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Impact of Digitization on Media and Media Presence of Debut Bands within Hard Rock and Metal Genres

Research on How Digitization is Challenging Certain Parts of
Media Industry and Media Presence of Debut Bands within
Hard Rock and Metal Genres

JELENA MIJATOVIC

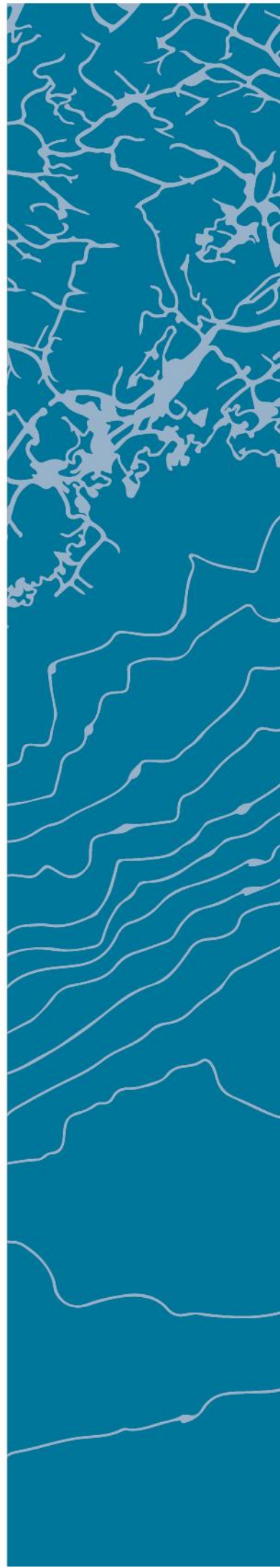
SUPERVISOR

Bendik Hofseth

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Faculty of Fine Arts

Department of Popular Music



Abstract

Since its introduction to the market, digital technology has continuously challenged various industries and their business models, including that of the media industry. Although the media industry was formerly ascribed the role of a gatekeeper and tastemaker for music, in a world in which the digital realm is profoundly related to daily life and new devices, platforms, and forms of media regularly emerge, it is questionable whether media industry channels can continue in the same role.

The aim of this study is to understand and evaluate how the current status of media industries is affected by digitization. In particular, the project focuses on the role of newspapers, magazines, and their online counterparts within contemporary music journalism and publicity practices, and the way in which the relationships between these affect media presences of debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres.

This thesis is based on a study of literature and reports from various bodies such as Reuters Institute and IFPI as well as of recent articles and discussions in relevant media outlets. The study also draws on in-depth interviews with high-ranking figures in the media and publicity spheres. The discussion chapter of this thesis reflects on findings from the above-mentioned research and attempts to anticipate future developments within the media industry; it also identifies opportunities and provides possible strategies for improving the media presence of debut artists within the hard rock and metal genres.

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1. Introduction

Digitization and the rise of the Internet have propelled us, in a very short time, into a state that I call “informational super-flow.” These developments have offered us vast amounts of easily accessible information and content and, as a result, have greatly altered patterns of consumer behavior. Such technological advancements consistently alter the status quo of the industries in which they are implemented, creating new ecosystems and opportunities at the same time as they disrupt and challenge contemporary business models.

A prime example of the disruptive tendencies of digital technologies has been seen in the music industry. The introduction of the Napster platform in 1999 radically challenged the way the industry operated and forever altered the way music was consumed and accessed, as it made all music available for free to download on a single platform. Napster was not able to sustain its model due to copyright infringement issues; however, the music industry neglected to acknowledge the radical change that Napster occasioned, as a new era of consumption was initiated. Unlike the music industry, progressive, technology-driven industries, and platforms such as iTunes (2003) and Spotify (2008), recognized and embraced the change. They introduced new business models that were tailored to the digital format and its corresponding forms of consumption, and thereby shifted the flow of power and revenue in their favor. While the music industry was trying to prevent the inevitable, the media industry fully embraced the new digital world as an opportunity for mass communication, offering free information online while recognizing the placement of online advertising as an effective way to monetize the latest technological advancements.

However, as digitization has progressed, it has brought on new devices, such as smartphones and tablets, and new forms of “social” media. These shifts have again challenged media formats, revenue streams, and previously established consumption patterns, and due to these radical changes, the media industry has seen its business model challenged and its future put in doubt. Traditional media stands now on a

crossroads between old and new business models similar to the one the music industry faced in the early 00s.

1.1 Research Question

For the past year and a half, I have been working as the head of promotion at Indie Recordings, one of the leading Scandinavian independent record labels, focusing on hard rock and metal. As an in-house publicist for Indie Recordings, I work closely with print and online media representatives in Europe and the United States. In my work I have encountered a set of challenges related to the changing dynamics within the media landscape that differs little between the European and American markets.

This thesis is an attempt to describe and better understand the changing ecosystem of the media industry and apply this understanding to my work promoting debut hard rock and metal bands. In particular, this understanding will be used to assess the current status of these bands, identify opportunities for improving my practices as a promoter, and determine the best strategies for increasing the bands' media presences and overall market impact. This paper will investigate the current state of traditional media with a focus on print media – particularly newspapers, magazines and their online counterparts – and will assess how they have been affected by the rise of digitization. It will also examine the contemporary status of music journalism and the publicity strategies and practices that correspond with it. Likewise, it will outline and further investigate how the challenges presented by digitization impact the media presences of debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres. Hence, the two main areas to be researched in this thesis are established by the following questions:

How does digitization impact traditional print media, its online counterparts, and music journalism?

How does the current status of print media and its online counterparts affect the media presences of debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres and what can be done within this context to make these bands' media presences more effective?

The first part of the paper will adopt a theoretical approach to the status of print media and its online counterparts in the current media environment. Likewise, it will describe the current status of music journalism and analyze its role as a linking body between the music and media industries. This will be followed by an in-depth explanation of publicity work within the music industry, including description of the responsibilities involved in publicity work and of the importance of promotional cycles and album release campaigns. This subject matter strikes me as personally important, as from my experience it appears that few people have a clear understanding of the actions carried out within a record label or the responsibilities of its various departments.

The second part of this thesis will explain the methodology applied to this study, with a detailed summary of the stages in which the research was conducted and the methodological principles that guided it. After analyzing further information collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with music publicity experts, I will consider possible publicity strategies for securing better media coverage and improving the media presence of debut hard rock and metal acts in the current media environment.

Given the scarcity of information on publicity practices within the current music and media environments, this thesis will hopefully be of interest to those involved in PR within the music industry, as well as new generations of students in Music Management and Music Business programs. However useful the data collected here proves to be, it will be interesting to see the extent to which it remains relevant years from now, as rapid changes continue to reshape the music and media industries and the platforms they use.

2. Theoretical and Practical Focus

This chapter will present a theory considering the media industry and media industry channels as they relate to this thesis' main areas of research. In particular, this theoretical analysis aims to summarize the current state of print media and its online counterparts and the relationship of these with music journalism and publicity; this theoretical analysis will then be applied to this thesis' practical focus, which is the media presence of debut artists within the hard rock and metal genres.

2.1 Media Industry

Michael Porter defines an industry as “a group of firms producing the same principle product or service” (1980, p. 7). “Industry” thus refers generally to those who manufacture products or offer services within a common field of interest with the purpose of commercial gain. In Porter’s further analysis of industry and its structure, he states: “Industry structure is relatively stable, but can change over time as an industry evolves” (1980, p.7). The structural changes Porter alludes to have occurred throughout the history of all industries, causing the industry to evolve and determining the industry’s “life cycle.” According to Porter (1980), there are four distinct stages of an industry’s life cycle: introduction, growth, maturity, and decline. As every life completes its own cycle, no industry or product is exempt from this universal pattern, including the media industry.

Media industries are defined as “communication channels through which news, entertainment, education, data, or promotional messages are disseminated. Media includes every broadcasting and narrowcasting medium such as newspapers, magazines, TV, radio, billboards, direct mail, telephone, fax, and internet” (Caruso, 2014, p. 77). The media industry is thus comprised of a vast number of communication channels through which particular messages are conveyed. Media industry scholars Havens and Lotz write that the general aim of the media industry “is to make intellectual property, package it and maximize revenues by selling it as many times as is feasible to the widest possible audience and at the highest possible price” (2012, p. 3). Hence, media industries operate with the purpose of capitalizing on the sales of products, goods, and services

based on information and entertainment. The term “intellectual property” in this case adequately indicates the distinction between media industries and telecommunication or technology companies, as Havens and Lotz note that “companies such as Google and Apple are often confused with the media industries [...], but they primarily provide the technological infrastructures and interfaces through which we access media” (2012, p.3).

However, as technological development continues disrupting and reshaping the landscapes of many industries, digitization has unexpectedly propelled several media industry outlets to the final stage of the industry’s life cycle: decline. It is thus crucial that all those working in media understand the current media environment and anticipate how the media industry and its communication channels will develop in the future; it is important that they identify the industry’s strengths and internal and external threats and create and adopt new strategies to prolong the industry’s life cycle.

While some parts of the media industry, such as the gaming industry, perform these tasks better and have increased their profits, others struggle or have been too severely disrupted by technological innovation to recover. One of the first visible examples of the latter was the music industry’s disruption by the innovations of digital technology and its failure to develop an appropriate response. Almost two decades after this process began, while there has been significant progress within the music industry, the industry’s ecosystem and financial gains are now facilitated and managed by tech companies to a greater extent. Although the music industry was a prime example of how not to respond to the structural changes Porter identified earlier, media industries continue to be challenged by these transformations to the point that many are now considered “legacy industries.” According to Havens and Lotz (2012), the term “legacy media industries” refers to media industries that were able to capitalize on mass production of goods – in particular, media that were established before digitization, such as daily press, magazines, TV, and radio. Although one could argue that the production of goods and intellectual property is today carried out at an unprecedented volume and scale, and we often hear it commented that “there was never more music or content available,” the overall commercial success gained by this production tells a different story.

For the majority of the media industries and their content creators, digital era business models result in less compensation, and various areas of the media industry seem to be struggling to keep pace with the new environment. It is interesting to note that media industries that appeared during the era of digitization or that were enabled by it, as the gaming industry was, adopted business models in sync with the dynamics of the current media environment, while “legacy” media industries have been challenged on various levels. Due to the nature of my work and the corresponding focus of this study, I have decided to investigate the current state of print media, in particular newspapers, magazines, and their online counterparts.

