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Abstract

The impact of COVID-19 has affected not only private citizens, but also arts entrepreneurship professionals and their respective business models. To explore both the problems experienced by professional music entrepreneurs and their solutions for navigating company survivability, growth and impact, a multiple-case qualitative research study using intensity sampling and grounded theory was conducted to uncover how professional music entrepreneurs ($N = 5$) succeeded in not only surviving the pandemic's effects on their personal businesses, but also in augmenting their companies' finances, resources and impact within the constructs of a post-COVID multimodal creative economy. The results present various themes and suggestions for implementation within music (and arts) entrepreneurship practice and education.

Introduction, Context and Need

Besides wreaking havoc on the world economy, changing the ways we interact and altering the business landscape, COVID-19's impact is forcing both private citizens and professionals to reimagine their daily lives; music entrepreneurs are certainly no exception. Before COVID, the music industry was finally adapting to the new musical and communicative technologies of the 21st century, and many music entrepreneurs were following suit. Indeed, their collective reaction to the many digital modes of product creation and dissemination in the creative economy was becoming the status quo.

A post-COVID multimodal creative economy, however, is emerging as most music creators' modalities for teaching, delivering, receiving and consuming musical products and services are rapidly transitioning to digital-based delivery. These modalities are becoming the predominant standards of a 21st century career and financial sustainability. Akin to most professionals in non-musical disciplines, it might behoove music entrepreneurs to rethink the philosophical pillars of their business approach such as their mission, goals, target audience, modality of products/services and communication strategies. This new era prompts an evolution of digital arts entrepreneurial practice.

Successfully operating a professional music enterprise in the COVID era is not an easy feat nor is it the result of random acts of trial and error; entrepreneurial startups require actions guaranteeing sustainability. Creative processes for product/service development such as exploration, improvisation, documentation and delivery can be fundamental to establishing an arts enterprise's brand, reputation, philosophy, vision, mission, market and value.[1] For example, many CEOs of arts- and non-arts-based companies are transitioning their business models to function multi-modally due to the pandemic as a means of survival.[2] Consumers can now experience products and services physically, virtually, synchronously, asynchronously and via other modalities.

Multimodal delivery of products and services improves security, sustainability and scalability due to consumers adjusting the following: daily life activities, professional life, communications, leisure and artistic creation/e-consumption.[3] Common online tactics include video interviews of COVID-era CEOs. Such videos tend to provide anecdotally-based suggestions for aspiring entrepreneurs, yet often fail to provide pedagogical, curricular and programmatic frameworks for arts entrepreneurship educators in this new multi-modal era. In numerous cases, CEOs of Fortune 500 companies and alternative education life coaches—what many might consider to be online entrepreneur education "gurus"—use their notoriety and platform to discredit the value of education, entrepreneurship education and even arts entrepreneurship education.[4] Some CEOs and notable music entrepreneurs have even advocated for students to drop out of college and—as a substitute—use surface-level inspirational sound bites advertised on social media platforms; they contain no empirical evidence or verified strategies for successfully navigating a career.

From a scholarly perspective, entrepreneurial career training programs and institutions are aiming to improve the effectiveness of arts entrepreneurship practice and pedagogy through evaluation, pragmatic observations, theoretical frameworks of entrepreneurship and even advancing an artistic meta-praxis depicting commonalities and connections between artistic and entrepreneurial action.[5] Yet, there is still the glaring reality that students will need to learn how to develop and operate professional music enterprises in the post-COVID multimodal creative economy. Certainly, the philosophical underpinnings, dissemination of student-centered learning, project-based learning pedagogies and continued scholarly

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[1] John Kratus, "Orientation and Intentionality as Components of Creative Musical Activity," *Research Perspectives in Music Education* 2 (1991): 4-8.

[2] Adam Ozimek, "The Future of Remote Work," https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3638597.

[3] Inmaculada Tamarit and Hanna Skorczynska, "Argumentative Strategies and Multimodality in Oral Business Discourse: From Theory to Practice," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 116 (2014): 2330-2337, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.01.568.

[4] Motivation Madness, "The Most Successful People Explain Why a College Degree is USELESS," October 2017, YouTube, 11:35, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8QY0NDWqzk&t=140s.

[5] See Josef Hanson, "Developing and Evaluating the Arts Entrepreneurship Profile: A Systematic Approach," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* (2021): 1-18, https://doi.org/10.1080/10632921.2021.1919586; Gary D. Beckman, *Disciplining the Arts: Teaching Entrepreneurship in Context*. Lanham, MD: R&L Education, 2010; Gary D. Beckman, "'Adventuring' Arts Entrepreneurship Curricula in Higher Education: An Examination of Present Efforts, Obstacles, and Best Practices," *Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 37, no. 2 (2007): 87-112, https://doi.org/10.3200/JAML.32.2.87-112; Ben Toscher, "Entrepreneurial Learning in Arts Entrepreneurship Education: A Conceptual Framework," *Artivate* 8, no. 1 (2019): 3-22, http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/artv.2019.0003; Jonathan Gangi, "Arts Entrepreneurship: An Essential Sub-System of the Artist's Meta-Praxis" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2014); Stephen Rueff, "Creative Freedom: Arts Entrepreneurship as a Mindset," *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 2, no. 1 (2020): 48-52, https://doi.org/10.46776/jaee.v2.57; Martín Rojas et al., "The Use of Technology to Improve Organizational Performance through Corporate Entrepreneurship," *International Journal of Management Science and Information Technology* 14 (2014): 38-62.

discourse of arts entrepreneurship education are necessary for facilitating relevant curriculum. However, existing literature lacks empirical accounts and viable suggestions for aspiring professional music entrepreneurs to adapt, manage, navigate and grow a business that also aims to express a mission-based purpose for impacting consumers' quality of life—especially in a post-COVID era. This research could offer innovations and perspectives for the role the arts have within entrepreneurial disciplines as well as a framework for organizing various stages of entrepreneurial development in challenging circumstances. Additionally, it may offer solutions that could expedite the time and processes needed so music (and arts) entrepreneurs can adapt their business to the new multimodal creative economy.

