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HOW HAVE MUSICIANS' CAREERS CHANGED IN THE DIGITAL PLATFORM ERA?

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To my family and my music dream.

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Abstract

The platform society is a reality. Better said, it is a second reality that adds and intertwines with the physical dimension. This is so also for the music industry. The last fifteen years have seen the growth of music streaming platforms such as Spotify and the consequent repositioning of the music business' actors. The new scenario opens up new possibilities and poses new challenges to musicians' careers, especially because of the ever-evolving character of platforms. The thesis has the purpose of depicting the platform society and the main platform mechanisms, as well as the influence of digital platforms on cultural industries, especially on the music one. After exploring in depth the main characteristics of the platform society, the dissertation explores how production, distribution, promotion, and musicians' relationships with their fanbase and other music workers take place in the platform environment, moving from qualitative interviews made with eight Italian musicians.

Introduction

The music industry has undergone several structural transformations over the past twenty-five years. The internet has produced a shift to the digital and a re-organization of roles within the recording industry. While until the 1990s the traditional major labels were the dominant actors in the industry, technological advancements and file sharing networks of the early 2000s caused a revolution that determined the rise and development of music streaming platforms such as Spotify, which today are among the most powerful actors in the music industry. The rearrangement of the roles and of the modalities of music fruition have not only generated modifications for major labels, but also for musicians.

This thesis aims to describe how the musicians' careers have changed in the so-called "platform society" with respect to the previously analogical past. In particular, the objective is to understand whether the present situation has actually facilitated the work of the musician or if it is rather a matter of more opportunities, instead of less workload. Both primary and secondary sources have been employed for the dissertation. The first two chapters are based on a literature review focusing on academic works related to the main topic of the thesis. The third and fourth chapters present the outcomes of a research based on qualitative interviews made with eight independent Italian musicians.

The first chapter will explain what platforms are and which are their mechanisms, together with an overview of how they influenced cultural industries, especially the music one.

The second chapter will offer a description of how music became commodified starting from the first half of the 20th century. In addition, there will be a brief history of the music industry during last century and its shift to digital. Finally, the case of Spotify and its main mechanisms will be presented as an example of the functioning of music streaming platforms.

The third chapter, based on qualitative interviews, will deal with the topics of music production, distribution and promotion from the point of view of musicians.

Finally, the fourth chapter will focus on the relationships of the interviewees with their fanbase and colleagues and will explain the meaning of the term *gig economy*, which is crucial to understand how the musician work occurs. Furthermore, a series of insights on specific music platforms features and on the future scenarios the interviewed people see for their careers and the music industry as a whole will conclude the research.

CHAPTER 1: CULTURAL CONSUMPTION AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

The first chapter will offer an overview of the platform society and of the three main platforms' mechanisms: datafication, commodification, and selection. It will do so primarily moving from the work by Van Dijk et al. called *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*. Besides, the main phases of the platformization of cultural industries – in particular of the music industry – are going to be presented.

1.1 The Platform Society and Platform Mechanisms

The current world no longer appears as it was around twenty years ago. The majority of people's everyday activities now take place on a different level with respect to the mere material dimension. A level that, however, is not separated from the latter but rather complements and enriches it. This new structure is referred to as the "*platform society*", and it is praised not only as the engine of the present economic progress and technological advancement but above all because the individuals can benefit from this new scenario to the extent that they are largely able to operate bypassing corporate or public intermediaries. Indeed, this transformation empowers them to set up businesses, trade goods, and exchange information online.

Basically, platforms provide individuals with tailor-made services, which are customisable in order to meet the needs of users and come with the promise of contributing to innovation and economic growth, by avoiding direct or indirect state control. As a consequence of this platform revolution, private citizens can organise themselves through the networks on the Internet, so as to depend less on public institutions or other kinds of gatekeepers – such as publishers, hospitals, unions, brokers, etc. According to a utopian view of this online marketplace, individuals would be able to offer their products or services directly and with no interference from offline intermediaries.

In addition to this enabling vision of the role of platforms provided by many theorists, in their work "*The Platform Society: Public Values in a*

Connective World", José Van Dijk et al. suggest looking at the platform society as a comprehensive phenomenon where online platforms are now embedded in the core of societies as they affect institutions, economic transactions and social and cultural practices, thus pushing state actors to adjust their legal and democratic frameworks. Van Dijk et al. believe there is an «inextricable relation between online platforms and societal structures» and what is more these platforms do not simply reflect the social, but they rather produce and reconfigure the social structures we live in. Therefore, although one could be tempted to think of online platforms exclusively as offering a new societal arrangement separated from the existing social and legal structures, it must be noticed that platforms are instead an integral part of society and they not only offer personalised benefits and economic gains, but they also exert pressure on public institutions.

An essential characteristic of platforms is that they are neither neutral nor value-free. As a result, there is a possibility that the specific norms and values inscribed in their architectures clash with the values underlying the societal structures in which platforms operate. Besides values such as innovation and economic progress, other public values are at stake, among which it is important to mention privacy, accuracy, safety, consumer protection, but also fairness, equality, solidarity, accountability, transparency, and democratic control. An example of a contrast that may arise between the values of platforms and the values of society is the need for transparency of data flows. In fact, this value is important to grant effective law enforcement but may collide with the privacy protection of users or other public values such as security or discrimination. A further level of divergence originates from the fact that since many dominant platforms are US-owned and operated, European and other regions' public values are often in conflict with the principles inscribed in their architectures, and the same can apply to other regions across the world. This arises from the fact that these values are far from being fixed for good or uncontroversial. On the contrary, they

are the stakes in the struggle over the organization of platform societies around the world.

But what does the term "platform society" exactly indicate? Despite, as seen above, a clear definition is still an object of controversy, Van Dijck et al. propose that the term refers to a society in which social and economic interactions are increasingly channelled by a predominantly corporate global online platform ecosystem, governed by algorithms and fuelled by data[1]. Digging deeper, an online "platform" is a programmable digital architecture designed to organise interactions between users, whether they are end-users or corporate and public actors. Such platforms are employed for the systematic collection, algorithmic processing, circulation, and monetization of user data. A key aspect of platforms is that they cannot be seen as separated from each other, that is why it is correct to speak of a "platform ecosystem", an assemblage of networked platforms driven by a particular set of mechanisms that shapes daily practices.

The current – corporate – platform environment is dominated in the West by the so-called GAFAM, also known as Big Five, whose actors are Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft; whereas in the East the three tech giants are the Chinese platforms Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent[2].

Specifically referring to GAFAM, Juan Carlos Miguel de Bustos and Jessica Izquierdo-Castillo (2019) assume that the members of this group have gained the title of leaders of the Internet and of the current economy. These platforms compete for the attention of users, develop media products and services and attract a large part of the online advertising investment. It is important to notice that such activities affect not only the traditional media but also the so-called disruptive

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[1] Van Dijck J. et al., *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018.
[2] Duffy B. E., Poell T., Nieborg D. B., *Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship*, in «Social Media + Society», Volume 5, Issue 4, pp. 1-8, 2019

platforms, such as Netflix and Spotify. It is clear, then, that besides being presented as a space where users can take charge of the distribution process with little or no interference from intermediates, the Internet has also paved the way to the consolidation of new hegemonic industrial structures that operate in the digital economy. Such an economic arrangement is widely based on intangible products and services, it works on a global scale and it is almost exclusively run by GAFAM. Overall, the very fact of operating in the digital environment is a huge advantage for these "infrastructural" platforms, which have virtually no limits to their expansion. The latter mainly happens through the collection of Big Data, the attraction of users to their ecosystems, and the accumulation of platforms. As a matter of fact, although in principle Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft allow all kinds of newcomers to enter, in practice the enormous growth of such platforms has not left much space for competitors in the heart of the digital economy ecosystem. All platforms outside the Big Five are indeed dependent on the ecosystem governed by the GAFAM. For instance, Airbnb embedded Google Maps as a standard feature in its interface. At the same time, the Big Five largely take advantage of these other platforms, websites and apps that integrate their basic services, given that they can enhance the collection of user data throughout the Web and app ecosystem[3].

In addition to the infrastructural platforms that form the core of the digital ecosystem, there are in fact the so-called "sectoral" platforms, which are specialised in a particular sector or niche, such as news, transportation, food, education, health, finance, or hospitality. Many of the most known sectoral platforms do not own material assets, have no sector-specific employees, and do not offer any material products, content, or services. They simply act as connectors between individuals

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[3] Miguel de Bustos J. C., Izquierdo-Castillo J., *Who will control the media? The impact of GAFAM on the media industries in the digital economy*, in «Revista Latina de Comunicación Social», Volume 74, pp. 803-821, 2019.

and single providers, as in the case of Airbnb which serves as a connector between hosts and guests. Sectoral platforms are dependent on "complementors", which are organizations or individuals that offer products or services to users through platforms. Complementors can be subject to the regulatory bounds of a sector and therefore have to stick to legal rules, professional norms, and labour relationships; they can be public institutions and governments such as universities and hospitals, which can provide sectoral products, know-how, and services; they can also be micro-entrepreneurs, offering private facilities such as their car (e.g. Uber drivers) apartment (e.g. people hosting their houses through Airbnb), or even their professional skills (e.g. Coursera). This new kind of intermediaries contributes to the economic value of platforms but at the same time raises questions regarding public principles such as precarious labour, a fair economic environment, and public costs.

In practice, there is not a fixed distinction between infrastructural and sectoral platforms, as they are both driven by a constant dynamic of integration. As a matter of fact, infrastructural platforms are engaged in an effort to extend their influence by becoming also sectoral connectors. For instance, Google Scholar is a service that is intertwined with and driven by Google Search.

Then, the mutual integration can occur economically, since the Big Five are acquiring technological and economic power by investing in various sectors through the acquisition of legacy companies (e.g., Amazon buying Whole Foods) or strategic partnerships (e.g., Google having shares in Uber).

However, the very terms "infrastructural" and "sectoral" platforms, "connectors" and "complementors" should be not understood as fixed categories but rather as roles and relationships taken on by particular actors over time and through contexts. In fact, a basic characteristic of the platform environment is that it is not fixed, but rather subject to continuous change. Van Dijck et al. (2018) define this process as "platformization". Taking Uber as an example, it may be considered as a

connector when it pairs drivers and passengers through its stand-alone platform, but it assumes the role of complementor when its service is offered among others supplied by many different transport providers through an integrated transport platform. Finally, it would take on the role of infrastructural platform if it had to map data to third parties[4].

1.1.1 The Platform Mechanisms

But how do platforms work? There are fundamentally three mechanisms underlying the functioning of platforms, which define the latter as not neutral. These are *"datafication"*, *"commodification"* and *"selection"*, and their interplay is crucial for users. Indeed, these mechanisms are what drives, for instance, the algorithmic filtering process within social media platforms, and subsequently what determines the failure or the success of a social movement (e.g., the failure of the Occupy movement in 2011; the success of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020) and of many other social activities, from apartment hosts on Airbnb to sellers on Vinted, and from columnists on Facebook to students on Coursera.

As mentioned before, Van Dijck et al. (2018) stress the fact that platforms affect the organization of society, and they do so by means of the aforementioned mechanisms. However, this is not the only direction in which the influence occurs since, on its part, society, too, is capable of shaping platforms. What is more, the mutual shaping of platforms and society is not predetermined or unmodifiable, but it rather depends on the kind of technologies, practices, and economic models employed and implemented. The GAFAM group, of course, exercises the biggest influence in shaping the core technological infrastructure, the dominant economic models, and the values of the entire ecosystem, and they can also guide the behaviour of sectoral platforms, societal institutions, companies, and ultimately of individual users[5].

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[4] Van Dijck J. et al., *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World.*
[5] Van Dijck J. et al., *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World.*

It is now time to explore the three platform mechanisms in detail. *Datafication* is defined by Mejias and Couldry (2019) as «a contemporary phenomenon which refers to the quantification of human life through digital information, very often for economic value[6]». In other words, datafication is the ability of networked platforms to transform into data many aspects of reality, not only those voluntarily given by users such as demographic and profiling data but also behavioural meta-data automatically acquired from smartphones such as GPS-inferred locations or time stamps. Every form of user activity online can be captured as data: paying, rating, searching, watching but also following, liking, posting, and so on. At first, such data were simply considered a by-product of online platforms, but with the passing of time the latter transformed into data firms, turning data into primary resources. Datafication is thus the mechanism that enables platforms to develop techniques for predictive and real-time analytics, but it is not exclusively so. Indeed, it can be seen as a user practice as well, since once platforms have collected and processed user data, they keep *circulating* them to third parties and to end users, allowing the latter to monitor the activities of friends and take part in the online economic activity.

The second mechanism is *commodification*, which is the process through which platforms transform online and offline objects, activities, emotions, and ideas into tradable commodities. The evaluation of such commodities is made based on attention, data, users, and money. Commodification is enhanced by datafication, as the wide amount of data collected and analysed by digital platforms supplies these ones with information on users' preferences, interests, and needs at specific moments in time. It is also connected with selection, as users are provided with personalised services and advertisements.

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[6] Mejias U. A., Couldry N., *Datafication*, in «Internet Policy Review», Volume 8, Issue 4, 2019.

Commodification mechanisms simultaneously enhance and lower users' power: on the one hand, connectors enable individual users to put their goods or experiences online (apartments, car rides, videos, etc.), thus potentially producing a shift in the economic power from "traditional" institutions such as hotels, taxi companies, and newspapers in favour of individual users; on the other hand, though, the same commodification mechanisms are responsible for the exploitation of cultural labour, the (immaterial) labour of users and the precarization of online service workers, and they are also considered responsible for the concentration of economic power in the hands of a restricted number of platforms owners and operators, especially the big infrastructural platforms at the core of the online ecosystem. In fact, the economic exchange online mostly happens within a structure known as *multisided market*, where a platform organises the connections and economic exchanges between different groups of users (e.g., end users connected with advertisers and the service providers such as news organizations and universities). One example of multisided market is eBay, which provides markets for both buyers and sellers. The success of each platform as a multisided market depends on the platform's ability to link the highest number of users to its side. A winning strategy in this sense is attracting end users by offering them free access to the platform, while providing advertisers and service providers with low-cost tools for targeting end users, as in the case of Google and Facebook offering data analytics instruments. The reason why there is a relatively small number of dominant online platforms is that attracting and connecting large numbers of end users requires huge investments, therefore only few platform corporations – the Big Five in the lead, together with few rising sectoral platforms – succeed as multisided markets, and this translates into a tendency towards monopoly. The different kinds of business models through which platforms as multisided markets work involve the commodification of user data, services, and goods, and there are two main strategies to do so. The first

way to commodify user data and attention is through *personalised advertising*. Advertising on platforms is not associated with particular content. On the contrary, it targets specific users whose interests and behaviour are registered in real time across media and devices. Content is mostly provided for free so as to increase the collection of data and to maximise the number of end users. At the same time, content is not exclusively produced by the platform itself but generated by users. Another modality of commodification of user data happens through *data services,* that is to say, assets provided by a few platforms specialised in offering analytics services, such as Acxiom and CoreLogic. Then, commodification takes place through monetary transactions. In some business models, platforms generate revenues by using *commissions* and *transaction fees*, a method largely employed by connective service platforms such as Airbnb, which charges hosts with a 3-5% service fee and guests with a 5-15% transaction fee. A variation of this strategy consists of providing a basic version of a service or product for free and charging the user for the premium version, a strategy that goes under the name of *freemium* model, whose Coursera is an example of. Commodification strategies ultimately represent the proof that economic processes are increasingly oriented towards and determined by platforms, as platform dynamics govern the economic exchanges at the same time of defining the participation of a large variety of users. As a result, platforms are more efficient than traditional public institutions at linking different categories of users (e.g., students with teachers, patients with medical institutions, etc.) in virtue of the constant stream of user data and advanced technological infrastructures they have at disposal. Individuals and institutional users are engaged in promoting themselves, their content, and their services thus intensifying the commodification of user data, goods, and services by platforms, by means of personalised advertisements and transaction fees.

The third and last mechanism is *selection*. Based on the kind of selection or curation of most relevant topics, offers, objects, or services, datafication and commodification can take place in different ways. Before the development of the platform ecosystem, the task of selection was carried out primarily by experts and institutions: journalists select what is news and what is not, professional reviewers help travellers to choose the best hotel rooms on offer, etc. Online platforms replace expert-based selection with one that is user-driven and algorithm-driven. The actions users can now undertake to filter content are mainly rating, searching, following, sharing, and friending. On one side, platforms trigger and filter user activity online through interfaces and algorithms, while on the other side, through their interaction with these coded environments users are able to determine the visibility and availability of specific content, services, and people. Although users consider this kind of selection to be more democratic, it must be mentioned that the latter is also driven by often black-boxed techno-commercial strategies, which are not transparent to users. This represents a non-negligible issue given that now users rely more on algorithms than on experts, even though they do not know much about the mechanisms behind those choices.

The three main types of selection are *personalization, reputation and trends*, and *moderation*.

Personalization depends on "predictive analytics", that is the capability to predict future choices and trends based on historical patterns of individual and aggregate data. However, these automated choices are difficult to analyse as they always remain partially hidden from view and are always modified in order to respond to business models and user practices. Platforms build a personalised environment of services, information, and people around each user, raising concerns about the social fragmentation that can stem from such an arrangement. Still, personalization is exactly the reason why the majority of people are attracted to platforms, as the former empowers users to be consumers

and citizens by allowing them to rapidly find the best offers and the information they are looking for.

As regards reputation and trends, platforms do not only personalise what users get to see but are also engaged in determining the reputation of users and in identifying "trends" among the user population. With respect to the first point, users are continuously solicited to review each other's performance and behaviour. Such reviews become metrics that enable users to quickly assess if it is convenient to engage economically with another user and by doing so platforms compensate for the lack of institutional guarantees. As concerns trends, many platforms offer "trending topics" to users, which are mostly the result of the algorithmic selection of content that generated a high user engagement. Thus, platform algorithms show a tendency towards virality or spreadability, and through cross-fertilization between platforms and followers, a certain content can go viral. One issue related to trends and reputation metrics is that societal actors try to influence these mechanisms. For instance, hosts offering accommodations on Airbnb or Booking may push hard to obtain a high rating from their customers, for the fear of getting a low review and being excluded from future engagement online, leading to inflated reviews that sometimes do not reflect reality.

Moderation is the third mechanism of selection, and it is a controversial one. Indeed, major platforms have the power of moderating the kind of content is shared and who can use their services, and sometimes such control can be excessive, as in the case of Facebook filtering historical content depicting nudity or violent scenes or the elimination of accounts because they did not respect real-name policies. At the same time, platforms are also accused of "too little" moderation when they fail to remove users or content that risks threatening public safety. To carry out the task of moderation, platforms largely rely on automated technologies besides thousands of human moderators or editors, and even ask their users to report any inappropriate content or behaviour of

other users. In all these cases, it is important to identify the core values that guide these mechanisms[7].

1.2 Digital Platforms and Cultural Industries

This paragraph aims at exploring the new pivotal role that platforms have acquired during the last two decades in the production and circulation of cultural content such as news, photography, and the topic of this thesis: music. The production, distribution, and monetization of cultural content is indeed undergoing a reconfiguration in many complex ways because of the activity of contemporary platforms, especially the GAFAM. Because of the complexity of such a rearrangement of the cultural industry across genres and geographies, affecting individuals and organizations, it may be difficult to develop a systematic analysis of the phenomenon. One solution in this direction has been advanced by Duffy et al. (2019), which consists in focusing on "platformization" in order to understand such changes and their implications for society[8]. The term "platformization" has been used by scholars such as Helmond (2015) and Nieborg & Poell (2018) to define the «penetration of infrastructures, economic processes and platform rules in various sectors of the economy and daily life»[9]. In other words, the process of platformization is reconfiguring the production, distribution, and monetization of cultural content. As a consequence, their analysis is crucial for understanding the reorganization of cultural practices.

Besides the role of infrastructural and sectoral platforms in shaping the digital environment, it is important to acknowledge that also social experiences of producers and consumers in specific contexts contribute to its modification. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of the

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[7] Van Dijck J. et al., *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connective World.*
[8] Duffy B. E., Poell T., Nieborg D. B., *Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship.*
[9] Magaudda P., Solaroli M., *Platform Studies and Digital Cultural Industries*, in *Sociologica*, Volume 14, Issue 3, pp. 267-293, 2020.

platformization of cultural production that takes into account both the institutional and the people activity is suggested by some scholars as the most accurate solution.

At the same time, when analysing the transformations of cultural industry induced by online platforms one must consider both the changes and the continuities with the past and the "pre-platform" arrangement. On the one hand, cultural industries – such as the music industry – have a long institutional history, which has shaped the governance frameworks, distribution and monetization strategies, and audience expectations in the new platform environment. On the other hand, in addition to the continuities with the past analogic framework special attention is required by the dynamic nature of platforms, which constantly change their own interfaces, algorithms, terms and conditions, and business models, impacting the type of cultural production. Accordingly, cultural producers must be both mindful of the institutional traditions and routines and responsive to the evolutions produced by the emergent models of content production and monetization.

Focusing on the discontinuity with respect to the previous arrangement, one of the premises of platformization is the democratization of creativity and production, according to which ideally mass customization becomes less relevant in favour of diversity. Nevertheless, the term "diversity" is not treated in the same way by competing platforms. As a matter of fact, diversity can be identified at different levels: at the platform level, or in terms of cultural content, cultural producers, etc. At the platform level, since within each cultural industry segment there are competing platforms at play it is uncertain and depends on every specific case whether or not such interplay will lead to a multiplicity of platforms and offerings, or instead to monopolization. As regards cultural content, the question is whether dominant platforms will facilitate unbounded creativity and diversity by creating new ways for expressing citizenship and if audiences will embrace the

latter. Last but not least, as concerns cultural producers the question is whether platformization fosters diversity among producers of cultural content in terms of gender, ethnicity, social class, location, etc. Indeed, platforms can surely provide new methods of production to a larger group of creators, but not necessarily a more diverse one, considering that the set of tools that creators use is increasingly bound by rules that flow from the top down rather than from the bottom up, at least partially disincentivising diversity and creativity. Anyhow, nowadays cultural industry segments such as the Korean webtoon industry – whose printed counterparts have historically relied on a long tradition as regards the way of creation of content – do not need to conform to those cultural expectations about content quality and standard, and cultural producers can benefit from an increased range of content made available by the new digital platforms, which allow for greater diversity in terms of genres, ways of production, and the demographic and educational background of the creators.

