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DISTRIBUTION AND CONSUMPTION OF MUSIC IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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Työn nimi MUSIIKIN KULUTUS JA JAKELU DIGITAALISESSA YMPÄRISTÖSSÄ		
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<p>Opinnäytetyön aiheena oli musiikkikulutus, ja kuinka se toimii 2020- luvulla. Opinnäytetyön toimeksiantajana toimi opinnäytetyön kirjoittaja. Työn tavoitteena oli päästä syvemmälle käsiksi digitaalisen musiikin kulutuksen toimivuuteen artistin näkökulmasta.</p> <p>Työn tietoperustassa käsiteltiin musiikin kulutuksen nykyistä asemaa digitalisaation aikakaudella. Siinä tarkasteltiin myös sitä, millainen sen taloudellisuus on itsenäisten artistien näkökulmasta, minkälaisia resursseja on saatavilla ja miten niitä tulisi hyödyntää. Lisäksi keskusteltiin myös erilaisista tulonlähteistä, joihin jokainen itsenäinen artisti on oikeutettu.</p> <p>Opinnäytetyön käytännön osio keskittyi kuvaamaan prosessia, askeleita ja toimenpiteitä, joita liittyy musiikkiteosten luomiseen sekä musiikkiteosten saamiseen kaupalliseen ja hyväksyttävään muotoon ennen niiden tuomista jakelupalveluihin ja suoratoistopalveluihin. Lisäksi käsiteltiin myös strategisia näkökulmia musiikkiteosten markkinointiin ja julkaisupäiviin liittyen.</p> <p>Työn tavoitteena on tarjota erityisesti itsenäisille artisteille informaatiota ja vinkkejä esimerkiksi oman brändin ja faniperustan rakentamiseen sekä musiikkialalla toimimiseen kokonaisuutena.</p>		
Asiasanat Digitalisaatio, musiikin kulutus, jakelu, suoratoistopalvelut, musiikin tuotanto		

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<p>The subject of this thesis was music consumption, how it has evolved throughout the past two centuries and how it works in the 2020s. The commissioner of this thesis was the author himself. The objective of the thesis was to get a deeper understanding of the operability of digital music consumption from an artist's point of view.</p> <p>The theoretical part of the thesis covered what the consumption of music is like in the digital age and what this new economy is like for independent artists, what resources are available and how they should be utilised. In addition, the theoretical part discussed about different income sources that independent artists are entitled to as a compensation for their work.</p> <p>The practice-oriented part of the thesis dealt with the creation of a music release, what steps and efforts need to be taken care of in order to make a music release commercially viable, and ready for digital music distribution services and digital streaming platforms. Furthermore, this part also covered the strategic aspects in regard to marketing and release dates, which are a key part when creating a music release.</p> <p>The aim of the thesis was especially to provide independent artists with practical information and guidance on how to take action and follow the correct path in terms of building a brand, fan base and a career in the music industry overall.</p>		

<p>Key words Digitalization, music consumption, distribution, streaming services, music production</p>

TIIVISTELMÄ
ABSTRACT
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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis discusses the production, distribution, marketing, and consumption of music in the digital age, as well as the history of piracy that the music industry has encountered. The idea and the need for this thesis arose from the author's own interests towards the music industry as well as from the experiences of working with music production. The aim of this thesis is to give readers more insight in regard to what the music industry has gone through in the past decades and how it has evolved and adapted to the changes that resulted from piracy and digitalization. More importantly, the thesis shall function as a guidebook for striving musicians and artists who are curious about how music is distributed and marketed in the digital age.

This thesis is practice based, and the author of this thesis works as a music producer and an artist through his registered business as a sole proprietor. The author chose to write the thesis in English instead of Finnish because the information and experience the author has gathered is more suitable for an international audience rather than domestic. Furthermore, the author has gained experience in the music industry through networking with other artists, researching information, self-learning, working at a record label and with distributors.

The theoretical part of the thesis deals with the evolution of the music industry. How piracy has affected the music industry, what efforts have been taken to combat piracy and what kind of innovations have emerged to help steer the music industry away from illegal copyright infringements. This part also addresses the current state of the online music economy, what this new environment is like for artists and consumers, what kind of services are available nowadays and what value they bring. Furthermore, the thesis aspires to inform readers about the consumer habits of digital music listeners and how digital streaming platforms influence the way music is listened to.

The process description in the thesis revolves around the creation of music and what steps need to be taken until a piece of music has reached its commercial form. To be more specific, this part discusses about digital audio workstations and their role in the music industry, steps for creating effective and proper artwork, what needs to be considered when preparing marketing and release strategies.

2 HISTORY OF MUSIC PIRACY AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Piracy, by definition is the act of copying and/or distributing copyrighted content without the permission of the authors or the ones who hold the copyrights. Although for the past two decades the majority of the problems caused by piracy have been happening on the internet, there is still a lot of traditional physical recording piracy going on. Piracy is an illegal activity that violates the rights of the creators and copyright holders, redistributing unauthorized content hurts the original creators and copyright holders, because they do not get compensated for their work. Ever since the 19th century the music industry and musicians have dealt with piracy in a form or another. In the beginning it was only sheet music that was unlawfully copied and distributed, but later on as new technologies emerged and it became possible to record and store music, piracy also evolved along with it. The aim with providing this information is to make the reader more knowledgeable about the history of piracy in the music industry as a whole, but more importantly to paint a bigger picture about how and why the music industry has continuously been forced to shift and adapt to the changes that have come from new technologies. (Tekijänoikeuden tiedotus- ja valvontakeskus.)

2.1 Vinyl Bootlegging

At the time when vinyl records were the standard way of listening music, they would sometimes get repressed unofficially in vinyl plants without the original artists and labels knowing about it, they were usually done very discreetly and in smaller runs as not to create suspicion. RCA Victor, one of the more known record labels who often pressed records from other labels via a license, was exposed of making bootleg albums for another label going by the name of Jolly Roger in 1951. During this time sound recordings did not have a federal copyright protection, but instead they were protected under a state law, which caused uncertainty on whether the original artists and labels were eligible for receiving royalties. (Paphides 2015.)

Perhaps the most interesting form of vinyl bootlegging came from the Soviet Union after the cold war in the 50s. Referred to as “bone music” or “roentgenizdat” was a form of vinyl bootlegging which used old x-ray photos as the surface on to which popular songs would be pressed on. During this post-cold war era no western music or even Russian music was allowed in the Soviet Union. The original vinyl records would arrive to the Soviet Union through the port, after which these records would then be used

as masters to copy music from, major famous artists such as The Beatles, Ella Fitzgerald, Elvis Presley and many others were etched into these old discarded x-ray photos. (Voice 2014.)

