

New Technology in Music & Entertainment (BMTY7004),
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Essay
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Critically evaluate how new technology has turned the music industry from a product to a service sector**Introduction**

In an ever changing society that is largely thanks to the rapid developments in technology, there is no doubt that the music industry has evolved its production outputs along with these advances, however there is indeed argument that the music industry has always been a service sector. Recorded music has taken a variety of forms, from phonographs to vinyl records, cassette tapes to CDs, and now the digital stream and download (Wall Street Journal 2018), the product itself has always been more than just that – a product. Former President of Capitol Records UK, Nick Raphael, explains part of their A&R process as finding the talent that can produce the songs that will become ‘the soundtrack to your lives’ (in The Economist 2016). That notion is what frames this argument that music has never simply been a product to purchase but, for the consumer, a service to their emotions and experiences. As well as this, technology has allowed for the narrative of the industry as a whole to have been switched; new technology now allows the consumer to dictate to the major labels what they want to listen to, rather than the other way round. This essay will therefore focus on the journey that music has taken and investigate in further detail the way in which technology has created these new narratives, including a focus on how technology also serves musicians themselves. This will be explored through the lens of algorithms and data metrics to discuss how these inform major labels as well as being an aid to independent artists, also considering the advantages and disadvantages of social media. Case studies with an independent singer and a new technology company will also be used to analyse this.

The Music Industry and Developments in Technology

In Wall Street Journal’s (2018) YouTube video *From Phonographs to Spotify: A Brief History of the Music Industry*, they explain that ‘streaming is almost entirely responsible for getting the industry back on track’ – alluding to the free file-sharing scandal caused by *Napster* in the early 00s that severely disrupted the music industry. However, what is interesting to note is that they refer to products such as the cassette tape as ‘new technology’, as, by today’s standards, this would not be considered ‘technology’ (Wall Street Journal 2018). They also mention the launch of the 1980s music video TV channel, MTV, which added another layer to the service that a singer provides which is ‘the ability to offer a whole artistic package’ (Wall Street Journal

2018). Even though both these milestones are pre the digitalisation of music, what they did do is staple two services that technology seeks to advance on today – the convenience factor and the ‘full package’ artist. With cassette tapes enabling people to listen to music in their cars, this founded the mindset of convenience for the music consumer. The way new technology has advanced on this is via multiple ‘on-demand’ systems of streaming with vast global catalogues. MTV providing artists with a reason to think of their ‘image’ has also lent to modern day uses of social media. The consumer of music does not just want to know about their favourite artist’s songs but also what they are doing and what they are wearing. Instagram stories and TikTok videos allow the consumer to feel connected to the artist and receive constant consumption of them.

As a byproduct of this advancement in voyeuristic access to artists has also come the ability for an unsigned musician to become a ‘viral’ music sensation without the help of a major label. With a ‘mind-numbing array of unbundled offerings’ for musicians to be able to produce, write, distribute and market their work, technology has offered a service that never existed before to musicians who want to make themselves heard (Miller 2020).

Social Media and ‘Viral’ Music Sensations

The main online system that has helped an independent artist make a name for themselves without a label is social media. According to *econsultancy.com*, ‘two-thirds of social media users’ use the system as a tool for music discovery (Cole 2019). There are even specifically created websites such as *Patreon* and *Bandcamp* that enable musicians to connect with and benefit directly from their fans (Cole 2019). With the ability for an artist to create their own ‘full artist package’ and connect directly to their followers, the social media popstar is now able to grow their own popularity which, in turn, attracts labels. However, with this knowledge comes an obsession over becoming ‘viral’, sometimes superseding the quality of music that an artist creates. Technology now provides a musician, or indeed anyone, with all they need to make and release music into the world, with the marketing service that social media provides being their tool to garner attention. In turn, the attention they receive services a label’s A&R team into being alerted what is popular right now and therefore who their next big signing could be. However, Disney Music Group’s A&R exec Mio Vukovic explains the dangers of trusting viral moments:

“It seems like people are signing these artists and they’re screeching to a red light. Because perhaps this artist isn’t even equipped to have the talent to repeat this event that’s happened.” (Vukovic in Resnikoff 2022b)

