

Artist Management & Fan Engagement

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I have used the AI tool Gemini for idea generation to stimulate thinking, the AI software Descript to transcribe interviews, and ATLAS.ti to code interview data.

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ABSTRACT

This research project aims to understand the role of artist managers in the music industry and the fan engagement strategies they use to promote an artist's career. For that purpose a literature review was carried out which looks at previous scholarly work regarding themes such as the cultural industries and how the music industry is situated within them, as well as the functions, roles, and business and economic value of these. The literature review also explores artist management, fan communities, artist - fan relationships, and the parasocial interaction theory. Furthermore, the study gathers data through qualitative interviews with artist managers who provide insights to answer the research questions. The findings of the study position artist management as an all-encompassing role that takes on multiple responsibilities, and reveal that fan engagement is considered a critical element when developing marketing strategies to promote an artist and their music. Finally, limitations and opportunities for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Artist managers play a crucial role in shaping an artist's career. They are involved in overseeing all aspects involving career development & guidance, logistics & operations, and planning & execution, and are seen as a liaison between the artist and the rest of the world.

The manager's role has become increasingly important as the structure of the music industry evolves and artists need someone to vouch for them and guide them in their decision-making when dealing with labels, producers, media, and other stakeholders. By being involved in all of these functions, they also play a big role in the marketing of an artist and their music.

There are numerous ways and approaches to market and promote the artist's image and music, however, there is one that seems to be critical. Fan engagement is a way for artists to interact with their audiences, whether it be on social media or in person, and it is what helps them build up their fan bases. Creating a community of loyal and dedicated fans seems to be pivotal for an artist's success.

My interest in this topic comes from partaking in digital fan communities for more than ten years, and wanting to understand how artists and managers capitalize on the opportunities that loyal fan bases provide. This study aims to answer the question: To what extent can artist managers rely on fan engagement strategies to promote an artist's career? The study also delves into the subquestions: (1) what is the manager's role in an artist's career? (2) what specific strategies do managers use to encourage fan engagement? (3) how do managers maintain the artist's authenticity while applying traditional marketing tactics? In order to answer these questions, the study explores topics including the artist manager's role and responsibilities, as well as the role of fan communities and specific marketing strategies tailored towards fans. Through the data obtained during the process of qualitative research, this study aims to understand the role that the manager plays in regards to marketing an artist

and their music, and to position fan engagement as a key element in any artist's marketing strategy.

The results of this study are relevant for music industry professionals, specifically artists, managers, and others who work in marketing, to better understand how to communicate with their audiences effectively in order to maintain an engaged and loyal fan base. This research is also relevant for the academic field of communication studies as it delves into marketing toward particular audiences and aims to understand what mediums and messages should be used to have effective communication. The study serves as encouragement for music industry professionals to remember that fans are the core of the industry and an essential part of how it thrives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The aim of this research is to understand the role of artist managers and how they use fan engagement strategies to build an artist's career. My research will provide a contribution to this field by providing further insights into the perspectives of artist managers in regards to their own roles and it will examine the functions of fan communities, specifically in relation to promoting an artist's career and music. This literature review covers a broad understanding of the cultural industries and how scholars have situated these within various fields of study, as well as a more specific look into how scholars have studied the music industry.

Additionally, I look into audiences, fan communities, and the parasocial interaction theory to demonstrate how these apply to artist-fan engagement strategies. The studies reviewed in this section will serve as a guide and will help me understand what scholars have found in their research about the role of artist management and fan engagement, as well as how they've gone about researching this topic, so that I can add my own contribution to the literature.

1. The Cultural Industries

The first section of this literature review will provide background information on the complexity of the cultural industries in order to properly position the music industry within the entertainment industry. For the purpose of this research, it is necessary to have an understanding of how scholars have situated the cultural industries within fields of study such as political economy, cultural studies, and business.

Adorno and Horkheimer, philosophers who are associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, used the term “The Culture Industry” in their book written in the 1940s (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). These two philosophers considered that culture had become something that could be bought and sold, instead of only pertaining to the upper classes, and thought that culture and industry should be opposites. However, Hesmondhalgh states that by the late 1960’s, culture, society, and business were more intertwined than ever. French sociologists, such as Bernard Miège, rejected the term ‘cultural industry’ in its singular form, instead, suggesting that the term should be used in plural, as it should convey the complexities of the different fields and forms of production that are part of the cultural industries (p. 16). Hesmondhalgh (2007) defines the cultural industries as those that “deal primarily with the industrial production and circulation of texts” (p. 12) and that are “directly involved in the production of social meaning” (p. 12). The following are the industries which he considers to be the core of the cultural industries; broadcasting, film industries, the content of the Internet industry, music industries, print and electronic publishing, video games, and advertising and marketing (p. 12). Another definition which really stands out is that of Scott (2006, as cited in Stewart, 2013, p. 10), who states that the cultural industries are “those concerned with the production, reproduction, and dissemination of symbolic materials and services of all types.” Moving forward, this text situates the cultural industries within the

fields of political economy, cultural studies, and business studies, and later on focuses on the entertainment industries, with a particular interest in the music industry.

a. Political Economy, Cultural Studies, & Business Studies

Hesmondhalgh (2011) identifies three contrasting approaches to research of the cultural industries; political economy of culture (PEC), organizational, business, and management studies (OBM), and cultural studies. This section briefly explains how the cultural industries are situated within each of these fields of study.

The cultural industries can be positioned within political economy approaches to analyze power dynamics and the impact of technology in terms of cultural production and distribution. Hesmondhalgh (2007) explains, “Critical political economy approaches see the fact that culture is produced and consumed under capitalism as a fundamental issue in explaining inequalities of power, prestige, and profit” (p. 34). The PEC approach is based on Murdock and Golding’s (2005, as cited in Hesmondhalgh, 2011) definition on ‘the interplay between the symbolic and the economic dimensions of public communications,’ which Hesmondhalgh utilizes to discuss the media and popular culture in relation to power dynamics and social justice.

Cultural studies, the second research approach, “is the attempt to examine and rethink culture by considering its relationship to social power” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). This approach positions the cultural industries within itself by arguing that ordinary culture should be taken seriously. Hesmondhalgh (2007) continues to explain that this approach insists that we should consider how the different elements in a culture work together, instead of analyzing them separately (p. 41). Cultural studies have also brought up important conversations that question what we mean by ‘culture’ and who has the authority to make decisions on culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 42).

The third approach to study the cultural industries is the organizational, business, and management studies (OBM). Hesmondhalgh (2011) draws on Tuchman (1978) and Gans (1980) to explain that OBM focuses on “organizational dimensions of cultural production, including an emphasis on routines, rituals, and values”. Hesmondhalgh (2011) goes on to explain how analysts began to see the cultural industries as a path to understanding innovation and imagination in workplaces (p. 53). The OBM approach contributes to the cultural industries studies by allowing for “an analysis of specific ways in which creative labor is organized and managed, including how this varies across particular cultural industries” (Hesmondhalgh, 2011). My research takes on the organizational, business, and management studies approach as it aims to understand the responsibilities that the artist manager role entails as well as what their role is in regards to marketing an artist’s career and the strategies they use to interact with audiences. The following section provides background on the functions and roles that make up the music industry, as well as its business and economic value in order to have a better understanding before diving into the research.

According to Hull et al. (2010), “the main activity of the recording industry is the production and distribution of symbolic content to widely dispersed heterogeneous audiences” (p. 40). Musicians write, record, and produce songs, which are then distributed to audiences who form attachments to the music or the artist, for one reason or another. Music can be interpreted in different ways, whether it is what the artist meant for the songs to portray, or whether the audience is giving it their own personal meaning. Audiences build and participate in communities based on the songs or artists they enjoy, they create spaces in which they can connect with other individuals who they feel might understand or relate to them. Popular culture analysts comment on the power of music, stating that it “promotes the experiences of the extreme for makers and listeners, turning emotions into hypnotic tempos that can be experienced privately or shared with others”, as well as commenting that “music

helps to shape our identities and comfort us during the transition from childhood to adulthood, resonating throughout our lives” (Lull and Campbell, as cited in Hull et al., 2010, p. 41).

b. Functions

There are different ways to understand the functions of the recording industry, however, Hull (2010) suggests that it can be better understood in terms of an economic model, which I discuss further in the next pages of this section.

