6-3-2014

# Bass in Your Face: A Case-Study Exploration of Networked Culture

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BASS IN YOUR FACE:

A CASE-STUDY EXPLORATION OF NETWORKED CULTURE


by


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A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the
Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the
dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Abstract


BASS IN YOUR FACE:
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by

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Using dubstep DJ Bassnectar as a case-study example, this thesis explores the

impact of social networks and mobile connectivity.  As evidenced by Bassnectar's

digitally based approach to experiencing, distributing, and consuming music,

these developments have contributed to the shift to a new model I describe as

Networked Culture.

Figure 1 is a video highlighting the Bassnectar concert experience.  Figure 2 is an

audio clip illustrating the "drop" in dubstep.  Figure 3 is another audio clip

demonstrating the dubstep sound.  Figure 4 is an image of an Ableton Live sound

library.  Figure 5 is an image of Ableton Live's functionality.  Figure 6 is an

image of Bassnectar's Twitter feed.  Figure 7 is an image of Bassnectar's

Facebook feed.  Figure 8 contains an image of Bassnectar's website.  Figure 9

contains an image of Bassnectar's SoundCloud feed.

Dedication


*I would like to dedicate this work to the memory of my beloved grandmother*

*Charlotte Padek.*

*She was a woman of valor, grace, dignity, and style.  But most importantly, she*

*believed in the value of education, and if not for her contributions this*

*accomplishment would not have been possible.*


*I would also like to thank my family and friends who have endured this long*

*process with me and provided love and encouragement throughout.*


*Also, much gratitude to my advisor, Matthew Gold, and faculty members Steve*

*Brier and Lev Manovich.  Your inspiration and tutelage helped me develop and*

*shape my ideas, while learning invaluable skills, knowledge, and life lessons in*

*the process.  I am also forever indebted to the City University of New York, for*

*what has been a truly life-changing experience.  Obtaining a Masters Degree*

*through this institution has taught me the value of knowledge and the importance*

*of sharing it to make New York City and the world around it a better place.*

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Introduction

The Bassnectar Concert

Wednesday evening, April 24th, 2013.

Memorial Auditorium, Burlington, Vermont.


The iconic first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony washes over a large

gymnasium filled with 3,000 young men and women, mostly ages sixteen to twenty-four.

After a few bars, Beethoven's Fifth becomes unrecognizable as the notes are distorted

into lo-fidelity bass sounds that incite cheers from the audience.  As the bass begins to

mix with space-age synthesizer noises, a raucous blend of music called dubstep pours out

of a thirty-foot wall of speakers that stretches across the front of the stage.  The sounds

are deafening, at over 110 decibels, and water bottles nervously chatter across makeshift

tables that have been assembled in an area where refreshments are available for purchase.

On stage, a longhaired man known as Bassnectar, who appears no older than

thirty himself, leans over his laptop and bounces up and down excitedly.  Almost as if he

were checking his email, Bassnectar clicks the mouse pad and taps the keyboard, in

between furiously pushing buttons and flicking knobs on a group of devices that lay on a

table in front of him, connected to his computer.  There are no instruments anywhere on

stage.

Psychedelic images and sequences play across giant video screens behind

Bassnectar, coordinated to the lyrics and themes of the music, drawing the audience's

focus. These visuals are enhanced by a massive lighting rig that illuminates the stage and

the gymnasium in bright, wild colors.  When Bassnectar plays a track called *Watch the*

*Lights Go Red,* the video screens and lighting rig create a spectacle of intense red images and lights that are almost blinding and hallucinogenic.

In the audience, young men and women are clad in neon-colored spandex outfits and have donned t-shirts that read "Basshead."  Almost in unison, they rock back and forth with their hands waving in the air in time to the rhythm of the bass.  Audience members frequently use their mobile devices to take photos and record videos of the concert.  During the course of the concert, audience members actively post messages and photos to Bassnectar's Facebook and Twitter feed.

After nearly three hours of heavy bass, the show comes to an end.  As he finishes his set, Bassnectar jumps off the stage and joins the audience to take his signature "Family Photo" with the crowd: a picture of Bassnectar in the audience together with the crowd making a "Bassface," or an expression of enjoyment derived from listening to and experiencing Bassnectar's boisterous music.  After the photo, Bassnectar physically interacts with the audience, shaking hands and signing memorabilia.  Then, almost as suddenly as Bassnectar disappears behind the stage, he appears on social network sites. He posts the just-snapped "Family Photo" and begins immediately to interact with fans through various social media platforms (see fig. 1).

As this scene illustrates, the use of technology by Bassnectar and audience members contributes to reshaping the concert into a non-traditional live music experience.  With the broad reach of social networks, Bassnectar and audience members make the event interactive by instantaneously engaging with each other.  This communication and connection with large social groups, uninhibited by geospatial and temporal boundaries, has come to define networked society.  Young Americans about the

same age as average attendees at Bassnectar concerts, sixteen to twenty-four, have been the heaviest adopters of this new type of socializing, making these events relevant examples to analyze how social networks and mobile connectivity have contributed to changing live experiences.

Bassnectar's concerts have grown in popularity in part because of the way he has employed mobile connectivity and social networks to distribute and encourage the consumption of his music in non-traditional styles. As social network sites like Facebook and Twitter have come to occupy an increasingly important place in 21st century American life they have emerged as more than social tools: becoming a primary means for aggregating and dispensing cultural content, like music. By distributing his music through these outlets, Bassnectar communicated directly with like-minded fans and prompted them to share his music within their respective networks, allowing his music to circulate widely without costly, traditional mass-media campaigns. Also, by making his music available through a wealth of digital channels, Bassnectar gave users a variety of consumption choices, which contributed to the success of his networked model.

Bassnectar's tactics represented a departure from the traditional models that characterized the industrial information economy of the 20th century, demonstrating how digital social networks and mobile connectivity have served as catalyzing forces in reshaping the traditional processes of experiencing, distributing, and consuming culture. Some critics contend that the closed structure of these systems limits the generative nature of the Internet and related technologies. However, other scholars, like Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman use their book *Networked* and a wealth of research conducted by the Pew Center to argue that a new social model of "networked individualism" has emerged

as a result of the "triple revolution: the rise of social networking, the capacity of the Internet to empower individuals, and the always-on connectivity of mobile devices" (Rainie, Wellman 18).  Other scholars, such as dana boyd and Yochai Benkler, have described how the affordability of mobile devices made these platforms more accessible and open, leading many scholars and critics to label this model a more participatory style of culture, as described by media scholar Henry Jenkins (2006).  As with most technological developments, smartphones and social networks have had neither a wholly positive or negative effect, but rather a combination of both.  Bassnectar's music experience, distribution, and consumption practices appeared to recognize the duality of these developments and exemplified how these media have encouraged a transition from an industrial information economy to a networked model of culture.

Chapter One

DUBSTEP MUSIC

Foucault would argue that in conducting a proper cultural analysis, one should inquire about dubstep music's relevance as an appropriate paradigm, asking what the music reveals about the society that produced it. In the vein of Aristotle, who believed that art was mimesis, or a reproduction of society, music represents the culture in which it was born as well as any other art form. Dubstep music represents an art form and an expression of popular culture. Following Latour (2005) and Actor-Network theory, exploring dubstep and Bassnectar's music as products of networked society helps illuminate the aspects of that culture, mobile connectivity and social networks, which contributed to its creation. As a case-study, Bassnectar's approach to experiencing, distributing, and consuming music highlights the role of mobile connectivity and social network sites in the development of networked culture.

