



Ben Marshall
DG3S41
RESEARCH PROJECT

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KELLYS RECORDS

How can graphic design visually improve the performances of music applications as well as social interaction through music?



Introduction

Over the last decade technology has expanded vastly throughout society, with improvements through medical research, social aspects and much more.

However, through the expansion of technology there are also multiple downfalls, such as the addiction to smartphones, and the mass production of items which people could not even consider to exist twenty years ago. Through this expansion, the music industry has changed vastly, moving from vinyls and record players, to cassette tapes, CDs, and now online streaming services. Because of this update, music technology has also expanded with better AMPS, sound boards, as well as visuals at music based events, depending on what type of music is playing.

Music is the chosen topic for this project as I've had my fair experience with being in the music industry throughout my life. From a young age I've been involved with music by playing the Cello, and then by moving onto playing the Trumpet and Cornet with a welsh bras band in Cardiff, and by having the chance to perform representing Wales at an international competition.

Even though I don't play these instruments anymore, my interest in music hasn't swayed, and now more than ever have I been involved with the progression of music, getting new interests with different styles of music, and how over more recent years it has digitalised and been experimented with more than ever, with the creation of new genres and types of music being made due to technological advancements. I'd like to find out from the advancement of technology how we can keep to our roots without leaving the old styles of listening to music in the past, and to bring them with us towards the future.

Methodology

My aims for this research project is to find out how graphic design can improve the experience of music applications as well as social interaction or through online videos and streaming services, and to also find out why certain types of listening to music are still relevant. This research paper will aim find out a way of creating an improved version of listening to music via social media or through the older ways of listening to music. The way this paper will show it's aims is by creating simple objectives of research by attending live performances, which will give me my own personal experience of these visuals, while also conducting ethnography at these performances, and seeing what sort of emotions and experience people are having at these performances.

I'll also be researching online articles on music visuals, streaming services, graphic designs place in the music industry, and why venues are important for live music performances. The paper also includes a section of music history, and what technological advancements have been made to change the way we listen to music. With these research methods, I should be able to find a suitable outcome for this project, or an idea of what my final question will be as there is a chance the original research question will change sometime throughout this research project.

For the primary research of this paper, it will include interviews with users based on their experience with listening to music, be that through CDs, streaming services or vinyls. It'll also be including visits to different record stores to find out if vinyls are still as popular as they used to be; which should show an understanding on if vinyls and other forms of music are still used to listen to music.

The secondary research will consist of finding information via online articles, which will give this paper information based on statistics found online, as well as including a survey with questions based around the users experiences with music streaming services, as well as their experiences at live performances, and how they believe these events can be improved.

Primary Research

To begin with the initial research, the paper to look into why streaming services originally came about, and why they're more reliable. Coming from Vinyls, to cassette tapes, to CDs, downloading music and now streaming, its easy to see why streaming music has become such a bigger thing. It has turned into the norm now that technology has advanced over the years, and its way easier to listen to albums via Spotify rather than listening to the same album on a vinyl player, which isn't in anyway portable or useful for situations when music needs to be played on loop (going out at night, on the way to work). I decided to visit multiple record stores based around Cardiff such as Kellys Records in the Cardiff Market, and D'Vinyl Records at the top of City Road.

While visiting D'Vinyl, It is easily shown that the sale of vinyls has reduced incredibly from the amount of stock in the store. The inside is rather small and there isn't much walking space as there are stacks of boxes full of records and cassette tapes. There was also a sale going on in the store with records going for as little as a couple of pounds, which tells me that the sale of vinyls has reduced massively.



