

# Kanye West (Ye)

## Musical Brand Portfolio

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### **Introduction -**

Kanye West, legally known as Ye, represents one of the most successful and influential brands in popular culture. Starting up as a music producer and later as a globally recognised recording artist, fashion designer, and entrepreneur, Ye has built a brand that changes the boundaries of the popular industry. His name represents innovation, controversy, musical experimentation, and disruption within the media. Despite positive and negative changes in the public eye, Ye remains one of the most globally recognisable personal brands of the 21st century. Coming from different perspectives of the music industry all the way to fashion and even politics.

This portfolio analyses Ye's brand, with theories such as Aaker's Brand Identity Model and Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model to examine the structure and evolution of his brand identity. This portfolio also describes both the audiovisual elements including music videos, stage visuals, and the visual identity of the YEEZY clothing brand and other elements such as statements and lyrics used in his music. The analysis also considers Ye's target audience, market position, and his large impact on the fashion industry through his clothing brand YEEZY and other collaborations.

### **Theories and Models -**

#### **Aaker's Brand Identity System and Equity Model**

- Brand as a Product
- Brand as an Organisation
- Brand as a Person
- Brand as a Symbol

Aaker's Brand Identity System links to Ye by spreading his brand across its four dimensions. He is driven mainly by creativity, innovation, and an aspiration to push the boundaries in music and fashion. His identity includes the traits people associate with him including his outspoken personality, experimental style, record breaking albums, YEEZY, and his strong reputation for challenging the norms of society. When it comes to brand as a product, his music and unique fashion designs are key, often being seen as premium, trend setting, and influential. The brand as a person shows Kanye as being bold, emotional and unpredictable, which further shapes how his audiences connect with him in both positive and negative ways. The brand as an organization appears through his well known creations such as Yeezy and DONDA, which reflect Ye's strong values of creativity and innovation.

### Examples of Brand as a Product -

- Music - Graduation, 808s & Heartbreak, My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy, Yeezus, Donda, have all heavily influenced the music industry.
- Fashion - YEEZY has changed streetwear, athleisure, and the sneaker culture, influencing some clothing brands to become more basic in design but higher in quality (minimalistic)
- Collaborations - His past partnerships with Adidas, Nike, and other ventures reflect his main ambition which was to create a lasting business enterprise with him also having full creative control and the opportunity to receive royalties on his designs, which Nike previously denied.

### Examples of Brand as an Organisation -

- Popular Music - Shaping early 2010s hip hop aesthetics, giving him a strong brand presence early on in his career.
- DONDA - A creative collective named after his mother, further releasing two albums with the same name, DONDA and DONDA 2
- YEEZY - His clothing company that had reached multibillion dollar estimated valuations at its peak.

### Examples of Brand as a Symbol -

- YEEZY minimalist colour palette (stone, bone, clay, utility black etc.)
- The Dropout Bear (early albums such as Graduation and Late Registration)
- The Yeezus red stage lighting
- Donda's blacked out aesthetic (primarily shown on the first DONDA album)
- The Floating Stage from the Saint Pablo tour

### Keller's Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model

Keller's model shows how brand equity is built from the consumer's perspective, usually being shown as a pyramid shaped framework that outlines how to build a strong brand through four key elements:

- Brand Salience
- Brand Performance & Imagery
- Brand Judgements & Feelings
- Brand Resonance

Keller's model also provides a useful framework for Ye, showing both the things which have grown his brand as well as the risks that come with it. From the beginning of his career with 'The College Dropout', he stayed consistent with establishing a strong identity with a bold self-promotion and consistent visual elements such as the 'Dropout Bear'. Ye developed a strong brand meaning through elements such as high quality in music and designs. His controversial and unpredictable persona also became a central part to his brand. When it comes to his Brand Responses, Ye's audience view points varied, with some judging him as a genius and a large influence to the music and fashion industry whilst many others consider him as being offensive and controversial. Ye's brand resonance is strong due to most of his audience being loyal, with consistently purchasing music, merchandise and attending

events. His brand has created a strong sense of community with followers who share the same vision of music and art whilst also not using the traditional advertising methods.

## Audiovisual Elements -

### Audio

Ye frequently uses vocals as a key instrument in most of his songs, changing it through various effects. Early in his career, he used pitched up vocals or 'chipmunk effect', primarily on songs such as 'through the wire' and through the fire. On albums such as '808's and Heartbreak' he used auto tune as a deliberate tool in his music. Genre Blending is also a crucial part of Ye's music, his unique production style is built from layered instrumentation and innovative sampling as well as recording vocals on an iPhone. For example MDTF blends hip hop with orchestral arrangements and soul, creating a grand cinematic type sound. Ye also uses story telling throughout most of his songs, using two different types of storytelling in an autobiographical narrative as well as sampling, extracting quotes and other samples to tell their own story. He uses real life struggles from his early days as well as social critiques talking about race issues within America. Furthermore, Ye also uses samples as a narrative, for example the opening to 'A Life Of Pablo' uses a young girl's prayer to add a storyline.

### Visual

Ye has used multiple influential stage designs and performances to show his brand. One of his most influential ones include the floating stage from the 'Saint Pablo Tour', this design made the crowd part of the performance and a key element of the visuals. His 2011 Coachella headline performance used Greek Architecture on stage whilst also integrating fine art and high fashion. 'Famous (2016)' uses a 10 minute long clip using naked wax figures of celebrities including Taylor Swift and Chris Brown creating a strong comment on his influence on fame. Furthermore, in 'Jesus Walks (2004)', he uses hard hitting imagery including drug busts and a Klu Klux Klansman struggling with a cross, addressing serious social and religious situations.



