality of the Djo brand and contributes to its non-substitutability within the actor-musician space.

5. CASE STUDY 2: JOJI

5.1 Origin

Joji is the musical project of George Miller, a Japanese-Australian musician who built a large following under the personas Filthy Frank and Pink Guy before stopping all related content in 2017 to pursue music exclusively. He signed with 88Rising and after releasing an EP *In Tongues* in 2017, he has released four studio albums: *Ballads 1* (2018), *Nectar* (2020), *Smithereens* (2022), and *Piss in the Wind* (2026), the last under his own independent label, Palace Creek (McNamara, 2025). His music blends lo-fi R&B, trip-hop, and melancholic pop and has accumulated billions of streams globally (Kelley, 2017; Bruner, 2019).

5.2 Identity Separation

Joji represents a case of complete reinvention, in which Miller retired his prior public personas entirely and replaced them with a new one rather than adding a music project alongside an existing identity. The separation was driven by personal necessity, strategic calculation, and a genuine desire to make music on entirely different terms.

5.2.1 Complete Reinvention

By 2017, Miller had built one of YouTube's largest comedy followings under the Filthy Frank and Pink Guy personas. However, producing the content took a serious physical toll. He has cited throat tissue damage and a neurological condition causing stress-induced seizures as contributing factors to his decision to retire all Filthy Frank-related content (Kelley, 2017; Bruner, 2019). Miller had also outgrown the humour creatively: 'It was a humour that I started when I was in high school. So naturally, as I got older, I got tired of that humour' (Kelley, 2017). The transition was therefore not a rebrand in the conventional marketing sense but a full life change. Miller described it as: 'It was not only a transition of career, but in my life too. Now I feel as if it was a rebirth, and I get to start fresh, and I get to leave this bad stuff behind' (Kelley, 2017).

5.2.2 The Name

The name Joji is widely reported to be the Japanese pronunciation of George, though no direct confirmation of this from Miller himself has been identified. What Miller has confirmed is the distinction between Joji and his previous personas: 'Joji isn't a character like Filthy Frank and Pink

Guy. Joji is just me' (Kelley, 2017). This framing means that where the prior personas were explicitly performative characters, Joji is positioned as the absence of character, a name that marks the space where Miller himself can exist publicly

5.2.3 The Strategic Challenge: Credibility

The central challenge was credibility. Miller was publicly known as a shock-humour YouTuber, and the distance between that identity and the melancholic, atmospheric R&B he wanted to make was wide. He acknowledged this directly, describing 88Rising's challenge as 'turning a fucking joke into something serious' (Kelley, 2017). To manage this, Miller had already been releasing music under a secret SoundCloud account since late 2015, allowing the sound to be evaluated independently before his identity was attached to it (Kelley, 2017). This anonymous testing established that the music could stand independently before the association with his prior personas became known, functioning as a deliberate credibility-building strategy.

Miller touched on the separation by saying: 'I like to let listeners learn to keep the two separate, because I don't want a shitty Pink Guy song with a bad message I made like four years ago to be like, Oh, that's Joji' (Kelley, 2017). The separation was not only about building a new identity but about protecting it from the old one.

5.2.4 What Separation Enables

The complete reinvention enabled Miller to pursue the music he had wanted to make: 'Now I get to do stuff that I want to hear' (Kelley, 2017). The separation created a clean slate on which a new brand identity could be constructed entirely on musical and emotional terms.

The Joji identity also provides privacy. Miller maintains strict personal boundaries in interviews and public appearances, deliberately non-transparent about his life. As one journalist observed, 'it's difficult to infiltrate Joji's interior, but he's polite about the walls he chooses to leave up. You can get to know him, but it has to be through the music' (Armstrong, 2020).

The Joji name does not construct a persona so much as create conditions for authentic self-expression through music. The separation from Filthy Frank is not concealment of Miller's true self but a removal of the character that was obscuring it. As the project has evolved, Miller has noted

that evolving as Joji has given him insight into Miller, describing the project as having 'revealed a bit of unknown potential' (Armstrong, 2020). The separation runs in both directions: Miller created Joji, and Joji is revealing Miller to himself. The complete reinvention mechanism operates by eliminating the prior persona entirely rather than placing it in a separate register, constructing a brand identity from scratch on incompatible emotional and aesthetic terms.

5.2.5 The Doppelgänger

The *Piss in the Wind* album cycle introduced a new development in Miller's identity separation. During the promotional campaign, he deployed a look-alike, model and actor Robert Birdsall, in place of himself for press materials, promotional images, and a Genius interview breaking down lead single 'Pixelated Kisses' (Pace-McCarrick, 2026; Sandiford, 2026). The stand-in, dubbed 'Joe G' by fans, was immediately recognisable as a substitute rather than Miller himself, and this transparency was part of the point: audiences across Reddit, TikTok, and Instagram engaged actively with the conceptual gesture, debating what the replacement signified about authorship, presence, and the relationship between an artist and their public image. Pace-McCarrick described the strategy as resembling 'immersive performance art' rather than conventional promotion (Pace-McCarrick, 2026). As a transmedia contribution it can be read in Jenkins' (2006) argument: the doppelgänger is not a repetition of the music but a distinct platform extension that adds a new conceptual layer to the project's identity separation logic, inviting audiences to participate in its meaning rather than simply consume it. Miller offered no extended explanation, and the intent behind the decision remains deliberately ambiguous, consistent with his broader approach of keeping his personal interior inaccessible to the public.

5.3 Transmedia Strategy

Joji's transmedia strategy operates on two levels simultaneously. At the aesthetic level, a consistent dark, melancholic, and cinematic sensory world is maintained across platforms. At the narrative level, recurring fictional characters across the music videos have generated an audience-constructed narrative universe that extends the project beyond purely aesthetic consistency into something closer to serialised narrative.

Following Jenkins' (2006) principle that each platform contribution should add a distinct piece to the overall world, Joji's world-building is therefore classified as hybrid aesthetic and narrative transmedia. The consistent aesthetic register, dark, melancholic, and cinematic, functions in the lyric mode Ryan (2015) describes prioritising mood and atmosphere as the organising logic. The recurring narrative elements across music videos introduce a multiplicity dimension in Jenkins' (2006) terms, inviting audiences to construct alternative and interconnected readings of the same visual world, combining compression at the aesthetic level with expansion at the narrative level.

Miller has described his songwriting process as beginning with instrumentals but being unable to progress unless he can see the potential for a movie in the material (Armstrong, 2020), suggesting the visual extensions are structurally integral rather than supplementary.

The complete reinvention enacted through the Joji name creates specific conditions for this hybrid strategy. A new identity built from scratch on incompatible emotional terms requires both an aesthetic register to distinguish it from what came before and a narrative dimension to give audiences something to construct around it. The Jojiverse is not incidental to the Joji project, but a structural consequence of the separation type itself.