Two core functions of a record company include the acquisition of masters and the marketing of those masters (Hull et al. 2010). The artist and repertoire (A&R) function is to obtain the rights to master recordings and to analyze the risk factors of a certain product or artist. Hull et al. (2010) mention that “a label can take a high risk of having new masters created by acquiring exclusive recording rights from artists and having the artists make master recordings, which ultimately, might lead to a greater reward” (p. 193). Musicians who have signed agreements with a record label are usually under exclusive contracts, which state that the label will pay the artist royalties¹ based on the sale of copies and that the artist will also receive advances to cover recording costs and other activities such as marketing (Hull et al. 2010, p. 209).

Another function within the music industry is production. Producers provide input into the process of the creation of recordings on three occasions, including: A&R functions (by finding artists and material to record), managing the production process, and performing business functions (e.g. budgeting) (Hull et al., 2010, p. 214).

One of the most important functions of the industry, and for the purpose of this project, is marketing. Kotler (2000, as cited in Gamble and Gilmore, 2013), defines marketing as “a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and

¹ Royalties are the part of the money an artist earns from each copy sold of their product (e.g. albums) after the record company monetizes the product (Passman, 2019, p. 80).

want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others.” Marketers should understand the needs of their audiences and develop products to satisfy those needs. In the music industry, this involves providing consumers with the music they want, while making a profit for the company (Hull et al., 2010, p. 229). As the music industry has evolved from traditional to more digital formats, the functions within the marketing departments have also evolved. Some of these functions now include sales, radio promotion, publicity, advertising, video promotion, sponsorships, and tour support (Hull et al., 2010).

One of the main tools for marketers is the four Ps of marketing: product, price, promotion, and place. In the music industry, A&R and production are involved in the creation of the product, however, the marketing department has the opportunity to provide input on the potential of new products, whether it is the recording or the artist. Promotion and place are perhaps the most important aspects of marketing music. Hull et al. (2010) comment, “Promotion involves the activities of informing and motivating the buyer, including media coverage, personal selling, tour support, promotional incentives for retailers, and new media marketing. Place refers to the process of distributing recorded music products to consumers and involves both traditional stores as well as virtual stores and other online methods for providing recorded music to consumers” (p. 263). As digital technologies have evolved, marketers now have to keep up with trends and understand exactly what their audiences want, and where they want to receive it, in order to successfully build a fanbase for an artist. The marketing plan for promoting an artist or recorded music product is based on the goals and resources available for the project. Hull et al., 2010, provides the example of marketing an international star, where the marketing would focus on mass media, versus promoting a local artist, which would have a strategy more focused on building a market in the area where the artist performs. The element of “place” has undergone drastic changes as the industry moves

towards digital outlets. Hull et al. (2010) state that the digital sector is the only growth area in recorded music sales this century, with revenues growing by 12 percent in 2009 and accounting for 27 percent of music sales (p. 281). It is important to note that the quoted text from Hull et al. is from 2010, meaning that there have been many more drastic changes in the years since it was published, however, Hull successfully predicted the change from digital products to music services, which has undoubtedly altered the other marketing Ps, being pricing, promotion, and place.

c. Business & Economic Value

With the rise of digital recordings, physical sales decreased massively. “Sales of recordings dropped from a high of \$14.6 billion in 1999 back to \$8.5 billion in 2008 (a decrease of over 40 percent) and appeared to be heading even lower” (Hull et al., 2010, p. 29). These tremendous changes led major labels to try to come up with a business model which would successfully distribute recordings through the Internet and other means that would restore the economy of the music industry. Despite all the changes that the music business has faced, there is still a strong demand for songs, performances, and recordings, which are all greatly valued by consumers (Hull et al., 2010).

Within the music industry business and economic model, Hull et al. (2010) identify three revenue streams - one based on the use of a song, one based on live performances, and one based on the use of a recorded performance of the song. “At the head of each revenue stream is a creative act - a song is written, a live performance given, or a recording is produced” (Hull et al., 2010, p. 42). The creative acts of the record label, producer, and recording artist result in copyrights in sound recording. Since these are three distinct creative acts, they produce three distinct income streams. Hull et al. (2010) explain that, although the song is the main source because it is included in all three streams, the recording provides

most of the cash flow, followed by sales of the recordings and performances (p. 43). Live performances are a separate revenue stream for the artist, without taking into account if it generates revenues for the publisher or record label. These three revenue streams have led to measures such as the “360 deal”, in which an artist signs an agreement for all music business functions with the same entity (e.g. label) (Hull et al., 2010, p. 43).

Record labels and concert promoters (e.g. Live Nation) have started using ‘360 deals’ when signing an artist. The first major occasion of a superstar signing a 360 deal was that of Madonna in 2007. Marshall (2013) highlights that Madonna signing a deal with a concert promoter (Live Nation), was a turning point for the industry. Live Nation Entertainment was one of the first entities to use this new strategy of a 360 deal, which involved recorded music, merchandising, fan sites and ticketing, broadcast rights and digital rights management, and sponsorship and marketing (Marshall, 2013, p. 80). In the present day, the majority of artists who are signing contracts with record labels or concert promoters, are falling under 360 deals. Passman (2019), states that “these deals started because the record industry was in such financial distress that the companies couldn’t survive on their record business alone” (p. 102). According to music industry professionals, there is no standard format for these deals, however, the basic layout of this type of deal includes touring, songwriting, merchandising, fan clubs, sponsorship, motion picture acting, modeling, etc. (Passman, 2019, p. 102).

As a whole, the entertainment industry is a high risk sector, since there is no formula to predict the success of a product. More specifically for recorded music, the failure rate is over 90 percent (Hull et al., 2010, p. 6). One big feature of the entertainment industry is “the financial cost of creating, distributing, and marketing entertainment products” (Hull et al., 2010, p. 6). These products require considerable amounts of money, which has led to a few large companies to dominate the industry, such as Sony Music Group, Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group, and Live Nation Entertainment. Additionally, technology has

been the main driver of transformation in the entertainment industry, specifically digitalization, and it has created a range of opportunities for expression, production, and distribution, and has led to the new business models we see in place today (Hull et al., 2010, p. 7).

d. Roles

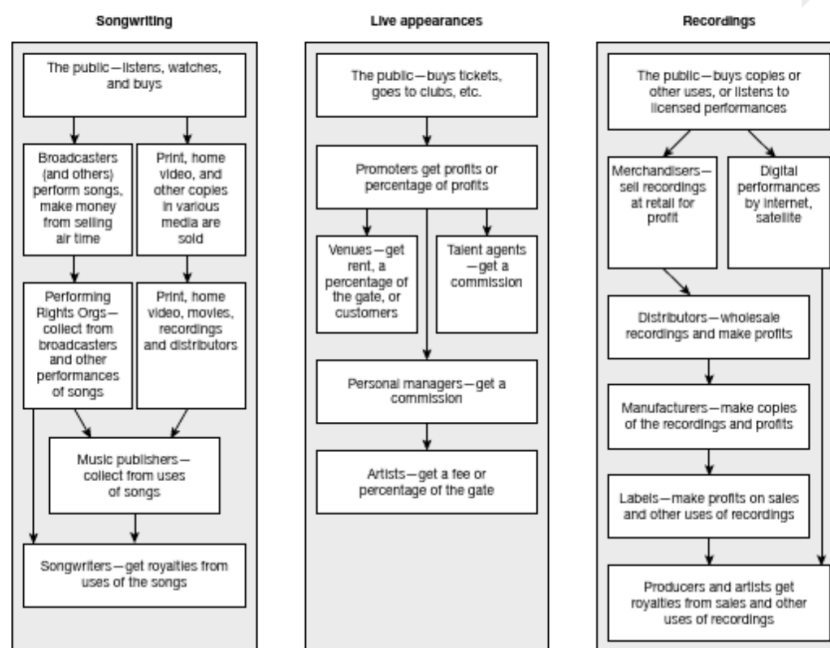
In order to further explain the three revenue streams mentioned above, Hull et al. (2010) identify the players and functions involved in each stream. The following are the players involved in the music publishing/songwriting stream; songwriters (including composers and lyricists), music publishers, music performing rights organizations, broadcasters, the public (for the broadcaster), other media, and the public (for the other media). These are the players within the live performance stream; the musicians and singers, personal managers, talent agents, promoters, venues, and the public. Finally, the players for the recording stream include; recording artists, side musicians/vocalists, record labels, record producers, record engineers, studios, record manufacturers, distributors, merchandisers, recording performing rights organizations, and the public (Hull et al., 2010, p. 46).

