The Evolution of MTV Music Programs

An Analysis of the MTV Artists Program

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Abstract

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The purpose of the study was to explore the evolution of MTV music programs by analyzing the *MTV Artists* program. Launched in 1981, MTV originally got its fame from its music videos and music shows. But in order to keep engaging its viewers, it has shifted from a pure music channel to a channel dedicated to pop culture. Its music programs moved from television to a digital platform gradually. The *MTV Artists* program launched in 2012 was the new digital music initiative of MTV. The researcher used content analysis to understand the background of the *MTV Artists* program. A survey was conducted to measure the influence of the program on MTV’s brand image and viewership.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Over the past few decades, new technology has dramatically changed the television industry. Competition from online programming like Hulu, Netflix and YouTube forced traditional television to keep evolving. Additionally, people are spending more time on different platforms like laptops, tablets and smartphones. Keeping the audience engaged in this multiplatform environment is more challenging than ever. Many TV networks have begun to using social networks and multiplatform strategies to enhance viewership. Greater competition among channels has resulted in declining ratings and advertising revenue, causing producers to look for cost cutting and breakthrough alternatives. The 1990s saw the introduction of more reality TV shows which became popular worldwide. From the 1990s to the 2000s, at least nine reality show franchises have had over 30 international adaptations like Idol and The X Factor. With the success of the shows like Big Brother, Survivor, American Idol, Dancing with the Stars on the major networks, other cable networks including Bravo, A&E, E!, TLC, History, and VH1, MTV changed its programming to mostly consist of reality TV shows during the 2000s (Levin, 2007).

Among all of the evolving networks, MTV is one of the networks that has changed most dramatically. Established in 1981, MTV launched as a 24-hour music video channel which not only changed the music industry, but also become an influential source of pop culture. Before MTV, viewers experienced music by listening to radio stations and recorded music; with the advent of MTV, viewers were able to watch music.
The concept was extremely attractive to record companies since they recognized its value as a promotion vehicle. In the 1980s, MTV was instrumental in promoting the careers of performers such as Madonna, Michael Jackson, Prince and Duran Duran, whose videos played in heavy rotation (MTV Launches, 2014). By the end of the 1980s, MTV started airing non-video programs, targeted the youth audience. Beginning with the popular reality show *The Real World* in 1992, MTV has produced more non-music programs since then to promote regular viewing among its 18-34 target demographic. Today, MTV’s main channel shows little music programming. With the shift in its programming, its brand image has also shifted from pure music to more about the culture surrounding the music (Ohlsson, 2010). To enhance its brand image, MTV not only created sister channels like MTV2 and MTV Hits that are airing more music content, but have also developed many special programs like *MTV Artists*.

Launched in August 2012, *MTV Artists* is a new platform that gives artists the opportunity to connect directly with MTV’s millions of fans. It started with over a million artists’ webpages that were created by MTV (AOL On, 2012). Then, it invites any artists, famous or not, signed or unsigned, emerging or established to claim or create their page on their website. Artists could customize their pages since they have full control of the content and information. The website provided artists with the ability to submit their own music video for on-air consideration. Also, artists could submit music videos and tracks to MTV/VH1/CMT’s websites, including MTV Buzzworthy, MTV Hive, CMT Edge. In addition, artists had the opportunity to partner with third parties like music festivals, and opening shows for other artists (Bibel, 2013). Collaborating
with Topspin, a technology company that provides direct to customer sales across the Internet, *MTV Artists* offers the opportunity for artists to sell digital and physical products directly to their fans. Fans could type and search for information about their favorite artists including photos, music videos, interviews, tour dates, and buy music directly from the website to support artists. Since everything has been transformed to a mobile platform, MTV also developed the Artists MTV app which not only has information about artists but also has more useful features like song ID, a tool that use the phone’s microphone to identify any song that is playing and gives the user information on both the song and its artist.

Although there is little music content on MTV’s main channel now, music and the culture around music still plays an important role in MTV’s brand image and *MTV Artists* is certainly a step that moves MTV back to its roots (Atkin, 2013).

**Statement of the Problem**

*Problem 1. How has MTV’s programming changed and evolved to continue to appeal to its target demographic?*

As a cable network, the traditional television programs on the channel are always the core products. According to Nielsen, the average TV viewer spent 4 hours, 38 minutes a day watching TV in 2012, a decrease of six minutes from 2011 (Chimielewski, 2012). Even though the time watching TV per person per day is decreasing, viewers still spend more time watching TV programs on DVRs, Netflix and Hulu by using different platforms (Kafka, 2013). With changing viewing habits, TV networks have to keep changing their programming to attract audiences and engage their brand. From the
establishment of MTV in 1981, it has continually reinvented itself and evolved to sustain its appeal to the target demographic of 12-34. There are multiple issues driving the evolution; intense competition, the improvement of technology and the collapse of the music industry. MTV is not only a single channel airing music videos. Owned by Viacom, now it is the “MTV Music Group” including sister channels like VH1, CMT, MTV2, and MTV Hits, all with diverse programming throughout these channels and other platforms. There is little music content on its main channel, but on other channels and platforms. It is important to understand the evolution of MTV programming in order to understand the background behind the launch of MTV Artists.

Problem 2. What role does music content play in MTV’s brand image?

In 2013, MTV was listed on the Forbes “world’s most valuable brand list, but it has also been criticized as one of ten brands that lost the most value (Sauter,2012). It revolutionized the music industry when it launched and became an influential source of pop culture. At first, the network’s creative music content helped build a strong brand globally, but as it gradually changed the programming and experimented with new programs, its brand image also has changed. Does that mean it abandoned the “music” part of its brand image as it removed the “music television” under its iconic logo in 2010? “MTV has never programmed more music in our entire history then we do today (on television)” according to Shannon Connolly SVP of music strategy at Viacom music group (Bloomberg TV, 2013). So how does MTV treat “music”? What role does music content play in its brand image? Is MTV still targeting the audiences who are interested in music as before? By understanding these questions, it will be easier to
understand why MTV decided to launch the *MTV Artists* program and whether this program helps MTV to maintain its brand image.

*Problem 3. What multiplatform strategies has MTV utilized and what are the influences?*

“MTV, more than any network, has an imperative for reinvention. The network must anticipate changing tastes and trends among its young audience,” declared Viacom’s CEO Philippe Dauman (Mcduling, 2014). To continually appeal to its target demographic, MTV must be dedicated to constant innovation not only on its programming but also on different platforms. From its appearance on the internet to the widespread use of social media, MTV never stops its efforts to keep its cutting-edge brand image. There are multiple multiplatform strategies that MTV has implemented and each of them has a different approach to appeal to different users. *MTV Artists* is one that has not only used its website but has also moved to a mobile app. Are these strategies helping to engage its viewers or not? Which have succeeded and which can be improved? An analysis of MTV’s different multiplatform strategies and its influences can be utilized to study the meaning and impact of *MTV Artists*.

*Background and Need*

*Evolution of MTV’s Programming and Brand Image*

MTV was established by Warner Amex Satellite Entertainment Company (WASEC) in 1981. John Lack, WASEC Executive Vice President and also the original creator of music television, collaborated with Robert Pittman, a program director for the Warner Cable Corporation, to pitch the idea of a 24-hour music television network.
The first video played on the channel was “Video Killed the Radio Star.” Since then, MTV not only established the music video as one of the most important promotion and marketing vehicles for the music industry, but also built a strong brand of pop music and pop culture itself. To continuously appeal to its target audience of adolescents, its programming has changed over time.

Initially, the key to MTV’s viability was to produce low cost music video programming; record companies provided the videos for free as advertising for its artists. MTV later paid for exclusive use of the videos (Burns, 2003). This arrangement allowed MTV to minimize costs by not producing programs. The programming is like a visualized top 40 music radio station with music repeated time to time according to a light, medium, or heavy “rotation” schedule (Burns, 2003). It also has introduced the concept of a VJ (Video Jockey) similar to the function of a DJ (Disc Jockey) used in radio. The only non-music video programs at that time were concert specials and other programs like interviews and music related movies. In the late 1980s, to capture its audience for longer periods of time (Wegen, 2011), MTV began to produce its own TV series; game shows like Singled Out and reality series like The Real World. Since then, there have always been reality TV shows on MTV.

Andrew Goodwin identified three phases of MTV’s development and notes that MTV moved from a focus on promotion of pop music to a role as “an all-encompassing mediator of rock culture that seeks to keep its viewers up to date with all current forms of music, with developments in popular culture generally. (TV, cinema, sports, celebrity news)” (Goodwin, 1992). In 1996, MTV launched MTV2, which allowed MTV to focus on traditional programming
rather than music videos. In 2009, MTV introduced different kinds of reality shows that began with *16 and Pregnant* and continued with *Teen Mom* and *Teen Mom2*. In 2011, MTV matured into a more traditional television network with a broad mix of scripted (*Teen Wolf*) and reality programming (Bauder, 2014).