Methodology

Design

This is a multiple-case qualitative research study using intensity sampling, which is the process of selecting or searching for rich or excellent examples of a phenomenon.[6] Using this method, a researcher can select a small number of cases providing in-depth information about the topic under investigation. These are not, however, extreme or deviant cases. In this study, the intensity sample is comprised of professional music entrepreneurs (N = 5) who met the following criteria:

1) Participants were CEOs of their respective enterprises (sole proprietorship, nonprofit or partnership) and registered with the IRS.

2) Participants' businesses offered two or more professional level musical products and/or services (e.g., performance, production, education, etc.).

3) Participants provided evidence for establishing (a) security, (b) sustainability, (c) leverage and (d) scalability within their respective business before and during the COVID era.

4) Participants' enterprises had a mission-based focus.

5) Participants provided evidence of national or international accolades curated by industry colleagues of a professional academy.

6) Participants offered their products and services to a national clientele and grew their company's financial revenue and assets by at least double the amount during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7) Participants provided evidence for having assisted other music/arts business owners to survive, adjust and grow their respective businesses amid the global pandemic.

8) Participants increased their company's visibility and impact amid the pandemic through strategic communications.

The researchers implemented a grounded theory approach to data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is a research method generating theory from systemically collected and analyzed data. It is used to uncover such things as social relationships and behaviors of groups, known as social processes. Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, while categories and analytic codes are developed from data.

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[6] Musarrat Shaheen and Sudeepta Pradhan, "Sampling in Qualitative Research," in *Qualitative Techniques for Workplace Data Analysis*, ed. Manish Gupta, Musarrat Shaheen, and K. Prathap Reddy (Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2019), 25-51.

Pre-existing conceptualizations are not used, also known as theoretical sensitivity. Theoretical sampling is used to refine categories and abstract categories are constructed inductively.[7] Social processes are discovered in the data and analytic memos are used between coding and writing. Finally, categories are integrated into a theoretical framework.[8]

Research Questions

1) Is there a venture sustainability or scaling framework for extant music (and arts) enterprises during a global pandemic? If so, what is the framework?

2) If the framework exists, is it gradational or fluid?

3) If the framework exists, is it arts- or music-specific? If not, what could non-arts businesses learn from this framework?

Participant Descriptions[9]

Located in a major city in Texas, **Company 1** is committed to the education, preservation and innovation of Afro-Ibero American and Black American music. They create music education opportunities for children (especially at-risk Ibero-American and children of color) of any income level with the potential to develop a professional career in the music industry. With a 100% high-school graduation rate and an 85% college placement rate, the organization provides students with high-quality curricula for honing cross-cultural music production and performance skills. The organization also equips students with career preparation and offers business and entrepreneurship workshops throughout the year. Company 1 had a pre-COVID-era operating budget of $2 million and has increased it during the COVID era to $4 million. Additionally, the CEO and president of the organization is the recipient of numerous international awards for music education, including a Grammy® nomination for Music Educator of the Year and the Country Music Association's Music Educator award. During Summer 2020, the partnership provided a five-day online professional development summit to more than 150 sole proprietors who specialized in non-profit music education, arts advocacy, administration, music production and performance.

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[7] Categories are subdivisions of data sorted into the same place. Being arranged in such a way allows researchers to easily identify the characteristics of each category. Analytical coding is the process of labeling portions of interview transcript text at both the initial stages of analysis and at increasingly more detailed analytical levels of abstraction. Theoretical sensitivity means that, via data collection and analysis, researchers are able to realize relationships between or among categories that lead them to build an informed theory that works with and is relevant to the phenomena under study. Analytic memos are mini-analyses written to state what the researcher is learning throughout the course of the evaluation. These are normally written both during and after compiling data. Interrater, or interobserver, reliability measures the level of agreement between different researchers studying or assessing the same thing. This is used when data is collected by researchers assigning classifications, scores or tiers to one or more variables.

[8] Karen Locke, "The Grounded Theory Approach to Qualitative Research," in *Measuring and Analyzing Behavior in Organizations: Advances in Measurement and Data Analysis*, ed. Fritz Drasgow and Neil Schmitt (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2022), 17–43.

[9] The companies in this study were selected in part because two of the three authors took part in products and/or services provided by these companies, including educational outreach efforts. Due to this previously-established acquaintance and trust, the companies agreed to participate in this study.

Based in Puerto Rico, **Company 2** is an LLC providing professional-level music production and education services to local and global clients. The CEO and president of the company worked for American Idol Puerto Rico as a music producer and produced, engineered and composed music for numerous international pop and Latin pop singers. The organization had a pre-COVID-era operating budget of $150,000 which increased to $2 million. Similar to **Company** 1, the CEO earned 13 Grammy® Award nominations and several wins, including the Latin Grammy® nomination for Producer of the Year. During the summers of 2020 and 2021, the partnership provided 11 free company sustainability workshops to more than 50 sole proprietors also specializing in music production and performance.

Headquartered in south Florida, **Company 3** is an Emmy® award-winning, Grammy® nominated and Downbeat Music® award-winning sole proprietorship offering audio engineering, music production and commercial music composition services to media and television companies. The company has a joint venture with NBC Universal and Netflix focusing on professional live performances in the singer-songwriter genre and provides educational workshops to colleges and high schools. During the summer of 2020, the CEO provided three free company sustainability workshops to over 13 sole proprietors who also offered music production, audio engineering and media production services. The company's pre-COVID-era operating budget was $80,000, which increased to $230,000 during the COVID era.

Centered in south Florida, **Company 4** is a sole proprietor who is internationally recognized as one of the leading bass trombonists in the Classical, Latin and commercial music idioms. The entrepreneur holds a doctorate of musical arts in performance and pedagogy and earned both a Grammy® and Global Music® Award as a trombonist, composer and producer. The company's services included (a) recording studio session services, (b) masterclasses for cross-cultural music performance and adaptability techniques and (c) music entrepreneurship workshops for navigating "crossover" careers (e.g., a classically trained performer who also performs in pops and other commercial musical spheres). During fall 2020 and spring 2021, the CEO provided four free workshops to three university students and professors who also specialized in music production, arts entrepreneurship-related curricula and performance. The organization had a pre-COVID-era operating budget of $56,000 and increased its operating budget during the COVID era to $132,400.

