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The missing link?
-bringing in consumers and cultural behavioural aspects to enhance our
understanding of network change:
Experiences from a study of the music industry

Abstract:

Recent decades has comparatively visibly demonstrated that “the key” to successful market orientation or marketing behaviour orientation requires knowledge and understanding of how to deal with both structural and behavioural change. With globalisation and the increasing common use of IT; dealing with change seems to have come include not only “the way things are done” but, more fundamentally, “who is actually doing it”. So both the study and managing of change within an industry first requires answering the somewhat fundamental question of how to be able to identify the contextual boundaries of the industry and market(ing) context. This paper discusses the issue of contextual boundaries and research delimitations when trying to study and understand change within consumer product industries (in the paper illustrated by a study of the music industry). Focus is on how to delimit the studied area in terms of which actors, resources and activities actually do (or should) belong to the studied context. The paper will empirically explore and illustrate if and how a re-conceptualisation of culture (see e.g. Ellis & Purchase 2007) can assist the contextual delimitation and at the same time enhance our understanding when studying change in contemporary social, technological and economically embedded ‘market-as-networks.

Purpose and aim:

- (1) To highlight challenges met when trying to study change within a consumer product industry heavily affected by the increasing common use of IT.
- (2) To explore and suggest a theoretical/methodological direction which can assist vital delimitations when studying industrial and market(ing) change, enhancing our understanding of “the new roles” of producers and consumers.

keywords,

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The missing link?
***-bringing in consumers and cultural behavioural aspects to enhance our
understanding of network change:***
Experiences from a study of the music industry

(Full paper, work-in-progress, will be presented at the IMP conference Marseilles 2009)

Introduction:

"A few years ago we (the record companies) just talked to a selected number of journalists, editors, and magazines. Now my contact database has over 7,000 people in it, because everybody has some type of publication on the Web. (From graham et al 2006)

The industry of recorded music has during the last two decades been faced with a number of fundamental changes and challenges. The increasing developments and common use of "IT" (*i.e. the internet and related various digital media apparatus and applications*) has been acknowledged as one of the contributing reasons for these ongoing challenges. This includes changes both in terms of production and distribution but also in terms of changed behaviours and structures related to an overall altered media production and consumption. In many ways this illustrates a principle example of how the utilisation of new technology rapidly gets implemented and embedded into cultural and commercial life. Consequently, it has been asserted that studies into such contemporary social, technological and economically embedded 'market-as-networks' can provide marketing research with a number of valuable insights regarding the issue of new technologies and industrial/market change. This paper will present some insights regarding the complexity of research delimitations and contextual network boundaries discussing findings and experiences from a study of IT's impact on the consumer product industry of recorded music.

Background

Sorting out the structures and processes in terms of market orientation and marketing behaviour orientation has in times of "digital revolutions" and "financial tsunamis" become ever so important for all businesses and industries wanting to keep up with the ever changing world (see e.g. Mattson 2009). Recent decades has comparatively visibly demonstrated that "the key" to successful market orientation or marketing behaviour orientation requires knowledge and understanding of how to deal with both structural and behavioural change. With globalisation and the increasing common use of IT; dealing with change seems to have come include not only "the way things are done" but, more fundamentally, "who is actually doing it". So both the study and managing of change within an industry first requires answering the somewhat fundamental question of how to be able to identify the contextual boundaries of the industry and market(ing) context. These conjectures are based on the following assertions and perceived accompanied challenges:

- *Traditional vertical industrial structures of self sufficient enterprises are being more and more "replaced" by informal networks of dynamic heterogeneous actor constellations (see Halinen & Törnroos 2006).*

The traditional perception of fairly easy identifiable business institutions, linked to a certain role and activity over time, is becoming somewhat obsolete making the identification of relevant data/information sources, access and units of analysis difficult. It has therefore been asserted that an industry or a market needs to be perceptually treated and studied as a complex value creating and exchange network. This approach is however even further complicated by issue of not knowing who to include in the network horizon.

- *The digital mass mediated world is filled with 'participatory personalities' i.e. individuals and groupings whose interests and activities coalesce with what traditionally is regarded as the commercial world" (Jenkins, 2006)*

The boundaries between the business/commercial sphere and the social/cultural sphere are becoming more and more ambiguous. This makes the essential sorting of what or who to be regarded as influential and

imperative to “the industry” highly complex.