Platformization has also brought transformations in work and labour. On one side, the request that platforms make to cultural workers is to be entrepreneurial, self-directed, and adaptable to the continuous changes determined by the economic logics online. Particularly, these constant transformations have worsened the precarity of artists operating in fields that now more than ever are characterised by unpredictability and individualism. On the other side, platformization has given rise to a new class of creative labourers working in sectors such as the news, music, and cinema to name a few. These new cultural workers are, as mentioned above, subject to the platform governance frameworks and must thereby adjust to the latter's twists, including to their algorithmic systems. Indeed, the use of algorithms has been one of the most impacting revolutions brought by platformization. A factor that has allowed for a democratization of the cultural industry, given the fact that today also creative aspirants who live outside the traditional centres of cultural innovation have more

chances of being discovered and influencing trends. Nevertheless, there are also downsides to be mentioned. Some scholars actually stress that prominent members of creative communities sometimes actively convey an image of themselves as "algorithmic experts", allegedly able to leverage the algorithmic black box of platforms and share knowledge on its functioning with the other creators, in order to gain visibility and monetise. On their part, platforms publicly denounce cultural workers' attempts to harness their algorithms as cheating and indexes of immorality, supporting platforms' moral authority. However, platforms' rules, pronouncements, and punishments officially made in favour of the best interests of their users, in reality are in the service of the tech companies' own economic gains. Cultural workers in turn do not uncritically accept platforms rules and governance, but rather organise themselves in communities of creators to strategise against the ever evolving algorithm, largely by undertaking reciprocal actions of liking, commenting, and sharing of content as happens, for instance, on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter. Thus, if on the one hand there is a call on digital workers to be entrepreneurial and competitive, on the other hand, phenomena of class mobility, worker resistance, and initiatives of solidarity are not uncommon.

That said, it is clear how platformization has started a process of redistribution of power and autonomy within cultural industries, which will be analysed more in depth in the next paragraph[10].

1.3 The Transition to the Streaming Era

Here is a brief overview of the recent history of streaming in the video industry. Until the beginning of the 21st century, tech companies were mainly involved in distribution rather than production. Today, instead of limiting themselves to delivering TV shows, music, and movies onto

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[10] Duffy B. E., Poell T., Nieborg D. B., *Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship.*

users' devices and screens, they are investing large amounts of money into content.

The forerunner of this change was Netflix, a video streaming platform launched in 2007 which in 2011 began charging users for watching its video streaming service. After Netflix, other infrastructural platforms, namely Amazon and Apple began their business in the field, the former creating Amazon Prime Video, the latter with the opening of Apple TV.

Before the present dominion of online platforms in media and culture, in the 20th century the key developments in such domains were driven by electronic corporations, while recording and radio industries were created to provide content to play on electronic devices. Once content became lucrative, electronic companies positioned themselves in production and distribution. For instance, the American NBC was a branch of General Electric, whereas big record companies were often subsidiaries of electronic giants, and the Japanese electronics group Sony turned into a powerful media force. Nonetheless, although boundaries have blurred, the electronics and tech sectors remain separated, each with its own cultures and industry bodies. The difference lies in the fact that tech companies are more powerful in virtue of the innovative and ever evolving technology at their disposal.

However, in order to investigate the present developments, it is important to understand where the tech industry originates from. Historically, it was born during the Cold War computing and communication state spending, but soon many enthusiasts began claiming that computers could serve well-being by decentralising communication from state control. The rise of this sector during the 1990s came as the global policy-making shifted to the view that markets rather than democratic institutions were best suited at meeting and serving people's needs and desires. As a result of neoliberalism, an advantage that tech companies had – and still have today – with respect to their media and telecommunication peers, was that they were very lightly regulated, not only in terms of competition but also in terms of

responsibility. As a matter of fact, Internet service providers, search engines, and social media platforms under the US and the majority of Western legal systems have very much limited liability for the content they host and circulate and they even have significant freedom to collect and sell data about their users. Moreover, the new platforms do not have such responsibilities as providing materials that serve the public interest when requested by law and regulation, differently from media companies, that are obliged to do so. This scenario has boosted the growth of big US tech corporations, including the GAFAM.

The first place where Big Tech disrupted media was the recording industry. Apple was crucial, not only for the launch of iPod and iTunes but especially for the innovation brought by the iPhone and the AppStore, which made possible the birth of the new music streaming services, above all Spotify and later Apple Music. In spite of all the criticism music streaming had faced, it eventually managed to stabilise its business, and laid the basis for the normalization of paid streaming.

As mentioned above, for its part Netflix began the tech industry's challenge to cable and satellite for monthly fees, by offering its own expensive content and modifying the television system into one of rival subscription streaming services[11]. At first, the three biggest traditional media companies – namely Disney, NBCUniversal, and WarnerMedia – lagged in adjusting to the new situation and largely remained on the sidelines. Switching to the digital and building video platforms of the size needed to compete with Netflix and Amazon would have indeed been extremely expensive. But when it became clear that remaining in their existing business model was more dangerous than changing, they began to act. In 2019, Disney launched Disney+. The following year, WarnerMedia introduced HBO Max and NBCUniversal set up Peacock.

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[11] Hesmondhalgh D., *Why It Matters When Big Tech Firms Extend Their Power Into Media Content*, in «The Conversation», 15/11/2017, https://theconversation.com/why-it-matters-when-big-tech-firms-extend-their-power-into-media-content-86876.

At the same time, streaming competition mounted from the Silicon Valley, which founded Apple TV Plus in November 2019. On its part, Google acquired YouTube already in 2006[12]. Thus, although their revenues have diminished in fields such as music, publishing, and to some extent television, the old media companies should not be considered at the end of the line since vast businesses still remain. At the present time, in the US there are still two oligopolies: Silicon Valley on the tech side, Hollywood on the media one and these two sectors sometimes compete but often cooperate. Anyway, eventually the tech sector will with no doubt dominate because of the many resources at disposal, the international range, and the monopoly power.

About public service media, such companies may have many shortcomings but were founded on principles of serving citizens with top quality information and entertainment, even though they will growingly struggle against the huge budgets of Silicon Valley and the other Big Media companies. This relative freedom enjoyed by the tech sector is worrying: the "fake news" storms have shown that tech corporations do not have a compelling obligation with regard to society and democracy. Besides, they avoid taxes and, as in the case of electronics corporations, their business model revolves around wasteful cycles of obsolescence and replacement. Not to mention that these corporations capture vast amounts of data about their users. To this extent, new laws and regulations appropriate for the present and future era are required to keep control of tech companies' usage of data about users and ultimately to make accountable their algorithmic processes by which the platforms operate and that are largely obscure and "black-boxed" at present[13].

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[12] Barnes B., *The Streaming Era Has Finally Arrived. Everything Is About to Change*, The New York Times, Nov. 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/business/media/streaming-hollywood-revolution.html.
[13] Hesmondhalgh D., *Why It Matters When Big Tech Firms Extend Their Power Into Media Content*, The Conversation, 15/11/2017.

To sum up, starting from the first decade of the 21ˢᵗ century the world has witnessed the so-called digital revolution, driven by the activity of big digital platforms that have led to a progressive digitalization in all sectors of cultural production. From a socioeconomic point of view, the new cultural industry's arrangement is characterised by two main innovations: on the one side, the size of the platforms, which are among the largest in the world and much bigger than the companies traditionally involved in the cultural industry; on the other side, their nature based on the economic advantage for the users. These attributes have made it possible for these platforms to create a monopolistic power over cultural production without national laws that could lessen their strength. Such an order of things mainly determines two risks: first, the professional work of the operators in the cultural industry is depreciated, as it happens with journalists, who are replaced with content generated directly by end users on large platforms; second, the quality of products is increasingly diminishing, as in the case of "fake news" in the field of information. Moreover, the "free of charge" practice common among the majority of large platforms is actually paid by consumers through an increasing transfer of data about themselves, their values, their habits, and their social networks, enforcing the new form of control called data surveillance. Thus, access to content may be free, but consumption is systematically monitored and elaborated by algorithms.

Another crucial tool in the hands of big platforms is convergence, which allows them to mediate all kinds of content, including musical and audio visual, making them available both on computers and mobile devices, increasing the distribution of culture at all levels. This aspect attests large platforms not only as global actors but also as multimedia subjects offering their users constant and diverse content. Last but not least, platforms have introduced an unprecedented novelty as concerns the articulation and availability of their supply. Before the digital revolution began in the mid-2000s, the products of the cultural

industry were available only at certain times, and different life cycles (e.g. newspapers became obsolete in one day, while the life cycle of a movie could be measured in months, or even in years). In other words, what users were not able to immediately seize was lost. Platforms have abandoned this logic in favour of the permanent availability of their products on the web. As a result, nowadays users have access to thousands of movies and TV series on Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+, to name a few of the largest platforms for movie streaming, and they can choose among millions of songs to listen to on music platforms such as Apple Music and Spotify.

A final notable transformation is perhaps the new economic valorization of the public: historically, cultural industries have based their revenues on the attention they managed to obtain from their public through advertising and during fruition. Today, what is valued by industries is performance, in terms of choosing content by activating it with a click, making a search, and selecting a purchase. As a consequence, platforms obtain benefits not only through advertising and the sale of products but also and especially from the increase in network traffic and the sale of users' data, made available by users themselves through their browsing activity. Again, such a huge flow of data is elaborated by the platforms' algorithms, which can predict and promote very specific and personalised future consumption options, allowing for the continuous circularity between demand and supply, between individual choice and the proposal of content providers[14].

1.4 How the Platform Society has Affected the Music Industry?

After an introduction about the platform society and its effects on the cultural industry, it is now time to explore the influence that platforms have specifically on the music industry in view of the next chapter, based on the paper by Magaudda and Solaroli named *Platform Studies*

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[14] Colombo F., *Reviewing the Cultural Industry: From Creative Industries to Digital Platforms*, in «Communication & Society», Volume 31, Issue 4, pp. 135-146, 2018.

and Digital Cultural Industries, specifically on the paragraph called "Platforms and Music".

Magaudda and Solaroli consider music as a paradigmatic sector as regards the intersection between platforms and digital cultural industries. This is because of two main reasons: on the one side, with respect to other fields such as the visual and the news ones, the music sector has been affected by digitalization at an earlier point in time, that is since the rise of the first generation of music distribution websites which were born in the first half of the 2000s, firstly through Apple's iTunes. On the other side, the music cultural industry has soon been identified by many media scholars as a sector in which it was possible to identify more clearly the early consequences of platformization, for example through the investigation of today's main music platform, namely Spotify. The most relevant study on Spotify is the work of a group of Swedish scholars who published the results of their research in the book *Spotify Teardown*, published in 2019 by Eriksson et al. In the book, the authors want to stress out that today music is part of a wider global system in which platforms play a key role. In brief, Spotify evolved from being in some way an "underdog" music service linked with the file-sharing and the online piracy environment, to becoming a global corporate firm, based on financialization and on the commodification of music through platforms mechanisms of datafication and the exploitation of users' behaviour.

Spotify was founded in 2006 in Sweden by Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon, two young entrepreneurs who had already become millionaires in previous years because of the launch of other start-ups in the field of advertising. Although the success of Spotify was largely connected to the idea of offering a legal and profitable digital music distribution model for record labels – differently from previous file sharing networks like Napster – until the launch of an official version in 2008 the platform took advantage of the advancement of peer-to-peer

technology which had already been adopted by pirate-related file sharing communities, relying on the unauthorised music catalogue shared by users of those illegal file sharing networks.

Spotify's financialization process is a prominent example of how the creation and distribution of cultural content are nowadays closely intertwined with business models based on global financial flows typical of the platform society. Spotify is not simply a music streaming service, but a media company that operates at the intersection of advertising, technology, music, and finance. That is why studying this platform is crucial for understanding the tensions and contradictions at the root of platforms including, on the one hand, their pre-eminently financial nature and, on the other hand, their tendency to identify their identity with progressive and democratic social values, represented by Spotify's slogan "music is for everyone".

Another contribution by the team of Swedish researchers is their attempt to unveil some of the opaque internal mechanisms of Spotify, by means of innovative methods to "teardown" the music streaming platform. Such an objective was not easy to achieve, not only because of the complexity of the task but also because after an initial partnership, Spotify refused to offer any collaboration about their internal work and technologies, leaving the researchers no choice but to rely on experimental research methods, such as the use of bots and the creation of fake record labels.

Besides Spotify Teardown, other scholarly works have contributed to the debate on the rise of platforms in the music sector. One of the main sub-topics taken into account by scholars in the music field is the role of data and their active management by platforms, especially exploring the consequences of "datafication" for music circulation. In contemporary music streaming platforms like Spotify, every data about a song which is listened to or skipped by users is tracked and subsequently used by the algorithms to organise music content, to manage their visibility, and above all to sort out playlists.

Thus, on the basis of the analysis of consumers' tastes and preferences made possible by the collection of data and the algorithms, Spotify is able to tailor its music streaming flow. By doing so, it can create personalised playlist services such as "Discover Weekly", a set of around two hours of music, updated every Monday according to individual preferences, inferred by means of the analysis of the user's data through a system of artificial intelligence and machine learning. Such method of creating playlists is perhaps the most powerful tool in the hands of music platforms, as these instruments are one of the main features through which platforms like Spotify enact the "selection" of contents, the mechanism identified by Van Dijck et al. (2018) and that was discussed in the second paragraph.

As a consequence, debates and research focus also on how the work of selection is performed, and how playlists are created, which still remain rather opaque processes. In fact, it appears that the outcome of this work done by playlists is the outcome of both automated data coming from listeners' behaviour according to their engagement (e.g. listening duration or skip rates) and an active curatorial work by the platform's staff, so there is not a clear method or data available for artists to know how tracks are added or removed from playlists. And yet, music artists and record labels are increasingly dependent on positions they succeed to reach on playlists managed by Spotify.

Furthermore, the commodification of music is still ongoing. The need to incorporate ownership and copyrights into protocols and digital formats has determined the rise of platforms based on blockchain technology, smart contracts, and automated algorithms, directing the music industry and content even more into the digital flow of big data characterising the present hyper-connected society.

Finally, a theme that is worth mentioning is the consumption practices of platforms' users and consequently the possible forms of resistance they can employ to counterbalance the power exercised by platforms through datafication and selection mechanisms. In a digital music

ecosystem where different platforms are available to consumers in order to stream music, one possibility for users is to choose different kinds of platforms. For instance, alternative platforms such as Bandcamp and SoundCloud offer a distinct type of management of data with respect to mainstream services like Spotify and Apple Music, as a result of a lower degree of dependence on financialization and marketing on the part of these so-called "producer-oriented" platforms. Nonetheless, this kind of music streaming services struggle to be economically sustainable and in their attempt to translate their alternative ideologies into the technical characteristics of the platforms. The choice of using alternative music platforms and adopting other forms of resistance against platforms' power implies that, to some degree, consumers can always potentially put in practice autonomous patterns for the fruition of digital content[15].

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[15] Magaudda P., Solaroli M., *Platform Studies and Digital Cultural Industries.*

CHAPTER 2: MUSIC INDUSTRY AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

The second chapter is going to focus on the history of the commodification of music and on the shift of the recording industry from the analogic world dominated by major labels to the digital era governed by music streaming platforms. In this regard, the functioning of such platforms will be explained by presenting the history and functioning of Spotify.

At the end of the first part, the thesis will present another kind of platforms – the so-called producer-oriented platforms as SoundCloud and Bandcamp, which appears to be keener on the interests of musicians – as alternatives to the consumer-oriented platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music that to some extent still follow the traditional capitalist logics of the pre-digital era.

2.1 A Brief History of the Commodification of Music

The previous chapter has explored the platformization of the cultural industry on general terms. It is now time to see more in detail the impact that such a phenomenon has had specifically on the music industry.

There was a time when people made music for themselves and to scan their days. Later on, after a series of social and industrial transformations, it became a commodity. According to Timothy D. Taylor, such a modification began with the invention of mechanical means of reproducing music and their diffusion in the first decades of the 20th century. It started with the player piano, then came the phonograph and the radio. All these tools marked the shift from exclusively making music to buying it.

In the United States, the phonograph and the player piano appeared around the same time, but while the latter quickly became an object of common use since many people owned pianos by the mid-1920s, the former had a harder time in the beginning because there was a debate about its use and it had a poor quality that prevented it from becoming

popular for many years after its launch on the market.

The first player pianos date back to the mid-19th century. They were autonomous devices that had to be attached to existing pianos with mechanical fingers that played the keys of the piano, responding to the machine's reading of music encoded in perforations on a paper roll. Subsequently, this external mechanism was integrated into the piano itself. The story of the marketing around the player piano exemplifies how music can be transformed from an abstract form of art into a commodity. Initially, the player piano was considered a gimmick by the public, and early sales were unremarkable. But at the beginning of the 20th century, it became a popular and desirable object thanks to the rising and fast-growing advertising industry. The turning point occurred in 1905, when different manufacturers standardised the perforation of rolls, allowing them to be played on different brands of machines. In a first phase, advertisement focused on the tool, highlighting the social status offered by the player piano through the depiction of beautifully furnished houses, and well-dressed and happy people surrounding the instrument. The core ideology at the basis of writings on the player piano was that of the "*democratization*" of access to music, which was articulated in democratization of ability and democratization of availability. Another ideology addressed the role of the self. Player pianos' advertisements assured that the individual could reach self-expression by using the player piano and that by no means they were giving up their selfhood to a machine. At that point, the focus shifted from the hardware to music itself. Many commentators of the time began to claim that thanks to the innovation music could be more attentively listened to, but according to Taylor it marked the rise of passive listening instead, and the consequent transformation of the musical experience into a commodity. By the mid-1920s, the player piano – and the phonograph – thus fostered the conversion of music as something that served social practices and that people made themselves to be a commodity that people could buy. Such reification of music was

accompanied by a fetishism towards living and dead famous musicians, who became the human faces of the new commodified music. Indeed, for the first time in history it was possible to listen to the greatest artists of all times up to that moment, from Beethoven to Mozart, from Chopin to Strauss, and many more[1].

The record industry was all set for its development when, after some technical improvements, the phonograph and its successor, the gramophone, became the first mass-recording tools and media for the dissemination of popular music, with their leading centres located in the United States and Europe. The success of record production began to depend more and more on the performances of famous performers, such as the Italian opera singer Enrico Caruso, who became known in the United States as the world's greater singer and best-selling artist in the first years of recording. By the 1920s, records had been made in almost every country and their dissemination in these first years was largely entrusted to the radio, since in the first half of the decade phonographs were still expensive for the average person[2].

As an effect of the economic crisis at the turn of the decade and the technological advancements in recording devices, many professional musicians rapidly began to lose their jobs. Until that moment, solo singers and bands were highly required, for instance, in movie houses – so as to provide films' soundtracks – and by radio stations, which used to hire live bands to perform in studio. People started to consider musicians as music "players" instead of labourers, and they could now listen to records comfortably at their houses. Adding to that, the singers and composers playing on recordings were often more skilled and talented than local musicians, further downgrading the category. In more general terms, recordings changed two things: on the one hand,

[1] Taylor T. D., *The Commodification of Music at the Dawn of the Era of "Mechanical Music"*, in «Ethnomusicology», Volume 51, Issue 2, pp. 281-305, 2007.
[2] Krüger Bridge S., *Music Industry*, in «SAGE International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture», 2019.

the nature of music, which shifted from being a social activity of music-making to a mass product that could be consumed privately; on the other hand, they created a dichotomy between music performers and music consumers.

Nonetheless, as Nancy K. Baym shows in her publication *Playing to the Crowd*, although at first many criticisms addressed this revolutionary configuration of the music panorama, it is true that the latter has allowed audiences to craft new ways of participatory practices through music fandom, giving listeners an unprecedented power of influencing artists and ultimately the music industry overall, as the decades went by and technological advancement increasingly reduced the distance between the two worlds[3].

Thus, it was in this scenario that the recording industry soon became the main actor to pull the strings of the new capitalist and commodified music environment, and if on one side the figure of the live musician as a labourer declined, on the other side new music professions arose between the 1920s and the 1930s, namely the professional pop singer, the session musician, the record producer, the disc jockey, the studio engineer, and the critic[4].

Past the protests of the American musicians unionised under the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) in 1942, from which originated a record ban that lasted two years and that marked the final victory of recording, professional musicianship changed from a career that guaranteed respectable standards of living to a large number of live performers into one where only a handful of elite musicians did well, a few more afforded middle-class lives, and the majority were unable to keep the wolf from the door. For career musicians, the new work configuration meant longer workdays, and travelling far distances for jobs, while for audiences that implied they could enjoy a wider amount

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[3] Baym N. K., *Playing to the Crowd*, New York University Press, New York, 2018.
[4] Krüger Bridge S., *Music Industry*.

of music.

The power of the record labels that were born in those years was therefore based on music as intellectual property rather than a shared experience, to the extent that it was possible to talk about music industry for the first time in history.