2.2 Tape Cassette Duplication

First introduced in 1962, the popular Belgian company Philips created the compact cassette as a means of developing a new standard for listening and storing audio. These compact cassettes were similar to reel-to-reel recorders in how they both used magnetic tape; however, the reel-to-reel recorders were considered inefficient due to their expensive price and being too technical to use for the average consumer. Philips proceeded to license this new format free of charge for Sony, which led to them being mass produced across the globe. The piracy involving cassettes however didn't begin until the 1980's, when dual cassette decks were first introduced. This device allowed people to dub their favourite albums and radio shows on to blank tapes, which consequently posed a new threat to the music industry. (Fung 2017.)

In 1981, the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) started an anti-taping campaign in the United Kingdom in order to make the public cautious about the copyright infringements and to put a stop to illegal tape duplication. Equipped with the slogan "Home taping is killing music – and it's illegal" the campaign also came out with its own logo, which had a cassette representing a skull with crossbones beneath it. The chairman of BPI, Chris Wright wanted to put a tax on blank tapes, which would generate revenue for labels and compensate them from lost royalties. The campaign was partly successful. Although the tax was not made effective in the U.K right off the bat, the country managed to make their piracy rate the lowest in the world. (Zaleski 2016.)

2.3 CD Duplication

Compact disks have now been around for almost 40 decades. They were the first standardized digital audio format, prior to this all of the predecesing mainstream audio formats were analog. This new digital audio used a binary format, implying that instead of using the original physical sine waveforms in which analog sound was recorded, this new digital approach would instead transform these analog waveforms into numbers and when recorded, they would turn into digital square waves. At first, Philips and Sony were both doing their own research on digital disc formats, but later on in 1979 these two

companies decided to join forces in developing what would become the compact disks. (Coldewey 2012.)

The first CD- player came out in 1982 as did the first run of CDs. CD-Rs (CD-Recordable) came about in 1990, and Yamaha was the first to introduce the recordable CD system, which was intended solely for storing data. Within 5 years Philips managed to make this new technology smaller in size and integrate it into computers. This innovation sparked an idea in the minds of tech-savvy people, and they realized that since all digital data is binary just like digital audio, this data could easily be reproduced or copied into CDs in the same manner as any other digital data. This realization marked the birth of digital piracy. (Orpheus 2017.)

2.4 Music Piracy on the Internet

As computers became more common in households, internet piracy also began to grow at a faster rate and services that offered songs for free started to emerge. Shawn Fanning, a university student from Boston, alongside his uncle John Fanning created a computer program called Napster in 1999. This peer-to-peer platform allowed users from all over the world to effortlessly share and download music, making illegal music piracy possible for any person with a computer. Another reason as to why this platform gained such popularity was due to the rise of MP3. files. These types of audio files used a certain form of compression, making the audio files much smaller in size in contrast to industry standard WAV. files, which consequently made the data sharing process much faster. (Dowling 2019.)

In just two years Napster had gathered roughly 26.4 million verified users worldwide. This extremely disruptive phenomenon was undermined and not taken seriously until about a year later when major labels such as Warner Brothers, A&M, Island, Universal and a handful of other big players filed a lawsuit against Napster for the copyright infringements that their platform allowed. Artists such as Dr. Dre and Metallica also filed lawsuits against the company. In court, Napster appealed to them being a peer-to-peer platform, implying that they themselves were not committing anything illegal, but only their users were. Not so surprisingly, they did not win any of the cases that were filed against them. Despite starting out as a notoriously unfair and illegal company, Napster managed to change their business into a legitimate streaming service, and to this day it is operating with a similar business model as their competitors such as Spotify, Tidal and Apple Music. (McIntyre 2018.)

3 DIGITAL MUSIC SERVICES

Since online music piracy had become such an easy and common practice for people, new innovative ideas had to be thought of in order to combat the financial damage that online piracy had inflicted on the music business. The industry was left in shambles when Napster, LimeWire and several other peer-to-peer platforms surfaced to the scene in the turn of the millennium. Altogether these malicious platforms cost billions of dollars for the music industry, leaving many artists without their fair share of royalties. (Ghoshal 2018.)

Digital music services can be divided into two types, user- and artist- centric. User- centric digital music services are more focused on curator content, they offer more of a utilitarian approach for the consumer and overall, their value proposition lies in providing consumers a flexible and easily approachable user experience. Artist- centric digital music services on the other hand operate in a more independent yet exclusive manner, implying that artists do not necessarily need any third-party services in order to release music. Furthermore, these types of services are often more focused on communities and they make direct fan-to-artist engagement easier. (Hu 2019.)

3.1 User- Centric Digital Music Services

User- centric digital music services, which can also be referred to as digital streaming platforms (DSP). DSPs are services that hold a large catalogue of music and cater this music to consumers in a “all you can eat” approach. These services usually offer consumers a monthly subscription, which gives them more features, or a free option that has less features, and is usually accompanied by advertisements. Digital streaming platforms have been revolutionising the way music is consumed in today’s world due to their swift accessibility and users not being forced to flood their mobile- or computer storage with endless data bytes of music. (Jolly 2019.)

Most, if not all digital streaming platforms have partnerships with major labels and distributors for licensing purposes, because in order for these platforms to legally make music available for the consumer, they must acquire licenses for this particular matter. On another note, digital streaming platforms also

bring an abundance of opportunities for independent artists everywhere. Due to their worldwide popularity and impressive algorithms they are an effective tool in gathering exposure and getting one's music heard on an international scale. (Bludow 2018.)

Some however argue that these types of platforms are financially unsustainable in the long-term, because the cost of operating such platforms is very high, and more importantly because the revenues that these platforms gain from streaming and subscriptions have to be divided amongst record labels, publishers, distributors and artists, leaving a small piece of the pie for the digital streaming companies. (Laker 2019.)

3.1.1 iTunes & Apple Music

iTunes was among one of the first online platforms to try out a completely new business model for music retail. When iTunes was first released in 2001, it was just a regular media player which was initially designed to be used with the first-generation iPod, an MP3- player designed by Apple. During this time the application only allowed users to make playlists, listen to radio, and rip and burn CDs. However, two years later from its release Apple transformed this platform into a digital music store which gave consumers access to millions of songs. This change was also made in order to provide a more legitimate approach to music consumption so that music listeners would reduce the amount of CD ripping and instead purchase individual songs from the iTunes Store. This new business model was revolutionising both for the music industry as well as for the consumers, and due to digitalization being an inevitable change, it was the right move to make. In 2004, a year after the store was launched, Apple reported that users together had in total purchased 80 million songs on the platform. (Kleinman 2019.)

Throughout the decades Apple has strived to be a leader in entertainment and technology. They have continuously proved themselves in being consistent with their innovations and what is popular, so it was not a surprise that they would tap into the online streaming market sooner or later as well. Although they were late to the party in regard to creating a streaming platform, they still managed to make Apple Music a popular worldwide platform. Apple Music was launched in 2015, roughly seven years after their main competitor Spotify had made their start.

