

INVESTIGATING THE DIFFICULTIES OF BECOMING A SUCCESSFUL R&B ARTIST IN THE UK

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Contents

2. Introduction
3. Management is stunting the growth of UK R&B artists
4. Management is stunting the growth of UK R&B artists
5. Management is stunting the growth of UK R&B artists
6. R&B ignored in the UK
7. R&B ignored in the UK
8. R&B ignored in the UK
9. UK Music Industry promoting trends rather than “real music”
10. UK Music Industry promoting trends rather than “real music”
11. UK Music Industry promoting trends rather than “real music”
12. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the US
13. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the US
14. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the UK
15. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the UK
 - How Important is the ‘Billboard 100’?
16. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Contemporary R&B
17. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Contemporary R&B
18. Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists?
 - Contemporary R&B
19. Portfolio Project Review
 - Research
20. Portfolio Project Review
 - Planning
 - Writing the articles
21. Portfolio Project Review
 - Writing the articles
22. Portfolio Project Review
 - Writing the articles
 - Ethics
23. References

Introduction

This project will broadly examine the difficulties of being a successful Rhythm and Blues (R&B) artist in the UK. The primary focus will be on the difficulties upcoming R&B artists from the UK are challenged with. In the last few decades, technology has transformed the way society consumes different types of entertainment. Traditionally, music has always been an integral part of entertainment in the UK. In today's generation, the invergence of social media and streaming platforms has increased global accessibility to genres of music. Effectively, this has had both positive and negative impacts on artists in the UK Music scene.

It's widely recognised in the UK that the influx of social media platforms has influenced the younger generations reception of music. Often, social media is used by artists and blog pages for promotions. As a result, social media has revolutionised how people are educated, informed and essentially acknowledge music. The music genre of R&B derives from America. In the past few decades, several famous R&B artists in America have achieved substantial online fame. Consequently, this has been recognised across the UK through social media. Some artists have tried to replicate this genre of music in the UK, however most haven't achieved significant success. R&B is considered a recently developed genre in the UK and it's evident in the struggles of upcoming artists.

Using a varied journalistic approach, this project aims to truly discover why it's difficult for R&B artists to achieve success in the UK. Each story will be angled differently to highlight the variety of difficulties that UK R&B artists compel against, and assess the potential future of R&B music in the UK.

Management is stunting the growth of UK R&B artists (21/03/22)

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A highly driven upcoming R&B artist from the UK says being under management is stressful. She believes most managers in the UK are more focused on themselves than the artists. Consequently, Latricia is yet to release music on any major streaming platforms. Latricia, 21, from North London was brought up in a musical household. Her mum used to sing in a group and play a lot of R&B music around the house, naturally Latricia says she “fell in love” with this genre of music since then.

Latricia makes R&B music and experiments singing other genres of music. She says “It’s really important to study different types of genres, because you can get inspiration from the different melodies they use. Sometimes, I listen to Bollywood and country music, because some of the melodies, notes and riffs they use can be imported into R&B music”. From her youth, Latricia had a long time to educate herself about music before being signed to management. This education has given her tools to become her own unique artist. As a result, her passion for music has prevented managers from influencing her sound and depriving her creativity.



Latricia admitted “the biggest problem I’ve faced in my journey is management. I’ve changed managers twice. The first manager didn’t take me seriously, because he prioritised other artists. My second manager tried to take advantage; I think possibly because I’m a young female.”

Generally, in the urban UK music scene; labels and management are male dominated. Therefore, it’s natural that work with male artists is easier for them. As a result, they often prefer to work with male artists and are effectively more useful to them.

Also, Latricia highlights that management made it difficult to release music. She says “in terms of releasing music, it was stressful as I couldn’t release on my own accord. I always had to go back to my managers. They’ll tell me I can’t release yet, because I have to go through artist development first and make sure everything’s intact.”

The majority of new artists who are signed to record labels are restricted under strict terms and conditions. The quality of music new artists make are strongly observed and influenced by the decisions of their managers. For that reason, releasing singles and albums can take a long period of time. Most of these upcoming artists have been signed due to their talent and potential. Often, this talent and potential resides in their own creativity. These artists may have been able to release a successful hit independently, however their lack of funding has prevented them from releasing. Latricia highlights that this is a problem she had faced before management.

Before management, Latricia says “I used to release on SoundCloud, I’d engineer, make beats in my room and upload.”

Soundcloud is one of the biggest music distribution platforms, because it’s free to upload and access. However, there are several profit limitations which doesn’t benefit upcoming artists. Soundcloud direct monetization scheme is only applicable to a set of qualified artists. These artists need to be a Soundcloud Pro or Pro Unlimited subscriber. The songs need to have at least 500 plays in the past month from countries where SoundCloud subscriptions and advertising are available. Therefore, plays outside of the list won’t be as accepted as part of the 500 plays. Moreover, the pay received is parallel to how much SoundCloud makes from advertising and paid subscriptions. Therefore, if their income decreases, so does yours. Lastly, you only get 55% revenue share. For new musicians, the lack of an established fanbase means the money they’d make from SoundCloud Premier would be minimal. This is a significant reason as to why Latricia went on a search for management in 2019. She suggests lack of funding is a major reason other young artists fall into the “trap” of needing a manager to help them.

