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Simulated artist management with iterative decision-making: a qualitative approach to studying managerial judgment

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Abstract. Platformization has shifted music-industry gatekeeping from label A&R departments to streaming algorithms and curation, weakened labels' artist-development function, and made managers increasingly central to emerging artists' professionalisation. However, how managers form their judgments, what criteria they use, and when they change their minds are not well known; existing research only relies on retrospective case studies and cannot observe the criteria and iterations of decision-making at the time. This paper puts forward a qualitative method called simulated artist management with iterative decision-making; the researcher acts as a simulated manager and, at each decision node, records the evaluation criteria and their sources, the alternatives compared and the reasons for revision. With AI proliferation in mind, this paper takes the fictional cross-border artist Lina Yue as the research subject and explores the judgment logic at four stages: training and debut, identity positioning, debut single, and contract structure. A multi-case matrix of three styles is also used to test transferability. The demonstration shows that the evaluation criteria can be set and tracked and the judgment chain follows the node order; the structural criteria (rights ownership, debut-single function) stay the same, but high AI saturation raises the demand for live performance and authenticity. The function of a manager is to manage risk by selecting criteria, not to forecast outcomes; artistic agency and catalog depth predict a long career beyond the reach of marketing resources alone, and retained rights are a long-term asset option, with value tied to publishing income.

Keywords: Simulated artist management, iterative decision-making, managerial judgment, gatekeeping, cultural intermediation

1. Introduction

The music industry has seen a change in who holds power. In the past, new artists were discovered, developed and produced mainly through the A&R departments of labels. Streaming platforms and social media have altered this system; now, algorithms, playlists and interface designs have formed a hybrid gatekeeping mechanism that is equal to or even more effective than human curation [1]. As the artist-developer function of labels has weakened, managers have taken on the responsibility of developing new artists, covering creative and commercial aspects, and connecting artists with labels, platforms and production teams [2, 3].

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The standards for management's decisions are not known. Most existing research relies on retrospective cases of real artists [4, 5], which present two problems. First, the judgment cannot be recovered: managers do not remember all the reasons for their actions at the time, and archives preserve outcomes rather than processes; therefore, post-hoc rationalisation may be mistaken for decision logic. Second, there are no evaluation criteria; it can know the results but not how they were obtained.

Simulated artist management with iterative decision-making is presented in this paper: the researcher assumes the role of a simulated manager for a fictional emerging artist, explicitly records the evaluation criteria, their sources, alternative comparisons, and reasons for selection at each decision node, and documents revisions triggered by new information. Thus, the criteria in a manager's mind become explicit and observable, and research can be conducted on how judgment is formed rather than inferred from the results.

Lina Yue is a 22-year-old singer from Hong Kong of China and Los Angeles who combines emotional pop with alternative R&B and cinematic ballads. This paper will investigate the effect of this style and the problems it may solve. Section 2 reviews gatekeeping, the manager's role and artist labour under platformisation; Section 3 introduces the method; Section 4 presents the simulated decision nodes; Section 5 discusses findings and limitations; Section 6 concludes.

2. Literature review and theoretical foundation

2.1. The evolution of gatekeeping: from label A&R to platform algorithms

Gatekeeping analysis studies who determines what is disseminated publicly [6]. In the recording era, label A&R was generally responsible for identifying artists and works, organising production and promotion under a single screening system [7]; however, its criteria were often not specified. Digitisation and platformisation have changed this situation; streaming services have lowered the supply threshold, and now algorithms, interfaces, playlists and human selection form a hybrid gatekeeping system [1]. Bonini and Gandini [8] refer to this as algorithmic gatekeeping and differentiate it from the label-era screening; short-video platforms such as TikTok have become new music-discovery entry points and have changed both the location and speed of gatekeeping [9]. As A&R's traditional core declines, it needs to determine who will lead the initial professionalisation of artists and how.

The mechanics of gatekeeping warrant closer examination. In the terrestrial-radio era, labels used financial resources to create systematic promotions for audience familiarity by having artists record hundreds of personalised station identifications—sometimes more than 500—which were then distributed across the country [10]. Under the trend of platformisation, this logic has also been applied to social media: Labels organise influencers to use an artist's music in the background of product-demonstration videos, and followers are exposed to it repeatedly and passively. The same way is used; repeated payments create a sense of habit. Copycat projects are generally not as well-funded, and thus their recognition and duration are relatively short compared with those of artists who receive continuous promotion.

