

THE OLD TOWN ROAD TO SUCCESS



By Aaron Wu

Who could have anticipated the level of stardom Lil Nas X would experience with his viral hit song “Old Town Road”? Yet in an interview, he remains unfazed when asked about his unprecedented success, stating it was “no accident”. **A testament to his calculated use of core marketing principles which allowed him to go from college dropout to singing at the Grammys in just a year.**



Today's streaming era dictates artists craft their songs to be short and catchy if they ever hoped to make it to the top of the charts. Yet with this same strategy used dime a dozen, how would Lil Nas differentiate himself? **Like any good marketer he would first look to current trends to identify potential opportunities**, resulting in his interest with the Black Yee Haw Agenda which saw the resurgence of cowboy fashion among black artists. The result was "Old Town Road", a trap infused country ballad which effectively achieved something never done before: combine 2 music genres and demographics previously considered mutually exclusive. Lil Nas first teaser of the song on twitter reached viral success, demonstrating a key fundamental principle all marketing students should know: **that in order stand out from your competitors, produce something that's new and innovative that caters to a need previously unmet.**



Lil Nas moved onto the next aspect of marketing: **Promotion**. Yet without the help of a label, he would need to look to something to more unconventional for promotion when normal advertisement methods aren't feasible. The answer was clear, as the creator of a popular twitter handle, **Lil Nas utilised memes as an effective new medium to communicate to younger generations due their viral nature through word of mouth.**



Yet Lil Nas would need to expand his cult following beyond Twitter to other demographics. First, he would expand to reddit, posing as a regular user asking for the name of his track on a popular forum, to which he then responded with a link to stream the full song. Ingeniously, this **use of product placement** meant whenever a person tried googling for the full song this would be the first link they saw. Lil Nas would then use **social diffusion**, expanding to other digital communities such as Tik Tok, where users participated in the #YeeHawChallenge.



Ultimately in just 3 weeks Lil Nas had done enough to promote interest in his persona and song, racking 141, 594 streams and a contract with Columbia records

Yet what would become the biggest takeaway from Lil Nas rise to stardom was the **impact publicity from media outlets and more specifically controversy, can have in inadvertently promoting your brand**. Billboard would go on to remove "Old Town Road" from the country charts for "not being a country song". In the following 2 weeks, Lil Nas received his biggest spike in listens with over 188 M streams, as countless radio stations, news reporters and internet websites debated whether Old Town Road can be considered country and more controversially, whether there was a racial dynamic to the decision.

In any product life cycle there comes a point of maturity. Rather than let his song exit the charts as the billboard controversy died down, he would go on to remix his song with some of music's biggest star. To solidify his relationship with the country demographic, he teamed up to re-release the song featuring Billy Ray Cyrus, a renowned country singer. There was also the remix with incredibly popular K-POP band BTS, tapping into the ravenous K-POP fandom. Both prolonged the life of Old Town Road and reintroduced the song back into the mould until eventually, he would dethrone Mariah Carey's record for the most consecutive weeks at No. 1.



Lil Nas knew that if he were to ever make it big without a label, he would have to do more than make a catchy song. He knew he would have to capitalise on certain trends and opportunities. He knew that he had to cultivate an intimate following through an interesting persona. He knew that by collaborating and re-releasing his song with other artists he could extend the life of his product

Lil Nas demonstrates what we at Marksoc believe in: **that marketing is not just a profession but a skill that can be used in any facet of life.**

THANKS FOR READING!

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