

Music Promotion In Brazil: from ‘caituagem’ to the challenges of digital competition

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DANIEL GAMBARO

PhD candidate at the Graduate Program in Media and Audiovisuals Process of Arts and Communications School from São Paulo University, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. E-mail: dgambaro@usp.br. ORCID: 0000-0003-0903-8788

EDUARDO VICENTE

Associate Professor in Sound and Audiovisuals Media at the Arts and Communications School from São Paulo University (ECA/USP), São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. PhD in Communication Sciences from the same institution. E-mail: eduvicente@usp.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-1130-0637.

THAIS SARAIVA RAMOS

Master in Communication Sciences from the Anhembi Morumbi University, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil. Professor at Communication School in the the same institution. E-mail: thaissramos@usp.br. ORCID: 0000-0002-8408-1594.

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Abstract

This article discusses radio as a mediator and curator of musical consumption, a historically-defined role that is currently questioned given the introduction of digital tools of music distribution. By means of interviews with professionals from the recording and radio industries, it describes the mechanisms used by the record labels' promotion staff to have a song on the radio airplay. Practitioners and stations used such commercial relationships to create legitimacy strategies that, even with the rapid growth of subscription-based music streaming services, support the curatorial mission. The radiophonic language, centred at the presenter, is complementary of the role undertaken by the software that organise and distribute musical content.

Keywords

Radio; Record industry; digitization; Smart Curation.

Introduction^{1,2}

This paper discusses how radio has historically functioned as “mediator” and “curator” of music consumption, a role institutionalised from its relationship with the music industry. Between the promotion work of record companies and the radio listeners, there is an open space for negotiation long operated by radio hosts and, for some time now, by station managers, thus configuring the broadcasters as mediators. Therefore, radio stations (represented by their practitioners) may be perceived as curators since, on account of negotiations with record labels and feedback from listeners, it occurred the consolidation of performers and bands who sustained, for a long time, the economic success of the Brazilian music industry. By sharing the exposure of performers with television, radio aids in the construction of the audience’s memory through promotion and repetitive play of songs during programmes.

The *radio pluggers* – also called promoters, the record companies’ employees responsible for contacting the radio staff – had a relevant backstage role in this stations/labels relationship, especially from the 1960 decade on, when more aggressive promotion strategies were implemented. Recognising the pluggers’ work is part of understanding how music radio assumed its institutionalised form in Brazil. It is not our intention, though, to present a complete historicization of such relationship, but to draw its characteristics, especially from the implementation of FM (Frequency Modulation) stations during the 1970s.

We believe that knowing the procedures that configured the stations/labels relationship allows for a better-informed observation about the role occupied by radio today, considering the medium must compete for listeners’ attention with music streaming services. Our main hypothesis is that, despite such services provide better alternatives for music consumption, radio retains its relevance as cultural mediator and curator, especially in regard of music genres of massive consumption, e.g. Brazilian Country Music (*Sertanejo*) and Funk from *Rio de Janeiro* and *São Paulo* (a variation of *Miami Bass*). The specific features of radio stations and their presence on the internet allow them to comply with the needs both of record companies and listeners. Therefore, radio can take a part on the *smart curation* (Martel, 2015), that is, the sum of informatic tools and human beings that organise, together, the ever-growing content offering.

¹ This paper is the original text from the communication presented at the 6th European Communication Conference (ECREA 2016), Prague – Czech Republic, November 9th – 12th, 2016.

² The authors would like to express their gratitude to the professionals who accepted to be interviewed, mentioned throughout the text. They also recognise and thanks *Fapesp* (São Paulo Estate Research Foundation), process 2015/20430-5, and *CNPq* (National Council for Technologic and Scientific Development) for the resources received to support their projects.

The main discussion will be organised in three sections. After the adopted methodology is described, it will be presented a discussion on how the development of radio and music industries after the 1960s implied in an increasing rationalisation of activities related to the massification of cultural consumption. Next, results collected through interviews with professionals from radio and music industries will be aligned to describe – from the point of view of those directly involved – the works of music promotion. The third part, just before some final considerations, will discuss the historic processes under the contemporary reality of music distribution through digital media.

Methodology

Three procedures were used in the making of this research: interviews with professionals, both active and retired; bibliographic review about the theme; discussion of hypothesis from the crossing of the acquired information.