5.3.1 The Sonic World as Transmedia Extension

The foundation of Joji's aesthetic transmedia strategy is its sonic identity. Miller is a self-taught producer who began making music on GarageBand after hearing Lil Wayne and wanting to recreate the beat (Bruner, 2019). The sound that emerged is lo-fi, melancholic, and instantly recognisable, built around hushed vocals, sparse instrumentation, and reverb. Miller has described the emotional logic: 'Certain emotions that are nearly impossible to put into words can be teased out via sound. I always had trouble getting my thoughts into words, but I certainly feel better when I get to have full control over something that I personally want to hear' (Armstrong, 2020). The sonic identity functions as the aesthetic anchor of the transmedia world, establishing the emotional register that all other platform extensions reinforce.

5.3.2 Album Covers as Visual Extensions

The album covers share a consistent emotional register without following a rigid visual formula. *In Tongues*, *Ballads 1*, and *Nectar* all feature Joji on the cover, maintaining a human presence while keeping the aesthetic dark and intimate. *Smithereens* uses a plain teal gradient with no human presence. *Piss in the Wind* features a dark landscape with a lone tree against a deep red sky. None of the covers are polished or commercially conventional; each shares a quality of darkness and atmospheric intimacy that mirrors the sonic world, functioning as visual extensions that reinforce the aesthetic register rather than advancing a narrative.

5.3.3 Music Videos and Jojiverse

Joji's music videos serve as the primary instrument for the project's transmedia narrative, using a dark, cinematic aesthetic to build a visual world that extends beyond the music itself. Videos including 'Will He', 'Slow Dancing in the Dark', and 'Gimme Love' use surreal imagery, from blood-soaked scenes to interstellar escapes, suggesting an interpretive subtext around isolation and escape (Armstrong, 2020; Baker, 2020).

The narrative dimension is rooted in the recurring character Dr Wallace, whose presence in 'Gimme Love' and 'Run' provides explicit continuity between the videos. Miller has described Wallace as a deliberately ambiguous figure who may be a catalyst for the apocalyptic or nightmare settings of the videos, purposefully leaving his backstory open to interpretation (Bernston, 2020). This openness is precisely what generates the multiplicity Jenkins (2006) identifies as a transmedia principle: by refusing to resolve the narrative, Miller creates space for audience construction.

This world-building has inspired fans to construct the Jojiverse, a comprehensive theory of interconnected plotlines and visual motifs spanning the full catalogue. This reflects Jenkins' (2006) notion of participatory culture, in which audiences actively collaborate to synthesise a fragmented transmedia world into a unified mythology. The Jojiverse represents the fullest expression of the expansion logic Scolari (2009) describes, driven not by the artist but by the audience, making Joji's transmedia system uniquely dependent on fan co-construction for its narrative coherence.

5.3.4 Live Performances

The Pandemonium tour in 2023 combined deeply emotional musical performance with comedic audience interaction, reflecting the complexity of Miller's identity separation in live form. The visual production is tied closely to the album aesthetic, with lighting and colour palettes shifting to reflect each album during the show (Taylor, 2023).

Between songs, the show incorporated comedic elements drawn from Miller's internet background, including playing Super Smash Bros. on-screen, firing merchandise with a trebuchet and a T-shirt cannon, and bringing out surprise guests (Yoo, 2022; Park, 2023). Long-term fans familiar with the Filthy Frank background tend to find the humour consistent with Miller's identity, while newer audiences who discovered him through the music alone occasionally find the comedic elements unexpected. This tension reflects the broader complexity of the complete reinvention: the prior identity is not fully erased from the live experience, even where the music suggests otherwise, and the separation that appears clean in the recorded output becomes murkier in the live context.

5.4 Brand Equity

5.4.1 Brand Awareness

Depth of Awareness

The depth of Joji's brand awareness is evidenced by streaming performance distributed broadly across the discography rather than concentrated around a single track, reflecting consistent recognition across multiple albums and release periods. Joji has over 14 billion streams on Spotify as of March 2026, generating around 5.4 million streams per day (Kworb, 2026). 'Glimpse of Us' is the most-streamed track with approximately 1.78 billion streams, closely followed by 'Slow Dancing in the Dark' with 1.77 billion, and 'YEAH RIGHT', 'Sanctuary', and 'worldstar money (interlude)' all exceeding 600 million streams (Kworb, 2026). This distribution indicates that recognition extends consistently across multiple albums.

Chart performance reinforces this depth. *Piss in the Wind* debuted at number five on the Billboard 200 in February 2026 with 86,000 album-equivalent units in its first week, making Joji the first Asian soloist to debut for consecutive albums in the top five of the charts (Caulfield, 2026). Earlier albums *Ballads 1* and *Nectar* both peaked at number three on the Billboard 200, with *Ballads 1*

also topping the Billboard R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, the first project from an Asian-born artist to do so (Bruner, 2019; Armstrong, 2020).

Breadth of Awareness

The breadth of Joji's brand awareness spans several distinct audience contexts, reflecting strong recall across different demographics and cultural registers. Within the alternative R&B and lo-fi music world, Joji is a defining reference point for melancholic, emotionally interior music. Within internet culture, the Filthy Frank legacy continues to bring a specific demographic of older fans who followed the transition from comedy to music. On social media, 'Glimpse of Us' generated significant viral engagement in 2022, generating broad awareness through multi-platform distribution of the track. The project has also demonstrated global reach, with particular strength in Asia, Australia, and among younger audiences internationally (Bruner, 2019).

5.4.2 Brand Image

Strength of Association

The Joji brand image is built on strong and consistent associations centred on emotional authenticity and melancholy. The sonic identity, built around lo-fi R&B, hushed vocals, sparse instrumentation, and reverb, is consistent and recognisable across five releases, suggesting these associations are strongly held rather than tied to a single era. The brand is further associated with privacy and mystery, with Miller maintaining strict personal boundaries in interviews and public appearances, keeping the music as the primary access point to his interior life (Armstrong, 2020).

Favourability of Associations

Critical reception has been consistently moderate, with a notable gap between critical consensus and audience response. *Ballads 1* received a 6.7 from Pitchfork (Blais-Billie, 2018) and *Piss in the Wind* a 5.9, cited for 'unspecific songwriting and listless vocals, despite some compelling production choices' (Jayasuriya, 2026). Rolling Stone clearly captured both the identity separation and the brand image: 'Miller used to make you cringe, Joji makes you cry' (Leight, 2018). Audience engagement has been considerably more favourable, following 'Glimpse of Us' and consistent chart performance across the discography. The gap between critical and audience reception is a recurring

pattern, suggesting the Joji brand operates primarily through direct audience connection rather than critical validation.

Uniqueness of Associations

The Joji brand is distinguished by characteristics with no direct equivalent in the lo-fi and alternative R&B space. The transition from one of YouTube's most popular comedy personas to a globally successful serious musician is genuinely unprecedented, described by Rolling Stone as 'one of the greatest transformations in modern pop culture' (Leight, 2018). This transformation narrative is itself a brand asset, giving the project a biographical depth that artists without that history cannot replicate. The consistent association with privacy and mystery further distinguishes it: while many artists in the space cultivate relatability through social media transparency, Joji maintains deliberate opacity, reaching its most extreme expression through the doppelgänger strategy during the *Piss in the Wind* campaign.

