Digital transformation and the DIY artist: Balancing artistic integrity and economic sustainability in the digital domain

1. Introduction

Digital technologies have fundamentally reshaped music production, distribution and promotion, catalyzing a profound evolution in the role of independent musicians (Ali et al., 2021). Although the concept of DIY (do-it-yourself) culture is not entirely novel in the broader history of music and artistry, it has assumed fresh and distinctive significance within the contemporary digital context (Spencer, 2005). This transformation has heralded a new paradigm, transforming the independent musician into what is now commonly referred to as the 'DIY artist.'

A DIY artist is an independent musician or other creative who chooses to take on the responsibilities traditionally held by record labels, management companies, and other industry professionals (Bennett, 2018). This includes producing and recording their own music, booking their own shows, promoting their own work, and handling their own distribution and sales. As artists increasingly turn to digital platforms to bypass traditional gatekeepers, the essence of DIY—autonomy, creative control, and direct fan engagement—faces new tests, balancing the democratization of music with the perils of platform dependency and data commodification (Everts et al., 2022).

The DIY ethos, historically rooted in a culture of independence and resistance (Guerra, 2018), is now in conflict with the paradoxes of online visibility—where the very platforms that empower artists with distribution and community also threaten to undermine the authenticity of the DIY philosophy through commercialization and algorithmic influence (Patterson, 2023). In the digital era, traditional boundaries separating artists from the broader music industry have blurred, empowering musicians to take on multiple roles and responsibilities, thus forging a path towards self-sufficiency and creative autonomy (Guichardaz et al., 2019).

DIY scenes offer a counter-narrative to mainstream culture by fostering a network of autonomous, anti-capitalist communities committed to mutual aid and the subversion of traditional production and distribution models, as reflected in diverse local and global movements (Griffin, 2015). These artists utilize their creative competencies and

entrepreneurial spirit to establish careers and businesses from the bottom up (Haenfler, 2017). They often draw inspiration from punk and underground cultures, which emphasize resistance and autonomy (Guerra, 2018, Bennett, 2018b). DIY artists are driven by a strong DIY ethic, which prioritizes creativity, self-management, and sustainability (Oliver, 2010) as they negotiate the challenges and expectations of creative and career independence (Frenneaux, 2023).

The DIY artist's career path transcends geographical boundaries, with studies examining DIY music careers in varied international settings, including North America, Europe, and East Asia (Baym and Burnett, 2009, Cummins-Russell and Rantisi, 2017). These studies shed light on the survival strategies employed by DIY artists in these regions, ranging from cultivating aesthetic freedom to navigating complex challenges like government involvement in local music markets (Jian, 2018). Acknowledging this diversity in all its forms is crucial for capturing the essence of DIY scenes' inherently diverse nature (Churchill et al., 2019).

The research questions in this study revolve around the influence of DIY practices on the digital transformation of independent music production, distribution, and promotion (RQ1). Additionally, the study seeks to understand the consequences of these changes on the delicate balance between artistic expression, local identity, and economic sustainability within the music industry (RQ2).

The structure of this article is as follows: In Section 2, we explore the existing literature surrounding DIY culture and digital transformation in relation to independent musicians, establishing the theoretical background for this research. Section 3 outlines the methodologies employed for data collection and analysis. The study's findings are presented in Section 4, with a comprehensive discussion of both its theoretical and practical ramifications in Section 5. Furthermore, Section 6 addresses the study's limitations and offers conclusions and recommendations for future research endeavours.

2. Intersections of DIY culture and digital transformation in independent music

2.1 The DIY ethos in independent music

In the contemporary independent music landscape, the intersection of digital transformation and the DIY ethos emerges as a central theme. In the UK, self-releasing artists and micro-independent record labels, for instance, manifest a delicate interplay between artistic creativity and commercial interests within the broader music industry (Strachan, 2007). This dynamic, observed globally, resonates within Swedish local music scenes, where fans find themselves empowered, yet at times exploited, in the wake of digital progression (Baym and Burnett, 2009).

