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## **UTILIZING DIGITAL MEDIA PLATFORMS by ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED**

### **INDEPENDENT ARTISTS**

This study aims to uncover how independent, self-employed artists, particularly those without economic means, benefit from digital media platforms and how they use digital media to generate income by showcasing their art in these environments. In this context, theoretical research will be supported by interviews with independent artists residing in Turkey, Bulgaria, and France, conducted through multiple-choice and open-ended questions. In the research, artists were asked questions such as whether they utilize digital platforms, the challenges they face, whether they seek assistance from individuals or organizations to exhibit their work in digital environments, whether they receive support from social media experts to promote their work on social media, and whether they generate income.

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The attention of music consumers has been drawn to the digital music market due to the presence of international companies producing various advanced electronic devices and providing continuous update support. Digital music platforms, accessible from mobile and online devices, have offered the opportunity to access and upload content from anywhere, providing local music groups with more opportunities to showcase their work. Recently, with the significant presence of the digital realm in our lives and the consequent shaping of the media landscape, music listening habits have changed, leading to the emergence of a group known as digital music listeners.

The digital transformation in the music industry undoubtedly did not occur in isolation but rather emerged alongside the phenomenon of platformization. The advancement of recording, transmission, and communication technologies has transformed production and consumption processes in the music industry, strengthening the revenue model in favor of large corporations and producers (Attali, 2017). Legal regulations and advanced licensing programs have led to a significant increase in digital music sales online and the emergence of a digital economy dominated by music.

Thanks to these developments, music enthusiasts and artists have gained a digital platform where they can share their emotions, share their works, and stay informed about each other. Through digital channels that allow the development of different music genres from various geographical locations, different artists have started to gain recognition. Initially, the internet, with its legal gaps and unregulated structure, allowed music to be listened to and songs to be downloaded for free, primarily due to factors such as easy access to the internet for everyone and the difficulty of controlling the online environment.

As a result of the efforts of international organizations, governments, and professional associations, digital platforms were placed on a legal foundation, and the rights of copyright holders were legally protected. Additionally, search engines and mobile operators played a significant role in the legal digital commerce structure of the internet.

Increasing consumer awareness, higher legal penalties, a growing demand for quality in music listening, and the diligent efforts of actors in the music industry have led music to find its financial value in the digital realm. The recent subscription and view-based payment policies developed by platforms like YouTube serve as examples of this phenomenon. In Turkey, the proper implementation of legal music policies in the digital music environment and the realization of copyright holders' demands can only be achieved through changes and development in consumer behaviors and attitudes. In our country, there is still demand for websites that provide illegal music services without licenses, and music consumers often consider this practice legitimate. According to Law No. 5846 on Intellectual and Artistic Works, this situation constitutes a crime; however, many people either do not know about it or choose to ignore it. The issue of how to fully protect the rights of music creators in the digital music space is still a subject of debate, and a solution is being sought.

Illegal music downloads still occur in the digital music market, which puts authors in a difficult situation. The ongoing loss of rights in digital music is due to significant reasons such as the inadequacy of certain laws in protecting the digital realm, issues with professional organizations, and particularly the inability of authors to unite among themselves. Furthermore, the difficulty of fully protecting intellectual property rights in the digital realm due to the challenging nature of online monitoring continues to pose serious problems.

The challenges faced by independent and original music artists who aspire to create affected by the digital environment's inability to fully protect intellectual property rights is another significant issue in the digital music domain. The dominance of international companies in the music market creates major obstacles for independent artists who want to create songs independently without being economically dependent, especially for local music groups. Moreover, the fact that authors' rights are

not fully protected and the difficulty of monitoring the digital realm where their voices can be heard forces these artists to seek protection under major music companies.

For digital music to proliferate, laws encompassing the digital realm need to be revised, justice needs to be rightfully served, the rights of artists aspiring to produce independent music need to be protected against powerful music companies. Only through these measures can the digital music environment reach its desired state.