In terms of their business model, Apple Music functions on a monthly user subscription, which is the main source of their revenue, but unlike other streaming platforms, they do not broadcast advertisements on their service. In addition, Apple Music in partnership with PlayNetwork operate in the business-to-

business segment through their service called Apple Music for Business. This service was designed to help companies create a consistent music strategy and a customized soundscape for their brand. (Stassen 2019.)

Furthermore, Apple Music brings value to consumers in that users are able to integrate their personal iTunes music library onto the platform. This is a selling point for listeners who enjoy music that is not already available on the streaming platform itself. Even though Apple Music is the leader of streaming platforms in terms of their music catalogue, holding over 70 million songs, there are still a lot of independent and older releases that are only available as physical pressings and not at one's disposal on streaming platforms. (Savvides & Orellana 2020.)

Apple has also extended their streaming platform for artists who have releases on Apple Music through their stand-alone phone application and website Apple Music for Artists. This service functions as an analytics tool which enables artists to observe various kinds of data that Apple gathers from listeners around the world. On the platform, artists can discover which cities and countries are bringing in the most streams, how much daily listeners do they have on average, if their songs are on any Apple Music playlists or if their music has been purchased from the iTunes Store. The application also allows artists to add team members such as label representatives and managers to whom the artist can grant different types of permissions of editing, viewing data and so on. Furthermore, through Apple's acquisition of Shazam, an application which identifies songs through audio recognition, Apple was able to incorporate data from Shazam which shows artists where and how many times users have used the application to find their songs. (Ingham 2019.)

3.1.2 Spotify

Spotify started out as a small start-up in 2006 with the mission of creating a music platform that would steer users away from pirating music and instead develop a new form of music consumption which would be fairer for the music industry and would compensate artists for their work. Spotify has been holding the monopoly on music streaming in terms of their user base for quite a while now, their user base consists of 320 million monthly users. This contrast is large when looking at other digital streaming platforms such as Apple Music, who have over 60 million monthly users, and Amazon Music, which has 55 million monthly users. (BBC 2018.)

This disparity roots from Spotify's freemium business model. Unlike other digital streaming platforms, Spotify offers two options for consumers, a free option which allows users to listen to music on the platform with the exception of having to listen to advertisements, and a monthly subscription option identical to other digital streaming platforms. Out of the 320 million monthly users roughly 144 million pay a monthly subscription for the service, and the number of paid subscribers has been increasing by over 20% year-over-year. (Porter 2020.)

Spotify's CEO Daniel Ek announced in early 2019 that the platform will be extending itself to the realm of podcasting. Podcasts are audio programmes that usually consist of several episodes, with each of them covering different topics, these types of programmes can be thought of as modern-day radio shows. This \$500 million investment is giving Spotify a way to differentiate themselves from other digital streaming platforms. By offering exclusive content and bringing more users to their platforms Spotify strives to become the leader of the audio industry. (Carman 2019.)

With this being said, Spotify gains the majority of their revenue from monthly subscriptions and advertisements. However, the total revenues that Spotify receives from advertisements and subscriptions are not solely their income to spend, Spotify keeps 30% of all ad revenue and subscription fees, and they divide the 70% among different rightsholders, such as record labels, distributors and publishers who then pay out royalties to artists based on their individual contracts. This is a common method that is practiced among many other streaming platforms. (Dredge 2013.)

In August 2020, Daniel Ek, Spotify's CEO received backlash for his comments in an interview by New Musical Express (NME). In the interview Mr. Ek stated that artists should not remain under the impression that releasing music once every three or four years is going to be enough. These words caused an uproar amongst the artist community. Although his words were taken out of context and wrongly interpreted it still resonated with many people and quite frankly did so for a good reason. Art is not something that should be manifested through force, art demands time and effort and should not be commodified in such an aggressive way. It is understandable, however, that artists must adapt or at the very least be aware of the changes arising from digital music streaming. Considering that for those artists who do not tour, sell merchandise, or have other income sources outside of streaming royalties this adaptation is crucial. (Daly 2020.)

Even though Spotify is more user-centred when it comes to their platform and their business approach, there does persist one key area where they have succeeded extremely well considering the needs of the

artist. Spotify for Artists is a dashboard where artists can edit their Spotify artist pages and analyse their listener data. On this platform artists are able to personalise their artist page to match their aesthetic and brand image, for example artists can change their header and profile picture, add social media websites and featured playlists, and create an artist biography. This personalisation feature is very important in terms of maximizing an artist's potential fan engagement. When listeners come across your artist page through a playlist or related artists for the first time, and even if they've listened to just one song from the artist which they enjoyed, it already increases the potential of them having a look at the artist's bio. Essentially, this feature is helpful for both the consumer and the artist. From the consumer's perspective this saves time because they do not have to research the artist through other platforms, nor will they be enough motivated to do so. And consequentially this is also a win for the artist, because by giving this easier shortcut the artists are more likely to grow their fan bases and seek a loyal audience. (Perez 2017.)

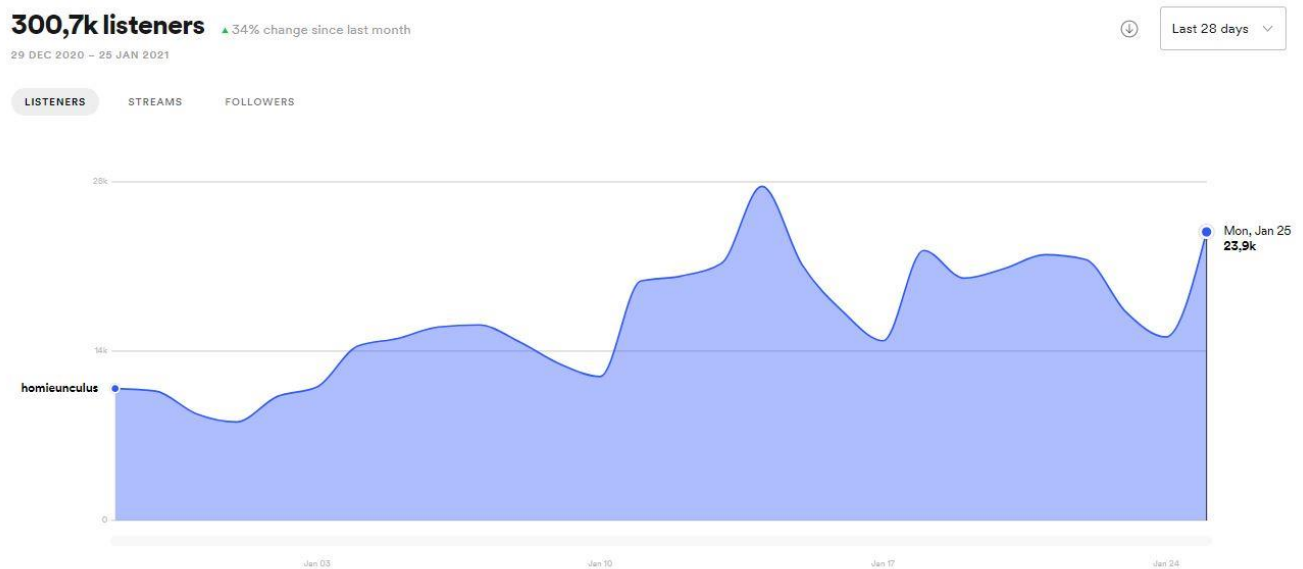


FIGURE 1. Overview of Spotify listeners from the past 28 days (Spotify for Artists)