The power of the viral moment established on social media is what creates the ‘major label bidding war’ (Vukovic in Resnikoff 2022b), but it must also be noted that there can be an ‘over-reliance’ on technology that can in turn ‘affect the quality of the music produced’ (Deaux 2017). This therefore poses the question whether labels are losing sight of their judgement regarding the A&R process due to the sheer ability that an artist has to control their own destiny via social media, perhaps neglecting their ‘old-fashioned’ method of using their own expertise on talent and sell-ability. Vukovic’s comments imply that perhaps the industry now being dictated to by social media, and thus homing in on one viral moment that an artist achieves, is not necessarily a valid reason for labels to make signing decisions. They perhaps neglect to consider how technology has made it so easy for artists to produce their own music and therefore whether the quality of it is worth signing, just because an audience likes it in that moment. This may be down to the reliance that the majors now have on the streaming industry, having needed to re-evaluate their revenue streams with the diminishment of physical product sales (Wikström 2023). What this dependence has created therefore is a switch of the ‘hierarchical ladder’ – with listeners being able to choose what music to listen to as quickly as they are able to type out the song name, major labels are learning what consumers like rather than ‘holding the monopoly over the content that reaches listeners’ and thus dictating to them what they should like (Venkateshwaran 2022).

Data Analysis and Algorithms – Information Service

The way in which labels become aware of what is popular is through the powerful technology of algorithms. ‘Algorithms in their simplest form are a set of rules that can act to generate the desired output’ (Brees 2023). Many DSPs now use these to deliver music to listeners based on their preferences and, the more listeners engage with what the algorithms deliver, the more it gets sent to others which then creates the ‘viral’ moment or the number of streams that, nowadays, give an artist credibility. Artists and labels also use this knowledge to determine the likelihood of their releases being picked up by said algorithms. Some artists are now releasing very long albums to ‘increase the likelihood’ that at least one of these songs is ‘picked up by the algorithms’ and ‘placed into fan-favourite playlists’ (Cole 2019). Equally, with Instagram’s ‘stories’ and TikTok’s minimal-length videos, attention spans are weakening, with content

(including music) needing to grab a consumer's interest almost instantaneously. Therefore, artists now also release shorter songs in order to 'increase the chances that a play [...] will help them accumulate equivalent sales quicker' (Cole 2019). This example illustrates as well that music being produced and delivered nowadays is not only done from a creative perspective but with the knowledge that technology can dictate the success of a song. Therefore, music production is now being considered in terms of what the consumers' needs are in order to service their social media requirements, for example.

However, the most intelligent way that technology can inform a label on an artist's potential is via data collection and interpretation. Data collection websites such as *Chartmetric* and *Soundcharts* both obtain data from all listening platforms and social media profiles in order to group statistics that teaches the reader about locations that artist is most popular in, the demographics of the typical listener as well as comparing them to similar artists. Sites like these inform labels where to place an artist's next release as well as how best to market an artist as they would gain an understanding of their listener demographic. *Chartmetric* is now also available to artists themselves which provides another tool for a musician to be able to make it on their own (Resnikoff 2022a).

Expert marketer Seth Godin states in his 1999 book *Permission Marketing...* that '*the internet is the greatest direct marketing medium ever invented*' (Godin:1999, p155). What is interesting about this statement written before the turn of the century is that Godin could not know at that point how the advancements in the internet could validate his statement, however simply applying his theories to modern technology is what proves it: 'in order to build a thriving content site, you must offer news [...] or truly customized data' (Godin:1999, p149). This was advice given to internet novices however it is one that modern social marketing campaigns thrive on. It is this constant presentation of news that social media platforms allow for that aids an artist to connect with their audience. It is the customized data that allows the artist to know who their audience is. *Chartmetrics* provides this opportunity for an artist to truly understand their audience in order to engage with them in a way that feels personal.

With so much at hand for a musician to achieve success on their own, it now seems that it is more 'an artist's decision to partner with a label [as] a choice, not a requirement' (Miller 2020). Technology providing the independent artist the opportunity to control their own destiny poses the question of whether more and more artists may eventually choose to decline a record

contract, developing their own understanding of the internet and technologies that allow them to achieve similar success to signed stars.

Case Study: Technology & The Independent Artist vs. Being Signed

Pre-internet, aspiring popstars ‘dreamed about being able to sign a contract with a record label’ (Wikström 2023) – the main reason for this may be because there simply was no other way of getting your music heard. YouTuber ‘Big Z’ explains how the advancements in technology have enabled the cutting out of ‘middlemen’ and provided the opportunity for an artist to be everything in one (Big Z 2022). Therefore, technology has now made it possible for artists to have a sustainable music career without the help of a label. Musician Louise Golbey has worked as an independent artist for a number of years and has, in that time, had conversations with different labels but made the conscious decision to refuse deals offered to her, as they weren’t right for her (Golbey 2023) (Appendix 1). Speaking of being approached by an independent label, Golbey stated that what the label was offering was work that she was able to do, and was already doing herself, and so her expectations of the label were much higher than perhaps what they would’ve been pre-internet (Golbey 2023). Golbey explains that social media is the ‘biggest tool as an independent artist’ and its main benefit is being able to ‘have control’ of it (Golbey 2023). Technologies such as video editing tools also save her, and other independent artists, the expense of everything involved in a music video release as well (Golbey 2023). Golbey is an excellent demonstration of how technology has enabled her to choose her path as a musician rather than simply accept the first deal offered to her. The service that technology has provided her as a musician is the all-important control over her own music and online presence; something that social media tools and access to other affordable tech-based tools allows her to have, contrary to what she would have control over if she were signed.