The online counterparts of newspapers and magazines developed as a byproduct of digitization and can be understood under the concept of “media convergence.” Convergence, state Havens and Lotz, is a term that denotes “the new connections among media enabled by digitization. Convergence can be seen first in terms of technical language, but increasingly in terms of media products and the media industries themselves. [...] [C]onvergence can indicate the merging of communication systems” (2012, p. 192). One of the leading scholars in this area, Henry Jenkins, argues that convergence also represents a “cultural shift by encouraging consumers to ‘seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content’” (Jenkins, 2008, p. 3). The dispersal of content across various media channels, however, necessarily causes the fragmentation of these channels and of media consumption across them. According to Havens and Lotz , “a key consequence of the greater range of media content in the digital era is the fragmentation of media consumption [...] and it results from steady erosion of mass media industries without their replacement of other mass media.” (2012, p. 209).

Dispersal, convergence, and fragmentation represent profound challenges within the contemporary media landscape. One of the areas of the industry most affected by these changes is that of print media – of newspapers, magazines, and their online counterparts. In the following sections, I will explicitly define the term “print media” and describe the current state of this media channel and its online counterparts.

2.2 Print Media

Print media is commonly defined as “the industry associated with the printing and distribution of news through newspapers and magazines” (Business Dictionary, 2018). The print media industry also includes other forms of print media such as books, pamphlets, and printed publications – or essentially any form of information disseminated through ink-on-paper production. For the purposes of this study, when I use the term “print media” I will be referring specifically to newspapers and magazines.

As a publicist at an independent record label, I actively deal with print media, as my work focuses on obtaining features, reviews, and interviews in specialized music print magazines and general interest newspapers at both a local and national level. I am therefore interested in understanding the way digitization has affected newspapers and magazines and altered their traditional “gatekeeping” role, the opportunities that digitization provides, and, the practical consequences of the new print media landscape for the success and media presence of debut hard rock and metal bands.

2.2.1 Newspapers

Newspapers are one of the oldest forms of mass communication media. One typical definition of a newspaper is that it is “a serial publication which contains news on current events of special or general interest” (ISO, 2006, 33.1). General-interest newspapers mainly report on events that have occurred in the 24 hours before the newspaper goes to press or they can also exist in the form of periodicals, which provide weekly coverage of events and information usually related to a specific location or area. As for newspapers’ material form, they are “printed on newsprint paper, usually appear without a cover, folded rather than bound together [...] They may include supplements such as color magazines, or other inserts for special features or events” (ISO, 2006, 33.1).

Although historically each new form of mass media has threatened to “kill” newspapers, they survived the rise of radio and TV and remained relevant sources of information throughout the 20th century. However, the introduction of the Internet and digitization in the early 2000s created a new ecosystem of information flow. Havens and Lotz argue

that “a combination of production and distribution adjustments have affected print industries in particular ways [...] [F]or many consumers, the nature of their use of print media has changed because digital technologies enable instantaneous update, revision, and delivery of content” (Havens, Lotz, 2012, p. 194).

To understand the changing status of a legacy media industry such as newspapers, it is crucial to analyze the financial dynamics of the business. Kipphan (2001, p.6) writes that newspapers mainly finance their production “by advertising inserts and advertisements. For this reason, the ultimate consumer price is relatively low.” However, in an era where digital information is freely accessible by way of a few clicks via a consumer’s desktop, tablet, or smartphone, the consumer price of a newspaper no longer seems relatively low. In addition, it is important to understand how the dynamics of the current market have affected the flow of advertising revenue that is newspapers’ main financial stimulus. Richter notes that “[s]ince the second quarter of 2003 print ad revenues have declined by more than \$6 billion, a loss that the \$500 million raise in online ads is nowhere near covering. Accounting for inflation, the past quarter marks a 30-year low in newspaper advertising” (Richter, 2012).

The main source of newspaper revenue is therefore deteriorating, further contributing to the decline of this format, or at least changes to its traditional content. The following anecdote illustrates how financial difficulties have caused the latter to occur. In March 2018, a regional newspaper in Agder, Norway titled *Fædrelandsvennen* was published for the first time without a standard section containing articles about culture and music. The event raised some eyebrows in both local and national media and music industry communities. Morten Bakke, an experienced “hire-in” publicist whom I was working closely with at the time, called me and declared: “FVN newspapers were published without a page for culture today. It’s a crisis!”¹

Havens and Lotz note that “[i]n case of some media – music, magazines, and newspapers – consumers have willingly forgone the physical version of media products in exchange for the convenience and quick and ready access provided digitally.” (2012, p. 201)

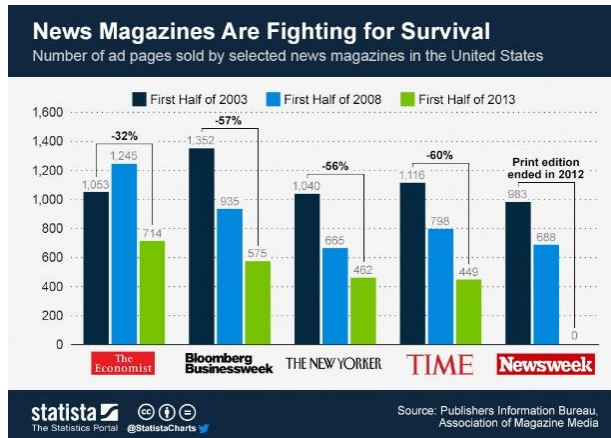
¹ “*Fædrelandsvennen kom uten kulturside i papirutgven i dag. Det er helt krise!*” Translation by the author.

Though it is true that different demographics tend to exhibit different behavior and consumption patterns, the new media ecosystem produced by digitization and informational oversaturation is occasioning a clash of formats and forcing media outlets to redefine content strategies based on consumption preferences. In such an environment, can a newspaper's editor-in-chief afford to prioritize cultural content?

2.2.2 Print Magazines

One of the most commonly accepted definitions of a magazine is: “[A] periodical publication containing articles and illustrations, often on a particular subject or aimed at a particular readership” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). Magazines can vary in size and length. They are generally printed on glossy paper. Defining the magazine's scope and financial basis, Kipphan states that “[t]he range of magazines consist mainly of periodicals, including trade magazines, journals and illustrated magazines. [...] [P]roduction costs for magazines are not paid for exclusively by the final consumer. Often more than half of the costs are financed by advertising” (2001, p.6). The financial viability of magazines depends on a combination of advertising, subscriptions, and sales at the purchase price. Magazine publishing is usually bound to a fast yearly schedule, with content planning beginning up to six months prior to the next issue's release. In this system, the editor-in-chief has much responsibility for selecting a magazine's content and anticipating trends and consumer interests far in advance.

Although there exist a variety of magazines, for the purposes of this study I am particularly interested in magazines that specialize in music. The most well-known magazines of this type are Rolling Stone, Billboard Magazine, The Fader, and NME. Given my work, I often deal with magazines specializing in hard rock and metal music, such as Metal Hammer, Rock Tribune (Belgium), Visions (Germany), Deaf Forever (Germany), New Noise Mag (France), and Rock Hard (Italy, France, and Germany). According to the latest research, magazines, like newspapers, are seeing their sales and advertising revenues decline. The following graph indicates the fall in ad page sales that five magazines in the United States experienced between 2003 and 2013:



(News Magazines Are Fighting For Survival, Statista, 2013)

Although this chart refers only to news magazines, the situation across the board seems equally dire, if not worse. The impact of digitization in music magazine circles has recently become strikingly clear, as NME shut down its print edition in March 2018, and Terrorizer magazine released its last number in November 2017 and has not been active since. The largest magazine specializing in metal music in Norway, Metal Hammer Norway, has not been released since July 2017, and although the magazine's editors have promised that the magazine will return, at the present date (April 2018) it has yet to do so. Team Rock Ltd., a media company responsible for various UK rock and metal magazines, such as Metal Hammer, Prog, and Classic Rock, went bankrupt in December 2016, leaving 70 of the company's employees without jobs. According to the BBC (2016), joint administrator Tom MacLennan said that Team Rock had traded at a loss "for a significant period of time." The firm's magazines, however, were saved from closure after they were purchased by Future Publishing.

According to a recent article in The New York Times, Wenner Media sold several of its magazines, including The National Enquirer and Men's Health, to private equity firms, and put Rolling Stone magazine up for sale. In that same article, Reed Phillips, a managing partner at the investment bank Oaklins DeSilva & Phillips, stated: "There have never been brand names like that, that have been sold in such a concentrated period. That alone indicates something is going on" (Ember, Grynbaum, 2017). Are these sales and closures the result of media owners trying to capitalize on their brands before it is too

late? Has magazine as a media form reached the end of its maturity phase? Havens and Lotz argue that this consolidation of print media outlets indeed represent the failure of the industry, as “the disruption of digital technologies to existing business models and practices eroded the legacy practices of the print and music industries before they established viable alternatives” (2012, p. 195).

2.3 Traditional Online Media

As digitization began to impact the media industry, print media outlets soon responded by introducing alternative digital forms. By the term “traditional online media,” I thus refer to these digital counterparts (explained in an earlier section through the concept of “media convergence”) of newspapers and print magazines. I also consider as traditional online media those “born digital” publishers such as Vice and BuzzFeed that only publish online and have business models that are in interesting ways distinct from the models of traditional print media outlets and their online counterparts.

The shift in media industries towards Internet content established online presence as an imperative for print media outlets. Print giants and media brands such as The Guardian, Kerrang, and Classic Rock developed their online presence early; however, the establishment of online-only publishers such as BuzzFeed and Vice brought old print media business models into question. The business model of online publishers was to offer free information to their audiences with the idea of capitalizing through advertising. As Ostermiller (2015) notes, online media outlets have struggled to introduce the sales and subscriptions that helped sustain print media, as although “ad technology has empowered advertisers to understand their granular audience and find that audience across the Web, it has done little to help publishers package and sell their impressions to tap into that demand”. The initial business model of online publishers also did not take into account the fluctuations that the digital media ecosystem would permit, nor the further development and impact that tech companies would cause on that ecosystem. Britton (TechRadar, 2015) argues that the main challenge to online media outlets selling their content is “consumer expectation [...] [B]ecause they have become accustomed to free online access to information, they are often reluctant to pay for content unless a

subscription offers an added value.” Although some online publishers have successfully monetized the information they publish, the majority has struggled to do so” (Newman, 2016).

