

The Crossover: Evaluating Mainstream Consumption of Urban Music Concerts

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Abstract

Live music performances and concert experiences have replaced traditional album sales as revenue sources for performing artists. Digital music downloads along with free and subscription-based music streaming services have contributed to shifts in continuously increasing concert ticket prices, though the music industry is not immune to the shift from purchases of physical products (albums) to greater consumption of experiential products (concerts). These shifts have accompanied a simultaneous growth in the popularity of urban music, crossing over from predominantly African-American to more mainstream audiences. This pilot study uses an applied analytics approach to understanding influences on urban music concert success in markets not characterized by large concentrations of African-American consumers. We use traditional music business data from *PollStar*, *SoundScan*, *Billboard*, Nielsen Broadcast Data, and Performance Rights Organizations along with relevant digital and social media analytic data from Google searches, and digital music streaming to examine market specific trends.

Keywords: urban music, live music, recorded music, music business

Introduction

Live music enjoys a prominent role in the music business industry, with concert revenue replacing record sales as the primary source of revenue for performance artists. It has been suggested this shift to decline in album sales/units is attributed to illegal downloads and piracy (Kreuger 2002, 2005) and proliferation of free and subscription-based streaming services of the likes of Apple Music, Google

Play, Spotify, and Pandora.

The twenty-first century has also seen another trend ushered in to the culture of music consumption. One need only look to the unprecedented success of Beyoncé's 2018 headlining of Coachella to confirm (Hadley 2018). Urban music, typically considered to include R&B, rap, hip-hop, and neo-soul, was traditionally thought to be performed and consumed primarily by African-American (or "of color") artists and listeners respectively. The "urban" moniker for this collection of genres stems from the colloquial reference to inner cities or urban areas in American cities that were commonly characterized by higher concentrations of African-American residents as compared to whiter suburban and rural enclaves. Inner city revitalization has led to rapid gentrification in urban centers around the country where white Americans have begun to find these urban areas increasingly more attractive. So too has been the trend in urban music consumption. This category of music is rapidly becoming the largest consumed genre in music, representing significant crossover into non-African-American listeners.

Prior studies in entertainment and music marketing have explored pricing trends in concert tickets (Black, Fox and Kochanowski 2007), showing a trend in higher ticket prices offsetting the decline in revenue from record unit sales (Krueger 2005). This phenomenon is not unlike prior research exploring the shift from physical products to experiential services in other industries (Sheth and Sharma 2008). In a music industry context, album units have followed suit of physical products while concert experiences take the place of experiential services. Moreover, culturally focused research has examined the impact and influence of urban music on mainstream audiences. Yet, little research has sought to explore artist characteristics that influence consumption trends in urban music live music concerts.

Proposed Methodology

This study seeks to isolate and understand the influence of indicators of urban artist popularity on the consumption of

urban music concerts. We will leverage traditional measures of artist popularity, including unit sales and radio play using *Billboard*, Soundscan, Nielsen Broadcast Data Systems (BDS), and Performance Rights Organization (PRO) data from ASCAP, BMI, and others. Newer analytic measures of artist popularity including digital streaming, Google Search frequency, and artist YouTube views (Nguyen, Dejean, and Moreau 2014) are also included. *Pollstar* venue data for concert performance metrics of total revenue and total ticket sales in units (controlling for venue size) will be used to measure consumption.

Study 1 begins with Nashville, Tennessee as the study context, representing a live music market not historically known for urban music popularity or a large African-American population. Study 2 replicates the methodology in Memphis, Tennessee, a similarly sized and geographically located city, with a predominantly African-American population. We anticipate findings to suggest increases in artist popularity metrics will positively influence consumption of concert tickets. This would represent a 180-degree shift from the old music business model where concerts were used to promote album sales.

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Morgan M. Bryant is an Assistant Professor in the Marketing Department of The Haub School of Business at Saint Joseph's University (SJU). In this role, Dr. Bryant teaches Marketing Research, Marketing Analytics, and Principles of Marketing in the undergraduate and graduate



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Eric Holt is CEO of Chiminus Enterprises, a diverse lifestyle marketing and consulting company that is nationally recognized. He is also the Managing Partner of Chiminus' successful subsidiary concert promotions company, The Lovenoise Group. Holt earned his Bachelor of Science degree with a concentration in Communications from Howard University in Washington, D.C., and a J.D. from Nashville's Vanderbilt University Law School. Considered an expert in branding, marketing, and urban music, Holt is a regularly sought-after speaker at universities and business groups. He also consults within the entertainment industry on promotion and branding strategy.



In addition to sitting on several non-profit boards, he proudly served as a board member on Nashville's Mayor Karl Deans' inaugural Music Business Council. Holt also had the esteemed pleasure of serving as an Advisor and Diversity Committee Chair for the Nashville Chapter of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences. Most recently, Holt graduated the 30th Anniversary class at Leadership Music. At the Curb College of Entertainment and Music Business at Belmont University he specializes in Urban Music, Live Music Venues, Marketing and Promotions in his full-time role as an Assistant Professor.



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