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“BangBangCon: The Live”

– A Case Study On Live Performances and Marketing Strategies With The Korean-Pop Group “BTS” During The Pandemic Scenario In 2020*

Cristina Freitas de Jesus**

In 2020, the unexpected pandemic scenario has led to a downfall of live concerts performances, after the government restriction for events and gatherings with a large number of people. The Korean-Pop (K-Pop) group BTS (*Bangtan sonyeondan*) also had their concert tour canceled in 2020. Therefore, the group came up with an innovative project to the music market, called “BangBangCon: The Live”, a live streaming paid concert held by the group, on June 14th, which achieved a Guinness World Record for most viewers during a paid music concert, in a live streaming format. It’s important, then, to study this event, and initiate a debate about alternative ideas for marketing strategies with live streaming music performances. The method to accomplish this research was desk research, analysing all the communication delivered from BTS, studying the website and platform where the event “BangBangCon: The Live” was held, and researching about the results the event has achieved. The results were the description of the event as a project, informing how many people have attended the event, and what were the marketing strategies that made it possible to become the highest audience to a paid live streaming concert, until the moment this article was published.

Keywords: Music, BTS, K-Pop, Live Streaming, Marketing

* I would like to dedicate this article to every writer who has interest in the K-Pop movement and has dedicated some time to report about this exciting movement.

I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my college teachers in ESPM, who have helped me through my research and have encouraged me to keep my interest in the academic field. I also would like to thank my family and friends who have supported me through my career.

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I. Statement of Intended Contribution

This article discusses how artists can create marketing strategies with new contents during the pandemic scenario, using as a case study the event “BangBangCon: The Live”, a paid live streaming concert held by the Korean-Pop group “BTS” on June, 2020. It is important to study through this article some topics related to marketing strategies, digital marketing and fan engagement through digital content. This article is also important to serve as an inspiration for business models to other music professionals, from record labels and entertainment companies, during this COVID-19 scenario, and initiate a debate about alternative ideas for live music performances in the next following years.

II. Introduction

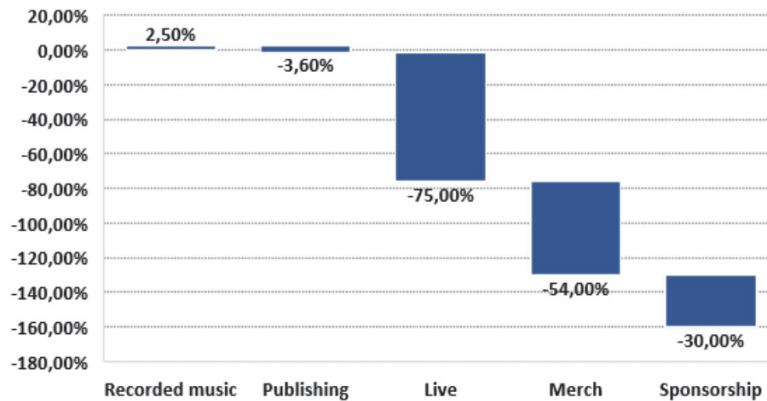
The landscape of the music industry is always changing, and in 2020 could not have been different. The unexpected pandemic scenario has led to a downfall of live concerts performances, and governments from around the world have prohibited large events and gatherings of people, that could lead to a coronavirus contamination. From small concerts to big festivals, such as Coachella and SXSW, the music market was

deeply affected by the social isolation, in order to help contain the spread of the COVID-19 virus (France 2020).

To understand this impact, it is important to acknowledge that the music industry can be divided in five formats: 1) Recorded music: direct access to the songs, mostly through streaming platforms; 2) Publishing: sync the song for commercial purposes, such as movie soundtracks and advertising themed songs; 3) Live: concerts performances; 4) Merchandise: official product related to the artist career, such as T-shirts and bags; 5) Sponsorship: brands establish agreement with the artists to promote their products (Mulligan 2020).

