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CMM Element 1 (Reflective Summary)

Write a 2500-word reflective summary which explains:

- a) Your involvement in the group portfolio and presentation task to create a single, remix and associated media assets, and
- b) Your reflections on the impact of all types of digital technologies with reference to the creation and promotion of original popular music and team development on creative industry projects.

Intro

This reflective summary aims to analyse and critique the accompanying portfolio submission. I will begin by discussing my personal involvement in the project, using Gibbs Reflective Tools as a guide (2013). I will discuss how we worked as a team, reflect on the successes and failures of the project, and make recommendations for best practice going forward for similar ventures.

The second section of this summary will discuss industry standard tools and digital technologies with regards to their effect on creative industry projects. This will involve personal reflections and opinions on these tools and technologies, and what I learned about them during the process of 'releasing' a commercial single and its remix

Reflection- my involvement

I will be using Gibbs Reflective Tools (2013) to guide my reflection of my involvement in the group portfolio. The following headlines will be used in the reflection:

Description

Feelings

Evaluation

Analysis

Conclusions

Personal action plans

Some questions I intend to answer during this reflection include: What worked? What failed? Why did some situations arise? Why did others and I behave the way we did? What could I have done better or differently? How can I improve? (Brown, 2015).

Description

The project in question was the creation of a portfolio, presenting the process of developing an original artist campaign including the recording, planning for digital release and promotion of a single and its associated media, with a theoretical working budget of £5000. My teammates were Justine Perret and Jan Dittrich. We assigned our roles based on our personal strengths/skills and proceeded to develop the mandatory and optional assets prescribed by the assignment, with the intention of regrouping at regular intervals throughout and ultimately at the end to share our portion of the work. The portfolio itself acts as the full 'description' for much of this section of my reflection.

As the deadline approached, we encountered multiple roadblocks as a group. The first being the absence of Jan halfway through the project, where we struggled to get in touch to access his portion of the assignment with a short amount of time until the deadline. This resulted in myself and Justine putting plans in place to complete his assigned portion. Further, Justine had Covid-19 over the Christmas break alongside other health issues throughout the assignment. Then, I was sent to A&E in debilitating pain where I remained in hospital for multiple days (including the original deadline date), resulting in an extension for the group. I had to take a substantial portion of time after this to recover, and then got Covid-19 and was unwell in the week approaching the renewed deadline. This all resulted in delays and a need to adapt original plans for all group members. The assignment was handed in on the renewed deadline of February 14th.

Feelings

Naturally, the challenges that came up resulted in feelings of immense stress with some mental health impacts. As a close friend of Justine, I was aware that she was also struggling with feelings of stress and anxiety regarding the project. However, we were both proud of our reactions to the situation, adapting quickly and working together to overcome obstacles. I am a generally calm and thoughtful person and was relieved to find that I did not let frustration or disappointment overshadow our work, nor to project anger towards Jan for his absence during a portion of the project. Looking back, I am highly satisfied with what we managed to accomplish given the circumstances, and I found the project itself to be insightful, interesting, and valuable in increasing my knowledge of important sectors of the music industry.

Evaluation

The value judgements that can be made about this experience are a healthy mix of good and bad, making for a valuable learning experience overall. In the beginning especially, we worked immensely well as a team, with complementary strengths and skills. Though this briefly faltered, we were good at retaining a civil and overall positive experience as a team in the end. All elements were successfully completed, and despite seemingly endless challenges we managed to produce something of which we were all quite proud. I felt that I contributed a positive and encouraging attitude throughout, and thoroughly appreciated the support and kindness from my team when I fell ill.

As for the portfolio assets themselves, I was happy with the quality achieved by the group across a wide range of assets created. I was incredibly impressed by Justine's songwriting and creative capabilities, her dedication, and her unwavering work ethic. She produced high quality artwork, videos, and of course the single itself with great enthusiasm. Jan was highly focused and meticulous in his approach to the branding assets and the financial plan, as well as completing the remix under a tight time pressure. Though at times he did not act as a terrific team player, he produced his elements of the project to a

high standard and remained calm and understanding of the requirements and frustration of the team, ultimately apologising for his absence. I was proud of the work I produced, particularly the EPK/website which took a large amount of time as someone with no previous experience in graphic design or website building.

Analysis

This project truly embodied the concept of learning by doing or 'experiential learning' (Gibbs, 2013), with all of us learning, sometimes the hard way, about the practicalities of releasing a commercial single and working as a team. Though there were many factors that could be deemed objectively 'bad' about the experience, the challenges simply lead to a greater learning experience and did not actually impede on the overall quality of the project. There were some key differences in the way we all approached the task which was reflected in the portfolio with the assignment of Belbin team roles (2022). We thankfully did not fall victim to 'groupthink' (not raising different opinions to a dominant opinion or decision, to avoid seeming like an outsider) (Janis, 1991), ensuring that we expressed our opinions and thoughts in a healthy and productive manner for the best result for the project.