The Spotify for Artists- platform also gathers a lot of valuable listener data. Artists can observe how much and where in the world their music is being listened to in a selected time frame. The platform includes a map where artists can pinpoint the countries where they have listeners, artists can also identify where the listeners are listening from on the Spotify- platform itself. The listeners are separated between five different sources, which include artists profile and catalogue, listener's own playlists, other listeners playlists, Spotify editorial playlists, Spotify algorithmic playlists and other. (Spotify for Artists.)

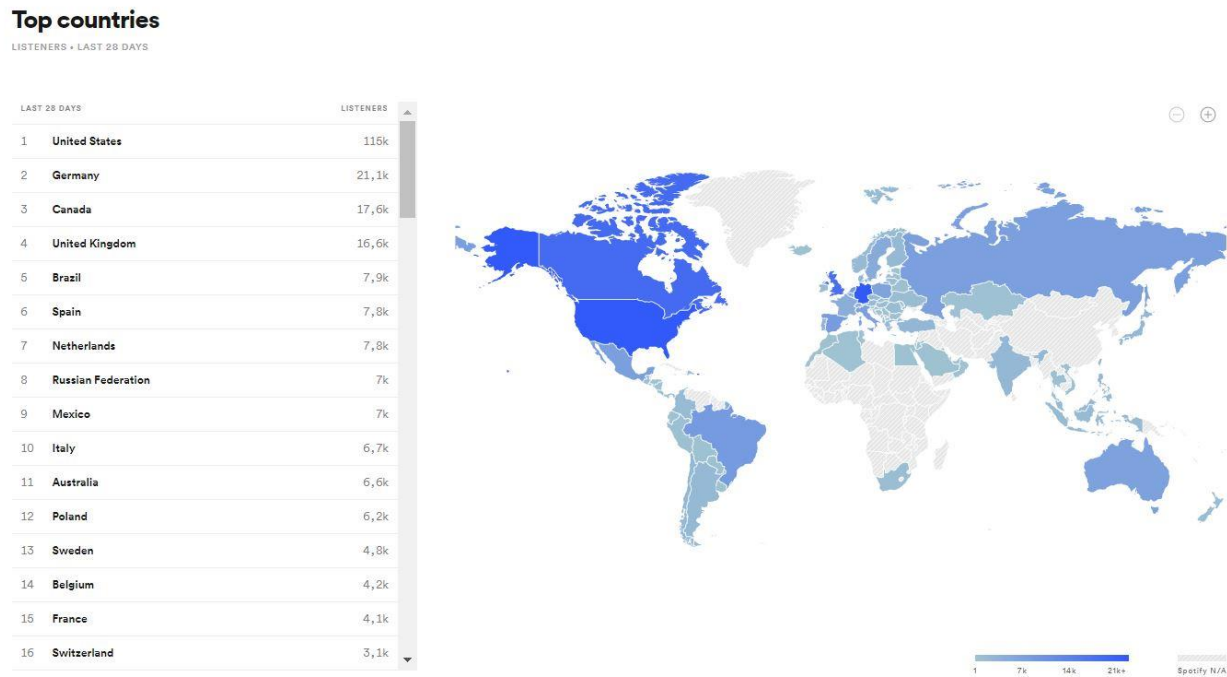


FIGURE 2. Overview of countries where music is being listened to (Spotify for Artists)

3.2 Artist & Community- Centric Digital Music Services

Artist and community- centric digital music services differentiate themselves from other digital streaming platforms in that they give more freedom for the artist and they often operate in a manner which promotes direct fan-to-artist engagement. These platforms also do not usually involve third parties, such as distributors or record labels, thus giving artists the freedom of what they want to release and when.

Services such as these can however be subscription based, but in contrast to traditional digital streaming platforms, the subscription fee on artist centred platforms goes directly to the artist instead of the DSP. Artist and community- based digital music services also promote the physical value an artist can bring for the consumer, for example selling merchandise and physical copies of music.

3.2.1 Bandcamp

Bandcamp has been a go-to platform for artists for over a decade now. Their user interface is very user friendly and the service provides artists with complete control over their artist page. The artist pages function like digital stores, where artists are able to add their releases and merchandise, set up their own

prices, manage orders, create mailing lists and view sales reports. In this regard Bandcamp is very unique, their business model and platform stands out from other digital streaming services. (Krukowski 2020.)

The platform surfaced in 2008, which was arguably the best time to start such a business. Digital piracy was still very much ongoing and digital streaming was a new thing yet to reach its peak. The developers of Bandcamp were up to date with what was happening in the music industry and how digitalization had affected it and were able to adapt their business model with these issues in mind. Bandcamp created an economy that was transparent, very much in tune with the needs of the artists and overall promoted the value of art.

Bandcamp uses PayPal as their transaction system, implying that all the income that artists receive are sent to their individual PayPal account. Users on the other hand can choose whether they'd like to use PayPal or their credit card as payment method. The way Bandcamp is able to profit from their service is fairly simple, along with PayPal, they both take a 20% cut collectively from each sale that occurs on the platform, with the remaining 80% paid to the artist. The Bandcamp environment is suitable for any artist who creates music, but there's an extra added value for those who make physical copies of their music and create merchandise due to their online store feature being very easy to set up. (Devlin 2019.)

3.2.2 SoundCloud

Founded in 2007, SoundCloud is a community- centric platform which gives every person the opportunity to share their music with the world. It is a platform in which the users play both roles, in this case the artist and the consumer. What this essentially means is that every user account has the same features, they can upload music, comment, give likes, send messages, make playlists etc. This key attribute of combining the consumer and the artist into one user account cultivated SoundCloud into a community- centric platform. The platform is very helpful for artists in the sense that it makes networking, collaborating, and receiving feedback really easy. Upcoming artists can easily find other artists who share a similar vision and develop relationships with them. (SoundCloud.)