With its programming changing, the brand image of MTV also changed. In the beginning, MTV mainly targeted a young audience from 18-34. For mid-1980s’ television, the music industry and advertisers, “youth” represented a group with identity, a life style expressed through rock music, stars and styles (Goodwin, 1992). MTV’s groundbreaking programming of music video created an identity, steeped in music, that spoke directly to this specific demographic and consequently its brand image was established by its music programming (Goodwin, 1992). In the ’90s, it started to produce more reality and script shows as previously mentioned. Although its programming has changed from its original 24 hour music video format, the MTV brand (BET, CMT, VH1, MTV2), remained focused on “format” programming and mostly programs that had a musical focus. (Burns, 2003). In addition, to fill the void with few music videos on TV and expand its reach worldwide, MTV launched MTV International in 2006, an online channel that aired commercial free music videos. Thus, the MTV brand shifted to become more about the culture surrounding music. Unlike other conventional business strategies that grow by retaining current customers and attracting new customers, MTV shed its loyal viewers as they grew out of the demographic. “We’ve chosen not to grow old with our audience, but to remain contemporary with current-day tastes,” Van Toffler, President of MTV and MTV2 said
in 2001. That allowed MTV to keep its core values intact but necessitated constant re-invention (Greene, 2001). Starting in 2010, MTV moved even further to focus on the second wave of the millennial generation (Interbrand, 2014), teens 13-17 with teen dramas like Skins and Teen Wolf. What is the role of music content in its brand image now throughout the changes? Many scholars like Andrew Goodwin, Burns and Thompson have researched the early evolution of its programming and focused on its non-music video programs, but few of them have discussed how MTV changed its attitude or strategy toward “music” in its brand image and how it innovated music programs on other platforms. Additionally, research is lacking concerning how other channels in the MTV Music group have influenced the brand image of MTV or the relationship between MTV and its spin-off and subsidiary channels. The researcher will discuss how its music programming changed and also the evolution of music in its brand image in the following chapters.

MTV’s Multiplatform Strategies

As new technology is changing the way viewers consume entertainment, most television broadcasters have embraced a 360-degree or multiplatform strategy and MTV is no exception. Multiplatform is about dispersal of content across multiple outlets and this may involve creation of new content for different delivery (Bennett and Strange, 2008). For many traditional media, the online version of its brand was just about having a presence there and MTV.com was no different. In 1999, Viacom formed MTV Interactive (MTVi), a new Internet only music company including three websites; MTV.com, VH1.com and sonicnet.com. MTVi contributed to the MTV360 strategy,
whose goal was to sell all platforms together to advertisers (Hogans, 2001). The website was re-launched in 2001 intending to strengthen the fans’ relationships with MTV by adding community elements that connect fans with favorite music, artists and MTV shows (Penki, 2001).

In 2005, MTV became more serious about its multiplatform strategies. It built a new digital media studio and launched the online video service “Overdrive.” The content included continuous MTV News updates, artist interviews, music videos, live music performances, original and newly created short-form programming, MTV and MTV2 show footage, and movie trailers. (Greene, 2001). In 2006, MTV pushed its multiplatform programming to a new level by making the 2006 VMAs (Video Music Awards) a multi-screen, interactive experience, which gave viewers a live behind the scenes view of the VMAs on MTV Overdrive. MTV was also starting to focus on social networks and mobile devices to help promote its shows and engage viewers. Examples of this strategy included the Facebook app for Collegelife, Facebook game “Jersey Shore” and its app on iPhone, and the group texting strategy to promote the show “Skin” (Wasserman, 2010). Moreover, MTV also created content for social media platforms, which it’s young viewers were most engaged with. It had been creating about 200-300 pieces of new content a day on its websites and social networks (Lawler, 2011).

MTV has a range of different websites, mobile apps and social media platforms. The MTV Artists website and app have a different approach to attract its target demographics. Through history, there are researchers have talked about the influence of these different platform strategies and also many have mentioned the multiplatform
strategies of MTV. Few researchers have discussed the strategies that relate to its music content or “music” part of its brand image, and the evolution of its music programs on different platforms. This research will focus on these aspects by analyzing the *MTV Artists* program.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore the formation of the *MTV Artists* program, its operation and its influences on the MTV network in order to better understand the evolution of MTV’s music programs and the network. MTV, as one of the world’s biggest entertainment brands, reaching more than 700 million of households around the world (MTV, 2013), has had a great impact on pop culture and the youth generation. It is also one of the most up to date TV networks (Halbrooks, n.d.), and is dedicated to constant innovation in content and technology. It has changed through history, in many ways, represented the changing habits and behavior of how the youth generation consumes entertainment. Beginning as a pure music channel, music has always been a major part of MTV’s programming and brand image; it has changed to today’s variety of shows and has little music on its main channel. It reflects one of its strategies, which is using music content or the culture generated by music to attract its target demographic. Analysis of a music program like the *MTV Artists*, will explain whether music content is attractive to the “millennial generation” and whether it is an effective way to engage its viewers and benefit its brand image.

In order to understand the influences of the *MTV Artists* program and the role of music played on MTV’s brand, a survey targeting persons age 12-34 was conducted to
collect information and data. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used according to different questions. Content analysis and observation was used to generate information to answer the first research question.

Research Questions
1. Under what conditions did MTV decide to launch the *MTV Artists* program?
2. How does the *MTV Artists* program work and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Will the *MTV Artists* program benefit the MTV brand image and help to engage its viewers?
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Technology has caused significant change in the television industry. The tastes of TV viewers and their viewing habits have also changed. People are increasingly watching time-shifted TV by using different devices. Competition has been fierce not only within the TV industry itself but also because of the emergence of online streaming services and other content providers. Traditional TV networks, like MTV, have to keep evolving. Originally known as a channel that mainly aired music videos, it has changed to a combination of various reality shows and TV series. However, music seems not to have completely disappeared on MTV since there are other music programs on its spin-off channels and other sister channels. In addition, the channel has developed many other music programs like *MTV Artists* – a new online platform to help artists to promote themselves and connect with their fans. This literature review will address three areas that relate to the background of *Artist. MTV*. The first area is how MTV has changed its programming through its history. The second section will be a discussion on the role that music content has played in its brand. Finally, the last section will focus on MTV’s multiplatform strategies.

Body of the Review

Involvement of MTV's programming

In the 1980s, the deregulation of the entertainment industry led to an explosion growth in cable television. Launched in 1981, MTV changed the music industry. Since 1981, music videos have essentially become advertisements for sound recordings (Starr, 2005). In addition, before MTV, music programming on TV was limited to bands
performing one or two songs on late-night talk shows or “Saturday Night Live.” (Guttenberg, 2011) MTV was launched with programming which was like a form of visual radio—using a continuous flow of music videos 24 hours a day. By targeting the 25-34-year-old demographic, MTV also allowed advertisers to reach the youth audience on TV—the market segment that had been watching existing TV least. The programmers of this new form of cable network came from radio and the trend was “narrowcasting, a way that targeting specific demographic and selling the popularity within that audience to advertisers rather than aiming at the largest possible audience” (Tannenbaum & Marks, 2011). Goodwin has suggested that there were three phases in the early history of MTV. In the first phase (1981-1983), the only different programs other than music videos were interview-based programming and concert specials. “Narrowcasting” was then challenged by Michael Jackson’s Thriller, airing in 1983. This was the first time there was an “appointment moment” on MTV, where audiences were expecting and waiting for a specific music video. It also shifted the music video from the cheap, unambitious video to high quality and well-made videos (Goodwin & Grossberg, 1992). In the second phase from 1983-1985, the programming policy started to shift from the “flow of 24 hours music video” to more varied programs like MTV Countdown and The Basement Tapes. In 1986, Senior Vice President of Programming Les Garland mentioned in an interview with Billboard that the 24-hour music video television was at a crossroads; it faced difficulty balancing a high number of all genre music videos (Billboard, 1986). In 1988, its program scheduling strategy had shifted to two techniques: “Dayparting” and “Stripping.” “Dayparting” is basically using the
schedule to program genre-based shows and “Stripping” is a strategy that airs the same TV series at the same time each day of the week. Thus, MTV had moved to a more conventional television schedule and has seen the decline of narrowcasting and more discrete programs. (Goodwin & Grossberg, 1992).