Each stream starts with an initial creative act, whether it be the songwriter, performing artist, or recording artist, and ultimately ends with the public who consumes the song, the live appearance, or the recording. According to Hull et al. (2010), the three streams also include primary control points through which the creative input is channeled (music publisher, personal manager, record label), a ‘place’ where the public can cast an economic vote through purchases or attention (radio station, concert hall, record store), and finally, other parties between the creative and the public who seek to profit from the income by providing a function useful to the completion of that stream. The most significant participation in each stream is from the public, who generates the income. Without the public consuming the

product, there will be little or no money in the stream. (Hull et al., 2010, p. 46 - 47). Figure 1.0 represents the three revenue streams mentioned above. These three streams identified by Hull et al. (2010) are still the basis for how the business models of record labels work, with the exception of those traditional formats which have now moved to digital.

Figure 1.0

Three Income Streams: Revenue flow from consumer to source



From *The Music Business and Recording Industry: Delivering Music in the Twenty-First Century* (p. 47), by G. P. Hull, T. Hutchinson, and R. Strasser, 2010, Taylor & Francis Group. Copyright 2010 by Geoffrey P. Hull

One specific role that needs to be highlighted for the purpose of this research is the role of artist managers. According to music lawyer Passman (2019), who's book is considered to be "the industry bible" by the Los Angeles Times, a personal manager is "the single most important person in an artist's professional life" (p. 32). They are "in charge of helping the artist with major business decisions, creative processes, promoting their career,

coordinating concert tours, and more” (Passman, 2019, pp. 32-33). Seeing as personal managers are involved in almost every aspect of an artist’s career, they will play an essential role in the research of this paper in order for me to understand how they work alongside the marketing departments (or by themselves if they’re not part of a label) to promote an artist’s music and build a community of loyal fans.

e. The Artist Manager Role

Since the artist manager plays such an important role in an artist’s career, scholars have tried to understand what exactly the role entails and the motivations behind wanting to take on this responsibility. So why do individuals work in artist management? Morrow (2018) explains that his research found the following reasons for wanting to work in artist management: being impressed by a client's talent, wanting to help them build their career, and helping the artist realize their potential (p. 1).

There is a debate in literature about how the artist manager role is understood and if it should be considered a creative career. Some scholars believe that it is a creative career, while others find it problematic to consider management a creative career. Nonetheless, a manager still plays an immense role for an artist’s career, and based on this debate of creativity, Morrow (2018) defines artist management as “a form of group creativity that involves the interaction between artistic creativities and managerial creativities” (p. 9). Frascogna and Hetherington (2011) propose a simpler definition, “artist management consists of anything that will help enhance or further an artist’s career” (p. 11). Although there is possibly a multitude of definitions for what artist management is, the two definitions mentioned above will suffice for the purpose of this paper.

Frascogna and Hetherington (2011) mention some of the artist manager’s responsibilities, including, planning, advising, organizing, strategizing, overseeing,

coordinating, being a detail person, traveling companion, and friend. As is clear to see, an artist manager takes on many responsibilities in order to provide the best opportunities for an artist's career, but in order to do that, the manager also has a list of criteria for choosing artists to sign. Morrow mentions seven points that US-based artist manager, George Stein, identifies as necessary criteria: the songs, the ability to sing, the ability to perform, a singer needs to have the ability to play an instrument, have to be focused, smart, and ambitious, have to be good-looking, and have to be young (Morrow, 2008: p. 6-7, as cited in Morrow, 2018, p. 68-69). This list may of course vary depending on the manager and the location they're based in.

Once a manager has signed an artist, it's only logical, based on the definitions and responsibilities mentioned above, that the manager's involvement is not only business related. Gaudesi (2016) defines the artist - manager relationship as, "a business relationship that implies a deep personal involvement where mutual trust between manager and artist is essential" (p. 70). Likewise, Frascogna and Hetherington (2011) consider the artist - manager relationship as comparable to a good marriage. They go on to explain that "the artist must have total confidence in the manager's motives and methods while, conversely, the manager must be totally committed to the artist and his or her music" (p. 35).

Overall, although there is a debate about whether or not the manager's role is a creative one, it's clear that the manager is, or should be, involved in all aspects of an artist's career, and that the relationship between the artist and the manager should be one of mutual trust.

f. Entertainment Industries

When we think about entertainment, we think about listening to music, going to a live performance, watching a movie, or other hobbies that are considered to be leisure activities. However, scholars have long argued that entertainment should be considered an industry due

to the economic value it holds. According to Hull et al. (2010), “As an industrial sector, the entertainment industry is similar to other industries that manufacture and produce products for profit. Each division within the entertainment industry creates a product that is unique to that industry. As an economic sector, the entertainment industry consists of various sub-industries that are devoted to specific forms of entertainment” (p. 4). There are various subdivisions within the entertainment industry, Hull et al. identify eight major divisions; motion picture industry, music industry, broadcasting, publishing, games, sports, exhibition entertainment, and gambling. So, what *is* entertainment? Vogel (2010, as cited in Stewart, 2013) defines entertainment as “anything that stimulates, encourages, or otherwise generates a condition of pleasurable diversion” (p. 13). Many scholars have identified that individuals create attachments to entertainment products because they stimulate or address emotional and/or psychological needs. Some of these might include feelings of sadness, excitement, relating to song lyrics, feeling understood by the artist, etc. As I mentioned previously, the music industry is one of the main divisions of the entertainment industries, the following section explores it more in depth.

2. The Music Industry

In order to better grasp this project, it is essential to have an overview of how previous scholars have understood the music industry. This section of the literature review will provide a brief rundown of how academics have approached the study of the music industry and a more in depth look at the artist manager role.

According to Coates (2018), scholars have studied the music industry (more specifically, popular music), in two different ways. One way of studying popular music is through focusing on the “textual and formal aspects of the music itself” (Coates, 2018, p. 281). This might include things such as musical notation and music theory, diagrams

analyzing an artist's work, or studying techniques used to create songs (p. 281). Another way of looking at popular music is by understanding "how popular music works in and as culture, and how it is mobilized socially, individually, and within and across media to make meaning" (Coates, 2018, p. 281). Coates (2018) goes on to explain that these two forms of studying the music industry might overlap, but that the difference is based on if the researcher looks at music as an object or a cultural signifier. My research takes on the second approach mentioned by Coates (2018) which focuses on how music is mobilized socially and individually across media, by trying to understand how the manager's role works in relation to other functions of the industry, and how the artist's music brings together communities of loyal fans by using specific marketing strategies that are tailored to those audiences.

From a different perspective, Sterne (2014) explains that the term 'music industry' has often been used to describe the monetization of music recordings, however, he argues that this is a limited way to understand how the music industry interacts with other media industries. He brings up Christopher Small's (1998) *Musicking*, to argue that music should be seen as more of a social practice than as a product, and that industries such as manufacturing, hardware, and technology should be seen as part of the 'music industries', instead of the singular term 'music industry,' which only focuses on recordings. Similarly, Williamson and Cloonan (2007) argue that it is necessary to consider the plural term, music industries, instead of the single term, as it allows for more of an understanding of how the economics and politics of the industry function (p. 305). They continue to say that considering "music industries rather than an industry represents a considerable shift in thinking" (Williamson and Cloonan, 2007, p. 313).

3. Artist to Fan Engagement

a. Fans & Audiences

Fan engagement is undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of marketing an artist's music and personal brand. Without it, some of the iconic superstars we know today wouldn't be in the position they're in. Musicians such as Taylor Swift, Harry Styles, and boyband 5 Seconds of Summer, have all used fan engagement as one of their main marketing strategies to have their songs in the top charts and to have loyal fan bases who have been engaging with and following them for more than a decade. Baym (2018), states that "Audience' is itself a 'fictional construct' used to abstractly pull together distinct individuals having varied concrete experiences" (p. 116). Audiences are an essential part of an artist's success. They are the ones who distribute and promote the work, and create networks where they build relationships with one another while finding creative ways of spreading the word about an artist's products (Baym, 2018, p. 117). The differentiating factor between audiences and fans is the level of investment in fandom and the activities they partake in, something which has been agreed upon by both, scholars and fans themselves (Baym, 2018, p. 119). Coates (2018) explains how initial fandom studies looked at fandom as "anti-social" behavior, but that more recent studies approach it from a more productive point of view (p. 287). He goes on to mention the scholarly work of academics such as Tia Denora, who studies how music makes meaning for individuals, and Daniel Cavicchi, who studies modes of fandom by researching fanzines, fan club correspondence, and others (p. 287).