For long SoundCloud was completely free and did not have any revenue sources. Over the years however, as SoundCloud grew bigger they began to monetize the platform through different additions. In 2014 they launched "On SoundCloud" which enabled their premier partners to advertise on their website.

This worked out well for SoundCloud because they acquired licenses and developed solid relationships with other record labels, which then later in 2016 made it possible for them to launch SoundCloud Go+, which is their subscription based streaming platform. In addition, SoundCloud also offers two premium services, SoundCloud Pro and SoundCloud Pro Unlimited. These upgrades are mainly targeted for artists and labels as they provide users with more upload time, in-depth analytics and customization possibilities. (Hynsson 2018.)

To conclude this, SoundCloud is a great platform for up and coming artists who are still polishing their sound and finding their true artistic self, but to be more precise, SoundCloud can be considered as a “dojo” that gives artists the opportunity to develop themselves, network and eventually flourish in their music.

3.3 What Value do Digital Music Services Bring to Independent Artists?

A lot can be gained from using digital music services as each of them possesses a quality that differentiates them from one another. However, the value depends heavily on the artist’s own strategy. Some artists might completely disregard digital streaming platforms and instead focus on an exclusive distribution strategy by creating exclusive albums that are only available in a few online stores and which are also available in physical forms. These artists usually have cultivated a loyal fanbase or a following, which eliminates the need to make every song available for a fragment of a cent from streaming. On the contrary, other artists might choose a more intensive distribution strategy and release their songs onto every single online music store or digital streaming platform.

This is where economies of scale come into play in regard to music distribution. An artist with a smaller loyal fanbase can achieve the same income as an artist who receives fragments of a cent per stream from various streaming platforms. Ideally, artists should be aware of these two sides of the spectrum in today’s music industry and make efforts to balance out their strategies. The artists who only focus on streaming counts take value away from the art that they make, and the artists who rely on loyalty overestimate that value from their art.

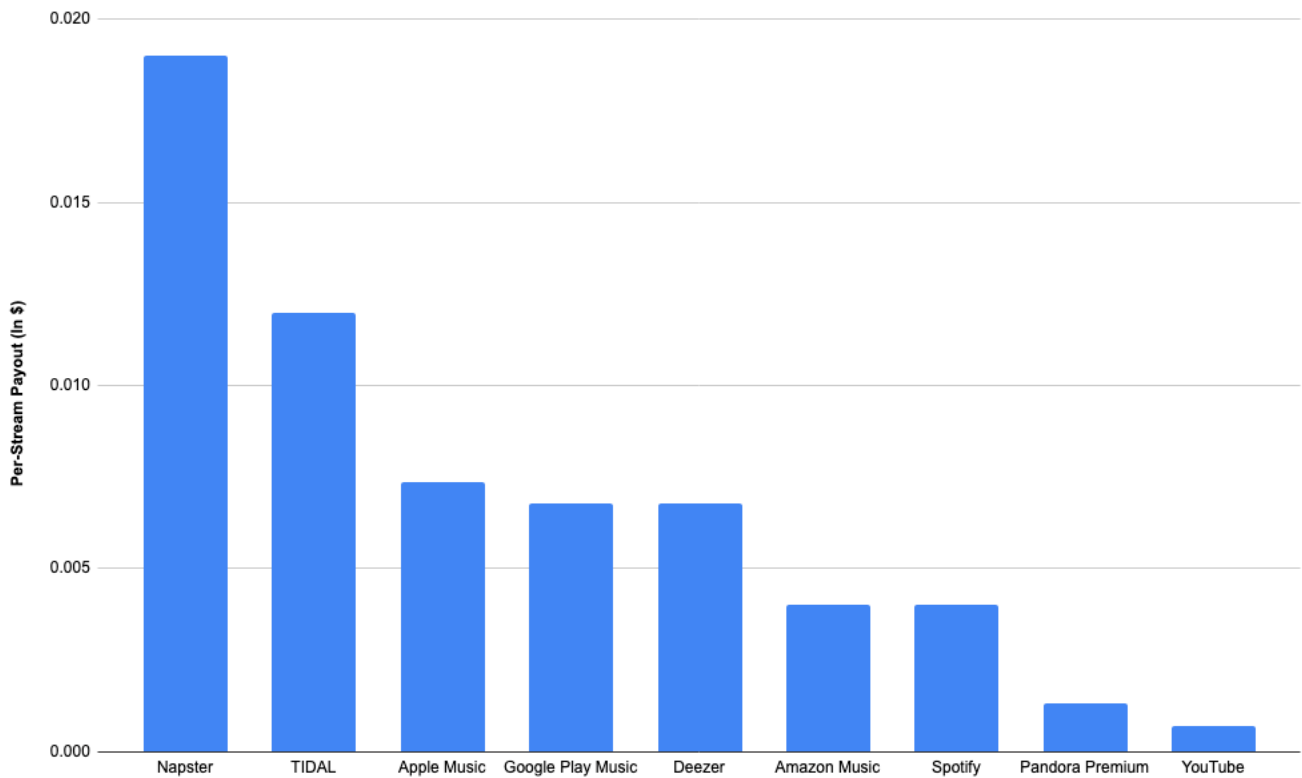


FIGURE 3. Average pay per stream on different streaming platforms (Sanchez 2020)

When it comes to digital streaming platforms, each of them pay out a certain amount per stream. This amount changes depending on which digital streaming platform is used, where the listener is located, which currency is used and whether the listener is using a free or a premium account. Napster and Tidal have been leading the race of best paying streaming platforms. Napster currently pays out roughly \$0,018 per stream whereas for Tidal this amount is about \$0,013. The two most popular streaming platforms however fall short on this matter, Apple Music pays out approximately \$0,007 per stream with Spotify going lower to \$0,004 per stream. (TABLE 1.)

3.4 Consumer Behavior in the Digital Streaming Environment

As digitalization emerged, the consumption of music became very easily approachable. Instead of having to carry individual CDs or cassettes in order to be able to listen to them, music is now accessible by just a few clicks. During the same time as this transformation took place, it also changed a lot of things from the artist's perspective as well. Consumers nowadays are exposed to a large amount of information and advertisements from digital platforms on a daily basis. It is as if the bar has been raised exponentially as to how likely consumers are going to invest their time into a specific matter. The fast-paced nature of the music industry appears in the way that many artists no longer focus on a particular body-of-work, but

instead concentrate on releasing singles and EPs on a consistent basis. The argument here is that due to the saturation of information and the information being so accessible, along with consumers having more freedom with their decisions, they are more likely to digest individual songs rather than long-play albums (LPs). (Brazell 2017.)

