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## **Final Reflective Paper CE**

### **1. Summary of the project that was completed**

My project revolved around a research paper/in-depth study of an emerging genre. This Genre is a relatively new segment of the Electronic Music realm, and has been coined “Future Bass”. After a lot of buzz in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2014, I wanted to see if this scene could become the next big sound, ie. the next Dubstep, or trap, or a staple like House or Techno.

This case study involved tracking more than 150 artists, collectives, and labels to measure their individual growth and paint a picture of the exploding scene. That is to say, this case study was dedicated to illustrating the metamorphosis of an underground Genre on its way to the mainstream.

This entailed tracking and monitoring various artists/labels over a period of 6 months (from December 2014 to June 2015). I selected 6 relevant geographic regions that had direct links and gatekeepers (influential artists, labels, blogs) in the scene, and had around 20 artists represented in each group. These included Australia, Canada, France, The Netherlands, UK, and USA. My goal was to get a better grasp of these movements/cultural fads – but also find the underlying drivers of success in a new digital environment. This environment has empowered and created a favorable setting for emerging artist to attain high

levels of growth, whether it is through new means of distribution, new marketing techniques, or because of new gatekeepers.

Due to the heavy quantitative data that has been compiled, I used a quantitative inductive approach (where data are used to develop theory) in order to comment on the growth of this evolving sound.

## **2. Results: how the project did/did not align with expectations**

The results of the project were quite interesting. All in all, many of the artists grew drastically across all platforms, indicative of a growing trend. To highlight some key examples, there were artists that had more than 200% growth on the combined growth index model. The artists that experienced these fast rates of growth include San Holo, Arman Cekin (NL), Oshi, Mura Masa, Troyboi (UK), Carmada (AUS), Ekali (CAN), and KRNE, Gravez, Ark Patrol (USA). The record labels/collectives that thrived were Record Record (FR), Soda Island (CAN), Bitbird, Heroic (NL), Hebinimochi, Moving Castle, and Hegemon (Worldwide).

Every region that I selected had at least one artist or label experience extreme growth (> 200%). This confirms that Future Bass is not just a localized movement, but rather a global phenomenon driven & fueled by the Internet. Moreover, based on the many averages per platform and per country, it's safe to say that there is an overall positive growth trend, with Australia and USA performing above average. Conversely, Canada and France performed below

average, while UK and Holland yielded neutral results. Lastly, 3 interesting drivers of growth have been found to increase success & inclusion amongst the Top 20%. These are the usage of **like-gating software**, being a member of an **Artist collective**/label, and **new media fluency** (in this case having Instagram).

These are the underlying drivers that have given the scene such amazing growth in such a short time period.

Regarding shortcomings, things that did not go as planned were some of the calculations. For the three tests of effectiveness, I realized that a correlation measurement (regression statistics) would have provided stronger, more reliable results. However this did not align because the School did not provide SPSS software that would be able to synthesize and process these types of statistics. Another shortcoming is that I didn't have a control Genre or something to compare the Future Bass numbers with. Instead, I largely worked within the framework of the genre, using the generated numbers to generate theory (quantitative inductive approach)

### **3. Process**

To measure the growth and evolution of the genre, I decided to start my own excel database for research collection purposes. When I started contemplating my approach, the first hurdle I had to overcome was the artist selection process. In my opinion, the best way to gage an exploding genre is to investigate it at the artist level. Since I was no expert in this new genre to begin

with, it took a long time to compile and verify all the names that I would monitor. After extensive periods searching SoundCloud and Youtube, cross referencing with blogs and charts, and exploring artist networks I completed my list.

I ended up selecting 6 regions that boasted at least 10+ relevant artists and other types of links to the Future Bass cosmos. These were Australia, Canada, Netherlands, France, United Kingdom, and the United States. All these countries have a rich music history, and in recent times have had a large influence on electronic music.

Now that the countries and artists had been selected I still needed to figure out “what” to measure. I ended up looking at all the metrics and found that more than 90% of all the artists had an active SoundCloud, Facebook, and Twitter account (the holy trio for an electronic musician). Next, the other two platforms that were frequently used were Instagram and Youtube. Thus, these became the 5 main data sources that I would track for each artist.

In terms of the time frame, I began collecting data in December, and knew that I had around a 6-month period to find trends and explore various sorts of growth. I collected and journalized the data for each social media platform, and every artist at the beginning of each month. This way I could see the incremental growth across all forms of media. Bear in mind that since the scene is still young, there were many new players that sprang up during the collection period. Thus, the list of 150 artists and labels was continually updated, with the last injection of

artists on March 1. At the end of the 6 months, I decided the best way to measure or rank the artists would be to create a combined growth index that took into account the complete growth across all platforms. The equation I used placed weights on each of the platforms, with SoundCloud receiving 50%, Twitter 20%, Facebook 20%, and YouTube and Instagram with 5% each.

To wrap up the quantitative side, I had access to the Next Big Sound database, which gave me extra layers of data such as Facebook talking about this, SoundCloud downloads, and YouTube views for selected artists (around 50% of the full excel list). I used these to cross-reference my own database and formulate some graphs for the results section. In terms of qualitative data I conducted 3 interviews with people involved in the scene including both artists and managers.