Studies about fandom have shown how fans create emotional attachments to certain artists or musical products which allow them to feel more intensely and create greater bonds with the artist (even if it's not a direct relationship), but mainly to create relationships with other members of the same fandom. With the digital platforms we have access to today, it has

never been easier for fans to be invested in specific fandom communities and to build relationships with one another.

b. Communities

Kozinets (1999) discusses “virtual communities of consumption”, which he defines as digital communities “whose online interactions are based upon shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities” (p. 254). These communities, specifically fandom related, have their own sets of practices and rules to which members must adhere. However, this is a simple task for the individuals who engage in these communities, since, as previous scholarly research has demonstrated, “fans act more like communities or publics than like audiences, focused on their connections to one another and the group rather than to what is so blandly called ‘content’” (Baym, 2018, p. 121).

Community building is not only essential for an artist to connect with their fans, but it is important for fans to connect with each other so that they can continue to build the fan bases of these artists, and in turn, continue to promote their products.

The concept of co-creation, or relational labor, will be a topic of interest for my research paper. Banks and Deuze (as cited in Morris, 2013) state that the “success of media production may increasingly rely on effectively combining and coordinating the various forms of expertise possessed by both professional media workers and creative citizen-consumers, not displacing one with the other” (p. 281). This relational labor has increased tremendously as fan communities and artists alike have become more avid users of social media platforms. The success of an artist’s work (or, arguably, an artist’s career) is dependent on the efforts made by fans to ‘work together’ with an artist. Morris (2013) provides the example of artist Imogen Heap, who asked her fans for input throughout her creative process of the production of her album. Heap requested feedback from her fans on

certain sections of a song, asked fans to submit lyrics, held a contest for fans to design the cover art of her album, and asked fans to send in tweets about her which would go into her biography (Morris, 2013, p. 280). Although this might seem like a lot to ask from your audience, this is the case with many of today's biggest superstars. Fans aren't willingly doing this labor because they believe they'll get some type of compensation (although, in some cases they do), but instead, they are doing this work because they are passionate about the artist and their work, and would be ecstatic to have their work seen by the artist themselves.

c. Artist - Fan Relationships

As we have seen so far, the relationship between artists and fans has strictly been depicted as a co-creational 'labor' relationship, however, scholarly work on artist to audience relationships highlights the importance of relationship building for the artist's success. Baym (2013), states that positioning audiences somewhere between "fans" and "friends" is a continuously used practice, and argues that social media has changed the expectations of fans in regards to their relationships with, or the access they have to public figures. In her research, Baym (2013) interviewed multiple artists who all agreed that with the easy access they have on social media, they have built 'friendly' relationships with their fans, with some going to the extent of saying that they don't consider them fans anymore, but instead refer to them as friends. However, although this relationship between the artist and the fans has its benefits, it also comes with some challenges.

Baym (2018) identifies three strategies for setting boundaries (or controlling) fan-artist relationships: territorializing, invoking intellectual property rights, and datafication. Territorializing involves "controlling the sites where audiences engage in their fan practices and possibly the practices themselves" (Baym, 2018, p. 160). By using the territorialization practice, artists get to have all their fans in one place which they control and profit off,

instead of letting their fan clubs, for example, be run by fans on any platform, which sends a message of power. Another example of territorializing would be in regards to the creative practices of fans, such as hosting contests for fans to submit videos which can be used by the artist (Baym, 2018, p. 163). The next strategy, which is not so commonly utilized, is regarding intellectual property rights. The artist has the power to utilize the law in cases where their intellectual property is being used without their consent. Baym (2018) provides the example of musician Prince, who threatened legal action to fan blogs who were sharing pictures of him if they were not taken down (p. 165). Baym (2018) goes on to argue that, although taking legal action is a power move from the artist against the platforms, it is essentially a move against the audiences who are using these platforms to post and search for content related to their favorite artists (p. 166). Finally, the datafication strategy is used to “reduce audiences to data so they can be analyzed until they are predictable” (Baym 2018, p. 166). This strategy gives artists the opportunity to gather data from their fans, such as emails and phone numbers, to track their practices on the artist's website and on other platforms in which they might control certain aspects (e.g. an artist's Instagram page) (p. 168). Although some artists might employ these control practices, many of them have had to accept that their fans will create communities on the platforms they wish, and have had to encourage them to keep spreading the word about them or their music so that they can reach potential new fans.

d. Parasocial Interaction Theory

The parasocial interaction theory (PSI) has been most commonly applied to television audiences by other scholars, however, I consider it to be an important phenomenon that can be applied to music audiences in today's social media platforms. The parasocial interaction theory was first proposed by authors Horton and Wohl in 1956 (as cited in Dibble et al., 2016) who defined it as “a media user's reaction to a media performer such that the media

user perceives the performer as an intimate conversational partner.” A definition of PSI that might serve better for the purpose of this paper is “a false friendship between an audience individual and a media character” (Sood & Rogers, 2000, p. 387, as cited in Stewart, 2013, p. 81). Based on these definitions, we can presume that PSI can be applied in the case of a fan who forms an imaginary friendship with an artist they are interacting with, whether it be online or at a live performance, by analyzing the way that the artist portrays themselves. As Giles (2002) discussed, scholars including Auter (1992) and Auter & Davis (1991) have noted that there are higher levels of parasocial interaction reported when a performer “breaks the fourth wall” and interacts directly with the audience (p. 291). In the present day and in relation to the music industry, this effect is not only seen in live performances, but also through social media when an artist engages directly with their fans. For example, PSI might be identified when an artist goes live on Instagram and replies to a question sent in by a fan. Parasocial interaction theory might essentially allow fans to create more ‘meaningful’ or intimate bonds with their favorite artists, which leads to the artist having a loyal fan base who spends more money on them and their products.

e. Artist - Fan Engagement Model

The artist-fan engagement model developed by Stewart (2013) is an essential part of the literature for my research because it aims to understand the relationship between the fans and the artist. The model helps to explain the emotional and monetization elements of fans attaching emotional value to music. Stewart (2013) highlights that “consumers want more personal interactions and artists should engage fans before trying to sell to them” (Cusic, 2012 as cited in Stewart, 2013, p. 99). The artist-fan engagement model is based on two core theories: hedonic consumption with parasocial interaction theory (PSI). There are two main constructs which make up the model, “Response to Artist” and “Response to Music”. Stewart

(2013) draws on Shen (2009) and Shen and Zhou (2011) to explain that the element of “Response to Artist” is based on the parasocial interaction theory which contains the sub-elements of Identification, Affinity, Similarity, and Imitation. The “Response to Music” construct is based on four different music responses, including Emotional, Sensorial, Imaginal, and Analytical factors. One of Stewart’s (2013) research questions considers “whether an artist’s engagement with their fan base increased their music revenue streams through use of the various digital technologies” (p. 224), however, the author explains that her study didn’t specifically test any components related to this question. My research is interested in comprehending how artist managers understand their role in relation to other roles and functions in the music industry (such as marketing) and how they implement fan engagement into their marketing strategies, which could possibly lead to subjective insights on the revenue increase which Stewart mentions.

Scholars who have studied audience interaction usually approach the subject from the fans’ perspective, however, my research takes a different route by utilizing the point of view of artist managers, who are the most essential members of an artist’s team and partake in all the different activities regarding promoting an artist’s career.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the answer to the question: To what extent can artist managers rely on fan engagement strategies to promote an artist’s career? This question is followed by the subquestions: (1) what is the manager’s role in an artist’s career? (2) what specific strategies do artist managers use to encourage fan engagement? (3) how do artist managers maintain the artist’s authenticity while employing traditional marketing tactics?

