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The changes caused by digitalization have had many impacts in how we live our lives, and this study looked at the impacts of digitalization on the music industry. This study analyzed how digitalization has changed how artists make music and how they define themselves, as well as the broader implications of digitalization on the music industry ideology. As discussed in the literature of the field of music ideology, artists had at one point depended on record labels to make music and define themselves. But this same literature stated that digitalization had little impacts on artists and that any technological changes only further served the ideology. This study entered into this discussion by conducting semi-structured interviews with artists. These interviews gained a view of how digitalization changed how artists go about making music and defining themselves, as well as testing if these align with the ideals of the music ideology. This study found that artists are dependent on digital alternatives in pursuit of making music. How they defined themselves has also become more digital, seeing the use of social media as a necessity, and invoking digitally bound ideas of authenticity and legitimacy. The artists did indicate that record labels do still contain some power, but it is often in specific parts of the industry rather than the total control of the past. Signing to a label were often seen as a means to an end, not as the sole arbiter of success that was put forward by the literature. This study also points to an emerging ideology, one that could be based on the power and control that can be exerted on musicians and other content creators through social media. This study calls for further research, as it raises questions on the effects that digitalization has had on other media industries. The possibility of an emerging ideology is also an idea that asks to be further researched, especially as digitalization continues to affect our world.

MUSICIANS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: HOW DIGITALIZATION CHANGED HOW MUSIC

IS MADE

by

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Dr. Zachary Levenson
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my wife and my mother, for always believing in me. I would not be here if not for you both.

APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND	4
Digitalization.....	4
An Ideology of Getting Signed	6
Limits and Necessity of Comparison	8
CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
CHAPTER IV: METHODS.....	18
Introduction	18
Population and Sampling	18
Research Instruments and Transcription.....	21
Ethics.....	21
Validity and Reliability	22
CHAPTER V: RESULTS	23
Introduction	23
Research Goals	23
Accessibility	25
Introduction	25
Access to Professional Networks	25
Access to Tools and Education.....	29
Artist Definitions.....	32
Introduction	32
Competition.....	33
Success	38
Legitimacy.....	43
Social Media Presence	48
Introduction	48
Branding	50
The Algorithm	53

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION	60
Discussion	61
REFERENCES	63

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Population Demographics.....	18
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Our daily lives have become increasingly bound to computers and the Internet, with a recent and notable case being telecommuting due to the pandemic. This widespread process of our world becoming more digital, a process called digitalization, has had many impacts on society. One area of our lives that has been impacted thoroughly by digitalization is how we consume and listen to music. How does the average music listener access their music? Likely through a streaming service such as Spotify or Apple Music, or perhaps even through downloaded mp3s. If digitalization has changed how someone listens to music, then how has it changed the way an artist makes music?

Digitalization is the ever-growing use of computer-based alternatives to the traditional physical means to fulfill a task. An example is using a streaming service to listen to music now, whereas in the past a physical format was used, such as a CD, cassette tape, or vinyl. The argument of this thesis is that digitalization has affected how artists make music. Artists now use software to produce their music, streaming services to release their music, and social media to advertise as well as to network with fans and other professionals (Baym 2010a; Baym 2010b; Baym 2018; Clark 2015; Jung 2014; Porfilio, Roychoudhury, and Gardner 2013; Pritchard and Vines 2013; Martin 2015). With this change in how artists go about pursuing their craft, it has also changed how they view being an artist. What it means to be authentic, successful, and legitimate for an artist of today differs from what artists thought in the past, before the adoption of digital ways of being an artist (Cunningham and Craig 2019; Page 2011; Thurlow 2019). But if artists approach making music and being an artist through digital means, then how does this change to digital means effect the traditional power structure of the music industry?

While there is current literature on the power structure of the music industry, it holds that record labels are still at the top of the hierarchy and that their power remains unshaken. Labels still control the sole means of legitimacy and success for artists. The literature asserts that if digitalization has had any effect on the industry, it has only been to further power the labels and their ideology (Arditi 2020; Arditi 2021). This thesis argues a different perspective; that there is a currently emerging set of ideas and ways of making music, bound by digital means, that circumvent the traditional music industry power structure. This ability to no longer need the support of a record label in their pursuits as musicians has allowed artists to hold perspectives of what it means to be an artist that differs from the traditional music industry ideals. Traditional ideas such as the legitimacy, authenticity, and success of an artist being dependent on whether an artist is signed or not (Arditi 2020). If these ideals no longer need to be followed, then how does the artist view legitimacy, authenticity, and success?

In summary, this study establishes that a digitalization process has happened in the music industry and that this transition from the physical means of making music to digital means has affected how artists view themselves. This thesis does this by viewing the current perspectives of artists in how they view music-making and what it means to be an artist. This thesis also gains a view of how artists use digital means in their pursuit of being an artist. By using semi-structured interviews, this study allows for an in-depth look at artists' perspectives on music-making and artist definitions while ensuring certain variables are discussed. By comparing the results of this study with current literature, this study also allows a lens in how digitalization currently affects the traditional power structure and ideals of the music industry. This comparison also allows an understanding into the possibility of an emerging power structure and its accompanying ideals founded in the digital means of being an artist. This study does not look at the historical reasons

for digitalization, though it is referenced at times. Rather, this study gains a perspective of how this transition has already and continues to affect artists, primarily, and the wider music industry. This study prompts further research, with future studies viewing the effects of digitalization in other media industries or a historical study that analyzes reasons for the digital transition that occurred in the music industry.

CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND

Digitalization

Digitalization, as a concept, is easily approached because its effects can be felt by the general public. Many aspects of our everyday life have slowly become digital in the last 20-30 years. This can be seen through streaming music and television or online communication through email and instant messaging. While it is easy to see the direct influences of digitalization, as is often the case with societal change, the impacts reach both broader and deeper than is readily seen. Gaining a better understanding of how digitalization has affected how artists make music and view themselves is but one attempt to better view the impacts of life becoming digital.

How has an artist's approach to making music changed? Artists now use software to produce their music, as well as mixing and mastering it. This software is easily accessible, with one artist stating that a rudimentary production software is standard on MacBooks. Having access to this software is one case but learning how to use it is another. Fortunately, artists can use sites such as YouTube to learn how to use the software from others. The reader can easily see this for themselves; just take the name of one of the software, for example, 'Logic Pro X,' and put it into the YouTube search bar along with "tutorial" and you will find hours of instruction. If the artist, or the reader, wants to learn how to use this software for mixing and mastering, all they need to do is search for it. Artists looking to others to learn the knowledge of the trade is far from new but, being able to find this education whenever and wherever they desire while requiring no cost is new to digitalization (Baym 2010b; Jung 2014; Martin 2015; Pritchard and Vines 2013). Digitalization allows for artist interaction in more than just tutorials.

Before digitalization, artists had to rely on their record labels to form connections with other professionals. However, in the research of this study, artists often discussed how they were able to use social media to connect with other professionals, whether these professionals were local or international (Baym 2010b; Clark 2015; Jung 2014; Pritchard and Vines 2013). These connections allowed for artists to enter into artist networks outside of their location, something that was difficult in previous decades (Baym 2010a; Baym 2018; Clark 2015; Jung 2014). This use of social media for connection extends to connecting with the audience as well. Artists use social media to maintain a certain kind of online presence, one that would present an image that may attract possible audiences (Baym 2010a; Baym 2018; Clark 2015; Pritchard and Vines 2013; Thibeault 2010). This presence was also used to signify the artists' authenticity, which will be thoroughly discussed in the literature review. All of these connections, to both professionals and audiences, aided artists in advertising their music and performances. Where advertisements before digitalization were mostly done through label assistance, these pre-baked connections gave artists a ready-made crowd to listen to their music and attend their performances.

As artists break away from the need to work with labels to access the tools they need to make music and be an artist, the ideas of what it means to be an artist have changed with this access. The ideas of what it means for an artist to be successful, to be authentic, and what they see as competition have changed from what was previously understood to being bound to social media and other Internet spaces. This study looks at these new takes on old ideas through the lens of surrounding literature in the literature review, then compares the traditional music industry's ideals with the results of this study. These results uncover artists' given understandings and perspectives in current times, allowing for an establishment of not only a

change in tools of music-making but in the understanding of what it means to be an artist. But in order to make these comparisons of traditional music industry ideals with artists' given perspectives, an understanding of those traditional ideals needs to be stated.

An Ideology of Getting Signed

The ideology of getting signed, a phrase coined by David Arditi in his book *Getting Signed* (2020), peaked in the 1990s. It was a music industry ideology where major record labels headed the music industry hierarchy. The major record labels were able to find profit in the sale of physical music media, which changed as new formats became available. Profit also came from the label's control of music copyrights, where owning the rights to an artist's music and often times their stage names, with Prince being an example, allowed the record labels to sell their use for uses ranging from movies to ads (Arditi 2020).

The control major record labels had over artists created tension between labels and their musical acts. However, this tension was mediated by some of the coercive ideas within the ideology of getting signed. For example, in the eye of the public, the image of an imagined legitimate musical artist was one signed to a label, which fed into ideology since it establishes and reestablishes the artist association with labels as the legitimate way to be an artist. These coercive ideas allowed legitimacy to the ideology in the minds of both artists and the broader public. For new artists, such ideas are particularly coercive as there was a belief that to succeed at becoming a recording artist, they needed to sign to a record label. While this was often the case in those times for many reasons, this idea resulted in a majority of bands working towards such a goal. New artists had difficulty gaining the capital needed to record and to build the connections to other parts of the industry required to reach the highest levels of success, whether that was access to industry professionals such as producers or having the necessary connections

to get played on radio stations. Major music labels had these connections and had the capital (Arditi 2020).

But getting signed did not always mean success for many bands and artists; even if albums were recorded, labels did not always release them. As artists would become aware of this, it often resulted in the artists losing freedom in how their music sounded in order to ensure that the album would be released at all. While not releasing an album might seem to be a loss of sales for the record labels, getting these acts signed to them allowed control over their music, reducing the competition of these new artists brought against their more promising or already established acts. However, since the dialogue between artists in different timeframes of their success and careers rarely happened, most new and unsigned artists were not aware of this level of control until they were already signed. Add in the idea that the public mostly did not consider unsigned acts to be as legitimate as those that were, as well as the access to capital and connections, and the appeal of signing to labels was often stronger than the fear of perceived control of the labels (Arditi 2020).

