

Analysis of Distribution and Content of Music Industry in the We-Media Era

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Abstract: The We Media Era has revolutionized the music industry, transforming both distribution and content. Music, a universal language that transcends cultures, has found new avenues of expression and connection through the internet and self-media platforms. Independent artists have gained unprecedented access to global audiences, challenging the dominance of traditional record companies. Nevertheless, concerns have arisen regarding the balance between distribution and content. In the quest for online visibility, there is a risk of compromising the quality and substance of music. This essay traces the evolution of the music industry from its inception to the We Media Era, emphasizing the profound impact on both distribution and content. While democratized distribution opens new horizons, safeguarding the integrity and artistic essence of music remains paramount. As the industry continues its evolution, it must navigate the delicate equilibrium between accessibility and quality, ensuring that music endures as a vibrant and indispensable form of human expression.

Keywords: We Media, music industry, distribution, content

1. Introduction

Throughout the history of human beings, the existence of music has been a distinctive appearance that identified our flourishing spirit and differed mankind from other creatures in nature. One can almost argue that music served as a universal language among people from every cultural background, and consolidated people as a whole. The origin of this artistic form could track back to prehistoric era due to visual traits of bone flute [1]. As regional cultures interweave as time travels, the form of music developed rapidly and diversely with a strong inclusiveness, although music production during human evolution presents differently. Despite the fact that music impacted on societies all over the world, the concept of “music industry” was actually presented during the era of blues and jazz, dating back to late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the emergence of recording technology and radio broadcasting became possible and matured later on [2]. For a long period of time, the music industry and musicians relied heavily on traditional record companies to release, advertise, and profit from their production [2]. However, a revolutionary system structure known as the Internet that became visible in the late 20th centuries drastically influenced the music industry. This analysis will focus on both sides of the impact the We Media Era had on the music industry specifically in its distribution, content, and possible ways to profit besides binding to the record companies.

2. The We Media Era

In order to determine the extent of influence that the We Media Era has had on the music industry, defining the term of We Media appears to be crucial. The We Media, also known as “personal media” or “individual media”, is a concept incubated from the Internet that allows individuals to transmit formal or informal information rather than by a corporation or institution [3]. Under such a concept, people are able to discuss and share all kinds of information with a lower barrier compared to traditional terms of “media”, which was in the hands of media professionals only. We Media in general terms might include social media, participatory media, and citizen media [3]. The most common international social media nowadays includes bloggers, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter etc. With participatory media, people might be more familiar with mainstream companies like TikTok, Youtube, Spotify, Soundcloud, NetEase (mainly in China), that have a greater customer base.

3. Distribution

Distribution of music in the We Media Era expanded radically due to an extreme low barrier for individuals to publish or release their works online. The earliest way of distributing music was physical written music notation, before recording was even possible back then. A Benedictine monk named Guido d’Arezzo is broadly considered as the creator of the stave of horizontal lines that could allow the public to record notes precisely [4]. People followed this standardized method and soon developed to public performances. Later on, the emergence of recordings made the distribution of music easy to spread among the public. The 20th century witnessed the advent of recorded music on vinyl records, a technological breakthrough that revolutionized the industry and allowed music to reach global audiences. Record companies dominated the industry in this era, Columbia Records and RCA Victor had a significant mark on the transition to vinyl records. However, the late 20th century brought disruption with the rise of independent record labels and DIY musicians who challenged the traditional record company model. DIY musicians refers to musicians who do everything by themselves, including writing, promoting, recording, releasing, and monetizing new music; planning, marketing, and producing tours; reaching, building, and engaging a fan base; managing social media; securing publicity; and so much more [5]. The advent of cassette tapes and CDs introduced new formats, while the digital revolution in the late 20th and early 21st centuries forced record companies to adapt to online music distribution. The most seismic shift occurred with the rise of the internet and digital streaming platforms, which have made music instantly accessible to billions of listeners worldwide. The internet and We Media provided artists sizable resources and platforms for them to distribute music, and individual record companies also seized their evolution in this process. While major labels like Universal Music Group and Sony Music Entertainment remain influential, the democratization of music distribution has given artists greater control over their careers and direct access to fans.

