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MUSIC & ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY
EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

Journal of the
Music & Entertainment Industry
Educators Association

Volume 9, Number 1
(2009)

Bruce Ronkin, Editor
Northeastern University

Published with Support
from



MIKE CURB COLLEGE of
ENTERTAINMENT and MUSIC BUSINESS

BELMONT
UNIVERSITY

The Representation of Major and Independent Record Labels in *Billboard* Magazine

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Introduction

The portrayal of majorities and minorities by the media impacts people's attitudes and opinions, and has been a central theme of social psychology and mass media inquiry (De Dreu and De Vries 2002; Severin and Tankard 2000). When a category or group is mentioned in the media, the words and phrases used to describe that group instruct people how to think about the organization, either in direct or indirect terms (Donohue 1997). In short, "The media [influence] attitudes...by siphoning and selecting the information we receive to make choices about our day-to-day realities" (Mahtani 2001, 99).

The level of social influence of majorities and minorities is affected by their media exposure (Clark and Maass 1990; Mackie 1987; Martin, Gardikiotis, and Hewstone 2002; Nemeth, Wachtler, and Endicott 1977). The media's reporting of various groups, record labels in this research, affect the perception people have of those labels. When the activities of minority groups are over-reported, it may appear as if they have more influence than in actuality (Scott-Jones 1994). The inverse is also true of majorities. If public opinion is related to media portrayal, then the way media portray major and independent record labels results in a distorted view of the marketplace.

Research shows that the media play a crucial role in the creation of social identities (Henry and Bjornson 1999), which warrants the study of its interaction with majority and minority groups. The media are an important source of information through which individuals gain knowledge about their world, and attitudes and beliefs are shaped by what media discern as public knowledge (Oskamp and Schultz 2004).

This research examines the representation of major (majority) and independent (minority) record labels in music industry trade media. Trade media, usually in the form of magazines and newspapers, are consumed by professionals in the industry those media cover, are usually more information-oriented and less entertainment-oriented (Baumgarten 1975; Summers 1970), and are usually considered the most influential on opinion

leaders, early adopters, and taste makers, those whose opinions carry the greatest amount of influence in their respective industries. Frequency of the use of “major” and variations of “independent” are examined, as well as use of the names of the major and independent labels. The findings of this research suggest that while there may exist a level of media influence over attitudes and perceptions, these links are not pervasive throughout media portrayal of these businesses, and the reality and perception of the prerecorded music industry is usually accurately portrayed by media reports.

Majority and Minority Relationships in the Recorded Music Industry

The recorded music industry is typically divided into two segments: major and independent (a.k.a., indie). All record labels fall within one of those two broad categories. The dividing line in the contemporary recorded music industry is defined not only in terms of corporate and economic size but also by degree of control over operations (Burnett 1996). Major labels are typically considered “conservative companies” built around strict rules and sales potential, with the ability to sign more artists and spend more money on marketing and promotion than independents (Baskerville 2006, 304-305). Burnett defines major labels as those who are part of “vertically integrated multinationals” (Burnett 1996, 49), combining aspects of content production and methods of distribution, while independent labels do not typically control their delivery chains.

Independent record labels as a whole play a significant role in the music industry despite their minority market share. Christman reports that in 2005, major record labels controlled, rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent, a total of 86.9% of the total prerecorded music market (with Universal Music Group capturing 31.7%, Sony BMG Music Sales Enterprise taking 27.5%, Warner Music Group taking 17.3%, and EMI Music controlling 10.4%), leaving 13.2% (totals do not add up to 100% due to rounding) of the prerecorded music market for independent distributors (Christman, “Biz Finds Silver Lining in Year-End Sales Numbers 2006,” 10).

Although many people may not see the music business as an incredibly entrepreneurial environment, the industry has historically been rich in “opportunistic, risk-taking, and pro-active” endeavors (Wacholtz, Edwards, and Thompson 1999, 1), words usually reserved for entrepreneurial

and small-business ventures. Indeed, it has been said that small business is the lifeblood of the music industry, being “essential for nurturing talent at the lowest possible level, where sometimes just a few thousand sales can see a project break even” as well as providing the breeding ground for the next generation of big businesses (Talbot 2004, 14).

