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Platform Disruption and the New Music Industry: The Influence of the Co-Creative, Networked Digital Age on Music Artists

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Platform Disruption and the New Music Industry: The Influence of the Co-Creative, Networked Digital Age on Music Artists

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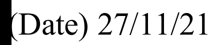
Statement of originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.



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Abstract

My experiences as an artist, writer and producer in the music industry have raised an important question: What does it mean to promote, create and distribute music in an industry undergoing substantial change due to the emergence of a participatory, networked digital culture? Over the past decade, my relationship with my audience has been reframed many times through changing online platforms, audience expectations regarding content, access and participation, and the ubiquity of personalisation.

This study seeks to understand the effect of digital participatory culture on the artist and on the creative process by tracking a crucial evolutionary moment, a progression of music production and dissemination. Today, artists must adapt to a constantly evolving market, where networked music and social media channels influence frequent shifts in consumption patterns. Understanding the competencies of successful artists in the new music industry requires an understanding of how digital culture has influenced the exchange between artist, label and audience today, as well as how participatory exchange has influenced the exchange between artist, label and audience. Entrepreneurial, autonomous methods that engage consumers directly are becoming more popular.

While there has been a great deal of published work examining the impact of participatory exchange on the consumer and the music industry (e.g. Choi & Burnes, 2013; Negus, 2015; Wikström, 2014), there is very little published work regarding the impact on the creator, particularly the increasing impact of participatory exchange and the competencies expected of artists working in the 'new' music industry. Given the extent and pace of change, and the volume of emerging platforms that attempt to harness the potential for participatory exchange, it is timely to undertake a study of the impact of recent developments on the music creator. To gain a comprehensive perspective on these effects, a broad representative sample of industry workers was interviewed. The research undertaken as part of this thesis is unique in that it is one of the first ethnographic inquiries into competencies, co-creation and practices in the new music industry from the perspective of the artist. The opinions expressed by the interviewees provide meaningful insights into the mechanics of working artists today, the impact of platformisation on the music industry and their ever-changing relationship with industry and audience. Twenty-five

participants were interviewed using an ethnographic method in key areas of the music industry, including artist management in the United Kingdom and the United States, independent and signed artists, publishers and record label employees. Due to travel limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews were undertaken remotely via Zoom. The objective was to gain a better understanding of the skills that artists have acquired to succeed in the digital era, as well as what it means to be an artist in today's music industry.

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1
Introduction

The advent of digital media has profoundly impacted the recording industry and the music industry as a whole. The production and dissemination of music has changed radically over the last 30 years and contemporary 'consumers' play a much more active role than in the past. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how digital participatory culture affects the artist and the creative process. As previously defined by Jenkins (2006, p. 2), a participatory culture is one that presents relatively few obstacles to creative expression and civic participation, places a strong emphasis on making and sharing one's own works, and provides some sort of informal mentoring in which the most experienced pass on their knowledge to beginners. Today's artists must adapt to an ever-changing market, where regular shifts in consumer behaviour are affected by networked music and social media outlets. To gain a better understanding of what it takes for artists to succeed independently or within the context of a label, it is necessary to understand not only the effect of the networked digital age on the music market today, but also how participatory exchange has influenced the creator's relationship with their audience, as well as the skills that artists must acquire not only in songwriting, recording and production, but also in an ever-increasing array of other skills. With continuous disruption created by the digital age on platforms and its impact on culture and production, this research will place a strong emphasis on the global popular music industry. Today, there are untapped opportunities for artists to break out from pre-defined structures and discover new ways to connect with their audience. It is important to consider the impact of rapidly evolving platforms and customer behaviour on the creator – particularly the independent artist. It is evident that the advent of digital tools and subsequent changes to the studio environment have had an effect on the sonics and creativity of the record production process.

Why am I particularly interested in this research subject? My career started as the primary songwriter, frontman and producer of the band Red Light Company, which was signed to Sony ATV Publishing and Columbia Records in the United Kingdom. We achieved a UK album chart position of number 13, selling over 20,000 copies in the first week of release, which provided an excellent insight into the music industry. The concept of do-it-yourself (DIY) ethics was critical

to my early entrance into the music industry; this was something that came very easily to me and the other members of my band. We promoted and connected via Myspace and Facebook. This allowed for cross-collaboration with musicians and videographers. It enabled us to engage actively with promoters and organise tours without the assistance of an agent (in the early stages of our careers) and provided us with industry exposure through showcases at New York's CMJ (a week-long annual industry-focused festival that allows unsigned artists to perform in front of A&R), satellite radio sessions at Abbey Road Studios and support slots opening for established bands and artists. Alongside my work in bands, I transitioned to songwriting and production, which pushed my aesthetic boundaries and expanded my musical output. I have had the privilege of working with a diverse range of artists, from remixing Lana Del Rey's *Born to Die*, to collaborating with Natasha Bedingfield, Laura Welsh and Soundtracks for the film *Pan*, to collaborations with producer Flood (U2, Depeche Mode) and achieving a number 2 album in Italy.

Over the last decade, the connection I have had with my audience has been reframed several times due to the evolution of online marketing and distribution platforms, shifting audience expectations regarding content, access and involvement, and the pervasiveness of personalisation. While this thesis focuses on the influence of participatory culture on artists and creators, the literature review and data chapters provide additional context regarding the competencies developed by artists in a rapidly evolving industry, as well as an exploration of what is increasingly being referred to as the 'new' music industry and existing participatory platforms. The thesis employs data from qualitative research to inform this study's examination of five distinct areas of artist competency in the current music industry context:

1. platform proliferation and the impact of networked digital culture on the artist and the producer
2. the rise of independent artists and their employment of DIY ethics
3. participatory platforms, collaboration, changing musical workflows and exchange
4. competencies, changing expectations and technologies
5. emerging platforms, competencies and engagement.

My experiences as a professional musician, songwriter and producer have prompted an important question: What does it mean to market, produce and distribute music in an industry experiencing dramatic transformation as a result of the rise of a participatory, networked digital culture?

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature, focusing on three distinct areas of prior research: artists, industry and participatory culture. It is prudent to examine the impact of the networked digital age on today's music creator through an examination of current and historic literature to provide context. Through the current literature, an understanding of participatory exchange as a major facet of exposing the creator's relationship with their audience in the new music industry will be explored, as will the competencies artists must develop in order to succeed.

Chapter 3 highlights the methodological approach taken by this thesis. It uses an ethnographic approach, through interviews with 25 industry participants to collect the data discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 4 examines how industry and artists are responding to participatory exchange platforms, with implications for record labels' traditional position in artist-to-audience interaction. The chapter also looks at platforms such as YouTube and TikTok, as well as the growing focus on participatory interaction in determining how musicians succeed in the new music industry. This involves an analysis of the many forms of participatory exchange that are widespread in today's music industry, the detrimental effects of participatory exchange on the artist and the influence of passive interaction between artist and audience. From an artist's perspective, this chapter discusses how to strike a balance between authenticity and successful audience engagement, as well as whether technology benefits particular kinds of musicians seeking success in the new music industry.

Following this, Chapter 5 explores the rise of independent artists and their employment of DIY ethics. Whether consciously or unconsciously, independent musicians working in the new music industry must apply certain DIY competencies and principles in order to succeed outside of a conventional label framework. Adoption of DIY ethics on a larger scale is important to comprehending the skills developed by artists in the new music industry. The rapid growth of creative digital technology has aided in the democratisation of cultural creativity. These aspects have successfully blended artistic practise with a viable career path, and DIY is at the heart of this culture. This chapter investigates the evolution of DIY into a component of mainstream cultural output, with a particular emphasis on the similarities and views of DIY ethics in the 'new' music industry. What difficulties do musical creators and the creative process confront in an era of DIY? The merging of traditional and new media has resulted in a more democratic and

networked paradigm of distribution and consumption, during which new skills were developed that benefited artists within this digital context. The democratisation of artists' access to the market as a whole is one of the most fundamental changes in the new music industry. Platforms, hosting services and increasingly prevalent low-cost production technologies such as personal computers, DAWs and audio interfaces have significantly enhanced the simplicity of producing, marketing and distributing music. While this is advantageous for musicians working in the new music industry, it also introduces new hurdles for artists seeking to reach their audience, owing to greater market competition.

Chapter 6 examines the transformation of artist-industry-customer connection as a result of digital disruption. This chapter examines a significant aspect of the research in terms of the shift from the traditional to the new music industry, concentrating on whether aspects of the more conventional model have survived platform disruption and how more dominant structures are adjusting to such change. How dissimilar are the old and new music industries and how closely do they cohabit and overlap? It is necessary to examine the aspects of old music industry structure that remain relevant in the new music industry in order to gain a better understanding of the development of platforms and their influence on both the old and new music industries. Within the context of this chapter's discussion of a more decentralised music industry, it is necessary to discuss the release methods available to artists, particularly direct-to-fan 'quasi-platforms'. These are a resource for artists looking to connect with an audience outside the confines of conventional label structures. This creates a new market entry point for artists who were previously excluded from the market by gatekeepers such as major record labels.

Chapter 7 discusses the shifting expectations of artists working in the new music industry, both from an industry and an audience standpoint. Notably, the chapter discusses what separates contemporary artists' duties and obligations from those of artists in more conventional positions in the past. One distinguishing characteristic of the abilities required of emerging artists is their higher adaptability to other jobs and related activities. Artists who are adaptable to the ever-changing environment of digital disruption have the best chance of capitalising on these new technologies in the process of engagement, production and distribution. There is an ongoing need for artists with organisational abilities and the ability to develop a variety of forms of visual and audio media. The desire for novelty is constant, and artists must position and build their identities and brands

strategically. In both the emerging and established music sectors, the boundary between creativity and branding is being challenged.

The final data portion of this thesis, Chapter 8, delves into the abilities and strategies established by musicians and producers, both independently and inside the confines of record companies. This study provides an overview of the skills and expectations of contemporary artists. The key requirement for artists working in today's climate is the use of platforms that provide market access. This platform upheaval in the distribution sector means profound changes have occurred in the way independent artists engage with the industry. While platform disruption is ongoing and constantly evolving, one significant disruptor in today's digital world is TikTok. Significant concerns remain in terms of creative techniques that are distinctive. Today, a large number of producers operate within the frameworks of audience co-creation and platform disruption in the distribution arena, which means there have been substantial changes in the way independent artists interact with industry. Within the ever-changing climate of platform disruption, TikTok is spearheading the music industry's current wave of viral success. It is necessary to consider the impact on upcoming artists and the ongoing resurrection of legacy music, which is finding a new home in this networked digital age. This viral success has a positive effect on musicians' creativity; record labels and artists alike are interested in learning the tactics used to achieve success on this platform.

Chapter 9, the concluding chapter of the thesis, summaries the main findings and offers some final comments on the key contributions made by the thesis. There is discussion of further research that could extend knowledge on several key aspects of this thesis.

2

Artists, industry and audiences: A literature review on the disruption of the old music industry

2.1 Introduction

Today's artists are expected to adapt to a rapidly shifting market, where networked music and social media platforms effect constant change in consumption patterns. Not only is it prudent to explore the impact of digital culture on the contemporary music creator, but also to understand how participatory exchange has impacted the creator's relationship with their audience, as well as the competencies artists must develop in order to be successful both independently and within the structure of a label. Due to this study's interest in the ongoing disruption caused by the digital age on platforms and its influence on participatory culture and production, this research places a strong focus and limitation on the global popular music industry. Within the context of this thesis, success is defined as the capacity to sustain oneself financially via music as a vocation, whether through touring, album sales, or publishing. Another aspect is the ability to navigate the new music industry with a degree of autonomy. While there has been a great deal of published work examining the impact of participatory exchange on the consumer and on the music industry (e.g. Choi & Burnes, 2013; Negus, 2015; Wikström, 2014), very little work has been published on the impact of this on the music creator. Given the extent and pace of change and the volume of emerging platforms hoping to harness the potential for participatory exchange, it is timely to undertake a study of the impact on the music creator. More expansive than the term 'musician', the term 'music creator' refers to artists who operate both within and outside of label frameworks, as well as producers of music and related content. With regard to the music industry, it is important to parallel the impact of the digital age researched by scholars such as Wikström (2014) and Azhena (2006) with historical accounts of the music industry, such as those of Negus (2015) and Frith (1988), in order to identify trends. Numerous scholars have written on the dynamics of participatory culture, notably Jenkins (2016), who provides compelling insights into the impact of participatory culture on parallel industry and politics.

Disruption is nothing new in the music industry, with the advent of broadcasting and recording having 'traumatic effects' on the pre-existing paradigm, as Frith observes:

> The music business was founded in the nineteenth century as a writing and publishing business, and the traumatic effects on it of broadcasting and recording were realized, for the most part, by the 1930s. (Frith, 1982, p. 93)

Negus (1992) notes that this continuous emergence of new modalities through the disruptive impact of technology is never passive, and to a lesser or greater extent, music has always seen a reliance on forms of technology in order to be produced, broadcast or disseminated: 'Technology has never been passive, neutral or natural. Music has, for centuries, been created through the interaction between "art" and technology' (Negus, 1992, p. 31).

The commodification of music is a process that, as Frith (1982, p. 110) states, is traditionally tied to the recording studio: 'music becomes commodity in the recording studio, and it is here that we can see most clearly that rock is not a matter of art versus business'. Frith goes on to admit that music is not exclusively a product, and its use as such has uncomfortable consequences for its production: 'music can never be just a product (an exchange value), even in its rawest commodity form; the artistic value of records has an unavoidable complicating effect on their production (Frith, 1982, p. 101). Negus maintains that this tension between record label and artist autonomy is one that has historically impacted less-established artists, while those with greater success yield more power developmentally:

> The dynamic of commercial success is characterised by the struggle of artists for ever more autonomy. Acts attempt to get in a position where they can avoid the input of record company staff and the entire corporate jigsaw of artist development. (Negus, 1992, p. 150)

If we examine roles within the music industry historically, one key role of artist and repertoire (A&R) is the acquisition of talent for record labels. As Frith (1982, p. 103) states, 'A large part of an A&R man's [sic] time (and that of his field staff) is taken up with watching and listening to unknown acts, assessing their potential – "a groupie with a chequebook" is one self-description.' In the 'old music industry' period, the A&R role was less one of analytics and more a matter of understanding potential, the zeitgeist and intuition: 'when artist and repertoire staff are asked to explain how they assess and respond to the music and artists they are approached with, they usually use such terms as "following hunches", "gut feeling", "intuition" and "instinct" (Negus,

1992, p. 51). Another employee within the traditional record label structure is a talent scout, as explained by Negus:

> Talent scouts spend their time visiting two or three gigs or clubs per night, and continually listening to demo tapes. They tend to have very little responsibility within A&R departments, although may occasionally be involved in bringing an artist to a record company and might look after minor aspects of that artist's career. (Negus, 1992, p. 48)

The use of analytics was less to do with the acquisition of new talent and more an understanding of the impact of artists currently on the record label's roster:

> Market research is mainly used to make decisions about acts with recordings already released, to assess a band or singer's popularity amongst a particular social group or in a specific geographic region. (Negus, 1992, p. 78)

This chapter will examine the influence of digital tools on producers' workflows as a consequence of the movement toward 'in the box' production. The rise of the 'bedroom producer' is one outcome of this process. Additional disruption is happening as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating remote communication. With Melosity and Kompoz seeming to be more significant than ever, this chapter will examine the need for collaborative production platforms. The popularisation of DIY ethics, as well as the rising prevalence of artist desire for autonomy in interaction, promotion, and production techniques, will be highlighted. While DIY methods are not new, their significance for artists has increased in the face of the industry disruption and platform innovation. In terms of audience engagement, a study of participatory culture will examine a trend toward more networked and collaborative environments away from centralised media organisations. Regarding the benefits of audience involvement and connection, it is important to consider the impact on artists.

DIY ethics and 'produsage'

When considering artists in the 'new' music industry, key to understanding the competencies they have developed in the digital age are do-it-yourself (DIY) autonomy and self-sufficiency, or

'DIY ethics'. Prior contends that this newfound market access is the result of the displacement of established cultural gatekeepers:

> With cultural gatekeepers relatively displaced, musicians are getting closer to fulfilling the "do-it-yourself" ideologies of punk and hip-hop, reinstating practices of homemade art that existed long before the rise of transnational media conglomerates and mass distribution. (2010, p. 403)

Bennett (2018) explores DIY culture within the context of its socioeconomic and anti-hegemonic roots, and considers how DIY practice is now being appropriated in a more entrepreneurial way in our post-industrial world. Within the context of DIY practises, Hracs discusses the dramatic change which has occurred in the proliferated role of musicians with the introduction of digital technologies: 'over the last decade […] digital technologies have altered the way music is produced, promoted, distributed and consumed, and this has individualized the majority of musicians.' (2013, p. 2) DIY within music is fundamental to understanding networked participatory culture, drawing from punk's DIY participatory youth message and extending to the emergence of digital technology in the mid-1990s. As a result of the disruption caused by digital technology, many artists' responsibilities have expanded as a matter of survival within the music industry:

> In Canada, for example, 95% of all musicians are not affiliated with either major or independent record labels and operate instead as entrepreneurs who are independently responsible for the entire range of creative and non-creative tasks (Hracs, 2012, p. 2)

The research within this thesis aims to address DIY competencies developed by artists within the 'new' music industry, to explore how industry reconfiguration has impacted creators and the disruption of platforms, bringing about more diversified and more significant opportunities for independent artists. While DIY skills such as promotion and distribution have remained constant, engagement through social media, production, and the use of other digital technologies has generated a new kind of demand on artists today:

> Contemporary DIY entails individual responsibility for a traditional and modern range of creative and non-creative tasks. Indeed, digital technologies have introduced new tasks

> such as maintaining websites, digital distribution and promotion using social media (Hracs, 2013, p. 6)

With the ubiquity of DIY competencies in the digital age, it is pertinent to examine the impact of non-creative work on the artist, as Hracs states, artists can no longer rely on specialised labour much of the time: 'under this literal 'do-it-yourself' (DIY) model musicians can no longer rely on skilled specialists and cultural intermediaries including engineers, producers, booking agents and managers'. (2013, p. 2) These issues are addressed in Chapter 4, with particular focus on the impact DIY competencies are having upon the freedoms of independent musicians working within the new music industry:

> While some may argue that this increased workload is offset by greater autonomy, creative control and revenue share, few scholars have critically analysed […] the extent to which greater freedoms are actually realized by typical independent musicians. (Hracs, 2013, p. 6)

Leading on from this, what does DIY mean within music today, and how has this line been blurred into mainstream cultural production? Further to Azhena's (2006) work, this thesis will examine the decentralisation of the music industry through the rise of platforms and the proliferation of formats. This will be underscored by its implications for the more DIY style of artist. As Kruger (2018) and Auslander (2015) explored, these platforms leave the door open to fans having a more tacit interaction with both artist and music. It is important to explore how this impacts industry and artists to adapt to more collaborative platforms. This collaborative interplay facilitated by platforms parallels Negus' notion of 'cultural intermediaries', with a movement away from one directional modes of consumption:

> The central strength of the notion of cultural intermediaries is that it places an emphasis on those workers who come in-between creative artists and consumers (or, more generally, production and consumption). It also suggests a shift away from unidirectional or transmission models of cultural production towards an approach that conceives of workers as intermediaries continually engaged in forming a point of connection or articulation between production and consumption. (2002, p. 4)

Building on Wikström's (2014) work on the impact of the digital age, this thesis will explore the role of the major record label within artist-to-audience exchange within the context of the 'new music industry'.

The industry is adapting to 'prosumption', a term coined by Toffler (1980), which highlights a blurring of the boundaries between passive consumption and more collaborative, active creation by the audience (Bruns, 2009); this shift in audience behaviour is being harnessed through new business models (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). Platform disruption and its facilitation of mediation between artists and prosumers reflects Negus' observations on 'cultural intermediaries':

> Some studies have shown that the cultural intermediaries of marketing and public relations can play a critical role in connecting production to consumption in such a way that their practices can shape the product and, in some significant way, feed the practices of the public back into the design and marketing process as a form of social knowledge (du Gay et al., 1997). (2002, p.9)

This is reinforced by Srnicek who observes that not only can produsers occupy the intermediary space, but also platforms, who 'position themselves as intermediaries that bring together different users: customers, advertisers, service providers, producers, suppliers, and even physical objects.' (2016, p. 50) Wikström (2014) provides a detailed account and analysis of both present and historical music industry practice and the mechanics therein up to the date of publication of his book. Notably, the notion that music firms have lost their ability to control the flow of their products within new models of digital distribution is important when considering recent shifts that have occurred within the economic climate of distribution. This thesis aims to address the broader impact of networked digital culture on artists and producers. Wikström (2014) briefly touches on forecasting participatory exchange as a new form of engagement between creator and consumer, but also a potential future source of value co-creation. However, there has been little research regarding the impact of 'produsage', a term coined by Axel Bruns (2009) as an extension of Toffler's 'prosumption', which highlights the production and consumption of audiences on the creator and the creative process itself. The relevance of 'produsage' is more valuable to artists and industry than ever before, with platform-led modes of discovery, the

recycling and redistribution of content generates greater revenue for record labels and more exposure for artists. Bruns speaks of the historic importance of mixtape culture in differing practices since the 1920s:

> It is a shift which has been a long time coming and has had many precedents, from the collage art of the Dadaists in the 1920s to the music mixtapes of the 70s and 80s, and finally to the explosion of mashup-style practices that was enabled by modern computing technologies. (2010, p. 1)

The importance of such openness to collaborative influence and participatory exchange has been identified in the past by artists such as Nine Inch Nails and Radiohead. Both acts have made attempts in the collaborative digital distribution sector by hosting music on ccMixter, a platform that allows for Creative Commons licencing of music, enabling community members to build on their work by contributing additional instrumentation. (Stone, 2009). Shields observes that embracing redistribution, especially in the era of file sharing, has a number of benefits for the music industry with prior research indicating that people who are most active in filesharing are also the most devoted consumers of the music industry (2009). This facilitation of collaboration through software and the impact on consumption and production of new musical forms is observed by Prior:

> Software, to this extent, activates and subvents a flattening of musical forms, transforming the scenes of music into a series of elastic and provisional styles. Typical of the constraining/enabling features of technology at large, the software both shapes the user's space and modes of composition, but also enables a series of new operations and practices central to the production of new forms.

This thesis aims to address the impact of participatory exchange in the digital age on artists, particularly the changing expectations and challenges that exist within a digital and participatory culture in terms of value, ownership and distance from their audience, as well as how creators are exploiting co-creation to enhance artistic and commercial value. Zhang (2019) examines the problematic relationships some artists are forging with their audience and the platforms they are expected to utilise. This expectation of interaction through Facebook's marketing tools and pressure upon creators to accrue 'likes' adds a new kind of pressure to the

process. Zhang's study highlights the shifting sand upon which artists are expected to build and adapt, amidst a scenario of constantly changing platforms and consumer behaviours. It is important to examine the effect of this on the creator, particularly the independent artist.

Further to Tarrasi's (2014) work, it is also pertinent to examine how the new cultural logic of platforms and an emerging emphasis on participatory exchange have shaped the types of artists finding success within the new music industry. It is self-evident that the reconfiguration of traditional relationships between creators, consumers and industry mediators impacts a creator's relationship with both industry and its public:

> In the music industry the role of fans has radically changed, i.e. from undermining the industry through piracy they are increasingly enhancing and co-creating value in partnership with artists and small record labels. (Rudny, 2016, p. 468)

Bruns (2016) explores the implications of a transition from production and prosumption to produsage through the emergence of user-led content creation. Conversely, Bird (2011, p. 512) argues:

> True produsers are a reality, but they are not the norm, and can often seem to be so in thrall to big media and technological 'coolness' that they accept the disciplining of their creative activities.

Bird (2011, p. 512) questions the current extent of the contribution of produsers' activity 'unless we regard every Twitter and Facebook update as an act of creativity'. Small's (1999) work on music as a 'verb' is particularly relevant in the context of audience consumption in the digital age. Platforms have sought to integrate music into people's activities through personalisation. Expanding on Small's work, it is pertinent to examine the relevance of 'musicking' within the context of this personalisation. The idea of genres of engagement is insightful, examining the nuanced way in which participatory exchange is perceived by both creator and consumer: including the fact that engagement no longer sits between poles of activity but instead blurs the boundaries through networked digital culture.

Further to Small's (1999) notion of music as a 'verb' and the performative aspect of audience consumption, Bruns (2009) created the term 'produser' as an extension of the 'prosumer' as a forecast shift from passive audience consumption to a more democratic and

proliferated model, based more upon the specific needs of the individuals. The focus of the third wave is to examine a shift since the 1950s of many countries transitioning from a second wave, or industrial society, into a post-industrial society that embraces the 'Information Age' defined by a fast epochal transition away from the conventional industrial economy created during the Industrial Revolution and towards an economy based mainly on information technologies. Within this context, Toffler (1980) challenges the notion of larger brands in favour of consumer autonomy. This is also aligned with Kruger's (2018) insights, providing a compelling glimpse into the state of popular culture in terms of audience consumption. It is important to understand the meaning of consumerism and the new rules in terms of audience engagement from the creator's perspective. Kruger argues against the notion of consumers transcending their former role, or at least perceiving themselves as artists through methods such as curation, and instead critiques this externalisation of the self as a collision of narcissism and voyeurism. Kruger raises concerns about the effects of this performative online veneer, causing an externalisation of the consumer's hopes and fears. With the democratisation of music as a performative role in consumers' lives, artists must be willing to acquire competencies in marketing, production and distribution in order to successfully promote and connect with an audience.

2.2 A chronology of twentieth-century advances in music technology

The introduction of digital media has had a significant impact on the music recording industry. However, technological disruptions within the music industry are nothing new: sheet music, the phonograph, and the introduction of radio all had disruptive effects on music, record labels and consumption patterns over decades. As stated by Théberge (1997), music is not only influenced by technology; it is also a commodity of leisure, subject to capital markets as any other commodity, while being further influenced by modalities of production and dissemination:

> In the twentieth century music is, to a large degree, a technologically dependent, leisure commodity whose existence is guaranteed by the organized activities of a number of large corporate enterprises and media outlets. As in other areas of commodity culture, rapid changes in musical style, fashion, and technology go hand in hand with contemporary modes of production and distribution. (Théberge, 1997, p. 20)

The foundations of the music industry can be traced back to the publishing of sheet music, with a demand brought about by people's desire to perform a musical repertoire within their own homes. As this occurred before the invention of the radio, sheet music was predominantly promoted through targeted performances at stage productions by leading performers of the time. The introduction of the phonograph soon followed; initially limited to music parlours in most major US cities, phonographs made their way into consumers' homes by the 1920s. With the introduction of radio in the early 1920s, labels feared that this would lead to the demise of the phonograph as a disruptive and accessible platform for consumption. Indeed, the growth of radio ownership from two out of five to four out of five homes between 1931 and 1938 was accompanied by a fall in annual record sales from $75 million to $26 million between 1929 and 1938 (Samuels, 2002). Radio's monetisation began with the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) collecting royalties in 1923. Samuels (2002, para 22) states that 'radio and TV licensing represents the single greatest source of revenue for ASCAP and its composers … and [a]n average member of ASCAP gets about $150–$200 per work per year, or about $5,000-$6,000 for all of a member's compositions.' The advent of television as a medium for promotion contributed to the destabilisation of major labels as gatekeepers within the industry due to the complex nature of promotion through such a medium.

Operating in parallel with the emergence of new distribution formats and in conjunction with record labels such as EMI were the production and recording of music. It was notable that the use of proprietary recording equipment required engineers to develop and understand methods specific to the studio complex's equipment. As Cleveland (2001, p. 18) states, these skills 'may or may not have been developed elsewhere – and those techniques were considered to be company "secrets"'. Negus refers to the centralised and fundamental links the recording industry had with the manufacturing of equipment and the ownership of studios:

> From its very earliest days, the recording industry was organised around the connection between; a) industrial manufacturing equipment used to produce recordings; b) consumer furniture necessary to reproduce these recordings; c) the complex of equipment and devices necessary to coordinate this. (Negus, 1992, p. 23)

This proprietary approach to recording equipment kept the engineers within the studio's ecosystem and created a walled garden; there were barriers around music production created by

standards of professionalism tied to issues of capitalist production and commerce, creating distance from insight into much of the process. As a result, as stated by Negus, technology has played a decisive role in shaping and disrupting the progress of popular music:

> Technologies for producing and reproducing sounds and images have decisively influenced how popular music has been composed, communicated and consumed throughout the twentieth century. (Negus, 1992, p. 20)

Advances in record production were instigated by the multitrack recorder. Conceived in 1955, this marked one of the first major technological innovations within the recording process, as it provided the ability to edit individual takes and record artists separately, whereas the only possibility prior to that was recording a live group performance. This heralded an essential step towards the culture of recording that we see today, and the ease with which we approach editing and layering recorded sound. Brian Eno provides a compelling insight into the early limitations and subsequent creative choices borne out of the four-track technology of the mid-1960s; these observations highlight technology's increasing influence on production choices, with the result always having to be summed from four tracks to one mono track:

> You should remember that everything, including the Beatles *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, was done on four-track until 1968. Normally engineers would do something like this: the drums on one track, the voices spread on two tracks with the guitars and the piano, say, on one of those tracks, and then the strings and additional effects on the fourth track. This was because they were thinking in terms of mono output; eventually, it would be mixed down to one signal again, to be played on radio or whatever. When stereo came in big, it gave them a problem. When they converted to stereo, things were put in either the middle, or dramatically to one side, or you'd hear some very idiosyncratic panning. (Eno, 1979, para. 10)

Eno asserts that the introduction of 16-track recording impacted production philosophy, leading to greater experimentation in utilising all tracks on the tape. With this additional track count, a new creative paradigm emerged, a more additive approach giving rise to more ambitious arrangements:

> The interesting thing is that after 16-track, I would say, the differences are differences of degree, not differences of kind. Because after you get to 16-track, you have far more tracks than you need to record a conventional rock band. Even if you spread the drums across six tracks, have the bass on two, have the vocals, have the guitars, you've still got six tracks left. People started to think, 'What shall we do with those six tracks?' (Eno, 1979, para. 10).

Phil Spector's approach to production echoed the tools available in the late 1970s; simultaneously, there existed auteurs within the music industry of decades past – Spector possessed the tools and competency to operate in a multitude of roles. This masterminding of the process was impacted by creating a 'wall of sound' established through an additive, multitrack approach. While originally coming to prominence with his work with acts such as The Crystals and The Ronettes from the early 1960s, Spector's use of layering and echo proved to be pioneering in the art-rock genre and inspired subsequent genres such as Noise and Shoegaze (Bannister, 2006), among others. As Théberge (1997) explains, developments in confluent technologies enabled access to recording technology to a broader audience, with a cost reduction, providing a much lower entry point. One significant component of this was the introduction of the synthesiser: not only did this provide greater access to a larger demographic of people, but it also shaped the sound of music to come, reinforcing Bob Moog's assertion of technology's intrinsic disruption on the sound of popular music as 'democratisation' (Harkins, 2019).

The subsequent development of Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) in the early 1980s significantly impacted both the sonic aesthetics of records and the process through which they were created. The focus dramatically shifted from artists' skill to the ability to program rhythms and melodies into synthesisers. The ubiquity of MIDI as a universal tool for interfacing drum machines with sequencers and synthesizers, combined with its cheaper, mass-produced home-studio equipment, meant that the advent of digital recording technology could surpass not only the cost and access limitations of analogue but also introduce a new level of sonic fidelity with the arrival of compact discs. However, while the development of MIDI provided a giant leap forward in terms of sequencing and home recording, there was a perceived downside to the more machine-like aesthetic it produced:

> Musicians complained that the limited range of sounds built into some drum machines and synthesisers virtually forced them to write music in a particular style. *Rolling Stone*, taking a typically reactionary stance, dubbed the entire period of the late 1970s and early ’80s as the era of ‘push-button rock’ (no. 461, November 21, 1985, p. 89). (Théberge, 1997, p. 1)

Advances continued in recording technology in the 1990s, with music production within the digital domain. As noted by Prior the ‘development of affordable technology for music production significantly lowered thresholds for making professional-sounding music. (2010, p. 402) Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) software platforms such as ProTools and Cubase facilitated a new kind of recording artist, or ‘bedroom producer’ (see below), due to the significantly lower cost of access to the required tools. Moreover, from the early 2000s, applications such as Cubase were widely disseminated through Napster; music piracy was prevalent on such a platform and we saw the emergence of widely distributed pirated tools for aspiring artists to create music. This surge in the number of music software applications had a dramatic effect on all facets of music production:

> The growth of music software applications in the early 2000s heralds one of the most dramatic transformations in music. There is no action, practice or convention that has been untouched by this growth, from recording, mixing and mastering right through to listening and marketing. (Prior, 2008, p. 12)

The power and flexibility of DAWs meant that there was potential for much higher track counts than the limitations of recording to analogue tape, and eventually powerful tools such as digital instruments and effects – including plugins – within the DAW.

The introduction of MP3s and associated compression led to a degradation in quality synonymous with downloaded music of the 2000s. The MP3 format’s fast transferability had huge implications for record companies’ control over music distribution, eventually leading to a ‘diffusion of production technology’ (Kirby, 2015, p. 370), which resulted in labels losing dominance in their access to recording facilities. In terms of production costs, digital recording technology’s capacity for storage means it now costs a fraction of what it would have cost to create the same recording during the analogue era. In addition, the rise of the MP3 and its free

online transfer costs has dramatically lowered the barriers to entry for potential artists and producers, and increased the ability to run one's own record label. This, coupled with the accessibility of pirated music software in the early 2000s, such as Steinberg's Cubase, made the opportunity to transition from consumer to creator much more accessible.

Frith (2012, p. 217) notes that the recording studio's role in the process is as a setting of commoditisation, where industry, musician and producers convene:

> The recording studio is the place in which the relationship of art and industry is articulated, through the relationship of musicians and producers; it is the setting in which music – of all kinds – takes on commodity form.

As already touched upon, this has been radically altered in recent years, with the advent of digital technology allowing for a new class of recording, known as the 'bedroom producer' (Gunderson, 2004). Today, many artists and producers have entered the production space exclusively 'in the box', meaning that production tools such as the audio workstation and effects used are limited to software within personal computers. This change in production modality, incorporation of roles and the subsequent impact were forecast by Attali (1977, p. 135) in the pre-digital age:

> This new activity is NOT undertaken for its exchange or use-value. It is undertaken solely for the pleasure of the person who does it (its 'producer'). Such activity involves a radical rejection of the specialised roles (composer, performer, audience) that dominated all previous music.

The changing studio environment has blurred the line between producer and prosumer, allowing for unprecedented access to production and distribution tools. This democratisation of tools has also diluted the need for more specialised positions in music, since artists are now expected to possess a wider range of competencies.

2.3 Artist

Today, unheralded opportunities exist for artists to step outside of predefined systems to find a path to reach their audience. There is a prevalence of music creators in the digital age who are more than just artists; they are also individuals, curators and artists, whose personality is at the core of their engagement with their intended audience. This transforms and elevates the

Soundcloud and Spotify uploads, creating context and encouraging the audience to want to engage. The expectation of interaction through platforms such as Facebook's marketing tools and pressure upon creators to accrue 'likes' add a new kind of strain to the process. It is vital to examine the effect of constantly changing platforms and consumer behaviour on the creator, particularly the independent artist. With the disruptive movement of tech companies occupying spaces once controlled by record companies, there is less stability when it comes to distribution platforms. This destabilisation seemingly creating a system with can take advantage of the more independent side of the music industry, as noted by filmmaker and musician Astra Taylor:

> Artists would rather think of themselves as outside the system. "The wonderful thing about the DIY vision is also its weakness," Astra Taylor noted. But the system has come for them, and toppled the structures that allowed them to create. (Dayen, para. 37, 2021)

YouTube is the world's largest music streaming service, in terms of total users and the more than two billion individuals that consume music exclusively on the platform. (Dayen, 2021) Dayen highlights potential problems with a platform such as YouTube in terms of artist monetisation:

> YouTube's complicated and opaque payment structure changes dynamically based on various factors, including time of day, location of the listener, and ad revenues tied to the stream. But the average money that comes back to an artist can barely be calculated. (para. 36, 2021)

As musician Damon Krukowski points out, the danger for musicians is their dependence on internet platforms as a monopoly for reaching and engaging with their audience:

> Artists used to rely on labels, and while that could get antagonistic, the labels still needed hit music to stay alive. "Apple stepped in, if they abandoned music tomorrow, it wouldn't change their bottom line," said Damon Krukowski. "They're not a music company, Spotify is not a music company, YouTube is not a music company. None of them need me, but I need them. That is unsustainable for music." (Dayen, para. 59, 2021)

While platforms acting as new gatekeepers provide significant benefits to artists in terms of distribution and engagement tools, their sometimes opaque payment structures and abrupt policy

changes place many more independent artists at the hands of the platforms with which they choose to engage.

Production tools

The use of other media modalities can exemplify the intrinsic link between technology and music to promote and engage with one's intended audience. The introduction of digital tools has impacted sonics, particularly fidelity, in terms of achieving a wider EQ range and creativity within record production. Further to this, Negus (1992) cites Middleton when referring to the proactive influence technology has had on media:

> Technology has never been passive, neutral or natural. Music has, for centuries, been created through the interaction between 'art' and 'technology'. As Richard Middleton has pointed out; 'technology and musical technique, content and meaning, generally develop together, dialectically. (Negus, 1992, p. 90)

It is clear that the introduction of digital tools and subsequent alteration of the studio environment have had an impact on sonics and creativity within the process of record production:

> In Hennion's view (not unlike those of Eno and Bennett), the studio becomes the 'laboratory' of the producer, a site where experiments, a trial-and-error process of tests, operations, and evaluations in sound take place. The insulated studio acoustics, the isolation of the musicians from one another in the studio, and the separation of their sounds on multitrack tape must necessarily be correlated with the insulation/isolation of the studio from the outside world. (Théberge, 1997, p. 218)

While this progression in technology certainly has its advantages, many of the skills required to make a record in a pre-digital era have become less critical, further shifting the sound of popular music away from the musician towards the production tools themselves, exemplified by the rise of MIDI technology and the ubiquity of synthesisers, to programming and sampling within DAWs. Through this genesis of technology, many 'in the box' genres of music emerged, which haven't been without criticism:

> Listen, don't get me wrong. I think this stuff is great, and I use it every day, but I just know that it's killing music. (Michel, a Montréal musician talking about his home studio in 1989). (Théberge, 1997, p. 1)

Théberge mentions the disruptive effect technology of on both the production and the consumption of music – more than just being a passive actor in the mediation of creativity and engagement:

> Musicians are not simply consumers of new technologies; rather, their entire approach to music-making has been transformed so that consumption, the exercise of taste and choice, has become implicated in their musical practices at the most fundamental level. In a somewhat different context, Ross Harley (1993: 214) has described this event as an inversion of the conventional production/consumption hierarchy: 'Electronic recording establishes a listener who is characterized by an apparatus that precedes him/her.' (Théberge, 1997, p. 200)

This point can be linked to Attali's prediction of technology creating a 'new noise', its influence having broader implications than just on the music itself, but also more broadly in society: 'a new noise is being heard (a new way of making music), suggesting the emergence of a new society' (Attali, 1977, p. 133). When viewed within the construct of a traditional studio space, Eno explains the process for one of the pieces on his album *Music for Airports* (1978) and the tacit feedback technology mediated between composition and production, with alterations in production choices aggregating themselves into transformative effects on the creative processes therein:

> Which puts me in mind of the first piece on *Music For Airports* (Editions EG). I had four musicians in the studio, and we were doing some improvising exercises that I'd suggested. I couldn't hear the musicians very well at the time, and I'm sure they couldn't hear each other, but listening back, later, I found this very short section of tape where two pianos, unbeknownst to each other, played melodic lines that interlocked in an interesting way. To make a piece of music out of it, I cut that part out, made a stereo loop on the 24-track, then I discovered I liked it best at half speed, so the instruments sounded very soft, and the whole movement was very

> slow. I didn’t want the bass and guitar - they weren’t necessary for the piece – but there was a bit of Fred Frith’s guitar breaking through the acoustic piano mic, a kind of scrape I couldn’t get rid of. Usually, I like Fred’s scrapes a lot, but this wasn’t in keeping, so I had to find a way of dealing with that scrape, and I had the idea of putting in variable orchestration each time the loop repeated. You only hear Fred’s scrape the first time the loop goes around. (Eno, 1979, para. 32)

Home recording

Looking at artists utilising home recording methods, the term ‘bedroom producer’ perhaps undermines the scope of the role. In reality, it reflects an independent musician operating in many capacities, whether this is a curiosity in programming, synthesisers or recorded sound. Further to this, as Théberge explains, by its very nature, the domestic home studio can be a mostly solitary exercise in creativity:

> Often ignored in this scenario of the home studio is the manner in which the domestic space has been transformed into a production environment. Musicians’ magazines often use clichés such as the arrival of the ‘information age’ and Alvin Toffler’s (1980) notion of the ‘electronic cottage’ to explain the existence of the home studio. It seems to me that there is something else quite striking about this particular manifestation of contemporary music-making that is very different from previous uses of music technology in the home; that is, the degree to which the home studio is an isolated form of activity, separate from family life in almost every way. (Théberge, 1997, p. 234)

As expressed by Gunderson, commercial studios have had to adapt to the advances in personal recording methods chosen by bedroom producers, with this production playing an important role when incorporated into the process of producing an album. Artist Danger Mouse began as a bedroom producer, with his breakthrough 2004 album *The Grey Album* entirely self-produced in his bedroom studio (Browne, 2020):

> Mash-up artists such as Danger Mouse have shown how the recording industry has been rendered superfluous by advances in music production technology. Artists once had to play the record companies’ games to gain access to precious time in a

> recording studio; today, a 'bedroom producer' can create a professional sounding album with a personal computer alone. (Brian Burton is known to have used Sony's Acid Pro.) Indeed, insofar as they want to survive, real studios have had to integrate 'virtual' studios into their setup. Many commercial production houses incorporate software into their own environments so that their customers will be able to transfer their work between PC and studio, where it can be further processed. (Gunderson, 2004, p. 2)

The tools now available to artists within the digital economy have undeniably reduced the demand for traditional recording studios in making a record, and therefore the labour force along with it. As a result, job opportunities for studio engineers have diminished, but there has also been further pressure in terms of availability and work conditions, often due to budget constraints:

> Much of the transcultural flow of music occurs outside of the popular music industry's structure and its organisational logic, a process that is likely to be facilitated in some respects by Internet technologies. However, the existence of such alternative networks does not negate or undermine the global asymmetries of music production and circulation. (Azhena, 2006, para. 120).

This ability to create high quality content with digital tools is not only tethered to music production, but also shared in many applications of cultural production as noted by Prior:

> It is nowadays a fairly straightforward exercise to find out how to make your own movie, add expressive filters to your photos, or publish your own newsletter. If only a decade ago we saw computers as esoteric business machines and word-processors, we now think of them as cultural devices for generating images, editing movies, and mixing tracks. (2010, p. 402)

There is a freedom to the process of creating the music, unconstrained by analogue recording's more hegemonic roots or by its implied 'bedroom' location. With the use of laptops and the internet, the modern musician has newfound mobility to utilise multiple spaces in the context of a record at any time and place. Further to Bruns' (2017) notion of 'produsage', online communities can add tacit feedback into the process of production through peer collaboration,

sampling and patch sharing. In some cases, music production and consumption have transformed into a shared and open community-based experience. Alongside this, the wealth of access to not only production tools but also networked communities on the internet has created a host of more lo-fi sub-genres specifically born out of independent artists utilising a proliferation of disparate production styles and musical attributes, such as 'bedroom pop' – a DIY ethos that echoes a similar cultural nostalgia and aesthetic of pre-DAW cassette-based home recording (McGraith, 2015). The emergence of this aesthetic was brought about by the ubiquity of laptops, much akin to the emergence of the low-cost solution of four-track recorders such as the Tascam Portastudio. While its digital counterparts can create a much cleaner audio fidelity, 'bedroom pop' embraces more avant-garde and lo-fi sensibilities, from which the genre emerged. These digital tools, loosely and connected with cassette culture, enabled artists to create in more informal settings. Anthony Carew (2017) suggests that the term 'lo-fi' is misleading, implying 'warm' and 'punchy'; instead, he advocates 'sounds like it's recorded onto a broken answering-machine'.

If we examine the impact of digital production workflows on the creative process while working 'in the box', the production of popular music involves a continual 'dialogue with the past' (Lipsitz, 1990), not only in how artists use and combine elements of previous musical styles but in the way the production practices themselves contain residues of previous 'modes' of producing and composing popular music (Negus, 1992, p. 89). For some, there is a fundamental need to break out of the box. The workflow within the DAW causes one to develop habits in terms of creativity: 'limitations will often inspire creativity' (Shull, 2018). Within this generational shift in production platforms and techniques, a subculture has emerged, embracing more analogue technology to step out of the pre-defined DAW workflow to enhance creativity and sonic aesthetics. Moreover, the tactile feedback from simple tools such as four-track recorders up to high-end analogue mixing desks adds colour, musicality and sensory feedback to the process that can be lacking with digital equipment, even with the inclusion of DAW hardware controllers. The introduction of analogue's limitations within workflow helps push some creators to find new ways around challenges, leading to further unexpected moments of inspiration. For example, being unable to undo recordings quickly forces the creator to justify the individual components of creating a song and the performance process therein.

A further consequence of the rise of the independent 'recording class' (Walzer, 2016) is the question of what exactly constitutes a professionally produced record for release. Hip hop utilises

many recording sources, which come together within the production process. Klein, Meier and Powers (2017, p. 7) note that while

> record contracts (past and present) often stipulate that artists deliver 'commercially satisfactory' recordings, a process that may involve label input and involvement, unsigned artists are now in a position to decide what might constitute an artistically and/or commercially satisfactory recording (2017, p. 7).

This questions the validity of such a clause, with the onset of many new techniques and practices that could be viewed as commercially unsatisfactory.

