

New Technology in the music industry essay

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Introduction

New technology such as the smartphone has made music easy to access and also easy to distribute for up and coming artists. Vinyl, CDs and Cassettes were high street products selling fast in shops like HMV but now music streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music account for 83% of music consumption in the UK (Pod News, 2022). Streaming platforms pulled the music industry out of the depths of illegal piracy downloads but people are still able to access music for free on sites like Youtube & Soundcloud. New technology like Virtual Reality (VR) is bringing a whole new world for music fans and another avenue for music artists to create revenue. The problem with easy access is that it can make over saturation and an industry that is cutthroat already may see levels of extremes that haven't been taken to before.

The shift of consumption in the music industry from product to service

Technology has quickly changed how people consume music. From the days of Vinyl, CDs and Cassettes where people had to physically put music on via a device like a stereo to now just being able to go on a phone and press play on a music streaming site/app such as Apple Music or Spotify. Physical media sales have decreased fast. In 2008 there were 132 million CDs sold in the UK but by 2018 this number had fallen to 32 million (Cole, 2019).

The shift to digital media streaming of music hasn't happened quickly but it has quickly shot up in numbers in recent years. For example, in 2016 Spotify had 30 million paid subscribers globally but when in 2019 the numbers accelerated up to 100 million. The same situation also happened with Apple Music launched in 2015 have now reached 60 million paid users (Cole, 2019). This rapid growth shows the increasing shift in music listeners.

One thing Spotify, Apple Music, Youtube Music, Soundcloud and all other music streaming platforms have in common is their algorithmic foundations, using machines to learn and work out what someone's music preferences are and their music listening habits (Cole, 2019). There are platforms that have given a new sense of how to listen to music in the form of curated and branded playlists. This is all a new way of music discovery and adding more to the music industry by supporting the users' choice.

Changes

New technology has also made a change in the length of singles and albums in popular music. Online music streaming has given musicians the chance to change the length of songs because there aren't any limitations like Vinyl, cassettes and CDs have. In 2017 and 2019 pop artists Chris Brown, Migos and Rea Sremmurd created and released 40 - 35 track albums. The NME magazine reported that the average song in the 1980s was around 5 minutes long but since 2009 there has been a reduction in length clocking around 3.5 mins (Cole, 2019). Kanye West and Lil Pump released a track called *I Love It* in 2018 which charted at number 3 in the UK and number 6 in the USA and the track length is on 2.08 minutes long (Song Facts, 2018). Social media has also caused attention spans to go down due to people skipping through videos on Instagram and Tik Tok. This is also another why songs are shorter.

One of the positives of being able to have longer albums and having more songs is that on the music platforms like Spotify it increases the chances of being picked up by algorithms and being placed into fans' favourite playlists. These playlists can increase the chances of getting bigger streaming numbers which improve their position on the charts (Cole, 2019). This is the reason why artists like J. Cole with his album 'KOD' and Post Malones album 'Beerbongs & Bentleys' smashed Billboard long standing top 100 singles chart record of having the most tracks by the same artist to chart in the Billboard Top 20, a record that was previously owned by The Beatles (Cole, 2019).

Sharing music in 2022

Before social media sharing music was mainly done through word of mouth and between friends and family members. Now in 2022 social media is the main discovery of new artists. Research conducted by the MusicWatch team shows that 90% of social media users engage in different ways of artists related activity on social media such as a fan sharing their favourite artist's new post on Instagram to their story (Cole, 2019). Two thirds of social media users agree that they find new musicians on social media platforms and around 60% then visit their artist's profiles on streaming platforms like Spotify after the artists have posted online (Cole, 2019). Fans are even more interested in the artist's lifestyle in 2022 so they sometimes follow the artists on each platform for different content, on the survey fans said that half of them use Twitter to check out the artists and band's updates for shows and 63 per cent said they use Snapchat for sending or looking at photos and videos from the live shows.

Spotify & Apple Music subscriptions

Streaming services like Spotify and Apple music now create around 80% of the music industry's income, compared to the 9% of physical music product sales. It's hard to find CD Players and Vinyl record players in shops in this day and age. Cars have also been upgraded for people to play music digitally through Bluetooth to connect to the sound system without using CDs (Conway, 2020).

Challenges

These new ways of listening to and sharing music have also brought problems for the music industry. According to the music magazine Rolling Stone, The Entertainment Retailers Association has shown that 56.4% of the money that is taken by subscriptions from streaming platforms in the UK goes to record labels and music artists (Conway, 2020). Even though streaming services like Spotify & Apple Music have helped reduce piracy, they are keeping a higher percentage of the music industry's money from the artists than ever before. The music industry used to rely heavily on physical product sales but has now had to rely on a high number of streams and shows to make a profit. Ed Newton - Rex a composer from America found out

that on average, a music artist earned \$0.12 per song sold if it was on a CD compared to \$0.0011 per stream on Spotify. This means that it would take 109 streams to generate the same amount of money as selling one physical track on a CD (Conway, 2020).

Opportunities

New technologies have been able to provide the music industry with more opportunities. Unknown artists no longer have to wait until they're signed to record labels to release their music. Online streaming has given artists the chance to build their fanbase, sell products online like merchandise and network with collaborators outside of their hometowns (Conway, 2020). Examples like Chance The Rapper and Stormzy have been known to build their careers by themselves through platforms like Soundcloud and Youtube to go on to become some of Hip Hop's biggest artists. Stormzy started by filming rap videos with a cameraman in Croydon and uploading it to his own Youtube channel to gain followers and kept with that same business plan until he was booked for music events and radio shows. Chance the Rapper used Soundcloud which is free to upload tracks on to build his listeners and engagement to promote his shows in his local area.

