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Reflective Report for What Tune Does the Bluebird Sing?

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## 1. SUMMARY OF PROJECT

What Tune Does the Bluebird Sing is a work of original research. In this study, I collected and examined Twitter usage and Next Big Sound data that covered 3000 professional musicians, representing hundreds of major music acts. The purpose of this study was to identify how music acts of varying genres utilize Twitter in distinct ways, and to differing effects. Finding trends in usage by specific genres, I came to several conclusions based on subjects from audience demographics and segments, technological fluency and workplace culture.

## 2. PROCESS

Conversations with several Music Business Seminar speakers—particularly Scott Cohen, Tony Woodcock and Pete Dyson—led me to question the degree of action that online social media demands of musicians in today’s attention economy. In an age where infinite information sources compete to consume the limited time of individuals, musicians of different genres behave in distinct ways across online social media. Based on these practices, certain musicians and their associated acts consistently maintain competitive advantages in attracting the eyes and ears of web users. Through a combination of personal study and participation in several courses, notably Branding, Advertising and Sponsorship, Online Social Media Management and Music, Media and Society, I became aware of strategies for engaging with specific market segments and population demographics on different platforms, devices and media. The geographic center of the UK was chosen with the purpose of focusing the study on groups popular within the UK for

purposes of the UK positions that population among the best studied national Twitter populations the world.

I selected music acts based on several factors, varying by genre. In the case of classical acts, each examined act has been any combination of the following: featured within any Billboard Charts within the last two months; been existence for an excess of fifty years; or is classified by Next Big Sound metrics as having an Established social stage. For acts of all other genres, which span all Billboard Chart-specified genres, each music act has either been featured on any Billboard Chart within the last two months or has been classified by Next Big Sound metrics as having an Epic social stage. Data on every identifiable, current member of every act from each of the following Billboard Charts, as populated of June 6, 2015 was collected for this study:

Twitter Emerging Artists; Catalog Albums; Digital Albums; Digital Music; Heatseekers; Independent Albums; Latin Albums; On-Demand Songs; Next Big Sound; Top 100 Songs; Social 50; Streaming Songs; Tastemaker Albums; Top 100 Artists; Top 200 Albums; Twitter Songs; U.K. Music/ Top U.K. Albums; U.K. Music/ Top U.K. Songs; YouTube Music; and every genre-specific albums chart (notably including Adult Pop Music & Songs and Classical).

Below is the process I took for each music act and music act member.

- Identify the presence or absence of a music act/member's publicly-visible Twitter account.

- Record the number of tweets, number of accounts followed by, number of accounts following and number of tweets favorited by each account.
- Observe the presence or absence of any account activity to declare the account active or inactive.
- Examine the content of the last six months' tweets for if the examined account Tweeted about personal, professional or both kinds of activities, in order to better understand the intended audience of each account.
- Examine the presence or absence of mentions, hashtags and replies for the examined account within the last six months, in order to establish the fluency of use with which the account user utilizes Twitter.

I created and populated a cloud-based database with this data for each act and its members. The populated data fields for this first database are the following:

Name; Twitter handle; number of tweets; number of followers; number of following; number of favorites; verified (Y/N); active/inactive; tweets contain content of a personal, professional or combined nature (E,R,B); outgoing, original account tweets contain hashtags, direct mentions, both or neither (#,@,B,N); # of unique hashtags outgoing (most recent fifty tweets only, based on software constraints); account age; number of tweets per day.

To this Twitter data, the following fields were also added and populated for each account:

Type of act (group, soloist—G/S), descriptor of account (act main, member—A/M),  
genre (multiple codes).

Finally, I added Next Big Sound metrics to the data sets for each musical act's main account row.

Based on the field, various null responses were coded and assigned to inactive and nonexistent accounts.

Through regression analysis, I isolated a number of variables that I deemed fit to exclude from my main set of findings—such as number of tweets favorited by an artist.

### 3. RESULTS

Perhaps most noteworthy of my findings is the sheer absence of classical musicians (not classical music acts, mind you) on Twitter. Out of my cleaned sample size of 505 classical musicians, 89.5% were either absent from or inactive on Twitter. With this huge void of conversation, it is understandable that classical music has a difficult time thriving in digital spaces. Classical findings were in stark contrast to mainstream pop music acts, such as Maroon 5.

#### 4. NEXT STEPS

I aim to further my culminating experience through two processes. First, I aim to expand and refine the dataset. In its current state, though very robust and appropriately representative of musicians from multiple genres, much data is unwieldy. Hashtag analysis, though incredibly interesting and potentially beneficial, is what I anticipate adding into my next study. From there, I would like to track direct mentions and a few other metrics. Much of this requires a cloud computing platform far more powerful than those I currently have access to, though.

After cleaning the dataset slight further, I intend to rewrite a version of this paper into a more digestible form that may offer more immediate insights. I would seek to publish this work in an online news source such as *Wired*.

#### 5. CONTRIBUTION TO DISCIPLINE AND PROFESSION

To date, this work represents the only recorded study—academic or otherwise—conducted of such a large number of musician Twitter accounts. This study helps affirm one very blatant truth; the classical music portion of the music industry is failing to remain relevant in digital spaces. Whether or not its target audience lies in these spaces, classical projects are often funded by governments, viewed as nonprofits and are said to increase some greater meta appreciation for music and the arts. While the heritage factor (those who grow up around classical appreciate classical) is going to remain significant to the future of this genre, major players in this field are doing very little in order to maintain their cultural import and position. I fear that widespread failure of classical musicians to adopt

digital media strategies will lead to the destruction of an historically privileged artistic space.

## 6. IMPACT ON STUDENT

I originally intended to conduct a study on the overall economic effects of policy on the U.K. music industry. After months of research and writing, I came to realize that such an endeavor would require hundreds of pages of writing, thousands of hours of work and tens of thousands of dollars to complete within such a timeframe. This project was one of my many pivots of this school year. As with my other pivots, such as the lecture that drove me toward big data analytics, I found this study to be incredibly beneficial. I have, on my own, conducted professional level research while constructing a database, cleaning my data and evaluating my overall research strategy in order to make the best message come to the top.

## 7. OTHER

All I wish I had changed about this project was the start date. I could have mapped thousands more artists with a few more months, and I could have cleaned my data to a level at which I would be comfortable to publish the paper today. More time to tell a better story of my results would also have been beneficial. Instead, I feel like much of my paper is simply a report of findings. With further analysis to come, I have no doubt that this project will to be something much more meaningful and valuable.

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## 9. APPENDICES

Based on issues of non-celebrity privacy and proprietary nature of my webscrape, I will make my dataset available by request, and separate from the submission of my thesis.

Aligned with the matters of privacy are the provision of my musician-based visualizations—again, filled with potential issues of privacy. I will make data available upon request for purposes of replicability and observational integrity, though.