Since then, Latricia has seen progress towards her goals of releasing her first single and project with new management ‘JFA Music Group’.

“This year I’m under good management, so I will be able to release a project in the summer on all popular music streaming platforms.”

Alongside releasing, they are helping to build her social publicity. She says, “we have a plan in place, the marketing side is under control. They’ll be helping me with all my social media platforms and reaching out to blog pages.”

Latricia says, “management has helped because I don’t have much knowledge of marketing, only the creative side. I can make the music, but I don’t know how to publicise it.”

In this generation, the ability to utilize social media well is crucial in becoming popular in any form of entertainment. Young people who have grown up in the age of social media are

instinctively good at using social media platforms. However, creating a professional profile and advertisement is more difficult. In the case of most big music artists, they have someone who is control of this. Therefore, it's likely that an upcoming artist who aspires to be successful will follow suit.

Latricia suggests that it's not only management holding back the UK R&B scene, but social media influence. R&B artists from the US are more prominent than in the UK. In comparison to the UK, their music is widely spread across many social media platforms. Consequently, artists who are unsigned and are searching for inspiration use ideas found online.

She criticizes the UK artists saying, "R&B singers are unsuccessful because of their pronunciation. They try so hard to sound like singers from the US, there's no type of uniqueness- everyone sounds the same."

Latricia names a few of the most popular R&B artists in the UK, "Ella Mai, Bree Runway and Jack James" and says "their uniqueness has made them popular."

Despite her controversy over the American influence on UK R&B Music, Latricia believes that America is currently the best place to be for success in R&B. She has recognised that the genre isn't popular in the UK, but is still growing and doesn't see it stopping. In the meantime, she wishes to move to the US in pursuit of achieving her goals.

"In five years, I see myself in America amongst artists such as Summer Walker. In May, I have a writing session for her. My management has a branch in the UK and a branch in the US, so I can get into the US that way."



It's evident that management is a big issue for upcoming R&B artists in the UK. Until this is resolved, the talent of these artists will be hidden for longer amounts of time. Nevertheless, artists like Latricia prove that there's hope for the UK R&B to progress in upcoming years.

R&B Ignored in the UK (10/03/22)

<https://sgentles.coventry.domains/uncategorized/rb-ignored-in-the-uk/>

“I can tell you pop artists that are at the top of the UK, but not R&B artists”.

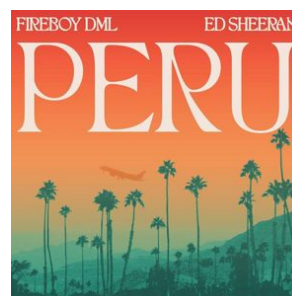
One of the UK’s top up and coming artists says it’s hard for RnB artists to break through because radio stations are only interested in playing pop music.

Alanya Renzullo, 20, predominantly sings R&B songs, however on the 7th March 2022 she released the song “Superstar” which incorporates a mixture of R&B and hip-hop. Despite previous success in the R&B genre, she had her first interview with BBC Radio two days after Superstar was released. In response to her recent success, she highlights the significance of pop music in the UK.



“I think it swings between pop and R&B. It has R&B features, but more of a pop beat. Pop is definitely the most successful genre in regards to audience size. Drill and R&B music is not on the same level, pop is part of the mainstream which is evident in radio plays. You don’t hear much drill music or R&B music on the radio,” she says.

There are several major artists that constantly feature and chart in the UK. As a result, these artists are constantly played on the radio. Currently, Ed Sheeran and Adele are among the most famous pop artists in the world and are certainly at the top of the UK pop music scene now. Ed Sheeran appears as a feature on “Peru” by Fireboy DML and that has charted at number 2 for the last 2 weeks, meanwhile his album ‘=’ is charted at number 3.



Likewise, when Adele’s most recent album initially released last year on the 2nd December, the album charted at number 2. Even three months after release, her single “Oh My God” from the album still charts in the top 25.

Alanya admits aspects of her singing is influenced by previous Hip-Hop artists.

“I don’t think my music is inspired but my sound is, I’m still a huge fan of Amy Winehouse,” she says.

Amy Winehouse had three albums which charted at number 1. Her first album “Back to Black” charted at first in 2006 and remarkably remained at the top for 6 weeks. The following year she released the deluxe edition, which also charted at the top for a week. It took another four years for one of her albums to chart at the top again. Amy Winehouse died on the 23rd July 2011, subsequently her following album “Lioness-Hidden Treasures” charted first in 2011 and remained in the top 10 for 6 weeks. During her lifespan she released six albums and three reached number 1, this is a great achievement for any artist. Her unique and powerful sound gained recognition and created an audience. However, a decade later it’s noticeable that a great sound doesn’t always put you into the public eye.

