

Musical artists as entrepreneurs

Assessing popular artists' brand partnerships, social media usage, and performances of identity politics

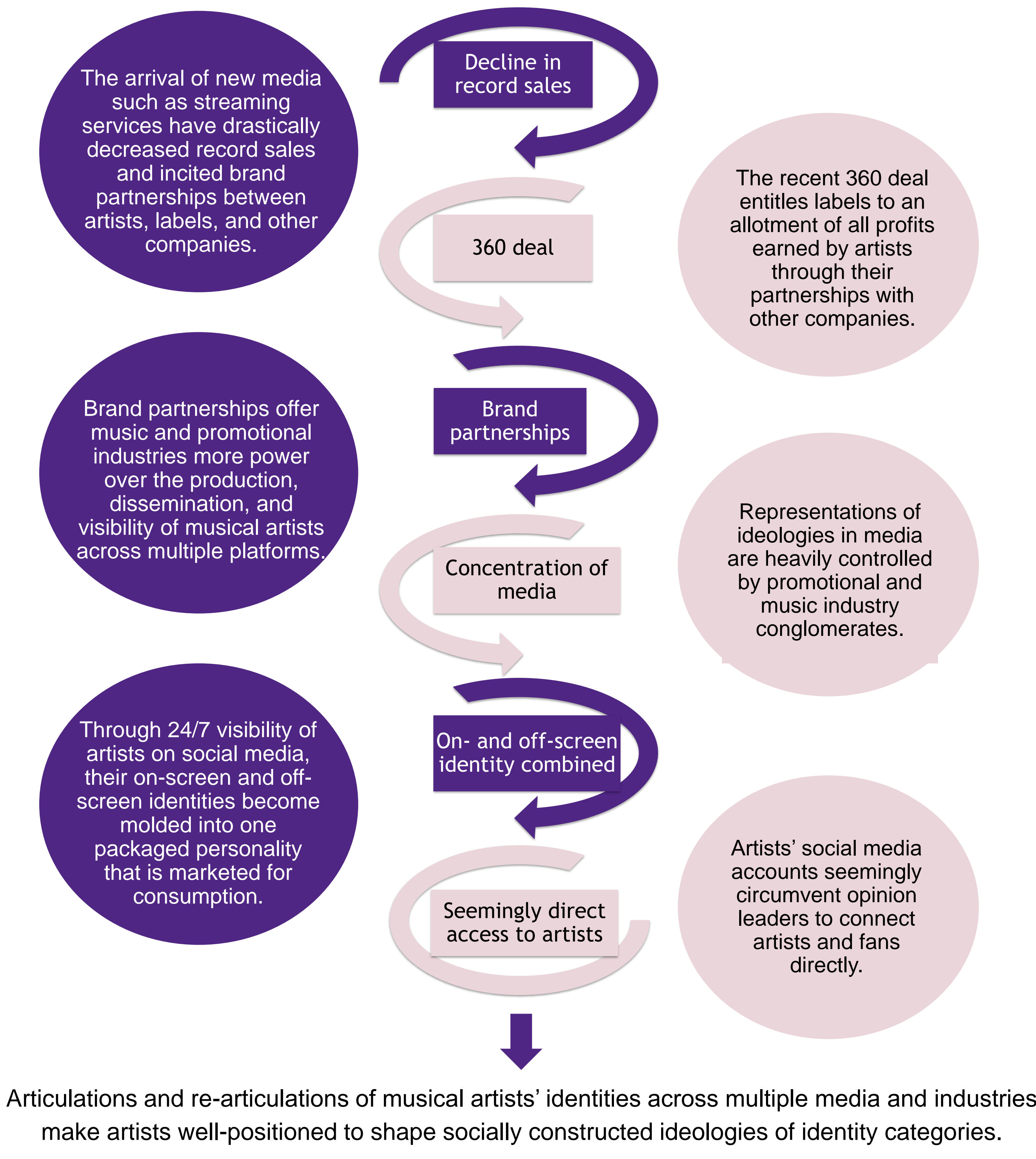
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The evolving landscape of the music industry

The emergence of new technologies and recent changes to the music industry's business model require a reevaluation of the potential power musical artists have to influence culture.