An empirical set of data was assembled from statements from radio pluggers, radio personalities and record producers, who described how they and their colleagues worked within the music distribution business, thus illuminating their influences over decision-making processes regarding the selection and promotion of songs by radio stations. The depositions were obtained as part of two different research projects undertaken by the authors themselves. The first one, between 2007 and 2009, covered interviews with people from the record industry, especially music producers, recording engineers, music directors and music managers, focusing on people relatively known by the general public. The main goal was to establish a foundation with primary references for other investigations about the Brazilian phonographic industry. The second research, initiated by 2015, seeks to understand the dynamics of the promotion of music in Brazil and, concurrently, recover the memory of radio pluggers and discuss their part in the process. On this second phase, workers connected to music promotion departments occupying inferior levels in the record labels' hierarchy are being privileged. Radio hosts who acquired a status of celebrities are also being heard. The depositions are recorded in audio and/or audio and video, transcribed, analysed and compared in order to compose a unified set of information.

The “massification” of music

The fundamental role played by radio as a medium, in its relationship with the music industry, was (and our bet is, it lingers) the broad promotion and distribution of music, or according to our interviewees, its “massification”. By

means of radio personalities' credibility and the rotational quality of the programming schedule, radio makes it possible to keep a song longer in the listeners' minds – an important effect to boost the sales of recordings and albums. The choice of playing or not a record constructs audiences as much as feeds the power relations between radio and labels, simultaneously impacting the popular culture (Berland, 1993; Dubber, 2013). Therefore, reproduction of a limited set of music reinforces fan familiarity and engagement. Nonetheless, such formula risks stations becoming less attractive due to repetitiveness and predictability (Warren, 2013).

Radio and music industries have a long and historical relationship in Brazil. First recordings of music date of 1902, and the first disc factory was established in 1913 (Vicente & De Marchi, 2014). Regarding radio, the first station initiated in 1923, and the growth of the Brazilian radio market was defined and backed by the 1932 regulation of commercial use of frequencies (Ortriwano, 1985). Between the 1930 and 1950 decades, radio had a significant part within Getúlio Vargas's political project, and the station *Rádio Nacional do Rio de Janeiro* assumed a leading role after being incorporated as a Brazilian State asset in 1941³ (Saroldi & Moreira, 1984). Music promotion, at least in the first half of this period, was much less connected to market interests and much more to the "project of unification of the nation" and the consolidation of a "national culture" aimed at by the government (Vicente & De Marchi, 2014).

Starting on the 1960 decade, the greater presence of large international companies, as well as the emergence of domestic communication conglomerates⁴, aided the development of a Brazilian music industry. Radio and mainly television (installed in *São Paulo* in 1950) were fundamental to the rise of a new generation of recognised Brazilian musicians and to consolidate the music market. The way cultural consumption developed in Brazil can be explained, at least in part, by the means commercial relations had been established, which led to domestic music prevailing as the most consumed genre in the internal market (thus transforming the country in an exception within Latin-America)⁵.

³ Initially a private equity company, *Rádio Nacional* became the most important station in Brazil due to the large territorial reach of its emissions, especially from middle 1930s to the 1950s.

⁴ Especially Globo Organisation, of which are part Globo TV Network, inaugurated in 1965, and the record label Som Livre, created in 1971.

⁵ According to data released by IFPI, 9 on 10 albums figuring amongst the best-selling during 2013 were national (IFPI, 2014: 15). The country occupied the 9th position in a worldwide ranking of music consumption, presenting one of the highest growing rates of digital market up to that moment, always with great prominence of domestic repertoire (IFPI, 2015: 27). In 2015 and 2016, due to the economic crises, the country showed a small retraction without affecting its position as leader in Latin America (IFPI, 2017).

The decision on what music should be promoted to reach high sale indexes is – and has always been – a complex process determined by cultural, artistic and mostly commercial factors. Among the phases are: the labour of performers and bands' managers, record producers and their jobs inside and outside the studio, the label's management departments, as well as the promotion departments and their relationship with the radio staff. The quest for novelties includes observing independent music production that, sometimes, reach major labels⁶.