- *“power in networks largely stems from two sources; “social arguments” and resource access”*
Håkansson and Prenekert (2004, p. 89)

If “the means of production” in terms resource access no longer are exclusive to, what is above is referred to as, “the traditional commercial world” the issue of network boundaries extends beyond academia and research methodology, becoming a managerial issue as well.

This paper will, based on these main points of departure, discuss the issue of contextual boundaries and research delimitations when trying to study and understand change within consumer product industries. Focus is on how to delimit the studied area in terms of which actors, resources and activities actually do (or should) belong to the studied context. The paper will empirically explore and illustrate if and how a re-conceptualisation of culture (see e.g. Ellis & Purchase 2007) can assist the contextual delimitation and at the same time enhance our understanding when studying change in contemporary social, technological and economically embedded ‘market-as-networks.

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Methodological approach

Paper disposition

The paper is divided into four different but inter-linked sections. The first section (1) addresses the issue of perceptually treating markets as networks presenting the main theoretical foundations. This includes providing the reader with excerpts from previous empirical studies of the music industry in order to illustrate and motivate this choice of theoretical approach. Additionally the issue of IT is discussed how the increasing use of IT needs to be considered as more than just a research variable of choice. The second section (2) addresses the accompanied methodological challenges met when trying to study markets-as-networks listing the challenges and suggesting/presenting a methodological direction. The third (3) and final section will present findings and experiences from a study of IT’s impact on the market and industry of recorded music; discussing ways to deal with the challenges met when studying markets-as-networks and “the new roles” of producers and consumers, focusing on research delimitations and networks boundaries.

(1) network studies of consumer product industries?

The network approach, viewing markets-as-networks, has, as indicated above, over the years found a more natural belonging (both of theoretical and practical implementation) within traditional industrial contexts and networks opposed to consumer product industries. Recent years have however also seen a growing broad interest among scholars emphasising the networked nature of exchanges even within so called B2C environments underlining the increased co-creational view of value creation and co-operative aspect of exchange (see e.g SD-logic-Vargo & Lusch 2008, IMP/CCT-Cova& Salle 2008, Markets-as-networks-Hadjikhani & Bengtson 2006, Many-to-many marketing-Gummesson 2008).

The reason for this, as interpreted in this paper, is two-folded; firstly, a “new reality” needs an updated approach to how behaviours and structures of exchange can (and should) be illustrated in order to be properly understood and, in the end, be manageable. Secondly, in the “old reality” illustrations where based on a behavioural and structural perception of the market/value-chain where business actors where organised in behavioural structures significantly different to, and separated from, the consumers or “the end-users“ (see e.g. Håkansson, H., Wootz, B. 1975). Regarding the latter, there have been voices raised (especially in the settling dust after “the digital big bang“) indicating that business actors nor consumers longer apply under these structural and behavioural rules but instead turning into a kind of “actor hybrids“ (see e.g Rondell,

Hansen, Gunnlaugsson 2008) or ‘participatory personalities’ (Jenkins, 2006) :

“Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands”. (Jenkins, 2006: abbreviated)

Studying change (addressing new conditions, possibilities and technologies) is of course per se, nothing specifically limited to the topic of IT as change itself paradoxically can be stated as being the only thing “constant” over time. It seems however that, as opposed to for instance the impact of electricity, IT, digital media and the use of its possibilities by its own nature is in constant change. It has been claimed to show “organic growth”, evolving over time as the needs and skills of people using it changes as well as the content in itself evolves i.e. the infrastructure and technological features and possibilities of for example the internet network (Malhotra et al 1997). For instance, the concept of the internet is in terms of content, features and functions is something quite different today compared to just five or ten years ago e.g. Web 2.0, 3.0 etc.