For those that attempted to act against this record label hierarchy, their options were limited. Any actions taken by those that interact with the music industry, whether they be listeners or artists, reinforce the ideology regardless if those actions are towards working with record labels, inaction, or in retaliation of record labels. Meaning even attempts to deviate from those higher in the hierarchy end up furthering the ideology, as these substitutions of the major record labels end up taking a similar if not smaller form (Arditi 2020). While major record labels were able to exercise near complete control of the music industry during this time, the rigid hierarchy of the ideology of getting signed would have difficulties meeting the changing economic and social conditions of the 2000s.

Limits and Necessity of Comparison

By taking the traditional music industry ideals presented by Ardit in *Getting Signed* and comparing them with artists' given perspectives of what it means to be an artist, this study shows the disconnect between traditional ideals and artists' perspectives. This establishes that there is an emerging set of ideas bound by social media and the broader Internet that is replacing the traditional music industry ideals. This coincides with the argument of the thesis, that digitalization has not only changed how artists make music but also how they view being an artist. This disconnect of ideas, and the emergence of Internet-bound ideas, points to the possibility of an ideology shift in music.

There are limits to this comparison. This study does not set out to explain the historical understanding of how this transition happened, as that requires a different approach, optic, and methodology. A historical approach may not have been possible at this time, as this study and related literature points to an understanding that we, as a society, are still in the midst of the transition to digital (Baym 2010b; Baym 2018; Martin 2015; Page 2011). Rather than seeing digitalization as a historical occurrence, this study establishes that a transition to digital has been happening and possibly continues to happen. A recent example of this transition possibly still occurring is the impact of the burst of digitalization due COVID-19 pandemic, a pandemic that only began to subside at the time of research.

As discussed previously, a historical perspective of this digital transition and its effect on how artists make music and define themselves is not possible at this time. This necessitates the study's approach of comparing the current artist's perceptions and the given music industry ideals found in the literature. Fragments of the ideas emerging throughout the digital transition are also found within the literature in different ways, as will be seen in the literature

review. This study ties these fragments to artists' responses to better establish both how these ideas contrast with the ideals of traditional music ideology and that these new ideals reside in the artists. In the future, where the changes brought on by digitalization have mostly crystalized, a historical perspective might be fruitful. But at the time of this study, it is necessary to establish that digitalization has led to a change in how artists make music and what it means to be an artist, as well as to how this points to a disconnect with the ideals of the traditional music ideology. This is to give a specific understanding of how digitalization affects music-making and points to a broader understanding of how digitalization has and continues to affect media industries in general.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

While there are studies that discuss ideology within music, they are mostly historical and focus on describing past music ideologies and how they represented the political, economic, and social environments of their time or how our contemporary optics slant such ideologies (Jakes 2019; Leech-Wilkinson 2002; Trapido 2017). Of these studies, David Arditi's research is the most known and persuasive research within the contemporary music ideology literature through his book *Getting Signed* (2020). This book gives a thorough discussion of the traditional music ideology but does not discuss the effect that digitalization and the economic crisis had on the music industry. Rather, it states that record labels remained fairly unscathed in contemporary times. While Arditi's study does not take a historical perspective, understanding the possible changes in the music industry over the last two decades is necessary for understanding the context of digitalization in the music industry and its ideology through comparison to artists' perspectives.

The loss of profit began at the turn of the century, mainly due to the transition of music from the traditional physical media such as compact discs and tape cassettes to digital formats such as files that can easily be shared, though it should be noted that this is not the only cause of the industry's loss in profit (Baym 2010b; Baym 2018; RIAA 2021). The dot com bubble of the 2000s affected the music industry's profits directly, as it was during this time that services such as Napster, AudioGalaxy, and Kazaa found investment support. Since these services allowed for a cheaper and more convenient form of music media in the form of downloadable files, these services directly affected the profit margins of the industry (Lanxon 2009; Political Calculations 2010). While the powers within the music industry were able to take some actions against this, the digital cat was out of the physical bag. As services such as Napster were closed due to

litigation by major record labels, the demand for digital never left and by the time the music industry attempted to meet these demands, these demands were already answered by other services (Arditi 2020; Baym 2018; Lanxon 2009). The most notable example of this is the drop in popularity of compact discs, which made up about 88% of the total revenue in 1999 but only represented about 48% of total revenue by 2010 (RIAA 2021).

While Arditi concedes that profit streams have shifted from selling physical media goods to subscription-based consumption in *Streaming Culture* (2021), he reasserts the claim that while the profit sources have changed, the ideology is largely the same and still places major record labels at the top of the hierarchy. The study states that social media and the broader Internet is just another tool in the label's toolbox. While *Streaming Culture* (2021) does provide a perspective on how the music industry was able to recuperate profits, it only points to the most obvious profit stream found in subscriptions and does not clarify how the ideology may have been affected by fifteen years of economic downturn (RIAA 2021). There is little to no discussion on the broader impacts of social media and the Internet, nor the shifting political economy and social capital in the music industry.

While there is little in the way of a debate with Arditi's works within the literature on music ideology, there are works in other pieces of literature that either disagree with some of Arditi's conclusions or point to ideological shifts. The remainder of the literature review looks at the research exploring the impacts of digitalization in media, both in music specifically and other media in general, as well as an argument from ideological literature that changes in technology and society can cause economic conditions that reveal an emergent ideology.

As David Harvey discusses in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (2005), technological or social change can lead to an economic crisis which comes at a loss of profits within the industry

and especially those higher in the hierarchy that controls capital. Naturally, the capitalists will attempt to recuperate this loss of profit. But in order to do so, they need to adapt to the new technological or social environment, which spurs the emergence of a new ideology (Harvey 2005). It is my assertion that the music industry economic crisis that started in 2000 and persisted until profits began to recuperate in 2015, was started due to mostly technological changes such as the Dot Com Bubble bursting and the advent of file transfers, with the crisis continuing as the wider public began to adopt these technological changes (Baym 2010a; Laxon 2009; Political Calculations 2010; RIAA 2021). The rise of the popularity of social media, in all of its many guises through innumerable Internet spaces, the rapid transition from physical media to digital media to subscriptions, and continually growing access to previously expensive music industry tools has allowed for the shift to a different music industry ideology (Baym 2010b; Baym 2018). This new music ideology would have new orientations of relations between artist and consumers, as well as artist and label. An emerging music ideology might have new concepts of success, fan interactions, and expectations of artist labor, with new conceptions of authenticity, intimacy, and personas that can be separate from our physicalities.

To discuss these new definitions, I look to some of the discussions and debates found in literature discussing the impact of social media and the Internet, in music specifically, and in media in general. For music literature, I will primarily draw on the works of Nancy Baym, who has done extensive work on interactions among fans and among artists, as well as the interactions between both artists and fans. I include other studies in the literature to provide further ideas and debates within these studies.

Baym discusses that the intimacy found between artists and fans is more intimate than those of previous decades through the frequent interactions where the artists share their private

lives with fans (2018). She finds that these connections mimic, often to the point of possibly being “real” and intimate relationships in their “frequency, ordinariness, and how personal they are” (Baym 2018). In forming these intimate relationships with fans, artists form recognizable personalities and personas that feature their most favorable traits, a preexisting idea in the music industry given a more direct-to-fan relational edge due to the possibilities social media brings.

This direct, intimate, and sustained interaction between fans and artist, or at least a persona of the artist, leads to the social media understanding of what is authentic (Baym 2018; Cunningham and Craig 2019; Thurlow 2019). While there are many debates within the literature surrounding authenticity, I mainly focus on literature that focuses on authenticity in social media. In this, Cunningham and Craig (2019) introduce this subject in dialogue with pre-existing research and thought on authenticity, a difficult discussion to navigate, and concluded that social media authenticity differs from “standard” understandings. In social media spaces, authenticity is dependent on the dialogue artists have with the community of fans they establish. And this authenticity is constantly tested and vetted, depending on the constant intimate relations between artists and fans. Lastly, an artist’s authenticity depends on their ability to appear truly distinctive from others in their field as well as differentiating themselves from the conventional norms of “legacy” or traditional media (Cunningham and Craig 2019). In conclusion, authenticity exists in social media spaces as coming from the constant interactions between artists and fans, while being vetted by the artist’s distinctness from others in the field and the authenticity norms of traditional media.

The nature of this intimate relational interaction and a social media-derived conception of authenticity provides both negatives and positives to those within social media spaces, whether they be artists or listeners. This, in part, leads to the ongoing debate within media literature on

the merits of social media and the Internet within media spaces, and whether it presents an overall negative or positive change. When artists share these intimate personas via interaction with their fans, other listeners can see these interactions and it makes it more likely for them to consume the artist's music or even become fans themselves. This has become the main marketing strategy of artists and many others, and the most successful examples become viral (Baym 2010a; Kaplan and Haenlein 2011; Storrod and Densley 2017). But these interactions can be stressful to some artists, to the point of some quitting the industry (Baym 2010a; Baym 2018; Logan 2021).

This style of becoming popular through social media interactions allows for identities that traditionally were ignored by record labels to gain a following, especially for racial and ethnic identities (Jung 2014). These interactions also allowed similar identities to connect across international lines and to find other listener markets (Clark 2015; Jung 2014) but such a reliance on technology for success can further poverty lines in countries that have an unequal adoption or access to technology (Clark 2015; Pritchard and Vines 2013). And while this type of interaction between identities can strengthen the presence of often ignored social groups, it has also allowed the spread of more harmful ideas such as white nationalist ideologies (Embrick, Wright, and András 2012). These intimate relations between persons on the Internet have resulted in new forms of media events, such as the participatory nature of fanfictions and digital concerts, as well as new media forms such as the “constructive collaborations” that change authors with every installment (Rettberg 2011; Thomas 2011).