Since transforming intellectual property into concrete objects is a highly expensive process, from the second half of the 20th century labels began to develop an apparatus that would enable them to recover their costs in quite a predictable way based on what audiences liked. Such an arrangement soon became known as the "star system", where staff songwriters worked on the realization of songs while those who employed them made a profit out of the occasional big hits. In such a scenario, those who had the potential to sell on a mass scale had more chances to get financed, while the majority of musicians would be discarded if they did not sell as expected by the labels. In the early 2000s, only a rough 20% pertained to the first category, with an 80% of musicians that were not able to earn royalties beyond their advances. This explains why record companies focus much of their efforts on a few superstars, increasing the divide between the latter and the smaller-scale local performers who may succeed in recording but could never reach distribution on a large scale.

The music industry has since followed a capitalist approach: the aim of doing music is to sell and make money. Hence the view of musicians as professionals only if they appear on television, magazines, and whether their songs reach top positions on popular charts, whereas all those who are not capable of making a living out of their music are seen as "hobbyists".

Over time, record labels have thereby taken on a bad reputation, especially among musicians, who have acknowledged that majors are more interested in their income than in those of performers. In the early 1980s, when the British Phonograph Industry (BPI) launched the campaign "Home Taping Is Killing Music" against home taping – the

practice of recording music from the radio onto cassettes carried out by private citizens – many artists responded that the record labels where those responsible of killing music by exploiting the performers under contract with opaque deals denying them publishing rights or part of their royalties. A situation that is worsened, even nowadays, by disorganization and dispersed rights database, which make it hard for artists to get the compensation they might deserve.

Nevertheless, labels provide musicians with the necessary infrastructure for building their professional careers, and they also lay out the investments and capacities needed to produce the music that soundtracks modern everyday life, bearing the economic risks of unsuccessful releases. In addition, as concerns the signed artists record labels distribute advances and assign support staff in order to allow them to be full-time music makers. Labels can offer specialists who support the process of music creation from development to production, the distribution of the final product, along with its promotion, the organization of tours, and booking of the artist for radio and television appearances.

The magical aura emanated by the recording industry was fuelled in the 1980s by the introduction of the compact disc (CD) and lasted effectively until 1999, when sales began to crash officially because of a global financial crisis, and most of all due to the spread of internet technologies and piracy practices of file-sharing by private users and later on by services like Napster and Pirate Bay[5].

2.2 The Shift to Digital

As mentioned in the first chapter, the music industry was in many ways the first media sector to be affected by digitalization. In the mid-1980s the new digital format of the compact disc provoked a boom in the industry and was capable of exceeding the sales of the analogic vinyl in

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[5] Baym N. K., *Playing to the Crowd*.

only a few years. At first, for major groups such as Universal/Polygram, Sony Music Entertainment, EMI, and Warner Music the new medium proved favourable, but they considered it as nothing more than a profitable digital – albeit still physical – replacement for the vinyl. However, it was way more than that. By the second half of the 1990s, the entire music repertoire had been made available in a digital format, and a feature of the CD is that it had no copyright protection, making it possible to burn digital copies from physical audio media without any loss of quality or constraint. This, together with the dissemination of data compression software such as MP3 and the connection of computers via peer-to-peer technologies (P2P) gave rise to the practice of music sharing on the internet, without any or little possibility of control over the new phenomenon on behalf of the recording industry. A boom in free music file-sharing forums took place on the internet, especially thanks to the rise of Napster. Purchasing music was no longer an obligated passage in order to listen to songs: users were now able to access music content freely in a digital format that could be downloaded or deleted as they pleased, marking a substantial loss of control by the music industry over its product.

The next step took place at the turn of the millennium with the breakthrough in the commercial sale and distribution of downloads initiated by an actor from outside the industry: Apple. The tech company opened its iTunes Store in the United States in 2003, containing almost all the digitally available music repertoire of both majors and independent labels. Together with the launch of the music player iPod, Apple offered an integrated commercial download and hardware system that was well received by consumers and which the music companies had to accept because of their weak position. The new music distribution system introduced by iTunes represented an extension of the old model on the digital realm. The brick-and-mortar retailers were expanded to include the new online stores, so that music companies lost power over the value chain and the transformation

process but still remained crucial as central producers and right holders. This new situation was mainly due to two factors: on the one hand, the failure of the majors' efforts to limit the free music exchange and consumption on the internet; on the other hand, the rapid growth of the media platform YouTube, which was acquired by Google in 2006 and emerged as a legal, freely usable offer that made the exchange and listening of music online largely unrestricted.

The end of the long industry crisis begun in 2013, with the emergence of commercial music streaming platforms and the associated transition from purchasing music to paid access to music, which was made possible thanks to the improvement of the internet broadband during the previous decade, the increased storage capacities for data-intensive media products and the advances in the processing, structuring and algorithmic control of a large amount of data.

The streaming platform Spotify, conceived in 2006 as a legal alternative to non-commercial file-sharing services, became the main actor of reorientation of the music market and consumption during the 2010s especially by introducing an innovative feature, that is the unlimited and mostly subscription-based access to music. In such a way, within a few years Spotify replaced both the recording industry's first revenue driver and the dominant consumption pattern. As a matter of fact, more than half of the music industry's global revenues were generated from streaming offers in 2019, while only 7% from downloads and 20% from physical audio media. As data shows, the streaming revolution has boosted an increase in the music industry's revenues since the first half of the 2010s, reaching a level similar to the one prior to the late 1990s crisis. Together with Spotify, which in 2019 had a share of 36% in music streaming globally, the other music streaming platforms dominating the online music consumption are Apple Music with 18%, Amazon Music with 13% and the Chinese Tencent Music Entertainment with a 10%.

Based on the studies done on these platforms so far – especially on

Spotify – in his paper *The Digital Transformation of the Music Industry* Ulrich Dolata identifies and outlines three characteristics underlying the transformation set off by platformization in the music business.

First of all, it is essentially a technology-driven process of socioeconomic change, characterised by an aggregate of disruptive technologies which are being enhanced and refined in a relatively short amount of time. These technologies include digitization, (mobile) internet, data compression and processing, cloud computing and machine learning. Their combination are at the basis of a series of changes in the organizational, structural, and institutional framework of the music industry, increasingly driven by new actors and less by the previous establishment. Such technologies have changed not only the music business but also the commercial and non-commercial access and sharing possibilities of listeners. In addition, the recording and production of music are no more an exclusive preserve of music industry's company-owned recording studios. Instead, they can now be organised independently by artists themselves. As regards distribution, music is no longer distributed exclusively by majors and their associated physical stores but primarily online by internet retailers and cloud-based streaming services. Last but not least, along time their commercial value has shifted from physical or digital products to a *for-fee temporary access* to the full repertoire. Because of all these transformations, the legal foundations of the music industry such as copyright and intellectual property rights had to be largely renegotiated and tailored to the new framework.

The second feature of the sectoral transformation of the music industry is that it has the form of an elongated process, which started at the end of the 1990s with the aforementioned development of the internet and the first music file-sharing networks, the end of which is still not foreseeable. Such unpredictability is owed to the constant technological innovation dynamics and the gradual socioeconomic changes affecting all of the sector's pillars: the product, the market and business models,

the ways of organising, the configurations of actors, the institutional framework and the consumer behaviour. These long periods of upheaval are often referred to as moments of mismatch, where "transformation" has to be intended as a radical reorientation that changes the sector's technological basis and its socioeconomic structures. At the same time, the transformation is "gradual", and occurs as an accumulation of different transformation activities that extend over time. As seen before, the music industry is an example of this kind of constant transformation that impels the actors involved to adapt and readjust.

The third characteristic of the music industry's upheaval is that in all its phases it received transformative impetus from actors that were previously outside of the music sector and used to play no role in it. Initially, these were the operators of subversive music file-sharing networks such as Napster and Pirate Bay, as well as young file sharers experimenting with the internet. Later on, the commercial consolidation and institutionalization of the new technical possibilities took place via established actors outside the music industry – such as Apple with iTunes and Google with YouTube – or via new founded start-up companies – as in the case of Spotify. Majors and the industrial interest groups underestimated and even opposed themselves to the potential power of the new technologies in the first decade of transition, opting for a strategical repositioning on a larger scale only when they faced pressure to restructure. The reason for that is found by Dolata in the path dependency or cognitive and structural inertia of saturated organizations, which determined the transformation as the product of a crisis-ridden readjustment accompanied by loss of control by the established actors rather than a process of coordinated restructuring guided by the music industry.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that the established actors became obsolete. Rather, they have been able to maintain their influence in the sector's reconfiguration of roles. They started to adapt to the new framework in 2007 and keep on being major players as concerns

production, marketing, intellectual property rights and licensing. Because of that, in 2018 the three biggest majors Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment, and Warner Music Group still accounted for around 70% of all revenues generated by physical and digital music sales in the Western world. Hence, the music industry is not facing a radical exchange of players, but rather a differentiation of the configuration of actors accompanied by a rearrangement of the power relations within the sector.

A further fundamental aspect of the music industry's transformation is the shift from purchasing to unlimited access to music, started already with the emergence of the subversive file-sharing networks and which became a commercial offer with the boom in music streaming at the end of 2010s. Although access to music not tied to purchase had existed for a long time in the form of radio, complemented since the 1980s by music TV stations such as MTV, that repertoire was pre-selected and curated by disc jockeys and largely concentrated on top hit playlists, so that kind of access to music was still limited to what radio stations or music televisions decided to play at a given time. With the modifications sparkled by music file-sharing networks on the internet, these boundaries were questioned for the first time. These networks offered music audiences the possibility of free and non-time-bound access as well as the chance to discover and share wider music repertoires. As a reaction, the industry branded as illegal the new possibilities of unrestricted access and exchange of music, preferring the purchase of songs in legal online stores such as iTunes in order to attempt to regain some control over the business and the activities of listeners. The music streaming platforms, whose socioeconomic models became solid during the 2010s, therefore were crucial in creating a middle ground between the necessities of the music industry and the demands of music listeners increasingly used to having music content at their fingertips ever since the launch of the internet. As a result, streaming services do not represent a decentralised, anonymous and non-commercial project

but is partially designed, set up, operated, and controlled by companies[6].

Thereby, the unrestricted access to the entire repertoire is indeed not free of restrictions. On the contrary, it is possible only through registration and payment to the platform. Users are limited in their fruition by the terms and conditions of the operator, and by technical pre-structuring such as interfaces, and algorithmic sorting techniques, by which their listening habits are influenced. Another form of payment is that everything is done on the streaming service is observed by the platform operators who, by means of demographic targeting and content targeting, condense users' activities into personalised sets of data which are both reflected back into music suggestions for listeners and provided to advertisers in order to maximise the effects of their ad campaigns.[7]

From a platform perspective, music streaming services are not merely designed for as facilitators of music content circulation, but they have indeed infrastructural qualities and are therefore able to actively shape the very conditions under which contents and their socioeconomic models are organised and circulated. Consequently, they are also able to shape the relationship between different types of actors – mainly consumers, advertisers, labels, and artists – that operate in that socioeconomic context[8].

2.3 The Case of Spotify

In order to explain the functioning of music digital platforms more in detail, it is useful to analyse how Spotify works, since it has been – and still is – the most influential player in the digital revolution of the music

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[6] Dolata U., *The Digital Transformation of the Music Industry. The Second Decade: From Download to Streaming*, SOI Discussion Paper, No. 2020-04, Universität Stuttgart, Stuttgart, 2020.

[7] Vonderau P., *The Spotify Effect: Digital Distribution and Financial Growth*, in «Television & New Media», Volume 20, Issue 1, pp. 3-19, 2019.

[8] Magaudda P., *Smartphones, Streaming Platforms, and the Infrastructuring of Digital Music Practices* in Levaux C., Hennion A., *Rethinking Music Through Science and Technology Studies*, London, Routledge, 2021.

industry described above.

As already mentioned in the first chapter, Spotify was founded in Stockholm in April 2006 to seek a solution to the industry's piracy issue and with the understanding that consumers who are not eager to buy a specific album song might be willing to pay for ease of access to a wide library of music. For a monthly fee, or for free with advertisements, the site offers a vast and open archive, easily searchable and equipped with loads of music. In July 2011 the company's launch in the U.S. marked the spread of the platform worldwide.

Spotify is indeed the most-used streaming service in the Western world, with 406 million monthly active users, including 180 million premium subscribers and 226 million ad-supported (i.e. free) listeners at the end of 2021[9]. Since its launch, the platform has gone through a series of changes in its approach, shifting from being a pirate-friendly alternative music service to becoming a large-scale firm trading on the New York Stock Exchange, with revenues of €6.8 billion in 2019, 90% of which were coming from subscriptions to premium access and the remaining 10% from advertising on free accounts[10]. As a matter of fact, Spotify generates revenues in basically two ways: subscriptions and advertising. The majority of the platform's money comes from its premium subscription service, Spotify Premium. Instead, revenues through advertising works through the offering of a self-serving ad platform called Ad Studio for advertisers with smaller budgets, whereas for those with large budgets Spotify offers programmatic and direct advertising[11].

Maria Eriksson et al. describe Spotify as a platform that, as its

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[9] Dredge S., *How many users do Spotify, Apple Music and other streaming services have?*, Musically, February 2022, https://musically.com/2022/02/03/spotify-apple-how-many-users-big-music-streaming-services/.

[10] Magaudda P., *Smartphones, Streaming Platforms, and the Infrastructuring of Digital Music Practices*.

[11] Rose T., *How Does Spotify Make Money (Business and Revenue Model)*, Entrepreneur 360, April 2022, https://entrepreneur-360.com/how-does-spotify-make-money-20281.

competitors, remains dependent on the willingness of the so-called Big Three – the global record companies Universal, Sony, and Warner – since the latter are those who supply them with music licensing deals. Spotify and its competitors thus all depend on the same product: a distribution license, which can be bought form only one source, namely the Big Three which form an oligopoly that can act as a cartel when dealing with music streaming services. A sign that the traditional music industry's actors have not lost their power, but rather their role has changed. Then, if Spotify and the other music platforms practically offer the same catalogue of music, in which sense Spotify can be considered as offering a "unique selling proposition"? In this respect, it is useful to go through the highlights of the music platform's history.

On May 1, 2007, Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon released an initial beta version of Spotify to a small circle of acquaintances, among whom there were some of the most relevant Sweden's technology bloggers that shortly thereafter wrote a number of enthusiastic blog posts, which resulted in many requests of invitations by their readers. Among the first beta testers there was Eric Wahlforss, a part-time musician and entrepreneur who would soon found SoundCloud, a "*producer-oriented*" platform that will be presented in the next paragraph. During its beta period, Spotify's interface looked similar to iTunes and it was centred on the search box, giving access to "whatever you want". The user was then conceived as an individual who already knew exactly what to listen to and did not need help with music recommendations. The hype around the service increased in 2008, as the two entrepreneurs claimed they would make music free by relying on advertising for revenue, and that they would make the music system shift from ownership to access. The first public version of the software was launched in October 2008, marking the legalization of Spotify, that in its beta version had practically operated as a pirate service, distributing music to the invited users without any license. Till that moment, music content had come from Pirate Bay and other file-sharing networks, but that changed when

Spotify began to sign agreements with record companies. Soon, parts of users' playlists became unavailable at the request of labels. The real addition of the 2008 version was a paid version of the service: Spotify Premium, which was legal. That way, the company could start selling advertising, which became more and more present for users of the free version. In other words, the 2008 launch did not really represent the launch of a new service, but rather of a new effort to monetise the platform, which had already been existing for more than a year and a half. In the second half of October 2008, Spotify announced that the service had been launched in other European countries but encountered problems in Germany and Italy due to local copyright collecting societies, which is why in the former it was officially set up in 2012, and in 2013 in the latter. Around the same time, it became available also in other areas of the world such as Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Southeast Asia.

Because of the various deals and rounds of investments signed before and after its launch, Spotify has been attributed a peculiar position in the market. Indeed, the Swedish company, as mentioned before is located at the intersection of different industries: music and technology, advertising and finance.

In 2013, Spotify was still seen by many as a pioneer in finding solutions for the crisis affecting the music industry. As Maria Eriksson et al. put it:

> Its à la carte, on-demand music streaming had arguably created a sustainable revenue model for artists. Spotify seemed to have stopped the downward spiral in earnings and income that had plagued physically distributed music recordings since 2002, and it had delimited informal practices of media circulation, effectively advancing the fight against unauthorized (or pirate) forms of file sharing.

However, despite the hype of those years, there were critical questions to be answered. For instance, it was not clear yet what was the substance of the service the company claimed to offer, given that the

platform was neither directly providing a cultural good nor offering valuable contracts in the field of cultural production.

Nevertheless, in 2013 Spotify was more interested in solving a different issue: the abundance of choice. Up to that moment, Spotify had acted according to the idea that users are individuals who already know what to listen to. But that is not always the case, thus many users began to demand for a system that would help them figuring out what to play. Likewise, artists started to ask for a recommendation feature that would get them to be heard on the platform. Consequently, the company increasingly reoriented itself in the direction of not only providing access but also recommendations for music that users would not request themselves. In that way, Spotify started shifting from being a simple *distributor* of music to being the *producer* of a unique service. The first relevant step in that sense was the acquisition of Tunigo in 2013, which provided users with playlists based not only on genres but also on activities and moods, curated by a team of music experts. Other music editors would be recruited over time to create local playlists for each country where Spotify was available, marking the beginning of the *curatorial* turn, which was largely implemented in 2014. The platform's aim was no longer that of providing more music but *better* music, now evaluated based on the proposition that musical quality depends on context. In the same year, Spotify also acquired Echo Nest, whose knowhow contributed significantly to the professionalization of Spotify's curated playlists and recommendations. Shortly after, the famous singer-songwriter Taylor Swift made the decision to withdraw all her repertoire from Spotify, claiming that Spotify's free service was depriving music of its value and that an album should have a price instead. Such an anti-Spotify move was an expression of the rising discontent by a part of musicians towards the music streaming platform, which began to be blamed for not paying enough and for favouring major labels interests.

In June 2015, the new competitor Apple Music hit the pitch. Spotify

sought to compete by providing more sophisticated curation of playlists based on enhanced algorithmic personalization. On its part, Apple presented its music service as more "human", in opposition to the allegedly too algorithmic Spotify, and announced its radio station Beats 1, where human DJs play mostly mainstream Pop music. However, in the industrial capitalism all commodity production implies the combination of labour power and machinery. Thereby, according to Eriksson et al., when it comes to curation as a commodity, the question is more about the *proportion* between human and algorithmic curation. Spotify accordingly continued hiring music editors with expert knowledge in local culture at the same time as investing in technology for "music intelligence", and in 2015 introduced "Discover Weekly" – a playlist of personalised music recommendations delivered every Monday to each user – followed by other weekly playlists such as "Fresh Finds" and "Release Radar" which ultimately posed music discovery as the main instrument of competition[12].

Since the second half of 2010s, Spotify has therefore refined the instruments and marketing techniques adopted within the framework of its curational turn. In general, three main mechanisms driving Spotify's functioning can be observed: curation, surveillance, and commodification of users' behaviour.

2.3.1 Curation

The monitoring and interpretation of users' data has created new possibilities of curating music, and on platforms like Spotify these are expressed mainly through the compilation of playlists and listening recommendations. These are not totally new phenomena, given that radios have always intervened curatorially to enhance the music experience of listeners, for instance by means of DJs' choices, and the same did record companies and music magazines by promoting selected

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[12] Eriksson et al., *Spotify Teardown: Inside the Black Box of Streaming Music,* The MIT Press, Cambridge, 2019.

musicians, shaping specific listener communities, and giving music socio-cultural meaning. As regards Spotify, the curation of music content is made through personalised music recommendations, a few one-to-many playlists such as "Today's Top Hits", "Top 50 Global", "Rap Caviar" or "New Music Friday", and mood-oriented compilations classified based on daily activities such as waking up, parties, chilling out, romantic dinners etc.

The most popular playlists on the platform are generally compiled by Spotify itself, followed by those realised by the three major music groups via their subsidiaries – Filtr for Sony Music, Digster for Universal Music, and Topsify for Warner Music.

Although algorithms are widely employed by Spotify, most of the big playlists are not created algorithmically but primarily by Spotify's employees or external playlists providers. Consequently, playlist curation remains an essentially manual activity, of course carried out with the support of all the digital data provided by users.

Certainly, with its large playlists Spotify has a great influence on the music taste and listening habits of users as well as in the (in-)visibility of artists and the sales of music companies. At the same time, whereas premade playlists provide listeners with a wider selection of artists, songs, and genres, it has also been found to decrease users' level of concentration when listening.

Moreover, a paradox is visible in Spotify's curatorial activity: while an almost infinite repertoire is now accessible at any time and any location, at the same time this is narrowed down again and categorised based on the context and mood by automated recommendations and curated playlists. This structuring shows a trend towards a branded musical experience that seems to offer fluid and plentiful musical content but, in reality, create circumscribed categories of content for different situations, users, and listening settings.

2.3.2 Surveillance

Spotify's business is based on continuous observation, evaluation, and prediction of individual user behaviour, which is possible due to the unprecedented progress in digital surveillance technologies during the last decade. Along with the automatic recording of activities such as the search for artists or songs, the playing or skipping of music pieces, or the creation of individual playlists, the platform also collects data on which playlists are listened to where and when, what is listened at what times, and who exchanges information with whom. The inclusion of situational factors such as time of the day, activity, location and environment in the data collection increases the precision of individual profiles that can be used, for instance, to capture a user's various moods and music preferences throughout the day or at different places. Broad categories such as age, gender, class or ethnicity are not put aside but have become secondary in the creation of a reified, datafied version of the self.

This amount of data forms the basis not only for the tracking and mapping of the activities and preferences of platform users over time, but also for predicting future users' behaviour.

2.3.3 Commodification of users' behaviour

As already mentioned, Spotify has been able to change the revenue structure of the music industry by shifting from the purchase of single music titles or albums to subscriptions that provide access to the entire repertoire supported by income from advertising, which is employed by Spotify to push users using the free offer towards paying for a premium account with no ad interruptions.