The ascendancy of social networking platforms reflects their importance in promoting independent music. However, these platforms also introduce a dichotomy; while they facilitate digital distribution, they simultaneously pose challenges to artists (Gaffney and Rafferty, 2009). This notion of duality extends to the global music scene although, despite the ubiquity of online platforms, the distinctiveness of local identities and sounds in independent music remains steadfast (Kruse, 2010). For instance, the Indonesian indie band Senyawa embodies this principle through their innovative use of platforms like Bandcamp and YouTube to distribute their music globally. By blending traditional Javanese music with experimental sounds, Senyawa has managed to maintain their unique identity while reaching a worldwide audience (Khaliq, 2020). Their success illustrates how artists can leverage digital platforms to amplify their local sounds, overcoming the barriers posed by digital distribution to preserve the authenticity of their music.

Diversity in DIY music scenes is multifaceted and includes a variety of identities and experiences including cultural and ethnic backgrounds, gender identities, sexual orientations, socioeconomic statuses, ages, physical and mental abilities, religious beliefs, and political ideologies (Dunn & Farnsworth, 2012). Research emphasizes the significance of acknowledging diverse voices, roles, and experiences to foster a comprehensive and inclusive understanding of DIY culture (Churchill et al., 2019; Hesmondalgh & Baker, 2011). For example, gender dynamics emphasise the broader context of inclusion and representation (Threadgold, 2023).

Arlo Parks, a British singer songwriter and poet emerging in the DIY music scene after 2020, exemplifies the polymathic nature of many artists today and is reflected in the diversity of her work. With a background that spans Nigerian, Chadian, and French heritage, Parks brings a unique cultural perspective to her music. As a queer artist, she explores themes of identity,

mental health, and sexuality with a depth and vulnerability that resonate with a wide audience (Duncan, 2023). Her ability to weave personal experiences into her music with broader social themes showcases the profound impact that diverse voices can have in fostering connection and understanding within the DIY music community.

Participation in DIY culture has significant psychological and social implications for artists. The autonomy and creative freedom associated with DIY practices can offer profound personal fulfilment and a strong sense of community belonging (Rehman, 2020). However, the pressures of self-management and the challenges of financial instability can also pose risks to mental health (Berg et al., 2022). Recognizing and addressing these impacts is crucial for supporting the well-being of DIY artists, fostering a culture that values not only artistic achievement but also personal and community health.

2.2 Balancing artistic integrity and economic realities

Digital culture, heralded for its transformative potential, at times falters when placed against the formidable presence of major labels, thereby reiterating the challenges independent musicians confront (Mclean et al., 2010). It emphasizes the vitality of technological tools for DIY artists, especially when contextualized within the framework of understanding and assimilating local music scenes (Oliver, 2010). In the purview of this study, the term 'independent musician' is synonymously used with 'DIY artist' highlighting their self-reliant and autonomous approach to music production and distribution.

As the music industry navigates the digital tide, independent music has undergone a metamorphosis. This evolution, at times, has been characterized by a 'trial and error' methodology. Notably, Baars et al. (2021) explains this transition through the "sonic capital" concept, grounded in the techno and house music scene of Berlin. In parallel, Montreal's music industry showcases how unique cultural identities, such as bilingualism, can mould network dynamics, demonstrating the significance of local attributes in network cultivation (Cummins-Russell and Rantisi, 2017).

The business strategies of DIY artists are in transition in response to the changing landscape of digital music production, distribution, and promotion (Wikström, 2020). Community-driven support systems like crowdfunding and other collaborative platforms add complexity as artists

seek financial stability while retaining creative control. This strategic adaptation involves orchestrating digital ecosystems, balancing an expansive reach with challenges in monetization and audience engagement (Cozzolino et al., 2021). Despite artists' efforts to maintain integrity, they often struggle with economic pressures, as seen in instances like Baltimore's Arts & Entertainment District (Rich, 2017).

Walzer (2017) articulates that independent music production, grounded in the DIY spirit and leveraging modest project studios, anticipates and conforms to the evolving music industry's contours. Such evolution is evident in how young artists harness their creative competencies, cultivated from music and style-based cultures, to chart out DIY careers. These careers are increasingly becoming emblematic of a synthesis between cultural relevance and economic viability, particularly within global music practices (Bennett, 2018a). An illustrative example is Regina Spektor, who emerged from the New York anti-folk scene of the 2000s, initially performing in small venues and self-releasing her music before gaining international fame (Orr, 2012).