Artists used these interactions and connections, in part, to form support networks, allowing them access to audiences and other professionals (Baym 2010b, Clark 2015). Forming these networks allows artists to interact across borders, with some artists working with

professionals in other countries to make their music (Clark 2015; Jung 2014; Pritchard and Vines 2013). However, using these networks places expectations on the artist, with audience members expecting artists to be readily accessible online (Baym 2010a; Clark 2015). To meet these expectations artists often carefully manage their online presence to keep an authentic appearance, often being described as developing a personal brand in the literature (Baym 2010a; Jung 2014; Page 2011). While these expectations can often be stressful on artists, it allows them access to audiences that readily listen to their music, buy their merchandise, and go to their concerts along with aiding in advertising by sharing artists' posts to their own networks (Baym 2010a; Clark 2015; Pritchard and Vines 2013).

Digitalization of the music industry also allowed for increased access beyond networking. As the literature discusses, artists are able to gain access to the tools to produce music (Baym 2010b; Baym 2018; Jung 2014; Martin 2014; Porfilio et al. 2013). From software to the knowledge needed to use said software, artists look to digital ways to pursue music-making. Thibeault sees digitalization as expanding the options of presenting music beyond performance, including, "recording, computer synthesis, sampling, remixing, and more." (Thibeault 2010). However, when the literature does mention artists having an increased access to the means to make music, it is rarely specific on what that access fully looks like to the artist. This is something that this study was aware of and looks to gain an artist's perspective of access.

A question that is posed quite often in the literature is, how does digitalization differ from the music industry disturbances of other technological changes? In this, the literature comes to different conclusions due to their optics. For some authors, it was that new artists have increased access to networks that previously were bound to location (Clark 2015; Jung

2014). This access could be far-reaching, often international, in ways that were not sustainable without considerable timeframes and support from interested record labels (Baym 2010b; Clark 2015; Jung 2014; Pritchard and Vines 2013). This access to networks also allowed artists to use their networks for advertising and building audiences (Baym 2010b; Baym 2018; Clark 2015; Kaplan and Haenlein 2011; Pritchard and Vines 2013; Thibeault 2010). Other studies discussed the notable difference of the relatively cheaper access to production tools and the knowledge on how to use these tools. Compared to previous technology changes, which required the artist to work with labels to gain access to the often-expensive physical tools to make music, digital music production is readily and cheaply available to a new artist (Baym 2010b; Jung 2014; Martin 2015; Pritchard and Vines 2013; Porfilio et al. 2013; Thibeault 2010).

However, this study sees the need for access to both networks and the tools of music-making to make lasting changes in how artists can approach making music outside of label control. For example, in “Transnational Migrations and YouTube Sensations,” Jung discusses that while cassette tapes had a “democratizing effect” that revitalized many genres in 1980s India, it did not aid in these genres gaining widespread success. While cassette tapes made recording the music cheaper, they did not contain the ability to also provide alternative networks to spread this music, leaving the music to the disinterested whims of the music industry (Jung 2014). While Jung’s optics was about how social media allowed for disenfranchised groups access when traditional record labels were uninterested in signing artists from these groups, this understanding of the unique introduction of access to music production tools and networks presented by social media is vital for this study’s approach to gaining a view on digitalization’s effects on artists (Jung 2014). An additional piece of the puzzle comes from including the changes digitalization has prompted in how artists understand authenticity, online presence, and

how they pursue their careers as discussed previously. By combining all of these changes caused by digitalization discussed by the surrounding literature in interviews with artists, this study gives a clearer artist perspective of the changes in how they make music, see what it means to be an artist, and clues into the broader changes in music industry power structure.

CHAPTER IV: METHODS

Introduction

The spring of 2022 was an interesting time for artists with the first interview for this study being conducted on the twenty-second of February 2022 and the final interview on the fourth of May 2022. As society in general, began to open up after the pandemic, the desire for live performances with artists had been in high demand. This provided a unique time to be interviewing artists, as they were well aware of the changes in the last few years due to said pandemic. It brought difficulties in scheduling interviews with artists, as some simply did not have the time between making music, performing, and working a primary job. However, since the subject artists were involved in making music and planning performances at this uniquely demanding time, their minds were already looking at the changes in how they operate as artists. The artists often gave lengthy responses, with two artists having an hour and a half interview and the shortest interview being forty-five minutes.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study involved artists that utilized social media and the Internet in their efforts as artists. The initial sampling of this population was done by using connections I had with artists via social media, namely Facebook. Of the seven artists that were included in this study, five were gained from social media connections. The remaining two artists, Machine13 and Tyche, in this study were recommended by artists that already were already part of the study. This style of sampling was intended to replicate the style in which artists form music professional networks, where artists can use those in their networks to make new connections to gain access to music professionals. While only two artists were interviewed when

recommended by other artists, there were also two artists that noted interest in the study but were unable to interview due to scheduling difficulties.

This study did not have any exclusion criteria, but it did have inclusion criteria. The subjects must have been active musical artists and these musical artists must have been active on social media. Naturally, in a study that provided artist perspectives on the use of social media and the Internet in the pursuit of music-making requires a population of artists that used social media and the Internet.

The demographics of the population, which are in Table 1 below, are all gathered from the interviews or from the artists' social media pages. To avoid revealing the artists' actual ages, the artists' approximate ages was used in the demographic. The range of artists' ages was as young as their mid-twenties and as old as their early thirties, with most artists being in their late twenties. Music form is the type of music the artist indicated they made, either in their interview or through their advertisements on social media. In this case, "EDM" stands for "Electronic Dance Music," an often-used acronym for both artists and listeners.

Years active are defined as the consistent years the artist had been active in their current music project. The reason for this definition is for clarity and consistency, as some artists had stopped pursuing a music career earlier in their life but only recently returned to music-making or had recently started their own music project. Giving the years active in their current music project allows for an understanding of where the artist is in regard to using social media as an artist. An artist that has been releasing music under the same name for six years will have a different perspective when compared to an artist that has recently started a music project.

The career stage of an artist is the greatest extent of their in-person performances. Discussing these definitions starting from the smallest extent to the largest. The definition of

“online only,” is performances only given online, such as music videos or streaming a performance. The second smallest extent is “local performances,” which is for artists that have performed live in their local city or towns close to that city. Artists that had “regional performances,” had individual live performances within their home region, which was the Southeastern United States for all artists in this study. Lastly, artists that had “regional tours,” had consecutive live performances in their home region.

While all the artists showed examples of having professional music knowledge, in the demographics only artists that pursued a music profession for others were considered a music professional. Therefore, there were only two artists in the study that were also considered a music professional, with one making and designing merchandise for other artists and the other artist working as an audio engineer.

Table 1. Population Demographics

Stage Name or Alias	Approximate Age	Music Form	Years Active	Career Stage	Music Professional
Atar	Early 30s	Underground Hip-hop	12	Regional Performances	N/A
Hadad	Late 20s	Indie Pop	2	Regional Tours	N/A
Hubal	Late 20s	EDM	5	Regional Tours	N/A
Kutbay	Late 20s	EDM	5	Local Performances	Audio Engineer

Machine13	Mid 20s	Cyberpunk	2	Online Only	N/A
Obod	Late 20s	Underground	6	Local	N/A
		Hip-hop		Performances	
Tyche	Early 30s	Synthwave	3	Regional	Merchandise
				Performances	Designer

Research Instruments and Transcription

I used Zoom, a telecommunication service, to conduct interviews and I utilized their auto-transcribing and video recording system. The output of this system was verified by myself, and I used traditional methods to ensure accuracy. Traditional methods meaning, the researcher verified the transcription provided by Zoom’s system by reading the transcript while either listening to the audio or watching the video of the transcription.

Ethics

In order to have informed consent, I informed the subject that they had the right to revoke their consent at any time and that they did not need to answer any question they did not wish to. I also provided the subject with relevant facts along with answering any questions they had. These relevant facts include that I have conducted this research to learn more about how artists interact with social media. I provided the subject with an alias, and informed them as such, unless the subject requested the use of their stage name. Lastly, I sent the artists the transcript of their interview and informed them that any data could be revoked. To ensure the subject’s confidentiality and anonymity, I stored all interview data in the university Box drive, as recommended by the IRB. Aliases were kept in a password-protected zip file on a removable flash drive.

Validity and Reliability

The theoretical approach of this thesis was informed by previous research and studies of ideology, music industry ideology, and social media studies. Interviews have been used to support music industry ideology research in previous studies, as well as research into the social media relational labor of artists (Arditti 2020; Baym 2010a; Baym 2018). A population of social media-based artists allowed insight into the artist side of music production and what it means to be an artist after the digitalization of the music industry.

The results of this study are relatively replicable, as long as artists within social media were the population and interviews utilized a similarly semi-structured format, especially if the artists are regional. However, there remains a possibility of continued ideological shifts as digitalization continues to disrupt the music industry or as the hierarchy continues to shift between record labels and tech companies. A similar research approach could reliably be used to analyze ideological shifts in other media industries that utilize the Internet, digitalization, and social media.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

Introduction

Research Goals

The primary research goal of this thesis was aimed at gaining a view on the effects of the digitalization of music-making. Within the results, the thesis hypothesized that artists would give accounts of using digital means to produce music. This use could be direct or indirect such as using software to make music or using digital means to meet needs in making music, with social media advertising and working with other music professionals over the Internet. This thesis will look for any of the artists' music-making needs being met by digital means.

The second research goal of this thesis was to gain an understanding of how digitalization's effects on the music-making process further affected how artists approached what it means to be an artist. In this, the thesis looked to find accounts of how artists defined aspects of being an artist, such as how artists defined success as an artist, how they might gain legitimacy, and who they view as their competition and what they compete over. Gaining these understandings is important in themselves, as it allows a perspective of not only how music-making has changed, but also the idea of what an artist is has changed to better engage with the changes due to digitalization. But by gaining an understanding of how artists define themselves, this thesis also illuminated how these definitions contrasted with the artist definitions of the music industry ideology and indicated the emergence of a new ideology.