In terms of the commercial priorities of online publishers, however, there has recently been a move away from traditional advertising. A recent study shows that many online publishers now view direct reader payment (45%), membership (14%) and sponsored content (42%), whether through text or video, as priorities in their business models (Newman, 2016 p.12). While the majority of publishers still offer content for free and view providing credible information as their top priority in this era of “fake news”, many publishers have introduced paywalls to their websites, though “born-digital” publishers such as Vice and BuzzFeed found success early, building incredibly strong brands and attracting millions of readers worldwide with a business model that emphasized creating content for advertisers, they have recently encountered difficulties. According to a report by the Financial Times, the American giant BuzzFeed cut nearly one third of its UK staff in a recent reorganization (Bond, 2017).

While declining revenues are causing media companies to reduce staff, another indicator of the financial instability of print and online media outlets is their growing tendency to dedicate an increasing amount of editorial space to simply generating publicity. The impact of digitization has put pressure on media outlets and their editors to be driven by click-ratios, a trend that is weakening the media presences of hard rock and metal bands, as well as those of mid-level established acts and performers on the more experimental side of the spectrum. In a recent email correspondence with an online media outlet that is one of its country’s major publications, I attempted to set up a feature for the premiere of a music video by one of the debut artists I am working with. The editors informed me that this type of feature does not attract as much of an audience as it used to, even for larger acts, and therefore the outlet was moving towards discontinuing these features. In an email correspondence with the editor-in-chief of another online media outlet with more than 1 million Facebook followers, I asked whether the outlet would be interested in writing a review of a little-known band. Even though the editor-in-chief was a great fan of that particular band and listed their debut album as one of their top 15 albums for that year,

they replied that reviews of unknown bands do not attract enough readers to warrant publication (personal communication, November 2017).

The above examples correspond with the general tendency of traditional online music media outlets abandoning features of artists and eliminating the types of features that result in low-click-ratio engagement. This leads me to ask: What kind of content provides higher click ratios? How can little-known debut bands attract a readership? Is it possible that we soon come to a point where debut bands have to pay for publicity, possibly in exchange for advertising or in the practice of “payola”?

Media editors would argue that, by presenting content with a specific “angle,” journalists can always attract a readership’s curiosity or interest. In this way, as much as editors and publicists are impacted by the pressures of the digital environment, journalists are also placed in a difficult position. In an industry where resources are shrinking, journalists’ workloads continue to grow. In order to continue this discussion of digitalization’s impact on online music media, I will therefore outline in the following section the role and current status of music journalism in the media industry.

2.4 Music Journalism

Music journalism is an integral part of the chain linking the media and music industries. Although music journalism has existed since the beginning of the print media industry, little serious research has been conducted on music journalism within academic circles. Recent publications examining the socio-cultural dynamics of music journalism, however, suggest that this trend is changing and interest in this field is growing. The fact that many universities have recently started offering music journalism as an undergraduate major also indicates an increase in interest for music journalism.

The first form of music journalism was established in the early 19th century as a form of cultural and music criticism. The *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung*, launched and run by Robert Schumann, was one of the first specialized music periodicals. The development of the newspaper industry led to cultural and music criticism becoming integrated with the media industry and being distributed for the first time in mass form. The original intent of

newspaper editors was to incorporate music into mainstream communication as a general form of entertainment, but music journalism soon developed power as a “gatekeeper” for the music industry, capable of creating trends according to the musicians it selected and the information it placed and disseminated. Music journalism’s importance rose as the music industry developed and it arguably reached its peak in the 1960s and over upcoming decades when rock and pop music “broke through” to mass media. At this point, mass media and music journalism established themselves as the legitimate gatekeepers of the music industry, while it became possible for a music journalist to attain the status of a “star.” In recent years, however, digitization has provoked drastic changes in music journalism. In the following I thus aim to investigate and present the status of music journalism and the roles and practices of music journalists within the new digital media environment.

Though music journalists have historically inherited “their own distinct professional tradition, employment conditions, goal definitions, newsroom power structures, position with corporate publishing organizations, and sources and source relations” (Forde, 2008, p.111), in the contemporary digital media ecosystem the conditions that kept in place these structures and relationships have been overturned. Some aspects of music journalism, such as its distinct professional tradition, remain; however, newsroom power structures and employment conditions in the industry have changed.

It should be noted that music journalists approach their work and are evaluated in a way that is distinct from traditional journalists. While traditional journalism requires professional qualifications, practices objectivity, and produces information-driven, descriptive reportage, music journalism involves textual and subjective interpretation and is premised on an evaluative and critical perspective. This difference in approach and evaluation may be one reason why music journalists experience higher levels of career instability and are less able to separate their working and social life than traditional journalists (Forde, 2008, p.111).

The above comparison points towards the difficulty of practicing music journalism in an environment in which traditional journalism itself is under threat. Digitization has reshaped many industries in which physical products were sold into industries in which service or

access is the main “product.” As such industries are harder to systematically monetize, salaries for workers in these industries have been spread thin. While digitization offers the utopian promise of free availability of information and content, it also operates in the realm of digital cents for its creators. According to Gambaro, financial difficulties within journalism “had – and are having – a negative impact on human resources provoking a reduction in the number of journalists and editorial staff and a degradation in job security, as well as of their financial and working conditions” (2016, p.5). Music journalists, perhaps more than others, have seen their job security and working conditions degraded.

From my perspective working as a publicist, I can confirm that the statement above accurately reflects the situation of music journalism in practice. The editors and journalists whom I work with often report the reduction of editorial space for music writing, a lack of staff, and an overload of work. The negative effects of digitization are also seen in the degradation of working conditions for music journalists:

“While for media owners the key challenge today is how to generate revenue, for individual journalists the challenge is how to build a sustainable career when there are so few full-time music editorial roles on offer. Not to mention the fact that, online in particular, a not insignificant amount of music editorial is actually the result of unpaid work” (Malt, 2017).

Digitization has thus put significant pressure on all parties involved with music journalism. It has severely disrupted the media industry’s flow of revenue and caused gradual downsizing at various levels across all the divisions of media outlets.

Contributing to the decline of music media and the diminished role of music journalism has been the development of tech platforms for music discovery such as Spotify, which have arguably taken over the gatekeeping role that once belonged to journalists. In a recent Wall Street Journal article, Shah argues that “in the streaming era, a new gatekeeper stands between record labels and listeners: the playlist professional” (2017). Following the rise of digitalization, many music journalists and radio programmers changed their career paths to work as playlist editors at Spotify, Tidal, or Apple Music. The shift towards tech platforms as gatekeepers of the music industry and the growing

importance of streaming services within that industry further put into question the role and position of music journalism today.

The lyric “video killed the radio star” is a famous homage to the theme of technological disruption that reminds us that traditional gatekeepers within the music industry have often been displaced with the advent of new technologies. However, music journalism itself has managed to sustain itself through every radical technological shift to date. One of the greatest German music critics, Joachim Kaiser (1928-2017), stated that “in a world of excessive information, music criticism has the function of absorbing some of the disinformation that overburdens the citizen” (Hochkeppel, 2017). The role of music journalist therefore persists in its essential, curative form. The claim is supported by the observation that Internet users today often need to be guided through the vast amount of information that is available and given a selection of the most interesting content. Barry Schwarz explains the principle of such a need in his book *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*: “Learning to choose is hard. Learning to choose well is harder. And learning to choose well in a world of unlimited possibilities is harder still, perhaps too hard” (2004, p.144). Confronted with “unlimited possibilities” in the music realm, the average consumer is overwhelmed with the amount of information provided, and thus allows the choices of a “moderator” to intervene.

The moderating provided by music journalists determines the media presences of artists and shapes public awareness of those artists. Music journalists’ choices are a form of public endorsement for both known and lesser-known acts. An exceptional review from a well-established, credible media outlet acts as a “sales pitch” for the artist, which becomes a valuable asset in their promotion in other forms of media, in streaming services, and for booking of live performances, the synergy of which could ultimately lead to an artist’s “big break.” Given that music consumers today tend to migrate between various platforms and music access points, it is unclear whether music journalism will continue in its role as a moderator or will ultimately change its form.

2.5 Publicity in the Music Industry

In this section, I will distinguish between the terms “promotion,” “public relations,” and “publicity,” and clarify the role of a publicist in the music industry; I will also describe the most common forms of publicity and detail the activities that publicists perform during a campaign. Although clarifying this role and job description might not seem relevant, as I find that few people outside the media or music industries understand what exactly a publicist at a record label does, I consider it important to make readers aware. In this section I will also point out the challenges that publicists, including myself, face as we serve as a bridge between industries in a state of flux.

According to Philip Kotler, “promotion includes all the activities the company undertakes to communicate and promote its products to the target market [...] and it is part of a marketing mix” (1999, p. 87). Applied to the music industry, this means that workers in promotion communicate with various outlets to create awareness about artists or their music among relevant or desired audiences as an extension of marketing efforts. According to Kotler, “public relations,” or “PR,” is a sub-category of promotion, or a part of a “promotion mix,” along with advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, and direct marketing. Although my job title is “head of promotion,” according to Kotler this title only partially applies, as my job description does not directly involve such parts of the promotion mix as direct marketing or sales promotion. However, the lines between these tasks are becoming increasingly blurred due to dynamics within an indie record label that often cause workers to perform various tasks in different divisions of the label. Public relations, according to Kotler, Wong, Saunders, and Armstrong, can be defined as “building good relations with the company’s various publics by obtaining favorable publicity, building up a good ‘corporate image’, and handling or heading off unfavorable rumors, stories and events” (2005, p. 719). The same authors add that “[m]ajor PR tools include press relations, product publicity, corporate communications, lobbying and counselling” (2005, p. 719).