Digital platforms, crucial for content creation and social networking, pose challenges for DIY artists. Managing digital algorithms for visibility requires an in-depth understanding of marketing strategies to avoid conformity to mainstream trends (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2023). Despite their advantages, challenges persist, as seen in the careers of musicians in South-west England (Haynes and Marshall, 2018) and in Milan's music scene. Both contexts emphasize the need for entrepreneurial skills among musicians for self-reliance (Tarassi, 2018).

The literature accentuates the intricate relationship between the DIY ethos, digital transformation, and independent musicians (Frenneaux, 2023; Jones, 2021). As artists navigate this complex matrix, the balance between artistic integrity and economic sustainability remains pivotal. Therefore, we will further explore these intersections, particularly in the face of unforeseen opportunities and challenges regarding digital transformations.

2.3 Digital transformation in independent music: Opportunities and challenges

The music industry's metamorphosis, driven by the rise in DIY culture, has led to a more democratized distribution, blurring the lines between traditional and contemporary media

(Oliver and Lalchev, 2022). Notable artists like Billie Eilish and Finneas have showcased the potential for commercial recognition within this framework (Power, 2019). However, the path is not devoid of hurdles as digital platforms, acting as the new gatekeepers, introduce complexities in visibility and reach for artists, alongside a hyper-competitive environment (Moreau, 2013).

The relationship between artists and audiences is evolving into a 'new economy of fandom,' where they collaborate as co-creators (Galuszka, 2015). This transformation highlights DIY artists' societal influence in promoting sustainable music consumption and the challenges of digital personalization on platforms like Spotify (Prey, 2016). Saragih's (2019) review shows the importance of collaborative efforts between artists, fans, and industry stakeholders in shaping the future of music consumption and production, fostering engaged music communities and innovative business models.

Streaming, though hailed as the democratizing force in music, might be reinforcing existing industry power structures rather than disrupting them (Nordgård, 2017). Sinclair and Tinson (2017) add depth to this discourse, bringing forward discussions on psychological ownership in the context of streaming. The age-old debate of art versus commerce has found new footing in the digital realm, as the notion of "selling out" has evolved, suggesting a more integrated blend of artistry and commercial pursuits (Klein et al., 2017).

Tschmuck (2017) provides an overview of the music industry's resilience amid digital transformations with a focus on power dynamics (Hviid et al., 2018). For example, emerging technologies like the Internet of Musical Things (IoMusT) (Turchet et al., 2018) and blockchain are poised to redefine industry structures and creative venture funding (O'Dair and Owen, 2019). Dolata (2020) notes a shift in listener behaviour towards streaming platforms, repositioning DIY artists as content creators (Negus, 2019), who utilize platforms like Patreon and Twitch for direct-to-fan relationships.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital trends, as artists began exploring digital formats, melding them with traditional performances (Rendell, 2020). On reflection of his keynote speech at 'The Great Escape' music convention, Cooke (2021) mirrored industry sentiments about the significance of D2F relationships in this digital era. However, streaming platforms have their shadows, as a tiny fraction of tracks dominates streamed music, amplifying income disparities (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2021).

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) hold the promise of augmenting the creative industries, but Anantrasirichai and Bull (2022) argue that they should complement human creativity rather than replace it. The pandemic, while challenging, also provided artists a moment for introspection, redefining creative identities and highlighting mental health's importance (Duarte and Gauntlett, 2022). Moreover, data literacy has emerged as a pivotal skill, influencing power dynamics, and unlocking new business opportunities in an increasingly platform-centric industry (Hagen, 2022). Darvish and Bick (2023) succinctly encapsulates the present, noting that technologies like streaming, AI, and blockchain are reconfiguring the music industry's value chain.

The growth of digital platforms, while increasing accessibility for DIY artists, has also inadvertently created new challenges like erratic algorithms and intensifying competition (Frenneaux, 2023). Observations from Geurts and Cepa (2023) suggest that such transformations are global, with the digitization of the Dutch music industry hinting at evolving platform power dynamics. D2F models are gaining momentum, necessitating an innovative digital marketing ecosystem (Murphy and Hume, 2023). Interestingly, Chinese streaming platforms present a unique landscape, democratizing music but sometimes at the expense of artists' cultural autonomy (Qu et al., 2023).