The research question and subquestions emerge after reviewing existing literature

about the topic and wanting to further understand the role of the artist manager in the present day, as well as aiming to comprehend how audiences and fan communities play a role in the success of an artist's career. To contribute to already existing literature about this topic, this study analyzes how artist managers in the music industry view their role and responsibilities, as well as their interactions with marketing teams or marketing the artist by themselves through the use of fan engagement initiatives, and how these play a role in boosting an artist's career.

The research design was a cross sectional study conducted between March 15th and April 6th of 2024, which gave me the opportunity to interview artist managers who work in the music industry across different companies and locations. The study population consisted of upcoming and established artist managers in order to identify similarities and differences between the way they see their roles depending on what stage of their career they're at. Respondents were selected by critical case sampling and convenience sampling, meaning that they were chosen because they were easily accessible to me and because "they display features that are central to the phenomenon of interest, and are likely to reveal the most information with respect to the research question" (Bryman, 2021, p. 379). I selected respondents by reaching out to artist managers I know or had previously worked with, as well as sharing a post on LinkedIn in which I asked for volunteers who fit the criteria. The only requirement for the sampling was to be an artist manager in the music industry, whether it was an upcoming manager or an established manager.

The method used for this study was qualitative research, more specifically semi structured interviews, in which I used an interview guide to keep it as more of a flexible and dynamic conversation. This allowed me to pay more attention to the interviewee's thoughts and feelings (Bryman, 2021, p. 425). I interviewed six participants through video conferences which was the most convenient method to surpass location barriers and scheduling because

participants were based in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Germany. Video conferences were also useful for recording so that I could later transcribe and analyze the data. Each interview lasted between 50 to 60 minutes, with questions that aimed to uncover how the artist manager sees their role and their relation to fan engagement. The interview guide can be found in Appendix A. Participants were based in different countries, have been artist managers for at least one year, and manage at least one artist. In order to protect the participant's identities, the names of the interviewees have been kept anonymous and different names have been assigned to each one.

Interview Lineup

Participants	Country they're Based In	Role	# of Artists on Roster
Participant A	Germany	Artist Manager	4
Participant B	Canada	Artist Manager	1
Participant C	Australia	Artist Manager	1
Participant D	United States	Artist Manager	4
Participant E	United States	Artist Manager	2
Participant F	United States	Artist Manager	1

In order to analyze the data I took an inductive coding approach to identify themes and sub-themes. I started by transcribing the interviews using the AI software, Descript, to which I uploaded the interview recordings and it would then generate the transcript for me, which I had to manually go through and revise once it had been created. I then coded the data using the Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software, ATLAS.ti. I pinpointed the codes I wanted to work with and then identified them across all interviews while also connecting memos to ones that stood out. Once I had coded the data, I categorized it into different themes which will be discussed in the analysis section of this paper.

1. Limitations

Due to the use of convenience and critical case sampling, some limitations and biases can be found present in the research which should be taken into consideration when analyzing the data.

First, the research can not be generalized because the study has a small sample size. The sample size is not representative of the whole population and might not represent the experiences of other artist managers and artists.

Secondly, there is a response bias present, meaning that some participants might have answered questions in a way that made them look good or changed their true responses because it's what they thought I would want to hear. There is also a confirmation bias on my part because the interview guide and my responses in some interviews might favor the idea that fan engagement is an indispensable part of promoting an artist's career, which also might have affected the participant's responses.

Finally, there is a limited scope in that the research doesn't discuss what measures are taken to identify the success of fan engagement strategies, and that the research only takes into account the perspective of the artist manager. For future research, it would be interesting to identify success measures and to interview artists, fan relations specialists, and music marketing professionals.

ANALYSIS

The next section of this paper categorizes my findings into three major themes which are accompanied by various sub-themes which were identified during the process of Inductive Coding. These themes are essential in analyzing my research question: To what extent can artist managers rely on fan engagement strategies to promote an artist's career?

1. The Artist Manager's Role

The artist manager plays an essential role in any artist's career. They are the key contact person for all stakeholders and are a buffer between the artist and the rest of the world. During my discussions with the interview participants, I asked them why they were working in artist management, and after analyzing my findings I discovered that there are two common topics that come up in most of the interviews.

The first topic is passion for music and wanting to help talented artists develop their career. Participant C explained, "I went into it because I love being behind the scenes and I love being a part of somebody's growth". Here, Participant C identifies one of the overarching ideas which was shared by many of the other participants. For example, Participant A, shares the same thought of wanting to be part of someone's growth, "For me, it always, it turned out to be that always what I was searching for was empowering creatives, empowering creativity."

The second common idea within the reasons for working in artist management is getting into it by chance after working in other roles within the music industry. Participant B discusses how her previous experiences working in the music industry led her to realize that she could work in artist management: "I finished stage managing production during university, and I was like, I really like managing and I like helping people and I like organizing. So I want to start management." Similarly, Participant D mentioned that she worked in roles such as marketing, music director at a radio station, and at the industry relations department in a company before she ended up working in management.

Both of these reasons for working in artist management can be related back to Morrow's (2018) explanation which comes up in the literature and states that his research found that individuals want to work in management because they want to help artist's build their careers and realize their potential.

The following section explores the role and responsibilities of the artist manager more in depth through sub-themes including Career Development & Guidance, Logistics & Operations, and Planning & Execution.

a. Career Development & Guidance

One of the first tasks as an artist manager is to decide which artists you want to work with. In my discussions with the managers I interviewed, they mentioned a few qualities or skills that they look for in an artist before agreeing to work with them. The main common idea was having a good relationship with the artist. This is also something that came up in the literature, with scholars identifying the relationship as a business relationship that has personal involvement and mutual trust, and even comparing it to a good marriage (Frasco and Hetherington, 2011; Gaudesi, 2016).

Participant B said, “It’s important that you feel comfortable with your artist and that you bond well together. Like if you were friends, you know, you want to have a good relationship.” Along the same lines, Participant A explains:

You really have to believe in them and create a vision with them. And you have to be their number one fan because you’re pitching for them, you’re representing them.

You’re using your network to be the buffer between the world and the artist, and you have to genuinely make people feel excited about the artist.

Morrow’s (2018) research mentioned a list of criteria identified by George Stein which he used to select artists to sign. From Stein’s list of criteria, a few came up in my own research, including the songs, the ability to perform, and being focused, smart, and ambitious. This leads me to the next quality or skill that was mentioned by most interviewees, which is taking initiative and knowing what your goals are, while also understanding that the manager is there to help you, not to do the work for you.

Participant C mentioned, “You're looking for somebody who will do this with or without you, but they want you. So not someone like, ‘Oh, can you please make me big?’ You're looking for someone like, ‘I'm doing all of this, it'd be so good if you could come along for the journey.’” Overall, most of the participants alluded to the fact that if you're working as a manager, it's because you're passionate about music and about the artist you're working with, and you're agreeing to sign them because you want to take on some of their responsibilities so that they can focus on their art.

The next point focuses on the relationship between the artist and the manager, and it's important to highlight that a common theme between all the interviews was that the managers see themselves in a ‘protector’ role. According to Participant A, “It's more as a protector of the artists and their vision, and giving that support to an artist of dealing with everything related to their career so they can focus on their art.” The managers also discussed taking care of the artist's mental health and protecting their vulnerability. Almost all interviewees used the word ‘vulnerability’ at some point when talking about music or about the artist. They mention that music is something so personal and sharing it with the world puts the artist in a vulnerable position which goes back to why the manager is taking on a protector role and wanting to shield the artist from being hurt. Participant B explains that although it takes a lot to be vulnerable, it's something that you have to take advantage of. Similarly, Participant F says that although she wants to protect her artist's vulnerability, it is something that is useful for marketing. This takes me to my next point which focuses on the responsibilities of the manager.

b. Logistics & Operations

Artist managers look at their job as an all-encompassing role, having been involved in most, if not all, aspects of an artist's career. It's interesting to note that while most interviewees have a roster of artists across different genres, they share similar experiences

and responsibilities. Scholars, notably Frascogna and Hetherington (2011), have defined artist managers as a person who will do “anything that will help enhance or further an artist’s career” (p. 11). Academic literature also notes that the responsibilities of a manager include those that take on the protector role mentioned above, but also the logistical and operational ones.

I asked all of the participants what a typical day in their role would look like and the conclusion was that there is no typical day as an artist manager. There are a few main responsibilities I identified throughout the interviews; research and outreach, general administrative tasks, and marketing, which I will discuss further in the next section.