This thesis also looked for evidence that the previous music ideology has been or has begun losing both its power and control over the music-making process. This ideology was based on the power and control of the music industry by record labels, where the legitimacy of an artist was based on whether they were signed to a record label. In looking for evidence of this

loss of power, this thesis specifically looked to gain a view of the success goals of artists to see if they aligned with this music ideology, as well as question the perceived legitimacy of artists signing to a record label. Since the previous music ideology also claimed that any technological and digital changes in music-making have come under the power and control of record labels, any findings with respect to digitalization that were not under the control of record labels may point to the loss of power and control.

Lastly, this thesis theorized that if the previous music ideology is losing its power due to the advent of the digitalization of music-making, then a new ideology focused on using digital means of music-making to exert power and control. However, how this ideology might be defined is difficult to tell, as this ideology seems to still be emerging. Within the results, there are avenues or concepts of control and power that can be seen in traces and will be discussed as they surface in the results. Rather than coming to a firm and fully researched conclusion, these concepts asked questions and gave insights into future research. Some of these concepts that can be seen in traces are the idea of artists needing to interact with algorithms and trending objects to gain success, the idea of online attention as social currency, the importance of social media metrics in evaluating success, and the ever-present importance of authenticity.

The results of the interviews will be presented in sections and sub-sections. Sections will contain all responses, that follow a trend throughout the interviews within a given topic or variable. Sub-sections will discuss the trends in responses within these topics or variables. For example, the “Accessibility” section will cover any responses that were in response to success goal questions, or any dialogue related to success goals found in the interviews. Within this section will be the sub-sections of “Access to Professional Networks” and “Access to Tools and

Education,” which will look at specific trends in the interviews that contained artists’ accounts of success goals.

Accessibility

Introduction

Since the primary research goal of this thesis was aimed at gaining a view on the effects of the digitalization of music-making, an important focus of the interviews was the heightened artist accessibility to the tools of music-making, to the education to learn to use them, and to the networks of professionals needed to make music. In pursuit of this research goal, I asked the artists how they got access to the tools they used to make music and followed up by asking them how they learned to use them. I also asked the artists if they had worked with other artists or professionals that they had met on social media, in order to gain an understanding of their access to networks.

Access to Professional Networks

During the interviews, I asked the artists if they had ever worked with other artists or industry professionals that they had met through social media. All the artists indicated they had, with varying degrees of connection. Even Hadad, who had an engineer and a producer in his band, discussed the connections to other music professionals he had formed via social media. While he was able to connect with local bands in a “grassroots” style, social media aided in connecting with bands in other areas that they were touring, “There's tons of bands from like Philadelphia and Nashville and you know connections we would have never made if someone didn't slide to the DMs.” Tyche talked about how he had just finished a collaboration, at the time of the interview, with an artist who lived in India. It started when Tyche got an email in the music project’s inbox, which asked him for more information on a song that he had made, “And

I kind of just broke down the instruments and the melodies and kind of just did like a something you would hear on synthwave radio, or something.” The artist then remixed the song,

And he actually recorded his own original vocals on top of it in Hindi and sent me the demo of it. And so, from there I was like, hey this is amazing.

Like, let's work together, figure out how to work together.

Despite some difficulties with time differences, they had been working together to release some collaborative music together. Tyche elaborated on how that connection started, “So, all thanks to YouTube, and doing a cover and all that. And it wasn't even him that found it, he said his sister sent him a link to this song, and I thought that was crazy, too.” Besides collaborating with other artists, it was common for artists to find and work with their producers and engineers through social media.

Obod found the producer he preferred to work with through another artist he was following on social media, who would “shout out to ArmAndHammer [the producer], he’s done production for him.” When he listened to the music and liked the production behind it, Obod messaged him, and they started working together shortly after that. Atar said that the majority of the producers he worked with he had met through social media, and,

If I could be in the studio with these dudes, like physically, a lot of the time I would prefer it for sure, but it's just not possible. So, next best thing is just shooting files back and forth in a Google Drive. And that's definitely how a lot of my music's been made.

On the other side of the interaction, Kutbay also worked as an engineer and talked about how he had gotten work through social media. “I reconnected with someone I went to high school with that... that makes hip hop music and makes beats and stuff and I'm mixing,

mastering his music, and I'm working on a whole EP with him actually.” While social media aided artists in connecting with other professionals across borders, it was also helpful in finding the local artist networks.

When starting his recent music project, Tyche stated that he used social media to “just network and meet other people from the Asheville area and adding artists on there first and just seeing what other artists were up to.” Obod had a similar experience, after connecting with one of the more prominent local artists. Through this artist, he was able to meet other artists in the area. And when that artist organized music shows in the area, Obod’s connection with the artist gained him access to performing at the shows. By using social media, artists were able to make connections with established local networks in a matter of weeks. While artists were able to enter into networks that aided in making music, they indicated that there were rules on how an artist should engage these networks.

One of the interview questions that I asked artists was if there are any rules to how they thought artists should interact online. This question often caused the artists to pause in thought, and then they would answer in a few different ways. One of these ways was when they talked about how to talk to other artists, professionals, and listeners on social media, or how others should talk to them. The prevalent and recurring theme of this topic was whether these interactions felt, to use their terms, “natural,” “authentic,” or “real,” rather than when it felt “not as genuine” or “like a business relationship.” Through one of these conversations, Hadad discussed what he thought it might be,

If you're talking with someone like minded like you're gonna act like, I don't know, a certain way. It just, it benefits you, generally, the environment you're in. It's like conduct, respect. I don't know. Maybe it's

just boundaries. You know, like talking about, to like reach out to that person you never met before. You might just seem like you're just asking for them to do you a huge favor, which is kind of disrespectful, that's what I'm kind of getting at.

This is the common thought that came up during the interviews, at least in regard to networking conduct. When he was talking about it, Atar said that he had met, “other people through the Internet.” Atar mentioned that these people had become “super relevant” for his up-and-coming music but, that meeting one of the more important people that helped with this “next wave of music” was an awkward affair. “But I didn't meet him in person, you know. It was like he hit me up online, and at first, I kind of ignored him.” This was due to how that person introduced themselves,

He was just like saying you know your music is dope, like. Let me take you to dinner and let's talk business and I'm just like just kind of suss about like anyone that's telling me they can change my music life...

The person was persistent, and eventually, Atar said, “ alright I'll bite, and so like now we're great friends.” However, Atar was aware of his reluctance, “Him doing it online, it was easier for me to brush him off and be like, I don't fucking know this guy, and he's making me these promises, and... I don't trust anyone on the Internet.” But if he had met them at a show and had “been able to feel his chemistry” then it most likely would not have taken as long.

Through connections on social media, artists were able to connect with other professionals to fill many of the needs usually taken care of by record labels. By successfully navigating the rules of engaging in these networks, artists were able to find bands to tour with, producers and engineers to mix and master their music, and other artists to collaborate with. In

all, this helped to support the thesis hypothesis that social media and the Internet can provide access to the networks that artists need in their efforts to produce music. While having access to networks is vital for artists, having access to music-making-tools and education is just as important.

Access to Tools and Education

When asked how artists got access to the tools they use to make music, four of the artists responded that they either originally pirated the software, downloaded a demo, or both before going on to fully purchase the software. Atar humorously recalled when he and his friends pirated their software,

When I was in like middle school, we pirated fruity loops back when fruity loops was like the number one most pirated fucking thing in the world, and we made like an album of like shitty little beats called, ‘Galaxy Pimp 3: Rise of the Proletariat.’

Obod discussed the ease of access in the current day, with Apple having free recording software included in their Macs called Garage Band, which he indicated as the first step for many artists. Obod then went on to discuss what he used currently,

Logic would be the next step. But, I mean, when you're sending it off to people that are actually professionals, they're most likely some will work on Logic.... You buy it once. 200 bucks or something for Logic and Logic gives you all the tools that you need for sure in order to make a song.

Kutbay also discussed the ease of entry for electronic artists, “All you really need is a laptop and some headphones.” He also showed off his handmade free spectrum analyzer, a tool

used for measuring frequency, balance, and tonal characteristics of a sound to aid in identifying problem frequencies in a mix. He illustrated how it worked during our interview. When Kutbay was asked how he got the analyzer, he said it was from Etsy, an online cottage industry market. Clearly, access to the tools needed to produce music was easy if the artist already had access to a computer and the Internet. But access to tools means little without access to the necessary knowledge to use them.

As previously noted, I also asked artists how they learned to use the software they had access to. Six of the artists discussed using digital means to learn, while the remaining artist learned from family who are also artists. While these digital means varied, the most consistent response was that watching YouTube was used as a learning tool. Obod put it in straightforward terms, “You could go to school for it and spend a ton of money, or you can do what basically everyone does and go on YouTube and spend no money.” However, being able to use YouTube was not always this reliable. Hubal discussed that when he first started learning, back when he was still attending high school, he had difficulty finding YouTube videos specific to the music he wanted to make but that easy access to this knowledge became more common over time. As Hubal reflected, “...as it got more popular, more popular, YouTube started blowing up with all these channels, doing tutorials and production videos. And then, you know, more recently, it has turned into like producers streaming on twitch...”

Besides YouTube, artists also noted a recent trend of artists live streaming themselves when going through the music-making process. Live streaming is when someone transmits live video coverage over the Internet, a popular online service called Twitch was the most common platform for this, but YouTube and Facebook also have live streaming services. Hubal stated that this recent growth of artists’ live streams is a response to Covid-19,

Especially over the pandemic, it was massive where all your favorite artists were like not... There were no shows, there was nothing, so they needed supplementary income. So, some of them started gaming on Twitch but some of them started doing producer streams and feedback streams.

Hubal considered this helpful, as it allowed him to see how successful artists went about music-making, and that some artists had transitioned to using it as a source of income. While not seeing it as a form of income, Tyche discussed how he used live streaming to engage with the audience, as well as used footage from the live streams in his social media outreaches. Tyche was also the only artist that voiced some issues with using the Internet and social media to learn how to make music.