This article aims to address several gaps in the existing literature related to the role of DIY artists in the contemporary digital music domain. First, we seek to explore the evolving nature of DIY artists and their multiple roles in the digital domain, as traditional boundaries between artists and the music industry have blurred. Second, we aim to examine the diverse international contexts in which DIY artists operate, shedding light on their survival strategies and innovative approaches to building sustainable music careers. Finally, we address the intersections between digital transformation, the DIY ethos, and the balance between artistic integrity and economic sustainability, particularly in the face of unforeseen opportunities and challenges brought about by digital transformations.

3. Methodology

For this study, a grounded theory approach was used to establish a link between the research questions and the empirical context of the research (Makri and Neely, 2021). Incorporating a

grounded theory approach allowed for the iterative development of theoretical constructs derived directly from the data itself, rather than imposing preconceived hypotheses on the participants' experiences (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This inductive method shaped the entire research process, guiding the interview questions, the data collection, and the subsequent analysis, thus ensuring that the study's findings were authentically grounded in the lived realities of the DIY music community.

Fifteen interviews were conducted to balance depth and breadth of perspectives within the study's resources. This sample size allowed for a rich exploration of experiences across various levels of engagement in the music industry, consistent with qualitative research standards (Marshall et al., 2013). Participant gender and background were recorded to ensure diversity and representation (Mathijssen et al., 2023).

Finally, we employed a thematic coding approach to analyze all the interview data. Using NVivo software, the raw interview data was organized, visualized, and synthesized into initial codes that captured aspects of digital transformation relating to DIY culture. These codes were then thematically clustered and integrated in-line with the academic literature through a three-tiered coding process (Gioia et al., 2012).

3.1 Empirical setting and research questions

The empirical setting for this study encompasses a diverse range of music scenes in varied contexts within the UK and Ireland, reflecting the evolving landscape of independent music production, distribution, and promotion in the digital era (Ritter, 2022). Our participants included individuals of different genders and socio-economic backgrounds, operating within multiple geographical contexts within the UK and Ireland (see Table 1). This comprehensive approach aims to explore the intricate challenges these artists encounter as they integrate new digital technologies—such as Twitch, YouTube, Instagram, Bandcamp, and Patreon—into their creative and commercial processes. The research questions were refined as follows to address the intersection of digital transformation and the diverse identities of our participants:

- RQ1: How have DIY practices influenced the digital transformation of independent music production, distribution, and promotion?
- RQ2: How do these changes impact the balance between artistic expression, identity, and economic sustainability?

#	Gender	Role	Status	Platform	Location	Time
1	Female	Singer songwriter	Full time	Patreon	London	30' 01"
2	Female	Musician	Part time	Bandcamp	Edinburgh	41' 06"
3	Male	Singer songwriter	Part time	YouTube	Bristol	28' 59"
4	Transgender	Singer songwriter	Full time	Bandcamp	Brighton	47' 21"
5	Male	Musician	Part time	Kickstarter	Manchester	25' 08"
6	Male	Musician	Full time	Twitch	London	25' 03"
7	Female	Musician	Part time	Patreon	Glasgow	21' 05'
8	Male	Singer songwriter	Full time	Patreon	Cardiff	47' 32"
9	Female	Singer songwriter	Full time	Bandcamp	Manchester	34' 57"
10	Female	Singer songwriter	Full time	Patreon	London	27' 50"
11	Male	Musician	Part time	Musicoin	London	27' 14"
12	Male	Singer songwriter	Part time	Kickstarter	York	35' 37"
13	Genderqueer	Singer songwriter	Full time	YouTube	Manchester	22' 34"
14	Female	Musician	Full time	Twitch	Dublin	49' 12"
15	Female	Singer songwriter	Full time	Bandcamp	Newcastle	26' 45"

Table 1. *DIY artists participating in interviews*

3.2 Data collection and analysis

This research seeks to explore the everyday interactions, challenges, and successes that DIY artists encounter when utilizing digital tools. Between 2020 and 2023, the author conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with fifteen DIY artists based within the UK and Ireland, ranging from part-time hobbyist music-makers through to professional independent musicians. This design facilitated an open dialogue where participants were able to freely share their perspectives, experiences, and narratives about the digital revolution in music (Pizzolitto, 2023).