As a consequence from the pandemic scenario, this industry began to face great difficulties. Even if live events could happen by the end of 2020, the reduced capacities and the fact that some venues will not be able to operate at all, means that this sector will reduce their revenue, a process that will likely happen in 2021 as well. As merchandise sales are often closely related to live performances, this sector has also reduced their revenues, and tend to grow back as the live performances are back as well. Brands started to hold back their sponsorships with music artists, afraid of the unknown future of the market. Music publishing revenue has been reduced due to the entertainment industry decline. Music streaming was the only sector from this industry that has been far less affected by a recession. Thus, the music market became

〈Figure 1〉 Projections For Music Market in 2020 compared to 2019



Source: Mulligan 2020

highly dependent on the revenue from streaming platforms to survive this uncertain period, and this crisis is likely to accelerate underlying trends in the music industry, based on the importance of streaming. As the “recorded music” streaming tends to grow, “publishing”, “live”, “merchandise” and “sponsorship” tend to decline when compared to 2019, as is shown in Figure 1 (Mulligan 2020).

III. Theoretical Background

3.1 New Product Development

The importance of new product development (NPD) has grown over the last few decades, and is now the dominant driver of competition in many industries, including the music business. The emphasis on new products has spurred

researchers from marketing and other disciplines to study the new product development process. Most conclude that, in order to be successful at new product development, a firm must simultaneously meet two critical objectives: maximizing the fit with customer needs and minimizing time to market. Researches present some strategies to successfully meet these objectives: analyze your current resources and competences, study if you have enough technology to apply it and use a parallel development process to both reduce cycle time and to better incorporate customer and supplier requirements in the product and its process (Schilling & Hill 2015).

New product development helps companies diversify target customer ranges and expand into new market segments. When it is time to launch a new product, a marketing strategy can help connect their customers to the new products before they are distributed, by building

interest and excitement around the product. In this case, marketing strategy should strengthen all touchpoints, use customer data to deliver personalized targeting, and reinforce the brand from every angle, having the customer experience as the focus across each stage of building your strategy (CMG 2020).

3.2 Digital Marketing

Digital marketing encompasses all marketing efforts that use an electronic device or internet, where businesses leverage digital channels such as: social networks, email, search engines and websites to connect with current and prospective customers that spend much of their time online. From website to business's online branding assets, there's a spectrum of tactics falling under the umbrella of "digital marketing". The professionals behind digital marketing are in charge of driving brand awareness and lead generation through all the digital channels - both free and paid - at company's disposal, focusing on different key performance indicators (KPI) for each channel so they can properly measure the company's performance across each one (Desai 2019).

Social media is a big part of digital marketing, where it is used by billions of people around the world and has fast become one of the defining technologies in the XXI century. Facebook, for example, reported having roughly 2.8 billion monthly active users as of the fourth

quarter of 2020 (Tankovska 2021). Globally, the total number of social media users is estimated to grow to 3.29 billion users in 2022, which will be 42.3% of the world's population (eMarketer 2018). Given the massive potential audience available who are spending many hours a day using social media across the various platforms, it is not surprising that marketing professionals have embraced social media as a marketing channel. Through social media, consumers are able to create participation, collaboration and sharing with the end-users and not only as an advertising and selling platform (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010).

3.3 The K-Pop Group 'BTS'

BTS is a K-Pop group from South Korea, consisted of seven male members, Kim Nam Joon (Rap Monster), Kim Seok Jin (Jin), Min Yoon Gi (Suga), Jung Ho Seok (J-Hope), Park JiMin (Jimin), Kim Tae Hyung (V) and Jeon Jeong-guk (Jungkook), who have gained great prominence in the international music market, mainly from the USA (Dewet 2017). The group debuted as a group under the company Big Hit Entertainment on June 13, 2013, with the album "2 COOL 4 SKOOL" (Aisyah 2017).

As BTS was launched with the purpose of reaching children and younger audiences, Big Hit Entertainment invested in different elements in order to attract the chosen audience, such

as music lyrics with narratives and stories experienced by young people. (Santana & Santos, 2019).

Jin-Mo Lim, a Korean pop music critic, wrote “the main factor in BTS’s success is social media. With social media they were able to communicate with the world public. This intimacy actually is the most important keyword in popular culture” (Park 2018). BTS not only uploads photos and videos to social media every day, but each band member also is a one-person creator who actively shoots, edits, and uploads his own creative contents individually. For BTS, social media is not just a fan-management tool but also a daily home ground that allows fans and band members to share their lives, opinions, and critical comments about their work. In addition, BTS communicates their lives through social media, creating casual dialogues with their fans, which in turn feed BTS members with sources of creative inspiration.

