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## 15 Seconds of Fame

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## **15 Seconds of Fame**

By Graham McLaren-Finelli

The average fan attention span is getting shorter and shorter due to the ever-increasing speed of technology. As a result, a new artist has approximately 15 seconds to grab the listener's ear. Streaming services have capitalized on this fact, and thus music is becoming more about capturing the listeners' attention as quick as possible rather than about actual musical creativity. So a musician has approximately 15 seconds to do something wild to capture your attention before you skip their song or exit out of their SoundCloud page.

The influx of demand for fast-paced internet, cell service, and other technological operating systems has caused our attention span to get shorter. According to Time Magazine, the average millennial attention span is 8 seconds, which is less than a goldfish ([“Science: You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish.”](#)). But the attention span was not always like this. Fast-paced technology plays on the brain's reward system, utilizing bright colors, vibrations, and sound cues. Similar to Pavlov's famous dog experiment, our brains have been conditioned to expect a certain feeling as soon as we hear, see, or feel a cue from our device. According to an article in *The Huffington Post*, electronic devices and social media have been designed to hijack the brain, and as a result, we are quite literally, addicted to our technology ([“How Technology Hijacks People's Minds”](#)). The speed at which technology operates has set a standard for how quickly our brains need stimulation, and anything less than the lightning-fast speed offered by today's cellular LTE 4G networks is inadequate.

The lack of attention span in today's music listeners has caused genres with “slow-burning” tracks such as “Stairway to Heaven” to fall to the wayside, making way for a more abrasive, bombastic genre that thrives off this generation's need for immediate satisfaction. In

turn, artists have been forced to re-imagine their song and album structures in order to stay current and interesting. This change, of course, has been indirectly facilitated by and entirely capitalized upon by streaming services.

In response to the need for instant gratification, a new genre has risen to the forefront of the music scene. Rap music, or rather, SoundCloud rap, is the newest trend in today's music. It is loud, distorted, relatively simple, and highly charged with potent emotion. One could even argue Soundcloud rap is the modern version of 70s Punk music, with some rappers of this new wave even referring to themselves as "Rockstars." SoundCloud rap's poster boy is a 17 year old rapper from South Florida, who goes by the name of Lil Pump. According to *Pitchfork's* website, Pump's breakout hit "Gucci Gang" was the shortest song in 42 years to make it onto the Billboard Hot 100 Chart, clocking in at just over two minutes (["Considering the Rise of the Super Short Rap Song"](#)). Pump is just one of the many rappers cresting the wave that is SoundCloud rap. From Lil Toe to Lil Baby, Lil Peep, and Lil Skies, the SoundCloud rap scene is growing larger and larger. This is, once again, due to the instant gratification attitude of today's music audience. This new genre capitalizes on loud, distorted production, and shock value lyrics, cramming as much stimulus into as little time as possible. It caters directly to this generation's attention span, so it's no wonder Lil Pump's SoundCloud rap track rocketed to the top of the charts.

As a result, other artists and genres are scrambling to remain relevant, and find themselves reinventing their typical song and album structure. The classic song structure; verse, chorus, verse, chorus, etc. is far too slow. Today's audience does not have time to sit through a whole intro, let alone wait until halfway through the song to hear the chorus. This structuring has been replaced by a different structure; chorus, verse, chorus, verse. There are almost no intro

sections, and according to an article found on Bobby Owsinski's Music Production Blog, the vocals in the average charting song start 7 seconds in (["How Our Attention Span is Changing Song Structure"](#)). The classic album structure of approximately 10 to 14 songs has been replaced by hyper-focused albums like Pusha T's *Daytona*, and Kanye West's *Ye*, (both 7 tracks) over-bloated monstrosities like Migos' *Culture 2* (24 tracks), and Drake's *Scorpion* ( 25 tracks). Artists like Kanye West have opted for concise, streamlined creative works, with a short run time to fit the attention span bill, and no filler tracks. Others, like Migos and Drake have opted for a cash grab, with albums stuffed full of tracks, in hopes that at least one or two will catch on. The rise, or rather, the fall, of attention span in music listeners has driven the modern artist to reinvent everything they know to accommodate it. The results are varied, and whether they are deemed good or bad is up to the listener.

Streaming services also have a hand in shortening songs and lengthening albums. According to Fortune magazine, streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Tidal were responsible for 75% of U.S. music industry revenue in 2018 (["Songs Are Getting Shorter. Blame the Economics of Streaming Music"](#)). Needless to say, streaming platforms are the future of modern music. With the current streaming platform model, artists are paid based on plays, and thus have less of an incentive to make longer songs. Packing as much stimulus into a two minute track would reward an artist much more than releasing a 6 minute epic. Additionally, artists make more money from a long, but mediocre album, because of the sheer number of plays they rack up when a fan listens to the album one time through. The inverse of this, a focused, but brief, quality project, rewards an artist almost the same, as fans are bound to replay a concise project chock full of hits. This seems to suggest that the 12-song album form seems to be on its way out.

The music industry is not what it used to be. Creating an artist's presence is almost entirely DIY today, due to websites like SoundCloud, Distrokid, and CD Baby, which allow unsigned artists to release their music to major platforms for a low price, and because of this labels are losing their grip on the industry. Establishing industry trends are no longer in the hands of corporations, and are instead increasingly in the hands of popular artists. In this case, the artists who are popular are the teenagers recording from their bedrooms. Short, loud, and attention-grabbing, the new wave is almost impossible to ignore. It will be interesting to not only see where the industry goes from here, but also what the next step is for our rapidly diminishing attention span.

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