Music streaming platform users have the choice of over 30 million songs to listen to on Spotify. This gives the consumer more value than buying albums on CDs as the subscriptions normally cost around £10 per month for the whole catalogue (Conway, 2020). The variety of music on the streaming platforms has benefits for the consumer because it gives them a chance to go song to song with different artists such as in Spotify playlist and it is a benefit for the music artists because it gives them a higher chance for their music to get heard.

Another opportunity that the internet and new technologies have to offer is listening to music on the go. Mobile phones are easy to carry around which gives the access for users the to listen to music anywhere through their mobile and headphones. This means that people are likely to be spending more time listening to music than they did when CDs were around because its more portable. MP3 players and walkmans were good when they first came around in the late 80s and 90s but the storage space was low so you couldn't have many songs on them whereas with a mobile phone and streaming service you can listen to any song you want with a touch of a screen (Conway, 2020).

Social media's impact on the music industry

People in the world are now consuming more media than ever before by the use of social media. Apps like Tik Tok, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook are running the show while also involving the music industry. Music artists are using these platforms to create and distribute content to attract more followers and fans then directing them to music platforms to listen to their songs and also creates the foundation for the artists of keeping long term fans. Creating content is one of the most important ways of promoting artists in the music industry. Musicians can create content from music videos, lyrics videos, Instagram & Tik Tok reel skits to showcase their style and personality (In The Know, 2021).

Each platform demands different types of content, for example, viewers tend to enjoy longer videos on Facebook and Youtube whereas Tik Tok videos are watched at a rapid rate for viewers to scroll through different accounts depending on the market.

Before social media, there was more hard work for artists to put in to build fanbases. Artists would have to take every opportunity to connect with their fans at shows and shows of other artists by handing out demos and speaking to them after the gigs (All round, 2021). The coverage is well would normally only be in their country, city and surrounding towns whereas now social media can take you worldwide without having a big following on these platforms.

VR technology at live events and shows

Virtual reality concerts is another innovative technology that the music industry is exploring. VR headsets let you watch a live show from the comfort of your living room with a 3D dimension. Developers are creating more sophisticated VR headsets to make the experience more real for consumers. Meta has already released a few headsets which explore much more than just live music events it can also be able to play games, do gym exercises and make people enjoy time with family and friends (Meta Quest, 2022).

Live Nation, NextVR, NEC's and Sony Music's Visualise are some examples of music companies that bring this opportunity for people to watch some of the world's biggest musicians with VR headsets. America's music festival Coachella worked with Vantage TV to give festival

goers who missed out on a chance to take a virtual tour around the festival site and enjoy the festival's music (Cole, 2019).

VR technology is also heading in new directions. In 2017 the band named Gorillaz created a music video for VR which broke a Youtube VR record flying past 3 million views in only two days (Cole, 2019). This shows that there are a lot of potentials to take this service higher in the music industry and build more technology for consumers to listen to music.

Negative Impact

Access to distribution is easy for up and coming artists nowadays as they can produce the track in their bedrooms and upload it onto the same streaming platforms as Kanye West and Adele, but the problem with this is over saturation. With over 40,000 tracks being uploaded to Spotify every day it means that breaking through is more difficult as it's very likely that the tracks can get lost in the flow (Galster, 2015).

We may be near to end the end of music piracy downloading on sites like Limewire, but users are still downloading and listening to music for free on platforms such as Youtube and Soundcloud. It can cost an artist lots of money to produce a track considering paying for the studio time, studio engineer, features, mix and masters and the list goes on for them just to upload it for people to watch it for free which can leave music artists disheartened and may lead to them quitting.

Conclusion

It was a bad start for new technology and the music industry because of piracy in the early 2000s but now with the help of streaming artists are trusting these platforms again to produce, distribute and promote. New technology such as smartphones has made music very easy to access for listeners from any class and background with platforms like Youtube, Spotify and Soundcloud to listen and upload to music for free. This is great as it gives everyone a chance to become a music artist and build a fanbase but this also means oversaturation of tracks making it harder to breakthrough. Now that smartphones hold apps like Spotify which have access to an endless amount of tracks whereas Vinyls could only hold a certain amount of songs makes artists more flexible about how many tracks they'd like to put on albums making the likeability of one of their tracks doing well because it's been picked up by the Spotify Algorithm. Social media has been a great asset for artists to interact with their fans and also produce more content for them to stay consistent when they are creating music but it can also be a negative because

some artists may think its better to focus on building their social media pages which are third party platforms instead of directing fans to their own platforms like artists websites and this can be a problem as the hype on a social media platform may die down as Facebook has in the recent years which may lose artists following causing the artists to be left with no core fanbase to sell their music too. Third party social media pages too can be hard to communicate to that fanbase to listen to the music on another platform as fans may just like the content on a music artist's page and not the music. Although Spotify and Apple Music have almost crushed the piracy of music which lost music artists lots of revenue, these platforms give a very low amount of money per play whereas before with CDs artists could a decent living if the CDs were sold, however new technology has given music artists lots more avenues to channel income through such as Tik Tok gifts and selling products online. VR Technology is just one avenue that has created an opportunity for music artists to explore to create revenue with Virtual reality live shows which could gain more people than just a venue capacity and home events which artists could do private events for customers across the world. Overall there are positives and negatives to new technology in the music industry but with the rapid speed of new technology, it could be likely for more income avenues to come in favour of music artists.

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