

EXPLORING THE 21ST CENTURY NEW AGE MUSIC GENRE: COMPOSERS' IDEOLOGIES, CREATIVITY AND PROMOTION

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the ideologies and creativity of New Age Music (NAM) artists and the promotion of the genre in the 21st century. Through a content analysis based on the secondary data from 19 archived interview transcripts, an article, and 24 albums, it was found that the NAM artists focused on healing, expansion of the mind, and spirituality; several artists did not identify themselves and outputs related to NAM; the commercialisation of NAM in the 21st century showed individualism in the product packaging; good promotion has been done in the same manner as other contemporary music genres, despite the pursuit is not for entertainment.

Keywords: New Age Music, genre identity, spiritual music, meditation, awareness

Introduction

New Age music came into existence as a result of the New Age movement in the West during the 1970s. Many viewed the movement as a spiritual subculture encompassing a wide array of mediums that gave rise to a higher spiritual meaning. New age music stood out significantly as the NAM composers displayed musical features and ideologies that aligned with the New Age movement (King, 2005). However, King stated that although a significant amount of research has been done on the history and ideology of the New Age and the New Age movement in the past 20 to 30 years, not much has been discussed under its musical context. Thereby, the NAM genre has been subjected to complexity and controversy in terms of its identification and musical understanding. Several studies have shed light on the complex nature of NAM (King, 2005; Summer & Summer, 1996; Zrzavy, 1990) and its cultural context (Coaldrake, 2019; Hall, 1994; Midbar & Midbar, 2012). The knowledge gap still exists in properly understanding NAM as a musical genre in modern

times. King (2005) implied that a musicological view of it can be explored. Although a holistic study undertaken by Weston (1999) has laid down a generic exploration of NAM before the 21st century, the current study will focus primarily on NAM in the 21st century. It was important to delve into some of the historical contexts of how NAM came to fruition to observe its evolutionary pattern and problems. According to Birnes and Martin (2013), Steven Halpern is one of the pioneers of NAM, whereby he contributed to creating sounds and aesthetics in NAM. They stated that Halpern was a former jazz musician who received considerable attention in New Age circles. In 1965, Steve Halpern initiated studies to examine the healing effects of music (Pen, 2013). His works bridged the early forms of NAM with New Age healing music paradigms (Edmunson, 2013). Also, his first album *Spectrum Suite* (1975) is credited for establishing popularity among NAM audiences (Coaldrake, 2019). Any music that contained mellow instrumental qualities in a way, became synonymous with NAM. This resulted in some musicians being labelled under the "New Age" tag by music distributors and record labels, although they were against it. And the issue persists to this day. According to Stewart (1988), NAM cannot be defined easily with so many styles under its umbrella.

Spirituality was considered an important NAM component (Larson, 1989; Ross, 2012). According to Newport (1998), the concept of NAM arose when professional musicians and composers became members of the New Age movement and began devoting their musical talents to the service of the movement. Degirmenci (2013) also mentioned NAM as a genre having an inseparable association with spirituality within its music. In terms of its major development, King (2005) stated that NAM began to develop in the 1960s and solidified during the New Age movement of the 1970s. According to Pen (2013), the term New Age with reference to music was not used officially and formally until 1976; however, the underlying philosophies and concept of a New Age movement were established in the mid-1960s associated with idealism generated by the dawning of the Age of Aquarius. York (2008) stated that the fundamental understanding of the Age of Aquarius is astrological.

The British *Windham Hill* Label in 1976 was one of the first record labels to recognise the new music style (Coaldrake, 2019). According to Darroch (2001), *Windham Hill* was the first record label to develop a market for and help define a new style that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s. He also asserted that the music recorded by the label was highly credited for shaping the characteristics of NAM to the public. However, how the *Windham Hill* label became associated with NAM is noteworthy since its founder William Ackerman had no intention to classify the genre under the tag "New Age". Stewart (1988) stated that it became the first label to get the tag of "New Age" as a result of its early record reviews in Boston's *New Age Journal* (founded in 1974). Clearly, the New Age Circle favoured musical characteristics portrayed by the *Windham Hill* label. Bronstein (1986) stated the label produced solo instrumental music that exuded soft tonal qualities and was different from most music on the market then.