2.2. The manager's role: from deal-brokering to cultural intermediation

Early research placed the manager at the centre of an artist's career and coordinated label, legal and financial departments [4]. With digitalisation, independent managers have become necessary links to coordinate resources in distributed production networks [3]. The manager is no longer merely a deal broker but also develops, coordinates and connects; choosing between artistic value and commercial feasibility, long-term growth and short-term gains, there is no obvious optimum under uncertainty [11]. It does not know the basis of managers' decisions, and thus have not studied them.

2.3. Self-management under platformisation and the research gap in judgment

Platformisation also changed artists' work. Platforms and social media have shifted the promotional labour to the artists themselves, creating self-management: artists create, operate social accounts, plan content, and compete for attention [12]. The degree of emphasis on artists' success varies: Laufey's "*From The Start*" was popular because of algorithm-friendly production and a strong fan community[1]; RAYE developed independently after difficulties in creative autonomy[2]; and Billie Eilish's persona and Lady Gaga's visual concepts are different ways to attract attention [13, 14]. Social media followers are related to streaming income but not total royalties [15], so they are not a good indicator of revenue. Therefore, artists must be self-reliant, and trained managers are increasingly needed; however, research on managerial judgment has not been conducted. Existing real-case research [4, 5] has provided functions and success factors, but not how criteria are formed and changed. The two adjacent literatures are missing. Research on managerial cognition studies how the mental models and value-chain frames of industry actors shape strategic choices, and includes research on artists as entrepreneurs that examines the decision logic of artists themselves, such as effectuation [16, 17]. Neither shows how the managers' evaluation criteria are formed and changed at the time of the decision. Therefore, instead of finding the reasons for a particular result, it can reconstruct the circumstances in which that choice was made and observe them directly.

The economic structure of the recorded-music industry increases the consequences of managerial decisions. In industry data, 80–90% of major-label releases do not earn back their advances[3]; testimony before the U.S. Copyright Royalty Board states that fewer than 10% of recording artists ever recoup their investment, and of around 32,000 new releases each year, only about 250 sold more than 10,000 copies and fewer than 30 went platinum[4]. Some estimates in the industry put the share of signed capital that never recoups as high as 98%, and these losses are treated as a structural cost and not as an anomaly. Thus, the business model is a portfolio bet; a single success can make up for the losses of several failures. For example, Capitol Records spent about $4 million on producing and marketing Katy Perry's 2008 debut album "*One of the Boys*"; the album sold more than seven million copies around the world and brought in an estimated $50–80 million through album sales, singles, ringtones and licensing, and "*I Kissed a Girl*" by itself had 4.7 million downloads in the U.S. and held the top of the Billboard Hot 100 for seven weeks[5]. One debut with a return of 12 to 20 times can cover the losses of a whole year of roster departures. Another path is to reproduce a formula, and this is possible but limited by resources. For many years, the boy-band and girl-band formulas have been copied by Simon Cowell's X Factor and Simon Fuller's American Idol

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1 The account of Laufey's "From The Start" is based on T. Mims, "Chartbreaker: How Laufey created a blueprint for modern jazz success," Billboard, November 8, 2023, https://www.billboard.com/music/features/laufey-from-the-start-bewitched-jazz-interview-chartbreaker-1235466072/.

2 RAYE's independent path is described in K. Denis, "RAYE on taking the indie road to BRITs history: 'I don't have to hand it all away again,'" Billboard, March 14, 2024, https://www.billboard.com/music/features/raye-brits-winner-independent-artist-escapism-1235632593/.

3 The 80–90% figure is taken from Orphiq, Recoupment explained: When you start earning, April 9, 2026, https://orphiq.com/resources/recoupment-explained.

4 The statement comes from an excerpt of D. Kusek and G. Leonhard, The future of music: Manifesto for the digital music revolution, ed. S. G. Lindsay (Berklee Press, 2005), filed as RIAA Exhibit O-146-DP in U.S. Copyright Royalty Board proceeding No. 2006-3, https://www.crb.gov/proceedings/2006-3/riaa-ex-o-146-dp.pdf.