Some of the issues around using social media for music education stem from the knowledge barriers around posting to YouTube. As Tyche told it,

I'm on YouTube because I've a background in editing film and stuff. And so, it's like a no-brainer for me but it's a lot of work to like... if you don't know how to do that it's very overwhelming. So, to even just make an album art with your music behind it and upload it to YouTube is actually pretty confusing.

This was an issue that Tyche had when learning how to play the synthesizer, in that when he was looking for videos, he “watched garbage tutorials after garbage tutorials.” In Tyche’s case, this allowed for an opportunity for him to use the lack of quality YouTube tutorials to make his own tutorial, which increased the foot traffic on his own YouTube channel.

While using the Internet for education has its flaws, the low-cost barrier, and availability of online music education, in conjunction with the access to tools as previously covered, has opened up access to music-making to the extent that Hubal actually saw it as contributing to competition,

It's gotten so cheap that so many of these just like kids are growing up producing that there is just an overwhelming amount of people trying to release music at the same time. And there's only so much attention that can be paid to it.

Regardless of how this access affected the growth of competition, artists reported that learning through online sources was a common occurrence and that it was accessible. The artists' reports on the ease of gaining access to both the tools and the education to use them supports the thesis' hypothesis that digitalization has led to easier access to music-making materials, than before the widespread acceptance of social media. Social media and the Internet allowed artists easy access to the tools, education, and networks needed to make music. In the opinion of some artists, this increase in access has also led to an increase in competition with others.

Artist Definitions

Introduction

This section looked at the artists' definitions of what it means to be an artist. Results looking at artist definitions supported the research goals of this thesis by giving a contemporary viewing of these definitions. This allowed the study to compare contemporary accounts with the literature that established how artists operating in the traditional music ideology saw themselves. This comparison will aid in seeing how artists saw and defined themselves differently than

before and if it is in digital terms. Therefore, this section presented how contemporary artists defined their competitions and what they were competing over, how they defined what success looked like for artists, and the ways they saw gaining legitimacy as artists. By viewing how this differed from what was established as artists' ideals of the traditional music ideology, an understanding of digitalization's effect on artists' definitions begins to be viewed.

Competition

A common response when asking about competition was that the artist did not feel like they were in competition at all. Kutbay considered artists that viewed music-making as a competition as absurd to him. To him, he saw it as something that "pushes people away from each other in the music community." Kutbay also felt that he has developed his own sound that nobody else can bring to the table, a sentiment shared by Atar, Obod, and Tyche. Tyche stated, "I just think... everybody's bringing their own unique voice to something. And if somebody's into it then it's for them, if somebody's not into it it's not for them." Atar also discussed that artists who see it as competitive make a different kind of music, "...if I wanted to chase success and compete in that sense, I would make different music." Atar considered this as a different kind of music than what he made, stating that he was,

Looking for groups of people, be that artists or listeners, that are interested in tapping into this specific thing that I'm doing, and I'm more grateful for their attention and their patronage than that I feel any type of like competitiveness or whatever.... I think, independent art oftentimes focuses on community for those reasons, and industry art focuses on competitiveness because it's this superficial place of like, rat racing yourself to the top.

Hadad saw this as a relatively recent development, stating that before Covid he felt that his music scene was more competitive. Whether this was because he was younger and had yet to mature, or this had something to do with the community changing due to the challenges Covid presented to artists, he was unsure. Hadad reflected

I don't know something about post-Covid. Since nobody could perform, and there was no competition at all like there's... It's the competition is turning to community. It's like you wanna see your peers do good and it's like... I listen to so many artists, I know that so many people listen to so many artists, I don't think there's a limit to how much music people can take in.

Seeing other artists not as competition but as community seemed to have surfaced, in part, from the thought that other artists were an opportunity for collaboration. For example, when Atar was discussing how he was looking for other artists that “are interested in tapping into this specific thing that I’m doing,” I responded, why make an enemy when you could make an ally? Atar responded affirmatively, “Yeah, exactly!” However, when artists did see themselves in competition with other artists, it was indirect.

While some of the artists did indicate that they had some impressions that there was competition coming from other artists, they did not view this competition coming from themselves. Rather than viewing themselves as being competitive, some of the artists reported that it was other artists being competitive. While Atar did not see himself as being competitive, he saw it as an aspect of a different approach to making music. He specifically discussed the rapper 6IX9INE (or “six nine”) as being competitive and that it was “a part of what made him brilliant and so entertaining.” But Atar stated that while he had respect for approaching music in

this way, that was not how he wanted to make music and that he had no desire to be associated with it. Obod responded to the question by sharing that, “I do not like thinking of it in competitive terms, and I have a lot of friends that 100% look at in those terms.” Obod saw this kind of competition directly when he had worked on a collaboration with one of these friends and how the artist saw the collaboration as a competition. While some artists reported feeling or seeing competition in this way, others saw themselves in indirect competition with other artists.

The two artists who reported feeling some form of indirect competition saw it in differing fashions. Hadad saw it as a natural part of being an artist, “I mean at the end of day you want people to be at your show.” Hadad indicated that this indirect competitive spirit was a positive influence, stating, “I guess there is a competition, because I don't know... There has to be a reason that I want to write a better song every time, you know? Maybe that's not all a me thing.” Obod also indicated there was some competition, but that it came from other artists for the attention of industry experts. He discussed the kinds of producers and engineers that he had worked with and that sometimes an in-demand professional may not be able to give his work the attention he would prefer because there were many artists that competed for that attention. Obod also shared that a professional that had little demand might not be in demand for a reason. For Obod, he found the perfect balance by finding a professional from another country,

...That's probably one of the good things about him being in Armenia is he's not like working with 10 different artists right now. If he's working with, like, two on two or three projects and I'm one of them. He can give it a little bit more attention to detail and whatnot.

In general, artists that did discuss feeling competition either viewed it as coming from other artists or coming from indirect forces. Viewing themselves in competition with other

artists was rare, and when they did see it, the artists seemed to view it as a minor facet of making music or as part of the music-making process for others. Being in competition to sign to a label was never mentioned, despite the surrounding literature attempting to establish that this was the main form of competition between artists.

When artists directly linked themselves to competition, it was not to artists but to content creators. Namely, artists stated that competition with content creators or the influence of content creators affected how they could use the Internet and social media. A content creator, in this context, is someone who produces digital media with the intent to educate or entertain an audience. There are many examples of content creators, as it can be anyone who releases videos on YouTube, posts a dance to TikTok, a meme to Reddit, a digital painting to DeviantArt, or a song on SoundCloud, being a content creator. While such a description can appear exceedingly general for sociological use, this was how the artists used the term and this usage is common in social media.

Hubal linked competition with content creators as being a direct contributor to his difficulty gaining spots in festivals and other concerts. He had previously stated that the venues would like his music, but that his social media metrics were too low for them. That venue organizers would tell Hubal, “So like pump those up and then, like you have a chance.” Rather than look at other artists as the competition, he stated,

Well, what do I have to do to get my social media numbers up besides working on music, and it's like music doesn't really attract much attention anymore. Like on Instagram, meme accounts blow up, if you're a hot guy or a hot girl you blow up, you know?

Hubal noted that while that might not be the only reason a person would find success,

...very few people I feel like blow up strictly off of music anymore, especially in the social media space, unless it's like a song on TikTok that goes viral like people can blow up super easily that way. But I think sort of the meme dancing like, attractiveness scale still applies like to TikTok stuff, too.

Machine 13 saw competition in a similar manner,

I think if you're if you're doing anything on social media it's some sort of competition. For that kind of attention currency, which is interesting kind of these days, right? So, it's like back in the day you competed against musicians. But now, you're competing against the entire entertainment industry which is now everybody.

Asking Machine 13 to elaborate on his statement, Machine 13 broke down how he saw competition in music evolve over the last hundred years. As he saw it, if someone wanted to be entertained a hundred years ago, one would have to see an opera, vaudeville, theatre, or a live artist. As time progressed, more and more people had access to vinyl, but an artist only had to compete against a handful of other artists. But as radio and recording became more popular, an artist had to compete against radio music, which in turn had to compete with radio shows. Then TVs come along, and as music migrated to TV, now an artist had to compete with TV music, and with anything else on TV. This goes on,

Till you get to the Internet age, where, like the bottom of the pyramid is this big and everyone has access. So, you're not... just the fence is, it's not high, but everyone can jump over it, you know? So, you're having to compete with everybody, for everybody's attention.

When I followed up on this thought process, I asked Machine 13 whether he meant he was competing with other artists or was he competing with content creators in general. Machine 13 responded with, “I mean, thinking very pragmatically, like I’m competing with anyone who's ever uploaded anything to the Internet, ever.”

These responses link to the accounts of easy access discussed previously in this study, in that the expanding access to the tools to make music contributed to the competition artists felt. While this increased the ease of access for artists, a similar ease of access might have also aided in content creators growing as well. From what the artists reported in the interviews, it indicated that competition with content creators was over social media metrics, at least in the case of Hubal. The artists’ responses did not support the idea of competing over getting signed to record labels. Rather, these artists regarded competition as a non-factor, indirect if it is other artists, or possibly competition over social media with content creators.

Success

Artists only had two different types of responses when they were asked what they saw as success for an artist. Some of the artists saw self-expression as success, which included self-expression, appreciation, and connection. Artists most often saw success as self-sufficiency, in that their main goal was to have music-making be their primary employment and success was often perceived as the main goal of artists in general. This sub-section looks at how artists saw success, and how they viewed how to gain that success.

Artists often saw the idea of self-expression as success as contrary to the prioritization of financial gain. Obod had found that when he focused on monetary success, it created roadblocks for his creativity in making music. He shared a personal story where a producer he worked with

at one point, who had some measure of success and worked with artists such as DaBaby, told the artist that,

People know when you're doing it for the wrong reasons. And you're not going to... I mean it just comes through, like you know, you can feel an energy from how someone sounds, how they're delivering something, you can tell when someone's half-assing it, doesn't matter how perfectly it's mixed, if they're not putting their heart into it. And also, with just like, your lyricism, you know if you're not being honest, it's very, very obvious.