The relationship between majors and indies has been well documented (Bleakley 2005, 10; Burnett 1996; Martens, “Shades of Indie Grey: For Smaller Labels, File Sharing Isn’t Black and White” 2005, 30; Martens, “Some Rays of Sunshine Amid the Retail Clouds” 2005, 34; Martens and Christman, “Indies in a Bind: Smaller Labels are Gaining Access to Big Box Chains. Will They Turn Their Back on Old Indie Retail Friends?” 2006, 24-25; Waller 2003, 15) as a symbiotic relationship where major record label companies feed off of indies but the independent labels also use the market leverage of the major labels for their own gain. Independent labels are described as more creative and democratic than major labels (Hesmondhalgh 1998; Mabry 1990), serving as “bastions for diversity and natural homes for niche genres” (Legrand 2005, 32), and representing the market segment where musical trends begin. Major labels, on the other hand, are usually thought of as more business-driven, where musical trends are co-opted and exploited for commercial gain, and will only sign acts when the risk of failure is minimized (Papadopoulos 2004).

It has also been suggested that the dynamic between majors and indies changes as the economy changes (Legrand 2005, 32-33). Speaking of the devastating impact major label consolidation and restructuring has on label artist & repertoire, Legrand quotes European indie label group Impala’s Chairman Michel Lambot, stating, “There’s less signings, and majors also hand back a lot of recording contracts. Artists and their management are feeling quite uneasy with the whole process and are looking at indies with different eyes. They know they can achieve substantial sales with indies” (Legrand 2005, 32).

The viewpoint indie labels take is that they are able to survive and compete “in various niches, such as hip-hop or children’s music, where majors don’t dominate as much” (Waller 2003, 15). Additionally, Lesley Bleakley, Vice President of Beggars Group, an independent label group, thinks, “It’s a different feeling for an artist to be on an independent label now than it was when I first came to America seven years ago...because we do practice artist development, and we do give artists more control” (Waller 2003, 15).

The relationship between majors and indies is give and take. Independents do what they must to survive, working with or against the structure of the music industry. Legrand states, "First in the United Kingdom and France, and now across the continent, Europe's indies are taking collective action in dealing with such major challenges as access to retail markets, media exposure, and digital development" (Legrand 2005, 34). If independent labels are unable to compete successfully against major labels in the marketplace, they find ways to cooperate with the major-controlled structure. Prior to the downturn in the music industry economy, "the majors felt they were competing with the indies. Now [independent record labels are] becoming their sole method of artist development...if the little labels are so good at finding and selling music on their own, why do they need the big guys? For leverage with broadcasters and retailers" (Kafka 2004, 41).

The analysis of this research is structured around several main theoretical issues. These issues are derived from the available literature's examination of the representation of major and independent record labels, and the power that representation has to alter the public's opinion of labels.

- 1) How frequently are the labels' names mentioned and how frequently are the tags "major" and "independent" (and variations thereof) used in popular trade media?

This is of primary importance in this study, as repetition and persuasion are linked (Cacioppo and Petty 1979), but these elements have not been previously examined in a prerecorded music industry context. Independent record labels have recently constituted approximately 16% to 19% of the recorded music market: 18.6% as of May 2005 (Market Watch 2005), 17.4% in 2004 (Christman, "Numbers Look Up for U.S. Biz: Album Sales Reverse Skid in '04" 2005, 5, 59), 16.7% in 2003 (Christman, "UMG Tops Album Share for Fifth Year" 2004, 38, 40), 16.4% in 2002 (Christman, "UMVD Expands Market-Share Dominance" 2003, 1, 53), 16.7% in 2001 (Christman, "UMVD Marks 3rd Straight Year as Top U.S. Music Distributor: UMVD Leads in Total, Current Album Share" 2002, 51), and 16.6% in the year 2000 (Christman, "UMVD No. 1 In Market Share for Albums, Singles in 2000" 2001). It follows that the majority of the media focus would be on major record labels (approximately 85%), and any imbalance, such as devoting a larger percentage of articles to inde-

pendent labels, would represent a skewed media representation of the marketplace. This skewed media representation would alter the perceptions of individuals who rely on those media sources for an accurate representation of the music industry.