MTV’s birth in the ’80s triggered a large amount of research. Beginning in the 1990s, research on MTV declined and thus there has been less research focusing on the long-term programming evolution and the influences of MTV. Goodwin shows how MTV changed between 1981 and 1992, but his analysis of the three phases has its limitations. First is the neglecting of the non-music video programming and scheduling on MTV. This has been challenged by the following developments of MTV, which is the dominance of the non-music video programming starting in the late ’80s with programs such as the music news show, The Week in Rock; the fashion news show, House of Style; and the game show Remote Control. Second, through Goodwin’s discussion of the changes in MTV, one fundamental reason of MTV’s changes that has not been discussed is the need to have continuous appeal to its audience and to improve its ratings. His discussion was in the context of “rock music culture” but not in the television context.

In the 1990s, MTV was moving further away from music and airing fewer music videos. According to MTV, music related programming still comprised 91% of its schedule in 1993. But CEO of MTV networks Tom Freston admitted that music videos were no longer giving them much business because of the lower ratings. Since 1992, MTV’s average rating has been 0.5% of the 62.6 million homes that received the
channel (Reilly, 1996). In 1996, more than half of prime-time viewing could be music-free (Kim, 2005) and MTV was devoting 20% of its time to non-music programming like *The Real World*, *Road Rules* and *Singled Out*. Individual music videos with no specific program title like *All Time Funniest Videos* and *Making the Video* were pushed to earlier hours or just replaced by non-music shows. MTV was facing the dilemma to satisfy both record companies and advertisers; one, the provider of its core program content and the other its main revenue source (Kim, 2005).

In the meantime, MTV was constantly experimenting with its programming in order to continuously appeal to its specific target demographic and attract advertisers. In June 1991, MTV began airing music videos in blocks by genres, with each block separated by commercials. Four months later, the channel went back to less scheduled programming because some record labels complained that viewers only watched what they wanted and that would mean losing a segment of the audience (Kim, 2005). As Kim suggested, “MTV’s challenge is to serve a narrow audience at a time of intense fragmentation and competition in the cable industry.” In 1993, MTV once again went back to the “Dayparting” schedule technique and created shows like *Yo! MTV Raps*, *MTV Jams* and *Alternative Nation* (Kim, 2005). In addition, MTV had originally announced that it would introduce MTV2 and MTV3 to focus on specific music video genres and deal with the increasing fragmentation of popular music. In 1996, MTV had dropped this plan to move “multiplexing,” and launched MTV2 instead, claiming that it would return to MTV’s roots as an all-music channel with intensive music videos (Kim, 2005). Since 2001, MTV developed more non-music video shows like news
series *Big Urban Myth Show*, and the reality shows *Becoming* and *The Osbournes*. Meanwhile, MTV continued using scheduled programming for its music video shows like *DFX* and *Hot Zone*.

Two conclusions can be drawn thus far. First, to balance the needs of record companies and the advertisers, MTV was trying to reschedule its music video programs and was developing new “regular scheduled” shows like *The Real Life* during the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Second, even though MTV achieved lower ratings, it was still powerful within its viewing audience because it succeeded in creating an identity by its music programs, and continued to be a lifestyle choice for advertisers. The limitation of Kim’s research was the heavier focus on the commercialization process of MTV’s programming, which overlooked the evolvement and the importance of its music programs.

In 2002, MTV launched three new digital spin-off channels; MTV Hits, R&B/Hip-Hop channel MTV Jams and VH1 Megahits. MTV X, which focused on hard rock and metal music was discontinued and replaced by MTV Jams with a focus on Hip-Hop music. The network explained the replacement based on demographic trends and industry data, with the demand for a channel only focused on hard rock and heavy metal being lower than that for Hip-Hop. Since Hip-Hop became a trend in the 1990s and 2000s, MTV’s music programming was devoting more attention to Hip-Hop and Pop music (Anonymous, 2002). For example, the show *Total Request Live*, which featured popular music videos, aired every weekday for an hour. As MTV continued developing “regular scheduled” music shows, its two spin-off channels MTV Jams and MTV Hits
maintained commercial free 24-hour music video programming as in the early years of MTV. In the meantime, there was more non-music programming like reality shows and competitive series on MTV.

In 2014, the channel which used to be known as a “music video channel” is more dedicated to reality TV shows like “Jersey Shore”, “Teen Mom” and “16 and Pregnant”. Despite criticism from the public, shows like Jersey Shore have been very successful and have had much better ratings than MTV’s music video shows. Thanks to the success of these shows, by 2010, MTV’s ratings among its core audience of 12- to 34-year-olds had increased by 24 percent to 895,000 viewers, according to Nielsen (Chozick, 2013).

By building its identity as the primary youth-oriented network, MTV was well placed to serve the needs of advertisers. The research around MTV’s non-music programs have also been increasing in recent years as shown in Curnutt’s (2008) analysis on The Real World and Cawthon’s (2013) study on Teen Mom. However, there is little scholarship focused on MTV’s music programs and the long-term consequences of them.

*Music in MTV’s Brand Image*

MTV’s gradual evolution from a 24-hour music video channel to a youth-content brand isn’t a new story. Now, MTV is making its way into many facets of teen life (High, 2006), and it represents not only a music channel but also the condition of popular culture. In the meantime, the position of music in its brand seems not as important as it used to be.

MTV was first introduced in 1981 with the words “Ladies and Gentlemen, Rock and
“Roll” spoken by one of the creators of MTV, John Lack. It has proven to greatly transformed the nature of the music industry and influenced the trend of popular music (Burns, 1995). Non-stop music video programming as a 24/7 marketing tool was influential in introducing numerous new bands and music genres into the mainstream. For example, in the early 1980s, since English artists had embraced music videos much earlier than North American artists, British music videos started to dominate MTV programming, and created what has been called second “British Invasion” by promoting English artists like Duran Duran, Billy Idol, Adam Ant and Thomas Dolby (Starr, 2005).

In the early days of MTV’s history, music played a central role and helped MTV established strong brand-related rock music in the ’80s. At first, MTV distinguished and differentiated its service from the mainstream by adopting a unique programming format. Consequently, MTV structured its programming in a fluid format that consisted of an endless stream of music videos. To appeal to its target audience, Robert Pittman, the director of the network, decided that MTV’s programming would embrace a rock format (Wee, 2002). In addition, founded and operated by people with a background in radio and a deep consciousness of the importance of branding, MTV introduced a corporate and marketing dimension to the world of rock ’n’ roll (Stubbs, 2011). To maintain its “Rock and Roll” brand image, its anchors, known as “VJs” were also drawing on the rock culture. VJs were encouraged to take casual attitude to on air mistakes, as “feel[ing]” was more important than accuracy (Goodwin and Grossberg, 1993). MTV redefined the way we related to music and deeply influenced the popular
culture, as Miller points out “with the rise of MTV and rock videos, the definitive experience of modern youth culture has been completely altered .... The music has been curiously disembodied, as rock has ceased to be a music for listening to ... and has come to be a music that you watch”. The Music videos on MTV also had an influence on the teen culture during 1980s and are “the biggest single influence of teen fashion” (Andrews, 2010).

In 1984, MTV introduced the first MTV music awards and launched VH1 with a more classic-rock format, which further strengthened the music portion of its brand. In 1985 and 1986, MTV suffered a ratings decline and faced the challenge of maintaining its youth oriented brand in the changing landscape of youth culture. In 1985, MTV “entered a state of institutionalized blandness” (Denisoff 1985). By 1986, MTV expanded its schedule to include syndicated comedies such as The Young Ones and The Monkees. MTV was becoming as mainstream as the Top 40 radio stations from which it initially hoped to differentiate itself as a channel with distinct rock aesthetic and programming schedule (Westrup, 2011). In 1989, MTV started developing “long-form” programming that still focused on music like MTV Unplugged and launched a number of shows on more specific music genre like Yo! MTV Raps, targeted at rap fans; 120 Minutes, targeted to rock fans; and Headbangers’s Ball, which catered to heavy metal fans. MTV’s shift to a diverse music-genre programming paved the way for the rise of many types of music, especially hip-hop, which became one of the most popular music trends in the 1990s (Wee, 2002).