To analyze dubstep music as a product of modern technology necessitates a brief discussion of the lineage of the two entities: music and technology. Dubstep was born of a complex history of technological, socio-political, cultural, and economic circumstances, whose roots are found in the early developments of recorded music. Beginning with the gramophone, technology has shaped the way music sounds and the way Americans experienced and listened to it, both intentionally and unintentionally. The innovative electronic music that was created throughout the 20th century was in part inspired by the development of not only audio capabilities, but technology in general. For example, with Emile Berliner's invention of the gramophone in 1888, one of the earliest home listening

devices for recorded music was created and listeners were introduced to a new world of sounds (Taintor 2004).  Reflecting on the effects incited by this development, author Luigi Russolo argued in his seminal work, *The Art of Noises*, that technological advances would continue to change the sonic perceptions of those who interacted with them, eventually facilitating a renegotiation of the boundaries between sound and noise (Russolo 117).

Russolo was correct, and the gramophone gave way to other developments like records, hi-fidelity amplifiers, and eventually the synthesizer.  Influenced by the sounds of technologically driven machinery that "were an emblematic part of the post-World War II computing culture" (Parrika 92), Robert Moog invented the synthesizer in the late 1960s.  Moog synthesizers, and other models, were responsible for the "sounds of modernity – the soundtrack of cultures of factories, urban movement, and progress" (96), enhancing the creation of new styles and setting the precedent for dubstep's popularity. Following the synthesizer, in 1981 major music corporations Sony and Phillips worked together to jointly develop the compact disc, or CD.  Shortly thereafter, a group called Oval pioneered and made famous a glitch style of electronic music, an important precursor to dubstep, that they produced by writing on the underside of CDs with felt tip pens, causing the CDs skip and create warped audio sounds.

By the late 20th century, the influence of avant-garde music produced by artists like Oval had affected the direction of cultural and technological evolution.  According to scholar Caleb Kelly, "by the mid- to late 1990s experimental music witnessed an outpouring of interest as the tools of music production were transformed and rapidly expanded with the mass take-up of digital technology.  The general population gained

access to more affordable computer and home studio equipment, and a surge of experimentation took place" (Kelly 7). The rapid advances described by Kelly allowed average Americans to easily experiment with electronic music and paved the way for a logical progression from the glitch sounds of Oval to the modern industrial sounds of dubstep music, created by DJs like Bassnectar.

*The Rise of Dubstep*

Dubstep was born in London, where the genre first emerged in the early 2000s as an off-shoot of traditional electronic dance music (EDM). EDM and the rave scene had become very popular across Europe, especially in London, and in the United States. As the liminal behavior and unlicensed parties that defined EDM and the rave scene reached their peak in the early 1990s, they became a cause of concern for lawmakers, both in Europe and the United States. Lawmakers believed that the heavy ecstasy usage that had become commonplace at rave events made attendees vulnerable to harm, as evidenced by the dramatic increase in the mentions of ecstasy in emergency room visits in the United States between 1994 and 1999 (Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act). The United States responded with the passage of the Illicit Drug Anti-Proliferation Act, also known as the Rave Act, in 2003 in an attempt to limit unlicensed parties like raves and the drug trafficking and usage associated with them.

In her work *Rave Culture,* author Tammy Anderson argues that this legislation cut down on large, warehouse style parties that had come to provide a home for EDM music. The rave scene quickly dissolved and transitioned into a new, club culture scene (Anderson 168). In a reaction to the changing nature of the rave scene, dubstep DJs reconfigured the traditional EDM sounds of the 1990s in what has been characterized as a

sonic inversion, shifting the focus and force of tracks to a heavy, wobbling bass sound.

Dubstep DJs were also revamping the sound of EDM to fit into a more club-culture style

of experiencing music and began incorporating more ethereal vocals and lighter, airy

notes to balance the heavy bass beats.  Perhaps the most noticeable shift in the dubstep

sound came in the way DJs developed a signature, distinctive and dramatic crescendo or

musical build-up to an intense release of the bass line, called "the drop" (see fig. 2).  The

surge of energy and assaulting release of sounds the drop incited catered well to guiding

audiences through the peaks and valleys of emotion that are central to a concert

experience and would have been facilitated at a traditional event by spontaneous

instrumental solos and other musical flourishes (Pitts et al. 88).  The frenetic sound that

resulted led the *Wall Street Journal* to describe dubstep as "heavy bass, irregular beats,

brassy sputtering and screeches that sometimes sound like a soundtrack from outer

space," and "the sound of robots having sex" (Wieczner 1).

As the rave scene dissipated, dubstep emerged out of the first 21st century

economic downturn, a more gritty music "nurtured in South London, whose languid

suburban sprawl falls beyond the capital's underground train network, among the

meandering overground routes and old industrial canal ways have shaped a different pace

of life compared to the rest of the city" (Walmsley 87).  The dilapidated industrial

remnants littered across the South London landscape reminded residents of the

contributions of modern digital technology to both the downturn in the industrial

economy that had once driven the area and the destruction of the rave scene that had once

defined the area culturally, giving dubstep its dark sound (see fig. 3).  Dubstep was also

heavily influenced by the positive aspects of the rise of information communication

technology occurring during the beginning of the 21st century.  With extensive research, scholar dana boyd and others have demonstrated that mobile connectivity and Internet access became more affordable and presented users with new outlets for cultural creation and distribution.  The first decade of the 21st century also witnessed the development of moderately priced tools like Ableton Live software (essentially a music sound library), laptop computers, and MPCs (Music Production Controllers), which were also instrumental in the development of the dubstep style of music.

A product of technology, dubstep music was created with a laptop, Ableton Live, and an MPC, presenting a relevant cultural product to employ as the subject of an analysis that seeks to examine the influential factors in the networked society that produced it.  Instead of having to manipulate technology intended for other purposes, earlier cited sonic experiments had led to the development of software made specifically for the creation of electronic music.  In 2001, Ableton released the first version of its software, Ableton Live, which functioned as a "loop based sequencer and digital audio workstation" (Ableton.com).  The software operated on both Mac OS X and Windows platforms, creating the need for a computer, laptop or otherwise.  To create dubstep music, producers also utilized a Music Production Controller, known as an MPC, which contained a variety of touch-sensitive pads, faders, and knobs that controlled the sound samples and effects assigned from the Ableton Live library.

In terms of making music, when a musician created music in the traditional sense, he or she physically played instruments and generally composed each song out of many elements.  For example, the Rolling Stones' classic song *Sympathy for the Devil* consisted of several different components: guitar melodies, drum lines, vocals, bass, etc.

In order to create the track, the Rolling Stones physically played all of the instruments that comprised the various parts.  This traditional concept of creating a musical composition comprised of multiple pieces also served as the guiding principle of making dubstep music, only with different media.   Instead of physically playing instruments to create the various elements of a track, dubstep DJs used the buttons on their Akai MPC instead.  Ableton Live provided DJs with a "sound library" that contained thousands of different sounds and effects, and each entry consisted of a different sound.  For example, a kick drum sound or a G major chord on a guitar (see fig. 4).  Ableton's sound libraries covered an immensely broad range: well beyond the number of instruments an average musician could have played.

In crafting a track, the dubstep DJ selected sound samples from the Ableton Live library.  When the DJ selected a specific sound sample, like a kick drum, Ableton Live generated a visual representation of that audio segment on the computer screen.  Then, the DJ used Ableton Live to assign that desired audio selection to a particular aspect of the MPC, the pad in the top right corner, for example.  When the DJ physically touched that particular pad on the MPC, Ableton Live received a signal to execute the command to generate a kick drum sound and did so.  To demonstrate successful execution of the command, Ableton Live created a visualization on the computer screen that indicated that the touch of the pad had been translated into a kick drum note and recorded.
The DJ created the rest of the drum segment by tapping out the desired drum pattern on the top right pad of the MPC, instead of physically playing the drums.  Ableton Live recorded the drumbeat and made it available for further processing and engineering.  The program also allowed dubstep DJs to easily copy and paste various elements, like the

kick-drum beat, to use in other songs. The dubstep DJ then selected various musical

effects from the library to manipulate the sounds they had produced and created

dubstep's signature wobbling bass sound. For example, the DJ would select a warp effect

and assign it to the same pad on the Akai MPC as the kick drum. But, instead of tapping

the pad to create a drumbeat, the DJ would drag his or her finger freely over the pad to

control the distortion effect and manipulate the kick-drum sound. When the DJ achieved

the desired sound, he or she removed their finger from the pad, and Ableton Live

received a signal to record that new, warped drum sound. Ableton Live again created a

visualization of the new, warped drum sound. By employing computers, Ableton Live,

and MPCs to make the innovative sounds that characterized the dubstep style, the process

of creating music was transformed into pushing buttons and moving knobs (see fig. 5).