For reasons just mentioned, the development and increasing common global use of IT has by its most vigorous advocates been described as somewhat of a “digital big bang”, turning the traditional and established perceptions of social/cultural and business behaviours and structures upside down and aside (see e.g. Anderson 2008, Weinberger 2008, Orr 2008, Lightman & Rojas 2008). Even if being a slightly hyperbolized (but wittily) claim it does seem fairly safe to agree with the “fact” that IT in many ways have affected a number of fundamental aspects of everyday social/cultural and business life. This has been especially “visible” and noticed in so called content industries; e.g. music, news, publishing):

“...The digital content markets and industries (in particular, the online news and music sectors) have changed significantly and fundamentally over the past few years, as more and more new players – many of them originally from other sectors – enter the market space of the original media companies (Swatman, Krueger, van der Beek, Internet research, 2006)

One of the fairly increasing overall views in the wake of the “digital big bang” is as mentioned earlier that open dynamic network structures of various actors are replacing traditional static organized industrial actor structures (i.e. vertically integrated and somewhat “closed” self-contained company structures). As for instance in the music industry:

“new combinations of customers, suppliers, and business partners are emerging to replace the dominance of the traditional record labels, the traditional, static music industry supply chain is becoming increasingly dynamic as new combinations of organisations come together (Tapscott et al., 2000).

“...business activities appear to be more networked, dynamic and flexible than structured in sequence as the Internet is transforming the structure of activities in the music industry, both in terms of virtual structures replacing physical ones, and dynamic network structures replacing sequential ones...Graham, et al 2006: abbreviated

(2) Network complexity

Using a network approach when studying change within in industry or when trying to illustrate and establish an understanding of network structures and processes is however, even without incorporating non-traditional actors, by its own nature a complex task (e.g. accessibility, delimitations etc). This comes, according to Easton (1995), from the concept of networks itself, as the network metaphor in itself is a representation of the complex connections found between the actors and activities involved and the context they create and enact within. The issue of going deep and at the same time covering a broad area of information over time related to the studied activities does increase the workload of collecting empirical data. The network setting virtually extends without limits through endless connections, making the studied network boundaries somewhat subjective. As new connections and relationships always can be found, a study of “the entire network” can for this reason never become the goal. This naturally becomes a bit of a paradox, as put by Easton, (1995);

“the smaller the unit of analysis, the more one loses of the connectedness that is the very essence of the

network”... “studying a large single network retains the connectedness...but raises very real issues of representativeness and restricts access to the majority of methodologies that, in practice, demand replication” (Easton, 1995, p. 417).

The incorporation of a number of different participants and informants over time also makes the potential access problem as well as making the difficulty of identifying the actors and visible boundaries when collecting the empirical data eminent. Adding even further to the complexity is, as mentioned, the increasing influence of non-traditionally actors making the contextual boundaries even more ambiguous. However, at the same time as the exchange environment within consumer product industries empirically might be becoming more “remote” and complex this also increases and motivates the need for research into these matters. The “facts of reality” will remain so instead of ignoring the complexity, by doing blind methodological compromises and theoretical oversimplifications we must find ways to deal with the increasing complexity (Gummesson, 2008). This as dealing with increasing complexity not only is of academic and educational (theoretical or methodological) importance but also of “real life” business relationship management significance. As indicated above, this is an issue not just important in terms of consumer marketing studies but also vital in order to gain a deepened understanding of industrial change (considering the increasing influence of non-traditional actor types).

(2.1) Starting off

One of the obvious troubles that network researchers face is the lack of methodological literature dealing with challenges found when doing business studies using the network approach. (See, e.g., Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Easton, 1995 and Törnroos, 1999). There are however according to business network literature a few conceptual basic guidelines that methodologically can assist the direction of network process studies:

- Johansson and Mattson (1988) argue that to start with this is a question of “microposition” versus “macroposition”. The “microposition” is mainly dyadic, describing the role and relationship within and between two actors. The “macroposition” level, employed in this paper, instead studies both direct and indirect actions and relationships within the network not studying the process from a certain actor’s perspective but studying the network process itself. The perceived network embeddedness of the “macroposition” level is hence both a way of conceptually emphasising the nature of network’s complexity and at the same time using that as an applicable way of limiting the size and extent of the studied network. (Halinen & Törnroos, 2004)
- Additionally it has been suggested as simple rule of thumb that ‘what the network participants collectively consider relevant, in a natural way, is what’s to be regarded as the basic limits of the studied network. This as the network context is expected to be, at least, partially shared by the network actors (e.g. Håkansson & Johansson 1992 Anderson et al (1994)).

