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ABSTRACT

This research project investigates the state of calypso in Trinidad by comparing its perception and consumption across two different generations – Generation X and Generation Z. Calypso is deeply embedded in the history and culture of Trinidad. Thus, this study examines the cultural hybridization within Trinidadian society which informed how calypso was written and performed throughout history. It also explores the influence of foreign cultures through globalisation. Surveys will be distributed to members of both generations online and additional interviews will be conducted with historians, cultural activists and working musicians. With the results obtained, the study will scrutinise the external, socio-cultural conditions which may impact its status and level of engagement among citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

Rationale

Music is not consumed in a vacuum. It is heard, interpreted and passed along by its consumers within the confines of the culture and society in which they exist. Their perception and interest in a musical genre can be closely linked to the surrounding socio-cultural context. Research from Tom W. Smith suggests that a generation's memory of experiencing a musical genre can define how they view and engage with other genres. This underpins that the longevity of a musical genre is heavily reliant on the way it is introduced to individuals and the prevailing culture in which it is understood.

There is an abundance of research conducted locally and abroad which examines calypso as a cultural phenomenon. Authors like Gordon Rohlehr and Rudolph Ottley have outlined its origins, development and its role in the changing, diverse society of Trinidad and Tobago. Others have studied artists and their contributions to the popularity, commercialisation and consumption of the genre. However, there appear to be minimal studies which explore calypso as it exists today. If this tradition is to be preserved, one must scrutinise the current state of the genre. This study serves to investigate the external factors that have affected its status within Trinidadian society by comparing how different generations interact with and relate to it based on their lived experience.

Parameters

Exploring this notion, this study centres Trinidad and Tobago, particularly the island Trinidad. Amongst the island's inhabitants, the target audience falls into Generation X and Generation Z. Generation X comprises of people born in the years 1965-1980 who grew up hearing calypso in the late 1900s, post the Black Power Movement and the creation of the subgenre soca. Generation Z consists of people born in the years 1996-2012 who grew up hearing calypso in the early 2000s during the growing prominence of globalisation through the invention of the internet, and increased popularity of soca. Consequently, this study will examine the state of calypso during the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, and the prominent socio-cultural forces in both respective time periods.

Objectives

- To investigate the social currency of Calypso in the late 1900's and early 2000's.
- To analyse the changing role of Calypso within society throughout the years.
- To compare the differing perceptions and interest in Calypso across Generation X and Generation Z.
- To explore possible socio-cultural factors that have impacted its prominence within Trinidadian society.

Methodology

The study will reference published books, journal articles and credible websites. Theses and journal articles will be compared to obtain general statistics and qualitative findings supporting the relationship between music and memory, and the generational divide within society. Interviews will be conducted with the Aiyegoro Ome - historian, cultural activist and cofounder of the National Cultural Committee – and local musicians and educators Theron Shaw and Tamba Gwindi to obtain anecdotal evidence on the changing status of calypso in Trinidadian society. Furthermore, questionnaires will be handed out to eighty participants (half Generation Z and half Generation X) to gather the different perceptions of calypso and deduce possible historical and cultural influences that have caused the proposed generational divide.

This study is composed of four chapters. Chapter one explores how music is perceived and consumed within a society, and how the status of said music and other cultural norms is subject to change with each generation due to the shifting social landscape. Chapter two examines the historical origins of calypso and the social, economic and cultural conditions which shaped its perception and subsequent development. Chapter three investigates the changing socio-political climate of the late 1900s that may have affected the way Generation X interact with the genre. Chapter four studies the social and technological advancements of the early 2000s that could have informed the how Generation Z interact with calypso.

CHAPTER ONE

There exists prior research that supports the idea that music is consumed and interpreted in the context of the socio-cultural landscape in which it exists. Roose and Stichele conducted a study in Belgium which presented tangible evidence of the cultural capital of a musical genre being influenced by the daily activities undertaken by its inhabitants. Their findings suggested that genres like opera and classical music - considered highbrow for being more sophisticated and less accessible to the broader population - had greater rates of consumption amongst people who had attained an education, were involved in the arts and or were introduced to them by their parents as they could better understand and appreciate them (200).

The research is valuable but it is not accessible to general audiences. The use of logistic regressions as a means of representing data makes it more difficult for people without that mathematical knowledge to interpret their findings. This study will make use of bar charts, pie charts, tables and percentages to ensure that the findings of this study can be understood and used by broader audiences.

Furthermore, Bennet and Janssen compiled and analysed different articles to investigate how popular music becomes “an object of memory” within a society and how it reflects the cultural identity. It did not produce primary data; conclusions were instead drawn from the commonalities found in these studies based in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Through this, one is introduced to age and generation as a factor in how music is perceived. A generation is understood to be a group of people around a similar age who live in the same location and experience the same social, historical and economic events

(Brecton). Each generation is said to judge the authenticity of a musical genre to the popular folk traditions of the culture by comparing it to the music they were exposed to growing up (Bennet, 4).

Other research explored the variations in different generations' understanding and appreciation of musical genres. Smith's report showed that the consumption of music was heavily connected to the time and socio-cultural context in which it was introduced. Compiling the results of his survey in visual charts and graphs communicated the change in the retention and interest in a genre within the timeline of a society. It also raised concern that a musical genre experiences most popularity at the time of its introduction and loses its relevance as society moves further past the socio-cultural landscape in which people were first exposed to it.

The work of Tom et al. introduced more social and interpersonal factors such as socialisation, gender and socio-economic class that could impact the level of engagement with a musical genre. Each genre was made into its own model that scored the impact of the suggested factors in its perception and popularity. The findings seemed to support the notion that the musical preferences of an individual could be determined by their parents'. In the Rock model, young girl's enjoyment of rock music could be linked to their parents' preferences (310). This study is focused on exploring both generations musical preferences in the context of socio-cultural landscape in which they grew up in. Thus, it will also scrutinise the role of household, specifically the influence the parent and the child's musical preferences have on each other, when discussing the viability and longevity of calypso as a musical genre.

Other statistics from Tom et al. reinforced the relationship between musical preferences and social class or education; however it did not present as previously conceived. Rock music was portrayed as noisy, rebellious music sharing strong associations with “college dropouts”; it was theorised to have less appeal to those more invested in the education system (314). But their findings seemed to imply that this association is not applicable to present day adolescents. This highlights that a genre of music and its relationship with people within a society can evolve over time based on the shifting culture.

Outside of music, there were other relevant studies that investigated this generational divide and its implications. The journal article done by Brexton et al. introduced the generation cohort theory. It proposed that each generation’s collective identity was most malleable, when coming of age, to the surrounding social conditions; this could justify using generation as a metric to measure how a society has changed and how the cultural practices and perceptions of its inhabitants can also shift.

Vera-Toscano and Meroni studied a range of generations, from the Lucky Generation to Generation Y (Millennials) to show the decrease in religion and traditional values, and the increase in progressive views regarding marriage, gender and parenthood over the years in Australia. Like Tom et al., gender and education were considered as possible factors for this phenomenon. Nonetheless, the most plausible causes were shown to be the lived experience and social context of each cohort. The Baby Boomers showed the most drastic change in views within the two-decade timeframe; this could be attributed to the social upheaval they experienced due to World War II, the greater inclusion of women in the workplace and other

events (675). This emphasises the significance of the social environment in how it impacts the views and preferences people hold and perpetuate.

Kapoor and Solomon reviewed prior research to explore the different generational attitudes towards the workplace. Sources seemed to agree that Baby Boomers, having grown up during the Civil Rights era, tended to demonstrate strict and self-sacrificial behaviour in the workplace. Contrarily Millennials appeared to be more self-focused. Unlike the former, the latter was said to prioritise projects and opportunities that would benefit them personally and professionally; this supposed emphasis on personal satisfaction was thought to be a consequence of their upbringing with the internet and social media which provide consumers with instant gratification.

Most research demonstrated a trend where younger generations hold different views, ideas and preferences than older generations; however this should not be taken as fact. Kapoor and Solomon did not produce primary research to justify the findings put forward by previous authors. Brecton et al. conducted survey research on the perceived stereotypes of different generations' attitudes towards the workplace. There was shown to be minimal to no variation in most workplace behaviours such as compliance with policy, appearance and attendance across generations. This contradicted the idea that younger generations were inherently different. This study will not operate with such bias. It will explore the various social, cultural and political forces brought up in the primary and secondary research conducted that may affect the status of calypso. It will also consider areas of possible overlap between both generations' attitudes towards the genre.

CHAPTER TWO

History of Calypso

Calypso is understood as folk music, satirical in nature, that features syncopated rhythms, call and response, rhymes, and double entendres. This definition briefly describes the genre. It does not provide the necessary context to understand its cultural significance and function within the shifting landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. One must examine its origins and the socio-cultural forces that shaped its development to be able to track how its influence has changed across different generations.