Dubstep music was also both a product of and a reaction to its original industrial

urban surroundings and the rise of digital technology that characterized the first decade of

the 21$^{st}$ century. As boyd and other scholars note, these developments like social

networks and mobile connectivity, helped create a more accessible and participatory

culture (boyd et al. 31). On the contrary, some critics like Sherry Turkle argue that the

rapid advancements in information communication technologies have had negative

impacts, undermining users' freedom and creativity (Turkle 293). As scholars like

Morozov and Scholz articulate, finding the balance between the positive and negative

power of mobile connectivity and social network sites became a defining challenge of

these developments, as reflected in the sounds of dubstep music (Morozov 354; Scholz

9). Dubstep "was imbued with nostalgia as much as futurism, and its search for lost

utopias was timely in an era when technology was as much a threat to humankind as a comfort" (Walmsley 88).

As social networks and smartphones increased in prevalence, club culture-based, live dubstep music experiences, like Bassnectar concerts, became so popular that the DJs were reaching rock-star status and earning hundreds of thousands of dollars per show. On November 9th, 2011, *The New York Times* published an article entitled "How Ryan Raddon Became the $200,000-a-Night DJ Known as Kaskade" (Schulman 2). The article discussed the growth in popularity of dubstep music and Joel Zimmerman, head of Endeavor, the electronic music division of the William Morris empire, explained that, "the thing that really flipped the script for dubstep was social media. You had kids getting connected in a different way" (3).

Dubstep DJs used social media to instantaneously interact with audience members during their shows and shaped the structure of the event. Kaskade, a popular DJ, employed similar tactics and created an impression of personalized communications with fans, making his concerts very popular. DJs also employed social media and mobile connectivity to encourage the sharing and consumption of their music in non-traditional ways. For example, dubstep group Krewella relied exclusively on social media sites to distribute and promote their music and develop a fan base. An article published in July, 2013 titled *How Krewella Leveraged Its Social Strategy Into A Career,* elucidates that by personally writing messages aimed at facilitating interaction with other like-minded music enthusiasts, the group's social network following increased dramatically, averaging more than two thousand new Twitter followers per week and more than 14 million views on their official YouTube channel (Buli).

The growth of dubstep continued, and in July 2012, Deadmau5 (pronounced Deadmouse), an EDM and dubstep DJ, graced the cover of the popular music press outlet *Rolling Stone Magazine*. The accompanying headlines read, "Dance Madness! The DJs Who Rule the World!" and the twelve-page spread chronicled Deadmau5's ascent to fame, again highlighting how Deadmau5's active social network presence had contributed to his burgeoning popularity (Eells 48). Later that year, social network supernode (a very frequent social network user that has a dense web of network connections and interactions) Skrillex, dubbed the "15-million Dollar DJ" by *Forbes Magazine,* received five Grammy nominations, including for "Best New Artist" of 2012 (Greenburg). While Skrillex didn't win for "Best New Artist," the nomination of a dubstep DJ in this category affirmed that the style had become very popular. Skrillex did win three Grammy awards however, and a few months later the EDM and dubstep group Swedish House Mafia sold out all of the tickets to their shows at Madison Square Garden in less than five minutes. In an interview about the performances at Madison Square Garden, the group said that "we could never go into Madison Square Garden ten years ago, they would say you're fucking out of your heads…all of a sudden we can play any stadium in the world" (Leave the World Behind). By the end of 2013 Skrillex's digital release, *Scary Monsters and Nice Sprites,* had gone double platinum in terms of numbers of downloads (Recording Ind. Assoc. of America).

Bassnectar provided another compelling example of the dubstep boom. Known for an extremely active presence on social network sites and for authoring his own posts, as opposed to some DJs whose accounts are handled by PR and media teams, Bassnectar engaged in countless discussions, debates, and interactions via social media,

accumulating over 1.5 million followers on Facebook and Twitter. Using this active social network presence and the communicative possibilities afforded by mobile connectivity, Bassnectar made his live-concert experiences collaborative. These events became very popular, selling over 200,000 concert tickets, grossing more than eight million dollars, and earning Bassnectar the ninety-eighth spot amongst the "Top 200 Highest Grossing North American Tours, 2012" (Pollstar). Bassnectar was also among the "Top 200 Highest Grossing North American Tours" in 2013 (*Ibid*).

Bassnectar also employed social network sites and mobile connectivity to facilitate the distribution and consumption of his music. By using these media to reach other like-minded individuals and communicate directly with his existing network, Bassnectar garnered huge exposure and encouraged the wide dispersal of his music: many of Bassnectar's songs each have over one million YouTube views. By applying social networks and smartphones, dubstep DJs like Krewella, Kaskade, and Bassnectar amassed large followings and fiscal success. Bassnectar specifically capitalized on what scholars have described as the defining characteristics of networked society: employing mobile connectivity to instantaneously communicate across a broad network at live events, distributing music via social networks and using these outlets as primary means for aggregating cultural content, and encouraging consumption through several diverse digital outlets thereby providing users with more choices. Using Bassnectar as a case-study example, this paper will now consider how mobile connectivity and social networks have reshaped the processes of experiencing, distributing, and consuming culture, to create a new, more open and participatory, networked model.

Chapter Two

NETWORKED CULTURE: LIVE MUSIC

*"I want to deliver an amazing experience and literally engulf everyone's body and*

*nervous system in bass. Our experience is a physical one as well as a musical one."*

-Lorin Ashton (Bassnectar)

*The Traditional Concert Experience*

Before the 21$^{st}$ century, live music concerts were not an artist's primary source of

revenue (Tschmuck 138). Traditionally, national concert tours were booked to promote

the sales of new, full-length ten- or twelve-track releases first on records and then on

CDs. However, as Internet access became more affordable, consumers were presented

with a myriad of new ways to access music that didn't require the purchase of physical

CDs. This rise of digital connectivity and the increase in mobile phone ownership and

social networking participation that accompanied it led to a strong downturn in recorded

music sales. According to figures collected and released by Billboard and Neilsen

SoundScan, the first three months of 2007 alone witnessed compact disc sales plunge by

20 percent from the previous year (Smith, "Declining Music Sales"). As the potential for

sales generated by new albums greatly decreased, so too did the number of new, full-

length releases (Lee, "Why We Shouldn't Worry"). With substantially fewer new albums

to promote, and the lackluster revenue opportunities they presented, the traditional

concert tour became an unnecessary expense.

*Theoretical Analysis*

Authors Lee Rainie and Berry Wellman explain that extensive research conducted

by the Pew Research Center has shown how the increased affordability of mobile

technologies led to their adoption by a broad percentage of Americans.  By 2007, mobile

phones were exploding in popularity, going from "the device that was the fourth 'hardest

to live without' to the number one slot" (Rainie, Wellman 6).  Cell phones continued to

increase in functionality, and by 2013 had evolved into more complex devices regarded

as smartphones, which were in effect pocket-sized computers that possessed the

capability of connecting to the Internet and run several different applications, including

social network programs.

Paralleling these improvements was the creation and growth of digital social

networks like Twitter and Facebook.  Twitter was launched in March 2006 and

functioned as a social network and site that allowed users to broadcast messages of 140

characters or less, called "Tweets."  Internet access was the primary capital required for

users to connect through Twitter, and this low barrier of entry encouraged the site to gain

tremendous popularity: it had amassed over 241 million monthly active users by April 27,

2014 (*Twitter*).  Launched in 2004, Facebook provided another popular social networking

outlet whose access cost was represented as the minimal price of Internet connectivity.