Although the major international record companies operating in Brazil focused on Brazilian Popular Music (MPB) and, later in the 1980s, on Brazilian rock, due to higher selling prices of albums and hence higher profits (Vicente, 2014), the music genre that sold more album copies from the 1960s until the end of the 1980s is the one we are calling "popular-romantic", especially in the segments "*sertanejo*" and "*brega*" (tacky)⁷. The strong stratification established in-between these main segments of music consumption in Brazil was reproduced by the promotion media, in an early moment through the relations between TV and Medium Wave (MW) stations: popular TV shows and MW stations gave exposure to the most "popular" music, while soundtracks in telenovelas and specialist TV shows played the more-sophisticated MPB and Brazilian rock. As of the consolidation of FM stations in the second half of the 1970s, such stratification was replicated in the two frequency bands, with FM dedicated primarily to international music and Brazilian MPB/Rock. Such division started to disappear in the 1980s and had been overcome during the following decade, when the most popular strata reached diverse FM stations programming. Nonetheless, the work of music promotion is relevant in both situations.

The work of music promotion

Given that spread and memory of a music or performer rely, apart from other aspects, on how much it plays on radio, the relationship the medium had with record companies have always been central for the music industry. Especially after the 1960s and until the early 2000s, at least, the interfaces between labels and radio broadcasters largely depended upon a professional constantly obscured from artists biographies and from music scenes analysis: "the radio plugger". In words

⁶ Pena Schmidt, who worked for Continental label from the end of the 1970s to the first years of the 1980s, recounts there was the so-called "paid matter", i.e., when a performer or band hires the company to record their own album. Some works happened to be distributed by Continental, although most of the contractors have never become part of the labels' casting.

⁷ We are defining as popular-romantic a wide range of artists to whom the romantic references are a shared particularity. Roberto Carlos – certainly the most important name of the Brazilian music industry between the 1960 and the 1980 decades – represents the most urban pole of this music genre, while other artists stand out as more connected to the urban peripheries and to rural areas, such as Altamar Dutra, Odair José and Waldick Soriano, among others.

put by Carlos Fernandes Conceição (*interview*, 2016), “the plugger is a link between the label and the performer, between the label and the field, the world. One must have a hell of sensibility, [must] believe in the product. It’s not only to deliver a product, [we] must show some selling technics, we are salespeople”. Carlinhos – the name used by his associates – worked as music promoter for several companies, as manager of BMG’s Brazilian branch promotion department and today still performs as freelancer in the same line of work. He highlights that inside record companies the teams of radio pluggers used to be large, divided by sectors, and each one visited a determined number of stations each day.

Between around 1960 and 1980 the popular-romantic music was the most promoted. The period comes before the popularisation of FM stations in Brazil, which occurred only during the 1980s. Until then, MW station hosts were the main instrument (considering radio) for uncountable performers to achieve fame. The radio personalities based their careers on relations of intimacy with the audience – the result of a process of “individualisation of listening” that marked the period of transition after the popularisation of TV (Ferraretto, 2014). The low technological quality of MW stations to broadcast music is also relevant in the process, leading to a predominance of voice that, on its turn, served to legitimise the radio personalities for their audiences. Several names stood out then, such as Eli Corrêa, Hélio de Aguiar and Barros de Alencar, the latter indicated by all respondents as the most accountable for massive sales of albums in the period. The audience ratings of Alencar’s show and, consequently, his efficiency in enhancing the sale of discs, were guaranteed by the legitimacy of his voice as perceived by his public.

Most times, for a song to be played by one station it should first be approved by the presenter and his or her producers. That is when the radio pluggers came in: they should demonstrate to the radio personnel the album had audience potential, and many hosts only played what they enjoyed. The resources used by promoters were varied: a good knowledge of popular music and market, friendships, negotiation with radio practitioners through “comforts”, and even a “motivation” in cash, the “*payola*”. The slang used by pluggers to define their work is “*caitituagem*” (peccaryness). According to online Portuguese dictionary Michaelis, “*caititu*” has three meanings: a mammal resembling a boar, native to American forests (called peccary); a piece of wood used in old flour houses to grate cassava; and those who insistently tries to

promote compositions or recordings, of their own or of others, by means of constant visits to radio and television stations, contact

with DJs and organisers of popular festivals and parties, distribution of promotional material, and even bribery⁸.

In other words, the function of music promoters was to “dig” radio and TV stations to uncover a space to expose albums, and to “grate” radio practitioners until they accepted to play the record on their shows.

There was a strong competition amongst record companies to conquer a space to play their artists, given the volume of production from each company. While disc stores received a large quantity of products to sell, the promoters of each label worked close to radio stations to promote something between five to ten albums a month. On this battle, radio pluggers used strategies sometimes unethical to break a song, such as scratching discs from competitors found at the station, sabotaging other promoter’s vehicle so they would arrive late at stations etc., as remembers Moacir Matias (*interview*, 2015), he himself a radio plugger. The next topics of the text will explain in more detail how these professionals operated.

