From Mass Roots to Grass Roots: Music and Community in an Internet Age

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This work answers questions that Mass Communications scholars, music industry professionals, and rock and roll lovers are asking: Is the mass music industry failing to meet the needs of its Internet Age market? And, with the accessibility of music on the Internet, will the music shift from broad, international stars to local community musicians?

The music industry is changing and the golden age of rock stars and guitar gods has passed. With the wide reach and variety of music on the Internet, it is becoming more difficult for the mainstream music industry to keep their customers’ focus on a limited amount of artists. Promotion and distribution on the Internet allow musicians to be successfully independent. Local music involves a close community of musicians and music lovers within an area no larger than a state or region.

In several other countries a focus on local music has replaced the mainstream music model. America has not yet embraced local music the way countries such as South Africa and Singapore have. However, the United States is starting to follow a localization trend as newspapers and television stations are developing websites to promote bands in the community like never before. This development fits with the Long Tail Theory, showing the “one size fits all” model is becoming obsolete in today’s marketplace since the consumer is looking for a more personalized product. Global corporations are attempting to localize their products and services to fit specified wants and needs of smaller consumer groups. This shift in consumer wants helps to explain the slowly declining profit margin for mainstream music.

To help explain this phenomenon, three focus groups will be carried out to complete the research. IRB approval has been received and the focus groups will be conducted and the information will be analyzed in the next two weeks. One focus group will include hand picked local music industry professionals, discussing any change or development in the local music scene in the past decade. The second focus group will involve a random sample of North Carolina individuals in the age range of 18-26 for the purpose of discussing the music tastes of the local music target audience. Finally, the last group will involve a random group of Elon students to examine their feelings towards local music in North Carolina as well as their home state and the role of local music in their lives.

In conclusion, this research is essential as it examines a new trend in the music industry. With music marketing, it is important to understand where the industry is headed. The Internet has opened new doors for music as it has both aided and hindered the sales and marketing of music. Society is responding to more localized content as the consumer drifts away from a generalized model. Based on American consumer trends, the mainstream music industry is losing mass market value and the music listener’s interests are in a smaller and more localized music scene.