However, due to the advent of mass public exposure and high profitability, NAM eventually succumbed to mass marketing and diverted from the true value it originated from (Doershuck, 1989). Newport (1998) mentioned how NAM was turned into a marketing slogan rather than a musical category when every conceivable music in music stores was claimed to belong to the New Age. According to Pen (2013), in the present day,

NAM is an incorporation of diverse musical categories that are vaguely connected to the original manifestation of the style, ranging from meditative/trance, space, acoustic, cross-cultural, vocal, jazz-fusion, healing/stress release, crossover classical, progressive/electronic to popular/commercial. Coaldrake (2019) suggested that NAM retains themes and titles that align with the environment, nature, dreams, and spiritual journeys. He refers to the current development of NAM as involving a broad range of styles; therefore, NAM has become a meta-crossover based on the elements already in crossover styles.

From our observation, the lack of knowledge presented from the above literature was the lack of composers' perception towards the genre, and their ideologies and creative imaginations. More importantly, their thinking toward the NAM genre has not yet been formally explored. Genre identification is also a bigger problem now due to its expansion in musical styles and the casual labelling of the genre by record labels and distributors. This study is structured to fill the gaps in knowledge presented through the composers' perspective on the subject.

Problem Statement

A progressive literary layout on the evolution of NAM in the 21st century is missing in academia. Thus, in the previous section, this study has attempted to trace the development of NAM from the limited literature. Furthermore, the unclear representation of the genre might have been the reason for the limited scholarly investigation of the genre. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no empirical investigation has been conducted to better grasp the complex nature of NAM from composers' perspective, its identification, and the recognition of musical creativity ingrained within musicianship. The commercial landscape of NAM in the current era is also not yet explored.

Purpose of the Study

The study aims to provide a scholarly understanding of the NAM genre in the 21st century. It aims better to understand NAM as a genre through its composers, investigate its evolution, and explore perspectives that would help deepen the understanding of modern NAM. Our research objectives are to:

- 1) Investigate the ideologies of NAM composers towards the genre.
- 2) Investigate the creative process of NAM composers in their music-making.
- 3) Explore the phenomenon of commercialisation of the NAM genre.

Methodology

Content Analysis

A conventional mode of content analysis towards secondary data was applied, whereby coding categories are derived directly from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Silverman and Patterson (2021), secondary data used in content analysis is relevant to research focusing on identifying the development of processes and trends. Riffe et al. (2008) outlined a general model for carrying out content analysis containing three main variables:

- 1) Conceptualisation and purpose
- 2) Design
- 3) Analysis

Analysing Secondary Data

~~The application of secondary data analysis in the past has been more prominent in quantitative studies but is now emerging in qualitative studies (Long Sutehall et al., 2010).~~ According to Germain and Chabaud (2009), re-use (or secondary analysis) of qualitative data is the process of reworking one or more sets of qualitative data to address research questions that can differ from those of the initial research project. They also stated that although the secondary analysis method is "a common practice when one deals with quantitative data, re-use of qualitative data is familiar in case study research but has no systematic approach" (p.827).

In discussing the varying types involved in the re-use (Secondary analysis) of qualitative data, Germain and Chabaud (2009) referred to Heaton's (2004) five types of re-use, which follows two structuring dimensions: 1) Purpose of the re-use with respect to the initial study (new or the same), and 2) One or multiple qualitative data sets. The first type refers to re-analysing a single data set, intending to replicate the initial research project to confirm whether it supports the original interpretation. The second type involves seeking a new research question with the data set generated from its inherent research question (additional analysis). The third type addresses a new research question (supra-analysis) by framing the data beyond the initial analysis. The fourth and fifth type is the derivation of data from different sources. The fourth type (amplified analysis) uses data from different studies on the same topic to achieve the form of comparative analysis. Lastly, the fifth type is assorted analysis, retrieving data from various studies to address the research queries of a new project. Based on the above understanding of secondary analysis, the researcher followed the fifth type (assorted analysis) to re-use the secondary data.

According to Germain and Chabaud (2009), when it comes to secondary data analysis, the researcher's judgment is vital when discerning the validity of the gathered data. Due to the absence of academic research on NAM composers, this study used non-scholarly open access data. Manu and Akotia (2021) stated that re-using unanalysed and archived raw data such as interview transcripts is prominent in Qualitative Secondary Analysis (QSA) methods to answer new research questions.

