

# Michael Jackson as a product music essay



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Michael Jackson was born at Gary, Indiana in 1958 to an African-American couple, Joseph Walter Jackson and Katherine Esther Scruse. Though Michael had a very troubled relationship with his father at very early stages of his life, being born into a family with a musical background has contributed to the elevation of Michael into becoming the 'King of Pop'. His career started as early as at the age of 5.

In 1963, he was part of 'Jackson 5', a band that consisted of his four other brothers. Although at initial stages the band entertained their local surroundings, it captured a professional interest in 1968 when it signed a contract to Motown Records. By 1970, the group has gained enormous popularity and has topped music charts with hits such as 'I'll Be There', 'I want You Back', 'ABC' and a few others. Michael has done four solo hits at this time. His solo 'Ben' stood number one on the charts. After three glorious years, the sales started to decline forcing the Jacksons to leave Motown in 1975. Later that year, renaming the band as 'The Jacksons', they signed to Epic Records.

Soon, Michael's outstanding performances and natural talent set him apart from the rest and made him central focus (Telegraph, 2009). Building on the relationship with producer Quincy Jones, formed at the time of acting in his musical movie 'The Wiz', Michael has released 'Off the Wall' jointly produced by Jones. 'Off the Wall' generated four US top ten hits, obtained number three on the billboard 200, sold over 20 million copies globally, and fetched various prestigious awards from American, Billboard and Grammy. This album has said to have brought 37% of wholesale album profits, the

highest ever royalty rate in the music industry (USA Today, 2009). However, the best is yet to come.

In 1982, the music business world has witnessed an unpredicted storm with the release of his 'Thriller'. It has won him 8 of the 12 nominated Grammy awards, spent 122 weeks on the Billboard 200, sold over 50 million copies globally, and has since then remained the best selling album ever. However, 'the album's success can't be measured by sales alone', says Mitchell and Newman (2009), 'as Jackson 'moonwalked' his way into history of music, 'Thriller' set a new benchmark for blockbusters that changed how the music business promoted and marketed superstar releases.' 'It also changed MTV,' she continues, 'breaking down the cable network's racial barriers and raising the bar for video quality.'

Amidst the turmoil in music business at that time, he was described as 'a one man rescue team for the music business' (Corliss, 2009). It exposed Michael as song writer, singer and dancer. Later that year, his fame reached further heights with the disclosure of his signature 'Moonwalk' live on 'Motown's' 25: Yesterday, Today, Forever' television show.

The period between 1984 and 1992 has showcased Michael's business acumen. During this time he purchased Beatles' back catalogue for \$47 million, built Neverland ranch, founded 'Heal the World' to aid children and environment, wrote a biography titled 'moonwalk', cause marketed to raise the funds for the poor in Africa and signed \$1 billion 15 year contract with Sony. The Beatles' purchase proved to be a great business move which guaranteed him millions of dollars of income forever (Strauss, 1996). In him

was a wise investor, marketing genius but a shopping spree. However, at this time, the interest in business did not affect his music career as he released two albums, 'Bad' and 'Dangerous'. Although, the albums were not in race with 'Thriller', they kept him afloat.

But even as Jackson grew richer and more successful observes Leung (2005), 'his personal life took a strange turn: his face, his colour, his sex, his outfits, his marriage, and his lifestyle.' And further, she opines, as the media zoomed in, he began to look more like 'a circus side show than a musical superstar'. The much adored and worshiped 'innocent' image of Michael has begun to show up cracks in the early part of 1993, when a 13 year old accused him of child abuse at his Neverland. Although he denied the accusation, he reportedly settled it outside of court for \$20 million causing suspicions (Independent, 2009). This was just a glimpse of numerous rumours and accusations to befall. Soon, Michael's image has begun to be questioned from every nook and corner and was surrounded by controversies—From physical transformation to song writing, from being married to becoming father of 'surrogate' mother born child, from 'Peter Pan' utopian ideas to adopting a chimp, from not exposing his children in front of media to dangling his third child 'Blanket' out of balcony, from his new business contracts to his financial bankruptcy, from attending a Grammy ceremony on triple date to showing in court wearing pyjamas, and from label disputes to taking painkillers or 'drugs'; every single move of him was under constant monitoring and was consistently linked to controversies.

Acquisitions of physical transformation include plastic surgeries and bleaching. The 'suspected' change of sex and colour has given a room from

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many moral and ethical allegations. The 'accused' self-induced change from black to white has been reported as betrayal of black community (Topping, 2009).

Although, Michael has responded with clarifications about the skin disease he possesses and mental and physical turmoil he went through in his childhood (to argue his innocent 'love' for children) in the famous interview of Oprah Winfrey and by writing songs such as 'It does not matter if you are Black or White', they did not yield any results. In the surge of these allegations, his marriage to Lisa Marie Presley, the daughter of Elvis Presley was surprising to many. However, the marriage was short lived. He then married for the second time, a nurse named Debbie Rowe in 1996. The couple had two children- son, Prince Michael Jackson in 1997 and daughter, Paris Michael Jackson in 1998. The second marriage was also resulted in divorce in 1999. A year later, Michael had a third child, speculated to be born of a 'surrogate' mother.

