

Sample Essay for Chapter 10

Explain how the post-1950 music industry used performer visual images to sell “products” other than music, and how this practice has impacted performers.

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As was discussed in the previous chapter, visual images of performers have been used throughout time to market music. In the latter part of the 20th century, however, this practice seemed more pervasive as new media became available. Marketers used **television**, music **video**, and eventually **web-based marketing** to advertise, and while **some performers prospered** through use of visual marketing of their bodies, **others found** body-centric marketing **practices detrimental** to their careers, or even **demeaning**.

Girls groups of the 1950s and 1960s provide an example of how performer’s bodies were utilized to market product. These groups were aptly named in the sense that the performers were often teenagers or very young adults. They happily signed recording contracts, but sometimes felt trapped in situations that were not ideal for them financially, or in terms of job security. Marketed as groups with names like

“The Ronettes,” **group members were treated as exchangeable parts** who could easily be replaced. Marketers did not acknowledge individuals by name, and **group members were created to “look alike”** through use of identical costuming, hairstyles, and jewelry. Most did not move on into solo careers. In terms of marketing, **accessories such as jewelry and make-up were sold** to young women who desired to “look like” the performers who appeared on the covers of the latest records. Some **entrepreneurs were more concerned about how women “looked” than they were with their musicality**, as the manufactured studio sound could be scrubbed. **Resultantly, some talented musicians were overlooked** for these roles.

Music **video marketing** that emerged on television in the early 1980s marked a noticeable change in how musicians were visually portrayed, and at times, images were **hypersexualized and even misogynistic**. While **some performers like Madonna financially benefitted** from music video marketing that focused the “gaze” of the listener on the performer’s body, **other artists felt demeaned**. Pat Benatar is just one performer who resented having her visual image altered, and she produced her own videos to counteract practices that she found intolerable. **MTV was essentially a “commercial” enterprise, selling not only music, but also inserting commercial products into scenes. For many women, the fear of “aging”** in this visual industry was very real.

Web-based marketing at the turn of the century made the link to marketing even more convenient. A performer’s **website would feature her music, but also included easy access to merchandise**. Many **artists became associated with non-musical products** such as clothing lines and perfume, for example. The end result is that **record companies hired fewer artists, and invested heavily in individuals who could be “franchised”** widely, including an entire product line. This practice, coupled with technology like auto-tune that could “correct” weak vocal technique, kept some very worthy musicians out of the industry.