6. CASE STUDY 3: TAME IMPALA

6.1 Origin

Tame Impala is an Australian psychedelic music project created and led by Kevin Parker, who writes, records, and produces all material himself (Currin, 2025). The project debuted in 2008 with a self-titled EP, followed by *InnerSpeaker* in 2010, *Lonerism* in 2012, *Currents* in 2015, *The Slow Rush* in 2020, and *Deadbeat* in 2025. Across this period, Parker also became a sought-after producer and collaborator across the global pop landscape, working with artists including Dua Lipa, Lady Gaga, Travis Scott, and The Weeknd (Currin, 2025).

6.2 Identity Separation

Tame Impala represents a case of deliberate and sustained de-personalisation, in which Parker subordinates his individual identity to a project name that operates as a distinct creative entity, shaped by both strategic calculation and personal psychological needs. De-personalisation here refers not to the generic abstraction common to any brand name, but to the active subordination of a known individual identity (Parker's name, face, and biography) in favour of a project name that operates independently of its creator.

6.2.1 The Name as a Deliberate Construct

The Tame Impala name has no conceptual origin or biographical significance. Parker has confirmed he chose it purely for how it sounded, later creating backstories to add meaning (The Project, 2022). From the outset, the name served as an aesthetic label rather than a personal one, a choice that immediately established a distance between the project and its creator.

6.2.2 The Band Illusion

The de-personalisation of Tame Impala was reinforced by Parker's deliberate presentation of the project as a band rather than a solo endeavour. The decision operated at two levels simultaneously. At a personal level, Parker has acknowledged pretending to have a rock band for years partly because he did not want to be vulnerable in front of his best friends (Currin, 2025). At a professional level he believed the band framing would make others take him more seriously than if he presented himself as a solo producer making bedroom rock (Currin, 2025). The band presentation therefore

functioned as a mechanism of de-personalisation at both levels, shielding Parker from personal exposure and from industry dismissal simultaneously.

The illusion was effective. Jay Watson, who joined as a live drummer and later became a core member of the touring band, recalled that it took him time to accept that Tame Impala was Parker's project alone, having initially believed he was joining a conventional band (Currin, 2025). Early press coverage from the *InnerSpeaker* and *Lonerism* eras consistently referred to Tame Impala as a band, reflecting the success of the framing Parker had constructed. As Parker later reflected: 'It didn't make sense to people listening to it that it could just be one person. It seemed absurd for people to know it was just me' (Currin, 2025). By the time the solo authorship was publicly confirmed, the band framing had already shaped the project's early reception and cultural positioning.

6.2.3 The Dual Identity System

This separation is actively managed. Parker has an internalised sense of what belongs under the Tame Impala name: when considering releasing techno music, he noted it would not have been released as Tame Impala (Apple Music, 2025), and on the Justice collaboration he specifically sought to make something that did not sound like Tame Impala (Currin, 2025). The result is a system in which the Tame Impala name carries Parker's solo artistic vision while the Parker name absorbs external collaborative work without contaminating it.

This separation has practical consequences, firstly providing creative insulation. Since the project is not anchored to Parker's face or biography, it can evolve sonically without being perceived as personal reinvention. Furthermore, it enables extensive external collaboration without brand contamination, giving Parker freedom to experiment under his own name without consequences for the Tame Impala brand. Finally, it creates a form of creative accountability; because the Tame Impala name has accumulated a recognisable aesthetic standard over fifteen years, anything released under it is held to that standard by Parker himself and by audiences. As Parker has put it, his other projects 'didn't have the weight of responsibility that Tame Impala has' (Di Fabrizio, 2020), suggesting that the separation is experienced not only as a freedom but as a form of creative accountability to the brand's aesthetic standards.

Paradoxically, the de-personalisation at the brand level appears to enable greater personal vulnerability in the music itself. Parker has described his albums as becoming progressively more personal over time (Apple Music, 2020) and the project as 'the thing that was going to rescue me' (Currin, 2025). The concealment of the self at the brand level is the condition under which fuller expression of the self in the music becomes possible. This dynamic enables and is the defining tension of the Tame Impala identity separation. This distinguishes it from more straightforward strategic uses of stage-name branding. The de-personalisation mechanism operates by removing Parker's biography and face from the project's public presentation, creating a brand equity that can evolve, collaborate, and express vulnerability independently of the constraints his personal identity would impose.

6.2.4 The Potential Shift Towards Personal Disclosure

The *Deadbeat* era marks a subtle but meaningful shift in this pattern. For the first time, a Tame Impala album cover features Parker himself, photographed in an unplanned moment during the cover shoot when his daughter came to him, and the photographer captured it spontaneously. Parker and his team chose this image as the album cover despite its unguarded quality, or perhaps because of it (triple j, 2025). During the *Deadbeat* tour, Parker brought his child onstage at the Prague show, a moment documented in fan footage across Instagram and TikTok. Rather than undermining the identity separation, these moments are consistent with *Deadbeat*'s thematic core of self-acceptance and vulnerability, suggesting that the boundaries of the Tame Impala identity evolve in dialogue with the project's creative direction.

6.3 Transmedia Strategy

Following Jenkins' (2006) principle that each platform contribution should add a distinct piece to the overall world, Tame Impala's world-building operates at the level of aesthetic experience rather than narrative and is therefore classified here as aesthetic transmedia. Each platform adds a layer to this multisensory world. Album artwork provides the first visual extension of the sonic identity: across the first four studio albums, artwork by Leif Podhajsky, Robert Beatty, and Neil Krug maintained a consistent psychedelic visual register — distorted natural landscapes, abstract scientific imagery, and desert environments gradually consumed by sand — each developed in

dialogue with the album's themes rather than as a generic packaging (Kahl, 2019; Kesa, 2015; Steven, 2020). A consistent pattern across these four albums is the absence of Parker's face or any human presence from the artwork, reinforcing both the de-personalisation strategy and the primacy of the sensory world over biographical identity as the transmedia anchor. The *Deadbeat* cover marks a departure from this pattern, as discussed above. Music videos extend the world into a moving visual register, and live shows translate it into immersive physical experience. The world is psychedelic, immersive, and emotionally interior, but it is built cumulatively across platforms rather than repeated across them.

6.3.1 The Sonic World as Transmedia Extension

The foundation of Tame Impala's aesthetic transmedia strategy is its sonic identity. Aesthetic transmedia, as used here, refers to the coordination of sensory and atmospheric qualities — sonic texture, visual register, and emotional tone — across platforms as the primary world-building mechanism. Parker has described rhythm as the cornerstone of the project's music, noting that it became a defining characteristic without him fully realising it at the start (Apple Music, 2020). The signature sound, built around heavily compressed drums, layered vintage synthesisers, dense psychedelic production, and Parker's vocals processed through reverb and distortion, is consistent and recognisable across studio albums and live settings alike. Parker has described the creative process as deeply personal, stating 'everything I am in this album' (Apple Music, 2020), suggesting this sonic consistency emerges authentically rather than as a calculated branding decision.