Based in south central Florida, **Company 5** operates a multi-award-winning music entertainment and production LLC comprised of top industry producers, instrumentalists, composers, audio engineers and communication arts specialists. The company (a) offers viability consultation and music production services for new business start-ups, performing/recording artists and music education non-profits, (b) develops strategic marketing initiatives for independent artists and (c) provides booking and management services for curated performers. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the partnership provided 26 free workshops to independent sole-proprietors, corporations and university administration specializing in music production, arts entrepreneurship-related curricula and performance. The organization had a pre-COVID-era operating budget of $120,000. Its present operating budget is $310,000.

Data Collection & Analysis

The researchers implemented a triangulated data collection technique. Semi-structured interviews with the music entrepreneurs were conducted and videorecorded. Follow-up phone calls were conducted to ensure interviewees' statements were consistent with their intended responses for each question. The lead

researcher transcribed the video interviews and phone conversations for analysis purposes and shared them with the co-researchers. The following company data were shared and discussed with the researchers:

- Longitudinal analytics for their digital presence (quantitative data);

- Customer testimonials and feedback (qualitative data);

- COVID-era business plan, multi-competitor analysis and financial information (qualitative and quantitative data).

The researchers analyzed the transcripts separately before coming together to discuss findings and reach consensus on emergent themes. Color-coding and categorization were utilized to organize data within each transcript. Data were then grouped into (a) deductive themes of security, sustainability, leverage and scalability as well as (b) inductive themes of predictive modeling, tenacity, empathy, impact, inspiration, community development, translatability and publicity.[10] The reader should be aware that the interview questions used for each company were constructed to address the deductive themes of the study. As a result, inductive themes emerged generating further insight helpful for entrepreneurship practitioners and educators. Inter-observer reliability between the researchers was also assessed to ensure the data coincided with the above themes as well as two meta-themes, *entrepreneurial aim* and *mission-based aim*.[11]

Interview Questions

The principal investigator conducted semi-structured interviews comprising the following questions:

1) How did you and your company survive the global pandemic?

2) Could you please describe the processes you underwent to adapt your company to the challenges of the COVID era?

3) Your company underwent tremendous growth amid the global pandemic. Meanwhile, most musicians and creative professionals lost professional work opportunities. I am wondering if there are specific variables that you addressed within your company's aim which produced more meaningful outcomes and longevity; variables that perhaps your competitors or other creative

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[10] Charles Vanover, Paul Mihas, and Johnny Saldana, *Analyzing and Interpreting Qualitative Research: After the Interview* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2021). Deductive data analysis means applying theory to the data to test the theory. In a "top-down" approach to data analysis in qualitative research, the researcher applies predetermined codes to the data that can be developed as strictly organizational tools or created from concepts drawn from the literature, from theory or from propositions the researcher developed based on anecdotal evidence. Inductive data analysis is a more emergent strategy where the researcher reads through the data and allows codes to emerge/names concepts as they emerge; this is more of a "bottom-up" analytic strategy. There are many forms of inductive analysis, but some common practices are open coding (sometimes called initial coding), in vivo coding (codes developed from participants' own words) and constant comparative analysis.

[11] For this study, the operationalized definitions for the two meta-themes are as follows: *Entrepreneurial aim* pertains to the company's aim of addressing its security, sustainability, leverage and scalability, which are the four deductive themes analyzed. *Mission-based aim* pertains to the company's desire to witness the impact, inspiration, community development, translatability and marketing outcomes of their products and services. These are the five inductive themes that emerged from data collection and analysis; this aim is more concerned with the social and aesthetic effects of the companies' products and services. It is worth noting that company survivability is not only pertinent before endeavoring in entrepreneurial and mission-based aims, but also was an inductive meta-theme subsequent to the companies' respective responses to the questions. These responses introduced three tactical inductive themes implemented to ensure survivability: predictive modeling, tenacity and empathy.

professionals should consider addressing as they try to adapt their business's functionality during the COVID era?

The researchers anticipated 30-minute interviews, yet all lasted between 105-122 minutes. (Participants obviously felt comfortable sharing their insights and experiences.)

Results

Question 1: "How did you and your company survive the global pandemic?"

Based on the videorecorded interviews and email responses, the researchers inductively uncovered three themes inferred by the comments below pertaining to company survivability: (a) predictive modeling, (b) tenacity and (c) empathy.

Predictive Modeling

In summary, utilizing mental imagery techniques and maintaining a keen understanding for interpreting data analytics allowed the companies to create hypothetical scenarios for staying "six or seven steps ahead of the game," which increased their will power to ensure the survivability of their company's dreams and goals. By removing worry from their cognizance, the companies readjusted their infrastructures and systems to incorporate emerging technologies that would eventually influence music consumption on a global level, both in-person and digitally. A key takeaway from the interviews was the imperativeness for companies to reimagine how they will operate in the future. In doing so, companies would foster continuous innovation and growth even amid a global pandemic. The companies also expressed that adaptability and functionality of any business, especially in the arts, always needs to be thought of in a futuristic context. By maintaining an aerial view of the industry like "an eagle," the survivability and functionality of a company can be salvaged to avoid repercussions of a crisis.

Tenacity

Facing potential business consequences from the effects of the global pandemic (i.e., loss of revenues, gigs and contractual agreements) did not seem to hinder the companies' tenacity, but rather enhanced it. During the interviews, participants embraced the notions of "not letting anything get in their way," "holding on to their dream" and "never giving up." Companies 3 and 4 shared a mutual belief that humanity would resort to the arts as expressive outlets for learning, coping and growth before the pandemic really spread around the world. Company 5 expressed its "hunter-like" work ethic. Representatives from the company also mentioned a quote by Oscar® winning actor Denzel Washington—"I do what I have to do so I can do what I want to do"—that inspired the organization to remain effective and tenacious regardless of any obstacle.