Hit parades

During the period of development of a Brazilian music market, some radio shows and some periodicals started to include “hit parades”, i.e., charts listing the most-requested songs, the most played, or the most sold singles and albums. There is a chance the most important initiative was *Grande Parada Nacional* (The Big National Chart), produced by Sebastião Ferreira da Silva, radio plugger and presenter. The list started as part of a show hosted by Silva at *Rádio Nacional de São Paulo*⁹ since late 1960s, when he weekly indicated the best-selling albums. His methodology was based on lists of sales provided by store owners. The data was collected and compiled by a team and later published in a specialist magazine that came to have a print of 25 thousand copies a month. The enterprise was financed by companies of the record sector through advertising spaces. Moreover, the best-positioned songs were played during Silva’s show.

Sebastião Silva swears he has never accepted payments to change the position of a song in the Chart. However, normally due to his own work as a plugger or his relationship with other promoters, he deliberately included in the list some “new releases” – which he also played on the show – to boost the album sales.

The record companies saw the charts as a “sales bulletin”. Being listed on one was the first step to consolidate the performer’s career – or, anyway, to sell

⁸ CAITITU. In: DICIONÁRIO da língua portuguesa. Brasil, Michaelis. Retrieved October, 07, 2017 from: <<http://michaelis.uol.com.br/busca?r=0&f=0&t=0&palavra=caititu>>.

⁹ A commercial station owned by entrepreneur Victor Costa until sold to Globo group in the 1960s.

more copies of a given album. Other radio practitioners followed the trends determined in charts to choose what to play on their programmes, often including the new releases. Bearing that in mind, music promoters also worked together with the main specialist stores to try and increase the sales and hence conquer a space in charts. According to Sebastião Silva (*interview*, 2015), usually it was only necessary to place an unknown artist in the bottom of the Chart, listed as new, for the name to be recognised and climb some positions in few weeks.

In terms of promotion, no other show seems to have been so efficient as *As sete campeãs* (The seven champions), presented by Barros de Alencar first on *Tupi* Radio and later on Record, both on the MW dial in São Paulo. According to Moacir Matias, a promoter who crossed different phases of music industry, "there was *As sete campeãs* on *Tupi* radio, and if you placed a song on the seventh position, the following day there would be a cue in front of stores. He [Alencar] was the only one like this..." (*interview*, 2015).

Other music charts, such as the ones made by radio stations *Bandeirantes* and *Gazeta*, were also popular. All shows with this format of lists were targeted and harassed by record companies, typically by means of radio pluggers, who could offer much more than a simple talk.

Small and big comforts

Our respondents stress that, initially, it was uncommon to give money to radio practitioners, although everyone recognised it as an existing practice. A very common trading currency were a few perks such as dinners, parties, trips and some goodies, addressed direct to the host. For example, Moacir Matias tells the story occurred in the 1970s, when he managed, for a famous radio personality and his children, a trip to Los Angeles and tickets to see a Jackson Five gig with access to the backstage: the label he worked for distributed the band's albums in Brazil. He did so without conditioning the "prize" to a given new release he was promoting, but as a way of strengthening his access to that radio host.

Sometimes the promoters offered trips to audition cocktails attended by the station employees, or even merchandising material to be given to listeners, such as t-shirts, discs, electronic devices, tickets for gigs and even meetings with artists. Such connection, settled with the pair presenter/producer and with the station manager, helped to sustain audience ratings – the ultimate objective of broadcasters that depend on advertising revenue.

The interviewed professionals made it clear the gifts were rarely connected to a specific promotion project. They should, however, strengthen the links between

hosts and pluggers, a fundamental harmony fomenting the good operation of *caituagem*.

While, from the point of view of stations and programmes, this marketing strategy helped to create a loyal audience, from the label's one the enhancement in album sales amortized the high costs of the perks. According to our respondents, the performers promoted with prominence by the main radio personalities, exclusively due to the effort of radio pluggers, easily reached the mark of hundreds of thousands of sold discs. As comparison, good sellers from MPB, who received great importance in TV campaigns paid by record labels, reached a maximum average of 200 thousand copies.