In the late ’80s to the early ’90s, with the popularity of MTV’s non-music video
programs, the role of music within MTV’s brand changed. Former MTV CEO Tom Freston said in 1993: “We’re not just about music. We’re about all issues associated with pop culture.” Consequently, MTV reduced the number of music videos shown by 36.5 percent from 1995-2001. By 2005, music videos comprised only 25 percent of MTV’s programming (Ohlsson, 2010). In 2005, the President of MTV, Christina Norman, responded to the claim that “MTV doesn’t play music videos anymore” by saying that even though the channel played music videos with a mix of other programs at the time, the connections to music that MTV provided to the artists and the audience were unparalleled. “Yes, videos have become a commodity. They’re available in a lot of different places. But the way in which we invite an artist to participate in and create with us a unique experience for their audience is something you can’t do by watching a (music video) stream.” (Paoletta, 2005).

In addition, Viacom had merged with Paramount Communications (including the Paramount film studio, Paramount Books and publishing company Simon & Schuster) in 1994. Therefore, Viacom decided to diversify the MTV brand by letting it develop films for Paramount and books for Simon & Schuster. The trend of a multimedia conglomerate also meant that teen-oriented culture was no longer media specific but a blending of film, television and music. Viacom planned to take advantage of its new diverse interest in film, publishing, and cable networks to produce more coordinated campaigns (Wee, 2002). As a result, music became only one aspect of the expanding MTV brand. As long as music was still a part of pop culture, MTV needed to reinstate music-oriented shows and maintain the “music” part of its brand image. On its main
channel, MTV developed shows like *Total Request Live* (1998-2008) and *AMTV* (2009-present). It also launched spin-off channels MTV2, MTV Hits and MTV Jams, which have a heavy focus on music. In addition, there are a number of music programs and music projects going on through other platforms like *MTV Artists*.

In 2009, MTV launched reality shows *16 and Pregnant*, *Teen Mom* and *Jersey Shore*. These series not only reversed MTV’s ratings slide but also landed the network on the cultural map again (James, 2011). In 2010, MTV removed the “Music Television” tag line from its logo, which further emphasized its shift away from pure music. MTV has evolved from a music channel to a channel about pop culture, but the core value within its brand is still intact, which is to continue to appeal to its target audience. The role of music in its brand has also changed, but since it keeps developing music programs, this is an indication that MTV still retains a strong interest in music as a tool to relate to youth culture (Interbrand, 2014).

*MTV Multiplatform Strategies*

As so many new technologies were emerging in the past two decades, traditional television networks like MTV have had to move beyond TV to engage its viewers through the full range of emerging digital platforms.

In 1995, MTV developed its first digital platform—MTV.com, since it realized that to remain relevant to the generation of teenagers, it needed to start adopting the Internet and its relevant technologies. MTV.com has a music database including artist bios, music, news, internet radio and more. MTV News covered all things that were relevant to its target audience, as well as in-depth details of MTV’s programming. By 1998,
improvements in technology allowed MTV to create programming with a more sophisticated relationship with its website. MTV launched a TV series called *MTVdotcom* in 1998, which adopted an entire web-based format including music videos, celebrity interviews and entertainment news. The text that scrolled across the bottom of the screen also encouraged viewers to visit MTV.com to access more information (Wee, 2002). By 2001, according to Media Metrix, MTV.com consistently ranked as the most visited music information website, averaging nearly 3 million unique visitors per month (Hay, 2001).

Later in 2001, MTV launched a multimedia approach to programming called MTV 360. It coordinated the programming of MTV, MTV2 and MTV.com. Each platform provided its own original programming that expanded content appearing on other screens, and it also would drive MTV and MTV2 viewers to MTV.com and vice versa, and allowed MTV to sell the three platforms together to advertisers (Schaffel, 2002). Moreover, MTV360 extended its unique promotion with record companies. One example was a multiplatform partnership with Capitol Records to promote Radiohead’s album, *Amnesiac*. On-air announcements on MTV and MTV2 encouraged people to go to MTV.com to attend Radiohead’s concerts; MTV was the exclusive ticket pre-sale partner for their Amnesiac tour. In addition, their music video was in regular rotation on MTV2. On MTV.com, there were also streaming previews of the album. Consequently, *Amnesica* has sold 231,000 units in the U.S. during the first week and ranked No.1 in the U.K. album charts and at No.2 on the Billboard 200 (Hay, 2001).

During 2005, Disney had started to provide hit shows from its ABC network for
download at the iTunes store. In addition, YouTube had launched and Facebook’s active users rapidly increased to 5.5 million (Levine, 2008). MTV was also on the move; it started to shift its digital strategy to accommodate the increasing popularity of social networks, user-generated content sites, and many other competitors (Esposito, 2006).

In 2005, *MTV Overdrive*, an online video service launched as a part of the MTV.com website. The site was made up of five channels: The Lineup, Movies, Music, News and On TV. These featured music videos, news updates, exclusive live performances, and artist interviews. The network broke its on air long-form programs into segments, so viewers could just watch the segment that they wanted. It also continued creating original online programming. Many of the programs were exclusive to MTV Overdrive.

For instance, MTV News was shot entirely for the Web and only a small portion aired on the MTV channel (Murphy, 2005). In 2006, MTV developed an online music service with Microsoft called *URGE*; it was integrated into the newest version of Microsoft’s Windows Media Player and offered more than two million tracks for users to download, individually at 99 cents each, with unlimited downloads at a monthly rate of $9.95. URGE also had features like custom-made playlists, rich editorial content and more than thirteen professionally programmed music radio programs (Microsoft, 2006). However, MTV struggled to operate this online music service in the face of Apple’s dominance with the iPod and iTunes and finally shut it down in 2007 (Metz, 2007).

MTV continued to experiment with different strategies through its music brand. In 2007, MTV created an innovative entertainment and gaming experience around music lyrics. MTV had noticed that music lyrics could build a deeply emotional relationship
with fans and also realized the need for lyric search. Each online music brand (MTV, VHI and CMT) improved its databases, allowing viewers who searched lyrics through the websites to get full lyrics, music videos, links to purchase the song, and comprehensive artist information. On mobile devices, viewers could text an artist’s name, a song name, or a portion of a lyric, and then receive a link to the mobile internet displaying the full lyrics and other artist and song information. By 2007, according to Media Metrix, MTV had attracted nearly 45 million unique viewers in the U.S. and 92 million worldwide across its online platforms (MTV, 2007).

As young people are the biggest group of consumers of content on smartphones and tablets (Subramanian, 2013), MTV was increasingly releasing apps to carry and promote its programs. Originally, MTV had developed several apps like the *MTV Watchwith* (2011) and *VHI Costar* (2012) as a second-screen vehicles for the channels’ programming, but were rated poorly by customers because of their “tendencies to crash” and lack of original programming (Schillaci, 2013). In 2013, MTV combined MTV and MTV2 apps and rebuilt the MTV app, which not only offered current network programs, but also included complete episodes of past hits like *Beavis & Butt-Head* and *Daria*. The MTV app also had a viewing companion feature enabling fans to interact via Twitter, take quizzes, watch behind-the-scenes clips, and view pictures while watching the shows (Ankeny, 2013). MTV also experimented with new strategies to promote its shows on mobile devices. In 2013, MTV released an entire season of the upcoming show “Wait Till Next Year” through an app, before the premier on TV. MTV believed that the audience who watched the entire season would go on to promote the show via
social media and other platforms. The strategy was very successful as MTV noticed an 82% bump in week-to-week app downloads (Manarino, 2013). In 2014, Colin Helms, the senior vice president of digital media at MTV said, “Now the thinking is mobile first: make it work first on mobile and then you can expand and add layers to it for the other experiences whether it’s desktop or app or whatever it is.” (Kantrowitz, 2014)

In conclusion, MTV was continually developing and experimenting with different multiplatform strategies to engage its viewers and enhance its brand image. As a network that targets young audiences, constant innovation is important and it will need to pursue an aggressive creative strategy in order to continue to capture the attention of this generation.

Chapter Summary

The research articles reviewed in this chapter indicate the evolution of MTV’s programming, its brand image, and its multiplatform strategies. Each of the research articles contributed to an understanding of the background conditions of MTV Artists program. The most essential findings are the changes and evolution of MTV’s music programming in its early history. The studies concluded why and how MTV made the decision to shift its programming and brand image from pure music to a channel all about youth and popular culture. Meanwhile, the studies showed how the role of music changed MTV’s programming and brand as well. However, there have been few studies that have focused on the long-term changes and consequence of MTV’s programming especially in its music programming. Another area that has been discussed was the multiplatform strategies used by MTV. Although these studies showed its different
strategies throughout the history, the studies have overlooked the influences of these strategies. By analyzing the *MTV Artists* program, this current study will contribute to the existing literature with a discussion about the evolution of MTV’s music programming and the influences of MTV’s music programs.

**CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**
Introduction

The television industry is in a state of change. Initially, three networks (ABC, NBC, CBS) dominated the market. The advent of cable contributed to the rise of many cable networks, which ultimately challenged the major networks. Most cable subscribers now receive service in excess of 100 channels (FCC, 2012). The competition is fierce within the TV industry. In addition, with the development of technology, television-viewing habitats are changing. Audiences can watch TV content anytime and anywhere in different ways. Online platforms like Netflix, YouTube, iTunes and HULU allow customers new choices. Facing this changing landscape, the traditional TV networks are now forced to evolve. MTV is one of them, and it has shifted from a 24-hour music video channel to a channel dedicated to pop culture. However, as a channel that originally got its fame from music videos and music shows, MTV has constantly experimented with new music programs not only on TV, but also on other platforms. In 2012, MTV launched the *MTV Artists* program, which is a new music initiative based on web and mobile platforms that showcases a range of artists and helps artists to connect with their fans. By analyzing the *MTV Artists* program, this study will discuss the evolution of MTV’s music programs.

The following research questions were included in this study:

1. Under what conditions did MTV decided to launch the *MTV Artists* program?
2. How does *MTV Artists* work and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Will *MTV Artists* benefit the MTV brand image and help to engage its viewers?

This study utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to answer the research questions. Content analysis was used to explain the background of the *MTV Artists*
program and how it operates. Existing interviews and research from previous trade publications and journals were analyzed. The influence of the *MTV Artists* program on MTV’s brand image and viewership were then measured through a survey. The survey consisted of mostly quantitative questions and a few qualitative questions. Crosstab analysis was used and data were collected and analyzed using inferential statistics.

**Setting**

The survey was conducted in the United States, using the professional online survey tool Qualtrics. People who had internet access were able to participate in the survey and take the survey through different platforms like laptops, tablets and smartphones. 87% percent participants were in the Philadelphia area and 53% percent participants were students of Drexel University. 79% percent of the participants who took the survey resided around the campus of Drexel University.

**Sample**

Convenience sampling was used in the survey. Since MTV’s target demographic is younger viewers from 12-34, people in this demographic were chosen to take the survey and only 4% percent were outside of this demographic. There were 73 participants who took the survey in total. 5% percent were from 12-17 years old, 63% percent were 18-24, and 26% were from 25-34 years old. The participants were restricted to those at the researcher’s university, and to the researchers’ friends, and to those participants willing to take the survey. Purposive sampling was applied to balance the amount of female and male participants. The participants in the survey were from diverse ethnic backgrounds and employment status. 8% percent were African-American, 26% were Asian, 55% were Caucasian, and 9% were from other groups, including biracial ones.
Among the 73 participants, 53% were students, 39% were employed, 7% were out of work or currently looking for work and 1% were military.

Measurement Instrument

Content analysis was used in the study to explain the background information of the MTV Artists program. The results were drawn from different resources such as existing literature, research, and interviews. To analyze the operation of the MTV Artists, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis was conducted along with the content analysis. For the third research question, a researcher-made instrument (Survey) was used to collect data and measure the influences of MTV Artists. Twelve to eighteen questions were asked based on the participants’ interested in music, viewing habits, attitude toward MTV’s brand image and the MTV Artists program. The results of the survey were drawn from the suggestions for the MTV Artists program and future MTV music program strategies.

Validity and Reliability

The content analysis was based on multiple journal articles, research, and interviews that from multiple sources. The researcher analyzed a variety of existing interviews with MTV senior managers. The quotations of the interviews were selected carefully to represent the major findings. The results were drawn from the intersections of different articles to ensure accuracy and objectivity. The survey was tested several times in a small group before distribution to make sure the questions were clear to the participants and were able to draw a specific conclusion.

Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis
The survey was created through the online survey tool, Qualtrics. After the pre-tests, a link to the survey was distributed through email and Facebook. An on-the-street survey on Drexel University’s campus was also conducted simultaneously. The data collection procedure lasted approximately two weeks. The collected data were categorized in terms of research questions and different themes. Quotations were selected from the answers of participants. Crosstab analysis was also conducted. The results were presented in numbers, percentage, and graphs. Data from the survey were also compared with the data from the content analysis to see if there was a connection.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Background of the MTV Artists Program

MTV may not have many music videos or music shows on its main channel anymore, but music has not disappeared from its brand. Instead of airing music videos on TV, MTV is now focusing on digital platforms and experimenting with different music programs.

Before the appearance of the MTV Artists program, MTV had developed a variety of music programs that would contribute to the launch of MTV Artists. In 2008, MTV launched the website—MTVMusic.com, a website that mainly focused on music videos. It offered more than 16,000 music videos, Unplugged performances, and exclusive MTV concert clips. However, the competition in the online video streaming market was increasingly fierce as YouTube continued expanding its number of users and new music video services like Vevo started taking over the market. In order to differentiate itself from the competitors, instead of only heavily focusing on music videos, MTV expanded its strategy to provide multiple ways for fans to engage with artists and to help fans to discover new artists. In 2010, MTV developed the MTV Hive website which replaced MTVMusic.com. The website mainly helped to promote non-Top 40 artists (Houghton, 2011). It combined music news, interviews, opinions, industry insights, and live performance videos. According to Shannon Connolly, MTV Vice President of Digital Music Strategy, the Hive is like “a trusted friend covering cool new music.” Later in December 2010 (Kaufman, 2010), MTV launched another music/artists discovery program—MTV Music Meter. It intentionally showed artists that were “high-ranking in velocity.” Velocity means “buzz.” MTV was cooperating with the Echo Nest company.
(a intelligence company that provides music services to media companies) to measure daily feeds from Twitter, Facebook, and news sites. This determined the most buzz-worthy songs and artists. Instead of just showing the most popular artists, the website presented less well-known artists who were gaining momentum. The *MTV Music Meter* extended its coverage from about 10,000 artists to more than 1.8 million (Dahud, 2012).

It was once again proven that MTV was putting more effort on the “music/artists discovery” strategy. “MTV at its core and infancy was about music discovery, and that's never left our DNA,” says Van Toffler, president of MTV Networks Music/Films/Logo Group “The internet allows us to go deeper and wider and create this really immersive experience around music.” (Bruno, 2011) In 2011, MTV developed an app of the website for mobile devices and this app became the *MTV Artists* app in 2013. “In many ways, the Meter served as an early prototype for *MTV Artists*, as we learned a ton about what music fans wanted in music discovery apps, and what the white spaces are on mobile specifically,” said Mark Mezrich, director, product development for MTV Networks (Patel, 2012)

Other than music discovery tools, MTV hadn’t stopped developing other digital music programs. The *O Music Awards*, which are digital music awards, showed how technology was impacting the music industry. It was another program, aside from the *MTV Music Meter*, which showed the recognition by MTV that the music buzz is moving onto the internet and social media. Music fans could vote via social media websites including Facebook and Twitter. The featured categories including Innovative Music Video, Must Follow Artist on Twitter, Most Viral Dance, Best Independent
Music Blog, and Best Music Discovery Service (Gustin, 2011). “Music is the fastest growing category in the digital space and currently lacks an event that truly celebrates and rewards the innovation that is happening every day in this arena. MTV has a long history of re-defining award shows… We think we’re the right folks to lead this celebratory charge,” said Dermot McCormack, head of MTV Music Group Digital (Barshad, 2011).

In January 2013, MTV introduced another artist discovery initiative—*MTV Artists To Watch*. The campaign aimed to connect fans and artists across all MTV channels and websites. Every two weeks, MTV selected artists, and then featured a new “Artist To Watch” who was showcased across MTV’s various platforms, including television channels, websites, apps and social networks. The *Artists to Watch* program helped to promote and expose rising stars in the music world and shows further involvement of MTV’s digital music strategy. Amy Doyle, MTV's executive vice president of music and talent programming said that “Music videos are still an important part of a music experience, but it's not everything. We really took the cue from the audience and they don't want just music videos. They really want to get to know the artist through their interviews and live performances.” (Sinha-Roy, 2014) Indeed, MTV has developed the *Artists to Watch Live* program on the MTV Hive and has put a lot of exclusive interviews on its website. This campaign is now a part of the *MTV Artist* website as one of the ways for fans to discovery new artists. In recent years, MTV has successfully discovered and promoted new artists including Justin Bieber, R&B singer Miguel, and indie-pop singer Lana Del Rey. In 2013, MTV picked New Zealand alt-pop singer
Lorde and Seattle rapper-producer duo Macklemore & Ryan Lewis as artists to watch, and both were nominated for multiple Grammy awards.