5 The figures for Katy Perry's debut album are drawn from C. Harding, "Katy Perry: Single lady," Billboard, February 11, 2009, https://www.billboard.com/music/music-news/katy-perry-single-lady-269425/.

franchises; however, such copying needs control of broadcast access as well as production and promotion infrastructure, and most labels do not have this level of control. K-pop agencies follow their own system and, according to estimates, put $1.3–7.5 million into the debut of one group and around $3 million into the training of each member, but only about 1% of trainees ever debut[6]; the first-year total for major groups can go above $20 million, and reports say YG spent more than $13 million on advertising alone for the BABYMONSTER debut[7]. In such a high-failure environment, value comes mainly from the manager's ability to select, position and develop artists, and this ability is therefore not a minor issue. Under these economic conditions, the shortage of research on how managers form and apply their judgment is an even more serious problem.

3. Method: simulated artist management with iterative decision-making

3.1. Why simulation

Simulation was selected to enable process observation that is unavailable in real cases, given the research question. Three properties make it suitable: controllability (profile, market conditions, and information environment can be set and altered to observe judgment changes), transparency (evaluation criteria at each node are made explicit), and iterability (the full sequence of initial judgment, problem encountered, and revision is recorded). Davis, Eisenhardt and Bingham have developed a theory-building tool for studying long-term, non-linear, processual phenomena [18], and Harrison et al. have verified its theoretical value in organisational behaviour [19]. Simulated artist management shows the process for real cases and provides material support for those real cases. It is not a type of teaching, but rather a study of the decision-making process.

3.2. Method design

Step 1: Build the artist's profile and initial environment—Many choices have been provided by the researcher for all the parameters—age, background, style, story, existing works, fan base, goals—but no specific answers have been given. In line with the case-study sampling method [20], a sufficiently rich case should be available for repeated analysis.

Step 2: Identify decision nodes and set evaluation criteria—For each node, the comparison criteria for alternatives (e.g., sound quality vs. speed to market) and the sources of these criteria are specified as theory, industry practice, reference cases or profile analysis. Multi-criteria decision analysis resolves conflicting objectives prior to decision-making [2, 21].

Step 3: Execute the decision and record reasons—The simulator compares the choices, selects one, records the reason for selection, reasons for not choosing others, and expected results—a decision-journal approach to avoid retrospective bias [22]. Log the expected results of the next iteration and determine whether the actual results meet the expectations.

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[6] The debut-cost and trainee figures are estimates reported in J. Yoon, "Why K-pop idols are paid far less than you think," Seoulspace, May 26, 2026, https://seoulspace.com/how-much-money-do-kpop-idols-make/.

[7] These figures are from NomadFinancials, Estimated amount invested by YG in advertising for BABYMONSTER: A deep dive into K-pop's boldest rookie push, December 15, 2025, https://nomadfinancials.com/estimated-amount-invested-by-yg-in-advertising-for-babymonster-a-deep-dive-into-k-pops-boldest-rookie-push/.

Step 4: Post-decision evaluation—In this step the simulator builds an evaluation setting for the chosen option and judges its effect by process indicators instead of simulated market results, for example the use of criteria, the record of reasons and the updating of criteria after new information; the constructed streaming-play and follower-growth figures serve only as material for reasoning. This is in line with Stage-Gate theory [23], in which each stage ends with a go/no-go criterion for progression.

Step 5: Cross-node iteration—Whenever new information needs to be added to an earlier judgment, the simulator logs the revision together with its reason, and otherwise the case is not treated as double-loop learning [24].

Four stages in a row make up the decision nodes over the 0–18 month discovery-to-debut period: training and debut, identity positioning, debut single, and contract structure; in order, they settle when to enter the market, what identity to show, which work to lead with and what kind of tie to have with a label or platform. The window reflects the discovery-to-debut cycle of the industry, the boundaries of Stage-Gate [23], and empirical work on how decisive debut-stage arrangements are [25, 26]. The window can be made shorter for an experienced artist and longer for a beginner.

Each node gets an observable norm from the staged goals (debut EP, market identity and fan base, key media exposure, stable team cooperation). AI saturation is added as a context variable, and then the simulator re-evaluates all four nodes under low, medium and high saturation and changes only this variable, and in this way its effect on the judgment criteria is isolated. In addition, the full decision log (criteria, sources, reasons, expected effects and adjustments) is attached to meet the audit-trail requirement of qualitative research [20].