Considering the, in the beginning mentioned, issue of hard-to-identify-actor-hybrids it seems reversely that by properly defining and conceptualizing the empirical context, the activities performed in the network will also define which and what representatives, informants and data are relevant to the studied network. A similar direction has been suggested by Ellis, Lowe and Purchase (2006) arguing that gaining understanding of the various network processes first requires an understanding and conceptualization of the context, as it is a way of “naturally” delimiting and defining the studied network. Taking on a perspective that recognises the influence of the living and dynamic surrounding cultural context is therefore according to Ellis et al (2006) not only of great contribution value but somewhat vital when trying to study and understand the dynamics of markets-as networks. So what does this entail? Ellis et al suggests that the concept (or a re-conceptualization) of culture can be used to delimit and define the studied network’s context, using culture as “the lens through which network activities are studied. Culture can according to Ibid provide the study with a somewhat natural delimitation of the studied network bringing along a description of the surrounding embedded context in terms of what is (and what is not) included in the study.

Bringing in the concept of culture can however be like opening up a box of unwanted associations, consequently emphasizing the need for a proper conceptualization. (Especially since this implementation of culture is more than using culture as just a variable of choice that can “taken out” if preferred). Secondly using culture as a “natural delimiter” (Ellis et al 2006) has mainly been discussed in relation to gain a

deepened understanding of traditional somewhat-easy-to-identify industrial networks.

(2.2.) How to proceed?

Culture can, as with most terms and concepts, be defined in a number of ways depending on how and why it is implemented into a study. The main reason for bringing in a certain conceptualization of culture into a study is of course not to make the study more complex but to assist the delimitation, description and interpretation of the network content. I will for obvious reason not account for all utilised and available conceptualisations of culture but instead bring into light the ideas and thoughts relevant for dealing with network complexity in the study of the music industry.

Basically, as described by Jobber and Fahy (2006), culture is defined as groupings of traditions, values and basic attitudes in which individuals and their lifestyles are developed. Traditionally such cultural groupings have been fixed or associated to provincial, ethnical, national and regional borders but the past decades (due to IT) have called attention towards the need of “de-nationalizing” the concept of culture (Ibid). It has instead been suggested that culture primarily is to be regarded as more closely related to a certain created social situation, dynamic structure or activity than the traditional provincial association. Culture is hence regarded as a dynamic ‘pool’ of the ideas and meanings, influencing an individuals’ or a groups’ decision making process, thus determining their interests and substantial actions. So using culture as a way of delimiting the studied network is, opposed to traditional ways looking at “Scandinavian shopping behaviour”, instead related to a certain grouping of individual ideas and values. Re-conceptualising culture is hence vital as;

“Meanings and knowledge change over time and our understanding of human behaviours must keep pace. As our wider culture evolves into multiple subcultures instead of one ruling culture, consumption also evolves, taking on new shapes and forms, leaving behind old meanings and developing new ones. (Schouten, Martin, McAlexander, 2007: *abbreviated*)

So how is culture to be re-conceptualised, what is it that “fuse”actors, creating a cultural belonging and a coalesce core embedded within the exchange network?

Maffesoli (1996) claimed that the traditional bases of sociality have been eroded or at least have become less dominant. Instead people strive for more ephemeral or temporary collective identifications by participating in activities grounded in common lifestyle interests, consumption and leisure avocations. Arnould and Thompson refer to this as a sort of *consumer culture*:

“Rather than viewing culture as a fairly homogenous system of collectively shared meanings, ways of life, and unifying values shared by a member of society (e.g., Americans share this kind of culture; Japanese share that kind of culture), it is viewed as the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism.”(Arnould & Thompson, 2005)

The various actors are hence viewed as culture creators not as culture bearers, emphasizing the more active aspects of consumption, also addressing the dynamic relationships between commerce, culture and consumption. Culture has also been described as the tribe like context in which the people build feelings of social commitment and identity by creating distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected and transient cultural worlds based on common consumption interests and activities. (see Belk and Costa 2002; Kozinets 2002; Shouten & Alexander 1995). Social status (i.e. the actors’ role, influence and character) is within such cultural conceptualisation attained by displaying or possessing certain forms of knowledge and skills, creating a sort of activity resource pool, consisting of values shared and re-valued by a dynamic group of members (Ibid).

