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Group Project Reflective Essay :

A personal explanation of my involvement within the creative music management group project (a) and my reflections on the impact of digital technologies as it pertains to pop music (b).

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WORD COUNT: 2578

INTRODUCTION

The task that was given to us as a group was to facilitate the selection, production and release of a single and a remix created for a recording artist in Q4 of 2020. The group working on this project included; Thando Zulu, Sharron, Karl and Rohan, all of whom are MA Music Business students at the time of writing.

The reason I specify the year and quarter in which this release project was undertaken is due to the fact that the landscape of the music industry in the year 2020 was very different to the years preceding it. This project and the resulting portfolio and reflective essay shows the need for music managers, and artist managers in particular, to be creative in their approach to the business elements of the music industry.

2020 is a year in which the music industry suffered the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic, where UK national lockdowns shifted the landscape of the music industry namely by hindering the live shows, tours and festivals. The restrictions imposed on the live music sector has led to many artists having to rely on streaming revenue to generate income and thus the digital release market has become saturated and new creative release strategies are the necessary medium for successful release campaigns.

In addition to releasing music into an increasingly saturated market place, lockdown measure and social distancing makes songwriting, production, promotional and music video shoots all the more difficult to execute.

TEAM ROLES

The first step towards executing the assignment brief was to get to know the team that would be working together. This was done on Zoom and initially Karl was unable to attend as Rohan, Sharon and I did not have his contact details. This hurdle was quickly overcome and the team consisted of the four people aforementioned.

During our second meeting we all introduced ourselves, explaining a bit of our experience in the music industry.

As the production and release of a single requires multiple areas to be considered and actioned, including; songwriting, recording, production, mixing, mastering, distribution, marketing, financing, graphic design and photography, I was encouraged to learn the level of expertise and experience within the group.

Karl 'KGee' Gordon has extensive experience in writing and producing records with various high profile artists including 'All Saints' and 'Jessie J'. Karl recently set up a label and had various contacts within the music industry. Rohan Kumar, is an international student from Australia which is where the studio space he owns is based. Rohan has experience in production, audio engineering and marketing. Sharon Manganaro is an artist and an artist manager which provides a much needed perspective when making decisions for a female artist of a similar age. My previous experience as an artist manager allowed me to come to this project with a level of confidence in understanding the required steps to have a successful single release.

Based on preference and relevant experience we assign the individual roles as outlined below;

Sharon Manganaro - Marketing and PR

Karl 'KGee' Gordon - Creative Direction

Thando Zulu - Business and Finance

Rohan Kumar - Marketing and PR

Execution of Actions

The first decision we made was to work with an artist called Marina Hovian. With the shared level of experience in the group we made the decision to opt for a real world release instead of working for something that was hypothetical. As mentioned, Karl is an accomplished producer and recently launched an independent label that distributes through Ditto Music. Marina Hovian is a 22 year old female Pop and RnB artist who is signed to Karl's label 'W. LDN. SOUNDSYSTEM'.

As a group we decided to work with Marina Hovian after having considered factors including; her release cycle, access to producers (Karl) and easily accessible distribution infrastructure. The decision to work with Marina Hovian enabled the project to move quickly in a positive direction as Karl being the owner of the Label could ensure that this release was prioritised, which is a key consideration when working with a Label.

My role within the team was to balance the accounts and explore potential revenue streams as we knew that we would spend more than the initial budget of £500. My perspective on the budget was that the £500 should be seen as venture capital that is not a limit but a seed that should grow and allow for greater spends and in time, greater rewards. With this in mind I presented various options for funding, grants and other methods of generating revenue during a difficult economic climate.

During the project I stepped in to support Sharon on the marketing and release strategy as Rohan was unable to execute his responsibilities. The marketing and release strategy was based on the 5 P's of marketing, with our promotions aimed at music consumers and music industry companies.

THE END PRODUCT

As a group we delivered on all the assets required for the assignment and a successful single release. The music for the single was completed and delivered in good time, Karl oversaw the producer that we agreed should work on the original track. Karl did the remix himself and also recorded, mixed and mastered the original track. The artwork was completed by Kuki London+, who were the same company that we commissioned to do the music video. Still from the music video were used for the artwork and short clips from the video shoot we used for other visual promotional content.

Sharon commissioned a graphic designer to make a logo for Marina Hovian. The logo was delivered in good time but as the music video and artwork had already been received from Kuki London+ we decided against asking for an edit on the artwork and music video as to keep costs low. The logo will be used for future projects pertaining to Marina Hovian. In my opinion this was a missed opportunity to present a cohesion project with a great level of consistency across all platforms. Brand identity and recognition are extremely important emerging artists looking to build a fan base.

Once the artwork and audio track were prepared I was extremely insistent that we delivered the song to the digital streaming platforms as soon as possible to allow time for the maximum number of editors at key online music platforms to listen to the music. Spotify for artists allow for a minimum of 7 days before release date if the song is going to be processed in time to trigger the Release Radar playlist. Editorial pitching on Spotify usually works better the longer the song is in the system as there is more likelihood that a wide range of editors will hear the music ahead of release day. The single "It Just Happened" was delivered to Spotify 16 days before the date of release.

Assets required for the spotify canvas were also delivered and are ready to be uploaded.

The Artwork focussed on Marina's face and image to create recognition as Marina Hovian is a relatively new artist. The difference between the 'Marina Hovian' logo and the name on the artwork can be seen on the images below

Single Artwork image on the right, Marina Hovian Logo on the left.



