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**The Effects of Social Media on Music Sharing:  
A Review of the Literature & Proposed Research**

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Music has always been a part of my life. I began playing the violin in the third grade at my mother's suggestion, and continued into middle school. In high school, I switched over to the electric guitar. I always enjoyed playing music, but nobody in my family really pushed me to pursue it, and as I grew older my free time became consumed with other responsibilities. Regardless, my parents instilled in me a passion for music, exposing me to different genres and taking me to concerts at a young age.

With the technology of today, music is becoming more accessible than ever—something that continues to fascinate and amaze me more and more every day. Shortly after the creation of the mp3 in 1999, numerous different music downloading platforms emerged, allowing anybody to download the songs or albums they wanted, whenever they wanted. I downloaded my first song and created my first playlist on iTunes (“Rachel’s Songs”) when I was 12 years old. To this day, I still have that playlist saved on my computer, along with 33 others. I have close to 6000 songs stored in my iTunes alone, with thousands more on my parents’ home computer from before I got my own laptop, and an infinite number stored on my accounts on streaming platforms such as Spotify and Soundcloud. I remember using LimeWire (the illegal file-downloading program) and BitTorrent (a seemingly more illegal file-downloading program), and downloading from the iTunes store when these two huge networks were shut down.

However, it seems as if the entire music sharing business has made a drastic shift almost overnight with the emergence of social media networks and music streaming applications. Even I, a young adult who was born and raised in the age of technology, find myself struggling to keep up. Pandora, Spotify, and Soundcloud are all platforms that allow you to access music without having to actually own it. Cloud-based programs have become the norm. And within these

streaming applications, social networks have emerged, contributing to the preexisting social media super-communities living on platforms such as Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter.

With all of these changes to technology occurring so rapidly, the initial question that comes to mind is how the popularity of social media is affecting the music industry. Studying smaller artists' use of social media is crucial to understanding the future of music sharing and the music industry, especially in regards to artist promotion and advertising. Artists can now post their own original content on content creation websites, and then share it on a social media network. Youtube has become the singer-songwriters' go-to network for self-promotion. Smaller, up-and-coming artists are emerging daily, using Facebook and Twitter to advertise their work and network. Abhijit Sen (2010) notes that, "There are now solutions available for artists to distribute their music directly to the public while staying in total control of all the ownership, rights, creative process, pricing, release dates, and more" (p. 1). This effectively removes managers, producers, sound engineers, and other players from many artists' rise to fame. Steve Collins and Sherman Young (2010) point out that, "there is a widespread feeling that the major record labels are becoming redundant" (p. 340). Sen (2010) also remarks that because the world of "music production, consumption, and distribution has changed...[power is being placed] back into the hands of the artists and fans" (p. 1). The technology of today seems to be changing the music industry entirely.

Studying music and its evolution in a society can give researchers a clue about the culture of a group of people as a whole. I believe that studying the way that music is shared is an integral part of this. I intend to explore the historical roots of the digitization of music, while simultaneously examining the evolution of social media networks and their role in music sharing. Through my research, I hope to gain an understanding of the flow of music exchange in today's

society by identifying the current, dominant social media platforms and examining how each platform is being used, especially in regards to promoting smaller, up-and-coming artists. By studying the historical background of music digitization and the different social media platforms, my ultimate goal is to determine the impact social media has had on the music industry, and to attempt to paint a picture of the future of music sharing.

Research questions:

- What impact has social media had on the music industry?
- What is the future of music sharing, and what implications does all of this hold for the future of the music industry?

**The Literature**

The research on social media and music sharing is limited because the topic is extremely current. Napster, the first music downloading platform, was created just 16 years ago in 1999 (Nowak & Whelan, 2014), and iTunes just 12 years ago in 2003 (Mjøs, 2012, p. 84). This makes it difficult to find studies or journals that have already been published within that short time frame. There is a clear gap in the literature. Therefore, music data analysts, bloggers, and social media monitoring applications have become the resident experts in the field.

**Changes to the Industry**

The music industry is one that has been forced to adapt to many changes throughout the years. Claire BeDell (2013) of Sproutsocial, a social media monitoring application, points out that “the traditional music business model used to depend on record sales — and record sales *alone*.” However, this is not the case anymore, as record sales are “becoming less indicative of

success” (BeDell, 2013). The viral nature of social media has caused some artists to become famous, even before they have released any actual albums. Justin Bieber, Lana Del Rey, and Macklemore and Ryan Lewis are all examples, attributing their success to the content-creation platform Youtube (BeDell, 2013). Also, with cloud-based streaming platforms such as Spotify and Soundcloud, users can access music virtually for free.

Kate Franklin (2013) is the Enterprise Sales Executive at Brandwatch, a social media monitoring application. Franklin (2013) maintains that in today’s society “bloggers are arguably more influential than journalists from more established titles.” Buzz generated online by music bloggers can dramatically influence sales of a newly released or soon-to-be-released track (Franklin, 2013). This contradicts the results of a study performed in 2014, that found that social media blog buzz has little to no impact on album sales, and that there is a *negative* relationship between social media buzz and song sales (Dewan & Rammaprasad, 2014, p. 101). The researchers in the study explained the negative relationship by referencing the “dual nature of social media,” meaning that when users blog about a specific song, the user often includes a link to an mp3 download of the song, thus encouraging free acquisition of the song, as opposed to actual sales (Dewan & Rammaprasad, 2014, p. 101).