Chatfield (2020, p.834) mentioned the three types of online open-access data that can be applied to secondary analysis:

- 1) Scholarly research data
- 2) Credible current and historical textual or visual data

3) Non-research data.

This study adopted a secondary analysis method similar to that of other studies that used interview transcripts as the main data source for their research inquiry. Interview transcripts are the most prominent secondary data sources, as Manu and Akotia (2021) suggested. In the current study, an inductive coding approach was used.

Data Collection

The criteria set for selecting the NAM artists for investigation was that the artists must be actively making music in the 21st Century and must have already produced several music albums. Secondly, they must have a strong presence on popular music streaming sites such as SoundCloud, Spotify and YouTube or other established music sites such as Bandcamp, Discogs. The criteria set for any other external sources collected was that they must highly correlate with the research objectives to provide strong supplementary support.

An online archive containing 14 interview transcripts met the requirement. It was a project titled *New Age Rising: A Collective Illumination*, conducted by Mark McNeill, co-founder of dublab.com (a non-profit music public broadcasting internet radio station based in Los Angeles). The researcher contacted McNeill and informed him that the interviews would be a secondary data source for a research study. He informed us that the online interviews were conducted in the spring of 2016 and were published in July 2017. The interview was conducted among 10 NAM Artists and 4 music experts. The music experts consisted of music journalists and producers. In addition to that, 5 more interview transcripts that fit our criteria were accessed online separately. Also, music albums or EPs that were released in the 21st century were randomly selected and analysed. One online article curated by the founder of *newagemusic.guide* was also retrieved.

The data collection process took around 3 months. A total of 73 interview transcripts belonging to numerous NAM artists were first read carefully and then filtered. The NAM albums and the online article were retrieved within a week. Given below is the total data collected for the Content Analysis:

Interview transcript: 19 (NAM Artist:15, Music Expert: 4)
NAM Albums:24
Online Article: 1

Findings of the Study and Discussion

Eighteen of the interview transcripts were used to investigate research objectives one and two, whereby statements from the 4 music experts, namely Andy Beta, Dave Segal, Douglas McGowan and Northern Ashram, were treated as supplementary data. As for the third research objective, one interview transcript, an article, and the 24 NAM albums were used for data analysis.

The music artists investigated in the study have been making and producing music around the NAM genre for more than 10 years, residing mainly in Western countries. They are Ariel Kalma, Carlos Nino, Diva Dompe, Electric Sound Bath, Gifted & Blessed, J D

Emmanuel, Laraaji, Matthewdavid, Robert Rich, White Rainbow, Steven Halpern, Yanni, Steven Cravis, Iasos, Ricky Kej, and Wouter Kellerman.

The themes that emerged from the coding table provided the major headlines for our findings. Important statements from the interview transcripts were extracted to support the interpretations made throughout. First, the ideologies of NAM composers towards the genre were discussed in detail. Secondly, the ensuing problems in genre identification were investigated, followed by their creative input in music making, and lastly, the commercialisation of NAM was presented.

Function and Traits of NAM

Mental Healing and Relaxation

One major factor that attracted the NAM artists (n=10) into the genre was the element of healing and relaxation it exudes. Meditation was also an important subject that was of interest, and some also delved deeper into the expansion of human awareness and consciousness with their music. The functionality and creative process of NAM were also highlighted. Some shared a more detailed view of the discussion. Music artist Steven Cravis, when asked if he had a particular philosophy that he tried to convey in his music, responded that it is all centred around unity and healing, that the satisfaction comes to him when he listens to his own music and then feels at one with himself and the world (Parsons, 2011, para.52). Talking in line with the concept of healing, music artist Matthewdavid also exclaimed how NAM as a genre is perhaps the most purely therapeutic music genre that he has thus far discovered (McNeill, 2017, "Matthewdavid", para.2).

