

# **Influence of Social Media on the Management of Music Star Image**

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## **Abstract**

*As a result of changing business models, the music industry has narrowed its focus to music stars with mass appeal. Management of music star image has become more complicated in the digital realm due to a rise in consumer-generated social media, particularly in the areas of promotion and publicity. As a new element in the promotion mix, social media enables management to develop artist-fan relationships by engaging fans using a variety of media formats. Social media also provides management with the tools to shape internet-based discussions and publicity. Using Richard Dyer's model of star image as a framework and other scholarly research, this study discussed the management of promotion and publicity of music star images via social media.*

## **I. Introduction**

The music industry has experienced a revolution over the past decade. After successive years of growth in the 1990s, CD sales began to decline at the turn of the century, posing a great threat to the industry. Following years of fighting digital piracy in legal battles, the music industry began to embrace innovative digital business models and shifted its focus to signing artists with mass appeal and large sales potentials. During this same period, Internet-based social media became an increasingly important aspect of marketing communications throughout all industries, including the music industry. Using Richard Dyer's model of star image as a framework and other scholarly research, this study explores ways of promoting and publicizing music star images using social media.

## **II. Background of the Record Industry**

### *Traditional Business Model*

From the early 20th through the early 21st century, the music industry maintained roughly the same business model. This traditional model included the mass production, promotion, and distribution of recorded material. Record labels would identify and develop artists, record music in professional recording studios, manufacture physical albums (vinyl, cassette, or CD), promote the albums in traditional media, and distribute the albums via physical record stores. Record labels of this time typically promoted their products

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using large budgets spent on heavy advertising, encouraging radio airplay, and television spots. This business model had a sales-oriented philosophy, focusing efforts on making transactions (i.e., selling CDs) with little concern for developing and maintaining long-term relationships with the customer. The consumer was subject to a slow, inefficient process of purchasing music where they had to travel to a physical record store (prominent retailers included Tower Records and Best Buy), search the shelves for desired music, and then wait in line to check out (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004). For the greater part of the 20th century, the record industry had an oligopoly over how music was distributed to customers.

### *The Turning Point: 1999-2000*

The period from 1999 to 2000 has been regarded as the turning point of the industry. After consecutive years of growth and record high U.S. sales in 1999, CD sales throughout the United States and the world began to decline. Many industry executives (at least in part) blame this decline on digital piracy, which began in 1999 with Napster. From 1999 until 2002, CD sales worldwide plummeted 19.8 percent, or about \$7.7 billion (Janssens, Vandaele, & Beken, 2009). CD sales have continued to decline.

### *Threat of Digital Piracy*

Innovations in technology have a great influence on business models throughout all industries. The MP3 was the most influential technological advancement in the music industry since the creation of the CD in 1982. The MP3 enabled users to compress music files from CDs into a format with slightly poorer quality that could be easily transferred through the Internet. This technology allowed Shawn Fanning to create Napster, the first peer-to-peer (P2P) file sharing network. Launched in 1999, Napster made it possible for users with the Napster software to search for and download music files from other users. It operated using a central computer server that would list users who had certain songs and make the connection between the downloader and the uploader. On December 6, 1999, the Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) sued Napster, accusing the company of enabling and encouraging copyright infringement. Within one month of the lawsuit being filed, the number of Napster users grew from 50,000 to 150,000 and the number of songs available grew to 20 million (Menn, 2003). At its peak, Napster had 70 million registered users (Janssens, Vandaele, & Beken, 2009). In 2001, the court ordered Napster to block all copyright-infringing files, and it was shut down in July of that year.