Collaboration

One aspect of the recording process that is yet to establish itself as a norm within the recording industry, or to be integrated into the major DAW platforms, is remote recording. While it has been facilitated for decades in the form of dedicated ISDN lines providing a platform for layering individual tracks, like much of the technology of the analogue era this proved to be too expensive for the home studio. With the advent of high-speed internet connections and mobile broadband, coupled with improved audio compression codecs, remote recording has become much more efficient. However, it is also now cost-effective for the home studio. While speed and efficiency have resulted in companies such as Source Elements providing real-time tracking solutions worldwide, there is a delay to the process; founder Rebekah Wilson states that, 'It takes about 100 milliseconds for internet data to get from the UK to New York and back. Once you add encoding and software latency, the round-trip time rises to 200 milliseconds on a good connection.' Wilson goes on to explain, 'That's just way too high for musicians to be able to play in sync together remotely' (Wilson, quoted in Wall, 2014, para. 26).

Platforms such as Kompoz and Melosity have been created solely with the idea of networked collaboration in mind. Kompoz is effectively a forum and file-sharing platform for artists looking to collaborate. At the same time, Melosity is an all-in-one platform, operating as a DAW within the Cloud, with artists able to share compositional elements without the need for file transfers. The demand for collaborative production platforms has increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–21:

> The music industry is attempting to adapt to the new normal imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic through a dramatic ramping up in its use of digital technologies for the production, performance, and consumption of music. (Frenneaux and Bennett, 2021, p. 9)

Unfortunately, this form of collaboration negates the fundamentals of spontaneous interactions within a shared space, and of non-verbal communication – which is often crucial to reading a situation collaboratively. Sharing and communication through a networked environment is, of course, nothing new; tools such as Dropbox have long provided the ability to share and comment on large files and shared folders, enabling cross-collaboration globally. However, O'Farrell speaks of the limitations of Dropbox when compared with Melosity:

> One of the drawbacks with Dropbox is that you have to use a separate platform if you want to communicate, whereas Melosity allows users to work on tracks and talk at the same time, which aids collaboration. (Taylor, 2016, para. 16)

Network culture

Media distribution is moving towards the creation of platforms offering tools that allow fluid interactions between the creator and the consumer. The blurring of boundaries between production and consumption within this new 'digital democracy' is highlighted by Prior, when speaking of the observed upsurge in productivity and innovation by the public at large in 2006 Time magazine:

> When Time Magazine made "you" the person of the year in 2006, it bucked the popular trend of identifying "great men" as sole influential agents of history, placing ordinary people, instead, at the center of an upsurge of productivity and innovation. "You" were the passionate producers of a range of cultural forms and media, from home videos to personal blogs, bedroom songs to podcasts. Harbingers of a "digital democracy," ordinary people are making culture with an energy and in quantities never seen before, Time suggested. (2010, p. 400)

Creators within the new digital landscape can bypass the challenges of distribution, reaching an audience directly. This comes with its challenges in terms of value, ownership and distance from

one's audience. This market access is also unencumbered by the geographic constraints of the pre-digital music industry:

> In an age of both globalization and digitalization, cultural products circulate widely and often instantaneously across borders. While licensing and promotional agreements between music makers and corporate partners routinely are territory-specific, musicians today may choose to license their music outside their home nation, potentially reaching international audiences and markets. (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2016, p. 12)

The reconfiguration of traditional relationships between creators, consumers and industry mediators impacts a creator's relationship with the industry and its public. Auslander (2015, p. 323) highlights the proximity artists maintain to their audience, based on their success and how this impacts the subsequent relationship:

> As a performer ascends to the pinnacle of Frith's pyramid, his or her relationship to the audience changes. Whereas musicians may initially be very close with their audiences, perhaps because they first encountered one another on a local music scene, the social distance between performer and audience increases as the performer's status rises, for a number of reasons. One is simply that stars appeal to a much larger and more dispersed audience than that of a local scene and cannot readily be socially available to such an audience.

In order to examine participatory culture's impact on the creator, it is important to assess the impact of the digital form within society, particularly in the context of late modern society's exposure to endless saturation of digital content. In his journal article, 'Digital Divisions and the Changing Cultures of the Music Industries', Negus (2015) explores the tangible side of music media – the fetishisation of the physical format, in particular vinyl. Furthermore, he examines digital distribution as it emerged at the forefront of consumption. Negus provides an insight into the mechanics of the industry before the disruption of the digital form, listing fundamental aesthetic principles with which creators and industry engage with their intended audiences, regardless of globalisation's impact upon the industry.

Network culture has been key to the disruption of consumption within the music industry, having moved forward confluently with technology. Varnelis (2020, para. 6) highlights the distinction between network and digital culture as follows:

> In contrast to digital culture, network culture makes information less the outcome of discrete processing units and more the result of the networked relations between them, of connections between people, between machines, and between people and machines.

Within digital culture and network culture, a new cultural logic has emerged from a post-postmodernism movement, which has had a profound impact on the creator's relationship with their work. Irvine (2010, para. 6) describes this shift from postmodernism to post-postmodernism:

> From this more recent perspective, living in remixed hybridity is thus obligatory, not a choice, since it is the foundation for participating in a living, networked, globally-connected culture.

Context is key to an artist building a connection with their audience, a connection generated through social media engagement, personality, visual and sonic aesthetics, and an interesting backstory. This drives people to browse social media accounts, look for live shows and engage with new releases. Franjić notes that advantage is given to a younger generation whose understanding of the nuances within the creative exchange – not only as an artist, but also as the auteur of a vision – connects with their audience:

> The most influential artists of nowadays have set a high standard – in the digital age, a musician is a curator as much as a maker, an actor as much as a storyteller. In effect, today's musicians, as public figures, are also performance artists. (Franjić, 2016, para. 6)

Frith speaks of the mediation between audience, artist and industry with the term 'genre world' whereby the industry generates marketing processes in response to this complex interplay:

> A new 'genre world'...is first constructed and then articulated through a complex interplay of musicians, listeners, and mediating ideologues, and this process is much more confused than the marketing process that follows, as the wider industry begins to

> make sense of the new sounds and markets and to exploit both genre worlds and genre discourses in the orderly routines of mass marketing. (1996, p. 88)

Further to this, the metaphorical idea of a 'stage' that can be entered and exited feels further from view than in decades past, with always-on connectivity, audience and industry expectations driving eyes towards an artist's every interaction: 'everything an artist does or does not do now plays into the reception of their music' (Franjić, 2016, para. 5). Perhaps one reason why context and access are becoming such important pillars within the deepening relationship between artist and audience is the loss of visual and tactile information associated with physical records. This loss, as Sexton (2009, p. 99) writes, 'is compensated by music's increased connection to other visual formats such as music videos and web-based data flows'. Social media platforms have given artists and independent labels the tools to develop disruptive strategies through which to bypass the more traditional linear supply chains dominated by major record labels, 'The digital age has blurred the lines between music and its promotion and presentation' (Franjić, 2016, para. 1). As noted by Klein et al. these social media platforms are not free from market conditions and still favour those with the resources of a major record label behind them, 'many of the social media platforms used by musicians benefit from monopolistic market conditions and tend to be dominated by major label artists, making it difficult for smaller acts to break in' (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2016, p. 13)

2.4 DIY ethics becoming more mainstream

While DIY has previously been associated with more independent artists, there has been a movement towards a more DIY approach for artists within the record industry, partly due to shrinking budgets and advances of independent and major record labels due to the decline of physical record sales, which places more pressure on them to adopt broader responsibilities for their careers as well as a diminishing of label support in order to supplement such roles, forgoing their more 'specialized division of labor' (Hracs, Seman and Virani, 2016, p. 5).

It is now more common than ever for artists to adopt roles that would otherwise have been allocated to promoters, agents and managers. This ubiquity of DIY ethos has extended into roles for more major label artists as well:

> Popular musicians perform many social roles, which can include those of artist, crafts-person, business person, social commentator, political advocate, celebrity, star, commodity, and many others. The question of which roles a particular artist embraces and from which she distances herself is partly driven by genre and historical context. (Auslander, 2015, p. 326)

DIY culture within music is fundamental to understanding networked participatory cultures, which draw from punk's DIY youth message, the emergence of digital technology in the mid-1990s and digital culture. Bennett (2018) explores DIY culture within the context of its socio-economic and anti-hegemonic roots, now being appropriated in a more entrepreneurial footing in our post-industrial world. He maintains that 'the attempt to maintain a clear-cut distinction, at both a conceptual and a practical level, between DIY and more mainstream cultural production is becoming increasingly problematic as the lines between these two fields of practice appear to blur' (Bennett 2018, p. 11). Attali (1977, p.135) asserts that the distinction between consumption and production will continue to become less evident with the role of music as a non-commercial entity:

> The activity is entirely localized, made by a small community for that community. There is no clear distinction between consumption and production. In Brueghel's painting, composing is symbolized by the ring dance. Setting themselves apart from everyone else, the dancers make their own music for their own pleasurable activity. This non-commercial music prophecies a post-capitalistic future.

This is also echoed by Strachan within the context of digital disruption and the processes of popular music:

> The lines between consumption, production and performance have become progressively more blurred, leading to a whole generation of practitioners whose roles are less easily placed within stratified divisions of labour that traditionally characterized the creative process of popular music throughout the twentieth century (2017, p. 7)

To contextualise DIY practices within the context of the new music industry, in certain respects it might be instructive to view an artist's career under the lens of the start-up model, underlining

the greater financial risk that exists within the new music industry. The importance of a minimal viable product (MVP) (Ries, 2012, p. 93; Robinson, 2001) is fundamental to developing a strategy as an artist when approaching an independent release strategy. The capital spent by artists to gain market exposure in the early stages of their careers must be carefully managed and effectively deployed. It is important to understand that any initial risk capital will likely give very little return:

> For example, in considering attempts by Australian bands to gain an audience by attending and disseminating their product at the leading international music festival and conference 'South by South West' (SXSW) in Austin, Texas, USA, Tom Harris (Founder of White Sky Music, a specialist music business management and bookkeeping company) warned that Australian artists potentially 'waste' significant amounts of money because it is difficult to stand out in such a competitive environment. Such mismanagement of funds also happens because some artists wait until they have a fully developed product before releasing it, and therefore confuse market exploitation with market-building. In this context, there is often no pre-existing market to exploit because it has not, as yet, been built. (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 39)

This careful deployment of funds means it is even more crucial for artists to be aware of economics and effective and novel means of engagement with their potential audience through high-quality media and an aggregate of content for any release. As a brand, artists proactively demarcate and promote themselves through constructs in which their brand exists utilising cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and subcultural capital (Thornton, 1995). When viewed in terms of artists as brands, participatory practices are a way for artists to utilise their audience as a source of ongoing exposure without the need for capital investment.

Within the context of autonomy and financing creative ventures independently, crowdfunding is a relatively new means of obtaining funding for artistic endeavours and part of a broader backdrop of disruption to the market for cultural commodities brought about by the digital age and the rise of online collaboration and content production. Galuszka and Brzozowska (2016, p. 13) highlight the democratising potential of crowdfunding in the context of independent media when contrasted to more traditional methods of production financing:

> The dissimilarity between crowdfunding and the traditional methods of financing the production of cultural goods suggests the potentially democratic character of the former, which allows it to be situated, from the perspective of media studies, closer to the interpretative areas of independent media and associated with the democratization of the media.

If we look at crowdfunding from the perspective of DIY and independent ideology, crowdfunding does not exhibit the radicalism associated with the desire of independence, as stated by Galuszka and Brzozowska (2016, p. 13): 'on the contrary, artists who take advantage of crowdfunding underline their connection to the existing production system and their willingness to participate in the main circulation of cultural goods'.

An extension of DIY ethics is the impact of perceived authenticity. As a term this can be construed as an essentialist concept, however, when one considers the history of contemporary music throughout the previous century, it's clear that authenticity is important not just for artists but also for consumers and industry. This is contextualised by Auslander in relation to Rock audiences:

> Taken on its own terms, rock authenticity is an essentialist concept, in the sense that rock fans treat authenticity as an essence that is either present or absent in the music itself, and they may well debate particular musical works in those terms. (1999, p. 90)

Wiseman-Trowse demonstrates the importance of perceived authenticity to artists and audiences alike, despite the fact that its effect often contrasts with commercial success:

> At the level of reception particularly, authenticity seems to be a mutable value often at odds with the commercial nature of the production and distribution of musical texts, a network of meaning that seems to exist outside of the artefact itself in its more tangible forms (2008, p. 32)

The function of authenticity in terms of popular and independent music is subjective and provides a compelling insight, with the articulation of which in Rock music often being historically linked to class identity (WisemanTrowse, 2008). If we examine authenticity as an approach of an artist in terms of autonomy and how that contributes to the construction of their

identity, there is a role that audiences play within the age of big data and the circular mediation between artist, audience and industry. Morrow speaks of this influence on autonomy:

> Through this process, artist management-related decisions, initially at least, become less subjective or 'autonomous' and more driven by audience small data. In this way, circular career progression potentially undermines the notion of the 'liberal artist' (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008); in this paradigm the artist is potentially not as free to self-express because they are responding to audience data during the process of creating their work (2019, p. 67)

While the relationship between artist, audience, and industry is not new, how artists utilise big data and respond to disruptions in creative industries has changed. This has led to an increase in the use of DIY ethics and entrepreneurship and a shift in perceptions of autonomy and authenticity.

2.5 Industry

As previously noted, this loss of control from labels as studio gatekeepers can be traced back to the disruption introduced by the MP3, with the ease of networked distribution now available to consumers at large. This was due to the data reduction allowed by the MP3 compression format, allowing for much smaller file sizes to be disseminated on slower internet connections of the time. Key to the distribution of MP3s was Napster, a centralised peer-to-peer (P2P) file-transfer service, initially released in 1999, which came to prominence in the early 2000s, irreversibly disrupting both the value and consumption of music. Not only would this have significant implications for the consumer; it also forced the music industry to move towards digital distribution and subsequent streaming models to adapt to consumers' needs. As a result, a more democratised environment ensued with the financial fallout of this disruption and the lowering cost of entry for creatives.

This destabilisation of the market has inevitably impacted record labels, with Kusek (2005) noting that, 'as a result, the traditional form of physical distribution was slowly dwindling music sales as consumers welcomed the new era of digital distribution'. Reportedly, US artists received just 12 per cent of the revenues their music generated in 2017. This figure, although low,

nevertheless represents a significant improvement on the 7 per cent reported in 2000. The Performing Rights Society, which processes payments for songwriters and composers, says 90 per cent of the musical artists on their books earn less than £5000 a year. A report by Citigroup found that 'consumer outlays (concerts, subscriptions) are at all-time highs, returning to a peak after a decline from 2006–10' (Beaumont-Thomas, 2018, para. 2). This low percentage of revenue received by the musician differs from many other parts of the entertainment industry. It is due to the fact that 'the consumption of music is so fragmented across various platforms' (Beaumont-Thomas, 2018, para. 5). Much of the shortfall in music sales occurred between 2000 and 2009, due to the decline in physical sales. The increase in artist revenue is a result of the growth of subscription-based streaming services and the rise in the popularity of concerts: 'The share of revenue that flowed to the artists was on a modest downward trajectory until the artists began to tour more frequently. Now, it's on the upswing' (Beaumont-Thomas, 2018, para. 11).

Within the music industry, there does appear to be growth for creators: Steven Johnson examined data from the occupational employment statistics in the US, discovering that 'there were 45 percent more independent artists in 2014 than in 2001' (Johnson, quoted in Deiker, 2015, para. 11). Conversely, Robert Levine (2015, para. 9) argues that these statistics may not be indicative of income. He instead focuses on 'whether creators can sell their work in a fair and functioning market that will reward them according to the demand for their work'. This growth in potential income for creators could also be bolstered by introducing the gig economy and a more portfolio career approach taken by artists. However, this type of subcontracted employment presents financial challenges, as benefits such as superannuation and paid leave are often missing.

Nevertheless, Baym (2018, p. 7) states that this kind of work balance is well suited to the musician: 'The gig economy prizes many of the qualities that enduring artists have. They're flexible, mobile, can take on a wide range of tasks, and they're used to working in teams assembled for short-term projects.' Tarrasi (2017, p. 9) notes the challenge of creators choosing to work in the creative labour sector, with a lack of stability and challenging work conditions (see also Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010, 2011; McRobbie, 2002):

> As the literature on creative labour suggests, the pleasures of working in the creative sector, and the autonomy and flexibility this affords, is typically offset by

> hard working conditions, the pressure of precarious livelihoods and with forms of self-exploitation.

Arditi (2014) argues that, rather than undermining major record labels, the disruption in cost and diminished workforce requirements of 'digital downsizing' are confluent with the interests of the record industry; they can increase profits by eliminating labour. As a result of this downsizing, the role of the producer has changed, with the segmented nature of jobs within production and development of the artist no longer feasible due to budgetary constraints. Producers can be responsible for roles traditionally viewed as A&R, as Negus (1992, p. 38) states: '[A&R] staff are formally responsible for acquiring artists, and have usually been described as 'talent spotters' – continually engaged in seeking new acts and material', both finding talent and developing – whether this is coaching, writing or aesthetic input, right through to album release. Negus (1992, p. 63) speaks of the importance of A&R and marketing relationships within traditional label structures:

> The relationship between artist and repertoire and marketing is at the core of the music business. The work of these departments and the relationship between them decisively shapes the way in which the sounds and images of pop are put together. It is the meeting point of a number of tensions which can be found refracted throughout the industry, and represents a wider set of orientations and practices than formal departmental categories imply.

The movement from physical to digital media paved the way for a third wave in disruption as audiences had already been acclimatised to the digital environment, where streaming or renting music felt like a natural progression. While Spotify has been the protagonist to the new distribution model of music, Apple has made steps such as the acquisition of Beats Music as an attempt to move confluently with audience demand. Until recently, Spotify has struggled to turn its business model into a potential moon-shot, with an operating loss of US$461 million on revenue of US$5 billion in 2017. However, as of the third quarter of 2019, through cutbacks and lower-cost plans, it has managed to turn over an operating profit of US$60 million. Many of the problems that caused streaming services to struggle as a singular portal for media consumption have abated, with a growing user base identifying this as a service rather than a product.

Consumers have become a greater force in the balance of power when deciding how music is distributed, voting with their choice of streaming services and moving away from one-way modes of distribution to a proliferation of platforms and services, as Gunderson (2004, para. 10) explains:

> One could say that consumers have taken over the distribution of musical goods and services to the detriment of those who have heretofore controlled the means of musical production. The near-instantaneous, viral information replication on a global network renders moot the legal formalities of trademark and copyright. The traditional radio station, with its fixed formats and mind-numbingly repetitive playlists, has been effectively displaced by technologies that allow music fans to specify what they want to hear and when they want to hear it. Radio and online broadcasting remain useful avenues for discovering new artists, but control over the music is no longer contingent upon the exchange of cash. In the age of digital communism, a song's exchange value evaporates as soon as that song hits the network.

Personalisation

As the music industry has moved towards a more tailored consumer experience, personalisation (more broadly known as customisation, tailoring services to accommodate the individual) has emerged as an asset in retaining audience attention. An example of this is Spotify's 'discovery' platform: 'Spotify's personalised, access-based model drives significantly higher retention rates compared to other music streaming services after four quarters' (Hinsen, 2018, para. 17). This level of personalisation provides a unique experience for each user. However, it also has negative implications: 'The big concern about personalisation is that it will cause users to retreat into comfortable enclaves, which will have the effect of narrowing their horizons' (Webster, 2016, p. 89).

Spotify's role in automated, curated content is to create an algorithm based upon the subscriber's listening choices: 'Spotify never intentionally seeds the playlists with particular songs, despite repeated requests from artists and their labels' (Pasick, 2015, para. 28). Their perceived value is within these algorithms. Analytics from platforms such as Spotify can prove invaluable to artists and labels in terms of understanding audience demographics, listening patterns and geography, thus enabling targeted marketing and touring. This data can be used to further the connection between fan and artist:

> In a way, social media can be thought of as analogous to the small musical scenes of the 20th century, like New York City's CBGB or Seattle's Sub Pop scene. In Facebook groups or on Twitter lists, some dedicated and like-minded fans are talking about the music they enjoy – and record companies want to listen. They're able to follow how the 'next big thing' is being voraciously discussed within a growing and devoted circle of fans. (Moon, 2017, para. 25)

Streaming platforms challenge our fundamental understanding of genre, with playlisting aggregating songs for situations, mood and context. Moving from genre- or artist-specific content towards context and situational playlists can be crucial to Spotify when building playlist data and personal information management. Malone's two classification methods are files and piles, where Spotify would fit into the latter, storing data away from the facilitating device. We have expanded from genre to music as a verb, tied to activities, moods and situations; there is no scarcity of entertainment and no access to content:

> For many people, music is just for mood, something to work, exercise or have sex to – situations that Spotify usefully caters to with playlists such as Productive Morning, Extreme Metal Workout and 90s Baby Makers. (Beaumont-Thomas, Snapes, 2018 para. 5)

Consumption modalities

The change in media consumption is not solely tied to the music industry. While somewhat unintentional, the nature of platform libraries for users to access has had a drastic impact on behaviour, with much more emphasis on the current and less on the archive: 'what got released today, what you can binge on the weekend' (Moran, 2019, para. 6). Bearing this in mind, there is an increasing awareness of a need to make the best use of legacy content:

> The film canon, film history, is constantly being rewritten; what's a classic film and what needs to be rewatched from 60 years ago is always being decided, and I think we lose track of that with streaming … [The conversation] shouldn't just be about the new, fresh, pretty, shiny thing. (Moran, 2019, para. 7)

While forms of physical media have undergone something of a resurgence within the music industry, this has not been echoed in the film industry:

> We've always had collectors who want hard copies; we get elderly people who don't stream, don't download, don't trust the internet … But streaming pretty much has put the boot in. (Moran, 2019, para. 10)

The live music industry has also seen a resurgence in recent years, which has mitigated some decline in record sales.

Platforms

For the time being, Spotify remains a dominant force within the new music industry. However, companies such as YouTube, Apple Music and Amazon Music hold the advantage of being insulated from an initial lack of operating profit due to being owned by larger parent companies. Another unfortunate aspect of the dominance of Spotify as a gatekeeper platform of music distribution and consumption is that such a monopoly does away with more niche and local models. Moreover, it begs the question of how we see the value proposition of music itself. What does seem compelling is that to turn the tables on Spotify, more creative and disruptive ways of looking at production and consumption must occur. Spotify has announced a new feature that allows artists to upload directly to their platform for free, effectively cutting out the distribution process of a label or third party such as Tunecore. While the ability to upload music directly and distribute it is not new, the fact that Spotify has made the process accessible is very important, with artists also retaining their full publishing rights. This appears to be aimed at enticing creators towards the platform instead of other platforms such as Apple Music or Tidal. Alongside this, artists have the advantage of submitting upcoming releases for editorial review on playlists, which significantly impacts the success of independent artists' releases. When combined with YouTube, the total share of music consumption is 46 per cent, which means that artists can upload music to a vast audience at no cost.

How has Spotify impacted 'top tier' artists? CEO Daniel Ek states that these artists 'grew from 16,000 in 2015 to 22,000 in 2017' (Hogan, 2019, para. 21). In addition, with the launch of Spotify's playlist submission tool, it is clear that Spotify is taking steps to expose lesser-known artists to a broader audience through its editorial playlisting. Artists such as JPEGMAFIA fit

succinctly into this new music industry model, with ‘more than 700,000 monthly listeners on Spotify’ (Hogan, 2019, para. 25), accompanied by the fact that he is solely responsible for songwriting and production; his income will be considerable when combined with touring and merchandising revenue.

One result of the movement of distribution towards a streaming format is that the age of the album has slowly been receding as a standard; this movement towards shorter formats has primarily been dictated as a response to consumption. Streaming platforms introduce a new level of complexity in terms of chart success. More recently, artists and their respective labels have been using release strategies that specifically aim to manipulate the playlist algorithms and charts for greater potential success. Regarding digital sales, *Billboard* reports that an artist can achieve an album-equivalent sale by dividing the sale of that album between listeners, ‘if one fan buys the first five songs, another fan purchases three random tunes they love from that same record, and two other casual listeners only snap up the lead single, those sales all come together to equal one full equivalent album’ (McIntyre, 2017, para. 5). In terms of streaming, every 1500 plays of any title within an album will count as an album sale towards the cumulative total. From this standpoint, it is clear why established artists are motivated to release longer albums, with each song adding more chances of plays being counted towards the record’s chart success.

> All this indicates that the decentralising potential of the internet is not as strong or as immediate as some have argued. I am not arguing against the possibility that some decentralisation is occurring or will occur. The internet and digital music technologies are indeed having a significant and unprecedented effect on the social organisation of music circulation; however, whatever decentralisation is occurring is conditioned by class, ethnic and national disparities in access to technologies. Because access to technologies and the knowledge to use them most effectively are conditioned by existing socio-economic disparities, they tend to facilitate the reproduction of the multiple and overlapping centre-periphery relations (i.e. between classes, races, ethnicities, genders, nations, regions, neighbourhoods, etc.) that colour the music industry and its broader societal context. Those within the established (social, economic and geographical) centres of the music industry

> are best poised to capitalise on new opportunities facilitated by new technologies. (Azenha, 2006, para. 11)

Speaking of the hegemonic structure of the industry in the past, Gunderson asserts that artists such as Danger Mouse have proven to be a challenge to traditional power structures through transcendence of existing artefacts of creativity enabled by consumer-available tools:

> If Attali is correct that music acts as a harbinger of social change, then artists like Danger Mouse may be taken as cultural prophets. They preach a new economics: the communism of simulacra, the unrestricted sharing of digital copies without originals. This new economics deterritorialises the culture industry; it threatens all industries that have traditionally profited as the producers and gatekeepers of information. Whereas communist regimes in the previous century could not withstand the onslaught of cheap commodities from capitalist countries, today we find capitalist countries increasingly vulnerable to the world's data commies – Danger Mouse, Linus Torvald, Shawn Fanning, and all those who are dedicated to the free flow of information. (Gunderson, 2004, para. 12)

Patrick Wikström (2012) discusses three archetypes in the music industry distribution model: ownership, access, and context. Ownership consists of physical media such as CDs and records, a primary means of music consumption that dominated the last century. Access includes the rise of online subscription-based music services such as TiDal, Apple Music and Spotify. Context represents a deepening relationship with the listener and the media they consume, enabling audiences to 'do things with music' and becoming increasingly important. Wikström (2012, p. 7) argues that 'increasingly the economic value created from recorded music is based on context rather than on ownership. During this process, access-based services temporarily generate economic value, but such services are destined to eventually become commoditised.' Sam Potts, Head of Radio Promotions at Columbia Records UK, states, 'In many ways, genre has been replaced by context as playlists become a dominant format' (Robinson, 2016, para. 31). Part of the value of consumption within Spotify for some consumers is the ease with which they can access curated playlists: 'Just look at some of the top Spotify playlists: Your Coffee Break, Feel Good Friday, Songs to Sing in The Shower. It's a 24-hour service providing a soundtrack to every moment in your life' (Potts, quoted in Robinson, 2016, para. 31).

The implicit 'direct to fan' bias has been a significant transition for artists with the platformisation of media and the proliferation of social networks. This favoured artists with a keen understanding of their audiences and an ability to sell directly to them. Some of the formative artists of the Myspace era were Ani Difranco and the Arctic Monkeys, who demonstrated that success was seemingly possible without the backing of more traditional record labels (Martinez, 2020). The truth in the case of Arcitic Monkeys and Clap Your Hands Say Yeah was more convoluted due to their embedded industry connections from the onset, as Strachan explains:

> Both acts were actually launched through concerted web-based campaigns to raise their profiles and build a fanbase. Both had management teams who had strong major label connections: Clap Your Hands Say Yeah manager Nick Stern is a senior PR at Atlantic (Waners), while their publicity was handled by Ken Weinstein, head of the independent Big Hassle Media, who was central in the success of acts such as The Strokes and Kings of Leon (Strachan, 2007, p. 259)

Much of the perceived value in the music creator-to-consumer interaction is in the artist's accessibility, whether through platforms or live concerts. New media have eroded the record's value and replaced it with diverse and fragmented revenue sources through which artists may earn money. This has inevitably impacted record labels, with Valencia (2008, p. 3) noting that, 'as a result, the traditional form of physical distribution was slowly dwindling music sales as consumers welcomed the new era of digital distribution'.

Charting the beginning of platform disruption in terms of the artist-to-audience interaction, Myspace, established in 2003, introduced a new, independent and interactive platform whereby artists could communicate independently of existing traditional infrastructure. It was a seminal moment in the foundations of reciprocity and participatory digital exchange between artists and their audiences, operating as a content platform and social media network. However, while Myspace was soon to be eclipsed by Facebook as a dominant portal for artists to share information and music, it failed to meet any meaningful standards as a platform for artists until the arrival of SoundCloud, a Berlin-based company, in 2008 (Parham, 2017).

There has been a radical shift in media perceptions of music as a commodity, with its distribution, ownership and consumption being challenged by tech platforms and infrastructure.

Platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music have undoubtedly instigated the second wave of disruption to the music industry, with permanent digital downloads being the first, fuelled by the rise of Apple's iTunes Music Store. This movement from physical to digital paved the way for this third wave of disruption as audiences had already been acclimatised to the digital environment, where streaming or renting music felt like a natural progression. While Spotify has been the protagonist in the new distribution model of music, Apple has also taken steps such as the acquisition of Beats Music in an attempt to move confluent with audience demand. Until recently, Spotify has struggled to successfully monetise its platform, with an 'operating loss of US$461 m[illion] on a revenue of $5 billion' (Tramount, 2018) in 2017; however, as of the third quarter of 2019, through cutbacks and lower-cost plans, it has managed to turn an operating profit of US$60 million. Further to this, many of the problems that caused streaming services to struggle as a singular portal for media consumption have abated, with a growing user base identifying this as a service rather than a product.

The innovative and disruptive movement created by tech companies is destabilising and adds value back to major record labels and artists. However, with these new business models come new rules of play; there are no predefined expectations of industry behaviour imposed upon these companies, each of which has its own separate culture. This could become problematic for creators, with success being tied to one company's platform, as seen in the case of YouTube recently. In addition, a reliance on algorithms and rules within a company can set some artists up for failure.

Quasi-platforms

Soundcloud and Bandcamp have become synonymous with facilitating the promotion of and digital distribution for independent artists. They specifically offer artists a space to not only host but, in Bandcamp's case, also sell their music directly to fans for a price set at the artist's discretion. With this being the case, a large percentage of Soundcloud artists have developed a more mixtape-based approach, with the ease of dissemination among their intended audience assisting as a vital resource in promotion. As an entry point for artists, Bandcamp offers an essential tool for grassroots-level artists. Bandcamp is a perfect example of the democratisation of access for independent artists looking to reach an audience and to commoditise their work: 'The decline in production costs, coupled with the virtually zero marginal cost of online

distribution, dramatically lowered barriers to entry, so that every artist can, in effect, create his or her own record company' (DiMaggio, 2015, para. 44).

In some ways, Soundcloud has maintained the reciprocity of platforms past, such as Myspace, as other platforms such as Spotify have formalised the consumption and exchange of music. The convergence of demos with independent and major label artists parallels a similar sense of discovery once found in the deluge of 'pirate' websites and forums. Soundcloud's asset is uploaded content, provided by its 'core creators', yet it does not hold the same power as major labels when approaching copyright infringement. This leaves Soundcloud in a precarious position, with very little in terms of company assets. As Soundcloud attempts to grow as a community and P2P music-based network, there are problems with its democratic ethos when commoditising user-generated content: 'Soundcloud's rhetoric of sharing and connecting through music remains embedded in the political economy and culture of digital networks under capitalism, and various contradictions result from this' (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 5).

Until 2014, Soundcloud's revenue relied on fees charged to music providers. This proved to be a fraction of potential earnings derived from Spotify's user subscription-based model, which Soundcloud later adopted in 2016. This effort to compete on equal terms with other music streaming proved to be unsuccessful; in 2017, Soundcloud massively downscaled and pivoted towards its producer and artist-based services to 'reposition itself as a creator-first community' (Deahl and Patel, 2018). SoundCloud provides an essential outlet as a consumer-oriented streaming service, which major labels can see as an alternative to the oligopoly created by another streaming service. However, there does seem to be a limit to Soundcloud adoption by the public at large. At the same time as its influence has great cultural reach, its hopes of broader democratisation of production and consumption have yet to be realised:

> Soundcloud, then, is a remarkable cultural phenomenon, but its struggles suggest limits to hopes that a 'producer-orientated' platform of this kind might be the basis of any significant democratisation of musical production and consumption. (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 5)

Bandcamp separates itself from other platforms in that it has not evolved in parallel with these. Moreover, it has become its unique ecosystem for artists and audiences: 'Bandcamp might justifiably be understood as an "alternative" to the platformisation of culture' (Hesmondhalgh,

Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 9). The core driver of Bandcamp's business model has remained a direct-to-fan digital storefront, which has been profitable since 2012. There have been a few additions, such as introducing a mobile app, Bandcamp Pro and the inclusion of a streaming service. While Bandcamp certainly has not proved itself to be the tech 'unicorn' that some of its peers have, there must be an acknowledgement of the steady and profitable growth of its somewhat static distribution service, totalling around US$7 million per month. Bandcamp's incongruence in terms of progression with other platforms has played to its strength. With a perception of consumption and sharing rather than a 'culture of connectivity', its success lies in indifference – although, to clarify, Bandcamp's artist pages are 'discrete entities'. This 'lack of connectivity' speaks well to its core user-base of more 'indie music practitioners':

> It feels like when you go on a Bandcamp page, you can concentrate on what it is more. It it's a release, an album or EP or whatever, it feels more conceptually there, in the closest way possible I think to a physical release. (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 7).

Prosumption and participatory exchange on platforms

One extension of 'quasi-platforms' is the more tacit feedback between artist and audience. The music industry is adapting to prosumption through new business models (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010). For example, the independent record label Noon Pacific is built and funded by subscribers through Patreon, a membership tool for artists and producers, allowing direct funding through audiences. Noon Pacific was launched by Dinnison in 2012 with three subscribers and by 2018 amassed over 100,000 weekly listeners, this was achieved by leveraging a community of new music enthusiasts to expand from a monthly mixtape into an active network of contributors that discover new artists and sponsor their music. (Seitz, 2018) Artists are signed on a song-by-song basis, with subscribers incentivised to help in selecting songs that the label should release: 'If your submission is chosen, you keep 1% of the song's total earnings' (Dinnison, 2016). It claims to be the first-ever community-built and funded record label:

> We felt like that's what listening habits are going towards; most people aren't listening to entire albums these days, they like a couple songs and usually discover them through curators or through playlists. We're really focused on signing just one

> song that we really believe in, trying to promote it, distribute it in whatever ways we can and really leverage the technology. (Dinnison, 2016, para. 5)

This reconfiguration of a traditionally industry-led process highlights Jenkins' previously mentioned notion of the democratisation of media within a networked environment. Harris views the disruption of digital media within the recording sector of the music industry as a potential necessity for its continued evolution:

> The recorded music industry was the most dominant and prosperous sector of the music business during the 20th century. It helped music affirm its position as an art form both with mass appeal, and political resonance. But the industrial mindset is not sufficient to meet the challenges of the new age. The darkening digital cloud of the Internet may indeed kill the music industry. But maybe that's what music needs; for its art and for its business. (Harris, n.d., p. 22)

New tech companies do not adhere to the traditional formulas and procedures of the record industry of the past. Elements of the process are deconstructed, and power dynamics are in flux. If artists expect the same structure and rules of business set up by tech companies, this could be setting them up for failure. While this curation, promotion and dissemination of music by consumers constitutes a disruptive step towards the democratisation of music, Burkner and Lange explain that its fundamentals have always been in place:

> The marketplace for music has long relied on a range of curators to find, evaluate, promote and sell the oversupply of musical talent and music-related goods and services. During the corporate era (1978–1998), major record labels deployed talent scouts (A&R) to discover and 'sign' promising talent (Hracs, 2015). Because of their scale, capital and vertically integrated systems, the labels also strongly influenced what music was produced, promoted and sold to consumers (Lange and Burkner, 2013; Hracs, 2012). As the supply of recorded music increased, music journalists, radio DJs, and record store clerks also emerged as influential sources of information and advice for consumers. (Jansson and Hracs 2018)

A point of interest with Noon Pacific is the 'built-in fanbase', the notion not just of a monetary investment but also a shared and collective responsibility for the success of the record label, the

artists and the singles. This deepening relationship between the artist, audience and label provides a fresh approach to the distribution and public relations (PR) of music today.

2.6 Audiences and participatory culture

> The period of decentralisation starting in the late 1910s was accompanied by a greater quantity and variety of available recordings. Around the early 1920s the primacy of ragtime music recording was displaced by a more varied repertoire of music. Catalogues of available music diversified with the proliferation of new recording companies, including the appearance of the first 'race' records. (Azenha, 2006, para. 22)

Until recently, traditional media institutions used centralised, one-way technologies. In terms of economic consumer engagement, traditional media tended to 'dominate phases in which marketers sought to forge perceptions in a broad population of consumers' (Doctoroff, 2015, p. 199). The phrase 'network culture' coined by Terranova (2004) has a multiplicity of ramifications for society referring to a social context whereby organisations and practices are shaped by networked connections connecting people. With this shift towards network culture, the participatory exchange between consumer and creator has superseded previous modes of distribution. Furthermore, the relationship between consumers and the media has evolved. Jenkins' exploration of participatory culture is particularly appropriate when examined within the context of the digital age: he states that 'a participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other' (Jenkins, 2015, p. 2). This highlights the democratisation of media within a networked environment, offering both opportunities (particularly for value creation) and challenges for the creator with the rise of prosumerism, given the new agency audiences have to shape the artist and determine their level of success. According to Leadbeater and Oakley (1999), the fact that the demarcation lines between consumption and production and between work and non-work tend to blur is one of the central ingredients of small-scale circuits of cultural production' (Tarrasi, 2017, p. 3).

Various scholars have written on the dynamics of participatory culture. Willis (2003, p. 392) defines it as 'an opposing concept to consumer culture – in other words, a culture in

which private individuals (the public) do not act as consumers only, but also as contributors or producers'. Jenkins (2017, p. 2) states that, 'A participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other.' When examining the fan's level of engagement with the creator, it is vital to assess the origins of an individual's shift from consumer to fandom: as Cavicchi writes, few studies have addressed this topic and what being a fan represents as an expression of the individual:

> Very few studies address the origins of an individual's fandom; for many scholars, 'fan' is a kind of consumer category into which someone simply falls or does not fall. Several studies, for instance, only deal with fans as the logical result of advertising or a 'star system' (e.g. Adorno 1990; Buxton 1990; Vermorel and Vermorel 1989; DeCordova 1991; Staiger 1991). In such studies, there is no 'becoming a fan'; rather, 'being a fan' simply appears as a mode of audience participation, part of a larger historical context of industrialisation or the rise of mass entertainment. Even in works about the psychology of fandom, most scholars often only vaguely refer to the development of an individual's fandom as a behavior that 'stems' or 'comes from' unavoidable 'contact' with media figures. As Jib Fowles (1992, p. 165) cryptically explains: We admit stars into the sancta sanctora of our minds to work on our emotions. (Cavicchi, 1998, p. 41)

Cavicchi also notes that the prevalence of fandom within the consumption of music audiences acts as an essential device for 'shaping personal and communal identity', with further studies also noting that this has a further impact on mood regulation, personal identity and relationships with others:

> Traditionally, there have been few formal studies conducted about the nature of music audiences, but recent studies in the sociology of music have suggested that fandom is far more pervasive in contemporary musical life than anyone ever suspected. For instance, Ruth Finnegan (1989) has pointed out the importance of people's devotion to certain musical 'worlds,' in which they play in or follow a local musical group or listen to a certain musical genre, as a way to shape personal and communal identity. Susan D. Crafts, Daniel Cavicchi, Charles Keil, and other researchers in the Music in Daily Life Project at the State University of New York

> at Buffalo (1993) likewise have outlined ordinary people's deep and lasting attachments to various musical stars and genres, ranging from Lawrence Welk to punk, which they use to manage their emotions, sense of self, and social relationships with others. (Cavicchi, 1998, p. 4)

Networked consumption offers the affordance of being able to modify and alter original content. This new paradigm offers a tantalising opportunity for some to at least participate creatively in the work of other artists. How does this impact the value of art itself? 'In cyberspace people collect lists rather than objects' (McCourt, 2005, p. 211). The evolution from mixtapes to the curation of playlists that we see online today has been described by Kibby (2009) as a form of self-expression, meeting this demand mentioned by McCourt. This desire of people to collect, consume and propagate in their own way has been reflected by the tools given to them within streaming platforms today. Of course, this does not come without cost; however, this information is valuable to services that collect data on their user base:

> The strategy of offering fans simulations of intimacy while simultaneously maintaining social distance persists in the realm of popular music today where it is enabled by social media. Lady Gaga, for instance, created a series of weekly videos called Transmission Gagavision distributed on a number of websites from late June 2008 through the end of March 2009. (Auslander, 2015, p. 325)

We must also examine the distinction between more active and passive audiences, the environments in which audiences demonstrate these behaviours and how this impacts the artist, leading to participatory exchange. This participatory exchange between consumption and production empowers audiences with agency, but in what ways is this positive and negative for artists and industry? Further, how are audiences using this participatory exchange when building community and relationships? This is a powerful tool for platforms and industry to bolster campaigns and the attention economy passively. While recommended playlisting and 'Discover Weekly' innovations within platforms have done much to democratise discovery, how has this, in turn, impacted consumers' self-image? Previously there was no way of targeting advertising and curation for anything other than the masses; now, we can enclave individuals through algorithmic individuation: 'there are in fact no individuals, there are only ways of seeing individuals' (Prey, 2017, p. 119).

Rather than viewing the individual as a data entity, many scholars have argued that we are deconstructed into our ‘data shadow’ (Andrejevic, 2013). In effect, we become data through our mediation with technology. Inevitably there will be disparities between our data constructs and our true selves. This gap regularly becomes apparent in the deployment of personalisation used by platforms. In order to gain a closer understanding of the individual listener, there is significant development into context-sensitive algorithms (Pichl and Zangerle, 2015). This is achieved by aggregating many data points from the user, such as location, time, motion and even nearby contacts. With the proliferation of smartphones and wearable devices, much of this data can be fed into contextual algorithms providing a more detailed indication of our listening intent at any given time: ‘we figure music to be a personal expression of our individuality, to be inherently pleasurable and therefore beyond rational measurement’ (Prior, 2013, p. 181).

The process of getting to know one’s audience is not just advantageous in terms of providing a bespoke experience for each listener, but also for targeted advertising and promotion. This data can flow both ways, with one’s musical identity able to ‘predict age, gender and lifestyle interests’ (The Echo Nest, 2017). Further to this, the data collection can go so far as to infer the ‘emotional and mental state of our listeners from what their favorite genres are’ (Suliga, 2017, para. 6). When viewed in context with Big Data, we can see that this level of personalisation becomes a powerful tool when shared between platforms. Prey (2017, para. 46), however, suggests – much like Webster (2016) – that this cycle of personalisation could prove to be troublesome in terms of audience consumption and subsequent creativity:

> From this perspective, in attempting to ‘know’ the individual media consumer, recommendation services are committing the cardinal sin of reification: reifying both the subject and the object of media consumption.

Jenkins, Ito and Boyd (2017) explore participatory culture’s effect on many aspects of today’s society within the context of civic engagement, politics and fandom. Importantly, it is clear that parallels can be drawn from Jenkins’ foundational ideas of participatory culture’s impact on youth culture and politics, including media and music consumption. Fundamentals of participatory exchange such as democratisation, value co-creation, networked culture and genres of engagement are explored. The idea of genres of engagement is insightful, examining the nuanced way participatory exchange is perceived by both creator and consumer, including the

fact that engagement no longer sits between poles of activity but instead blurs the boundaries through networked digital culture. Jenkins (2008, p. 247) views this convergence as a 'critical utopian' moment, which should not be distracted by its surrounding technology. His views on fan participation seem to stem from a place of fandom himself: 'if media content didn't fascinate us, there would be no desire to engage with it; but if it didn't frustrate us on some level, there would be no drive to rewrite or remake it'.

The term musicking (Small, 1999), which conceptualises music as a practice, seems to run confluently with platforms' data collection within social media and streaming. Small (1999, p. 2) asserts that music can be viewed as a 'verb', with the consumption being 'an encounter in which human beings relate to one another'. As a parallel to personalisation within platforms and music as a 'verb', Small observes that 'a musical performance is a ritual whose relationships mirror, and allow us to explore, the relationships of our world as we imagine them to ideally be' (1999, p. 8). Bennett (2005, p. 333) exemplifies this deep incorporation of music in consumers' everyday life through context:

> Popular music, then has become part of the urban soundscape (Bennett, 2005) to the extent that it is often simply taken for granted by those occupying public spaces. However, popular music is far from being merely a passive pleasure. The myriad contexts in which popular music is consumed is in part testimony to the huge impact that rock, punk, rap and various other genres of contemporary popular music have had on society.

The ritual of work, study, play and exercise is catered for through personalisation; this develops music into an infused part of our experience, a function. Speaking of the introduction of the Sony Walkman, Bennett (2005, p. 338) reinforces this idea of music evolving into a verb, incorporating itself within everyday activities:

> With the arrival of the Sony Walkman in 1981, the presence of music in public spaces was given a whole new dimension, the compactness of the Walkman allowing the listener to literally carry his/her musical world with them. Suddenly, the phenomenological experience of familiar surroundings – the shopping centre, the crowded city street, the subway, etc. – was radically altered, the listener's

> perception of these spaces being informed by the songs and music he/she chose to listen to.