MTV has also continuously analyzed its target demographic. In January 2012, MTV conducted an online survey with 500 people from 15 to 29 years old, asking them to keep journals and upload videos and images in order to understand young music fans and what were they expecting from the artists. The study found that music fans were looking for a more personal, direct and instant connection with the artists. Artists were expected to be constantly accessible. 75% of millennials (born roughly between 1980 and 2000) say they feel a stronger connection to musicians who are open about who they are. Also, the millennials are now using different tools, apps, and websites to discover different genres or artists. 85% agree that “among people my age, it’s cooler to listen to a diverse range of music versus one genre.” (Hillhouse, 2013) The research gave MTV inspiration for its digital music strategies.

The launch of MTV Artists

After experiments and research on digital music programs, MTV launched the MTV Artists program in August 2012; it was an attempt to close the gap between musicians and fans by providing a destination where fans could search for their favorite artists, discover new artists, listen to and buy music, and purchase concert tickets and merchandise. “With MTV Artists, we want to make music history accessible, open a door to today’s musicians, and spotlight the best new music by giving the millions of fans our brands connect with every day access to the most compelling performances, interviews, reviews, artist favorites and whatever else artists elect to port,” said Van
Toffler, president of Viacom’s Music Group. “There is infinite choice out there, but with this artist platform, we want to provide a meaningful road map for consumers to weed through the chaos, and discover the musical gems that should break through.” (MTV, 2012)

There are several ways for fans to connect with artists and explore new artists. Fans can search their favorite artists, and then enter the page of the artist or discover artists by categories like Emerging, Popular, Genre, Collections based on MTV shows, MTV Artists To Watch campaigns, and VMA nominations, plus find artists based on one’s similarity to another. For artists, MTV allow both established and emerging artists to claim or create their webpage on the MTV Artists website and artists have complete control of their own page. When artists claimed or created a page, they could customize it with their own logo or background, upload content and create a banner directing fans to whatever they wanted, such as tour information, websites, and their latest album on iTunes. MTV also offered opportunities for artists to get a presence across a number of MTV screens and properties including MTV, VH1, CMT, MTV Hits, MTV Jams, VH1 Soul, CMT Pure and Palladia; MTV’s programming staff make programming decisions by monitoring fans’ engagement on each artist’s page, and provide editorial coverage on MTV’s various outlets like Buzzworthy, Hive, EMT Edge, VH1 Tuner and MTV live events like the Hangout Music Festival. Through a partnership with Topspin—a technology company that provides direct-to-customer sales across the internet—artists have been able to utilize MTV Artists to generate revenue by selling their digital and physical products, merchandise, and tickets. Topspin stated that “sales through MTV
Artists pages will be subject to the same 15% fee as all other Topspin sales (Topspin, 2012).” Other than that, MTV has developed a tip jar, where fans could donate money directly to their favorite artists; 100% of the revenue goes to the artists (Topspin, 2012). MTV also shares 50% of ad revenue that runs along with the music videos with the artists (Dahud, 2012).

Results of the survey

The survey was administered to answer the third research question about the influence of the music program *MTV Artists* on MTV’s brand image and viewership, and part of the second question by measuring the viewing habits of MTV’s target audience, their interest in music, music-related TV shows, programs and mobile apps, and their attitude toward MTV’s brand image and *MTV Artists*. The results are based upon 73 responses to the survey. There are four general demographic questions to help classify the respondents. The results indicated that the respondents were composed of 53% female and 47% male. The most frequent participants were in the age range 18-24 and 25-34, at 63% and 26% respectively. These participants were also included in MTV’s target audience from 12-34. That is due to the survey that used a convenience sample in which most of the participants were college students and the researcher’s friends. The limitation was the inadequacy of the sample from 12-18, which was 5%. The random participants from the 35-44 and 45-or-older group account for 3% each of the total participants. For the employment status question, 53% were students, 38% were employed, 7% were unemployed or currently looking for work and 1% were in the military. The fourth question categorized participants by ethnicity and indicated that
55% were Caucasian, 26% were Asian, 8% were African-American and 10% were others including biracial, Israeli, Middle Eastern, Afro-Caribbean and African.

Question 5 is an attitudinal question that inquired about the respondents’ level of interest in listening to music, watching music videos, and watching live music and concerts. The survey provided seven levels of interest for each aspect from “very interested” to “not at all interested.” The vast majority of respondents were very interested or interested in listening to music as figure 1 showed, at 63% and 29% respectively. As for interest in watching music videos; the answers were much more dispersed with 22% being very interested, 9% interested, 22% somewhat interested, 5% interested, 2% uninterested, 5% somewhat uninterested, and 4% not at all interested. The rate of interest in watching live music or concerts rose slightly with 33% being very interested and 26% interested. Over half of the respondents showed interest in each aspect by selecting very interested, interested and somewhat interested. The results of this question indicated a universal interest in music among the respondents. This may provide hints for MTV on how to improve its current music program and on what aspects should MTV place more focus.
Figure 1. Respondents’ level of interest in music

Question 6 is a categorical question asking, “How often are you watching MTV?” First, it divided participants in two categories: people who never watch MTV and people who watch MTV. The results showed a significant amount of participants never watch MTV, accounting for 43% of the total. 26% watch less than once a month; 12% watch once a month; respondents that watch two-to-three times a month and once a week are at 5% respectively; 3% watch two-to-three times a week; and 5% watch daily. When subdivided by the age range, a higher percentage of respondents in the age range 25-34 indicated never watching MTV than in the 18-24 group. The results suggested that MTV was more attractive for younger viewers, and indeed MTV has been shifting its programming strategy to focus on the millennial generation in recent years. Across gender lines, the results showed female respondents had higher rate of never watching (at 49%) than males who never watch (at 35%). In general, because there is a high rate of “never watch MTV,” how to attract a larger audience from its demographic, especially in female audiences and mature audiences, is an issue for MTV.

Figure 2. The frequency of watching MTV among respondents from 18-24 years old
Question 7, 8 and 9 were intended to collect data about the viewing habits of people who watch MTV. Question 8 inquired, “what shows do you usually watch on MTV?” Among the 42 respondents, 62% selected reality shows, followed by the comedy series at 43%, MTV Video Music Awards at 33%, movies at 31%, music shows at only 21%, and scripted series at only 17%. The results were predictable; according to the literature review, MTV has focused on reality programming since the early '90s. Reality shows have also generated higher ratings, with shows like Jersey Shore drawing a 7.3 rating for its season-three finale and being the top TV show of 2011 in the 12-34 demographic (Ng, 2011). The comedy series on MTV have also become popular. For example, The "Guy Code" franchise has continued to build momentum, with the season-three premier achieving a .5 rating among 12-34 demographic, becoming the highest rated and most watched original season premiere in MTV2’s history. The rating also increased 22% over season 2 and 47% over season 1 (MTV, 2013). One respondent said Guy Code and Girl Code were the only shows they watched on MTV. MTV VMA’s have drawn attention in recent years. In 2011, the awards attracted 12.4 million viewers, and in 2013
earned a total audience of 10.1 million, generating 120 national and worldwide trending topics on Twitter, and 1.2 million Instagram likes (Ng, 2013). As the survey results showed, music shows and scripted series were the least popular ones. It was not surprising that the music shows are no longer attractive on MTV since there are so many ways and platforms for the audience to consume music and MTV also no longer puts much effort into its television music programs. However, for the scripted shows, MTV has made this a priority with an aggressive development plan that started in 2010. Six series ordered in 2011 included *Skins, Teen Wolf, Awkward, The Hard Times of RJ Berger, I Just Want My Pants Back* and *Good Vibes*. In 2013, MTV launched two more scripted shows: *Faking It* and *Find Carter*. As the results suggested, few people watch these series, so MTV may need to improve the content of these series and raise audience awareness of these series. Among the people who watch MTV, 83% watch on television, 31% watch on laptop or computer, and 5% watch on mobile phones. 14% of the audience watches on both laptop or computer and television. It indicates that television remains the first destination for viewing TV content. The multiplatform viewing habits of MTV audiences have yet to be formed. The results of question 9 indicated that for 26% of 43 respondents, MTV audiences watch MTV Hits or MTV Jams, two channels that mainly focus on music content, illustrating MTV audiences’ interest in music. When cross tabbed with Question 10—which asked about the perception of MTV’s brand image—the results were not as predicted. 73% of the 11 respondents that watch MTV Hits or MTV Jams thought MTV is pop-culture related, 55% selected teen-culture related, and only 27% chose music related. The result shows that even though MTV
claimed it has programmed more music than ever on television (mainly on other channels like MTV Hits MTV Jams), it was unable to change or influence its brand image. For the 85% of total respondents who were not watching MTV Hits and MTV Jams, it was even harder for them to notice MTV’s effort on music programs. As the literature review discussed, the brand image of MTV has shifted from music to pop culture. The results supported this statement with 64% of total considering MTV as pop culture related, 51% considering it teen-culture related and 37% seeing it as music related.