It seems as this approach is a way of “organizing” the otherwise fragmented consumer environment without using the outdated and far too homogeneous and over-simplifying concept of consumer segmentation. A segment is a group of homogeneous persons as they share the same personal and behavioural measurable characteristics (age, ethnicity, etc) but are not necessarily connected to each other; a segment is consequently not capable of “collective” action. The tribe is instead viewed as a network of heterogeneous persons – in terms of personal characteristics –who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is hence capable of “collective” action. (ref)

This does not however mean that focus is on the study of culture and the context itself as the study of cultures and contexts, as ends themselves, does contribute little to the area of consumer marketing research (see e.g. Simonson et al 2001). It is therefore important to underline that the upcoming empirical excerpts is about the study of network activities within a certain interconnected cultural context and surrounding, not about the study of the cultural context and surrounding in which these network activities takes place.

“it is necessary to think away from culture in a narrow sense and towards the broader view of culture as intersecting embedded patterns. To think away from *culture within an industry* and towards *an industry within a culture*. (Negus, 1998)

To accommodate this approach this paper will however initially turn to sociological and anthropological studies of popular music. Using this rich flora of studies as a basis enables an enhanced understanding of other related data (face-to-face interviews, biographies, scene specific magazines, documentaries etc)

Culture and the context is not only perceived as the outer surrounding environment but also in a way a part of the actual activity studied as the actors' individual and collective activities in a sense in itself is what defines the context. (...*take away the activity and you take away the context, and vice versa*) Therefore, conceptualizing culture as the collectively created and shared 'playground', the core of which the studied activity is based around, is a both way of delimiting the studied network as well as defining what is (and what is not) included in the study. This approach is also sometimes referred to as studies within a sub-cultural context. Within the rich fauna of anthropological and sociological studies of popular music and popular culture the term *sub-culture* has however been widely criticized as a baggage from the past. This as the term by its own nature position the contextual activities studied as less significant to the "general" world;

“The use of the term subculture incorrectly presumes that society has one commonly shared culture from which sub-culture is deviant” (Gelder & Thornton, 1997)

So instead of using the term sub cultures, the term *scene*, or more specifically in this paper *music scenes*, is used to 'describe and designate the contexts or cultures in which producers, musicians, and fans all collectively sharing a common musical preference collectively distinguish themselves from others'. Bennett & Peterson, (2004) describe the concept of music scenes as 'the grouping of musical production and consumption practices through which individuals attain and retain a commitment to certain music and its cultural sphere' The concept of *music scenes* does consequently even further include all participants connected to the contextual activity as part of the studied cultural context, not necessarily separating or polarizing traditional production activities from consumption activities. The concept of music scenes is therefore discussed and suggested in this paper as a mean of defining the boundaries of certain contextual activities (production and consumption) enabling the study of "the relation between actions and the changing embedded context".

Music journalists commonly use the term music scenes to describe a certain area of cultural and commercial activities. This does not necessarily mean that there are clear boundaries within or between different music scenes but that every scene has a core of activities in which styles of music, attitudes and behavioural patterns are sources of commitment and dedication. Such commitment does according to e.g. Bennett and Peterson (2004) not always necessarily involve regular face to- face contact, or the display of spectacular visual apparel (no uniform like clothing, hairstyles and tattoos). In fact, individuals separated by vast distances, who may never physically meet can share their mutual devotion and commitment to a certain scene through different interaction intermediaries like internet websites, bloggs, user forums and online parties but also through fanzines, magazines as a sort of *para-social interaction*¹.

¹ Parasocial interaction (or para-social relationship) is a term used by a social scientist to describe interpersonal relationships in which individuals through e.g newspapers and magazines develops a close relationship to a subject or object or activity. The most common form of such relationships is one-sided relations between celebrities and audience or fans...