Participant E said, “Every day was different. It was kind of like, all right, what do we need to do for that artist that day?” The rest of the interviewees had similar answers, explaining that their daily tasks were dependent on what their artists were working on. For some participants, their daily tasks included looking for publications, radio stations, and festivals, and reaching out to let them know about their artist, while for others it was replying to emails, taking phone calls, content ideation, booking shows, etc. The general idea seems to be that the manager takes on many, if not all, of the logistical and administrative responsibilities so that the artist can focus on creating their music and the visuals for it. Other responsibilities mentioned by the interviewees included tour planning, attending rehearsals, taking meetings with record labels, and invoicing. Participant E summarized it best by saying:

When you're managing somebody they really look to you to be like, ‘Hey, What do I do? What's the right decision? How do I get from point A to point B?’ So like, I have to make sure we have everything in check. Like, every little nook and cranny is where I help, like, be a stepping stone.

Amongst all of these responsibilities, the manager also works on marketing the artist by helping build up their image and their fanbase, the next section goes into further detail.

c. Planning & Execution

Part of the manager's responsibilities is to market their artist and help them create a community of loyal fans. However, the manager's involvement in this depends on the artist and on the team they have. Some managers are fully involved in marketing their artists, from coming up with the strategies to filming and posting the content, while others aren't involved as much, only contributing with content ideation. This might be because the artist wants to be in charge of their content and marketing and only needs the manager to provide feedback, or because the artist is working with a record label that has a marketing department who takes care of it. Participant F said, "I'm more of like, just ideation because she's actually really good at social media and creating really cool and funny videos, so, she's told me that she doesn't really need that much support on her socials except for ideation." Participant B also had a similar experience with an artist on her roster. On the other hand, Participants A, C, D, and E share a comparable experience which involves them in all aspects of marketing. Participant C said "I do everything, basically, except for content creation. I will write press releases, email playlists, pitch radio stations, any like, physical material, like posters, QR codes, anything like that I do." Some interviewees were more involved in other regards, "I'm doing mainly social media, digital content strategy, marketing, or I usually take the lead on any campaign, if it's for a release, whether it's an EP or an album. I'm also focusing on digital marketing, onboarding, and sometimes even customer care." - Participant A.

Building a fan base is arguably the most important detail of marketing an artist. Participant A states, "Without fans, there's no career, period." This is a concept agreed upon by all of the other participants, who believe that fans are vital for an artist's career, and by academic scholars such as Baym (2018), who argue that fans are the ones who distribute and

promote the artist's work in creative ways, and who help their communities grow. In terms of marketing and building a fan base, the manager's role is to ensure that whatever is being communicated to the public is being targeted towards a specific audience and that it leans in to what the fans want to see. Participant D mentioned that part of her role is to remind her artists to interact with the fans on social media by replying to their comments, liking their posts, following them back, etc.

The responses mentioned above provide us with an overview of what the artist manager role entails and more specifically, for the purpose of this research paper, what their role is in regards to marketing. It should be noted that although all of the interview participants had similar experiences, the research sample is small and cannot be generalized.

2. Fan Engagement is Crucial

Fan engagement can take many different forms, but no matter the form it's in, it's crucial for any artist to build up a fan base if they want their career to go somewhere. This section delves into the approaches that participants take to build their artist's fanbases and to foster a loyal community. I will also be exploring marketing approaches that are targeted specifically towards fans and a discussion of how to strengthen the relationship between the artist and the fans.

a. Fanbase Building & Communities

Baym's (2018) academic literature has differentiated audiences and fans based on the level of interest in fandom and the activities they participate in. This is a crucial point in order to comprehend the importance of needing to build a loyal fanbase rather than simply maintaining an engaged audience.

The first point of interest in regards to building a fan community for an artist is understanding that it's going to start off small. Participant E explains, "Doing a fan meetup,

even if there's only five people there, a lot of artists that I've worked with are like, 'Well, why am I going to do that? There's only gonna be five or ten people.' And it's like, no, those five or ten people are better than zero, you want to build those relationships." Once that has been established, there are a few key elements that participants deemed as necessary to build a fan base; authenticity & vulnerability, fan engagement, targeted content, community building, and live performances.

As mentioned in the previous section, vulnerability is something that the managers try to protect for the artists they manage, nonetheless, it's something that they can use to their advantage, along with the artist's authentic personality, to help them connect to their audience. Participant F gave an example of an established artist who capitalizes on her authentic personality, "All these girls from all over the world, they see this normal looking Taylor Swift on the stage who is dorky and can't dance, and when she's on stage she just looks like she's just a girl in her bedroom having fun." This example is just one of many that were provided by participants, who emphasized the importance of portraying the artist as being genuine and vulnerable through their content. Participant B offered another example, "That [building a fanbase] kind of goes hand in hand with the content that he makes in terms of it being very vulnerable and very personal to him, and it being something that not only he likes to create, but people like to see."

The next key element is fan engagement. Almost all interviewees discussed the need to engage directly with fans at one point or another, and stress that it's critical for building a relationship with the fans. Participant E said "I think a lot of times where artists miss the mark is that they're like, 'I did this poll on Instagram, like that was so exciting for my fans,' and it's like absolutely not! They didn't even get a sliver of the engagement that they should." This was a common thought between the interviewees, and to solve it they explained ways of interacting with fans which included, replying to comments on social media, following fans,

liking posts from fan pages, hosting live streams, having conversations on online forums, and even doing an online video conference with a few fans to build the relationship one-on-one.

Creating targeted content was also a fundamental point recognized by the interviewees. Participant D mentioned that before coming up with a strategy, it's necessary to understand your audience demographics so your content can be tailored to them. Similarly, Participant B said, "We definitely need to try to connect with his fans more in terms of doing more research on his metrics and where his fan base is, and understanding how we can provide for them what they are looking for, based off of where they are, what they listen to and what they're into." Another interesting point that came up in this section is understanding who the artist wants as an audience and how they want to be perceived. Participant C explains, "We're kind of making him exclusive, but we also want him to be taken seriously. We don't want him to kind of just be like this heartthrob for 14 year olds."

The next point of interest is community building. Once the artist and their team have established a fanbase they need to nurture it and maintain a community in which both, the artist and the fans, are getting what they want. Participant B explains, "It's just really important to ensure that the fans feel heard, they feel seen, they feel understood, they feel loved." Several interviewees agreed on the fact that in order to build and maintain a loyal community, it's important to let the fans know how appreciated they truly are, and how essential their involvement is. When fans are happy in the community they're participating in, they're bound to tell other people about it and get them to also join which keeps the fanbase growing. Another major factor of a fan community is interaction between the fans. Of course, the fans want to interact with the artist and they want the artist to see how much they enjoy their music and content, but in spite of that, fans need to be able to build relationships with one another, whether it's online or in person. Participant A said:

Everybody communicates through their phones and so being able to use that digital connection but then transforming it into a real connection at a concert, building that sense of community and connection between the fans themselves, not just you with your fans, is just as important as the connection with the artist and the music.

Overall, participants agreed on the fact that building and maintaining a connection between the artist and the fans, and between the fans themselves is essential to have a long lasting community.

The final key element I pinpointed for fan base building is live performances. A portion of interviewees expressed that the artists on their roster started building up their fan bases through live performances. Participant B noted, “A lot of his fans are from him performing and people being like, ‘Wow, he's kind of good.’ And then from there, we kind of built a fan base on social media.” Additionally, other participants explained that it’s easier to create a connection with the audience in person rather than online, and that once that relationship has been established, the audience will ideally listen to the artist’s music outside of performances and start to get involved with their fan community. An interesting point that came up in regards to more established artists rather than upcoming ones, was audience segmentation. Participant C commented, “We're kind of making him exclusive, but we also want him to be taken seriously. We don't want him to just be like this heartthrob for 14 year olds, right? So we segment the audiences when we have over 18 shows and under 18 shows.” Audience segmentation is something that should be considered for further research in order to note what, if any, effects it has on building a fan base.

b. Specific Marketing Approaches

Now that the key elements to build up an artist’s fan base and community have been established, this section will delve deeper into specific marketing approaches that have been

tried and tested by interview participants. Most of these strategies involve the key elements that were previously mentioned and are tailored towards the fans.