Question 11 is an important question that further embodied audiences’ attitudes toward MTV music programs and helped to answer the third research question. 40% of respondents agree that MTV should develop more music shows or music programs. 18% strongly agree, 34% are neutral, 5% disagree, and 3% strongly disagree. Over half of the respondents agree with the statement, and the results reflected viewers’ expectations of MTV music shows and programs. Thus, music-related shows or programs are very likely to benefit MTV’s brand image. Across the age range, the results among 12-34 year olds were significantly different from the 25-34 demographic. For the 12-24 demographic, 33% agreed with the statement and 17% strongly agreed, 39% were neutral, and 11% strongly disagreed or disagreed. Among the 25-34 year-old respondents, the rate of agreement with the statement was much higher than the rate for the 12-34-year-old group, with 26% strongly agreeing, and 58% agreeing, and only 11% neutral and 5% disagreeing. Combining these results with those for question 6, there were more respondents in the 25-45 demographic who never watch MTV. The results
of the two questions suggested that music programs or shows might help to engage viewers especially in the 25-34 demographic.

Question 12 is another behavioral question that asked, “what music apps are you using on your phone?” The results were within the expectations and could be inferred from the result of question 5, which had asked respondents their level of interest in music. 82% respondents have used music streaming or music radio apps (such as Pandora and Spotify) on their phones, which again showed respondents’ interest in listening to music. 12% were using instrument apps like Garage Band, and 10% have live music or concert discovery apps like Bandsintown on their phones. 5% were using other apps, and 15% have no music apps. The results helped to explain the music app market and helped the *MTV Artists* app to identify its competitors.

Question 13 directly tested respondents’ attitudes towards the MTV Artists website and app. The results contributed to the second research question. That 90% respondents had never heard about the MTV Artists website and 92% had never heard about the app indicated the insufficient promotion of the program. 10% had heard about the website and none of the respondents have visited it. 4% had heard about the app and 4% had used it but no longer did so. For the respondents who had never heard about it or had heard about it but were not sure what it was, there are two short descriptions about the website and the app, with a screen shot of the website and a picture showing the layout of the app. Then, the following questions asked the respondents’ interest in visiting the website and trying the app. The results seem similar to the graphs shown. When categorizing the results by people who never watch MTV and those who do watch MTV,
the results showed slight differences. For the respondents who watch MTV, 5% were very interested and 45% were somewhat interested in the *MTV Artists* website, compared with the respondents who never watched MTV, with 26% being somewhat interested and 3% being very interested. The results indicated that the website was more attractive for MTV’s audiences. Perhaps this is because MTV’s audiences already had the habit of viewing MTV’s web pages, or were more likely to follow the latest updates from MTV. As for the MTV Artists app, the results between the two categories were almost the same; among the MTV audiences, 5% were very interested and 36% were somewhat interested; in contrast, within the respondents who never watch MTV, 35% were somewhat interested and 6% were very interested. For the respondents who never watch MTV, the app was more attractive than the website. For this group, the rate of being not at all interested and not very interested in both of the website and the app was much higher, at 49% and 48% respectively. When asked the reasons for this disinterest in the *MTV Artists* website and app, almost half of the respondents claimed they were not useful while 30% claimed they could find information on other websites or use other tools and apps instead of those for *MTV Artists*. Other reasons included “Not interested in MTV,” “I don’t typically enjoy pop music,” “Not interested in pop culture,” “I don’t like crowding my phones with apps,” and “I don’t care much.” As the data showed, the main challenge for the *MTV Artists* program would be “useful or not.” The lack of promotion may be one of the reasons why people thought the program was not useful since the app actually has some very useful features like Songs ID as mentioned earlier. Another challenge is the competition. There are many alternatives in the market.
Even though there are no apps or websites exactly the same as those for *MTV Artists*, fans can still find the information they need through the other apps or websites. In conclusion, MTV should make a greater effort at publicity on the *MTV Artists* program especially focusing on the useful features.

*Figure 4. Respondents’ level of interest in the MTV Artists Website*

*Figure 5. Respondents’ level of interest in the MTV Artists App*
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

MTV, which had been known for its creative music programming has successfully reached young audiences and greatly influenced the pop culture since its birth in 1981. As new technology has emerged and audiences’ viewing habits have changed, TV networks have had to constantly evolve to engage their audiences. MTV has shifted its strategy to focus on reality programming instead of music content. However, while MTV has never stopped its effort in producing music programs, this has not happened on its main channel but on its other channels and platforms. Previous studies have discussed the evolution of MTV’s programming, but have overlooked the development of its music programs through the years. This study has mainly focused on the development of MTV’s music programs by analyzing its *MTV Artists* program. The survey detailed in chapter 3 was intended to evaluate the influences of MTV music programs and test respondents’ attitudes toward the *MTV Artist* program.

The research questions included the following:

1. Under what conditions did MTV decided to launch the *MTV Artists* program?
2. How does the *MTV Artists* program work and what are its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Will the *MTV Artists* program benefit the MTV brand image and help to engage its viewers?

Discussion

Background of MTV Artists

The *MTV Artists* program has taken a long road to its present form and this journey has reflected the evolution of MTV’s music-program strategy. In the 1980s, MTV was
a pure music TV network and most of its programs on TV were music videos or
musically related. In the 1990s, MTV shifted its programming strategy to air more non-
music video programs in order to capture its audiences for a longer time. MTV
developed other channels and platforms that were more focused on music, like MTV2
and MTV.com in order to engage its music fans. In the 2000s, as MTV’s target
audiences were moving to the internet and mobile devices, MTV started making more
of an effort toward its digital music strategies and experimenting with different music
programs on these platforms. From the online music streaming services like *MTV
Overdrive* and *MTV Music.com* to music/artist discovery tools like the *MTV Music
Meter* and *MTV Artists*, MTV has never stopped its efforts in digital music
programming. MTV has also experienced some missteps: In 2005, MTV missed the
chance to buy MySpace which was a popular destination for music fans to get reliable
information about artists and for artists to communicate with their fans. In the same
year, the online video website *Overdrive* launched but never grew as a separate entity
and the digital music store *Urge* failed in 2007. This could possibly have been due to
the fact that MTV was too ambitious to take the digital music market without regard
for the sensibilities of its target demographic and its neglect of other competitors in the
market. On the other hand, MTV has not been afraid to try new things and could have
learned from its experiments and failures. Now, after all these efforts, *MTV Artists* is
becoming a more mature tool for fans to connect with their favorite artists and discover
new artists.

*SWOT Analysis of the MTV Artists*
As the survey results showed, music-streaming apps like Spotify and Pandora have the most users and could be a threat for *MTV Artists*. These are not only music-streaming apps, but also have features to discover new artists and music. Unlike the *MTV Artists* app in which users need to type or search artists, Spotify’s Discovery feature recommends artists and songs according to users’ taste in music, the music they have heard in the past, and the artists they have followed. Spotify also offers biographical information and tour dates artists’ pages. Another competitor is the live music discovery tool Bandsintown with 10% of survey respondents using the app. This app is dedicated to providing tour information for artists, allowing fans to track their favorite artists and get notification when they or similar artists come to the user’s area. Compared to these apps, the strength of the *MTV Artists* app would be that it provides a platform not only for fans to discover music and artists, but also for artists to build a better connection with fans. For artists, it directly connects them to fans by giving artists’ full control of their web pages on *MTV Artists* and allows them to sell digital and physical products, merchandise, and tickets directly to fans without a middleman. MTV also has the resources and promotional capability for artists to publicize themselves on multiple platforms. From the fans’ perspective, since there are so many content and artists’ websites that are not able to provide a full experience for fans, fans often rely on search engines to get information which is dispersed on the internet. MTV was attempting to create a solution to this problem with its *MTV Artists* program by offering more comprehensive information about the artists including biography, discography, years active, interviews, music videos, tour dates and artists’ tweets. Although unlike
Spotify, which could stream music, the app seamlessly connects with Pandora and iTunes, and also allows users to listen to and buy music. Additionally, the app has an interesting feature on each artist’s page called “Top 10 songs in 90 seconds” and has useful features like lyric search and “Songs ID” which uses a phone’s microphone to listen to a song that may be playing which it then identifies and provides information about both the song and its artist. Another threat to MTV Artists, besides competing apps or websites, would be the established habits of users. As the survey revealed, many respondents were not interested in the MTVArtists program because they could find information through websites or tools that they already use. Indeed, for example, if a user followed an artist on Twitter or liked him/her on Facebook, it would be easy to get all the information desired including news, updates, tour dates and more, plus fans could interact with artists through these platforms. In order to break users’ habits and further differentiate itself is an important issue for MTV Artists. This may also have been related to one of the weaknesses of MTV Artists, which is the low recognition rate among the respondents, with 90% having never heard of it. It is crucial for MTV to strengthen publicity and promotion of the program. Promoting it on television is probably an effective way, since the results showed that most of the respondents are still watching MTV shows on television. In addition, as the results showed, users paid more attention to the useful features on MTV Artists. Even though MTV Artists has features like “Songs ID,” it seems not to be attractive enough for the users to try it. Other than developing more functional features, MTV Artists may also need to build a closer relationship with artists to obtain more exclusive content in order to attract more
users. Letting fans be a part of choosing which artists could win the promotion opportunities such as online voting may also be able to help engage more users. Cooperation with other companies like some of MTV Artists’ strong competitors may help to reduce the rivalry and provide valuable improvements similar to its collaboration with Topspin.