Empathy

Each company stated that they worked within a philosophical framework centering on empowering and developing opportunities for growth, introspection and self-efficacy among their clients and consumers. They also expressed that customer dissatisfaction would have occurred had they abandoned their corporate ambitions. As COVID-19 was spreading, their roles as artists, communicators and producers shifted to creating, communicating and producing *hope* for their clients and costumers. Empathy for their

clients was expressed by producing and releasing songs online as opposed to "treating them (i.e., their market) like a transaction." Representatives from Company 4 shared their belief that the role of music businesses in society is to help listeners experience art to make their lives worth living. Given that continuous reports of increased sorrow and uncertainty manifested due to the global death rate of COVID-19, the companies expressed their mission to provide artistic products and services (e.g., online performances and pre-recorded videos using empathetic lyrics reflecting the human condition) to let their clients and consumers know they were not alone. During a vulnerable moment, one participant representing Company 5 shared that "without empathizing with humanity, we have no humanity," and insinuated that music and art require human expressivity and human empathy. In sum, all the companies reconfigured their business models to ensure that their services would empathize, validate and encourage consumers.

These statements support themes that may be viewed as mission-based. The first is *tenacity,* a common personality trait associated with will power and resiliency—traits needed for survival. The second was *empathy*, which coincides with Rueff's essay describing how empathy fosters creative freedom.[12] During the transcription stage, it became apparent that empathy for clients' wellbeing was a pertinent variable contributing to the success of each company. A third theme emerged: each entrepreneur's ability to predict (a) the effects of the global pandemic in a business and industry context and (b) continued arts markets and consumption.

Question 2: "Could you please describe the processes you underwent to adapt your company to the COVID era?"

The data collected suggested each company engaged in four broad yet distinct processes: (a) security, (b) sustainability, (c) leveraging and (d) scalability. While the entrepreneurs did not use these terms directly, it is clear they operationalized the definition of these processes in an entrepreneurial framework. All five music entrepreneurs described how they successfully used these processes amid the pandemic and how each process occurred in the same systematic order:

A. The first process addressed was **security**. All five music entrepreneurs expressed that securing the foundations of their business was of primary importance, even before attempting to build the company further. The five items they aimed to secure were:

- finances and assets;

- employees/staff jobs;

- the elimination of debt and unfeasible commitments in order to facilitate time and efficiency as both an executive (i.e., CEO) and a creative professional (i.e., performer, producer, educator, etc.);

- methods of product and service delivery to abide by COVID-safety guidelines ;

- their own jobs.

B. **Sustainability** was the second process. All five expressed that sustaining the pillars of their business was fundamental to scalability. Hence, the entrepreneurs focused on sustaining the companies':

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[12] Stephen Rueff, "Creative Freedom: Arts Entrepreneurship as a Mindset."

- *Brand, marketability and advertisements.* In addition to increasing the quality and quantity of marketing efforts, all five entrepreneurs believed it was important to create both micro- and macro-content such as:

  o event flyers;

  o inspirational quotes embedded with an action photo of the company's personnel, products and/or services;

  o upcoming events or open Q&A online chats;

  o behind-the-scenes videos highlighting everyday life, personal artistic practice and development and professional work life.

During the interviews, the entrepreneurs indicated a lack of activity on social communication platforms before the pandemic, but reported increasing their level of engagement with fans, potential customers, prospective clients and sub-contractors during the pandemic. Each company was proactive, which led to being sought-after:

- *Authenticity* was indicated to be an important variable accompanying the quantity and quality of micro- and macro-content.

- *Reputation of products and services.* Maintaining the highest quality products and services, even if delivered in a different modality, was of highest importance. For example, when the leader of Company 2 conducted virtually-streamed production sessions with a vocalist, he made sure that visual and audio quality of the session would maintain continuity and high fidelity, even if the client was logged on in a different time zone, state or country. The same held true for the other entrepreneurs within their respective vocations.

- *Reputation of the company spokesperson* (i.e., themselves as CEO). The entrepreneurs made sure to include words of encouragement and wellbeing after engaging with a current or potential customer. In doing so, the entrepreneurs believed the reputation and brand would be sustained or increased.

- *Labor productivity.* The entrepreneurs achieved this by "doing less":

  o Company 1: "People who get things accomplished aren't marvel superheroes. I try to focus on tasks that will produce results and put my efforts into the activities that will give me the most payoff."

  o Company 4: "With the time I am allotted, I express one discipline—I am a producer. I produce for clients. I produce collaborations and networks. I produce research. I produce future practitioners. I psyched my mind into believing that I didn't have much to do, which reduced my stress. So, I became productive in my work and in what I needed to build."

  o Company 5: "When the pandemic hit, I realized that I was too busy and not as productive. It got me thinking that to be busy doesn't necessarily equate to productivity. One could be busy and not productive. One could be busy and productive. So, I focused on executing tasks that matter by determining which tasks truly address a gap in the market, field and people groups based on a routine

assessment of our company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats—a S.W.O.T. analysis."

- o Company 3: "I stayed productive through pre-grind clarity. When I am grinding, I can't think. So, every morning, I made sure that I made time just for me without that entrepreneurial urge to "get 'er done." I made me some yummy coffee and sat on the couch in complete silence and just relaxed—shut all noises off. Eventually, I compartmentalized tasks that are unimportant, important and urgent."

- o Company 2's leader went on to explain how unimportant tasks can be distinguished as tasks that produce no results and no consequences if left unattended. He also mentioned that he increased his motivation and self-efficacy by tailoring assignments as tasks that helped him build his (a) network and team, (b) supplementary content and (c) experience in the field.

C. The third variable addressed was **leveraging**. All five entrepreneurs expressed that, in order to engage in leveraging their business' assets, they:

- consciously exuded more generosity towards their clients. In other words, the entrepreneurs counteracted the notion of rationing products and services and did the opposite—they gave more than was asked to the client.

- ensured that if products and services were being offered at a reduced cost, they contractually demanded the client credit the company's name, digital contact information and the tasks it completed (e.g., production, audio engineering, performance) for the final product (e.g., single, EP or album) in all its advertisements (e.g., clients' podcast interviews, website, social media platforms, etc.).