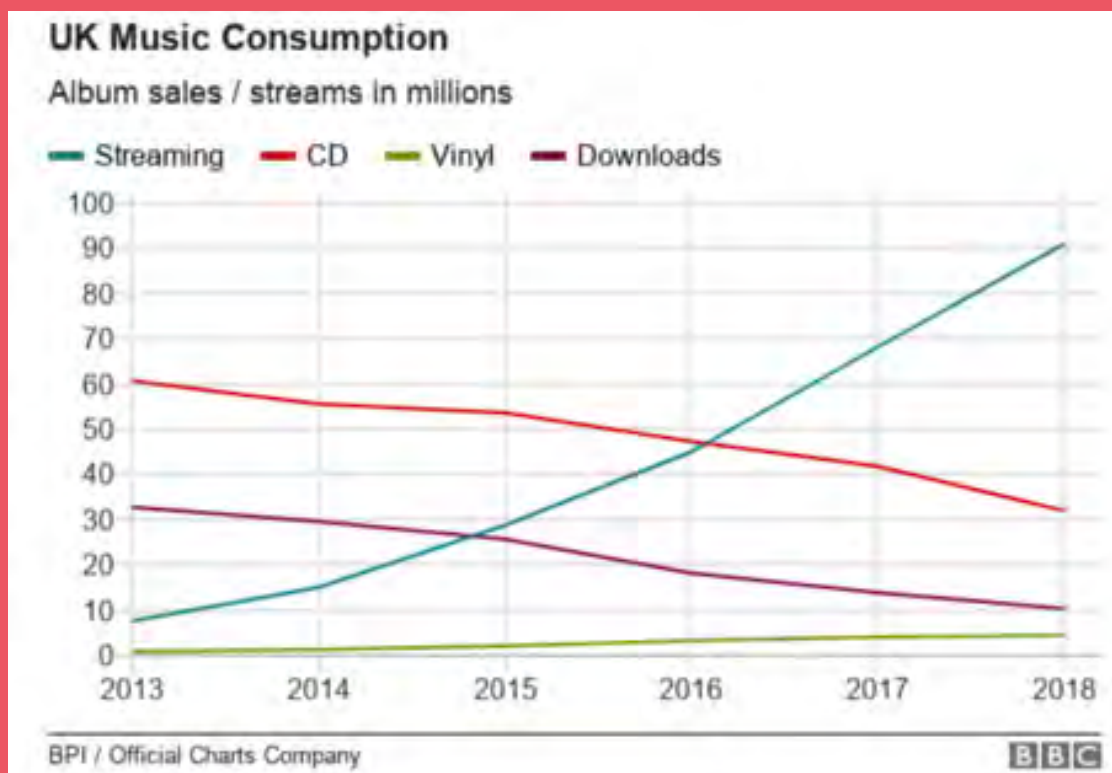
Even from this finding, one look in HMV on Queen Street Cardiff also sells vinyl records and record players, which have a higher product quality compared to D'Vinyl and The Record Shop.

Even though the quality of the vinyls in HMV are in perfect condition, they only seem to be selling more modern artists, unlike D'Vinyl where the products sold are older albums/singles from artists back before the 2000s.

Because of these findings, it is shown that records and vinyls from these different stores have their own benefits, and are only really bought for nostalgic purposes and sound quality purpose due to the advancements of technology throughout the years. Even from this evaluation, vinyls are still believed to have a form of value even though there has been a rise in streaming sales.



(BPI / Official Charts Company - Mark Savage, 3/Jan/2019)

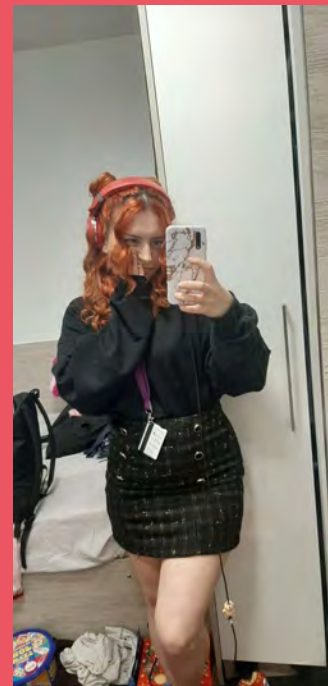


Interviews

Even with this information, interviews were conducted on peoples opinions on vinyls and record players and multiple questions relevant to why they're still classed as being important. One of the interviewees, Alisha Braund, stated that they believed that vinyls were an important part of history and are still relevant to this day. In this interview they said vinyls were the first of their kinda and gave music the ability to be played back for the users, which in itself is something revolutionary and a major part of the technological advancement of music. Alisha also said that vinyls are worth celebrating and should be kept alive, as they're a part of musical history and also contain some form of beauty to them which isn't visible when referring to cassette tapes and CDs or online streaming services.