IV. Live Streaming

In a tentative effort for artists to maintain their connection with their fans, the live streaming became a highlight for this scenario. This format, then, was for sure a big interest for the music’s fans, especially when it’s possible to see that, during this period, there were several audience records from live streaming. In 2020,

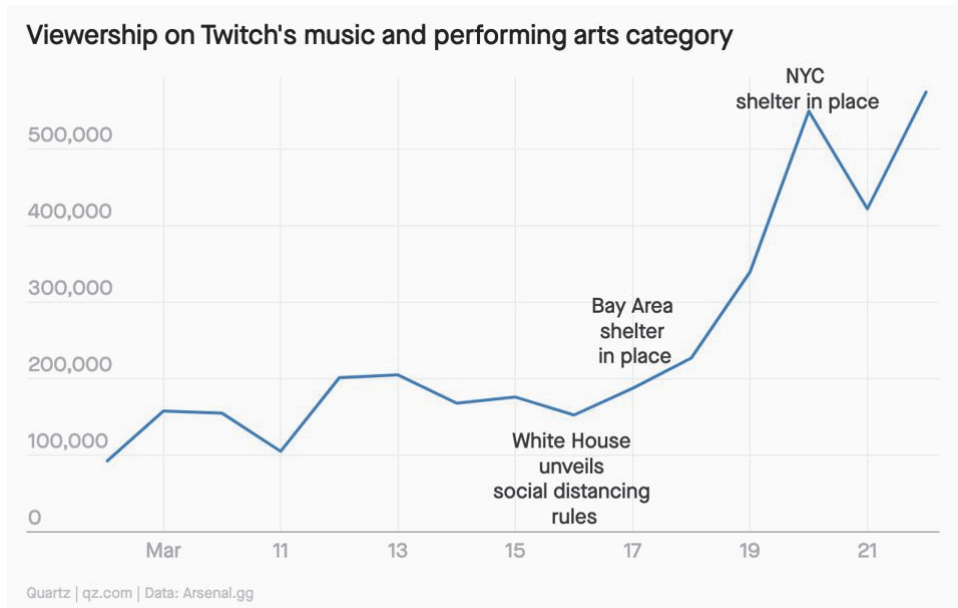
the amount of views in the video streaming platform Twitch, specifically in their “Music and Performance Arts” Category, rose by 619%, from an average of 92,000 viewers to 574,000 viewers, between February and March. That way, several music artists started to be more active with the “live streaming” format on this platform during quarantine, as it is possible to analyze on Figure 2 (Grant 2020).

The audience growth also occurred in the video streaming platform Youtube. Brazilian singers Marília Mendonça, Gusttavo Lima and the group Jorge e Matheus, who are three of the biggest music artists in Spotify Brazil, had live concerts on YouTube and broke several records on the platform. Marília has now the biggest Live video in YouTube’s history with over 3,2 million unique viewers. Before the quarantine, the international artist that came closer to such results was Beyoncé, with 458,000 viewers in a live streaming performance in 2018 (Romariz 2020).

V. BangBangCon: The Live

Like many other artists, the K-Pop group BTS also had their concert tour “Map Of The Soul Tour” with dates across Asia, North America and Europe canceled in 2020. The group then came up with an innovative project to the music market, called “BangBangCon:

〈Figure 2〉 Viewership on Twitch's music and performing arts category



Source: Grant 2020

The Live". This was their first online concert during quarantine, recorded from Seoul, and streamed to the entire world at the same time. It was held on June 14th, in a 90 minutes concert, and announced through BTS social media accounts (Daly 2020).

To be able to watch this concert, the fans had to purchase tickets, that cost 26 dollars for the ones with a BTS membership account, and 35 dollars for the general public. The consumers also had to own a mobile or a computer device with access to the internet to watch the live streaming (McIntyre 2020).

The event had an enormous audience, with over 756,000 people attending the event, allowing it to break the Guinness World Record

for the biggest paid live streaming concert ever registered (Punt 2020). The consequences on social media were also very impressive, as the hashtag "#BangBangConTheLive" was the most popular topic from the social network "Twitter", highlighted on the "Trending Topics" worldwide and in more than 10 countries on the day of the concert (Twitter 2020).

The tracks that were performed during this concert also had an increase on their audio streaming results. Their song "Boyz With Fun", for example, has increased for over 300% in audio streams and "Just One Day" has increased for over 200% during the weekend from "Bang BangCon: The Live" (Sony Music Group 2020), as it is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

〈Figure 3〉 “Boyz With Fun” audio streams



Source: Sony Music Group 2020.