Within this context, it is also important to assess what the practice of listening means to streaming services. The implication is attentiveness to the music; however, with the abundance of media as more of a soundtrack or wallpaper to our everyday lives, the term 'user' starts to become more appropriate. Bennett references Frith when viewing music's social functions as identity, mood and time management – assertions that echo Cavicchi's notion of the importance of fandom:

> At its most spectacular, popular music has contributed to the spread of alternative ideologies – about politics, gender, race, the environment, and so on. But it is not only in such spectacular contexts that musical affect is experienced. Even in relatively mundane contexts popular music matters in important ways. Certain songs may, for example, help people overcome bereavement, break ups in relationships, or generate memories of past experiences (DeNora, 2000). As Simon Frith observes, 'the social functions of popular music are in the creation of identity, in the management of feelings, in the management of time … [Popular music] is special … not necessarily with reference to other music, but to the rest of life (Frith, 1987, p. 144). (Bennett, 2005, p. 1)

Further to this, Cavicchi (1998, p. 135) asserts that the study of fandom and its social function can similarly be linked to a broader study of people and human behaviour, something which is intrinsically linked to a sense of self; they perhaps unknowingly display their musical identity and interaction therein as a mirror of themselves:

> Indeed, by studying fandom, I have, in many ways, been studying people and who they think they are. Fans talked to me frequently about using fandom to signify and think about their personal identity. For some people, the music was more like a mirror, enabling them to recognise themselves in either Springsteen or the characters in his songs. As Andrew Laurence explained, 'I think my fandom of Bruce's music basically boils down to one thing: it speaks to me. I identify with a

> lot of his characters' thoughts, ideas, and dreams. I put on a record and pieces of me come out' (interview, September 28, 1993).

With the introduction of many more modalities for creativity in the digital era, traditional aesthetics have been challenged, lowering the barrier to entry and democratising the process of creativity. This has led to the rise of 'produsage' – as mentioned previously, a term coined by Axel Bruns (2009) as an extension of Toffler's (1980) prosumption – meaning 'production by consumers', indicating a blurring of boundaries between passive consumption and a more collaborative, active production by the audience. Théberge (1997, p. 242) asserts that the potential of digital technology will essentially render the distinction between production and consumption as 'meaningless' and could be seen as another mechanism through which DIY emerges:

> A new kind of consumer practice now lies at the very heart of music production in the digital studio. This practice changes, in a fundamental way, the very nature of contemporary music-making. Such a development is certainly not without its positive effects, for it potentially opens the doors of creative activity in music to a wider range of individuals: 'What has become interesting is the idea that artists are people who specialise in judgement rather than skill. And this, of course, reopens the question of who can use that job description' (Brian Eno, Mix 16 [6], 1992: 30). Indeed, it could be argued that 'with the introduction of digital technologies and their attendant uses, the distinction between production and consumption has become increasingly blurred and, to a certain degree, meaningless.

Gunderson (2004, p. 2) reinforces the assertion by Attali that the diminishing division between producer and consumption represents the final 'composition' stage of musical development. Within this, the dissemination of tools, the democratisation of technology and minimal barrier of competency to entry creates an environment of universal accessibility:

> One is tempted to speculate that late capitalist society is on the cusp of the 'composition' stage of musical development, as described in Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Attali argues that music's social function has passed through three distinct stages: sacrifice (the assertion of control over

> violence), representation (the creation of socially meaningful works), and repetition (the reproduction and dissemination of music apart from social context). The fourth and final stage, 'composition,' is essentially utopian: the production of music by and for its own consumers. The traditional opposition of the active producer and passive consumer disappears in the age of composition. Although music production software remains far from universally accessible (most of the planet's population does not have easy access to a telephone, let alone a computer), the increasingly wide availability of powerful computers in advanced capitalist countries suggests a gradual democratisation of technology that does foster utopian impulses.

Kruger (2018) provides a compelling insight into the state of popular culture in terms of audience consumption, arguing against the notion of consumers transcending the role of consumption or at least perceiving themselves as artists through methods such as curation and instead critiques this externalisation of oneself as a 'collision of narcissism and voyeurism'. Beadle (1993, p. 234) asserts that the endless cycle of revisionist and reproductive pop culture, which is further supported by greater ubiquity of consumer tools, creates and embodies a new form of digestible commodity: '[Pop] like all culture, feeds on itself endlessly and having eaten itself, produces not waste but another dish for the paying customer.'

Kruger raises a concern that this performative online veneer causes a manifestation of the consumer's hopes and fears:

> There is a need for a closer investigation of how curators create and communicate values in the marketplace not only for themselves but for producers, consumers, specific products, platforms and spaces including shops, neighbourhoods and cities. Finally, beyond developing more robust conceptualisations of curation within specific contexts, a more complete picture may be produced by comparing and contrasting curation-related activities, processes, motivations, values and spatial dynamics across different industries and markets such as music, food, fashion, media and art. (Kruger, 2018)

Hofmann (quoted in Friedlander, 2016, para. 9) writes that, 'Fans don't want to only receive new music; they really want to create and interact with this music.' Auslander (2015, p. 325) states

that this interaction with fans is in some ways beneficial to an artist's career as a critical asset in their promotional arsenal:

> By tweeting (or seeming to tweet, since not all celebrities' tweets are actually composed by the celebrity) on a continuing basis, stars can keep fans apprised of the moment-by-moment details of their lives.

For some creators, the changes in consumer behaviour towards this more interactive model must be an uncomfortable deviation: not every creator has the skills or inclination to engage with their audience at the level and pace expected, nor do they wish to open their work up to various forms of collaborative engagement. However, there has been little research regarding the impact of produsage on the creator and on the creative process itself, something that will be addressed in this thesis.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided context by reviewing the 'old music industry', highlighting Negus (1992) and Frith's (1987) insights into the industry's mechanics before the disruption caused by platforms and networked culture. Additionally, it discussed the effect of production tools and methods on the industry, artists and audiences. We have witnessed an increase in the prevalence of produser and prosumer activity due to the democratisation of access to technologies and their ubiquity. The growing significance of Small's (1999) concept of music as a 'verb' was addressed, with genres of engagement associated with produser activity.

In terms of the effect on artists working in the new music industry, the chapter discussed the impact of digital tools and the consequent workflow of producers as a result of the trend towards 'in the box' production. The emergence of the 'bedroom producer' is one outgrowth of this process, with this term implying what constitutes a professional production and an inferred aesthetic, with many genres and sub-genres established by this mode of production space. Further upheaval is occurring as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a need for remote collaboration. With platforms such as Melosity and Kompoz seeming more relevant than ever, this chapter has examined the demand for collaborative production platforms. Finally, an examination of participatory culture and its implications for the artist–audience relationship was conducted in terms of artists – specifically, the abilities that successful artists use to build rapport with their audiences. The expansion of DIY ethics into the mainstream was discussed, as was the

growing ubiquity of artist demand for autonomy in engagement, promotion and production methods. While DIY practices are not new, they have grown in importance for artists in light of the new music industry and platform disruption.

The music industry's response to the disruption caused by digital formats was discussed. This disruption occurred along with Arditi's (2014) concept of 'digital downsizing', which affected various jobs, including those of producers in the music industry. Spotify has established itself as a significant disruptor in the delivery of music and its consumption, with the development of personalisation as a crucial asset in audience retention. Our perceptions of genre have shifted due to streaming services, with music often serving as a supplement and complement to a particular mood or activity. Additionally, the album format's significance has waned, and the charting process has become more complicated. The chapter examined the impacts of Soundcloud and Bandcamp as quasi-platforms on more independent artists, with the ease of market access a significant advantage for DIY producers.

Finally, a study of audiences and participatory culture demonstrated a shift away from centralised media organisations towards a more networked and collaborative environment in terms of consumer involvement. This collaborative exchange may take on more conventional forms, ranging from fandom to mixtape culture, remixing and social media engagement. This more participatory form of marketing and distribution may be disconcerting for many artists, despite the benefits of participation, market knowledge and connection.

3

Methodology

3.1 Methodological approach

Popular music ethnography

Ethnography often entails a protracted period of close observation and residency with a select number of people. This observational method was chosen to lead the research through data, offering a comprehensive overview of today's music industry, and allowing for the inclusion of artists' perspectives in areas where other kinds of analysis would not. As a working music producer in the music industry, insider research was a component to consider, as described later in this methodology, however access to a broad pool of participants representing a diverse cross section of the industry was one great advantage to this study. This form of enquiry is particularly suited to the study of popular music as stated by Cohen: 'popular music is something created, used and interpreted by different individuals and groups. It is human activity involving social relationships, identities and collective practices.' (1993, p. 127) As noted by Frith, historically insight into musicians' definition of social roles, choices and contradictions has been limited and while our understanding of such topics has advanced marginally, assumptions regarding popular music behaviours and processes continue to be established based on little empirical data (Cohen, 1993):

> Very little has been written about how commercial decisions are reached. We still don't know much about how musicians make their musical choices, how they define their social role, how they handle its contradictions (Frith, 1982, p. 9)

Cohen speaks of the more analysis-led examination of rock and popular music of the past and the necessity of social context especially when addressing its deconstruction within the framework of an ethnographic study:

> Much research on rock has been more influenced by linguistic, semiotic and musicological traditions than by the social sciences, and has relied upon textual sources and analysis. Tagg and Negus (1992) have noted that musicologists studying popular music still tend to ignore social context. Hence lyrical and musical texts may be

> deconstructed and their 'meaning' asserted, but the important question 'meaning for whom?' is often neglected. (1993, p. 126)

Within the context of popular music, ideally, active involvement in some of that participant's workflow and a significant focus on in-depth interviews with informants would provide a nuanced insight. As Cohen states, direct experience may expose and confront prejudice, therefore promoting more analytical thinking:

> Researchers who directly and intensely experience another culture can be made aware of their own biases, world views, values, aesthetics, categories and theories, and have them challenged, which can increase self-understanding. (1993, p. 133)

While 'participant observation' was considered, the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic rendered any such observation impossible. This was due to the continued travel restrictions, which hampered any ability to travel to their places of employment and the fact that the majority of the music industry was essentially shut down. One further conclusion was that this could potentially lead to bias due to direct artistic and collaborative involvement with peers, described by Kawulich (2015, para. 2) as a 'process enabling researchers to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities'. In-person observation would likely have yielded a plethora of data; however, once it became clear that this was impossible, the emphasis shifted to an unbiased environment for participant interviews. Additionally, each interview's duration and scope were extended to gain a deeper understanding, thereby generating more valuable data. In order to convincingly articulate the views expressed by interview candidates, it was deemed that interviews would have the most negligible bias. Within the context of popular music, as noted by Cohen, the goal of the ethnographic element of this study was to enhance self-awareness and call into question preconceived conceptions or erroneous assumptions:

> An ethnographic approach to the study of popular music, involving direct observation of people, their social networks, interactions and discourses, and participation in their day-to-day activities, rituals, rehearsals and performances, would encourage researchers to experience different relationships, views, values and aesthetics, or to view familiar contexts from an alternative perspective (1993, p. 135)

While ethnography is provides little direction without theory, theoretical models do not merely force themselves on field settings and data; rather, they give a framework for the researcher to work within while analysing the data. (Cohen, 1993) The ethnographic data of participants contributed in guiding and shaping the course of this research. This methodology allowed for an examination of the more particular to the more general, a 'bottom up' approach:

> This allows one to begin to develop theory in a way that provides much more evidence of the plausibility of different lines of analysis than is available to the armchair theorist or survey researcher. (Cohen, 1993, p. 132)

The chapters provide a great deal of background as a result of the participants' insight. This is partly due to the close observational proximity that one is allowed with the participant compared with other forms of analysis, as exemplified by Cohen:

> Ethnographic research can bring the researcher in 'the field' into contact with social reality in a way that no reading of secondary sources or 'armchair theorising' could ever accomplish. Most importantly, therefore, ethnography takes the form of a direct encounter, a shift from strictly theoretical formulations to a domain that is concrete and material. (1993, p. 132)

Video conferencing was used to conduct the interviews. While this was not the anticipated modality of engagement, the casual atmosphere aided the interviews and assisted in participant availability due to the ease with which one could organised an online meeting. For industry interviewees such as A&R, this was away from the participants' places of work, allowing for a more conversational approach while having the guidance of structured interview questions to follow. Interview audio was recorded digitally, subject to permission granted by willing participants. This suited the medium of video conferencing through which the interviews took place. While interviews were performed using a predetermined set of questions (see appendix), a conversational approach was used when it did not seem to have a significant influence on the informants' reports. This allowed for free-flowing interviews and for the researcher to develop rapport with the subject, while yet adhering to the pre-assigned questions. (Garbarski, Schaeffer and Dykema, 2016). Additionally, the more conversational approach allowed for more stimulating dialogue, which instilled greater confidence in the informants and resulted in a more comfortable interview setting.

Interview subjects for this study were spread throughout different areas of the industry to give a broad understanding of the impact of participatory culture and competencies developed by and expected of artists in the 'new music industry'. Examples and rationales for selecting interviewees were as follows:

1. management both in the United Kingdom and the United States, whose role is to both liaise with record labels and develop artists independently provided great insight into their own roles as well as expectations upon artists in the new music industry
2. UK publishers, who inform the co-writing and A&R aspects of the industry
3. record producers, provided compelling insight into the process and evolution of record production
4. independent record label owners, who applied their unique insight into what it means to run a record label in the new music industry, as well as what is expected of artists in the digital age
5. independent and signed artists, who provided great insight into their own experiences and competencies while interfacing with their audiences and industry.

Participants such as Flash, Barney and Tom assisted in providing a timely snapshot of a music industry perspective through their association with publishing, management and record labels respectively. In terms of an Artist perspective, Laurel, Scott, Dustin and Luke each had their own experience as independent acts with not only their talent, but clear competencies in autonomy and engagement being a lynchpin to their success. Ian's unique experience as a Grammy award winning engineer, producer and record label founder assisted in providing a broad perspective, particularly on what it means to be an artist to a record label owner in the new music industry. Alessandro's experience in PR and his momentum on TikTok provided a unique case study into leveraging success on one platform more broadly into success in other areas of his music career. A detailed list of individuals roles within the music industry has been included as an appendix.

Background information regarding potential interview candidates was obtained through secondary sources, such as social media, websites and relevant platforms. Bias from the informants was limited because the interviews were exclusively one-on-one events. The average interview length was 45 minutes; the length of interviews did not vary dramatically as the

interview format through online conferencing meant that the structure remained the same: professional and succinct. The transcribing of interviews took place after each interview. Due to the limited availability of some participants, the interviews were conducted over a one-year period. This allowed for a more in-depth investigation, as information gleaned from previous interviews could be used to inform more nuanced questioning when approaching the latter interview candidates.

Through an ethnographic approach, interviews were undertaken with 25 participants within key areas of the music industry, primarily based in London and Los Angeles, including artist management, independent and signed artists, publishing A&R, label management and record label employees. The geography of participants was largely dictated by my own personal connections with both locations. The aim was to understand the competencies artists have developed to facilitate their success in the digital age and what it means to be an artist within the music industry today. This approach was best suited to the nature of this study through the exploration of human experience (as discussed by Calhoun et al. 2002, Punch 1998 and others). As illustrated by Mason (2002, p. 4):

> Based on methods of analysis, explanation and argument building which involve understandings of complexity, detail and context. Qualitative research aims to produce rounded and contextual understandings on the basis of rich, nuanced and detailed data. There is more emphasis on 'holistic' forms of analysis and explanation in this sense, than on charting surface patterns, trends and correlations.

3.2 Data collection

Interviews

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured approach, consisting of prepared questions about each participant's experience within the music industry. The approach was 'to be seen as involving the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it' (Mason, 2002, p. 63). As an insider in the music industry, this was an acceptable approach to interviewing, since it allowed for more participation in discussion of relevant subjects, yielding additional insights. These prepared questions were used to guide the interview process. However, there was also scope for additional semi-structured discussion, allowing for more nuanced

insight; as Mason (2002, p. 7) states, 'qualitative research should produce explanations or arguments, rather than claiming to offer mere descriptions'. While interview questions were tailored to the role of an interview candidate within the music industry, an example of interview questions for artists is attached as an appendix to this thesis.

Approach to maintaining objectivity

Insider research

It is imperative to weigh the benefits and drawbacks of insider research. One of the study's benefits is my enthusiasm for the subject of artist–audience interaction; this passion motivated a large portion of the research. Additionally, it has aided in directing nuanced questions and gaining access to key interview candidates across a variety of industry disciplines. Regarding the advantages of insider research, Saidin and Yaacob (2016, p. 850) cite Bonner and Tolhurst:

> Bonner and Tolhurst (2002) believe that being an insider researcher gives three advantages to the research. First, an insider will be able to better understand an issue; second, he will not disrupt the flow of social interaction; and finally, he will be able to extract true data from the participants as he can relate well to them.

Additionally, my familiarity with the music industry's cultural framework facilitated my investigation while trying to understand the study issue. When discussing the benefits of insider research, Hodkinson (2006, p. 138) notes the possible benefit of improved data quality and effectiveness: 'Longstanding calls for the "matching" of interviewers with respondents suggest that in addition to its potential benefits in terms of access, insider status may enhance the quality and effectiveness of qualitative interviews'. Bennett (2002, p. 461) notes that this insider research viewpoint is increasing in popularity as a methodology as a result of the expansion of roles individuals undertake outside of academia:

> it could be argued that the use of 'insider knowledge' by contemporary youth and music researchers is simply following a current methodological trend in ethnographic work, at the centre of which is an open acknowledgment of the researcher's tiedness to space and place.

Regarding disadvantages, Saidin and Yaacob (2016, p. 851) address the researcher's impact based on their pre-existing perspective, which may result in a biased interpretation of data; this was something that needed to be considered while performing the study: 'It could be argued that the insider researcher may be influenced by his similar background to the participants and as a result, it would influence the interpretations of data in his study.' Notably, the degree of proximity between interviewees can be quite skewed; this must be factored in while collecting data: 'Over-complacency may result in failure to recognise that - even when consistently regarded as an insider - one's precise level of proximity is liable to fluctuate somewhat from one respondent to the next' (Hodkinson, 2005, p. 139).

My proximity to the interview subjects was something that was taken into consideration when selecting potential candidates. However, this position as an industry insider did provide access to subjects that would otherwise have proved difficult. As stated by Agar:

> Holding a degree of insider status clearly can have implications for the achievement of successful and productive interactions with participants. In the course of ongoing decisions about the granting of trust and cooperation, research subjects are liable to observe and classify those who seek to research their lives (1996, p. 105)

While the 25 interviewees represented a sizable cross-section of the music industry, given the proliferation of platforms, music genres and record companies, it is impossible to reflect all views fully. Due to the fact that artists may approach careers in music in a variety of ways as a result of the disruptive nature of the new music industry, a larger sample size of artists would aid in obtaining a more comprehensive and representative view of careers and competences in the new music industry. As previously stated, my role as a music industry insider was used to obtain access to interview candidates. While this offered a number of benefits, my closeness to specific interview candidates and preconceptions about the music industry certainly influenced the data gathered, despite my being aware of this. The consideration of 'participant observation' was made owing to the possibility of obtaining more comprehensive and informed findings inside each candidate's workplace. Due to the non-contextual method, in-person interviews were not possible, and therefore did not inform the study in terms of workplace observation.

3.3 Explanation of selection criteria for data collection

In order to gain a greater understanding of what it means to be an artist in the new music industry, it was essential to have a broad range of artists to interview. Furthermore, as artists' roles vary greatly, between entrepreneurial and more label dependent, this provided a deeper understanding of expectations from the artist's perspective.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The interviewees were required to give their own enclaved viewpoint on what it means to be an artist, their expected skills, and the importance of participatory exchange in interacting with their audiences. Each industry position has overlaps in terms of the subjects covered, which aids in further informing the research. Numerous music industry sectors have been excluded; this is mainly due to the degree to which these roles overlap. Subdivisions inside large record labels, such as marketing, styling, and internal public relations, are examples of how all of these jobs may be represented to some extent within the current interview candidate capture. Additionally, the sample size of 25 interviewees provided a reasonable representative sample size of each industry sector. Due to the creative nature of the industry, views did not always align across interviewees, which offered additional insights when analysing the data.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has briefly discussed the ethnographic methodology used in this research. The interviewees for this research were chosen from a variety of sectors of the industry in order to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the effect of participatory culture and the skills acquired by and required of artists in the new music industry. A sample size of 25 candidates was determined to reflect a wide cross-section of the music industry. While 'participant observation' was explored, it was determined that this technique might result in bias owing to my direct creative and collaborative engagement with peers. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted remotely over a 12-month period owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. One significant aspect of this study was the use of insider research; the benefits and drawbacks of this were highlighted to ensure the study's integrity was not compromised.

The first data chapter will focus on how industry and artists are adapting to a more collaborative environment, as well as the impact of decentralisation on the traditional role of record labels and the artist–audience relationship.

4

The impact of platform proliferation on artists and industry

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore how industry and artists are adapting to platforms that promote participatory exchange, with disruption impacting the traditional role of record labels within artist to audience exchange. It will also examine platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and an emerging emphasis on participatory exchange in defining how artists find success within the new music industry. This will include an examination of the kinds of participatory exchange prevalent within today's music industry, the adverse impact of participatory exchange on the artist, and further to this, the impact of passive exchange between artist and audience. From an industry perspective, it is prudent to examine industry perceptions of participatory culture and disruption impacting the traditional role of record labels within artist-to-audience exchange. The chapter will examine perceived authenticity from the artist's viewpoint while engaging effectively with their audience, and whether technology advantages certain types of artists finding success in the new music industry.

Digital conglomerates have played a pivotal role in circumventing the distribution of music by record labels and profiting from musicians' work (Aziz, 2021). Streaming is often regarded as a major source of income for artists; in reality, this is an unsustainable model for most, with more reliance on a multitude of revenue streams such as touring, merchandise and music licensing to television and film (Deresiewicz, 2020). Only a fraction of the US$4 billion generated in 2017 was paid out to artists (McIntyre, 2017). This limitation in terms of monetising music sales is seemingly beyond the artist's control, with platforms dictating the per-stream payout rate. This low payout rate aligns with Spotify's intent as a platform for discovery, rather than a one-stop-shop for artists; it will aggregate the artists' merchandise, concerts and relay back-end analytics to gain a deeper understanding of an artist's streaming audience.

Spotify's role in automated, curated content is to create an algorithm based upon the subscriber's listening choices: 'Spotify never intentionally seeds the playlists with particular songs, despite repeated requests from artists and their labels' (Pasick, 2015, para. 28). Their perceived value is within these algorithms. Playlists have a profound impact on the success of

artists, with a good playlisting feature causing significant surges in streams, allowing artists to be seen within the context of a new audience. As a continuation of existing tropes within the music industry, this feature is not, however, free of manipulation by major labels, with Warner Music Group CEO Stephen Cooper admitting that labels pay to get artists into streaming playlists: 'So playlisting is one of the big reasons why artists need record labels today' (Cooper, quoted in Wright, 2017, para. 27). While Spotify and other streaming services discover and promote acts without being paid directly, independent artists are at a disadvantage compared with major label acts. *Billboard* journalist Glenn Peoples reports that 'popular playlists can and have been bought' (Peoples, quoted in Wright, 2017, para. 29).

There have been moments where artists have attempted to take more control, a notable example being Radiohead's 2007 release of the album *In Rainbows*, which involved a 'pay what you want' model. (Garland, 2009) While successful for Radiohead, this did not effect change for artists operating within the industry more broadly, perhaps due to Radiohead's unique position – not only financially but also creatively – to be able to engage with their audience in such a way. This proliferation of income streams also has an impact on workload for independent artists, with Brighton-based musician Gazelle Twin revealing that 'the music is maybe 10–20 percent of what I do' (quoted in Harrison, 2019, para. 25), she goes on to state that, 'I spend most of my time on admin. I have a team, but even so it can be overwhelming. It's very low paid but the control can be rewarding too' (quoted in Harrison, 2019, para. 25). When coupled with the rigidity of record labels when it comes to adapting and the problems concerning copyright data, O'Dair (quoted in Allison, para. 9, 2016) states when addressing the need for innovation such as Blockchain within a copyright ledger:

> Since the turn of the millennium, people trying to make money from recorded music have struggled with significant challenges. Music can be streamed and downloaded at the click of a button but payments to the people who actually make that music can be slow and opaque.

One of the most significant challenges for emerging artists in the new music industry is the emphasis on participatory exchange as a primary mode of engagement when promoting releases and building a profile. This participatory exchange can come in the form of crowdfunding, with such platforms as Patreon or as direct interaction in the form of Twitch. One key observation

concerns managing distance from one’s audience and the perceived ownership granted to the audience based on the crowdfunding model. While adopting these platforms as a critical ancillary revenue for artists is becoming more prevalent, it is vital to address the impact on music production and consumption. It is also important to note that through crowdfunding platforms such as PledgeMusic, independent artists can offset all production and distribution costs, granting an assurance, once funded, that their work will be realised.

4.2 The emerging emphasis on participatory exchange

The pressure for artists to create and disseminate content catered to multiple platforms is one of the most significant changes in promotion within the digital age. Flash Taylor, a senior A&R for the one of the UK’s leading and longest running international independent publishing company ‘Bucks Music Group’ and interview participant, aptly defines the process as ‘feeding the machine’, whereby in order to stay relevant, one has to maintain a certain level of content churn (see below). There seems to be a dissonance between industry perception and audience reception; however, when it comes to artists’ expected level of engagement, the industry uses the frequency of engagement as a valid barometer in terms of marketing. This pressure to engage is a source of great anxiety for many artists, with some preferring to connect with audiences on their own work schedules rather than being dictated to by pressures from labels or the status quo. Furthermore, maintaining distance from one’s artistic persona is a healthy way of offsetting the positive or negative comments one might receive online. This distanced relationship with one’s artistic persona does not necessarily have to impact the project’s credibility, but rather acts as a buffer from the artist to maintain distance and objectivity. Hracs and Leslie discuss the blurring of the lines between creative labour and leisure, which often results in an 'always on' situation for many artists engaging with their audience:

> Creative work means being ‘always on’ (Entwistle and Wissinger 2006, 774). Work extends beyond the four walls of the office and spills into society at large (Lazzarato 1996, 137). In this situation, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish work from leisure. (Hracs & Leslie, 2013, p. 5)

Much of the participatory exchange between artist and audience plays into the artist’s idea of what works and what does not creatively. While this has always been a process that has underscored an artist and audience relationship, a new player in the form of algorithmic

playlisting has disrupted this relationship. If able to understand their desired algorithmic playlisting, artists can cater their sound to this, with the benefit being greater exposure. This idea of authenticity being tied to the platform by which an artist is discovered also acts as a strong demarcation line within the industry at large, with TikTok being viewed as at the very far end of mainstream cultural production. Platforms on which artists choose to engage with industry and audience dictate a great deal of their broader perception.

Further to this, the line between more mainstream artists and influencers seems to be blurring. There is an ease with which artists can discreetly exploit platforms for both promotions and partnerships. This also means that audience data, tailored explicitly towards personalisation, is becoming of greater importance to artists or managers and not just labels. The use of participatory exchange to extract data from one's audience is becoming more prevalent for those looking to provide more targeted, personalised advertising and touring schedules around campaigns.

The impact of platforms does not affect artists exclusively; the discovery moment has been drastically altered for both A&R and management. While Spotify may not be a global gatekeeper of the music industry, it provides an effective tool for the industry to take advantage of when looking to sign new artists. This online mode of discovery being of such importance to record labels that new roles are being created in order to secure artists, such as forensic A&R (see below) and TikTok-focused A&R. These roles are an indication of the rapid increase in not only the pace of change but also the pace with which labels must act in order to stay ahead of others. We are seeing major labels move towards a more mathematical, analytics-based approach to signing acts, while more independent acts are moving away from such platforms to monetise through ancillary revenues. This divide between algorithm and independence seems to be creating a wider gulf between more mainstream cultural production and independent artists, even with the democratisation of tools and lack of barriers to entry.

4.3 Real-time performance as a re-emerging form of live broadcast engagement

The introduction of digital media has had a significant on impact the music recording industry. However, technological disruptions within the music industry are nothing new. The Golden Age of Radio, or old-time radio, was the dominant form of American home entertainment from the early 1920s to the 1950s, superseded by television. Both radio and subsequently early television

were reliant on live performance for a host of its programming content. These included soap operas, talent shows, music performances, cooking shows, variety hours, mystery serials, radio plays, sports and a host of others. NBC created infrastructure in order to support the broadcast of live performances, which were hosted in ballrooms in New York City, while being broadcast in parallel through the radio network. David Sarnoff, the leader of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) delivered a speech at the time iterating the importance of such a broadcast live event:

> This is a great day for radio, for television and for the public. Tonight for the first time in the history of this great science and art of radio, we are televising the great music of Wagner, the great interpretive genius of Toscanini, and the playing of his gifted artists in his orchestra. Never before in the history of the world was this possible. (Horowitz, 1994, p. 271)

Television became the dominant medium of choice for the consumption of entertainment in the home. While this was also initially reliant on live broadcast as the foundation for its material output, a more significant influx of pre-recorded content came with advances in technology.

How can we parallel the live performance in today's industry with the broadcast era of the 1920s through the 1950s? Modern technological interventions mean that live performance broadcasts are no longer limited to large studios but rather are accessible to anyone with a smartphone or computer. The ubiquity of available devices means that music performance as a broadcast modality is seen commonly across platforms. In terms of fidelity, while the captured audio may be of high quality, the consumer side will be dependent on compression algorithms used by the platforms themselves. Further to this, the consumer experience is highly dependent on the data bandwidth of the particular viewer as well as broadband contention, whereas in more traditional live broadcast much of the consumption quality had uniformity. This point of consumption being impacted by an audience's playback medium has been a reality since the inception of home entertainment. Where the digital age diverges is in the range of fidelity an audience can experience through broadband contention – much akin to John Cage's redefining views on 'artist, artwork and audiences' and Hagel's exploration of truth opposing substantive reality: 'One of the key components of this post-Cagean online musical genre is the ability to

have two-way interactive experiences within a multiplicity of immersive environments' (Duckworth, 2005, p. 161).

Relating to the use of personal computers paired with the ubiquity, utility and value of smartphones, there is no need for performers to be tethered to a studio to execute a live performance. The use of different spaces for performances can be explored. This was much more difficult to facilitate in the era of analogue radio broadcasting, with an extensive infrastructure required to broadcast from a location. One significant change in terms of practice is the movement away from a one-way, linearly programmed broadcast to one that gives artists their sovereignty when scheduling their performances. In the past, performers would have been expected to align with the structure of radio scheduling; in the digital age, there are no limitations on where and when an artist can set up and disseminate a live stream in order to connect with their audience.

4.4 The kinds of participatory exchange prevalent within today's music industry

With the proliferation of platforms quietly dictating modes of engagement, audiences come to artists with their expectations in terms of content. This point of curation is exemplified by Flash when he states that 'artists are universe creators' (Personal Communication [29.9.2020]). While this confluence of artist-led curation alongside their output is nothing new – more specifically record labels set up to release their music alongside choice signings – the scale at which one can now curate is more granular. From the influence of Instagram to Spotify playlisting and podcasts, curation is only limited by the artists' ambition rather than by resources. Whether artists choose to present themselves as an authentic representation of who they are away from their artistic persona is a point discussed by Ian, a record producer and independent record label owner, later in this chapter.

Participatory exchange is becoming a fundamental way for artists to reach their audience and a substantial financial asset. One clear example of this is through the platform Patreon, whereby artists often exchange curation of acoustic gigs through direct contact. However, this movement towards crowdfunding can be an uncomfortable fit, with Luke, an independent LA-based singer/songwriter, explaining his discomfort around the platform:

> Before I had, I would have said no and never, but I recently signed up to Patreon which was something that I'm still unsure if it was the right thing to do or if it's something I want to keep doing, but I thought about it and then some account manager just reached out, unrelated, had been tasked with trying to grow it, especially in COVID with no gigs and things it was a good time to start begging your fans for some money. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

One of the significant motivators for Luke's adoption of Patreon was the minimal amount of work required to maintain his presence on the site while still gaining a significant return. This additional income must come as a welcome asset due to its relative stability compared with other income streams within an artist's portfolio, such as streaming revenue. Additionally, top-tier fans within Luke's Patreon structure can vote for a specific song for Luke to cover once a month in a private acoustic show for all Patreon fans. This setup affords Luke roughly £500 a month in revenue, which Luke explains is a reasonable return considering the work required to run the operation:

> I'm making like £500 a month. It's a nice amount of money to actually know is coming in. You know it's not changed my world, but I sort of set it up so it's a bare minimum effort from me in terms of what I have to do. You know, in some ways I'm like okay, this cover thing is sometimes quite annoying, but it is what it is. It's not that difficult and it runs itself and yeah, not something I'm excited about each month. We haven't had any stupid songs that I've had to do. This was sort of by design. So usually the most famous song wins, and if it's a famous song, it's probably quite a good song. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Scott, an independent recording artist, provides an alternative perspective to the crowdfunding model through the platform PledgeMusic, which he used in the past to fund the recording and subsequent release of one of his albums. Having already released one album, Scott's band had grown enough of a profile to justify seeking crowdfunding for the second album. As he explains, the significant problem with such a venture is the reliance on one's audience as well as the unknown, all-or-nothing nature of the funding model: 'The biggest risk would be the fact that the audience were responsible for hitting the target – otherwise the release would not happen.' (Personal Communication [21.10.2020]) Much akin to Luke's model, Scott provided his

audience with a vote on which cover version the band should perform. As he mentioned, this was key to the successful funding of the album: 'This was priced high as a perk, but we achieved the goal due to this. The audience members got to pick the track they wanted us to cover.' (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Jane, a songwriter and independent artist, proposes a unique perspective in terms of the need for conversation around her social media campaign. Jane prefers to brainstorm with others in order to generate fresh ideas for content and interaction: 'I have someone I brainstorm with, as I need a conversation to stay in touch with myself, in a way. It's a real effort for me as an artist.' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]) Further to this, her choice of the individuals with whom she chooses to brainstorm collaboratively is not necessarily tied to the music industry, providing an outsider, consumer perspective on artist engagement: 'Brainstorming is an essential part of it for me, especially with people who are not necessarily (music) artists, who are from the other side, or say visual artists, helps me a lot.' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020])

More broadly speaking, Jane struggles with feeling like an outsider when approaching engagement, compared with, say, an 18-year-old artist with more of an innate understanding of the cultural lexicon in which platforms exist. Her view is that the younger generation of artists are less precious about production and dissemination, giving them a clear advantage when viewed through the lens of the new music industry: 'I mean, you can be 15 years old today, put beats on your Instagram posts, don't care, be completely open. Because you haven't really known anything else and you'll be fine. You'll be comfortable. You grew up with this.' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]) Jane also highlights that Twitch may perhaps be a midway point between platforms for an artist such as her. She feels that Twitch is a platform that she could utilise as a stage door for an audience to view her process of songwriting and production. As a consumer of music, she enjoys the process of watching others work: 'I'm getting back into making tracks and things like that now I think, should I do a Twitch stream? I love watching producers work on Twitch. I'm actually really into that.' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020])

Production tools and participatory audience exchange have helped to shape music's sound in the digital age, playing a passive and active role within the creative process itself. It is clear that the introduction of digital tools has had an impact on sonics and creativity within the process of record production. While this progression in technology certainly has its advantages, many of

the skills required to make a record in the pre-digital era have become less critical, further shifting the sound of popular music away from the musician towards the production tools.

4.5 The adverse impact of participatory exchange on the artist

Disruptions in the digital age have eroded the record's value and replaced it with diverse and fragmented revenue sources through which artists may attempt to generate income. StageIt is an example of a platform that satisfies consumers' desire to interact directly with artists while simultaneously offering a monetary reward with little cost for the creative. While these concerts are not held in a physical space, they do provide a sense of connection, as described by Bennett (2001) and referenced by Marshall and Redmond:

> It is without doubt that some musical experiences afford indescribable, unlocatable sensations – even enchantment (as defined by Bennett 2001: 5 and called forth by Redmond: 2014: 126). Such musical experience might happen in the presence of the performer or in their absence, as in the case of recorded music. In this context, any sense of 'real' space and place is less definitive, allowing for 'special encounters' to be imagined and felt. (Marshall, Redmond, 2015, p. 1).

This democratisation of curation does come with problems, however. Luke has perceived a definite shift in the entitlement of some Patrons, who start to demarcate themselves from regular fans. He believes this stems from a perception that these people almost feel ownership due to the subscription-based model. This raises an important issue in maintaining a distance from one's audience while maintaining an income, connection and a vehicle for promotion. Notably, Luke has fears that these Patrons will behave differently when he returns to live shows and experiences the subsequent guilt of taking their money while also attempting to run a more democratic operation:

> My fear at the moment is sort of, what sense of entitlement these Patrons are going to have when I meet them in person. Like, what will happen? They're already sending me messages, 'Can we change the rules? None of my songs ever get voted.' I can't just tell him to fuck off because they give me like 20 quid a month. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

While it is clear that Patreon does not play a pivotal role in Luke's career, it has laid bare a key difference between the subscription-based model and traditional CD or ticket sales. Some fans' perceptions change when they feel their money is direct supporting the artist: 'It's like, okay, you're giving me a recurring money. I have laid out what you get, but it's sort of blurred because they are creating more of a relationship with me.' (Personal Communication [14.9.2020]) Luke further explains that there is an innate kind of deceit in his communication with these fans, whereby he feels an obligation to express or exaggerate the importance of the fans' financial support:

> And I'm also in a sort of marketing way, telling them often, really appreciate you, means the world, which is sort of half true half not true. You know, I wouldn't miss this money. Well I would a bit but, it's not life or death money. With using that kind of language, is it giving them a sort of sense of saving [my] life? (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Flash, a UK-based publishing A&R, makes clear his perception from an industry standpoint on the operation of artists within the new music industry. His term 'feeding the machine' indicates the production and distribution of content on a multitude of platforms. Further to this, Flash explains the pressure artists come under once they have engaged with the distribution of content in order to maintain some success, which itself can be fleeting:

> If you're a songwriter and it's your job to write the songs for the project or a band or whatever. And you're told – I call it feeding the machine – so the moment that if you're an artist and you drop your first thing to the internet and you start getting significant numbers on SoundCloud, for instance. It's going to start basically directing people to your project. And you need to engage them and keep their interest there. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

From an industry standpoint, Flash clarifies that the pressure placed on artists in the digital age is far more significant in terms of release and upload schedule than in decades past. The central issue is producing a sufficient volume of content and valuable content, which adds to the plot of the artist and generates greater awareness and excitement around a project. This seemingly

impossible task becomes an expectation, with the standard set by the artist from the onset becoming the bar for content moving forward:

> It's taken your entire life to get that one moment where people are like I fucking love the song dude. And you're like: amazing, what's next? What am I going to do next? you know? So yeah, absolutely, there's certainly the anxiety that I think happens for some, maybe industry unsupported artists. I'd hate to be a young artist in this day and age you know I did my time being in a band. I couldn't imagine sort of having to go through all this the new way. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

This sentiment of the relentless churn of content is echoed by Luke, with his most significant problem being the frequency of the schedule:

> Having to contend with the pressure of trying to keep up as well with other artists who are doing it much better, and having a manager or people going, 'We need to post this many times.' But it's not so much, I feel like when it's coming from somebody giving me advice about what we need to do, it's more the calendar of it, like when we need to do it, how often rather than what needs to be in it. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

While this churn of content may be a source of great distraction for many artists with whom the process does not resonate, it also breeds a level of apathy in Luke, where the expectation of its volume creates a desire not to create content at all. It also brings into question the message or meaning of what the artist is trying to say; with such a lack of expected brevity, it brings into question the dilution of identity:

> The messages now become irrelevant, it's just that you're in their face or like hello, I'm alive, I'm still here, care about me. And it's like what? Why should we care about you? Doesn't matter, just know that I'm here doing a little dance … I don't know how much of that is specific to me, because I'm also fighting a sort of desire not to do any of it. Get back to writing songs and stuff. I don't know if it's as much the new industry or just in general. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Australian singer and songwriter Dustin clarifies that his perception of pressure for content is merely propagated by industry rather than audience behaviour. The notion that if the artist is seen to be keeping busy on social media, this promotes a healthy image for the project's perception in other areas such as more traditional media, radio and press:

> I kind of felt like a lot of that stuff was secondary and it was really only to keep the people around in the industry that were invested, happy, and happy to feel like I was doing the things that everyone else was doing. But a lot of those things didn't seem to make any difference to the actual connection with the audience. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

However, Dustin feels fortunate – being more independent than most artists with his level of success – that he has only engaged with content that he sees as aligning with his artistic persona. Nevertheless, he experienced a level of discomfort when pressured to engage in order to promote, as he felt the music should speak for itself:

> I guess maybe more on the social media thing, you know, content – in terms of that. I always felt like anything that has to do with me personally when people wanted me to video or talking about a song or even trying to tell a story about it and sell the music, around releases: that was one step too far for me. I never enjoyed doing it because I felt, rightly or wrongly, I'd put so much time and effort into making the product and it should be, I'm backing it. I really believe in it. I've worked really hard to make it great and that should be enough. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

Further to this, the metaphorical idea of a 'stage' that can be entered and exited feels further from view than in decades past, with always-on connectivity, audience and industry expectations driving eyes towards the artist's every interaction: 'everything an artist does or does not do now plays into the reception of their music' (Franjić, 2016, para. 5). Perhaps one reason why context and access are becoming such essential pillars within the deepening relationship between artist and audience is the loss of visual and tactile information associated with physical records. This loss, as Sexton (2008, p. 99) writes, 'is compensated by music's increased connection to other visual formats such as music videos and web-based data flows'. This engagement with audiences

can become a great source of anxiety for artists, particularly when they are trying to distance themselves from their artist persona. Ian suggests that a far healthier approach is to fictionalise one's artistic identity as a separate character in order to create a healthy distance when dealing with one's audience:

> You can be authentic while playing a character. The authenticity comes from: is this believable? Does this ring true that this character would be producing this music, wearing these clothes, interacting with these people? That takes a lot more thought, but it depends how much you want to protect your personal identity. I think it's probably overall psychologically a good thing, even if your artist identity is essentially you with the embarrassing bits removed. At least that is an identity, and then it occupies a different space in your mind. When people inevitably call you a cunt or say your music's shit or even say you're amazing and the best person in the world, you know they're not really talking about you, that they're talking about this other entity that you've created. I think it's probably healthy to do that. Healthier than it being just you and your life.

While this struggle with artistic persona is one that artists have faced with all forms of media, new and old, the new music industry and the tools of engagement allow for a greater scope when it comes to the proliferation of presentation modalities. An artist can, with the anonymity provided by the internet, completely separate themselves from their art. Some examples of this can be seen in a broad range of genres, with MF Doom starting in the mid-2000s using a gladiator mask to conceal his identity. Before this, we had bands such as Slipknot and artists such as Burial. In terms of true anonymity, however, an artist such as Clutchy Hopkins, who has and continues to be an unidentified musician, has maintained complete anonymity throughout his career; the utilisation of online platforms supports this anonymity as a promotion and distribution mechanism.

4.6 The impact of passive exchange between artist and audience

One consequence for artists of platform disruption is the more passive feedback artists gain from online engagement. Negus (1992) discusses this situation, wherein other media modalities can exemplify the intrinsic link between technology and music to promote and engage with one's

intended audience. Theberge speaks of the disruption technology has caused for both the production and consumption of music, with consumers becoming more than just passive actors in the mediation of creativity and engagement:

> Musicians are not simply consumers of new technologies, rather their entire approach to music-making has been transformed so that consumption, the exercise of taste and choice, has become implicated in their musical practices at the most fundamental level. In a somewhat different context, Ross Harley (1993: 214) has described this event as an inversion of the conventional production/consumption hierarchy: 'Electronic recording establishes a listener who is characterised by an apparatus that precedes him/her'. (Théberge, 1997, p. 200)

This passive feedback loop from consumer to creator informs the processes of the artist. Scott states that, 'I feel I have the ability to gauge the response to potential "dud" – the artist/fan relationship I feel should be open.' (Personal Communication [21.10.2020]) This relationship between artist and fan can feel very real, and certainly helps shape the development of an artistic narrative through the course of one's career. Scott underlines an unsaid sense of understanding even through the unexpected changes in sonics and image he may undertake:

> Coming from a fan perspective – I have experienced artists I like go through harsh shifts in sounds where I have tapped out and understand from the artist perspective the need to shift and change. There is a risk that comes with this. In my current project, which involves a projection of some of my most extreme ideas – I have found a positive response overall, due to the fact my fan base tend [sic] to expect curve balls. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

While this interplay between creator and consumer is undoubtedly amplified in the digital age, in the early stages of an artist's career there cannot be such a reliance on audience feedback simply due to the lack of access to a large enough audience. As a result, Dustin particularly honed his sound in a purposefully isolated environment in the early stages of his creative process:

> I feel like I've been quite insular in the way I've gone about creating things, I've done some co-writing stuff, but generally I've written, produced, mixed and done everything in one room on my own. It's been a very insular creative world that I've

> explored. I've been comfiest and happiest when I've been able to isolate from the world and just get that done for six to nine months and come out the end with something that I'm proud of, and in that middle bit, I don't really want much input. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

Yet this passive feedback has since become embedded in the narrative of his own release curation. Through releasing primarily with Spotify as a target distributor, he feels an innate understanding of not only the sound that will resonate successfully with his existing fan base but also with the curated and algorithmic playlisting, offering him a chance to expand on his existing audience:

> But I've seen over maybe, we've made like seven or eight EPs and albums now, so there's been quite a few releases where at the start I had no idea what was working and why, but the last two or three releases I've kind of known. Okay, that song is going to work for the streaming audience. It's got the sound and I think during the production process, particularly in even writing, I've been looking for those triggers. I don't know how conscious they are, but I'm definitely aware of: okay that thing worked before, not quite tangible what it is, I don't know exactly what it is, but I know what it feels like. And if I can capture that feeling again or something there that I'm chasing, it's been part of a feedback loop for sure. It doesn't feel like a compromise. It doesn't feel like a sacrifice creatively.