Friendship

Almost every deposition we recorded present declarations about close relationships kept by radio pluggers with artists and with radio presenters. The links with performers and bands were strengthened when the radio plugger accompanied them in presentations, small concerts and radio show interviews. The hosts introduced live participation of artists (or their promoters) as a strategy to add value to their radio show. Hence the relations with radio practitioners made it easier to start a conversation and the negotiations. Eli Correa, for instance, acknowledged to play songs on his show only to help pluggers, thus improving the careers of performers or bands they believed in. "Especially because the mate [the promoter] is a friend. Sometimes you didn't like [the song] at first, but ended up liking it later, by insistence of the plugger, and suddenly the song really skyrocketed... The comrade guaranteed the success" (Eli Corrêa, *interview*, 2016).

It is important to stress that the radio personalities held, up to the 1980s, some autonomy to decide what to play on their programmes. During negotiations with radio pluggers there had been times when they refused to play songs they felt were unworthy or inadequate to their audiences. Likewise, in other moments the presenters gave airtime to recordings that, despite from the same album, were not the ones chosen to be promoted by the record label. The promoter's work was also a way for radio practitioners to identify novelties and trends, domestic or international, and use that knowledge to update their shows and reinforce the credibility they carried with the audiences.

The "payola"

The payment for a song to be included in the radio airplay is the most polemic theme addressed during the depositions. First, we must take into account

that, just like the distribution of perks, this manoeuvre is the practical consequence of the control and power once exercised by radio personalities and their producers over the music programming. Curiously, each side of the negotiation saw differently this type of bribery: while radio practitioners, with rare exceptions, tried to hide the scheme, pluggers recognised it as a regular commercial procedure.

The logic behind the acceptance of such manoeuvre is simple: the record company spent a huge amount of money producing and printings discs, as well as with the artists' contracts. Those expenses with promotion on radio, especially with "payola", should help to assure the profitable return of the investments made. For presenters, in turn, the matter was more complex: letting it clear that they received any type of financial advantage to break a song – disclosed as their or their audience's favourite – would certainly put their reputation into question. When asked about when the mechanism started, both Moarcir Matias and Luís de Souza (*interview, 2015*), who worked as music promoter on the 1960s, mentioned Genival Mello as the pioneer, manager responsible for artists like Antonio Marcos and Nelson Ned. Souza also associates the need for *payola* to impositions of sales made by record companies concerning the formation and launch of performers, intensified when international corporations extended their presence in Brazil. João Lara Mesquita (*interview, 2008*), C.E.O. of Eldorado label during the 1980 decade, opines that multinational corporations "hooked" the market and "asphyxiated" smaller labels. Those major companies had enough financial resources to put discs on store shelves by consignment contracts, that is, only receiving when the unit was sold. Mesquita denounced that big companies' branches sometimes invested more money on promotion on radio than in the performer's career because they had to prove to their headquarters a strong presence and domain of the Brazilian market. Therefore, the *payola*, more than a mechanism for promoting an artist or a recording, also became a way to exclude small companies from the music business, then assuring the exclusive presence of those hired by big companies on the main stations airtime.

During the 1980s, especially on FM broadcasters, the negotiations were transferred to the station management. The radio pluggers stopped contacting show by show to negotiate first with artistic directors and, later, with commercial managers, as noted by music promoter Umberto Campos. It was accorded how many times a song would be introduced in the station's playlist, and that generated a cost. "Why? Because advertising revenue dropped for radio, and then stations started to survive with money from the promotion of albums. So, why are there so many pitiful artists enjoying success? Because they have money. Who owns more,

plays more" (Umberto Campos, *interview*, 2015). When talking about changes on his activity, Moacir Matias stated that

Before, the plugger presented a product, showed the music, he had to know everything, who was the composer, he talked about the strength of such song. Today the plugger only picks up an album and doesn't even know what it is. Today I am a music negotiator: I go there, pay the guy, he plays my music, and it's over. (Moacir Matias, *interview*, 2015)

The record producer Arnaldo Saccomani (*interview*, 2008), though, says it doesn't mean success can be invented. The station would not risk losing audience by playing songs incompatible to its identity. Moreover, as Saccomani points out, there are musicians that, even if intensely developed, don't show talent or charisma required to convince a listener to buy their music or show.

Anyway, the demands of investments in promotion, especially with "payolas", makes the entrance ticket to the music business really high. With fewer record companies operating as of the 1980s – consequence of a process of acquisitions and merges (Vicente, 2014) – and with changes in the radio business, the emergence of new music artists became more and more conditioned to the available money.

