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Indie Rock and Mainstream Pop are Thematically, Instrumentally, and Structurally Analogous

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Introduction

Indie rock is a genre of music and produces an indie rock by a musician's creative control over the music's creation, distribution, and marketing. Millennials are experience-based, aesthetics driven customers and are, therefore, drawn to indie rock so that its image may be projected onto them. Businesses have noticed that marketing an experience yields higher sales and are now marketing experiences to the Millenial demographic. Independent musicians have often deluded their music with pop themes and production in order to appear more marketable and attractive to major record labels, thus blurring the line between indie rock and mainstream pop. I conducted research on the top 5 year-end songs according to Billboard and Pitchfork from 2014-2004, Billboard representing mainstream pop and Pitchfork representing indie rock. I analyzed these accepted indie rock songs against accepted mainstream pop songs to find that there is no distinct overarching difference between what is deemed indie rock and what is deemed mainstream pop. Business are adept and finding their target audience and always being able to sell what someone may want to buy. Indie rock has a consumer base who values the individuality and perceived authenticity of indie rock, however, indie rock is just a product marketed to this section of the consumer base and perceived authenticity is perceived after all.

Abstract

Millenials have inconsistently defined indie rock since it was thrust onto the mainstream in 2004 with the breakthrough success of Modest Mouse’s Float On, Franz Ferdinand’s Take Me Out, and Zach Braff’s Garden State. Indie rock is not defined by its sound, thereby defining it as a pure genre. Indie rock is defined by its aesthetic qualities: anti-mainstream appeal, style, promotion, etc. Indie rock is flexibly defined person to person as they perceive it. Consumers define indie rock by its themes being implicitly anti-mainstream and a two-produced sound while producers define indie rock by a musician’s creative control over the music’s creation, distribution, and marketing. Millennials are experience-based, aesthetics driven customers and are, therefore, drawn to indie rock so that its image may be projected onto them. Businesses have noticed that marketing an experience yields higher sales and are now marketing experiences to the Millennium demographic. Independent musicians have often deluded their music with pop themes and production in order to appear more marketable and attractive to major record labels, thus blurring the line between indie rock and mainstream pop. I conducted research on the top 5 year-end songs according to Billboard and Pitchfork from 2014-2004, Billboard representing mainstream pop and Pitchfork representing indie rock. I analyzed these accepted indie rock songs against accepted mainstream pop songs to find that there is no distinct overarching difference between what is deemed indie rock and what is deemed mainstream pop. Business are adept and finding their target audience and always being able to sell what someone may want to buy. Indie rock has a consumer base who values the individuality and perceived authenticity of indie rock, however, indie rock is just a product marketed to this section of the consumer base and perceived authenticity is perceived after all.

Conclusion

The definition of indie rock is muddled and unclear, but has largely been adopted by the Millenial generation to mean anti-corporate and non-specifically authentic. Business are aware that Millennials desire an experience, and not a “product”, and have subsequently managed to market the public image of certain popular music to appear as indie rock. Millennials seek an experience that they experience and can personally relate to. Indie rock purveys this aesthetic which allows Millennials to individualize and/or reaffirm their own beliefs. However, as underground rappers have streamlined the line between pop and underground, indie rock musicians have been creating music that is indie/creative sounding while simultaneously being catchy or universally accessible in the hope that they may be signed to a major label which implies job security and increased financial and structural similarities and differences between indie rock and mainstream pop. The percent difference between Devotion (Relationships) occurring thematically in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs was 5%. The percent difference between Self-Emportuning occurring thematically in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs was 1.3%.

Works Cited


Results/Discussion

Analyzing my sample for the instrument combinations that were common to top ten popular songs in Nunes and Orphanides’ study which were “background vocals, a synthesizer, and a clean guitar” or “background vocals, a synthesizer, and a distorted electric guitar” (398) as the “role of a single instrument may be negligible because of causal asymmetry” (400). It is important to note that these are “core” configurations that are not limited to the instruments stated meaning that these popular combinations may have any number of other instruments with them and these two popular ones may overlap. The percent difference between the combination of background vocals, synthesizer, and clean guitar occurring in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs was 10% while the percent difference between the combination of background vocals, synthesizer, and distorted electric guitar occurring in indie rock and mainstream pop was 97.4%.

Indie Rock is not restrictive in subject matter, but can contain many of the same thematic devices as mainstream pop music. In my research I found that the percent difference between love occurring thematically in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs to be 11%. The percent difference between Devotion (Relationships) occurring thematically in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs was 5%. The percent difference between Self-Emportuning occurring thematically in Pitchfork vs Billboard songs was 1.3%.

-I am noting that while the percent differences for Club (Dance), Generic Rap (Hustle/hypermasculinity, Anti-Greed, and Corruption (Revolution)/Justice/Feminism/LGBTQ themes were relatively high with Club (Dance) and Generic Rap (Hustle) themes occurring more in mainstream pop, but total occurrences in Pitchfork and Billboard were less than 25% of the songs analyzed in that category and, therefore, yield negligible results until a larger sample size, with more occurrences can be analyzed and researched. These lack of presence was apparent for many themes, song structures, and instrumentation combinations that were included in this sample. Many of the high percentage differences were the result of low sample sizes.

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