Social network sites like Twitter and Facebook afforded users with a cyber space to

"construct a public or semi-public profile, articulate a list of other users with whom they

share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by

others within the system" (boyd, Ellison 2).  As Manuel Castells formulates in his

fundamental work *The Rise of the Networked Society*, the concept of social networks was

not a new organizing framework created by digital sites like Facebook (Castells, 21).

Rather, these sites altered the traditional structure and boundaries of pre-digital social

networks because they "enabled users to articulate and make visible their social networks

which resulted in connections between individuals that would not otherwise be made"
(boyd, Ellison 2).  This looser, visual design of social network sites encouraged users to
connect with more diverse groups of individuals than those they would have normally
interacted with, including politicians, actors, and musicians.  Individuals' social networks
became large groups populated with hundreds and thousands of members, affiliated by
what Benkler, Rainie, and Wellman describe as loose ties: bonds centered around third
and fourth degree connections or points of common interest, visually articulated by social
network sites and available for contact with mobile connectivity, unrestrained by
boundaries of geographical proximity.

The dramatic increase in the power of microchips and the availability of digital
bandwidth allowed these social network sites, referred to as SNS, to take a mobile form.
For the affordable cost of a cellular data plan, smartphones were readily capable of
powering mobile SNS applications and connecting to the Internet from any location
where a signal was obtainable.  This "emergence of lightweight, easily portable
smartphones and the rise of wireless connections made it possible for people to connect
to the internet wherever they could get a broadband phone signal, enabling people to use
social media on remote servers that were accessible by any mobile device" (Rainie,
Wellman 106).

With smartphones and a range of social networking sites, users could
communicate with their broad social networks synchronously or asynchronously,
whichever they desired, untethered from traditional temporal or physical constraints.
Scholar Jason Farman explains in his work, *Mobile Interface Theory,* that this
communicative power oriented users to new practices of social interaction and more

malleable notions of spatiality and temporality (Farman 74). Other critics, like Yochai

Benkler, also claim that these enhancements had a positive impact by enabling users to

readily communicate with larger groups of individuals through a variety of outlets in a

more unrestricted manner. Supporting the proclamations of their positive effects,

participation on social network sites continued to increase rapidly, and in October 2007,

Facebook had fifty million active users. By the beginning of 2010 that number had more

than quadrupled, and Facebook boasted over 802 million daily active users and 609

million mobile daily active users in March 2014 (*Facebook)*.

Rainie and Wellman also established the positive contributions of these nascent

digital outlets. These authors argued that the emergence of "widespread mobile

connectivity and social networks profoundly affected behavior," and contributed to a

transition to a more open model they term networked individualism (Rainie, Wellman

107). For these scholars, the variety of social networking sites available also contributed

to the more participatory nature of the networked model because users were presented

with more outlets for communication. As of March 2014, there were at least fifteen

different SNS that each boasted at least ten billion estimated unique monthly visitors, and

Facebook was the most popular, with 900 billion estimated unique monthly visitors

(*Ebiz*). The communicative possibilities afforded by the relatively low costs of Internet

access required to use social network sites, and the design of the sites themselves,

persuaded scholars and critics to support the media's participatory potential.

Accordingly, SNS and their mobile counterparts were described as "a substantial

departure from the range of feasible communications channels available in the 20th

century, and internet and mobile technology offer users new ways of connecting to each other in groups small and large" (Benkler 376).

Other scholars contended that social networks and smartphones derived progressive power from the open nature of their systems. Following the spirit and the original, malleable structure of the Internet, these tools allowed users to manipulate and reconfigure them to their needs and curiosities. For example, Twitter was built with open source software and remained committed to developing and releasing contributions to the open source community, which allowed users to develop applications and mold the site to their needs and curiosities (*Twitter*). However, critics like Jonathan Zittrain question this point-of-view, arguing that these SNS and mobile devices departed from the generative systems that characterized the initial intent of the Internet because they weren't readily programmable or changeable (Zittrain 236). Taking this argument further, scholar Mark Andrejevic claimed that the structure of social network sites undermined users by taking advantage of them as unsuspecting participants. Andrejevic reasons that SNS like Facebook mimic the structure of capitalist systems Marx cautioned against: privately owned entities that isolated users from the products of their labor and enacted this labor to make a profit (Andrejevic 94).

For example, to participate and formulate a profile on Facebook or Twitter one had to agree to sites terms and conditions of use, which stated that any data users populated the site with became the respective site's property; including traces of user's activities while on the site, their photos, and the content of their posts. Facebook and Twitter could use this information for whatever purposes they saw fit, most often selling it to other companies who used the data to create advertisements targeted at users as they

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perused the site.  Andrejevic stipulated that this constituted the alienation of users from the product of their labor in the form of the content they generate through their interaction with the site:

> Sites like Facebook provide users with a service, in exchange they extract some form of payment.  Just as there is a 'cost' associated with free-to-air TV…so too there is a cost associated with the services provided by commercial Internet services: submission to monitoring and targeted advertising.  The exchange that characterizes these interactive sites (willing submission to monitoring and advertising in exchange for access to communication resources) might be understood as a second-order result of capitalist appropriation.  (Andrejevic 94)

However, as other scholars demonstrated, mobile connectivity and social networks provided more helpful contributions by presenting users with more accessible channels to communicate with more loosely affiliated groups of people, untethered by spatial proximity.  In that networked model, the "smartphone was the basis for personal communication and Facebook the key web in the social operating system" (Rainie, Wellman 144).  The potential facilitated by this model for a greater range of interactions with a larger volume of individuals encouraged many to claim that social networks and mobile connectivity made communication more open and participatory, as Bassnectar's interactive concert experiences illustrated.

*The Bassnectar Example*

While the concept of  "live electronic music strikes many as oxymoronic" (Collins 38), Bassnectar concerts were indeed live music experiences.  But, Bassnectar

and other dubstep DJs' concerts departed from traditional live music experiences because the technical nature of dubstep music necessitated that they performed with Ableton Live software, laptop computers, and MPCs as opposed to traditional instruments. However, the nature of watching a man stand on stage and maneuver knobs and push buttons commanded a different type of focus than watching musicians play real instruments. To enhance the effect of the technologically created music, dubstep DJs' concerts had a strong focus on large-scale audio, video, and lighting components. As Bassnectar himself expressed, his concert "experience was a physical one as well as a musical one" (Ashton, "VaVa Voom").

In the fall of 2013, Bassnectar launched the Immersive Music Tour that spanned seventeen cities and touted Bassnectar's "most extensive production to immerse the crowd in low-end frequency and ethereal visuals to match" (McGovern, "Bassnectar Announces Fall Tour"). This tour was so elaborate that it required nineteen crewmembers and two semi-trucks to transport twelve tons of gear, including sixty-four lighting fixtures, one hundred and sixty video screens, fifty amps, twenty-two laptops, and nineteen pairs of headphones (Elektro 31). It also featured an elaborate, thirty-foot sound system crafted by the highly regarded sound engineers at PK Sound. As a result, Bassnectar's music was broadcast through venues across the country at one hundred and twenty five decibels, reaching one hundred and thirty in the front row, almost as loud as the sound of a jet engine at a distance of one hundred feet. The intense audio was matched by a psychedelic video show that unfolded across the LED screens that covered the entire backdrop of the stages on which Bassnectar performed (see fig. 1).

