

Popularity of Music Television: Phenomenon or "One Hit Wonder"?

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Essay Type: Cause-Effect

MTV promotes a romanticized teen lifestyle, reflecting the images of famous artists that differ with the realities of the "Generation X" lifestyle. While some view the station as "illustrated radio" or an entertainment network for viewers' pleasure, others more accurately consider it as an advertising enterprise that endorses products and promotes attitudes (O'Neil 12). Whether or not MTV critics agree with these "messages" that the network sends out, it has become a huge franchise generating large profits and great popularity. MTV's entertainment, commercialism, and messages satisfy and influence many types of viewers, giving us, the viewing audience, a better understanding of the immense popularity of Music Television (MTV).

As the entertainment mogul, MTV jumpstarted careers and dictated nearly every move in pop-culture. Its "children" range from Madonna to Britney Spears. With 1988's "Yo! MTV Raps," it brought hip-hop into the mainstream; with 1992's "The Real World," it laid the groundwork for reality television. By the mid-80's, as a group of competitors enticed MTV's young audience, the network reinvented itself. The anchor in 1987 was the pop-trivia show "Remote Control." Even with all the shows that have stemmed out of MTV, their music videos are still a major priority.

Commercialism is as showing too much regard for profit and MTV does this with its advertising industry. Once the advertisement industry noticed the MTV network's popularity, it became a very desirable sales method. Advertising agent Kevin Burns explains, "if you are a national advertiser and you buy teens, you are going to buy MTV" ("Viacom" 11). MTV

appealed to its viewers by constantly televising popular singers and other role models. A music video endorses many nonmaterial items, as well as material items. Regular inter-program commercials usually promote brands of physical items. However, in music videos with the popular singers, messages, and images are promoted to the viewer. Videos increase an entertainer's popularity, thus promoting his/her record, producer, type of music, style of dance, and physical image. This popularity increases profit industries. The artist's record sales boom, benefiting not only the record company but also the record stores and any other person involved in the process of production. "MTV was dealing with the [record] labels, not the artists," states R. Serge Denisoff (154).

With so many brands and agencies waiting to place their ads on MTV, the network itself needed to advertise its own information and existence in some way to increase its own profit. The network began to air animated segments after commercial breaks that endorsed the MTV logo. Then in 1989, the network issued "In The Bin," a newsletter designed to unite MTV, VH1, and retailers (Newman, "MTV Spreads" 55). The newsletter included advertisements and information about new developments in the MTV Network. These endorsements for the network get people interested in MTV.

With MTV's fame towering with both its entertainment and advertising fronts, the only thing left would be the fans. Of course, MTV has changed the way listeners experience music and the way musicians compose it: A pop song is now something to be viewed as well as listened to. And as MTV's popularity is on the rise, stars realize they need their MTV. The artists who have a visionary eye for their music create quick-cut eye candy for listeners. Sales of Michael Jackson's hit "Thriller" exploded after the video of the same name (whom critics still rank as the

best video of all time) began airing. MTV's ratings went through the roof because the fans responded to the video.

In 1981, no one expected MTV to be such a powerful franchise fourteen years later. It developed a new style of entertainment that competitors can only wish to copy. Becoming an MTV star was a dream to many people. Advertisers were more than happy with the network's stations that satisfied so many viewers and had distinct personalities. Music videos changed the image of music. As *Essence* columnist Bonnie Allen says, "MTV made us look at the sound of music" (83).

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Mary Prater is a Political Science major. Natasha Whiton was her English instructor.

Ms. Whitton's Comments: *Mary was asked in this essay to write about the causes of a modern phenomena. In active prose, she did an excellent job both of detailing the popularity of music television in today's society and offering a variety of creative and innovative reasons for this effect.*