- submitted their completed products (i.e., albums, singles) to international-level peer-reviewed competitions with the assumption that they (the entrepreneurs) would be able to (a) redirect publicity and prospective clients to the proper channels for professional inquiries and (b) ensure their market's loyalty, should the entrepreneurs' product(s) be selected as a nominee or a winner within a specific category:

  - o Company 1: "It's important to start with one thing and then expand your offerings to other things people could benefit from."

  - o Company 2: "My clients started asking me if I also arrange for strings and record vocals and master engineer. I knew I could offer more and it was time for people to learn about this. I adjusted my business plan, production packages, created representative examples of my capacity to provide additional types of services people were unaware that I actually do, put it online, and texted the videos to previous clients and all my friends. I made sure my website was up-to-date on these things, too."

  - o Company 3: "…and everybody knew me as the go-to person for producing television music. But, for fun, I started posting late night practice on guitar and singing to hi-def tracks that accompanied me. I did the whole sha-bang. Nice lighting, nice fit (outfit) and pressed 'record.' Target marketed the videos to places I wanted to play at in Miami. Next thing I know, these places saw my video and now I am negotiating

contracts to perform there. So, my business expanded to become more than an audio production company, which is cool cause we shouldn't be limited."

- o   Company 4: "I had different days in which I would perform different styles of music. Monday was classical videos. Tuesday was practice videos…scales, arpeggios and simple melodies. Wednesday was jazz videos. Thursday was teaching videos. And Friday was Q&A videos from questions people asked me throughout the week. This was great because now I am more than a trombonist. I get to show people that I can offer music to all people."

- o   Company 5: "There came a time when I gathered our team to have a meeting about what we could do better as a company. Some of the team members had cool ideas that I never thought about because I just never thought we could be that kind of business, too. But we rolled with the idea. And BANG! Now we do that, too."

In sum, the purpose for these leverage strategies was to increase visibility, perceived productivity of the enterprises and redirect prospective clients back to each company's website to learn more about other products and services.

D.   A fourth theme that emerged was **scalability**. All five music entrepreneurs expressed a focus on creating more music and media content during the COVID era. Product/market-fit testing on online platforms and fan feedback were key variables determining product and service development trajectories:

- Company 1: "…so it was important for us as a company to stick with what we do best. People know that we are the go-to organization for helping kids build careers in commercial music. We expanded the organization to offer more courses that fall within the realm of commercial music. We created more teaching videos and made them accessible online as well."

- Company 2: "I obtained a grant which was helpful. This gave me more opportunity to continue producing more songs and tutorials, which I was already doing, but now it became easier."

- Company 3: "…and you know, there was an oversaturation of music being produced due to quarantining. Music listeners were being bombarded by so many home-based music entrepreneurs. There was a point where I decided to narrow down my content to highlight the musicianship and engineering skills clients knew me for. Consistency and continuation of productivity were important for me in order to take the business to the next level."

- Company 4: "…my wife told me she liked the comedic videos that I was doing with trombone and how they were still high-quality performances but enjoyable to watch. I started getting more opportunities from music manufacturers to represent them via DM messages. I was like 'Eureka! This is a niche. Let's make more!'" (laughed)

- Company 5: "In the beginning, I produced a lot of different genres and behind-the-scenes videos so people could see all we offer. Then our team started focusing on the analytics and engagement. We compared the engagement value and analytics with different videos. It was clear that people really loved when we released musical content that was more fusion oriented, so we kept making more. Eventually, we received many inquiries to produce albums within that exact same genre!"

Question 3: "Your company underwent tremendous growth amid the global pandemic. Meanwhile, most musicians and creative professionals lost professional work opportunities. I am wondering if there are specific variables that you addressed within your company's aim which produced more meaningful outcomes and longevity; variables that perhaps your competitors or other creative professionals should consider addressing as they try to adapt their business's functionality in the COVID era?"

Similar to question 2, the data suggests a coalescing around a number of issues. In reference to the inductive themes stated earlier, five inductive aspects emerged shedding light on the importance of having a company mission: (a) impact, (b) inspiration, (c) community development/outreach, (d) accessibility and (e) marketing. The researchers also uncovered a phenomenon within these aspects: they were executed in a step-by-step, orderly manner. Furthermore, data based on the email responses suggests these inductive aspects were addressed continually *after* solidifying the security, sustainability, leveraging and scalability processes.

Impact

Participants described a desire to *impact* consumers as opposed to merely impress them with their art products and services. It was important to inform audiences about the impetus for their products/services when marketing them to clients and fans within their online communities. For example, the entrepreneurs often supplemented their marketing campaigns with a message addressing a social need (awareness for ecological, cultural, political, pandemic, arts, mental health issues, etc.) to help communicate the importance of their product (e.g., new single, new album, new educational resource). Partnerships with social activism organizations and other local, non-arts-based businesses were also a common practice for enhancing impact.

Based on the interviews, impact was (a) evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively through website and social media analytics, and (b) expressed vertically and horizontally. All five companies expressed a desire to expand their messages of hope and empowerment through their services and make sure that lives were being transformed through their artistic services. Each entrepreneur indicated it was imperative to first set up their business infrastructures to experience vertical impact such as increased profitability, revenue, assets, leveragability, scalability and notoriety (i.e., traditional capitalistic desires). Once this was established, the participants focused on developing strategic initiatives to help improve the quality of life and the professional interests of their clients, which (in this study) constitutes horizontal impact. Lastly, to expand their horizontal impact, each business focused their efforts on building rapport and healthy engagement at local levels, then state levels, then regional levels, then national levels and finally, at the international level.

Inspiration

Another mission-based aim the entrepreneurs pursued was *inspiration.* A strong desire to help build other entrepreneurs' and consumers' self-efficacy through their music, conduct and business practices was noted among all the participants. The data suggested that, by inspiring others, each business' art form and professional practice would continue to flourish:

- Company 1's leader stated: "I am an educator. If I don't teach others how to do and how to teach, then I won't contribute to the advancement of my field. So, as an educator, my hope is

to inspire the next generation to pass on the music and the skills needed to make life more abundant."

- In an email response, the leader of Company 2 stated: "I want to help musicians learn how to do it, too. Hopefully my music will inspire them to try."