While public relations form a part of promotion, publicity operates as a part of public relations. Publicity is defined as a “type of promotion that relies on public relations effect of a news story carried usually free by mass media. The main objective of publicity is not

sales promotion, but creation of an image through editorial or 'independent source' commentary. While the publicist can control the content of the story, he or she may not have any control over its placement or interpretation by the media" (Business Dictionary, 2018). The publicist controls the content of the story by helping to create it but lacks control over its placement or interpretation because the publicist does not pay anything, and since the story is placed independently by media outlets, the publicist cannot guarantee that the story will create a positive image. Publicity in media takes the form of news, reviews, features, and interviews. In what follows, both the terms "publicist" and "public relations" will be used to refer to publicity in this particular context.

A music publicist is a link and a mediator between the media and music industries, as well as a critical agent in the circulation of information. A music publicist is responsible for spreading the word about a particular artist by creating "buzz" through the arrangement of features, reviews, and interviews in the press. However, a music publicist's work differs from conventional publicity. Forde points out that "music industry press officers are occupationally and organizationally distinct from government or police press departments as their primary function is promotional and their secondary function is informational" (2001, p. 167). In the same manner, when a music publicist serves as a middleman between the music industry and radio or television, its main goal is to promote musicians. Forde also notes that PR specialists in music, "because their activities are primarily product-led rather than news-led, tend to be generally more occupationally proactive, sending material and making numerous follow-up calls to the journalists and section editors" (2001, p.167). Being proactive in various tasks is imperative for music publicists, especially in their communication with media outlets and artists. Publicists are frequently involved in every aspect of an artist's development.

A skillful or experienced publicist uses knowledge about the market, their contacts within the media industry, creativity, and branding to deliver results. An essential task of a music publicist is to identify the strengths of a particular artist – what makes the artist stand out – and develop a strategy to create publicity and press momentum for the artist. This strategy and the publicity it generates can involve the artist's brand, campaign storytelling, or an "angle" to the artist that instantly appeals to the press and public. PR campaigns

are usually adjusted and tailored to each release, taking into consideration the artist and their possible audience. From a record label perspective, a music publicist's work is closely linked to a label's marketing and distribution departments, and every campaign that the label conducts is a product of their synchronized efforts. Public relations also exist as an independent business sector within the music industry, as independent PR firms often offer their publicity services for hire.

As this study focuses on print media and traditional online media, in what follows I will attempt to summarize how PR work is carried out from the perspective of the record label I am working at, with respect to these particular media channels. The process of a PR campaign around an album release starts several months prior to the album's release. The first promotional material is sent to "long lead" media or print magazines. Print magazines tend to plan their issues three to six months in advance in order to properly draft and design each issue for printing. The promotional material sent to long lead media outlets consists of watermarked WAV files (to prevent possible leaks), album artwork, the artist's pictures, and biographical information; it is usually sent via a promotional platform such as Haulix or Jukebox. The long lead times of print magazines give publicists many opportunities to follow up with the outlet and discuss with their media staff the possible publication of an interview, feature, or review. Print magazines tend to synchronize the content of their issues and features so that they correspond with upcoming releases.

The second stage of a PR campaign is sending material to "short lead" media, which includes media channels that can assess and present the material in a relatively short time-frame, namely daily and weekly newspapers and magazines and traditional online media. In PR campaigns for album releases, each time that a single (a song taken from the album) is released, a mini-campaign is launched within the general campaign. The single is usually either pitched to one online media outlet for a world-wide exclusive premiere, or to several media outlets for exclusive premieres in multiple territories. Each single is generally sent out with a press release that contains all the information the press might need in the form of text, audio-visual links, and pictures. Publicists typically send the press release to all the relevant media outlets in their contact list with the aim of getting the news featured in as many media outlets as possible.

Recent developments in the media industry, however, are causing media outlets to publish fewer features in any form – reviews, interviews, or premieres – dealing with debut bands. The explanations that media presenters tend to give for their reluctance to feature debut bands can be paraphrased as follows: “Click-ratios for debut bands are significantly lower;” “We do not get a lot of engagement;” and “We cannot prioritize debut bands.” I recently received a press release from a major online media outlet focusing on hard rock and metal that stated that, due to the hundreds of presses releases they receive on a daily basis, they will no longer take into consideration any band whose record label is not willing to support them by investing in advertising (BraveWords, press release, March 2018).

Although publicists secure independent, unpaid placement of stories, their work goes hand-in-hand with that of the marketing department of their record label. In recent years, however, investment in advertising by music industry marketing departments has declined. According to a report by the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, marketing expenditures in the music industry declined from 2.4 billion USD in 2008 to 1.7 billion USD in 2015, while in 2016, 1.7 billion USD was invested by the music industry for promotion and marketing combined (IFPI, 2018). This decline is a direct result of digitization and changing dynamics within the music industry ecosystem. At the same time as music journalism lost its status as taste-maker and gatekeeper to tech platforms, print media and its online counterparts lost leverage with advertisers to other forms of media. The respective reasons for these two developments are as follows. First, music industry revenue has sharply declined since 2012 due to digitization and the music industry’s failure to adapt, causing downsizing and cuts at various levels within the industry and weakening the influence of music journalism and marketing. Second, the rise of social media giants such as Facebook and YouTube, and of advertising platforms such as Google AdWords, have shifted the dynamics of the advertising industry. The latest reports indicate that Google and Facebook account for 73% of all digital advertising in the United States (D’Onfro, 2017). These platforms offer lower costs for advertisers and are better able to segment and target desired markets than are traditional advertising platforms.

These factors significantly impair the exchange of information and publicity between the music industry and media industry. While music marketing departments lack the resources to support campaigns, media outlets struggle with their commercial sustainability and are less willing to provide editorial space to cultural or specialty content that does not guarantee high click-ratios. It is therefore more important than ever that PR specialists develop highly creative strategies that can deliver desired results. In my experience I have observed that debut hard rock and metal acts have few chances to gain publicity in comparison with well-established and mid-level bands, and debut bands in general have fewer publicity opportunities across the board. The challenge of securing publicity against strong competition from an abundance of new releases, while editorial space declines and outlets demand high click-ratios, is a topic that warrants careful research and discussion. I therefore dedicate the following chapter to a presentation of research into this challenge and a discussion of the possibilities for improving publicity practices in the current media ecosystem.

3. Methodology: A Qualitative Approach

This chapter will describe the methodology I have applied while conducting this study and my reasons for prioritizing a qualitative over a quantitative method. According to Denzin and Lincoln: “The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency” (2000, p.8). The qualitative method thus focuses on answering the questions what, how, and why rather than answering the question how many. According to Denscombe, a qualitative approach focuses on the “experiences, opinions and feelings” (2010, p.174) of subjects with the main goal of collecting data and understanding both general and individual perceptions of the topic being researched. However, an apparent flaw of qualitative research is that, “for researchers more familiar with quantitative methods, which aim to measure something [...], the aims and methods of qualitative research can seem imprecise” (Bricki, 2007, p.2). Despite appearing imprecise, however, qualitative research can give researchers a deeper understanding of their research subject as it allows insights into the personal experiences, opinions, and motivations of the individuals studied.

Qualitative researchers also play a much greater role in their research than researchers using quantitative methods, as they mediate between the collected data and the study’s outcome; therefore, the quality of the data gathered and the ways in which the data is acquired and interpreted are highly important in qualitative research. Although in my research I encountered ample data regarding the impact of digitization on media, I found very little information related to the second area of this study – the way changes in media are affecting the media presences of debut bands in the hard rock and metal genres. Information related to debut bands and very general recommendations of what debut bands should do to get coverage were available on DIY websites geared towards musicians and PR and marketing service providers.

Because I take it to be essential that research in this field consider various issues, including the dynamics of the media and music industries, the status of music journalism, and media situation of debut acts, I have decided to adopt a qualitative approach in this study and take into account the diverse perspectives that can offer insight to my research

topic. My research aims to draw on the strengths and weaknesses of other participants in the study and their points of view, in order to gain understanding of matters related to the research topic and analyze and realize possible opportunities for debut artists and their publicists in today's media environment. Due to the specific nature of my research topic and the advantages that a holistic approach provides, a qualitative method is the most suitable for this study.

3.1 Literature Research

The study of literature is the starting point of every research process; it supplies a study with its foundation, determines the path the research will take, and provides general understanding of the subject being researched. As much academic research has been conducted in fields related to media and its development, I encountered ample information associated with the issues I wished to address; however, I found little research focused on the media presence of debut bands or the contemporary dynamics of the relationship between PR and the media and music industries. I began researching literature for this thesis by simply searching for texts through Google and Google Scholar, where I found various books and articles on the topics of media and music journalism. I also used the SAGE knowledge database and Theseus, a Finnish website for theses and online publications from the Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences. Besides obtaining general information that would form the foundation of this thesis from recognized media scholars such as Havens and Lotz, I investigated recent journal articles and reports related to my research topic. Given the fast pace and fluctuating nature of media and media studies, I attempted to take into account the most recent information and theories. Though the journal articles and reports I encountered varied in scale and approach, they proved to be very insightful and illuminating sources of information. I have worked actively with media outlets and developed knowledge of the media industry through experience as well as through attendance at various seminars and panels given by media industry professionals.

Due to the fast-changing dynamics of my field of research, I also elected to use YouTube as a source of information, and I carefully listened to recent discussions and lectures I

found there from experts in the media and music industries in various panels and conferences. Although these sources cannot be characterized as literature, public discussions featuring industry experts offered interesting and valuable insights that I took into consideration when designing this study. Given the disruptive impact that technological innovation and tech companies have had on the media industry – and their consequent importance for certain areas of my research – I also considered relevant articles and reports from tech, entrepreneurial, and business outlets. I paid particular attention to research on tech platforms in view of their particularly influential and disruptive effect on the media industry. In the process of conducting research, these various paths intersected and made possible broader knowledge of the field being researched.

While researching the above-mentioned literature, I also experienced occasionally what I call “entanglements” – moments in which I was unable to process or evaluate the importance or relevance of information. This can result from taking a broad analytical approach that requires one to process an abundance of information. As in a magazine or newspaper, the person selecting the information to be published must be a skilled editor-in-chief and cut through the irrelevant information to present readers with a well-designed text.

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

“Although interviews can be used for the collection of straightforward factual information,” writes Denscombe, “their potential as a data collection method is better exploited when they are applied to the exploration of more complex and subtle phenomena” (2010, p.174). Denscombe continues by pointing out that “if the researcher needs to gain insights into things such as people’s opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences, then interviews will almost certainly provide a more suitable method” (2010, p.174). The use of semi-structured, in-depth interviews therefore proved to be a suitable method for conducting research in this study, which deals with complex, multi-faceted issues and the experiences of various music and media industry professionals.