Although other factors were influential in the decline of CD sales, digital piracy from P2P services commonly receives the bulk of the blame. According to the RIAA, "In the decade since peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing site Napster emerged in 1999, music sales in the U.S. have dropped 47 percent" (Record Industry Association of America, 2011). Statistics such as this show a correlation between the decline in sales and emergence of digital piracy, but researchers have not proven digital piracy to be the direct cause of the decline. Janssens, Vandaele and Beken (2009) propose that file sharing has three possible effects on the record industry. The first is the substitution effect. This suggests that if customers are able to download music for free through unauthorized online services, they will no longer be willing to legally purchase the same music. Record labels view this as the most likely and threatening effect of digital piracy. However, a real limitation to this theory is to believe that people who would download a free copy would not necessarily legally buy the same product at market price. A second effect is the sampling or exposure effect. By downloading music from the Internet, people are able to experience or preview the product before making the decision to legally purchase the product. This effect positions file sharing as a means to promotion, allowing customers to discover new music with little effort. The third effect is the network effect, which can be compared to radio exposure (Janssens, Vandaele & Beken, 2009). A song's popularity on unauthorized sites and peer-to-peer networks increases reach of exposure and publicity.

Music labels have responded to the growing threat of digital piracy in two ways: awareness campaigns and legal action. The RIAA states that its response to piracy was "designed to educate fans about the law, the consequences of breaking the law, and raise awareness about all the great legal sites in the music marketplace" (Record Industry Association of America, 2011). As a means of dissuading people from participating in P2P file sharing, these promotional campaigns were intended to educate people about the issues of copyright infringement and how piracy hurts artists, job growth, and the U.S. economy. These campaigns also informed people of the benefits of using legitimate online music services (Janssens, Vandaele & Beken, 2009). The music industry's legal response was threefold. The first targets of legal actions were the unauthorized file sharing services. These lawsuits effectively shut down numerous file sharing sites

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including Napster, Grokster, Morpheus, Kazaa, and, most recently, LimeWire. Lawsuits also targeted Internet service providers to force them to reveal infringer identities or pay damages for infringement, or block illegal sites (Janssens, Vandaele & Beken, 2009). Lastly, lawsuits targeted individual P2P users who had committed copyright infringement. Between 2003 and 2007, the RIAA filed suit against more than 20,000 individual P2P users, maintaining that the lawsuits were intended to spread awareness of the potential consequences of copyright-infringement (Hiatt & Serpick, 2007). As of 2008, the RIAA has stopped filing lawsuits against individual users, but continue to fight legal battles against illegal music sites.

### *Going Digital*

In order to curb the decline in music sales, the music industry had to adjust its business model in order to survive in the digital age. As an initial attempt to enter the digital marketplace, all of the big five major labels created new digital music services in 2001 and 2002. Warner, EMI, and BMG set up MusicNet, followed soon by Sony and Universal's PressPlay. Both legal digital music distribution services proved to be unsuccessful. MusicNet and PressPlay were subscription based digital music distribution services that offered a small selection of the labels' catalogues for a monthly fee. Another reason the services did not attract many users was that the music available was subject to a number of technological restrictions that prevented copying and distribution (Janssens, Vandaele & Beken, 2009). In order to be successful, legal digital music services had to be more user-friendly than the unauthorized peer-to-peer services.

Apple Corporation's iTunes Music Store is the most successful and popular legal music service to date. Originally intended to boost sales of its iPod, Apple launched the iTunes Music Store on April 28, 2003, after signing licensing deals with all five major labels (Levy, 2006). iTunes, a pay-per-download music service, allowed users to purchase music at 99 cents per song or \$9.99 per album\*. Initial success of the music service was believed to be due to its lack of security restrictions. Apple CEO Steve Jobs had to fight for this user freedom in negotiations with the record labels. "We told them that to compete with Kazaa, we had to offer users broad personal-use rights . . . like being able to burn as many CDs as you want. And being able to put your music on as many iPods as you want, being able to put it on more than one computer. They were not in that mind-set when we first talked," said Jobs (Levy, 2006). Another important factor in the iTunes store's success is its accessibility. Users are able to purchase music conveniently from their computer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Within 6 months from its launch, 14 million songs were purchased on iTunes. By July 2004, over 100 million songs were purchased (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004). As of February 24, 2010, over 10 billion songs have been purchased on iTunes ("iTunes Store Tops 10 Billion Songs Sold," 2010).