4. Content

The content of music appears as a human's spiritual expression that transcends cultural, linguistic, and temporal boundaries. At its core, music comprises a structured arrangement of sounds, melodies, harmonies, rhythms, and lyrics that evoke a wide range of emotions and convey narratives. Beyond its technical elements, music serves as a powerful medium for storytelling, cultural preservation, and emotional catharsis. In the late 19th centuries, the concept of popular music was introduced, as “any genre of music that appeals to a wide audience or subculture.” [6]. In a personal perspective, the culture of pop music depended on the content to a great extent. The rise of jazz and blues in the 1930s would serve as an example of content. Jazz and blues originated in New Orleans and spread along the Mississippi River via traveling bands. During this time it developed into a big band style

with arranged parts, blues musicians like Robert Johnson and Lead Belly expressed emotional turmoil like personal adversity or overcoming hard luck in their music, raising an empathy from the society [7]. World War 2 led to further technological advances like magnetic tape and long-playing records. R&B and rock & roll emerged from electric blues in the 1950s, popularized by icons like Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley. Music during this era represented a strong personality of character, such as the spirit of rebel. The 1960s saw an explosion of genres as the Beatles' British Invasion influenced bands worldwide. Motown Records also refined soul music during this period. Throughout the century, cultural shifts blended with new technologies to continually drive new sounds and the evolution of popular music styles [8].

5. Distribution Vs. Content

Undoubtedly, the proliferation of the internet and self-media has brought about revolutionary advancements and new possibilities for the music industry's development. However, it has also, to a certain extent, negatively impacted the music industry, giving rise to a set of challenges and issues. In the pursuit of online traffic and visibility, there is sometimes a tendency to compromise on the quality and depth of music. As the market gradually saturates, the intense competitiveness has led to an imbalance between the distribution share of music creators and the actual quality of content produced. On mainstream media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, driven by algorithmic recommendations and user-generated content (UGC) remixes, traditional promotional methods are gradually being replaced by the model of promoting songs through short video clips, entering an era of 15-second music [9]. The algorithms and trends on some mainstream platforms may result in short-lived bursts of popularity rather than enduring musical value, giving rise to what can be termed "commercial songs" that prioritize profit potential over the artistic or societal meaning of the music. In 2018, a TikTok song titled "Learn to Meow" received Billboard Radio China's annual Top 10 Chinese Golden Songs award [10]. However, this song faced significant criticism for its lack of meaningful content. Its fame was primarily attributed to a simple yet catchy melody, resulting in a relatively high level of popularity. This stands as a quintessential example of a case where the proportion of attention garnered by distribution significantly outweighs its actual substance and societal relevance.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the We Media Era has ushered in a new chapter in the history of the music industry, profoundly impacting both distribution and content. This transformative period has been characterized by unprecedented opportunities for artists and listeners alike, along with significant challenges that have reshaped the music landscape. The democratization of music distribution has empowered artists to take control of their careers and connect directly with their audiences. The internet and self-media platforms have eliminated traditional barriers, allowing independent musicians to release their work globally. This shift has expanded the reach of music, fostering a diverse and inclusive ecosystem where a multitude of voices and genres can thrive. However, this era has also witnessed a shift in the dynamics between distribution and content. The quest for online visibility and short-term virality has, at times, overshadowed the depth and quality of music. Algorithms and user-generated content have given rise to fleeting trends and "commercial songs," raising questions about the enduring value of music in the digital age. Ultimately, the We Media Era has opened new avenues for music's global reach, offering opportunities for both established artists and emerging talents. While challenges persist, music's resilience and capacity to inspire and connect people across cultures and generations remain undiminished. As we navigate the future of

the music industry, it is imperative that we preserve the integrity and artistic significance of music, ensuring that it continues to be a vibrant and essential part of our shared human experience.

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