Alisha explained that the sound vinyls create is something that cannot really be replicated, and are only really similar to live performances with quality standards compared to anything else. She also believes that vinyls are important because the music plays the way the artists intended, with all that hard work and dedication being remastered for the modern day and online streaming services can cause songs/albums to lose their original flare, which was the thing that made vinyls stand out when they were first released.

Throughout the interview, Alisha mentioned that she had a personal connecting with vinyl records due to growing up with her grandfather, who owned an extensive amount of records which she was allowed to play and listen to often, which gave her a connection to him in a different manor as she never got to meet him before he passed.



She uses vinyls as a way to comment with people around her and for those who have passed, as well as having an understanding of how music used to be played in its original form, as well as having a bigger perspective of music history through vinyls. From this part of interviewing Alisha, she shows how much of an effect vinyls have had on her life, and what effect they can have on a person if they're emotionally attached to vinyls, or if vinyls are included in activities or hobbies that they can relate with.

Throughout the rest of the interview, Alisha moves over to the aspect of online streaming and how convenient it is in everyday life, as it is easily accessible, without no electrical supply required, whereas with vinyls and record players, they are bulky, large, fragile, and aren't portable, which is why she believes that other consider them as less important.

And even though Alisha spoke about her love for vinyls, she also believes that today's society has allowed for vinyl/record stores to stay open and thriving, due to the beauty of records and what they hold towards our society, which is the reason why people continue to buy them, even if they're from old Vinyl stores or just from HMV, or even through online sales.

At the end of our interview, Alisha also went on about her love of musicals, and how they cater to keeping the industry alive by releasing vinyls of music which gets played at these musicals. This is something that she loves as it helps introduce vinyl records to those who might only listen to music through CDs, digital download or through streaming services. It'll get the users to interact more with vinyls and get them more curious to give them a go.

From this interview with Alisha, it is shown that her interest in vinyls is rather important, and her reasons for loving vinyls includes a big connection with family, as well as enjoying the quality of sound that the music gives out from the record players. She explained throughout the interview how vinyls are historically important in the music industry, and that they shouldn't be disregarded so easily, even though their sales have gradually increased. Overall from this interview, it is shown that vinyls are still appreciated and shouldn't be disregarded as a part of music history when they're still a major part of the music industry in today's society.

Bedlam, Live Event

To add to this, managed to attend a live event in Cardiff at the beginning of this research paper. At this event could easily conduct ethnography on certain people in the crowd, while also recording my own experience of the event and how I felt throughout the time there and how it could be improved for myself and others. The event was held in the Cardiff Students Union. The event lineup was mostly Drum and Bass artists such as Turno, Unglued and SaSaSaS, and because of this, the event itself had very base/heavy music and was extremely loud with a very night club like environment to it. The venue included multiple sets of strobe lights placed around the main room, with a huge screen behind the DJ set so the artists could play their videos as the night went on.

Music visuals can also be useful for those who are deaf, but would still like to enjoy the experience of the event from those visuals. They're also very important in the fact that fans would like to see more from artists rather than just seeing a standard performance, these visuals can enhance an experience at live events, as well as attracting fans towards videos with engaging cover art for online videos, as well as being on merchandise for those devoted fans.

They're also useful for catching the attention of new listeners and getting them to interact with the music via these visuals. From the rear of the venue, was the bar which had enough space for people to walk past without getting crushed into. The vibe of the event was rather hectic, but from what I could tell, it didn't really facilitate to those who had disabilities.

This experience has given more ideas towards a solution of the report, and has shown from the experience at the event that organisers need to consider more options for those who cant access these venues.

From this information, there are multiple articles online of an event created specifically for adults with leaning and physical disabilities who want to be involved at similar events.