6.3.2 Music Videos as Visual Extensions

Tame Impala's music videos form another layer of the project's aesthetic world, extending its sensory register across a visual platform rather than advancing a narrative. The visual language draws consistently on surreal and psychedelic imagery, described by one critic as 'exponentially vibrant and surreal, transporting viewers with futuristic elements and experimental measures' with visuals that 'blur the lines between realistic and unreal elements' (Akkiraju, 2025). This consistency is maintained even where individual videos diverge significantly in approach. The *Loser* video, for example, deliberately strips away the psychedelic visual register in favour of a more restrained and grounded aesthetic, yet remains thematically coherent with the album's emotional world (Akkiraju, 2025). Rather than following a single visual formula, the video output holds together through a

shared sensory and emotional logic, which is precisely how aesthetic transmedia operates. Each platform contribution is distinct but recognisably part of the same world.

6.3.3 Live Performances as Transmedia Extension

The Tame Impala live show extends the aesthetic world by adding an immersive physical dimension unavailable through any other medium. Parker has confirmed his direct creative involvement in the visual dimension of the show, synchronizing lights and visuals to the music in real time, driven by a belief that audio and visual should work together (Apple Music, 2020).

The Guardian described it as 'a multisensory happening, somewhere between Pink Floyd and the Chemical Brothers, more than a rock gig, yet not quite a rave,' noting laser fans, a UFO-like rig emitting a rainbow glow, and visuals recalling both 1960s psychedelia and early 1990s club culture (Lynskey, 2022). The Berkeley Beacon described the experience as feeling 'transported into another realm,' with lasers, confetti, and visuals choreographed to the music (Turcotte, 2022). Technically, the production operates as a constant interplay between real-time-generated visuals, image-based animation, and live camera effects across over 60-metre-wide LED screens (XiteLabs, 2021).

The most significant transmedia element of the live show is the Rushium concept, introduced during *The Slow Rush* tour. A fictional pharmaceutical brand presented through a video at the start of each show, in which a character advises the audience to take a drug that alters their perception of time (Lynskey, 2022). This demonstrates what Jenkins (2006) means by a distinct platform contribution: the show does not reproduce the recorded material but extends and deepens the album's aesthetic world in ways unavailable through any other medium.

6.3.4 The Storytelling Dimension

While Tame Impala's transmedia strategy is classified as primarily aesthetic, a storytelling dimension is still present. Parker's albums carry consistent thematic content: *Lonerism* explores isolation, *Currents* processes personal transformation, *The Slow Rush* examines time, and *Deadbeat* confronts self-acceptance. Currin (2025) described the albums as feeling 'like exhalations, like Parker is breathing the troubles in his head into tunes the rest of us can carry for him' capturing the emotional coherence across the discography.

This storytelling remains contained within individual albums rather than extending across platforms. Parker has resisted the concept album label, noting that while audiences expect narrative arcs from him, the thematic coherence emerges from personal experience rather than deliberate planning (Apple Music, 2020; Apple Music, 2025). Transmedia extensions such as live shows, music videos, and album covers reinforce the emotional and aesthetic tone of each album without advancing a narrative across platforms. This confirms Tame Impala's classification as aesthetic transmedia, while establishing that its world is emotionally rich rather than purely visual and sonic, consistent with Ryan's (2015) lyric mode.

6.4 Brand Equity

6.4.1 Brand Awareness

Depth of Awareness

The depth of awareness is evidenced by the substantial streaming performance of the project's catalogue, reflecting consistent recognition across a broad listener base. As of March 2026, Tame Impala has over 13.3 billion streams, with 'The Less I Know the Better' alone exceeding 2.4 billion streams. The discography generates over 13 million daily streams (Kworb, 2024). Recognition extends beyond streaming: Tame Impala headlined Coachella in 2019 and has performed in arenas and at major festivals globally, demonstrating that the brand generates active audience demand (Lynskey, 2022; Apple Music, 2025).

Breadth of Awareness

Tame Impala demonstrates broad breadth of awareness across multiple audience segments and consumption contexts. In the alternative and indie music world, the project is a reference point for psychedelic rock and pop crossover. Parker's collaborations with Dua Lipa, Lady Gaga, Rihanna, and Travis Scott extend the brand's reach into mainstream pop production (Currin, 2025), while consistent festival and arena headlining positions it across the live music world. Together these reflect recall activated across streaming, production, and live contexts simultaneously.

6.4.2 Brand Image

Strength of Associations

The Tame Impala brand image is built on consistent associations centred on sonic and visual identity, with rhythm as the defining characteristic that emerged organically (Apple Music, 2020), producing a recognisable associative signature that audiences hold strongly across time and context.

Perfectionism is a further association: Parker has acknowledged that every album has been completed because he ran out of time rather than because he felt it was truly done (Currin, 2025), a standard of craft that has become part of how audiences understand the brand.

Favourability of Associations

The favourability of associations is evidenced by industry recognition and critical reception. The project has won the ARIA Award for Album of the Year three times, accumulated approximately 15 wins from over 30 ARIA nominations across categories, including Album of the Year, Best Rock Album, Producer of the Year, and Engineer of the Year (Brandle, 2025). At the 2025 Grammy Awards, Tame Impala won Best Dance/Electronic Recording for 'Neverender', a collaboration with Justice, the first Grammy win after five nominations. This was followed by a second win in 2026 for 'End of Summer' from *Deadbeat* (McNamara, 2026). Critical reception has been equally consistent: The Guardian described the live show as scaling Parker's 'meticulously produced headphone records' into 'something improbably spectacular when played loud in a field dazzled with lights' (Lynskey, 2022), and Mark Ronson has placed Parker in the 'mad genius' archetype alongside Sly Stone, D'Angelo, and Shuggie Otis, artists whose creative vision is not easily replicated through collaboration (Currin, 2025).

Uniqueness of Associations

The Tame Impala brand is distinguished by several characteristics that set it apart from other artists in the psychedelic and alternative space. The dual identity system, in which Parker operates as a collaborator under his own name while Tame Impala functions as a distinct solo project — a structural arrangement not always used by artists comparable to scale — allows the brand to be present across multiple cultural worlds without being diluted by them. The project spans multiple

genres, without losing its core aesthetic identity, a range that Currin (2025) described as making Parker arguably unique among rock musicians of his generation. The live show adds a distinctive dimension: technically elaborate, immersive, and occupying a space that critics have described as unlike any comparable artist's live experience, it functions as a brand touchpoint with no direct equivalent in the psychedelic or alternative space (Lynskey, 2022; Turcotte, 2022).