3.3. The position of the method in the existing methodological spectrum

This method has its own place among research methods. Case studies of real artists [4, 5] have rich material but do not reconstruct the process; simulation adds this process view. Quantitative models are built in computational simulation [18, 19, 27], but in simulated artist management the researcher is the decision-maker, and qualitative records of judgment are the output. Fiction- and arts-based research [28, 29] uses constructed materials for aesthetic insight, and the same foundation is applied to generate verifiable, auditable judgment records. There are no actual cases or demands for quantitative accuracy; instead, they are qualitative tools to improve the transparency of judgment standards.

The researcher is the one who makes the decision. Validity is the researcher's knowledge of artist management, copyright and platform logic, which is also affected by prior learning. Therefore, the source of each indicator is specified as theory, case study, practice or value judgment, and thus can be distinguished from scholarly or personal opinions.

4. Case analysis: simulated management of LINA YUE

4.1. Case background

LINA YUE is a fictional young singer of 22 years old who grew up in Hong Kong of China and Los Angeles. She is fond of emotional pop, alternative R&B and cinematic ballads, and excels in singing, producing and writing. Her works of art turn personal memories into universal emotions and explore the theme of fragmented identity. At the age of 16, she posted covers and built a small online community; at 19, she created her first original work; at 22, she gained the attention of an A&R executive, and now has eight finished demos and an unknown market path. She is the singer-songwriter who owns the recording and composition rights; she is a cross-border artist with assets and liabilities, and all decisions must link the Chinese, American and global markets.

4.2. Decision 1: training and debut

The first node: Train and optimise, or release the existing demos for the market? Options: Six months' training before debut, immediate demo release, or three months' training followed by release. Criteria: Trade-off between sonic quality and speed-to-market (training improves completion but delays entry; immediate release builds presence faster but works may be substandard); utilisation of the limited attention window provided by an A&R discovery; and a profile fact that creative ability has already been A&R-acknowledged, so what is lacking is production and performance polish. The simulator will set up a three-month training and release cycle to collect and reproduce demos, respond to changes in the market promptly, and improve the debut. Therefore, the industry has reduced quality in pursuit of speed and is not optimal. Given the economic structure of the industry, this calculation is even more dire: with 80–90% of major-label releases failing to recover advances[8] and fewer than 10% of artists ever breaking even[9], extended training only increases the sunk cost in a portfolio composed mainly of losses. Execution: Select three to five representative tracks from the EP as the core, re-record for streaming and short-video compatibility, and perform limited performance polishing according to Laufey's strategy of releasing high-completion, algorithm-friendly productions rather than extensive training[10]. Three to six months after release, based on simulated play-data benchmarks and playlist placement and media exposure, it will be determined whether to continue or modify.

4.3. Decision 2: the market presentation of a cross-cultural identity

Second node: Which identity fits the cross-border background? Options: Lead with Hong Kong of China, bring in Los Angeles modernity, or present her as a link between the two. Criteria: Differentiation (in a crowded market, people remember a distinct identity more easily); Authenticity and Consistency (her cross-continental material supports a matching positioning and makes it believable); Market Coverage (a bridge identity speaks to Asian listeners and to global ones). The simulator settles on the bridge position; it suits the current trend of cross-border cooperation and the view that different cultures often have advantages of their own.

Industry data supports the choice. Original artists create the mould, and after establishing a successful template, labels systematically sign and market sound-alike copycats (whisper-vocal alt-pop performers after Billie Eilish, raw confessional voices after RAYE's independent breakthrough, and grunge-derived bands after Nirvana[11]), while broader trends of musical homogenisation reflect labels' focus on proven sonic formulas[12]. Copycat projects generate a short-term profit but rarely produce artists with the narrative authenticity to sustain a long career, as the original's story, relatability and market fit cannot be reverse-engineered. At the same time, there was a contrast: Tiffany was motivated by a cover song and became the youngest female artist to reach number one on the Billboard 200, but she is primarily remembered for those early hits; Debbie

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8 Orphiq, Recoupment explained; see note 3.