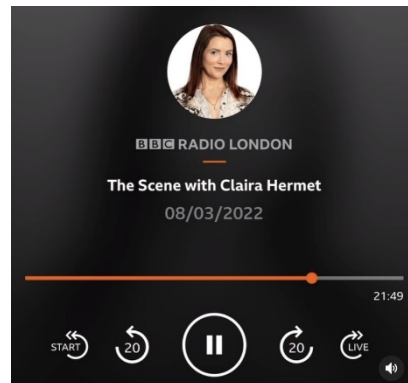


Alanya suggests that online promotion helps your music the most in today’s generation.

“I promote my music mostly on Snapchat and Instagram. Recently, I’ve started to add paid promotions. This includes google advertisement, Instagram advertisement and YouTube advertisement. TikTok is a good way to promote, it only takes one song. It’s not easy, but it’s not hard for a song to pop off. People are popping off a lot of sampled old school R&B tunes and now they’re trying to sample pop as well.”

Recently, a lot of upcoming and established artists in the UK use online advertisement to promote their music. Online platforms use device users search history and following on social media platforms to suggest music from artists who have paid for promotion. Most noticeably, TikTok has been a platform that has helped upcoming artists start their career. The music is placed behind a video of the artists choice and their sound can be used by other users. As more users add the artists sound to their videos, the outreach of the song becomes greater. In the past two years, young UK artists such as ArrDee and Aitch have developed a successful career in music. This has been done predominantly through the use of TikTok advertisement. Lately, rising artists in the UK have been sampling R&B and Hip-Hop songs from the previous decades. The majority of these are rap artists and the main idea is to create a nostalgic feeling amongst their viewers. Using sampled songs creates a wider audience as they combine two genres of music together, this shows their versatility to rap on any type of beat.

Alanya hasn't engaged in any of these trends, but her new single "Superstar" seems to be getting recognition regardless. On the 8th March, BBC Radio played her song and invited her for a short interview. She had a positive response to this new experience.



“It has encouraged me more to do music. I’m not under management or signed to a label. So, if I’m able to do that independently, then I could do a lot more under someone. A label helps you, because it’s like a bank. If I was signed, my music would pop off more as it would be prioritised and promoted more.”

There’s a lot of potential for Alanya’s career to progress from this point forth. Although, the increasing competition and popularity of other genres in the UK makes it an uncertainty. She says in the next five years she sees success as on the “radio” regularly and becoming “mainstream world-wide”.

UK Music Industry promoting trends rather than “real music”

(13/03/22)

<https://sgentles.coventry.domains/uncategorized/uk-music-industry-promoting-trends-rather-than-real-music/>

A very promising hip-hop and new school R&B artist says the UK music scene is in jeopardy because trends are preventing the creativity of artists.

Young upcoming artist from South London who is referred to by the stage name “Chainz” has found it difficult in this transitional period of UK music. Between 2018-2019 he had released 10 songs of his own; in the last 2 years he has taken a step back to perfect his sound.

Chainz says, “I took a break for various reasons, music was the damage- collateral damage. Obviously, taking a hiatus means you’re not speaking to anyone or promoting and your music will be affected by it. I had to take that time out, because you need to grow and understand what you’re currently doing and what you want to achieve.”

Many artists in the UK and globally take breaks from music due to their own personal development and circumstances. Some artists are affected negatively on their return, whereas others are shown the same or greater appreciation. Ramone Rochester, who goes by the stage name ‘Ramz’ took a hiatus in response to his depression. Ramz is also an artist from South London, he initially gained overnight success with his debut single “Barking” in 2017. However, due to depression he began to release music less often. Recently, he has started to release new music again, unfortunately his old sounds haven’t resonated with the UK audience as they did previously. His debut single “Barking” gained 15 million views on YouTube in a matter of 5 months, whereas “Supercharged” released by him 5 months ago only has 127 thousand views on YouTube. Both of these songs share a similar sound, but it’s evident that the fan base for that style of music has declined. Although Ramz’ break from music wasn’t a success, Chainz has reflected on his absence and believes that it has helped him.

Chainz admits, “I was told by someone who I grew up listening to, someone high in the music industry that I should take a break and let life run its course before releasing more music. At the time it felt like an insult, because how can you tell someone who is just starting to quit. However, being in my current position I realise that I needed a break. During that break I improved massively”.

However, the current trends existing within the current UK music scene still make him doubtful about the music he plans to release. He claims the US has a greater reception of all types of music than the UK. He dislikes the “scheme” set up by the industry in the UK.

He says, “As the US is larger, creativity is more open. In the UK, the popular music is always and only going to be a trend and once the trend is finished, you’re done. Whereas, In America there can be a trend, but R&B and other genres will always have their place to shine. A lot of discourse in the UK on social medias say I hate this kind of aesthetic or these kinds of people because recent sounds that have taken over.”