**Music Programs and the MTV Artists influences on MTV**

The results of the survey showed respondents’ strong interest in music, high expectation of MTV’s music shows and programs, and some interest in the MTV Artists program. It indicated that music was always an essential part of people’s lives. MTV once changed the music industry and influenced a generation through its creative music programming, and is now moving its music programs to digital platforms to try to engage more music fans. MTV never stopped developing music programs. Music as an important part of pop-culture still plays an important role in MTV’s brand image today. There are significant numbers of participants who have never watched MTV, but 40% of them showed interested in the MTV Artists app and websites and many participants are expected to explore more music programs and shows on MTV. It showed MTV Artist’s potential to attract more users after further improvement and promotion. Thus, music programs like MTV Artists are very likely to benefit MTV’s brand image and help engage its target audience.

**Limitations**

The first limitation of the study was related to the sample. There were only four participants in the 12-17 demographic. MTV’s target demographic is 12-34 and moving
further to focus on the 12-17 demographic. Second, since the survey was mainly conducted on the Drexel University campus, most of the participants were students in the Philadelphia area. The limitations of the sample make the results difficult to generalize to the entire MTV’s target audience. Third, since *MTV Artists* is still a relatively new program, there are not enough details and information about its business model and how it is works, especially for the artists. It was also difficult to reach the producers of the program. The results would be more comprehensive with an interview of a program insider.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several recommendations for future research. First, some of the limitations of the survey sample listed above may be minimized. An in-depth content analysis of *MTV Artists* could be conducted with interviews and more information provided. To demonstrate a more complete SWOT analysis, analyzing more competitors would improve the results. Since *MTV Artists* is a new program and is still getting constantly improved, watching the development of the program and other MTV digital music programs could provide a deeper understanding of MTV’s digital music strategies and the evolution of MTV’s music programs.

**Conclusion**

*MTV Artists* is a new digital music initiative of MTV, reflecting the evolution of MTV’s music programs and the progress of MTV’s digital music strategies. Several conclusions can be made based on the findings of the study.

First, it may hard for people to remember that MTV used to focus on pure music content in its early days. Many people complain that MTV airs less music content but
more reality programming. It is surprising to learn that 1,200 hours of music videos are aired each week across MTV sister channels, subsidiary channels, digital and social screens. In fact, MTV has never stopped producing music programs, although no longer seen on its main channel but available on other platforms. As the study showed, MTV has placed more focus on digital platforms and has kept experimenting with different digital music programs in recent years. *MTV Artists* is MTV’s latest program, which has evolved from its previous digital music programs.

Second, the brand image of MTV has shifted from pure music to pop culture. Even though MTV was constantly developing music programs on digital platforms, it has not been able to change the fact that its reality programming has a greater impact on its brand image. Music as one aspect of pop culture plays a part of the MTV’s brand image but not all of it.

Third, the results of the study showed audiences’ high expectations of MTV’s music programs with 58% respondents agreeing with the statement, “MTV should develop more music programs and shows.” First, it reflected the fact that audiences didn’t pay much attention to MTV’s music programs on its other channels or platforms. MTV may need to make more of an effort on promoting and publicizing its music programs like *MTV Artists*. On the other hand, the results indicated that music programs might help MTV benefit its brand image and helping engage its target audiences.

Last, the study analyzed the strengths and weakness of the *MTV Artists* program. As a relatively new program, it is still too early to say whether it will be a success. However, it has a great opportunity for development and the potential to further benefit
MTV’s brand image and engage its viewers.


APPENDIX A

Survey of MTV Music Programs

1. What is your gender?
   Female
   Male

2. Which category below includes your age?
12 - 17
18 - 24
25 - 34
35 - 44
45 or older

3. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?
   Employed for wages
   Self-employed
   Out of work or currently looking for work
   A homemaker
   A student
   Military
   Retired
   Others

4. Which race/ethnicity best describes you?
   American Indian or Alaskan Native
   Asian
   Caucasian (non-Hispanic)
   Latino or Hispanic
   Pacific Islanders
   Others

5. How would you describe your interest in...?
   - Listen to music
     Very Interested
     Interested
     Somewhat Interested
     Neutral
     Uninterested
     Somewhat Uninterested
     Not at all Interested
   - Watch music videos
     Very Interested
     Interested
     Somewhat Interested
     Neutral
     Uninterested
     Somewhat Uninterested
     Not at all Interested
   - Watch Live music or concert
     Very Interested
     Interested
     Somewhat Interested
     Neutral
     Uninterested
6. How often do you watch MTV?
   - Never
   - Less than Once a Month
   - Once a Month
   - 2-3 Times a Month
   - Once a Week
   - 2-3 Times a Week
   - Daily

7. What shows do you usually watch on MTV?
   - Reality shows
   - Music shows
   - Comedy series
   - Script series
   - MTV Video Music Awards
   - Movies
   - Others

8. What devices do you use to watch MTV shows?
   - Phone
   - Tablet
   - Laptop
   - Television

9. Do you watch MTV Hits or MTV Jams channels?
   - Yes
   - No

10. Which of the following best describe your perception of MTV’s brand image?
    - Music related
    - Pop culture related
    - Teen culture related
    - Others

11. MTV should develop more music shows or music programs.
    - Strongly Agree
    - Agree
    - Neutral
    - Disagree
    - Strongly Disagree

12. What music apps are you using on your phone?
    - None
    - Music streaming or music radio apps (Pandora and Spotify)
    - Music games apps (Magic Piano)
    - Instrument apps (Garage Band)
    - Live Music/Concert Discovery apps (Bandsintown)
    - Others
13. Do you know the MTV Artists website?
   Never heard about it
   Heard about it, but not sure what it is
   I have visited the MTV Artist website

MTV Artists is a new platform for fans to connect to their favorite artists. Fans could type and search for information about their favorite artists including photos, music videos, interviews, tour dates, and buy music or tickets directly from the website to support artists.

14. How likely are you to continue visiting the MTV Artists website?
   Very Unlikely
   Unlikely
   Somewhat Unlikely
   Undecided
   Somewhat Likely
   Likely
   Very Likely

15. How interested would you be in visiting the MTV Artists website?
   Not at all interested
   Not very interested
   Not sure
   Somewhat interested
   Very interested

16. What are reasons for not interested in the MTV Artists website?
   Not useful
   Limited features
   I don't like the design and layout
   I can find information on other websites instead of the MTV Artists
   Others

17. Do you know the MTV Artists app?
   Never heard about it
   Heard about it, but not sure what it is
   I have used it, but not anymore
   I am currently using the MTV Artists app

The MTV Artists app is a free music app for fans to stay connected with the artists they love. Stay up to date with tour dates, exclusive album and song pre-releases, backstage footage and up-to-date news and interviews, then buy music and tickets, all in one app. Browse OFFICIAL ARTIST BIOS and use tools like TOP 10 SONGS, SOUND ID, and LYRIC SEARCH to discover and become an expert about bands and artists wherever you are.

18. How interested would you be in trying the MTV Artists app in the future?
Not at all interested
Not very interested
Not sure
Somewhat interested
Very interested

19. What were reasons for not using the MTV Artists App?
   Not useful
   Difficult to use
   Limited functions
   I didn't like the design and layout
   I didn't find what I need
   I can use other apps instead of *MTV Artists*
   Others______

20. What are reasons for not interested in the MTV Artists App?
   Not useful
   Limited functions
   I don't like the design and layout
   I can use other apps or other tools instead of the *MTV Artists*
   Others______