Apart from these revolutionary shifts, what is worth noticing is that streaming has opened up new possibilities and forms of commodification of music. The features of the music content as a commodity itself have already been described above. Nonetheless, another important aspect to explore is that the new streaming platforms

have also paved the way for an enhanced exploitation of music audiences as an integral part of the commodity. On the one hand, streaming platforms do not simply deliver music but offer a new service of their own by recombining and bundling the raw material acquired from the music companies into curated playlists tailored to the different daily activities and individual moods. Such a rearrangement of music content makes platforms not simple retailers or intermediaries in charge of distribution, but rather manufacturers that perform a productive and value-adding work that change the commodity character of music. On the other hand, a further raw material is what users provide in the form of exploitable data through their activities on the platform. Hence, another modality of productive work carried out by music platforms is the evaluation and aggregation of users' data, on the basis of which they can tailor the music material made available to them.

The economic exploitation of users' behaviour concretises in the form of personalised advertising and above all in the refinement and quality improvement of the platform's recommendation and curation services. This tendency towards the commodification of users' behaviour on platforms is one of the core elements of the so-called "surveillance capitalism" and today encompasses data registered on the basis of everyday life activities, feelings and moods.

Spotify's business model has radically changed the music industry and the way music is played over the past two decades. Due to the rapid implementation of commercial streaming, the music economy has initially undergone a transition from purchase to (paid) access and later on, in the second half of 2010s it went through another substantial change: the readjustment of the relationship between abundance and control.

The music product on music streaming services is only borrowed – for a fee or with advertising – and thus remains in the possession of the companies, and so do all the data tracks. These data are collected and

evaluated by the platform and other companies, in a way that music listeners are not treated as abstract entities or roughly circumscribed collective, but rather tangible individuals with distinct personality traits.

Thus, the loss of control experienced by the music industry in the phase of anonymous and unrestricted file-sharing in the early 2000s has been compensated for by commercial music platforms in the following decade[13].

All in all, how much has Spotify been able to shape the music world? In addition to all the considerations made during this chapter, it is worth mentioning some other indicators as a proof of the influence that Spotify has had on the music industry, artists, and consumers in the last fifteen years. Here are a few examples.

As concerns music piracy, Spotify managed to propose a sort of third way between the traditional purchase model of the established music industry and the new possibilities of unrestricted fruition of music content offered by the internet. Together with the recording industry's consumer awareness campaign, Spotify was able to make new generations pay for music again, albeit at a fraction of the previous price of a CD. Music piracy therefore declined from 18% in 2013 to 10% in 2018, and according to a study on online piracy an American University International Law Review this phenomenon is diminishing, particularly because of the increasing availability of affordable legal content.

Another contribution is the de-genrefication of music. Sure enough, subscription services have allowed users to explore an endless array of artists, sounds and genres for less than $10 per month, fostering experimentation both for artists and listeners. Accordingly, in a 2019 survey by the research firm YPulse 85% of millennial Spotify users

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[13] Dolata U., *The Digital Transformation of the Music Industry. The Second Decade: From Download to Streaming.*

stated that their music tastes do not fall under only one category.

For several years, Spotify was criticised for its free ad-supported tier, which provided users with free music at the only cost of periodic ad interruptions. Ek claimed that this system has been crucial for converting listeners into paying customers, and the company's continuous rise in paid subscribers proves so.

Furthermore, not only have streaming services made the boundaries between music genres blurrier, but they also have recategorized many of them into "moods" by means of playlists. Since the beginning of the 2010s, the Spotify's dedicated editorial team has created countless emotive and genre-less playlists, such as Mood Booster which includes happy, optimistic songs of all genres.

Spotify has also introduced the autoplay function, a concept that prior to the streaming era did not exist. After a playlist or album is over, the algorithm automatically suggests the listener new songs that fit with that mood. As of today, all streaming services have adopted this function.

The Swedish company is also acknowledged of having ended the Apple's monopoly. As a matter of fact, with the launch of the iPod in 2001 and iTunes in 2003 Apple completely dominated the legal digital music market. But its dominion ended in 2016 when streaming revenues surpassed those of digital downloads. In that year, Spotify led among streamers in the second quarter of the year with 44% of the global market. Apple followed with 19%. In the second quarter of 2020, Spotify still held the top spot with 34%.

In 2015 Spotify started to offer its users a personalised end of the year's review of listening habits in the form of a playlist named "Year in Music", rebranded one year later as "Spotify Wrapped", updated every December and containing one's most listened songs during the previous twelve months.

As regards credits mentioning songwriters and producers, after years of lagging behind the audience's demand for a proper crediting system,

Spotify implemented public credits in 2018. The shift from CDs to digital platforms had indeed determined the loss of liner notes mentioning the people that are behind a piece of music. Many streaming platforms have adopted and implemented their credits interfaces within the last couple of years, with Tidal leading the industry thanks to its enhanced credits features established in 2019, which include musicians and engineer in addition to songwriters and producers.

After COVID-19 caused difficulties to the live music industry, Spotify has attempted to limit damages with a new feature called "Artist Fundraising Pick", allowing fans to tip or donate on the artist's page. The money gathered through this feature can be sent to a charity chosen by the musician or go directly to the artist, supporting him or her during the hard times of lockdowns. Other streaming services such as the Chinese Tencent's QQ Music, Kugou, and Kuwo adopted this function after Spotify. While the tipping option has surely given some relief to music workers, some critics from inside the music sector and from artists themselves pointed that such feature was kind of an admission that artists are not being paid enough by Spotify itself.

One of the most recent Spotify's contributions are the Spotify Canvas, launched in their Beta version in February 2021. Canvas allow artists to upload customised loop videos of 5-8 seconds that are visible during the reproduction of a song, in order to make the listening experience enjoyable also to the eye. The company's data shows that users are 5% more likely to keep streaming when listening to songs featuring a Canvas, 20% more likely to add those songs to their playlists and 9% more likely to visit the artist's profile page.

A further novelty introduced by Spotify concerns podcasts, a format that has become increasingly popular because of its possibility of being both watched and listened to. Nevertheless, working on a podcast can be problematic for creators when it comes to add music because of the complex licensing process. Through its self-owned podcast creation

platform Anchor, in October 2021 Spotify has launched a feature that allows creators to integrate full songs from Spotify directly into their shows, with no further licensing required. The streaming platform has referred to this innovation as the "future format" of audio, enabling podcasters to create formats such as guided meditations, album reviews, and DJ and radio style shows more easily.

Finally, a more controversial contribution regards targeted ads for artists. In October 2019, Spotify launched the advertising platform Marquee, a sponsored recommendation tool for which a musician or their team pays Spotify for ads targeting users that are more likely to be interested in that ad. The new platform is accessible through the Spotify for Artists portal, that is the app where artists can update their personal and professional information, upload a profile pic, and monitor the insights of their music. Data shows that Marquee ads have become one of Spotify's most lucrative new revenue streams, with a click-through rate of 20% and 55 cents per click[14].

2.4 An Alternative to Consumer-Oriented Platforms: SoundCloud and Bandcamp

Moving towards the central theme of this thesis, which deals with how musicians' careers have been affected by the platformization of the music industry, it is interesting to briefly describe a different kind of music streaming platform. So far, an analysis of the so-called "*consumer-oriented*" audio distribution platforms has been carried out – a category that primarily includes streaming services such as Spotify and Apple Music. However, an alternative category of music streaming platforms exists, allegedly more focused on the needs of music workers. It is the category of "*producer-oriented*" music platforms, which are thoroughly described in an article by Hesmodhalgh, Jones, and Rauh

[14] Robinson K., *15 Years of Spotify: How the Streaming Giant Has Changed and Reinvented the Music Industry*, Variety, 2021, https://variety.com/2021/music/news/spotify-turns-15-how-the-streaming-giant-has-changed-and-rinvented-the-music-industry-1234948299/.

by studying the two more relevant platforms of this kind, namely SoundCloud and Bandcamp. The intention behind the outlining of these services is to identify alternatives to the mainstream platforms, thus offering a bigger picture of the contemporary music industry driven by platformization.

As described in the article, these two platforms represent the possibility to promote a democratization of cultural production and consumption in the music industry. In fact, in recent years the practices and working lives of many musicians have been dramatically altered by the rise of consumer-oriented streaming giants, which are mainly moved by capitalist and utilitarian logics according to a considerable portion of musicians. On the contrary, producer-oriented platforms serve a different purpose, allowing for free and easy uploading and labelling of digital files containing music, and seeking to provide a means by which musicians can find audiences without the need to work with major or independent recording and publishing companies.

The first major example of a legal producer-oriented service was Myspace, even though it was largely used for social networking among non-musicians. Nevertheless, the website founded in 2003 rapidly lost its popularity as a social network after 2008, largely because of Facebook. Indeed, Myspace was mostly used by musicians for sharing music and information, whereas SoundCloud and Bandcamp have been more instrumental for musicians as channels to reach audiences.

SoundCloud was founded in 2008 in Berlin by Alexander Ljung and Eric Wahlfross, and after a quick growth in 2010 and 2011 it has become the main way in which amateur and semi-professional musicians share music with potential audiences. Its interface has been described as highly sharable and highly social, since it easily links to mainstream social media platforms, allowing for the following of other users, the reposting of tracks posted by other listeners, and the liking of tracks. Registered users can upload music content up to a limit of 2 hours for free, more if they pay a subscription fee. According to

professional musicians, SoundCloud provides a sense of direct connection with fans, in contrast to standard streaming services, while emerging musicians find that the platform offers the possibility to reach fans with no intermediary.

As a result of its mix of amateur, professional, and semi-professional content, SoundCloud offers a large and diverse set of music and other sound files. Nonetheless, the service is particularly popular especially among EDM and hip-hop music makers and listeners because of some key values attributed by them to SoundCloud. First, the abundance of grassroots content made available by the use of low-cost digital technologies. Second, the de-emphasising of the performer identity at the visual level. The real protagonist is music, represented as a waveform, which reflects conventions adopted by EDM and hip-hop communities, where DJs have typically relied on visual references to cue and mix tracks. Moreover, the waveform symbolises the engagement with computer-based music technologies of the EDM and hip-hop scenes, which are generally enthusiastic about new technologies. The waveform indicates a focus on social interaction given that SoundCloud allows registered users to post time-stamped comments directly on it. Such an interface can offer a valuable source of feedback for amateurs and beginners, while for professional music makers and their fans it can create a greater sense of intimacy, community, and interactivity than it happens on mainstream consumer-oriented platforms.

However, the interactive and apparently democratic character of SoundCloud is at stake for the very "*culture of connectivity*" conveyed by the platform, which implies a continuous pressure from users and from technologies to expand through competition. Also, the culture of connectivity involves monitoring users' behaviour and gathering data about music consumption, which are therefore potentially available to third parties. Furthermore, its business model depends on what can be characterised as "free" or unpaid labour of users. All these aspects compromise and contradict SoundCloud's rhetoric of sharing and

connecting through music, as facts shows that it remains embedded in the political economy and culture of digital networks under capitalism. Alike all companies attempting to establish themselves as the main provider of a service, SoundCloud has undergone many losses in the hope of making large profits later on. But the platform proved unable to monetise the wide amount of freely given content – which is often unauthorised – leaving it disadvantaged against the dominion of Spotify, Apple Music, and Tidal. Because of these difficulties and low revenues, in 2014 SoundCloud began to sign deals with major music publishers, distributors and artists, so that they could attract advertising, and in 2016 started offering a consumer-oriented subscription service akin to the one offered by consumer-oriented platforms, enabling subscribers to enjoy ad-free music and offline access. But these efforts did not pay off and after 2017 the service refocused towards content producers, on the basis of selling them data on user behaviour and extra storage. That way, it partially recovered but although SoundCloud efforts to present itself as a place where musicians can go from being unknown to fame and as a "bottom up" challenge to the music industry, it has not been able to bypass the systems of intellectual property. This determined the platform's shift in recent years from a "light" policy on takedown notices about copyright infringements on the part of its users to a stricter stance following the deals signed with major record companies. The new policy accordingly places at greater risk certain categories, primarily DJs, who upload mixes featuring unauthorised third-party content. To make things worse, the algorithm that is in charge of takedown is considered inaccurate by some musicians and the process through which users can appeal is opaque, causing uncertainty and some producers to migrate to other platforms with more loose takedown policies.

In short, SoundCloud is favoured by the need of the record companies for a variety of online outlets for licensed music, so that mainstream consumer-oriented platforms do not form an oligopoly. What is more,

the music industries rely on new talents and cultural products, and SoundCloud grants a relatively costs-free environment where musicians can experiment musically. The outstanding case of the Italian singer Blanco, who published on SoundCloud a number of fortunate experimental singles in 2020, who shortly after signed a contract with Island Records and after two years figures regularly at the top of the Italian charts is an example of the utility of the producer-oriented platform.

On the upside, the present copyright enforcement policies that SoundCloud is forced to comply with limits the hopes that a producer-oriented platform of this kind might be the basis of a true democratization of musical production and consumption.

In this sense, Bandcamp is described by Hesmondhalgh et al. as an interesting comparison because its relative success seems to partly escape the notion of "platform". The music sales website was also founded in 2008 by Ethan Diamond and Shawn Grunberger but it did not grow at the same rate of other sites such as Facebook and Twitter or peer music platforms such as SoundCloud and Spotify, which were all founded in the same year.

Bandcamp differs from other music platforms in that it primarily offers artists a digital storefront for sales of digital files, physical releases, and merchandise and it operates in a way that seems counter to the approach of the dominant music streaming services. As a matter of fact, Bandcamp does not operate as a multi-sided market as other music platforms typically do, but it rather works within a single market system consisting of digital and physical music commodities. Moreover, the website does not constitute a real platform because it does not offer real opportunities to work with the data, and its recommendations system appears to be entirely editorial rather than algorithmic, let alone that it does not hosts advertising of any kind, in strong opposition to the standards of the contemporary internet as a whole.

But then, how has Bandcamp managed to survive in the platform

environment and has not declined like the similar social media Myspace? One answer is partly that the former offers tools that represent specific values of the indie music practitioners, who form its core user-base, and that these capacities directly relate to its "quasi-platform" status. Thus, the artist pages on the website are distinct entities, lacking for instance the autoplay function offered by consumer-oriented platforms (but also by SoundCloud) which takes listeners from a track to the next when a song is over. In such a way, the music content on Bandcamp feels much as a physical release, be it a single, an EP or an album. Bandcamp reflects exactly the indie value of materiality and provides users with their own space rather than offering the dream of virality and success. Because each artist page is quite autonomous, there is less fear that a release will disappear in the never ending flow of content, offering an alternative to the endless scrolling of the "News Feed" typical of most social media. As mentioned above, the platformization of the music industry has made the music commodity malleable, informed by datafied user feedback, open to constant revision and recirculation. All in contrast with the indie emphasis on materiality and permanence.

A further element of discontinuity with the mainstream music platforms is the absence of public metrics such as "likes" or the number of followers. On the contrary, the number of people who have purchased a release is not represented numerically but pictorially, in the form of a collection of avatars of fans who have supported the musician, again in harmony with indie practices, since the artists pertaining to this genre judge the conventional metrics as irrelevant and generators of anxiety. All these elements reflects the desire of a part of musicians to see audiences not as metrics but as individuals with which to form communicative bonds.

One of the platform's most recent moves included opening a bricks-and-mortar store in Oakland, California, and collaborating with a record manufacturer to offer a vinyl pressing service to artists. Bandcamp's

discourse is based on the fact that the platform makes money when artists makes a lot of money, then its interests are aligned with those of the community it hosts. Besides, artists can set their own download pricing, based on the assumption that musicians know their fans better than anyone else and so they can themselves set the best price.

Nevertheless, although it has largely based its discourse on its counterposition to standard platforms, Bandcamp has one thing in common with the mainstream platforms' logic: the emphasis on the autonomy. In fact, except for the "top" artists backed by major labels, the majority of musicians operating on music streaming platforms have at least some independence as concerns their music, first of all because platforms have nothing invested in any single artist's success or failure, going against the managerial practices of the traditional music industry and praising self-management instead[15].

At the end of this second chapter, where a description of the history of the commodification of music content, of the music industry's shift to digital, and of consumer- and producer-oriented platforms has been carried out, it appears evident that new technologies have transformed the music industry and consequently musicians' careers in a relatively short period of time. The next chapter attempts to give a snapshot of the new working and social conditions faced by musicians, supported by qualitative interviews to local Italian independent artists that will show advantages and disadvantages of making and distributing music in the new digitalised and "platformised" music world.

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[15] Hesmondhalgh D., Jones E., Rauh A., *SoundCloud and Bandcamp as Alternative Music Platforms*, in «Social Media + Society», Volume 5, Issue 4, pp. 1-13, 2019.

CHAPTER 3: PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, AND PROMOTION OF MUSIC

The third and fourth chapters are based on interviews with eight Italian musicians, in order to explore how their careers are influenced by music streaming platforms and social media.

The interviewees have different roles in the music environment: three singers/songwriters, one executive producer, three beatmakers, and a pianist were interviewed. Nonetheless, these are only the main activities they identified with when asked to describe their role in the music sector. In most cases, they played more than one.

3.1 Production

First of all, the interviewees were asked about the main steps involved in the production of their music.

Alessia Toffoli, a 22-year-old singer from Vittorio Veneto (TV) described as follows the steps behind the realization of her last release *Primule*:

It all started with an inspiration I had while I was taking a walk with a friend. Later, my music teacher and I composed the instrumental. From there, we worked on the structure, on the melody, on making the words sound musically within the spaces to give a sense to my thoughts. So, everything starts with inspiration, a thought, and moving from that you create a structure. It's like building a home. I recorded the lyrics with a DAW in my brother's room. My teacher had proposed a melody that I changed later on. But this is the beauty of music. Finally, I added instruments, vocals, and other elements to make it even more like *my* song. (Alessia, 22)

While a couple of decades ago songs were recorded analogically, today the majority of musicians record digitally by using the so-called Digital Audio Workstations (DAW). There are plenty of them on the market. Alessia uses Ableton. And she even realised a videoclip for the song:

I know how to use it quite well. For the mix and mastering, I have an audio interface that connects the condenser microphone to the computer. Once the song was complete my brother and I made a videoclip. We bought a GoPro and with that one we were able to film the video that I edited with an editing software on the computer. (Alessia, 22)

For Francesco Pellegrini, a 21-year-old singer living in Albignasego (PD) artistically known as V3INOFF, the steps are slightly different. He is part of a crew called CSM020, which includes four singers and a producer, PEDR0:

We usually meet in the studio but never with too much organization. PEDR0 works on some beats he has been producing and arranges some parts. He lays some melodies down and most of the times I get inspired and write on them. He works on the structure of the beat, then he arranges the melodic part and the drums. He does everything digitally. If there is a guitar, usually it is a sample or we call someone to work on a guitar line as it happened in the song *Ripartire*, where one of the guys that sing has also played the guitar you hear in the instrumental. Anyway, when PEDR0 completes the beat we make some recs to see what fits and what doesn't. We make a demo and later on we go to the sound engineer and we mix the beat. After that, we complete the official recording. We mix everything and we work on the master. Overall, this is the proceeding, but there could be many exceptions. (Francesco, 21)

Also Giovanni Raule, 25 years old, a rapper from Maserà di Padova (PD) whose stage name is DSG works together with one or more producers and follows his own proceeding:

Usually, I start from a beat, be it a type beat found on YouTube or a produced instrumental from some beatmaker. I listen to it many times and from there I begin to create a mood in my head. I start to hum it, to find the proper flows for that beat. After that, I think about the structure of the lyrics. I think of a verse and a chorus, and I see where they fit better. When I'm over with the lyrics I go to the studio for the recording. Some other times I meet directly with the producer in the studio. We create the beat and the mood together, and I write the lyrics. Lately, this scenario has become predominant. (Giovanni, 25)

But these are not the only two ways in which the creation of music takes place for DSG:

The last project I published is a mixtape called *Boeing B-17*, realised with Sunny, another rapper. Differently from how I work when I get inspired by a random type beat, this time we made an accurate selection of songs by American rappers that we like and we decided to make the Italian remix of those songs. We re-wrote the verses and the choruses and we created the entire project. (Giovanni, 25)

For Bartolomeo Giuliano, 35 years old from Marcianise (CE) who mainly described himself as a producer, production happens in a quite different way:

As a beatmaker, the starting point is a song written by someone else. As a producer, I interact with the artist. The artist has an idea and he wants to propose it to the world. I always make a parallelism between who harvests a fruit and who serves as an intermediary to get the fruit on the shop counter in the form of a packed fruit juice. What I do is understand what packaging better fits the product – the idea of the artist – and on which shelf we are going to propose it. In practice, a client proposes a budget, we plan where we ideally want to arrive and I am in charge of fractioning that budget also taking into account aspects such as the advertising. So I basically manage the technicalities that sometimes artists do not even know about (Bartolomeo, 35)

Gianluca Gallo, 28 years old from Padova artistically known as Jay Stills, is a producer as well. Since the terms "*producer*" and "*beatmaker*" are often confused, he stresses an important difference between them:

The term *producer* has evolved over the years and is not completely defined yet. In fact, if you use this term you must spend some words to specify what kind of producer you mean. If you think of Brian Eno, he could be defined as a producer but he didn't make samples, he worked with bands and gave artistic directions to the artists. It is what I do, too, and it's the aspect that I like the most. As regards sitting and looking for sounds as beatmakers do, I prefer leaving this part of the work to a friend of mine that works with me. He creates the structure and I "embellish" it. But it depends on the occasion. Overall, I do both things because eventually one must be able to do a little bit of everything. (Gianluca, 28)

As a matter of fact, today the term "*producer*" is often used to indicate a beatmaker, namely a musician that works on creating instrumentals. But such a term is not limited to this role:

At the emergent level, many artists think the producer is simply the person that makes beats. But this is wrong. If from the very beginning the artist does not know which direction to follow, she will probably end up off-road. When you do a song by yourself, it is difficult for you to look at what you are doing objectively. Having an external eye is different. This is also true for the recording. The most recent example I

can tell you about is that of a guy from Padova that came to my studio to record a demo. During the recording, we discussed what to do. (Gianluca,28)

Patrik Roncolato, 26 years old from Montegrotto Terme (PD), is both a singer and a producer. When he works as a singer, the steps of production are the following:

The beginning is always the hardest thing. When you start in the right way, everything else is set. The important thing is to bring your rational part together with the intuitive one. The intuitive part can be a theme that you hum, a drum base, a bass guitar, etc. Usually, I start from a round of chords, which can originate intuitively or based on a reference. I'm a huge fan of references. Nothing is ever created completely from scratch, whether one likes it or not. When I produce for myself, since I am not primarily a singer I work on the instrumental in the first place, and only in a second moment I write the lyrics and sing. Instead, when I collaborate with others it depends on how the other person prefers to work. (Patrik, 26)

Atef Farahat, a 26-year-old producer from Albignasego (PD) known as JWar described two different aspects of its way of working:

There are two fundamental points: there is the working side – that I'm adopting less and less – when a client asks me to produce an instrumental. In that case, I ask what he would like to do, if he or she has a reference or an idea, I make the artist listen to some beats, and that is the less human and more mechanical aspect. Then, there is the connection side, that of the human relationship that takes shape within the studio. In that instance, you already know where to direct the work and you are more relaxed, because maybe in the case of a mere working relationship you may feel obliged. When you do something for fun it's different. (Atef, 26)

JWar has collaborated with different artists, among which there is V3INOFF, one of the interviewees. For the last album of the latter, he produced the song *Complicato*:

I had told V3INOFF about my house music background and he replied he wanted a track that sounded different from the ones he had already worked on for his project. Therefore, I decided to create something with an indie sound but with a house drum base at the same time. I put together some chords and I arranged something. I made him listen to that and he loved it. He came to my studio with some written lyrics. We recorded a demo. I took a piece of his voice and turned it into a sample. That sample became part of the drop. I made three different drops. In a first moment, I thought I

had to choose one, but then I decided to use all three of them. Let's say I am good in the post-production phase. Once I have the voices I can add a thousand elements. That is why I generally wait to have all the recordings before working on the beat. (Atef, 26)

Davide Grazioli – 24 years old from Rome – is a pianist and his role in music production is primarily that of accompanying other artists or instrument ensembles with his piano:

I have worked with other musicians for their music that have been published. So, in those tracks there is my contribution but the song is officially by those artists. In addition, I write scores and compositions for other instruments. (Davide, 23)

Having presented the eight interviewees and their main roles, it is time to explore their work of production more in detail. In particular, a question posed during the interview was about the influence that the disposal of an almost infinite repertoire on music platforms may have on how they produce their music.