Case Study: Un:Hurd - Digital Marketing App

As well as the tools mentioned above, new technology companies are also homing in on the music industry, understanding that the independent sector is thriving and something that they can build a business upon. While the uses of social media are prevalent, it is also becoming a minefield for an artist to navigate on their own, with the apps almost being a full-time job in themselves. Alex Brees, CEO of a new app called *Un:hurd*, identified this need and used his knowledge and work experience within technology to build a platform that uses both data and algorithms to assist a musician with understanding how best to market their work. Brees states that ‘Un:hurd’s technology replaces the traditional marketing agency requirement’ (2023)

(Appendix 2). He explains how his role ‘within the automotive-tech industry as a Trading Analyst [allowed him] to understand how to use big data to inform smart marketing decisions’ (Brees 2023). The app provides suggested playlists for an artist to submit to, based on their genres and current data, as well as using information from the artist’s social media platforms to suggest other ways of using those apps to reach further potential. Brees and his app are an excellent example of how the traditional concepts of technology (i.e., data analysis) can merge with the music industry to provide a service.

Conclusion

Upon conclusion of this analysis, it is clear that technology will continue to provide new opportunities and services to the music industry as it continues to develop. While the main advantage has been giving a platform to musicians who may never normally have found an opportunity to get their music heard, the credibility of music produced and also the artists getting signed from self-made popularity has definitely come into question. However, technology’s service to independent artists has become invaluable and provides them with a viable career as an unsigned musician. Overall, the most notable shift in service that technology has provided for the consumer is providing them all the power. With this convenient and on-demand service, for the consumer, continues and advances the main service that music has always provided – that of soundtracking a key moment in someone’s life – and is one that will always remain.