An additional question in this research regards the terms used to describe the attributes of major and independent record labels.

- 2) Do the media portray major and independent record labels using the same set of descriptions each time a record label is depicted?

Traditionally, independent record labels are described as the locus of creativity (Wacholtz, Edwards, and Thompson 1999), democratic (Burnett 1996), and decisive, while major record labels are thought of as more business-oriented (Talbot 2004). Media depictions (“good” or “bad,” “large” or “small,” as examples) of businesses affect the perceived influence of those entities as well (Moscovici 1976).

The Influence of Media on Tastemaker Opinion

The idea that media influence opinions and attitudes is nothing new. Even before World War II, media theorist Walter Lippmann (Lippmann 1997) suggested that people respond to the “pictures” in their heads by relating a story where the English, French, and German inhabitants of an island operated under the idea that all three nationalities were at peace with each other. In fact, World War I had made Germany enemies of France and England for over a month but the inhabitants were unaware of this because they only received news from the mainland once every six weeks via steamboat. Over twenty-five years ago, McCombs and Shaw generated the original agenda-setting hypothesis by finding correlations between media messages and audience interests in relation to the political process. In that study, they found that, “The media are the major primary sources of national political information; for most, mass media provide the best—and only—easily available approximation of ever-changing political realities” (McCombs and Shaw, “The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media” 1972, 185). This model explains the correspondence between the rate at which the media cover a topic and the amount of importance people attach to that topic. The media may not tell the public what to think, but they are able to influence what the public think about. Furthermore, research

by Behr and Iyengar suggested that television news coverage not only affected the public agenda, but that it was also unidirectional (Behr and Iyengar 1985). These concepts are important for this study because they indicate that the media influence public thought and discourse, but that public concerns do not necessarily direct media coverage.

McCombs and Evatt have given support for a second-level agenda-setting theory (that goes beyond the basic definition of agenda-setting) that includes the media's ability to tell the public *how* to think about certain objects (McCombs and Evatt, "Issues and Attributes: Exploring a New Dimension in Agenda Setting" 1995). Research by Ghanem (Ghanem, "Filling In The Tapestry: The Second Level of Agenda Setting" 1997) has identified how the use of frames (how the media tell a story and what is emphasized) and subtopics (categorizing the attributes of an issue) by media outlets shape the public's thoughts and opinions. Essentially, the media have the ability to use subtopics and frames to influence the attitude, agenda, and perception of the public who trust the media to provide accurate, unbiased portrayals of reality. When framing news stories, the inclusion or exclusion of ideas, and simplification or elaboration of connected issues, influences consumer perception (Shah, Domke, and Wackman 1996). Entman also suggested that media frames can be used to call attention to certain elements while leaving other elements out, and that, "The way a problem is framed might determine how people understand and evaluate the issue" (Entman 1993, 52).

For this research, the attributes of major and independent labels are examined in an agenda-setting context. The subtopics dimension categorizes the attributes of an issue (Ghanem, "Media Coverage of Crime and Public Opinion: An Exploration of the Second Level of Agenda Setting" 1996). As an example, Brosius and Eps in their exploration of media reporting on attacks against foreigners and asylum seekers in Germany discovered subtopics including foreigners, political action, assaults, and trials (Brosius and Eps 1994). This research examines the traditionally-conferred attributes and descriptions of major and independent record labels in actual correlation to the descriptions of major and independent record labels in music industry trade media.