Chainz argues that conversations across social media disregarding alternative sounds, is exemplary of the public’s negative perception of new music outside of trending music. He believes that on the one hand, these social commentators are to blame. On the other hand, the industry is responsible, because “they’ve made it that way”. Artists that enter the scene with their own genuine sound are overlooked and again this is the industry’s fault.

Chainz says, “they’ve made it so you can’t have more than one trend at a time that’s popping.”

One of the most popular genres of music for the youth in the UK of the last decade has been “Drill” music. Drill originated in Chicago, but in 2012 Brixton group “67” initiated their own style of drill in the UK. As a result of their success, many groups and solo artists adapted to this new sound of drill. In today’s culture it’s evident that drill music has a substantial impact on the lives of many young people. Even though drill has lasted a decade, there’s no debate that it’s still a trend. The existing drill sound has proven a great way for many prominent UK artists to enter the music scene. Some of these artists have held great success for several years and implemented their own personal sound. However, the majority of drill artists lack versatility to enter other sub genres. Chainz blames this on those who control the music industry, especially record labels.

“The labels are exciting artists and telling them to continue making the same sound, because the artists have achieved success with that sound. They are creaming the money out, oversaturating the market and leaving them there. It happens with most labels in our culture, because we don’t have any quality control.”

A significant amount of UK artists had limited longevity in the UK music scene as they can only perform one type of sound. Consequently, they are dropped by their labels and the labels recruit newer artists who can produce the current popular sound. Most often, this occurs with teenagers and young adults as Chainz states they are “easily influenced” by the fast money and fame.

“A lot of people lose their creative direction when they become signed, most often they’re young and don’t understand the importance of a contract and being signed to a label.”

Despite concerns over the control of most labels and management, Chainz suggests that he would sign with the correct label if a good opportunity was apparent. He has a good understanding of the music scene and doesn’t believe he would be manipulated into abandoning his creativity. There are a few artists whose sound interests him in and outside of the UK, particularly British duo “D-Block Europe” and solo US artist “Summer Walker”. These artists share international popularity across the Hip-Hop scene, but they noticeably created their own sound and style.

D Block Europe are a British collective consisting of Adam Nathaniel "Young Adz" Williams, Ricky Earl "Dirtbike LB" who are from Lewisham, London. They have an American influenced sound and image, but they often rap and sing about topics that are relatable universally. They're inspired by legendary New York rap crew The Lox; however, they concentrate on ethos rather than one genre or sound. Their individuality in the UK Music scene is a crucial aspect that inspires Chainz.

Chainz says, “the type of music I’m making and the beats, that’s what I’m looking out for- that kind of vibes and sounds. Before, I was going off what sounded good in the music scene. When I started out that was the Afro-Swing sound. Now, I’ve found my own lane in R&B”.

It’s evident that Chainz’ hiatus has given him a greater outlook on the UK music scene. He has recognised that trends in the UK can be valuable for short term success, but is developing his own sound in aims of differentiating himself from the rest of UK hip hop and R&B artists. The ambition behind this is to have a long-lasting successful career, rather than a few moments and years of popularity.

Investigative Article

Why are UK Rhythm and Blues artists significantly behind US Rhythm and Blues artists? (27/03/22)

<https://sgentles.coventry.domains/uncategorized/why-are-uk-rhythm-and-blues-artists-significantly-behind-us-rhythm-and-blues-artists/>

In the last few decades, it's apparent that the music genre 'Rhythm and Blues' (R&B) has expanded from the US to the UK. Although, artists and social commentators within the UK music scene have highlighted that US R&B remains superior. The origin of R&B is significant, it lays the foundations of understanding the US's superiority in the genre. Despite the origin, there are important underlying factors that explain the international belittlement of UK R&B music.

Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the US

The genre 'Rhythm and Blues' originated in America and emerged in the 1910s; it is a symbol of an evolutionary transition from the genre 'Blues'. Blues was the expression of freed African Americans from slavery. It was introduced when America held a reputation of racial segregation, and initially only appealed to black people in the US. It was the invention of African-American singers and combined a mix of country music, field chants, gospel, and other genres.

What's the difference between 'Rhythm and Blues' and 'Blues'?

An established author of culture named Gregory McNamee recognises that as a response to the hustle and bustle of urban spaces new instruments were added to amplify the sound, and this birthed the "Rhythm" in "Rhythm and Blues".

In one of his books, he says "when it got to such noisy places, all honking horns and grinding gears, the low moan of the blues could not make itself heard. It added the saxophone, drum kit, and piano, and thus amplified, the blues, now rhythm and blues."

With the introduction of instruments, R&B became more appealing to the masses. Both black and white Americans engaged with this music form. Initially, Jerry Wexler of Atlantic Records noted that sales to white people and radio play on white stations didn't exist. However, the early 1950s was a period of transition for the R&B market. There was an increase in white

teenagers' engagement of R&B as they began purchasing the music. The book 'Rockin' in Time' shows evidence that 40% of 1952 sales at Dolphins of Hollywood record shop, located in an African-American area of Los Angeles, were to whites. This is an example of how influential R&B music was in the US. R&B arguably united US teenagers in one of the biggest entertainment industries, in a period where racial segregation was still widely apparent.