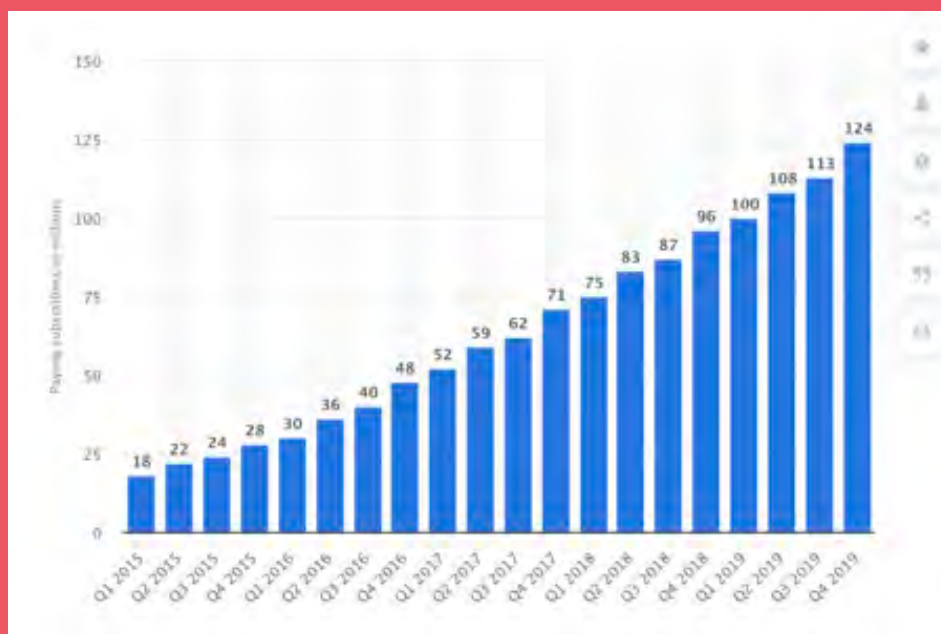
Secondary Research

Throughout the investigation, multiple online articles were used which state many reasons as to why streaming services are used more than downloaded music such as CDs and digital files. In the article “Downloading music vs streaming music: Which is best for you?” The writer states that “Streaming music is different because you don’t actually own the tracks. You listen over the internet, either through wi-fi or mobile data.” (2. Chris Smith, 28/02/2019). From experience, streaming music is more useful as it means the users don’t have to buy albums or songs. Because of this, the sales of physical music (CDs/Vinyls) have decreased, with just thirty two million CDs sold in 2018, almost 100 million less than 2008 with a drop of 9.6 million year-on-year (3. Mark Savage, 3/01/2019).

Streaming music also includes the advantages of being able to search for other songs/albums that you haven’t bought before, and can then listen to without paying for the entire song/album. So if people are looking for a change in music or want something new to listen to then its pretty useful to have, especially if you’re having mates over and want to play different genres of music. Music streaming also includes up to date songs/albums which gives the users automatic notifications or recommendations once the songs are over of things that they might listen to based on their current genres of music or playlists that they have created via the streaming service.

Because of these reasons, it seems more likely that the majority of people would rather use streaming services, instead of downloadable music via CDs and online downloads. Music streaming has also shown that music is less likely to be pirated now that most music is on these streaming services, which come at a low monthly subscription price, which also gives people more of a reason not to find these pirated songs/albums, as it’ll take more time instead of paying for a subscription.

Music streaming services are classed as more convenient rather than having to go out and buy an album from a store or online. It has been proven that the number of Spotify premium subscribers rose by 28 million users from 2018 to 2019 in the corresponding quarters of those years (4. Amy Watson, 7/02/2020). This data shows that more people are willing to pay for music services, rather than pirating music through the internet as it is more convenient based on the rising number of paid subscribers on Spotify.