Methods: Sample

Billboard magazine is seen as the primary source of information for music industry professionals and trendsetters. It is read in more than one

hundred countries and attracts more than 2.5 million unique visitors to its online component, *Billboard.com*, every month (Nielsen Business Media n.d., para. 10). For these industry-leading reasons, *Billboard* magazine is the medium examined.

The sample consists of articles from *Billboard* over a period of five years (2001 through 2005). The sample covers a specific trade medium that is available via online databases (here, EBSCO MegaFILE). *Billboard* boasts a total readership of over 104,000 people each week (*Billboard* n.d.), with many industry executives and opinion leaders among those subscribers. The volume of articles over the specified time renders a representative sample of influential industry trade media. Also, trade media are useful in this research to render a representative sample of how sources outside the businesses studied represent the businesses, as opposed to publicity press, which would be influenced by forces inside the respective business covered. A total of 745 articles and headlines were coded.

This research defines *coding unit* (the basic unit of text classified) as every article and headline with *record* or *label* as the subject term or 51221 or 51222 as the NAICS code or description, with 51221 and 51222 representing the NAICS codes for companies engaged in record production or integrated record production and distribution. The analysis is limited to those articles and headlines in order to have a more precise analysis of stories that feature prerecorded music companies.

Coding Schedule

To answer the research questions the variables must be coded in order to measure their frequency (Weber 1990). In creating category definitions, two basic decisions were made (Krippendorff 1980). First, the categories should be mutually exclusive, so that coding units with similar meaning are classified into each category, but not into more than one category. Second, a decision should be made on how narrow or broad the categories should be. The schedule used was designed to examine the research objectives.

Source Status

Major and independent representation in *Billboard* was measured using two different variables. The first concerns the use of record label names, counting each name as either a reference to a major label or independent label as defined by the *Music Industry Sourcebook* from 2000 to

2005. The second variable counted was the frequency in which the status “major,” “independent,” and “indie” were used. All label names and statuses counted were reviewed to ensure appropriate context.

Source Descriptions

The descriptions were measured by examining the terms that accompanied (within one hundred character spaces) the words “major,” “independent,” or “indie” in the headline or body of an article. As defined earlier in the research, the descriptions were placed into one of two categories: a) business related descriptions that identify the label as being more business-focused, e.g., “On Sept. 23 Arista Records will be the first BMG-owned label in the U.S. to release a *commercial* CD with copy-management technology (Garrity 2003, 10), or b) creative descriptions that refer to the innovative aspects of the record label, e.g., “...if he can maintain *creative* autonomy. Meanwhile, pursuing a fully independent path in the U.K. is Mike Stock” (Sexton 2003, 7). For each category, synonyms (as defined in Table 1) for the terms defined earlier in the research were assembled using *Roget's New Millennium Thesaurus*.

Results: Major and Independent Representation Status

After all headlines and body text were coded and all names and statuses for all independent and major labels were counted, results differed when counting all references compared to just counting the statuses. Out of all 745 articles and headlines, 7,588 names (such as Arista, Razor & Tie, and Bloody Dead) and descriptions (such as major and indie) of independent and major labels were used. Out of those 7,588 names and descriptions found, 84.2% were used in conjunction with major record labels ($n = 6,390$), while 15.8% were used to name and describe independent record labels ($n = 1,198$). These results are only a half a percentage point different than the market share held by these two opposing sections of the record industry during this time, with major labels controlling an average of 84.7% of the market share from 2001 through 2005 and indies controlling 15.3% in the same time period.

However, when counting only label status (“indie,” “independent,” and “major”) a different outcome results. Of the 1,248 occurrences of descriptions, major record labels account for only 42.3% of them ($n = 529$) and independents account for 57.6% of occurrences ($n = 719$), dissimilar from the market share over the same period.

Major and Independent Descriptions

The distribution of the source descriptions that accompany major and independent label representation is shown in Table 1. The descriptions that accompanied the major label representations were primarily business and commercial synonyms (29% and 26% of all descriptions counted, respectively). In contrast, the descriptions that accompany independent record labels referred primarily to business and originality synonyms (33% and 19%, respectively).