Emerging communication technologies have created entirely new platforms where people can share their thoughts and/or the thoughts and artistic products (works) of others. These platforms allow for sharing and continuous transmission, establishing a new media based on a culture of sharing and discussion. The most significant feature of this new media is its user-generated nature, often referred to as "social media," which can take the form of an environment/application/platform/site. It emerged as a system (Web 2.0) that allowed users to be more actively involved in the communication network and is based on the idea that content on social media-based internet sites should be provided by users themselves. Social media platforms differ from traditional media in their ability to bring together individuals, crowds, and people, enhance communication and interaction, and connect masses with individuals (Benckler, 2000, p. 567).

Digital platforms and technologies have fundamentally changed the dynamics, especially for artists. Traditional artists typically have four main income streams: live performances, physical sales, public appearances, and royalties and merchandise from licensing. However, the increasing significance of new media and widespread distribution and social platforms have provided unprecedented access not only for artists signed to record labels but also for independent artists on a global scale. Nowadays, every artist has the right to publish their content on streaming and video-sharing platforms like YouTube and receive compensation in the form of copyright fees (Sayimer, Turhan, 2017, p. 265).

In parallel with the emergence of the internet and various technological advancements, new actors have begun to replace the traditional actors in the production, distribution, and retail processes of the music industry through digital channels. Alongside the traditional business model, new service providers have emerged directly as the artist delivers their work to the audience (Graham, Bernard et al., 2004: 1093). In the platform economy, these new roles are assumed by digital streaming platforms and digital service aggregators. The existing components of the industry are somehow integrated into the changing business model through the phenomenon of platformization, leveraging advantages derived from past catalogs, contracts, or production habits (Krueger, 2020).

Evrencan Gündüz produces his own music and distributes and promotes it through his individual YouTube channel. With 81 video uploads from 2012 to the present day, the artist's monthly average views range from 2 million, and his monthly average income varies between \$573 and \$9,000, all of which goes directly to the artist. Currently, with 121,524 subscribers, the artist uses his YouTube channel for promotion and distribution of his music, and he also independently sells albums through other digital platforms (Socialblade, 2017). Despite having lower view and income ratios compared to other music channels, the direct transfer of all income to the artist emphasizes the importance of individual channels in the independent music industry.

Individually created music in the digital realm offers significant advantages to both consumers and producers. According to the music producer, these advantages include the reduction of costs due to the elimination of intermediary firms, the distribution and promotion of any desired number of recordings in music production, and almost no stockpiling issues for music (Bayram, 2009, 13).

The process of delivering a musical work to the audience by the music industry relies on a complex organization consisting of interconnected networks and actors. Jacques Attali (2017) defines this complex structure in the music industry as networks based on the composition, representation, and repetition of musical forms. This network, which determines the fundamental production form in the music industry, is the creator of various social and economic relationships. As a result, it replaced the patronage relationships of the past, with artists producing market actions alongside producers and managers, presenting marketable products, and performances. Attali mentions that records, jukeboxes, radio broadcasting, and the recording and transmission of music brought the music industry back to economics (2017, 125). With the development of sound recording and compression technologies, especially with the possibility of accessing and downloading recorded music for free through a program called Napster, the music industry faced its most significant challenge in the digital world (2017, 160). S. Richard Witt (2020) points out that the music industry's battle against free digital music access, from Napster to Pirate Bay and 4chan, took a different direction with the widespread use of music streaming services such as iTunes, Google Play, Spotify, and Deezer one after the other.

Since they are user-generated, it is possible to categorize the actions and behaviors of social media sites that concern copyright law into three categories. The common point of these categories is the existence of the action and behavior we define as "sharing," which mainly falls within the scope of copyright law. In this context, social media users: (i) share their own creative and original intellectual products on social media sites; (ii) create and share their own works using someone else's work, or

(iii) directly share someone else's work. These actions carried out through social media sites in our daily lives can lead to various copyright-related issues.

## **2. Shift of audience expectations**

In today's digital music industry, it's more important than ever for artists to have a deep understanding of the shift in audience expectations. With the rise of digital content consumption, the way people perceive and consume music has changed dramatically. According to a research from Pew Research Centre it is concluded that "Technology contributes to an expectation that "all digital content should be free." (Thompson, vd.). In the same research paper, a number of respondents were worried about audiences' decreasing attention spans.