Success with the Apple's iTunes Music Store has encouraged more licensing deals between music companies and a variety of legitimate online digital music services. According to the IFPI Digital Music Report 2011, there are currently more than 400 licensed digital music services, many of which offer a catalogue of 13 million tracks. "The record industry is more open to new models now than it has ever been," said Mark Piibe, the global head of digital business development at EMI Music. "We are experimenting in ways that we wouldn't have considered three years ago, and we are also getting a lot more sophisticated about the differences between markets" (*IFPI Digital Music Report*, 2011). Although not a new concept, the music subscription service model has seen some growth in popularity in recent years, likely due to advances in broadband and portable technology.

Based out of Sweden, Spotify is a music streaming service that has seen recent success in the digital music market, having licensing deals with all of the major record labels as well as numerous independent labels. Instead of purchasing individual songs, users are able to access nearly 15 million songs through the Spotify software on their computer or smart phone application. CEO Daniel Ek said, "We're educating people into moving from ownership to access" (*IFPI Digital Music Report*, 2011). In addition to its unique business model, Spotify allows users to share their playlists with friends via Facebook, Twitter, and e-mail. In this "freemium" subscription model, users are able to choose from three plans: free, unlimited, and premium. Users with the free plan are subject to advertisements. The unlimited plan offers ad-free listening for about \$5 a month. Users with the premium plan pay \$10 a month for ad-free listening with smartphone access and the ability to make offline playlists that are available without an Internet connection. With over 10 million us-

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\* iTunes' pricing structure has changed since its creation in 2003. Single songs are currently offered at 79 cents, 99 cents, or \$1.29. Album pricing varies depending on a number of factors, including release date and popularity.

ers and 1.6 million paid subscribers, Spotify is the second most popular digital music service in Europe after iTunes (Baig, 2011). The service expanded into the United States in July 2011.

### III. Increased Emphasis on the Star

Over the last decade, the recording industry has seen consistent growth in digital revenue. The industry's digital revenue in 2010 was \$4.6 billion, compared to \$420 million in 2004. In 2010, 29% of the record industry's revenue came from digital channels, up from 2% in 2004. Despite the 10 times increase in the digital music market's value, the overall value of the global record industry has decreased 31% since 2004 (*IFPI Digital Music Report*, 2011). Since 1999, the Big Five record labels have now become the Big Three. In 2006, Sony and BMG merged forming Sony Music Entertainment and in 2011, EMI was bought by Universal Music Group. The Big Three are Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group. Major record labels have had to substantially cut costs due to the continuing decline in overall music sales. These cuts have greatly affected record labels' artist and repertoire (A&R) and marketing departments, which are funded by about a third of the company's revenue (*IFPI Digital Music Report*, 2011). These labels have, therefore, had to narrow their strategy and try to eliminate risk when it comes to investing in artists. Experts believe that record labels will "pursue a risk-adverse strategy by focusing only on marketing clones of artists with mass appeal and large sales potential" (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004). By directing their focus to artists with proven success and popularity, major label A&R and marketing departments will have an increased responsibility in managing each artist's star image. In their book, *On Record* (1990), Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin said, "[the] most important commodities produced by the music industry . . . may not be songs or records but stars." This is the philosophy major record labels are operating with to remain successful in today's music marketplace.

### IV. Model of Star Image

Richard Dyer's model will be used in this research to define and outline the discussion of star image. According to this model, a star's image is made up from four types of media text: promotion, publicity, films, and criticism and commentaries (Dyer, 1998). Dyer originally used this model as a method to define a movie star's image, but it can be expanded to define a music star's image due to the similarities in the two entertainment industries and their products. In his book, *The Beatles: Image and the Media* (2007), Michael Frontani adapted the third media text in Dyer's model from films to work product in order to make the model suitable for defining a music star's image. The revised model of promotion, publicity, work product, and criticism and commentaries will be used for this research.

The first media text, promotion, refers to materials deliberately created to support the designed image of a star. Promotional material includes announcements, news releases, fan club publications, photographs, advertisements, product endorsements, and public appearances, as well as advertisements, news releases, or trailers that promote the star's work product. The content of these promotional materials is consistent with the image that management has designed for the individual and is intended to promote that image to the public (Dyer, 1998).