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 The Authenticity Paradox: How Identity Separation Enables Rather Than Blocks Self-Expression

Table 1. Three-layer persona model (Auslander, 2006; extended in this thesis) applied across cases¹

Auslander's layer	Tame Impala	Djo	Joji
Layer 1 — Real person			
Real person Legal name; private self	Kevin Parker <i>"I pretended to have a rock band for years, partly because I didn't want to be too vulnerable" (Currin, 2025)</i>	Joe Keery <i>"I just really wanted to be taken seriously. I was just trying to give myself the best shot" (Davies, 2025)</i>	George Miller <i>"It was not only a transition of career, but in my life too... a rebirth" (Kelley, 2017)</i>
Layer 2 — Performance persona			
Performance persona Stage name; public artistic identity	Brand-entity Legal name absorbed into project name; Kevin Parker credited separately for external work only	Protective shield Djo quarantines music from acting fame; shield weakens across three albums as disclosure increases	Hard reset Filthy Frank/Pink Guy personas fully retired; Joji built from scratch on opposite emotional register
Layer 3 — Character			
Character Role within specific text; fictional figure	Diffuse / absent No recurring fictional character; world is sensory rather than character-driven	Evolving Early "costumed character" (wig/sunglasses era) dissolved; <i>The Crux</i> = character merges with real person	Embedded Dr Wallace and recurring video figures create character layer; doppelgänger strategy adds meta-character dimension
Real person "bleed" into transmedia world			
Degree of personal disclosure How much of the real person enters the brand world	Low historically; <i>Deadbeat</i> era marks first deliberate personal disclosure — Parker's face on cover, child on stage in Prague (triple j, 2025)	Low to high; systematic arc across albums from concealment (<i>Twenty Twenty</i>) to full exposure (<i>The Crux</i>) (Coachella, 2025)	Paradoxically high emotional disclosure through music, near-zero biographical disclosure; doppelgänger inverts the logic entirely (Pace-McCarrick, 2026)

A surface reading of stage-name branding might suggest that introducing a project name between artist and audience creates distance, that a mask, however, artistically motivated, is still a form of concealment. The cross-case evidence examined here complicates that intuition. Across all three cases, identity separation (Section 2.4) does not suppress authenticity in the sense Auslander (2006) describes as the impression of integrity and unmediated communication between performer and

¹ Table generated by Claude Sonnet 4.6 on April 15th 2026

audience but creates the structural conditions under which it becomes possible. The paradox is that the structural gap is what allows each artist's most personal expression to reach audiences.

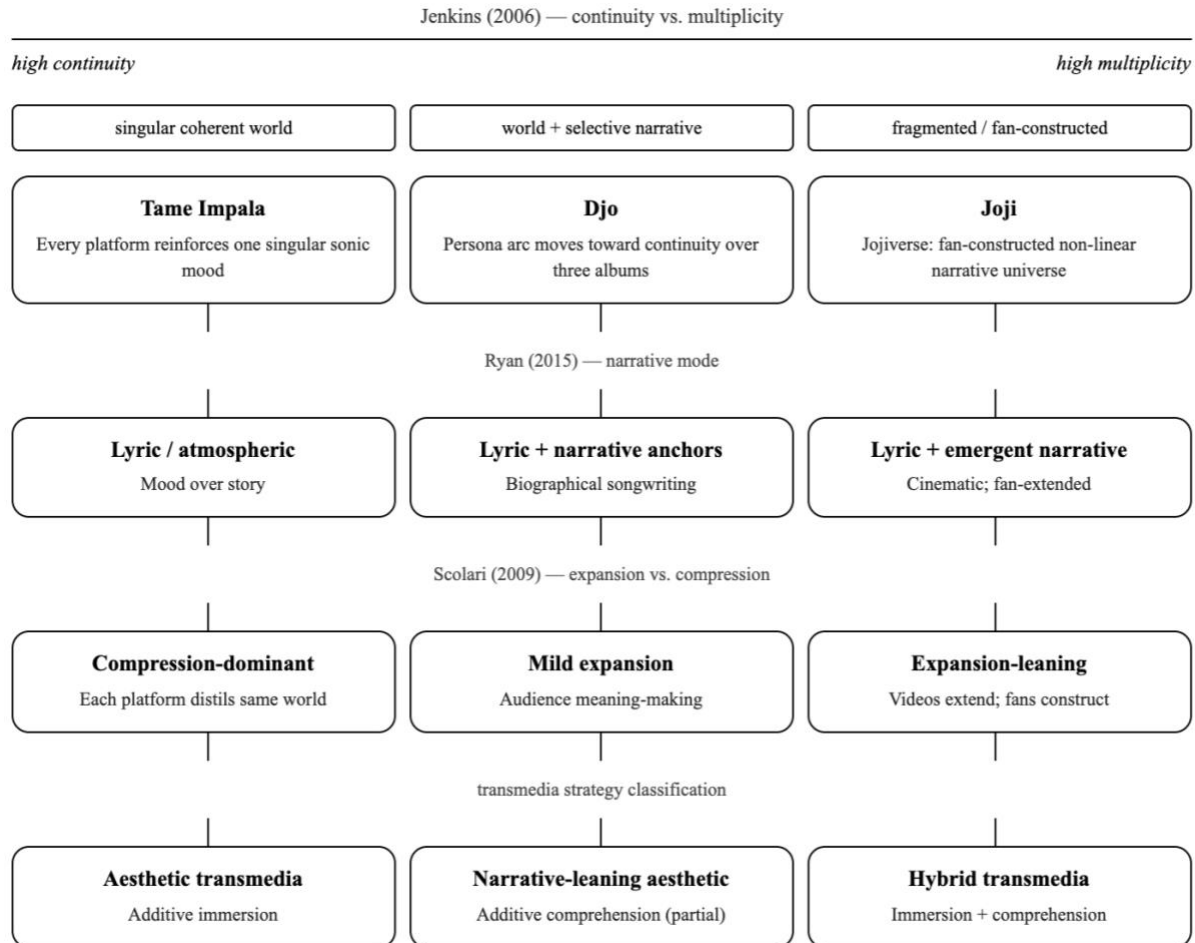
The three-layer model developed in Section 2.4, comprising the real person, performance persona, and character, provides the analytical framework for mapping these differences, as illustrated in Table 1. In each case, the layers are configured differently, and the configuration shapes both the transmedia world the artist builds, and the mode of authenticity audiences perceive.

As the case studies establish, each artist's identity separation produces a distinct configuration of the three layers. Parker's de-personalisation absorbs the real person entirely into a brand entity with no character layer, enabling emotional exposure at the level of the music itself, with the brand functioning as the container for vulnerability that the person cannot safely hold publicly. Keery's protective separation begins as an explicit shield reinforced at the character layer through costumed performance, then systematically collapses across three albums as the insight deepens that personal directness strengthens rather than weakens audience connection. Miller's complete reinvention removes an incompatible prior character entirely, positioning Joji not as a persona distinct from the real person but as a more authentic version of the self, while simultaneously making the real person more inaccessible than ever through strict biographical opacity and, in the *Piss in the Wind* campaign, the doppelgänger strategy.

