

Tileyard Education

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Creative Music Management

Assessment 1

Reflective Summary

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Introduction

This paper aims to reflect on the work conducted by my assigned group for the creation, promotion, and release of 'Love Cake' and its remix. Love Cake is a song that wants to break free from the conventions of Drill and Rap by utilising a deeper and more vulnerable rhetoric than most songs of the same genre. Zanoliti, the Artist, had already tried in the past to push his narrative towards topics such as love, loss, and heartache with good reception from his fans. However, social pressure and genre-specific conventions pushed him to stray away from this path. In 2022 Zanoliti is finally ready to establish his name as a sensible, yet 'hip' artist that does not need to conform to one genre only. While the Portfolio shows what was done to promote and release the single, this reflective summary focuses on the group dynamics and on the impact of digital technologies in the modern music market, with emphasis on the need for unsigned artists to receive better support in an extremely competitive environment.

Considerations on Team Dynamics

Working in a group of people who do not know each other can be a challenging activity. The group I was assigned to work on this campaign originally comprised 5 people, of which only 3 actively contributed to the job. As almost half of the team was never available for meetings and did not take part in the assigned tasks, more work was put on the remaining members' shoulders. One of the members of my group was the Artist himself. Having the Artist in the working team came with both perks and disadvantages: while we could consult him and access his data easily, this also meant that the group work was not spread fairly across the members. For instance, the Artist had to write, record, and produce the song while also working on his part of the tasks, while the rest of the group only had to deal with what was necessary of them. Hence, the work was not perceived to be fairly split among the members, and brought some to create more, or less work than others independently. The RACI Matrix attached in the Portfolio shows how the tasks were meant to be split among the team members, but does not show the extra work that each one had to put in due to a perceived lack in communication. The group started working together after two initial meetings which were attended by the 3 main members. During those meetings, it was decided how the tasks would be split. My role in the project involved advising the artist on guerrilla marketing strategies that could be employed in the promotional campaign, finalising the visual concepts from the lyrics and vibe of the song, completing the budget, and improving the quality of the portfolio.

Due to external circumstances, the team could not meet more than 3 times: this resulted in a slow development of the project, which was also hindered by the increase in Covid-19 cases across the

country. As Tušl *et al.* (2021) pointed in a study about the impact of the Pandemic on work and personal life, more than 31% of employees interviewed reported a perceived negative impact on their life following the public health emergency. More over, the project was spread across two months which included the Christmas holidays, hence less time could be allocated to working together. Due to restrictions, the work was then conducted mostly independently by each team member, with sporadic consultations on the WhatsApp group chat and Zoom calls.

The Artist acted as group leader and was the one to finalise all decisions. However, being in a predominantly male team (of the 5 original members, only one was female) meant that male members would often group together and leave behind the other person. Lack of effective leadership and internalised misogyny hindered the project, as mansplaining tactics and camaraderie brought delays and a generalised lack of motivation, that was also perpetrated by the members who left all the work to the last available days. As the group leader, the Artist should have been more firm in having deadlines respected and demanding quality work and equality. In this case, the Artist imposed himself as a leader, when he should have allowed another member to act as one, as an external person could have maintained a more professional and detached attitude towards the release. I was discouraged by the lack of motivation and the lack of respect towards people's work, and could not give my best in the group as a big part of the job was left to one week before the deadline. When it comes to group work, it is suggested to make use of RACI Matrix to define accountabilities and responsibilities within the members, and to follow the GANTT chart. It has also been proved that tasks should be divided according to skills, experience, and personality to help each member feel more comfortable and give their best in the shared job (University of Birmingham, 2021).

On the other hand, the initial meetings were used to lie down a solid plan for the single, which helped in the individual and group work as all team members were aware of their tasks and the timeline, hence giving a sense of security when parts of the work were missing. However, as parts of the work were dependant on particular tasks, I could not advance in my job until everyone had completed their part. This resulted in a chain of delays that made working together more difficult, and resulted in some members completing missing links by themselves. As I started working on the project I realised that without the help of the team I could not have made it in time. A little over three weeks before the deadline I managed to convince the rest of the team to start working on the project, and thanks to our experience and professional skills we could meet the deadline. Future projects should have stricter deadlines and clearer milestones so that all members have their work

ready when needed. In order to do so, it would be useful to create a shared calendar and to have the group leader demand more from the team members.

Considerations on the Impact of Digital Technologies and the Creation and Promotion of Popular Music