Its history can be traced to the seventeenth century. The Transatlantic Slave Trade had brought over West Africans from differing tribes such as the Ashanti, Igbo and Yoruba and sold them off to plantations in the New World. Families and members of the same tribe were purposefully separated to prevent communication and collaboration among the enslaved on the plantation.

Deprived of their name, language and religion, the enslaved had to rely on storytelling as an expression of their identity and culture. In West Africa, there was a strong oral tradition. A significant member of their societies was the griot – a musician and storyteller who performed stories, poems, dances and songs which not only entertained the crowds but preserved the history, genealogy, and cultural and religious traditions of their community. In the New World, this tradition carried over with the chantwells.

The chantwells, typically women, performed songs of praise which recounted the legends of their gods and fabled heroes. They also sang songs of lament, derision and satire where they mocked the planters and the class system which oppressed them. These songs were sung in French creole, the language which was being forced upon them and thus they all understood.

The slave trade and later slavery as a whole was abolished in Trinidad in 1838; however the class boundaries remained in place. When welcoming the Lenten season, the white French planter class held masquerade balls from which the newly freed ex-slaves were barred. Thus, they held their own masquerade celebration known as Canboulay. The ritual had started as a reenactment of the sugar cane plantation burning down to commemorate their freedom from their former masters (Doughlin). It was a ritual of celebration which included singing, dancing and stick-fighting. It later morphed to resemble the pre-Lenten Carnival activities from which they were barred.

When examining calypso, it is important to acknowledge the phenomenon of cultural hybridization – the mixing of various cultures within Trinidad. The enslaved West Africans had introduced the griot which led to the chantwell but the concept further evolved.

In the Canboulay tradition, music was firmly connected with dance. The style of music performed by the chantwells changed with the emerging forms of dance during this time period. For instance, the Calinda was a dance which bore heavy West African influence in its movement and its instrumentation. The song which accompanied it was said to be a satirical

ballad accompanied by a banza¹ and tambour. The percussive accompaniment was reminiscent of West African music. Stick-fighting, another element of this culture was later incorporated into it. The chantwells were then tasked with entertaining and rousing the fighters and the crowd. To maintain engagement, the chantwell made use of litany (Call and response). The audience would be prompted to respond to the chantwell's song.

The style of music sung by chantwells continued to change with the introduction of the Bel Air – a supposed imitation of the Bouquet Dances performed by the French upper class. The accompanying music featured a chorus supporting the chantwell and more percussive instrumentation with three to five drums and shak shaks. There was a retained Yoruba influence; the songs were performed in minor keys like traditional Yoruba melodies. On the other hand, more European literary conventions were being introduced. The music was written in blank verse – a style of poetry that did not rhyme but had a particular flow or meter - often iambic pentameter.

These songs, which would be called calypsos today, were known as carisos. The term was thought to have originated from the Carib word, “carieto,” for joyous song (NALIS). Despite the name, this artform was not perceived positively by the white upper class. This opinion was documented in a report from R. C. G. Hamilton which read, “from the time these bands took part in Carnival, the riot and disorder greatly increased as well as the obscenity and indecency” (Rohlehr).

¹ A banjo whose body was made from a calabash; originated in Haiti.

The authorities sought to annul the practice; however the lower class did not easily surrender this expression of their culture, art and freedom. The police clashed with the participants of Canboulay in the streets of Port of Spain in 1881, beginning the Canboulay riots. The violence came to an end after the Hosay massacre in 1884 when the government outlawed further canboulay processions; the assembly of stick-fighting was banned as well as the use of African drums. Those who engaged in Canboulay including the chantwells were deemed outlaws and were ostracized.

These female singers did not surrender; in response, they retaliated using their only weapon – their words. The language of carisos became more aggressive. There were more references to violence, sex and leud humour. They had always been a form of satire where the performer could “unburden themselves” and respond to the social, political conflicts happening around them. In this iteration, the messages of these songs were no longer obscured within double entendre.

Another form of calypso to develop was the Oratorical Calypso or Sans Humanité.² Like the cariso, the language was violent as this was the only means the chantwells had in venting their frustrations.

Come to my den and there you shall see
Skellingtons and bones of your family
Your body shall be placed on a mountain peak
And there you shall say your prayers for a week
And after that dreadful pain you shall meet a hurricane.³

² French phrase which means, “without humanity.”

³ Rohlehr, 63.

These performances involved two or more singers improvising verbal insults against each other for the audience's entertainment. They were most popular during 1900-1925. In this time period, one could observe the transition from French Creole to English. This was also when the term "Calypso" first appeared in newspapers and other publications. The exact origins of the word are unknown. It was suggested that the word was an anglicization of the word, "carieto" or the word "kaiso"⁴ (NALIS).

As politicians had been unable to suppress the tradition, they attempted to establish parameters to control it. The Argos Committee of 1919 had proposed the calypso tent as a means of separating calypso from stick-fighting and removing its connotations of violence and rebellion (Rohlehr). In these tents, the calypsonian had to capture the audience's attention with only words. Calypso grew to incorporate an element of fantasy, absurd comedy, sexual innuendos, exuberance, energy and rhythm.

Iron Man – Mighty Zandolie (1964)

[Verse]

Well the police arrest me for mih own material, that shouldn't be

Two women police arrested Zando way up in Mayaro

I decided to make an invention so I pack up mih house with iron

The news went around that that was the case

You know they come with a warrant searching mih place... look the hour!

[Chorus]

Five o' clock in the morning, two women police came searching

And before I could put on mih clothes, all mih iron exposed!

⁴ Hausa word meaning, "bravo" – used for celebration.

The use of double entendre with the word, “iron” made the situation Mighty Zandolie had described in his calypso more absurd and comedic to the audience. It was more lively than oratorical calypsos and carisos of the past with its comical lyrics, major tonality and bright orchestration with horns.

While more comical calypsos were being produced, the genre retained its associations with social commentary, rebellion and politics. In 1956, Lord Invader performed, “Rum and Coca Cola,” a satirical song that reflected the reality of the United States’ military occupation in Trinidad.

And when the Yankees first went to Trinidad
Some of the young girls were more than glad
They said that the Yankees treat them nice
And they give them a better price
They buy:

[Chorus x2]

Rum and Coca-Cola
Went down Point Cumana
Both mothers and daughters
Working for their Yankee dollars

The rhyming couplets, the major tonality and upbeat orchestration made the piece appear lively and positive; however the lyrics, though not explicit, discussed the extortion of young girls and women in Trinidad by the U.S. soldiers.

There was no call and response but there was use of a chorus, as seen previously with Bel Air. Back up vocalists have become more common in calypso performances. Modern day calypsonians are accompanied by these singers and the standard Calypso band which features the keyboard, guitar, bass, drumkit and auxiliary percussion (De Las). This instrumentation calls back to the Calinda, with the pairing of stringed, melodic instruments with percussion.

Another “nostalgic” inclusion to these performances is dance. In this modern interpretation, the dancers serve as a supporting element of the spectacle created by the calypsonian to entertain the crowd and share their message. In 2024’s Calypso Monarch competition, Machel Montano brought on young dancers dressed as students to reinforce his role as the “professor” in educating the audience about the history of soca.

CHAPTER THREE

Calypso in the Late 1900s

The late twentieth century marked a significant period in the history and development of the society and culture of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1962, the former British colony had gained its independence. Under the leadership of the then Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, there were promises of a more equal society that allowed greater freedom and opportunity for its citizens; however there remained social and economic confines from the former colonial order. Research conducted in 1970 (Craig) found that people of European descent accounted for fifty percent of the business executives - even though they represented less than five percent of the country's population. Contrarily, those of African descent, who were within the majority, only accounted for five percent of the business population.

The Black Power Movement – also known as the Revolution of 1970 – was a response to the unjust social order and working conditions that Afro-Trinidadians faced post-Independence. The National Joint Action Committee (NJAC), founded in 1969, called for and organised public protests in the streets of Port of Spain.

Calypso was not divorced from this movement. As discussed before, it had been used by the disenfranchised as a means for voicing social, political and economic issues. Ome spoke to the vital role of the arts in interpreting the street demonstrations of the protesters. When writing articles about the movement, he had been petitioned to include the calypsonians who were involved such as Black Stalin, Valentino, Relator, Composer and Chalkdust.