〈Figure 4〉 “Just One Day” audio streams



Source: Sony Music Group 2020

At first, it seemed to be just one more live streaming performance, like many other artists were producing it as well, but the results from this event highlights the importance to have a closer look at the “BangBangCon: The Live” and its product innovation and marketing strategies.

5.1 Product Innovation

During the concert, the viewer was offered a six camera options screen, with different angles from the concert at the same time, where the fan could choose which camera would like to see, as it is displayed in Figure 5. This was a

〈Figure 5〉 Camera View Options



Source: BangBangCon: The Live 2020

strategy to create an ownership emotion with their fans, where they could choose their favorite point of view from the concert. At the same time, there was a “chat section” on the right corner of the screen, where it was possible to enter comments along with other BTS fans while the concert was happening.

〈Figure 6〉 Lightstick during “BangBangCon: The Live”



Source: Twitter 2020

The fans could also connect their “BTS Lightstick”, a popular merchandise from K-Pop artists, where it colors itself according to the song that is being played through a bluetooth connection, as it is displayed in Figure 6. This product is very common at their physical concerts, and the possibility to connect their lightstick to “BangBangCon: The Live” was one more way to create a closer experience from BTS to their fans around the world.

5.2 Marketing Strategies

Since the day they’ve announced “BangBang Con: The Live” until the day the concert actually happened, BTS delivered digital content to their fans and kept in touch with them every single day. The diversity of types of content they delivered and the high frequency of these interactions were the key to engage their fans to purchase tickets to the concert. This series

of digital content was called “BTS FESTA”, an annual project where the group celebrates their debut anniversary with their fans during the month of June. In 2020, Big Hit Entertainment actually adapted this project into a warm-up and engagement strategy to sell the concert. On the day “BTS FESTA” began on June 1st, tickets to the concert started to be sold online and, during these two weeks until June 14th, the group was constantly reminding their fans about the concert, until the live stream date, a day after the “BTS FESTA” had ended. Therefore, this was really the key to engage with BTS fans to sell tickets during these two weeks, as it appears in the schedule from Figure 5, in South Korea Time.

5.2.1 Digital content: videos

One of main focus from “BTS FESTA”’s digital content was the video format, delivered to their fans through BTS official Youtube account named BANGTANTV. The videos content are described below:

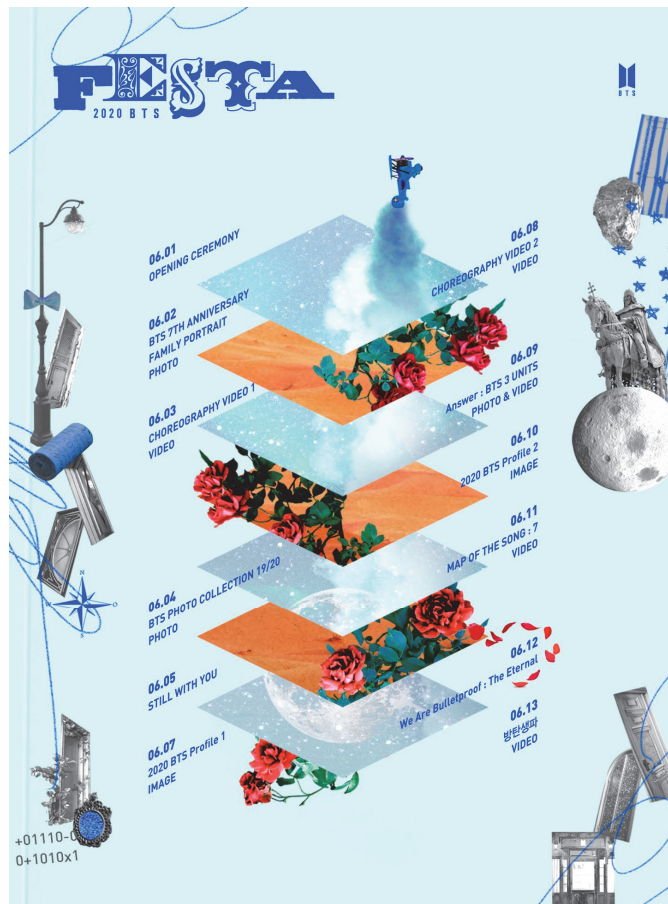
- “Opening Ceremony”: BTS danced and sang to their song “Airplane pt. 2” in a very informal performance. This video was recorded in 2018, what was a good surprise to their fans since it had never been published online before. On this same day, “BangBangCon: The Live” tickets started being sold on Big Hit Entertainment’s website “Weverse Shop”.
- “Choreography Video 1”: BTS rehearsed to perform the song “Dionysus” in 2019. This time, it was added the hashtag “#2020BTSFESTA” on the video’s title, promoting this set of digital content.
- “Choreography Video 2”: a second rehearsal video from the group, but this time from a performance to the South Korean music awards show “MAMA” in 2018. Once again, the fans were surprised at the fact that a video recorded two years ago was finally uploaded.
- “BTS 3 Units Photo & Video”: the group delivered three interview videos, where BTS members talked about the creative process behind their latest album “Map Of The Soul: 7”, and what were their individual contributions to the album.
- “Map Of The Song: 7 Video”: BTS uploaded a video from the group singing their own songs on a karaoke booth, creating amusing moments from the members’ interactions while singing the songs in casual performances.
- “We Are Bulletproof: The Eternal”: an animated music video for the song “We Are Bulletproof: The Eternal”, full of references from BTS’ career moments that would make a special connection between the group and their fans.
- “Video”: on their debut anniversary date, BTS uploaded a video with almost one-hour-length, with the group having a party