Perspectives from music experts were also taken to observe if their reasoning aligned with the composers. Andy Beta shared his view on the genre:

It's sense of calm, exploring the ethereal using a musical language on the spectrum with that of pop, but for far different purposes. At its finest, it's beautiful and evocative music, it acts like a drug. New Age is also functional music, be it background music or a way to relax and unwind. (McNeill, 2017, "Andy Beta", para.2)

Another music expert Dave Segal, further expanded on the alluring factors of NAM. Terms such as "chakras", which are prevalent in New Age philosophy belonging to Eastern Spirituality, were expressed whilst sharing his view on how functional NAM as a genre is in terms of helping people chill out, find inner peace, resonate with the solar system, and so on (McNeill, 2017, "Dave Segal", para.2). The component of healing in NAM is often accompanied by various New Age expressions. It aligns with the New Age movement ideologies inviting metaphysical thoughts and ideas. The artist Gifted & Blessed illustrates this well, stating that his initial attraction towards NAM was themes of extraterrestrials, other dimensions and alternative healing modalities (McNeill, 2017, "Gifted & Blessed", para.2).

Most of the NAM artists strongly held the ideology of healing the body and mind through sound properties channelled through the genre. Delving a little deeper into the idea of music for healing, the artist Steven Halpern expressed his idea on how the musical

components of NAM relate to healing and relaxation. He stated that the human body, mind and spirit are akin to a musical instrument with built-in rhythms, such as the heartbeat and the rhythms of brainwaves (Singleton, 2012, para.21). And he also further implied that there exist certain patterns in them that can enable higher levels of health and well-being (para.21).

Healing Vibration and Frequency

The idea of heightened awareness in NAM dictates the relationship between the composer and its listener. In this case, the listener needs to be aligned mentally with the music to experience its benefits. As NAM artist Iasos shared:

New Age music has the intention to harmonize a person, to raise their frequency, raise their awareness, help them connect to celestial realms, help them connect to love - universal love. If you're not vibrating on a higher frequency, you're not in tune with that music. (Pants, 2011, para.27)

The artist Carlos Nino shared a similar statement about NAM listeners, stating how some of them are truly connected to the music on a vibrational level, as opposed to random listening (McNeill, 2017, "Carlos Nino, para.14). Words such as frequency and vibration are often the limelight when artists try to talk about NAM, as Laraaji, while talking about the labelling issue of NAM, mentioned how the New Age tag don't appear negatively for people that could experience the music's vibrational intention, transpersonal affection, vast now, celebration, contemplation (McNeill, 2017, "Laraaji", para.4).

Frequency and vibration are universal concepts, whereby in New Age philosophy, the planetary motions and the solar system have always been of interest, concerned with their effects on earth's frequency and vibration. The idea of the Age of Aquarius, which played one of the biggest roles in sparking the New Age movement into the public consciousness, belongs to the subject.

Evolution of NAM in the 21st Century

NAM artists also expressed NAM's fresh revival in the 21st century. Most opined that NAM is gaining momentum as part of a cultural evolution in the current era. NAM, which was often regarded as having a bad rep in the past (Weston, 1999), looks to be slowly fading away. Artists shared their thoughts on the issue and how things have started shifting positively for NAM in the current era. Music expert Northern Ashram talked about the concept of musical regeneration simply as a matter of time by citing an exemplary viewpoint that keyboard tones of the '80s were probably quite difficult for most people to enjoy listening to in the early 2000s (McNeill, 2017, "Northern Ashram", para.9). However, as more time passes on, old sounds are accepted with a fresher perspective and might even experience wistful memories of the past (para.9). Whereas, music artist Diva Dompe, shared a modernist perspective towards the regeneration of NAM:

Many styles of music have experienced a resurgence in the last 5--10 years because of our increased access to formerly obscure recordings, i feel like

new age music is relevant recently because it provides an open-ended and experimental framework for artists who feel drawn to progress the genre and possibly because of a spiritual paradigm shift caused by the acceleration of consciousness, information, and technology. (McNeill, 2017, "Diva Dompe", para.14)

On the other hand, music artist Ariel Kalma viewed the revival of NAM as a byproduct of people seeking positive transformation, and as such, the musical expressions in NAM supplement well to it. (McNeill, 2017, "Ariel Kalma", para.10). Likewise, artist Dave Segal also chimed in with similar ideals on how ecological problems and other global issues create a need and hunger for a more peaceful outlet through music. He goes on to state how negative news gets amplified through the internet, causing global stress, and that's where the increased need for NAM factors in (McNeill, 2017, "Dave Segal", para.10). A need for more peaceful and soothing music is a pattern that was observed when NAM first started emerging in the 1970s. As Darroch (2001) highlighted, there was a need for an alternative to Rock music during that period. In the 21st century, it is at a similar juncture where the NAM genre reappears again more vividly to soothe and relax human minds. In this manner, the essence of NAM is in one way or another, primarily directed toward the holistic well-being of mankind.