The music charts have always been a key factor in determining the success of artists, and in the 1950s black R&B artists began to dominate the charts. This was revolutionary, previously black people were non apparent in mainstream US entertainment. Black artists such as Ruth Brown were consistently making hits that held high positions in the charts. Ruth Brown placed hits in the top five every year from 1951 through 1954: "Teardrops from My Eyes", "Five, Ten, Fifteen Hours", "(Mama) He Treats Your Daughter Mean" and "What a Dream". As a female in a patriarchal society and an artist associated with a genre that is rooted in black culture, this was a significant achievement for black people and women in the US.

At the end of the decade, the introduction of two black record labels summarized the progression of black people in the R&B music industry. Robert Palmer reports in 'Rock and Roll; An Unruly History' that 'Sam Cooke's Sar and Berry Gordy's Motown Records' made their debuts and these were both black labels.

Furthermore, the continuity of success in the late 1950s from black American R&B artists was evident in artist Brook Benton. In 1959 and 1960, Benton had achieved one number one and two number two hits in the 'Billboard' R&B charts. The Billboard rankings is the music industry standard record chart in the United States for songs, published weekly by Billboard magazine. The rankings of the Billboard charts in the 1950s were based on sales and radio play in the United States. Many white American R&B artists that would be famously recognised for R&B today, were competing against him. However, it's evident that the majority of American listeners still played his music more. Tom Simmon's "Brooke Brenton" biography highlights that Benton had a certain warmth in his voice that attracted a wide variety of listeners.

The success of R&B music in the Billboard charts is evident from the 1950s to the early 2000s. There was the birth of artists such as Usher, R. Kelly, Janet Jackson, TLC, Aaliyah, Destiny's Child, Tevin Campbell and Mary J. Blige who sold many records. These were generational talents who represented R&B strongly for the last decades of the century and early 2000.

In fact, Chris Molanphy's article "100 & Single: The R&B/Hip-Hop Factor in The Music Business's Endless Slump"; identifies that in 2004, 80% of the songs that topped the R&B charts were also at the top of the "Hot 100". That period was the all-time peak for R&B on the Billboard Hot 100 and on Top 40 Radio.

Despite R&B's huge success in these early years of the century, sales started to decline as a response to the growth of hip hop music. Hip-Hop has adapted some R&B elements which has blurred the lines between hip hop and R&B. However, there's still distinctive differences that separate the two genres. The famous Canadian artist 'Drake' is a great example of the blurred lines between Hip-Hop and R&B music; often his music has strong elements of both genres.

Origins of Rhythm and Blues in the UK

If R&B originated in the US, how did it start in the UK? In 'How Britain Got the Blues: The Transmission and Reception of American Blues Style in the United Kingdom', Roberta Schwartz suggests it was mainly because African American servicemen stationed in Britain or seamen visiting ports such as London, Liverpool, Newcastle and Belfast – often brought over recordings of American artists.

In the early 1960s, several bands, tried to emulate black rhythm and blues performers. Similar to R&B's development in the US, it grew in the new UK club scene. Black artists in the UK were inspired by the black American R&B artists and this was prevalent in the number of black artists that helped form the genre in the UK.

At this time, the Black British artists largely achieved only moderate success. Although, white bands and artists took inspiration from R&B and used elements in their Rock music. They influenced major British rock musicians, including Eric Clapton, Mick Taylor, Peter Green, and John Mayall. Rock music became the prominent music genre of the decade, this was parallel to the mod subculture that began in London and spread throughout Great Britain. There were parts of the mod subculture that was influenced by the rebellious tone and image of US rock and roll and blues musicians.

The Rolling Stones are one of the most famous UK bands, and their rock music took inspiration from Rhythm and Blues. They led the "British Invasion" of the US pop charts. This was a cultural phenomenon of the mid-1960s. Famous rock and pop music acts from the UK became popular in the America. Pop and rock groups such as the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Zombies, the Kinks, Small Faces, the Dave Clark Five, Herman's Hermits, the Hollies, the Animals, Gerry and the Pacemakers, the Searchers, the Yardbirds, the Who and Them, as well as solo singers like Dusty Springfield, Cilla Black, Petula Clark, Tom Jones,

and Donovan, were at the forefront of the "invasion". The reign of pop and rock music from the UK in the US charts was short lived. US culture shifted and the music preference of the citizens changed as a result.

In the 2000s, British R&B and soul artists re-emerged in the charts, such as Amy Winehouse, Estelle, Joss Stone, Duffy, Natasha Bedingfield, Florence Welch, Adele, Floetry, Jessie J, Leona Lewis, Jay Sean and Taio Cruz. These artists topped charts and sold many records in the US.