Regarding source descriptions considered indie-centric and descriptions considered major-centric, 287 descriptions were found describing independent labels that are also considered indie descriptors, e.g., “Artemis Records’ recent move to Koch Distribution appears to have given the

“Indie” Labels	Major Word Count	Major Percentage	Indie Word Count	Indie Percentage
Creative	387 (393)	0.3672	87 (81)	0.4478
Democratic	166 (178)	0.1575	49 (37)	0.2466
Original	783 (753)	0.7429	126 (156)	0.6340
Organic	1 (3)	0.0000	3 (1)	0.0151
Diverse	33 (39)	0.0313	14 (8)	0.0704
Niche	6 (10)	0.0000	6 (2)	0.0302
TOTALS	1376	1.0355	287	1.4441
“Major” Labels				
Conservative	21 (21)	0.0199	4(4)	0.0201
Commercial	793 (760)	0.7524	120 (153)	0.6038
Bureaucratic	54 (61)	0.0512	19 (12)	0.0957
<i>Bureaucratic Minus “Network”</i>	39	0.0370	7	0.0352
Business	888 (918)	0.8425	215 (185)	1.0768
Conventional	72 (68)	0.0683	10 (14)	0.0503
TOTALS	1828	1.7343	367	1.8466
TOTALS Minus “Network”	1813	1.7201	355	1.7863

Table 1. Independent and major description word counts.
 Note: Numbers in parentheses indicate the expected values (rounded to the nearest whole number).

4-year-old independent label a *new lease on life*” (Christman, “Downsized Artemis Begins New Era” 2003, 5), compared to the 1,376 similar descriptions used for major record labels. Thus, compared to the total number of words found in the vicinity of major and independent representation in the articles ($n = 105,400$ and $n = 19,874$, respectively), independent record labels were described as more creative and original (“indie-like”) compared to major record labels.

Additionally, major-label descriptions accounted for 367 words counted as independent-label depictions, compared to 1,813 similar descriptive words used for major record labels. Words used to traditionally describe major record labels were counted more often in relation to independent record labels (1.8466% of all words counted) than in relation to major record labels (1.7343%).

A closer examination of the independent descriptions shows that indie labels are described using those independent descriptions in every case examined except for the adjective and synonym “original” ($c^2(5) = 32.56$, $p < 0.0005$). The adjectives and synonyms for “creative” (0.4478% for indies compared to 0.3672% for major labels), “democratic” (0.2466% for indies compared to 0.1575% for majors), “organic” (0.0151% for indies compared to 0.000009% for major labels), “diverse” (0.0704% for indie labels compared to 0.0313% for major labels), and “niche” (0.0302% for indie labels compared to 0.00006% for major labels) all accounted for a higher portion of independent-label adjectives than major-label adjectives. “Original” and related synonyms accounted for 0.7429% of the major-label adjectives compared to only 0.6340% of all independent descriptions for indie labels.

Major label descriptions are more uniformly distributed ($c^2(4) = 20.62$, $p < 0.001$). The descriptions “conservative” (0.0201% for indie labels compared to 0.0199% for major labels), “bureaucratic” (0.0957% for indie labels compared to 0.0512% for major labels), and “business” (1.0768% for indie labels compared to 0.8425% for major labels) are used more often to describe independent record labels than major record labels. Alternatively, the descriptions and synonyms for “commercial” (0.6038% for indie labels compared to 0.7524% for major labels), “conventional” (0.0503% for indie labels compared to 0.0683% for major labels), and the word “bureaucratic” and related synonyms excluding “network” (0.0352% for indie labels compared to 0.0370% for major labels) are used more often to describe major labels than indie labels.