Word Count: 2470

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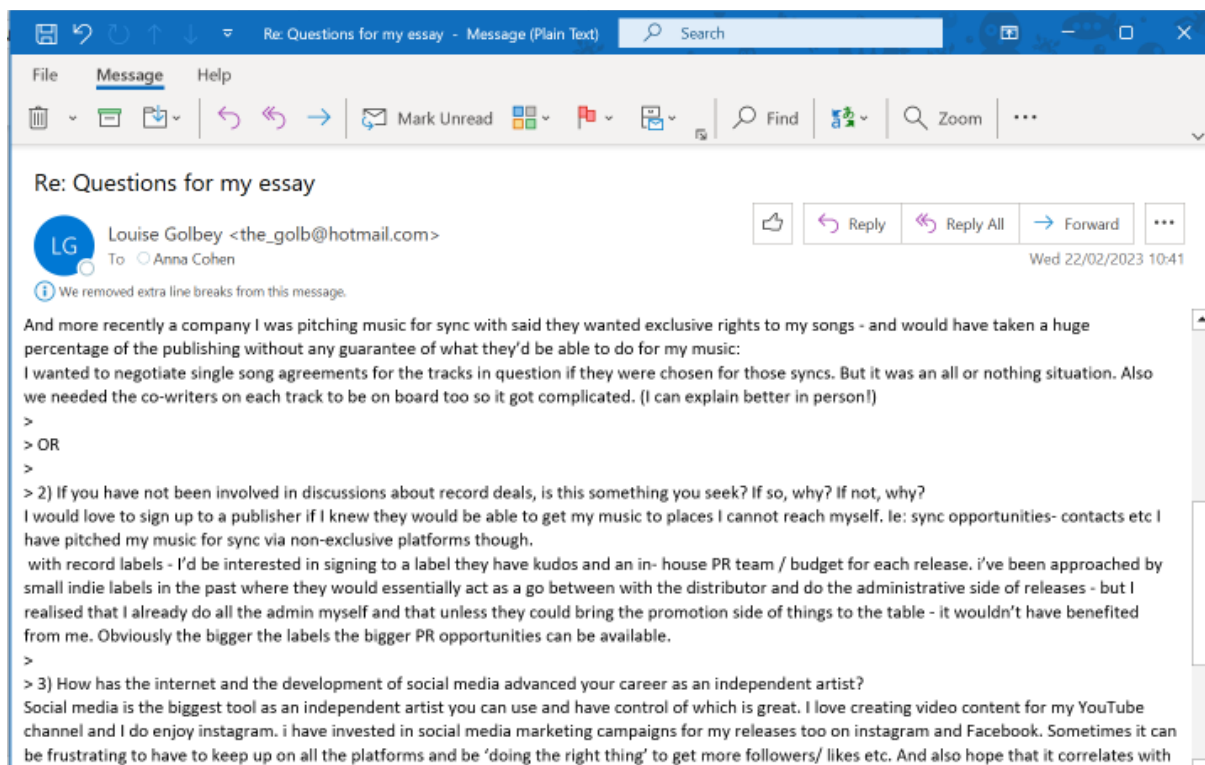
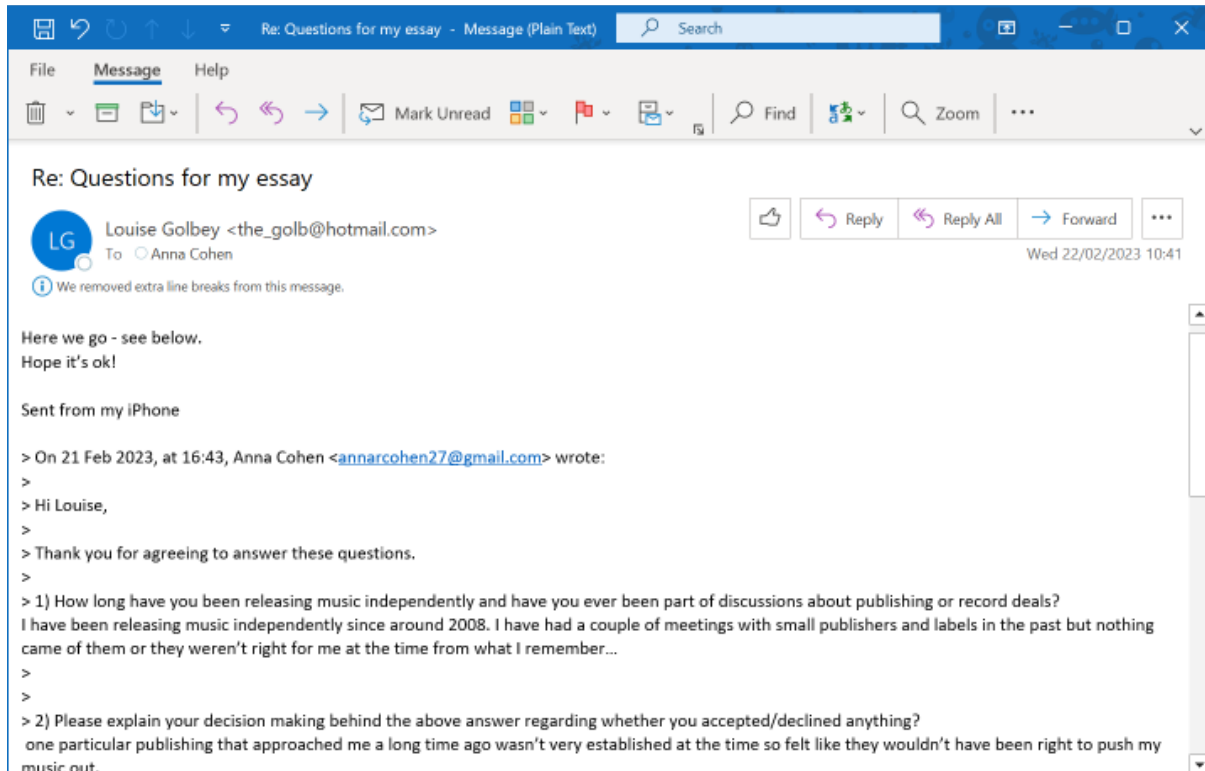
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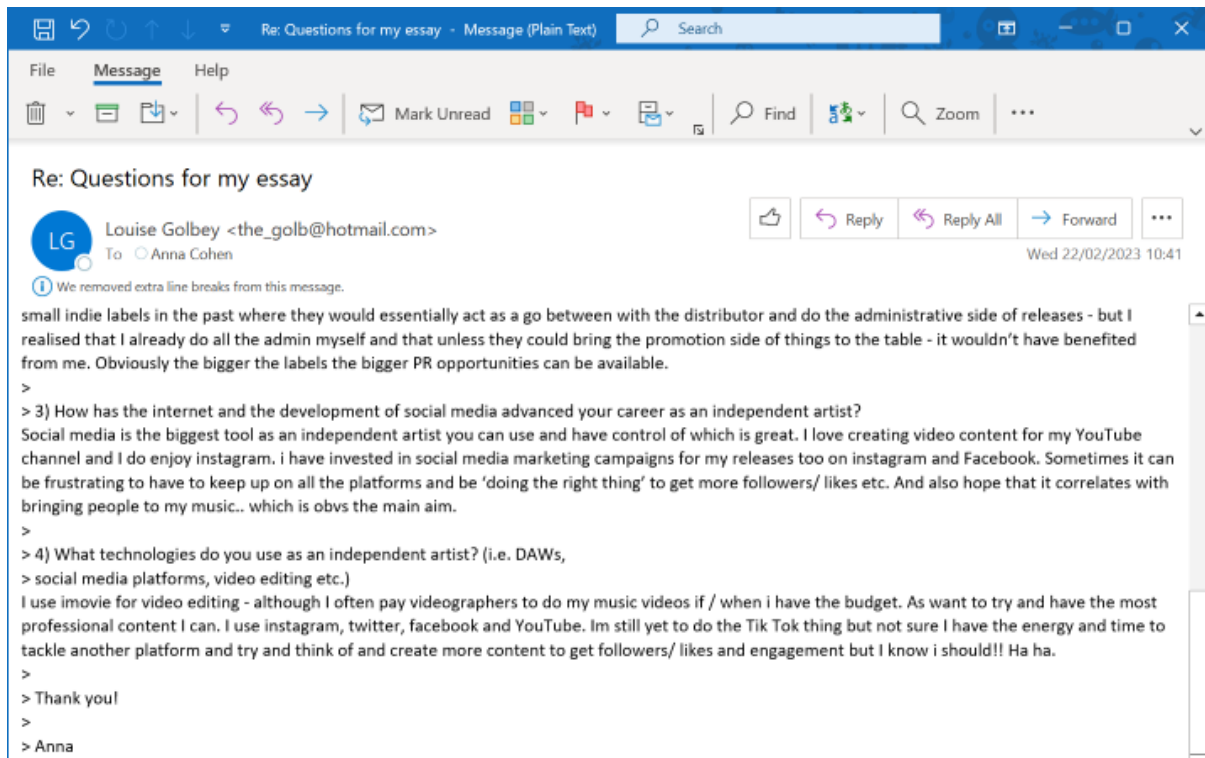
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Appendix 1