One of the most common examples that arose during the interview process was asking for feedback and letting fans be involved. Participant E explained:

I think about really letting the fans be a part of conversations. Like let fans design merch, ask what songs they want on the set list, at shows let them pick the song that's played. It's more so about like, how do you get them so excited to get to that point that it's like, 'I need to be in that fan base because they get to do all this cool shit.'

This concept was brought up by other participants who shared examples of established artists like Halsey and Harry Styles, who interact directly with the fans during live performances by allowing them to choose the next song or by reading signs from the crowd. Participant A also shared the example of giving fans different merchandise designs and asking them for feedback on which design they liked more. The examples mentioned above are also similar to Morris' (2013) case study on Imogen Heap and her fans which explained how she asked for feedback from her fans on songs and asked them to send in lyrics, which is also related to the concept of relational labor.

The next marketing strategy that was brought up by all participants was the use of TikTok. TikTok is a social media platform in which users can post short form or long form videos and where they can do live streams. A few participants talked about having the artist post content such as singing videos, behind the scenes content, and 'day in the life' videos, however, most of them acknowledged that participating in trends is the most used content on the platform. In regards to trends, Participant F brought up an interesting point and explained that nowadays if you take too long to participate in a trend, "you're cringe and desperate". She went on to say, "You have to think about, is it a trend that you want to follow so that you're, like, acceptable in the eyes of society, or is it something that you want to disrupt." It

will be interesting to see how the type of content artists share on this platform evolves as new changes and different platforms arise.

Another marketing strategy that was brought up frequently by interviewees was doing giveaways and contests. The majority of participants discussed giving away merchandise, signed album copies, posters, etc. and the only thing the fans had to do was pre-save a song, sign up to the artist newsletter, or other activities along those lines. Participant A gave a particularly exciting example of a giveaway she did with one of her artists, “We were doing pre-saves for the first single of his last album that came out, and so, the message was clear: pre-save this to enter the competition to have [the artist] play at your house party.” She explained that the story behind this was that the artist started his career by playing at house parties and that linking the giveaway to the artist’s personal story also gives the fans something to connect to and more of a reason to participate.

To finish off this section, I’d like to highlight a point that was brought up by only one participant who said, “I think to have good fan engagement initiative, the artist doesn’t always need to be involved in that. You can do so much without having the artist involved at all.” She expanded on this idea by explaining that the company she worked at hosted various events in which the artist wasn’t present but it was a place for the artist’s fans to interact with each other and enjoy the artist’s music together, which ties all of this back to the idea of having a strong fan community.

c. Strengthening Artist-Fan Relationship

The final sub-theme of this section delves into the ways in which managers can help their artist strengthen the relationship with their fans. Participant B commented,

I feel like really just reaching out to the fans and having more of a community with them. It’s a lot of creating this community with fans, seeing why they like the music,

what resonates with them, learning about them and who they are as people, where they come from, and how they came across the artist.

This was a common theme across all interviews and it led back to the point of making the fans feel seen, heard, and understood so that they keep putting in effort into that relationship. Other ways in which managers help artists strengthen the relationship with their fans include truly showing off the artist's genuine personality, giving fans the opportunity to be involved, granting them inside looks into behind the scenes or upcoming projects, and giving them reasons to want to stay involved in the community. Participant C provided an example of artist Taylor Swift and how she sends some fans 'surprises' before a new release so that they can feel like they're in on a secret with her, or how most of her marketing has 'easter eggs' that fans need to decode in order to unlock a new song, for example.

On the other hand, in order to properly build this relationship it's also necessary to take into account the artist's perspective. Participant D reflects on a moment related to this:

After a show I'm like, 'Come out and meet people.' And they do, and they'll come back to me and be like, 'Oh my God, this person and her friend drove up from Florida, which is like an eight hour drive. Or, this dad and his daughter wore fan made merch that they made together and came to the show.'

She explains that it's important for the artists to interact with the fans, not only to keep them happy, but to see how much of an impact their music is having on people and to keep themselves excited about having conversations with the fans so that they want to keep doing it.

Overall, it's important to take marketing approaches that are tailored towards the fans and what they want to see. It's also critical to keep in mind that fans want to see real, raw perceptions of the artist and need to see their personality shine through. Before moving on to the next section, I would also like to tie in Baym's (2013) research on fandom which reveals

that positioning audiences between “fans” and “friends” is a commonly used practice, especially now that social media has changed fans expectations. While this approach of positioning fans as friends can definitely be useful for strengthening the relationship between the artist and the fans, it also has its limitations and challenges.

3. Fan Engagement Challenges & Benefits

As has been mentioned a multitude of times, fan engagement is crucial for any artist’s career. Participant C says, “I think that the relationship is, you know, they become your idols, right? Like, this is, like, the 1900s version of, like, going to church and praying to God.” Regardless, as I’ve emphasized multiple times, it goes without saying that building a fan base comes with its challenges and benefits.

a. Artist-Fan Relationship Challenges

During the interview process with all participants, a few concerns were identified when it came to managing the relationship between the fans and the artist, and it’s clear to see that some of these concerns are intertwined with each other..

The first concern brought up during interviews was not being able to give the fans everything they want. This also goes hand in hand with the artist having a fear of disappointing people which takes a toll on their mental health, this will be further discussed later on. Participant B said, “I feel like it’s just not being able to give the fans what they want every single time, but still wanting to give them as much as much as you can without, you know, losing yourself in that.” She continues by comparing to being a people pleaser, in the sense that you don’t want to give them everything but you want to please everybody, but then you’re making yourself unhappy. Similarly, Participant D shared a case in which one of her artist’s content pieces gave fans something that they wanted to see, but not exactly in the way they wanted to see it.

The second challenge discussed by participants was having to set limits and boundaries for how much of their personal lives the artists can share with the fans, which is also related to managing fan expectations. A few participants shared that they have discussions with their artists about what kind of content and how much of their personal lives they should be sharing on the internet. As I mentioned before, giving fans a behind the scenes look and letting them see the artists personality are essential, however, they need to know when to stop sharing. Participant C explained

Fans think this person can do no wrong, so they also have to balance with like, ‘this person is a human and they might not actually share the same deep rooted values as I do.’ In a way, they're also expected to be content creators, they're also supposed to have political stances, and they're also expected maybe not to have anything problematic in their past.”

This example is something that has been seen in the music industry for years, with artists such as Taylor Swift being pressured to take a political stance in regards to elections or the Israel-Palestine conflict, for example. Baym’s (2018) research explores three strategies for setting boundaries which include territorializing, invoking intellectual property rights, and datafication. Interestingly enough, none of these were applied by the interviewees who discussed setting limits in regards to the relationship between the artist and the fans.

As I mentioned previously, managers take on a protector role for the artists they manage, being cautious of their mental health in aspects such as rejection and vulnerability. Participant F shared, “I think it's just the rejection. And I think artists are so vulnerable, like they're already putting their craft out there to you, and if they're getting hate comments it can really distract them from their art, and it can really discourage them.” This ties back to the first challenge of not being able to give fans everything they want because sharing too much can be damaging to the artist’s mental health, but sharing too little can also have adverse

effects if not taken well by the fans. The overall idea seems to be that artists need to maintain a healthy distance in the relationship with the fans, while also giving them enough to keep them wanting more. Participant D provides another example of not doing meet and greets at performances because some of her artists wouldn't be comfortable with it due to anxiety or other concerns about not knowing people's intentions.

b. Artist-Fan Relationship Benefits

Although there are a few challenges to managing the artist-fan relationship, the benefits surely outweigh them.

If all interviewees agreed on one thing, it would be this; the fans are the industry, and without them there's no career. Participant B said, "The fans are where the industry is and they're the core of how it grows. It's important to really create a relationship with them because they give so much of their time, energy, and money to artists." All of the participants emphasized the same point of needing to keep the fans happy and giving back to them, not only through music, but interactions. Likewise, Participant D shared, "Those are the people who are actively seeing what you're posting or actively going to your new single. They're the ones going to your shows and being like 'I brought my whole entire friend group with me to this show and now all my friends are fans.'"

Interviewees also shared examples of artists such as Beyonce, Taylor Swift, and One Direction, who have had huge success and active fan bases for more than ten years. Participant F commented, "Just build loyalty with your fans, so it doesn't matter how many years have passed, they'll just feel this connection." This came up after a conversation about giving fans the opportunity to like the artist and their story as well as their music, which points back to the previous discussion about letting the artist's personality shine through in their marketing, and everything else they do.