A 2012 study conducted by Next Big Sound, a music data and analytics company, analyzed the impact of social media on iTunes digital sales. The study found that, “Wikipedia page views, Internet radio impressions, and Last.fm plays showed the highest correlation of digital album sales during the first week of an album’s release. In the case of digital album sales, we found that for more than 50 percent of artists, taking into account the number of visits to their website helped more accurately determine what their first week album sales would be. Other

leading indicators of future album sales are Facebook pageviews, traditional radio, and once again, Wikipedia pageviews.” (Buli & Hu, 2012).

### **Social Media Platforms**

Today, it is not uncommon to use social media to share or discover new music. Franklin (2013) mentions how, “as music fans, most of us turn to Twitter or Facebook to keep updated about our favourite bands, whilst new tracks or videos will 99% of the time get their launch on social channels. Furthermore, social media is where music audiences naturally congregate, forming their own communities and sharing their experiences of bands and artists.”

Popular micro-blogging service Twitter has become an outlet for talking about music. According to Brandwatch’s 2013 Twitter Landscape Report, music is the third-most talked about conversation topic on Twitter, following TV/film and sports. In fact, as of March 2015, the top ten most-followed Twitter accounts are all musicians, aside from President Barack Obama, YouTube, and The Ellen Show (“Twitter accounts with the most followers worldwide as of March 2015 (in millions),” 2015).

### **Music Social Networks**

In more recent years, social networks revolving completely around music have emerged. According to Next Big Sound, in 2011, “more than 3 billion fans played over 60 billion songs on various online music platforms” (Buli & Hu, 2012). Pandora, Spotify, and Soundcloud are music streaming platforms that allow users to share playlists and songs with their network of friends. Jessica Edmondson of Socialnomics references the 2013 Nielsen U.S. Entertainment Consumer Report, stating that, “Music streaming increased a full 24% from 2012 to 2013, while

downloaded sales decreased 4.6%. While downloads *have* been steadily decreasing on their own, this stat is still somewhat reflective of a broader shift in the listening experience from downloaded to streamed songs” (Edmondson, 2013). The influence and integration with Facebook is apparent with all of these music streaming platforms. Edmondson notes that this makes “sharing and discovering [music] automatic,” with services like Spotify automatically posting what users are listening to right onto their Facebook feeds (2013).

In 2011, Justin Timberlake and Specific Media Group “purchased the nearly defunct Myspace for \$35 million, and a little over a year later, unveiled a new Myspace that almost entirely centered around music” (BeDell, 2013). Myspace now looks identical to the Spotify userface. A Finnish study published in 2013 found that many consumers now turn to Myspace to listen to newer, unknown artists, reporting that “Myspace has become a certain de facto medium for artist presence [despite the fact that] its popularity has been decreasing. [The service] is profiled [entirely] towards music” (Salo, Lankinen & Mäntymäki, 2013, p. 29). Myspace has evolved from a simple social media platform to a massive, global, music social network.

Music communities have also begun to emerge on YouTube, which has previously been referred to solely as a content-creation website. Noah Nelson of NPR Music surmises that the number of cover musicians (artists who film and produce their own unique covers of popular songs) “eclipses original work by a long shot,” calling YouTube, “this generation’s MTV” (2013). YouTube cover musicians have begun to collaborate with each other (similar to the way established musicians feature other artists on their own songs), often resulting in growth of both artists’ fan bases and an explosion of new subscribers/followers. Some cover musicians on YouTube have gained incredible followings, with some artists even securing record deals with major labels and achieving mainstream success in the music industry.



### **Maintaining Artist Image and Connecting with Fans**

Franklin (2013) states that “identifying and engaging with fans [via social media] is a crucial step in solidifying a band’s relationship with its audience.” In other words, keeping up a social media presence is another part of the job for the musicians of today. BeDell (2013) mentions that, “in addition to promoting their music, artists use social media to shape their images and build their brands. Many musicians’ social media presences are carefully crafted and curated, and some are [even] managed by agencies and managers.” Claire Lim, co-owner of music PR company A Badge of Friendship, states: “Nowadays, when we think about building a PR campaign, social media is integral to making the campaign work. The band must be active online...From a band’s perspective, not having a presence on places like Twitter or Facebook can be almost damaging. There have been times when an editor is keen on the music but then notes that the band in question has just a few hundred likes on Facebook or that their posting is sporadic” (as cited in Cooper & Shepherd, 2013).

Some artists are even beginning to offer their music for free online. In July 2013, rapper Jay-Z gave away one million free copies of his album *Magna Carta Holy Grail* to fans, through an app of the same name (Cooper & Shepherd, 2013). Miley Cyrus also just released a complete, 23-song album (*Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz*) for free on her website. Connecting with fans is now an essential part of maintaining artist image.

### **Tracking the Trends**

Franklin (2013) mentions how tracking social media platforms can present interesting insight into consumer trends, tastes, and purchasing behavior. This enables streaming

applications to recommended new tracks or artists to users, allows record labels to test the effectiveness of their outreach, and lets advertisers target specific demographics of consumers.

### **Conclusion**

Social media is making music more accessible than ever, with cloud-based programs dominating the current music scene. By studying the historical background of music digitization and the different social media platforms, my ultimate goal is to determine the impact social media has had on the music industry, and to attempt to paint a picture of the future of music sharing.

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