In designing the interview scheme, I identified two areas of research to focus on: the impact of digitization on traditional media and music journalism in general and on debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres in particular; and the factors that determine whether debut bands receive publicity within the current media ecosystem and the strategies that can be applied to improve their chances. Semi-structured in-depth interviews are traditionally carried out in a face-to-face setting. This type of interviewing facilitates interaction between the interviewer and interviewee and provides the interviewer the option of posing follow-up questions or incorporating new angles of questioning that can lead to discoveries not anticipated in the initially outlined interview design. Likewise, face-to-face interaction allows the researcher to consider and interpret non-verbal information conveyed by the interviewee. As the informants who were interviewed were spread geographically across countries and continents, a face-to-face interview was not possible in each case. According to our schedules and time-zone differences, we generally found that the most suitable means for carrying out the interviews were either a phone call or Skype.

3.2.1 Strengths & Challenges

Although I am professionally involved in the topic of this research, and I would argue that I have acquired a notable amount of knowledge and experience in this field, I was very eager to begin the process of interviewing my informants. My eagerness was due in particular to the fact that questions relating to media presence and publicity are not often addressed in the hard rock and metal community, possibly because of that community's general ambivalence towards technology and publicity.

Denscombe notes that “[w]ith semi-structured interviews, the interviewer still has a clear list of issues to be addressed and questions to be answered. However, with the semi-structured interview the interviewer is prepared to be flexible in terms of the order in which the topics are considered, and, perhaps more significantly, to let the interviewee develop ideas and speak more widely on the issues raised by the researcher. The answers are open-ended, and there is more emphasis on the interviewee elaborating points of interest” (2010, p.175). Using open-ended questions in the way Denscombe describes, I found

opportunities to pursue the ideas of my informants, raise further questions relating to my research subject, and let my informants develop new narratives and elaborate on their responses.

The main benefit of conducting these semi-structured in-depth interviews was that I gained valuable insights from the views expressed by the interviewees, while the interviewees and I mutually broadened each other's perspectives. As the informants were highly experienced professionals, they provided interesting observations related to my research topics on both a global and local scale. The most significant challenge in conducting these interviews was, in fact, preparing the interview itself including designing the questions, placing them in a meaningful order while leaving them as open as possible, and ensuring that they were free of bias or suggestion. The questions were assessed and considered from several angles, and after several drafts the interview questions were completed. The interviews resulted in dynamic conversations, as additional questions and discussions arose based on comments and elaborations by the informants. These additional points the informants made might not have always been directly related to my research focus; however, it was interesting to discuss these topics, as they contribute to a holistic view of the areas under research and can stimulate thinking about how we should assess and implement future music publicity practices.

3.2.2 Ethical Concerns

Ethical considerations are an important element of every research project. Ethics traditionally concerns morals and systems of conduct differentiating between right and wrong. A commonly accepted definition of ethics is: “[N]orms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behavior” (Resnik, 2015). To operate ethically is to respect and be aware of such norms.

In the context of my research, ethical concerns include the question of the anonymity of my informants and the possibility of disclosure of sensitive information that could affect their companies, their work, or their reputation as public figures within their communities. It is therefore crucial that I point out the high priority I have given to matters of

confidentiality in my interactions with informants. Each informant was approached carefully, and the ethical concerns mentioned above were addressed; informants were asked whether they preferred to stay anonymous or disclose their identity along with their opinions in this text. Although I would argue that the data I collected does not contain sensitive information whose disclosure should be withheld, others may interpret the matter differently; therefore, each informant was allowed to decide whether they wished to present their comments publicly.

Though I would have respected whatever decisions the informants made, I am very pleased that each of them has allowed their name to be published, as doing so indicates a spirit of openness and may give more credibility to this study. It is thus more likely that this study will be valuable to debut hard rock and metal bands seeking to educate themselves on the topics covered therein, as well as to other scholars researching in this area. It is worth noting that the informants did not stop at allowing their names to be published; when I asked them whether I could share their interviews and the valuable input they contained with an artist whom I am working with, all the informants agreed.

3.2.3 The Interview Guide

The interview was designed to include four sections and contain 13 total questions. In the first section, I asked each informant a general introduction question that was designed to give them an opportunity to present themselves, with a focus on their background, relevant experience, current position, and location.

The questions in the second section of the interview focus on each interviewee's perception of the current state of the media industry, with emphasis on newspapers, print magazines, and their online counterparts. I was interested to see how the changes to these media channels that were discussed in Chapter 2 are viewed by the industry insiders who have been directly affected by them. In particular, I was interested in my informants' opinions about their workload and working hours, the pressures shaping editorial decision-making, the emphasis on click-ratios, and the content strategies they

have chosen to adopt. During this part of the interview, questions were also directed towards the importance of these issues for debut hard rock and metal bands.

This line of questioning brought us to the third part of the interview, which involved a discussion of the current publicity models employed by debut hard rock and metal artists, the media presences they tend to result in, and the question of whether the standard PR strategies are properly tailored to the current media landscape. Similarly, I opted to ask interviewees what makes debut bands stand out in today's crowded landscape, and what kinds of strategies might be able to overcome the challenges that debut bands today face.

The fourth and final section concluded the interview with an open question giving informants the opportunity to make any additional comments they might have related to the topics discussed. The questions were carefully tailored to eliminate indications of the researcher's agenda and were designed to draw out as much as possible the informants' perspectives and opinions. The interview consisted of the following questions arranged into sections as follows:

1. Tell me about yourself (for instance, your name, age, position, location, and experience).

2. In your opinion, how does digitization influence today's newspapers, print magazines, and traditional online media? What kind of changes do you notice occurring?
 - 2.1. How would you describe the current state of the media (especially newspapers, print magazines, and traditional online media) in your country?
 - 2.2. How would you describe the current state of music journalism?
 - 2.3. What changes in media (especially newspapers, print magazines, and traditional online media) do you think will occur in the future?
 - 2.4. How can we adapt to or affect these changes?
 - 2.5. How will these changes affect the media presence of debut hard rock and metal bands, and what can we do about them?

3. How would you describe the media presence of debut hard rock and metal artists in newspapers, print magazines, and traditional online media in your country?
 - 3.1. In your opinion, what are the largest challenges that debut hard rock and metal artists experience when it comes to getting publicity?
 - 3.2. What kind of promotional strategy do you think would be suitable for overcoming those challenges?
 - 3.3. What was the most recent promotional campaign for a debut hard rock or metal band that caught your attention because of the creative approach of the campaign and not the music itself? Please describe it.
 - 3.4. Considering everything that has been previously stated, do you think that the promotional sector should rethink its overall strategy? If you do, then what would you suggest?

4. Thank you for all that valuable information; is there anything else you would like to add before we finish?

3.2.4 The Choice of The Informants

After carefully researching the relevant literature, choosing the study's methodology, and designing the interview, I proceeded to the following stage of the study, which required setting criteria for the selection of informants. Informants were selected who met the following criteria:

- has a minimum of five years of experience in the music and media industries
- is now actively working in media and/or PR
- has a strong personal relationship to hard rock and metal music

Eventually, semi-structured in-depth interview were completed with the following participants:

Kim Kelly

Kim Kelly, based in New York City, is the metal editor of Noisey/Vice USA. She was listed as one of the top 25 most important people in metal by MetalSucks in 2016. She has 15

years of experience in music media. Her articles have appeared in Rolling Stone, NPR, Spin, Pitchfork, Kerrang, and The Atlantic.

Sebastian Kessler

Sebastian Kessler is the deputy editor-in-chief of Metal Hammer Germany, the largest heavy metal and hard rock media outlet in Germany. He has been a part of the Metal Hammer team since 2007 and has over 10 years of experience in the music media industry.

Jan Schwarzkampf

Jan Schwarzkampf works as an editor of Visions, one of the most famous music magazines in Germany. Visions magazine covers a variety of music genres that span from metal, hardcore, and punk to alternative, postrock, and britpop. Jan is also a radio host at Fritz Radio, a Berlin-based rock and metal radio station. He has over 15 years of experience in music journalism and the media industry.

Barbara Francone

Barbara Francone has been editor-in-chief of Rock Hard Italy – a rock and metal magazine that is one of the largest music print publications in Italy – since 2004. After several years working for the major rock label Roadrunner Records, in 2002 Barbara started a PR and management agency called “Neecee Agency.”

Nikki Law

Based in Los Angeles, Nikki Law has worked as the head of publicity at Metal Blade Records, the largest metal record labels in the world, since October 2015. Prior to that, Nikki worked for four years as a publicist and product manager at Century Media Records.

Martin Carlsson

Martin Carlsson works as the editor-in-chief of Sweden Rock Magazine. He started his career in 1987 when he created his first fanzine. Martin has also worked as a journalist for the Swedish daily newspaper Expressen.

Philippe Jawor

Philippe Jawor is a journalist and the assistant editor-in-chief of a prominent French metal magazine. He is also a freelance photographer and has worked in the media industry for the past five years.

3.2.5 Transcription & Interview Analysis

The interviews conducted for this thesis project were recorded using a digital recording app and immediately saved and stored on Google Drive. The conversations were interesting and dynamic, and the question-and-answer format often led informants to reference earlier discussions, introduce additional topics, and share information “off the record.” All the interviews were conducted in English, which spared me from spending additional time and resources translating them. English as a language of choice did not appear to be a hindrance to any of the participants.

The interviews generally lasted between 75 to 90 minutes, which produced more than 10 hours of recorded material. Transcribing the interviews would therefore take a significant amount of time. While transcribing, I therefore decided to prioritize answers that were relevant to the research topics and not transcribe sections that did not refer to the research directly. Based on my research into transcription techniques, I initially considered using an automated transcription tool such as “Happy Scribe” to transcribe the interviews; however, the results this tool produced were not satisfying for the purposes of a qualitative research study. As a “listener” who prefers receiving information aurally, I therefore listened to the interviews and replayed the parts that I found especially interesting, taking my time to reflect on them. The texts were transcribed and analyzed simultaneously. After assessing all the interviews, I collected the most relevant parts of each one in order to present them as findings in the following chapter.