Davide gave an insight into the importance of the quality of sound nowadays:

On Spotify, the mix and master must be of very high quality. Listeners must say: "Wow, this rocks!". People notice when the mix is bad. If you mix and master your song according to how the market requires it for your genre, that song has much more potential. It is useful to analyse the songs that make many streams, understanding how the instruments and the voices are mixed. How do you do that? By copying them. Because the mix and the master create a more attentive ear. It's what captures the attention. Everybody likes a pleasant sound. It enlarges the beauty of the moment. (Davide, 24)

JWar sounded enthusiastic when asked if the quality of sound of the songs in the top charts had an impact on the technical level of his music:

You can hear that many Italian artists – even the big ones – have a very American sound. Listening to that sound gives you incredible inspiration. I assure you that there is always someone that already had your idea. It is up to you to make it better or in a different key. (Atef, 26)

As regards the quality of sound, he answered:

Let's move from this assumption: quality counts, but until a certain point. If you listen to songs in the playlist *Raptopia*, many of those songs are Drill. And I can tell you that the quality is really low. Where the voices and the instruments are positioned between left and right, and other elements. But they make good numbers anyway because, at the end of the day, they are nice songs or the rapper is talked about in that moment. One thing that really opened my eyes was the song *Bottiglie Privé* by Sfera Ebbasta. I heard the sound quality of the voice and the piano. By far, I believe is the song that sounds better in Italy.(Atef, 26)

As Trizio, also JWar uses references during production:

When I'm mixing a song I use many references. First, I listen to how the song is taking shape. Then I take a break, I open Spotify and I hear how a certain song sounds. Because when you listen to your song again and again, your ear gets used to it, and listening to a good reference is important to understand what you are doing wrong. This is something I do every time, and Spotify and other platforms where I listen to music always helped me a lot. (Atef, 26)

Indeed, Spotify is not the only platform used by the people interviewed. Jwar described the differences between a number of platforms – both producer-oriented and consumer-oriented – in terms of sound quality:

A platform with higher quality compared to Spotify is Tidal. SoundCloud, too. Even though the qualitative level of the tracks uploaded there is lower than on Spotify. This is because users uploading on SoundCloud do not care too much for the mix and master. Nevertheless, SoundCloud's compressors are way better than Spotify's in my view. (Atef, 26)

The topic of compression is a relevant one given that when a user uploads a song on a platform, the latter applies a certain amount of compression to the audio file. Every platform has its own standards. Trizio explains the concept of compression:

It is a term that indicates the compression of audio dynamics. Basically, the lower sounds sound a little higher, whereas the higher sounds sound slightly lower. Personally, I could not talk of an improvement or deterioration of sound quality. In my opinion, it is an improvement because sounds become more transparent, specifically referring to Spotify. The fact is that sounds are more compressed, very compressed.

But apparently, this is the current trend. On WAV files, and consequently on CDs and vinyls, the dynamic range between high and low sounds is better. (Patrik, 26)

As a listener, Jay Stills has tried both Spotify and Tidal. He made a comparison between the two services:

Tidal is so much better. Obviously, you must have an audio system that allows you to feel the quality. And the compression is better, too. Spotify compresses everything and makes everything sound warmer. But if the track does not need to sound warm, it must not. Instead, in order to use fewer connection data, Spotify compresses files. On the upside, Tidal caters especially to an audience of audiophiles. And the subscription is more expensive than on Spotify. You know when you make a song, master it, listen to the file and it sounds in a certain way? And then on Spotify, it sounds slightly different? On Tidal, the master is the official one. Songs sound exactly as they left the studio. (Gianluca, 28)

V3INOFF was bitter in his judgement of Spotify's compression:

If I listen to my album on Spotify, I get annoyed because it wasn't mixed that way. The platform applies its compression that makes your music sound for Spotify, but I would really love to listen to my songs as they were mixed. Top producers calculate the compression so that they make a "wrong" mix to make it sound right on Spotify. (Francesco, 21)

Another aspect of music production is the length of the tracks. Bartolomeo, who has been in the music business for fifteen years, explained the trend toward a reduction in the length of a song:

When we were 14 years old we made six-minute long songs because otherwise, they were short (laughs). Later, they taught us the radio edit, where a song of three minutes and a half was already too long. Now the standard is around two minutes forty. On Instagram is one minute. On TikTok, I find more and more sped up songs. The youngsters are pumping this new genre called Hyperpop whose one of the characteristics is the pitched voices, in the Alvin Superstar fashion. (Bartolomeo, 35)

On social media like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat music is ever-present. But the formats on those platforms are accelerating even more the abbreviation of songs according to Bartolomeo:

Brian Eno made *Music for Airports* in the 1970s. He said that making quality background music was possible. The problem is that music is more and more in the

background, as the world is increasingly speeding up. Therefore, the length of a song today is fifteen seconds. What can you musically give in such a short time? An idea, maybe. (Bartolomeo, 35)

If the reduction of the length of a music piece seems to be the dominant trend at present, it is curious to see the answers of the other interviewees when asked if they take into account the need of the market for songs under three minutes. Trizio answered:

Yes, I have to. Because I am a listener myself and I stream music online. So I listen to what I want. If I like what I'm listening to, good. If I don't, bad. I think that the general attention span is quite lowering under three minutes. Personally, I feel like I'm saying too little under three minutes, but sometimes I do that as well. For example, one of the shortest songs I wrote – called *Angiolieri* – is two minutes and twelve seconds long, because I wanted it to be like this. So yes, I take into consideration the length side, not so much in terms of marketing but rather in the terms of "Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you". If I find a song that is five minutes and a half long, I think about it. Of course, it depends on the artist. I listen to 1970s progressive music and those songs last twenty minutes. It depends on the genre, too. There is a metal song that is eighteen minutes long and I still listen to it from time to time. (Patrik, 26)

Jay Stills appears more resolved on this topic, even though he expresses his disillusion with the current trend of reducing the timing of tracks:

I absolutely take into account the timing when I produce a song. I use social media as a reference. It's sad to admit it, but by now people quit listening to a song earlier and earlier. They do not even open Spotify sometimes, but they just go listening to the four songs that are viral at that moment on TikTok or Instagram Reels. And at that point, you start getting attached to those people that convey something to you. Therefore, I believe tracks must be quite concise but you should still be telling what you want to say. For me, the maximum length shall not exceed three minutes or three minutes and a half. If you repeat yourself you must say something extremely interesting. You must be enjoyable. Otherwise, you know that people will skip your song. (Gianluca, 28)

JWar's point of view on how long a song should be has changed over time, since before producing mainly Trap and Indie tracks he was into EDM:

An EDM track can last four minutes or more, and songs pertaining to that genre were published on Beatport, a platform made especially for EDM. So I used to publish according to that time standard. What made me change my mind was *Sportswear* by the Dark Polo Gang. It is one minute fifty-nine long and the artists singing are two. It was a brilliant idea at the marketing level because the song is short and people play it again immediately. From there, my view totally changed. If I make a song over two minutes thirty I'm not happy. I assure you that I have not reached three minutes in a very long time. (Atef, 26)

DSG has always been outspoken in his writing style, thus he affirmed it was not necessary to make major adjustments as regards the length of his songs:

On the one hand, today the attention threshold of listeners is much lower than it was years ago. Consequently, I try to propose my music in a leaner way. On the other hand, I do not worry too much about the length of my songs because I've always been used to freewrite. Overall, my style has always tended towards writing in a straightforward way. (Giovanni, 25)

On his part, V3INOFF offered his personal view on the matter based on his last project:

I do not take into account the timing of a song while I do music. Of course, it is normal if once you're done you look at the length, if it's boring or not. However, I consider dullness rather than length. There are two-minute songs that are way more boring than others lasting four minutes. In my last album, *Permaloso*, you can find both cases. There is a song called *Sembra Assurdo Che* that reaches four minutes. It's a little dull but it was made on purpose. It requires more engagement. (Francesco, 21)

As concerns production, the last question posed to the interviewees regarded which format they believe is the more suitable for release nowadays. More specifically, they were asked if according to them it is more useful to release singles instead of more substantial projects – such as albums or EPs – in the current platform environment. Many different ideas emerged on this point.

For instance, Jay Stills is convinced that releasing albums is not useful for everybody, and offers an interesting insight into the nature of Spotify as a platform:

In my opinion, only famous artists can afford to release an album, because they have a big number of fans that are willing to spend forty-five minutes or an hour of their time listening to what you have done. Therefore, I think that an emergent artist that works on an album is making a mistake. Also because today's Spotify is not the five-year-ago Spotify. Today it's a social platform, and what does this imply? That you have to post. The more frequently, the better. (Gianluca, 28)

Only in a second time, he affirmed, an emergent artist can think of releasing a project, better if a collection of singles as an EP can be:

That's why I'm totally for singles. You must learn from who does it as a job. I'm not speaking of big artists, but also of emergent musicians that are followed and post singles. In the meantime, they play at gigs, they create a core group of fans and at that point, they issue an EP because they know someone will listen to it. (Gianluca, 28)

DSG, on his part, does not want his art to be influenced by a choice between singles or albums:

I do not feel pressured to release singles. It's an inner struggle, that of feeling pressured. Clearly, there is a market and an audience that is waiting for your music, so it's obvious that there is pressure every time. But you must make peace with your mind and create a mental structure according to which every release that you will publish will be right and in line with what you want to convey. Because let's remind that music is something so natural, so genuine that it must not be overshadowed by this psychological pressing that can originate from platforms and the people around you. (Giovanni, 25)

He supported his statement by bringing up the example of his last projects, the mixtape *Boeing B-17* already mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, and his EP *Universal Sound.* By doing so, he also provided an overview of SoundCloud and the difference of this service with Spotify:

I consider *Boeing B-17* a big project, an important one. We published it on SoundCloud. There is a tendency to minimise this platform. But according to me,

SoundCloud has a lot to give. And making a project like a mixtape with American instrumentals that were already published has a lot of potential on SoundCloud. Differently, *Universal Sound* was published on Spotify because all tracks were produced from scratch by our producer. SoundCloud gives you more freedom as regards the kind of music and the beats you can use. It's freer than Spotify, which instead sets some boundaries as concerns the cover art, the instrumental, and other aspects of the release. (Giovanni, 25)

V3INOFF is convinced that the choice of releasing either a single or an album depends on the kind of music an artist makes:

For instance, one of the members of CSM020 makes Trap music. To him, I suggest releasing singles. Because the average Trap and Rap listener wants singles. Those listeners think they want an album, but they don't. Once it's released, they get disappointed, because there are not only hits in an album. There are also dull songs. That's why it depends. To an artist that makes Indie Pop as I do, I suggest releasing an album, too. Because we have a different kind of listeners. Indie listeners go look for the emergent artist. When an album is released, they appreciate the nuances, they don't exclusively look for the hit song. (Francesco, 21)

Based on his experience as a producer, Bartolomeo described the current music industry and why, for him, it is more convenient to release singles nowadays:

To the artists I manage, I exclusively recommend releasing singles. At present, the album is counterproductive since trends change rapidly. As a consequence, you don't have time to stay in the studio for two years working on an album. Eventually, the trend changes and you have lost two years. At the marketing level, the single is simpler, because the mere fact of releasing something is news, there is a notification that talks about me. People have a short memory so I cannot afford to remain silent for months. After six months, I don't exist anymore. (Bartolomeo, 35)

According to Bartolomeo, once you are on the carousel the pace is tight and the artist's motivation is the only fuel possible. And that is the reason why a number of the musicians he managed quit at some point. What is more, for Bartolomeo making singles is valuable also for other reasons, for instance, to understand what the audience wants from the artist:

Making singles allows you to make a check-up of your fanbase. Let's pretend you make a sad song and a fast song. Who knows which one is best? I could tell you that fast songs perform better, but perhaps you are the sad songwriter that people were waiting for. We do not have the answer. So you publish both the sad and the fast song and see which one makes more views. (Bartolomeo, 35)

3.2 Distribution and promotion

The interviewees were asked a series of questions regarding the two steps that follow the work in the studio, those that enable the song to be listened to by as many people as possible: distribution and promotion.

Distribution refers to all those actions accomplished by the musician – or the management – to get the music to his audience and other potential listeners. Promotion is the next step, which begins when the song or the EP/album is ready and its release strategy has been set.

Whereas, before the internet, distribution and promotion were mostly an activity that happened in real life with emergent musicians bringing or sending their tapes and CDs to distributors, in the platform society these phases largely take place online. That is why the first question asked the interviewed people was which platforms and social media they use the most to distribute and promote their music.

JWar does not directly release his music on streaming platforms. Rather, the artists he works with release the songs containing his instrumentals:

I see they use Instagram a lot, but also TikTok. TikTok's algorithm is fantastic because overnight you can get 300,000 streams. So why not upload a video featuring your song or a guitar cover of that track on TikTok? Overall, Instagram and TikTok are top players for sponsorship. (Atef, 26)

Alessia Toffoli uses both Instagram and TikTok but does not disdain Facebook either:

I find that there is a difference between publishing on Facebook and publishing on Instagram. On Instagram, people are typically younger, but if I place a link in the Instagram Stories, people there are less likely to press on that content compared to

Facebook. On Facebook, there is a higher level of interaction. For the videoclips I made, most of the views came from links I published on Facebook. Perhaps it's an age matter, but Facebook's users are more eager to click on links. On Instagram, users are younger and there is less interaction. Nevertheless, I primarily use Instagram because my age group of reference uses Instagram. (Alessia, 22)

In line with this vision, Alessia stressed the fact that there is a difference in how to present the content on each platform:

Despite I sponsor the same content, both because of the different platform and the audience, I have to publish it in two different ways. On Facebook, links work fine. On Instagram, I have to make many stories and Reels. (Alessia, 22)

She gave the example of her last song *Primule*:

On Instagram, I made a promotion also before the release date and before the videoclip, especially through Stories where I showed the "Behind the Scenes", in the attempt of getting the audience curious about the creative process and the various misadventures we had during the shooting. On Facebook, the song and the videoclip were promoted after the release, signalling the link to the video and to Spotify. And overall, I noticed that on Facebook people tend to click less on Spotify's link, whereas they click more on the link to YouTube. (Alessia, 22)

Jay Stills, who spent some years in London, is not only a producer but he also runs a promotion agency. Consequently, he was able to offer the promoter's point of view and depicted a specific kind of platform that exists today to help independent artists get distributed and promoted:

We work exclusively with a platform called Musosoup. It is a platform that has not landed in Italy yet. In London, when you want to promote your music it is helpful to get published in blogs, get into playlists, etc. Musosoup is a platform that is growing. When we started last autumn, the beta version had just come out. It's a new platform where playlist curators have an account. An artist pays a subscription fee and then pays a certain amount every time he or she uploads a track. Differently from other services where it's the artist that must reach curators, on Musosoup the curators are the ones looking for the musician. The platform lets us see all songs organised according to genre, but also to format such as EP, album, or video. Then, we listen to those songs and we save the ones we like. We are curators, we own a series of playlists on Spotify and a blog. (Gianluca, 28)

Jay Stills explained more in detail what are the services offered to artists by the platform:

We find the artists and we ask for their PressKit, which is a file including the artist's bio, a description of the song, photos, videos, and a link to the track. Once the song is released, we publish an article. We do interviews, too. All the services we offer have different prices. Interviews and getting featured in Instagram posts are paid services. On Musosoup, an artist that uploads a song points out the entity of the budget so he or she will spend just the right amount. (Gianluca, 28)

Davide underlined the fact that, as there are plenty of different platforms, it is important to be present on as many services as possible:

There are a lot of platforms. So you should publish your songs in all of them. You must be, for instance, on Spotify, Apple Music, TikTok, Audius. Audius is a platform where your music becomes NFT. You get an amount of "cryptoaudius" based on the streams. How does the NFT work? You publish your song and promote it. At that point, people can buy it and re-sell it. Every time they re-sell it, you – the artist and author of that song – receive the so-called royalties. (Davide, 24)

3.2.1 Distribution

There is a fundamental type of service that is essential – especially for independent artists – to upload songs on music streaming platforms nowadays. In fact, when an artist wants to release a song on services such as Spotify, she must turn to distribution services acting as intermediaries between the musician and the various music streaming platforms. Artists pay an annual fee or spend a certain amount per song or album. There are several services of this kind on the internet. The most cited by the interviewees was Distrokid.

Despite DSG had not directly uploaded his songs through Distrokid up to the time of the interview, he described as follows the distribution platform:

I observed friends and colleagues uploading theirs and my songs and projects. You have to make sure that Spotify confirms that everything is alright with the song and therefore can be uploaded. Distrokid makes a first quality control of the track before sending it to the music streaming platforms. (Giovanni, 25)

Thus, Distrokid and other similar platforms ask the artist to tick the music streaming services where he would like the song to be uploaded, the genre of the track, the release date, whether or not the lyrics contain explicit language, which people were involved in the production and which was their role, and more.

Alessia told about her experience with finding the right distributor:

My choice was between Distrokid and Soundrop. I chose the second one. On Distrokid, you pay an amount and then you can publish as much as you want. Since I do not publish many songs, I preferred the option that lets you pay 89 cents per song. The difference is that, on Distrokid, whatever earning you get from that song is given to you immediately. On Soundrop, unless you don't reach the threshold of 20 euros you don't get any revenue. (Alessia, 22)

JWar made use of Distrokid for a certain time, but at the moment of the interview he had passed to a different kind of distributor:

I distributed most of my music through Distrokid. I also tried The Orchard, which is a label/distributor I used while I was part of a music project. It's always better to contact this kind of service because they can suggest your music to curators' playlists on Spotify. At the present time, I'm publishing with Artist First. Actually, I'm going to upload a song that I recently made with an artist from Padova through Distrokid, because services such as Artist First do not always accept your tracks. Label/distributors do not look only at the music side. They also look at other aspects such as the age of the artist, the image, etc. Artist First invests, you do not pay for it as you would for Distrokid. It gets part of the royalties, the 10-15% depending on the song. (Atef, 26)

Labels/distributors, as the double term used by JWar suggests, play two roles based on the case:

In the case of an artist I collaborate with, they work as a distributor. With a band I produce for, they also work as a label. And in that instance, they sponsor you, they invest their money in your music. (Atef, 26)

Trizio presented an even different scenario:

With the band, we distribute autonomously. Now we even have a manager that is giving us tools and orders and we are fine with it. Because personally, I'm not that good at organising the release of a song. I discovered Distrokid and I appreciate it.