The three cases together reveal a consistent pattern beneath their structural differences. Identity separation does not produce a single mode of authenticity but redirects personal expression away from the real person's public presence and into a transmedia world. In each case, the stage name is not a mask placed over the real person but a frame that determines where authenticity is expressed and how audiences encounter it, through the music, the visual world, and the platforms examined in the following section.

7.2 Aesthetic vs. Narrative: The Transmedia Engagement Loop

Figure 2. Transmedia strategy classification across cases: Jenkins (2006), Ryan (2015), and Scolari (2009) frameworks applied²



Having established how identity separation shapes the mode of authenticity each artist projects, the question becomes how that separation translates into a specific transmedia strategy. Applying Jenkins' (2006) principles to the three cases and specifically focusing on the tension between continuity and multiplicity, reveals a spectrum of approaches that maps closely onto the type of identity separation each artist has adopted. Read alongside Ryan's (2015) distinction between narrative and lyric modes and Scolari's (2009) expansion versus compression framework, the cross-

² Table generated by Claude Sonnet 4.6 on April 15th 2026

case comparison produces a picture of how transmedia strategy type shapes the engagement loop between artist and audience, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Tame Impala is at the high-continuity end of the spectrum. Every platform contribution, from albums and music videos to live performances, supports a singular multisensorial world rather than an advancing storyline. As his case study documents, this is most visible in the live show, where audio, visual, and spatial design operate as a unified affective system rather than a narrative vehicle. This is consistent with Ryan's (2015) lyric mode, in which the organising logic of a transmedia world is mood and sensation rather than narrative sequence, and with what Scolari (2009) describes as compression: each platform distils the same affective world rather than expanding it with new information. This pattern suggests a mode of transmedia engagement distinct from Jenkins' (2006) original concept of additive comprehension, which this thesis terms additive immersion: each platform's contribution deepens the intensity of the listener's affective relationship with the world rather than adding narrative comprehension. Every touchpoint is a portal into the same experience, encountered from a different angle.

Joji is on the opposite end of the spectrum. While the project maintains a consistent aesthetic register across platforms, the music videos introduce a narrative dimension that extends beyond atmospheric coherence. As demonstrated in his case study, Dr Wallace's ambiguity is precisely the openness that aligns with the multiplicity Jenkins (2006) identifies as a transmedia principle. Additionally, the fan-constructed Jojiverse is the fullest expression of this dynamic. Here, the expansion logic Scolari (2009) describes is driven not by the artist but by the audience, making the Joji transmedia system uniquely dependent on fan co-construction for its narrative coherence. Rather than additive immersion, what Joji's strategy produces is closer to Jenkins' original concept of additive comprehension: each new platform contribution, whether artist-produced or fan-generated, adds a piece to a larger puzzle that audiences actively assemble.

Djo sits between those two poles. The primary world-building mechanism is the songwriting itself, with songs rooted in specific biographical moments that function as personal narrative anchors. Yet, the platform extensions do not build on these narratives or generate a cross-platform storyworld. The most significant transmedia extension in the Djo case was not artist-produced at

all, as the viral spread of 'End of Beginning' on TikTok, representing audience co-creation of a different kind to the Jojiverse. Where Joji's participatory culture constructs a fictional universe, Djo's constructs emotional commons, a shared affective space in which biographical specificity becomes universally applicable. This distinction has consequences for how brand equity forms. The Jojiverse generates strength through narrative engagement, whereas the emotional commons generate strength through emotional identification, producing the experiential brand associations Keller (1993) attributes to the benefit dimension of brand image.

7.3 The Pre-Existing Audience as a Moderating Variable

Table 2. CBBE outcomes by transmedia strategy type (Keller, 1993).³

CBBE dimension (Keller, 1993)	Tame Impala <i>aesthetic transmedia</i>	Djo <i>narrative-leaning aesthetic</i>	Joji <i>hybrid transmedia</i>
Recognition ID from sonic/visual cue alone	5 — very strong	3 — moderate	4 — strong
Recall Comes to mind unprompted in context	4 — strong	4 — strong*	4 — strong
Favourability Positive associations; perceived authenticity	5 — very strong	3 — mixed	3 — mixed
Strength Depth and durability of fan engagement	5 — very strong	3 — growing	5 — very strong
Uniqueness Distinct; non-substitutable associations	5 — very strong	4 — strong	5 — very strong
Overall CBBE profile	<i>Uniformly high; aesthetic strategy builds equity across all dimensions</i>	<i>Uneven; recall spike driven by single viral track; other dimensions developing</i>	<i>High on strength + uniqueness; favourability gap between audiences and critics</i>
Very strong (5) Strong (4) Moderate / mixed (3) Weak (2)			
* Djo's recall is strong but narrow — approximately 70% of streams concentrated in one track (Kworb, 2026). Breadth of recall remains limited compared to depth. Scores qualitatively derived from case study evidence.			

Kevin Parker built the Tame Impala brand without any prior public profile. Meaning that Keller's (1993) brand awareness dimensions were developed from zero through the transmedia world itself. This baseline condition produces what might be called pure brand equity formation: every

³ Table generated by Claude Sonnet 4.6 on April 15th 2026

association audience that continues to be held within the Tame Impala name has been generated through the sonic and visual world Parker built, with no prior identity either helping or complicating that process. The result is a uniformly strong CBBE profile across all five sub-dimensions, where recognition, recall, favourability, strength, and uniqueness were all earned independently through the consistency of the aesthetic transmedia strategy.

George Miller's case presents a structurally different dynamic. The substantial YouTube following he had built as Filthy Frank and Pink Guy constituted a pre-existing audience, but one whose associations were categorically incompatible with the Joji project. The challenge was therefore not the absence of awareness but the active management of the wrong kind of awareness. Miller addressed this through the anonymous SoundCloud described in his case study, effectively decoupling the awareness dimension of CBBE from the image dimension. The CBBE outcome reflects this complexity: strength and uniqueness are very strongly evidenced, with deep and durable fan engagement across the full discography and a brand story, that Rolling Stone has called unprecedented in modern pop culture (Leight, 2018). Favourability, however, shows a consistent gap between audience reception and critical consensus, with Pitchfork scores that diverge significantly from streaming performance and chart positions. This gap may partly reflect the residual complexity of the prior identity, since the Filthy Frank legacy continues to inflect how some audiences and critics encounter the Joji project, even where the separation has been otherwise successful.