4. Findings

In this chapter, I will outline the findings taken by the in-depth semi-structured interviews with my informants. The two main areas of the interviews are: impact of digitization on print media, their online counterparts and music journalism; and media presence of debut artists within hard-rock and metal genres.

4.1 Impact of Digitization on Media

I asked my informants about the influence of digitization on today's newspapers, print magazines and traditional online media, and I got the following responses:

Barbara Francone: *"Nowadays people are always hurrying. They don't have more time to read a book, a magazine article, listen to an album [...]. They do not care more about in-depth analysis. Digital is good for our life, but maybe it does not help us to use our brain anymore. Instead of increasing culture, it increases our ignorance and makes us lazy. This is a problem that concerns not only the new generations, but also mine generation [...]."*

Sebastian Kessler: *"News travel faster, while longer in-depth-stories and -interviews struggle for the readers' attention. At the same time, what was once the "unique selling point" of magazines and publishers is now in the hands of – potentially - everybody, as nearly every fan can easily set up a blog or even webzine. Even bands and musicians are rushing ahead, posting details of the life work online, making it harder for journalists to find a unique and exclusive twist for their story."*

Nikki Law: *"I've noticed, especially in the last few years, that a lot of USA websites have moved away from "traditional" interviews and reviews; these sites are more focused on lifestyle-oriented content - usually in the form of a video or podcast, instead of a transcribed/written review, or "sensational journalism" - news stories that generate a lot of clicks and views. Some sites have also abandoned reviews completely - unless they receive exclusive content – for example, a song premiere, album stream, etc. to run alongside the review [...] Print magazines and newspapers, meanwhile, are slimming*

down their pages and content, are being released less frequently, or are going out of print entirely.”

Kim Kelly: “Print is essentially dead in terms of the American metal media. There’s Decibel, and then Revolver, with basically every other publication of note living in digital form online. When I was younger and had just started writing 15 years ago, there were a variety of metal and rock magazines to choose from; now, it’s all online, and the remaining ‘mainstream’ magazines like Guitar Player and Rolling Stone are hopeless at covering metal [...].”

Philippe Jawor: “I believe digitization tend to influence more and more print magazines and traditional online media. A simple Internet presence, with a website and/or social media is not enough anymore - you always have to come up with new formats, and once a format works, everybody seems to follow the same path [...].”

Martin Carlsson: “I worked at Expressen², I was there ‘hard-rock-metal guy’. The review section was smaller and smaller and finally was just down to reviewing Metallica. [...] For concert reviews, traditionally, you took notes, and then you would hand in a review 2 hours after the show; now, you have to sit there with your computer or phone write comments and rate every single song and they want you to blog with the readers in real-time, while at the same time you’re reviewing and watching the show. [...]

Jan Schwarzkampf: “I think that print press is always a bit late, because online media is just faster, they work on hour-to-hour basis. [...] when it comes to being informed about music, I’d say print mags are less valuable than they used to be. You don’t need to read magazines to be informed about music, you just need to be befriended with your favorite band on Facebook [...]. I used to buy Visions magazine because it had a CD, I was happy I could listen to couple of songs directly, now you wait for the new preview single to pop up on the internet, you don’t necessarily need to have print media if you want to get informed about music [...].”

The interview with each informant has been continued with the question “How would you describe the current state of the media (especially newspapers, print magazines, and

² One of the daily press outlets in Sweden;

traditional online media) in your country?”. Here’s what informants that work for print media, Barbara, Sebastian and Philippe, have stated:

Barbara Francone: *“In the last 5-7 years, newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines started to experience a big crisis. They are losing readers and are not able to find new, younger ones. They tried to be more competitive online, but they suddenly understood that Internet was killing them. Online advertising is not a good way to make money. [...] Online journalists are underpaid - or not paid at all.”*

Sebastian Kessler: *“German media landscape is changing and evolving constantly since the early 2000s. No newspaper or magazine can live without a website and at the same time, they are giving away their content for free, have to produce for different media, think about social media and video content [...] until today without a financial profitable role, even though there are several more or less successful paid models like Spiegel Online, Bild Plus. Everybody hopes to find a way to refinance online journalism without having a clear answer.”*

Philippe Jawor: *“Since my journalism studies, we’ve always heard print media is going through a very hard crisis : daily press tend to suffer a little less from the crisis since there are strong habits in the country, but we have seen many magazines simply shut down, some after a few issues, but others after years and even decades of activity; traditional online media seem to still look for the good business model, but one thing is certain, there is less and less money, so less and less qualified journalists, less and less photographers, reporters [...].”*

Following the interview structure, I asked the informants how they would describe the current state of music journalism:

Kim Kelly: *“I think it’s struggling to stay relevant and keep up with technological and societal shifts. Social media is the biggest traffic driver for online outlets, and Google and Facebook are still king. In addition, music and music knowledge is everywhere now - no longer does a fan need to dig through a dusty record bin or write letters to a friend in Chile to learn more about the genre, everything’s on Wikipedia, Metal Archives, and countless blogs [...].”*

Barbara Francone: *“A lot of things changed in the last 10 years. Firstly, it’s very hard to do it as a real job. Most part of the Italian journos are just freelancers that don’t get any money. They write about music just for passion, and maybe to get music or concert tickets for free. So we can also notice a lack of professionalism. Everybody can start his own blog and write about music. Once music press used to be a kind of oracle and journalists were a kind of “rockstars” or even V.I.P. Today a lot of readers don’t need to buy magazines anymore; they read superficially online websites and they do prefer to form their own opinion by themselves [...].*

Philippe Jawor: *“I guess we can say music journalism is in a poor state; magazines are shutting down, others are running on amateur or volunteer writers, photographers, community managers etc. to save some money. I guess everyone now can pretend to be a journalist with a blog, a YouTube channel, or even a print magazine [...], the quality is definitely going down, mainly because the audience is not willing to pay to hear/read/watch about music anymore.*

I asked my informants what changes in media (especially newspapers, print magazines and traditional online media) they think will occur in future. The responses were following:

Barbara Francone: *“I think that only the brave and the best ones will survive. But they need to rethink a little bit about their goals and their way to work.”*

Kim Kelly: *“There’s no telling what will happen to the metal media industry in the next few years [...]. I’m certain that it will always exist in some form, but whether that’s a shift back towards the underground, or a continuance of this newer upward trend towards mainstream media acceptance, I couldn’t say.”*

Sebastian Kessler: *“I think and hope that print products will survive, especially in our “special interest” segment. At the same time, the journalistic brand has to be present and available on all channels – be it the “classic” internet, social media, and in the near future - with smart speakers on the rise - even more as audio and video content.”*

Martin Carlsson: *“We are at an interesting point where people started paying for online content and I hope that the people that read print magazines will also be interested in paying for digital content [...]. But I don’t think they will want to pay for it unless you’re a*

really big media. Here in Sweden we have something called Readly [...] it's the easiest explained as "Spotify for magazines". You pay 99 kroners a month and you get to read over 2000 magazines. The problem with Spotify is, there's no a musician on the planet that can make a career solely based on revenue from Spotify. The plus for an artist is that can they can tour, they can do sponsorships, merchandising [...]. The problem for magazine is that magazine has it revenue from magazine sales.

Jan Schwarzkampf: "I think that more and more magazines will die, cause I don't see the trend towards people buying magazines and daily press. People are not interested in getting information on paper anymore. [...] I think it's also a time issue, I don't think people don't have time to read, they are too caught in timeline on their Tinder or Instagram [...]."

The interview with each informant has been continued with the interview question regarding how we can adapt or affect the change. Here is what my informants replied:

Barbara Francone: "We need to be open minded, show respect to our readers and try to offer them something different. It's necessary to intrigue people. The main problem is that we act as we'd be on 90's or 00's, but 20 years passed."

Nikki Law: "I think everyone should embrace the change [...], and realize that the "traditional" interview/review is dead, for the most part. It would definitely make my job easier and also benefit the artist if we thought more creatively about publicity. The artists that utilize social media effectively in connection with press outlets, and are willing to do "out-of-the-box" interviews on video or podcasts, usually have a lot more awareness about their album, tour [...]"

I asked my informants how these changes affect the presence of debut bands within hard rock and metal genres. The informants have stated the following:

Sebastian Kessler: "The chance for new or debut bands is, that they can build up an audience of their own nowadays - see Carpenter Brut, Greta Van Fleet, even Ghost - being featured in a "classic" medium can be kind of the coronation, or can be "scheduled" part of their puzzled way to fame. The other way 'round is hard: "only" being featured in a magazine or web magazine without creating your own buzz on other channels won't get

you far as a debut band. Relevance may be the key word – even a band needs a SEO manager, so to say.”

Nikki Law: “I think it'll become increasingly difficult to have debut bands covered by media, since videos and podcasts take a lot of time to produce - and "traditional" write-ups are usually reserved for established artists. For artists in this position, I would recommend that they focus on social media to promote their album or tour [...]. Once they've built a following on their socials, I think press outlets will feel more inclined to cover them.”

4.2 Media Presence of Debut Bands within Hard-Rock & Metal Genres

The interview with each informant has been continued with the interview question regarding media presence of debut bands within hard rock and metal genres in their respective countries.

Nikki Law: “There are some debut artists that receive a lot of coverage - but I'd say that's pretty rare. And in most of those cases, I think their popularity in the media has less to do about the music, and more to do with sensational or controversial headlines they have received.”

Barbara Francone: “Daily press doesn't care about metal & hard rock - unless you are Metallica, Kiss, AC/DC and Iron Maiden. Specialized music magazines of course try to feature also new artists, but it's almost impossible to get cover stories or big features. Also labels that invest in advertising get more - even if they artists/records is not that good [...].”

Sebastian Kessler: “Speaking for Metal Hammer - we feature unsigned newcomers on two pages every month, with one particular “demo band of the month” being introduced via interview. Also, we feature new comer voting on our website to choose bands to play on our Metal Hammer Stage at the With Full Force festival or for the opening slot at the annual Metal Hammer Awards in Berlin. Also, festivals are participating newcomer programs or setting up their own. The biggest may be Wacken and the Wacken Metal

Battle, together with the Wacken Foundation and events like they “Wacken Music Camp”. Of course, those actions are also part of the festival features in print and online.”