From an industry perspective, David, an LA-based artist manager suggests that while the information one can gather from one's audience holds value, artists should control their own creative decisions. Audience feedback should be used to inform the creative process rather than dictate it. While this passive exchange has long existed within the music industry, there seems to be an increasing rate of exchange with the immediacy of feedback from today's platforms. Further to this, David asserts that he feels audiences are often unaware of their influence:

> I think its super valuable for artists and their teams to understand their audiences. The best artists then use this knowledge to lead their audiences into new territories, as opposed to letting the insight stagnate themselves by trying to people-please. I've worked with artists who have asked fans questions over social media in order

> to determine video ideas or release strategies. I've seen artists see what fans like are wearing at shows and decide to make merch in that same creative style. Or you see what other artists your fans like listening to, and reach out to those artists to organise a collaboration single, or tour. Audiences I feel are often influencing the artists they are fans of without even realising.

The impact of the passive exchange between creator and consumer, which artists have experienced in both the more traditional media of decades past and the new music industry, is undoubtedly increasing in frequency with platform disruption. Depending on the artist's perspective, this exchange can be relevant in certain circumstances or be ignored when it becomes a pervasive influence in one's career. If we relate this behaviour back to the prosumer, it could be argued that it is often the case that prosumerist fans are unaware of their influence on artist(s). Klein et al. speak of the embedded nature of promotional culture on digital platforms:

> Promotional culture is embedded in digital platforms, and particularly social media, […] people earn value based on their capacity for being known, liked, and respected for their opinions and actions. The countless ways in which these hyper-promotional platforms have insinuated themselves into everyday communication thus can make even mundane interaction seem calculated, inorganic, and advertising-esque. (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2016, p. 9)

The fact that audiences are often unaware of their influence on artists says much about the tools available to them, with the majority of influence coming from posts that garner the greatest overall public interest.

4.7 Industry perception of participatory culture

In terms of industry perception, it is clear that artists' preferred modes of participatory exchange act as a clear demarcation between the world of pop and more alternative music. Barney, a UK-based artist manager, states that, as a personal preference, he would actively avoid the world of TikTok when looking at artist discovery. While there may be TikTok artists who celebrate DIY as the central tenet of their artistic identity, it acts as a defining line for mainstream consumption and production. As a more band-orientated manager, Barney makes it clear that he would be hard-pressed to engage on this platform:

> From personal preferences I would never be signing an artist because they've got a TikTok dance or something. You know or that they've written a song which involves a TikTok dance. As a side note, I do know labels which are hiring engaging choreographers to work in a capacity where they are creating dances to new tracks. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Barney goes on to state that he feels a platform such as TikTok opposes his fundamental creative ideology, describing the idea of working with an artist on said platform as 'dirty':

> Yeah, I couldn't work with somewhere with, you know if they came to me, even if the track was the greatest track in the world. But the only way I could digest the track would be to watch them do some dance moves to it. Just, it would make me feel personally dirty. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Further to the idea of TikTok being a quick and easy platform for discovery, Flash asserts that he sees this having a dramatic impact on the pace of change within the industry as a whole. It is clear that while TikTok started in 2016, the subsequent volume of artists discovered on the platform seems to be accelerating, in Flash's opinion, at a much faster rate than previous platforms, such as YouTube. This influence of process raised a salient comparison with the world of influencers, as noted by Flash. The perception is that influencers cater exclusively to brand partnerships and audience engagement with no or limited cultural production. Influencers typically are defined as someone who has the capacity to influence their audience of a product or service via social media promotion. These influencers seemingly occupy the same cultural space as artists without the need to practise any form of work, values or production. However, that does not mean the world of influencers does not inform and cross-pollinate with that of cultural producers. What is clear is that the line between more mainstream artists and influencers has been blurred with the emergence of these platforms. This is a product of the ease with which artists can promote their music and then seamlessly and discreetly promote other brands for profit on a single platform. Flash suggests that more mainstream artists borrow from this influencer mentality in order to achieve a successful business model:

> I'm certainly not trying to compare artists with influencers. But there are certain artists that have to apply some of the logistics that influencers do. I mean, I fucking

> hate influencers because I think there are self-entitled little shits, and demand far too much for free in life. But I do understand how they have become businesses. Because of their opinion and their taste and what have you, they have accrued a number of followers, which again is that statistical number, that data that you can on sell to other brands or other business opportunities. And if the likes and everything keep on going up and the followers keep on going up, more businesses will put you on their books as influencers of note. Very simple business model. I get it entirely. I don't have to like it, but I get it entirely. Certain types of artists have to maybe borrow a little from those rules as well. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

It is not only that these more mainstream artists utilise platforms for cross-promotion; they also see great value in the data. For example, the team of an artist such as Taylor Swift can access more personalised data from her audience, allowing for more personalised content and engagement, which adds depth to her campaigns. Flash sees these more holistic participatory exchanges with which she engages her audience as a cynical but clever attempt at data collection:

> The first time I saw it, was a few years ago now and basically Taylor Swift did this Christmas video, and she knew what some of her fans wanted for Christmas, so she bought it for them. And then she turned up all around America at their doorstep and gave them a Christmas present. And at first, I was like, that's fucking cool. That's really cool. Well done, Taylor Swift. You're giving something back to your audience. And then after about an hour I went shit, that's cynical. The amount of fucking data you've got after that one simple thing, but then the business mind in me was like that's still pretty fucking clever. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Cross-platform engagement is a valuable tool for more mainstream artist engagement when it comes to data collection. This broad audience demographic affords an opportunity to understand the Big Data that drives decisions made on touring schedules and territorial record promotion. For more independent artists, not only is there partisan baggage from the industry when it comes to the platforms to which artists chose to distribute, but the management of multiple platforms –

which, if they are to be utilised effectively, require tailored content – represents a significant cost in terms of time and resources.

4.8 Maintaining authenticity while engaging effectively with one's audience

The question of artist authenticity was a divisive issue. Many respondents indicated that the pressures of over-sharing when engaging with their audience did not align with their sense of artistic identity. Jane echoes this sentiment: 'The concept of sharing everything on social media isn't very much aligned with my sense of artistry.' Rather tellingly, Luke demarcates an apparent contradiction when responding to a question concerning the authenticity of engagement: 'I feel like I'm going to have one voice telling me what the correct answer is. Well, like what my manager's answer is and what my answer is.' (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Further to this, Luke suggests that the more idealistic side of him would instead embrace a more closed-off persona: 'I want to present in that way I still kind of like mystique to some extent.' (Personal Communication [14.9.2020]) Although this mode of engagement seems to be an awkward fit for a particular generation of artists, having grown up with an ideology of mystique and a lack of transparency in the process, Luke states that his foundational influences were the antithesis of modern modes of production and consumption, 'My heroes are people from a long time ago who never did any of this shit. Every time I'm sort of tapping into the way things are now, there's a little bit of the sort of artist ideal in me, that dies.' (Personal Communication [14.9.2020]) Jane echoes this point, but also makes clear that the artists to whom she is attracted within the new music industry maintain the same sense of artistic distance that Luke was referring to:

> There used to be a different kind of mystery around the creative process, before the explosion of social media, in my opinion. There is still, for a lot of artists. You want to preserve your process, at least I think I do. (Personal Communication [15.10.2020])

David suggests that this problem with constant content churn is predominantly one that impacts younger artists in the stage of establishing themselves: 'I would suggest that regular engagement is most important for newer, less established artists, whilst for established artists with huge

existing followings, scarcity and meticulosity can be more effective.' From a purely pragmatic standpoint, David goes on to state that content needs to be produced at such volume:

> We are battling machine algorithms most of the time, you want to ensure that as much of the content you put out is 'liked' or shared by fans, in order to display your worth as a creator to whatever platform you are engaging with.

Scott echoes this need to cut through as a newer artist; he goes on to suggest that in order to be noticed, identity is everything, 'having a strong sense of identity (read as "branding") is absolutely vital, due to the sheer amount of noise one has to cut through'. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020]) Finally, Scott suggests that in order to maintain a high-quality standard of on-brand content, a conceptual strategy is required from the outset:

> From a personal perspective – I have a vision in which the art/visual side of the music is as important for the audience to subscribe to … I would say having a concept and sticking to it helps solidify this. I feel that I try to straddle both in attempting to ensure regular content is dispersed, while keeping the feel of the 'brand' intact. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Luke admits that while the temptation not to engage is there, this engagement also provides him with a positive experience. He does, however, express a level of frustration that content he personally finds to be authentically resonant does not necessarily translate into audience engagement:

> And yeah, I definitely aspire to not do any of it. And I do actually feel the kickback, the nice thing of posting something quite off the cuff. Engaging with an audience in that way. sometimes you get back something. You spend a lot of time, well I do, thinking about what the photos look like or the design of everything in terms of visual content, and then it kind of falls on deaf ears and then you post something really stupid, and then it gets a massive reaction. You're like 'fuck's sake'. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Dustin clarifies that for his content to be impactful on his audience, it must be aligned with his own brand identity. He believes in limiting the frequency of engagement and instead focusing on

quality. He believes over-engagement, or engagement for its own sake, will lead to a dilution of artistic identity:

> I'm finding with my releases and my brand, the thing that I've been doing personally for me: I'm a lot more authentic when I stand behind the content and I really believe in it, and the times when I've put content out for the sake of having content it doesn't feel as real. It doesn't seem to get the same amount of response and I guess for following that feedback, leads me to the conclusion that content for content sake, it feels good in the world of likes and in the environment of social media, but it doesn't actually add to your career in anyway, or give you any further in credibility as an artist. You know, it doesn't actually change the message. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

Regarding Dustin's use of the term 'brand', Klein et al. observed that the word has gained popularity among artists in the digital age:

> "brand" has become the de facto descriptor for people, places, organizations, and ideas that previously would not have used and might even have shunned such a label: from philosophies to nations, individuals to political movements, places of worship to institutions of higher education. (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2016, p. 9)

Dustin considers that the artist's greatest strength in differentiating themselves from others comes through creating within their own world. The posting of mundanities only serves as a distraction from the real message of engagement:

> I think you can water down what it is you're actually saying with your music by creating all this other distractionary stuff. Posting about what you're up to as a person, that, everyone else can do. Not everyone can write the song or sing the way that you can, and that's really what people are there for. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

Dustin believes that the onus is on the artist to set up a perceived frequency of engagement. Then, through a consistent engagement schedule, audiences expect a reasonable level of

engagement from Dustin, which allows him to create the quality of content with which he feels comfortable:

> Even if it means it's a bit longer between posts or releases. I'd much rather have something that's really strong, and when it does go out it's not a compromise to the rest of the body of work that I've spent so hard to build, and my fans kind of know that when I do release something, it's going to be of a certain quality and the rest of the time they don't really hear from me. You kind of set that up. That's the engagement I have with them. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

The expectation of more frequent engagement from a consumer side in the new music industry brings more significant issues when viewed from the perspective of maintaining authenticity and aligning with artistic identity. This competency often delineates between more mainstream and independent artists, who would rather be more selective about the kind of engagement rather than its frequency. What is clear is that this ongoing conversation with one's audience can be a source of anxiety both in terms of identity and relevance, with a lack of engagement leading to a lack of relevance. There is tremendous pressure on new artists to constantly be maintaining a level of content churn, as David described, while higher profile artists, having already established themselves, require less interaction.

4.9 Disruption impacting the traditional role of record labels within artist to audience exchange

Spotify's role in automated, curated content is to create an algorithm based upon the subscriber's listening choices. In terms of Spotify as an industry tool for artist discovery, Flash admits that it is an important resource. In addition, the ease with which one can verify writer credits allows for an expedited process when looking for co-writers who could potentially be worth signing for publishing. With this idea that they may be gatekeepers in the A&R world, Flash admits that they hold some power in this capacity to a certain extent:

> I use various playlists during the week. I will listen to New Music Friday or I'll scan through New Music Friday for stuff that I haven't heard. I do like the fact that they've got credits now, so if I hear a song that I like, I can go on and find out who the songwriters are. Then cross reference with PRS, see what they're doing, where

> they’re at. So to me there is a slight gatekeeper scenario for me in a niche way. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Speaking more broadly, Flash asserts that artist discovery is a more multisensory experience, with visuals playing a more significant role when engaging with an artist for the first time. Flash believes YouTube has been responsible for breaking more artists than Spotify because of this:

> But are they a gatekeeper to facilitate that? Yeah, they played their part, and they definitely do have an editorial. And it goes to the right playlists and stuff like that. So they are a gatekeeper. Have they broken an artist solely themselves? I don’t know. I mean YouTube, I think have broken artists because it’s more a visual element. I think again, there’s probably worthwhile saying at this point as we’ve grown older and how we perceive our music and how we get our music has changed. I think we tend to listen with our eyes a lot more. So the visual element really informs and Spotify is not a visual platform. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Flash speaks of the changing ‘discovery moment’ as an A&R from the music industry past. This pace of change was echoed in his previous comments concerning platforms and relates to the speed at which A&R must act when they find an artist building momentum. Further to this, much of the momentum attributed to new artists, Flash suggests, is wrapped up in the context around an artist and its position within the culture of the time, knowing one’s audience. While artists have always been expected to encapsulate an element of the cultural zeitgeist of the times, online culture can be highly proliferated, with many movements happening in parallel; as an A&R, it takes a level of understanding to identify these trends in order to position well for an artist signing: ‘The discovery moment has dramatically changed from what we were talking about with you and your band to this moment where something can catch fire really quickly, but it’s got to capture the imagination and the culture.’ (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Further, Flash indicates that a clear competency which some may overlook is contextualising the media through tags within platforms. This enables further discovery and dramatically widens the potential audience: ‘It’s not about putting up something randomly on TikTok. It’s knowing how to tag it correctly so it’s finding the right places.’ (Personal

Communication [29.9.2020]) The impact of Spotify's 'New Music Friday' playlist on the music industry has been profound in breaking new artists and in terms of industry perception. Rather than having previously chased a good playlisting on the radio or seen a midweek chart position as an arbiter of success, it seems a spot on an influential playlist is just as important. Flash notes that if you are looking at artists in terms of investment, losing out on an important playlist can be make or break for some careers:

> If you've got a track out there and it's been building steam and you've been spending money in terms of marketing and it doesn't get on a high and in the top five or top 10 of New Music Friday that looks pretty bad. You know, I don't think a lot of music fans really care about it, if it doesn't get in the top five of the top 10, that certainly makes the bean counters a bit worried: 'How much did you spend on this for it to not to get in the top five? You know? New Music Friday? Yeah, yeah, right. We're going to start kind of pulling back on stuff, you know?' (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Barney suggests that while Flash is correct in highlighting the pressures artists are under to secure a New Music Friday playlisting spot, with the longer tail of independent artists' careers and a little perseverance, this need not be the deciding factor of success and failure. Further to this, rather than good playlisting having a profoundly tangible impact on numbers, these features can act as more of a vanity metric in order to placate worried accounting departments:

> There's an awful lot of onus and pressure on campaigns now to be geared around, we've got to get New Music Friday. And if you don't get New Music Friday, like a lot of people fall apart. And that really isn't and shouldn't be the case. You know you're getting now a lot of songs, which are taking a while to percolate and bubble up. It takes time, but you know things can catch. It's just that Spotify has changed the way that people approach a marketing strategy and also there's too much onus put on those numbers. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Spotify has seen a rapid ramp-up in its user base since its launch, with journalist Liz Pelly (2017) noting that 'its network of paying subscribers has risen sharply in recent years from five million subscribers in 2012 to more than sixty million in 2017'. This number rose even further in 2019,

with over 100 million paying subscribers. This mass adoption indicates a fundamental shift in music consumption as a product to music as a service:

> Although we may see decentralisation in the short term with digital technologies, these trends will likely be reversed as these technologies ultimately enhance economies of scale and foster concentration. Unlike the 1950s, the various aspects of the music industry are more tightly controlled today suggesting that whatever period of decentralisation may occur it will be more short-lived. There may be a time lag in this process of re-consolidation, but over the medium to long term major labels are best poised to exploit the digital music market. (Azhena, 2006, para. 37)

Speaking of the mass user adoption of Spotify, Barney claims that much of this is down to its user interface and its subsequent distribution on mobile devices, along with a seamless experience, whether at home or on the move.

> There have been plenty of pretenders to do that, it's just that Spotify got the user interface completely bang on, where I could put Spotify on a mobile phone, into the hands of a grandparent or a toddler and they would understand it really, really quickly. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

As the music industry has moved towards a more tailored consumer experience, personalisation (more broadly known as customisation, tailoring of services to accommodate the individual) has emerged as an asset in retaining audience attention. An example of this is Spotify's 'discovery' platform: 'Spotify's personalised, access-based model drives significantly higher retention rates compared to other music streaming services after four quarters' (Hinsen, 2018, para. 17). One surprising shift within the more traditional label structure is the creation of new A&R roles to cater to the changing technology. Flash speaks of one such role being forensic A&R; such a role carefully monitors the analytic data and, more broadly, audience engagement of a song, signalling whether an artist of interest is gaining traction. This further expedites the process of A&R. However, it also presents challenges in terms of speed with which offers must be presented:

> There is now a new A&R role at the record labels and it's called forensic A&R. There's just these people who are very Internet savvy, can use these kind of tools,

> you know the metadata. And follow it statistically, but also culturally as well. So the discovery in this place is watching a spike. And why is that spiking and being able to identify that spike. And if it's spiking from one place to the next, so if it's going to point from point A to point B in say, a day, something of fucking significance happened. You need either your offer in at the end of that day or certainly the next morning. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Speaking of this new role specialisation within major record labels, Barney further highlights the perceived importance of TikTok for the music industry at large. So much so that a new A&R position specifically catering to TikTok is now an accepted part of the industry lexicon. This short-form, digestible and widely proliferated medium has rapidly become a key asset for the industry when seeding new content to consumers:

> I know now that a really important part of A&R meetings [is] about the TikTok charts. So yeah, there are adverts out there actively, on music recruitment sites, looking for people that specialise in TikTok A&R. Well, hang about, this didn't exist a couple of years ago, but well, it's now [a] major thing. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Revenues from these major platforms increasingly draw from two streams: subscriptions and advertising; this changes the notion of 'music as property', which supported the industry before disruption, to a more democratised, proliferated distribution system where users have a choice in their consumption and ownership. Platforms such as Soundcloud and Bandcamp have become resonant with producers due to their promise of a more democratised form of distribution. This focus on production rather than consumption has led to a more independent spirit demarcating these platforms and mainstream models. Furthermore, streaming does not contribute positively to further sales, whether physical or digital; instead, it displaces any further sales, which implies it is best served as a form of bundled sales of zero marginal cost. Thus, as Hesmondhalgh et al. observe, 'in many respects, these producer-oriented platforms have become the principal site for "alternative" music, in the way that independent, alternative record companies and record shops once were' (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019, p. 10).

Focusing on more democratised platforms, Bandcamp has become an invaluable distribution platform for more independent artists who want to move their assets away from streaming platforms for monetisation. Moreover, Barney states that Bandcamp has introduced a platform-specific focus whereby on Fridays, artists' songs released on the platform accrue no fees, further moving the focus from streaming platforms, with this campaign aptly being named 'Bandcamp Fridays': 'On Bandcamp, COVID has really played to [the artist's] advantage, I forget what the hash tag trend is. I think it's like free artist Fridays or something like that.' (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

This mode of accruing a following on social media and streaming platforms and then funnelling this audience into a more profitable platform such as Bandcamp is succinctly highlighted by Ian, a UK-based independent record label owner and record producer. In addition, the ancillary revenue that accompanies music sales on Bandcamp, such as sales of t-shirts and other merchandise, can make the difference between an independent artist being able to subsist and not:

> Even just listeners on Spotify, they're per head worth like .0005p to you. The best way is to funnel as many of those as possible into your website, or on to BandCamp so they could buy a vinyl or they could buy a t-shirt, something with a decent markup that is actually going to be profitable for you.

Ian's suggestion of funnelling one's audience into a more profitable or appropriate platform seems to be a sensible approach for independent artists. Further to this, there is a central platform where artists can play to their strengths in terms of interaction and promotion. As Barney previously suggested, the proliferation of platforms has created more partisan baggage in terms of aesthetic and commercial alignment; the more independent artists are best served in tailoring content specifically to platforms that would yield the greatest impact.

4.10 Technology advantages certain types of Artists in the new music industry

We have witnessed a 'flattening out' of how artists interact through platforms and outlets. Previously, marketing was often linked to particular geographical areas, radio stations, or regional print media; this has been considerably reduced to a smaller number of less geographically specific sources. While this expands access, these platforms are not exclusively focused on music, highlighting the need for artists to build skills in audience retention and

content creation. These abilities may be shown via high-quality audio-visual material and personal interaction, which provide artists with important metrics for successful communication and creation:

> Staff in record companies, whilst having their favourite anecdote about [BBC] Radio 1's resistance to specific acts and genres, devote most of their promotional effort to this station. As Barnard (1989) has noted, although resented for its power virtually to make or break a record, Radio 1's near monopoly of pop radio has, over the years, greatly simplified the promotion process. (Negus, 1992, p. 110)

Scott speaks of this 'flattening out' in terms of ease of access with which new independent artists can reach their audience within the new music industry. The ability to have a presence on platforms alongside more established acts has democratised barriers to entry. In contrast, the lack of production and distribution costs has significantly offset many fiscal concerns:

> Overall, the playing field has evened up somewhat in regards to be able to release music on the same platforms as established acts – Production costs and distribution of physical media had been a huge differentiating factor between the new artist [with limited funding] and the big players. Now we have the ability to rub shoulders with name artists. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Ian also reinforces this democratisation of entry. He feels that the most significant challenge an artist faces when presenting to the world is marketing. The fact that such a plethora of competing voices exist now means new and unique ways of interfacing must exist to cut above the noise:

> I think all of the tools, they do favour independent artists more, I think. There are almost no barriers to entry to releasing a record, to making, releasing and distributing a record digitally. The barrier now is … because that's so easy for everyone to do, is getting people to actually pay attention to your [song] and not the 18 billion other ones that are also being thrown at them. So now, it's a job of marketing, essentially.

Additionally, Scott emphasises the increasing possibility for artists to generate income via live streaming, fostering a portfolio of revenue streams through ancillary sources. Scott does,

however, admit that this example came with the backing of management and label; however, it does provide a compelling example of the deterritorialisation of the new music industry (Deleuze and Guattari, 1972) and an artist's ability to exist only in the digital realm.

Scott goes on to suggest that this flexibility in terms of output and persona offers further opportunity for multiple, non-genre-specific projects all tied to the same artist:

> For the prolific and flexible artist, there is the option for parallel projects to overlap and allow more streams of potential income if the work is put out, which would require some serious juggling, but ultimately could see results without compromise, if for example anonymity was applied. The same person could produce work in genres (example, Dance/Electronic music verses more traditional Rock) and see how the reaction is and gauge if one or the other is the most rewarding/viable avenue to pursue. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

When we examine discovery based purely on algorithm playlisting, Flash views indie bands as the worst off when it comes to platform disruption. This, he feels, is down to the algorithm having a significant bias away from this type of music. This raises an essential question of whether this bias is creating less demand for indie bands or whether it is merely a reflection of audience demand being represented in the algorithms:

> I find certain technologies disadvantage certain types of artists. If you're a young band in the UK trying to go through the steps. The Spotify algorithm doesn't seem to like indie bands. I think that potentially comes down to, are there less indie band fans or is the algorithm not highlighting these young bands who are releasing music up on Spotify during for a Friday release? What is it? Is it a chicken and egg scenario? Is the demand for indie music less? (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

The fiscal state of the new music industry creates a bias towards certain types of artists. As noted by Flash, this is also reinforced by the Spotify algorithm, which he notes seemingly does not have an appetite for indie bands. This feeds into the notion of solo artists being the more viable type of signing in recent years due to a mainstream appetite for such acts and the low operational cost. This is potentially causing an echo chamber scenario whereby the popularity informs

algorithms of such signings, which in turn impacts music discovery, further biasing these kinds of artists. If we look at the more independent side of the music industry, the resources required to build and establish an audience have been lowered significantly due to the more democratised barriers to entry.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter has explored platforms and the expectation that participatory exchange has had on artists. This impact of participatory exchange is not limited to the creative input of audiences on artists' work, but also relates to them as investors in artists' careers. This does bring with it an underlying tension in terms of audience expectation. It is, however, an asset to more independent artists who are looking to fund the production and release of records through such platforms as Pledgemusic, enabling them to produce records that would not necessarily be financially viable under a more traditional model. One further development in the more passive participatory platform exchange has been the increasing emergence of live streaming as a key asset in an artists' portfolio to support income and meet consumer demand. This idea of increased proliferation of consumer demand lends itself to Flash's phrase, 'feeding the machine', by which an artist must consistently engage on a multitude of platforms in order to retain relevance. This schedule frequency is a source of anxiety for many artists, with a competency in regular engagement providing an advantage to said creators. However, the notion that the engagement must be meaningful is unclear and artist-specific, with the more independent artists seeming to be able to engage slightly more on their own terms.

Disruptions in the digital age have eroded the value of the record and replaced it with a patchwork of disparate and fragmented revenue streams via which artists might seek to earn money. We are seeing major labels adopt a more quantitative, data-driven strategy to signing acts, while more independent artists opt out of such platforms in order to monetise via ancillary earnings. When it comes to data collection, cross-platform interaction is a powerful instrument for more mainstream artist engagement. This diverse audience demography enables an examination of the big data that influences touring schedules and territorial record marketing strategies. There seems to be a disconnect between industry perception and audience reception; when it comes to artists' desired degree of involvement, the industry relies on engagement frequency as a relevant marketing metric. The influence of the passive transaction between

creator and consumer, which artists have encountered in both conventional media and the new music industry, is undoubtedly rising in frequency as a result of platform disruption. This constant flow of information may be a cause of significant distraction for many artists who do not connect with the process. This passive feedback loop between consumer and creator influences the artist's methods. We have seen a change in the 'discovery moment' for industry. Furthermore, rather than chasing a coveted radio playlist or using a midweek chart position as a barometer of success, it seems that a slot on an influential playlist is just as significant

The distinction between more established artists and influencers seems to be eroding. There is an ease with which musicians may use platforms for promotional purposes as well as collaborations. Influencers seem to share the same cultural space as artists, but are not required to engage in any sort of labour, values or output. That is not to say that the world of influencers and cultural producers does not inform and cross-pollinate; while there has always been implicit feedback between artist and audience in terms of what defines a successful or unsuccessful release, the emergence of platforms has enabled this to take place with much more immediacy and on a multitude of differing modalities, from the content or aesthetic of social media posts through to album campaigns. What is clear is that understanding one's audience takes time to cultivate; it is the artist's responsibility to understand this dynamic and decide whether to tailor their creativity accordingly. This immediacy in terms of interaction has been expedited further with the emergence of platforms such as TikTok. There is partisan baggage within the industry when viewing artists' choices in terms of which platforms to engage on. Although this might not be an ideal choice for some types of independent artists, disregarding such a platform is becoming increasingly difficult due to their impact on the commerce and culture of the new music industry. The drastic shift in terms of tools at an artists' disposal seems to advantage the more independent artist, with a lack of barriers to entry and minimal financial outlay for distribution.

5

The rise of independent artists and their employment of DIY ethics

5.1 Introduction

The increased success of independent and DIY artists in the new music industry is consistent with Anderson's (2006) concept of the 'long tail' influencing the structure of the digital entertainment economy. This implies a more extensive proliferation of independent artists, less focus on the need for big hits and a stronger emphasis on providing consumers with an always-available library. The popularity of individual records becomes less significant with time, with the accumulation of copyrighted material, or library, being the most considerable value. Noteworthy, however is the criticism placed on the long tail due to the fact that the vast majority of cultural content consumed via aggregators is comprised of the top 1% of popular offerings thus magnifying hits rather than smaller scale releases. (Elberse, 2008) While alternative music has been affected by major record companies' hit-driven focus, to adapt to disruption, the value and applications of the library are now more vital than ever. Whether consciously or not, independent artists working in the new music industry must employ some facets of DIY competencies and ethics to achieve success outside of a traditional label structure. The broader adoption of DIY ethics is key to understanding the competencies developed by artists in the new music industry. The democratisation of cultural creation has been facilitated by the rapid development of creative digital technologies, this is consistent with Hesmondhalgh's view that this is congruent with media decentralisation: 'A vital corollary to access as democratisation would be the decentralisation of media technologies and organisations' (1997, p. 256). These elements have combined creative practice with a realistic career option, and DIY is a foundation of this culture. When viewed within the context of DIY as appropriated within this thesis, Bennett and Guerra (2019) suggest that DIY as a movement is driven partly by a sense of collectivism and the quest for alternative modes of production.

With the disruption of platforms such as Spotify, artists seeking to carve out a career in the new music industry have placed a premium on independence and DIY capabilities, with evident rewards. Technological advances enable independent artists and producers to create and distribute music with their audience while maintaining creative authority. Twenty years ago,

there were five big British labels and no more than two dozen independent distributors; now, Spotify offers music from 751 different sources (Ingham, 2021). DIY is the music industry's fastest-growing segment, with income growing from 1.7 per cent in 2015 to 4.1 per cent in 2019, or US$873 million, with a total of US$2.15 billion income going to independent artists without a recording contract. Nevertheless, major record labels still accounted for 67.5 per cent and indie labels for 32.5 per cent of income (Houghton, 2020).

From a career perspective, DIY was a form of self-management emerging from the punk movement in the 1980s (Bennett, 2018). Anderson (2013, p. 12) notes that 'punk bands challenged the status quo within the music business, circumventing the recording, manufacturing, and marketing services of major record labels'. As a result, artists derived authenticity through direct-to-fan engagement, bypassing a more traditional label structure and production methods. DIY as a subculture was popularised in the 1970s by the punk movement. Rather than relying on major music labels to reach their fans, artists started recording, producing their own records, arranging their own tours and paving the way for smaller bands to attain greater exposure via recurrent low-cost DIY touring. The emerging 'fanzine' movement assumed responsibility for covering and promoting underground punk scenes, substantially altering the way fans engaged with bands. These fanzines swiftly evolved beyond their origins becoming one of the portals to DIY culture for youth culture. The term 'DIY' is associated with various concepts relating to self-sufficiency, cultural production and movements. While DIY initially referred to untrained people adopting construction and improvement jobs at homes (Talen, 2015), it has catalysed into a cultural movement with a far broader reach than its initial connotations. As noted by Bennett and Guerra (2019), DIY has expanded from punk to include heavy metal, indie rock, electronic dance music (EDM), and hip hop. From punk's DIY participatory youth message to the emergence of digital technology in the mid-1990s (Mckay, 1998), the adoption of DIY within music production and dissemination is fundamental to understanding how independent artists are utilising co-creation as a vital tool for engagement and promotion.

DIY has become increasingly ubiquitous and professionalised (Bennett, 2018). Webb discusses Negus and Hesmondhalgh's (2007) interpretation of DIY as creating a social and lifestyle infrastructure that aided the growth of their record labels, concerts, events and publications. Some of the punk bands that followed the Pistols et al. looked to punk's more

ideological culture of DIY independence; according to Hesmondhalgh: punk's outstanding reputation as a driver of democratisation of popular music was brought about by the formation of hundreds of small record labels, apparently unconnected with previously existing networks of cultural enterprise and outside the traditional South-East England hinterlands British music industry. These DIY labels were the institutional embodiment of punk's well-known commitment to accessibility, widely publicised in fanzines and the music press, and on record sleeves (Hesmondhalgh, 1998, p. 257).

This chapter will examine the progression of DIY into a part of mainstream cultural production, focusing on parallels and perceptions of DIY ethics in the 'new' music industry. What challenges do musical creators and the creative process face in the context of DIY? The convergence of old and new media has resulted in a more democratised and networked distribution and consumption model. New competencies have been established to best advantage artists within this digital landscape during the genesis of this disruption. The democratisation of entry into the market for artists en masse is one of the most significant shifts in the new music industry. The ease of creating, promoting and distributing has been improved dramatically by platforms, hosting services and the ubiquity of affordable production technology such as personal computers, DAWs and audio interfaces to both consumers and producers. While this is beneficial to artists working in the new music industry, it also presents new challenges in reaching one's audience due to increased market competition.

The chapter will proceed by exploring four distinct areas of inquiry regarding the adoption of DIY ethics within the 'new' music industry:

1. DIY ethics within the new music industry
2. independent recording and promotion practices
3. DIY and dissemination
4. consumers as independent producers.

5.2 DIY ethics within the new music industry

The broader adoption of DIY ethics is critical to understanding the competencies established by artists in the new music industry. These competencies being based on access and participation as noted by Hesmondhalgh: 'Fundamental to a democratic media system are the notions of

participation and access.' (1997, p. 256) From punk's DIY participatory youth message, to the advent of digital media in the mid-1990s, DIY is central to understanding networked participatory culture. The Trapese Collective includes examples of acts that demonstrate how DIY and punk are intertwined, such as putting on events, creating zines and spreading anti-fascist activism, rather than rooting DIY in punk or vice versa (Griffin, 2015). The growth of 'autonomy centres' in the United Kingdom in the 1980s exemplifies the historical connection between DIY and punk (Bryan and Chatterton. 2007, p.107). Speaking of independent record labels such as Rough Trade, Hesmondhalgh underlines the importance of collaboration and cooperation in the culture of DIY artists:

> In choosing to work with a post-punk independent like Rough Trade rather than a major record company, musicians were effectively trading in short-term financial security for a sense of collaboration and co-operation, and the feeling of a shared musical culture. (1997, p. 262)

Furthermore, Rough Trade, initially was founded in 1976 on the ethos of a worker's co-operative as Hesmondhalgh states in an 'unprecedented attempt to create internal record company democracy' (Hesmondhalgh 1997, p.266). DIY is regarded as an ideology that promotes individuality and innovation, rather than just a slogan, although others have described DIY as a movement (McKay, 1998, Spencer 2008). Spencer (2008, p. 11) refers to the broader cultural implications of DIY artistic expression: 'the DIY movement is about using anything you can get your hands on to shape your own cultural entity; your own version of whatever you think is missing in mainstream culture'.

Bennett (2018) explores DIY culture within the context of its socio-economic and anti-hegemonic roots, now being appropriated in a more entrepreneurial application, untied from larger corporate interests. He asserts (2018, p. 11) that

> the attempt to maintain a clear-cut distinction, at both a conceptual and a practical level, between DIY and more mainstream cultural production is becoming increasingly problematic as the lines between these two fields of practice appear to blur.

When looking at the new music industry from the artist's viewpoint, the blurring of the lines between DIY and mainstream cultural production is an important facet of today's artist practices.

Although the DIY ethic might not be centred on defying the 'hegemony of the major labels and mainstream music industry' (Dale, 2008, p. 180), there is a common skillset brought forward from these DIY roots, which is now expected of artists operating in the music industry. Flash, a UK-based publishing A&R, provides a compelling insight not only on the evolution of DIY culture at large but also on the evolving roles of artists in today's music industry. He discusses Brockhampton, a band in which each member has a distinct role to play. While Hip-Hop evolved from a historical ethic and embodiment of individualism vs collectivism, authenticity vs performance, and underground vs establishment, we can see a parallel generated by the confluence of technology disruption in many acts outside of this genre today. Ashlan Grey, the band's social media manager, is as well known as any other member. The distinction between singer, artist and influencer is blurring:

> The guy who does all the social media stuff, even though he might not perform musically with the band, he is part of Brockhampton. The thing is, all the Brockhampton fans see him as part of the band. He is not the guy that does the social media. He's in the band, so when it comes to autograph time, he has to sign his autograph because they see him just as valuable because I guess social media is an art form, you know, *good* social media, so if you were a kid, why wouldn't you want to get the autograph of a really good artist, but just in a different kind of scenario? (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

In reality, when we look at the entire Brockhampton lineup, we can see that many of the members serve in a production capacity rather than a creative or performative one. Current members are:

- Kevin Abstract – vocals, production, video direction, creative direction (2010–present)
- Dom McLennon – vocals, production (2010–present)
- Romil Hemnani – production, recording engineering, DJing (2012–present)
- Joba – vocals, production, mixing, mastering, piano (2012–present)
- Jon Nunes – management (2012–present)
- Henock 'HK' Sileshi – creative direction, graphic design (2012–present)
- Merlyn Wood – vocals (2012–present)

- Bearface – vocals, guitar, production (2013–present)
- Robert 'Roberto' Ontenient – production, web design, app programmer (2013–present)
- Matt Champion – vocals (2014–present)
- Jarabi Manwa – production (2015–present), vocals (2020–present)
- Kiko Merley – production (2015–present)
- Ashlan Grey – photography, social media runner (2016 – present) (Kochhar, 2017).

The origins of celebrity embodying more than creative practice alone can be dated back as far as the production involvement of George Martin with the Beatles (Martin, 1979), to Brian Eno's creative influence becoming synonymous due to his work with a multitude of acts including Devo, Talking Heads and U2. In terms of more administrative roles becoming performative, this can be linked to video production, particularly vlogging on YouTube. These YouTube personalities would often require teams of people to execute social media, editing and managerial roles. Part of the YouTube vlog appeal would be a peek behind the curtain, allowing audiences to gain a deeper understanding of the processes involved in being a YouTuber. From the audience's perspective, this exposure of the audience to the backstage mechanics of operation, or breaking of the fourth wall, may have increased audience openness and appreciation for perspectives outside of conventional artistic performance practises. It also represents a common understanding between music and visual media, and the sensibility of artists and video creators working within the digital space. From the viewpoint of a record producer, Ian sees the new music industry as having a proliferation of producer positions. This impact on record production has become inevitable as a result of diminishing budgets of major record labels and the impact of powerful production tools at the disposal of artists in general. Although higher-budget productions have their place, they have almost exclusively been available to established artists. Ian, a record label owner and record producer, addresses the sharp decrease in demand for more innovative, hands-on record producers, as well as the consequent improvement in the quality of demos he receives:

> Let's say the archetypal, ultimate producer, the George Martin if you like, who either works for or is employed by a record company, the person who oversees it from: they receive demos and then, at the end, they hand back a mastered thing to

> be duplicated, essentially. The person who's having an input on song arrangement, on song choice and then instrument arrangement within that, and then the recording process … I think that kind of producer is in marked decline, because a lot of artists either want to or can only afford to do a lot of stuff like that themselves. When you receive demos now, they sound pretty fucking finished.

Ian sees producers falling into three separate camps within the new music industry. First, there are 'songwriters and beat producers'. This new set of producers offer a more modular approach for record companies when looking to develop artists. They are often involved in the writing of songs and consequently demand a royalty split to compensate for lower upfront fees. Second, there is the engineer producer, 'basically filling in a technical gap for a band or an artist'. Third, there is the more creative, all-round producer; these producers are essential for more established artists who need a creative foil, as described by Ian:

> Where you're a massive band, you've been touring loads, and that's where your Eno comes in. Basically, you got no ideas left. You've reached the maximum of everything inside you, so you need someone to come in and give you some sort of mental parameters. You can have all the equipment you like, you can record wherever you like. All of the songs that you write sell billions of copies, so it's like, well, how do I choose what to do? How do we make an album? Because all the options are there. That's the problem, isn't it? Somebody who gives you parameters, almost like a guru, or a sort of Tibetan monk. It is very holistic and psychological.

The record industry has shifted towards a more DIY approach for artists, partly due to the ability to facilitate and perform more tasks on the artist's part without the need for a record label or recording studio, and partly due to their lack of income, which puts more pressure on artists to take on more significant obligations for their careers, forgoing their more 'specialised division of labor' (Hracs et al., 2016, p. 5). According to Dustin, an Australian-based recording artist, even being heard by the industry, regardless of the release of an album, demands a variety of competencies in a proliferation of non-music related outputs:

> I also think for a lot of people to even get on any kind of radar, to even get to a point where you don't have to do everything yourself to where you've got a manager, even having a conversation with the manager. You've got to already have done everything. You've got to have built a website and had built a social media following and found a way to write and record and release music that's existing and it's got response … People aren't really signing just acts that don't have anything anymore unless they're really young and they're just taking a chance. But a lot of people have to kind of build their own. Basically, be a record label as well as a marketing thing, a live touring act, everything. They have to have all the skills ready to go before they even get an introduction into the industry. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

It has become apparent that both independent and mainstream artists' paths to market need the same DIY skills from the outset. Although there are still some young, talented artists who are discovered with little online exposure and then established by industry and Svengali'd into an online persona, this work is increasingly being undertaken by the artists themselves, often with the aid of small groups of friends around them. This manifests itself in a pressure to perform multiple roles related to music, as exemplified by Laurel, a UK-based recording artist, who states, 'I think there's just a huge amount of pressure on somebody to fulfil multiple roles.' (Personal Communication [25.11.2020]) While this abundance of positions increases the artist's workload, it also creates a continuity of identity through modalities of expression, according to Laurel: 'You can launch yourself, you could do everything yourself and if you have that determination and self-governing and all of this stuff and you can do so well with it, but it's just a lot of hard work.' (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

There has been a new avenue of release for artists gaining momentum, rooted in the world of technology rather than the more hegemonic origins of independent labels entwined with major labels. Labels reduce up-front risk by providing incremental participation based on engagement with these emerging models, allowing for more versatility on both sides, with artists who do not need a label's full service still having access to the resources they need. Barney, a UK-based artist manager, speaks of one such distributor, AWAL, moving into the 'plug and play' space of services:

> AWAL have just launched a really interesting setup, which has been mirrored by Caroline in that you basically do your distribution agreement with them and more often than not, there's no money, there's no advanced paid, you will get your tracks and a team that will make sure that everything works in the way it should do. But then if you supply them with, say, extra content like videos, interview footage, bits and pieces like that, you can bolt on some marketing facilities that will come and again and you don't pay for it. What happens is that you agree to give away a little bit more of your rights ownership. I think that's giving the artist a load more power and flexibility and responsibility over their career. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

When coupling the access of individuals to these tools with the implicit networked interaction of Web 2.0, there are more opportunities than ever for creators to build a foundation, independent of labels, utilising ad hoc services such as PR or single song assignment deals. With Spotify moving into the distribution space and further expansion predicted into areas such as label deals and concerts, platforms are shifting into a space previously occupied by labels. We are seeing increased competition, with Apple Music closing 2018 with 57 million subscribers, against Spotify's 83 million (Statista, 2019). This disruption brings with it new challenges, as these new platforms are not tied to preconceived notions of the music industry past. Perhaps innovation within this space and platforms becoming one-stop-shops for artists is the direction required to produce a greater level of competition and fairer compensation for independent artists. As Dinnison, founder of independent label Noon Pacific, states:

> You just don't need all the services that a major label provided at one time. You [can] get a laptop where you can create your songs, home studios or places you can rent for a day. It's very DIY compared to what it used to be and the costs involved five or ten years ago. (Dinnison, 2016)

Barney talks about a recent signing of his artist to Ingrooves and emphasises this pushback of responsibility for content curation onto the artist and management team rather than the label:

> We've done a distribution deal with Ingrooves, who have just been bought out by Universal. The reality is that we've had lots of virtual chats about what we want to

> do and when we might possibly go. And then there's loads of wonderful digital tools that Ingrooves have, and then you have to watch a bunch of instructional videos, and then you are managing the entire process yourself. You're taking care of the upload. You can then select which digital platforms it's going to, which territories it's served to. You can have all the assets stored in particular folders which certain team members get access to, so very much the technology is empowering the artist. You know, it's great. Everyone gets an understanding, and you can see your figures in real time. You can see which channels are working for you, where your audiences are, you know where your money is coming from, more importantly. And so yeah, there's the self-governance which has come through an organic process in that there's artists that just want to do it, and you develop that way. There's also self-governance because the industry is moving that way, and it's putting a lot more onus back on it to you as management and artist team. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

For artists, it would be unwise to rely on a single platform as a sole source of distribution, promotion and revenue; for example, in the 2018 'adpocalypse', YouTube creators struggled with overnight changes in monetisation policies and promotion on specific types of content uploaded to the website. Independent artists now have more market access via mechanisms such as crowdfunding and platforms, which serve as a medium for wide audience exposure with low financial investment, with gatekeepers remaining but taking on new responsibilities. The music industry's destabilisation as a result of platform disruption and the creative movement spurred by these 'quasi-platforms' is redistributing wealth to major record labels and artists.

5.3 Independent recording and promotion practices

In terms of music promotion, The Buzzcocks were pioneers of successful do-it-yourself music. In 1977, they issued their *Spiral Scratch* EP on their record label, New Hormones. They promoted it in punk zines and sold it via mail orders and small London retailers, deftly skirting the record business and encouraging other successful DIY acts to follow suit. In much the same way, contemporary artists such as Tyler, the Creator, Mac Demarco and FKA Twigs have used a similar DIY ethos to gain exposure internationally with great success. Mark Mulligan, a media

and technology analyst, refers to the importance of innovation in parallel with the current growth of the music industry. This innovation and disruption are often informed by the creativity and promotional ventures of independent and DIY artists:

> The continued boom in recorded music revenues is accompanied by a growing complexity to the underlying business, with increased diversification of business models and artist/label relationships. Over the next few years continued revenue growth will be both accompanied and driven by business model innovation and disruption. (Mulligan, 2020, para. 6).

While home recording in the music industry has been increasingly prevalent due to technological advancements such as the affordability and ubiquity of powerful personal computers, there has been a significant increase in the frequency of bedroom producers working in the music industry in recent years (Auvinen, 2016). Technology democratised access to previously inaccessible tools and allowed for unfettered time spent recording. The record label's power over marketing has been eroded by the free access to promotional platforms and channels enjoyed by all artists and consumers. More access has increased competition, with streaming services adding 40,000 songs to their catalogues each day (Cahalin, 2020). While the music industry was one of the first to see the impact of digital disruption due to file-sharing platforms such as Napster in 1999, the ongoing disruption will have implications for other media-related industries. Investor capital is now flooding into the media industries, with seven podcasting companies having been acquired for more than $100 million in the last two years (Steele, 2020). Streaming has opened up access for artists who lack the financial resources to create the same degree of promotional expenditure as labels, providing an opportunity while also levelling the playing field in terms of access to audiences and the ability to widely distribute independently.

Regarding streaming, independent artists are now able to use many of the same data and distribution tools as major labels. At the same time, platforms provide artists with tools for managing their fan networks. While this democratisation might seem beneficial to all, it has created an environment of abundance and creates challenges for creators wanting to be heard above the noise of others. Context is critical for an artist to connect with their audience, which can be accomplished through social media interaction, personality, visual and sonic aesthetics

and a compelling backstory. People are more likely to search social media accounts, check for live events and engage with new releases due to this.