Both as a solo musician and with Ultima, my band. Indeed, I subscribed to the "Label" option, since it allows you to upload songs for unlimited artists, all for 80 dollars per year. It's not that much, so I'm happy with it. (Patrik, 26)

For his last album *Permaloso*, V3INOFF ended up relying on Distrokid, but managed to release also through other services:

As regards distribution, we sent the album to several labels all around Italy, but we didn't get an answer. So, eventually, we decided to release it independently through Distrokid. In reality, we contacted an old friend that works as an editor and we made him listen to the songs. He has a contract with a distribution service and a label. So we were published under these two services, but we didn't notice a great difference. Just something more than simply releasing through Distrokid. (Francesco, 21)

Having tried both Distrokid and the label, V3INOFF made both a comparison in terms of quality of the services and a criticism of how Distrokid works:

How uneasy is it to upload music on Distrokid?! Every time something goes wrong. If you need something to be modified you have to write seventy emails in English. There are four of us uploading on Distrokid in CSM020, do you know how many times we had to change something? Distributing music through these other services is simpler. You create a Google Drive with all they need. You give them the press release, the lyrics, the masters. Per se, not much has changed. But we worked differently. We felt like we were not alone. If we had a problem, we wrote to someone in the service and within a day they solved everything. It takes a week for Distrokid to reach out to Spotify and answer you. (Francesco, 21)

On its part, Spotify offers a powerful instrument that allows artists to monitor data about their music and their fans.
The website is called *Spotify for Artists* and presents different sections: *Home*, *Music, Audience, Profile,* and *Charts.*
Both in the computer and the mobile version, the Home Page of the website shows an overview of the logged artist's performance during the last seven days: how many people have listened to the artist's songs, how many streams he or she got, and finally how many followers they have gained or lost. In another section, the Home Page offers a series of articles with tips from experts and famous musicians. Examples of such

articles are: *Artists share their best advice on music & more*; *Song Start: An educational series for artists*; *Insights to supercharge your strategy*; *How to get playlisted*. The topic of playlists is particularly relevant. In fact, Spotify gives musicians the possibility to get featured on curators' playlists, which are generally the most active and followed on the platform. As a consequence, such playlists are shown more frequently among the first results once Spotify's Home page is opened. Entering this kind of playlists is of great importance for artists because it would mean potentially getting thousands of streams and therefore being discovered by a wide audience. Of course, because the number of famous curators' playlists is not that high compared to the number of artists on Spotify, a selection is due in order to organise the entrance – and exiting – of songs within these highly desired playlists. For this purpose, Spotify provides musicians with a form that can get even unknown independent artists within the curators' playlists. If they are lucky, because again the number of people compiling the form is huge. Alessia recounted her experience with the so-called "Playlist pitching" on the occasion of the release of *Primule*:

I submitted *Primule to* Soundrop three weeks before the release date, mainly because I considered the possibility of entering playlists, even if it is hard to be selected. The song was included in a playlist with fifty listeners called *Best Music Italy.* It was not a Spotify's official playlist but neither was one by a random user. It was a curator's playlist, an official one. (Alessia,22)

She went on to outline how the form is structured and what the artist is supposed to mention:

The first rule is always that of being short and concise. Who must read all the submissions loses interest if I the text is too long. So the content must be short but impactful. Therefore, I included information on the music genre, namely pop/blues specifying it was in Italian. Then, a short description of the message behind the song, which is the alternation between spring and winter as a metaphor for the cyclicity of dark moments and positivity in life. The playlist's curator liked it. (Alessia, 22)

The present scenario depicted by the interviewees so far clearly differs from the one that was depicted by Bartolomeo from before the music streaming platforms became major players in the music industry:

Let's say now everything is digital. When I started I still made CDs. I remember going to music stores in my area by car and leaving my CDs on consignment, a formula according to which I gave my product to shops. If I came back, either they gave me my CDs back or a payment. Many of those shops do not exist anymore, unfortunately. Today, distributing a song means placing it on Spotify, Instagram, etc. (Bartolomeo, 35)

3.2.2 Promotion

The other topic of this paragraph is promotion. Even in this case, playlists play a crucial role. Based on his background, JWar distinguishes between different kinds of playlists:

Many playlists literally make you buy streams and use bots. In that case, it's like you did zero. But there are also good playlists that increase your listeners and I experienced that firsthand. I published some songs under payment with this agency managing different playlists and people reached out to congratulate me. I saw from the Spotify insights that everything had increased. (Atef, 26)

JWar gave his judgement on how a part of musicians does not like the idea of paying for promoting their music:

Many musicians think: "If I pay for my music, it means I'm buying views". But this is completely wrong because unfortunately, we are no longer in the 1990s when you brought around your CD. You need to sell your music on Instagram, and Instagram allows you to promote it based on your budget. Sponsoring is the right move to make. Even big artists like Sfera Ebbasta do it. In that case, it's the major that pays for him. But I've been thinking: "If they do it, why shouldn't I?" (Atef, 26)

As a producer, Jay Stills did not manage the promotion of the artists he worked with, but the years he spent in London taught him a series of steps an artist should consider carrying out a successful promotion:

Making music is a job, and you must think of how to propose it. Otherwise, your songs don't circulate. The founder of the British and Irish Modern Music Institute (BIMM) is engaged in a work of artists' promotion. He pushes musicians in the

direction of having a good promotion plan. Things like having a calendar, and being on TikTok because you might become viral and earn money. TikTok created a fund for creators. Not for everybody but for those who make many views. If someone uses your track on TikTok you earn revenues. Then how can you not upload your track on TikTok? (Gianluca, 28)

He then stressed the point that every platform has its format and its audience, thus artists must be capable of satisfying the needs of those who are listening, watching, or both. Still remaining faithful to their personality:

The promotion must be carried out in a certain way. Artwork, photos and videos of the backstage. Besides, you can make a version of the song with just voice and piano or guitar. You publish a snippet. On your Spotify, you could create a playlist with songs that have the same mood as yours. Later on, you can publish that playlist on Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, etc. That way you strengthen the hard core of your fanbase because people landing on your Spotify page may decide to follow you and activate notifications. It is important to be present everywhere because every platform has a different application. When I want to have some fun for five minutes now I open TikTok. You must understand what works on every platform. (Gianluca, 28)

As a solo artist, Trizio takes care of promotion by himself. Differently, he and the other members of his band Ultima are helped by an expert:

I tried many different ways. I sponsored my music on Facebook and Instagram but it didn't go too well, maybe because the targeting was not properly set. Once, I relied on a press office. I ended up in a bunch of small playlists. It costed me 200 euros. It even pitches your music to webzines and magazines. It went so-so, I was not that happy. This happened for the latest single I have released called *Ieri, Estate*. With the Ultima, we have a person that helps us from this point of view and it's easier. He gives us directives on when to publish. It's extremely important. And he gives us some contacts. For example, we did not release our last single *Convivio* on our YouTube channel, but on a channel specialised in releasing emergent artists' music instead. (Patrik, 26)

Also V3INOFF promoted his album *Permaloso* on different platforms:

On social media, we prepared posts and everything else by ourselves. We tried to create a colourful and organised feed. We published on Instagram and also on Facebook, but simply because we have Facebook Stories linked to the ones on

Instagram. We made some videos on TikTok, too. There is a friend of ours that helps us with that. Apart from that, we always try to meet people in real life, like meeting in a bar and drinking something together. (Francesco, 21)

Programming the timing of the release of all posts, the single, the video, and finally the album was part of his promotion strategy:

We started to promote the album a month before. We wanted to work differently this time. Usually, it works like this: you release the single, you announce the album, then you publish the tracklist, and finally you release the album. We proceeded like this: we announced the album, we published the tracklist, we announced and released the single, and eventually we released the album. We decided to give priority to the album, not to the single. We didn't want the single to take over the album. (Francesco, 21)

DSG, who releases his projects both on Spotify and SoundCloud, follows this procedure:

I announce the release principally on Instagram, be it a single or a project, publishing the artwork and I start showing content related to the upcoming issue in my Stories. I spend some money on sponsoring, too. For instance, I can sponsor a post, but usually I sponsor Instagram Stories. I stuck to this approach for the EP *Universal Sound* released on Spotify. The same applies in case I publish on SoundCloud more or less. I start with Instagram to announce the project and I publish content such as posts, Stories, Reels, and sponsored content. (Giovanni, 25)

Alessia Toffoli has not promoted *Primule* exclusively online. She also took actions in real life in the form of live shows and the inclusion of her song in a short movie:

As regards social media, I promoted the song on my account and with the help of my friends. I also made an interview with a webzine on Instagram specialised in emergent artists, the only promotion I paid for. Then there is all that part of promotion from when I sang *Primule* live. I even included it in the end credits of a short film I'm working on for the Venice Film Festival. (Alessia, 22)

A question posed to the interviewees was, indeed, whether they think more traditional forms of promoting music – such as performing live, curating a merchandising, and providing physical releases – are still effective for an independent artist in the second decade of the 2000s.

Alessia does not believe physical copies of her music would be beneficial at the present time:

For a matter of money and being at the beginning of my career, I don't find it strictly necessary to make physical releases of my songs. Firstly because I have not completed an album yet and it would be inconvenient to issue CDs only for a couple of tracks. I think I can do such things once I will have more visibility because these are surrounding details, not the main elements of promotion. Then, of course, on any possible occasion - such as at gigs, in theatres, at school concerts, etc. – I bring my songs and I sing them so that they can be known by an audience also in the real world. Singing live has a different impact, it creates a different level of interest in who is listening. (Alessia, 22)

Jay Stills in some way adds to Alessia's opinion by stating that the best way to promote music beyond the internet is performing live:

In particular, performing in small groups. What I mean is that of course, a song would sound much better with a full band. But what works very well in London and that would work fine here, too, is that a singer should have an instrumental with all the elements and then if, for example, he can get a keyboardist, he removes the keyboards and reproduces them live. I saw rappers performing way better because there is someone else on the stage and there is chemistry. Something happens on the stage and people feel it. (Gianluca, 28)

In addition to the digital release of his songs, Trizio has decided to provide his audience with merchandising as well, both with his solo project and with the band:

As Trizio, I got inspiration from a local artist, a guitarist that used to sell USB flash drives containing his music that you could re-use. I made my own flash drives with Trizio written on top of them. I expected they would sell better, but some people bought them. Very practical. I put both the unedited gems and the ones I already released. With Ultima, we made CDs but they did not sell particularly well because also in that case you must do a great work of promotion. We even made T-shirts. Those are selling quite fine. The aesthetic is very important. (Patrik, 26)

V3INOFF believes in the importance of the physical side of music and worked on different ideas for the merchandising related to his last album:

We bought a stock of white T-shirts. We made a digital version of the print, which is a screen printing with only words, no images. We sent them to press and we sell them at gigs. We will also make physical releases of the album but more for us to have them. We will give them as a gift to those who helped with the creation of *Permaloso*. And finally, we are working on a magazine dedicated to the album. The name will be *Permaloso Magazine*. It will contain few words and many photos. We will even include QR codes linking to digital content such as videos of the backstage. There will be a short description of how every song was born, together with the first demos. (Francesco, 21)

DSG too has promoted his songs by singing at live concerts:

I took part in gigs where I sang my unedited songs. It happened at the Mase Sound Festival in 2019 – the event organised with my friends from the crew MASE which I am part of – where I brought my song *Level Up*, released only months later. In a live performance I recently participated in with a friend of mine, we presented a song we made together titled *Niente di Male*. This year, in the second edition of the Mase Sound Festival I presented my upcoming single *Apollo*. And then, I sing tracks from older projects to re-give them visibility. (Giovanni, 25)

What is more, he has provided his fanbase with merchandising that does not directly relate to his music, but is rather part of a wider imagery linked to the neighbourhood where he lives:

I had T-shirts, sweaters, caps, and other gadgets made for the crew MASE. But I consider this merch as more tied to the neighbourhood and to the will of bringing around the name MASE – which is slang for Maserà, the town I live in – than music. Obviously, this empowers music as well. (Giovanni, 25)

Thus, despite today the majority of actions undertaken by musicians for promotion take place online, the general opinion that arises from the interviews is that performing music in real life and working on merchandising is still important to reinforce one's career and the relation with the fanbase, a topic that will be dealt with in the next chapter.

To conclude this paragraph, it is interesting to see how Bartolomeo described why people investing in an artist's merchandising can have a

powerful and positive impact on the musician, not only in economic terms:

I still buy CDs. It's a way to support the artist. If I am giving you 10 or 20 euros is because I know that this is your way to understand if you want to continue pursuing this road or not. That is what supporting means: financially helping a person to continue working on what they love. If I want to express my appreciation to my friend that is a pizza chef I buy his pizzas. He doesn't need a like or a shared post. (Bartolomeo, 35)

CHAPTER 4: GIG ECONOMY AND OPINIONS ON MUSIC PLATFORMS

The fourth and last chapter will explore the relationships that the interviewees maintain with their fanbase and with other people inside the music environment, such as other musicians, distributors, promoters, and so on. It will do so primarily by outlining the concept of "*gig economy*". The last paragraph will gather additional considerations by the eight interviewees on the subjects covered in this dissertation and their opinions on matters related to music streaming platforms and their music careers.

4.1 Relations with the fanbase

As for many jobs, music work requires building a network to be successfully carried out. Such a network does not only comprehend colleagues or other people working in the field. In order to succeed and be able to make a living through music, it is essential for musicians to have an audience – most precisely a fanbase – who is willing to invest emotionally and economically in their music.

Moving from the book *Playing to the Crowd* by Nancy K. Baym already cited in the second chapter, it is interesting to see how the positioning of audiences has changed with the arrival of the internet.

Baym explains that while for a long time the music industry has considered people belonging to audiences as atomised, the internet has allowed those people to come together and build group infrastructures able to influence contemporary media and shift the balance of power between listeners and professionals. One of the roles of audiences in the internet era is to distribute and exhibit their favourite musicians' works, so it is easy to understand their impact on artists' careers. However, their activity is not limited to that, since fanbases now can create and circulate their own creations, be it remixes, stories, videos, covers, or designs that sometimes can become more popular than the official

works they took inspiration from. In other words, they are the ones that make things happen[1].

The interviewees shared their experiences and views on the topic of fanbases. Davide affirmed that today it is possible to gain a fanbase from zero thanks to social media and music platforms. But there must be commitment and logic in the artist's work:

You must be good at creating content and be consistent. You must publish every Thursday or every Friday. Days must not be random but based on who is listening. You must know your niche. (Davide, 24)

According to Davide, it is a matter of marketing, of how the artist presents herself. And the artist must be able to exploit the potential of every platform. He made the example of TikTok, which works in a peculiar way:

I know people that gained 10,000 followers on TikTok starting from zero. How? Sometimes they publish a video where they sing and play an instrument, but they also show part of their daily life. I know a girl that makes videos with cuts and a voiceover: "Good morning, this is how my day went. I ate a croissant, then I met with this guy and we went recording because tonight we have a gig" and writes "Part 1". "Then at lunch, we ate at this place. Later, we took a taxi that brought us to the venue". And the day after she publishes the second part with an extract from the live. By doing so, she has increased the number of followers and the views. Having one's own format, colour, and style is important. (Davide, 24)

Bartolomeo shares a point of view that is similar to Davide's. It is fundamental to know who is listening to our music:

As in the past, you must build your fanbase. You must earn it and look for it. But the modalities to do so are not that obvious. Moreover, I see that artists do not take this aspect into account. They have no idea who might like their track. The first step is always to identify your target. And in that case, there might be some surprises

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[1] Baym N. K., *Playing to the Crowd*, New York University Press, New York, 2018.

because maybe you thought you were referring to X, and instead Y reacts better. (Bartolomeo, 35)

As mentioned before, the internet has offered fans unprecedented possibilities to get into contact with their favourite artists. The contact between musicians and their fans can happen on social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok or on platforms such as YouTube, which allows for commenting directly on music content. Nonetheless, the relationship still happens face-to-face at gigs or other social occasions. Alessia talked about how the relationship with her fanbase takes place:

On Instagram, I have more interaction with people of my age group. Then, I try to create a contact in person if, for instance, they want to learn more about the message behind the song. I look for a conversation to spread the message because eventually, music is union It's a language that speaks soul to soul. (Alessia, 22)

When asked about the reaction of his fanbase to *Permaloso*, V3INOFF took the occasion to reason on where his fans come from:

The album received good feedback. Then, I'm from Padova but it's the city where I have fewer listeners. A lot of feedback came from the rest of Italy. That's why unfortunately I don't find my real fans in front of the stage. There are people from the South, too, but also from Milan. There are some people from Venice that I often find at gigs whom I became friends with. There is a girl that follows us from the very beginning and supports us. There are people pouring their hearts into this. (Francesco, 21)

Also JWar has received feedback from someone that listened to the tracks he produced, and had experience with fan-made material:

Thankfully, I have always received many compliments. Especially when I worked with the music label. Someone had even created a fan page. There were two of them. It's wonderful to see that a person that you don't know directly appreciates so much what you do. It's a beautiful human connection. You feel like you can go wherever with your

fanbase. That is why you often hear the sentence "My fanbase is my family". It gives you incredible emotions. When I attend other musicians' gigs in my area, even without playing on the stage there is often someone that recognises me and listens to my music and it's always a pleasure. (Atef, 26)

Trizio added to this by pointing out a characteristic of fanbases that is common to most of the independent artists, that is the fact that the core of such audiences is often made of close friends, and this can represent a great help for the artist in terms of feedback:

Considering that we are emergent musicians, in the majority of cases fans are your close friends. Then, some live in your area and support you. There are also those who don't know you well but particularly like your music and at that point, you begin to feel more important sort of. The pro of having your fans close to you is that you can listen to everybody's opinion, which sometimes can be useful. Especially from those who have sophisticated music tastes. With all due respect to my girlfriend that likes other sorts of music (laughs). (Patrik, 26)

As JWar, and similarly to Trizio, DSG depicted an image of the fanbase as a family:

What do I mean by family? Well, I personally know many people that are part of my fanbase. And for me, this is important because a person shares one of your songs, writes to you, expresses an opinion on your music and you find that person physically in front of you. So, I have a close relationship with my fanbase. I feel lucky. (Giovanni, 25)

Although DSG expressed his satisfaction with how the relationship with his fanbase takes place both offline and online, he noticed a trend towards less involvement on social media in recent years:

Let's say the lockdown and the Covid pandemic "isolated" us in general. Once, there was more engagement. More people sharing my music on their Instagram Stories. I'm not saying the hype has decreased but nowadays people seem less inclined to interact when it comes to a music release. I'm not blaming anyone, even though there were

times when I asked myself: "Why am I doing this?". Because I did not get the reaction I expected from my fanbase. I kept on releasing music but it didn't emit the noise I wanted. (Giovanni, 25)

Besides the lockdown, DSG attributed part of such inaction to the social media functioning and the continuous flow of content to which every user is exposed to. That is why for his next release he adopted a strategy that seems to go against the general understanding of social media, which considers continuous posting as crucial in order not to "disappear":

I've auto-silenced myself on social media so that, when the song is , I'll let everyone see I'm there. Taking a step backward to take – I hope – two steps forward when the track is out. I don't know, I think is the right move. If you are too present on social media, people may pay no mind to the Story that is important to you because they might see it as one among many. Instead, when I release a track I'd like people to feel that I believe in what I do. Therefore, I will try to take something away in the first moment, in order to hit with more impact afterward. It's a theory, but I hope it works. (Giovanni, 25)

A topic related to fanbase is the use of features such as TikTok videos and Instagram Reels. Two similar formats that, as previously mentioned, have increased the possibility of creators – musicians certainly fit in this category – to get known by wide audiences.
Davide recounted his personal experience on TikTok, where he counts 6,768 followers (Oct. 7, 2022):

I knew I could do live streaming on TikTok and that people could send money during such live. I discovered that I needed to have at least 1,000 followers to do it. When TikTok went viral in the first half of 2021, I thought I wanted to upload a video of me playing something over the keys of the piano. My first video got 3,000 views. I was thrilled. I was gaining 30-35 followers a day. After that, I published other videos where I'm playing, framing my hand and a part of the piano keys. These videos get 2,000-3000 views each. Luckily and ingeniously, I had already found my format. The trick is

to keep on publishing the same format because at some point your niche adjusts. (Davide, 24)

Davide exploited the potential of such medium to gain followers and build his fanbase on TikTok. Similarly to what Bartolomeo and Jay Stills and the same Davide stressed out in the previous chapter about releasing songs, also on this kind of format the artist is more likely to obtain results if she posts frequently:

I understood consistency is the most important aspect. It becomes a job. It means every two or three days you must publish, you must go live every day. And if you reach 10,000 followers what have you gained? All and nothing. But if I open my own website and I put the link in my TikTok bio, someone might click and buy, for instance, my music scores. (Davide, 24)

Alessia is on TikTok as well, but her activity on the platform is different from Davide's:

Initially, I was more tied to social media and I planned my videos based on the format of the platform. Later on, I changed my approach. I post content related to my releases. At the psychological level, it's less stressful. Maybe yes, it's necessary to maintain a certain degree of consistency but it must be sustainable. For instance, if during a month I don't have projects to release, I take the opportunity to talk about myself and my daily life. (Alessia, 22)

JWar affirmed to be so involved in the productive side of the music process that consequently has no time left to take care of TikTok:

I have so many things take care of. Once, I made a TikTok video because I had really nothing to do. But generally, I do not publish frequently due to this reason. (Atef, 26)

To the question of whether formats such as TikTok and Reels have influenced the way of making music, Jay Stills answered affirmatively:

On Reels, you can publish things that you do not propose elsewhere. Once I wrote thirty seconds or one minute of music and I played more instruments. Guitar, bass, keyboards. In the end, I made a little mix and master in order to sound good on the phone. So yes, these formats influenced music. If your music genre is one with a lot of basses, it's pointless to publish your songs on Instagram because people listen through the speakers of their phones. (Gianluca, 28)

Trizio admitted he does not often publish Reels or TikToks, but he recognises their potential:

Personally, I use them for technical stuff, not for my music. For example, I make guitar loops or videos of me playing the guitar along with an instrumental. I do not sponsor that much what I do as Trizio. Because I see technical content can have more impact nowadays. In my view, if I make a Reel with my song only few people are going to watch it. While for example I made a Reel where I made some guitar loops based on existing songs I made and I reached 10,000 views. (Patrik, 26)

He also offered his opinion on the difference between the functioning of Instagram Reels and TikTok, and consequently on the kind of algorithm behind these two formats:

I had begun to use TikTok with consistency and I liked that. Once I lost consistency, I did not get the same results. It's similar to YouTube. Instagram is more balanced from this point of view. Even if you post after a long time, you can still get a high response in terms of views. (Patrik, 26)

Therefore, TikTok and Reels are formats that increase musicians' chances of reaching potential fans if they are used in the right way. This last concept links with the next theme: the "*gig economy*". In fact, TikTok and Reels – together with other aspects of the independent artist's work such as music production, distribution, and promotion – demand a certain degree of entrepreneurship on the part of the musician.