Obod noted that while being told this was difficult to hear, the advice eventually resulted in him using music to process the difficulties of his life. Atar had a similar but differing view on success in that meeting his own expectations of being an artist mattered most,

To me being successful is, am I making the art that I want to make and am I sharing it how I want to share it and it's not really about, necessarily like, are the biggest platforms covering me, am I making a lot of money.

For these artists, what mattered more than fiscal success was either feelings of appreciation from the audience or feeling that they contributed to music in their own way. For Obod, being an artist was about connecting with people and sharing his experiences. He did not quantify success as a fiscal measure, but “when I feel like I'm achieving any kind of success is when I get super heartfelt messages.” Atar explained that he views success as contributing in his own way:

Success to me is, am I expressing what I want to express, and who am I getting to be as a person. I just want that freedom have my own version of an alternative lifestyle where I get to make music and make music videos.

While these artists view self-expression as success as being mutually exclusive to a focus on monetary gain, what artists stated in the interviews often indicated that it might not be so clear of a separation.

Self-sufficiency was a major goal for the majority of artists' and they gravitated toward being able to pursue music-making as their sole labor. Even Obod looked to being self-sufficient as a goal along with connections to the audience, admitting, "But for me personally, I would be plenty happy if I could reach as many people as possible, and be able to give myself some supplemental income, without having to perform a lot." Hadad also married the idea of self-expression and connection to the idea of being self-sufficient,

You know with any art; you hope people like it. So, the more people who like it, I think that would feel really good. But I'd say that I think others are more important than if I'm having fun, and it's providing, you know, food.

Hadad also equated having a self-sufficiency goal as being serious about art, for it to become his primary job: "I mean cause everyone in my band has to have jobs and do this. So, if it could become self-sufficient, that would be a huge goal." All the artists involved in this study indicated, to some degree, that becoming self-sufficient was a success goal of theirs. Just breaking even was a goal for Machine 13,

If I could do what I do and not be losing money that would be awesome, like if I could at least break even on what I'm doing, and that's like I could like die happy with this particular project that I'm working on.

While all the artists saw self-sufficiency as a goal, some saw the difficulty in reaching such a level of success. The idea is to make enough money off of touring and merchandise, but as stated by Obod,

I'll sell CDs, you know, but you can't make the same kind of money there as we're used to because of streaming platforms and whatnot. Then, I mean it doesn't matter really until you're up there with like, you know, 100,000 monthly listeners.

Tyche stated that being able to have music-making being his primary source of income is ideal but stated that it would be likely that he would need to work as an engineer as well, "I think it's kind of rare to be full on music." Rather than there being a separation of expression and sufficiency that was stated by some artists, it appears that most artists were looking at both in regard to success. The artists also reported a fairly unified opinion on how they would be able to gain that success.

"I think the Internet is essential," said Kutbay. When I prodded him about this, he responded not just talking about artists,

If you're a musician, for example, or if you're a business... to have your product or your art out, like in front of a large amount of people. Like, without the Internet... I mean there's TV, I guess, as a means to get your, like get some ads out or something but that just wouldn't apply to music. You know most people stream music now that they don't go out and buy CDs.

Kutbay was not the only artist that gave responses that highlighted the necessity of using the Internet and social media to achieve their success goals.

When asked if achieving success without the Internet or social media was possible, Hadad responded, “oh, probably not. Hmm. That be hard, in this day and age.” When Atar was asked this same question, he responded that social media had already provided him with some measure of success, “I’d say so of the most successful moments that I’ve had have been sharing my videos that I’ve made through the Internet. Building my reputation like... when I was throwing events getting people to come out to those events, you know, the Internet and social media was like a really important part of raising that awareness.” As indicated by the artists themselves, they were not the only ones that equated social media usage with success. As stated by the late twenties white EDM artist under the alias “Hubal”,

Specifically, to like electronic music, like social media makes or breaks you, really. You know I’ve had calls with some people like, I’ve sent out press kits to festivals and stuff trying to get just like local or regional spot, and like not even like big spots just like entry level local regional spots, and they’ll go hey, your music is great. We love the look, but your numbers are super low.

Artists often indicated that they used social media to broadcast their music in pursuit of success. While Machine 13 saw social media as the way to get his voice heard, he indicated how that was just the way it is done currently and that at some point social media will also be outdated. While it is around, Obod considered social media a boon to those artists that are not as social, which points to a minor thought on how social media allows access for artists that do not fit the mold of the traditional view of an artist. The given artists’ opinions looked to social media for their success, and if an artist is going to be discovered “Your odds are probably likely

to be discovered on YouTube recommended, or TikTok right now, at least.” For these artists, social media is necessary for success.

A central hypothesis of this thesis is that digitalization had affected the music industry, and the artists’ stated focus on social media as the way they could succeed supports this. Artists did not see their success goals and avenues coming from signing to a label, despite the traditional ideals of success for artists. Instead, artists viewed how success could be achieved through digital means and how their success was measured by others, namely venue organizers, through social media metrics. This is a clear indicator of how digitalization has affected how artists defined themselves, at least in how they define success and how they saw how to achieve it. It would also indicate how they saw legitimacy as an artist.

Legitimacy

A result of this study is that the desire for signing to a label is minor for the modern artist, rather than the ideal as stated previously in the literature (Arditi 2020). While this conclusion relied on several factors, such as the hypothesized growing access to tools and software, a central aspect of this deduction is that getting signed to a label has begun to lose its renown as a symbol of artist legitimacy. Another conclusion is that artists will begin to see the use of social media in efforts to become an artist as legitimate. This sub-section looks at whether artists viewed signing a label as the sole arbitrator of artist legitimacy and whether using social media was an avenue for legitimacy.

The question of whether an artist needed to sign to a label to be legitimate garnered long conversations in these interviews. As is often the case in semi-structured interviews, none of the artists only had one thought or opinion in response to this question and many had both positive

and negative perceptions about record labels. Atar saw being signed as treating music as an industry, something he was opposed to,

But they don't get to put music out and the music they do get to put out has been run through like a board room... Well, this word is really hot right now. Or this celebrity is really high right now, you should name drop them, or write a chorus like this, or you know. And so, in that sense, I think it like delegitimizes me like an artist, and makes them less interesting to me, because I don't have any like rose-colored glasses about the industry in that sense.

Hadad considered signing as favorable, stating, "That's everyone's dream... I think." He also considered it the same as taking a loan, but with different terms,

But at the end of the day what you're kind of just doing is you're just taking a business loan.... But like it ain't free money and with the record label like someone's actually gonna tell you how to spend your money.

Hadad concluded that while "back in the heyday" it was necessary to sign to a label, it was not necessary now. That, "we have the Internet. We have the ability to reach, like potentially the entire world. It's still like a one in a one million kind of deal but it's definitely more possible."

Atar considered that odds of success were fairly even,

...some people get in the industry for is, just to have it be a job which is fine. But it works out for them about as often as it works out for guys like me like, seriously though, so many people are in the industry and never get anywhere.

For Obod, the proliferation of smaller labels had reduced the importance of getting signed to one, then used social media metrics to elaborate:

It's funny because a lot of the times that you do see people get signed, I don't think it's what it used to be, where there's a lot more super small agencies now. You know, they might say, like, "I just got signed this is huge for me." And then you look at who signed them, and they have like 100 followers on Instagram.

Conflictingly, this quote came after he discussed that other artists getting signed to a label caught his eye.

Tyche had concerns about the level of control that labels had after signing with them, stating, "It's all record labels are, they're just, they loan you money, and you pay it back the rest of your life. And even when the project's over so, I don't see it as a legitimate thing." Artists often shared Tyche's concern over the loaning of money and fears around losing control over their music. In general, while artists could see the appeal of signing to a label, it was not considered a marker of artist legitimacy.

However, some of the artists considered the legitimacy of signing to a label dependent on certain factors. For example, Machine 13 ultimately saw it as dependent on the goals of the artist. If an artist wants to get on the radio or "make it to the big 4" then there is only one way to do that. Machine 13 indicated that, "If that's your goal, you're not going to be able to do that without getting on a major label." In the end, whatever makes you feel like you have contributed to culture and society, as well as whatever can get you the followers is what mattered, he told me. Tyche shared similar views, but his were genre-specific, "I think if I were pursuing a pop country career probably, definitely need to have a record label." He then extended this to pop

artists in general, and primarily because, "...it's a radio-based industry, they still own the radio." For other artists, it was specific to the label.

Contrary to what Obod stated, in that smaller independent labels had delegitimized getting signed to some extent, both Atar and Hubal considered them to be more legitimate. For Atar, the labels Rhyme Sayers and Stones Throw were considered "taste makers" for underground hip hop, so signing to one of them "can be very legitimizing." Hubal considered Spinnin Records and Dead Beats as being "really big in bass music right now." So, he considered being signed by either of them as something that "definitely adds credibility." It should be noted that while Spinnin' Records started as an independent label, in 2017 it was acquired by Warner Music Group (Ingham 2017).

While all the artists did consider signing to a label in some type of positive perception, it often depended on various factors. Sometimes it depended on the genre. And in some genres, the artists only saw certain labels as legitimate. In other cases, it depended on the goals of the person signing. And considering that all the artists interviewed had some positive perspectives, only two freely indicated that they would sign to a label if given the opportunity, but only certain circumstances that benefited them. Artists did not see signing to a label as the sole arbiter of legitimacy and they did see the pitfalls of label control rather than it being hidden from them, as is stated by *Getting Signed* (Arditi 2020). The artists did occasionally see getting signed as a means to success, but only under certain conditions and not as the de facto ideal. However, all artists saw social media as a valid means of gaining legitimacy, but only if it was used in certain ways.

When I asked the artists if using social media felt legitimate, most saw it from a positive perspective, but they also saw issues with it. For Hadad, "it's just like, part of the game you have

to play.” Atar saw social media as an effective way to gain a measure of success, “I think a lot of artists, especially nowadays, have built fan bases online. Or built their reputation online before they really have even done a show.” He took a broader perspective in response to the question,

The interactions that they're having or the networking that they're doing isn't any less valid. It's just things keep changing, and the metrics by which we measured what a real artist was, or what a real singer was, real rapper, just keep changing in the Internet and social media.