Black Stalin (1969)

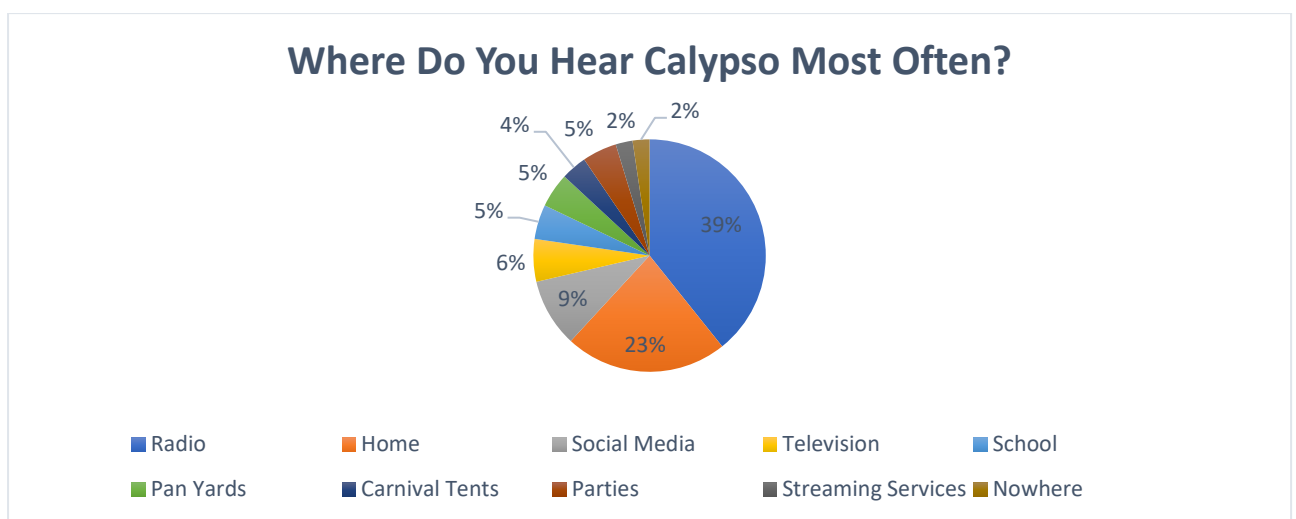
Never live by a gun but you died by one,
This Martin Luther King Senior son
A gentleman of great capability
Who never knew the meaning of the word enemy.
But a man who devoted his life to fight
That all American negroes must get civil right.
I say his works must be continued although he's dead,
So people don't forget the great things that Martin said.

In this excerpt, certain conventions of calypso have been maintained, including the use of iambic pentameter and AB rhyming scheme. However, it is more crucial to discuss the lyrical content of the calypso.

Black Stalin's discussion of the rights of those of African descent was told through the remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr. Though the movement centred the experience of Afro-Trinidadians, it was influenced by the American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. This could be an early example of social-cultural globalisation - the transmission of the ideas, values, language and art of one culture to another. Calypso had developed through the mixing of different cultures within Trinidad. The advancement of technology, including the radio and the television, allowed for greater cultural influence from other nations.

While there was a growing Pan-African movement across the globe, the movement faced resistance from the police and other authorities. The rioters held demonstrations in banks and other businesses, effectively shutting down business and affecting the profits of the upper

business class. Thus, those associated with the protests were taken into police custody. Ome, an active member of NJAC at the time recalled when the police had come to his house to arrest him. The street demonstrations like the Canboulay riots, received violent pushback from the police. Moreover, the calypsos which spread the message of the movement were not played on radio stations. Ome elaborated that the NCC, the cultural arm of NJAC, had to host art forums, concerts and cultural rallies to promote this music.



(Fig. 1.)

There may be doubt regarding the legitimacy of this supposed censorship of calypso on the radios. From the survey conducted for this study, the radio was voted the most common medium where participants would hear calypso. That did not equate to calypso being prominent on radio airways. It only meant that when participants heard calypso, it was most often via the radio.

Table 1

Which Calypsos Do Participants Recognise?

CALYPSOS	TALLY (%)
Black Stalin, "The Black Man Feeling to Party"	81.4
Calypso Rose, "Calypso Queen of the World"	65.1
Lord Kitchener, "Sugar Bum Bum"	82.6
The Mighty Sparrow, "Jean and Dinah"	79.1
Explainer, "Lorraine"	66.3
Andre Tanker, "Sayamanda"	47.7
David Rudder, "Calypso Music"	93
Lord Kitchener, "Pan in A Minor"	59.3
David Rudder, "The Hammer/Bahia Girl"	64
Denyse Plummer, "Woman is Boss"	58.1
Kurt Allen, "Too Bight"	18.6
Singing Sandra, "Who the Bells Toll, Ancient Rhythms"	26.7

Notably, participants expressed familiarity with popular calypsos that would have been out during the proposed media censorship. However, the songs offered in the selection were more light-hearted in its themes. For instance, Black Stalin's "The Black Man Feeling to Party," David Rudder's "Calypso Music" and "Sayamanda" were celebratory calypsos.

There were positive sentiments about calypso expressed by participants yet their interest in the genre was shown to be limited.

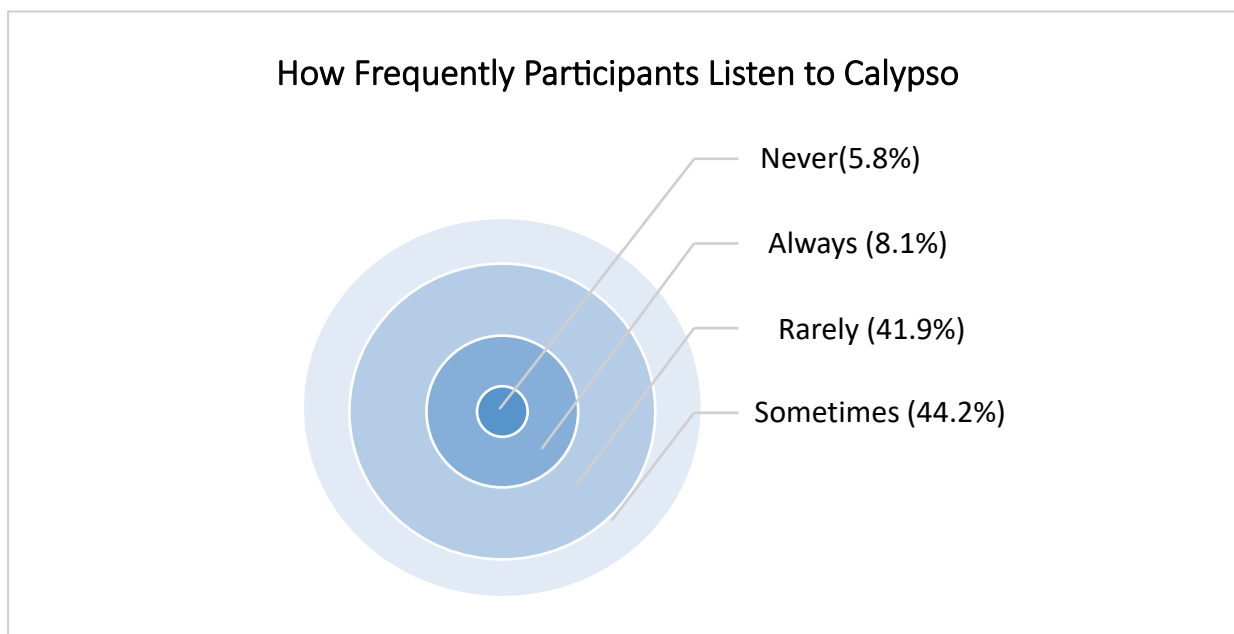
Table 2

How Do Participants Feel About Calypso

Given Opinions on Calypso
" I enjoy seeing calypso performances, but I don't listen to it regularly."
"I enjoy it when it's on but I wouldn't put it on, on my own"
"I think it's a cool genre, not my cup of tea but I can appreciate it"
"It's fine, not a huge fan. But I appreciate what it is and its significance"
"I like it when I heard it but I don't really listen to any songs"
"I enjoy the few songs I have heard, but there are rarely settings where I or my friends would intentionally put it on"

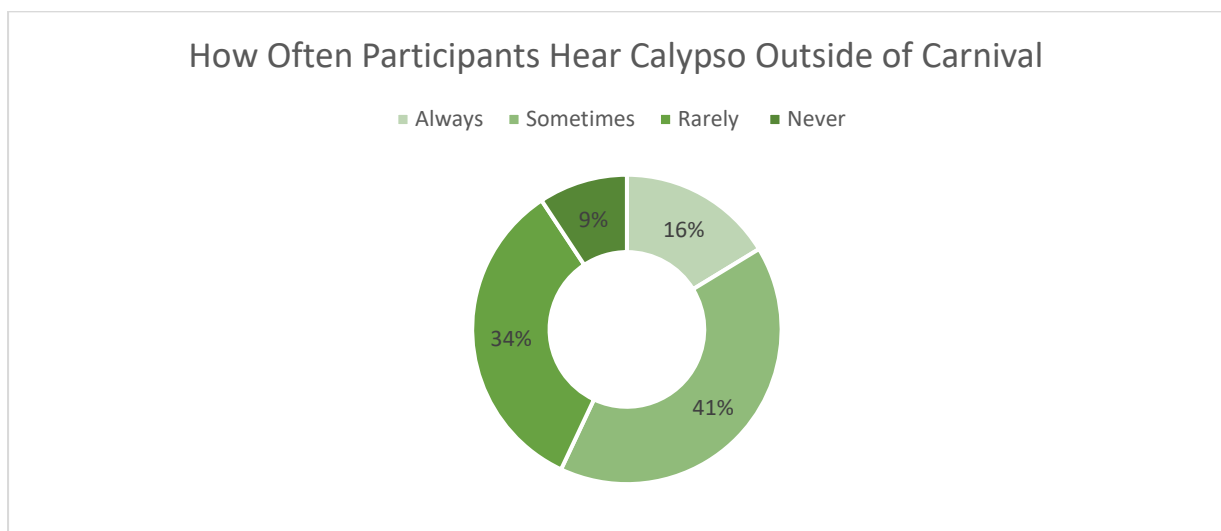
Selected responses from question three of the survey which asked participants to write how they felt about calypso.