Economic changes and smart curation

Following the popularisation of the FM band and consequent migration of audience to the new stations, especially after 1980, the music marketplace is also reconfigured in the next decades. According to Umberto Campos (*interview*, 2015), there was the emergency of a new public, and "the radio hosts felt obligated to be different, too". Popular-romantic music was then promoted over the new spaces, but competition became tougher than ever due to the also increasing presence of international music and new music styles. To face the challenges, the radio plugger "set up prizes for competitions on the FM, big prizes: took listeners to *Rio de Janeiro* [from *São Paulo*], gave tickets to great gigs, in Rio, in *Salvador*, even in other countries, Los Angeles. You had to be more aggressive", tells Campos (*interview*, 2015).

The emergency of new music styles is not necessarily a fabrication of the music corporations, in particular of the majors. On the contrary, we see it as resulting from the observation of independent cultural circuits, such as regional ones, and its adjustment to suit distribution throughout different marketplaces to renovate the cultural production flux. For instance, Kid Vinil (*interview*, 2008) indicated a few São Paulo stations that contributed to materialise the renovation of

rock'n'roll during the 1980 decade: Excelsior FM, from the end of the 1970s until the early 1980s, and rock-segmented stations 89FM and 97FM, in the following years, gave airtime to indie bands and artists from independent labels such as *Baratos Afins*¹⁰. In Rio de Janeiro, this function was covered by *Fluminense FM*. There was at first an important role played by disc jockeys (DJs), who broke and sustained the "new" music in the 1980s¹¹.

With payment for music exposure instituted in other levels inside the stations from the end of the 1980s, the radio personalities had their autonomy to decide which music would play on their shows reduced. Even hosts working at MW stations, so important for music promotion until late 1970s, lost power since the promotion efforts were then concentrated on FM band.

Sometimes it is necessary for someone to be a little bolder. Today we can't do that because FM is in charge of playing everything, you only have to see what is playing there and play it here. It is not worthy trying to make experiments, today [one] doesn't achieve success on MW (Eli Corrêa, *interview*, 2015).

All at once, the 1990s saw the intensification of the movement started on the former decade, in which small labels disclosed artists inside their own cultural circuits, so later they would transfer to bigger labels (Vicente, 2014). Besides, as part of a long process of outsourcing the production activities undertaken by major record companies, the record producer and the music director ceased being employed by those firms and, in many cases, turned into independent artist managers and agents, responsible for launching and sustaining the performers since the launch of their careers. This is the case of Arnaldo Saccomani, Pena Schmidt and Marco Mazzola, besides many others. It also composes an important factor the more concentrated market established from merges and acquisitions amid music corporations. Those firms started to reduce the costs for prospecting and producing performers by more and more using the effectiveness of small companies (Dias, 2008).

The record labels saw their market share and, consequently, their profit margin diminish as of the beginning of music distribution via internet around year 2000. Once the structures for prospecting and production were already curtailed, the next step was to reduce the commercial divisions. The promotion departments were cut down and gave space for outsourced agencies that intermediate the contracts with radio stations. These agencies, working closely with artist managers,

¹⁰ Initially a store that sold albums, the micro-label from entrepreneur Luiz Calanca became one of the most prominent releasing the indie rock'n'roll produced on that moment in *São Paulo*.

¹¹ Examples are names such as Big Boy, in *Rio de Janeiro*, Kid Vinil himself and Maurício Kubrusly, both in *São Paulo*.

present the performers or bands to the stations, propose interviews, negotiate short concerts and, sometimes, book gigs. João Araújo (*interview*, 2008), ex-C.E.O. of *Som Livre* label and the Brazilian Association of Recording Producers (ABPD), lists the activities occupied by these firms: oversees the artist' career, develop his or her work and, when the artist becomes profitable, keep a significant part of his or her incomes.

Rogério Fernando Gonçalves, partner of a music agency, tells the process:

When an artist comes to us, usually the album is ready. We give advice and discuss a plan with them, or we "do a lab" and decide to put money on the product, introduce it [to the market], until we find a favourable condition. If the music is successful, it will happen. If the song looks like a hit, it is *sticky*, it will surely happen. What changes is how long it takes: sometimes it skyrockets to success soon, sometimes it takes longer. (*interview*, 2016)

Selling albums has become a less important revenue source for performers, and the public presentation of songs and the experiences of a concert gathered forces as the core of the music business. Arnaldo Saccomani (*interview*, 2008) indicated, by the time he gave the interview, that "it is only worthy to produce music if it is getting radio airplay. If the it doesn't play on radio, don't make it, do not even compose it, because this album is not going to sell". The problem now is that, without the money for promotion from record companies, all costs must be afforded by the musicians and their managers.