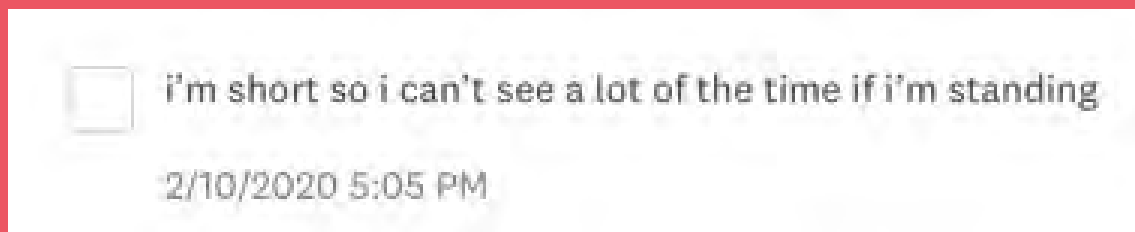
From checking out the apple music application, its very easy to notice that the app recommends music that is for the user based on what they have played, as well as what they might like to listen to in the browse section, including a radio section for different broadcasting stations and podcasts, while also including a search bar for music that the users could find if somebody had recommended a song, album or artist. Even though there are multiple advantages of streaming services, there have been multiple issues with artist payments, the amount of advertisements that happen on unpaid accounts on Spotify are also an issue, as well as the problems of music ownership which can effect artists and how much they earn from the services.

Online Survey

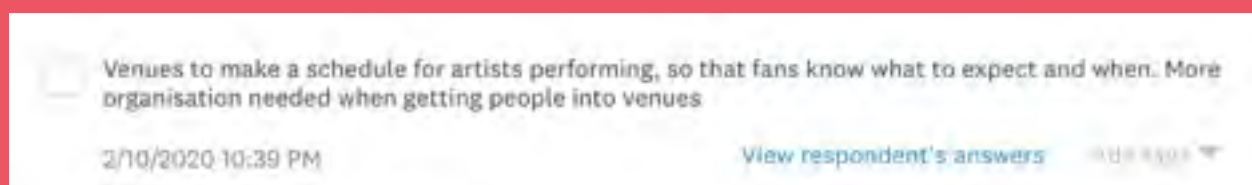
From this information I decided to create a survey based on music services, as well as live shows and events. The survey consisted of questions based around the public's experience with these services/shows, for example one of the questions is asking if the user(s) have had any issues while using these services. The majority of answers from this question are standard issues based on the services themselves such as adverts between songs, or having to use their mobile data if they aren't connected via the internet while using Spotify, even though on both Spotify and Apple Music, the users can download their favourite songs/albums if they're paying for a premium subscription to these services.

Another answer to that question was that only the most popular artists were getting the most spotlight from the app instead of newer, lesser known artists who're trying to make a name for themselves on the app. Some users have also stated that they're paying for premium accounts on these services without the music actually playing because they aren't connected via the internet or mobile data. From this problem, a useful solution to this could be that these services show which songs/albums are downloaded to your devices and which ones can only be played if they're connected via the internet, indicating to the users that they would need to download the songs from the cloud before disconnecting from the internet if they'd like to listen to these songs while offline.

One question from the survey asks about the users experience at live performances and how they believe these experiences could be improved. Many answers include reasons which cant really be sorted out with the event managers like “people being assholes at these events”, or because “i’m short so i can’t see a lot of the time if i’m standing”



Many answers to the question stated that on a few occasions that live events have been canceled, or the fact that there aren’t specific times for supporting acts which makes the event rather unorganised, especially if those trying to attend these events want to arrive at certain times based on what acts they really want to see. Many answers also include reasons to improve live events, such as “a schedule for artists performing, so that fans know what to expect and when.” or for their to be more access for those with disabilities and options for those who are noise sensitive and want to experience these events without there being any complications.



On the last question of the survey, over 85% of those who answered didn’t know how much artists actually made from these subscription services. From those answers, it seems that the public aren’t educated on how much artists make via their subscribers, which could be created into one part of an outcome.

Under One Roof

“Under One Roof is an 18+ event, and it is aimed at adults with learning and physical disabilities who want to come and party at a rave! “A lot of the people we spoke to either cannot attend club nights due to lack of physical access, or because they don’t feel comfortable or safe. We also welcome along family members, carers and friends - so everyone can attend together.”

(5. Matt Reeve & Yemaya Marsden - 10/10/2018)

The event found online focuses on those who can’t normally attend night clubs or raves. In a way this event answers one of the survey answers stating that live events should include more accessibility for those who don’t feel comfortable or can’t physically access these events. Because of this information, this gives a vague idea of what could possibly be created for a final piece towards the end of the project, which could be an event or application which is an all around music app created for everybody.