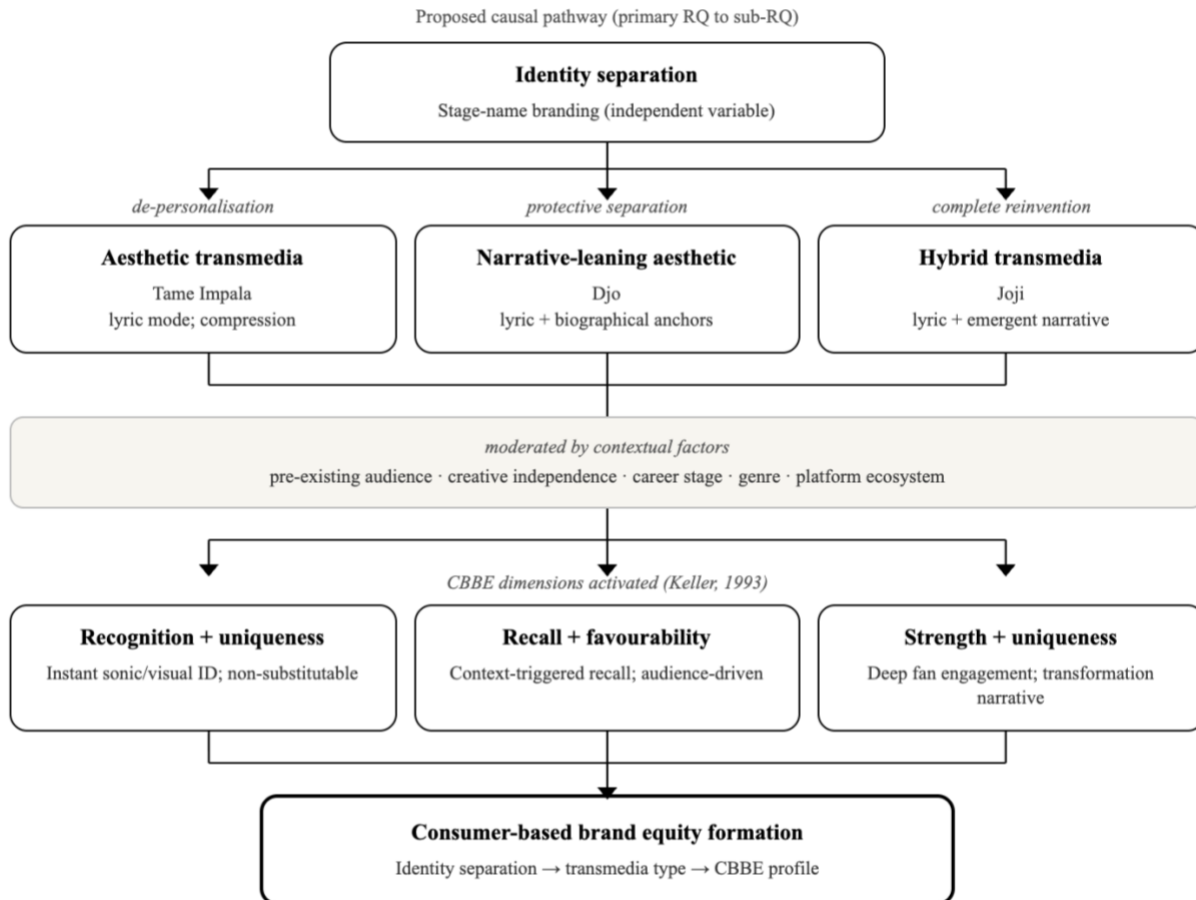
Joe Keery's case is the most instructive for understanding how a pre-existing audience of a different kind shapes brand equity formation. Unlike Miller, whose prior audience was built around content incompatible with his new direction, Keery's existing fame as a globally recognised actor constituted a form of brand awareness that was neither compatible nor incompatible with the music but simply adjacent to it. The CBBE evidence reflects the specific consequences of this adjacency. Recall is strongly evidenced but heavily concentrated, as approximately 70% of the project's total streaming catalogue is accounted for by a single track, noted in his case study. Recognition and favourability remain uneven, with Pitchfork's 5.9 for *The Crux* indicating that the identity separation has not fully landed in critical circles. The protective separation was efficient in giving the project space to develop on musical terms, but the adjacency of the acting identity means the

Djo brand equity profile remains more dependent on a single cultural moment than the other two cases.

Taken together, the three cases suggest that pre-existing audience type moderates brand equity formation in a specific way, as indicated in Table 2. The complete absence of prior audience, as in Tame Impala, produces the most evenly distributed CBBE profile because every dimension must be earned through the transmedia world alone. An incompatible prior audience, as in Joji, produces high strength and uniqueness but introduces persistent complexity around favourability. An adjacent prior audience, as in Djo, accelerates awareness formation but risks concentrating it around a single point of cultural contact rather than distributing it across the full brand world. Identity separation does not operate in isolation. Its effects on transmedia strategy and brand equity formation are shaped by the audience context in which it occurs.

7.4 Synthesis: Identity Separation, Transmedia Strategy, and Brand Equity Formation

Figure 3⁴. Proposed causal pathway: identity separation, transmedia strategy type, and consumer-based brand equity formation



The cross-case comparison traced in this chapter supports the central proposition of this thesis, where identity separation shapes the type of transmedia strategy an artist adopts, which in turn shapes how brand equity forms in audiences' minds. Following Yin's (2018) replication logic, the three cases do not merely illustrate this pathway but collectively substantiate it, with each case confirming the pattern from a different structural position.

⁴ Figure generated by Claude Sonnet 4.6 on April 15th 2026

As shown on Figure 3, de-personalisation favours aesthetic transmedia, which builds brand equity through recognition and uniqueness, grounded in a sensory world consistent enough to be identified without a name attached. Complete reinvention favours hybrid transmedia, which builds equity through strength and uniqueness, sustained by the depth of fan engagement that narrative openness invites. Protective separation produces a transmedia approach that is emotionally direct without being fully aesthetic or fully narrative, generating strong recall concentrated around specific cultural moments rather than distributed evenly across the brand world. These are propositions that hold across the cases examined here and that future research could test against a broader range of artists and separation types.

Two theoretical contributions emerge from this pattern that extend beyond the cases themselves. The first is the aesthetic versus narrative transmedia typology, which provides a vocabulary for analysing artists whose transmedia coherence is organised around sensory consistency rather than story, filling the gap in Jenkins' (2006) framework identified in the literature review. The second is the concept of additive immersion, a counterpart to Jenkins' additive comprehension, in which each platform contribution deepens the affective intensity of the audience's relationship with the artist's world rather than adding narrative information. Together, these contributions suggest that transmedia theory required expansion beyond its narrative-driven origins. More specifically, transmedia theory' platform contribution logic — the question of what each channel adds that others cannot — makes it uniquely suited to analysing brand behaviour in attention-fragmented media environments. Where conventional brand frameworks, including Keller's (1993) own, treat platforms as distribution channels for brand messages, transmedia theory reframes them as world-building mechanisms, asking not how widely content circulates but how deeply a world is constructed. The aesthetic-narrative typology and the concept of additive immersion suggested here extend this reframing beyond fictional entertainment, making transmedia theory applicable wherever brands operate as experiential worlds rather than informational signals, a condition that characterises not only music, but fashion, gaming, and platform-native consumer culture more broadly.

8. CONCLUSION

Music is no longer only about releasing albums. In an attention-fragmented media environment, successful artists operate as brands, building worlds audiences consume across platforms and beyond the music itself. Transmedia theory offers a framework for analysing how those worlds are constructed, yet its origins in narrative fiction left music at its margins. This thesis has argued that music belongs within transmedia theory on its own terms, and that resolving music's place within it requires two theoretical extensions: an aesthetic versus narrative transmedia typology, accounting for artists whose cross-platform coherence is organised around sensation rather than story, and the concept of additive immersion, in which each platform contribution deepens affective intensity rather than narrative comprehension.