and celebrating their seven-year-old career.

The video format has the ability to connect an artist with their listeners, as it allows fans to get to know the artist, see the world through their eyes and present a visual impact of a video that can be just as powerful as the music (Haf 2020). These contents above showed BTS members working and playing with each other, which could create a proximity between BTS

and fans through casual moments from the group, especially considering a pandemic scenario where nobody is able to watch the members perform in person. Moreover, with the “We Are Bulletproof: The Eternal” video, BTS could remember important memories shared with their fans, and this process compliments a song, whereas the content of a video becomes the difference between simply enjoying a song and truly understanding the meaning behind

〈Figure 7〉 “BTS FESTA” schedule



Source: BTS Instagram Account 2020

it. Music videos give the opportunity to see the artist's vision unfold in front of their viewer's eyes, and BTS could achieve that through this series of videos with their fans all over the world (Haf 2020).

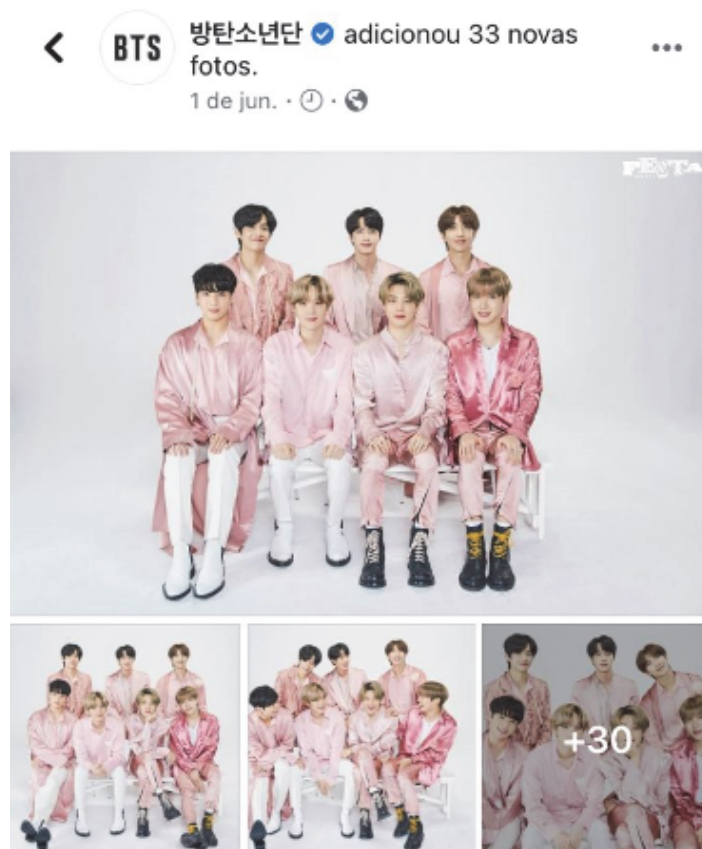
5.2.2 Digital content: photos

BTS photos are also a very popular type of content among their fans. The group went through several photoshoots in order to deliver

different sets of photos during this campaign on their official Facebook page, as it is explained below:

- “7th Anniversary Family Portrait Photo”: they uploaded 33 photos from the group on their Facebook account, that had different clothes and scenarios, as shown in Figure 8.
- “Photo Collection 19/20”, where they posted 20 pictures from different moments during 2019 and 2020 on their Facebook

〈Figure 8〉 “Family Portrait”



Source: BTS Facebook Account 2020

account, as it is displayed on Figure 9.

- “Profile 1 Image”, where they posted new photos with descriptions and fun messages written by their members directly to their fans, as shown in Figure 10.
- “BTS 3 Units Photo & Video”, where they posted 21 photos of the group as shown in Figure 11.
- “Profile Image 2”, with 14 more images that had their pictures and fun messages to their fans, as it is displayed on Figure 12.

Regarding the published photos, it is important to analyze not only the concept but also the aesthetic behind the creation of the images. This marketing strategy was created to cater to the audience’s needs where, in this case, it can be a little different since the product offered is in the “live streaming” format. If the fans are looking at the photos and they can feel a sense of satisfaction, even if it’s just by the beauty aspect, then it achieves the campaign’s goal of attention (Kusumawati & Widita 2020). The development of digital technology that extends to the use of photos and videos has benefited the K-Pop fans in many ways such as accessing videos, pictures and in engaging with their favorite artists online (Rahim, 2019). With so many photos and concepts published by BTS in such a short period, the group delivers an amount of emotions to their fans and they were able to maintain their connection online.

〈Figure 9〉 “Photo Collection 19/20”



Source: BTS Facebook Account 2020

〈Figure 10〉 “Profile 1 Image”



Source: BTS Facebook Account 2020

〈Figure 11〉 "BTS 3 Units Photo & Video"



Source: BTS Facebook Account 2020

〈Figure 12〉 "Profile Image 2"



Source: BTS Facebook Account 2020

5.2.3 Digital content: music

On June 5th, BTS member Jeon Jung-kook released a new song called "Still With You", that carried a thankful message to their fans' support, creating a bigger bonding between the group and their fans. This song was a gift for their fans and posted in SoundCloud, a free audio streaming platform. As a result, this song became the fastest track to achieve one million streams on the audio streaming platform SoundCloud, in only 28 minutes (Sharma 2020). It's interesting to notice that it wasn't available on other paid platforms, because this could cost their fans some investments on the new single campaign, while the focus of this campaign was to purchase tickets to the concert.

VI. Conclusion

The delivery of this diverse digital content, going through photos, old videos and fun messages, enabled BTS to maintain their contact with the fans, which made the calling for the concert more effective, unlike many other artists who announced their live streaming performance with any storytelling construction behind it. That way, BTS being available through their official social media accounts during two weeks in this campaign, was their marketing strategy to create a narrative of

approximation between the group and their fans, and activating emotions through digital content to the fans who were far away from them during the pandemic.

Besides, the concert was held on a private platform, which made it possible for Big Hit Entertainment to adapt the show to what the fans needed, including the lightstick connection, multi-camera view and the possibility to send messages to other fans around the world, a totally different format from the other live streaming that were being held by big international artists in 2020. This new product development occurred in a very requested period, since the group's fans were isolated and missing to see their favorite group to perform, and was well evaluated by the consumers who praised the concert on social media, already requesting a second edition from the event.

The "BangBangCon: The Live" was on the beginning of this pandemic scenario, and other paid live streaming concerts were held afterwards since then, such as Billie Eilish, Dua Lipa and even BTS themselves again, with a concert in October 2020 called "Map Of The Soul: ONE". Although the idea of a sold-out stadium concert is still a very far away reality and the live streaming concerts tends to be the closest experience fans can have as a music concert, this new format is also a very interesting innovation for music artists to get in contact with many fans around the world simultaneously, even when the pandemic is over. It's important,

then, to pay attention to these events, such as "BangBangCon: The Live", and initiate a debate about alternative ideas and marketing strategies with live music performances in the next following years, understanding how artists can remain in contact with their fans, which is so important to maintain their career.

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