Publicity, the second media text, refers to the influence of the press on a star's image. Dyer explains that publicity is "theoretically distinct from promotion in that it is not, or does not appear to be, deliberate image-making" (Dyer, 1998). Publicity is what the press publishes about a star. This type of media text can be found in newspapers, magazines, television, interviews, gossip columns, and basically any other publishable medium that is not directed by promotional efforts. Publicity is important for a star's image because it appeals to the public as being a more authentic representation of the star, untouched by management. Publicity can have either a positive or negative effect on promotional efforts (Dyer, 1998).

The third media text in the revised Dyer model is work product. Work product is what gives the star their celebrity status. For a music star, work product is defined as recorded music, live performance, and video. Although it is primarily the result of the star's artistic creativity, work product may also be slightly influenced by management to remain consistent with previously established promotional efforts (Frontani, 2007).

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The final media text category is criticism and commentary. This category comprises reviews of work product, commentaries, biographies, obituaries or other writing after a star's death. This category of media text typically provides a retrospective of a star's life or professional career (Dyer, 1998).

## **V. Influence of Social Media on Star Image**

The development of social media on the Internet has considerably transformed the way people communicate with one another. According to a recent Nielsen report on the state of social media, nearly 80% of active Internet users visit social networks and blogs ("State of the Media," 2011). Social media can be described as "a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities, and issues" (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2004). "Social media" is an umbrella term that includes social networking sites, creativity work sharing sites, blogs, and forums.

This new media form is becoming increasingly influential on consumer behavior in the marketplace, specifically in awareness, obtaining information, developing opinions, and purchasing behavior. Consumers are substituting traditional media and means of advertising, such as television, radio, magazines and newspapers, for new media that give them instant access to information at their own convenience. Due to its consumer-generated nature, social media is perceived as a more trustworthy source of information than traditional advertising and communication. Therefore, consumers are turning to social media platforms to obtain information and make purchasing decisions (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

As both a new promotional tool and a venue for consumer-generated communications, social media is becoming increasingly influential on the creation and realization of a music star's image. A variety of social media platforms including Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, YouTube, VEVO, and interactive artist websites, are used to manage promotion and monitor publicity of stars. The following discussion of social media's influence and importance on the creation and realization of the music star image will focus on the first two media texts: promotion and publicity.

### *Promotion.*

While traditional advertising, public relations, and direct selling still exist and remain essential, social media is becoming an increasingly important tool used in the promotion of a music star image. According to Nielsen, active adult social networkers are 75% more likely to be heavy spenders on music compared to the average adult Internet user, therefore promotion via social media is crucial to an artist's and, in turn, their record label's success. Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest "a new [communications] paradigm that includes all forms of social media as potential tools in designing and implementing [marketing] strategies." Promotion via social media is similar to that of traditional elements of the promotion mix in that it enables companies to communicate messages to their customers. In terms of the music industry, it allows artists and record labels to talk to their fans and customers. Messages published in social media are consistent with the artist management's promotional strategy and design of the star image. Management also controls the content, frequency, timing and medium of this communication (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Advances in social media have significantly reduced the communication gap in distance and time between an artist and a fan. Various types of social media "enable instantaneous, real-time communication, and utilizes multi-media formats (audio and visual presentations) and numerous delivery platforms (Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, to name a few), with global reach capabilities," (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). An artist is virtually able to communicate instantly with thousands of people over a number of media platforms.