Part of my role in preparing the marketing and release plan including collating the metadata that was available and documenting it within the marketing and release plan. The reason for this was to help ensure the correct information was associated with the song when delivered to various platforms for radio, publishing and digital distribution.

A high quality electronic press kit was created by Sharon. The EPK contained all the necessary information pertaining to Marina Hovian and the new single "It Just Happened". My only reservation in regards to the EPK is that it is only viewable on the link that Sharon has shared (see appendix). The reason I believe this to be an issue is that, in my experience music industry personnel rarely engage with novel software, especially if the source is an emerging artist or an emerging artist manager. With this in mind I would have more readily accepted the EPK in a PDF format that can be easily attached to an email and forwarded to the relevant personnel without concern about the proper functioning of the link.

Karl provided the team with a list of press targets that had previously supported Karl's work and therefore had an existing rapport with him.

TEAM DYNAMICS

As outlined above our group delivered the necessary assets for the project and the real world release. Though this was not achieved without a level of friction and frustration within the team dynamic. The consistent issue with our team was that Rohan Kumar rarely communicated effectively with the rest of the group. This was addressed on a group Zoom call yet this too proved ineffectual in inspiring a change of action from Rohan. This meant that Karl, Sharon and I each picked up areas of Rohan's role and delivered assets later than we would have ordinarily desired. This inaction particularly frustrated Karl and Sharon and led to high levels of frustration as is to be expected where there is a lack of communication and commitment to the group project. The end result was that Karl, Sharon and I delivered the project as a group of 3 rather than the intended group of 4. Sadly it would be fictitious to agree the Rohan contributed to the portfolio's that were produced.

Part B

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Throughout history, technological advances have pushed the music industry into new and previously unimagined futures. The invention of the synthesiser at the turn of the 20th century had to wait until Bob Moog and his contemporaries pushed the music industry into a new future in the 1960s (Merrick J, 2020).

Karlheinz Brandenburg's Mp3 was not well received in the early 1990s and by the end of the 20th century the Mp3 was seen as the best system for the digital distribution of music (Rose, J & Ganz J 2011). The invention of the MP3 by Karlheinz Brandenburg changed the music industry and ushered in the age of streaming. The age of streaming's oligopoly consisting of Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, Deezer, Amazon and Tidal has changed the ways in which artists, labels, managers and publishers operate within the industry. The largest digital streaming platform is Spotify. Spotify was founded by Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon in 2006 in Stockholm, Sweden. Spotify is a Digital Streaming Platform offering digital copyright restricted recorded music and podcasts. In Q3 2020, Spotify recorded 144 million premium subscribers to their platform, which is an increase of 41 million subscribers from Q3 2019.

With Spotify being 15 years since inception, I propose that we are on the cusp of yet another industry shaping innovation entering the music industry landscape. Satoshi Nakamoto may have brought lasting change to the music industry by publishing a white paper establishing the model for a blockchain in 2008. Blockchain technology has the potential to change the way global markets operate. The fundamental shift from centralised to decentralised networks makes blockchain technology the sound of freedom for some and others are ringing the alarm bells of fear.

In addition to Blockchain, Ai technology continues to advance to a point where at present it is completely acceptable to have artificial intelligence make a playlist for you using an algorithm. I am persuaded that the next chapter of technological advancement within the music industry is upon us.

MUSIC CREATION & PROMOTION

The speed and ease associated with creating popular music has changed the way the industry functions in that the music industry market is more easily accessible than in prior generations. This has been ideal in a year where many artists have had to use their home studios and computer technology in order to keep creating and releasing music. An interesting technological development pertaining to music creation is the ability of artificial intelligence to compose music. Companies akin to Amper music are already being used by artists to create music and these companies have writing credits on songs like 'Break Free - Taryn Southern'. (Deahl D, 2018)

Digital marketing techniques are currently the main way to promote new releases due to the almost global limitations on travel due to the Covid 19 pandemic. The traditional methods of having print media, billboards and posters have a lessened impact due to the decreased footfall and decreased demand for physical magazines. Conversely the demand for digital on platform content has increased due to the increased amount of time people are spending on their mobile devices and computers. Therefore using relatively new digital platforms like Twitch and Tiktok have been pivotal in various viral songs over the course of 2020.

TEAM DEVELOPMENT

In recent times, the role of the A&R scouts have changed from a largely risky, heartfelt and unpredictable art to a more data driven, business minded and risk averse discipline. The almost immediate data generated when music is distributed digitally has led to a mechanism where spotting trends and watching streaming numbers has replaced listening out for a unique sound, believing in the music and taking a risk on a new act. The next evolution in A&R scouting is the employment of artificial intelligence in the process of artist discovery. Multiple record labels including Warner Music Group, are now using Ai prediction tools to help guide the process of onboarding new talent. In 2020 Warner reported that it signed double the number of artists by using the recently acquired AI-driven A&R company 'Sodatone'. (Stassen M, 2020)

CONCLUSION

In my living memory I have seen the birth of the streaming age, the resurgence of vinyl, and the birth of AI directed playlists. Over time all new technologies become the norms for those who use them often. Artificial intelligence and the invention of blockchain technology that will be able to facilitate the correct storage of the massive amounts of data that will be produced, signals the dawn of a new age for music technology. This new digital leap from Ai being seen as science-fiction to normal life is already happening before our eyes. It is my opinion that the impact of digital technologies on the creation, promotion and team development within the music industry is immeasurable in its capacity to change the landscape of the industry. Yet this impact is not obviously felt, much like the gradual strength of a river ever-expanding its banks until the terrain is forever changed.

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APPENDIX

An epk was produced that can be view in full at this link:

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/GuseRSBiutovK/>