Lack of Identity: NAM as a Selective Genre

The perplexing issue in the NAM genre lies within its identification factor. No definitive term currently classifies a certain musician under the NAM genre, although the record labels and music distributors might categorise them as such. So until an investigation is carried out on each artist, whether the artists are classified under the NAM genre by choice or circumstance cannot be confirmed. This particular issue is not a modern phenomenon but a puzzle that persisted even in the early stages of NAM during the 1970s. McNeill (2017), who originally surveyed 10 NAM artists that was part of our investigation, gave an opening statement in his project, which stated:

New Age music is a genre simultaneously embraced and shunned. Beyond the schlock masquerading as enlightened listening exists a vast expanse of highly attuned material produced by musicians identifying as part of the New Age movement. Others, who fit comfortably into this sonic fold, choose to dodge the banner in favor of freer territory. (para.1)

Here, we extracted important key statements from several artists to construct our viewpoint. Mixed responses were found during our initial analysis. Out of the 14 NAM Artists, four partially identified with the NAM genre, eight fully identified, and two didn't want to be identified under the genre. Of the two denied, one (Music artist Yanni) displayed ignorance of the term New Age, even after receiving Grammy Award nominations for Best New Age Album in 1993, and *Billboard* awarding him No. 5 "New Age album artist of 2016". When asked how he felt about the term "New Age", he responded that he wasn't even slightly aware of the meaning of the term New Age (National Public Radio (NPR),

2016, para.16). He further expressed how it was never his choice to get identified with NAM, stating how musical types that didn't fit into the mainstream music category became a New Age artist. (para.19)

Instances like this shed light on the seriousness of the identification problem, namely that the issue resides even at the highest musical platforms. From our observation, some artists avoid identifying themselves as creators of the NAM genre, even though their musical style and expressions fit into it. They also seem quite selective as to which of their music fits into the NAM category musically, as they try to identify themselves with the NAM genre only partially.

NAM artist JD Emmanuel gave a statement that dictates the difference between his music and his viewpoint on the identification problem:

I have never wanted to be associated with the term "New Age Music" as I have always described my music as "Minimal" or "Electronic Minimal." However, I understand why I am included as a New Age Music artist which seems to be based on the wide definition of a type of music using free form, drone, repetitive patterns, environmental sounds and improvisation to create altered, meditative states for relaxation, stress release, focusing the mind, etc. (McNeill, 2017, "JD Emmanuel", para.2)

Whereas the artist Carlos Nino paid no attention to genre labels, stating that for him what's more important was Sound, Vibration, Energy and Consciousness (McNeill, 2017, "Carlos Nino", para.6). As for the artist White Rainbow who was neutral about New Age ideologies but didn't confirm if he can be considered as a NAM Artist, presented a long list of genres that he thought fits his musical style:

Ambient, experimental electronic, Kosmische, minimal, vaporous plumes, reverb-based synth composers, flanger-core, wind-chime derived, proto-spa, space music, psychedelic, drift-wave, float tracks, cloud sounds, Eno-wave, treatments, trip-gaze, health-core (McNeill, 2017, "White Rainbow", para.21)

And in terms of viewing NAM as a spiritual interest, music artist Matthewdavid, who looked upon himself as an experimental artist, stated that, if left aside the entire complexity of the New Age phenomenon, whether it be in music or philosophy, at its core it might be referred to as Therapeutic Spirituality (McNeill, 2017, "Matthewdavid", para.8). Also, another artist Robert Rich gave equal importance towards NAM concerning spirituality, as he stated that it is best reserved for music that contains spiritual implications or certain beliefs attached to it. As for his music, he refrained from being associated with NAM (McNeill, 2017, "Robert Rich", para.6).

Under these given conditions, it appears that unless there are major record labels or music distributors purely dedicated towards NAM with New Age ideology, the NAM genre will remain an ambiguous musical genre due to the individualistic ideology of the composers. Music artists, thus, should be given the autonomy to select their musical identity. Indeed, currently, it purely rests upon each music artist to decide whether they

fall into the NAM genre at their own discretion. The music industry is also important in establishing certain criteria for NAM nominees in awards and ceremonies.