With advances in technology, there is more content and a higher level of competition for attention, and as a result our attention spans have shortened as a result. According to data from Facebook: "In News Feed, we're seeing people spend, on average, 1.7 seconds with a piece of content on mobile compared to 2.5 seconds on desktop." (<https://www.facebook.com/business/news/insights/capturing-attention-feed-video-creative>) The shortening in attention span is a phenomenon which we can observe not only on social media. It is also valid for offline media. "In the mid-1980s, the average time that passed before you would hear the vocals on any radio song was 23 seconds." (<https://www.wirebuzz.com/blog/attention-spans-music>).

The music industry has had to adapt to our shorter attention span, as attention is a currency that governs its own supply and demand model.

## **3. The significance of metadata and obstacles with metadata management**

Metadata refers to any information that needs to accompany a music file on streaming services or digital stores. Metadata is data attached to a digital file that describes the contents of the file. In other words, metadata is the information used to describe, organise and manage digital content. It

can be used for a variety of purposes, including cataloguing, enabling discovery, storing and retrieving data. It is also used for royalty distribution, therefore its economic significance is of very high importance.

There are two types of metadata in the music industry: objective and subjective. Objective metadata is used to describe a song, such as the title, release date, track number, performing artist, cover art, and main genre. Subjective metadata is used to recommend and search for songs, and includes details of how a song sounds, such as moods and keywords.

One of the biggest challenges facing independent performers in the digital era is namely the metadata. One of the biggest problems for performers in the digital age is that metadata and data exchange standards are overcomplicated matters. Most players of the industry have come up with their own formats for metadata, which makes it hard to navigate the jungle of databases all over the industry. Metadata formats are designed to be read and edited by machines, so they can be migrated from one digital domain to another. This makes it difficult for artists to establish complete control over their own metadata. As a result, metadata is turning out to be a major technological obstacle for independent performers.

In the context of rights management, metadata is especially important because it identifies ownership, assisting licensing and authorisation of rights. It is also the key to discoverability of content on the Internet.

Streaming platforms and search engines rely on metadata. It's critical that such metadata is distributed and logged accurately, not just for a song or album's discoverability, but because metadata helps direct money correctly to all the rights holders.

It is also important to understand what the data exchange standards are. These standards are invented to facilitate the sharing of structured metadata across different information systems and such standards represent the requirements for the format and content of the data being transferred among those systems.

The European legislation states: “Where rightholders do not provide online content-sharing service providers with the relevant and necessary information on their specific works or other subject matter, or where no notification concerning the disabling of access to, or the removal of, specific unauthorised works or other subject matter has been provided by rightholders, and, as a result, those service providers cannot make their best efforts to avoid the availability of 17.5.2019 EN Official Journal of the European Union L 130/107 unauthorised content on their services, in accordance with high industry standards of professional diligence, such service providers should not be liable for unauthorised acts of communication to the public or of making available to the public of such unidentified works or other subjectmatter.”(<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legalcontent/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L0790&from=EN>).

Therefore, it is important to educate independent performers in this subject matter and also build consciousness about the importance of metadata because it can be considered fundamental for the success in the digital environment. Also, it is also ultimately their own legal responsibility to document the metadata accurately to attribute the relevant credit to all co-creators and contributions.

In today’s environment, every artist needs a metadata management strategy not only for their current releases but also for the entire back repertoire, which is also sometimes referred to as ‘Deep Catalogue’. At the very least artists should be keeping their own metadata database in a spreadsheet which contains each track along with its associated metadata. As a minimum, artists need to collect the following data in a structured format: Song name, Artist display name, real artist name, composers and writers, producer(s), copyright, genre, ISRC code, BPM, song duration.

According to ‘The Verge’ - “Metadata sounds like one of the smallest, most boring things in music. But as it turns out, it’s one of the most important, complex, and broken, leaving many musicians unable to get paid for their work.” (<https://www.theverge.com/2019/5/29>)

Metadata standards offer conventions for the generation and description of data. They specify and define the structure of metadata and the way it is communicated between parties. One of the widely accepted standards within the music industry is DDEX.