9 Kusek and Leonhard, The future of music; see note 4.

10 Mims, "Chartbreaker"; see note 1.

11 On the major labels' cloning of grunge after Nirvana, see Stuff That Interests Me, The great alternative gold rush: How major labels cloned grunge and triggered a cultural crash, July 17, 2026, https://stuffthatinterestsme.net/the-great-alternative-gold-rush-how-major-labels-cloned-grunge-and-triggered-a-cultural-crash/.

12 On the musical homogenisation of hit songs, see A. Thompson, "Are hit songs becoming less musically diverse?" The Pudding, May 2018, https://pudding.cool/2018/05/similarity/.

Gibson, however, wrote and produced her own work at age 14 and released ten studio albums and performed in Broadway productions[13]. Thus, artistic agency and catalog depth are both linked to an authentic identity, and they predict a long career in a way surface-level marketing cannot. Apple's long-running printer line, stopped after Steve Jobs's return in 1999, is a typical case: even a strong marketing tool cannot save a product that moves away from the brand's core identity, and printers were such a product, since they are functional commodities, not creative-lifestyle devices[14]. In the same way, the failure of Apple's marketing shows a product-category incongruity: printers did not fit Apple's creative-lifestyle identity, and label promotion likewise cannot succeed without an artist who has built a creative identity of their own.

4.4. Decision 3: debut single selection

Third Node: Which work is the debut single? Options: A slow ballad, a cheerful pop song, or a happy hit song. Criteria: Consistency of Positioning (in line with the bridge-and-transformation identity), Market Entry Point (a memorable, resonant track gains initial spread and playlist placement), and Artistic Integrity (demonstrating songwriting ability rather than pursuing immediate popularity). The simulator will choose a moving ballad suitable for the image of the character and directly present her main ability, leaving room for commercial works later. Thus, an artistic identity can be formed without commercial pressure; according to the industry's consensus, the first single introduces an artist to the public. As a single successful hit can compensate for the roster losses of an entire year (as shown in the case of Katy Perry in Section 2.3), the debut single is a high-stakes choice in this chain. Therefore, it is not about which song is better; rather, it is about which song has lasting artistic value. Contemporary artist comparisons show why: Mötley Crüe, Warrant and Cinderella were all supported by major labels in the 1980s glam-metal scene, but Mötley Crüe sold over 75 million records worldwide[15], Cinderella sold about 15 million[16], and Warrant never achieved similar success. Divergence is related to the depth of songwriting and live-performance identity, not marketing resources. Execution: According to the above three criteria, evaluate the candidates; conduct a brief test of memorability; release them in a playlist-friendly manner; and pair them with a consistent supporting narrative in line with RAYE's construction of artistic credibility before traffic[17]. Simulated initial-play benchmarks and playlist placement indicate whether the narrative has been accepted.

4.5. Decision 4: contract structure

Fourth Node: What kind of connection to a label or platform? Options: A top-tier all-encompassing deal (all-inclusive revenue sharing for recordings, live shows, endorsements, merchandise and films in exchange for capital, channels and promotion, with stronger creative control), full independence, or a light-touch contract

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[13] The careers of Tiffany and Debbie Gibson are described in J. Blanco, "Tiffany and Debbie Gibson are back: The 80s pop queens we never stopped loving," 80s Baby, May 12, 2026, https://www.80sbaby.org/tiffany-debbie-gibson-80s-pop-queens/; and in A. Reiher, "A 17-year-old star made Billboard history 38 years ago today," Parade, June 25, 2026, https://parade.com/entertainment/a-17-year-old-star-made-billboard-history-38-years-ago-today.

[14] On Apple's printer line, see J. Rossignol, Apple released these oddly unique products in the 1990s, MacRumors, July 11, 2025, https://www.macrumors.com/2025/07/11/apple-in-the-1990s/.

[15] The Mötley Crüe sales figure is from Rock Atlas, Mötley Crüe: Complete band history and legacy, n.d., retrieved October 19, 2026, from https://rock-atlas.com/charts/bands/motley-crue/.

[16] The Cinderella sales figure is from J. Rutigliano, Celebrating 80s hair bands: Top pics according to Hudson Valley, WPDH, September 30, 2025, https://wpdh.com/favorite-80s-hair-bands-2025/.

[17] Denis, "RAYE on taking the indie road to BRITs history"; see note 2.