Creativity and Imagination

We investigated the artists' thoughts and the creation process of NAM. Musical creativity directed towards healing, meditation and awareness was observed as the major inspiration in their creative output. We extracted statements that would help us better understand the given subject.

Electric Sound Bath, a musical duo artist, stated that interest in their musical art form was aroused within the healing nature of sound, whereby their main objective is to keep evolving and keep spreading their sound to as many people as possible (McNeill, 2017, "Electric Sound Bath", para.14). Likewise, the artist Steven Halpern talked about the holistic purpose behind his musical creation, stating that he wanted to start creating music as an instrument to help people access higher energy spectrum than that of jazz or rock music, by incorporating music elements of ancient roots of ancient Greece, and China and Egypt, where musician were also healers and priests (Singleton, 2012, para.10).

It is interesting to observe how NAM composers are inspired. As music artist Steven Cravis talked about his musical album *Healing Piano*, he shared how his early years as a meditator inspired him to create music that will project those meditative feelings to its listeners, including those who have never tried meditating before (Parsons, 2011, para.7). It is an important and intended objective of NAM to affect the listener through music, as the artist White Rainbow also stated that "the ability to transport" (McNeill, 2017, "White Rainbow", para.25) was what defined great New Age Records. Meanwhile, Music expert Dave Segal shared his views, stating how the best composers in the field of NAM focus on creating tones that arouse the feeling of elevating or getting dissolved into a state of bliss among listeners (McNeill, 2017, "Dave Segal", para.12).

Several artists shared their insights on how they form their musical functions. The artist Ariel Kalma stated his inspiration comes from the exploration of the consciousness landscapes (McNeill, 2017, "Ariel Kalma", para.2). The artist also talked about the imaginative process he follows before he sets into composing:

Actually, it's more the preparation, which is for me is long, than the actual playing. When I sit down and I start playing whatever instrument I'm playing it's like a door. I knock at the door, maybe for a long time, and at one point the door opens and I'm in. (para.4)

He also further talked about the end goal of his musical thought, which affects him either emotionally or intellectually, is to unravel new pathways of thinking and to serve his meditation (para.4). The artist Diva Dompe too touched on the ideals of expanding the mind as the source for his creative output, "...to explore the limitless consciousness/matter/energy vehicle of existence differentiated from source" (McNeill, 2017, "Diva Dompe", para.4). Likewise, the artist JD Emmanuel also talked about how his musical inspiration lies towards exploring the deep altered states of consciousness to attain an empty state of mind (McNeill, 2017, "JD Emmanuel", para.4). Essentially, the

exploration of human consciousness through meditation is of great interest to NAM. However, a slight distinction can be made among the artists in terms of their intensity, judging by their description of their musical goals and creative inspirations. For instance, some artists seem to describe their interests without an in-depth description of consciousness, although their music revolves around a similar musical spectrum.

The expressions found in NAM had the means to provide solace and meaning for both its composers and listeners. Creativity and imagination intertwined with philosophical reasoning toward consciousness are undoubtedly present in the minds of NAM Artists. The attention to the mind is what differentiates the genre from others. Music creation motivates composers to expand their minds, consciousness, and awareness. It can be concluded that healing and giving space to the mind are among the central themes observed in the NAM composer's ideologies and also set in parallel with the thought process involved in the creation of NAM.

Commercialisation of NAM

To learn more about how NAM is being commercialised in the music marketplace, we explored three components: the artistic display of NAM albums, NAM Artist profile and audience demographic, and promotion.

The Packaging of NAM Albums

The artistic display used in NAM albums was an important element discussed by King (2005) and Zrzavy (1990). It was an important factor that projected a distinct feature of the NAM genre in the marketplace. The absence of the artist's portrait and name on the album covers was a common characteristic. The imageries were also mainly focused on nature, landscapes or abstract art.

We investigated modern NAM albums produced in the 21st century to observe any emerging changes or adaptations in the NAM genre. 24 NAM albums were randomly selected from the NAM artists (n=14). Emerging patterns were first observed through the coding table to establish our interpretation.