However, interacting with other artists and professionals through social media often felt inauthentic to the artists. This feeling of authenticity or inauthenticity was central to feeling that others were legitimate or not. Obod said that it depends on why someone is seeking to interact, “...You can tell who's being real and who's not, you know, so I know when someone really loves my music, and when someone is looking for something.” He then stated that he had formed real relationships with others this way and that it was easy to see if someone was authentic. Obod continued, “Authenticity is something that it's not hard to pick up on, you know when someone is like, really feels something...” For Hadad, the way he prevented these inauthentic interactions was to do what came naturally, as he told it, “You gotta do the ones that you feel compelled to use and don't try to like just do it, because everyone else is.” Hadad's opinion was that there were many social media sites to use, so he only used the sites that resonated with him and what was working for his band and that others can tell when someone was “faking it”. For Atar, how he presented himself online was important, that he was trying to present himself and his music as “sincere, honest, raw.” He stated that he took care in how he presented himself online, in an effort to not have “a weird, curated, overly complicated, very professional” online presence. Lastly, Kutbay stated that using social media was “absolutely” legitimate, “and to people who it

doesn't, that it doesn't feel legit to. All I have to say is, stop doing that fake shit. You know what I'm saying?"

While most of the artists I interviewed indicated some sort of inauthenticity in social media interactions, they also provided ways to avoid these inauthentic interactions in almost an advice-giving manner and often presented it as a problem of individual users rather than social media as a whole. This indicates that in the mind of the artists it was not whether the use of social media was legitimate or not, but that how it was used as the indication of being legitimate or not. Along with the lessening legitimacy of signing, the interviews indicated that artists saw that legitimacy primarily came from an authentic use of social media. Throughout this section, artists reported ideas of competition, success, and legitimacy that are no longer defined by getting signed to a label. Rather, they view these artist definitions as being bound to the successful use of social media, the Internet, and other digital means.

Social Media Presence

Introduction

Similar to how digitalization opened up access to tools, education, and networks, artists were able to use social media and the Internet to meet other music-making needs previously fulfilled by record labels. As has already been touched on, artists were able to use social media to distribute their music. The artists were able to use social media in a highly similar fashion to advertise their music and performances. Artists also reported using social media to manage their branding in a way that was similar to how labels managed the public relations of bands. But in order to use social media in this way, artists discussed the importance of properly interacting with social media algorithms and appearing authentic. In all, this section further illustrated how

artists looked to digital means to fill the needs of being an artist. This shows the impacts of digitalization, while also indicating the weakening utility and power of record labels.

Advertising

The question that prompted this sub-section was whether artists thought they could find success without the use of the Internet or social media. Originally designed to be a question looking into how artists viewed success and social media, most responses were about the hypothetical difficulties that the artists would face in the attempt of not using social media to advertise. They also stated that they often used traditional advertisements but, used the traditional advertisements for social media as well. Hadad summed this up well when discussing how his band might theoretically do this, “We just recently started doing some flyers. But what do you do put on those flyers? You put your Instagram handle, you know.” Atar also talked about using traditional methods, where he said that he had put flyers up on “every store on every telephone pole multiple times” before going on to do “the radio thing.” He also involved other traditional forms, like the local paper. However, in his mind,

But I think ideally you would do both, a digital and those traditional forms as well and then that kind of comes together, because one informs the other. Like... if you online, you want to inform people that something is real.

This idea of proving that what they were advertising was “real” was commonly mentioned and alluded to. Kutbay also talked about using physical advertisements to heighten his social media advertising, “if a promoter sends you the poster to the show that I'm playing, that's the same thing I was going Instagram post, and then I'll hashtag it with CLT music and CLT EDM or Charlotte hashtags.”

Hubal discussed that even if one were to do such a quality job of using traditional methods, “other people would have to start doing social media for you.” But to not involve the Internet at all was doubtful because he did not believe “that world exists anymore, you know?” Before we had interviewed, Machine 13 had thought of non-social media ways to release music as well, and he thought of using an “analog mail campaign” where subscribers would get music sent to them in the mail on a regular basis. But in order to do so, he thought he would need to use social media and get his presence high enough, “I forgot what the magic number is these days, and mean like, if you have like 2,000 subscribers over whatever channel.” Once he reached that point, he would theoretically remove all traces of an Internet presence. Machine 13 concluded that “at least in this stage of the project the Internet is kind of like a have to, like being on social media is just kind of like a must.” I then asked him a question: that to even go against social media, he would have to use it some? “Correct,” he confirmed.

This study, therefore, concluded that artists saw the way to advertise was through digital means, namely social media and the Internet. But using social media to meet these needs required more than just posting about upcoming music releases and performances. It required careful management of others’ perceptions, akin to public relations, which artists managed through attention to their branding.

Branding

Machine 13 perhaps gave the most straightforward example of what artists possibly meant by “branding.” In answering how he used social media as an artist, he split the “agenda” into two different categories. The first he described as the “actual music and practice footage and show footage.” But the intention of the second category was, “...kind of pushing the actual brand story itself, the character.” Atar invoked the term in a more elaborate sense when I asked

him about how he used social media to advertise, where he discussed the importance of using videos, “it's like I definitely understand that it helps push the brand, and like stuff like that make these like visually striking videos.” Atar then described the videos as a “...Commercial for what I do, essentially, and for what I am as an artist, that I can make the song and dream up this video and execute it all and fund it. ...Like, me putting my flag in the soil and saying like I can make something this big. It's audio and video, and it's all from my brain...” Tyche also used the term branding when talking about how artists present themselves.

When I asked Tyche if he felt that interacting online was legitimate to him as an artist, he discussed how he had created his music project with social media branding in mind. Tyche stated, “Luckily the whole [music project] was very purposely reversed engineered with all these things in mind, having a mascot that has the humor of Dead Pool.” While he had not used the term then, he had used it shortly in the same conversation. After he described how he used his “mascot” online he then described how not to use branding,

...Compared to like a doom metal band like it's... I guess you can get away with being jokey and all that. But it messes with your image and your brand if you're seen, you know, it'd be very like, I don't know, it'd be weird to see like some very serious metal band.

Atar also referred to perceived expectations when discussing how other styles of hip hop are presented online, which he described this type earlier in the conversation as “like WWE.” He explained that this type of hip hop was more about the social media presence than the music being made, “It's really, can you market? Can you brand? Are you funny, are you? Do you have crazy colored hair and have guns, and are willing to engage in kind of like all this beef online...”

After I asked Tyche if there were any rules that artists need to follow when they interacted online, he stated that artists need to, “keep things kind of focused on the vibe of the project.” After he elaborated that this means, in part, a need to restrain from posting topics not related music or the “local creative community,” Tyche said that, “It's kind of for that project, if it's something completely different then you make a different profile and brand for something else and focus on that.” Obod echoed this thought, though his realization was more gradual.

Obod discussed that if one were to start by looking at his earliest Instagram posts, it would be a “very slow descent into only artist stuff.” At first, it was only sprinkled with music-related content but slowly became more involved in music. Obod talked about how he used to post unrelated topics, “...back in the day, it's like, ooh lizard. I'm going to post this lizard because I like reptiles.” Hubal stated a similar thought and that if he was posting on social media then, “I don't think I post anything except for like music that I'm releasing.” Looking at branding in a slightly different fashion, Atar used his online presence as a way to show that while his music can often times be, “doom and gloom and like depressing anger...” that was not the only online presence he wanted to show. But rather than sharing this in a “shocking... rap music way,” Atar wanted to have a more relaxed presence by showing himself as authentic by showing himself cooking and just chilling out listening to vinyl.

Often when discussing branding, artist also talked about how they presented themselves online and how that is viewed by other people on social media. In these discussions about their social media presence, artists often concluded that there was a need to engage with social media algorithms but represented this as in conflict with portraying themselves as authentic. The reason the artist saw themselves needing to engage in these algorithms is due to it being perceived as the main way to gain attention online.

The Algorithm

At the end of the interviews, I asked the artists if there was anything else they would have liked to talk about. Atar initially said he had nothing to say, then expressed his dislike of streaming services. Rather than cut up his quote, I will share what he said in full:

I will say fuck Spotify and like all that racket, that's a fucking extortion ring. Streaming services are so obnoxious, and the way that social media taps into these algorithms to incentivize artists, to behave a certain way or make music a certain way or share themselves a certain way to be rewarded with attention on in the way that that then dictates how artists think they need to be that's annoying. But I can't say that I don't find myself entertained by things like that at times myself.

This thought of how algorithms shaped who on social media got attention was a reoccurring theme in the interviews, with differing approaches among the artists. Some were like Atar and had no small amount of vehemence towards algorithms and their influence, others had varying degrees of acceptance of its influence and reported attempts of using it to their advantage. Machine 13 described content that was “tailored to the algorithm” as a “little more sold out” and “less legitimate.” He then explained the content that was specific to Instagram, that there was “trending audio” and talked about “all of the dances” that would trend. He stated that while he would not use any of the dances, he that he would instead,

“...Definitely snag like a cool like audio thing every now and then try to get my own weird gas mask spin. Because, that that's just the game right now, if you... I think if you truly just are 100% like, did your own thing, starting out, it'd be hard to make any kind of dent in the algorithm.”

Machine 13 then stated that making a “dent in the algorithm” to “get a little bit of a following” was necessary to at least not lose money on his music project. He continued with the assertion that is not the goal for some artists, that they “don’t give a shit” about the algorithm, which he described as being “kind of badass.” But for Machine 13, in order to reach his success goal, he had to be, “a little sold out when it comes to my presence online like that.” He then followed that up by stating that it was one of the “unwritten rules, like you have to tailor your stuff to appealing the mastery algorithm.” While not directly stating it, when Machine 13 conflated artists that do not engage in the algorithm as “kind of badass” he was invoking a common idea among the artists. That overly engaging with social media algorithms was inauthentic and in order to appear authentic an artist needed to take in how they worked with algorithms.