Martin Carlsson: *“We write about debut bands in Sweden Rock Magazine, but daily press no, unless its really hyped.”*

Jan Schwarzkampf: *“We have 7 rock and metal magazines in Germany, and in few of them, almost every debut band somehow shows up. I think there’s a good chance to get publicity and get discovered here in Germany. [...] They do not get big articles, but small articles and reviews, you can find in all the rock and metal magazines.*

In further discussion, I asked my informants to identify the biggest challenges that debut bands within hard rock and metal genres are facing regarding getting coverage. The informants have stated the following:

Barbara Francone: *“There are too many releases, so it’s a big competition, and often it won’t be won by the best ones. Money talks.”*

Sebastian identified the same challenge: *“Too many bands. The main challenge may be - being seen and heard as an unsigned newcomer band, with 200 and more label releases coming out every month.”*

Nikki Law: *“I think it’s difficult to get press outlets to cover these bands sometimes, since videos, podcasts, etc. take a lot of time to create [...] and the “traditional” write-up is becoming less common. Websites and magazines also want to cover artists that will bring them traffic/readers - if an artist doesn’t have a large fanbase, I don’t think the press outlets see much benefit in covering them [...].*

Martin Carlsson: *“Cause they are unknown and their photos suck [...] If we get great photos, we might decide pull something up just because of their photos. That is something that can change the image of the band, and that’s a small thing the bands or labels could do.”*

I asked my informants what kind of promotional strategies would be suitable to overcome above-stated issues. The informants have suggested the following:

Barbara Francone: *“If a record company truly believes in an artist, it’s necessary to invest [...] and make sure to get adverts, tour dates in the country [...]. I think that one of the record companies’ goals should be to deliver quality instead of quantity.”*

Sebastian Kessler: *“From my point of view, having a unique style in terms of music, show and outfit seems important – give the people a story to pass on, besides great and outstanding songs of course. Have music and videos ready to share. And play live, as often as you can – to reach people, to show that you can play, to get direct feedback and become better.”*

Martin Carlsson: *“You need to stand out, you need to be able to tell an interesting story. People do not want to read about ‘we formed this band this year and etc’, when you can go online and watch videos of cute cats or check what Donald Trump has done in the past 2 hours. You’re competing against so much information, you need to stand out.”*

Jan Schwarzkampf: *“They should be visible on the internet, and they should build their network. They should know themselves and think for themselves where they can fit it. [...].*

In further discussion, I asked my informants to describe the latest creative promotional strategies debut bands presented, that provided them with media coverage.

Nikki Law: *“Venom Prison is a good example of a debut band that received a lot of attention in the metal community. Since I wasn’t a part of the campaign, I can’t say what their strategy was [...], but as an outsider, it seemed that a lot of the media’s focus was on the band’s stance on contemporary issues and not so much about their music. [...] I think that if a debut band is able to generate sensational or controversial headlines - intentionally or not, the media can’t ignore them.”*

Barbara Francone: *“Speaking as a music promoter and manager, I can say that we worked very well with Ghost from the second album and Zeal & Ardor. But honestly, the latest big campaigns that I remember were the ones we did for Trivium and Airbourne during my Roadrunner years. The label used to be very innovative and competitive at that time. Nowadays I can see that the record companies are a bit lazy to find new ways to do*

promotion and marketing for a band. Times changed a lot also for them and it's time to invent new way to reach people."

Kim Kelly: *"I would have overlooked the new Ghastly album were it not for their incredible album artwork - it was truly beautiful, and blew me away, so I was even happier when I listened to the album and found out how killer they are!"*

Jan Schwarzkampf: *"Yesterday I was at a pre-listening for the new Zeal & Ardor's record at the cinema, but again, they are not a debut artist anymore [...]"*

I asked my informants whether promotional sector should rethink its strategies. The informants have stated the following:

Sebastian Kessler: *"The promotional sector has to internalize - and of course, some already did - that a simple 'Here's my band, you don't know them, but please write about it, they paid me to ask you to I'm a huge fan of their style!' doesn't really work. Try to excite the right people - to do so, you have to know who those people are/who could like this particular band - explain where the band comes from, what it has done, where they want to be – and try to find a common ground in terms of promotion and timing. It's not cool for a journalist or medium to publish a review three months after the release, same goes for video clips and news. Think crossmedial, give journalists and fans a story to tell and to follow on different platforms, that's quick and newsworthy, fun-to-read-stuff for online news and features, and exclusive stories for print."*

Nikki Law: *"Yes, publicity needs to be re-tooled. As I said [...] it would definitely make my job easier - and also benefit the artist - if we thought more creatively. The artists that utilize social media effectively in connection with press outlets, and are willing to do "out-of-the-box" interviews on video or podcasts, usually have a lot more awareness about their album, tour, etc."*

Barbara Francone: *"Yes, of course. But we need a lot of money to do that. Selling records is very hard and often record companies are not brave enough to invest. It's very important to coordinate with label managers, distributors and outlets [...]. You also need to be present on the road – street-team, collaboration with rock clubs and pub, organize*

in store signing sessions, meet & greet with competition winners [...]. The record company or PR agency needs to be well known on the territory [...].”

The last, but not the least question was whether my informants had anything else to add before we finish. Philippe replied with a smile: *“sorry for all the pessimism”*.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings presented in the previous chapter as they relate to the theoretical and practical focus of this project outlined in Chapter. 2. The analysis of the interviews I conducted generated enough data to better understand the changing dynamics of music media within select markets; however non-substantial differences were noted in tendencies across different markets.

5.1 The Digital Impact on Media: Current State & Future

The data that I gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with industry professionals closely corresponded to the information that I had encountered in my research and outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Both indicated that media outlets are struggling to develop profitable business models as new media platforms evolve and the ways we consume content undergo radical changes.

The information I gathered in interviews indicates that the fast pace of life and the corresponding speed with which information is circulated and consumed is creating a highly competitive environment for newspapers and magazines. The increased speed of consumption is affecting attention spans and prompting average consumers to avoid information that is viewed as too thorough, making it difficult for newspapers and magazines to maintain readerships. Likewise, as Sebastian pointed out, the ability to write and disseminate information that was once one of the “unique selling points” of traditional media is now available to almost everyone. In an environment where potentially everyone is a publisher, achieving exclusivity requires additional effort. This is seen in the trend of online music media outlets abandoning reviews and exclusive premieres, except in the case that an additional angle or story can be introduced to give the article an air of exclusivity. Furthermore, my informants indicated ways in which digitization is impacting traditional media content and its corresponding forms of publicity. Based on current trends in the media industry, the majority of those interviewed predicted that, in the future, traditional forms of publicity such as reviews might be abandoned as a form of artist presentation.

However, digitization and monetizing difficulties are not the only causes of crisis in the media industry; the traditional business-to-client (B2C) transaction model that media outlets have long used has been redefined. With music available across various platforms and artists accessible to fans through social networks, fans can now find music and information about their favorite artists, and even communicate with the artists, without the mediation of traditional media channels. Digitization has created an ecosystem in which the traditional lines and channels of communication are blurred. At a panel at the by:Larm festival in Oslo in March 2018, Noisey/Vice UK's editor-in-chief Tsepo Mokoena stated: "Artists do not need media support anymore in order to break. It is really bad for my job as an editor, but that's the reality" (Mokoena, personal communication, 2018).

Although one might wish to blame consumer ignorance and new, "digitized," behavioral patterns for the decline of newspapers and magazines, health and convenience are also motivating changes in consumption patterns. Though we live in an era of "skip" and "scroll" commands that allow us to ignore unwanted information, a recent study conducted by researchers at the University of California-San Diego indicates that we are inundated daily with the equivalent of 34 gigabytes of information (Bohn, Short, 2012). Considering the amount of information the human brain thus receives on a daily basis, it should not surprise us that consumers avoid in-depth information in traditional, text forms. Nikki noted how this trend is now affecting publicity practices: "[A] lot of USA websites have moved away from 'traditional' interviews and reviews; these sites are more focused on lifestyle-oriented content – usually in the form of a video or podcast, [...] or "sensational journalism." However, as this shift towards audio and video content is not merely a result of consumers' ignorance or information overload, it should not necessarily be viewed negatively. As humans process visual information 60,000 times faster than text information (Pant, 2015), one could argue that digitization has provided us with content in the formats that are easiest for us to understand – audio and video. Based on these observations, we should expect the tendency towards audio and video presentation in online media to continue. In addition, as market segmentation and a growing variety of media outlets make it harder for music media and journalism to deliver their messages, both the content and format of those messages will become increasingly important.

The information that I gathered in interviews suggests that media professionals generally expect the newspaper format to continue to decline as digitalization progresses, and also believe that editorial spaces for music will continue to decrease as competition for various types of features or publicity increases, possibly prompting significant changes in the structure of publicity. According to Martin, in 2005 there was one page in *Expressen* wholly dedicated to rock and metal coverage, while now matters are completely different. In the new music and media environment, it appears that hard rock and metal might become underground genres that only are covered in rock and metal media outlets. One of the many indicators that rock is slowly but surely slipping out of the mainstream is the removal of the “Best Rock Song” category from the most recent Grammy Awards Show broadcast (January 2018).

Music journalism evolves according to developments in the media industry and shares the media industry’s business models. Presumably, the current fluctuations in the media industry will prompt more changes to the format and content of music journalism. However, innovative formats and sensational titles are not the only ways for music journalism to attract audiences. The vocalist of a metal band from Kristiansand once told me, “I’ve never been to Tromsø, and I have nothing to do with Tromsø – but I read iTromsø because of their journalists” (Personal communication, October 2017). An informant, Kelly, expressed a similar notion regarding reviews. The most creative writers and music journalists are able to attract diverse audiences because of their writing style, no matter the content of the writing itself. However, whether such journalism persists, and in what form, remains to be seen.

5.2 Media Presence of Debut Bands Within Hard Rock and Metal Genres

Based on the information I gathered in my interviews, it is clear that debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres are confronting a media ecosystem in flux, and traditional modus operandi, strategies, and campaign plans will need to be adjusted if these bands will continue to secure publicity.