#### **4. Next steps**

The next steps of this project will be to continue the research and extend it from July – December 2015, in order to have 1 full year's worth of data. This means I can let the numbers stabilize, give the genre some more time to reach its full potential, and more accurately interpret the growth metrics. At the end of the year, I will have a pretty formed idea of what direction Future Bass is headed. I'll also have the option to make visuals or lists based on full year stats. I think blogs and media outlets will want this kind of information, and I'm pretty sure I'm one of very few people who will have 1 year's worth of research on this topic. Same

thing applies to brands, music supervisors, agencies of all kinds; I think they will cherish the chance to learn about tomorrow's next crop of artists.

Another topic of further research would be to have a something to compare the Future Bass genre too, instead of the numbers being all within the same framework. This would give me another axis to compare the Genre's evolution to something else, rather than talking about the evolution based on the growth of artists within.

Although creating a whole data set of another genre might be a colossal task, a solution could be to pick another sub-genre or experimental movement and have a smaller sample size of maybe 40 - 50 artists. I would repeat a similar methodology measuring the 5 data sources, maybe with different countries, and possibly with alternative variables.

## **5. Contribution to the discipline and profession**

As I mentioned in my project proposal, there is not enough research being done in the field of Electronic Music because it moves so rapidly. Especially if we observe genres and their classification, there is often a barrier and heaps of misinformation because of the very ambiguous nature of genres, styles, and emerging sounds. Moreover, it's really hard to continuously revise standards when so much content is being created (at professional and amateur levels). Thus with this information overload, some organization and categorization is essential for music to be properly consumed.

Therefore, by researching genres my aim was to clarify this grey area in the EDM theatre. I pretty much documented a Genre that didn't officially exist yet, and collected 6 months of data to measure its evolution. At the end of the 6 months, I'm glad to have found and validated some interesting trends and developments unique to this scene. I'm sure these developments (like-gating, artist collectives, live streaming) will soon pop up in other genres and will be applied to different types of music/entertainment.

Furthermore, I think it's valuable to find and sift through this data since the music industry is very cyclical, with trends getting recycled all of the time. With the quick pace at play (even quicker acceleration inside the EDM universe) its vital to keep tabs so that the industry can see signals/red flags once a movement reaches critical mass. I've also unearthed some of the top talent in the scene, and I'm confident that some these specimens will become the future headliners of tomorrow.

Hence, with all the data to back up these profiles, I think I have compiled an adequate list of key players that will be valuable to brands, music companies, labels should they choose to connect and engage with a younger demographic.

Given the fact that many of these artists in question are in the beginning of their careers, it is an apt time for music supervisors, publishers, sponsors, labels, booking agencies, and advertisers to get the stars of tomorrow while they are still affordable. Many companies like Red Bull and Vans like to establish long-term

relationships with young emerging artists to develop them, and “hitch a ride”.

With the size and scope of my database, I think I have more than a few relevant candidates that would excel in this profession.

## **6. Impact on the student completing the work**

This project in a nutshell has been immensely valuable in allowing me to build a framework of rising Genre. When I started, I was not an expert of Future Bass. I was comfortable with electronic music, but the evolving Future Bass sound was a mysterious animal of which I only knew the tip of the iceberg

I knew only a few musicians from select countries, and it wasn't until I started researching the artists on a macro-scale that I embraced the community. I learned a lot about the artistic side of the electronic music, since I was adamantly following these artists on a month-by-month basis. A main lesson I absorbed is that an effort should be made not only on the creative side, but also on the business end of the music creation process. The most successful artists carry this mentality, and are very entrepreneurial in their approach to marketing their releases; this means harnessing the direct-to-fan relationship and being open to new marketing tools such as Like-gating, Instagram, Bandcamp, Snapchat, and Live Streaming platforms.

Some real interesting things that I came across include that the younger artists are more adept with social media, and often have an Instagram account to show for it. For this segment of electronic music, I thought YouTube would be



more popular, however it's really only the labels and renowned artists with successful accounts. Lastly, learning about all the relevant gatekeepers (labels and collectives) in the scene puts me one step ahead of the curve. These new trends that are happening are strategies that I'll definitely be considering moving forward. I've realized I am confident that I've collected

The main thing I am really taking away from this research project is a story of growth and opportunity. Indeed, the digital age has empowered net labels and electronic artists to create, distribute, and market their music without the need of traditional labels. This has unleashed waves of creativity made possible by the online mechanisms of YouTube, SoundCloud, iTunes, Spotify and every other music tech startup from Silicon Valley to Stockholm. It's now time to catch this wave and make something of this. Thanks to this Research, I feel I have a good foundation to take advantage on the creative and business front.

## **7. Bibliography**

No direct sources were used for this Reflective Paper. For a list of sources used in the Research Process, please consult that Research Paper instead.

## **8. Appendix**

For visuals and graphs regarding the descriptive results, please resort to the extended appendix of the actual research paper.