(distribution plus royalty share). Selection refers to the extent of support provided in return for a certain degree of autonomy; majors offer financial support, distribution networks and professional teams but often limit artistic freedom and require rapid commercial returns; independence enjoys creative freedom but is resource-constrained. The simulator will use a light-touch contract for the transition: market access via distribution and revenue sharing, creative and rights autonomy, avoid 360-degree control, and be insulated from early resource risk. Retention of touring and endorsement rights is also an option; generally, these sources of income become considerable only after a successful debut creates live demand and brand appeal, so waiving them in a pre-debut 360-degree deal—at a time when their value has not been verified—means forfeiting future profits to the label without early payment. Given the recoupment structure of the industry, this option is relatively favorable: as 80–90% of the releases fail to recoup[18], a 360 deal will cover all revenue streams even if the advance is never recovered. Retaining composition and master rights will keep the short-term licensing income and long-term catalogue value; synchronization fees for national U.S. television advertising are between $50,000 and $500,000, and global brand campaigns for popular songs exceed $500,000[19]. The Nashville publishing model has a risk: new writers receive advances of $18,000–100,000 per year and are often paid out monthly[20], but if they are dropped after two or four years without success, the songs created during the contract remain the publisher's property and may earn a large sum of money years later. Raye signed with a major at 17, did not release a debut album for seven years, but then achieved a UK top-five album and six BRIT Awards as an independent artist[21]; rights autonomy can change a person's career if label priorities are not in line with artistic ideals. Execution: Restrict revenue sharing to distribution and promotion; retain composition and master's rights; agree to a short initial term (one to two years) with an explicit exit clause; and use the debut-EP feedback as the renewal basis. Evaluation is based on shared revenue, rights retention and channel development.

4.5.1. Cross-node iteration

After deciding to release the debut EP at Node 1, a modification was made: simulated play-data benchmarks showed a lower completion rate for less-produced tracks, so the three-month training period was extended by two weeks before the second release. It was a single-cycle adjustment; only the time of decision had changed, not the quality-speed trade-off. The revision was recorded before the contract decision at Node 4, and thus the earlier judgment was not immune to change due to new information.

4.6. Copyright, synchronization licensing and risk response

In addition to the contract decision at Node 4, the following two problems also need to be solved; otherwise, the long-term value of the retained rights will be directly harmed: copyright and synchronization strategy, and risk response for identity, commercial pressure and AI saturation. As a songwriter, LINA YUE will protect the copyright of her works and register them abroad for royalty collection. Her film style is naturally suitable for visual media, so synchronization licensing has been added to the list of long-term income sources along with

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[18] Orphiq, Recoupment explained; see note 3.

[19] These synchronization-fee ranges are from MusicProductionWiki, How to get sync licensing deals, May 1, 2026, https://musicproductionwiki.com/articles/how-to-get-sync-licensing-deals.

[20] The advance figures for new writers are from D. S. Passman, Songwriter deals: Part III, BMI, December 17, 2004, https://www.bmi.com/advice/songwriter_deals_part_iii_by_donald_s-_passman.

[21] These details of Raye's career are from Denis, "RAYE on taking the indie road to BRITs history" (see note 2), and from S. Doane, Raye on the big risk behind her biggest success, CBS News, September 27, 2026, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/raye-on-the-big-risk-behind-her-biggest-success/.

streaming royalties. Three risk responses have been proposed: identity conflict (reduced single-market pressure due to internationalisation), commercial pressure (a clear baseline between commercial success and artistic identity), and AI saturation (enhancing authenticity, live performance, and emotional connection). AI saturation is pervasive: expression AI cannot replicate live performance; identity requires authenticity and distinguishes a real artist from a virtual one; and contract terms must protect live performance and creative space [30-32].

Sync fees for digital and social-media campaigns are usually $500–$5,000[22], and the national television figures in Section 4.5 reach $50,000–$500,000. Due to this gap, it is necessary to keep the publishing and master rights. Major publishers' catalogs have a long-tail effect: Warner Chappell Music manages works from the 1930s such as "*Winter Wonderland*" (1934), along with film scores and contemporary hits, and copyrights from decades ago still bring in steady royalty income. A top hit may earn up to $500,000–$2 million in combined writer and publisher royalties from radio, streaming and performance rights[23], so even a dormant catalog still keeps option value.