The three cases examined here, Djo, Joji, and Tame Impala, collectively demonstrate that identity separation is not just a branding choice but a variable that can shape both type of transmedia strategy an artist adopts and how brand equity forms in audiences' minds. De-personalisation leads to aesthetic transmedia and builds equity through recognition and uniqueness. Complete reinvention leads to hybrid narrative transmedia and generates deep fan engagement, though favourability remains complicated by the prior identity. Protective separation builds awareness quickly but tends to concentrate it around a single cultural moment rather than spreading it across the full brand world. Taken together, these findings extend Keller's (1993) CBBE framework into a context it was not designed for, showing that the type of prior identity an artist carries is a factor that determines which brand equity dimensions develop and how strongly.

Future research could test this framework deductively across a broader artist sample, incorporate genres beyond alternative and indie rock where identity separation may operate differently or carry different cultural stakes. Tracking how separation type evolves over a career would also be valuable: the cases here represent early-to-mid career stages, whether the brand equity patterns identified are stable over time is unclear. Primary audience data through surveys or interviews would move the CBBE claims from inference to direct evidence, enabling more rigorous testing of the association between transmedia type and specific brand equity dimensions. Finally, the three cases were selected for theoretical richness rather than representativeness, which limits

generalisability. A comparative study including artists from non-Western markets or non-English-language contexts would be a next step in extending the framework's scope.

APPENDIX

Appendix A. Control Variables

Control Variable	Tame Impala (Kevin Parker)	Djo (Joe Keery)	Joji (George Miller)
Creative Independence	Primary songwriter, producer, and instrumentalist. Maintains creative control.	Independent project, self-produced and self-released through AWAL Recordings.	Transitioned from an independent YouTube career to a music artist under a new name. In 2025 he left 88rising.
Pre-Existing Audience	None under real name. The audience was built entirely through the Tame Impala brand.	Substantial global recognition as an actor on Stranger Things, portraying the character, Steve Harrington.	Substantial following on YouTube as a character called Filthy Frank / Pink Guy.
First Release Under Stage Name and Career Stage	2008 Established artist	2019 Early-stage artist	2017 Established artist
(Degree of) Identity Separation	De-personalisation. Legal name known publicly but absent from brand presentation: releases, artwork, and public-facing materials are attributed to Tame Impala rather than to Kevin Parker.	Protective separation. Stage name shields music career from acting fame; two identities coexist publicly in separate fields.	Complete reinvention. Prior persona retired entirely; Joji built from scratch on an incompatible emotional register.
Genre	Psychedelic pop, psychedelic rock, indie rock, synth-pop, neo-psychedelia, electronic	Synth-pop, indie rock, neo-psychedelia, psychedelic rock	Alternative R&B, lo-fi, trip-hop
Primary Ecosystem	Streaming platforms, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube (music videos), live shows (tours and festivals)	Streaming platforms, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube (visualisers), shows (tours and festivals)	Streaming platforms, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube (music videos), shows (tours and festivals)

Appendix B. Operationalisation of Keller’s CBBE Dimensions for Qualitative Analysis

CBBE Dimension	Sub-Dimension	Qualitative Indicators	Data Sources	Guiding questions
Brand Awareness	Recognition	1. Ability to identify the artist from sonic cues without contextual information 2. Ability to identify the artist from visual cues without the artist’s name 3. Consistency of visual and sonic identity across platforms 4. Stage name recognised as a distinct creative entity separate from the artist’s legal name	• Press coverage • Fan discourse identifying the artist from unlabelled content • Album, artwork, music videos, merchandise’s visual language	• Can/do audiences identify the artist from sonic or visual cues alone? • Is the stage name recognised as a creative entity distinct from the legal name?
	Recall	• The artist comes to mind unprompted in genre, mood, or situational context • Artist referenced as a benchmark or point of comparison within their genre • Frequency and nature of unsolicited mentions in fan discourse • Presence in algorithmic playlists and editorial recommendations	• Reddit and X discussions referencing the artist, unprompted • Playlist inclusion data (Spotify editorial and algorithmic) • Press and critic comparisons to the artist	• Does the artist come to mind when audiences think about particular genre or mood? • Is the artist used as a reference point by critics, fans, or algorithms?
Brand Image	Favourability	• Reviews and press coverage • Fan discourse • Perceived authenticity and credibility • Perceived emotional resonance of transmedia content	• Music review aggregators and publications • Fan testimonials and emotional reactions • Industry recognition: awards, nominations	• Are the associations audiences hold about the artist predominantly positive? • Is the artist perceived as authentic and

				credible within their genre?
	Strength	• Depth of fan engagement beyond passive listening (concert attendance, merch purchases, repeat streaming) • Fan-created content volume and quality • Active community participation in dedicated spaces • Behavioural loyalty signals (pre-saves, vinyl purchases, tour ticket demand)	• Fan-created content • Concert and festival attendance patterns • Streaming data	• Do fans actively participate in the brand world (creating content, sustaining community)? • Are associations strongly and durably held over time?
	Uniqueness	• Perceived distinctiveness of sonic identity • Perceived distinctiveness of visual/aesthetic identity • Cultural shorthand or meme status unique to the artist • Fan and critic language emphasising non-substitutability • Distinctiveness of the transmedia world from competitors in the same genre	• Fan discourse comparing the artist to others (or asserting incomparability) • Critical reviews highlighting distinctiveness • Meme culture and cultural shorthand unique to the artist • Social media discussions of aesthetic or sonic identity	• Are the artist's associations distinct from those of competing artists? • Has the artist established a cultural shorthand or unmistakable aesthetic identity? • Do fans and critics describe the artist as non-substitutable?

Appendix C. Step-by-Step Methodological Process

Step	Action	Description
1	Framework Derivation	Establishing the three analytical frameworks applied in sequence: identity separation types (Auslander, 2006), transmedia classification criteria (Jenkins, 2006), and qualitative indicators for Keller's (1993) CBBE dimensions.
2	Data Collection	Gathering publicly available data across all source types: music videos, album artwork, live show recordings, press coverage, artist interviews, streaming metrics, and fan discourse.
3	Initial Coding (Transmedia)	Categorising each artist's cross-platform presence using Jenkins' (2006) transmedia principles, determined by which dominate: continuity versus multiplicity, and compression versus expansion.
4	CBBE Dimension Coding	Applying the CBBE operationalisation framework to assess whether evidence of each dimension is present, through which transmedia touchpoints it manifests, and how strongly it is evidenced.
5	Pattern Identification	Identifying patterns in how identity separation shapes transmedia choices and which CBBE dimensions are most strongly developed by each strategy type.
6	Cross-Case Comparison	Following Yin (2018), comparing findings across the three cases to identify replication patterns and assess whether divergence reveals contextual moderators.

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