Digital streaming platforms redefined the listening experience for consumers. It is no longer the norm to listen to an album from start to the end, but instead it is more common nowadays for listeners to jump from one song to another, listen to it for a moment and decide whether that song is good enough to be added to a personal playlist. What digital streaming platforms did was that they changed the perception of music. Some argue that the perception has changed for the worse, because now more than ever before music is being commodified in such a way that it holds almost no value, songs now are just data bytes that bring an artist a fragment of a cent when listened to. On the other hand, music is now extremely accessible, which in itself is a very good thing considering that it gives artists more opportunities of getting heard.

4 DIGITAL MUSIC DISTRIBUTION SERVICES

Digital music distribution services, also referred to as aggregators or distributors, are the key for getting music releases into various online music retailers and digital streaming platforms globally. These services function as a middleman between the artist and the listener and are very handy for independent artists as they offer many resources for selling music and building a fan base. In addition to having music delivered into music retailers and digital streaming platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, Amazon, Pandora, Tidal and many others, digital music distribution services also offer many other valuable services for artists to use. (Songtrust.)

Digital music distribution services collect mechanical royalties from streaming and online retailers and provide in-depth reports of these sales for artists to look at. However, these reports can take up to six months to arrive depending on the distributor, and they usually work so that reports are two months behind. This is a good thing because this way artists are able to foresee their sales before receiving them based on their streaming count analytics and thus, giving an artist more financial security in the case that royalties are their main source of income. Furthermore, digital music distribution services provide International Standard Recording Codes and Universal Product Codes for individual songs and releases respectively. These codes are put in place to identify individual songs and releases, to track digital sales and overall keep music releases organized so that it is easier for artists to switch distribution services while still keeping original ISRC- and UPC- codes. (PQ 2019) The business models of digital music distribution services vary on almost each provider. There are only a couple of aggregators available which are completely free for artists, and most aggregators however operate either on a monthly/yearly subscription, or they take a percentage of an artist's royalties. (Andronicos 2019.)

4.1.1 Amuse

Amuse is a Swedish start-up digital music distribution company founded in 2017. It is a great option for independent artists who are starting out and looking into getting their music onto digital streaming platforms for the first time. The service comes in two-tiers, Free, and Amuse Pro. On the free option artists are able to release music to all major digital music platforms and artists can release music as much they want. However, there is a 15% fee which Amuse takes from royalties. Amuse Pro on the other hand grants an artist more features for a yearly subscription, in addition to the features already mentioned

above artists can add team members, such as managers and labels, their music gets released on social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram and Facebook, they can create multiple artist accounts and customize their release dates. (Amuse.)

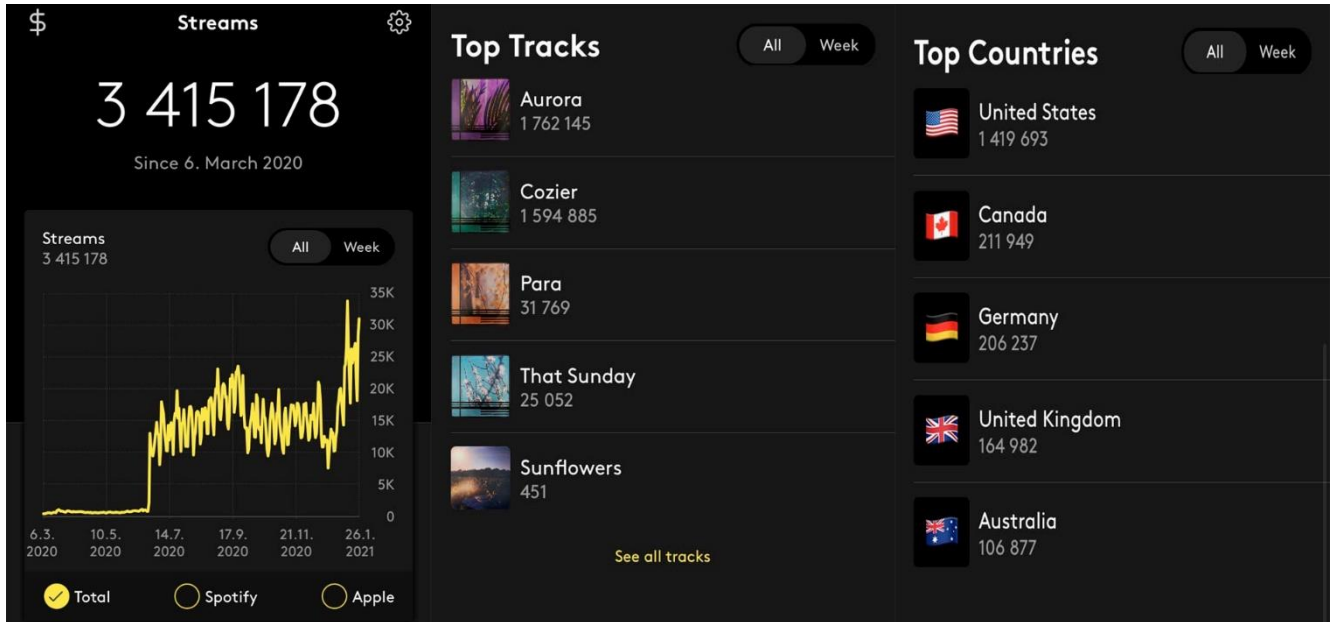


FIGURE 4. Analytics of the Amuse iOS- application (Amuse- application)

The thing that makes Amuse stand out from other digital music distribution services is its use of algorithms on their distribution platform. In February 2019 Amuse launched “Fast Forward”, a feature which allows artists to receive advance royalty payments for their songs while still keeping their master rights for their songs. This innovation works through an algorithm which uses up to 35 billion data points that calculate the future earnings for artists. (Feldman 2019) The algorithm’s job is also to identify promising artists that have talent and potential through data gathered from analysing music consumption and listening habits. For such artists Amuse offers a licensing deal which includes promotion, marketing and strategizing releases with team members from Amuse. (Jones 2019.)

4.1.2 Distrokid

Distrokid is one of the leading digital music distribution services available at the moment. The platform is really easy to use and is overall very convenient in terms of all the features it offers. Making things simple appears to be one of their value propositions. The company is operated by a small team of three

people, a programmer and two customer service representatives. All other work areas, for example updating daily statistics, verifying artworks and songs, checking for copyright infringements are all automated and operated by bots who work nonstop day and night. (Kaplan 2017.)

Distrokid comes in three different yearly subscription options: Musician, which is the standard option for artists, grants users one artist/band name, they're able to upload unlimited amount of songs and lyrics, split royalties with team members as well as get verified on Spotify. Musician Plus, and Label options both share identical features between each other except that on the Musician Plus users can create two artist/band names and on the Label, users can create up to a 100 artist/band names. The additional features that both these subscriptions have include the ability to receive daily stream/sale statistics, customize release dates, label names and preorder dates. Furthermore, Distrokid provides very specific royalty reports which the user can download onto a Excel- sheet, the detail of data that Distrokid provides is immaculate, and artists are able to see how much income and streams each digital music store or streaming platform generated, how much streams are worth in different countries, and they can see when the data has been reported and in which month the sales have occurred. (Distrokid.)