In the digital marketplace of social media, artists must maintain an online persona that is consistent with their manufactured star image (Ferri, 2010). Social media platforms, such as Facebook and MySpace, offer users a one-stop shop for everything about an artist. "Essentially, it's an electronic press kit," said Derek Bachman, program manager at SaskMusic (Foley, 2010). From an artist's Facebook page, fans are able to find information including the artist's biography, band members, tour dates, and discography. Often artists also make available various types of media including studio or concert photos as well as links to artist and record label websites, merchandise websites, supported charities or organizations websites, and the artist's other social media pages. Once a fan chooses to "like" the artist on Facebook, they receive updates from the

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artist about new music, appearances, tour information, photos, video, and anything else the artist chooses to tell their fans. Facebook and MySpace pages also give the fan various ways to access and purchase their music. Facebook is now working with iTunes allowing fans to click on a link posted on the artist's page, which then directs them to the iTunes store where they can preview and purchase that artist's music. Recently, Facebook has reached a similar partnership with Spotify, which allows Spotify users to share playlists and songs they are listening to on Facebook (Nakashima, 2011). As one of the first social networks to allow musicians to post songs on their profiles, MySpace has played a significant role in promotion of artist's music. For example, alternative rock group Arctic Monkeys set up a MySpace page so that fans could easily access their music. Their presence on MySpace is said to have supported the sales of their debut album, *Whatever People Say I Am, That's What I'm Not*, which became the fastest-selling album in British music history (Young & Collins, 2010).

While traditional promotional elements were typically passive, social media is an interactive form of communication. Social media have encouraged consumer interaction by converging different types of media, whether that is text, photographs, video, or otherwise (Cayari, 2011). As an easy means of quickly publishing messages, Twitter has now connected with Facebook, allowing Tweets to now also simultaneously post to Facebook as a status update. Social networking sites like Facebook and Google+ allow users to share a variety of multi-media through status updates or by posting to a friend's wall. Similarly, YouTube and VEVO fans are able to share video media on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and other social media simply by clicking a Share button. This convergence of multi-media on social media platforms has made the distribution of promotional messages and media of artist images to be quick and effortless.

Messages intended for the promotion of an artist's star image should be designed to interact with fans and stimulate conversations over a number of social media platforms. This interaction between artists and fans "contributes to a sense of community in which honest, open communications are encouraged and customer engagement is enhanced" (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). When fans re-Tweet or share something an artist publishes, they are essentially advertising that artist's message to a new network of people to read (Foley, 2010). Therefore, these messages should contain information that fans may find interesting and would like to pass on to their own network of followers. Likewise, by composing tweets or status updates in the form of a question, you are directing your message at fans on a more personal level while encouraging responses. These responses, in the form of comments on Facebook and tweets on Twitter, will be re-published to the fan's network of followers.

Publishing messages in a variety of media formats is often more appealing to the fans. The music video has been used as a promotional tool in the record industry for decades, with original broadcasts on MTV in the 1980s. In the age of social media, people are viewing more video content online at their own convenience. During May 2011 alone, over 31 million people in the United States watched video content on social media platforms ("State of the Media," 2011). Today, record labels are making music videos available to consumers online via licensing deals with YouTube and VEVO in hopes that views will result in greater music sales. "We offer consumers artist-branded channels on YouTube," said Michael Nash, executive vice president of digital strategy and business development at Warner Music Group. "In a world where over half of the active rosters are signed to extended rights agreements, it is extremely important for us to have a strong marketing partnership with our artists," (*IFPI Digital Music Report*, 2011). Justin Bieber is perhaps the poster child for the music video as a promotional tool on YouTube. With over 430 million views on YouTube, Justin Bieber's song, "Baby," was the 8th highest selling single in 2010 at 6.4 million units sold (2011). Other artists, such as the Black Keys, have published music videos of unreleased songs on Facebook through YouTube as a means of promoting an upcoming album release.

As yet another means of engaging fans, some artists allow fans to submit photos from concerts, which may then be published on the artist's social media pages. Foo Fighters told their nearly 6.4 million Facebook fans to submit photographs they have taken at their concerts by tagging the artist in the photo. The band selected 130 of these fan-photos and published a photo album on their page called "Pics from our pals." By engaging their fans on Facebook, the Foo Fighters shared their fans' real experiences while narrowing the communication gap between artist and fan.