Although the current media environment allows publicity to reach wider audiences in order to create awareness about bands, media presence in its traditional form has proved difficult to obtain in comparison with its availability a decade ago. As Martin stated:

“Ten years ago, I did a review [...] for Expressen, and it actually changed the bands career [...]. It helped changed the perception of the band. Today, a review in a major Swedish newspaper like that wouldn't be able to change the perception of a hard rock/metal band [...], the impact is not the same.”

My interviews indicated that one of the key ways debut bands find success is by building a community around themselves. Building a community begins with defining the goals and purpose of the community, and then crafting a compelling story to promote this purpose that can easily be shared across media platforms. It also appears increasingly important that bands be vocal about topics they are passionate about besides their music. In an era of information overload, my informants argued that bands and their PR teams should focus their publicity efforts on bands' genuine qualities and passions, and consider ways bands can relate to and engage with potential audiences. Rather than trying to “sell” their music through different platforms, bands should aim to produce engaging content that conveys a strong message, belief system, or philosophy to their audiences.

In this vein, branding is an integral part of communication in the current media environment. It is integral that artists have a well-defined brand core and image. If the core values of the artist's brand are, for instance, humor, integrity, or “daring to be different, the artist's image and communications should faithfully communicate these values. By remaining loyal to their core values, a band can craft a compelling narrative around themselves and gain audiences through brand recognition.

Artists should also consider adopting what Nikki referred to as “out-of-the-box” campaigns. In Chapter 2, I explained what traditional publicity campaigns involved. “Out-of-the-box” campaigns distinguish themselves by introducing novelty in the presentation of an artist and their release. One of the bands signed at Indie Recordings, Halcyon Days, before starting the campaign for their album due in June 2018, performed a metalcore cover of one of the most popular Norwegian songs of 2017, “Bængshot” by Linda Vidala. Though the band recorded the song while having “late night fun in the studio with guitars

and a bottle of Jägermeister” (quote by the band) and only intended to put it on YouTube, after an internal discussion we decided to pitch the song to the Norwegian national radio station P3. The song received airplay on the show of one of P3’s most popular hosts (Ruben Show, P3) and received over 100,000 listens (RadioMonitor, February 8). Though covering a song itself is not novel, the metalcore version of “Bængshot” was interesting enough to increase coverage of the band and earn them significant publicity through Norwegian national radio. Although the band had already released an album and received airplay on P3, this “out-of-the-box” approach that began in “late night fun in the studio” significantly added to their exposure and helped them reach many new listeners.

Content strategies that have aided debut bands’ media presences thus include “out-of-the-box” campaigns, branding, and building communities. Related to the notion of building a community is the practice of supporting other bands who occupy a similar niche. At a separate panel at Music Norway Headquarters in November 2017, Tsepo Mokoena argued that shout-outs to fellow artists are becoming increasingly important and may already be more relevant than support from media outlets. As traditional media spaces become less influential, shout-outs from relevant, established bands using their media-presences for promotion can be highly valuable for debut acts. Media cooperation between artists is not new; however, in view of the decline of artists’ leverage with media outlets, cooperation and mutual support between artists is increasingly important for spreading awareness about new and little-known acts.

5.3 What Can We Do to Utilize the Current Ecosystem & Improve Media Presence of Debut Artists within Hard rock & Metal Genres

Although a cursory view might suggest that the music industry is finally beginning to develop a new and stable business model (though such an analysis would ignore how this model undercuts artists’ compensation), it is clear that the media industry (or at least the print media, magazine, and traditional online media industries that this thesis focuses on) is currently very far from stable. According to the research outlined in Chapter 2 and information gathered in in-depth interviews with my informants, the media industry is struggling to develop a sustainable business model, and its future development is

uncertain. Despite this uncertainty, however, there are certain shifts and tendencies developing in media and related platforms that we can anticipate and tailor our practices to in order to maximize media presence within the current environment.

The industry professionals I interviewed indicated that, besides having great new bands and music, record labels and PR professionals should redefine their strategies for creating awareness about the bands they represent. Based on their insights, I propose the following formula that debut bands and PR workers can use to orient their campaigns:

B – C – I – C – B – I

This formula represents a strategy consisting of branding, community, investment, creativity, boldness, and interconnection.

Branding: As discussed in the previous section, branding relates to the presentation of a band's image and values. It differentiates a band from the crowd and articulates a unique selling point (USP). As Sebastian mentioned, "having a unique style in terms of music, show and outfit seems important – give the people a story to pass on, besides great and outstanding songs of course." Branding, as much as music, can impact audiences on a physical and emotional level, create an image or feeling in their minds, and produce an identification of the band with a particular idea or concept. Although many bands' brands are expressed in a sound that is easily recognizable, given the number of active bands and amount of new music released every week, there is a high chance that one band's music will sound much like another band's. A well-designed brand, however, is unique, can represent a band consistently, and will distinguish the band from its peers. It differentiates the band at the same time as it attracts listeners who share the band's values. Every artist today should consider the core values around which they wish to build their brand. Even as artists evolve musically, adopt new sounds, and reach new fans, their brand should continue to convey the same core values

Community: This aspect of the formula is closely related to branding, as community ideally builds on particular values of a band apart from their music. Communities are built around common interests; therefore, bands and PR specialists should foster the building of community by defining interests the band shares with other bands and audiences, with

the band's music being only one aspect of their interests. Raising issues that the band is passionate about and introducing topics that resonate with the band members will attract like-minded audiences – or it may even engage audiences with contrary opinions who are willing to enter into a discussion. In building a community, taking a stance on certain issues might polarize potential audiences; being polarizing, however, has proven very advantageous in publicity, since artists who provoke strong opinions create buzz around themselves both as musicians and public figures. Taking a public stance also provides bands the opportunity to talk to their audiences about topics they really care about and not only about themselves. In building a community, bands can leverage social media organize live meet-ups and keep dialogue with their fans open and sincere by consistently asking questions, expressing opinions, and encourage discussion. As media presence today is a key tool that can help artists break through, building a loyal community can dramatically help artists achieve success. Likewise, communities can help artists build relationships with other artists and develop networks of mutual support.

Investment: At a time when up to 50 albums are released each week in the metal genre alone, and media outlets are continuously less willing to feature debut artists who do not promise advertising, it is increasingly important that labels adjust their marketing and promotional budgets to more effectively support artists. As Barbara mentioned in our interview, “[i]f a record company truly believes in an artist, it’s necessary to invest.” Record labels should focus on the quality of their artists rather than quantity and adopt an “all-in” strategy to support their best acts. Though focusing investment on top-quality artists increases short-term financial risk not doing so in order to run a larger number of mediocre campaigns with lower returns on the label’s investment could be a losing strategy in the long run.

Creativity: This aspect of the proposed formula is related to the overall content strategy that a band presents during and after a campaign. Content strategies should engage audiences, entertain them, and motivate them to join a band’s community. However, in light of the vast amounts of publicity content published on the Internet today, debut artists and their PR representatives should pursue more novel, “out-of-the-box” approaches. To do this they should follow the latest content strategy trends. The content strategy for every

band will differ according to the band's brand values and community interests. To design an out-of-the box content strategy, bands and their PR teams should aim to create potentially viral content that entertains and engages audiences while remaining loyal to the band's values. Video or audio of a band performing a cover of another artist, competing in a guitar battle with another band, or of band members playing "name that song" are examples of engaging content that are rarely seen from most bands. Creative content strategies are not limited to content published online, either. Live shows and tours should also be viewed as opportunities for bands and PR workers to apply their creativity and develop their brand and community by making a strong impression.

Boldness: According to the industry professionals I interviewed, making statements on a contemporary issue can propel a debut band into the media spotlight. There is a trend in music media of artists finding success for being vocal about issues that are very important to them. Similarly, artists belonging to strong communities have power, as they can raise questions and address issues in their communities, and possibly then disseminate their views on a wider scale. In the hard rock and metal genres in particular, artists often challenge mainstream culture, systematic thinking, and religious dogmas (Christian metal excluded). In today's society, however, the number of controversial issues open to challenge and opinion is growing. Bands that vocally express bold, progressive, but conscientious views that correspond with their core values will generate support within their community and, very likely, in the wider media. Bands that leverage their communities to generate attention and action around important issues also have the potential to improve people's lives.

Interconnection: I use this term to refer to all aspects of the formula listed above in connection with one another. Given the competitiveness of the music industry today and the difficulty debut bands face in establishing their media presence, it is important that bands and their PR teams use all the tools and networks available to them. Contemporary debut artists and the record labels promoting them should combine all aspects of the above strategy to give bands the best chance of success. They should establish a brand that conveys the band's core values, develop a community around common interests, invest assertively in each band that deserves attention, pursue creative content

strategies, and boldly air bandmembers' views about controversial issues; these strategies together can help bring bands into the media spotlight.

5.4 Conclusion

With this thesis, I have explored and attempted to identify the way the dynamics of the media industry have been influenced by digitization, and the impact these changing dynamics have had on the media presences of debut bands within the hard rock and metal genres.

According to the information I have gathered through research of relevant literature and interviews with music media professionals, the forms of media I have chosen to focus on (newspapers, print magazines, and their online counterparts) have been challenged by a general shift in consumption habits and the difficulty of developing a feasible business model in the new media environment. Although this paper cannot guarantee how the media industry will evolve in the future, the research and interviews conducted for this project indicate that closures of print magazines are likely to continue, which means that the media space traditionally available to music publicity will be significantly reduced. While general-interest newspapers might not decline to the same extent, it is probable that representation of the hard rock and metal genres in this media form will continue to decrease. Newspapers, print magazines, and their online counterparts will need to update their business models and find ways to monetize their products; at the same time, we can anticipate changes in the way media is presented, in the content selected for feature stories, and in the formats that media is consumed in.

These changes will directly impact music publicity practices and raise questions about the strategies that record labels should adopt to promote the releases of their debut albums. In spite of radical shifts in the ways media and music are consumed, publicists tend to operate according to the same strategies that were used two decades ago. The publicist's role should be updated, and general strategies for promoting debut bands should be tailored to trends in the current music and media environment.

The industry professionals whom I interviewed provided suggestions for how the roles and strategies of a publicist could be updated, drawing on their own experiences. These strategies can be summarized as the interconnected use of branding, community-building, record label investment, creativity in content strategies, and bold expressions of a band's stance on contemporary issues. Applying these strategies in combination can help debut hard rock and metal bands today create awareness, secure publicity, and earn recognition.

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