Music creators are increasingly adopting broader roles; as individuals, curators and writers whose cultivated identities are at the centre of their connections with their intended audience. Although technical advances have their benefits, many of the skills needed to produce a record in the pre-digital era have become less relevant, further shifting the sound of popular music away from the artist and towards the production tools themselves, as demonstrated by the emergence of Musical Instrument Digital Interface (MIDI) technology and the ubiquity of synthesisers to programming and sampling within Digital Audio Workstation (DAWs). Artists are more than passive participants in the mediation of innovation and interaction; Theberge (1997, p. 200) refers to the disruption technology has caused in both the creation and consumption of music:

> Musicians are not simply consumers of new technologies, rather their entire approach to music-making has been transformed so that consumption - the exercise of taste and choice has become implicated in their musical practices at the most fundamental level.

With much of the focus currently on singular projects, it is clear that this shift in engagement has implications for artists in their career identity. One such implication for identity is that of the alias. While having various projects is nothing new, and many artists have had a portfolio of diverse and confluent musical outputs in the past, the new music industry gives artists more scope, anonymity and tools to realise a variety of musical and aesthetic outputs. Furthermore, with an environment that promotes various projects and a more eclectic artistic approach, recording artist Scott suggests that the potential for parallel projects, untethered to a singular artistic identity, is becoming more widespread:

> For the prolific and flexible artist, there is the option for parallel projects to overlap and allow more streams of potential income if the work is put in, which would require some serious juggling, but ultimately could see results without compromise, if, for example, anonymity was applied. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

From the perspective of performance, this anonymity calls into question traditional perceptions of artist-to-audience engagement. For example, McColvin (1930, p. 137) spoke of the

importance of the performer within the context of the music performance itself: ‘It is fairly certain that a stranger to music would believe … that the performer was far more important than the music he performed, at least so far as the general public was concerned’. McColvin clarified the significance of this by saying that knowing a good artist means knowing that whatever they perform will be performed well. In many of today’s styles, the importance of performing ‘adequately’ within the scope of performance has diminished due to a strong dependence on technology to compensate for any inadequacies on the artist. In their discussion of the role of DIY competencies concerning music performance graduates, Lebler and Hodges (2017, p. 24) emphasise the sole importance of performance competency in an artist’s canon being lessened in the digital era:

> It could be argued that a DIY approach is essential for survival in the dynamic 21st-century music industry. Hallan and Gaunt (2012) advocate that music students should broaden their thinking and pay attention to a range of aspects of a career in music, and that they should play an active role in their learning and planning process.

The music industry has a cyclical nature regarding the kinds of artists that achieve success at any given time. When it comes to the artists who succeed in the ‘new’ music industry, Ian, a UK-based music producer and record label owner, mentions industry bias. Like many other interviewees, Ian emphasises the increased demand for and success of solo artists in the new music industry. Much of this stems from a financial and logistical standpoint, one that is simple to expand from small-scale touring to commercial success:

> It would appear to benefit a solo artist more than a band, and that’s tied in with the economics of it and the current income models, whereby if you’ve got to pay for touring, and you’ve got to split songwriting in five ways, given that across-the-board individual musicians’ income is down, even pre-Covid, the less people you have to share that with is more beneficial to you.

The development of platforms with resources that enable fluid interactions between the creator and the user is becoming more common in media distribution. In the new digital landscape, creators have the potential to circumvent distribution challenges and directly engage an audience.

This presents its own set of challenges in terms of value, ownership and audience distance. In addition, the reorganisation of traditional relationships among creators, customers and industry intermediaries affects a creator's relationship with the industry and the general public. When it comes to approaching one's career as an artist in the new music industry, Scott emphasises the importance of flexibility. His process has been influenced by his experience as an artist whose career has spanned pre-digital promotional disruption and the emergence of platforms. He stresses the importance of flexibility due to the rapid pace of change in the music industry:

> As labels, print press and to a certain degree, radio have become less relied on to get a break, the independent artist now has more access to tools available to utilise. Coming from someone whose first break came pre-internet or digital era, sending physical press kits to get reviews, A&R attention, etc, now is both a fantastic and daunting time in regard to getting an audience. The most important aspect of flexibility is having the ability to stay as ahead of the curve as possible. Purely due to how quickly change occurs. Flexibility in this regard means not relying too much on previous successes in terms of achieving goals. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Two significant factors have changed, according to Scott. To begin with, he discovered that personal contacts were critical in gaining press traction for releases in a pre-digital industry. Furthermore, as Scott has relocated from the United Kingdom to Australia, he considers the geographical distance between Australia and the United Kingdom a constraint, necessitating a complete rethinking of his strategy for interacting with industry. When we look at distance to the music industry from a geographic perspective, this has important implications. Much of Scott's work and fan base in the United Kingdom has not translated into significant momentum in Australia, and Scott has been forced to start from the ground up:

> As a practical example, my previous work involved networking with press and radio contacts, establishing and maintaining a strong rapport with staff of magazines, labels and press to keep presence and coverage at the optimum level (This comes from someone without management and dedicated PR.) Now I find myself in a position where not only do those outlets no longer exist, I am geographically in a new place. The rules I once followed no longer apply, and I

> have had a steep learning curve. Without flexibility, this would not have occurred. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

As an independent artist, Scott emphasises the importance of paying attention to traditional outlets such as print media. However, he considers all forms of promotion to be legitimate tools in an artist's arsenal. While some aspects of maintaining a career as an artist have become more challenging, he accepts that given enough creativity, everyone has an opportunity at success from their own homes with tools available to creators and consumers:

> Outside of streaming platforms and social media, paying attention to local print press, both regional and national, and researching blogs has shown there are more options than just relying on the standards to make my art known and available. With live streaming becoming necessary within the last year, ways of engaging with an audience are plentiful. Technology is absolutely essential to the modern artist. We now have the ability, if creative enough to produce industry-standard work from home: reducing expenditure and increasing productivity. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Ian notes that much of the perceived value within the music creator-to-consumer exchange is access to the artist, whether through platforms or in concert. Those who prefer to remain aloof will be less likely to capture the attention of their intended audience: 'If you're putting yourself forward as a very kind of aloof, you know, non-relatable thing as a sort of stance, it's hard then to DM people on Twitter.' This openness and relatability have been shown to pay dividends for the kinds of artists finding success. Ian goes on to state that this has been a big part of the success of both Ed Sheeran and Lewis Capaldi:

> Someone like Ed Sheeran or Lewis Capaldi, these aren't your distant big screen stars. They're basically like: 'Oh well, just wondered up here with a guitar, shall we have a little song?' It's a skill in itself, to project that to the whole of the O2 for seven nights running is pretty amazing, actually. But I think it does favour those three qualities, just because of the interaction.

This notion that the authenticity of the artist is somehow tethered to the frequency of engagement and interaction is something Ian finds creatively frustrating:

> If you just want to drop an album with no fanfare and your photos are all not of your face and all that kind of stuff. That is, by any stretch, the cooler way to do it, in my opinion. To keep that sort of distance. However, I don't think the landscape today is set up for cool people to be successful in music. That's why everyone's so fucking lame.

Furthermore, with always-on connectivity, audience and industry demand pushing eyes towards artists' every contact, the metaphorical notion of a 'stage' that can be entered and exited feels further from view than in previous decades: 'everything an artist does or does not do now plays into the reception of their music' (Franjić, 2016, para. 5). Flash argues that while how artists interact with the industry and the public has evolved from an industry perspective, the artists themselves have not. He believes the job of artists is to create a world around themselves and that this is an inherent ability:

> I think interfaces have changed, but the artist themselves, I think you're an artist, or you're not. I've always kind of thought that you can't teach being an artist. You either have that flair, or you don't. You know, and you always had this artistic flair. I always had a strong image of you being on stage. It always seemed to be your vision and your vision was, this has to be right. This has to be right. Everything from Christian F. Yeah, you were obsessed with that film, the first video has to have elements of that slight Germanic kind of cold feet, that's artistry. Artists are universe creators. Do I actually change my universe based on the feedback that I'm getting? (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Context is key for an artist to create a link with their audience, and can be achieved through social media engagement, personality, visual and sonic aesthetics, and a compelling backstory, among other things. When we step forward into digital epochs, one unintended result of this digital churn of interaction is the influence of a band's or artist's aesthetic on historical iconography.

5.4 DIY and dissemination

The interviews I conducted explored, among other things, the impact of DIY on artists themselves – their workload, their direct contact with their fans and how modern forms of cultural development are blurring the lines between DIY and popular culture. The interviewees

gave a broad variety of responses; nevertheless, all of them echoed a common core concept of control – as Ian puts it, 'DIY means control'. In addition, Ian claims that DIY can be a dividing line when it comes to voicing and aligning one's artistic creative persona with other like-minded people:

> It means, just by default, expressing a personal vision of something and if you do have quite dearly held principles about which music you think is good, what kind of artists, as a label now, and as a producer, deserve your time and energy and as a label, financial input. Who do you want to support? … Essentially.

Interviewees' relationship with the term 'DIY ethics' was complex and multifaceted. While they agreed on some aspects, they were complex, diverse and contradictory, reflecting differing interests, responsibilities and experiences. Respondents' cognitive dissonance when faced with the question of DIY was surprising; on the one hand, it was something they welcomed as a requirement or useful tool in their professions, but on the other hand, it was an intimidating slogan that did not fit with their creative identity.

If we examine DIY as the practice of autonomy, it is clear from the outset that artists should be able to engage in these practices willingly and competently. The DIY ethic, according to Roberts and Moore (2009), acts as a 'mechanism' for mobilisation. A system of components that work together in a phase, which is in line with the growing number of tasks that artists are required to perform on their own. Laurel states that 'new' music industry signings come with greater expectations on artists. No longer is the implication that the artist must be a good singer, producer or musician; rather, there needs to be a keen awareness of one's place within the industry, as well as a competence in marketing as an artist independently, to the point where the artist becomes a commercially viable opportunity for investment. David, a US-based artist manager, stated:

> I think you just have to do everything. I mean, I imagine as things heat up and you get bigger budgets there is definitely more people that come in to help, but really, people don't just get signed based on them having a good voice anymore.

While the action of DIY in the sense of labour might be one that Luke, an LA-based recording artist, performs on a daily basis, he does feel a heavy burden is attached to the label as an artist.

He does not feel that he can identify as a DIY artist due to his previous major record label experience, as well as grants he has received and an ingrained idea of his own artistic identity:

> Just even just the phrase, that term, like if someone was like oh yeah, you're a DIY artist, which maybe isn't even a thing people say very much anymore, but it wouldn't. It wouldn't jump out as something that I'd be like: yeah, I'm a DIY artist. I guess because I've had to straddle both things. You know. I've signed a big deal for the first album and stuff like classic major label shit. I guess I'm not unsigned now, I'm signed, it's not like a big label, but it's, you know, I don't know what that – what the term means anymore. I'm signed to a label that has a distributor and marketing budget and stuff like that and so technically, I'm not unsigned. I've fallen into grants and different things, I think we've sometimes applied as an unsigned sort of band. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

One important distinction made by Luke is that in order to fully identify with DIY, the artist must be willing to adopt any role in order to achieve their goal. His approach has been one of following his passion, working on those areas he really feels reflect his own artistic identity. While he states that the more pragmatic side of his career in terms of booking shows, the idea of adopting such a role terrifies him:

> I feel like DIY in a kind of big way, that scares me is like: you don't have a manager, you don't have booking agent. You don't have anyone, and you're basically doing that all yourself. You're emailing venues, that terrifies me. I'm just like, no, I can't, I'm too lazy and I'm too used to having people do that at this point. It's the things that I enjoy that I do the DIY. I'm not like slaving away at shit that I hate. As soon as it's something I hate, I'll push it off to whoever I can. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Luke, an independent UK singer/songwriter now based in LA, clarifies the difference between DIY and unsigned and adds to David's argument about passion for what the artist is doing being a driving force in terms of being able to take on any task required to make the project work. There appears to be a clear difference between identifying as DIY and following DIY ethics, with the aesthetic distinction being the most significant:

> But I know DIY and unsigned isn't necessarily the same thing … I feel like they are connected … I feel like the DIY aspect of what I do has just been this personality thing where, I like doing it, why would you not do it? And I've been competent at the things that I need to do. I was into art before I was into music, so I kind of have some visual skill. I like computers and gadgets and stuff, so I just have an aptitude for the Internet and things like that and then my wife is an artist and from the get-go, when we were still just dating, she would do my artwork. It just made sense because, she was free but also, I liked what she did and it kind of just all fit together. So, it just flowed very naturally, and I wouldn't say that I fly the flag for DIY aesthetic. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

Ian Mackaye (American singer and frontman of Fugazi and Minor Threat) expressed the same sentiment regarding control in a 2012 interview, saying that using a DIY ethic while deciding to release music by his own bands gave him more power and autonomy for creativity:

> With Fugazi we always just did it ourselves. And that way we know. We know that it's, like, done the way we wanna do it. It won't be exploited. It'll just be what we wanted which is to make the stuff available. (2012)

UK-based publishing A&R Flash makes it clear that artists who are inspired and motivated are more appealing to him. One of the non-performing writers he represents provides further insight. As a co-writer, the work of organising sessions can be taxing, and it is frequently assigned to management or publishing A&R. However, there is a growing consensus that writers would be best served by doing this work themselves. The advantage is a more selective collection of sessions that match the writer's aesthetic, hopefully contributing to greater success:

> I respond more to people, artistically who like to get shit done. I prefer working with people that come up with ideas as opposed to people who go: what do we do now? What are you doing? [.] But then again, I really, really love, you know nonperforming co-writers, the ones that hustle their own sessions. They're not relying on management or publisher there, just hustling their own thing. Yeah, that's great as well, because, you know, you're not stressed about trying to fill their diary. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Flash uses the term 'DIY' as a verb, almost as though it were a switch that could be turned on or off depending on the situation. It is something that comes naturally to being an artist in the new music industry, a skill that is needed to be effective as both an independent and signed artist to varying degrees. When it comes to the songwriters and producers that Flash represents, he finds that remaining busy is not always the optimal strategy. Sessions may fill up a diary, but they don't always result in songs being released (also known as a 'cut'). He claims that the writers will be better served by taking on the responsibility of understanding themselves and knowing the required sessions:

> They're more adept at DIYing it themselves and filling their own diaries. And you're like 'fucking great'. And then you kind of start introducing ideas rather than sending the wrong ideas just to basically keep them busy. And yeah, I think that's important with publishing. I think that's very DIY as well as a non-performing songwriter. Knowing what you're into, knowing what you want to work with and identifying it. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

As an independent artist, Dustin provides a compelling insight into the realities of trying to realise creative ambitions geographically away from the music industry. The skills he acquired were not only due to his lack of proximity to industry but also part of his process of building confidence to become an artist in his own right: 'for a long time, I didn't have any confidence to do stuff as an artist publicly, so I was just kind of recording other people and working with other people behind the scenes'. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020]) Dustin's artistic endeavours became more autonomous as a result of his relationship with sound and production skills. These talents, he claimed, were a prerequisite for achieving his artistic goals. Furthermore, he maintains that his growth as an artist was a function of the skills he learned, rather than a desire for artistic freedom:

> Being an artist was a by-product of the skills that I developed just engaging with, you know, recording people and not being an artist basically making as much music as I could without being an artist. (Personal Communication [07.10.2020])

The benefit of DIY competencies spreading through platforms and industries is that they democratise access to a larger audience. Scott claims that the 'playing field has evened up

somewhat in regard to [being] able to release music on the same platform as established acts'. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020]) Scott also notes that the financial disparity between existing and new artists has been addressed:

> Production costs and distribution of physical media had been a huge differentiating factor between the new artist (with limited funding) and the big players. Now we have the ability to rub shoulders with name artists. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

This understanding of DIY as a position held by a dogma of absolute control over any practised aspect of production is disputed by some artists in the new music industry; it may also be viewed as a competency for assembling and leading a team on a budget that is either non-existent or practical for an independent artist. As UK-based artist Laurel goes on to say, more charismatic artists who surround themselves with their own teams of friends and creatives will find themselves better placed in terms of content development:

> The person that can do the photo shoot, the person that can write the songs, produce the music, be in the visuals, either have great friends that are making visuals for them or be able to make that themselves and get a lot of people to work for free, so then you've got the charismatic side. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

From a music industry standpoint, Flash points out that DIY ethics are just as important now as they have always been, with the exception of the interface and software. The methods rather than the concepts of promotion and relation have changed, from leaflets, posters and street promotion to the digital domain:

> I think the DIY ethic is as important now as it was back in punk or hip hop. You know, I mean the birth of hip hop around the Bronx. All DIY. The artists were using the tools around them at the time to broadcast the signal that they wanted to get out there. Whether it be flyers or printing up T-shirts. Just setting up a fucking sound system on a street to promote your club event further down the line. All that, and I see that the modern-day artists are still using that DIY ethic, but with the tools that have been created over the last 10 years. So yeah, same principle … different interfaces. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

While the tools accessible to artists for transmission have always evolved, the fundamental ways in which artists engage have remained consistent. Independent artists are at the front of emerging cultural movements, which necessitates self-promotion, self-release and direct interaction with audiences. Independent artists are at an advantage when adopting any role necessary to accomplish their goals, since contemporary forms of cultural growth blur the distinction between DIY and mainstream culture.

5.5 Consumers as independent producers

The importance of DIY also crosses over to consumers. With the availability of production tools to anyone with a laptop, tablet or smartphone, the boundary between professional and bedroom producer blurs. In reality, the term 'bedroom producer' reflects an independent musician operating in many capacities, whether this be a curiosity in programming, synthesisers or recorded sound. With the use of laptops and the internet, the modern musician has a new-found mobility with which to utilise multiple spaces in the context of a record at any time and any place. Further to Bruns' (2016) notion of produsage (discussed in Chapter 2), online communities can add tacit feedback into the process of production through peer collaboration, sampling and patch sharing. Alongside this, the wealth of access to production tools and networked communities on the internet has created a host of more lo-fi sub-genres specifically born out of independent artists utilising a proliferation of disparate production styles and musical attributes such as 'bedroom pop', a DIY ethos that echoes a similar cultural nostalgia and aesthetic of pre-DAW cassette culture (McGraith, 2015). The ubiquity of access to such tools has resulted in a DIY approach within music production culture becoming more mainstream:

> Several studies (see, for example, Gill and Pratt, 2008; McRobbie, 2002) have pointed out that cultural practitioners are usually multi-tasking in the sense that they are usually performing many roles as a way of 'ducking and diving' (McRobbie, 2002: 524) in order to survive and overcome the risky economy associated with small-scale music activities. Almost all respondents performed different roles but this made it difficult for them to explain whether they were musicians, journalists, or booking agents. The multi-tasking attitude was connected to a DIY attitude of auto-promotion and auto-production which is a common feature of independent

> music production, but at the same time it was enabled by a networked system of production. (Tarrasi, 2017, p. 217)

It is important to emphasise the increased financial risk to the artist in the new music industry. The importance of minimal viable product (MVP) is fundamental to developing a strategy as an artist when approaching an independent release strategy. It is even more crucial for artists to be aware not only of economics, but also of effective and novel means of engagement with their potential audience, through high-quality media and an aggregate of content for any release. This requirement of continued engagement through novel content is not something from which artists can rest, as Watson notes:

> [Artists] have to plan to be consistently remarkable. Not just on day one, but on day ten, twenty, one hundred, and all the way through the life cycle of the project. And the life cycle of the product will be shorter. (Watson, quoted in Morrow, 2018, p. 46)

Liz Tripodi asserts that 'the artist needs to think of themselves as a brand', rather than presenting themselves as a collection of 'we don't want people to see us this way' (2016). As a brand, the artist uses cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and subcultural capital to proactively demarcate and promote themselves through the constructs in which their brand exists (Thomton, 1997). Participatory practices, when viewed in terms of artists as brands, are a way for artists to use their audience as a source of continuous exposure without the need for capital investment.

Tom makes it very apparent that his use of the term 'DIY' is contextual, in the sense that his upbringing shaped his perceptions of genres such as punk, indie and rock due to the types of bands that identified as DIY as well as social groups that aligned with these bands. The setting is one steeped in bands, with the only way to succeed being a grassroots DIY mentality, whether that involves booking shows, designing album artwork or creating music videos. This knowledge of what DIY is, in Tom's opinion, relates to a connection 'very much with a genre', as he puts it: 'I think of it more as a punk, indie, rock leaning thing.' (Personal Communication [19.11.2020]) What is obvious is that there is one field of DIY work, as expressed by David, that occurs in the aesthetic, sound and ethos of independent artists; this overlaps with another area of DIY work – not just a set of principles, but a set of competencies that artists in the modern music industry

must share, consciously or unconsciously, with independent DIY artists of decades past. There is a difference between DIY as an ethos and DIY as a practice, as we can see. Is this DIY culture and its fundamental values still reflected in today's genres? Bedroom pop and bedroom indie, according to Tom, 'seem to be the closest thing' (Personal Communication [19.11.2020]) to what might be considered DIY today. The abundance of access to not only production tools but also networked communities on the internet has generated a slew of new lo-fi sub-genres produced by independent or prosumer musician using a range of production styles and musical characteristics such as 'bedroom pop', a DIY ethos that echoes a similar cultural nostalgia and aesthetic of pre-DAW cassette culture (McGraith, 2013). The ubiquity of more powerful, lower-cost home recording solutions such as laptops precipitated the introduction of this aesthetic, much like the emergence of low-cost four-track recorders such as the Tascam Portastudio, which was released in 1979 as the world's first four-track tape recorder. Many of the features found on a higher-end mixing desk and tape recorder were included in the Portastudio: 'Each channel in the 4x2 mixer had its own fader and pan, bass, treble, trim, aux send and mic/line controls; also, tracks could be "ping-ponged", and users could overdub and punch record parts for days' (Alberts, 2003, p. 34).

The convenience with which the Portastudio could be transported and set up was an important step towards recording being untethered from traditional recording studio spaces that we see today:

> The 20-pound Model 144 was a heavyweight when compared to the analog Portastudios of today, but the ability to carry it to gigs and do remote recording with a couple of mics was a blessing to anyone in the late 1970s. (Alberts, 2003, p. 34)

Although digital equivalents can produce much cleaner audio fidelity, 'bedroom pop' embraces more idiosyncratic recording techniques and lo-fi sensibilities, which is where the genre rose to prominence. These digital tools loosely, and in connection with cassette culture, allowed artists to create in more informal settings. It is clear is that the connection made by unpolished artistic expression is a major part of the appeal of bedroom pop and DIY genres from the past. Tom, a UK-based general manager of a publishing label, discusses similarities between today's aesthetic and DIY as he sees it:

> Some of the very successful artists in that space can't really play the guitar very well and things like that and I think there's a thing with it musically now where some people almost follow that path as well. So, there's a DIY aesthetic and actually, I guess comes back to punk almost in a way where like not being very good at the instruments was a part of that. So yeah, there are definitely parallels to be drawn between the bedroom pop thing and DIY as I think of it. (Personal Communication [19.11.2020])

The divisiveness of the term 'DIY' when viewed through the lens of artistic identity became apparent during the qualitative component of this study. DIY has a long history in the work ethic of independent artists; it not only encapsulates a fierce individuality, but also a punk-influenced cultural ethos. DIY elicits a wide range of reactions from both artists and industry professionals. The fundamental issue is that DIY is seen not only as a collection of distinct, self-driven competencies, but also as a set of values to uphold in order to preserve credibility when interacting with industry and the general public. Although the routes to market and infrastructure for release may have changed, the competencies associated with DIY have remained consistent. The demand on artists to build their own audiences, connect with them and spread content has never been greater; what has changed is the ease with which content can be produced and broadcast. While there has never been a greater pressure to produce content, the artist now has access to powerful resources that make the learning process less taxing and time consuming. While the demand to provide content has never been higher, the task has in certain respects become simpler.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the disruption resulting from the movement of platforms into a space previously occupied by record labels. This has facilitated the shift in power from industry to consumer. Labels are no longer the dominant mediators of the creative process or engagement. Instead, there is an implicit expectation of direct to audience engagement from artists. Therefore, it is prudent to consider the current disruption of the new music industry compared with the disruption of independent labels of decades past. This chapter has sought to understand what the term 'DIY' means to artists who operate independently in the new music industry or who work within the structure of a label, and how this translates into practice in their careers. Ian made clear that the

conventional producer role is diminishing, since many artists either want to or can only afford to undertake a lot of this work themselves. When viewed through the lens of an artist, the blurring of the barriers between DIY and mainstream culture creation is a significant aspect of contemporary artist practises. The roads to market for both independent and mainstream artists in many cases require the same DIY abilities from the start, which means that as an artist there must be a readiness to take on whatever role is necessary to accomplish objectives. Just being heard by industry A&R now often requires a range of abilities in a profusion of non-music related outputs.

Transparency and relatability have been found to benefit the kind of artists that achieve success in the new music industry. Exposing the audience to background operations or breaching the fourth wall from the audience's viewpoint may have dividends in boosting audience receptivity and appreciation for views outside of normal artistic performance practises.

Independent artists now have access to a similar set of data and distribution capabilities to those used by major labels. Simultaneously, platforms provide artists with tools for managing their fan bases. While this democratisation may seem to benefit everyone, it has produced an atmosphere of plenty and caused difficulties for artists seeking to be heard above the noise. We have seen a 'flattening out' of the way artists interact through platforms and outlets. Previously, promotion was often tied to specific geographic sites, radio stations or regional print publications; this has now been reduced to fewer, less geographically specific outlets. While this broadens the reach, these platforms are not solely focused on music, highlighting the need for artists to develop skills in audience retention and content creation. Due to the constant connectedness in the digital age, as well as audience and industry demand, the metaphorical concept of a 'stage' that may be entered and departed, seems farther removed from view than in past decades. The environment in which artists are expected to create and interact with their intended audiences has been significantly disrupted, in terms of distribution mechanisms and creativity, from the inception of their projects to the point of inspiration when making music. The emphasis of the artist's role has evolved from one that places a premium on music to one that places a premium on marketing, with the success of a campaign hinged on audience engagement.

6
Participatory platforms, collaboration, changing musical workflows and exchange

6.1 Introduction

The artist–industry–consumer connection has been transformed by digital disruption. Before the early 2000s, artists had to deal with numerous industry gatekeepers to reach a wider audience. Nowadays, the process is usually as follows; first, the artist shares their songs with the audience online, bloggers may notice it and enhance the song's popularity exemplified by artists such as Lorde with her breakout single 'Pure Heroin' in 2013 and Lana Del Rey's single 'Video Games' in 2012. Once the number of organic plays increases, the song may be included in a popular Spotify playlist or receive its first radio play. This upward cycle of artist–consumer market connections can continue in various ways and at a dramatic rate.

The restriction traditionally imposed by platforms as an intermediary to artists gaining access to the market, is the cause of gatekeeper disruption. The gatekeeper function has moved to one of facilitating and boosting public attention. Adaptation has been imposed as a result of disintermediation (Hughes et al., 2016). This chapter will discuss a significant aspect of the overall thesis research in terms of the transition from the old to the new music industry, focusing on which aspects of the more traditional model have survived platform disruption and how the more hegemonic structures are adapting to such change. What is the extent to which the old and new music industries are distinct from one another? Moreover, to what extent do they coexist and overlap? It is timely to investigate the facets of the traditional music industry structure that still retain relevance in the new music industry in order to acquire some perspective on the emergence of platforms and their impact on the old and new music industries. This relates to the industry's discovery moment (how A&R discovers a new and unsigned artist) when it comes to new artists and the strategies that artists might use to acquire traction in finding their audience and attracting industry attention. This will be accomplished by examining the various forms of participatory exchange typical in today's music industry, such as online streaming platforms,

more independent distribution and social media integration, drawing a parallel with the adaptations of large labels to these disruptions.

Within the scope of this chapter addressing a more decentralised music industry, it is essential to address release mechanisms that artists have at their disposal, specifically direct-to-fan 'quasi-platforms'. These are a resource for artists who seek to reach an audience outside of the traditional label system. This opens up a new market entry point for artists previously closed off by gatekeepers such as major record companies.

6.2 The evolution of the new music industry brings forward facets of the old industry

> What is noise to the old order is harmony to the new. (Attali, 1977, p. 35)

At first glance, the new music industry seems to be very different from the old one, where the gatekeepers – the major record labels – systematically restricted access to the music market and maintained 'artificial scarcity' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). The digital era has seen radical change with major corporations repositioning themselves from record companies to music companies, with the tacit balance shifting away from record sales as the centre of the business model to one that exploits rights in all areas of music-related revenue. This movement and adaptation of the music industry to external forces align with Attali's more historical but prophetic concept of continuous industrial appraisal: 'Our science has always desired to monitor, measure, abstract, and castrate meaning' (Attali, 1985, p. 3). While platforms provide new opportunities for artists, Srnicek observes that capitalism's basic principles remain in effect, with profitability at the forefront: 'Platforms offer new forms of competition and control, but in the end profitability is the great arbiter of success.' (2016, p. 124) The new music industry model is based on leveraging artists as brands rather than only selling albums. This change is influencing how artists of all kinds, from celebrities to unknowns, must see and market themselves – in other words, the way the cultural industries conceive of their audiences is changing. There is greater emphasis on audience research, marketing and addressing 'niche' audiences (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 2).

The changes brought about in the music industry are a response to the cultural industries' unique economics:

> Due to high production costs and low duplication costs, profits are most effectively achieved through audience maximisation. The notion that record labels are involved

> in selling a recording artist within the broader scope of entertainment outside of the sphere of just music itself is not new. (Negus, 1992, p. 5)

This has been accelerated as a by-product of the increasing pressure on labels to accrue a proliferation of income streams due to the diminishing income returns from record sales. In terms of the more traditional players in the music industry, there has been both development and consolidation in the new music industry, with the major music firms retaining a stronghold on recording and music production revenues while also expanding their involvement in artist management, promotion and merchandise. Record labels today collect a variety of revenue sources related to artist brands, including proceeds from emerging digital music offerings; this transition, as explained by Goodman, is an effort to pivot into a more profitable space as well as altering the perception of their role in music: 'to recast themselves as music – rather than just recording – companies' (Goodman, cited by Oakley and O'Connor, 2013 p. 407). Hesmondhalgh reinforces this with an emphasis on the model of all cultural industries:

> The ownership and organisation of the cultural industries have changed radically. The largest companies no longer specialise in a particular cultural industry, such as film, publishing, television or recording; they now operate across a number of different cultural industries. (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 2)

Sony's recent acquisition of Artists Without A Label (AWAL), a portal for anyone to upload music for review to their digital distribution channel, exemplifies this diversification of revenue sources and congruence between the old and new music industry forces. One reflects a step towards complete music democratisation, while the other represents a more hegemonic reorganisation. The latter runs at odds with Attali's notion of music being a mirror, prophetic and a catalyst of future changes within the industry: 'its styles and economic organisation are ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster than material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code' (Attali, 1977, p. 11). For Sony, the incorporation of more independent platforms represents a move towards establishing a direct link with the millions of artists globally who are currently unsigned to a record label. This proliferation of income streams and opportunities exploited by major record labels is explained by Laing as 'a unitary business sector, albeit one in which sub-sectors have a relatively autonomous relationship to each other' (Laing, 2009, p. 15).

Against this context of significant transformation, there is an unmistakable resemblance to the old music industry: exceptional financial rewards continue to be paid to a few– *'plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose'* (Jean Baptiste Alphonse Karr, 1849) However, commercial failure is much more commonplace due to the recoupment structure of major record labels. Hilary Rosen of the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) spoke of these inefficiencies at a Congress hearing in 2000:

> Typically, less than 15 per cent of all sound recordings released by Major record companies will even make back their costs. Far fewer return profit. Here are some revealing facts to demonstrate what I'm talking about. There were 38,857 albums released last year [1999], 7,000 from the Majors and 31, 857 from independents. Out of the total releases, only 233 sold over 250,000 units. Only 437 sold over 100,000 units. That's 1 per cent of the time for the total recording industry that an album even returns any significant sales, much less profit. (Rosen quoted in Cumberland, 2002, para. 41).

Another key standard of the old music industry is the power of a major record label when mass marketing. This is set against a backdrop of increasing financial risk assumed by more independent artists when entering the market. However, there has always been high risk from major record labels as well, with unpredictability in audience consumption patterns playing a significant role:

> Fashionable performers or styles, even if heavily marketed, can suddenly come to be perceived as outmoded and, equally, other texts can become unexpectedly successful…cultural companies are engaged in a constant process of struggle to control what symbol creators are likely to come up with. (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 27)

The popular music industry has often been characterised by change, and that transition has nearly always been driven by technological advancements (Hughes et al., 2016.). The rise and dispersion of related music industries have emerged from the democratisation of music technologies and the digitalisation of music practices. Artists are finding new ways to interact with audiences, produce content and to communicate with industry figures as digital access expands for all players. These new music industries, which are no longer dominated by record

labels, provide more options for artists to collaborate, connect and engage with those interested in their music. When viewed through the prism of music industry disruption, platform disruption is evident; these platforms provide data distributed to third parties such as labels and publishers. This mechanism treats recorded music as a means to an end rather than the end product itself. Data gathered from these processes are part of a combination of big data that corporations use to research and predict customer behaviour using digital positivism. This participatory interaction between creator and consumer, generating exploitable data, resembles Attali's (1985, p. 9) concept that 'music now seems hardly more than a somewhat clumsy excuse for the self-glorification of artists and the growth of a new industrial sector'. Furthermore, it is clear that the online space has become highly competitive in terms of consumer attention and acquisition, with substantial revenue generated from ads in the digital age on platforms such as Google and Facebook (accounting for over 50 per cent of online advertising), as expressed by Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 3):

> There has been a huge boom in the amount of money that businesses spend on advertising, only partially interrupted by the economic crash of 2008–2009. This boom helped to fuel the spectacular growth of the cultural industries.

The transformation of the music industry has been centred primarily around the consumer, with an emphasis on the ease of use and speed at which music is available: the music industry, like many others, has adapted to the dynamics of an increasingly capitalist and globalised world, which places a premium on the speed of communication. As a result, it could be argued that we are currently experiencing the most definitive and perilous form of commercial exploitation of music as an art form. Hesmondhalgh (2013, p. 2) emphasises the complexity with which these industries now operate in the digital age:

> These conglomerates compete with each other, but, more than ever before, they are connected – with each other and with other companies – in complex webs of alliance, partnership and joint venture.

The new modality of digital distribution has resulted in a bleaker reality than a simple distillation of claims about popular music's 'democratisation' and ease of access to the market indicates.

Nevertheless, when we examine the fundamental industrial change, it is evident that some core facets of the music industry remain unaltered, as Meier explains when citing Garnham:

> Despite decreasing production costs, these industrial logics have not been fundamentally altered in the digital age. In fact, the second portion of an oft-cited passage by Nicholas Garnham has assumed renewed importance: 'It is cultural distribution, not cultural production, that is the key locus of power and profit. … The cultural process is as much, if not more, about creating audiences or publics as it is about producing cultural artefacts and performances. (Garnham 1990: 161–62). (Oakley and O'Connor, 2013, p. 406)

The abundance of media with which one is confronted at any given time has been a significant development in the discovery of new music. As a result, there has been a profound change in gaining recognition and building credibility from the artist's viewpoint. When it comes to engaging and distributing music, this is one of the essential issues that artists, labels and managers must address. The most important asset that managers and artists have is access to platforms, which have the ability to carry an audience if the artist engages and promotes successfully. This, combined with the lower cost of experimentation in terms of interaction modalities and an increasingly globalised audience and industry, reflects a paradigm shift in the position of artists and management in the new music industry. Watson states:

> More of the control is now in the artist's hands, and the manager's hands as a consequence … Whether that's a good news story or a bad news story depends on how good you are with actually doing something with it … the majority of artists now are having to bring a lot more innovation into their career, and that's a good thing. And the pace of change is huge. (Watson, quoted in Morrow, 2018, p. 46)

Today, far more music is published than in the pre-digital era. This is in line with Srnicek's observations of platforms reliance on the 'network effect': 'digital platforms produce and are reliant on 'network effect': the more numerous the users who use a platform, the more valuable that platform becomes for everyone else.' (2016, p. 52) Now that major record labels are reduced to only three companies, these continue to dominate a sizeable portion of the global recorded music industry:

> Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group reportedly captured 38.9 percent, 29.5 percent, and 18.7 percent of U.S. album sales in 2013, respectively – figures that include CDs, vinyl, digital albums, and 'track equivalent albums. (Oakley and O'Connor, 2013, p. 405)

Hughes et al. (2016) note that there has been a paradigm shift from a linear to circular career development in the new music industries, investigating artist co-management across geographic territories in reaction to this transition. In the old (linear) music industry model, artists first sought recognition from industry gatekeepers. If they were successful, it would mean being offered a contract – be it management, publishing, recording or a combination of all three – thus being given a chance to gain attention from audiences promoted through intermediaries and the organisations they served. John Watson (a successful artist manager and record label owner) discusses the difficulties that today's artists and managers encounter, as well as the growing applicability of agile management strategies:

> The challenge now is that because people's appetite is so voracious and their access to new forms of entertainment is so vast, it's harder and harder to sustain interest. The cycle from discovery to moving on just keeps speeding up and speeding up and speeding up. And so, the challenge for artists, and those who are empowered with trying to help them, is to keep finding new ways to fascinate, new ways to be remarkable; not just that song, but the next song, and the next song and the one after it, and the next album after that and the next tour after that. (quoted in Morrow, 2018, p. 46)

The music industry's restructuring has nevertheless carried forward many aspects of more traditional organisations. Instead of adapting, these institutions frequently invest in platform disruption in order to gain market share. The promise of ultimate democratisation appears to be far from the reality, with total institutional control also waning. The reality is that independent artists have more opportunities in the form of access to market with tools such as crowdfunding and platforms as a vehicle for broad audience exposure with minimal financial outlay, with gatekeepers still present but in differing, more diverse roles.

6.3 'Quasi-platform' problems and advantages for both users and artists

> The decline in production costs, coupled with the virtually zero marginal cost of online distribution, dramatically lowered barriers to entry, so that every artist can, in effect, create his or her own record company. (DiMaggio, 2015, para. 44)

Soundcloud and Bandcamp have become associated with assisting in the promotion and distribution of new artists. Based in Berlin, Germany, SoundCloud is a Swedish-founded online music distribution platform that allows users to upload, promote and distribute audio; this is coupled with a Digital Streaming Platform, which allows users to stream audio from their websites. Swedish sound designer Alexander Ljung and Swedish electronic musician Eric Wahlforss founded SoundCloud in Berlin in August 2007, with the website going live in October 2008. It was created to help artists collaborate by sharing and discussing recordings, but it has now evolved into a publishing tool for music distribution. SoundCloud began to challenge Myspace's supremacy as a platform for artists to release their music shortly after launch (Buskirk). Bandcamp differs from the Soundcloud model, providing much more flexibility from the artist's side, allowing artists and labels to upload music and monitor how music is sold, additionally selling merchandise. Bandcamp Live, a ticketed live-streaming service for artists, debuted in November 2020.

The service is a built-in part of Bandcamp's website. Ticket fees were eliminated until 31 March 2021, after which they increased to 10 per cent. In addition, artists can use Bandcamp's vinyl pressing services. Following a 50-artist trial in 2020, the company expanded to 10,000 artists in early 2021, with ambitions to expand further. In addition, artists can set their prices on Bandcamp. In 2020, the company sold two million vinyl records, more than doubling its previous year's sales. Both platforms specifically provide artists with a space to host and, in the case of Bandcamp, sell their music directly to fans at a price determined by the artist.
A significant number of Soundcloud artists have adopted a mixtape-style strategy, with the ease of distribution among their target audience serving as a valuable promotional resource. For artists at the grassroots level, Bandcamp is a critical entry point. Bandcamp is an excellent example of democratising access for independent artists looking to expand their audience and monetise their work. As Barney noted during our discussion, what is most important is to 'find a platform that works for you and cater to that audience'. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Bandcamp, like predecessor platforms such as Myspace, can be customised and used as a hub for the sale of music and aesthetic presentation, promotion, touring schedules and connection. Although SoundCloud has attempted to compete with Spotify and Apple Music by launching its consumer-facing subscription model, the Verge has pointed out that, apart from existing content posted by artists inside SoundCloud's ecosystem, the offering of music from outlets such as major labels was comparatively limited. In certain respects, Soundcloud has preserved the reciprocity of past platforms such as Myspace, even though platforms including Spotify have formalised music consumption and sharing. Soundcloud has a much higher amount of engagement than more traditional consumer-facing music streaming services. However, this ostensibly more democratised approach, which is echoed in social media platforms, can also be problematic; van Djick (cited in Hesmondhalgh et al., 2019, p. 21) argues that this involves 'a continuous pressure – both from peers and from technologies – to expand through competition and gain power through strategic alliances'.

The convergence of demos uploaded to Soundcloud alongside indie and major label artists' work evokes a similar sense of exploration as the flood of 'pirate' websites and forums did in the past. Soundcloud's strength is uploaded content provided by its 'core creators', but it lacks the power of major labels when it comes to copyright infringement, leaving Soundcloud in a vulnerable situation with few company assets. Furthermore, as Soundcloud attempts to grow as a community and P2P music-based network, there are problems with its democratic ethos when commoditising user-generated content: 'Soundcloud's rhetoric of sharing and connecting through music remains embedded in the political economy and culture of digital networks under capitalism, and various contradictions result from this' (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Ruah, 2019, p. 6).

Until 2014, Soundcloud's income was derived from fees paid by music providers; however, this proved to be a small fraction of the potential earnings generated by Spotify's user subscription-based model, which Soundcloud later adopted in 2016 after failing to compete on an equal footing with other music streaming platforms. As a result, Soundcloud downscaled and shifted its focus to producer and artist-based services in 2017 to 'reposition itself as a creator-first community' (Deahl and Patel, 2018, para. 1). The problem for Soundcloud's user base and a conflict of interest within the company is that it collects and uses personal information from its users. With a user-facing business model that is essentially free, commoditisation comes through the collection and tracking of user behaviour, which can then be made available to third parties.

As a platform for producers, SoundCloud offers a relatively low-cost environment in which distribution and production can be approached more arbitrarily. While it is uncertain whether Soundcloud's more democratised design as a distribution site is a success, it has proved to be a fertile ground for discovering new talent in the industry (Post Malone, Don Monique, Kygo). Soundcloud does provide an important outlet as a consumer-oriented streaming service, which Major labels can see as an alternative to the oligopoly being created by other streaming services:

> Soundcloud, then, is a remarkable cultural phenomenon, but its struggles suggest limits to hopes that a 'producer-orientated' platform of this kind might be the basis of any significant democratisation of musical production and consumption. (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 5)

Bandcamp separates itself from other platforms in that it has not evolved in parallel with these; moreover, it has become its own unique ecosystem for artists and audiences, 'Bandcamp might justifiably be understood as an 'alternative' to the platformisation of culture' (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, p. 9, 2019). The direct-to-fan digital storefront, which has been profitable since 2012, has remained the mainstay of Bandcamp's business model. There have been several changes, such as the addition of a smartphone app, Bandcamp Pro, and the inclusion of a streaming service. Although Bandcamp has not proven to be the tech 'unicorn' that some of its peers have, the steady and profitable growth of its somewhat static delivery service, which now generates about $7 million per month, must be acknowledged. Bandcamp's idiosyncratic approach, compared with other development channels, has worked to its advantage. Its popularity is based on difference, with a view of consumption and sharing rather than a 'culture of connectivity'. Bandcamp's artist pages are 'discrete entities', and this 'lack of connectivity' speaks well to its core userbase of more indie music practitioners:

> it feels like when you go on a Bandcamp page, you can concentrate on what it is more. If it's a release, an album or EP or whatever, it feels more conceptually there, in the closest way possible I think to a physical release. (Hesmondhalgh, Jones, Rauh, 2019, p. 7)

Furthermore, Bandcamp allows artists to set their price for releases, suggesting that 'the most effective price just is not the same for every artist':

> Soundcloud offers accessible self-publishing and music abundance but struggles to be sustainable. Meanwhile, Bandcamp seeks to act as an 'alternative' platform but finds relative stability partly via (often unacknowledged) congruences between platform ideologies on the one hand and values of its indie and DIY admirers on the other. (Hesmondhalgh, Jones and Rauh, 2019, p. 10)

Bandcamp has worked hard to establish itself as the go-to site for independent artists looking to monetise new releases and compilations of older ones. According to UK-based artist manager Barney, Bandcamp introduced the highly successful 'Bandcamp Fridays' release schedule, allowing artists to queue up releases for free. This has had a further impact on artists with platform-specific releases on Bandcamp: 'Fridays there's absolutely no sales fees and listing fees for the artist. So yeah, there are a lot of artists because they know they're getting all the money. Yes, they're doing platform specific tracks for Bandcamp.' (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Another significant distinction between sites such as Spotify and Bandcamp is the editorialisation of playlists; although Spotify uses algorithms to generate playlisted content, Bandcamp aims to bridge the gap between radio and internet platforms. Barney speaks of his frustrations and aesthetic preference as a consumer with the former method of playlisting:

> On like Spotify, Apple music, what winds me up is that the algorithms now are serving me the same crap and I think as a discovery tool, it's poor. It's worse than it's ever been. And so to find and discover and unearth new talent it's hard, unless I really know what I'm looking for. The algorithms just serve you with the same old crap. Whereas at Bandcamp there's actual humans that send out a newsletter each week of stuff that they've found on the platform that they think is really cool. So you could subscribe to the rap newsletter, the Rock Newsletter. It's brilliant, you're getting a human that has found something and is giving you an opinion in the same way that I used to listen to John Peel. It's great to kind of have an actual person as opposed to AI serve me something. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

This disruptive and innovative movement led by these 'quasi-platforms' is destabilising the music industry, but it is also restoring value to major record labels and artists. However, no

expectations of industry behaviour are placed on these organisations – each of which has its own distinct culture – as a result of these new business models, which have varied in success. This could be a dilemma for creators, as success becomes tethered to specific platforms.