### **3.1. DDEX**

DDEX or Digital Data Exchange, LLC (DDEX) is a not-for-profit, membership organisation that was formed in 2006, and is focused on the creation of digital music value chain standards. DDEX was established by a consortium of leading media companies, music licensing organisations, rights owners, digital service providers and technical intermediaries. Since then the membership has grown from right across the digital music ecosystem throughout the world. DDEX standards help all players in the digital music value chain to more effectively communicate information along that value chain. This leads to efficient business transactions, reduced costs and increased revenues for all sectors involved. DDEX is now the de facto standard for the formatting and delivery of metadata relating to the digital music value chain and its standards are implemented right across the globe (<https://ddex.net/about-ddex/>).

“The digital supply chain relies on the management of a high-volume of low-value transactions. The sale of a digital music track often requires record companies, retailers, collecting societies and other intermediaries to interact multiple times, from ‘announcing’ the track is available to reporting its usage. In the past, the digital music market has been hampered by non-standardised or proprietary reporting formats.

The adoption of standards supports the propagation of new technologies to distribute media, lowering the barriers to entry for new firms and ultimately resulting in increased choice and reduced costs for consumers. If artists, content labels and distributors can afford to improve and broaden their offerings, more customers will listen to digital music broadcasts and there will be more revenue for songwriters and other rights owners.” (<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/>)

### **3.2. Importance of SEO and keyword optimisation**

SEO is short for search engine optimisation and is the process of reaching people using search engines to find a particular piece of content. Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of



increasing the visibility of organic (free) search in order to increase brand awareness, drive qualified traffic, and develop reputation. For any band or musician, search engine optimisation (SEO) is an important tool to help ensure that people who search for you online are able to find your website or content. SEO is a process of improving the visibility and ranking of your website in search engine results pages (SERPs). By appearing in the top 3 results for a particular search query, you can significantly increase the number of people who are exposed to your music.

#### **4. METHOD**

In the scope of the research, interviews were conducted with a total of thirty-two individuals. The research questionnaire consists of multiple-choice and open-ended questions. Of the participants in the study, 35.4% reside in Turkey, 33.3% in Bulgaria, 28.2% in France, and 3.1% in Colombia and Italy. The participants in the research are between the ages of 18-65. Accordingly, 45.7% of the participants fall within the 25-34 age group, 34.2% in the 35-44 age group, 16.5% in the 45-54 age group, and 3,6% in the 55-64 age range. When looking at the gender of the participants, 53.1% are male, and 46.9% are female participants. Regarding the marital status of the participants, it is observed that 56.3% are single, 37.5% are married, and 6.2% are divorced. The educational levels of the participants are as follows: 15.5% have a high school degree, 21.9% have a bachelor's degree, 53.2% have a master's degree, 6.3% have a Ph.D., and 3.1% have a college degree.

Half of the participants, 50%, stated that they have been performing on stage for 12 years or more. 27.4% of the participants mentioned performing individually for 10 years, 5 years, and 3 years separately. 16.3% of the participants stated that they have performed individually for 7 years, 6 years, and 2 years separately. 6.3% of the participants mentioned performing on stage for 1 year.

Regarding their roles in the music industry, 53.1% of the participants identified themselves as solo artists, while 25% stated that they are members of a group. 3.1% of the participants mentioned that they are solo artists, group members, or orchestra members separately. Additionally, 3.2% of the participants identified themselves as composers, 4.7% as both composers and performers, 3,7% as both group and solo artists, and 4.1% as primarily solo artists but occasionally part of a group. Furthermore, 3.1% of the participants mentioned that they are sound engineers and label managers.

The participants mentioned various music and art genres, including pop, folk music, multi-art, R&B pop, multifunctional, rock, punk, classical music, inestable, bass music/rap, piano chamber music, musicall, jazz, indie, alternative rock, Turkish art music, singer-songwriter, guitar player, indie

rock/synth pop, neo-classical/jazz/soundtrack, electronic rock/alternative, and world music/ethnic/electronic/experimental.