'Saint Pablo' Tour Floating Stage.

## Written Elements -

### Lyrics

"That that don't kill me / Can only make me stronger" 'Stronger, Graduation' - These lyrics convey the resilience and perseverance that defines his public image and entrepreneurial mindset in fashion and music, indicating every setback is a setup for a comeback.

"I'm like the fly Malcolm X, buy any jeans necessary" 'Good Morning, Graduation' - These lyrics mix both fashion aspirations and a historical figure making it clear to his audience about him wanting to break boundaries in both music and fashion.

"No man should have all that power" 'Power, MBDTF' - Shows his own immense influence and aspiration for creative industry and control which is also a significant point in his brand's aim.

### Statements & Interviews

"George Bush doesn't care about black people" - Ye made this statement during the 2005 Benefit Concert for Hurricane Katrina which resonated with many people who felt that the government response was inadequate.

“best music video of all time” - At the 2009 MTV awards, Ye interrupted Taylor Swift's acceptance speech stating he believed that Beyoncé had the better music video at that time, further showing his bold persona.

Ye had a strong view on Mental Health Awareness, addressing his struggles with Bipolar on his 2018 album 'Ye' with “I hate being Bi-Polar, it's awesome” being the cover bringing attention to other people living with the same condition.



Cover art from his 2018 album 'Ye'.

## Kanye's impact on the Fashion Industry -

### YEEZY and it's Collaborations

YEEZY began as a brand by Ye in 2009, it aimed to be known for its minimalist style and colours whilst also making a large impact on the fashion industry. Originally collaborating with Nike releasing the Nike Air Yeezy, followed by the Nike Air Yeezy 2 in 2012 and 2014. However, shortly after Nike and Ye's partnership ended due to royalty disagreements. He then partnered with Adidas for a longer period of time ranging from 2015 to 2022 producing popular footwear like the Yeezy Boosts. He also had year-long partnerships with companies such as GAP and Balenciaga. In the present day, Ye has focused on independent projects as well as even launching a website named 'Yews.Live' Covering all different aspects of the media. The overall aim for YEEZY hasn't differentiated much since the beginning.



YZY collaboration with Balenciaga / GAP.

### Influence on High Fashion

Ye has had a significant impact on high fashion brands by influencing them to change their overall aims. His collaboration with Adidas showcased the power of sneaker culture with large popularity growing from shoes such as the 'Adidas Yeezy Boost 350'.

This led luxury brands such as Balenciaga, Prada, and Louis Vuitton to embrace more casual, sporty styles making them appeal to everyone for everyday usage. Ye's minimalist, neutral look also motivated brands to prioritize simple shapes and colours. Furthermore, his partnerships and friendships with designers such as Virgil Abloh created greater connections between hip-hop culture and luxury fashion. Overall, Ye demonstrated that high fashion doesn't have to be overly formal, it can be comfortable, everyday wear that still feels premium whilst still having that signature minimalistic look.

### Target Audience -

Ye's main target audience is mostly young adults who are into music, fashion, and creative culture. A lot of his fans, including people around my age, appreciate how he tries new things and isn't afraid to stand out. He also attracts people who follow hip-hop closely and care about style and self-expression through music and the media. He meets his audience's expectations by constantly differentiating his sound and style, offering both originality and creativeness. Ye's audience appreciate his authenticity, honesty, and trend setting fashion. He also keeps people engaged by creating new sounds and constantly delivering new work that feels fresh and distinctively his own through YEEZY.

## Market Position and Competitors -

### Market Position

- Music Industry: Innovative production skills, the commercial success of his albums, his willingness to push creative boundaries and his influence on multiple generations of artists.
- Luxury Fashion: YEEZY and early high profile collaborations with companies such as Louis Vuitton, 2009.
- Streetwear Culture: Collaborations with Nike and then more extensively with Adidas, provided the necessary production and distribution infrastructure to bring his vision to a global market.
- Celebrity driven Brand Ecosystems

### Competitors

#### Examples In music:

- Drake: Strong competitor due to being both innovative and a 'hitmaker'.
- Travis Scott: Both compete by influencing each other's careers and a shared focus on high quality production on their music as well as having mentorship from Kanye and them both having similar visions in the music industry.
- Kendrick Lamar: High influential artists as well as them both also having a high competitive drive also making him a strong competitor.

#### Examples In Fashion/Streetwear:

- Virgil Abloh (legacy of Off-White)
- Jerry Lorenzo (Fear of God)
- A Bathing Ape (BAPE - Tomoaki Nagao)
- Supreme (James Jebbia)
- Nike x celebrity collabs (e.g. Travis Scott x Jordan collaboration)

#### In Celebrity Branding:

- Rihanna (Fenty)
- Beyoncé (Ivy Park)
- Pharrell Williams (Louis Vuitton Men's Artistic Director)
- Kim Kardashian (Skims)

## Conclusion -

Ye is both highly influential and unpredictable, making him a complex 'brand'. On one hand, Ye's creativity and innovation have built a brand with massive cultural impact across primarily music and fashion. Consistently setting trends rather than following them, and the ability to reinvent himself has kept his audiences engaged for a long time. However, this same unpredictability also creates significant weaknesses in his brand.

His overall brand is deeply tied to his personal behavior, so controversies and public outbursts quickly affect his business ventures creating large amounts of negative attention from the media. While his boldness controls his influence, it also makes long-term stability difficult, for example the brand deal with Adidas coming to an end due to antisemitic comments and other negative behavior. Ye's brand is a good example of how originality can build a positive reputation but unpredictability in behavior in the public eye can cause backlash and negative views.

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