The digitalisation of the music industry brought many advantages to independent songwriters. The first consideration to be made is that, thanks to the availability of streaming platforms and cheap distribution services, anyone can distribute their music without any need for third men. In fact, the recorded music industry revenues rose considerably since the advent of Spotify in 2006: according to IFPI (2021), revenues grew by 7.4% in 2020, marking the sixth consecutive year of growth. The latest Global Music Report shows streaming as the biggest source of revenues for the music industry, totalling \$13.4 billions in 2020 (IFPI, 2021). More over, the art of producing and mastering can now be accessed by anyone thanks to Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) and A.I. generated mastering services. Promoting music has also become widely affordable through social media sponsored posts and PR services such as MusoSoup or SubmitHub that link artists to online magazines, blogs, radios, and playlists curators. However, although data show that the recorded music industry is establishing itself as a sustainable and accessible market, the digitalisation of the industry also brought disadvantages to grassroots artists. The first downside to this new environment is competition: over 60,000 tracks get uploaded to Spotify (and other streaming platforms) daily (Ingham, 2021). Due to the huge number of creators, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to attain a certain degree of fame. Many artists are building their careers through Spotify playlists: an example can be found in Lorde's 'Royals', song that propelled her career after being featured in Sean Parker's (former Napster co-founder) popular Spotify playlist Hipster International in 2013 (Bertoni, 2013). However, getting on popular Spotify playlists has also become difficult to the vast amount of songs and pitches happening daily. Some artists, such as singer-songwriter and producer Tianda, admitted to having tried to have their songs distributed by Believe or The Orchard to get access to better chances at being featured in playlists (Tianda, 2021). However, these kind of distribution deals are hard to get if monthly listeners are low, therefore artists need to come up with ways to engage listeners organically. One way to do it would be to collaborate with artists or producers who have a bigger listeners pool. In the case of Zanotti's career, collaboration has always been key to his development, as his songs featuring producers or other artists generated more views and streams than others. For this reason many artists seek skilled producers to make remixes of their tracks. Remixes broaden artists' audiences, get people to grow

accustomed to them and also fit with the new short videos trends brought forward by TikTok and Instagram Reels: these remixes bring together popular culture and musicians, allowing undiscovered talent to be heard by countless people through these apps (Krishnamurthy, 2021). ‘Love Cake’ was also remixed to include a grassroots rapper: in this case, Zanotti wanted to introduce this less-known artist to his audience.

As competition is raging, artists also need to be on top of production. The introduction of DAWs made anyone with a computer able to mix and master their music; however, the results are not always at industry standards, especially for those who have just started making music. If on one side we have a cost-effective and independent tool to create songs, on the other side we have the difficulty of standardising production and getting accepted by labels and publishers. However, the availability of computers and DAWs also brings a huge number of producers in the market, meaning that artists can easily find and collaborate with many skilled professionals. An interesting digression should be made on A.I.-generated masters: the popularity of these services has increased consistently in the last ten years, as real-life pro mastering engineers can be too expensive for independent artists (Deahl, 2019). These A.I. algorithms thus allow musicians to access professional mastering services on a budget, but also pose a threat on engineers that might become obsolete in the grassroots digital music landscape. ‘Love Cake’ was self-produced by the artist with help of an engineer. In this case, having an external person mastering the song would have benefitted the final quality. However, the artist was adamant in giving the song his own signature, therefore it was decided to spend the budget on the rest of the release campaign.

‘Love Cake’ comes with a music video to be released subsequently. The music video was originally meant to be released with the song, but restrictions caused by Covid-19 delayed the shootings. Nowadays, music videos are still relevant if linked to a narrative to be pushed by the artist. Many rap videos put emphasis on the sense of tribe which, as described by Godin (2008), is a powerful tool in marketing because it focuses on individual feelings in grouped targets. That is the reason why we chose to portray a complex story without losing the sense of group that is inherent to rap narratives to impress individuals in a framed category. The video would also appeal to people outside of the target audience, thus bringing in a more varied customer pool.

Another important aspect for independent songwriters in the modern music industry is promotion. In the case of ‘Love Cake’, the team chose to focus part of the budget on guerrilla marketing. Guerrilla marketing makes use of unconventional marketing tactics that are low-cost and have high impact on consumers (Marti, 2013). This is due to their nature: these campaigns tend to be memorable and act on consumers’ feelings and emotions, working on a budget. Zanotti’s single will

be promoted by organising a ‘speed-dating’ networking event for professionals and creatives in the music industry. This event is based on the concept of speed-dates, but with a more industry-focussed twist: people will have less than five minutes to interact with others before changing pals. More than a networking event that would help Zanolotti’s connections, the party will also be focussed on the promotion of the new single. Attendees will be encouraged to save, stream, download, and share the single through a rewards system that will allow them a certain number of drinks per action taken. In this way, the more times the song will be streamed and shared, the more free drinks people will get. This strategy would create a buzz, as networking events are to be valued especially after the Pandemic. Moreover, Zanolotti will look proactive towards his career, that would benefit from this event both from the streaming and the connections side. Although guerrilla marketing acts as a non-traditional, cheap, and potentially viral strategy, it is important to gauge its cons before depleting such unconventional strategies. Guerrilla marketing might bring backlash and can be easily misunderstood, thus taking the consumers’ attention towards something different from the end goal (Rieger, 2020). In this case, attendees might lean more towards the networking side, forgetting about the release altogether. In order to prevent this from happening, it was decided to have members of the team on site to remember customers about the single launch and the free drinks possibility.

Further Recommendations and Conclusion

As an emergent artist, Zanolotti should keep his focus on increasing his social media ranks to reach people outside his current sphere of interest and expand his audience. As it was analysed in the Portfolio, many drill and rap artists reached national success by featuring in remixes: by curating his social media, Zanolotti will also increase his chances of being noticed by bigger artists and getting his spot on songs that are more likely to get into charts than his own. More over, Zanolotti should also focus on the production by collaborating with different producers across the country and thus increasing his audience by winning over the producers’ followers. Building a long-term strategy including marketing and collaborations could bring improvements in Zanolotti’s career. The first step towards this goal would be to find long-lasting collaborators as trust in each other and knowing how each member works will create a synergy that will make the group more efficient and effective.

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