The research included 31 independent artists. It was found that four participants had no other occupation and were solely involved in the music industry. Other participants stated that they had various professions such as engineers, journalists, research assistants, students, actresses, psychologists, and accountants, while also being involved in the arts. These findings indicate that independent artists often engage in other jobs to make a living.

However, 84.4% of the participating artists stated that they received support from government sources or private organizations, while 15.6% stated that they did not receive any funding. Of those who received support, 60% mentioned receiving funding from government organizations, while 40% mentioned receiving funding from private organizations.

The research results indicate that 96.9% of the participants use the internet every day, while 3.1% use it several times a week. Participants provided the following information about their internet usage: 90.6% use the internet for personal reasons, such as communicating with friends or family, 87.5% use it for professional purposes, 65.6% use it for education, and 3.1% use it for different needs.

Regarding social media usage, 84.4% of the participants use Instagram, 75% use Facebook, 37.5% use Twitter, 9.4% use TikTok, and 3.1% use LinkedIn. 3.1% of the participants stated that they do not use any social media platforms. Among those who use social media, 78.1% use it to communicate with friends and family, and the same percentage, 78.1%, use it to promote their art. Additionally, 18.8% use social media to generate income from their art. These findings reveal that independent artists use social media to disseminate, promote, and generate income from their art, although the use for income generation is relatively low.

Among social media users, 67.9% found social media usage easy and felt safe, while 32.1% felt varying degrees of discomfort (25.8%, 6.3%). Despite finding social media usage easy, their presence as artists on social media is not as high.

Participants prefer having someone else manage their social media accounts. Participants express a decreasing preference for managing their artist accounts on social media platforms themselves, with percentages of 28.1%, 25%, 21.9%, 12.5%, and 12.5%, respectively. Nevertheless, 62.5% of the participants publish their music on online platforms such as iTunes, Apple Music, Spotify, YouTube, Amazon Music, etc., while 37.5% do not use these social media platforms for music distribution.

When asked how they found their current distributors, 55% mentioned finding them online, 15% through word of mouth, 5% from musician friends, 5% from production companies, 5% from labels, and 10% from other sources. 5% mentioned not having distributors. Additionally, 35% of the participants stated that they changed distribution companies and transferred their content to another distributor during their career.

The findings indicate that only 10% of the performing artists use social media on a daily basis. 15% use it once a week, 25% share content on social media every month, and 50% do so once a year. These findings suggest that independent artists do not prioritize the use of social media platforms, even though these platforms can be crucial for promoting their performances to wider audiences. Although 46.9% of the participants found social media usage easy, they do not use these platforms sufficiently. According to the results, they do not use vlogs and podcast platforms.

When participants were asked how much of their personal income is covered by content distributed on social media platforms, 80% stated that less than 10% of their income is covered in this way. 10% of the participants mentioned covering 15-30% of their income, 5% stated that 10-15% of their income comes from this source, and another 5% stated that 70-99% of their income is obtained through this method.

Participants were asked which platform or digital service providers they prefer for making money by uploading their content. 80% preferred YouTube, 75% preferred Spotify, 55% preferred Apple Music, 20% preferred Deezer, and 20% preferred other platforms. More than 50% of the performance artists participating in the study preferred having someone else handle their digital distributions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the theoretical part of our study emphasized that evolving technologies offer many opportunities for independent artists to promote their performances, our research results show that artists benefit from the income-generating potential of digital media to a very limited extent. The reasons for artists not using these platforms adequately are not solely personal. The widespread adoption of digital music will increase usage by regulating laws covering digital media, protecting the rights of artists who want to produce independent music against powerful music companies. With the regulation of laws that protect independent artists in Turkey, Bulgaria, and France, the digital music environment can become more supportive of independent artists.

New media platforms, such as YouTube, which allow the establishment of individual channels without any membership fees, provide artists with the opportunity to distribute and promote their work without the need for intermediary companies. As music producers improve their recording

technology skills, they can become more effective on these platforms. As technology becomes more inclusive and efficient, new business opportunities will continue to emerge, particularly in the digital distribution and live entertainment sectors. These developments can be seen as positive effects on the individual music industry, which is one of the creative industry sectors of new media.

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