It has been argued that a different sort of music industry typically develops where there are so called music scenes at its core and that a scene supporting industry often is the domain of small collectives, fans turned entrepreneurs and volunteer labour. As stated by Currah (2006), the commercial development of new markets and technologies are explored by innovative individuals within a network (such as a music scene) it is the study of these networks that provide insights to future market conditions and consumer perceptions. Smith and Maughan (1997) similarly described music scenes as important sites when researching the dynamics of how features and values occur and are created around music over time, describing it as a sort of breeding ground of industrial activities in which cultural norms, tribe-like features and behavioural conditions emerge. There is however a danger in viewing a music scene as merely a breeding ground or a cultural context deviating from general society. The common view in both academic and day-to-day discussions of separating the major record industry from these so called independent DIY industries has often led to the misleading conception or notion that there is one "real industry" and one "non real-industry". Cumberland (2007) even claims that vast and growing activities of global DIY and independent industries today "are the music industry every bit as much as the majors, maybe more so" meaning that there is a lot going on outside mainstream media bubble "-It's easy to forget that what's happening in music isn't what's happening on MTV, Radio One or in the charts". This is vital to consider when discussing how "the" music industry is said to do this and that or when addressing the impact of digital media on the world of music.

Using the concept of music scenes underlines the embeddedness of the studied activity and its surrounding as the context in many ways by its own nature becomes the studied activity. (*No activity-no context, no context-no content*). Applying such reasoning obviously brings along both perquisite (advantages) and challenges.

Perquisites as research done on music cultures and music scenes consequently becomes a valuable source both in terms of context limitations as well as in case content and structure. Relying on the rich fauna of popular music studies subsequently provides the case study with a solid and to some extent natural delimitation, assisting the interpretation of the empirical data. It is when doing case studies according to Halinen & Törnroos vital to expose the complexities involved in the functioning of the studied network in order to be able to deal with them. As one way of dealing with complexity when doing processual case studies of change over time, according to Pettigrew, is '*to focus the study towards the process of certain activities in its changing context*', focusing on "*a number of sequenced individual and interdependent actions inside a changing context*". Therefore focusing the study towards the process of activities within a certain music scene has conceptually the potential of offering an apt study into activities highly related to its own dynamic context. What these activities consists of naturally becomes one of main empirical questions as these activities also can be identified as the means of exchange.

The problem of using the concept of music scenes as a case focal is that the content is greatly connected to the context. Even if suitable from a network point of view, it again addresses the issue of doing generalizations from the case. This, as the problem of doing generalizations based on case studies often is due to the unavoidable problem of not being able to separate the studied activity from its surrounding environment. This can however, as implied, be dealt with by studying and analyzing comparable activities from two or more distinct time periods enabling a cross case comparison (e.g., Menard, 19**; Eisenhardt, 1989; Perry, 1998; Romano, 1989 and Yin, 1989). As the pace of perceived change often varies from short and nervous movements to cyclical development and, finally, long-term evolutionary processes the issue of how time is perceived and related to in the case is vital to confer. This as the perceived past, present and future is relative to the issue studied (*i.e. "more recent historical events" can in the context of archaeology be something occurring ten thousand years ago but seen from a high-tech perspective innovations ten years ago can be perceived as ancient*).

This means more concretely that the past and "the beginning" is decided by chosen music scene itself and that "historical events" do not need to be have taken place two hundred years ago but as little as ten or twenty years ago. Time is in this way put in relation to the studied context. By doing so it is possible to identify particular events using what is commonly termed a critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954; for applications in relationship and network studies, see, e.g., Edvardsson and Roos, 2001).

These critical events are hence set by critical moment related to the history of the music scene itself not

related to the history of, say, human evolution. Network processes alternating in character are so detected through commonly noticeable events all which by the representatives themselves mark important transition periods. Hedaa (2002) claim that as such events are formed within the contextual time space they also create a somewhat ‘visible path’ which can guide the research in the changing environment. Noticeable moments defined by the representatives both confirm and complements the chosen dichotomy of the cases or periods (*e.g. the home computer, the synthesiser, the internet, filesharing etc.*) Using the same type of sources and informants across the periods is naturally helpful in order to find comparable data. The periods are hence specified on the basis of noticeable events acknowledged by the music scene’s ‘informatives and ‘representatives as well as relaying on previous studies within the area. As case studies often requires comprehensive descriptions of the network the single-case study often become the only option. (Easton, 1995). Using the common contextual and cultural setting of a chosen music scene does however by using the concept of time as a case multiplier and/or divider make case comparisons possible. (Halinen & Törnroos).