6.4 Examining the platforms available to artists that enable and encourage participatory exchange

> Technology provides the tools with which people and institutions augment their abilities to communicate, and changes in communication technology profoundly destabilise and create new opportunities in art and culture. (Peterson and Anand, 2004, p. 314)

As the music industry adjusts to a more consumer-oriented experience, personalisation (also known as customisation, which tailors services to suit the individual) has emerged as a valuable asset in retaining audience interest. In automated, curated content, Spotify's job is to build an algorithm based on the listener's preferences. For example, in terms of the popular Discover Weekly playlists, Jacobson states that: 'Spotify never intentionally seeds the playlists with particular songs, despite repeated requests from artists and their labels' (Pasick, 2015, para. 28). This level of personalisation provides a unique experience of discovery to the listener, with much of Spotify's perceived value being within this algorithmic process:

> The technology behind Discover Weekly, a personalised weekly playlist generated for the user based on their previous listening behaviour, is powered by a scalable factor analysis of Spotify's over two billion user-generated playlists matched to each user's current listening behaviour. (Jacobson quoted in Pasick, 2015, p. 1)

Playlists significantly affect an artist's popularity, with a successful playlisting feature triggering substantial growth in streams and enabling artists to be discovered by a new audience. Artists and labels can use analytics from platforms like Spotify to better understand customer demographics, listening habits and geography, allowing for more targeted marketing and touring. For example, independent and unsigned rapper Chance the Rapper hosted a show in Chicago as part of a Spotify invite-only distribution scheme, inviting his top 1 per cent of Spotify listeners in

the city. This degree of detail in analytics is very valuable since it provides insight on how to operate as an artist in the new music industry.

Spotify has introduced a new feature that allows artists to upload music directly to their website for free, bypassing the need for a label or third-party distributor such as Tunecore. Although the ability to upload and distribute music directly is not new, Spotify's decision to make the process free is important, as artists maintain full publishing rights. This appears to be an attempt to entice artists to use the Spotify site rather than Apple Music or Tidal. Artists can also submit forthcoming releases for editorial review on playlists, which has a significant effect on the popularity of independent artist releases. When paired with YouTube, the overall share of music consumption is 46 per cent, indicating that artists can freely distribute their music to a large audience.

The age of the album has steadily been declining as a norm (Ingham, 2018), due to the shift in delivery to a streaming format; this transition towards shorter formats has been dictated mainly by consumption. In terms of chart performance, streaming services add a new level of complexity. More recently, artists and their labels have employed release techniques that seek to exploit playlist algorithms and charts to increase their chances of success. Regarding digital sales, *Billboard* reports that an artist can achieve an album-equivalent sale by dividing the sale of that album between listeners:

> If one fan buys the first five songs, another fan purchases three random tunes they love from that same record, and two other casual listeners only snap up the lead single, those sales all come together to equal one full equivalent album. (McIntyre, 2017, para. 5)

In streaming, every 1500 plays of any song on an album count as an album sale against the number. When viewed in this light, it is easy to see why established artists are inspired to release longer albums, as each song increases the likelihood of the album charting.

6.5 Noon Pacific: Single song deals, crowdfunded and audience curated

> It's a new challenge where the community aspect and artist development directives could become more of a selling point for a label, over the ability to get your music 'out there'. We may see a drop in labels signing one track at a time and instead signing artists to a 360-style deal, creating a family around the label and

> encouraging dedication and consistency through releases and branded parties. (McGlynn, 2018, para. 12)

Traditional grand narratives of the record industry's history are not followed by new tech firms, as established in Chapter 4. Instead, process elements are being dismantled and power dynamics are shifting. If artists expect tech companies to follow the same business structure and guidelines, they could be setting themselves up for failure. One example of a disruptive model moving into the label space is Noon Pacific, an independent label that subscribers initially funded through Patreon. Artists are signed on a song-by-song basis, with subscribers being incentivised to help select songs for the label to release: 'If your submission is chosen, you keep 1% of the song's total earnings' (Dinnison, 2016). They claim to be the first-ever community-built and funded record label: 'We felt like that's what listening habits are going towards; most people aren't listening to entire albums these days, they like a couple songs and usually discover them through curators or through playlists' (Dinnison, 2016, para. 6).

Built on top of SoundCloud's Application Programming Interface (API), Noon Pacific was initially designed to curate playlists seamlessly with the assistance of SoundCloud on the licencing and streaming fronts, which is frequently an impediment for aggregators (Stem, 2016). Dinnison's musical curation was augmented as the implementation progressed by submissions from artists who had followed his progression. According to Dinnison:

> It started out by just picking through all the blogs, maybe 30–50 of them, just picking through different ones each week and trying to surface the best music. As Noon Pacific got bigger, I started getting a lot of submissions from artists that were pumped on what we were doing. (Stem)

The platform's advisor, James Sealey, who previously served as Chief Operating Officer of Three Six Zero Group, the management company representing artists such as Frank Ocean, Calvin Harris and Deadmau5, catalysed the next step. Dinnison and Sealey came up with the idea of a singles-only label after considering listening habits and what a new, innovative label might look like (Dinnison, 2016).

The 'built-in fanbase' concept, which involves a monetary commitment and a mutual and collective responsibility for the success of the record label, the artists and the singles, is a point

of interest with Noon Pacific. This growing bond between artist, audience and label offers a new perspective on music distribution and promotion today.

6.6 Platform disruption

Streaming platforms are reshaping our basic notion of genre, with playlists curating music for certain circumstances, moods and contexts. The shift from genre- or artist-specific material toward contextual and situational playlists may be critical for Spotify's playlist data collection and administration. Malone's two categorisation systems are files and piles, with Spotify falling into the latter category since data is kept independently of the enabling device. In addition, media consumption has shifted in ways that are not entirely related to the music industry. While this is intended, the nature of the platform libraries available to users has a significant effect on behaviour, with a far greater focus on the present than on the archive: 'what got released today, what you can binge on the weekend' (Kenny, quoted in Moran, 2019, para. 6).

The live music industry has seen a renaissance in recent years, somewhat offsetting the decrease in record sales. As artists become more reliant on live music as a source of revenue, Figure 6.1 (Van der Sar, 2013) provides a glimpse of artists' revenue streams in 2013 after the disruption caused by widespread internet piracy and digital distribution:

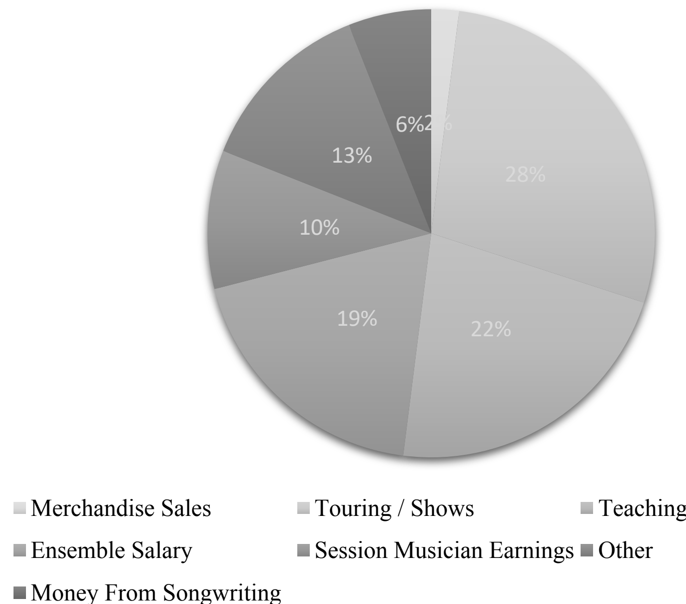


Figure 6.1 Average share of music income from major revenue streams, all respondents

It is critical to highlight the prevalence of 360 agreements inside big labels as a means of strategically compensating for lost revenue; does the major sector's dependence on streaming platforms reward artists similarly? Martinez (2020, p. 6) discusses J Cole's support of 360 agreements, recognising that labels must be rewarded and that this wider financial benefit would result in a more significant investment in the outcome of not just album sales but also touring and merchandising success:

> Some artists, like J Cole, have praised the 360 deals because of the investment companies make in artists. He mentions that it is a win-win situation for the artist and company because the labels want to make money and if an artist's album is not selling, the artist and the company can still make money by putting the musician on tour … Other artists, like Chance the Rapper, are opposed to the 360 deals. 360 deals devalue artist creativity, he believes, and the independence that being independent has given him. He does not believe that signing a 360 deal would afford him that. Moreover, an artist may not like the 360 deal because revenue from touring, merchandise, streaming and other sources, may put 'more money in the label's pockets than in their own bank accounts'.

Spotify remains a dominant influence in the new music industry for the time being. However, since bigger parent businesses own them, companies such as YouTube, Apple Music and Amazon Music are shielded from an early lack of operational profit. Another negative feature of Spotify's monopoly on music distribution and consumption is that such a dominance effectively eliminates more specialised and local alternatives. Within the current environment of the music industry, it is difficult to see a genuine rival to Spotify. Additionally, it raises the issue of how we see music's value proposition.

The music industry is being destabilised by a disruptive and innovative movement led by tech companies, as Chapter 4 established and as noted by Srnicek: 'We have witnessed a massive proliferation of new terms: the gig economy, the sharing economy, the on-demand economy, the next industrial revolution, the surveillance economy, the app economy, the attention economy, and so on.' (2016, p. 45) However, it is also returning value to record labels and artists through a more democratised entry to market, a proliferation of new exploitable income streams and an abundance of data collected from audiences. As a consequence of these new business models, no

predefined market standards are imposed on these companies, each with its own distinct culture. This may be problematic for creators if their output is tied to a single company's platform, as it has been with YouTube in recent years, where reliance on internal algorithms and guidelines has resulted in the downfall of some creators. The proliferation of channels for content distribution also places high demands on creators to create exclusive and personalised content for each platform separately; this is a tacit expectation to maximise reach. Barney, a UK-based artist manager, emphasises the importance for the creator of identifying the right avenue for engagement: 'I think the first step is you need to identify where your audience sit.' (Personal Communication [10.9.2020]) Engagement on platforms challenges the balance between creator and media producer; however, Barney acknowledges that this should not be the core of an artist's interests, with the real emphasis being on the art: 'You know you shouldn't have to be this massive self-facilitating media behemoth. It just sort of it dilutes the art.' (Personal Communication [10.9.2020]) Greater ability for artists to promote and market their work outside of the reach of conventional record labels is at the heart of industry platform-led disruption.

6.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the reconfiguration of the music industry included many elements of more traditional organisations. Rather than adapt, these institutions often invest in platform disruption to increase their market dominance. In terms of the more traditional players in the music industry, the new music industry has seen both growth and consolidation, with the major music labels maintaining a stronghold on recording and music production revenues while broadening their engagement in artist management, promotion and merchandise. The promise of ultimate democratisation seems to be a long way off, and institutional power appears to be eroding as well. The reality is that independent artists now have more market access via methods such as crowdfunding and platforms, which serve as a vehicle for wide audience exposure with little financial investment, with gatekeepers remaining but in more varied positions. The music industry's transition has been predominantly consumer driven, with a focus on simplicity of use and accessibility. From the perspective of artist and audience, streaming platforms are altering the fundamental concept of genre, with playlists creating music for certain occasions, emotions and situations. The transition from genre or artist-specific content towards contextual and situational playlists may be essential for Spotify's playlist data collecting and management.

Artists and labels have used release strategies that capitalise on playlist algorithms and charts in order to maximise their chances of success.

The destabilisation of the music industry caused by the disruption of platforms and creative movement driven by these 'quasi-platforms' is returning value to major record labels and artists. However, there are no industry-wide standards put on these organisations, each of which has its own unique culture, as a consequence of the success of these new business models. This may be a problem for creators, as success becomes more reliant on particular platforms. For the time being, Spotify maintains a hegemonic position in the new music industry. One disadvantage of Spotify's monopoly on music distribution and consumption is that it effectively excludes more specialised and local options. It is difficult to see a viable Spotify competitor, given the present state of the music industry.

7

Competencies, changing expectations and technologies

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses changing expectations faced by artists from an industry and an audience perspective in the new music industry. Hughes et al. (2016) defined these expectations and recurrent themes as the 'new' artist. Significantly, the chapter focuses on what distinguishes the roles and responsibilities of contemporary artists from those of artists in more traditional roles in the past. In today's music industry, the emerging musician is increasingly expected to possess a diverse set of abilities. As previously addressed in Chapter 5, entrepreneurial abilities and self-management are critical assets in an artist's skillset. The development of the 'new' artist is essential to the growth of the new music industry. While the audience has always been integral to the success of an artist, in more recent times potential audience influence on artist visibility and success is now readily apparent and quantifiable. The impact of independent artists in this new paradigm has also destabilised the linear nature of artist, industry and audience structures, with the more conventional linear model providing artists with only indirect access to audiences via management or record companies. The new 'circular' model (Hughes et al., 2016) enables many market entry and audience engagement opportunities. One distinguishing feature of the talents needed by emerging artists is their greater transferability to other careers and associated activities. To find success, artists must be adaptive to the ever-changing world of digital disruption; only those who can capitalise on upcoming technological advancements will succeed. Today's artists are expected to be proficient in various roles, which may be unsettling for some, with those who show an ability to create and participate in a variety of modalities gaining an edge. In the new music industries, standing out requires fresh creative breakthroughs in both artistic and commercial endeavours. There is an ever-present demand for an artist's organisational skills and different types of visual and audio media to be generated. The demand for novelty is continuous, and artists must deliberately position and develop their identity and branding. The line between artistry and branding is being tested in both new and old music industries. The difference is that in the new music industry, branding is discrete; instead of the

more traditional use of music in advertising, there is an ability to shield the artist's brand while still commercially exploiting the music for financial gain.

Numerous definitions exist to describe artists working in the new music industry, such as Darker's (2013a, 2013b) notion of the 'musicpreneur'. These definitions underline that these creatives act as self-employed, multidisciplinary artists who manage their music career's creative and commercial aspects, developing business models and income streams. Rather than depending only on downloads and album sales, it is now typical for artists to have several income sources. To address changing expectations for artists working in the new music industry, this chapter will describe how interviewees characterised the position of an artist working in the industry today. Additionally, an assessment of the competencies and expectations of contemporary artists working in the music industry will be conducted, emphasising respondents' responsibilities and how their expectations have evolved as a result of music's digitalisation. Following that, a study of the technologies used by artists and industry, and how they characterise them in terms of monetary exploitation and creative exploration, will be conducted. Specifically, the chapter will study changes in creative methods, asking how, with so many producers now working 'in the box', this has impacted the creative process for artists.

7.2 Differentiating artists in the digital age

The growth of social media and 'direct-to-fan' platforms has allowed artists to interact with and commoditise their fans directly. Therefore, some would argue that thinking of artists as 'brands' is a helpful connection when monetising one's work. Yet this is an argument with which many feel uncomfortable, as expressed by Courtney Love in an open letter even before the digital disruption encountered today:

> Don't tell me I'm a brand. I'm famous and people recognise me, but I can't look in the mirror and see my brand identity … The problem with artists and the internet: Once their art is reduced to content, they may never have the opportunity to retrieve their souls. (Love, 2000, para. 87)

Today, artists are required to be proficient in marketing and distribution techniques, and in the use of creative technologies such as audio production, photo and video-editing software as well as platform engagement. Developing self-efficacy and resilience is critical for the efforts of

young artists to cope with the numerous pressures inherent in the modern music industry (Hughes et al., 2016). Further to this, autonomy also assists in developing a niche market, as argued by Bennett: 'building a successful [musical] career depends on entrepreneurial activities and carving out a niche market' (cited in Haynes and Marshall, 2017, p. 27). Kusek notes, when speaking of the autonomy expected of artists today:

> Today, your success is largely in your own hands. Forward thinking musicians are acting more and more like entrepreneurs. You are no longer a product… You are your own company—and you are the CEO! (cited in Haynes and Marshall, 2017, p. 4).

As noted in Chapter 5, DIY self-management was most often linked to the punk movement in the 1980s, before the digitisation of music. The non-commercial self-management methodologies were linked to liberal ideologies that portray the artist as genuine and free of the mainstream market demands (Wiseman-Trowse, 2008). Thus, punk artists were put at the centre of the significance and values associated with the concept of authenticity by using the means of creation (Hughes et al., 2016). This normalisation of entrepreneurship within the new music industry has resulted in the coining of words such as Darker's (2013a, 2013b) 'musicpreneur' concept. According to Darker (2013, para. 6), this concept defines 'an independent, polymath musician who takes care of both the artistic and entrepreneurial aspect of their music career, creating business models and revenue streams'. Rather than label this entrepreneurialism as profit-hungry artists, it is essential to note that the motivation for these efforts often lies in conduct not characterised by profit maximisation. Instead, the motivation is often the intrinsic creative joy of problem-solving. The realities of these expectations of complete artistic autonomy are somewhat contradicted by Tom Prove, label manager at Communion Records and Publishing, who suggests that while the number of gatekeepers has diminished, there is now an imperative for artists to work in a variety of channels simultaneously in order to gain meaningful exposure:

> What it feels like now is that we don't have that one big lever that you call pull now. Perhaps instead of there being that one big lever there are just shit loads of tiny little levers. You need to have an army of people pulling all those tiny levers at the same time. (Personal Communication [19.11.2020])

This is reinforced by recording artist Laurel, speaking of the exhaustion experienced while trying to maintain the interface with the audience and industry:

> You know, while people are getting excited about your Instagram and then I think when you do all those things at once people take notice. You have to kind of be everywhere to be somewhere almost, don't you? It can be quite exhausting. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

This does not imply that gaining exposure is more challenging; in fact, Tom acknowledges that it is now generally recognised that it is easier to achieve recognition as an artist on one's own, although with more background noise to deal with:

> In a lot of ways, the challenge is the same. Which is: how do I as an artist or a band cut above the noise? I think in lots of ways in the past, there was gatekeepers which probably had a strong control over your ability to do that as a band or artist in the past. I think, it's kind of widely accepted now that it's easier to do that on your own. But there's perhaps more noise that you need to kind of like contend with. (Personal Communication [19.11.2020])

Laurel contends that the artist must be competent in all aspects of their creativity and business output, even to be heard by the music industry: 'Yeah, I think you just have to do everything.' This DIY sensibility is undoubtedly not suited to all artists and must preference those with significant proficiency in this area. Importantly, as Laurel points out, the quality of an artist's work must still be comparable to that of a professional; labels want to hear a finished product and see an established aesthetic:

> Even though you're creating a DIY project, it's still expected to be of such a high level that people want to sign on, because people don't know it's DIY, people don't know you don't have a budget, they just give a fuck about whether it sounds good and looks good. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

Laurel relates the difficulty and pressure that the artist experienced in this capacity: 'You have to build everything from the ground up in this very, very difficult DIY sort of way and there's a lot

of pressure on it.' This is reinforced by the fact that artists may exercise complete control over the discovery of their project, as well as the trajectory of their career, as Laurel explains:

> I think there's just a huge amount of pressure on somebody to fulfil multiple roles. It's good as well because you can launch yourself, you could do everything yourself and if you have that determination and self-governing and all of this stuff and you can do so well with it, but it's just a lot of hard work. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

When confronted with the question of what it means to be an artist in the digital age, Jane, an independent singer and songwriter, spoke of profound change in 'pace and accessibility to music-making' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]). This pace impacts the music industry at large and the speed at which the musician is expected to produce themselves creatively or, as Jane puts it, 'the pace at which you need to be creative' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]). Scott, a DIY artist, speaks of this change in accessibility as no longer being a significant differentiating factor for more independent artists:

> Overall, the playing field has evened up somewhat in regards to be[ing] able to release music on the same platforms as established acts – production costs and distribution of physical media had been a huge differentiating factor between the new artist (with limited funding) and the big players. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Jane believes that this acceleration of expectation in terms of artistic output has increased in line with the developments in technology that enable any artist to produce from a bare-bones setup: 'in a way, it's in line with the pace at which you can just make a record these days, even with just a laptop and a few bits of equipment' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]). Jane believes this has impacted aesthetics more broadly, and acknowledges that this is positive or negative depending on one's sensibilities: 'It's not to everyone's taste, but it's definitely part of the landscape.' (Personal Communication [15.10.2020]) Further to the pace of change, Jane relays the need for skills and the production of creative output – 'online skills', as she puts it. Jane brings the multifaceted nature of the artist's skillset to the fore when mentioning artists of the past in context with platform disruption:

> I believe great artists like you know, Prince and Bowie, they were really skillful in other things as well, visual arts, concepts, stage sets, styling … I wonder if Prince came out now, would he do a Twitch? … Being an artist does require many skills. Navigating and making the most of social media is one of them for sure. (Personal Communication [15.10.2020])

To parallel Jane's point concerning the need for social media competencies, Laurel believes being an artist has less to do with musical ability than ever before: 'people don't just get signed based on them having a good voice anymore'. The pressure placed on artists for many reasons is one of concern for Laurel: 'There's a lot of pressure to be the person who has the good body that goes to the gym. The person that can do the photoshoot, the person that can write the songs, produce the music, be in the visuals.' While the notion of an artist as a 'product' is nothing new, Laurel believes that the expectation of a multitude of competencies with little to no support is a new paradigm shift:

> Obviously as an artist there has always been this product, this whole product. When you see some of these big pop stars from maybe a few years ago, they didn't have everything, they could sing. They looked good. They could probably dance, but they had vocal coaches. They had dance teachers, they had people to help them with workouts. I feel like now there's this sense of perfection that is still being attained. However, there's not often a lot of support for somebody to achieve that. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

While there are changes in expectations of artists, Tom believes that initial exposure by word of mouth has remained the same, with the tools being substituted in a digital landscape. There must be significance given to real-world numbers and building an audience organically in order to build a sustained career:

> Also, in all of this, you know in the digital age it's still like another lever which I haven't actually mentioned yet. What's important is the real world. Building an audience through word of mouth, and shows and culture. More often, followers on Spotify or Instagram will come from being at a show or come from a friend. So that stuff still is really, really important. Still probably the most tangible or meaningful reflection of where a band is at. (Personal Communication [19.11.2020])

While there have been instances of artists who achieved their initial commercial success with relatively little live performance, such as Mike Oldfield, Kate Bush and 10cc, engaging at the point where demand dictated it, Scott speaks of this ability to convert much of the more virtual interaction and engagement one received into real-world fans:

> Another important factor, though not a pure replacement for touring and live performances is the ability to stream live shows, reaching a potentially greater audience than ever before. I have also seen examples of bands gaining profile and sales without actually playing live – granted the example I am aware of comes with label and management backing, however this is still an interesting new concept. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

The proliferation of social media and 'direct-to-fan' platforms enables artists to connect with and monetise their followers directly. Artists benefit from an understanding of marketing and distribution strategies, as well as the application of creative technology. Self-efficacy and resilience are important components of young artists' attempts to navigate the many demands inherent in today's music industry. Rather than labelling the 'new' musician's entrepreneurship as profit driven, it is essential to consider that the motive for these initiatives is often non-profit oriented; the incentive is often the intrinsic joy of problem-solving. While artist expectations have shifted, in many instances the value of early exposure through word of mouth has remained consistent, with only the modalities of engagement being replaced in a digital environment.

7.3 Competencies required and developed by artists in the new music industry

> The new artist is in possession of a wide range of skills beyond musical ability alone. In this context, artists are no longer just music producers or performers; they are independent media producers with a diverse set of abilities that can be applied to and beyond the music industries. (Hughes et al., 2016, p. 121)

The decreasing influence of major labels, the shifting landscape of live performance and the emergence of digitisation and the internet have all necessitated that artists acquire new abilities. A positive effect of this is that, through greater control of the production and dissemination of their work, artists gain greater autonomy. This has led to a much greater prevalence of more

independent artists working outside independent or major label structures. While fear of mediocrity is entirely reasonable in an era of plenty, an inflow of creative material into our newly democratised world would also increase competitiveness in these now-thriving creative sectors. Thus, as Sen (2010, p. 20) states:

> The free-flow self-expression has led to an assault on established notions of professionalism, a legal chaos and technological remix of the folk and popular culture. The super abundance of self-expression has put an end to the archaic gate-keeping mechanisms of hi-driven record labels, risk-averse radio stations, ossified movie studios and trend-seeking media coverage. Creativity seems to be flourishing with the old obstacles out of the way.

The notion of creative abundance in the digital age is positive and balances against the negative connotations of mediocrity via ease of access. Low-budget recordings and the internet have given artists control over production and dissemination. The music platforms discussed in Chapter 4 have become a single stop of user-generated content, which provides a moment of discovery for audiences. Diverse forms of music consumption provide a plethora of mechanisms for ensuring and enacting music's contextual presence. The development of digital music technology has increased the diversity of music consumption modalities (Nowak, 2014). As noted by Nowak: 'Contemporary modes of consumption are not only multiple but increasingly fragmented and heterogeneous' (2014, para. 1). Nowak goes on to note that the individual's corresponding music taste dictates these modes of consumption:

> The fragmentation of modes of consumption refers to individuals who consume music through one particular medium or technology that corresponds to their taste. For instance, listening to popular music hits on streaming services, to hip- hop or electronic music on vinyl disc (see Bartmanski and Woodward, 2013, 2014), to 'breakcore' on MP3 file or 'grime' on cassette tape (see Whelan, 2008) are so many fragmented modes of music consumption. (Nowak, 2016, p. 20)

One noteworthy feature of emerging artists' abilities is that they may be transferred to other areas outside creative activity (Hughes et al., 2016). For example, artists in today's musical environment acquire abilities to engage with specific platforms, communicate and engage with

audiences, create high-quality audio-visual material, review analytics and use advertising. David Adcock, an artist manager, speaks of the importance of engagement across platforms almost being a war of attention, with high-quality output and consistent engagement giving artists the most significant reward:

> Battle for fan attention is now against competitors across the whole world, not just your hometown. It's also a battle against social media and other entertainment activities (gaming, etc.) themselves. You can reach more people faster than ever, but so can everyone else.

These skills are not exclusive to music; in other disciplines, they are highly transferrable and valuable (Hughes et al., 2016). Independent artist Alessandro, who tries to write a song each day, must devote much of his time to PR and administration in order to justify the time spent creatively:

> I'm trying to do half and half, it depends on the day but usually in the morning I'm trying to do the PR work, more administrative, when my brain is fresh. In the afternoon/evening is when I'm trying to do creative work. Obviously if there is a campaign that keeps me very busy or if something is going wrong I will spend more time on that, or if I'm going to a studio to record, I will spend my whole day on that. (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

When the question of time spent away from the creative process as a DIY artist was posed, Scott provided a more macro response in terms of the division of time throughout a release cycle:

> I would say the creating the concept for release and music itself comes first, therefore as an example I will spend a month on the writing, recording and artwork needed for say an EP release. During this time, I will revisit mixes daily and tweak until satisfied. Regarding the administration and organising of promotion, I will spend approximately one to two months on putting in place the necessary pieces pre-prelease, then maintain engagement for a period post-release. I tend to capture sketches and ideas of both art and musical ideas daily, but set them aside until I allow a period of time to devote to exploring them. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

In accordance with Tom's assertion that more traditional approaches have weight in new music careers, Scott considers incorporating dealing with the print press, a job previously assigned to PR, labels and management, as an essential skill in his portfolio of DIY competencies:

> Outside of streaming platforms and social media, paying attention to local print press, both regional and national, and researching blogs has shown there are more options than just relying on the standards in terms of making my art known and available. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Scott states that flexibility is one of an artist's essential competencies in the new music industry. His own experience is one of joining the music industry at a time of pre-digital disruption:

> Coming from someone whose first break came pre-internet/digital-era – sending physical press kits to get reviews, A&R attention, etc. – now is both a fantastic/daunting time in regards to getting an audience. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

This need for flexibility is due to the pace of 'how quickly change occurs' and, quite tellingly, Scott states that part of this flexibility 'means not relying too much on previous successes in terms of achieving goals'. Instead, the major shift noted by Scott is the tools at the disposal of artists:

> Flexibility being the most important, purely due to the huge shift that has occurred in the industry in general. As labels, print press and to a certain degree, radio have become less relied on to get a break, the independent artist now has more access to tools available to utilise. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

From the perspective of Communion Records, Tom admits that the status quo is to build a following online on platforms such as Spotify and Instagram, have that business be successful and utilise the services of major or independent record labels as a springboard. However, Tom raises the idea that an artist may create their team outside this environment:

> That's also why I think a lot of artists do the self-releasing thing early on. Build a big audience on Spotify and on Instagram and start making decent businesses from that. But if they decide they want to take this to the next level, you probably still do

> need a team, I mean you can hire your own team independently I guess, but I think that there comes a point because there are so many different things you have to be doing at the same time you do need help. (Personal Communication [19.11.2020])

In reference to these teams, Mariann, an independent artist and head of DJ agency Popjoy, speaks of the proliferation of new companies offering services to artists, which segments out tasks that record labels or DIY artists would otherwise have adopted:

> I just feel like now, there's all these small companies. They can do like marketing content for musicians or they do like PR for musicians. And then you have the labels. I just feel like there's a mix of professionality in the different categories. (Personal Communication [9.10.2020])

As noted in Chapter 4, publishing A&R Flash has seen a change in the discovery moment of artists by A&R and believes that much of what makes an artist compelling for him in terms of core assets has not been disrupted by the digital age. Much of his attraction to artists relies on values of work ethic and amiability:

> I mean the way that I try and identify an artist that I would like to work with, again, it's just like start with songs, then do the meeting. Figure out the team – is the artist like a good person? Can I work with this person? You know, if I discovered said artist through Spotify or whatever, rather than just getting a demo through the mail, or however I discovered, your discovery process would have been different from, say, 10 years ago, unquestionably, but my identification of an artist, my instincts kind of still ring true. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Self-motivation is a tenet of successful artists that record producer and label manager Ian Dowling sees carried over by artists in the digital age. This seems to be a key asset with more relevance now than ever before. With much of the proliferated work having to be taken on by the artist, self-governance and planning are of crucial importance to DIY artist careers:

> I think it's probably the same as what sets any creator apart in their sort of digital world which is self-motivation. A clear goal in mind, a clear, realistic goal in mind,

> and an appreciation of the steps required to get there. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Ian, a record label owner and producer, believes that the tools used by artists enable greater discovery and autonomy, and assist in empowering the aesthetics and sound of the individual artist. This is because the tools, in a way, behave like a third party in the creative process:

> The social media stuff, video editing software, web design, they're all tools, right? And there's no one way to do it. The great thing about being a creative person is you can't help but filter everything. You take stuff in, and then pull it out again, and it's got a bit of you in it, or the way you would do it. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Ian goes on to list a clear set of expectations he has of artists in terms of competencies that he would find compelling when looking to work with or sign an artist:

> The ideal skill set is different depending on the genre/section of the music industry that the artist is involved in, but for all creatives (not just music), I would say the most important qualities are:
>
> - clear goal setting and strategising – being clear on what you're trying to achieve, what the necessary and most pressing steps are, all stemming from a realistic appreciation of where one currently is and where one wants to be in the future
> - in-depth knowledge of one's intellectual property, performance and other associated rights
> - a working knowledge of what others' responsibilities are, and the financial ramifications of those for the artist and the subcontractor
> - self-motivation
> - ability to receive large amounts of information from various sources, filter out the noise and use what relevant bits are left to effectively make decisions about how to achieve your goals (applies to everyone in today's info-driven age, really)
> - delegation (being able to organise one's team, giving creative control out where necessary, if advantageous).

(Supplemental points provided by Ian through email)

The process of record production, writing and distribution seems to foster self-efficacy among the interview candidates. Artists who plan, establish objectives, monitor their progress and reflect tend to have satisfactory outcomes. Conversely, performance anxiety may also impact performance ability and negatively influence creative skills. In addition to self-governance, an artist's feeling of control influences their degree of motivation and involvement. In order to achieve the professional success for which artists strive, the drive and commitment to creating music and performing are critical (Lohiniva, 2019). As noted in Chapter 4, a critical consideration supported by the majority of interview candidates was anxiety arising from the pressure to engage with and promote on a multitude of platforms. Scott's more DIY perspective raises concerns about over-exposure:

> I have in my communication an established 'voice' that I feel comfortable with using to liaise with my audience. The main source of anxiety I feel is the thought of overexposing/relentless engagement being a detrimental effect. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

The decline of major labels, the changing environment of live performance and the rise of digitalisation and the internet have required artists to develop new skills in response to these changes. This has resulted in an exponential increase in independent artists operating outside of independent or major label frameworks. Diverse modes of music consumption provide many methods for guaranteeing and implementing music's contextual presence. In addition, the advancement of digital music technology has increased the variety of ways in which music may be consumed. In today's musical environment, artists develop the ability to interact with particular platforms, connect with and engage audiences, produce high-quality audio-visual content, analyse analytics and use advertising, among other skills. These abilities are not limited to the field of music; they are highly transferable and helpful in a variety of other fields.

7.4 Competencies and techniques developed by artists and producers both independently and within label structures

With the advent of web-based technologies, musical creation begins to blur the distinction between musicians and non-musicians with the advent of music-making technologies. Thus, it

may be suggested that knowledge of how to play a traditional musical instrument is no longer required to digitally produce music since the computer fulfils this function (Kramer, 1988). The pervasiveness and abundance of information and communication have altered the nature of human experience. The convergence of communications and computer technologies has developed and thrived, becoming an integral part of contemporary society. The inherent connection between technology and music is demonstrated by using alternative media to promote and engage one's target audience. As Negus (1992, p. 79) states, 'The perception of music is influenced by perceptions of an artist across a range of media which continually interact and build up over time.' In the digital era, production tools have aided in shaping the sound of music by acting as a passive participant in the creative process. While this technological breakthrough undoubtedly offers a number of advantages, such as high fidelity with low noise and the ability to edit within a DAW with ease, many of the skills required in the pre-digital era, such as 'tape op', or tape operation and editing, have declined in relevance.

The demand placed on artists to produce and distribute material compatible with various platforms is one of the most significant shifts in marketing in the digital era. There seems to be a disconnect between industry perspective and audience reception regarding artists' anticipated degree of involvement, with the music industry considering engagement frequency as a legitimate gauge for marketing purposes. The music's reception influences the artist's perceptions of what works and what does not work artistically. While this has always been a process that emphasised the connection between artist and audience, a new player in the shape of algorithmic playlisting has upended this relationship.

Disruptions in new media have eroded the value of the definitive recorded work and replaced it with diverse and fragmented revenue sources through which artists may earn money. This poses questions around the retention of one's audience while keeping an income, relationship and marketing vehicle. From an industry perspective, it is evident that the pressures on artists in the digital era are much higher in terms of release and upload schedules than in previous decades. The critical problem is generating sufficient material and producing valuable content, which contributes to the artist's storyline and creates more awareness and enthusiasm for a project. This seemingly tricky endeavour becomes an expectation, with the artist's first successful release serving as the bar for future work. The effect of the passive exchange between creator and consumer, which includes indirect engagement from audiences such as record sales,

which artists previously encountered in more traditional physical media and the new music industry, is undoubtedly increasing in frequency as a result of platform disruption and the abundance of analytics available to artists and industry. Depending on the artists' viewpoint, this exchange can be relevant in certain circumstances or may be ignored when it becomes a pervasive influence on one's career. The majority of influence comes from postings that get the most widespread public attention. What is apparent is that this continuous dialogue with one's audience may be anxiety-inducing. The new music industry incentivises a bias toward particular kinds of performers. If we look at the more independent sector of the music industry, the resources needed to develop and establish an audience have decreased significantly due to more democratised entry barriers.

It has become clear that the routes to market for both independent and mainstream artists require the same DIY abilities from the start. While the routes to market and infrastructure for distribution have evolved, the DIY skills have stayed constant. The need for artists to develop their audiences, interact with them and disseminate their work has never been higher; what has changed is the simplicity with which material can be created and delivered. While the demand to create material has increased, artists now have access to tremendous tools that make the learning process less demanding and time-consuming.

7.5 Technologies employed by artists in the new music industry

Technology has long been critical to the music industry in the three stages of music creation, consumption and distribution. Previously, major record companies controlled this technology, with many possessing the studios where the recordings were made. As a result, music recordings played a significant role in the development of the music industry. They were influential in laying the groundwork for major record labels' ability to exert significant control over capital, and production and distribution processes. This was pivotal to the success of the 'old' music industry model, ss noted by Hughes et al. (2016, p. 122):

> The labels' longstanding influence on the industry (and on artists) was contingent on their ownership of capital and the nature of recording technology at the time. Today, technology has refigured the popular music landscape once again.

Historically, these recording studios were inextricably connected to record labels; as Watson (2015, p. 93) notes, 'Until the late 1950s, with very few exceptions, British recording studios were owned by major record companies and could be considered "spaces to centralise, control and channel creativity"'. The first purpose-built record label-owned recording studios in the United Kingdom were EMI's Abbey Road Studio in London, initially named EMI Recording Studios, which opened in 1931; Capitol Records Studio in Los Angeles, constructed in 1956, was the US equivalent. The recording procedure was considerably more industrial than it is now. Tony Platt, a 1971 EMI recording engineer, sheds light on the label's more industrial function, with studios such as Abbey Road being 'very much part of the manufacturing process, rather than part of the creative process' (Platt, 2011, quoted in Kirby, 2015, p. 42).

Théberge (1997, p. 200) discusses how technology has impacted both the creation and consumption of music, acting as a catalyst for creativity and engagement rather than as a passive player in the mediation of creativity and engagement:

> Musicians are not simply consumers of new technologies, rather their entire approach to music-making has been transformed so that consumption - the exercise of taste and choice - has become implicated in their musical practices at the most fundamental level.

Flash, a UK-based publishing A&R, notes that the powerful tools now at the disposal of artists have destabilised the role of the traditional recording studio as a staple of the music industry:

> As technology like Pro Tools, Logic X started becoming more and more viable and robust enough to actually take on bigger sessions, that started carving out an industry for the studios. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

As Gunderson (2004) notes, commercial studios have had to adapt to the advances in personal recording techniques used by bedroom producers, with this production playing a significant part when integrated into the process of creating an album. In terms of bedroom production, recording artist David Gray gained significant success with his breakout album *White Ladder* in the early 2000s. In terms of methodology, this was a very DIY production in Gray's London bedroom. Gray discusses the disconnect he felt from the studio, both in terms of his process and his ability to create the production he required in a comfortable environment:

> We bought a few bits of equipment, and we began to record at home. I was getting the hang of live performing, but the studio remained something of a mystery. There seemed to be a distance between the song in my head and the thing that got onto tape. Recording at home managed to shrink that distance. It was a much more intimate experience, a more unguarded open space in which to try things, experiment, maybe even relax! (Gray quoted in Lunny, 2020, para. 7)

Beck's 1996 album *Odelay* is another noteworthy example of an album that accepted its constraints. Again recording in a bedroom, Beck utilised an early version of Pro Tools, in which 'after every take, the computer required about a half-hour to compile the data' (Edwards, 2008, p. 3). Beck used the time between takes to find samples to include in the mixes; this constraint proved beneficial, adding to the recording's colour. When Beck discusses his current creative process in light of the *Odelay* album, he states, 'When I go back to it, not a lot feels different. I'm into the same things, you know what I mean?' (Beck quoted in Edwards, 2008, para. 3).

It is via new technology that social status, connections and hierarchies may be reconfigured; nevertheless, new technologies do not guarantee the democratisation or diversity of society. Users of software constantly encounter new technological paradigms as part of their cultural being, resulting from different music-oriented platforms and allying with specialised social media platforms to facilitate the creation and discovery of self. It is widely accepted that significant shifts occur in the way music is created, distributed and consumed. An enormous social and cultural shift has occurred in the ease with which certain people may create and distribute music, as noted by Théberge (2006, para. 119):

> New distribution and production technologies are greatly facilitating and empowering autonomous local musical cultures and their engagement with other geographically and culturally distinct musical cultures.

This is echoed by artist manager Barney when he speaks of the impact technology has had on the barriers to entry for artists working independently:

> Technology has enabled someone to go from the bedroom to the charts in a relatively few short steps. You can have someone that's written a song on their laptop and it gets picked up by an A&R person those people don't even meet and

> then it could be fast tracked and distributed and have a little bit of push behind it and then it could connect and go. So the hoops you have to jump through as an artist are smaller to get the ball rolling. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Laurel extends Barney's notion of the democratising impact of technology on music careers when speaking of the minimal financial outlay required of artists working with the production and dissemination tools of today: 'You can still have a go with the big guys and you can get a lot of attention for it and it's like, the Internet things can just spread and that's amazing.' Further to this, Laurel speaks of the new music industry being a more forgiving place for artists, with the opportunity to develop and reinvent over time. This, she believes, is part of a culture of change:

> Actually, I don't think I would be here if I hadn't been born in this age … You get more time. You get more space to reinvent yourself. There's just more of a forgiving culture of change. My first album didn't hit the charts, but that doesn't really matter, I'm making another album. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

Flash speaks of his experience with choices in digital audio workstations being a demarcation in terms of workflow regarding artists and producers who he represents:

> Pro Tools was essentially an editing tool, but then it became bolstered a little bit for more of a recording tool, but I still see Pro Tools more as a studio tool as opposed to a kind of Logic which is a writing room tool, it's [a] studio tool as well … So when my [artist] Dan Weller is doing a co-write session, he tends to use Logic, but when he's producing an album he will use Pro Tools. So I've been doing it for kind of nearly 20 years, it's been very interesting watching culture change and sort of seeing differences and then just correlate what those changes really mean. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

As technology is becoming more common and available to artists to create music and for altering the audio recorded, it is worth considering the relevance of popular music to musical 'skills' in its conventional sense – technical skills in an instrument or voice. Without a doubt, sample libraries and software plugins enable artists of different degrees of musical ability to create music (Hughes et al., 2016). However, a certain degree of musical proficiency, performativity, adequately applied technology and creative talent would still be required to attain apparent

credibility. Additionally, as stated before, live performance today often incorporates production technology (such as triggering samples). Therefore, today's artists, aided by technology, are more capable of framing performances in ways that fit their level of skill.

7.6 Remote Music Collaborative Software (RMCS) platforms for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration

> Whereas the music that most people listened to was for many years produced and distributed by large corporations, increasingly music is created and distributed in diffuse networks connected by a combination of face-to-face relations and social media. (DiMaggio, 2015, para. 47)

While traditional digital audio workstations have previously been a space of isolated creativity with limited functionality in the collaborative space, there is a movement to support more asynchronous collaborations (Cremata and Powell, 2020), offering music creators new ways to network and create projects with the help of crowdsourced participants from all over the world. Théberge (2004) proposes cloud-based networks as a solution to the issue of musical isolation. With the ready availability of production tools and the ability to host DAW software and interfaces on portable laptop computers, the possibility to produce, mix and record is tied to a studio, but can be made in various locations and also trans-locally and trans-temporally. Prior discusses the laptop in relation to the globalised digital age:

> Very much a device that fits descriptions of contemporary society in these terms, the laptop is one of a number of nomadic machines of the digital age. Allied with prospects of unfettered International travel and promulgations of a flexible capitalism traversing the globe in networked circuits, the laptop is the image of the quick, mobile and efficient device. (2008, p. 4)

This extends beyond the utilisation of laptops to more tablet-based solutions, such as the increasingly more capable iPad Pro as a helpful tool in record production. At the same time, while on its own perhaps it lacks the capacity of a fully featured DAW, it affords the user apps that can be integral to their process. Record producer Tha Bizness mentions the need for a fast and intuitive interface when beat-making and arranging, a workflow that led him to utilise the

iPad Pro exclusively for his production process. He refers to needing to produce like he was '18 again', with 'one piece of gear' (Morrison, 2015), which meant that ideas could come quickly without the distraction of outboard equipment slowing his workflow – although, like some analogue processes, this simplicity minimises the choices one needs to make, allowing for more focus to be spent on the content of the recording. With the power of the iPad Pro now rivalling many laptops and programs such as beatmaker 2 providing a quick and flexible DAW, it is easy to see why this may become a choice for some producers working from a portable setup. For the time being, the laptop remains central to the workflow of many producers. Prior notes that laptops have had a wide impact on music creation, ranging from genre to creative space to collaboration, and they continue to be a powerful and adaptable tool:

> the laptop remains a dynamic and emergent device open to inventions and rearticulations in moments of practice. Just as it drives the formation of new genres such as 'glitch' and the 'microsound scene' (Cascone, 2000), so it moves music production into myriad spaces and locales, reinforcing a suppleness in functionality and use. (2008, p. 10)

Teenage Engineering is a Stockholm-based company at the forefront of challenging workflow by design within the context of the small and portable digital interfaces. It designed OP-1, a synthesiser, sampler and sequencer released in 2011, and the OP-Z, a multimedia synthesiser and sequencer released in 2018. The OP-1 comes with an interface that explicitly limits and pivots the existing skeuomorphic design approach, challenging the user to more than create by playing with the interface, and in turn the sound. While this approach may seem challenging at first, the process of learning can lead to moments of unintended creativity and, once mastered, it can offer a powerful toolset for users.