- Company 3's leader expressed: "Everybody has a dream. My business aims to help dreams come to life. If I can do it, anyone can. Hopefully, my life is a testament to others for what one could do if they don't quit."

- The leader of Company 4 conveyed: "If someone sees my music videos and feels happier to go about their day productively, my job was a success."

- Company 5's leader said: "We need to inspire people to innovate and create art that will make the world a better place. We must consider how our products/services are going to empower other contemporaries and aspiring entrepreneurs to experience revelation and act upon it."

Community Development/Outreach

Community development/outreach also emerged as a common aspect. However, there was an emphasis on building strong in-person and online communities where community members could connect with one another and share personal experiences with the entrepreneurs' products and services. The communities were developed as follows:

- Participant businesses posted "fun" and "inquiry" questions on social media for followers to respond to. Questions prompted followers and consumers to talk about current events in the fields of arts entertainment, education, creative processes in artistic offering and so forth. By doing this, each entrepreneur strengthened their community and secured a larger following on social media platforms.

- Participants released prototypes (e.g., incomplete songs and engineered mixes) to acquire feedback from their fans. The rationale to release prototypes was supported by the following notions:

  o audiences love to provide their opinions;

  o audiences want to be involved in the creative process;

  o audiences were online for extended periods of time wanting involvement in something meaningful and fun.

- Participants released weekly or biweekly e-newsletters to subscribers providing greater insight and context for ongoing projects, and supplemented these e-newsletters with exclusive behind-the-scenes videos and photographs.

- Participants published blogs and vlogs on their websites addressing the deeper philosophical facets of their respective fields in order to encourage their fans.

- Participants offered free virtual and in-person lessons to different age demographics (from children to seniors) by partnering with organizations such as neighborhood country clubs and churches.

Translatability

As the world became much more connected through digital social platforms during the COVID era, all five participants became aware of a promising growth opportunity: leveraging the *translatability* of their products and services. By analyzing the data and engagement of artistic content on social media, all of them observed (at different times) how their projects were consumed internationally. For example, Company 5 determined that U.S. viewers were responsible for 67% percent of their consumer engagement, and that Brazilian consumers comprised 22% of the views and shares on one social media platform and 42% of the views for their latest music performance post. This comparison of the data to the product's attributes encouraged the company to release songs that were translated to Portuguese and/or rearranged to have Brazilian musical instrumentation and grooves. Within a week of posting a song targeting Brazilian and Portuguese-speaking online communities, Company 5 grew their overall fan base by 22% and received two inquiries from prospective clients.

Company 2 and Company 4 both expressed the importance for their products/services to be accessible to a wide array of demographics. They did so by approaching this aspect three ways:

- *Culturally.* This included ethno-cultural societies and belief systems. Lessons, production services and performances were geared to accommodate a population identifying with different cultural expressions.

- *Globally.* This was achieved by entrepreneurs translating their products, services and enterprises for audiences whose first language was not English. Each entrepreneur included an option button to translate their business websites to Spanish. Furthermore, Companies 1 and 3 created video tutorials that included Spanish subtitles while Companies 2 and 5 released video tutorials where they spoke in Spanish. Company 4 rearranged and performed original music to include musical elements unique to the target global region/country.

- *Multimodally.* Each music entrepreneur wanted to deliver services in various modalities:

  1) in-person: Performances and keynote presentations within their local community; since airline flights were on halt due to the pandemic, in-person services were at a minimum;

  2) online synchronous: Consultation services, virtual/remote production and performance services and live Q&A chat sessions;

  3) online asynchronous: pre-recorded products such as video tutorials for production, performance and audio engineering techniques and entrepreneurship educational strategies.

Translatability was embraced as a powerful way to globally communicate each enterprise to designated, broader audiences that might identify and support the enterprise's musical products and services as well as their entrepreneurial- and mission-based aims. Each entrepreneur understood the impact of a historic pandemic: it affected every sector of society and perhaps made people of different walks of life more relatable to one another. Hence, translating their business' mission and products/services was a way to

scale the impact of each venture.[13]

Marketing

As the final mission-based aim the entrepreneurs expressed, *marketing* emerged as a prominent theme. The entrepreneurs' rationale was to:

1) syndicate news about their companies' ongoing initiatives for providing access to educational services made available to various demographics in the markets, and

2) recruit potential donors, sponsorships and partnerships with other individuals and companies sharing the same mission; in doing so, each business could potentially produce more security and sustainability.

Each entrepreneur mentioned the use of professional videographers to record a set of videos for marketing purposes and channeled through their e-newsletters, websites, online blogs (to improve search engine optimization) and social media presence. For example:

- a two-minute long introductory video describing the company's team, mission, services and method of contact; this was supplemented with action scenes of product creation and services taking place with engaged customers;

- a one-minute highlight reel showcasing the enterprise's best musical works;

- a three-minute highlight reel showcasing the enterprise's best works featuring client and fan testimonials;

- three one-minute videos directing fans and clients to learn more about a new, limited-time-only service.

Participants described their priorities for these videos as being centered on market engagement: "…fun," "…high definition," "…fast-paced dialogue," "…clear and concise about what is being offered" and "…accessible" across a plethora of digital platforms. Word of mouth yielded the best marketing results according to Companies 1 and 5. Both specified particular times of day to email and text the videos; many were accompanied by a cover letter (containing several positive testimonials) to those whose vision aligned

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[13] Translatability could be part of a broader theme of investigation within arts entrepreneurship research. The authors use *translatability* as a term where accessibility is a possible result or outcome. Accessibility is when a company provides access and benefit from a system of operation to deliver products and services to as many people as possible. By multimodally enabling audience access through digital technologies or other innovations (e.g., distribution channels, consumption routines, etc.), entrepreneurs can create products that are experienced by consumers of diverse demographics and consumption/delivery preferences with no marketing barriers. While it is plausible that a company's aim to improve accessibility could improve its ROI, the researchers verified with each participant whether accessibility was one of the inductive aims uncovered by the study or if translatability better expressed the participants' goals. The companies indicated that by wearing their "survival hats" to keep their enterprises afloat, they focused on translatability by tactfully translating musical products into another genre. For example, Company 2 reproduced an electronic pop song into an Afro-Cuban pop feel with the lyrics translated into Spanish in an effort to acquire prospective fans in Miami who might enjoy their artistic brand and lyrical message. In essence, the companies translated their products to reach selective audiences from around the world that had a high probability of identifying with the company's aims, products and services and could become potential fans, followers and customers through target marketing and data analytics. The companies mentioned that accessibility is a theme they hope to address in the future, once the online creative economy is more stable.

with theirs. A representative from Company 3 said, "Having videos ready to go at a moment's notice was awesome! I could convince prospective clients and event managers that I was the right person for the gig. All they had to do was press play." Lastly, all music entrepreneurs indicated that they repurposed these videos to online media sites, music instrument manufacturers they were contractually obligated to endorse and local and international news outlets.