Figure two further demonstrated the lack of enthusiasm in the regular consumption of calypso. Most participants were shown to only engage with calypso on some or rare occasions.



(Fig. 2.)

This seemingly low or inconsistent engagement with calypso could have resulted from the reduced visibility of the genre. Aside from the supposed media suppression of more socially conscious calypso, the overall genre was said to have a limited airtime on radio stations. There was a policy that did not allow calypso music to be played after Carnival celebrations had finished (Rohlehr). There was said to be a strong Christian influence within Trinidadian society. Calypso was thought not appropriate not to play during the season of Lent. Though the policy was relaxed in 1967, fewer stations played calypsos outside of the designated time period.



(Fig. 3.)

It could be suggested that participants did not engage with calypso regularly because it was not a genre that is part of their everyday life.

There was a social stigma that could have affected its consumption. Calypso had developed out of the Canboulay tradition – the one that had been outlawed by the government. The restrictions had been lifted but the associations were not easy to shake. This was not helped

by the gang warfare perpetuated by rival steel bands in the 1950s. Shaw validated the existence of this stigma as he himself had not been allowed by his mother to partake in calypso as, “being associated with steelpan men and calypsonians would be like associating with a gangster.” Nevertheless, few participants offered that as a reason when asked about not attending calypso tents (Table 3). Thus, it should not be used as a probable conclusion.

Table 3

Reasons Participants Gave on Not Attending Calypso Tents

(%)	Reasons Given for Not Attending Tents
44.8	Lack of Interest
36.2	Did Not Know About Them
7.0	Lack of Availability
5.2	Concerns of Safety
3.4	Lack of Transport
1.7	Out of state
1.7	No Reason Given

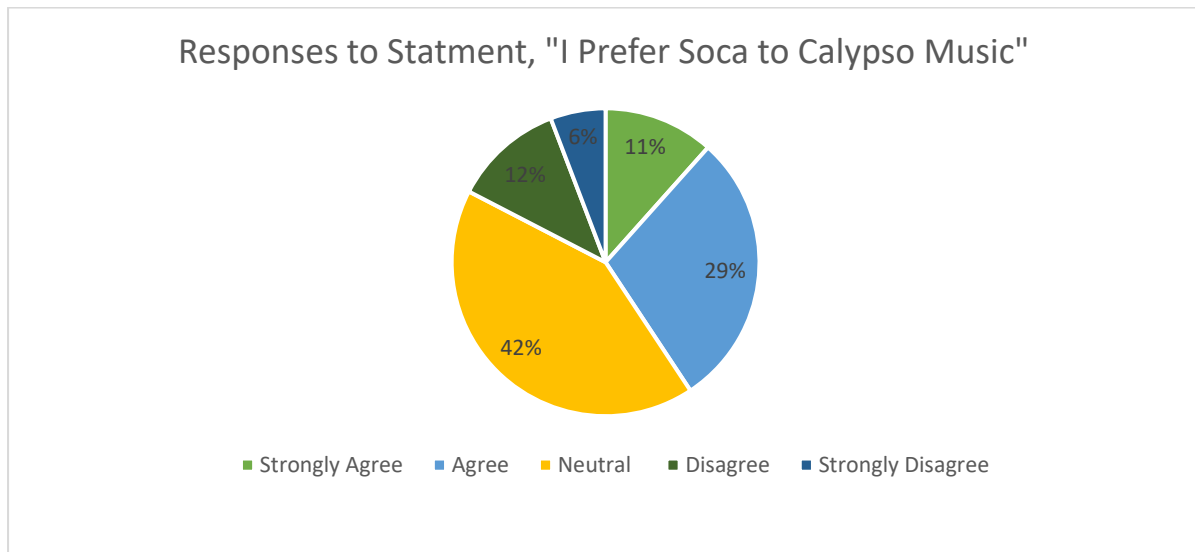
Another element to consider was the politicization of calypso. As mentioned previously, calypso had been used as a form of social and political commentary by the disenfranchised Afro-Trinidadians. As it had started from them and centred their perspectives, a bias had become clear in the lyrics. Rohlehr had investigated how Afro-Trinidadians viewed themselves as the norm and every other group as a deviation from the norm. For instance, the calypsos written about the growing Chinese population ostracised them, featuring racialised and derogatory language.

“For is Ling Ting, bowled and caught by Loong Tang
And Ming Ting were clean bowled by Poon Pang
And the whole Oval shout
When Loong Lung get Wang-Pung-Ting-Pang-Toong out (Viking).

He also drew attention to the prejudiced language in calypsos targeting the East Indian demographic. The alienation of Indo-Trinidadians, as proposed by Rohlehr, in the calypso space would result in declined public interest of the genre as they comprised the majority of Trinidad’s population. This was most prominent around elections. It was alleged by Ome that the People’s National Movement had paid TUCO – the national Calypso organisation – to feature pro PNM calypsos in calypso tents. If this were true, this would have resulted in an increase in Anti-Indian sentiment, driving Indo-Trinidadians from the tents. In Trinidad, the political parties have historically been divided among racial lines; PNM was considered the party for those of African descent while The United National Congress UNC was that for those of East Indian descent. Nonetheless, no participant cited these tribal politics as a reason not to engage with calypso.

Attention should be paid to the creation of soca. Within Trinidad, the phenomenon of cultural hybridity bore new fruit. Garfield Blackman, known as Ras Shorty I, began to incorporate East Indian rhythms and instruments including the tabla, dholak and dhanta in the composition of calypso (NALIS). This led to the creation of the subgenre sokah, the soul of calypso. Other subgenres were chutney soca, rapso and ragga soca.

If there had been hesitancy to play conscious-raising calypso, soca would have been the better alternative. While it lacked the same complexity in themes, it was a festive subgenre that better suited a party-like environment. It was upbeat in its fast, syncopated rhythms and its more light-hearted themes. It was most commonly played in fetes, Carnival bands and mas processions.



(Fig. 4.)

Majority of participants were neutral with a general appreciation for both genres but there were strong opinions expressed by the participants who showed preference to soca.

Table 4

Reasons Why Some Participants Prefer Soca to Calypso

Reasons for Choosing Soca Over Calypso

"Soca music is more relatable and caters more to having fun and enjoying yourself."

"I just prefer that it more upbeat and it bit more repeatable to play in gatherings"

"The soca music has a more upbeat tempo that I prefer"

"It is more appealing to listen to in my opinion"

"It's more upbeat and better to dance too"

Selected responses from participants who expressed preference towards soca over calypso.

The style of soca was becoming popular among the listeners and artistes. In the late 1980s, David Rudder had started producing calypsos which sounded more akin to soca. Shaw recounted how there were mixed opinions on whether his music should be classified as calypso with its distinctly upbeat tempo, major tonality and inclusion of drums like the tabla in the instrumentation.

Can you hear a distant drum
Bouncing on the laughter of a melody (yea, yea)
And does the rhythm tell you, come, come, come
Does your spirit do a dance to this symphony yea, yea)
Does it tell you that your heart is afire (oh yeah)
Does it tell you that your pain is a liar (oh yeah)
Does it wash away all your unlovely
And are you ready for a brand new discovery
(Rudder)

Regardless, there were clear hallmarks of the calypso genre. The verse was written with an AB rhyming scheme and was iambic in terms of emphasis. There was also use of call and response between the main performer, David Rudder, and the background vocalists.

Calypso as a genre had grown and evolved. In this time period, one could observe new variations of the standard calypso style and the growing phenomenon of globalisation – more specifically its impact on calypso and Trinidadian society as a whole. Nevertheless, these phenomena became more prevalent in the early twenty-first century in regard to the shifting perception and consumption of calypso.

