

2) Discuss the issues raised by media ownership upon the diversity of media products and services available to audiences in the contemporary media area you have studied

The ownership of music has become a blurred subject in the digital era with copies of songs being immediately available to consume through Web 2.0 technology, it has never been easier to illegally obtain music and not pay homage to the rightful owners of the music.

Sony Corporation is a multi-media conglomerate, owning 33% of the global market share in the music industry alone. Because of this and being one of the 'Big Three' music distributors (along with Universal and Warner), they have the money and industry respect, to represent a wide ranging variety of bands and artists. They, as the label, get fees and band/artist revenue, so it could be argued that they claim the ownership of any material produced by their bands and artists.

As a conglomerate they converged and bought many smaller labels that specify in certain genres, such as deconstruction, Sony's dance/electro label and Columbia, Sony's indie/rock label. With this in mind, if it is Sony's sub-companies that manage and control the artist and oversee distribution and marketing then surely they are the true owners of the produced music. It is important to note that bands and artists represented by big conglomerates such as Sony are majorly profitable as they have the big financial backing, however, they do not receive as big a percentage of profits than a lesser known independently backed band/artist.

As such a big company, Sony are able to create methods of reducing privacy and claiming ownership over produced music. They created synergy with video streaming website YouTube to cut down on illegal/unauthorised distribution of their artist's material and said usage is immediately blocked and notified. Sony are also the forerunners of a new distribution concept 'instant pop'. This is when music is immediately available to download as soon as it has received air time. This caters for fragmented audiences who are part of the immediate consumption culture. Instead of having to turn to torrents and illegal downloads of newly released songs in order to obtain a copy, the music is available legally. In doing this the audience is respecting the rightful ownership of the songs to the artist and label. The first example of 'instant pop' is Jessie J who is managed by Sony.

A Wolf at Your Door is at a UK based indie/rock independent record label. As a small part of the 30% of global market share that independent record labels take within the overall music industry they do not have the financial or reputational comfort in the way that Sony does.

When talking to the label manager, Ian Dickinson, he said that because of the easily accessible illegal copies of music, A Wolf at Your Door suffers. As rightful owners of the music, along with the artists, they are having to resort to highly priced gigs and band/label merchandise in order to make a profit or even break even.

Last year, A Wolf at Your Door had to sell the ownership rights of one of their most profitable bands, Deaf Hevana to Sony. This exchange and recognised synergy

between Sony and smaller independent labels is beneficial to both companies who will both receive profit from this deal.

A Wolf at Your Door caters to a fragmented audience by mainly distributing digital through their own website or synergy links with distribution platforms such as iTunes and Spotify. In doing this, they can cater for a global audience, which was near impossible for independent companies decades ago who would have to pay physical distribution fees for CDs, tapes and vinyl. The readily available and more affordable digital software and technologies have been most beneficial to independent labels and have changed the way the audience consumes music. This is evident through the \$16.8 million rise in digital download sales in 2010 alone.

Overall, it is clear to see that the rightful ownership of music has been blurred in the digital era. This is damaging to all companies within the industry be it major (like Sony) or independent (such as A Wolf at Your Door). Now that audiences have many ways of obtaining music it is harder to control the profit and rightful fees that belong to labels and artists. We are no longer all consuming music purely from fixed time radio broadcasts that have to pay PRS fees to labels. So the digital era has warped our consumption of media. Be this beneficial for independent labels but also damaging to all in the industry. As Bob Dylan once said “The Times They Are A Changing”

This is a confident response, making a clear argument throughout and taking a particular slant on the question which is sustained to the end. The contrast between Sony and a UK indie is well integrated and the answer situates the workings of the industry very clearly within the digital era. Examples are apposite. Overall, all three elements are worthy of level 4.

Total Marks (44)