REPORTING MONTH	SALE MONTH	STORE	ARTIST	TITLE	QUANTITY	SONG/ALBUM	CUSTOMER PAID	COUNTRY OF SALE	EARNINGS (USD)
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	1	Song	n/a	JP	\$0.004192593497 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	hear the wind blow.	1	Song	n/a	JP	\$0.008084046864 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	6	Song	n/a	NZ	\$0.072015647056 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	3	Song	n/a	CA	\$0.015065427638 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	feathers.	1	Song	n/a	CA	\$0.003277079011 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	1	Song	n/a	CH	\$0.007040837618 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	2	Song	n/a	DE	\$0.011680287011 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	4	Song	n/a	IE	\$0.021160960630 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	1	Song	n/a	ES	\$0.006354843328 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	1	Song	n/a	SI	\$0.003811692082 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	2	Song	n/a	IL	\$0.006269073801 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	my ___ for you..	1	Song	n/a	IN	\$0.001762945055 100% of team
Jan 2021	Dec 2020	Apple Music	homieunculus	introduction	1	Song	n/a	KR	\$0.008631832044 100% of team

FIGURE 5. Excruciating detail view on Distrokid (Distrokid)

5 ROYALTIES

Royalties are the primary source of income for a lot of artists whose livelihood is music. In the digital music economy, there exists two different types of royalties, which are performance rights royalties and mechanical royalties. By definition, royalties are income that is paid by digital streaming platforms and performance right organizations to artists, songwriters, studio musicians, arrangers, composers, essentially anyone that has received credit in creating a commercial piece of music. (PQ 2020.)

5.1 Performance Royalties

Performance royalties come from events and sources where a song is broadcasted publicly. Such events and places include online and regular radio, television, restaurants, shops and live performances. Usually if someone wants to play an artist's music for commercial use, they must acquire a license for that music. But it could get very complicated and time consuming for a business or a radio to acquire these licenses individually, so instead businesses pay small sums to performance rights organizations (PRO) for the privilege of being able to play music inside a public service business for example. Popular performance rights organizations are ASCAP and BMI. These organizations gather all the license fees and distribute these amounts of money as performance royalties for artists. (Songtrust.)

5.2 Mechanical Royalties

Mechanical royalties are payments that artists, songwriters, composers, and different contributors receive when a new copy of their music is made. (BMI) More precisely, all different contributors of a song are entitled to mechanical royalties whenever their song is pressed on to a physical release such as a CD or a vinyl, or when their songs are streamed on digital streaming platforms, or when their song is purchased from iTunes, Amazon or other online music retailers. (Robley 2013.)

Mechanical royalties are always paid by the entity who has the license to either reproduce or distribute the track. For independent artists it is usually the digital music distributor such as Amuse or Distrokid who pays these royalties, but if an artist is signed to a record label, then it could also be that the record

label is the one in charge of paying these mechanical royalties. In addition, mechanical royalties can also be acquired through registering with a collection agency, such as Harry Fox Agency, Loudr or EasySongLicensing. These agencies issue mechanical licenses for a small fee, as well as collect and distribute mechanical royalties for artists. (Music Licensing: Mechanical Royalties Explained.)

Distributions /

Teosto December, foreign distribution

14.12.2020

NCB December, mechanical reproduction

14.12.2020

NMP December, performing (online)

14.12.2020

NMP December, mechanical reproduction (online)

14.12.2020

Distributions, total

Withholding tax

Withholding tax, earned income, 1,50 %

Deductions, total

FIGURE 6. Breakdown of mechanical and performance royalties. (Teosto)

Teosto, a Finnish music copyright organization collects both performance and mechanical royalties. The organization is non-profit and is the only existing association in Finland which collects payments for artists, composers and publishers. In order to receive royalties from Teosto, artists must create an account and pay a one-time 124 € incl. VAT membership fee. After this procedure is completed, artists shall deliver a work and a performance notification along with a tax card. By becoming a member, the artist authorizes Teosto to administer registered musical works globally, this means that Teosto will be able to negotiate licenses and royalties on the artists behalf saving a lot of time for the artist.

6 CREATING & MARKETING MUSIC RELEASES

There are a lot of things that need to be taken care of before a piece of music reaches its final form and is ready to be released. Recording a piece of music, preparing an accurate visual image and a proper marketing strategy are all equally important aspects when putting together an album or a single. The internet and digitalization have brought endless possibilities and different approaches that an artist can take to achieve the end goals of making a successful piece of music.

Ideally, a cohesive music product should have an artwork that aligns with the message and the feeling of the music and its sonic texture, as well as the overall aesthetic of the artist. When a piece of music has reached its final form, effort and time should be taken in order to gain an understanding of what the particular piece of music represents and how it makes the listener feel, and through gaining this understanding efforts for creating a release and marketing strategy should be taken in order to maximize exposure and positive reception.

This chapter focuses primarily on the authors' own practices and experience which he has acquired through creating music, researching the industry, and working with different distributors, record labels and industry professionals. The aim of this chapter is to bring the practical aspects of finalizing a piece of music into a commercially viable product available for aspiring artists globally.

6.1 Digital Audio Workstation- (DAW) Programs

The one connecting tool for audio recording that majority of sound engineers, producers and artists who record their music use is the digital audio workstation. It is no longer a necessity to have an expensive recording studio for making quality music, instead the process of recording and engineering songs has become extremely flexible. Nowadays artists and bands can record their own parts of a song from different locations in the world and bring a song to life through transferring individual audio files to create a final product.

Digital audio workstations are computer software that are designed for recording, producing, arranging, composing and engineering audio. These programs have incorporated everything that a traditional studio needs into one software. For example, they include various different instruments, mixing tools and

sounds for creating music and finalizing it into a song. Furthermore, one of the most popular features that these programs have is multi-track-recording. Essentially what multi-track-recording means is that audio can be recorded on to separate tracks and edited individually without affecting other audio tracks, making the process of mixing and mastering much easier for sound engineers. On the production, composition and arrangement side digital audio workstations also include a separate arrangement view where the producer can arrange recordings and overall determine how a song progresses from beginning to end. (Hracs, Seman & Virani 2016, 16.)

Since the emergence of digital audio workstations, the cost of entry into music recording has dropped significantly. Instead of purchasing physical gear worth thousands of dollars a person can achieve the same results with a computer software that costs roughly \$500. These programs are extremely powerful in terms what they offer for the user. With enough practice and learning, the user can perfect the skillsets of all roles that are necessary for creating finished songs.