CHAPTER FOUR

Calypso in the 2000s

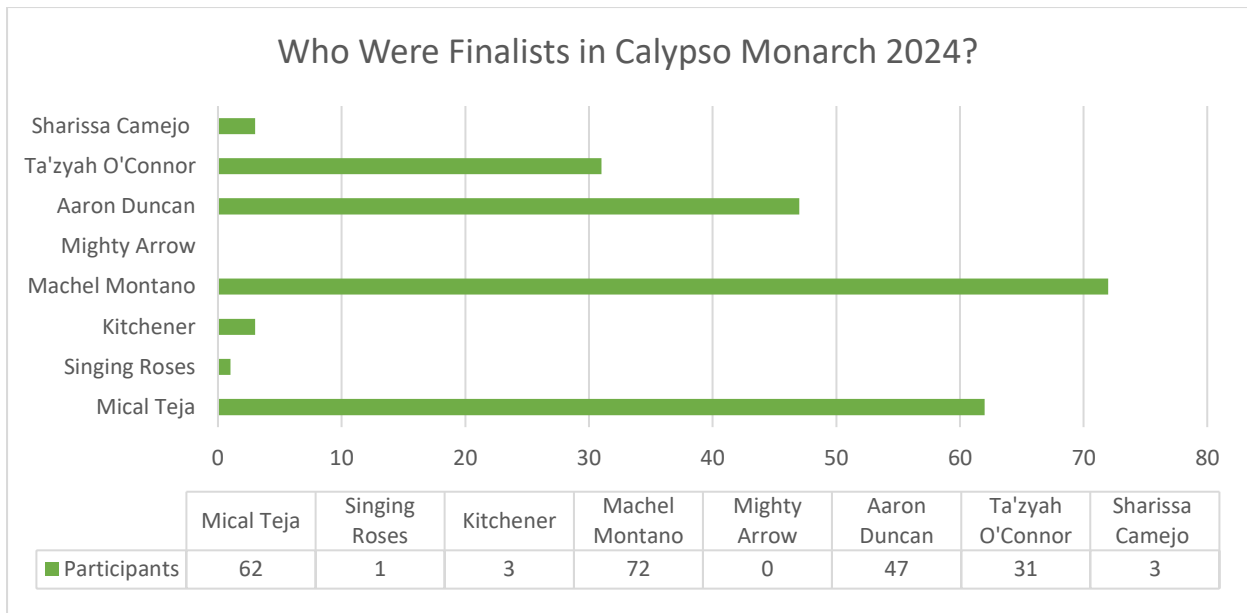
With the invention of the internet in 1983, the early 2000s was the beginning of a more interconnected world. Globalisation, the movement of the people and goods around the world, became more prevalent in the everyday lives of Trinidadians. The education system had adopted a Caribbean-based curriculum yet American and British novels like *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *Parable of A Sower* and *Pride and Prejudice* were studied at the secondary level. Radio stations like Hot 93.5 and Star 94.7 FM commonly played American pop, rap and hip-hop.

Calypso was being featured less frequently on radio stations and other media. 91.1 Talk City, a radio station that prominently featured calypso and other local music, struggled to secure advertisements to support their acts. Consequently, participants' knowledge of recent calypso music was shown to be very weak. When asked to ask at least three recent calypsos, more than sixty percent of participants could not provide a single answer. Furthermore, they struggled to identify the finalists in Calypso Monarch 2024.

Table 5

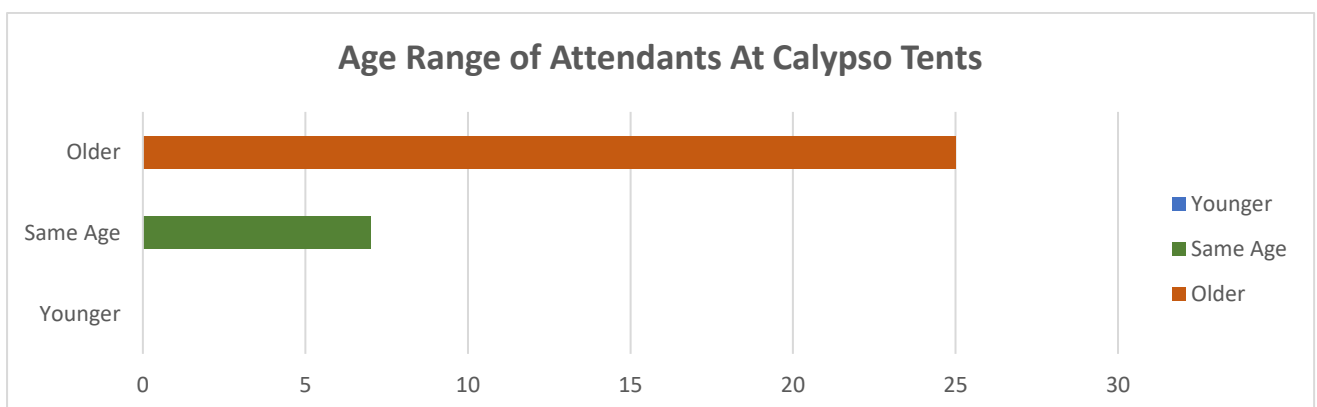
How Many Participants Can Name Calypsos from the Past Few Years (2020-2024)?

Yes, I Can	I Cannot
33.7%	66.3%



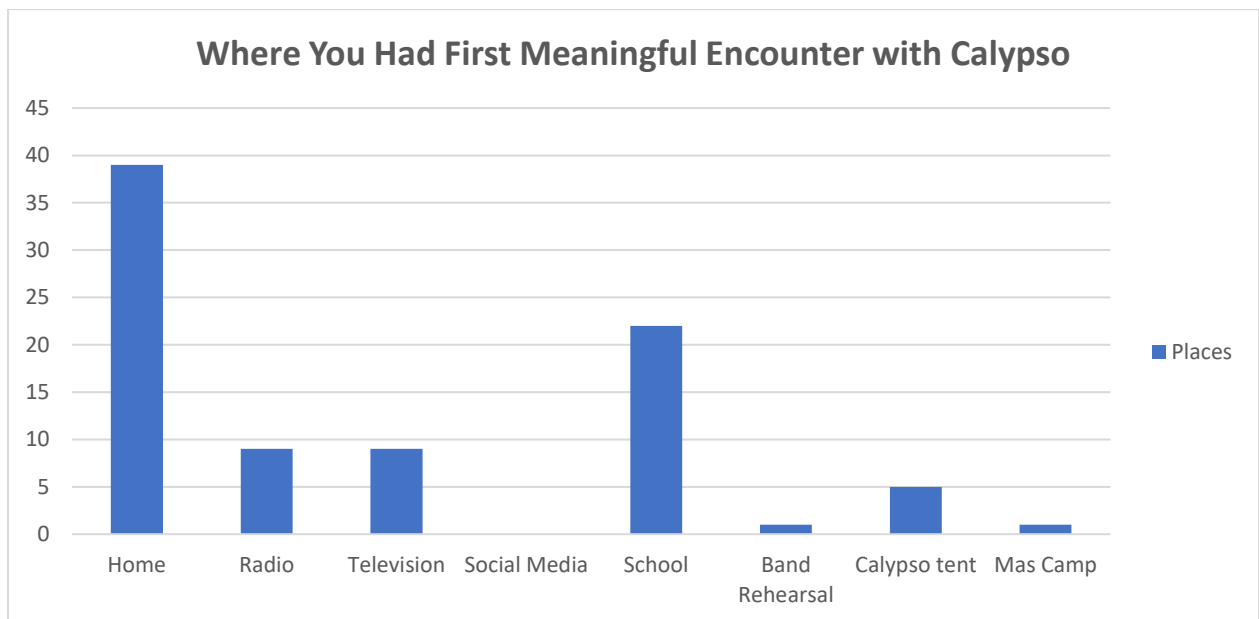
(Fig. 5.)

The calypsonians were selected from various calypso tents by the judges to compete at Skinner Park to earn a spot at the televised finals. A high ratio of participants had not attended any calypso tent. Shaw remarked how the calypso tent he had attended two years ago had a very poor turnout. Less than ten people were in the audience to watch the twenty-five performers. Similarly, Ome recounted how the calypso tent formerly sponsored by Lord Kitchener had to close one evening as no patrons had come out. Looking at both accounts, it was apparent that the tents struggled to attract patrons, particularly from a younger demographic. Those who attended the tents described the crowd to be older.



(Fig. 6)

Many participants from Generation Z stated their reason for not attending the tents was that they were not aware of them (Table 3). This could suggest that calypso tents were not as prominent in the everyday way of life of Trinidadians. Seemingly, calypso tents and radio stations were no longer the most effective means by which citizens were exposed to calypso. From the survey conducted, it was apparent that the main introduction to calypso for participants was the family household.