Kutbay discussed that he had been posting to his Instagram daily since the beginning of the year, and his content was, “pretty clean too, like I’ve got pictures and graphic designs.” But made the distinction that, “I’m not just trying to post everyday soullessly so that I can get on some, like algorithm shit.” When I responded by stating that he was not trying to serve the algorithm, Kutbay responded that there were certainly content creators that acted in algorithm-friendly ways and that by doing so had found success,

But there are people that do that, and there are people that work really hard and post every day and they have a viral from posting every day and working really hard. So, don’t take it the wrong way when I say... what I’m saying is that, because you can do that if you bust your ass, you can fucking get it to look at your shit.

While not discussing algorithms specifically, Hubal gave a glimpse of how algorithms had an influence on the artists even when they are using social media in their private time. When on social media he would see the successful posts of other artists online and began, “dissecting the video... are there any pieces of this I could naturally use in some of my stuff to make the engagement go up.” Even for artists that previously did not use social media saw the need to use it to engage algorithms. Hadad explained why he saw the need to use social media to engage as part of the job. Hubal then followed this up by stating that, “it just forces me to do it more.”

Artists saw that there were some loose rules for engaging algorithms. For example, Atar said to post at certain times of the day and that there are certain days of the week not to post, like the weekend. Hubal was specific on when to post,

It's like Thursdays and Fridays are super crowded, so like if you're doing it, you gotta post it at a certain time. You got to think about, you're on eastern [time] so you got to do it on Pacific time, when people would be waking up so like, 11 pacific is like ideal. So that you posted it like 2 pm at East. It's like a formula people have, it's wild.

But an artist could go further than just when they post. Tyche talked in-depth about how he was able to use people searching for synthesizer tutorials on YouTube and Google to his advantage. This idea came to him when he was trying to learn how to play the instrument himself, and he, “watched garbage tutorials after garbage tutorials.” This gave Tyche the idea to record his own tutorial that, “frankensteined all the really important things,” originally for himself. He found it useful and decided to share it on his music project YouTube channel. It became his most successful video. In response to this he, “changed the whole channel to be about the synthesizer.” And then he would “plug” his music in these tutorials, “to see the synthesizer in

context, you can check out my music project, [Redacted], which is the name of the channel so, I've pegged that as a funnel, basically, to speak to a new audience.” Tyche felt lucky that the video was successful, but explained what he thought led to it, “Because a lot of people were buying the synthesizer and then immediately, they would Google like well, how do I use this thing...” He then stated that he is an advocate for artists using their YouTube channel for more than their music, as “on YouTube is the analytics are just insane.”

While Tyche did tutorials on the synthesizer, he shared some other examples of what artists could do, such as singer-songwriters showing their writing process. He described it as finding something music adjacent to put on your channel, because “you just kind of open up the large part of that funnel where people are kind of discovering you through something...” Tyche ended this part of the interview by stating something highly similar to what Atar stated at the beginning of this sub-section, that an artist doing something similar to what he did on his YouTube channel is able to counteract Spotify,

So, somebody that is exposed to original music where they wouldn't have been in any other way possible, because you're fighting against, I guess, Spotify playlists and all these other, recommendations on YouTube, you might need to have some killer artwork, or I don't know, like It's just a cool way to get exposure to a new person that could become your audience.

Artists often alluded to why it was necessary to interact with algorithms, such as when Machine 13 talked about how he used some of the trending audio to “make a dent in the algorithm.” Without doing this, he noted that it would be difficult to gain attention. Over the course of the interviews, the artist often likened “attention” to a form of currency, sometimes

even directly. Tyche was one of the artists that directly called it a currency when he discussed that posting at certain times was important and if someone posted at an obviously bad time, such as midnight, that, “Sorry it's just an expectation thing, or you know just when you launch stuff, there's that finite currency of attention. It's something we have to think about too.” When Machine 13 was talking about whether he felt any kind of competition, he stated that he did:

I think if you're doing anything on social media there's some sort of competition. For that kind of attention currency, which is interesting these days, right? So, it's like back in the day you competed against musicians. But now, you're competing against the entire entertainment industry which is now everybody.

While he continued to break down his view on competition, he would state that there, “is just an overwhelming amount of people trying to release music at the same time. And there's only so much attention that can be paid to it.”

Tyche and Machine 13 are the only artists that used the term directly, but others invoked similar ideas throughout the interviews. When Atar was talking about how streaming services affected how music gets popular, he said,

...The way that social media taps into these algorithms to incentivize artists, to behave a certain way or make music a certain way or share themselves a certain way to be rewarded with attention on in the way that that then dictates how artists think they need to be.

And Obod alluded to an idea of attention as some form of social currency as he talked about featuring with artists that were more successful than him, “I had one album that I dropped last

year, where every song had a feature, and most of those people do have more attention and more success with their music than what I have.”

As seen in these results, artists often saw the need to engage with social media to gain attention. Social media algorithms are something they often attempted to utilize but from arm’s length. In their view, overly engaging with algorithms was inauthentic. Authenticity and inauthenticity appeared to be very important for the artists, as they often would discuss these topics in differing parts of the interviews. Using social media was considered essential for the artists, but authenticity seemed vitally important in that usage. Authentically using social media was seen as the opposite of “faking it,” or seemingly presenting a false self, or approaching another person online under the guise of trying to interact honestly, but secretly looking to gain something.

Artists often discussed the importance of what to post, primarily that it should be “honest” and “natural,” and not being natural was often equivalent to being inauthentic. Those that do not have an authentic online presentation might not be able to be seen as much on social media, which limits their interaction with algorithms. While the focus of this research is on music specifically, Hubal saw it as a general rule in interacting with social media, “The biggest thing is authenticity, you know, Instagram model coming out using like fake plane backgrounds.” He discussed how this made it difficult for him to continue working on his music, especially when, “you see people who have been doing it for less time, who get popular off of meme culture, popular off of body image, or whatever it might be, it can be disheartening.”

The results of this section concluded that artists looked to digital means to advertise, even if that required physical evidence of it being “real” or authentic. Artists also looked to social media for maintaining their brand, though it was important that their brand not be seen as too tied

to social media algorithmic trends. To be too engaged with the algorithm was seen as being inauthentic, but artists considered it important to work with algorithms. Otherwise, their brand, advertising, and music risked not being seen at all. The results of this section clearly pointed to artists' definitions often being tied to using social media and the Internet, and this indicated that they do not look to record labels to meet these needs. But most interestingly, this section also alludes to aspects of a possibly emerging ideology.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

This thesis started to take shape in part due to an inspiration coming from a popular thought in the current literature surrounding music ideology. Namely, there is a current sentiment that, despite the possible effects of technological progress, the music industry has largely remained the same as it had in previous decades. That record labels have incorporated any technological changes to further their power and control over artists. One of the goals of this thesis was to provide an insight into how this may or may not be true, at least from the perspective of artists. The core argument of this thesis was that digitalization has had a large impact not only on how artists made music, but how they defined themselves as artists. From branding to getting access to music-making tools, artists showed that this argument is true throughout the study. Digitalization is having and has had a demonstrable effect on how music is being made and how they go about defining themselves, as seen by the reliance of artists on the Internet, social media, and other digital objects such as software.

The results of this study did not only illustrate that artists are using digital means to make music and define artists, but it also illustrated that the power and control of the music industry over artists, namely major record labels, had considerably lessened. Labels were able to keep control over artists and the industry by controlling the access to make music, publish it, and even what made an artist legitimate (Arditi 2020). But, as this study has illustrated in many ways, artists are currently seeing other ways to access the means to make music and define what an artist is. What implications does this have for the future of the music industry? If the traditional ideology is losing its power and control, is there another ideology emerging?

Discussion

Looking at trends over the course of the interviews, there are points where artists discuss aspects of using social media and the Internet that are discussing algorithms and aspects that are related to algorithms. As was already touched on, the algorithm might have some measure of control over the popular trends of sounds that are used in music. But it might also dictate the expectations within genres, as Tyche points out that the humorous dialogue in social media of his music project's persona would be considered out of place if a "serious metal band" did the same.

Artists also frequently discussed the importance of authenticity. They often pressed the importance of what to post, primarily that it should be "honest" and "natural", and not being natural was often equivalent to being inauthentic. To connect the dots, it seems that artists and possibly other content creators put importance on the consistency of brand, and to do this they carefully curate their online presence. For an example given in the interviews, if an artist makes dark and gloomy EDM, then anything they post needs to be either related to music or further exemplifies the dark and gloomy aesthetic of their music. Some humor can be used, but too much makes the artist seem inauthentic. Branding is nothing new to music and artists, but it has transitioned over to social media. The artists that do not have an authentic online presentation might not be able to be seen as much on social media, which limits their interaction with algorithms.

During the interviews, the concept of online attention as currency came out, with a few of the artists directly equating online attention to a kind of social capital. Some of the artists were acutely aware that they could only ever hope to get some limited attention from other social media users. The currency of attention was limited, and for some, they saw any other content on the Internet as possible competition for attention. Many of the artists were aware of ways to use

algorithms to get that attention. One example is Tyche being able to use synth tutorials to “funnel” viewers that otherwise would not see or listen to his music on YouTube. Another example can be found in how Machine 13 would use trending audio in an effort to make a “dent” in the algorithm.

If there is an emerging ideology related to music, it may not be specific to music but to the broader concept of content creators. That is what this thesis points to needing further elaboration by future research, as there is a possibility digitalization is continuing and that this ideology is still emerging. What a content creator ideology would look like is not certain, but there are a few conclusions in the results that might aid in guiding possible future studies. Authenticity is vitally important for artists, and possibly content creators, in that how they are viewed and how they view others is considered important in succeeding. Trends will most likely be shaped by the algorithm of whatever social media has the most power and control over that type of content. This extends to the top of the social media hierarchy, which would be the technology companies that control said algorithms. This idea of attention as a currency presents an interesting possible concept and social capital, which might be a useful way to describe how content creators interact with each other and their audience. This currency seemed to be somewhat related to social media metrics such as views and listens, but an attention currency may have further importance in a content creator ideology.

It is the hope of this researcher that this study will help others in not just the effects of digitalization in media industries but in also finding an emerging ideology, whether it is found in the music industry or in social media content creation.

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