To turn these technically based concerts into interactive experiences, Bassnectar employed mobile connectivity and SNS, which had become commonplace, especially among young adult Americans, ages eighteen to twenty-nine, who were in the audience at his shows. A Rasmussen study conducted in 2010 indicated that as young Americans were rapidly adopting social networks they were also attending more concerts than any other demographic (Jurgensen, "The End of the Road"). Looking to explore how digital technology was influencing the Bassnectar concert experience, the author developed short, five question surveys to inquire about attendees' social networking and mobile device usage. The author conducted these surveys at Bassnectar shows across the country from 2010 through 2013, as part of various Bassnectar tours and other live music events, including music festivals Camp Bisco and Summer Camp. Of over two thousand audience members polled, 93 percent owned smartphones and participated at least twice a week on social network sites, and that 86 percent had included Bassnectar as a member of their respective social networks prior to attending his concert (Kretmar, "Social Media Usage").

Examining the content of his social network posts suggests that Bassnectar understood how he could utilize the media as he was already communicating with many audience members through social networks before they attended his concerts. These outlets remained the logical media to solicit real-time input and feedback from audience members at his concerts. By posting on social media Bassnectar asked audience members to inform him of how they wanted to structure the concert experience. Using their smartphones and mobile social network applications concertgoers could respond

immediately to Bassnectar's queries, express their opinions, request songs and special effects, and communicate directly with Bassnectar in real-time.

For example, before a show in Atlantic City in October of 2013, Bassnectar used Twitter and Facebook to ask fans at which point in the show they wanted to have a balloon drop occur. Bassnectar posted that he was "in the balloon factory with D&B Interactive….Which cut shall we drop balloons on?" (Bassnectar) He also included a link to a post on Instagram that featured a photograph of himself with several balloons. Over 5,000 fans eagerly responded and suggested various songs on which they wanted the balloon drop coordinated. Bassnectar obliged and cued the release during the song that most fans requested. Throughout the concert and after its conclusion, responses continued to appear and audience members posted a multitude of Tweets and Facebook posts to Bassnectar, offering accolades and words of gratitude. Indicating that he had received and read fans' requests and comments, Bassnectar personally penned a response immediately following the concert. Communicating his gratitude in his inimitable style, Bassnectar posted "ATLANTIC SSSSSITTAYYYYY :) immmpact!!!! :) thanks for a smashing Wednesday ride" (Bassnectar) (see fig 6)!

The following night, at a show at Pennsylvania State University, Bassnectar again used social media to communicate with audience members and arranged another opportunity to engage with fans. On Twitter he announced "a Bassnectar Meet & Greet tonight" (Bassnectar), and encouraged fans to interact with him before the show and to use social media to voice requests. As the show started one audience member tweeted a song request, and asked other fans to "retweet if you think @bassnectar should drop teleport massive" (skytoucher). The post was "Liked" or "Retweeted" over three

hundred times, including by Bassnectar himself, to acknowledge he had processed the request.

At concerts before the networked era, audience members and performers were limited to communicating with each other through yelling or holding up large signs. However, Bassnectar's use of mobile connectivity and SNS to directly interact with audience members demonstrates how "social media reconfigured the relations between performers and audiences since the 'rock god' or 'popstar' became an ordinary member of the network and that enigmatic distance is breached and they become a 'familiar friend'" (Baym 287). In personally authoring his communiqués and intermingling directly with audience members by becoming part of their networks, Bassnectar appeared to occupy a more approachable role than the 'rock god.' Through e-mail interviews and text message discussions with the author in April 2014, Bassnectar explained how he initially "developed an understanding of cultural networking in high school," and recognized the potential social networks presented for sharing content and developing scenes and a following. However, without the ready accessibility of social networking sites and modern mobile connectivity, Bassnectar articulated how "it was completely DIY (do it yourself)…which was actually literally 'indy' as in 'independent of large commercial corporations' not 'indy' as in hip mass market buzz-rock that plays at Coachella." But, with modern digitally based SNS these processes were made easier, and "as the Internet developed it never seemed like a new thing as much as a really good upgrade to something that was already in existence: social networking" (Ashton, "Re: Social Networks"). By using smartphones and social networks to engage with fans and audience members and make his concerts interactive experiences, Bassnectar illustrated

how these technologies contributed to a more open, networked model of culture and communication.

Chapter Three

NETWORKED CULTURE: DIGITAL DISTRIBUTION

The myriad of social network sites that developed over the past decade presented Americans with new media for filtering and dispensing culture. The design and accessibility of these sites allowed users to easily approve and share content with each other and made these processes more open. As music critics heralded, this represented a transformation to a networked model of cultural distribution and "a sign of a seismic shift in the way consumers would acquire music" (Smith, "Declining Music Sales"). Bassnectar utilized this change to frequently release new music through SNS and allow his niche style music to achieve large-scale exposure. With this approach, Bassnectar's music garnered the type of publicity and popularity that would have only previously been possible with a costly mass media campaign, affirming the participatory capabilities of these media.

*Traditional Distribution*

Before the accessibility of the Internet and SNS characterized modern society, Americans had a limited number of media outlets through which they could discover and obtain new cultural products, like music. In the industrial economy of the late 20th century, the cost of physically distributing music culture, like CDs, was prohibitively expensive, and large corporate retailers were generally the only outlets that could afford to participate in this industrial distribution process. To offset the costs of distributing culture, retail outlets had to appeal to the most general audiences, and "only carried content that generated sufficient demand to earn its keep" (Anderson 139). To "earn its keep" in a record store, a traditional ten or twelve track CD had to create a demand large

enough to sell at least two copies each year, to an audience from within less than a five-mile radius of the record store, a feat more challenging than it seemed.  To stimulate this kind of demand, large retail conglomerates and corporate music labels utilized "a small set of actors socially understood to be 'the media' (whether state owned or commercial)" (Benkler 180).  This meant they employed very costly, carefully planned publicity campaigns in mainstream media outlets like the *Wall Street Journal* and *Rolling Stone Magazine* to attract the largest and most homogenous audiences.  Scholar Yochai Benkler termed this closed model the industrial information economy because the costs of this system led to a "very limited number of 'slots' available for speaking on these media…and limited number of points to which all were tuned" (Benkler 198).

The restricted number of actors that could "speak" in this arrangement allowed the few mainstream outlets that could do so to subsume the role of filtering cultural content.  As scholar Chris Anderson argued, Americans were "led to believe by marketing and a lack of alternatives" that their tastes catered towards "a hit-driven culture" (Anderson 139).   Also, because of the limited number of retail and media outlets through which Americans obtained and discovered new music, it was difficult for non-mainstream, niche styles to reach large audiences.  Americans "consumed the finished statements" that were mass marketed by large corporate entities because outlets that offered more choices and were aimed at specific groups of like-minded Americans weren't readily accessible.  As Bassnectar explained, before social networks he and his "friends organized our own shows, booked the bands, made the fliers and posters, promoted, performed, etc…we distributed our music through a complex international network called 'tape trading.'  Each band would cut a demo, design cover art, and go to

Kinko's and photocopy a ton of 'ads' which were like a photocopy of the cover art and some text or bio explaining the band. I handled all of this activity for my band and would take the demo and place it in an envelope…and I did a weekly correspondence with fanatics in South America, eastern Europe, Asia, and all over North America. This was all necessary because the avenues for promotion didn't exist so we had to build them ourselves. Each local scene was so small (sometimes maybe one or two fans in a city….rarely more than 100) so it was an underground niche. And we built a network" (Ashton, "Re: Social Networks").

*Theoretical Analysis*

In the modern social network "each person became a portal to the rest of the world, providing bridges for their friends to other social circles" (Rainie, Wellman 55). While these features led many scholars to commend the sanctimonious effects of SNS, others were more critical. In the *YouTube Reader,* author Toby Miller argues that SNS, especially YouTube, "appeared to undermine the crucial parts of conventional media power. But, [they] didn't do anything of the sort" (Miller 229), he asserts, because YouTube represented a modern capitalist system that separated users from the products of their labor in the form of posts they made and their activities while navigating the site. Miller claims YouTube reconfigured this labor into an alien force and then employed it against users for nefarious purposes, "spying on users and disclosing their Internet protocols, aliases and tastes to corporations," depending on market demands (230).