Discussion

This research unfolds some of the complexities surrounding the relationship between the media, public opinion and discourse, and reality. After analyzing the content of a major industry trade magazine, several points of interest surface regarding this research. First, major record labels are likely to be represented more often than indie labels when label names and terms “independent,” “indie,” and “major” are used (84.2% major to 15.8% independent). This is important on several levels. This shows that *Billboard* does report independent record labels as separate and distinct entities in their frequency from major record labels. Also, these results are consistent with the market share held by these two groups in the same time period, suggesting that *Billboard* magazine may accurately reflect the marketplace about which it reports without giving a false impression that independent labels hold a greater market share than they actually do. This could be for several reasons not examined in this research. As a market-driven media organization, the management of *Billboard* may feel it needs to orient itself to serve the majority of the population (major record labels) in order to maximize profit. An additional explanation could be that *Billboard*, as a news organization, naturally reflects the market it services with no preoccupation of market orientation.

The second major finding concerns the representation of independent and major record labels when only the status “independent,” “indie,” and “major” (and plural forms) are used. Over half of these words (57.6%) used in news articles are used to represent independent record labels. This result is far different from the use of proper names and statuses. This drastic difference in results indicates that while proper names are used far more often to represent major record labels (83.6%), independent record labels are seven times more likely to be represented with a basic “independent” or “indie” status. This suggests that media may treat independent record labels in a much more general, vague way than major record labels. When major record label issues are discussed, it is in the context of specific labels and names (e.g., EMI, Capitol, or Atlantic). Similar trends in minority and majority news coverage have been found in different types of media in different contexts (Taylor 2006), including sports coverage (Fullerton 2006) and New Zealand print media (Loto, *et al.* 2006). While the hegemonic viewpoint is spoken of in direct, specific terms, the minority perspective is less detailed and covered in more broad, indistinct ways. This treatment may ultimately lead to less independent label credibility

and marketplace authority in the minds of *Billboard* readers.

Third, concerning the descriptions that accompany the major-independent distinction, words typically used to describe independent record label qualities are used in *Billboard* to describe indie labels more often than major labels. Independent record labels are described using the terms “creative,” “democratic,” organic,” “diverse,” and “niche” more often than major record labels. The only indie-like word found more frequently in conjunction with major labels than independent labels is “original.” This shows that *Billboard* generally supports the commonly-held views of independent record labels as entities where artists are freer to experiment and have more voice than at major record labels.

However, the research also found that *Billboard* uses several terms usually associated with major labels in independent-label contexts as well. The words and synonyms for “conservative,” “bureaucratic,” and “business” were all found more often in the context of independent record labels than major record labels. Closer examination of the data reveals several important caveats, however. The “conservative” adjective was used only slightly more in independent-label descriptions than major-label descriptions (0.0201% for independent labels and 0.0199 for majors) by a margin of 0.0002% and meets the exact expected values in the chi-square test. This indicates that while, statistically, the word was used more in independent-label descriptions, this use is negligible.

In regards to the use of “bureaucratic,” all synonyms for this term are found more in indie-label descriptions than in major-label descriptions. However, out of all the synonyms for “bureaucratic” found, the word “network” accounted for 28% of the major-label count and 58% of indie-label synonyms. While the word “network” is a synonym for “bureaucratic,” networks and networking play a very large part in indie-label success, so the values in Table 1 are given both with and without including the “network” synonym to give a more accurate representation. A specific example concerns the MIDEM conference, an international music industry conference held yearly in Cannes, France.

“As someone who has held top positions at both indies and majors, [Bob] Frank is in a unique position to gauge MIDEM’s importance. ‘I think it’s more *important* for an *independent* to be there than it is for anybody else,’ he says. ‘I don’t think a lot of majors have a presence

whatsoever...They don't have the ability to piecemeal together a global *network* like we [independent record labels] do'" (Amicone 2002, 41).

In this context, removing the word "network" from the list of synonyms for "bureaucratic" gives us a perhaps truer picture. Without the word "network" included, the word and synonyms for "bureaucratic" are used more in conjunction with major record labels than independent record labels (0.0370% and 0.0352%, respectively).