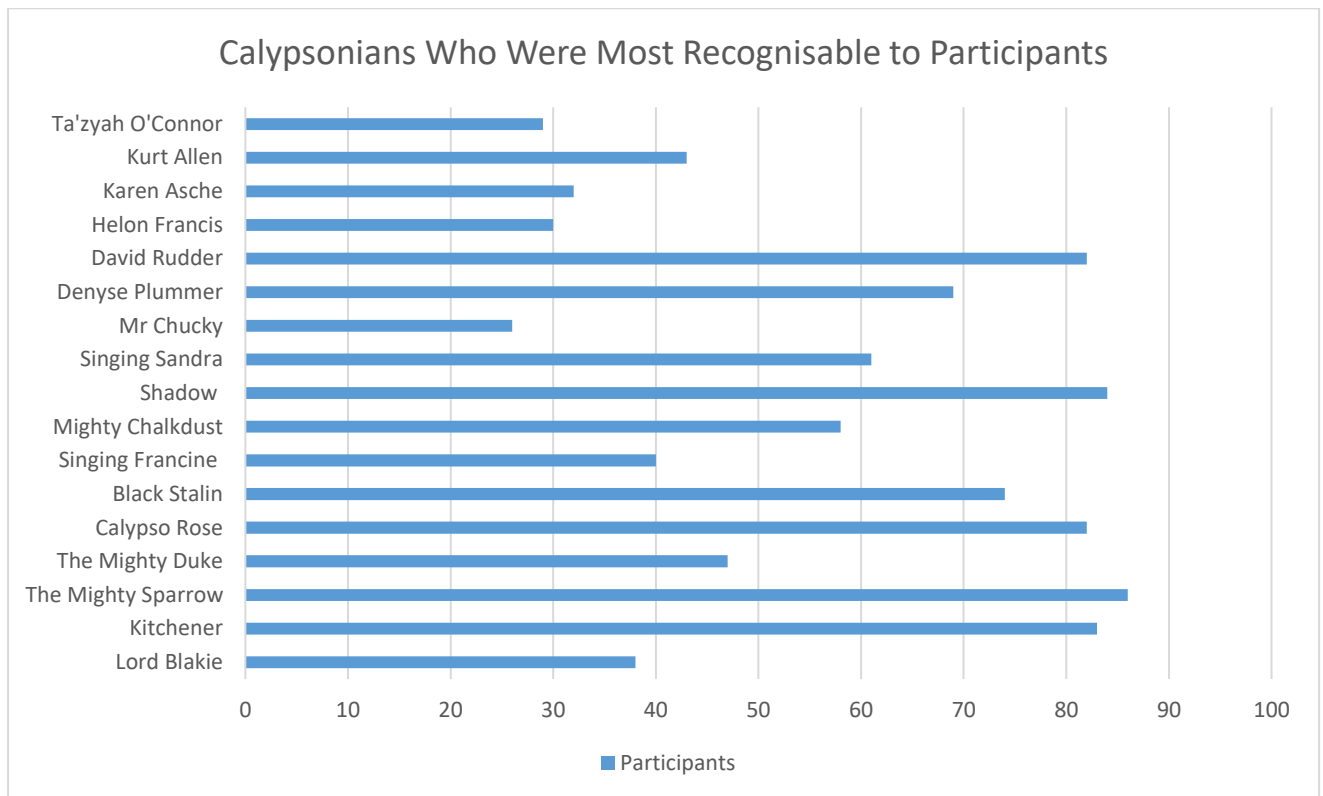


(Fig. 7.)

It was previously considered that the musical preferences of a parent could influence those of their children (Tom, et. al). Shaw's account of his mother not introducing him to the calypso space had given credence to the notion. Thus, one must examine the biases of the parents of Generation Z.

Their parents would primarily fall into Generation X. This would mean that they grew up in the late twentieth century where calypsonians like Lord Kitchener and Mighty Sparrow were producing music. Following the logic of Smith's research, this would mean that their

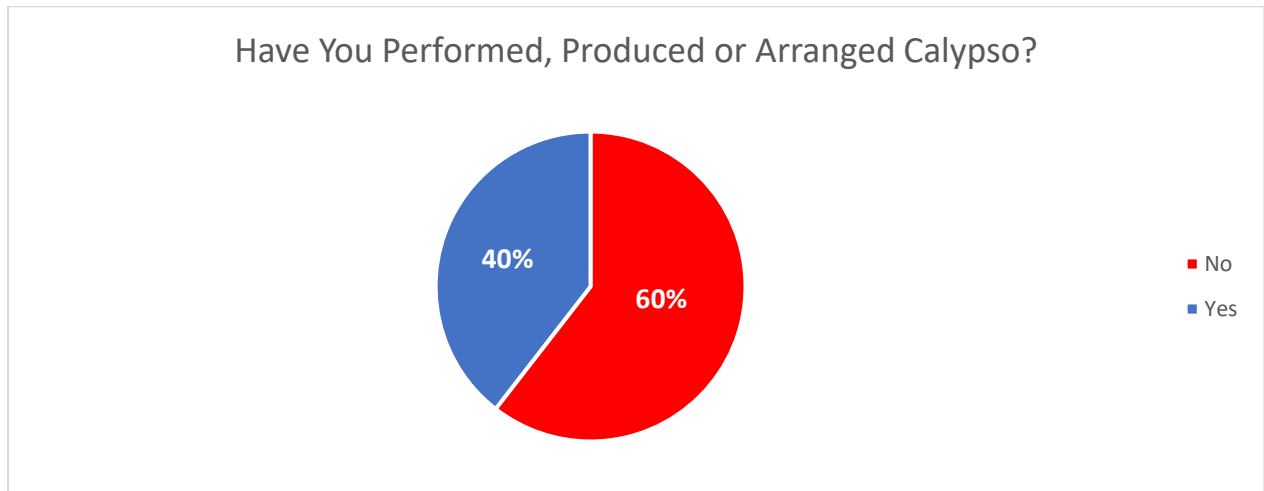
understanding and appreciation of calypso would be linked to those artists and socio-cultural events of that time. Therefore, they would more likely introduce their children to that era of calypso as that was the one with which they had the most experience.



(Fig. 8.)

Using this rationalisation, it would be understandable as to why participants were more able to identify those calypsonians than those who were performing currently. Additionally, it could explain why few participants chose Kitchener as a finalist even though he had passed away (Fig. 5). They may have grown up hearing that name in relation to calypso music and chosen him due of familiarity.

Outside the household, active interaction with calypso music appeared limited. More than half of the musicians in the survey did not write or perform calypso music. Of the minority who did, most produced calypso for their own academic achievement or financial gain.



(Fig. 9.)

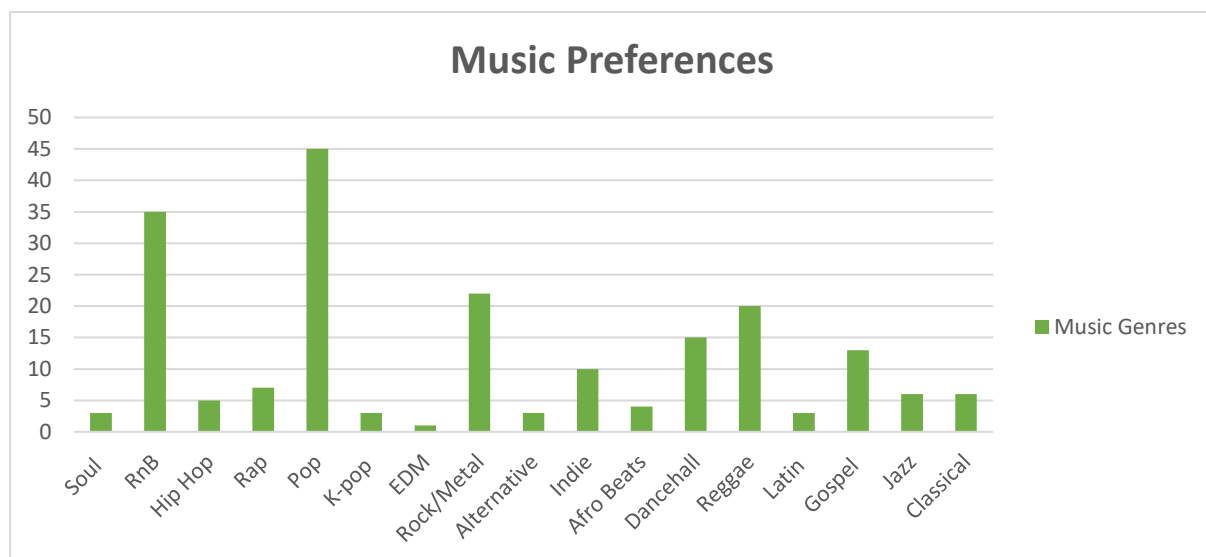
Table 6

Reasons Given by Participants for Choosing to Produce Calypso Music

Tally	Reasons for Performing/Arranging/Composing Calypsos
	School Competitions
	Exams (CAPE, CSEC)
+++	For Performances
	To Accompany Calypsonians