4.2 Gig economy

According to Nancy Baym, nowadays the work of a musician –
especially independent ones – can largely be described with the term
"*gig economy*". Based on a 2016 blog post by the U.S. Bureau of Labor
Statistics, Baym reported that this notion owes its origin to American
jazz musicians who adapted the word "gig" from African American slang
to describe work. Such a word then made its way from music to wider
parlance in the 1950s, to indicate any job a person takes to keep body
and soul together while his life is elsewhere.

The gig economy prises numerous qualities that persistent musicians
have. Such characteristics are being flexible, mobile, able to take on
many different kinds of tasks, and being used to working in teams built
for short-term projects. Undertaking this kind of career has both pros
and cons. On the one hand, the autonomy and continuous change of
gigging can be exciting due to the abundance and variety of stimuli,
compared to other jobs defined by repetitiveness and hierarchical
constraints. On the other hand, gig work can be quite unstable.
Responsibility, risks, and precariousness are borne at the individual
level and questions about where the money will come from are a source
of anxiety.

Another term as a synonym of "gig economy" is self-employment, and it
is different from wage labour because it demands distinctive and
communicational skills and requires the workers to invest all their
human capital to compensate for the lack of organizational structures[2].

In other words, not only today but since when the musician has become
a profession it has been necessary for artists to undertake various tasks
that go beyond the simple creation of music. It has always been like
that, to various degrees, even for artists under major. Moving from the
interviewees' experiences, a snapshot of the present music scenario will

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[2] Baym N. K., *Playing to the Crowd*, New York University Press, New York, 2018.

be given to illustrate how musicians' careers have changed in the digital platform era.

The argument that is willing to be demonstrated is that platforms have not really facilitated the work of musicians but have rather offered the latter many instruments that they must be able to leverage in order to maximise their outcomes. Today, the artist must be good at creating a network and being always present in the mind of people and other professionals. She must have knowledge of a little bit of everything, not exclusively of writing or singing, for instance. Besides, the availability of tools and the reduction of space-time distances provided by platforms have virtually allowed for having a job not related to music at the same time as engaging in the different occupations required by the music work.

A degree of entrepreneurship is required for musicians to navigate within the fluid environment of platforms and make themselves recognisable. Davide outlined this concept affirming that studying marketing is the first step for a musician once he is out there working on his music:

When someone decides to make music, he should buy a book about marketing and read it. A book on self-improvement, on the discipline of entrepreneurs. Because you are an entrepreneur. It means you sell music. And music is a message. To sell a message, you must create a good story. I know a rapper that became very famous because he created the story of the good guy while being a rapper often recalls the idea of drugs, money, etc. He went outside the pattern. You must create your format and your message. (Davide, 24)

Additionally, one must find the economic resources to sustain the music work and in the meantime make a living. Davide told about his working condition at the time of the interview:

Every week, I do piano bar in a restaurant on the seaside in Pescara. Then, I have 5-6 gigs in Abruzzo together with other instruments in literary cafes where we play a series of scores that I wrote. (Davide, 24)

Together with playing his music live, Davide claimed to be aware of the fact that there are other aspects to be taken care of:

Along with the world of music creation, the musician must curate the world of promotion as well. You must find contacts. A publisher, or the venue's owner that makes you play, for instance. Alternatively, this work can be done by a manager. A person that tells you: "Hey, you are going to perform at this place on Saturday". Except in that case, if I earn 200 euros I must give the manager 100 euros. Therefore, the more you do on your own, the more money you earn for yourself. If you want to be independent, you must look for your contacts independently. (Davide, 24)

When asked about how he found the people that allowed him to play the piano in the restaurant, Davide said that he had met them several years before:

I had given the owners some piano lessons. After a while, they asked me: "Why don't you come to our restaurant to do piano bar?". That's how things work. (Davide, 24)

The fact of having other jobs to sustain her career is true for Alessia as well:

My energy concentrates 100% on music, but to make music you need a good deal of money. So, in line with my schedule I do some collateral jobs once in a while, but never something full-time. I try to handle everything by myself, without turning to professionals that obviously have to be paid. Of course, for bigger projects is right to look for expertise, but for what I'm currently doing I prefer to work by myself, maybe with some collaborations and asking for help from colleagues and friends. (Alessia, 22)

For example, as reported in the paragraph dealing with production, for her last release *Primule* Alessia handled many aspects of the music production and the video shooting and editing, with the assistance of her music teacher as regards the writing, and of her brother for the videoclip. Then, as regards the recording, mixing, and mastering she used Ableton, which she learnt to use autonomously:

I learnt to use Ableton as most people do, that is by watching videos on YouTube that explain how it works for free. (Alessia, 22)

Similarly to Davide, Alessia mentioned marketing as a skill that musicians must possess to make their music recognisable, even though it is important not to overlook the artistic side:

It is necessary to know how to act in the current music marketing world. The objective should be that of finding a balance between communicating a message and your personality in music while at the same time making a song that is going to be streamed and sold. Then, the keyword should be "de-productise" music, because if we see it exclusively as a product, like selling a refrigerator, all the artistic sense is lost. (Alessia, 22)

However, maintaining the artistic soul of a song and one's own identity becomes hard in an industry that is ever-changing and where the competition is huge, for the very fact that platforms have lowered production costs:

The problem is that you must be ever-present because the moment you are not releasing or posting, unless you already have a strong fanbase and personality, you are forgotten. In this modern society, we are used to having everything right away. There's no time for waiting, and this kills art, which needs to be conceived and created. (Alessia, 22)

Although Trizio has always managed to work at something related to music, he dedicated his time also to other fields:

I studied Environmental Engineering at the university for my bachelor's degree. Now, I'm studying Safety Engineering for my master's degree. During summer, a couple of years ago I helped one of my guitar pupils who is a hydraulic engineer. However, since I was not too fond of the job and the work as a music teacher increased, I quit. I feel I am extremely lucky because even though teaching is not my real passion, it is still music. I spend all my days playing and talking about music. (Patrik, 26)

V3INOFF also does a collateral job in order to finance his music:

I work as a waiter. That way I can pay for my music. For the album, I spent four times what I thought I would have spent. We attached hundreds of posters around the city. And that is expensive. Recording, mixing, and mastering are expensive, too, also in terms of time. So yes, I work. I even attended a Philosophy course at the university for one year, but I didn't feel happy. I wanted to live, at the cost of struggling at work because you never know what can happen one day. It's quite a rock and punk way of living life but it's cool. Because if something good happens to you, you get excited. (Francesco, 21)

Music is plan A for V3INOFF, and for his album *Permaloso* he took care of many aspects required for distribution and promotion, but he did not do it alone:

I'm convinced you don't get anywhere if you don't build a team. Some ten essential people, who support you and find contacts for you. It's teamwork. Then, of course, there is a frontman but it has always been so. (Francesco, 21)

Despite in many circumstances the artist is still required to make money with jobs that do not relate to music, Bartolomeo made a consideration on how the possibilities of learning competencies related to music production and music marketing have risen during the 2010s:

When I was 18, in 2005, I could not attend a course in sound engineering unless I went to Rome, or Milan and paid for private structures that cost a fortune. Today, in Campania there are at least four conservatories that own a recording studio and technical courses held by qualified personnel. There are tons of music business and social media management courses. Consequently, a class of people dedicated to music marketing is rising, which is exactly where people of my generation have bogged down. There were no entrepreneurs or managers. Nothing. (Bartolomeo, 35)

Thus, today people willing to work in the music business have more chances to make a job out of their passion for music. But there are downsides as well:

On the one side, who makes music nowadays is advantaged. On the other side, there was never a historical moment with so much music as today. The market is oversaturated. However, there is a positive note. My mentor always says: "If there's a lot of junk around you, it's easier to distinguish if you propose something of quality." There are always two sides. Undoubtedly, I would have preferred to work with today's possibilities compared to what was available when I was younger. (Bartolomeo, 35)

There is an aspect of the gig economy that has already been mentioned several times by the interviewees. Finding contacts and cultivating social relations which can turn into opportunities for gigging and music collaborations is crucial for building a music career. Old and new acquaintances, friends of friends: every human relation can be decisive and bring with it new chances for building the network that could get musicians one step closer to making a living out of their primary passion. It goes without saying that, besides the traditional face-to-face encounters and word of mouth, platforms and social media have provided artists with unprecedented possibilities for connection and discovery.

Alessia enlisted the modalities in which she usually is contacted and stressed the importance for musicians of curating their social media profile:

Most of the times, I get contacted to sing or for other activities such as movies or support in the organization of events. They contact me through Instagram, Facebook, or else through the word of mouth by other people. In that way, they also get to see my past projects and the experiences I've made. Because Instagram is like an ever-active curriculum. It shows what you have done in a visible way with audio, videos, and photos. (Alessia, 22)

While recounting her personal experience of networking, Alessia also shared her view on what majors are looking for today as compared to when platforms were not deeply influencing the dynamics within the music industry yet:

Given that social media and platforms such as Spotify have made everything apparently simpler, there is an overabundance of artists and an overlapping of content. Thus, it's no more like when producers went looking for someone to discover and around whom to create a project. Now it's almost pointless to contact producers because unless you already have a product that is working, they are not looking for you. They're no longer simply looking for someone with an artistic identity, a good voice, and presence. Now, you must be good at selling yourself, you must already have a strong fanbase, and an interesting project well underway to be carried forward with a label or a producer. (Alessia, 22)

Such a reflection emerged from the thought that the very fact of having more tools implies that the artist must prove to be good at taking advantage of them and building her career autonomously. If she does not succeed, she may not be considered good enough or simply she would not be able to emerge and get spotted among the numerous emergent and independent artists striving for visibility.

Proceeding with the topic of social relations, also JWar was contacted on social media by people he had not previously known in person:

I think I met 80% of the people I collaborated with on Instagram. The other day a guy from Ferrara asked me for a master because he had listened to a song from two emergent artists from Padova of which I have curated the master. If Instagram did not exist, I would not have done all the things I did. Speaking of connecting with people, Instagram has opened the world for me. You live in a small town like Albignasego and you can get wherever you want. (Atef, 26)

Jay Stills recounted the story of contacts he created while he was living in London. He even collaborated in smart-working with some artists:

I had initially looked for people to work with in order to learn. I worked mainly with singer/songwriters and singers. At that time, to find these people I used to write in Facebook groups. On one of them, in 2018 I found the announcement of this girl who had come second at The Voice Finland and was about to move to London. She asked me to work together. We worked on some demos. Generally, we worked on the writing of lyrics, in remote working. (Gianluca, 28)

Being also the owner of a recording studio, Jay Stills was contacted by people that had found his studio on Google:

Mainly, in the last months people have found me on search engines. A guy from the Dominican Republic that works in Spain has recently moved to Padova and has an agent. He's working with a Spanish producer to release a song and was looking for a place where to record. He found my studio on Google by writing "Recording studio Padova" and then he contacted me on Instagram. (Gianluca, 28)

Bartolomeo manages a recording studio as well. Similarly to Jay Stills, people get word of his studio both online and offline. He also makes good use of the sociological notions he learnt at the university:

Especially when speaking of rappers, for instance, they tend to come to the studio in groups. So, for me, a very simple ad strategy is taking a photo, tagging them, and posting it in my Stories. Every tag can potentially convert into a chat, and each one of them shows me to his friends if they share that pic. (Bartolomeo, 35)

He made a comparison between the kind of clients he interacted with when he opened the studio and the ones that come to his studio today, and he reflected on how platforms have contributed to changing the rules of the game:

When I started, I was used to the logic of bands, which were quite closed and restricted communities, because you needed to study and buy an instrument. Today, the main turnouts for me are primarily songwriters and rappers. Anyone can download a type beat from YouTube and write something on it. So, these kinds of clients multiplicated exponentially. (Bartolomeo, 35)

On his part, beyond the most popular social media platforms Trizio tried another platform, one which is specifically made for musicians:

With the Ultima, we found the bass player and the singer on the platform Villaggio Musicale. The ballroom dance orchestra I played with last night, I found it on that platform, too. It works fine. You can choose to post announcements like "I'm looking for a singer a drum player, etc." or you can offer a service yourself. You can also

upload videos and photos, write a bio, and specify your music genre. There are not many professionals, because usually they do not need it. But it's widely used by semi-professionals like me. (Patrik, 26)

Apart from Villaggio Musicale, Trizio had experience with other social media platforms for musicians:

There is a modern version of Villaggio Musicale which is called Kleisma, but till now I got contacted only once, and doesn't look like it's too well developed. I tried Vampr, too. It's a sort of Tinder, but for musicians. I got contacted a couple of times. However, as everywhere you can find people who are not consistent. At the moment, I'm not looking for any collaboration. But if I should need it, I guess I'd primarily use Villaggio Musicale or I would make use of the contacts of my contacts and stuff like that. (Patrik, 26)

Also DSG has collaborated with people he happened to know on social media:

I was a fan of an artist from Parma that I had been listening to for some months on YouTube. I liked his works so much I began to look for whom he was collaborating with. His videos were stunning, so I decided to contact his videomaker because I wanted a video in that fashion, too. I reached out to him and he answered he was available. Thanks to this contact I realised two videoclips for the songs *Level Up* and *Milano*. He managed the editing, while the filming was done by a guy from Maserà. (Giovanni, 25)

He even recalled a time when he was contacted to offer a service:

A Rap magazine from Torino asked me to write some articles on the newest issues of the Italian Rap scene. This gave me visibility even if they did not advertise my music directly. They had listened to my music and they liked it, so they proposed me this project. I did it for six months. It was cool. (Giovanni, 25)

What emerged from the interviews concerning the gig economy is that in spite of the fact platformization has brought along a democratization within the music industry, the working life of a musician has not

necessarily become easier today compared to the past. More tools and more opportunities do not automatically translates into success. Rather, artists must demonstrate to be skilled in using the instruments offered by social media and the contemporary technology and to stand out from the great crowd of aspiring musicians. Economic constraints are another influential factor that determines the choice of personally undertaking different parts of the music job instead of relying on professionals, at least in the first steps of the career, and of doing side or full-time jobs to sustain their passion.

4.2 Opinions on the present music environment

The last paragraph is going to explore more in depth both cited and additional aspects related to the platforms' functioning, together with the interviewees' expectations for their career and their opinions on the future scenarios that may open in front of the music industry in an increasingly platformised society.

4.2.1 The Musician as an Entrepreneur

As regards the idea of the musician as an entrepreneur, Davide made a reflection based on the fact that the number of musicians pursuing a professional music career has increased as a result of the spread of platforms:

Music is beautiful because it's varied. Every musician has something to give. Today there is a lot of competition. We should share instead. If there is a pianist that is more skilled than me I do not have to compete with him, I must *learn* from him. It's not that obvious. (Davide, 24)

He also stressed the importance, for him, to have an entrepreneurial mindset in order to be consistent and make advancements in one's career, something that in his view many musicians have not acknowledged yet:

All these topics that we covered are unknown to the artists in the first place. There are loads of aspects behind the music industry. Much analysis can be done at the social, economic, psychological, historical, cultural, and artistic levels. (Davide, 24)

For independent artists, today there are different options on how to carry on their careers. They can work by themselves or, if they manage to, they can take advantage of the recording budget offered by labels and distributors, as explained by Bartolomeo:

Traditionally, record companies have offices with a limited staff, so they concentrate the work of such people on the top artists. Differently, when they want to test a product because they judge it as interesting they give the artist a recording budget. In other words, they give independent artists a certain amount of money that they can manage autonomously. At that point, they must prove to be wise in their expenses. They are usually free to waste it if they want to, or they can use it to launch their careers. (Bartolomeo, 35)

With time, labels have adapted to the new streaming environment but the substance appears to be quite the same as regards the recording budget, with some modifications in terms of the method of payback that distributors and labels can opt for:

In the last couple of years, some labels have started providing recording budgets to artists they consider worthy. There is an office that decides if you can benefit from a "loan". They give you a deposit and then they regain it through streams. So from that moment on, every cent you earn is retained by the label until the original deposit is not paid off. There is a bit of confusion concerning roles because distributors are increasingly acting as labels. (Bartolomeo, 35)

As regards a comparison of the gig economy for musicians before and after the spread of platforms, Trizio commented:

I think today emergent artists have a little less work to do. Still, you must make ends meet between different activities. In the past, you had fewer possibilities and this is

the upside of technology. Let's say the struggle is channelled into other fields, precisely into taking on different activities and doing something that makes you stand out from all the other emergent musicians. (Patrik, 26)

V3INOFF somehow offered a different point of view by making the example of a musician from an older generation:

I believe once there were fewer things to do because there wasn't a digital world to keep up with. I contacted the guitarist of a famous Italian singer from the 1990s for a live session. He is 50 now and when we told him we had made posters to promote the album he explained to us that back in the days that was how it used to work. Going around attaching posters, spreading the voice. What else could you do? Then, what did releasing music mean? That from one day to another CDs were out. Maybe your song could go on the radio. (Francesco, 21)

V3INOFF also made a reflection on what could have been the driving force that led to the change in musicians' possibility to virtually manage so many different aspects by themselves:

In my case, the key has been YouTube. Without YouTube, I would have done nothing. You really can save thousands of euros and find everything you need to learn how to mix professionally. A young Italian artist that became famous in 2020 recorded her debut album during the Covid-19 pandemic, at home. She played the guitar and wrote the lyrics. One of the biggest labels in Italy signed her immediately. But they were far so they told her to record the voices with her phone and send them. (Francesco, 21)

Therefore, once again it seems like the platformization of the recording industry has determined a diversification and in many cases an increase of the musician's tasks. As a consequence, a wider knowledge of those tasks and of marketing strategies seems to be a decisive contributor to success according to a part of the interviewees.

4.2.2 Categorization According to "Moods" and Role of Playlists

Another essential topic brought to the attention of the interviewees was the categorization of songs according to "moods" played out by Spotify

and other music streaming platforms. In particular, they were asked if, in their opinion, such a categorization is efficient and if it still values the musical aspect compared to the more traditional organization of songs according to genres.

Bartolomeo answered bringing the point of view of both the listener and the musician:

As a listener, I say yes. Because if I have guests at home over for dinner and I want to play something appropriate for the occasion, I can play the Relax playlist, for instance. If you ask me the question from the point of view of the artist, I say no. Because it's clear that those playlists are largely maneuvered. I have noticed that when I play the Focus playlist in shuffle mode, it's always the same that starts as the first one. (Bartolomeo, 35)

Differently, Alessia stated that the categorization of music based on moods can be good for musicians as well:

As for all things, there are pros and cons. Surely, by classifying music based on moods there is no categorization based on genres, but maybe the user is looking for a precise mood and she can listen to different genres. It's beneficial both for the listener and the artist. For the listener, because he interfaces with more genres and discovers new ones. For the artist is good as well because otherwise it would be harder to reach a wider audience. On the downside, the artist could feel pressed to adjust to playlists otherwise she could not be eligible. (Alessia, 22)

At the question of whether curatorial playlists on Spotify have led to focus almost exclusively on mainstream music to the detriment of niche genres, Alessia commented:

Absolutely. Because ultimately, to make many streams on Spotify you must either be a famous artist or rely on playlists. So playlists have influenced the music environment, they are the flagship product of what the market requires. Consequently, if what the artist produces tends to reflect what is popular on playlists is because playlists work according to market analysis of what the audience listens to. (Alessia, 22)

JWar shared his opinion on playlists by reasoning from the plausible point of view of Spotify:

I see it as marketing. There are so many people working to enhance the platform's profits that they do everything to entice you into listening because for every stream they earn something. The mere fact of Spotify knowing your moods. Many people think "Wow, they played the right song at the right moment!". They scrutinise you throughout all your day to offer you the best service, and this is fantastic. Spotify is your DJ. (Atef, 26)

The apex of such work of monitoring of users' behaviour and activities is the *Spotify Wrapped*, already described in the second chapter:

This thing that Spotify observes us all day long becomes evident at the end of the year, when for every user it publishes a report with everything you have listened to in the previous twelve months. It means they don't miss the tiniest data. Spotify is pure marketing. (Atef, 26)

Also Jay Stills is convinced that playlists are beneficial for artists because music genres are too big categories compared to moods, which are more varied and user-friendly in a platform such as Spotify where there are not only audiophiles and music experts:

I think such a categorization helps the artists because how many of them would end up, for instance, in a playlist named *Folk Rock*? If there was only one Folk Rock playlist, millions of artists would end up inside it. Consequently, for instance, acknowledging there is a niche that likes playlists named something like *Music you would listen to in a café*, Spotify made a playlist called *Your Favourite Coffee House*. So, for me categorization according to moods helps the artist because maybe you make a song on that mood, enter the playlist and people can go listen to your other songs, too. (Gianluca, 28)

V3INOFF, too, is convinced that playlists based on moods are useful for musicians:

I think they work. For example, the playlist to work out, the chill playlist, the one when you are in love. Categorising based on moods work. Because people don't think in terms of genres anymore. The young boy listens to Marracash as well as Jordan Jeffrey. And somehow understand both artists. And this thing is amazing. So it absolutely works. Especially from the point of view of the artist because you could find an audience that you would not find if you categorised for genre. (Francesco, 21)

DSG expressed his view by focusing on the point of view of the listener and on the benefits that can be generated for the artist when the categorization of playlists is based on moods:

The listener can listen to songs that perfectly fit the situation or mood he is into at a particular time: running, cooking, etc. Thereby, if the listener schematise his life based on songs, it's useful for the artist as well. In my case, if a person had my song *Fight Molotov,* which is aggressive, in his playlist while he does kickboxing I would be more than happy. The listener must be supported my music. That's why I think categorization according to moods is functional. (Giovanni, 24)

When asked if he feels conditioned by this kind of categorization while working on his music, DSG answered:

I don't care. I have never aimed for that. If the beat recalls the summer hit, good. But there is always me in that song. And I am not interested in making songs based on playlists in the first place. I don't want to adapt to the system. I want my personality to get to the heart of people and at that point, the listener can categorise it and insert it in one of his playlists, such as *Intense Work Out* in the example of *Fight Molotov.* (Giovanni, 25)

The categorization based on moods, then, was generally considered functional by the interviewees as regards the listener, the artist, or both. Moods appear to be a better kind of classification because they fit the logic behind Spotify's algorithm, which is partly analysing users' behaviour and moods throughout the day in order to suggest the right songs at the right time to them. In that sense, a categorization merely based on genres would result too limited.