Noted scholar Mirko Tobias Schäfer articulated this concept as "implicit participation," defined as "the automation of user activity processes…that did not necessarily require a conscious activity of cultural production" (Schäfer 51). Schäfer

argues that users were supposedly unaware that social network sites undermined them by recording their activities and transforming them into valuable market resources: privately owned SNS are valued in the billions. As the concept of "'participatory culture' is closely interrelated to its technological features," Schäfer claimed the attributes that defined social network sites were "inseparably related to implicit user activities" (63), and mitigated the positive impact of these outlets.

However, a number of other scholars have demonstrated how explicit participation on SNS made the processes of circulating and aggregating culture more open. To begin with, Henry Jenkins explained that the low cost of Internet access and data plans made the barriers to sharing cultural expressions in these media relatively low. As Jenkins illustrated, the accessibility of SNS encouraged Americans' heavy adoption of them and this digital environment rapidly became populated with an exceptional amount of diverse cultural content, like music, and provided Americans with more choices than had existed in the industrial model. For example, Wal-Mart, one of the primary retailers of CDs, stocked the equivalent of thirty-nine thousand songs while Rhapsody, a digital music streaming service, offered users access to a catalog of over seven hundred thousand songs (Anderson 139). As Anderson articulated, while users were indeed confronted with advertisements that influenced their decisions in the digital realm, they had a minimal impact, as evidenced by the distribution of songs streamed on Rhapsody. Following a power-law distribution, "not only is every one of Rhapsody's top one hundred thousand tracks streamed at least once each month, but the same is true for its top two hundred thousand, top three hundred thousand, and top four hundred thousand. As fast as Rhapsody can add tracks to its library, those tracks find an audience" (142).

Users were inundated with content and quickly realized that they were interested in niche culture, but needed a new filtering mechanism (boyd 74).

Americans began using the functions and structure of social networks, in part because they allowed individuals to easily and reliably suggest unfamiliar content to their respective networks. For instance, if an individual listened to a new song he or she liked on YouTube and wanted to share it with their network, they simply clicked on the "thumbs-up" icon at the bottom of the screen. Then, a prompt appeared encouraging the user to log-on to one of five different SNS, including Facebook. If the user logged onto Facebook for example, upon doing so "a notification on one's Facebook profile would appear showing that the user had 'liked' or 'recommended' that item. This could be seen by anyone within that individual's personal network, opening the possibility that those in the network would at least click on that link and even 'like' it as well" (Rainie, Wellman 218). In addition, the individual's entire Facebook network would receive an update indicating that individual had "Liked" that particular YouTube video. The update would have also included the link to the YouTube video, allowing other members of the individual's network to easily view it and re-distribute it, if they desired.

This ability to endorse and distribute cultural content became a hallmark feature of SNS and Internet usage as a whole. As scholars note, the "Like" and "Recommend" buttons that characterized Facebook and Twitter quickly "expanded well beyond the social networking site into external websites and served a function of establishing trust and credibility" (235). By simply clicking the "Like" button, average Americans assumed the role of informing their networks of content and usurped this function from mass media outlets. With social networks users didn't just consume finished products

from the limited mass media outlets capable of speaking in the industrial system, as Benkler described. Instead, users received content and recommendations from the multitude of sources that were the individuals that comprised their networks. They could then share this content, comment on it, and engage in the same process of discovering and distributing. Interaction on social network sites was defined by these actions, affording the description of process of consuming culture in this capacity as more participatory.

In addition, as the popularity of social networking sites increased, so too did the power of these media. By 2013, the average American had at least two hundred friends on Facebook alone, which enabled these outlets to encompass a broad reach. For instance, if an individual "Liked" a new Bassnectar song on Facebook that song would have been distributed to that individual's entire network. As other members of the individual's network repeated the process, Bassnectar's song had the potential to reach billions of viewers. By using SNS to share and recommend culture with their respective social circles, users exercised the outlets' participatory possibilities to generate organic exposure that compared with that achieved through a costly campaign in traditional mass media outlets. This contributed to the myriad of choices average users encountered and encouraged scholars and critics like Howard Rheingold to label these outlets as more open, as he did in his work *Smart Mobs*.

In a further testament to SNS openness, individuals who participated frequently on SNS, like Bassnectar and other dubstep DJs, established themselves as credible sources and developed dense networks, becoming "superstar nodes" (Benkler 260). As Bassnectar explained, in the absence of social network sites achieving the exposure of a

"superstar node" would have been prohibitively expensive and virtually impossible for most kinds of niche culture, including dubstep. Conversely, social networks allowed DJs like Bassnectar to easily reach other like-minded individuals and foster a following for his unique musical style.

*The Bassnectar Example*

Bassnectar capitalized on the opportunities that social networks afforded to promote his niche style of music and reach a massive audience. Because of the loose organizational structure of social networks, Bassnectar joined the average users' network and communicated directly with them, and other dubstep music enthusiasts. Bassnectar's distinctive style of writing suggests that he authored his own posts, and the few written by third parties were distinguished with the initials of the individuals who wrote them. While some scholars argue that this type of interaction simply represented a modern marketing ploy, Bassnectar appeared to genuinely express himself through his social media interactions, which helped Bassnectar accrue over twenty million views of his musical catalogue. The explicit participation involved by both Bassnectar and other social network users in this process demonstrated how the accessibility and structure of SNS opened involvement in the processes of filtering and transmitting cultural content to average Americans.

Bassnectar utilized social networks to develop credibility and a large following by departing from the traditional schedule of releasing only one album per year. While Bassnectar released one full-length album each year, he supplemented that with frequently released singles and shorter, extended play (EP) albums. The singles ranged anywhere from three minutes in length to continuous mixes over half an hour, and the

EPs generally contained five to seven tracks.  This frequent, spontaneous style of releasing music wouldn't have fit well with the careful coordination and planning that was required for traditional press coverage in the select media outlets that were the main voices in the distribution and promotion processes.

But, the ready accessibility and broad reach of SNS made them choice platforms for Bassnectar's spur-of-the-moment, create-and-release style.  For example, in October 2010, Bassnectar released a seven-track album titled *Wildstyle*.  Bassnectar announced the EP (Exclusive Play album) with a Facebook post that included links to various digital outlets where users could access the album.  Since the signature track from the EP was uploaded to YouTube on October 18, 2010, it has been played over one million times (*YouTube*).  Following *Wildstyle*, on November 22, 2010, Bassnectar released another single titled *Yes* with another Facebook announcement, and since it has been posted this track has been played over two million times.  Shortly after, on February 14, 2011, Bassnectar released his *Walk Like an Egyptian* remix in response to the Egyptian "Arab Spring" Revolution occurring at the time.  As scholars  el-Nawawy and Khamis explain in their work *Egyptian Revolution 2.0*, the Egyptian Revolution was one of the most popular subjects discussed on SNS in 2011 (el-Nawawy, Khamis 23).  When Bassnectar made the *Walk Like an Egyptian* single available he announced that "a few hours after hearing the news that Egypt was becoming a democracy I was sitting on a plane next to my buddy Tamer, who is Egyptian, and the joy in his face was electrifying. He was beaming, and I thought maybe it would be fun to dust off this old tune and huck it out into vapor space, so here you go" (Ashton, "Walk Like an Egyptian").  When he released this song, Bassnectar expressed his thoughts about an event that was inciting heavy

participation from many social network users, and capitalized on the exposure that those interactions afforded.  The *Walk Like An Egyptian* Remix post was liked by over 1.3 million people, and then subsequently distributed to all of the members of those individuals' respective networks, reaching billions.