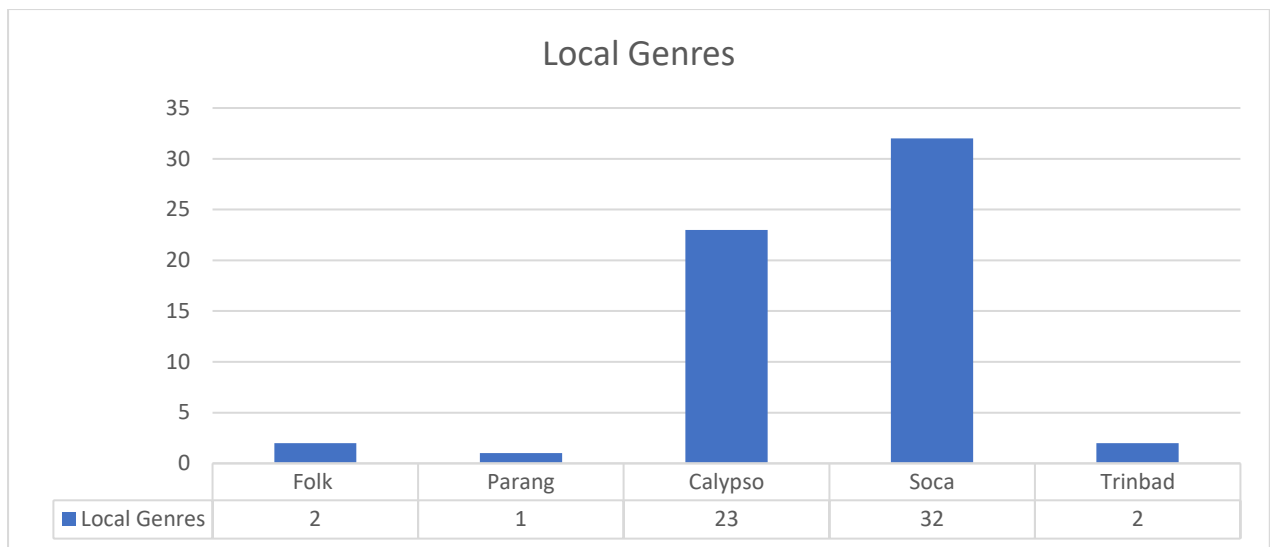
It would be difficult to name one definitive reason for the apparent decline in interest in calypso in this century. There may be certain variables that could be examined to determine their probability.

One examined the global Pan-African movement of the late twentieth century and its different ideologies trickled down to Trinidad and helped influence the cultural movement of the time. Through the advent of social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook, this phenomenon became expedited. Radio stations that had prioritised local music like calypso were shut down due to low engagement. To maintain interest and secure commercialisation, radio stations favoured music that was popular globally. In recent years, stations like 93.5 FM started to feature music from Korean boybands such as BTS and NCT since Korean pop music had increased in visibility worldwide across multiple platforms like YouTube and TikTok.



(Fig. 10.)

Placed side by side, the findings asserted a greater interest in foreign genres over most local genres. This could have resulted from the greater popularity of the former on local radio stations and social media. If participants heard them more frequently, they would have more opportunity to connect to them and with which build a positive relationship.



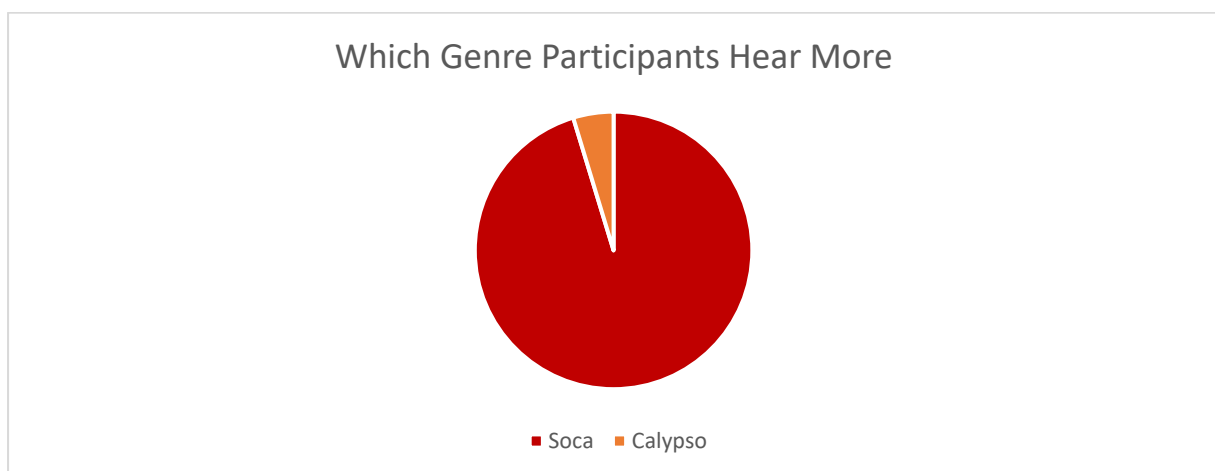
(Fig. 11.)

Perhaps the declining interest in calypso could suggest that there was a negative shift in its style of presentation. Calypso was satirical in nature, employing picong⁵ and double entendres to poke fun at socio-political and or economic issues as a form of social commentary. Gwindi had commented on how the topics discussed in calypsos had not changed but the calypsonian’s approach had. The clever tongue-in cheek lyrics had supposedly been neglected in modern calypsos. This concern was also brought up by participants of the survey. Two separate complaints received were, “I enjoy funny and satirical kaiso. Not the lamentations and preachy nation building songs” and “Calypso these days are so preachy.” Calypso had always been used to discuss serious subjects. The difference could be the loss of the artistry in the lyrics, which may make the tone read more stoic and self-righteous.

⁵ Picong (derived from Spanish word “picón”) refers to teasing or satirical banter.

There was also said to be a decline in its musicality. The verses seemed more drawn out with a more limited melodic contour (Shaw). Having such restricted motion in the melody would make the piece feel stagnant, lacking momentum or melodic drive. A participant shared that, “The music is too slow and tedious. Lyrics must fit within the melody or else it is rap not calypso.” If both the lyrics and the music were apparently drawn out, it could justify why participants would not engage with this style of calypso. Almost seventy percent of participants could not name one calypso that had come out a few years ago.

Another possible contributor to this phenomenon could be the greater ubiquity of soca.



(Fig. 12.)

While the majority of participants expressed appreciation of both genres, it was undeniable that they heard soca more. Particularly Generation Z would have grown up hearing soca being played on the radio, in mas bands and fetes. Thus, they would form more memories and develop positive associations with it, especially in more celebratory context like Carnival parties. This was supported by the fact that soca was the most listened to local genre by participants (Fig. 10).

Table 7

Named “Calypsos” by Participants

Familay, Drink Water, Hello

Engine Room, Backyard Jam, Jamming Still

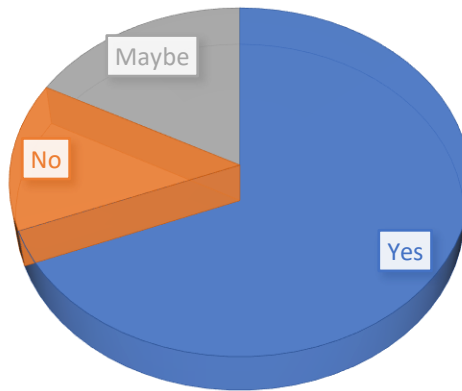
Savannah Grass

Selected responses from participants when asked to name recent calypsos.

Moreover, there was trend where participants were unable to distinguish soca from calypso. Soca was a subgenre of calypso; it would not exist without calypso. But the genre bore its own distinctions that appear to be missed or confused. When asked to name at least three calypsos that came out in the years 2019 to 2024, some participants named popular soca songs. This could suggest lingering confusion regarding the separation between calypso and soca. Or this could also point to the fact that people were more familiar with soca music and or did not hear the recent calypsos being released.