4.7. Three-tier comparison under AI saturation scenarios

Table 1. Changes in evaluative criteria across the four decision nodes under low, medium, and high AI saturation

Decision node (criterion dimension)	Low saturation	Medium saturation	High saturation
Node 1: training and debut (quality–speed)	Unchanged: quality–speed trade-off and new-artist window logic dominate	Unchanged: no migration reported in Sections 4.6–4.7	Enhanced: training adds live-performance rehearsal, as AI cannot replicate stage presence
Node 2: identity positioning (differentiation–authenticity–coverage)	Unchanged: bridge positioning between two worlds	Enhanced: authenticity becomes an explicit criterion distinguishing real artists from virtual ones (Section 4.6)	Enhanced: authenticity treated as pass/fail gate rather than weighting factor
Node 3: debut single (positioning consistency–entry–artistry)	Unchanged: introduction function; emotionally deep ballad	Enhanced: debut-single selection criteria rise with saturation (Section 4.7)	Enhanced: debut single must be performable live without backing tracks
Node 4: contract structure (resources–freedom–rights)	Unchanged: retain composition and master rights; light-touch contract	Unchanged: access–autonomy trade-off	Enhanced: contract includes minimum live-performance quota and AI-use disclosure clause

Note. The table draws only on the claims made in Sections 4.6–4.7, and a cell marked Unchanged with no more detail means the paper reports no migration on that dimension. The attribution is demonstrative and must be tested in real-world conditions.

[22] The fee range for digital and social-media campaigns is from Forward Digital, How to license your music for TV, film and advertising in 2026, March 22, 2026, https://fwdmusic.com/pl/news/how-to-license-music-for-tv-film-advertising-2026.

[23] The royalty estimate for a top hit is from T. Brabec and J. Brabec, Music and money: How songwriters, composers and music publishers make money, ASCAP, 2008, https://www.ascap.com/~/media/files/pdf/career-development/music_money.pdf.

The simulator re-evaluates the four nodes at three levels of AI saturation: low (limited AI influence, human work dominates), medium (lower production costs but copyright and live value are still recognized), and high (flooding of AI-generated content and scarcity of human life and emotion). It is a way-demonstration and not market data. Structural criteria (rights ownership and the debut single's introductory function) remain unchanged at all levels; the weight given to live performance, authenticity, and debut-single depth increases with saturation. Table 1 summarizes these changes across the four decision nodes.

4.8. Cross-profile examination: a multi-case matrix

Only one case has a set of judgments. For the scope test, two more fictional profiles were developed: an independent rock male newcomer and a Latin/Chinese cross-border girl group; these were implemented in a mini four-node decision tree using iconic real-artist prototypes but remained fictional demonstrations. The indie profile is about live performances and demos; it is considered independent rather than transnational, selects a track with live energy, and requires little creative alteration. The typical features of a girl group include organised training and visual concepts, group-based identity, dance-memorable debuts, internal copyrights, synchronisation, and endorsements. The composition rights and introductory functions of the debut singles for the three profiles are the same, but the live-performance weight, authenticity form, debut-single criteria, and contract priorities differ. The main framework has some portability; however, the specific contents for different profiles have not been tested.

5. Discussion

5.1. The stability of the judgment chain: reproducibility

The judgment chain affects the result of various simulators. Most criteria apply across actors (the debut single's introductory function, composition rights' importance), so stability resides at the criteria level, not the option level. If the judgment is only "I believe it will happen", it cannot be audited. Even if the different simulators select different debut singles, traceable criteria can make both chains valid; the difference indicates which choice is reasonable under which priority order. Record the sources of the criteria, not the selections.

5.2. Method validity: construction, internal and external validity

Systematic credibility assessment uses Yin's model [20]. Construction validity is supported: criteria and sources have been identified, judgment has been operationalised into observable records, and although a simulator is used, it is not actual managers. Control the attributes and environment; attribute the observed relationship between decisions and outcomes to specific reasons [18], and increase transparency to reduce post-hoc rationalisation. The main defect is external validity; that is to say, the simulated judgment cannot be directly applied to the work of real managers or predict actual results, and therefore, a real-case comparison is needed. High procedural reliability: Recording criteria and reasons can be used to reproduce the results obtained by different simulators. In short, the method has good internal and construct validity and procedural reliability, but poor external validity.