Amidst this personal life turmoil, not so surprisingly the 1990s have been barren in terms of musical revenue. Though the release of the best selling remix album ever: 'Blood on the Dance Floor: HIStory in the Mix, the Dangerous world tour, a few charity events, a couple of shows celebrating his 30th anniversary and most acclaimed half time performance of Super Bowl XXVII have looked to rejuvenate his image, dangling his third child out of third floor balcony in 2002, the British journalist, Martin Bashir's documentary, 'Living with Michael Jackson', (in which the pop icon reportedly told that he shared bed with young children) in 2003, the second child abuse allegations, and following the pop stars arrest in 2004 based on <https://assignbuster.com/michael-jackson-as-a-product-music-essay/>

these and many other relative allegations have further fueled the outrage (Rolling Stone, 2009). Ironically, in the following year Michael was acquitted of all these charges. In 2006, his Neverland ranch was closed due to labour disputes and he moved to Bahrain to start a new. However, the controversies have never left him as he entered into dispute with King of Bahrain on several matters.

As a late surge in the declining stage of his career, he and AEG, the music promoter, announced a surprise comeback to take place on 11th of July 2009. However, Michael goes into cardiac arrest and dies at the age of 50. Even in death the controversies did not desert him as there were many speculations on how he died.

In the vocabulary of Product Life Cycle (PLC), beginning in 1963 up until 1978, Michael was in introduction stage, where he was a part of a group. He created awareness among music industry with his electric and outstanding performances. His stand alone performances from the group have served as trail before the actual solos at a later stage. Although being a part of group, he built a name for himself among music producers and customers.

From 1978, with 'scarecrow' role in the musical movie 'The Wiz' has entered into Growth stage. Teaming up with Quincy Jones, the producer, he has extended his image to new markets. With albums like 'Thriller', performances like 'Moonwalk', endorsements contracts like Pepsi, and cause marketing and charity works like 'We are the World' profits and sales have seen an unbelievable growth. All due to the improved quality, styling and added new value attributes to the music. And, thus, he was able to open up

entirely new distribution channels. The invention of the music video genre, improved quality of the same, lip-syncing to pre-recorded voice in live performances and access to a whole new distribution channel in the form of MTV are a few of the many examples.

The year 1986 has seen the start of the Maturity stage. The sales and profits have reached to such a peak stage that, even the commercial success of 'Bad' with over 30 million copy sales worldwide were considered lower. With the controversies regarding personal life beginning to creep into his musical career the rate of sales growth slowed down.

With the emergence of numerous controversies coupled with customer churn and competition, the early part of the 1990s have seen the beginning of the end-the decline stage. The changes in his music videos with construction of sexual and violent natured images did not suit many customer preferences. The banning of 'In the Closet' in South Africa is a proof of the same. In the beginning of 2009, Michael calling it 'a final curtain call' planned to perform 50 concerts (which saw a record breaking ticket sales and estimated to make close to \$100m) but has met with his untimely death.

So, Michael Jackson as a product (or marketing offering) has a similar life cycle to that of many others. However, what seems unique to him is the reincarnation or another cycle after its death-Product Death Cycle (PDC).

Buried under huge financial debts for most part of his life, Michael's earnings have grown by millions after his death. Under various film, contract and merchandising deals, he has earned close to \$200 million by the end of the year (Arango, 2009). Even beyond 2009, he is expected to earn close to 100

million per annum. For the man who left mark on over a 6 billion people, the Neverland and many other places on his name could be money generating machines for eternity from the tourists.

The commercial renaissance after his death can be witnessed in almost everything—the physical and online retail outlets, the Billboard charts, radios, TV shows, internet and the like. As the digital music listeners fell back to CDs, over 422,000 copies of his albums were sold in the second week after his death, 40 times higher than the first one (Deprez, 2009). As per online, he notes, the shares of Apple, Amazon and eBay rose more than 2%, 1.3% and 0.64% respectively and expected to be long lasting. According to Silvio Pietroluongo, the Billboard director of charts, ‘the level of dominance by Michael Jackson on the top pop catalogue albums chart is unlike anything one has ever seen on any Billboard chart, regardless if it occurred pre or post death’ (Smith, 2009).

Michael Jackson topped the search list of all the major search engines for the year including Google, Yahoo and Bing (Michael Jackson, 2009). Britney Spears, whose name topped the Yahoo search for past four years has been wiped out within an hour of his death as millions of users poured into it in no time (FD Wire, 2009). His music and videos became ubiquitous on the radios, iPods, MP3 players, televisions and internet (Sisario, 2009). As Barker (2009) puts it, his commemorative products and memorabilia are like the stimulus package 3 in the midst of global recession.

In the contemporary capitalistic world, death of a few popular celebrities has always transformed into brilliant business opportunities (Porter, 2009).



However, in the case of Michael Jackson, the opportunities in generating sale in death as in life are totally at par. It's not a day or a week affair; it is here to stay longer and thus might need another cycle.