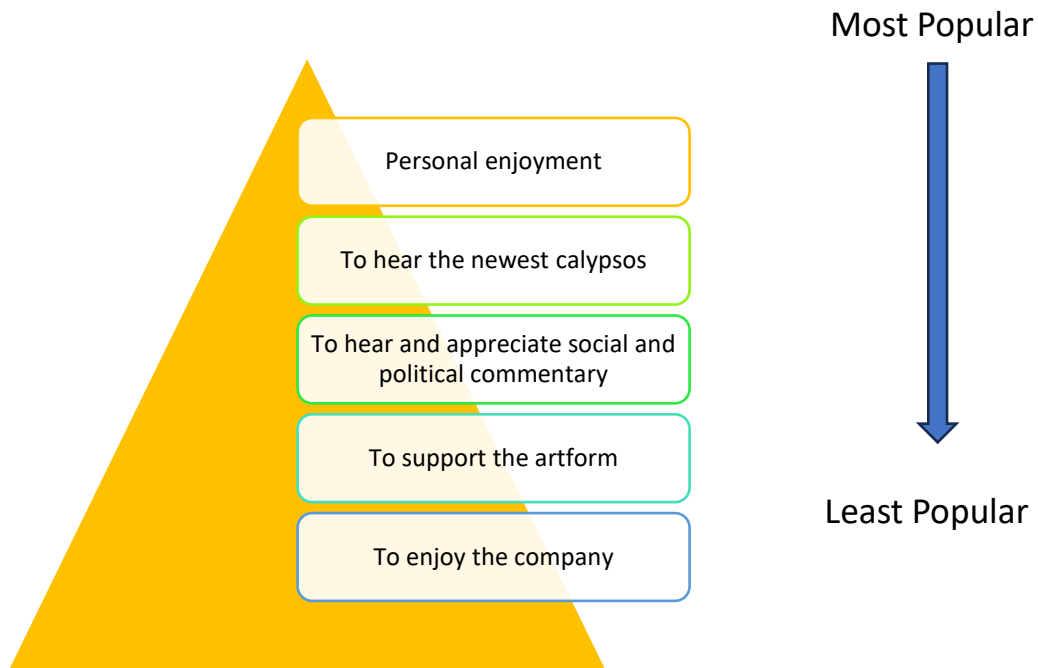
The last chapter touched upon the stigma towards calypso that predated Trinidad’s independence; the ostracization of the calypsonians that could deter persons from being involved in calypso. Furthermore, the tents had faced scrutiny due to the racial and derogatory language used by performers against other political and ethnic groups. Almost no participants cited this as reasons to not engage with calypso in any meaningful capacity. The majority of those who did not attend the tents claimed that their main reason for not attending was their lack of knowledge of them. Furthermore, most of the participants who had gone to one were open to attending another.

Would Participants Return To Calypso Tents?



(Fig. 13.)

Reasons Participants Gave to Return



(Fig. 14.)

Possibly, the greatest factor to examine was the lack of innovation concerning the promotion of calypso. Unlike the late 1900s, a relevant feature of the 2000s was the advent of social media platforms. Though many participants of Generation X were found on Facebook, Generation Z was more active on social media platforms. They formed the majority of participants involved in the study. Therefore, it was concerning that social media was voted the least likely place to encounter calypso. If one wanted to reach out to the younger demographic, calypso would have to be accessible in the forums where they were most active.

Aside from Machel Montano, younger participants were most familiar with calypsonians Mical Teja and Aaron Duncan (Fig. 5). Both were very active on social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube. Aaron Duncan participated in online trends and farmed interactions with his fanbase. This may have helped foster a positive relationship with listeners and make them more likely to seek out his music.

Calypso maintained a somewhat positive perception in the 2000s but peoples' interactions with it were increasingly limited. Thus, it was no longer as effective in voicing the concerns of the people and provoking rebellion and social change. Although there was not one solid conclusion, there were extenuating conditions that could help others gain better perspective of the situation.

CONCLUSION

Limitations

Though aiming for equal representation, Generation Z accounted for more than sixty percent of participants. The survey had been shared online via WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook in an effort to catch as many entries as possible. This emphasises the ubiquity of social media among the younger generation who grew up on the internet versus the older generation who were introduced to it in their later years. Moreover, it could also cast doubt on the reliability of the representation for Generation X in this survey.

Discussion

Despite the blurred lines between calypso and soca, the former has maintained its narrative style and function. Many modern calypsonians have used it to educate people on social, cultural and political issues; as discussed previously, Machel Montano performed a calypso which reinforced the relationship between soca and the history of calypso. There was shown to be a generally positive perception of the genre among both generations. Yet there was a clear decrease in public participation between the late twentieth and early twenty first century.

The calypsos most recognisable to both generations were those of the late 1900s. While this demonstrated how the process of socialisation had allowed for younger generations to be introduced to the genre, the latter had not formed unique connections with the calypsos coming out during their time. As a result, they would be less likely to pass it down to their children in the future. Soca would have a higher probability of being passed down as it had

been shown to be more prominent in the media and in peoples' daily lives. The most apparent obstacle to the social relevancy of calypso was its lack of visibility within public spaces and the media. With reduced opportunities for interaction, people could not develop strong connections with the genre.

Recommendations

There are steps that can be taken to boost the visibility of the genre within the public space. Community and cultural initiatives like Rhythm Nation could be organised to reintroduce the genre to younger generations in an engaging manner. Calypsonians should be encouraged to promote their music on social media platforms where they can tease performances, share behind the scenes' clips, and create or participate in trends to farm interaction with this audience. However, without a clear answer as to why it initially dropped in popularity and consumption, these suggestions may not be as effective.

While the results of this study cannot be used to pinpoint the precise issue affecting people's engagement with calypso, they may provide insight into the socio-cultural context in which citizens experience this genre. This study could be used to inform further research in preserving the prevalence of calypso within Trinidadian society.

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APPENDIX

Sample Questionnaire

Calypso Across Different Generations

My name is Gabrielle Tull. I am a final year music student at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine. My final year project is investigating how different generations view and engage with calypso. Your responses to this survey will be greatly helpful to my research.

** Indicates required question*

1. To which generation do you belong? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Generation X (1965-1980)

☐ Generation Z (1996-2012)

2. What genres of music do you listen to on a regular basis? *

3. How do you feel about calypso? *

Calypso can be classified as folk music, often satirical in nature, that features syncopated rhythms, rhymes, call and response, picong and double entendres.

4. How do you feel about soca? *

Soca is a subgenre of calypso. It incorporates East Indian rhythms and instruments into the calypso beat. It is considered more upbeat and festive in nature.

5. Which genre do you hear more often? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Calypso

☐ Soca

6. Respond to the statement, "I prefer soca to calypso music." *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Strongly Agree

☐ Agree

☐ Neutral

☐ Disagree

☐ Strongly Disagree

7. Please give at least one reason to explain your answer. *

Lived Experience with Calypso

The following questions will be focused on calypso.

8. **Where did you have your first meaningful encounter with calypso? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Home
- ☐ School
- ☐ Calypso Tent
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Other: _____

9. **Are you familiar with any of these calypsonians? (Check all that apply) ***

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Mighty Chalkdust
- ☐ Black Stalin
- ☐ Shadow
- ☐ Lord Kitchener
- ☐ Mighty Sparrow
- ☐ Lord Blakie
- ☐ Calypso Rose
- ☐ David Rudder
- ☐ Singing Francine
- ☐ The Mighty Duke
- ☐ Mr. Chucky
- ☐ Singing Sandra
- ☐ Denyse Plummer
- ☐ Helon Francis
- ☐ Karene Asche
- ☐ Kurt Allen
- ☐ Duane Ta'zyah O'Connor

10. **How frequently do you listen to calypso? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

11. **When you have listened to it, what were the main reasons? (Pick the most relevant options) ***

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ For personal enjoyment
- ☐ For school
- ☐ For panorama or Carnival bands
- ☐ Other: _____

12. **Do you recognise any of the following calypsos? ***

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ "The Black Man Feeling to Party" Black Stalin
- ☐ "Calypso Queen Of The World" Calypso Rose
- ☐ "Sugar Bum Bum," Lord Kitchener
- ☐ "Jean and Dinah" Sparrow
- ☐ "Lorraine" Explainer
- ☐ "Sayamanda" Andre Tanker
- ☐ "Calypso Music" David Rudder
- ☐ "Pan in A Minor" Lord Kitchener
- ☐ "The Hammer/Bahia Girl" David Rudder
- ☐ "Woman is Boss" Denyse Plummer
- ☐ "Too Bright" Kurt Allen
- ☐ "Who The Bell Tolls, Ancient Rhythms" Singing Sandra

13. **Where do you most commonly hear calypso? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ School
- ☐ Home
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Social Media
- ☐ Calypso tents
- ☐ Pan yards
- ☐ Carnival parties
- ☐ Other: _____

14. **Please select the finalists from Calypso Monarch 2024 from the names below. ***

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Mical Teja
- ☐ Singing Roses
- ☐ Kitchener
- ☐ Machel Montano
- ☐ Mighty Arrow
- ☐ Aaron Duncan
- ☐ Ta'zyah O'Connor
- ☐ Sherissa Camejo

15. **Do you hear calypso outside of Carnival? ***

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

16. Name 3 calypsos that came out within the past five years. (If you do not know any, write "I cannot" and move along). *

17. Are you a musician? (If no, skip the next two questions) *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. Have you performed, produced or arranged calypso music?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

19. Please explain your answer

20. Have you attended a calypso tent? *

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

21. **If no, please choose the reason most relevant to you.**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Lack of interest
- ☐ Did not know about them
- ☐ Concerns of safety
- ☐ Other: _____

22. **If yes, please explain why did you go to the tent?**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ To perform a calypso
- ☐ To play in the Carnival band
- ☐ To listen to the calypsoes
- ☐ To support a loved one performing
- ☐ Other: _____

23. **How many people were in the audience?**

24. **Were they around your age? Or were they older/younger?**

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Around my age
- ☐ Older
- ☐ Younger

25. **Would you go back?**

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Maybe

26. **Please give at least one reason why**

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