Out of the total NAM albums (n=24), most (n=14) projected some form of abstract art with varying expressions, mostly related to minimalist art. Photography of nature was used in some of the albums (n=5). Also, themes of spiritual imagery were observed (n=7). The majority of the art was imaginative (n=15). However, the deeper meanings conveyed through the imageries were difficult to decipher for most (n=13), as they were symbolic and carried spiritual expressions and varying forms of abstract art.

Interestingly, 2 albums had a portrait of the artist, which contrasts with early literature (King, 2005). Also, all of the albums we investigated had the artist's name on the album cover. In the modern era, these changes may be attributed to copyright issues, label agreements, etc., another field of study that can be further explored. However, cohesiveness was observed in the expressions displayed in modern NAM albums, just as Zrzavy (1990) propounded before the 21st century.

NAM Artist Profile and Audience Demographic

Our study observed that 11 artists (total n=14) had their own personal websites. Whereas all of them (n=14) had their music out on at least one or more of these websites: Apple Music, Bandcamp, Discogs, SoundCloud, Spotify and Youtube. These sites are globally well-known hubs for streaming, buying and selling music online. Also, music in vinyl format was being sold by some artists on sites like discogs and bandcamp. Consumers were interested in collecting vinyl as there were several sold-out copies. Also, live concerts were present for most (n=13) except one. YouTube was observed as the most widely shared platform for their music, as most of them (n=10) had personal accounts.

Fasmer (2013), who owns the site *newagemusic.guide* investigated the demographics of NAM audiences by curating an article through his website. He talked about how it was important for NAM Artists to define their audience early on, considering how NAM, although a global genre, has little success in countries like South America and only limited success in greater parts of Asia (except for Japan) and Russia.

Fasmer, who also owns the web radio channel *New Age Stars* provided a statistical chart (see Table 1) to support his claim. It displayed several countries' Average monthly stream (one listening session) and TLH (Total listening Hours).

Table 1: Table 1: Average Monthly Stats of Web Radio Channel New Age Stars.

Country	Streams	TLH
United States	15260	17004:27
Canada	2362	1988:12
Mexico	1877	1718:23
Japan	936	971:12
Brazil	980	766:09
Spain	523	508:53
Turkey	405	508:53
France	493	347:09
Italy	327	289:34
Germany	332	286:37
Ukraine	161	281:19
Argentina	534	273:53

Adapted from *Who is the typical New Age music fan?* by BT Fasmer, 2013, *New Age Music Guide*. <https://newagemusic.guide/for-artists/who-is-the-typical-new-age-music-fan/>. Copyright 2013 by BT Fasmer.

From Table 1 we can observe that more than 90% comes from Western countries, with the United States at the top. Fasmer (2013) stated that although the radio statistic is simply an overview of his particular radio channel, it indicates where most NAM fans are. Fasmer, who further wanted to give his impression of the listeners' background, gave out three points based on 5 years of communication with NAM fans. They are:

- 1) Above average income.
- 2) An interest in meditation and mental health and

3) A general positive state of mind.

Fasmer also further stated that the promotion tends to be successful when NAM artists affiliate their music with meditation seminars, workshops, etc. The researcher also contacted Fasmer for a comment on the article, and he stated, "I believe the main findings in the article are still valid today".

Commercial Appeal and Promotion

One interview transcript with great relevance to our inquiry was obtained. The interview was conducted by Solveig Whittle in 2014, with New Age artists Ricky Kej and Wouter Kellerman on the topic of marketing and also other important aspects relating to NAM's commercialisation. When asked what steps were taken to attain a #1 ranking on their collaborated NAM Album (*Winds of Samsara*) on the Billboard New Age Album chart, Ricky shared the initial steps undertaken:

We did everything the traditional way: promotions on Amazon, iTunes, alternate distribution centers, sending out email blasts, spreading word through social media, etc. All of this helped contribute to a strong debut at No. 1. (Whittle, 2014, para.21)

He also stated the importance of live performance to maximise and sustain its commercial appeal by stating how his musical partner Wouter did a live performance show in LA, which in return helped maintain their album ranking on the chart position (para.21). They both talked about the importance of signing up with a label that is willing to work diligently for the music that is being promoted. However, they also highlighted the need to work independently alongside the label to promote their work, stating that it is the musicians' responsibility to work alongside the label in terms of promotional efforts (para.29).