Three months later Bassnectar announced the release of another single entitled *Lions*, created with fellow DJ ill.Gates.  A month later at the end of June 2011, Bassnectar posted the links on Facebook and Twitter to another new single, *Upside Down,* from his forthcoming album.  Then, on August 2$^{nd}$, Bassnectar released a lengthy, fifteen-track album entitled *Divergent Spectrum*.  When he released the album Bassnectar announced on Facebook, "OFFICIAL: Divergent Spectrum is AVAILABLE NOW! We have a new free track for you as well, one of my favorites off the whole album: "Bassnectar & Seth Drake - Above & Beyond" ...waiting for you @ bassnectar.net MEGA THANKS FOR THE SUPPORT" (Bassnectar) (see fig. 7).  This post was also "Liked" by over one million people!

As Rainie and Wellman stipulated about high-density network theory, the more content individuals distributed via the social network, the denser their networks became. From October of 2010, through August 2011, Bassnectar released six different pieces of music spur-of-the-moment, without much of a pattern.  This unplanned release style would have been impossible without SNS because the releases would have been scheduled months in advanced to try and reach an audience as large Bassnectar did. However, the spontaneity of Bassnectar's releases contributed to an impression of genuine artistic expression.  Users then had the opportunity to easily click the "Like" and "Recommend" buttons which empowered them to determine for themselves whether or

not these messages resonated with them, if they liked Bassnectar's music, and if they wanted to share it with their own networks. Both boyd and Rheingold agreed that this active nature of discovering and sharing cultural content through social network sites allowed users to control these functions. By releasing his music with messages aimed at like-minded individuals Bassnectar capitalized on this change and used the "Like" and "Recommend" buttons to serve as stamps of user-generated approval that inspired continued circulation of his posts and music.

Some scholars, like Schäfer, argue that this networked model of cultural distribution took advantage of users interactions on SNS by selling data derived from these engagements for advertising, changing user participation from explicit to implicit. However, to participate on social networks users, including Bassnectar himself, agreed to the sites' terms of usage, acknowledging that they recognized the full scope of their action on these sites. When they agreed to the terms of participation and interacted on social network sites by posting content and using the "Like" and "Recommend" buttons, users were in command of their actions and engaged in explicit participation. In a departure from the limited voices that were involved in this process in the industrial model, any user who joined social network sites could filter and share content. This more open style of distribution was characterized as a model of many-to-many instead of one-to-many. As Benkler describes, social network sites provided a "transmission medium for a vastly larger number of speakers than was imaginable in the mass-media model of the 20th century" (Benkler 255).

Bassnectar capitalized on the new opportunities social network sites afforded. His frequent and spontaneous release of new content spoke directly to users and established

his reputation, helping him to become a "superstar node" with a dense network of over two million followers, unaided by traditional publicity campaigns. Bassnectar's effective strategy demonstrated how SNS provided average Americans with the means to readily dispense and aggregate culture and contributed to the move to a networked model of distribution, defined by this more participatory process.

Chapter Four

NETWORKED CULTURE: DIGITAL CONSUMPTION

The rise of mobile connectivity and social networks that characterized the first decade of the 21$^{st}$ century was in part fueled by the increased affordability of Internet access. This contributed not only to the production of a wealth of digital content but also to the development of new venues and hardware to access this material and new processes for consuming it. In a departure from the traditional purchase of physical products at brick-and-mortar retail outlets, networked cultural consumption encouraged the streaming and downloading of intangible, digital counterparts of all varieties, consumed through a number of different avenues. With Internet access as the primary obstacle to accessibility, Bassnectar and other dubstep DJs used these outlets to make their music readily available for like-minded consumers.

*Traditional Consumption*

As technology developed, the record was replaced by the CD, which "rapidly became the preferred form of sale by the record companies, passing sales of phonograph records in 1988" (Aspray 454). However, CDs, like their predecessors, were expensive to make available for general consumption. As David Suisman explained in his work, *Selling Sounds,* the prohibitive costs of distributing music for general consumption excluded unique styles of music from reaching either average Americans or the specific audiences to which they might have appealed (Suisman 276). Producing a CD that wasn't intended for a broad, general audience was impossible in this organization and consumers' agency was stymied: they were confronted with a limited number of choices

at retail outlets and could only purchase music during their local retailer's specific days and hours of operation.

*Theoretical Analysis*

The triple revolution, constituted by the rapid increase in the affordability, accessibility, and usability of the Internet, social network sites, and mobile devices, made the process of consuming culture more participatory. As scholar Sherry Turkle asserted in her work *Alone Together,* Americans wholeheartedly embraced the products of the triple revolution, making the Internet one of the most rapidly adopted technological innovations. As Rainie and Wellman confirmed, before the Internet "it took radio thirty-eight years to attract a comparably sized audience of fifty million Americans; television took thirteen years. But it took the web just four years to amass that many" (Rainie, Wellman 61). Vincent Miller explained, "the digital environment made it easier for musicians to enter the marketplace by making available their own creations themselves" (Miller 92). This accessible nature that Rheingold and boyd also argued characterized the Internet, allowed the various outlets that developed to become populated with an unprecedented amount of cultural content (boyd 6).

In addition to social networks, a variety of other sites appeared to help users navigate this content, including streaming services like Spotify and Beats Music, listening outlets like SoundCloud, YouTube, and Pandora, and retail outlets like iTunes and Amazon.com. Several affordable hardware devices also became available to facilitate access to these digital conduits; iPhones, tablets, iPods, etc. The accessibility of these devices and the various digital forums created significantly more choices for consumers, both in terms of the music they wanted to listen to and how they listened to it.

As the sheer number of songs in Rhapsody's music catalogue illustrated, this networked model presented "consumers with access to almost infinitely larger selections of content, much of it for free, and ubiquitous access to music through an increasing array of gadgets, both static and mobile" (Miller 92).

In addition, the open structure of consuming culture in this model allowed users to access these various outlets from any location where their respective devices could obtain a mobile signal. For example, a music streaming site like SoundCloud only required Internet access for users to visit and provided a space where users created their own channels, posted music, and followed channels created by others, like Bassnectar, to listen to the music they had posted as well. Spotify became another popular outlet, offering users a platform that, for a nominal subscription fee, allowed access to a huge library of music as well as the ability to employ algorithmic-based applications developed by the site to generate songs to match the user's sonic preferences. These outlets became regarded as streaming services and operated on more of a rental style model: users could listen to the music they wanted, but only with Internet access and they didn't actually own a physical or digital copy of any of the music.

Other digital stages emerged, like iTunes, Amazon.com, and Beatport. These outlets were also readily accessible with an Internet connection, but required users to purchase digital downloads of individual tracks or albums in order to listen to them. Unlike streaming services, users needed Internet access to purchase downloads of songs, but once they downloaded the song or album they owned a digital copy that didn't require Internet access to listen. Music blogs, like *The Music Ninja* or *The Hype Machine,* also became a popular way to consume music that required Internet access but were generally

free for users to visit, and offered streams of new music and occasionally exclusive features or content.

Some scholars cautioned that the underlying structure and objectives of outlets like YouTube and SoundCloud sought to undermine the autonomy they seemed to present users. Evgeny Morozov argues in his work, *To Save Everything, Click Here*, that user's actions on sites like SoundCloud are mined in the same way as a user's interactions on Facebook, and that outlets like SoundCloud and Rhapsody also embody capitalist systems: these sites separate users from their labor in the sense that they sell data derived from user's actions on the site to make a profit. However, just as users willing consented to Facebook's terms of use, they also consented to similar terms when using outlets like SoundCloud and Rhapsody. Despite Morozov's alarmist account, the structure of outlets like SoundCloud allowed users to engage in a more explicitly participatory style of consuming culture (Morozov 338).

With the variety of music, wealth of outlets, and number of devices available, users were presented with several choices, which allowed average Americans to engage in a more open process of consuming music because all that was required for participation in many instances was Internet access. This shift to a networked style of cultural consumption was categorized as a "move away from a world in which some produced and many consumed media, toward one in which everyone had a more active stake in the culture that was produced" (Jenkins 7), and consumed. Benkler also described the plethora of choices afforded in this networked model as a transition from "common culture passed along through a small number of mass media firms to more

fragmented culture dispensed through more channels to more hardware" (Rainie,

Wellman 30).