Both professional and amateur artists use online technologies to collaborate with songwriters, artists and producers from all over the world (Hu, 2016; Settles and Dow, 2013). As noted by Prior:

> The practice of swapping semi-completed songs and ideas for songs is instructive […] For instance, band members no longer have to be physically co- present to collaborate with each other. Software files and audio files can be easily sent through electronic or regular mail to be added to, modified or mixed, then returned for further iteration. (2008, p. 9)

Collaboration has become a much less time- and labour-intensive process in the digital age with the increasing ubiquity of 'peer production' (Benkler and Nissenbaum, 2006). Long-distance collaboration is nothing new – for example, the band The Postal Service exchanged DAT tapes via the US postal service to finish writing and recording remotely on its debut album *Give Up* from 2003. The principle remains the same as tools used today, but the speed at which adjustments and feedback can be executed with services such as Dropbox has facilitated much greater efficiency. Forbes.com contributor Cherie Hu (2016) wrote that 'Dropbox has served as a key convergence point for music professionals in recent history, from artists and producers to publishers and curators' (para. 5). Dropbox has long been the platform of choice for asynchronous file sharing when looking to collaborate remotely with other artists and when interfacing with industry and cross-media workflow. It has thus acted as a key intersection for music professionals, ranging from artists and producers to publishers and curators:

> We frequently hear from the creative community that Dropbox is core to their creative process and their platform of choice for collaborating with others. (Liz Armistead, quoted by Hu, 2016, para. 3)

It is worth noting that Dropbox is not releasing any product features tailored specifically for the music industry and that previous attempts, such as its integration with SoundCloud, have failed. Jukebox, a partner app aimed at music fans, which allows for offline playback of Dropbox tracks, has also not taken off as well as many other music apps. Music Business Association President James Donio speaks of the need for diversified connections and collaboration with seemingly disparate platforms within the new music industry:

> We want to bring diverse companies into our forum because there are untapped opportunities, relationships and deals that emerge from all these people in the commerce, creative and technology sectors coming together. (quoted in Hu, 2016, para. 9)

Platform developers would undoubtedly see RCMS, whether synchronous or asynchronous, as a sector with increasing demand from the artist and industry perspective, with growth potential fuelled by the emergence of the Covid 19 pandemic. Songwriter Dan Henig suggests that industry will adapt to meet demand, with remote collaborations becoming a continuation of the

creative process: 'The industry will grow to where remote sessions become more normal' (Leight, "Who's Zoomin' Who"). (Frenneaux and Bennett, 2021, p. 5)

7.7 Viability of platforms for collaboration integrated into the DAW

Remote recording is one part of the recording process that has yet to become ubiquitous in the music industry. The tools and platforms utilised for this purpose are also known as Remote Music Collaborative Software (RMCS). Although using networked musical environments, RMCS-based music production is primarily associated with recording and production. RMCS allows 'amateur and professional musicians, not only to coexist, but to enjoy the shared experience of performance' (Duckworth, 2005, p. 167). Notably, some of these platforms provide spaces for the use of social networking platforms to crowdsource musical feedback (Koszolko, 2015*)*. Although there is much synchronous collaboration, there is also a lot of asynchronous work. Barbosa (2003), Duckworth (2005) and Hugill (2005) have published research papers on early networked music collaboration; there has also been research on advances in the field of synchronous networked music performances (Alexandraki and Valsamakis, 2009).

Regarding recording and composition in terms of remote collaboration, it has long been clear that synchronous output over the internet has a hard latency and quality limit. Remote recording has become more appealing due to lower-cost and higher-speed internet access, mobile broadband and enhanced audio-compression codecs. Although companies such as Source Elements have been able to provide real-time tracking solutions all over the world, there is still a latency acquired through the process of audio exchange, as founder Rebekah Wilson explains:

> It takes about 100 milliseconds for internet data to get from the UK to New York and back. Once you add encoding and software latency, the round-trip time rises to 200 milliseconds on a good connection … That's just way too high for musicians to be able to play in sync together remotely. (Wilson quoted in Wall, 2014, para. 26)

While this may appear to be improving, as evidenced by the Rolling Stones' live performance during the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, from the homes of individual band members located between Europe and the United States, the limitations imposed by latency became obvious when the band's drummer, the late Charlie Watts, was forced to air-drum as a result. Further

advancements have been made, with sites such as JackTrip attempting to improve latency issues. Ohm Studio has been iteratively working on its real-time collaborative DAW since 2007; however, its adoption has been minimal in favour of more popular and less personalised channels such as FaceTime, Google Hangouts and Zoom. As a result, when used as a collaborative writing method, the creative process is less about achieving perfection and more about discovering how to communicate ideas efficiently. Non-real-time networks tend to have a greater voice in distanced co-creation. This asynchronous shared space has attracted several businesses.

RMCS provides producers with social networking and music production tools that enable the cloud-based creation of musical pieces with the input of internationally community-driven respondents. The dialogue and sharing of work between artists and producers, led by a facilitator in a small online group, is at the heart of this partnership. Koszolko speaks of the importance of RMCS as a disruptive force in the field of music production, as well as a broader implication of the democratising nature of deterritorialised, and in some cases anonymised cloud-based collaboration:

> The use of Internet cloud technology has the potential to reshape music production methodologies, while also eroding or substantially reducing the time delay that is currently part of the workflow for many musicians who still choose to exchange data files via the Internet without the aid of RMCS … Freeman (2014) and Wilson and Walker (2015) refer to remote collaboration systems as being a solution to the displacement of musicians in time and/or space … Freeman (2014) lists the ability to remain anonymous as another factor encouraging the use of RMCS. (Koszolko, 2015, para. 31)

Changes in the production workflow encourage learning, generate new collaborative partnerships and, in the end, assist in the attainment of the new musical outcomes. Both synchronous and asynchronous collaboration have advantages and disadvantages, depending on the preferred interactions and outcomes. While the modality of real-time, deterritorialised collaboration promises the most disruption in terms of engagement, asynchronous collaboration allows for an undisturbed creative process with the opportunity for input at the creator's discretion. In addition, it allows for more time to be spent in the refining of ideas, as well as providing a clear boundary between the inputs of the various collaborators. Importantly, good organisational and

leadership skills are essential for effective collaboration when approaching more deterritorialised sessions. Attention should also be paid to each participant's input, with delineation of ownership being part of the dialogue when necessary.

In terms of more traditional DAWs, a key issue is standardisation, which is relatively poor due to proprietary standards among major vendors. DAWs lack an inherent property for collaborative efforts, with data typically being stored locally. One fully featured solution of note is from Steinberg, called VST Connect Pro. This is integrated into Cubase for a fee and provides a full-featured remote recording tool that allows anyone to record a musician or other artist in professional quality remotely. This parallels Source Elements' Source-Connect Pro, mainly focusing on Avid's Pro Tools platform for implementation. Both feature full access to the requisite tools embedded into professional DAWs, utilising synchronous transfer with playback being sent ahead of time to compensate for latency. However, this requires intensive broadband and data capacity, which VST Connect offsets with its automatic PCM audio upload feature. One additional feature of note is Steinberg's Studio Pass app, which effectively puts anyone with an iOS device in the room with the producer, allowing for face-to-face communication regarding projects. Ohm Studio has a significant benefit over other apps when it comes to 'jamming' ideas. It allows for the near-real-time exchange of musical ideas; it incorporates messaging and chatroom functionality, which lies at the heart of the creative conversation. Platforms, including Kompoz and Melosity, were built with the sole purpose of facilitating networked collaboration. Melosity is an all-in-one platform that serves as a cloud-based DAW, enabling artists to share compositional elements without having to transfer files, in their own words: 'It's Google Docs for musicians'. Kompoz is simply a portal and file-sharing site for artists looking to collaborate. Melosity speaks of the development process when approaching the online collaborative space, with an emphasis on artistic exchange rather than the social media environment:

> Version 1 focuses only on the collaboration tool itself, allowing musicians to collaborate with people they already know. The key is to get this right and allow it to stand alone without any social network supporting it. (Melosity, n.d.)

This artist-centred approach adopted by Melosity is reinforced by an emphasis on limiting the time-wasting aspects of the online collaborative environment when the second phase of Melosity's development is discussed:

> When this has been achieved, we will release the community (LinkedIn for Musicians) and allow musicians to find other people to collaborate with from around the world. Many companies have attempted this in the past and failed because they are still not solving the core time-wasting problem that exists. (Melosity, n.d.)

This ideology of ensuring that the artistic process and tools are at the forefront is at odds with other asynchronous platforms such as Blend, which is effectively run as a social media portal for project sharing. It describes itself as a 'social media platform' emphasising sharing music projects in 'source format'. This more isolated approach, while not impairing the existing artistic process of the artist, does not allow for a deeply collaborative creative process as a more synchronous RCMS would. It does, however, seem to be the logical extension of a more traditional DAW process, which has always been an isolated environment, running at odds with more traditional collaborative engagement: 'what DAWs have been doing for 15 years now, is promoting an exception in music history – making music alone' (Makles, in Carson and Koszolko, 2015, p. 10).

The problem with this type of collaboration is that it ignores the basics of spontaneous interactions in a shared space and non-verbal communication, which is often crucial to collaboratively reading a situation. An occasional lack of clarity regarding who is responsible for specific potential actions, such as mixing, is one of the drawbacks of this particular creative process. The project initiator must assume delegation of positions such as mixing and mastering, with a lack of clarification potentially negatively affecting projects with less established roles and providing distraction from the creative process to administrative tasks. Weinberg (2005, p. 10) discusses the exploration through interdependent networked environments, allowing for novel outcomes:

> The use of technology in musical networks pushes the tension between structure and process music into an experience where predetermined rules and instructions combined with improvised interdependent group interactions can lead to evolving musical behaviours, giving a new meaning to Cage's exploration of unpredictability, chance determination processes, accidents, and contextual emergent music.

Sharing and communicating in a networked environment is not new; tools like Dropbox have long allowed users to share and comment on large files and shared directories, allowing for global collaboration. However, O'Farrell speaks of the limitations of Dropbox when compared with Melosity: 'One of the drawbacks with Dropbox is that you have to use a separate platform if you want to communicate, whereas Melosity allows users to work on tracks and talk at the same time, which aids collaboration' (in Taylor, 2016, para. 16).

Soundtrap, recently purchased by Spotify, is another noteworthy recent offering. This framework runs entirely inside a browser, making it simple to share projects and run on low-cost hardware. Soundtrap, on the other hand, has its limitations and would fail to have all of the functionality that one would expect from a full-featured DAW. Instead, artists will use the resources with which they are familiar and to which they have access. While many well-known artists in music capitals like Los Angeles may prefer in-person writing sessions, those without this access will have to rely on these tools if they hope to collaborate on music projects.

In terms of participatory exchange, SoundStorming, for example, enables artists and audience members to interact through their iPhones. The company views listening as no longer passive, echoing Small's concept of 'musicking' with the benefit of more significant audience interaction for the artist, as stated by founder Jolene: 'You can collaborate with people on the spot, talk to that person and actually make the song happen' (2020). Composer Larry Polansky describes the continuing disruption of music by technology, both in terms of resources and modalities, as 'a co-evolution of technology, art, and collaborative process' (Duckworth, 2005, p. 160). Consumer desire for participatory exchange is more important than ever when the virtual is the actual music scene during social isolation, untethered from place and rich in interactivity. John Cage's redefining of roles in the 1960s, specifically the roles of 'artist, artwork, and audiences' laid the groundwork for this ongoing paradigm shift (Duckworth, 2005, p. 159): 'One of the key components of this post-Cagean online musical genre is the ability to have two-way interactive experiences within a multiplicity of immersive environments' (Duckworth, 2005, p. 161). Embracing this blurring of professional and consumer collaboration, an organisation called February Album Writing Month (FAWM) invites songwriters to collaborate online via its website to produce fourteen songs (an album length) in 28 days. 'It doesn't matter if you only write lyrics or struggle with them! Find friends and collaborators from anywhere who complement your skills and challenge you as a musician,' says the homepage of the FAWM

website. There is demand for this type of online collaborative engagement, with approximately 5000 musicians signed up with the platform and committed to collaborating on songwriting projects in 2019. This wealth of collaborative potential is, as Koszolko (2015, para. 37) states, 'a key new element in regards to RMCS is the access to a vast network of collaborators, who are part of the larger synergetic system associated with a given platform'. Further to this, Duckworth (2005, p. 165) forecasts this growth of participants and an emerging emphasis on a more collective identity:

> A critical component of the emerging landscape of virtual music is the sheer numbers of participants that will be involved, and the power – creative and otherwise – that this connected and technically savvy mass of people will be able to evoke.

Duckworth's growth of virtual music through numbers of participants will be the catalyst for more significant improvements and innovations in remote collaborative engagement. This paradigm of remote collaboration is being made possible by platforms and software, which allow creativity to occur seamlessly and unhindered by latency.

7.8 Networked communities, lo-fi sub-genres and the wealth of access to production tools

In the new music industry the mechanism through which music is produced is unrestricted by analogue recording's more hegemonic origins or its implied 'bedroom' location. The contemporary artist can now use countless spaces in the context of a record at any time and in any location due to laptops and the internet. Through peer collaboration, sampling and patch-sharing, online communities may bring tacit input to the development process, similar to Bruns' (2017) concept of produsage.

'Lo-fi', which is a word that implies low sound quality, is the polar opposite of 'hi-fi'. It became a feature associated with many popular music recordings in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and gradually evolved into a category within independent, or 'indie', popular music. Along with this, the proliferation of disparate production styles such as 'bedroom pop' has produced a slew of more lo-fi sub-genres. These were primarily born out of independent artists using a DIY ethos that echoes a similar cultural nostalgia and aesthetic to pre-DAW 'cassette culture'. This term was commonly used in fanzines during the 1980s and 1990s; it

refers to the recording of music of all kinds onto compact cassettes on a global scale in the 1980s, as well as how the ‘home tapers’ that made them were networked through magazines and fanzines. Tapes are being sought by a global middle-aged community with a strong sense of nostalgia, as well as by millennials as a form of ‘digital rebellion’, as a fast-growing collectables field:

> The cassette has a tactile and intimate element compared to the corporate magic of streaming millions of songs. Cassettes give every album an overture of clunk and rattle as they settle into the player, and they confer a strange, transgressive mastery on the listener. If you decide you don’t like the music, you can just record over it with something better. Cassettes bring artists back down to earth by reminding them that art, like life, is fragile and fleeting. (Beaumont-Thomas, 2019, para. 3)

The significant parallel with the more democratised resources at the disposal of artists in the new music industry is that cassette culture was not simply determined by a series of specific sonic aesthetics, but rather by its artistic and democratic potential, both of which were put in opposition to the old music industry. Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 5, file sharing – while not production – could be seen as an extension of the democratising potential of cassette culture, akin to creating and disseminating recordings between peer groups. Both of these could be linked to independent artists and bedroom producers, also known as the independent ‘recording class’ (Walzer 2016), who are challenging the recording studio’s status as a place where creativity meets industry. As previously stated, this loss of power from labels as studio gatekeepers can be traced back to the disruption caused by the MP3 and the ease with which customers can now access networked distribution.

Today, independent recording artists and unsigned artists benefit from the opportunity to fulfil their music ambitions in the capacity of producer, label and PR. Thus, critical choices relating to the complicated intersection of culture and business, art and industry are frequently decided beyond the limits of the studio and label. Furthermore, the advent of more powerful but reasonably priced consumer-oriented recording technology has eroded the line between professional and consumer (Meier and Powers, 2017). Laurel shares insight into her methods and career. With most of her past work centred on the bedroom recording studio setting, she has built a career on her own terms by using home recording and promotional strategies as the foundation

of her output. Laurel asserts that had current technology not been established, she believes her career today would not have been possible:

> Actually I don't think I would be here if I hadn't been born in this age. My first record was more underground it did as well as it did, but I've had multiple different EPs, records and songs come out in so many different styles, and none of them ever really hit the charts or anything and I'm still here making music and I'm about to release another record that's doing better than anything I've done before. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

Independent artist Luke enjoys the recording process and, as with many of the other competencies he has developed, it is his fascination with the process that motivates him to improve:

> I definitely think people should be competent at recording their own demos and stuff … I've not had to drag myself through. I love studios and microphones and stuff like that. It's just a passion, so it's easy for me to do that. So I get why it's hard for some people, but I still think that's kind of just part of the game, you need to be able to do that. (Personal Communication [14.9.2020])

One of the major draws for Laurel in terms of home recording is the control and comfort of being able to create on her terms; in turn, this has impacted the shape of the record, both sonically and creatively: 'On my last album I made all my music in my bedroom and I actually wanted to do that. It made me feel comfortable. It was really the vibe of what I was going for.' (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

This comfort in terms of process is also reflected in record production and confidence in one's autonomy. Historically, most artists lacked the freedom to experiment due to the fact that if their first album failed to sell in sufficient quantities, they were effectively driven by an economic imperative to create a follow-up album that would be more successful in order to recoup both its production costs and those of the preceding album. Conversely, in Laurel's case she has built her enterprise on a modest but sustainable basis, where she owns all the tools. This instils confidence in her artistic approach and career longevity:

> When you don't have budgets, when you don't get signed by a major record label when you're still in your bedroom with your laptop and your really shit interface, you can still make stuff. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

Notably, having these tools at her disposal enables her to be more reactive to culture, particularly the rapid pace of digital culture:

> I think it's also to do with the speed at which things are being consumed. I think people used to spend a lot of time writing an album and curating a whole music campaign, but now with the whole digital age, social media, things are just coming out so fast, trying to stay relevant and trying to stay on trend or whatever you're trying to do, I think sometimes you have to be quite self-resourceful. (Personal Communication [25.11.2020])

Furthermore, the transformation in producer culture to a more unstructured and independent setting does not negate the requirement for these productions to be mixed and mastered by industry professionals once signed to major record labels, as stated by Klien, Meier and Powers:

> Record contracts (past and present) often stipulate that artists deliver 'commercially satisfactory' recordings (Passman 110), a process that may involve label input and involvement; unsigned musicians are now in a position to decide what might constitute an artistically and/or commercially satisfactory recording (2017, p.7).

This component of the more conventional music industry has slowed the transfer to new production modes. Billie Eilish's debut album, famously created in their bedroom by her brother Finneas, was mixed by Robert Kinelski, an American mixing engineer and record producer. He is well recognised for his engineering and mixing work with Lil Dicky, Big Sean, Karol G, Joji, and Beyoncé in the past. Robert speaks of Billie Eilish's album:

> It's always going to boil down to the people involved; the location and tools are merely dictated by who's using them and how they're being used. With this album, I honestly think that if you didn't know, you wouldn't say it sounds like a bedroom, because I don't think it does. (Waves, 2019, para. 23)

Robert further clarifies his role as a mix engineer within the confines of bedroom production: 'Often you just want to bring it to a professional level without messing it up, because people are doing great stuff at home' (Waves, 2019, para. 23).

What constitutes a professionally made record for release is another consequence of the growth of the independent 'recording class' (Walzer, 2016). In the mid-1990s, there was robust and shared respect, and even preference, for less-than-flawless recordings compared with previous commercial standards. Adam Bell (2018, p. 49) acknowledges Brian Eno as pioneering the notion of the studio as an instrument, noting that it 'did not require previous experience, and in some ways, a lack of know-how might even be advantageous to creativity'. This notion is typified by a band such as Kraftwerk, the members of which state 'we play the studio' (Bell, 2018, p. 49). Bell refers to the conceptual shift instigated by a variety of artists and producers post 1960s:

> Sly Stone, Stevie Wonder, Prince, and Brian Eno signify a conceptual shift in which an alternative approach that might make using the studio as an instrument cheaper, more accessible, more convenient, or more creative was increasingly sought after. Compared to the 1960s, using the studio as an instrument became less about working the system as it were and working the systems. (Bell, 2018, p. 49)

While much of the appreciation for lo-fi music in the 1980s was based on its charm, despite its flaws, now the flaws are seen as indicators of meaning and authenticity. Hip hop makes use of a variety of recording sources that are combined during the production process. The ad hoc nature of the process lends itself to a more portable and less studio-based environment. Bell, Hein and Ratcliffe (2015, para. 79) address the disturbance in workflow caused by the implementation of digital processes in recording: 'this is attention that is necessarily diverted from the music itself'. For example, a DAW such as Ableton Live has a workflow that strongly emphasises live performance. Although it is possible to write, record, mix and arrange, beatmatching and crossfading allow for a more complex and performance-based approach. A new wave of artists and producers has flooded the production space solely 'in the box' with particularly popular DAWs such as Fruity Loops. Although for some there is an absolute necessity to break out of the box, the workflow within the DAW causes one to develop habits in terms of creativity: 'limitations will often inspire creativity' (Shull, 2018). A subculture has arisen within production

due to this generational change in production platforms and techniques, adopting more analogue technology to break free from pre-defined DAW workflows and impact creativity and sonic aesthetics.

Furthermore, tactile feedback from basic instruments such as four-track recorders up to high-end analogue mixing desks adds colour, musicality and sensory feedback to the process that digital equipment can lack, even with DAW hardware controls. The introduction of analogue's limitations into workflow pushes some developers to think outside the box, resulting in more spontaneous moments of inspiration. The ability to quickly undo recordings puts the DAW-led producer in a position to explain the various aspects of song creation and performance. The keyboard and mouse not only get in the way of the creative process at times, but they also cannot replace the intangible input that comes with manipulating sound in the analogue realm:

> It takes longer to get the sound, whereas most of the stuff is right on the board. It's just more hands on, isn't it? Mixing with the mouse drives you up the wall after a while. (Touzeau, 2006, p. 188)

The performative aspect of music production is an integral part of the process for some, as it informs and embodies creative choices. This can be seen in live electronic music; as Vandemast-Bell (2013, pp. 241–43) states, performance is 'a product of the belief that the body is participating once again in the music making process, that the human is having a physical effect on the music, not just pressing buttons to facilitate the playback of recordings'.

There has been an increasing shift in the implementation and aesthetics of DAW design; initially, a skeuomorphic approach to the workflow and design of interfaces was utilised in order to emulate the aesthetic principles and approach of analogue:

> but now we are beginning to see the converse: hardware modelled on software. We expect that in the future, software design will increasingly drive hardware design (Bell, Hein and Ratcliffe, 2015, para. 46).

With a clear reconfiguration of the default mode for artists to be in more informal settings, this had impacted numerous aspects of artists' careers, ranging from sonics to a sense of agency. With the definition of a 'professional' production being questioned more than ever, the future of

traditional recording spaces – while they are still necessary – appears to be diminishing in favour of a sustained need for high-quality mixing and mastering engineering.

7.9 Unique approaches to creativity with so many producers today working 'in the box'

Historically, popular music record production in the old music industry involved several individuals with unique roles collaborating in a professional studio, including recording engineer, mixing engineer, composer, performer, mastering engineer and record producer. As technology has become more accessible, producing music in smaller project studios with fewer personnel has become commonplace (Théberge, 1997). With the availability of production tools and the ability to host DAW software and interfaces on various devices, the capacity to create, mix and record is no longer reliant on a physical location. Watson notes:

> Whereas in a professional studio, music production has always been a collective project between recording artists, musicians, producers, and recording engineers, in small digital home studios, multiple roles are performed by a single person … That a single person could perform all of these roles would have been unthinkable without the enabling power of technology. (2013, p. 36)

When combined with advancements in AI-based mixing and mastering tools such as Izotope's Nuetron, which works within the DAW and LANDR, an online mastering service, hardware emulation, access to sample libraries within DAWs and even subscription-based plugin packages from companies such as Slate Digital, musicians now have access to powerful tools like never before with a minimal financial barrier to entry. With the DAW eschewing its skeuomorphic interface design origins, the workflow becomes a critical element of production. Through the use of laptops and the internet, the contemporary musician gains unprecedented mobility, allowing them to use various locations within the framework of a record at any time and in any location. In addition to Bruns' (2017) concept of 'produsage', online communities may provide implicit feedback throughout the creation process via peer participation, sampling and patch-sharing.

Along with this, there is an abundance of access not only to production tools but also to networked communities on the internet, such as YouTube music producers whose comments sections engage discussion, and platforms such as Reddit, which host a multitude of distinct music-related forums. This has resulted in the emergence of a slew of more lo-fi sub-genres

created by independent artists utilising a variety of disparate production styles and musical attributes such as ‘bedroom pop’ Scheps (2018) explains that, ‘Every laptop is a studio and every room is a live room’. The availability of computers facilitated the development of this style, much as the introduction of low-cost four-track recorders such as the Tascam Portastudio did. While its digital equivalents may achieve a far higher level of sonic quality, ‘bedroom pop’ embraces more avant-garde and lo-fi sensibilities, which is where the genre originated. The continuity of conventional record production and the natural separation of various stages, such as songwriting and mixing, are eliminated in the DAW environment. In this environment, one may work on all of these sub-processes concurrently. One significant creative difficulty associated with DAW-based work is the sheer amount of options available in the DAW environment. Schwartz (2004) advocates using various methods to deal with this kind of complexity. Several of these techniques include making choices irreversible (Schwartz, 2004, p. 178). Scott navigates this impact on his songwriting by separating the process from the computer when he would rather focus on core elements of the process, such as melody and chord structure:

> As a guitarist I will write and play with ideas away from a computer and preferably in an acoustic setting. I will take those ideas and apply my experience of production to flesh them out to replicate a band set up if the track needs. This process is more based around chord structure and melody-based phrases. That said I do not see myself as a traditional songwriter, I find the process more akin to putting together a puzzle from an abstract perspective. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

As a development of this, Scott sees value in the affordances of digital workflow, an opportunity to experiment that provides an alternative outlet for his writing approach:

> The other process is more around ignoring melody/chord progression. I see extreme value in manipulating sounds, samples, noises and then turn them into something musical. This purely based using a DAW to creative ideas. I will then attempt to make sense of the experiments into a more digestible format if needed. I use midi for programming purposes, and even though I have a degree in music technology, I try to ignore anything learned in favour of finding new sounds. Trust your ears. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

Scott's two approaches highlight the benefits of each method, with the most effective method being to construct the music away from digital tools and then experiment with them after a strong chord structure and melody have been developed. While the decision paralysis produced by the DAW workflow may be detrimental to the creative process, the ability to manipulate sound inside this workflow can significantly influence the direction of the music.

7. 10 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the development of social media networks and 'direct-to-fan' platforms that allow artists to interact directly and monetise their fans. Artists benefit from an understanding of marketing and distribution methods, as well as the efficient use of creative technologies. Self-efficacy and resilience are critical components of young artists' efforts to manage the many demands of today's music industry. Rather than characterising the entrepreneurialism of the 'new' musician as profit-driven, it is critical to recognise that these efforts are often non-profit in nature. Instead, the inherent pleasure of problem-solving is often the motivator. While artist expectations have changed, in many cases first exposure through word of mouth has stayed constant, with just the means changing in a digital world. The decline of major labels, the shifting environment of live performance and the growth of digitisation and the internet have necessitated artists to develop new competencies in reaction to these developments. This has led to an exponential increase in the number of independent artists working outside the frameworks of independent or big labels. Diverse forms of music consumption provide a plethora of approaches for ensuring and enacting music's contextual presence. The development of digital music technology has resulted in a proliferation of new ways to consume music. Artists acquire the capacity to communicate with specific platforms, connect with and engage audiences, create high-quality audio-visual material, evaluate analytics and use advertising in today's musical context, among other abilities. These skills are not exclusive to the area of music; they are highly transferable and advantageous in a wide range of different disciplines.

It has become apparent that independent and mainstream artists' paths to market need the same DIY capabilities from the outset. While some young, bright artists are still discovered without much internet exposure and then nurtured into an online persona by industry, this work is increasingly being done by artists themselves, often with the help of small groups of friends. This expresses itself

in the form of pressure to fulfil various responsibilities associated with music. While distribution channels and infrastructure have changed, the need for DIY skills has remained consistent. The importance of artists developing their audiences, interacting with them and disseminating their work has never been greater; what has changed is the ease with which content can be produced and distributed. Artists today have access to incredible tools that simplify and expedite the learning process.

8

TikTok, Emerging platforms, competencies and engagement

8.1 Introduction

This chapter examines skills and methods developed by artists and producers, both independently and inside label frameworks, as well as including an overview of the skills and expectations of artists working in the music industry today. The outlook of the music industry is being challenged by emerging platforms, which provide a compelling insight into the future of not only the music industry, but also artist-to-audience engagement. Platform upheaval in the distribution sector implies significant changes in the way independent artists interact with industry. While platform disruption is continuous and in continual flux, one major disruptor in today's digital world is TikTok. Important questions remain about unique approaches to creativity. So many producers today work within the frame of audience co-creation and platform disruption in the distribution space, implying significant changes in the way independent artists interface with industry.

TikTok, previously known as Music.ly, was launched in 2014 by Chinese founders Alex Zhu and Luyu Yang. The platform developed a passionate user community, and in November 2017 was purchased for a reported $1 billion by ByteDance, a Beijing-based media and technology firm. ByteDance also had a similar app at the time, TikTok, which debuted in China in 2016. Both Musical.ly and TikTok were popular, although each was dominant in a different region. Musical.ly, like the now-defunct platform Vine, fostered creativity through very narrow parameters. Rather than the six seconds of video content that characterised Vine and Musical.ly, TikTok's initial key length was fifteen seconds, but as of 2021, this has been increased to ten minutes. Previously the fifteen second limit was dictated by the maximum recording length inside the app, but users may combine clips to create up to 60-second narratives.

TikTok has had a significant effect on the music industry, from its influence on real-world success with chart-topping artists to a new form of collaborative discovery powered by user-generated material. The implications of such a co-creative platform on industry and the public have been expedited as individuals have lost access to traditional venues for monetising their talents due to pandemic restrictions introduced in 2020. More people are becoming digital

content producers, some of which showcase their professional expertise and artistic ability. Much of the success that artists are seeing is due to music being a flexible narrative tool that lends itself to different multimedia productions as an expressive and complementing component (Yao, 2020). While TikTok formerly provided users with access to a commercial collection of royalty-free music tracks, it now also allows users to submit their audio recordings. Once a user uploads an audio clip to the platform, it becomes freely accessible to other users. The ease with which music can be downloaded and disseminated on TikTok has led to a large amount of unauthorised use of copyright on the platform (D'Agostino, 2020). Naturally, this has led to a wave of DMCA takedowns and threats of legal action from major labels. TikTok has signed a series of licensing agreements with all three major labels. Notably, the press releases announcing the deals mark the start of a more significant collaboration between TikTok and major labels.

TikTok was accessible in over 150 markets and 75 languages as of 2018 (Geyser, 2021). According to Sensor Tower statistics, TikTok was downloaded more than 104 million times in Apple's App Store during the first half of 2018. By late 2019, the subscriber base had reached 800 million (Geyser, 2021). TikTok had 62 million downloads in January 2021. The app had 315 million downloads in the first quarter of 2020, the highest quarter ever for any app; 500 million of these were from India, 180 million from China and 130 million from the United States (Doyle, 2021). TikTok is currently used by over one billion individuals every month, compared with 680 million monthly active users in November 2018, which indicates substantial growth (Doyle, 2021). In terms of demographics, as of June 2020 teenagers accounted for 32 percent of TikTok's active user base, with almost 50 percent of TikTok's user base aged 34 years and under and 26 percent aged between 18 and 24 years (Geyser, 2021).

8.2 Moment of discovery, exposure on TikTok and its proliferation through industry

As new creative tools such as media-focused phone apps, accessible DAW solutions and platforms for distribution proliferate, music – like other media – will become more collaborative and flexible. The music industry seems to be more inclined to embrace rather than retain control in opposition to this trend. One potential benefit of labels entering into licensing agreements with TikTok is that it will potentially offer new revenue streams for artists. This is good news for the industry as a whole, given the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the music business, with many companies and artists losing whole revenue streams owing to the

pandemic's impact on artists' and industries' inability to host and perform live concerts and to tour. TikTok recently announced a new collaboration with UnitedMasters, a business that charges independent artists a modest distribution fee for access to Spotify, YouTube, SoundCloud and Apple Music (Yao, 2021). By joining with UnitedMasters, music producers on TikTok may 'distribute their songs directly to streaming services and other partners' (Yao, 2021, para. 13), allowing them to better capitalise on the buzz generated by their songs becoming viral on TikTok. Through this agreement, TikTok has begun to develop an ecosystem for artists interested in capitalising on the company's collaborative, meme-driven vision for music consumption. If the anticipated TikTok-branded music streaming service materialises, TikTok will transform into a full-fledged music platform (Yao, 2021).

In Chapter 7, Flash, a UK based publishing A&R, discusses the 'moment of discovery' that, when viewed through the lens of TikTok, shows that there is tremendous potential for artists to acquire recognition despite having a small pre-existing audience. The cost of this visibility is the need to tailor one's material to the platform; with so much competition for attention, there must be some aspect of audience co-creation and an awareness of the context in which the artist's work exists. From this exposure on TikTok, the artist can then, as Ian highlighted in Chapter 6, 'funnel' the audience towards platforms such as Spotify or Bandcamp for the impactful streaming numbers or monetisation of their audience, respectively. Within the ever-changing environment of platform disruption, TikTok is driving the most current wave of viral success in the music industry. It is necessary to examine the effect on emerging musicians and the continuing renaissance of legacy music, which is finding a new context in this audio-visual medium. This viral success further influences artists themselves creatively; record companies and artists alike want to learn the strategies behind success on this platform. Finally, it is important to consider the effect of institutional investment on the music industry; with vast quantities of legacy catalogues now being purchased, there is a striking contrast between the security of this library's investment and the volatility of new artists.

The rising impact of streaming services' algorithms on music discovery and consumption has garnered increased attention and research. Similar to how algorithmic feeds used by Facebook and Twitter have reshaped news consumption, the overwhelming decision paralysis that comes with suddenly having unlimited access to millions of songs at our fingertips 'is mostly mitigated by entrusting our music discovery to curated playlists and algorithmic

recommendations' (Yao, 2021, para. 2). Yao notes that the differentiating factor between TikTok and other platforms is a re-emergence of a sense of more pre-digital discovery:

> As a result, an intriguing paradox emerges: as our playlists become more individually customised than ever, our music taste somehow evolves to feel less personal. Prior to the streaming era, music discovery predicated on mass media (i.e. radio and MTV) and word-of-mouth recommendations were as conducive to producing monocultural hits while also emphasising personal agency in curating music collections, as demanded by the cost of purchasing physical and digital copies … We own nothing but our playlists, which are ostensibly tailor-made for us, yet heavily influenced by algorithms. This erosion of personal stakes and agency in music consumption has made music less a part of our personal identities and more of a digital commodity, for better and for worse. (Yao, 2021, para. 3)

TikTok is a paradigm shift for music discovery; it is in some ways a reflection of broader trends in platform disruption, which are becoming more democratised and participatory. According to TikTok:

> The system recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors – starting from interests you express as a new user and adjusting for things you indicate you're not interested in, too. (TikTok for business, n.d.)

Each of these variables is weighted differently by TikTok's 'For You' recommendation algorithm, ensuring that each For You page is fully tailored to a person and their degree of interest. TikTok states that a significant indication of interest is when a viewer watches a video from start to finish. This would be given more weight than a weak indication, such as whether the viewer and producer of the film are from the same country. These 'indicators of interest' are then used to rank For You page videos depending on the probability of a user being interested in a piece of material (McGlew, 2021).

Barney, a UK based artist manager, emphasises that the actual benefit for artists on TikTok is the algorithm, ensuring that any artist's work, regardless of the initial following, will be seen by at least 100 people. This guarantee of a minimum audience is inherently more gratifying than on other platforms. It promotes consistent engagement with artists through 'likes' and comments, gaining a

greater knowledge of what resonates with their prospective audience through a process of trial and error. In addition, the tools required to disseminate may be as modest as a smartphone:

> The cool thing about TikTok is the way that the algorithm works at the moment is that anybody, any video that you post up on there is guaranteed to get 100 different views, so that's 100 separate views if you had bothered to write a song, that kind of plays that sort of short-form Tik Tok hooky content and those hundred people then share it around, you really can start a fire really quickly. I mean, it's like 'Old Town Road', the Lil' Nas track which is a track that blew up. He managed the whole thing essentially from his phone. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

These musicians who have found success on TikTok have a drastically different delivery style from their counterparts on other platforms such as YouTube. In addition, this compressed format further emphasises the massive expectation of 'content churn', as highlighted by artist manager David in Chapter 4. Flash highlights how cultural change has resulted in significantly fewer gaps between perceived generations of artists compared with decades-old comparable means of transmission media such as vinyl to CD:

> YouTube sensations right at the very start: so the Laura Aquilina's or the Orla Gartland's, Nina Nesbitt as well, for instance, you know they got significant action as some of the UK's first YouTube stars and they all got deals elsewhere. But with the TikTok generation already, and that's what five years? So, the evolution of music culture is happening, kind of a yearly rate, sometimes a monthly rate. So, it's kind of the actual cultural change from one significant moment to the next has exponentially grown and got quicker than say vinyl to CD or vinyl to cassette to CD, you know which was the original format. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Artists can now control the outcome of their single premieres with a few mouse clicks. This is through the use of appropriate tagging as well as understanding how to capitalise on the imagination of one's audience, as noted by Flash:

> The discovery moment has dramatically changed from what we were talking about with you and your band to this moment where something can catch fire really

> quickly, but it's got to capture the imagination and the culture; Jawsh almost needs to know his audience. It's not about putting up something randomly on TikTok. It's knowing how to tag it correctly, so it's finding the right places. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Historically, an artist had to depend on the resources and network of a label to disseminate their release. Now, an artist can upload a single song directly to TikTok, bypassing all radio stations. Within a few hours, the artist could have far greater exposure than would previously have been possible through more traditional media. TikTok's published research reveals how the platform is transforming the music industry for marketers, artists, audiences and the industry as a whole. This includes third-party research conducted by TikTok Marketing Science in conjunction with InSites Consulting and qualitative research conducted by PRS IN VIVO, which informed the studies. The study incorporated several territories: the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. TikTok has had a significant effect on the music industry, with audiences finding new songs, artists and soundtrack trends. This success extends outside the platform, as music popularised on TikTok is surging to the top of the charts, such as a group of singing nuns known as the 'Poor Clares of Arundel' who reached number 5 in the UK album chart (Beaumont-Thomas, 2021). In TikTok's ecosystem, the primary metric for determining a song's popularity is no longer the number of times it has been played, but rather how many users have used it to create their videos. In a future where collaborative content creation is the norm, the value of a media product will be judged by the amount of user-generated content inspired by it: 'as the attention economy peaks, music not only has to compete with other forms of media for attention, it is also converging with other creative formats' (Yao, 2020, para. 16). Some 80 per cent of TikTok users claim they find new music on the site, higher than for other digital platforms, streaming services and friends. More than half (56 per cent) of findings occur organically in the 'For You' feed. (TikTok for Business, n.d.). The TikTok for Business study aided in identifying three primary drivers of the TikTok music experience: discovery, being discovered and rediscovery. The research demonstrates that TikTok introduces audiences to new sounds and songs associated with current trends. TikTok users have a highly exploratory 'discovery mindset' that drives their behaviour – 'but it also shows how TikTok is inspiring people to break outside of their existing music bubbles' (TikTok for Business, n.d., para. 9). Through trends, successful rising artists and viral songs, users discover new music and are encouraged to like, save and

share it inside the app's ecosystem. Individuals who are captivated by music on TikTok take their excitement outside of the app as well:

> After listening to new music, almost half of people on TikTok add the song to their favourites (47%), view the artists' profile (46%), and even follow the artist on TikTok (43%), and this, in turn, has triggered a mass wave of new artist discovery. (TikTok for Business, n.d., para. 10)

Record companies are rushing to sign musicians with viral TikTok songs, hoping that their success will spread to other platforms. TikTok has started to position itself as a music discovery platform, pursuing new musicians and recognising its platform's promotional potential. Due to TikTok's enormous reach and impact, an artist may now rely entirely on the platform to promote music, funnel audiences and gain recognition on other social media platforms.

8.3 A case study in using TikTok as a funnel for driving new audiences towards Spotify

While many of the qualitative respondents, on both the industry and artist sides, were sceptical about TikTok as a powerful medium for audience engagement, Alessandro, a London-based independent musician, has made TikTok his primary source of exposure, amassing 16,300 followers and 195,000 likes across his videos. This audience has afforded Alessandro further exposure on Spotify, with his 2019 single, 'Kings', totalling over 50,000 streams. This use of TikTok as a driver for Spotify is explained by Alessandro, with his belief that Spotify should be the last step for an artist, one which is a reward for work on other platforms:

> Spotify is like the final goal; before getting to that, you need to make sure you're doing the work on all other platforms. There is not any specific platform you should work on; I think it really depends on the artist or the project. (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

Alessandro provides a compelling insight into his perception of new digital streaming outlets. Platforms such as TikTok, he believes, serve the same purpose as more traditional forms of advertising, which then drive sales to the artists' shop, be it Apple Music or Spotify:

> The way I think of Spotify or streaming platforms like Apple Music as well is like a shop, so you know people don't just go into your shop and buy stuff, most of the time

> maybe they heard about your shop through a friend, or maybe online or a TV ad. (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

Alessandro's connection with the TikTok audience is facilitated by his use of the platform's trends and contextualisation in his creative production. This may include composing new lyrics for current songs that he thinks fit with his sense of creativity, and producing more light-hearted meme-based content and personal experiences to cultivate a connection with his target audience. This constant engagement is bolstered by his usage of the comments area, where he makes a point of responding to all comments on videos; he believes that consistent engagement is key to the relevance of artists in the new music industry when accounting for the number of distractions with which audiences are faced:

> I think it's very important to be consistent because, like everything else, consistency is key. And so, it is for social media in terms of content creation. The reason why is because, especially in 2020, where everything is happening online, there's too many distractions online where people tend to forget quite easily and quickly. The more you remind people of you, the better (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

This constant engagement, regardless of whether it contextualises one's music, is reinforced by Alessandro when he speaks of his approach to the types of content he chooses to disseminate:

> It doesn't have to be you constantly plugging your music, but it could even be, if you're using Instagram, for example, doing stories talking about how your day is going, talking about your night out, you're cooking something. Just things which are not music-related but still talking to your audience. So, it is important to maintain this relationship with your audience. (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

Regarding his preference for TikTok, Alessandro feels that the limitations in terms of time constraint help him connect more effectively than the longer format of platforms such as YouTube: 'I hate doing covers on YouTube, I much prefer doing a 10–15 second video on TikTok.' (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

As a music publisher, Flash also sees the benefit of utilising TikTok as a significant source of audience engagement. However, he believes that for some artists, there is an underlying apprehension of being associated with TikTok: ‘There will be some artists that will think that TikTok’s not relevant to them. They will think it’s kind of cheesy, or they think it’ll be … not sell out, but that kind of vibe.’ Regarding his current roster, one band that he feels would be effective on TikTok is ‘TTRRUUCES’. As Flash states, they have some of the key ingredients required to traverse the attention economy of the platform: ‘They are incredibly creative, both musically and [because] they’re very visual artists, artistic thinkers, as well.’ (Personal Communication [29.9.2020]) The issue of association, Flash believes, is partly to do with the age of the band, and a disconnect between teenagers and mid- to late twenty-year-old artists:

> So, you would think that TikTok would be the best platform for them, but because they’re not in their teens and they’re certainly not in their early 20s. They’re sort of late 20s. They’re looking at it, going; I think that TikTok would be damaging to the brand. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Flash believes that this conversation with the band is part of his role as an effective publisher. His assertion that the band members should set aside their preconceptions comes from a broader understanding that to compete effectively in the current climate of the new music industry, bands must try to find their ways of harnessing a platform with which they may not necessarily identify. This can be related back to Auslander’s observations in Chapter 2 regarding the roles adopted by artists, whereby the roles specific artists take and from which they choose to remove themselves are partly influenced by genre and historical context. Flash provides a compelling insight into his motivations and TTRRUUCES’ arguments against such a mode of engagement:

> Have you got the app? ‘Yeah, we never really looked at it’ and I was just like, neither do I. But you know because their YouTube videos are very visual and very colourful and full of personality, wit and humour. I think they haven’t made that leap; I think they’re kind of thinking: we’re a YouTube band and not a TikTok band. Well, you can be both and you can be all these things. I tried to explain that with how songs fly off TikTok, is there’s usually a dance or challenge or something like that. It’s not just about the song, It’s about something else around it. In some ways, the song becomes less relevant as the action; it’s kind of the soundtrack. It’s kind of ‘entertain me for 15

> seconds'. That's essentially TikTok, and music is a part of that. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Alessandro believes that being precious about one's output in today's climate is not an effective strategy to engage with an audience successfully. This was again echoed by Auslander in Chapter 2, whereby engagement authored by an artist on a consistent basis assists in keeping their followers informed of the day-to-day aspects of their life, thus retaining relevance. TikTok may also be seen as a type of 'liveness in a virtual world', with the immediacy of transmission and the readiness of many to offer up artists' music to appropriation and reuse. Alessandro relates music to being more of an experience than the somewhat passive mode of consumption in the age before social media; this new paradigm, he believes, should be embraced by the artist:

> As an artist, as with everything else in life, if you're being precious with something then you fail. Especially in 2020, there's so much going on, so from the moment you put out a new song or anything online then it's not yours anymore. You are giving it away so people can use it as they prefer. That's the good thing about social media and the internet in general, where it wasn't really possible before, you were just buying CDs, listening to music from your Walkman or your stereo and you were limited to that. Now music is more of an experience; people can see the experience in different ways; people can see your song as an experience of doing a dance on TikTok or using it for a video on YouTube, or listening to your song and thinking about their life, different things. People were probably doing these things before, but with social media, it amplifies now; it's more accessible now. (Personal Communication [04.09.2020])

Flash parallels more traditional examples of TTRRUUCES' successful engagement with their potential on TikTok, which used the band's song within the video game 'FIFA 2020'. Flash sees the viral potential of this music when combined and recontextualised with differing sources of media. It is this moment of discovery that excites Flash as a publisher, the moment where there is parabolic growth through word of mouth rather than a need for constant PR engagement:

> I know for a fact that one of their songs, in particular, would be TikTok-tastic. It's a song called 'I'm Alive', and before even the album came out before the song was

> released, we got it on the FIFA 2020 soundtrack. We were tracking it all the way through it. 'Who is this band, TTRRUUCES? Do you know? I heard on FIFA, who is this band? I can't find the song anywhere online. What's happening with the band? It's my favourite song. I can't listen to it on my phone, and you're like, holy shit, that's pretty fucking amazing right? So then slowly but surely the project TTRRUUCES, it *was* slowly but surely, little bits of information would go up here and there and there like suddenly, oh, there's an Instagram account because you know people would have had alerts for TTRRUUCES, so any kind of new internet moment would feed the excitement. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Flash admits that this excitement for the discovery moment must also be embraced by the artist. However, Flash believes that there is integrity in a platform such as TikTok, as long as the content creator believes in the work they are broadcasting. The difference with TikTok was the limitation on content length prior to changes in 2021, which impacted the type of creative output one can engage in:

> They've got to come to that conclusion themselves, if they are not invested into that 15-second platform in the same way that they would invest in a three and a half minute music video for YouTube, it's going to look shit. So there is integrity to artistry in TikTok, I think. I think if you're using stuff and you make it fucking cool or funny or whatever, I think you need to have integrity to do that. It doesn't really matter that TikTok is just 15-second bursts; it's kind of semantics. If you look at it in terms of a three-and-a-half-minute pop video on YouTube, you still want to broadcast your artistic integrity, whatever that may be in a very concise and clear way. Artists will put something up on TikTok, but it's hard for them to promote it. It's either the TikTok universe will pick up on it and celebrate it and kind of almost lift the project on their shoulders collectively for a period of time, or they won't. It's obviously not as binary as that, but that's how I think we've seen a lot of TikTok sensations happen. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Applying Flash's use of the word 'integrity' within the context of platforms, it is prudent to note that different platforms have varying values, and artists should approach each with expectations that correspond with the platform's fundamentals. According to TikTok's self-commissioned

study, four out of ten users of TikTok say the platform helps them to discover new musicians. TikTok can help musicians reach new fans. Because TikTok is a democratic platform, any artist – whether an independent musician or a chart-topping band – can share their music and gain followers. Record labels further strengthen this discovery through the use of 'challenge' videos, which create an interactive environment for audiences to actively participate in the dissemination of videos by making their creations based on the content provided by labels. Many of the year biggest hits of 2020 were accompanied with a TikTok challenge such as Doja Cat's 'Say So', The Weeknd's 'Blinding Lights' and 'Savage' by Megan Thee Stallion. In a few years, we may find ourselves in a media environment where singles are automatically accompanied by a TikTok challenge, just as music videos have become a common component of the release process.