Planning and execution were also vital in gaining maximum response and attention from the NAM audience. When asked why they chose July for their Album release, both shared a mutual perspective. Ricky stated how the winter festive season can get very competitive for selling music, as Wouter also exclaimed, "Christmas season starts early and is too competitive, so we wanted to have enough time to promote and sell before the season." (Whittle, 2014, para.35).

In terms of music listening experience, Ricky mentioned how his music was focused on longer musical experiences, stating that he prefers giving his audience a complete hour experience (para.49). Thereby, judging by the success their album had, audiences of NAM seem to embrace longer musical listening as opposed to singles. Several more important areas were highlighted by both artists, such as the importance of YouTube over other streaming sites and the need to have a personal connection with the audience, which Ricky mentioned about making all their Facebook posts as personal as possible (para.57).

The role of live performance was re-highlighted, which was seen as being greatly essential in NAM's overall commercial landscape. When asked about the role of live performances

and how they relate to the album's promotion, Wouter shared that performance is an important supplement in supporting the album; likewise, the album helps market their shows (Whittle, 2014, para.63).

In the end, when asked what advice they can give to successfully promote their albums without a label backing or PR agency, Wouter exaggerated and expressed that an enormous dedication needs to be made, "You can do everything yourselves, but it needs 18 hour days (!)" (para.78). Whereas, Ricky implied positively, but stated how possessing good music isn't enough but rather a part of a bigger process:

You can DEFINITELY do everything yourselves. Do NOT be in a hurry to release an album. Wait for the right time; ensure you have the funds to promote, and just because its good music- you will NOT get an audience. (para.79)

The process of online promotion and live performances are vital undertakings in most musical genres (Knab et al., 2007; Weissman, 2017). And it is prominent even in NAM. What differentiated the NAM genre in its commercial appeal was that it tends to be more toward contemplative musical experience than entertainment values such as those found in pop music. Music that extends for longer durations is a standard format cherished amongst its audience. Therefore, while following standard music industry procedures, NAM Artists also try to maintain deeper musical values rooted more towards mental healing experiences.

Conclusion

As reflected upon the thoughts and ideals projected through the NAM composers, NAM in the 21st century can still be considered vague in its description as a holistically inclined musical format, mainly directed towards healing, meditation, spirituality and relaxation. However, the versatility existing among the composers' musical creativity and expressions has been illustrated in the current investigation. NAM composers' exploration also branches out to experimental and innovative music and new sounds, regarded as the NAM musicianship in the 21st century.

In terms of the musical identity of NAM, the issue still persists in the current era, with some artists unwillingly being tagged under the genre. However, the study also revealed new stats that some artists were neither rejecting nor accepting but partially identifying with the genre. This reveals a better acceptance of the NAM genre compared to the pre-21st century, presenting a modern perspective on neutrality. However, at the same time, an underlying ignorance and lack of attention paid to the meaning and origin of the astrological term 'New Age' among both artists and the music industry contribute to the identification complexity.

Regarding NAM's commercialisation, we observed a big market gap between the West and East, revealing a great market potential for Eastern countries in the future, provided the growing popularity of modern NAM. In regard to the promotional aspect for maximising sales, NAM poses no different marketing and promotional strategies from

other musical genres, such as live performances and social media use in boosting album sales.

The current study can be classified as an initial scholarly investigation into 21st-century NAM and its composers, presenting avenues for further exploration. For future studies, conducting an in-depth study on artists who fully identify themselves with NAM is recommended to gain a purer perspective on the evolutionary pattern of NAM. Also, this study was more oriented towards composers' ideologies and less towards their practical applications; thereby, live performances of NAM Artists and their recording studio setups would be intriguing areas to explore. Musical analysis of NAM is also lacking in terms of a proper understanding of its musical aesthetics, structure and dynamics. Based on the findings of the study, NAM artists pay much attention to the vibration in their music; therefore, an analysis of the tone frequency of NAM would pave the way for a greater understanding of what contributes to a particular listening experience to arouse higher vibration and mental healing. And in terms of promotion and commercialisation of NAM, more investigation is needed on NAM Artists residing in non-western countries where audience reach is particularly limited, and also find out why NAM has less appeal in those areas.

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