Finally, the synonyms "commercial" and "conventional" are used more frequently to describe major record labels compared to independent record labels. Analyses of the synonyms for "commercial" indicate that the most frequently used synonyms coded were "market" (68% of "commercial" synonyms) and "sale" (25% of "commercial" synonyms). This suggests that major-label commercial endeavors *Billboard* reports on are largely market-oriented and concerned with product sales. The most frequently found synonyms for "conventional" were "expected" (43% of "conventional" synonyms) and "mainstream" (22% of "conventional" synonyms). Additionally, more synonyms were found to describe major record labels as "conventional" (9 out of 23 counted) than independent record labels (4 out of 23). Not only does *Billboard* frame major record labels as more conventional, but it also uses a wider array of vocabulary to describe the conventionality of major record labels.

These findings illustrate the types of descriptions used to represent major and independent record labels in the media. They also provide direction for future research into media framing in the recorded music industry. Further investigation into the subject should focus not only on what kinds of descriptive terms are used to define these businesses, but also what impact these descriptions have on the public's and opinion leaders' collective psyche. Additionally, the nature and categorization of the topics should increase the validity of the research topic. Longitudinal analysis of the subject matter would further help define the nature of the issue and provide a greater understanding of the interactions between the marketplace and the representative media.

This research indicates how the majority and minority positions in recorded music are reflected in the media. Notable is that major and independent record labels, as two separate groups, are reported on in almost direct correlation to their market shares (when proper names and statuses are

used). Relating this to the second-level agenda setting theory, people that read *Billboard* magazine over the time period examined consumed media that reflected the market. Over time, people may come to expect that they will be presented with media that is balanced with the market share, and this expectation may lead to a viewpoint that is skewed compared to the actual market share if *Billboard* makes changes in its reporting of major and independent record labels.

Additionally, if media consumers are affected by what they consume, then *Billboard* does have an effect on the way people view independent record labels and major record labels in general. With the more general status used to report on independent record label issues, media consumers may relate this to the market in a similar manner, generalizing indie labels while maintaining distinctiveness among major record labels. If the media can not only tell people what to think about but also *how* to think about it, then the generalizing of independent record label issues may lead to a greater trend in the marketplace as well, with the possible result of a loss of marketplace identity for independent record labels.

The media may also impact consumers' viewpoints on major and independent record labels. As illustrated in the data, *Billboard* describes indie record labels in traditional independent record label terms and major record labels in several common traditional major label terms. Ultimately, this agenda-setting control the media have may serve to keep the *status quo* in the recorded music industry by keeping the minds of the consumers focused on traditional independent/major label issues. Whereas major record labels may have sought to strive for originality and uniqueness in the marketplace in the time period examined, *Billboard's* representation of major record labels may have continued to keep the mindset of the reader oriented on traditional major-record-label values. Conversely, independent record labels may have tried to become more commercial and conventional in their operations, but *Billboard's* reporting tactics may have directed the public to focus on the standard unconventional assessments that independent record labels have acquired. Ultimately, media consumers need to be aware of instances where what is reported does not match reality.

This analysis of the representation of independent and major record labels illustrates how the media may influence not only what people think about, but also how they think about those things. With independent record labels not receiving equal coverage, this may lead media consumers

to believe indie labels are not as important or active as they really are. If the second-level agenda setting theory holds true, then public opinion and perspective are persuaded by how the media portray their subjects. That portrayal, if inaccurate, leads to an inaccurate public perception as well. With a lack of focus on specific independent label activities, media consumers may tend to regard independent labels as a collective “them” rather than consider specific actions of specific record labels. While *Billboard* may report on major and independent record labels in close proximity to their total market shares, the magazine’s portrayal of major and independent record labels may provide fuel for people’s perceptions and misperceptions of how these companies conduct business. This may perpetuate the reputation indie labels have of being creative, organic entities, which may or may not be the case. By studying how different sources of social influence act in their natural environments, we can better understand how exposure to these media may establish expectations and affect how people interact with the marketplace. Future studies may use these findings to test media theory further, and in turn extend the exploration of mass communication’s social influence.

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