(3) The electronic dance/music scene (study excerpts,-shortened)

This paper looks at a music scene very closely related to the digital revolution, picturing the club-scene of electronic/dance-music that emerged in the late 1980’s. The scene has been described as; utilizing ‘1970’s punk-rock do-it-yourself principle and attitude fuelled with new technology’, turning the traditional rock aesthetics and ways of making, marketing, performing and consuming music on the side. (Savage, 1991) The club-scene, initially known as the rave-scene, emerged much due to development of affordable digital music instrument technology such as the sampling-synthesizer, home computers and music-software. A study of this scene can therefore present valuable insights to the underlying transitions seen in the music industry today in terms of aesthetics and attitudes as well as how the modern interactive audience is described and perceived.

“features of a technical resource are created in interaction with the context in which it is embedded” (Håkansson and Waluszewski, 2002). In order to understand how “the digital big bang” in recent years have affected the world of music in might therefore be apt to examine how values are created around music and how technology have influenced the features of creating and receiving music over time .

In the early 1970’s came the first portable and easy-to-use analogue synthesizer “the Mini-MOOG” which made a huge impact on popular music. Electro-pop –music pioneers Kraftwerk recorded the album “Autobahn” in 1974 using the synthesizer as the dominating instrument, inspiring the world of popular music, soon making the synthesizer part of every established bands line-up. The 1980’s saw the arrival of MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) making it possible to connect and control synthesizers to computers and sequencers. Though still quite costly it was now possible to let computers play a network of synthesizers all at the same time using programmed pat-terns. This new opportunity was illustrated by bands like Kraftwerk replacing their self’s with futuristic-like robot replica’s on stage and releasing albums called Man-machine and Computer world. This affected in great sense how popular music and musicians were viewed and looked upon, making it possible to create music without the limitations of being a traditional instrumentalist, implementing technology into pop-culture. The album Computer world, 1981, was inspired by the futuristic view that computers in the future would be connected in a world wide network affecting the way we live and communicate, making the global local and the local global. The band has repeatedly been mentioned as major cultural “inspirators”, in a way setting the aesthetics of “the digital future” especially by the club scene of electronic/dance music.

The technology was however in the early 1980’s highly pricy and limited to a chosen few established stars. The use of accessible and affordable digital technology linked to change in present popular music became evident with the rising popularity of electronic/dance music and the “club-scene” in the late 80’s. The club-scene, as mentioned earlier, emerged much due to development of affordable digital music instrument technology and home computers making it possible to create and record music outside the big and costly recording studios as well as enabling music to be created and produced in entire new ways;

“Through its use of state-of-the-art digital technology urban dance music has facilitated new approaches to musical composition. By the means of digital sound-sampling, natural and recorded sounds can be removed from their original contexts and reworked into alternative allowing the contemporary composer to appropriate sounds from a range of musical and other

sound sources and to subsequently re-use the latter in creating an entirely new piece of music”.
(Bennett, 1999)

This cut and paste collage format was with digital technology in the late 1980's taken to a whole new level and is today a source of revenues for many musicians selling various sound clips as “construction modules” online containing drum-loops, bass-lines, and sound-riffs. Consumers adopting modern Dj's-culture (remix-culture) started in the 1990's to digitally distribute new versions of old songs, recreated and re-edited by fans and musicians which in some ways blurred the boundaries between producer and consumer. A number of well established artists such Björk, electro-pop gurus Depeche mode and hip hop legends Public Enemy have embraced this trend and directly encouraged fans to remix their song by uploading sound files on their websites. This is also seen in radio and TV shows where the listener is encouraged to make their own remix of the show's lead theme. The enabling of remixing due to digitalism is therefore an example of how the relationship between technological development and culture practice is bidirectional as culture in many ways drives technology and technologies enables the practice and emerge of cultural activities.

The music industry as a entity consists of a number of various actors and activities including concert promoters and clubs, music instrument developers, musicians, artists, disc-jockeys, sound technicians, radio stations to name a few. Beside these activities there are of course what is commonly referred to as the record industry, record companies or record labels.