Amy Winehouse is one of the most respected female artists of UK R&B history. Winehouse was recognised for her deep, expressive contralto vocals and her eclectic mix of musical genres, including soul, rhythm and blues, and jazz. She plays a major role of the controversy over 'third British invasion', her music was strongly recognised internationally. The pinnacle of her career highlights her significance, at the 2008 Grammy awards she won five awards. Outstandingly, she became the first British woman to win five Grammys, including three of the General Field "Big Four" Grammy Awards: Best New Artist, Record of the Year and Song of the Year, as well as Best Pop Vocal Album.

The BBC's Garry Mulholland called Winehouse "the pre-eminent vocal talent of her generation".

UK upcoming R&B artist, Alanya Renzullo, dedicates a lot of her time to vocal training. She has a wide vocal range and her songs express deep emotion. Alanya says, "I'm a big fan of Amy Winehouse, my sound is definitely inspired by her".

Sadly, Amy Winehouse passed away in 2011 to alcohol poisoning. It's evident that her legacy still remains, which reflects her international success as an artist.

How Important is the 'Billboard 100'?

Since 1958, the "Billboard Hot 100" has been recognised as the music industry standard record chart in the United States for songs, published weekly by Billboard magazine.

The American music industry is well respected globally and plays a significant role in the perspective of international music. To be considered a successful artist, a superstar, it's important that you have the ability to triumph in the US. The music industry in the USA is accountable for the most influential record companies, radio stations, community orchestras, television channels (MTV) and specialized magazine (Rolling Stone). The most important music genres globally were birthed in USA, through its wide ethnic diversity: hip-hop, blues, country, jazz, soul, rhythm and blues, pop, techno and rock. America is recognised for its strong immigration, which has led to a range of different types of music coming from there.

Another example of immigration influence on American music are the African slaves. They were taken to America, and with them, they brought their musical traditions. Black people's struggle led them to find some release in their music, and there started 'soul' and 'blues'.

The majority of music we hear today has American origins. America is the centre of today's generation of music. As a result, the 'Billboard Hot 100' can be considered a detrimental factor of how successful an artist is.

Contemporary R&B

There are arguments that the original version of R&B no longer exists. Music is a significant element of culture; the subjects and sounds reflect present society. Globally, society has changed in many ways since R&B was first introduced to America. The deep roots of R&B embedded in slavery and freedom will always hold weight in the US. Therefore, some influences of these sounds are still apparent, but they've been adapted to modern society and represented as part of 'Contemporary R&B'. Contemporary R&B is a combination of rhythm and blues with elements of pop, soul, funk, hip hop, and electronic music. Artists from the US dominate this new style of R&B. In comparison, UK artists are struggling to succeed.

As a result of the history of R&B and current status of successful artists, the US is currently considered the centre of contemporary R&B music. To be considered a successful contemporary R&B artist, it's important to have popularity in the US. In the recent two decades, US R&B artists have been at the forefront of the 'Billboard Hot 100' charts.

The first decade of the century, was the most prominent year, considering the rankings of contemporary R&B artists in the charts. Billboard shows that the most successful R&B artists in the 2000s were Alicia Keys, Usher, Beyonce, Mariah Carey, Rhianna and Ne-Yo. At the top of this list for awards and longevity is Beyonce. Outstandingly, Beyoncé was named by Billboard the most successful female act of the 2000s.

Alicia Keys singles gained huge success, especially her debut single "Fallin". At its peak it held number one on the Billboard Hot 100, Mainstream Top 40 and Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs charts. Also, it won three Grammy Awards in 2002, including Song of the Year, Best R&B Song, and Best Female R&B Vocal Performance.

Likewise, Usher had many successful singles which are still played heavily today. A few of these are from his album 'Confessions' in 2004, which sold 1.1 million copies in its first week and over 8 million copies in 2004. It has been certified Diamond by the Recording Industry Association of America. Since 2016, it has sold over 10 million copies in the US and an impressive 20 million plus copies worldwide. Unsurprisingly, Confessions had four

consecutive Billboard Hot 100 number one singles. These were, "Yeah!", "Burn", "Confessions Part II" and "My Boo". It won three Grammy Awards in 2005, including Best Contemporary R&B Album, Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocal for "My Boo" and Best Rap/Sung Collaboration for "Yeah!"

Mariah Carey is a well-known R&B artist, highly respected for her single "We Belong Together". It topped the Hot 100 charts for 14 weeks, and was later hailed "song of the decade" and won a Grammy Award for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance in 2006. Consequently, it's ranked as the most successful song of the 2000s on Billboard's decade-end chart.

From 2010, contemporary R&B moved to become even more commercial, with artists such as Ne-Yo really getting into their element. However, sales began to decline as R&B attempted to catch up with the modern changes of music. R&B Artists started to implement Auto-Tune and new computerized synths in aspirations of a more futuristic feel; meanwhile still attempting to include the common topical themes such as love and relationships. In the last 2 years, US contemporary artists such as Summer Walker have gained significant popularity world-wide, and have catapulted R&B back onto mainstream charts.