Musical artists as potential meaning-makers

As media becomes more concentrated through brand partnerships and more pervasive through social media, I wish to examine the current conditions of the music industry and their effects on artists' performances of identity politics.

Research questions

Following Dyer's (1979) theory of a 'star image' as the carefully constructed public personality of a film actor curated through multiple forms of media, I examine the *construction of musical artists' identities in today's online, branded world*.

I wish to fill a gap in the literature that explores *how musical artists' 'star images', as constructed through brand partnerships and online music videos, may offer alternative identity categories and thereby challenge dominant ideologies of identity politics*.

The exploration of the medium of 'online music videos' remains underdeveloped and so I wish to contribute to existing literature about the *changing relationships between artists and audiences, as afforded by social media*.

I will also evaluate *modern constructions of musical artists' authenticity* based on artists' performances of their star images across various platforms and industries.

Case studies: Drake, Cardi B, Post Malone

Using three case studies, Drake, Cardi B, and Post Malone, I determine how modern musical artists articulate identity categories through performances of their star images. I examine the construction of artists' star images through dominant and preferred readings of their (1) music videos (2) brand partnerships (3) social media posts and (4) self-branded commodities.



Drake
@champagnepapi

He is a multiracial rapper with several entrepreneurial endeavors outside of music, heavily focused in Canada. His music videos have frequently been the subject of processes of memeification.



Cardi B
@iamcardib

She is a former exotic dancer, self-made Instagram personality, and reality-television star, turned into a body-positive female rapper and working mother. Cardi is known for her 'Bronx-girl' antics.



Post Malone
@postmalone

He thinks "genre is stupid" and participates in many different musical styles and genres. He is often criticized for being a culture vulture by appropriating black culture.

Methodology

Through processes of articulation and re-articulation to conceptualize how meaning-making evolves from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next, I explore how musical artists represent their identities through (1) posts on their social media accounts (2) images, sounds and lyrics in their music videos (3) artists partnerships with other companies and (4) artists' self-branded commodities.

I conduct discourse analyses of YouTube and Instagram to examine their affordances and the social dynamics involved in different forms of engagements between audiences, artists, labels, and companies partnered with artists on these online platforms.

Timeline I will construct a timeline of each artist's career to determine what narratives were used to construct their star image using (1) interviews (2) performances (3) appearances on talk shows and (4) award shows.

Social media activity Though an analysis of hashtag usages, captions, and images posted on each artist's Instagram account, I determine (1) what genre artists classify themselves within and (2) what differentiators they use to appear unique.

Instagram A discourse analysis of Instagram will consider (1) interactions afforded by the platform (2) how artists engage with Instagram users and (3) how other Instagram users engage with each other.

Music videos Through an analysis of each artist's two most-viewed music videos on YouTube, I examine how artists attempt to construct their star image through complex combinations of sounds and moving images.

YouTube A discourse analysis of YouTube will consider (1) the ways in which participatory action is encouraged through practices of memeifying, commenting, sharing and liking uploaded music video files and (2) how music videos are presented in this online environment.

Brand partnerships I identify (1) what companies have partnered with each artist (2) how each artist has promoted different companies and (3) if the values of each partner company intersect or diverge with values projected by the artist's star image.

Self branded products I examine (1) what commodities each artist has created (2) what industries these products and services are produced, consumed, and circulated within and (3) how these commodities support, extend, or contradict the artist's star image.

Literature cited

Dyer, R. (1982). A star is born and the construction of authenticity. In C. Gledhill (Ed.) *Stardom: Industry of desire* (pp. 136-144). New York: Routledge.

Reinforce, complicate and resist hegemonic identity categories

I will compare and contrast the ways in which each artist navigates through music and promotional industries based on their intersectional identities to question: *how does Drake, Cardi B, and Post Malone's individual performances of race, gender, and sexuality reinforce, complicate, or resist dominant ideologies of identity categories within and outside of the traditional music industry?*