(...) as record companies outsourced their production structures, renouncing their basic functions and creating a network of autonomous service providers, many music artists started to realise that having a contract with a record label, major or indie, was disadvantageous to their careers... One tangible result is an immeasurable music production that find an output largely on the internet, where these artists expose themselves and do business. (De Marchi, 2016, p.180)

Such impact is notorious when active radio pluggers claim that, without money, the artists cannot make themselves a success. In other words, there is a process of contraction and homogenisation of music production towards more commercial appeal, what can put at serious risk small niches of consumption. Even the former promises of the internet democratising the access to production means seems to have led to no concrete results. According to De Marchi, "the formation of a digital content market comes with an aggressive reintermediation in the relationship between producers and consumers" (2016, p.190), i.e., although the decentred production increases the number of producers, only a few digital intermediaries effectively reach large audiences.

Pena Schmidt and Kid Vinil (*interview*, 2007 e 2008) agreed that creativity and innovation were lost both at record companies – now, mainly music distributors – and at radio broadcasters. It results from a process of rationalisation inside music stations that drags on since the 1990s all around the world, thus limiting the breaking of novelties (Berland, 1993; Ahlqvist, 2001). Radio repertoire is narrower, and the stations are playing less and less music. Record companies sell less, and radio personnel do not try anything new. The outcome is the loss of audience appeal.

In summary, we arrived at a scenario in which the radio practitioners, both from FM and MW stations, lost air time on the schedules and now show less accountability for the artists' achievements. Strictly commercial relationships between radio station and promotion agencies are being established, which reduces the capacity of performers to access the processes of promotion of their own music (Kischinhevsky, 2011). The prospection of new names becomes more difficult for the same reasons, even if it occurs in a more diffuse space and incorporates the possibilities arisen from the internet. The artists still depend upon larger structures such as the record companies and broadcasters to "skyrocket". In this scenario, a discussion on the concept of smart curation and its implications for the music business makes perfect sense.

According to De Marchi (2016), over the 2000 decade the majors felt it was safe again to invest in the digital market, making their music catalogues available in a range of services, from paid download to the streaming services and online radio. Brands such as YouTube, Spotify, Deezer were incorporated in the daily life, "firms notable for developing new business models using music in digital networks" (De Marchi, 2016, p.104). No one can deny this is a possible way for the reorganisation of today's scenario, since such strategies are valuable because they display the most dominant characteristics of the digital environment and conform to the listeners' lack of motivation to pay for music. However, they do not completely replace the "previous" model of music consumption. The theoretical freedom of production and consumption is still determined by a few "gatekeepers", usually web services that align tools such as subscription, recommendation, algorithm, group chats. All these elements are highlighted by Martel (2015) as decisive for the culture in the digital era, when the concept of "cultural service" becomes as relevant as the one of "product".

By analysing how algorithms work for recommendation of music – thus allowing the listener to find "new releases" – Martel warns those technological devices have some limitations. Firstly, because just like have always been the case of radio by means of promotion strategies, the search results may be tampered

with and a performer or band be favoured in detriment of others due to commercial reasons. Secondly, because by working only with quantitative data machines have difficulties in predicting behaviours, emotions and sensibilities, which leads to increasingly modest recommendations (Martel, 2015). Therefore, the human element is as important as the digital tools for recommendation. The author count on such approach to suggest the *smart curation*, a double filter that unites big data with human intervention. The smart curation is part of a conversation, a talk that allows exchanges, a plurality of tastes, and develops in different “spheres of judgment” (Martel, 2015).

We must point out, however, that Martel finds valuable the conversations and recommendations legitimised by the popularity of the critics on web-based environment (the “e-reputation”), but do not take into consideration the traditional means. In the specific case of radio, as can be understood from the interviews Martel selected to include in his book, it is clear he deliberately placed the medium in an inferior position, one of low relevance for music recommendation. In our opinion, his explanation is too simple and little connected to the different realities of the medium around the globe, including the Brazilian market. New and old communication means are combined to promote and distribute content, being the listener/user dimension a fundamental one. The decisions made by individuals are based on personal taste as well as on the reputation of a promoting agent, independently of the space where it occurs. So, opposed to the ideas of Martel, we believe that radio stations – digital or web-based – are also a fundamental factor in a *smart curation* of music.