Stewart's (2013) Artist - Fan Engagement Model can be tied into this section because it looks to answer the question of "whether an artist's engagement with their fan base increased their music revenue streams through use of the various digital technologies" (p. 224). Only a portion of my interviewees mentioned the revenue streams, and very briefly, however, they did emphasize that fans are the ones who are spending money on the artist, whether it is to come to a show or to purchase their music or merchandise.

c. Superfans

This section focuses on a topic that has come up in many discussions between music industry professionals in the past months. The term 'superfan' is definitely not new, however, now that changes are occurring in the music industry, there is a resurgence of interest in marketing directly to fans, and more specifically nurturing superfans. Two conflicting points of interest came up during interviews.

Participant F shared, "I think people are slowly starting to see how truly impermanent social media is, so I'd be interested to see if we start to revert back to more 'classic' ways of promotion or just using social media as more of like a tool now, instead of something that we rely on super heavily." This quote from Participant F relates to the superfan case because, although the term might be considered as 'new', the concept of superfans is part of the "classic" ways of promotion in terms of artists marketing specifically to their fans to allow them to convert into superfans. Similarly, Participant C expressed concern about fandom culture dying down and it being related to changes on social platforms, "I don't feel like that level of stan² really exists anymore. Twitter being taken over, kind of ruined the vibe. Same with Tumblr, they kind of just flopped, and I feel like we're not gonna get to that level, I don't think, anymore."

² Stan: "an extremely or excessively enthusiastic and devoted fan" (Merriam-Webster Dictionary)

On the other hand, Participant A expressed concerns regarding the superfan discussion, saying that the ‘new buzzword’ is causing division in the industry. She went on to discuss:

I think some people are turning towards superfans as a way of fixing the industry’s problem that artists can’t make enough money off their own music. I think it feels a bit icky, it feels a bit weird. It’s like, why are we putting it on fans to fix this problem, and also why are we creating more work for the artists?

It seems that there are two opposing views regarding the superfan conversation, however, they both have the same end goal of keeping fans happy. One side appears to think that we need superfans in order to continue having a considerable level of fandom, while the other thinks that it puts more pressure on the fans and more work on the artists in order to keep the fans happy.

CONCLUSION

Artist management is an all-encompassing role that oversees multiple aspects of an artist’s career. They are the liaison between the artist and all other stakeholders. One of their main responsibilities is marketing and building up the artist’s fan base, which takes specific approaches that are specifically tailored to fans to promote the artist and their music.

Fan engagement is undoubtedly one of, if not, the most important elements of marketing for an artist to have success in their career. Throughout the literature review and my own qualitative research, it was made definitive that music industry professionals have to take the fans into consideration for any marketing purposes, however, an interesting point that came up in the research was that the level of fandom we see in the present day isn’t as active as it was maybe five or ten years ago, which suggests that there might’ve been a point in time in which managers or marketing professionals weren’t so focused on directing their content

towards the fans. Tailoring marketing approaches towards the fans will aid the process of building a loyal fan base for the artist and maintaining a community that will support the artist and their music for years to come.

The research question ‘To what extent can artist managers rely on fan engagement strategies to promote an artist’s career?’ was answered throughout the process of qualitative interviewing, where the artist managers who participated seemed to believe that fan engagement is crucial. During the interviews it was also revealed that although it is necessary to create a strong bond or relationship between the artist and the fans, there should be boundaries for how much of their lives the artists should share with the audience. The research also answered the subquestions (1) what is the manager’s role in an artist’s career? (2) what specific strategies do managers use to encourage fan engagement? (3) how do managers maintain the artist’s authenticity while applying traditional marketing tactics? Interviewees provided insights into their role and responsibilities, as well as how it works in parallel to other roles in the industry, provided examples of fan engagement strategies they have applied for their artist’s marketing, and expressed the importance of showcasing the artist’s personality in their marketing to keep it genuine and authentic.

Further Research

Although this study did answer my research question and subquestions, there is certainly a possibility for further research. Future research should take into consideration the limitations which I mentioned above regarding the sample of the study, the scope limitations, and the response bias. As the interviews didn’t reveal any specific examples related to this, it would also be of interest to delve deeper into the concept of the parasocial interaction theory so that it can be better understood in relation to marketing an artist within the music industry.

One interviewee also brought up the working conditions of artists and other professionals in the industry, which is a big area of concern that could also be studied further.

APPENDIXES

Appendix A - Interview Guide

Opening

Tell me about yourself.

How long have you been working in the music industry?

What has that been like?

Do you work by yourself, with a small team, or are you part of an agency/label?

Can you tell me more about that?

The Manager Role & Motivations

Why did you go into the role of an artist manager?

How did you feel when you signed your first artist?

Can you tell me about the artists you work with? (names, genres)

What does a typical day look like in your role?

Artist Development

How do you decide which artists you want to work with?

What are some skills and/or qualities that you look for in an artist? **OR** What do you look for in an artist?

What are your goals?

How do you support your artists?

Can you give me an example of X?

What are your main responsibilities?

Can you elaborate on X?

What are some of the biggest challenges you face in your role?

Why do you think that is?

What are some of the most rewarding aspects of being an artist manager?

How does that make you feel?

Marketing

What is your role in marketing for the artists you work with?

Can you walk me through your interactions with the marketing team? (when applicable)

What is the approach you take to market an artist?

Can you expand on X?

What are the key elements of a marketing campaign for an artist?

How have new social media platforms influenced your marketing approach?

Fan Relations

What strategies do you use to build your artist's fan bases and cultivate strong relationships?

How do you use different platforms to communicate and connect with fans?

What is the role of fan communities in boosting an artist's career?

What are some fan engagement initiatives you have put in place?

What happened after you tried X?

What are the benefits of having a strong artist-fan relationship?

What are the challenges in managing the artist-fan relationship?

Is there something in particular that you believe strengthens the artist-fan relationship?

If short answer: Can you expand on that?

Closing

How do you see your role changing in the upcoming years?

What are some aspects that you believe should be modified to improve the interaction between artists and fans?

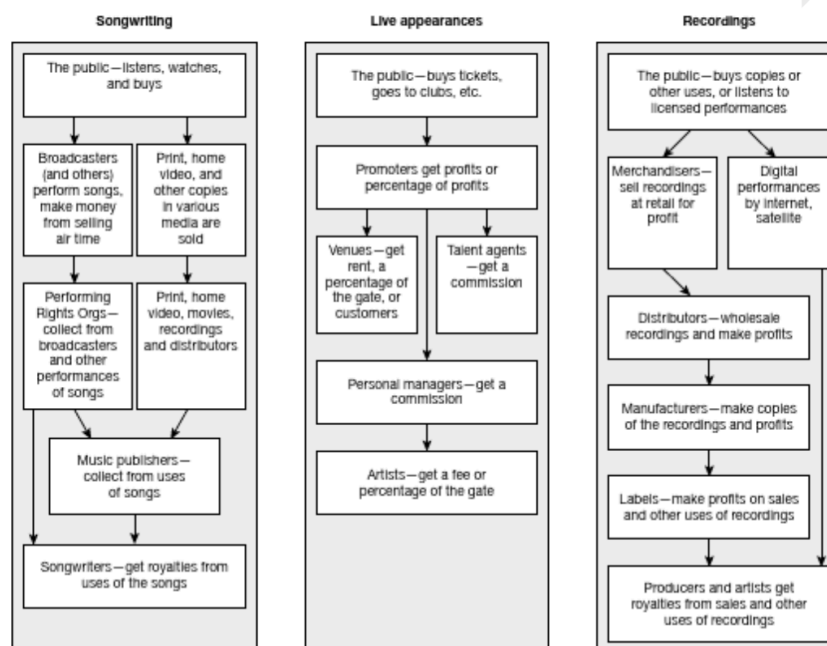
What advice would you give to people who are interested in becoming artist managers?

Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in this role?

Appendix B - Figures

Figure 1.0

Three Income Streams: Revenue flow from consumer to source



From *The Music Business and Recording Industry: Delivering Music in the Twenty-First Century* (p. 47), by G. P. Hull, T. Hutchinson, and R. Strasser, 2010, Taylor & Francis Group. Copyright 2010 by Geoffrey P. Hull

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