Discussion

This study revealed numerous findings that can be implemented within music (and arts) entrepreneurship practice and education. For the first research question concerning venture survivability, the researchers uncovered three overarching themes:

> 1) the ability to *predictively model* events by researching trends and implementing the latest technological innovations / business practices;
>
> 2) leveraging one's *tenacity* and spirit of resiliency to reach a desired goal;
>
> 3) expressing *empathy*, especially during a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

For the second (adaptation) and third (potential variables) research questions, researchers uncovered a sequential four-step process with five aspects that were used to realize both their venture's entrepreneurial (extrinsic) and mission-based (intrinsic) goals. By addressing these two meta-goals sequentially, the entrepreneurs were able to re-prioritize portions of their business operations—security, sustainability, leveraging and scalability—to function within an evolving industry standard of multimodal products/service delivery. To accomplish this, participants interrogated and reimagined aspects of their venture's mission to emerge more impactful, inspirational, community-oriented and accessible. Lastly, being empathetic to their market, the entrepreneurs made specific plans to market these new aspects of their business mission to achieve their business goals.

Observed Commonalities and Research Question Results

Based on the findings, a plausible response to Research Question 1 (*Is there a possible framework for venture sustainability?*) is "perhaps." Below, Figure 1 outlines the steps implemented by the entrepreneurs. A plausible response to Research Question 2 (*If extant, what is the framework?)* is "gradational." The entrepreneurs in this study first determined their entrepreneurial and mission-based goals before pursuing the extrinsic steps towards survivability. Once accomplished, they addressed survivability through predictive modeling to stay ahead of trends, pursuing resources and support with tenacious spirit and offering products/services with a spirit of empathy. Next, they addressed the extrinsic goals of security, sustainability, leverage and scalability for their respective enterprises to maintain vertical momentum. Propelling their enterprises forward towards functionality in a multimodal creative economy, the entrepreneurs focused on intrinsically expressing their mission through a linear multi-step process of impact, inspiration, community development and accessibility. The result of this focus was then marketed, which fueled an increasing tendency to focus their enterprises on their mission and encouraged more empathy for their market's reaction to COVID.

Concerning Question 3 (*Is the framework arts specific?*), one powerful observation uncovered in the data was that four out of the five inductive themes helped to maintain the enterprises' relevancy, customer satisfaction and aggregation, and the expansion of products and services falling within principles aesthetic
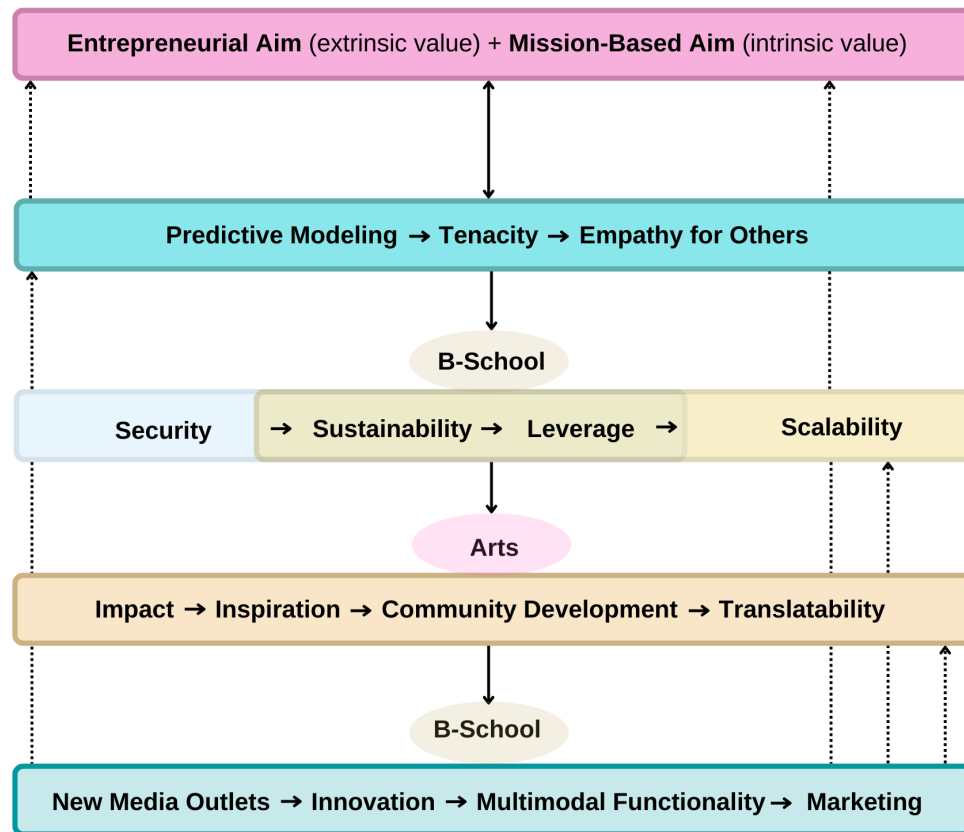
Figure 1. COVID Response Model

in nature: impact, inspiration, community development and translatability. In other words, the effectuation of artistic impetuses is what paved the way for new media outlets, innovation and multimodal functionality in the post-COVID era.[14]

Practical Implications

The data above suggests the following for arts entrepreneurship educators and practitioners:

1) Always listen to one's market and team members. In doing so, one might uncover new directions and solutions to advance the company.