“A record label is a brand and a trademark associated with the marketing of sound recordings and music videos. In everyday usage, a record label is also a company that manages such brands and trademarks; coordinates the production, manufacture, distribution, promotion, and enforcement of copyright protection of sound recordings and music videos and maintains contracts with recording artists and their managers”

The birth of electronic/dance music and the “rave-culture” in the late 80's gave rise to an explosion of small independent record companies marketing and performing their music on mess-like dance parties (normally referred to as rave parties) This club-scene has frequently been compared to the punk scene from the late 1970's in terms of political economy due to the approach of owning and/or controlling the means of production, releasing and promoting music using independent manufacturing and distribution networks. Rave parties or “Gatherings” in the late 80's were (unlike discotheques) initially marketed and arranged by the very people that participated in the parties themselves. The scene and their illegal warehouse parties relied on informal networks of entrepreneurs who found and organized Dj's and secured and transported the necessary sound and lightning equipment. (Redhead1993; Hemment 1998) The use of internet, as seen today, was at this point of time (*late 1980's early 1990's*) yet to be discovered so instead of the user forums, bloggs and social-networks sites we see on the internet today, masses of dancing people gathered in fields and abandoned factories, marketed by cultural networks and word-of-mouth, also making the scene receive its underground status. A contributing reason for this was also the fact that a lot of the music and records that were produced used samples and bits of old records taking the copyright and piracy discussions to a new dimension; is it possible to claim legal rights over a bass-drum sound, when used in a completely new musical context?

The scene was for a number of reasons like the one above initially less concerned with performer identity of a single artist or individual band- brands like with rock-stars. Instead the scene has been described as more concerned with the experience of music as decentralized “holistic experience” making the disc- jockey a producer and a performer and the dancing audience the stars. The scene originates thereby from an underlying philosophy of refusing the traditional aesthetic priorities of popular music, like “rock stardom” (Reynolds 1990). Since no big money needed to be spent by the record companies and artist/producer-networks on the marketing and creation a specific artist or “star” the record companies, often run by the artists and producers themselves, could afford to release a large amount of records with various aliases/artists/producers enabling the genre to flourish. This did in many ways set the “standard” of how to record, launch, promote and discover new music e.g. as seen today 2009 with the highly popular and influential Beatport music store. Here one finds thousands of labels managed by a mixture of fans, music creators, “artists” and dj's where the search for new tracks or soundclips are based on the label, remixer, producer etc. Seen as slightly paradox mix of

punk-attitudes and disco-grooves, religious cults and post-modernism as well as being hi-tech oriented and full of creative entrepreneurship this youth culture made a huge impact on society and the music industry.

(-shortened empirical version)

Summing up (so far)

Obviously there are a number of other related issues that needs to be dealt with when using a re-conceptualisation of culture (such as using the concept of scenes) to assist the study of network change and the "new" role of the business/consumer-hybrid. It does however seem as if this is a possible opening in terms of defining a context containing non-traditional and hard-to-identify actors. Consequently this approach or direction is not limited to either B2B or B2C environments as future research of industrial networks and changed behaviour and structures will be forced to include non traditional actors previously regarded as "merely consumers". The latter does however in return generate another fundamental question. Considering that the concept of exchange is the basic component of business and that the concept of exchange itself requires the interaction of two parts; how then can exchange be studied and understood if the different actors all share the same role in terms of being co-producers of a consumer product etc? There is an obvious risk of getting caught up in a "methodoretical" loop, not knowing where to start or who to observe in terms of interaction and the actual creation of economic profits? Further research is hence needed to structure and identify the different aspects of the exchange process, establishing a deepened knowledge and understanding of what actually flows within the interactions establishing improved ways to generically describe the network actors. It is consequently not enough to state that all actors, social/cultural and economic/business, interact and affects the overall network process as this contributes very little to business theory/methodology or business practise in general. This will however, as stated earlier, be left to future research ...

Comments:

Due to page limitations (working –paper max10 pages) the paper is currently "under completion" and is to be complemented with a thorough empirical presentation as well as presenting a more structured analysis and concluding discussion./ Thanks for reading./ - Comments, Critique and collaboration suggestions etc are welcomed at: Jimmie.rondell@fek.uu.se

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