6.2 Creating Artwork for Releases

Every music release deserves an artwork that accurately represents the music and adds to the overall image of the end product. Artworks usually give the listener a first impression of a music release, and listeners quite often fall victim to judging a music release by its artwork without listening to what it actually contains. Therefore, artists should emphasize on the design of the artwork in relation to the music since it is a crucial part of attracting new listeners. Furthermore, artworks are also very important when it comes to promoting your music and distributing it, because they add to an artists' brand image as a whole.

In addition to finding a good image for an album or a single, the artist must also follow and comply with the guidelines of distributors and digital streaming platforms. In order to create an artwork which will be accepted by the distributor an artist must follow these guidelines:

- A perfect square of at least 3000 x 3000 pixels in size. (Some distributors allow 1600 x 1600 px.)
- Do not use images which are not copyright free.
- No additional text except for artist name and song title.
- Parental Advisory- logo can be used only if a track contains explicit language.
- No inappropriate images or brand logos shall be visible in the artwork.

- RGB color mode instead of CMYK. (CMYK may not show accurately when exported)
- Availability in different file formats such as JPG, PNG and BMP. (Some distributors only accept one format and not the others.) (Breaking it Down #1: Artwork.)

For creating an artwork, artists can utilize free services such as Canva, PicMonkey, Pexels and Unsplash. Canva and PicMonkey are free online graphic design platforms where users can create everything from album covers to business cards. They offer many different templates and designs for users to choose from and have a very easy-to-use user interface. Pexels and Unsplash on the other hand are websites that provide copyright free stock images that users can edit and use on music artworks and other promotional content. However, if an artist is willing to invest in artwork then that is usually the better option, many graphic designers work out of commissions and are willing to collaborate with artists in a way in which artists can share their vision with the graphic designer and brainstorm on what fits best. (PQ 2019.)

6.3 Building a Strategy for a Music Release

When a music release is finished and ready to go it is wise not to release it right at that instant, but rather figure out a good timing for it within a month at the very least. It's very important to send your finished work to distributors early on so that they are able to process it and check if everything's alright, and so that all the digital streaming platforms and online retailers can process it on time as well.

When releasing music to Spotify it is important to deliver the music to the distributor at the very least three weeks before the release date. This way an artist is still able to pitch one of the songs for a potential editorial playlist placement through Spotify for Artists. In addition, due to Spotify being very reliant on algorithms, releasing music on a Friday also increases an artist's chances of getting picked up by Spotify's algorithm on to its algorithmic user-centric playlists such as Discover Weekly, Release Radar and others. (Ross 2020.)

Artists should also keep in mind how seasons and holidays might potentially affect the success of a release. Typically, people tend to be busy on holidays, spending time with their loved ones and so forth. Therefore, consequently their daily use of electronic devices decreases, which can dramatically affect the way an artist's music release is received on the release day.

In addition to figuring out the best release date, artists must also give enough time for the marketing and promotion that occurs in the space in between when a release is sent to a distributor and when the release

day comes. In case there are no promotional contents already made, this time should be used to create that kind of content. Furthermore, artists should remind their audience of their upcoming releases at least once every two weeks and utilize promotional content in all online platforms where their audience resides.

6.4 Promoting a Music Release Online

In the digital age, there are various different routes and paths an artist can take in order to reach new people and gain new fans. Artists should always focus on growing their audience organically and avoid services that offer fixed streams or listeners in the disguise of marketing. These services are often scams, many of them are operated by bots from which the streams are coming from, they are very ineffective in getting real long-term results and can potentially get your music pulled down from digital streaming platforms and online retailers as it is against their guidelines.

Better alternative for this is to do research on playlist curators on digital streaming platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. Many playlist curators have their contact information in their playlist description which is solely there for song submissions. Going the extra mile in contacting these curators, introducing yourself professionally and making your song pitches personalised for each curator makes a lot of difference and increases your chance of receiving new listeners. A good thing to think about before starting to research playlists is to identify the genre an artist is creating and who are some artists that share a similar sound. Finding playlists which align with the artist's genre is very important as it makes the scope of the research more precise, thus giving an artist a greater chance in receiving more listeners. (Zimmerman 2019.)

In addition to playlists, artists should also consider creating a press kit for themselves. Press kits are essentially the content that is necessary for creating an article or a blog post. Press kits should include a biography of the artist, sample of the music and sound the artist creates and professional photos. In the same manner as discussed in the previous paragraph, an artist should conduct similar research and find websites that align with the values of the artist and showcase artists in the same genre.

Social media is also a very effective tool in promoting music and should be something that an artist updates and strives to grow on a consistent basis. Social media platforms bring a great advantage for

artists, because they allow communication to flow freely and directly, and they are a great tool for bringing out the personality and visual aesthetic of an artist and for many fans it functions as an added value in addition to the music. Sponsored social media posts are also a good way to promote a music release, they are very cost-effective and allow users to create campaigns in which they can define their audience based on demographics, geographic location and their interests. Furthermore, when talking about social media, an artist should consider their social media pages as a branding tool and think carefully about the content which they want to publish, as not to break the cohesiveness or the consistency of aesthetic on their profile. Finding the balance between promotional or music- and personal posts is very much something to keep in mind when building a fan base through social media.

7 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the music industry has gone through major shifts and adaptations throughout the decades even prior to digitalization, and there have always been new innovations and efforts to make the industry a fairer space for artists. Digitalization however has arguably been the most damaging yet progressive issue that the music industry has encountered. From financial losses of billions of dollars due to piracy and copyright infringements to new platforms which enable users to listen to music in the same manner that was previously illegal but compensating the right holders, this chapter in the music industry has without a doubt forever changed the way music is consumed and perceived by the mass public.

With digitalization, the internet and new technologies emerging constantly, there's more room and opportunities for independent artists everywhere. Artists now are more capable of managing themselves and creating music more cost-effectively. There is however a lot more saturation and competition in the music industry than ever before, which does bring new challenges for the independent artist, but with the research information and first-hand knowledge shown in this thesis, it is much easier for independent artists to take action and follow the correct path in terms of building a brand, fan base and a career in the music industry overall.

When building your career as an independent artist, there are a lot of accounts to take care of and a lot of services an artist needs to deal with. Therefore, it is extremely important to keep everything organized, because when opportunities arise and new doors open, it is advisable to have everything in order, so that all existing user accounts are easily accessible and do not become an obstacle in reaching end goals.

Writing, researching and bringing the knowledge I already had from my personal music endeavours to life was really eye-opening and helpful as it gave me more clarity about the approaches and efforts which I have taken to further my career as an independent artist. Furthermore, I believe that the research presented in this thesis gives the reader an accurate perception of what the music industry is like today and what resources are available for independent artists.

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