4.2.3 Opinions on Music Platforms' Features

Besides the categorization based on moods, the interviewees were demanded to share their opinion on other features of music streaming platforms and social media. One question posed to Davide, for instance, regarded the algorithm behind Spotify:

We don't know what kind of algorithm we are dealing with. Thus, you cannot upload a song online and hope that the algorithm suggests it to the people that would love your music. More than good and bad, that's how things work and you cannot modify it. Rather, you should understand how it works and take advantage of it. (Davide, 24)

A feature of music platforms that was mentioned already in the second chapter is the autoplay. At the question on what, in her view, might be the effect of the autoplay on the listening experience, Alessia answered:

Let's start from the fact that if I am listening to music on Spotify and I do not have a Premium account my experience is interrupted by ads. This, too, diverts attention. Then, it's chaotic because there is a mix of artists that are played automatically after the reproduction of a single or a project, even without any correlation with the artist you were initially listening to. (Alessia, 22)

Connecting to the topic of the autoplay and the attention threshold, Alessia spotted a contributing factor to attention decrease also in the pricing model typical of platforms:

In the past, you could listen to music only if you bought an album or you went to a concert. Today, you pay around 10 euros per month on Spotify, but those 10 euros are redistributed on the entire platform. That way, it's like the platform is conveying the idea of "You don't need to focus on what you are listening to". Because in any case, the platform is getting money from those streams. The artist is not at the centre but has become an instrument that is used within the process of earning." (Alessia, 22)

Recently, Spotify has also introduced the Canva feature, which gives the possibility of adding a short loop video of a maximum of eight seconds

that is run during the reproduction of a song. A further element of distraction or a function enriching the listening experience? Alessia commented:

In my opinion, it doesn't make such a big difference. A videoclip has meaning because it is an additional narrative of the story. Uploading six segments of video that repeat themselves during the reproduction of a track I think it's distracting. (Alessia, 22)

A feature that was warmly welcomed by the majority of musicians is the crediting of all people that contributed to the creation of a song on music streaming platforms. However, Jay Stills is not completely satisfied with how they are managed on Spotify, preferring the system used by Tidal:

Now Spotify shows the credits, but not always. On many songs, there is still a hyphen instead of a name in some of the categories such as the producer or the songwriter. The only platform I found has a good crediting system is Tidal. (Gianluca, 28)

 Another feature of Spotify is showing the performance of the best five songs of an artist in terms of the number of streams. However, the precise number of plays is shown only when above a thousand streams. Behind that value, the platform just shows "<1000". V3INOFF was asked if according to him, such value can influence the choice of a user to listen to or not the tracks of an artist that features songs with less than a thousand streams:

Of course, if the average listener sees <1000 he doesn't even play that song. So it strongly affects listening. (Francesco, 21)

4.2.4 Future Scenarios
The interviewees were posed a series of questions related to the future scenarios they see for their music, the platform environment, and the music industry overall.

DSG was asked if he believes the way platforms are structured and programmed has determined a trend toward mass conformism or whether there is still space for niche music on Spotify's Home Page:

I think people are increasingly placed before pre-set elements. In the sense that when you enter the platform you immediately see the first five hits of the week, the ten more listened tracks, etc. And in that way, people lose the will to look for other songs in my opinion. More and more it seems like the platform is telling you: "This is what works. Listen to it". You have your direction and you encounter that deviation brought by the platform. Thus, in my view more and more people are opting for this "guided" listening because it's easier. We are at the border between having our own mind and not having it anymore. (Giovanni, 25)

A particular theme covered during the interviews was the overabundance of content available to users nowadays on both social media and streaming platforms. Alessia considers it as an opportunity, because of the availability of space on the internet for everybody:

For me, the point is to educate on the use of these new instruments. Lately, I noticed a change of mentality. Once, in the contests I took part in there was the idea of saying: "That place is mine and I must take it at all costs". Now it's like everyone cooperates because now there are no limited spots. Everyone can create his own space. The fact is that you must be able to bring people to your space. There is space for everyone, but you must create your own. (Alessia, 22)

In a sense, it can be stated that the internet has reduced – if not cancelled – the dimension of space. During the Covid pandemic, this became clear also in the music environment, not only in terms of the listening of songs which has been so since the first half of the 20th century but also in terms of performing live. Unable to do live music in person, musicians faced the challenge of bringing their music to their fans directly from home. And they did so, of course, by means of social media. After that experience, artists acknowledged, even more, the importance of social networks for the promotion of their music and for communicating with their fanbase:

During the lockdown, I organised some live streaming from home. Beautiful initiative, even though it couldn't last. It was a way to cope with the situation. I saw many bands doing online live concerts. Now that it's over, I don't think many musicians will keep doing that, except for some web radios. On YouTube, for instance, there are a series of channels that already did that before Covid. Apart from that, I'm the first to say that when it's possible, it's way better to perform in person. But it certainly gave a great boost to online concerts. It could occur that the artist decides to go live to involve the people that couldn't go to the concert. (Patrik, 26)

Jay Stills commented that the Covid pandemic has risen awareness among musicians on the possibility of building a career not only by performing analogically but also by curating their profiles and being present online. Social media have intercepted this trend and taken action accordingly:

Social media have added to musicians' careers. Now, you can earn money from other sources in addition to playing at concerts. Instagram has officialised partnerships with different music labels. TikTok, as I said before, has established a fund for creators. Then, as an artist you can reach out to your fans every day, and you can let them enter your world. Social media must become an extension of the musician's career. Also because when a person goes home after a concert, she can find that artist's music on social media and music streaming platforms. (Gianluca, 28)

Another aspect of the analogical side of artists' careers treated in the previous chapter is merchandising, of which physical copies are an important part.
Trizio, who has issued his personalised USB flash drives, was asked if he thinks that his audience appreciates more listening to his songs on the physical support or if they prefer to stream his music:

Absolutely, they give more value to the physical support. Certain things are a lot more attractive when you pay for them. Because they gave you credit and there is a personal benefit for them, too. We live in a selfish world but there is still some generosity. (Patrik, 26)

For DSG it is not important the support through which his audience listens to his music. The more practical the better:

What I'm interested in is that my audience listens to my songs. Be it on a CD or a platform, the important is that my music reaches my listeners. Years ago, the primary support were CDs, now platforms are the most comfortable solution. I grew up with CDs but I can say that they've gotten old. Who would go buy a CD if you can listen to music simply by unlocking your phone and opening a platform? In my opinion, focusing on platforms is the right thing. If it's the most functional support, we must leverage it all the way. (Giovanni, 25)

4.2.5 Earnings

Being a musician is a career. As a consequence, the economic side couldn't fail to be mentioned. In the previous chapter, the interviewees were asked about the eventual collateral jobs – or gigs – they took on to finance their dream of becoming full-time musicians. This paragraph will include the answers of the interviewees as concerns the possibility of payment offered by the music streaming platforms and by the music industry.

Trizio was asked if he considers the platform sustainable for a musician in terms of earnings:

Absolutely not. As far as I remember, Spotify pays 0.07 cents per stream. Then, there are some differences between platforms. It can also vary according to the law of supply and demand. Of course, on the most used platform, the revenues will be lower. But clearly, it's not sustainable. Luckily, there is the SIAE and the royalties. It means that if your song is used in a commercial, for the soundtrack of a movie, or broadcasted on the radio you earn revenues. But even in that case, it's not sustainable unless you build something big around you. Merchandising and live concerts are unparalleled from this point of view. (Patrik, 26)

Bartolomeo explained how the more traditional ways of earning through music work compared to the new modalities offered by platforms:

A local radio pays right holders 7 euros per minute to broadcast a song. The average time for a song today is around three minutes. It's 21 euros. If you go to Sanremo, on tv, you earn 1500 euros per minute. How much does Spotify pay? And not even per minute, but for stream. Therefore, speaking of earnings on platforms, it's not even close. If we consider it as a promotional tool, it's all right because at least you don't pay for it or you pay a little money. But for sure it's not water that quenches. Doing live concerts is a much better fuel. (Bartolomeo, 35)

DSG confirmed this point of view by talking about his personal experience on Spotify:

I'd like to earn a million (laughs). On Spotify, I earned 2 cents maybe. Kidding aside, I have never been able to recover all I had invested in the music I uploaded. (Giovanni, 25)

V3INOFF recovered a part of his expenses, but again it was not enough the regained them fully. The largest share, also in his case, is performing live:

We were able to earn a hundred euros. With hours of songs. It's impossible to make real money through platforms. Speaking of concerts, we get some money from time to time. Even though most of the time we performed for free. But generally, we earn something from playing music at events, like the time we played at the Navigli in Padova. (Francesco, 21)

4.2.6 The Traditional Music Industry and Music Platforms

Another topic addressed in the interviews was the role of the traditional music industry in the contemporary music environment dominated by new music streaming giants such as Spotify and Apple Music. A question posed to the interviewees in this regard was whether, in their opinion, the already existing recording industry was supported or overshadowed by the new music platforms.

Jay Stills answered in favour of the second scenario:

Platforms surely overshadowed majors. Nonetheless, in one way or another recording companies know how to make money. Of course, when they sell a CD for 15-20 euros they earn money directly from the physical release. On the other hand, Spotify and the other platforms made it possible that if an artist like Zucchero makes a cover album, and you want to listen to the original song you can directly go to the page of the original artist by clicking on his name. That way, you can listen to other songs because they are suggested by Spotify's radio service. (Gianluca, 28)

For Jay Stills, indeed, overshadowing does not necessarily mean replacing:

So let's say that on one side, music streaming platforms have helped artists and the majors behind them. On the other side, they took away from them the absolute control over the market. Everything is more diversified nowadays, and consequently more complex. (Gianluca, 28)

Trizio expressed his view in terms of the adaptation of recording companies to the new music environment where powerful music platforms seem to be dominant and have changed many of the rules of the previous status quo:

For me, it's more a question of adjustment. Majors can easily adjust. Today, for artists there are more opportunities for independence. But it's not a big problem for labels. It's another aspect of globalization. They will find a way of making money even in the new setting. Among the independent labels, there will be those that will make it and others that will fail. (Patrik, 26)

V3INOFF believes that music platforms have benefitted the whole music economy by simplifying the way music can be listened to:

Now everybody listens to music. Once, it was not like that, trust me. Until 2010-2011 where did you use to listen to music? On YouTube, from videos. Until 2014, nobody paid for Spotify. I did not even use it. It was a waste of money. Now, if you meet someone that does not use it, you are perplexed. (Francesco, 21)

DSG reasoned from the perspective of the artist and affirmed majors are not essential today since a musician does not necessarily need to be accountable to a major in order to launch his career:

The major can create a sponsorship of your music around you. But in the end, on the platform you find the artist, with or without a major. And eventually, in my view, the real "major" of an artist are his listeners. Once, everything was in the hands of majors and only what they assumed the audience would like could work and be boosted. Who did not have a deal with a major dropped back. This setting was improved with the arrival of music streaming platforms and social media. Now, everyone can propose his music. And who knows, it can work. Even better than a signed artist, maybe. (Giovanni, 25)

Once again, the interviews suggest the idea that the platform society and the mechanisms behind it have certainly brought innovations and provided music workers with unprecedented instruments.

The possibility to reach wide audiences and make a living out of the music profession have generally increased, and this can be done even without working under a major label. The latter is still an influential actor in the music business, but its role have been revised due to the spread of music streaming platforms, as explained in the first two chapters. As a consequence, digital platforms have triggered a democratization of the music industry in many respects. More people have more possibilities, and that equals more competition. The musician must consequently be able to stand out and be recognisable. To do so, in many cases she has to undertake duties that lies outside the work of music production in the strict sense. Indeed, in order to contain costs the artist should develop entrepreneurial skills as well, which would allow her to manage autonomously – when it is possible – the activities of distribution, promotion, and the relationship with fans and other music professionals.

Conclusions

The thesis has shown how in many respects the platform society has radically affected the music industry and the careers of musicians. If until a couple of decades ago, for many musicians several aspects of their music production, distribution, promotion, as well as the relationship with colleagues and audiences still happened mostly analogically, nowadays digital tools are prevalent, as emerged from the interviews.

The eight interviews have served as valuable sources of insights into the abovementioned spheres of a musician's career and have offered a clearer view of how the latter has changed in the digital platform era.

As regards production, the technological advancements of the last twenty years and the rising of platforms have introduced essential modifications to this part of the music work. Indeed, in the majority of cases production happens digitally thanks to Digital Audio Workstations, basically software that contain all the features of a professional studio, where it is possible to record, edit voices, add sound effects, and mix and master the audio track.

Social media platforms such as YouTube have enabled musicians to autonomously learn production competences, by watching video tutorials, and increasing the possibilities of singers to practice on instrumentals even without having a band or knowing how to play an instrument, thanks to the so-called type beats uploaded by professional and semi-professional producers on the platform.

Some interviewees stressed the fact that music platforms have had a positive impact on the general quality of sound. Given that music platforms are virtually for free, everybody has access to high quality music. As a matter of fact, many of the producers interviewed declared they use to listen to songs on Spotify or other streaming services to check the sound quality of the songs they are working on.

Then, the interviews moved on to cover the theme of tracks' length. The tendency observed by the interviewees is that of a reduction in the

timing of songs. If ten years ago the standard was around three minutes and a half, today it has lowered to two minutes forty. Social media are accelerating such trend by allowing to use music as a background for formats such as Reels and TikToks, which can even last fifteen seconds. However, despite the general positive answer to the question if it is a factor to keep in mind when working on a song, some of them specified that a balance should be found between the market standards and the will of the artist.

The last question on production regarded the choice of releasing albums/EPs or singles. The trend indicates singles as the most functional format in the ever-evolving platform environment because of aspects such as the attention threshold and the amount of time needed to work on a multitrack project. Even in this case, some of the artists affirmed they do not feel pressured to comply with the benchmarks of the music market because eventually what really matters is publishing something in line with what the musician wants to convey, in whatever form is issued.

As production, also distribution and promotion are activities that today are largely conducted online. The fastest way for artists to get a song or a project on music streaming platforms is through online distributors that act as intermediaries between musicians and those platforms. For a certain fee, online distributors make a first quality control of the track before sending them to stores.

Another option for musicians is to distribute their music through label/distributors. These services do not require a fee. They invest economically in the artists and get part of the royalties. Consequently, it is more complex for artists to distribute through this method, since labels/distributors do not only consider the music side but also the image of the artist and his following, for instance.

An instrument that can potentially bring a song to hundreds, thousands, or even millions of ears are playlists. On Spotify, for instance, the so-called curators' playlists are the most active and

followed on the platforms. Ending inside a curatorial playlist is far from being simple, as the number of songs published every day is huge. That is why Spotify has provided musicians with an online form through which they can submit their songs to playlist curators, increasing their chances to get featured on one or more playlists.

When the single or album/EP is ready and the strategy is set, the promotion phase begins. Artists can promote their work taking advantage of social media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. Communicating to audiences the release of a project through Stories and posts can be done for free, but it may not be enough if the artist does not have a consistent and proactive fanbase. Even when having one, the interviewees mentioned that paying for sponsoring their music is important. Social media themselves offer ways of promoting a post or a Story, with the possibility of adding an external link. However, some of the interviewees have tried these services and did not always get the expected results for the price they paid. What is more, relying on profiles that offer sponsorships claiming to increase followers and streams sometimes can be risky. In fact, such pages may use fake accounts and bots to reach the promised results.

Besides the digital methods of promotion, among the interviewees there was still someone that resorted to more traditional promotion strategies, such as referring to a press office to pitch the project to webzines and magazines. Last but not least, the majority of the interviewees named live performances - and some of them added merchandising - as an irreplaceable and effective means of promotion.

The fourth chapter dealt with the social relations the interviewees create and maintain with their fanbase and with their colleagues within and outside the music environment.

Having an audience is essential for musicians because fans are people that grow fond of their music and are willing to participate in their artistic life emotionally and in some cases economically.

The internet has expanded the power of such groups, who are now able

to come together online and build group infrastructures able to exercise influence on contemporary media and market trends.

From the artist point of view, social media platforms have increased the chances of reaching out to their listeners and to get discovered by new ones. For independent artists, it means that they can be spotted by people that they live far away even without sponsorship by labels or press offices. This can be done thanks to social media algorithms, for instance by using two of the most recent social media formats: Instagram Reels and TikToks. Nevertheless, the interviewees agreed that in order for these formats to produce results, there must be consistency and a strategy behind them.

The next topic was the "gig economy". Such term is at the basis of all the aforementioned steps. In many cases, especially at the independent level, it is not always possible to make a living exclusively out of the music work. Thus, artists may decide to take on side and full time jobs even not related to music in order to economically fuel the dream jobs.

Social media platforms represent a great support for musicians in terms of building and maintain a network of both colleagues and audiences. However, the interviews demonstrated that platforms have not only facilitated the work of musicians. Rather, it is true that platforms have lowered costs and offered them many instruments, but the latter must be exploited according to marketing logics so as to get satisfying results in terms of career advancements.

Finally, the interviewees were asked a series of questions related to specific platform features, and the possible future scenarios they see for their career and the music industry.

From this paragraph, it emerged that having an entrepreneurial mindset is highly recommended so as to be consistent and make progress, as well as for wisely managing the economic resources at disposal.

Working under a label is still considered as a booster for an artist's career. However, in many cases the interviewees expressed a preference

towards working independently, at least in the first phases of their careers, given that platforms allow to manage every aspect of the music work without artistic restrictions of any sort.

As regards platforms, it is evident that they produced a series of changes in how music is perceived and circulated. Among the features of music streaming platforms, the categorization of songs according to moods was judged by the interviewees as the expression of marketing strategies performed by music services to offer a personalised experience to users. For some, such a categorization and the playlists based on it may push musicians to produce songs that conform to the most popular moods in order to have more chances to get playlisted, to the detriment of creativity and spontaneity. But in general, it was judged positively in terms of functionality, since such a classification allows listeners to interface with more genres, consequently increasing musicians' chances to get discovered.

Other features of music streaming platforms were discussed with the interviewees, such as the algorithm and the autoplay functions, as well as the pricing model. In some cases, these features were considered distracting and determining a decrease of the attention threshold. Songs from other artists being automatically reproduced at the end of an album or paying a monthly fee for the complete music repertoire instead of investing directly in one album was seen by some interviewees as factors that can divert users from a focused and involved listening.

The interviews also involved questions on the future scenarios that the interviewed musicians see for their careers and the music industry in general. Overall, interviewees widely agreed on the idea that social media and platforms will be increasingly instrumental in the management of production, distribution, promotion and creation and maintenance of networks. New features enrich the possibilities of reaching out to fans, as in the case of concerts in live streaming that became popular during the Covid pandemic. Thus, interviewees

mentioned curating one's own profile and being present online as actions of paramount importance.

At the same time, as already mentioned the analogic side still remains the fundamental element for true connection with fans and collaborators. Merchandising and performing live were consequently brought up as unavoidable aspects.

Speaking of earnings, all of the interviewees had no doubt that social media platforms themselves do not grant an adequate amount of money to sustain musicians' careers. Also in this instance, live gigs and merchandising were identified as more profitable economic sources.

Last but not least, the interviewees were asked to reason on whether the traditional recording industry has been helped or overshadowed by music streaming services. Some of them talked in favour of the second option but specified that it does not mean they were cut out of the game. Majors will always find their way to make profits. From the point of view of the artist, music platforms and social media have allowed for more independence. Majors are no more the only possible way to success for musicians.

To conclude, from the interviews has emerged the idea that the platform society and the mechanisms behind it have certainly brought innovations and provided music workers with unprecedented instruments.

Major labels are still influential actors but their role have been reconfigured due to the spread of music streaming platforms, as explained in the first two chapters. In fact, now musicians have greater opportunities to reach potential fans and make a profession out of their music work even without being signed. However, such a democratization brought to more competition as well. The musician must consequently be able to stand out and be recognisable, even by taking on activities that fall outside the mere music production. Entrepreneurial competences then have become crucial as they allow, in many cases, to manage independently the spheres of distribution,

promotion, and the relationship with fans and other music professionals, making it possible for the artist to reduce costs.

To conclude, the comprehensive element emerging from the thesis is that today it exists a digital reality that adds up to the material dimension. Of course, this translates in a further level of complexity besides the physical world. The nature of platforms and the process of platformization, thus, have posed new challenges to musicians in addition to increasing their possibilities within the music industry. Algorithms and formats are always changing. Consequently, artists must adjust accordingly in order to try taking advantage of such reconfigurations.

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