### *Publicity*

Social media has drastically changed the landscape and magnitude of the publicity media text of a music star image. Specifically, social media has expanded the publicity concept of word-of-mouth to a much,

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much larger scale. With these new media technologies, it is possible for an individual to communicate with hundreds to thousands of other individuals instantaneously. “We are at a moment when the digital-music experience is moving from a linear to a dynamic model: the many telling the many what they like, hate, and want others to hear, and providing a communal experience that re-creates digitally some of the reasons we fell in love with music in the first place,” said reporter Michael Hirschorn (2007). With the capacity to self-publish, everyone now has the ability to influence consumer behavior. According to a Nielson report on social media, 60% of social media users publish reviews of products and services and 30% of active social networkers follow a celebrity (“State of the Media,” 2011). With an increasing number of people publishing reviews and turning to social media to make purchasing decisions, managing publicity on social media platforms is becoming crucial to maintaining a profitable music star image.

The sharing capabilities of social media can produce beneficial mass publicity that is consistent with the promoted star image. However, bad publicity can be detrimental to a star image. In the past, music stars and other celebrity personalities have argued that they have been misrepresented in the media and often employ publicists to monitor and control the type of media coverage artists are receiving. The increasing speed and extent of social media conversation between consumers will certainly make controlling publicity a much more difficult job (Ferri, 2010). In his book, *The New Influencers* (2007), author Paul Gillin explains, “Conventional marketing wisdom has long held that a dissatisfied customer tells ten people. But that is out of date. In the new age of social media, he or she has the tools to tell 10 million.” With the power now in the hands of the consumer, publicists and managers must attempt to control social media publicity to coincide with their promoted music star image. While successful promotion efforts should stimulate good publicity, maintaining an effective presence in social media is the best way to control publicity overall, both good and bad.

Artist management should provide social networking platforms that develop communities of social networkers that center on shared interest in the artist (Mangold & Faulds, 2009). Aside from artist Facebook pages, managers could also create Facebook groups that give fans and critics a place to communicate with one another. Some artist websites have a forum section that encourages registered users to post discussion topics to which other users can post their responses. Foo Fighters is one band that employs this tactic. By registering to the Foo Fighters Postboard, fans can share their opinions on Foo Fighter-related discussion topics with others. Allowing users to submit feedback results in a closer artist-fan relationship and engaged a wider fan base. To encourage use of similar forum or discussion platforms, artist management may provide registered users with exclusive benefits, such as being able to hear songs before they are released to the public (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).

Another crucial element to controlling publicity is by providing information about artists. Mangold and Faulds (2009) suggest, “Consumers are more likely to talk about companies and products when they feel they know a lot about them.” The same is true with fans and artists. Information inspires action. For example, when fans learn that their favorite artist is coming to a nearby venue, they may share that information with their friends via social media. Once artist-fan relationships are developed from promotional efforts, these relationships must be maintained. The best way to maintain and strengthen these relationships is to keep fans and followers informed and updated with what the artist is doing. Twitter is probably the most ideal social networking platform for this type of communication although Facebook can also be used. By publishing a tweet every day or so, artists remain in the public eye of their followers. At the same time, if an artist has recently received bad press in other media outlets, social media gives them the ability to address their fans and provide a response to the press.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Consumers are turning to social media to conduct their informational searches, develop opinions, and make purchasing decisions. Therefore, a strong social media presence is crucial to successful management of music star images. Management of music star image must include promotion via social media by providing information using a variety of media formats, stimulating social media-based conversation, and developing artist-fan relationships by engaging fans. Due to the expansive nature of Internet-based word-of-mouth communications, management must also use social media as a means to control publicity and shape discussions. The overall realization of management’s designed music star image relies heavily on its representation in the social media marketplace.

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While an effective digital strategy will remain crucial to the management of music star image, the future will likely bring even more user-friendly, interactive models of social media. As technology improves, more distribution services will begin partnering with social media platforms to enable direct selling of music. We are already seeing these sorts of partnerships with Spotify and Facebook, which enable users to make recommendations to other users. In order to remain effective, it's necessary for the record industry to explore new models and increase market research to identify their role in this growing consumer-run market.

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