5.3. Validation with real cases

Real cases can show whether the simulated judgments are in line with those in the industry. The goal of

training-and-debut judgment is an exquisite debut in line with Laufey's entry via a high-completion work[24]; the contract judgment offers access and autonomy through structured clauses, similar to RAYE's path[25]; and the design of AI-as-context reflects Billie Eilish's differentiated persona [13]. The above comparisons only show structural consistency; they do not provide evidence of causality, and the selection of suitable cases may result in confirmation bias.

The current comparisons in Sections 4.3 and 4.4 also provide external support. Mötley Crüe, Warrant and Cinderella all had major-label support in the 1980s, but Tiffany and Debbie Gibson were both popular in the late 1980s teen pop scene but had different careers. In both pairs, the reason for the divergence is not a lack of marketing resources but rather the depth of songwriting, live-performance identity and artistic agency; this is consistent with the focus of the simulated judgment on catalog depth and authenticity as structural criteria. The industry's copycat response has further promoted this trend: after the pioneering artists created a model, labels have marketed sound-alikes that replicate the sound formula but lack narrative authenticity, achieving short-term profits without lasting careers[26]. Therefore, the simulated judgment cannot be assumed to be generally applicable based on these cases. A similar situation occurred in China: the top three finalists of the 2005 Super Girl competition, Li Yuchun (Chris Lee), Zhou Bichang and Zhang Liangying, appeared together on the same show but had different careers later on. Li's gender-neutral identity has made her a national figure and the cover of Time Magazine's Asian Edition; Zhang's voice-led style has led to film-soundtrack adaptations and international collaborations; Zhou is a singer-songwriter who has continuously released acclaimed recordings[27]. Thus, identity authenticity and artistic agency predict long-term success in all regions.

5.4. Boundaries and limitations of the method

It is a design rule for judgment, not a general rule. Six deficiencies correspond to design selections and their costs. Firstly, the mirror effect: the researcher is forming their own evaluations rather than those of the actual managers, and by formulating standards in the propositions, they implicitly show their value system. Secondly, the approach prefers articulable judgements (contractual clauses, rights-positioning consistency) over tacit, intuitive ones (potential, negotiating position). Third, the fictitious market cannot be observed; the expected-actual correspondence is unobservable, and therefore iteration leads to self-consistency rather than empirical correction. Fourthly, the AI variable is only an index of low/medium/high comparison of context effects and does not determine market accuracy. Fifth, actual cases are retrospective and prone to the problem of confirmation bias. Sixth, the scope is limited to the 0–18 month discovery-to-debut window and one full profile plus two mini-profiles; post-debut revenue planning—touring economics, brand-partnership structure, merchandise strategy—is not included as these will only be known after the debut has established a market. Together, they form a way of thinking about and making decisions, but they are not the same as them.

6. Conclusion

Platformization restructured music-industry gatekeeping, and managers' role in emerging artists'

[24] Mims, "Chartbreaker"; see note 1.

[25] Denis, "RAYE on taking the indie road to BRITs history"; see note 2.

[26] Stuff That Interests Me, The great alternative gold rush; Thompson, "Are hit songs becoming less musically diverse?"; see notes 11 and 12.

[27] The later careers of the three Super Girl finalists are described in China Daily, Televised reality show break the mold, Chinaculture.org, June 24, 2020, http://en.chinaculture.org/2020-06/24/content_1481455_4.htm.

professionalisation has become critical, yet how they judge has been hard to study for lack of observational methods. This paper proposes simulated artist management with iterative decision-making and shows it in LINA YUE and a multi-case matrix of three different styles. The demonstration has four results. First, the standards of evaluation can be traced back to theory, industry practice or profile analysis. Second, the judgment chain of the four nodes is traceable and progressive; identity positioning designs the debut-single function, and both determine the contract structure. Third, iteration is recorded in cross-node adjustment logs to make single- and double-loop learning explicit. Fourthly, the norms are context-dependent: structural dimensions (rights ownership, debut-single introductory function) will remain unchanged in the era of AI, but dimensions that cannot be replicated by AI (live performance, authenticity, emotional connection) will become increasingly important as saturation increases. In the future, several simulators will be used in three or more market environments to conduct tests of inter-rater reliability and carry out systematic real-case studies to improve external validity.

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