

ABSTRACT

The Making of MONK Monté: Creativity and Commodification in Trinidad and Tobago Popular Culture

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This thesis demonstrated that commodification of popular culture does not compromise creative output. It specifically showed that Machel Montano's (MONK Monté) thirty-five-year-old career has produced continuously creative work although this work has been commodified or commercialised.

This thesis used a Cultural Studies approach whereby socially-constructed notion of High Culture are not privileged over those considered Low Culture. The study also adopted the componential theory of creativity, which states that creativity is highest when a highly skilled, highly creative, thinking, and motivated individual works with a management team that supports creativity.

The study examines the ways in which Montano negotiated between creativity and commodification through seminal strategies during his career in the periods of "Winer Boi," "High Definition (HD)," and "MONK Monté" using the themes of Re-invention, Collaboration and Partnership, Technology and Experimentation, and Sustaining a Competitive Advantage. This is explored through a series of structured interviews, questionnaires, textual analysis, and my own lived experience as a manager of the artiste.

The creative output of Montano's brand of soca music has not been compromised but rather augmented by merging creativity and commodification. This strategy has allowed him to break new ground and sustain a 35-year international career. Additionally, this research saw Montano's music career as operating in an alternative ambassadorial capacity for Trinidad and Tobago in late 20th-century and early 21st-century popular culture as manifested in regional integration via the arts. The findings of this study signify that on-going prejudice, dismissal, and contestation against popular culture now require recalibration.

Keywords: Machel Montano; popular culture; soca; commodification; creativity; collaboration; partnership; self-re-invention; competitive advantage.