To support our opinion, we highlight that the professionals we interviewed between 2015 and 2016, similarly to the ones interviewed in 2008, state in unison that radio is of utmost importance to music business, primarily because it is still the best suited communication means for music “massification” by repetition and memory creation.

Music streaming services and paid downloads, such as Spotify, do not satisfyingly reward the artists yet (Knopper, 2018). Live performances are fundamental sources of revenues for musicians and managers, and for that the web presents itself as a good channel for promotion. Rogério Gonçalves (*interview*, 2016) believes internet is a very important tool to his agency’s work, since it gives substance while presenting trends to radio station and hence open spaces for exposing music. At the same time, radio promotion represents a possibility of improving the online visibility of the artists (by increasing the visualisation of social media profiles, for example). Thus, what is happening on the web sums up as a tool to be used in the decision-making process inside the music industry.

As for the radio business, it looks like a moment of opportunity is opening. Streaming services are not able to back the “massification” of music without the repetition and the presenter’s voice legitimising a song or a performer or band. There is no doubt this type of service is becoming popular and has potential to reach many more users, especially with the probable improvement in the conditions of access to the internet in Brazil¹². However, the current moment also implicates in changes in the radio formulae, maybe to recover its fundamental role in music release. To make it clear, we are not defending practices such as the payment of bribes to launch a song. On the contrary, we are suggesting a transition that returns the reputation of the radio personality to listen, evaluate and suggest music, thus contributing as part of the “human dimension” of the smart curation.

Today radio represents a sequence of events that happened in the 1990 decade, it is not so innovative. Some stations even take some chances with this innovation, but could bet much more, because if radio puts its stakes on a new market, in the new music generation that is just happening, things would be easier [for independent music]. (Kid Vinil, *interview*, 2008)

That is to say two propositions intersect: one, to renovate the music programming, with space to sustain the current modes of production and to enable independent music offering and massification, with greater connection with autonomous music scenes; and two, to praise once again the radio personality, i.e., the link with the listeners construed in the course of the years and which is now expanding to web profiles. Indubitably, such renovation shall imply in a format of radio business less dependent on resources paid by record labels and music managers, and more concerned with strengthening the ties with the listeners and not solely with the music industry.

Conclusion

From depositions collected through interviews with professionals from different sectors of the music diffusion chain, this article demonstrated how the relationship between radio stations and record companies was assembled. Historically, personal relationships are added to market-oriented rational decisions to promote music and performers before a broad public.

¹² According to Brazilian Association of Recording Producers (ABPD), in 2016 the income with digital sales of music reached 111.7 million dollars, or 49% of the total revenue of the music industry. As comparison, the income with public playing summed up 84 million dollars, or 36.6% of total. Streaming services represented 75% of total digital sales (90% if video streaming is also considered). The digital market grew 23% in 2016 in comparison to 2015. (Data retrieved September, 22, 2017 from: <http://abpd.org.br/home/numeros-do-mercado/>).

Not denying the commercial relations resulted in the narrowing of the music distribution channels, by favouring big album sellers instead of a greater cultural diversity, it is clear that radio broadcasters took a significant role as cultural gatekeepers. As verified, such role is not completely erased with the introduction of automatized mechanisms for music recommendation, available through digital platforms. Quite the reverse, it is on its historically-attributed function that the radio business may find a competitive advantage to the maintenance of its legitimacy as curator for music consumption.

We do not wish to advocate in the benefit of unethical practices such as those described in this text. Nonetheless, we tried to show how the historical development explains the way radio is perceived today by its public – positively or negatively. The relationship between radio pluggers and radio practitioners, for instance, was important for many radio personalities to establish their reputation with the audience. We believe, with a certain optimism, that such deeds can be reversed to a greater cultural diversification on the mediatic content offering related to music.

Today, the job of radio promoter becomes wider and more complex. Considering the feasible multiplication of specialist spaces of music distribution, the work of the pluggers seems to dislocate from the promotion oriented to “massification” to niche markets of relatively independent circuits of music.

For a possible extension of this research it would be required an additional, qualitative investigation with the audience, to answer how the music consumption is divided amid the new and the old channels of music circulation. It would also demand the observation of audience movements in specialist music shows, normally offered in channels alternative to traditional radio broadcasting, such as podcasts and webradios. The set of data to be obtained, together with the observations detailed on this article, would make it possible to propose business models that horizontally integrates different recommendation strategies that qualifies the smart curation.

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