*The Bassnectar Example*

Bassnectar developed a digital consumption strategy that capitalized on the

accessibility of digital outlets and the choices they afforded users. The harsh, industrial

noises and disjointed melodies that characterized dubstep and Bassnectar's music would

not have harmonized well with average music consumers in the pre-modern industrial

system. While dubstep became more popular and Bassnectar's songs amassed millions

of YouTube views, that number did not constitute the same volume of popularity to sell

two full-length records per year within a five-mile radius of a record store (Anderson

146). This meant that Bassnectar's releases would have had a hard time reaching general

audiences in the traditional model. However, the accessibility of digital forums, like

SoundCloud, presented Bassnectar with a variety of spaces where, for little cost, he could

make his music readily available for like-minded consumers. By presenting access to his

music through a variety of means, streaming, downloading, etc., Bassnectar gave users

several choices.

For example, in October 2012, Bassnectar released a six-track EP entitled

*Freestyle,* and made the album available across the Internet. First, a link to purchase a

digital download of the album was made available directly on Bassnectar's website,

Bassnectar.net. By downloading the album from here users could then listen to it

anywhere they had access to their digital music library, without the Internet. Users could

also stream the tracks on Bassnectar.net, which didn't require them to purchase the

album, but they could only access the music with Internet access. With the various

hardware available along with mobile connectivity, users could have downloaded or streamed *Freestyle* from any location with a mobile signal, at any time.

On his website, Bassnectar also featured prominent icons that provided links to other outlets where the *Freestyle* album was available, both for download and streaming (see fig. 8). Users could have downloaded digital copies of the album for $5.99 from iTunes, Beatport, Amazon, and Juno and these outlets were also accessible from any location with an Internet signal. *Freestyle* was also available for streaming on SoundCloud and YouTube, through Bassnectar's channels on each of these outlets and streams of the album were featured on various music blogs, including the prominent Vibe.com, *Vibe Magazine's* website (see fig. 9). Internet access represented the primary barrier to consumption through all of these means as well.

Finally, consumers had access to a number of affordable hardware devices through which they could access these various outlets and consume Bassnectar's music. According to a report released by Cisco, over half a billion mobile devices and connections were added in 2013, and the number of smartphones, tablets, laptops, and other Internet-ready devices in existence surpassed the number of people in the world in the beginning of 2014 (*Cisco*). As mobile Internet connectivity and related devices became increasingly affordable, users had a multitude of choices in hardware to utilize to access the outlets through which Bassnectar's music was available. The variety and affordability of these various devices presented users with a model of cultural consumption in which they could select when, where, and how they listened to Bassnectar's music.

In this more participatory system, users had a diversity of choices to access and consume culture, including Bassnectar's music. By making his music available in this way Bassnectar amassed significant exposure: the *Freestyle* album acquired over six hundred thousand listens on SoundCloud and over one hundred thousand views on YouTube. Additionally, the album peaked at number seventy-nine on the US Billboard "Top 200" chart (*Billboard*). By affording users so many choices, Bassnectar capitalized on the participatory possibilities afforded by a networked model of cultural consumption.

CONCLUSION

> *"I'm climbing up the walls 'cause all the shit I hear is boring,*
>
> *All the shit I do is boring, all these record labels boring,*
>
> *I don't trust these record labels I'm touring….*
>
> *Song not for sale,*
>
> *Probably won't make no money off this, oh well,*
>
> *Reap what you sow,*
>
> *Perfection is so."*
>
> *-Beyoncé*

On June 16, 2013, rap icon Jay-Z announced the release of his new album, *Magna Carta Holy Grail,* in a commercial that aired during the NBA Championship Finals.  The commercial was sponsored by Samsung, who purchased one million copies of the new album and made them available as free downloads for Samsung Galaxy smartphone owners through a *Magna Carta* application that provided users exclusive access to the album seventy-two hours before its official release.  Speaking to producer and music mogul Rick Rubin about the motivation behind releasing his recent album this way, Jay-Z explained, "we don't have any rules, everyone's trying to figure it out.  That's why the Internet is like the Wild West, the wild Wild West, we need to write the new rules…the idea is to really finish the album and drop it, giving it to the world at one time and letting them share it, and it goes out" (Inside Magna Carta Holy Grail).

Later that year, Beyoncé announced the release of her self-titled album with a late night post on Instagram.  Without any traditional promotion, the album was made

available exclusively through iTunes in digital format for the first week it was accessible, prompting some traditional brick-and-mortar retail outlets, like Target, not to carry the album at all.  In a video Beyoncé posted on Facebook to accompany the album announcement, she explained "I didn't want to release my music the way I've done it.  I am bored with that.  I feel like, right now people experience music differently.  I miss that immersive experience.  Now people only listen to a few seconds of a song on their iPods…there's so much that gets between the music, and the artist, and the fans.  I felt like, I don't want anybody to give the message when my record is coming out.  I just want this to come out, when it's ready, from me to my fans" (Beyoncé, "Self-Titled, Part 1").

Hip-hop legends De La Soul also followed suit and made their entire catalog available for free downloads through their website for twenty-five hours in honor of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the release of their debut album, *3 Feet High and Rising.*  The group explained, "it's been too long where our fans haven't had access to everything.  This is our way of showing them how much we love them" (Newman 2).  They also articulated that they felt the need to adopt a model of "constantly giving people new music," in order to compete with the "more-is-more release schedule of their younger peers" (3).

As Bassnectar and other dubstep DJs demonstrated, social networks sites and mobile connectivity contributed to the creation of a new model of networked culture.  This model was defined by the ability to communicate instantaneously across a broad and diverse group, the social network as the primary media for aggregating and filtering cultural content, and the consumption of culture through a variety of digital outlets and

devices.  Following this networked model of culture, Jay-Z, De La Soul, and Beyoncé all employed social media and mobile connectivity in a similar way as Bassnectar has since 2010.  With the exclusive preview release of his *Magna Carta Holy* Grail album orchestrated through a social media-based smart phone application, Jay-Z confirmed how these outlets could indeed communicate across a broad and diverse audience.  When superstar Beyoncé released her album with an Instagram post instead of any traditional promotion, she affirmed that social network sites had opened the processes of filtering and sharing cultural content and become as powerful a tool to reach users as mass media outlets.  Making their entire catalog available for free digital downloads, De La Soul highlighted the myriad of choices digital connectivity afforded users in how they could access and consume culture, and the popularity that encouraged.

While EDM and dubstep DJs, like Bassnectar, represented a niche musical style, their digital approach was very successful, encouraging mainstream, popular artists, like Jay-Z, Beyoncé, and De La Soul, to adopt this networked model of culture.  The fact that these artist have all begun using social media and mobile connectivity to shape their experience, distribution, and consumption practices in indicates that social media and mobile connectivity have become essential elements of 21st century American life, making the networked model of culture a defining aspect of modern society.

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Figure 2.  Skrillex. "Cinema."  Benny Benassi. *Electroman*.  All Around the World,

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Figure 3.  Bassnectar. "Nothing Has Been Broken." *VAVA Voom*.  Amorphous Records,

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Figure 4. Ableton Library, 27 April 2012. Screenshot.

Figure 5. Dubstep Music Production, Apr. 2014.  Screenshot. 28 April 2014

Figure 6. Bassnectar Twitter Feed, 9 Oct. 2013.  Screenshot. 28 April 2014.

Figure 7.  Bassnectar Facebook Feed. 2 Aug. 201.  Screenshot.

Figure 8.  Bassnectar Website Freestyle Release. Apr. 2013.  Screenshot. 28 Apr. 2014.

Figure 9.  Bassnectar SoundCloud Feed.  Apr. 2013.  Screenshot.  28 Apr. 2014.

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