Again, another US female artist has made history as an R&B artist. On the 16th of November 2021, Xander Zelder reports that "Summer Walker claims a share of Billboard Hot 100 history, as she floods the chart (dated Nov. 20) with 18 songs from her new album, Still Over It." It's evident that her singles about love and relationships have resonated with the American public.

Even upcoming R&B artist from the UK are very aware of Summer Walker. Upcoming artist from South London, Chainz, respects her work highly.

He says "D Block Europe and Summer Walker are the two biggest artists I'm listening to right now."

Likewise, upcoming UK R&B artist Latricia, 21, aspires to work with and reach the heights of Summer Walker. She says "In 5 years' time I see myself in America amongst artists such as Summer Walker".

In contrast, the only British R&B artist that has seen great success in the US since the 2000s is Leona Lewis. Her lead single, "Bleeding Love", was the best-selling single of 2008 and Lewis was proclaimed Best New Artist by Billboard the same year. Since then, it has been a mixture of pop and hip-hop music that have ventured into the Billboard charts from the UK.

There are several UK R&B artists that chart well in the UK Official Charts. However, the lack of presence in Billboard Top 100 Charts evidently shows the lack of international appreciation of these artists. Currently, the US is currently the centre of music. As a result, the deprivation of UK artists in America's charts highlights their lack of international success. Moreover, limited reception of UK R&B artists diminishes their presence compared to fellow US R&B artists. R&B artists from the US chart consistently in the Billboard Top 100 charts and worldwide. Aside from America being the centre of modern music, the capacity of people is far greater. According to 'Populationof.net', the United States of America has a population of 337,599,000 people, whereas the UK only have 67,829,000 people. Consequently, when music is successful in the US, it usually reaches a greater outreach of people compared to successful artists within the UK.

Overall, the figures of record sales and chart rankings evidently present the superiority of US R&B artists. The R&B genre is embedded into the culture of America; its origins are part of America's identity. Therefore, its authentic nature in the US largely benefits new and upcoming US R&B artists compared to UK R&B artists.

Portfolio Project Review

In this last section, I will summarise the tools and approaches I've utilized to conduct this portfolio of articles. Before writing my articles, there was thorough research and planning. I will explain and evaluate each step I've taken in proceedings.

Research

In this portfolio, I've used a range of primary and secondary research to create my articles. The feature articles are driven by primary research, whereas the information in my investigative article consisted of secondary research. Although, in all of my articles I've used a combination of both to consolidate my reports. There are several advantages of using primary and secondary data, which my articles are evidence of.

The primary research that can be seen in my portfolio is predominantly interviews. Primary data is unique and therefore implements authenticity to each article. This creates a more interesting read, because the reader hasn't had access to this information before. Also, it's information which can be current and necessary to the present environment. News reporting is often about broadcasting new and relevant information; primary research gives you the resources to provide information on present issues. By conducting interviews, I was able to ask questions that would prompt answers relating to current affairs. In the case of my portfolio, the interviews helped me find out individual perspectives on the problems with the UK R&B music scene in the UK. All music artists have different upbringings and difficulties during their life which impact their music. Often, the media and social commentators bypass their journeys and only reflect on their levels of success. The purpose of an interview, is to gather an in-depth insight into the individual. I'm 'Investigating the difficulties of becoming a successful R&B artist in the UK', so it's important to assess the views of individual R&B artists having difficulties in the UK. The background information they provide and information regarding the question are equally important in assessing the focus. Interviews are a fast way of gathering relevant information and considering the time-scale it was the most appropriate form of research. As a result, I decided to build three articles around three extensive interviews.

Moreover, the interviews effectively appeal to Blumler and Katz' personal identity theory. Their theory suggests that audiences are highly active in their media usage and seek out media to fulfil a certain need. Personal identity is one of the four motivations of media that Blumler and Kartz identify. The idea is that the consumer could choose to read something that helps to reinforce self-values and behaviour. By using direct quotations from the interviewee's answers, it's evident that my information reflects the perspective of real people.

The interviewees in my portfolio are upcoming artists; those who are upcoming artists of any genre of music can sympathise and relate to the difficulties of the interviewees. The reader is more likely to read, as they are able to reinforce their own beliefs about the difficulties of music in the UK.

In addition, I've acknowledged that some articles require more secondary research than others. In my portfolio, the investigative article demands factual background information of UK and US R&B music. If the aim is to be informative, there should be statistics and external information that can support thesis statements. The inclusion of this type of information considers "cognitive needs". This part of Blumler and Katz' theory suggests that the media is used by the audience for acquiring knowledge, information and facts. Even if the audience doesn't have a strong interest in music, they may read the article to gather historical information to better their intellect. In my investigative article, I've gathered music charts, biographies and online accessible historical data to ensure this article meets "cognitive needs". The use of historical data is important in an investigative article, as it's advised to analyse a broader timeline of events. Also, the effective use of historical data makes the articles trustworthy, there's reliable evidence that can be accurately analysed and investigated. easy to insert your own opinions into an investigative article, however this isn't appropriate according to journalistic ethics. I've broadly aimed to comply to the National Union of Journalists Code of Conduct, and accuracy summarizes their list of ethical codes. As a result, using secondary data fairly, has enabled me to accurately support my points.