Conclusion and action plan

I have realised that, when approaching group work by separating out and delegating tasks, it is vital to stay in touch on a very consistent base throughout the project's completion. This ensures that everybody is on the same page and is something that should be made clear from the outset so that people are kept in the loop if one member will be absent / uncontactable. On reflection, I would personally like to improve my prioritisation skills, having spent substantial amounts of time on the EPK/website when focus could have been put on other areas given the pressure we were under. Our approach of understanding each other's skills and strengths from the outset and assigning roles accordingly is something I will keep in mind for future collaborative projects.

Impact of digital technologies on creative industry projects

I will be discussing industry standard tools and digital technologies with regards to their effect on our project- the release of a commercial single and its remix- as well as on wider creative industry projects.

As someone with no previous working experience in the music industry or in business, everything I am learning during my MA is, for the most part, brand new information. I am fascinated by the digital aspects of the music industry and how rapidly they have and continue to develop over the years. Perhaps the standout observation I made during this project was how much being an artist is like running a small business- from having a customer base to the artist themselves acting as a 'brand' (Bianchi, 2017;

Nguyen, 2018). Though I knew that there was a large operation behind the scenes of every artist, I was fascinated by the sheer scale and detail that goes into every single aspect of an artist's persona and their releases. In essence, I was surprised by how formulaic it all is.

When it came to our own project, we were highly aware of the importance of digital technologies and social media for our campaign and did not at any point put significant thought into physical sales. This natural inclination reflects the wider industry understanding that digital is key. Such a large portion of our budget and time went into social media for this reason, with up-and-coming artists so often discovered on platforms such as TikTok (Rosenblatt, 2019). Our approach to the project itself was also heavily reliant on digital technologies. With all three of us working from different countries, storage and communication via Whatsapp, Zoom, Google Drive, and Microsoft One Note was essential for the success of the project. My key contribution to the project, the website/EPK, is an inherent symbol of this move from physical press kits to digital electronic ones. You would simply be laughed out of the building if you presented a physical press kit in this decade.

The most insightful discussion I had during this project was with Senior A&R at Believe, Sebastian Smith (Seb) ¹. He went through the practicalities of finding, securing, and growing an artist from discovery to fame/success. The main point that he stressed was the importance of social media and digital technologies for an artist campaign, claiming that digital spend was “everything” for a successful campaign. In an attention-seeking industry, with a population of people with increasingly short attention spans, it is important to focus on paid advertising and to constantly stay up to date with the newest technologies, platforms, and trends (Ferrone et al., 2019). This is something that I am aware of from personal experience, growing up in a generation that is digitally literate from childhood, constantly bombarded with the ‘newest’ exciting thing. I find this to be an exhausting state of being, but one that does not seem to be going anywhere any time soon!

It was of Seb's opinion that the industry is swiftly moving away from ‘old school’ media into the digital age, i.e., away from radio and magazines towards social media and other digital formats. This is a common theme, with an ever-changing opinion on where best to focus your efforts. In this industry especially, adaptability is key. He mentions that you must go where the song/artist goes, and not the other way around. For example, if you planned for success and invested all your time and energy into Facebook, but suddenly your song goes viral on TikTok, you must act fast and change your priorities accordingly. Depending on where, when, and how the song or artist is gaining popularity, you need to be prepared for all eventualities and adapt whenever necessary. This is an exciting time to be an artist

¹ The notes from this meeting/interview can be found in the Google Drive containing all assets for the accompanying portfolio: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1KRCi5HE4VUyDnc6v9mMHBTXoHsvUKKUB?usp=sharing>

or on an artist's team, but without a doubt a stressful one too. The severe degree of unpredictability in the digital age, in an industry that is already heavily reliant on chance, makes for a time where anyone, but not everyone, can be successful.

Unrelated to the project, I also had multiple discussions with Lucius Yeo, the CEO of music PR agency Copacetic, for an artist that I used to manage. I was able to apply my knowledge from carrying out this project to a real-world artist campaign, with the necessary tools and understanding to contribute and participate fully in discussions with the agency. Lucius provided fantastic advice regarding the best ways to go about marketing an artist and their EP, echoing much of what was said by Seb. Both industry professionals could not emphasise enough just how important digital technologies are in every aspect of the music business. This further confirmed any beliefs I had about the industry's shift from physical to digital and backed up many of the decisions made during our project.

Our recent study of blockchain and NFT's, as well as the metaverse, is a what I imagine to be the next step in the digitalisation of the music industry (eMusic, 2021; PWC, 2021). NFT's, and cryptocurrencies more generally, are being brought into the public eye, and many celebrities are jumping onboard while it's hot (Viviana, O. and Harkins, M, 2022; Rao, 2022). As it stands, social media is king, but as we have seen with trends over the past two decades alone, this reign may be short-lived. It is of my opinion that some form of social media will always remain relevant, however, the platforms themselves have a rapid turnover, and with each approaching new generation there is a different method by which we will need to approach creative projects such as a commercial single release.

Conclusion

I found this project to be a thought-provoking, useful, and enjoyable experience. I learned a tremendous amount about the music industry, the technicalities of releasing a commercial single, and most beneficially I gained a range of new skills in graphic design, marketing, and branding. It opened my eyes to the vast impact of digital technologies on creative industry projects and the ever-changing landscape in which the music industry must navigate.

I look forward to taking everything I've learned and applying it to real-world projects in future, and hope to work with my team mates on similar ventures throughout the remainder of my MA and beyond.

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