Speaking of the algorithm, TikTok states that, 'The system recommends content by ranking videos based on a combination of factors – starting from interests you express as a new user and adjusting for things you indicate you're not interested in, too' (TikTok Newsroom, n.d.). Among these considerations are the following:

1. interactions with other users, such as the videos you like or share, the accounts you follow, the comments you make, and the material you produce
2. video metadata: this section contains information about the video, such as subtitles, audio, and hashtags
3. device and account settings, such as your preferred language, country and device type (McGlew, 2021, para. 3).

With so much competition for an audience's attention, it is clear that consistent engagement and playing to the algorithm will produce benefits for artists; as previously indicated, Alessandro is finding success with his less-precious approach to creative output. This has resulted in a noticeable increase in his Spotify streaming statistics, as well as helping him in selling out London venues when he was able to perform live.

8.4 How success is defined in the digital era of music: 'Viral songs'

TikTok is changing the way people consume music. Many new fans will discover music through TikTok after seeing a sample or dance choreography. We are witnessing an age in which customers choose music on the basis of its virality. TikTok remains a big mystery in the ever-changing music world, and 'the rules are still being written' (Schube, 2021, para. 31). TikTok

also fosters a new breed of influencers who do not need large amounts of money to include artists' music in their works. It is an almost entirely free trip to instant celebrity, as long as the artist can distinguish themselves from the many other outstanding artists. Users discover music on TikTok that they were previously unaware existed; this is in contrast to popular streaming services, which use algorithms to suggest content based on the user's preferences or prior knowledge. TikTok has fostered some of the most dramatic success stories in the music business. Consider Nathan Evans, an obscure folk musician whose TikTok video of himself performing the nineteenth-century sea shanty 'The Wellerman' went viral, garnering him a major label record contract and a series of television appearances (Beaumont-Thomas, 2021). When the app debuted in 2016, it allowed users to discover only viral videos and chart-topping songs. Today, the opposite is true in that songs and versions of songs made famous by TikTok affect the *Billboard* rankings. TikTok's identity is founded on music discovery. It enables aspiring artists to market their music and grow a worldwide fan base by submitting their original songs to the site. Without a doubt, TikTok can instantly viralise music by relatively unknown artists. Individuals want the opportunity to be as big as the most successful people on the platform. TikTok fulfils this need via its lauded algorithm, which is always on the lookout for fresh clips rather than just pumping out the most recent videos from famous users. Songs will also gain traction on TikTok if famous producers include them in their content.

In the case of an independent musician without the budget for a PR team and limited expertise to produce artist content; Harbron explains it seems as if you have no opportunity:

> In the way that independent businesses are left scrambling to keep up with big-industry fast fashion brands, constantly ripping off or offering cheaper alternatives, are more grassroots musicians being left in the dirt, with either a choice of trying to compete or be defeated by the TikTok machine. (Harbron, 2021, para. 9)

Music and its accompanying visual media have always had an intrinsic link, whether through the physical engagement of live performance, or the fetishisation of physical media or visual media. A clear interest in all modalities of perception and their connection is required for effective engagement (Harris, 2021). Virality in terms of music is intrinsically linked to the visual media by which it is accompanied. While very rapid in the age of platform disruption, this repurposing and new audience discovery are not necessarily new. However, the democratisation of broadcast

and access has made it a possibility for all. The song ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ by rock band Queen is perhaps a defining example of the nature of viral music content. The song was a success upon its first release on Halloween 1975, even though the late Freddy Mercury and his fellow band members did not anticipate it to be as popular as it turned out to be. The video for ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ has been credited with pioneering the format that would subsequently be aired on MTV. The six-minute ‘promotional video’, as it was dubbed, was produced in a matter of hours by director Bruce Gowers. Decades later, Queen won their one and only MTV Music Video Award in the category of the best video from a film. There are several examples of reinterpretation of the song and video, which continued to propel Queen towards new audiences and frame them within many contexts. A pertinent example of this is the use of ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’ in the 1992 movie *Wayne’s World* (which features a standout scene of lead actor Mike Meyers lip-syncing to the song), released only months after the death of Freddie Mercury from an AIDS-related illness. The soundtrack for the film, which includes the song, debuted at no. 1 on the *Billboard* album chart in 1992, with the song itself peaking at no. 2 on the *Billboard* singles list more than fifteen years after its original release. Moving forward in time and into another space in terms of audience exposure, in 2009 the ‘Bohemian Rhapsody’s’ video parody by the Muppets became a viral phenomenon, recording over 9 million in its first month. The video was the first created for the Muppets’ Studio project and includes every Muppet character. The video now has over 127 million YouTube views. This reimagining in a multitude of contexts helps to establish the essence of how content is disseminated today at much greater speeds through platforms, the value being the context within which the existing content is reframed.

The notion of viral videos is intrinsically linked to meme culture, and its reprocessed, recontextualised and repurposed dissemination through internet communities. Similar to how sports fans share game highlights, meme culture takes songs out of their original context and contextualises them in readily consumable clips:

> Music arguably has the strongest repeat value of all media products, and the TikTok model exploits that by pairing the same music clip with different user-generated visuals to enhance its repeat value. (Yao, 2020, para. 15)

Understanding the link between virality and meme culture bridges the gap between traditional virality through platform disruption and how it has paved the way for shorter format

reinterpretation on a platform such as TikTok. Music is usually social, as individuals discover it at gatherings, through peer recommendations on social media or via word of mouth. TikTok is the closest to re-socialising music consumption since it goes beyond real-world social networks to match various songs to specific audiences, 'based on aggregated listener data. After all, memes are inherently social, and on TikTok, music is both the muse and the vessel for memes' (Yao, 2020, para. 12). On TikTok, memes have gained the status of music artists, and companies have little control over which ones become popular. Users are both consumers and producers, contributing to TikTok's music hype engine via content consumption and creation. One salient example is Childish Gambino's 'Redbone'; this was a standout song on Gambino's album *Awaken, My Love*. However, the song became a popular meme on Twitter:

> The tweet often begins as follows: 'What "Redbone" would sound like …' followed by a specific scenario that ranges from what the song would sound like in a bathroom at a party to what it would sound like at Gordon Ramsay's Hell's Kitchen. Accompanying the tweet is a short snippet of 'Redbone', which has been remade to sound a little muffled (evoking the sound of what it is actually like to hear a song that is playing loudly while you're in another room). (Watson, 2017, para. 2)

This concept of music serving as the punchline to situational humour, or music serving as a flexible and sympathetic foil for various activities, defines the success of songs used in TikTok videos. It also influences the writing process for some artists who cynically imagine their music spreading via TikTok through audience co-creation. Although algorithms play a significant role in this kind of crowdsourcing discovery, given that TikTok's primary feed is entirely algorithmic, the deciding element has moved back to the whim of the TikTok algorithm, which is in turn steered by its user base. Some astute artists have recognised this pattern and intend to capitalise on it by integrating TikTok-friendly dance routines into their music videos. However, this is no guarantee of organic viral success – it is 'one thing for content creators to game search algorithms for clicks, and quite another to engineer a meme' (Yao, 2020, para. 11). There is another passage via which success can be found: influencers on the platform disseminating to their audiences. One example is 'Driver's License' by Olivia Rodrigo, one of the newest TikTok superstars. The sudden success of her song demonstrates that the app has gone above and beyond

in providing users with variation in comparison to its early years. ‘Driver’s License’ went viral when it was retweeted by renowned artists such as Charli D’Amelio. Rodrigo showcased the song in early January, unaware that it would be such a viral success. Rodrigo’s account has grown to almost 10 million followers in the time since the video was uploaded. It is worth noting that the app assisted in propelling Rodrigo’s songs to number one on streaming sites such as Amazon and Spotify.

8.5 TikTok’s aesthetic influence on writing

Undoubtedly, platform disruption has affected the kinds of musicians who have found success in the new music industry, such as Nina Nesbitt and Jawsh 685 (Newsbeat, 2020). However, also worth noting is the effect this has had on creativity. Publishing A&R Flash speaks of the success found by Jawsh 685 with his reinterpretation of a Jason Derulo beat:

> So essentially, you can become a sensation on TikTok, and I think that’s essentially how Jawsh 685 blew up because he did a beat, and then Jason Derulo took it off the internet and added his vocal to it. And then it became this international success; I think it was TikTok that was one of the first catalysts for that to happen. Now Jawsh 685 is signed to RCA internationally, and that happened very swiftly as well. I mean, that’s an example of a young artist suddenly blowing up really quickly and then the traditional music industry applying the old rules. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

With distribution modes being drastically disrupted and audiences being exposed to an overwhelming quantity of material, it is evident that artists must adjust their aesthetics, sound and structure to maximise their chances of success on any given platform. Artist manager Barney speaks of this tailoring of content to specific platforms being necessary to maximise engagement with one’s audience:

> I think the first step is you need to identify where your audience sit … It’s just like you think, the amount of content that has to be created to service these channels, and then you will be accused of being lazy if the content is identical on each channel if it’s just being resized to be optimised for that channel. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Barney continues by noting that this customising of content is often not for the audience's benefit so much as for the benefit of the music business and platforms, promoting support via the provision of unique content that drives a userbase to their particular platform: 'So, it's like all of the marketing heads of the channel set up TikTok, Instagram, Facebook; they'll all be demanding that they have some form of unique content.' (Personal Communication [10.9.2020]) The result of this demand for a plethora of varying and tailored content – as previously noted, 'content churn' – for the independent artist is often incredible pressure; Barney notes that he believes the time is better spent engaging with one's audience on the platform most suited to the artists' demographic, and which has the most natural audience engagement:

> I think for an artist, that's an incredible pressure and doesn't make any sense. However, what does make sense is that if you have a really engaged audience on a particular platform, you kind of have to look into why that is. And is that because that platform, the demographic on that platform is a particular age bracket? Just like you know, we know that say Facebook now is very much the grandpa as it were. You'll have a really, highly engaged audience of 30 plus that are on there and then across the sort of 20s and 30s, it's Instagram and at a push on the lower end, Snapchat and certainly if you're going to instead, very early teens up to maximum 20 it's TikTok. I think if you can find where your audience is most active and serve that, and then the rest of it, I wouldn't worry so much about, because again, it's too much pressure. I mean, at the end of the day, if you're a musician, that's what you should be. You know you shouldn't have to be this massive self-facilitating media behemoth. It just sort of it dilutes the art. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Not only does TikTok represent a significant change away from music discovery on other platforms, but the material must be contained inside a concise amount of time, and the algorithm rewards those who can maintain audience interest. Additionally, compared with other platforms, the nature of discovery on TikTok is heavily skewed towards new producers. One of the most disruptive aspects of TikTok is the app's inability to anticipate which songs will become viral. While streaming services and radio stations promote a predictable variety of pop, TikTok does not mirror this behaviour.

TikTok's impact on the music industry has already been significant. Dylan Pasqua, Music Partnership Manager at social media marketing company Fanbytes, describes the unique 'TikTok effect' occurring in pop music:

> There are some elements that just 'work' on the app. We look for a 15-second vocal hook, often with clear, actionable words – a call to action, of sorts. Something the user can riff on, or apply to their own life. (Quoted in Rodgers, 2021, para. 15)

Barney discusses the effect TikTok has on an artist's creative process, and how the industry is starting to create roles to keep on top of trends on platforms such as TikTok:

> It also can affect how you write. I mean, I know now that a really important part of A&R meetings are about the TikTok charts. So yeah, there are adverts out there actively, on music recruitment sites, looking for people that specialise in TikTok A&R … this didn't exist a couple of years ago, but well, it's now major thing. And yes, huge amount of anxiety because on top of the fact that you're possibly being put under pressure to post, you know, as part of an omnichannel marketing strategy, you're probably also going to be put under a little bit of pressure from an A&R perspective of like, well, will this song go on TikTok? (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

Flash echoes this idea of business adaptability, emphasising the importance of analytics websites in the identification of trending artists:

> There are websites that you can track and trace TikTok's impact, from when it's loaded to where it goes. It's kind of expensive. It's a monthly kind of thing, but the information you get from it is just. I mean, it's deep, it's really, really, really deep. Because we're an independent publishing company, we are not driven by figures or stats; we're still driven by that: 'Oh my God, I love this song', right? We want to work with THAT writer or THAT artist. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

As stated by Tucker, TikTok has evolved into something of a post-Tumblr entity as a result of Gen Z's impact, merging countercultural tendencies into today's mainstream media sphere and fostering an inclusive culture among middle school-aged youth:

> They're giving great power to an app once deemed by many, myself included, as juvenile nonsense, and, because of this, it becomes harder to mock and make fun of them and their mega-influential e-posse. (Tucker, 2020, para. 5)

For some, TikTok represents a new manifestation of counterculture and the themes it promotes, with these having maintained a consistent influence throughout the generations in their many embodiments, the latest including artists such as Timothée Chalamet and Harry Styles. In addition, the Tik-Tok-sphere has introduced countercultural material to its middle-school Gen Z audience, reinforcing the notion that it is acceptable to question the status quo (Tucker, 2020). With this in mind, massive mainstream successes often fail to gain meaningful traction on the app. Conversely, older recordings, unsigned artists' tracks and obscure remixes rule the TikTok algorithm. Almost every single in 2020's top streamed chart was associated with a TikTok trend. As demonstrated by the following 2020 chart, these songs need not be new or from established artists:

1. 'Toosie Slide' – Drake
2. 'WAP' (feat. Megan Thee Stallion) – Cardi B
3. 'Therefore I Am' – Billie Eilish
4. 'Let's Link' – WhoHeem
5. 'Say I Yi' – Ying Yang Twins
6. 'Where is the Love?' – The Black Eyed Peas
7. 'Whole Lotta Choppas' – Sada Baby
8. 'Adderall (Corvette Corvette)' – Popp Hunna
9. 'Mood Swings' – Pop Smoke
10. 'THICK' – DJ Chose & Beatking

(TikTok Newsroom, 2020)

This explains why record labels and artists alike want to understand the practices behind success on this platform. In terms of platform disruption's impact on music more broadly, one more obvious change has been the impact of streaming on the types of recordings that generate the greatest success for artists. Rather than being paid for actual sales, artists are compensated

through a stream, which is legitimate only if a song is played for 30 seconds. It makes sense to stream several tracks concurrently, which means filling the artists' album with numerous shorter songs. One of the most significant changes has been how individuals are financially compensated, which affects how songs are created. Previously, artists were paid if they sold an album or a single, as noted by Harding:

> In 1995, we had songs that were coming in at four minutes and 30 seconds. Today, songs are down to three minutes and 42 seconds because of the difference in how artists are getting paid now. (Mack, 2019, para. 3)

Therefore, an album such as Drake's *Scorpion*, which is a lengthy double album clocking in at over 90 minutes, Drake includes a slew of very brief tracks, since he is compensated for each song the audience listens to, regardless of whether they listen to the whole album (Mack, 2019).

Average lengths of UK number ones by year:

- 1998 – 4m 16s
- 2008 – 3m 44s
- 2018 – 3m 30s
- 2019 – 3m 3s

(Music: ed, 2019)

Not only are songs becoming shorter, but how musicians introduce their songs is evolving as well. As a result, the age of lengthy introductions that ease an audience into the music is over:

> Today, we are not only seeing songs getting shorter but there is a sort of a new song structure that we've observed that we've called the pop overture, where basically a song, at the very beginning, will play a hint of the chorus in the first five to 10 seconds so that the hook is in your ear, hoping that you'll stick around till about 30 seconds in when the full chorus eventually comes in. (Harding quoted in Mack, 2019, para. 6)

We see two patterns developing: the average successful song is growing shorter, while lengthier songs are becoming less popular. Because musicians are no longer exclusively reliant on radio play to attain chart success, they are no longer limited by the conventional need to keep their song under three minutes. Thus, artists are theoretically free to make their songs as lengthy or as short as they want.

Perhaps it is pointless to consider TikTok as a means of feeding the mainstream consumer behemoth: 'rather, it's helpful to view it as its own island, where occasional ferries move passengers on and off' (Schube, 2021, para. 29). Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see a future in which musicians abandon complete songs entirely to produce snippets of moments for young people to dance to. Given the continued decrease in our collective attention spans, this seems to be a reasonable conclusion.

While building personal playlists on streaming platforms provides a feeling of agency despite the impact of algorithmic suggestions, TikTok empowers listeners by providing a forum to express their interpretations of every particular song. Furthermore, through TikTok, music production becomes a live process since previously released songs are continuously remixed and reused to produce many versions, most of which vary just in graphics yet are distinct enough to be amusing. In addition, certain digitally adept artists have used TikTok to engage listeners directly in the production of their music. For instance, artist Charlie Puth has frequently tasked followers with creating lyrics for songs that he made using TikTok's 'duet' function.

The transition from physical to digital purchasing of music has fragmented albums into individual songs, while the streaming model recombined the whole music library into monthly subscriptions. With TikTok, songs are further segmented into small snippets of 'drops' and 'hooks' to express a particular atmosphere and serve as aural triggers for visual media. This is iterated by publisher Flash, who believes that personality is at the core of successful engagement when limited to such a concise platform as TikTok:

> TikTok's interesting - how it differs from my way of seeing it is: it's quick, it's shorter bursts. So, you're not having to perform a full song. Also, what that means, you could have more personality, there's more whistles and bells, and there's more gimmicks to cram into a 15-second video than, say, doing a full two and a half or three-minute cover. (Personal Communication [29.9.2020])

Barney reinforces Flash's assertion that understanding one's audience yields the greatest success when engaging on a platform such as TikTok:

> So, Instagram obviously, if you're a younger artist, be it of grime, whatever it's like you're going to be creating loops, which in your mind could work for a TikTok dance, which sounds awful, but this is how kids are getting going now, it's kind of understanding the platforms and what works. (Personal Communication [10.9.2020])

According to a 2016 Music Biz consumer report, 77 per cent of respondents said their primary method of listening was playlists or single song streaming. In comparison, just 22 per cent selected the album as their preferred format:

> As the music industry continues to adjust on the fly to the technological innovations that change the way we consume songs, power players have come and gone, some have increased leverage, and, in some cases, others have dissolved into nothingness. The lineage is pretty straightforward. First, there was the MP3, then, eventually, the option to stream uninterrupted for a fixed cost or free with advertisements, and now, there's … the snippet? (Schube, 2021, para. 1)

The conventional notion of the album as a physical item to be examined in a tactile manner while losing oneself to the music has been pushed to the sidelines in the fight over how we interact with music. This is in contrast to the allure of vinyl and its importance to some as being more than just physical, but an artefact holding great value:

> Is it so wrong, wanting to be at home with your record collection? It's not like collecting records is like collecting stamps, or beermats, or antique thimbles. There's a whole world in here, a nicer, dirtier, more violent, more peaceful, more colorful, sleazier, more dangerous, more loving world than the world I live in; there is history, and geography, and poetry, and countless other things I should have studied at school, including music. (Hornby, 1996, p. 83)

The music industry, too, has had to adjust to our new listening habits and consumption patterns. When evaluating an artist's success, all kinds of streams must be considered. Measuring record sales

alone is no longer sufficient. The name given to quantifying all those listens has resulted in the invention of the musical term: the Album-Equivalent Unit. The origins of the album were a result of limitations in the physical formats of the time. Album-Equivalent Units have become the official standard for album sales. They consider all factors, including streaming statistics, digital album sales and conventional album sales, when determining an album's performance. As an artist, the album format remains a very efficient method of ensuring quality and coherence. If the artist is uncertain about some songs, they may need to be trimmed to suit the conventional album format. By adopting an album approach, an artist establishes the limits necessary for deciding what should remain and what should be left out. While some seminal albums have taken a long time in both the writing and production phase, notably Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* (1977), Tears for Fears' *Seeds of Love* (1989) and Queen's *A Night at the Opera* (1975), Brian Eno spoke of the importance of constraints and structure to the record-making process in his 2013 RBMA lecture:

> The two things that make good records are deadlines and small budgets. The two things that make bad records are no deadline and endless budgets. (Quoted in Parsons, 2017)

Having an album mindset benefits artists in ways that streaming will never be able to replace:

> Approaching a project with an album mentality helps you limit how many songs you need to finish. When you have a concept or idea for an album, visualising a traditional album length (typically 10–20 songs) is much easier than dealing with unlimited tracks. (Parsons, 2017, para. 39)

With the demise of the album as a conventional format, a new meaning and description for these releases has emerged:

> Big artists have even started calling their "albums" something completely different. Drake releases playlists now. Beyonce makes visuals. Chance redefined the mixtape. Frank Ocean is releasing 45-minute music videos. (Parsons, 2017, para. 10)

This terminology becomes even more fascinating when seen through the perspective of the mixtape. This phrase refers to the creative approach as defined by the media in which it is presented:

> When digital streaming platforms made it easy to profit from online-only releases, provided the artist or label owns the rights to what's uploaded, "mixtape" became a nominal term used cynically to signal which rap records were meant to be taken more seriously than others. (Think of how many times you've seen advertising for an artist's 'debut album' only to think, 'Don't they have three albums already?') (Thompson, 2021, para. 2)

Tyler the Creator capitalises on this use of the mixtape as a statement of artistic intent with his latest release, 'Call Me If You Get Lost', which plays with the concept of the mixtape as an established medium, one that has developed a reputation for experimentation that extends beyond the traditional album within specific genres:

> 'Call Me If You Get Lost' … argues for the mixtape not as a tidy bit of careerist maneuvering, but as an aesthetic tradition. It's an inspired choice, nostalgic but irreverent, and suited perfectly to his strengths: It grants him the freedom to play with tone, to write personally or use his gravelly voice as texture, to treat the harshest raps and the most delicate hooks as mad experiments gone wrong. (Thompson, 2021, para. 2)

The mixtape and EP still represents an important tool to be exploited by artists who feel they may not necessarily be ready to realise a whole album project. They may use this form of minor-scale release as a testing ground, then scale up in terms of release length within the artist's financial and promotional means. This allows for flexibility in terms of outlay and process. Sydney producer Willaris K speaks of this process from his own experience:

> From a label perspective, it gives the team a chance to see who the early fans are and test what is working and what isn't before launching a debut record. From an industry perspective, there are less and less places for an EP to exist – most outlets don't write EP reviews, a lot of magazines wouldn't feature an artist until an album campaign, and EPs aren't really eligible for as many categories (in terms of ARIA Awards, Grammys, etc.) as a full-length record would be. (Quoted in Newstead, 2018, para. 19)

As platforms become the main point of convergence for musicians and artists alike, it is clear that the tacit feedback between the two has a significant effect on the kinds of songs that succeed

in the new music industry. The collaborative spirit inherent in internet culture promotes more involvement on the part of the creator, suggesting significant changes to both the process of production and the content itself. While TikTok has proved to be a significant catalyst for change, other platforms will no doubt emerge that will continue to have an impact on the industry, audience, and artists. While predicting the success of particular songs on such platforms is difficult, a knowledge of online culture and one's position within it seems to produce the best outcomes for musicians on platforms such as TikTok.

8.6 Legacy music catalogues becoming viable investments for institutional money

Hipgnosis Songs Fund and Primary Wave are reshaping how the music business works. Typically, publishers and composers retain publishing rights, while labels and performers retain recording rights –in 2021, these two startup firms have acquired rights for artists such as Fleetwood Mac, Neil Young, Shakira, John Lennon and Dire Straits. These businesses may profit from royalties, licensing, brand agreements and other income streams that would have gone to the artist by having acquired the music rights (Ingham & Wang, 2021, para. 2). Hipgnosis is listed on the London Stock Exchange; Primary Wave is supported by major investors such as BlackRock. Both companies have benefited from investors of all kinds recognising that the value of music assets has remained constant, if it is not increasing, throughout market turmoil. Although impacted more broadly by household income, as Hipgnosis founder and CEO Merck Mercuriadis put it, 'If Donald Trump did something crazy, the price of gold and oil are affected whereas songs are not … [Songs] are always being consumed' (quoted in Ingham and Wang, 2021, para. 3). Hipgnosis was created by Merck Mercuriadis and is a Guernsey-registered investment firm focused on songs and related musical intellectual property rights. The company raised a total of approximately £1.1 billion (gross equity capital) in its initial public offering on 11 July 2018 and future offerings in April 2019, August 2019, October 2019, July 2020, September 2020 and February 2021. Hipgnosis moved its whole issued share capital to the FCA's premium listing category and the London Stock Exchange's premium part of the main market in September 2019. It became a member of the FTSE 250 Index in March 2020. Primary Wave Music is one of the world's preeminent independent publishers of iconic and renowned music. The corporation is home to some of the most recognisable songwriters, performers and record labels in recorded music history, such as Stevie Nicks, Whitney Houston and Bob Marley.

This movement of institutional investment into the music industry space, particularly with legacy catalogues, was noted by record producer and record label founder Ian Dowling, who emphasised the importance of catalogue value and intellectual property:

> We've all got to appreciate the intricacies and the value of being creators of intellectual property. Investment people definitely value it because loads of hedge funds, vast startups; I think Nile Rodgers is being part of one, actually. They're basically paying off songwriters, millions of quid for copyright assignment on hits they've already had. Writers like Benny Blanco, loads of top hit writers, they basically take a chunk, might even be 100 million quid, I don't know, because they, these investment firms, they're looking long term. If they've got intellectual property and they've got a vast catalogue of it, even little clicky micropayments here and there, over years, I'm sure somebody's crunched the numbers. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

This movement towards investment in large swathes of catalogue is fuelled by the perceived notion of the stability of music as an investment when compared with other, more volatile assets coupled with the passive nature of the accumulation in returns. Ian offers a fresh perspective on the new music industry, which focuses on safeguarding the rights of current artists rather than on investing in emerging artists. This has always been a component of the music industry, but not a major feature of its operation, as it seems to be in light of the amount of capital involved:

> It's probably low over the course of a year, but if you're a pension fund, for example, that's what you want. You want steady low growth over a long period of time. All the major publishers and record labels have been buying up; I think it's Warner; they own the biggest catalogue; they've just been buying loads of stuff. They realise that there is no such thing as shelf space anymore. So why not just own everything? You don't have to have a shop or warehouse or store it or anything. It doesn't cost you anything. You've got an initial payout, and then it's just passive income. (Personal Communication [21.10.2020])

This newly invigorated interest in legacy catalogue must also be fuelled by the nature of discovery on platforms such as TikTok. There is an opportunity for any number of classic songs to be featured in a video and then propelled into a top spot in the charts, once again renewing their status to an entirely

new audience. With seemingly no apparent formula for success on TikTok, these classic songs arise when they fit an agenda of any given content creator:

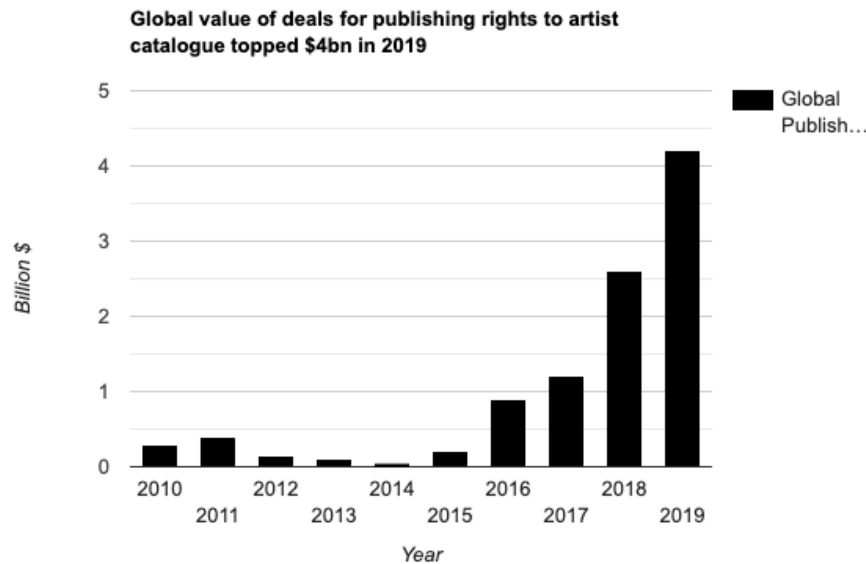
> many new tracks are 'popping' in the global listening agenda, created with the aim to satisfy new platform selector's demands, and yet, showing how no formula for success can be written as well, as random tracks surface as a result of fortuitousness. (Tello, 2020, p. 25)

The research undertaken by TikTok indicates that individuals on TikTok are more inclined to share a video if they are nostalgic about the music included in it, 'with over four out of five people on the platform stating that nostalgic sounds actually enhance and add value to their TikTok experience' (TikTok for business, n.d.). One salient example of this is TikTok Creator Nathan Apodaca, who catapulted Fleetwood Mac's 1977 song 'Dreams' back to no. 2 on the Rolling Stone's top 100 chart through his use of the song in a viral skateboarding video. This sense of nostalgia is a critical driver in the success of the video and subsequent chart position. This demonstrates that TikTok as a tool for reaching an audience isn't just for the young artist; the TikTok community's strength has aided in recontextualising classic songs to a cross-generational audience. These classic songs are finding a new audience through TikTok and even reclaiming their former positions at the top of the charts.

This trend of library eroding new music's market share corresponds to the fact that the fastest-growing group of music streaming customers in major markets is now middle-aged. But, at the same time, they are not a new audience; they are just new to the streaming ecosystem:

> Some 60% of new music streaming subscribers in the UK in the 12 months to end of February this year, for example, were over 45 years old, with MusicWatch stats showing a similar trend in the United States. (Ingham, 2020, para. 5)

This trend in the importance of publishing catalogue as a critical asset not only for publishing companies, but also for investment firms, is reflected in the data (see Figure 8.1).



Source: Sweeney (2020).

Figure 8.1 Global value of deals for publishing rights to artist catalogue

From the traditional music business to today, record companies must balance marketing and product development efforts: they must maximise the quantity of repertoire that is streamable, since this tends to attract a younger audience (Wang, 2021, p. 5). The rejuvenation of legacy catalogue from companies such as Warner is indicative of the consumer's shifting listening habits. This is supported by Tim Fraser-Harding, Warner's head of worldwide catalogue, who thinks consumers now have considerably less partisan baggage when it comes to the musical genres with which they identify:

> Nowadays people say: 'Do I like it? I like it. I want to hear it again.' That's why you can have some particularly weird things discovered from films or games that will appear out of kilter with what other genres that person listens to. And if they become musicians, they will sample a broader range of music than done in the past. (Quoted in Wang, 2021, para. 13)

This shift in behaviour, along with the increased capacity to exploit library from any period, is proving to be a steady investment for not just record companies, but also institutional investors who see music catalogues as a long-term stable investment.

8.7 Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the disruption TikTok has created for the new music industry, with record labels eager to sign artists whose TikTok songs have gone viral in the hope that their popularity will extend to other platforms. Due to TikTok's tremendous reach and influence, artists may now depend solely on the site to promote music, funnel fans and achieve exposure on other social media platforms. TikTok's identity as a platform is founded on music discovery. It was noted more broadly concerning audience engagement that with so much competition for an audience's attention, it is apparent that artists will profit from continuous engagement and playing to the algorithm. Alessandro states that he feels that artists should not be precious about their work in today's climate; he believes this does not correspond with a successful audience engagement strategy. Alessandro's work ethic is also evident in his visible engagement on his TikTok channel, where he makes a point of responding to every comment on his videos; he believes constant interaction is critical for an artist's relevance in the new music industry. One could argue that this strategy is unsustainable in the long run, but it accelerates the growth of his profile in the short to medium term. It was discussed that it is not impossible to see a future in which artists forsake full songs in favour of creating fragments of moments for audiences to dance to. Within a few years, we may find ourselves in a media landscape where singles are automatically accompanied with a TikTok challenge, just as music videos have become a common feature of the release process.

As platforms continue to serve as the primary point of convergence for musicians and artists, it is apparent that the implicit feedback between the two has a major impact on the kinds of songs that thrive in the new music industry. The collaborative attitude inherent in online culture encourages more creative participation, implying substantial changes to both the production process and the material itself. TikTok may be a precursor to what is to come as the music industry continues to evolve this kind of platform; in a world where collaborative content production is the norm, it could be forecast that a media product's worth will be determined by the quantity of user-generated material inspired by it. While TikTok has acted as a catalyst for change, other platforms will emerge that will continue to have an effect on the industry, audience and artists. While forecasting the success of specific songs on such platforms is challenging, it seems that an understanding of online culture and one's place within it results in the greatest outcomes for artists on sites such as TikTok.

9
Conclusion

This thesis has sought to better understand the impact of platforms and the networked digital age on the artist and creative process through the lens of a pivotal developmental phase in music production and dissemination. Awareness of the key competencies of successful artists in the new music industry requires an understanding of how digital culture has shaped the way artists, labels and audiences interact today, as well as how participatory exchange has changed this. This thesis is significant in that it is one of the first ethnographic examinations of the competencies, co-creation and practices of artists in the new music industry. Platform disruption has had a huge impact on the music industry, and the perspectives stated by interviewees provide insight into the mechanics of today's working artists, as well as the evolving nature of their connections with the industry and their audiences.

Chapter 4 examined platform disruption and the expectations placed on artists through participatory engagement. Participatory exchange has an influence on artists' work, not just via their creative involvement but through audiences as investors in their careers. This does provide an underlying conflict regarding audience expectations, with audiences feeling more ownership due to their investment. This is an advantage for increasingly independent musicians seeking to finance the creation and distribution of recordings through platforms such as Pledgemusic, since it enables them to create records that would not be financially feasible under a more conventional approach. One further development in the more passive participatory platform exchange has been the growing prominence of live streaming as a critical asset in an artist's repertoire for generating revenue and meeting customer demand. This concept of rising consumer demand lends itself to Flash's expression, 'feeding the machine', which refers to an artist's constant engagement across a variety of channels in order to maintain relevance. This scheduling periodicity is a cause of worry for many artists, with claimed creators benefiting from a proficiency in regular engagement. However, the need for participation to be meaningful is ambiguous and artist specific, with more independent artists seeming to be able to engage on their own terms.

Disruptions in the digital era have weakened the value of the record, eclipsing it in favour of a patchwork of different and fragmented income sources via which artists may make money.

Major labels are adopting a more quantitative, data-driven approach to signing acts, while more independent musicians are opting out of such platforms in order to monetise via ancillary revenue. When it comes to data collection, cross-platform interaction is a very effective tool for engaging more popular artists. This broad demographic allows for an evaluation of the Big Data that determines touring itineraries and territorial record marketing methods. There seems to be a discrepancy between industry perspective and public reaction; when it comes to artists' desired level of engagement, the industry views interaction frequency as a meaningful marketing statistic. The passive transaction between creator and consumer, which artists have faced in both traditional and new media, is certainly increasing in frequency as a consequence of platform disruption. This continual interaction may be a distraction for artists, and many are disenchanted by the process. However, the artist's musical and artistic agendas are often influenced by this passive feedback loop between consumers and creator. We have seen a change in the 'discovery moment' of artists by A&R and industry, as stated by Flash. Rather than pursuing a coveted radio playlist or relying on a midweek chart position as a metric of success, it seems that a spot on an important playlist is just as crucial.

The line between established artists and influencers seems to be blurring. Musicians may utilise platforms for promotional objectives as well as collaborations with relative ease. Influencers seem to occupy the same cultural space as artists, but are not obligated to do any labour, adhere to any ideals or be cultural producers in any meaningful sense. This is, however, not to argue that the worlds of influencers and cultural producers are not informing and pollinating one another. While implicit feedback between artist and audience has always existed regarding what constitutes a successful or unsuccessful release, the emergence of platforms has enabled this to occur much more quickly and across a variety of different modalities, from the content or aesthetic of social media posts to album campaigns. What is evident is that developing an awareness of one's audience takes time; it is up to artists to recognise this dynamic and determine whether to modify their work appropriately. The introduction of services such as TikTok has accelerated this sense of immediacy in terms of engagement. When it comes to musicians' platform selections, there is partisan baggage inside the industry. While this may not be the best option for some types of independent musicians, avoiding such a platform is becoming more difficult as their influence on the economics and culture of the new music industry grows.

Chapter 5 examined the case that disruption caused by platforms' entry into a field formerly dominated by record labels has permitted a power transfer from industry to consumer. No longer are labels the primary mediators of the creative process or interaction. Rather, there is an implied expectation of artists engaging directly with their audiences. As such, it is prudent to compare the present disruption of the new music industry to the decades-old disruption of independent labels. This thesis has attempted to define what the word 'DIY' means to artists who work independently or inside the framework of a label, and how this translates into practice in their careers. Record label owner and music producer Ian made it quite evident that the conventional producer job is dwindling, as many artists either choose, or can only afford, to do the majority of this work themselves.

Chapter 6 explored how the music industry's reconfiguration included several characteristics of the old music industry. Instead of adapting, these institutions often invest in platform disruption in order to strengthen their market dominance. Ultimate democratisation looks to be a long way off, and institutional authority also appears to be weakening. Independent artists today have market access via crowdfunding and platforms, which serve as a vehicle for broad audience exposure with minimal financial input; gatekeepers remain, but are taking on new roles. The destabilisation of the music industry brought about by the disruption of platforms and the creative movement sparked by these 'quasi-platforms' is redistributing wealth to major record labels and artists. However, as a result of the success of these new business models, no industry-wide norms have been imposed on these organisations, each of which has its own distinct culture. This may be a challenge for creators, as success becomes more dependent on certain platforms. Spotify currently retains a dominant role in the modern music business. One downside of Spotify's monopoly on music distribution and consumption is that it essentially eliminates more niche and local alternatives. Given the current status of the music industry, while only a matter of time, it is difficult to predict a successful Spotify rival.

Chapter 7 examined the growth of social media networks and 'direct-to-fan' platforms that enable artists to communicate directly with their followers and monetise them. Artists must be knowledgeable in marketing and distribution strategies, as well as the effective use of creative tools. Self-efficacy and resilience are key components of emerging musicians' attempts to handle the plethora of expectations placed on them by today's music industry. Rather than characterising the 'new' musician's entrepreneurialism as profit-driven, it is imperative to

recognise that these activities are often non-profit in nature. Instead, the intrinsic joy associated with problem-solving is often the driver. While artist expectations have shifted, in many instances first exposure through word of mouth has remained consistent, with the methods evolving in a digital environment. Diverse modes of music consumption provide an abundance of strategies for assuring and implementing music's contextual presence. The advancement of digital music technology within the networked digital age – primarily platform disruption – has led to the emergence of new modes of music consumption. Artists gain the ability to interact with particular platforms, connect with and engage audiences, generate high-quality audio-visual content, assess analytics and use advertising in today's musical environment, among other skills. These abilities are not limited to the field of music; they are extremely transferable and useful in a variety of other fields.

It has become clear that the roads to market for both independent and major musicians need the same DIY competencies from the outset. While some talented young artists are still discovered without significant internet exposure and subsequently fostered by the music industry into an online identity, this work is increasingly being done by artists themselves, often with the assistance of peer groups. This manifests in the form of pressure to fulfil numerous musical commitments. While distribution methods and infrastructure have evolved, the need for DIY skills has persisted. The significance of artists cultivating, connecting with and spreading their work has never been stronger; what has changed is the simplicity with which material can be generated and transmitted. While there has never been a greater demand for creative labour, artists now have access to remarkable tools that simplify and accelerate the learning process.

Chapter 8 examined the emerging phenomenon of record companies rushing to sign musicians whose TikTok songs have gained widespread success, in the belief that their fame would spread to other platforms. As a result of TikTok's massive reach and impact, musicians may now rely entirely on the platform to promote music, attract fans and gain recognition on other social media sites. With so much competition for an audience's attention, it is clear that artists will benefit from sustained engagement and algorithmic manipulation. As platforms continue to be the main point of contact for musicians and artists, the implicit feedback between the two has a significant influence on the kind of songs that survive in the new music economy. The collaborative nature of internet culture fosters more creative engagement, meaning significant changes to both the production process and the content itself. While TikTok sparked

transformation, additional platforms will arise that will continue to influence the industry, audience and artists. It is suggested that it is not difficult to envision a future in which artists forgo crafting whole songs in favour of providing more brief forms of music for listeners to dance to. Within a few years, we may find ourselves in a media ecosystem in which singles are automatically accompanied by a TikTok challenge, just as music videos have become a standard component of the release process.

It would be prudent to evaluate where future research efforts should be directed in order to further our understanding of the competencies gained by artists in the rapidly changing new music industry. With TikTok serving as a compelling preview of future industry upheaval, the measures by which music will be judged in the future will undoubtedly shift and challenge our understanding of what it means to be a successful artist. Additionally, new platforms will emerge with the intention of increasing connection between artist and audience; the artists that are most adapted to these platforms will have the greatest success. The record label's function is under severe pressure to evolve. As previously stated, the 'long tail' of copyright creates a contrast in the current industry climate; we see dynamic and explosive growth of new artists via emerging platforms such as TikTok; on the other hand, we see institutional investment and established music industry record labels doubling down on legacy catalogue investment. Long-term institutional investment in legacy catalogue may help major record labels to maintain their dominance for years to come, despite platform upheaval and increased democratisation of access for artists and audiences. Independently, due to the ever-expanding emphasis on platform disruption, new forms of DIY interaction and approach will become more popular, allowing creators and prosumers wider market opportunities. Artists developing, engaging with and promoting their work have never been more critical; with tools of engagement constantly evolving, the competencies required of artists are in a constant state of reinvention.

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Appendix: Interviewees featured within thesis

Alessandro Ciminata, 4.9.2020, online Zoom interview

Independent artist and PR for Charm Factory in London UK

Barney Dick, 10.9.2020, online Zoom interview

Artist manager at Crowd Control Media and digital consultant representing acts such as Gordon Mills Jr (BMG), Pett Level (BMG / INGROOVES / UNIVERSAL)

Dustin Tebbutt, 7.10.2020, online Zoom interview

Independent Australian artist, Dustin's EP Home and debut album First Light reached #34 and #13 respectively on the ARIA albums chart. Nominee for the 2014 ARIA Music Award for Engineer of the Year for his EP Bones

Flash Taylor, 29.9.2020, online Zoom interview

Senior A&R for the one of the UK's leading and longest running international independent publishing company 'Bucks Music Group', Flash Taylor has worked in Publishing as an A&R since 2003, working with companies such as Zomba Music, Sony ATV, Perfect Songs

Ian Dowling, 21.10.2020, online Zoom interview

Grammy award winning Engineer, Producer and Record Label founder, Ian won his Grammy for his work on Adele's "21", having also worked with Bombay Bicycle Club, Catfish and the Bottlemen, Kasabian, One Direction, The Orwells, KT Tunstall, Blaenavon, LIFE

Jane (Real name redacted at request of interviewee), 15.10.2020, online Zoom interview

Independent Artist, Songwriter and Producer

Laurel, 25.11.2020, online Zoom interview

British indie artist signed to Communion Music UK

Luke Sital-Singh, 14.9.2020, online Zoom interview

Independent artist previously signed to Parlaphone Records UK

Scott Lee-Andrews, 21.10.2020, online Zoom interview

Independent UK DIY artist, recently relocated to Melbourne, Australia with new band 'Strange Unit'

Tom Prové, 19.11.2020, online Zoom interview

General Manager for Communion Music Group, a subsidiary of Universal

Appendix: Sample of artist interview questions

i. Which of the following do you consider to be essential for you as a musician working within the context of the 'new music industry'?
   a. Flexibility
   b. Knowledge of factors external to streaming platforms and social media
   c. Using technology to push your sound forward creatively
   d. The constraints of digital technology as a creative tool

ii. In terms of content, is it more important for you to regularly engage with your audience than ensure that everything is meticulously aligned with your sense of artist identity?
   a. Further to this, does this (often) dichotomy of editorialization and pressure to engage become a source of anxiety?

iii. Do you feel there is a value gap between the value of the work that you produce and its subsequent monetary reward?

iv. Is self-government a skill which has come naturally to you or one which you have acquired in the process of your project?

v. How important is it for you to have feedback from your audience within your creative process? Does this become something that influences your process?

vi. What would you identify as key differences for artists in the digital age?

vii. How important are visuals and other media in the exchange between yourself and your audience?

viii. Is DIY something which you see as a key part of your musical identity or somewhat of a necessity for any artist starting in the new music industry?

ix. What do you as some key expectations your audience has from you?

x. Have you considered including your audience in decision making or creative input at any point? If so, can you give me an example?

xi. Do you think that the intervention of technology has advantaged certain types of artists? If so, what competencies do you have to develop in order to be heard?

xii. In terms of time spent, how is your day divided between creative and administrative tasks?

xiii. Do you find the term ‘content’ a reductive one?

xiv. Is the term ‘brand’ one which sits well with you in context with your project?

xv. What is your creative process when it comes to songwriting? Does this involve the use of technology and how?

xvi. What do you perceive as key signs of authenticity?