2) Online platforms can be helpful for market research and testing "proof of concept."

3) Fusing other artistic mediums—especially multimedia production—could strengthen the quality of the product and communicate the plethora of services that the company offers to consistent markets/consumers as well as prospective clients.

4) Security, sustainability, leveraging and scalability should be addressed as step-by-step, orderly processes.

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[14] Jonathan Gangi, "Effectual Entrepreneurship in the Arts: The Story of Austin Classical Guitar," *Artivate* 10, no. 2 (2021), http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/artv.2021.0009.

Limitations

While this study presents valuable data and implications for surviving, adjusting, navigating and growing arts enterprises in a post-COVID world, the researchers only utilized an intensity sample of five professional music entrepreneurs, which was purposeful. This strategy helped lay the foundation for future studies and provides in-depth analyses of successful decision-making.[15] Contextually, the research questions aimed to find successful arts business adjustments as a response to the COVID era. The authors note that observations in this study are not necessarily generalizable to all arts ventures. Another limitation could be the companies' response bias to the interview questions. While there was financial metric for selection, it is possible that the companies' responses were at times overstated due to knowing that their account would be available to the public.

Suggestions for Future Research

The results of this study inspire at least three avenues for future research:

- to uncover new findings for pragmatic, pedagogical and curricular application as informed by entrepreneurs of specified disciplines within arts and non-arts entrepreneurship disciplines. Researchers should consider doing a causal-comparative study between the findings from the two groups.

- to uncover new findings for pragmatic, pedagogical, and curricular application as informed by music entrepreneurs who specialize in more mainstream-oriented performance careers (e.g., popular music styles such as hip-hop, EDM, country and pop) and non-mainstream-oriented performance careers (e.g., jazz, Western art music, global music styles). Researchers could then compare the differences and similarities between both groups of performance-based entrepreneurs for how they adjusted, managed and grew their enterprises amid post-COVID multimodal creative economy.

- to uncover new findings for pragmatic, pedagogical and curricular application as informed by practicing arts entrepreneurs and applied arts faculty and administration who are not currently immersed in real-world practice as an entrepreneur. Researchers could specifically compare applied faculty's philosophical, pedagogical and curricular solutions to equipping students for viable careers amid the COVID era.

Conclusions

For arts entrepreneurs specifically, this study identifies one possible business model response to the realities of the COVID era. The framework identified appears to suggest an internal circular solution path oddly reminiscent of Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey."[16] While not explicitly endorsing direct comparisons to Campbell's ideas, there is a broad methodological similarity: specifically, that in order to create a successful COVID response, the entrepreneurs appear to have used a tripartite strategy.

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[15] It is our view that the analysis presented above is applicable for both pedagogical purposes and practically for current and aspiring arts entrepreneurs.

[16] James D. Hart, "Arts Entrepreneurship and the Hero Adventure," *Journal of Arts Entrepreneurship Education* 1, no. 1 (2014): 49-72, http://dx.doi.org/10.46776/jaer.v1.25.

When broadly identifying the framework suggested by the study's data, we could say that after the entrepreneurs (when confronted by something out of their control) re-committed themselves to the entrepreneurial and mission-based goals, they made a decision to survive the COVID era and sustain their ventures. They did this via two well-known entrepreneurial techniques: leveraging pre-existing assets and using these assets to increase market share, and thus, scale.

It appears somewhat obvious that they assessed and used their assets-at-hand as an initial step. While it is clear that the sample was successful pre-COVID, it is also clear that their asset assessment uncovered skills. These skills, however, were not obvious or frequently identified in entrepreneurship literature. Predictive modeling, for example (perhaps an extrinsic asset), is typically gained through both experience and education. However, it (arguably) takes a certain tenacity to follow through on any decision, especially the decision to survive. Yet the data suggests that the asset of empathy was crucial to their success as it acted as a platform.

At this point—again, broadly speaking—Campbell's approach becomes more obvious. If one wonders what the entrepreneurs encountered when they embarked on the "Hero's Journey," it appears they found arts policy in the underworld of "entrepreneurial sustainability." Specifically, to accomplish each venture's goals, the entrepreneurs leveraged what can be identified as (broadly speaking) arts policy or arts non-profit concerns to drive creative solution development through translatability. The solutions implemented were impactful, inspirational, community-driven and accessible.[17]

To continue the Campbell model, after the entrepreneurs descended into the underworld of "arts policy as a potential response to the COVID era," they collectively emerged into the daylight of a new world via new, idiomatic marketing practices. After re-prioritizing portions of their business operations (e.g., crafting a reimagined business plan in response to something out of one's control), they independently determined that without communicating these new priorities to their pre-existing market and, thus, gaining some leverage to actually scale their businesses, leaving the "underworld" successfully (e.g., launching the reimagined business plan) would be impossible. While the entrepreneurs' marketing techniques/strategies may not appear innovative extrinsically, they leveraged perhaps the most intrinsic asset they possessed—*empathy*. One wonders how the four arts policy solutions the entrepreneurs used as a COVID response would have been received if the market were not consuming an aesthetic product.[18] While the answer to this question is beyond the scope of this study, it may merit some consideration.

It is our hope that all readers, practitioners, students and teachers of arts entrepreneurship feel encouraged by the findings of this study. Clearly, this work (though not determinative by any means) suggests that basic entrepreneurial techniques and "the arts" (arts policy in this case) can be used together to address business-based issues in successful for-profit and nonprofit arts businesses. Our hope is that arts entrepreneurship educators find this study useful in the classroom and practitioners can use our findings as a model to thrive in the COVID era.

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[17] It should be noted that arts non-profits—entrepreneurial or not—are likely quite familiar with the role of arts policy. The authors note that leveraging aspects of arts policy in pedagogical or practical contexts appears not to have much presence in dedicated arts entrepreneurship literature.

[18] James D. Hart and Gary D. Beckman, "Aesthetics, Medium and Method: An Introduction to the Differences and Similarities between Arts and Non-Arts Entrepreneurs," *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy* (November 2021): 1-15, http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/25151274211045696.

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