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Commodification of Music

The music industry has evolved significantly from the invention of phonography to stream music anytime and anywhere. Before the 15th century, early sheet music was hand-copied by monks until the invention of printers appeared (Bay, 2019). With Gutenberg's movable type printer, European musicians not only began to print and publish music but also developed a method for single-impression printing of music that fastened the process (Bay, 2019). Furthermore, according to Bay (2019), the very first official " copyright" enforcement was established by Henry VIII, who ordered everyone must send in all printed items to him first to facilitate licensing between authors and clients. Music slowly became an acknowledged industry after the world's first copyright law being introduced in 1710, known as the Statue of Anne (Bay, 2019). As more music publishers in Europe (England and Germany) surfaced, there was a big demand for music that turned music into a commodity. Just similar to books, music exploded successfully as an industry. The most crucial moment in music history was when Thomas Edison invented phonograph in 1877, which was a device that can record and play back audio; unlike the phonoautograph Edouard-Leon Scott de Martinville invented which only recorded but could not playback sounds (Thompson, 2016). Moreover, Emile Berliner improved Edison's device by inventing the gramophone in 1887 which was the first commercial disc record that could only hold approximately three minutes (Thompson, 2016). Interestingly, this length became the standard duration of any ' single' in the present day (Bay, 2019). Although the public was afraid that recorded music would make people culturally illiterate and would lead to not learning how to play instruments, an estimate of 3 million discs and cylinders were sold by 1900 (Bay, 2019). Imperceptibly, music has transitioned from an oral tradition to a commodity that is used daily.

The big Disruption

The big disruption occurred in the music industry between 1999-2000 was named Napster, and is described by Kelly (2017) as the company who " left an impact on music disruption, consumer preferences, legal treatments toward copyright infringement, and intellectual property in cyberspace that extends far beyond the peer-to-peer platform's three-year life span" (p. 5). In August 1999 by a Northeastern University student called Shawn Fanning founded Napster, known as the peer-to-peer file sharing platform specifically for the format of MP3s (Kelly, 2017). MP3s were a favorable format to store music because they can be shared, downloaded, and stored on a computer without taking up physical spaces (Kelly, 2017). Kelly explained that Fanning decided to drop out of college to discover the perfect solution for finding digital MP3 files (2017). Fanning launched the company with his uncle and two other programmers he met online – Jordan Ritter and Sean Parker (Kelly, 2017). According to Kelly (2017), Napster users grew enormously from 1. 1 million to 6. 7 million in 6 months after it launched, and the selection of songs also peaked at twenty million songs. Furthermore, Napster was able to create a sense community by providing the option of personal messaging and chat rooms organized by music genres (Kelly, 2017). However, this was a pleasure phenomenon for copyright owners. Later that year, RIAA (The Recording Association of America) sued Napster and ordered Napster to shut down in July 2001; but Napster was allowed by another court to stay in operation during the appeal (Morris, 2015). Napster had to file for bankruptcy in June 2002 but was bought by Rhapsody in 2011 and it merged Napster’s library and subscribers with its subscription service (Morris, J 2015). Although Napster did not survive successfully as a business, it carried on its legacy that motivated the next generations.

The Market Shift in Music

Following Napster’s footsteps, iTunes had a similar objective of offering direct digital content towards consumers while generating profits for major record labels (Arditi, 2014). Indeed, Apple won the market but other innovative companies such as YouTube and Spotify appeared with a better idea: listening to music wherever and whenever (Bay, 2019). With the emergence of ongoing technology such as having internet access on smartphones, people can use it for many purposes including streaming music (Bay, 2019). For this reason, it led to a market shift in the music business. Internet distribution has increased consumers’ options and provided both durable and non-durable options (Eriksson, Fleischer, Johansson, Snickars, & Vonderau, 2018). An example of non-durable options is “ streaming” music, which is delivered through a data connection and has gained prominence in the past few years (Eriksson et al., 2018). Spotify, being one of the top streaming music services because it is the most convenient way to listen to music (Eriksson et al., 2018). Moreover, consumers do not need to buy the entire album when they only want to listen to a few songs on streaming services (Bay, 2019). This consumer behavior also promotes the ‘ single song culture’ that artists nowadays tend to release more singles than albums (Bay, 2019). Another reason for Spotify to be booming in the industry is that artists can record their work and share their music with listeners through Spotify without pitching their demos to music companies (Bay, 2019). While digital streaming music platforms seem to harm the traditions in the music industry, it will continue to develop rapidly in the next five to ten years.

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