Graphic Design and Music

Graphic Design is also a large part of the music industry, especially since a large portion of album covers in recent years are created with many visual effects and seem to be created through digital manipulation, branding for the artist they're working for, advertising, etc. Using graphic design for these artists is also extremely important, as it visualises exactly what the artists music would look like from somebody else's point of view, as well as keeping to the theme the musician.

It is also used throughout music videos and has been used to get more creative with music videos. For example, a song called "Remind Me" by Röyksopp (6. Röyksopp - 28/Aug/2009) is an isometric video showing the user journey of an average person and what they do on a day-to-day basis. In the video, it explains almost everything about what the user is experiencing, and what items, devices, and objects do throughout the users day. By example, at one point in the video, it takes us on a journey on a train, but shows and labels different parts of the train journey, like going through a tunnel and what a train tunnel does, and by also showing statistics on transportation going towards work.

This video is a great example of what graphic designers have to offer towards musicians and artists, and why graphic design as a whole is essential towards the music industry, without it, these artists wouldn't be able to run their imagination for album covers or create incredible pieces of design work for musicians.

"That 'brand' defines that album and marks it in time and can be adapted for any related collateral from merchandise to marketing tied directly to that album and its associated tour."

(7. Brian Hickey - 11/02//2016 - LinkedIn)



Online Influences

Social media also has an incredible influence on the music industry. Of course there are the standard music apps like Apple Music where you can share your music with friends or people who follow your account, but on this service it isn't that obvious, and you have to go through a section of the app just to allow your account to share music with others, which in itself isn't a good user journey, while on Spotify it is way easier to share playlists with others. With the creation of social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc, it has given the chance for musicians and artists to connect with their fans, which also means that musicians can give out special offers, to announcing event for fans with the click of a button.

Using social media for music purposes is also useful for these artists to get closer to their community of fans, by seeing what they ask for, information on new music releasing, and what they can expect over the upcoming months/years.

A good example of social media and music is the popular platform known as TikTok. On this application, users can create skits with others and create videos by doing voiceovers. It also allows users to follow each other depending on how much they like their content. One very popular song "Lottery (Renegade)" by K CAMP was used on TikTok, and because of this it began to blow up on the application, which then gave the song more popularity for the artist. Many other songs have been played on this service which have "blown up" and gained a vast amount of popularity, which in term has boosted the popularity of the app, and the artists who've created the music.

This has proven that social media has a massive influence on the music industry, and how much it can effect the popularity of music, which shows why music and social media are massively important for one another, and that artists and musicians should be using social media platforms to their advantage, and not to neglect these services, especially since social media plays a massive part of our everyday lives.

Summary

Over the course of this research project, I have come to the conclusion that older styles of listening to music are still used to this day. Vinyl record sales grew, with a revenue of 12.9% in the first six months of 2019, compared to CD's which barely budged at all. Because of this finding, It is shown that even though streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music are at the height of listening to music, vinyls are still being used today, and are seen as having better sound quality, and are respected more. They're seen as an important part of our music history, and should be kept alive as they have a form of beauty towards them compared to other ways of listening to music. I have also found out that most live performances don't facilitate to those with disabilities, which completely leaves out a section of fans of musicians who cant attend events due to certain facilities.

From my secondary research, I've also found out that graphic design is an essential part for musicians and artists, and without designers to assist these people in visualising their music through videos, album covers and advertising, the popularity of songs wouldn't be as high. Designers will always be needed to help with the creation of album art and music videos. As well as if music wasn't used on social media applications, such as TikTok, more people wouldn't know about those songs. I have also found out that social media has an incredible influence on music and how it is distributed across these different platforms. What if musicians and their fans could communicate over a social platforms, while also being able to listen to their music, as well as being able to post their own work and create updates based on what they have listened to, being able to communicate with friends and sharing playlists?

Because of these findings, I have decided to change my project question; How can graphic design facilitate the needs of music influencers, as well as creating a social platform for musicians and designers to collaborate and work together?