Screenshots of email sent to me on 22nd February 2023 from Louise Golbey in response to my questions.





The screenshot shows an email client window titled "Re: Questions for my essay - Message (Plain Text)". The interface includes a menu bar with "File", "Message", and "Help". Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for deleting, saving, printing, undo, redo, and other actions. The email header shows the subject "Re: Questions for my essay", the sender "Louise Golbey <the_golb@hotmail.com>", and the recipient "To: Anna Cohen". The date and time "Wed 22/02/2023 10:41" are displayed on the right. The email body contains a message from Louise Golbey, which has been formatted with line breaks. The message discusses her experience with indie labels and her career as an independent artist, mentioning social media and video editing.

Re: Questions for my essay

Louise Golbey <the_golb@hotmail.com>
To: Anna Cohen

Wed 22/02/2023 10:41

We removed extra line breaks from this message.

small indie labels in the past where they would essentially act as a go between with the distributor and do the administrative side of releases - but I realised that I already do all the admin myself and that unless they could bring the promotion side of things to the table - it wouldn't have benefited from me. Obviously the bigger the labels the bigger PR opportunities can be available.

>

> 3) How has the internet and the development of social media advanced your career as an independent artist?

Social media is the biggest tool as an independent artist you can use and have control of which is great. I love creating video content for my YouTube channel and I do enjoy instagram. I have invested in social media marketing campaigns for my releases too on instagram and Facebook. Sometimes it can be frustrating to have to keep up on all the platforms and be 'doing the right thing' to get more followers/ likes etc. And also hope that it correlates with bringing people to my music... which is obvs the main aim.

>

> 4) What technologies do you use as an independent artist? (i.e. DAWs, social media platforms, video editing etc.)

I use imovie for video editing - although I often pay videographers to do my music videos if / when i have the budget. As want to try and have the most professional content I can. I use instagram, twitter, facebook and YouTube. Im still yet to do the Tik Tok thing but not sure I have the energy and time to tackle another platform and try and think of and create more content to get followers/ likes and engagement but I know i should!! Ha ha.

>

> Thank you!

>

> Anna

Appendix 2

Screenshot of email sent to me on 27th February 2023 from Alex Brees, CEO of Un:Hurd, in response to my questions.