Planning

This stage was pivotal in creating the highest quality portfolio. Without planning, there would be a lack of structure across the project. Additionally, organisation enables you to complete tasks on time. I planned and executed this portfolio within a period of four months, so it was essential to organise information at a fast rate. The three feature articles were planned around three interviews that I held. Interviewing was a significant part of the planning stage. Likewise, it's important to configure the structure of each article before writing it. I used previous knowledge of writing feature articles to assist me.

In the beginning, I asked a variety of artists and people in the music industry to be interviewed. I approached them through social media and e-mail, because this is where people in the entertainment industry are most active and responsive. This was executed at the start, to avoid disappointment and panic if interview offers were declined. As expected, I noticed a lack of responses from bigger artists and higher people in the music industry. At first, my project title was "The Difficulties of UK Music Success", but my responses took me in a niche direction. The upcoming artists that agreed to interviews were affiliated with the

Rhythm and Blues genre. As a result, I decided to organise the interviews in a specific way, consequently receiving answers directly regarding the difficulties of the Rhythm and Blues genre in the UK. Many journalists stress the importance of meticulous planning to ensure they remain in control working to set questions or as Aitchison describes it, a “script” determined by the particular angle being pursued. In each interview, there was a similarity in questions. However, I used my knowledge and research of these artists to accumulate individual answers. This gave me access to explore the matter from three different angles. If I hadn’t planned these interviews to receive individual answers, there would potentially be three of the same articles.

Writing the articles

Using my research and planning, it prepared me to write the articles. I depended on previous knowledge of journalistic theories to help me structure my stories. There’s a difference between the structure of a feature article and an investigative article, it was essential that I structured these two types of articles differently.

Feature articles typically tell a short story, they require a different structure to traditional stories. The beginning of traditional stories usually introduces the story, and the resolution is found at the end. However, news stories often start with the resolution. Although, it can start at the pivot of action to entice the reader to read further. My feature articles are about the opinion of upcoming artists; therefore, their opinion is positioned in the opening of each article. As Allan Bell notes, the central action of news stories is told in a non-chronological order, “with result presented first followed by a complex recycling through various time zones”. So, a typical news story “moves backwards and forwards in time”. In the articles I explain the artist’s opinion of R&B in the UK over the past years, then expand on how they feel about their current journey and where they’ll be in the future. However, there’s no certainty to the ending, as their journey is ongoing and the music scene is still changing. Bell highlighted that rather than being resolved neatly, news stories often finish in “mid-air”). This is a result of the continuation of many stories. The situation of events presented in article, only reciprocates the events of that present time. Therefore, the story can continue after the article is published.

After assuring myself with the structure of each feature article, I had to ensure that the content was appealing. A significant part of each article is the direct quotations from the interviews. According to Allan Bell, direct quotation serves three key purposes in journalism: First, a quote is valued as a particularly incontrovertible fact because it is the newsmaker’s own words.... A second function is to distance and disown, to absolve journalist and news outlet from endorsement of what the source said.... The third function of direct quotation is to

add to the story the flavour of the newsmaker's own words. Bell argues that one of the primary questions of journalism is "Who says?", he suggests that the credentials of the source is very important. Direct quotations remind the audience that this is an account which originated with certain persons. Attribution of sources is important to the notion of journalistic balance. Keeble explains that reporters use sources to distance themselves from the issues explored. Rather than express their views on a subject, reporters use sources to present a range of views over which they can appear to remain objective and neutral. Without quotations, it would become an opinion article – which was not my intended direction. I chose to use direct quotations to explore the personal views of those with the UK R&B scene. By using direct quotations, there's emphasis on the bias of the source rather than the reporter.

On the other hand, I took a different approach with my investigative article. The pyramid structure is mainly useful for shorter and simpler news stories, but it's not always appropriate for more complex and/or lengthy stories, particularly those based on many different sources. Journalist David Randall talks of constructing such stories through "building blocks" which should be linked logically to each other. My investigative article has a combination of several sources, including both primary and secondary sources. The information in this article is predominantly configured by a variety of secondary sources. I used numerous sub-sections to organise the information into different parts, but each section has a connection to the main point.

Ethics

As a journalist, good ethical conduct is a standard procedure that should be maintained throughout any work. I chose to follow the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) ethical codes and procedures. Ultimately, I've chosen to follow their codes to ensure that I produce content that is "honestly conveyed, accurate and fair". There are a few elements of my coursework that contest some of their codes, however I've followed safe guarding practices to ensure that I abide by the codes.

Prior to my interviews, I sent out consent forms to the participants. These consent forms explained the aims of the project and gave them an option of how their information disseminated. All participants agreed that they're willing to be identified. As a result, I had permission to not hide the identity of my sources.

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