A thematic analysis was employed as the primary method for dissecting and understanding the collected data. This approach is renowned for its capability to identify, analyze, and elucidate patterns or themes inherent in datasets (Cassell et al., 2018). The rationale for

choosing this method was its inherent flexibility, making it adaptable across different theoretical frameworks and allowing for deep immersion into the data's intricacies.

The author's initial step was a thorough familiarization with the data, which entailed meticulous transcription and repetitive perusal of the content to achieve comprehensive immersion. During this stage, preliminary insights were jotted down to guide the subsequent analysis. The author then embarked on a systematic exploration of themes, initiating with coding the data. Relevant data fragments were pinpointed and collated according to their corresponding codes. Subsequently, these codes were organized into potential themes (King et al., 2018).

4. Findings

4.1 Digital tools for personalized fan offerings

The findings reveal that for DIY artists, platforms such as Patreon and Twitch are key for moving from conventional music-making to monetizing via digital platforms. Merging DIY ethos with modern digital tools, artists are branching out into new ventures like exclusive merchandise and book writing. This adaptability allows them to innovatively serve their fanbase, underlining how digital platforms are transforming the music industry.

Our study highlights the importance of digital tools, for example, through specialized mailing lists:

> *I like keeping in touch with like my fan club, [they] are on a separate mailing list for my everyday newsletter.* [2-F]

Subscription platforms such as Patreon and Bandcamp not only offer a regular income stream but also foster a sense of real-world engagement for artists, enabling them to continue their creative process without the burden of additional employment:

> *It's the closest thing to real life in terms of getting paid, for what you do and being able to write the next song because you don't have to do something else, that I've come across.* [4-T]

Data shows that DIY practices significantly affect independent music, with artists using digital platforms for personalized fan experiences, such as handwritten lyrics or demo CDs, and maintaining a focus on quality. These practices advocate for an adaptable, personal approach that values creative freedom over commercial success. DIY is regarded as a means for creative expression and a natural avenue for developing digital skills.

4.2 Independence through online community and identity

One of the key findings of this study is that the practice of self-recording and self-production have enabled DIY artists to work on a small scale and maintain control over their music as digital distribution platforms have become crucial for independent musicians to release and sustain their music. For example, the subscription model on platforms like Bandcamp has provided a stable, albeit small income stream, reducing the pressure to pay rent:

> *At some point, I realized that I was using Bandcamp as a platform for releasing my music.* [4-T]

Crowdfunding, exemplified by Kickstarter, has empowered independent musicians to innovate in music production, distribution, and promotion. Successful campaigns highlight the potential of digital platforms for project financing and direct fan engagement. The study also notes a pivot to live streaming platforms like Twitch by artists in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitating creative continuity and broader audience outreach:

> *At the moment, my main platforms are Twitch, Patreon, and Ko-fi. Prior to that, it would have been hugely Facebook or Instagram driven.* [14-F]

Subscription platforms support musicians in monetizing their work and securing consistent income, shining a light on DIY practices in the evolving music industry. Despite challenges, platforms like Patreon offer independent artists a distinct avenue for fan engagement beyond mainstream social media and streaming services:

> *I started making albums back in the '80s... and that's what I've done ever since, kept my own label, put my records out myself, and toured extensively across the world.* [8-M]

4.3 The impact of digital transformation on DIY practices

The findings indicate that artists dedicated to DIY practices manage their own music careers, including label management and show bookings. They approach content creation as a unique personal expression rather than mere content production prioritizing artistic integrity over monetization, keeping their records affordable and often bypassing social media expenditure to preserve their DIY principles.

DIY practices are pivotal in the digital evolution of independent music, as artists naturally aspire for widespread dissemination of their work. However, balancing creativity with income generation presents challenges, leading many to adopt platforms like Patreon for financial support:

> *Financially [Patreon is] a source of passive income and artistically passive-ish... it's a source of more guaranteed income because I felt that my gigs were too sporadic.* [1-F]

The emergence of these types of platforms emphasizes the role of DIY practices in motivating artists to adapt to digital platforms, fostering economic sustainability while preserving their artistic autonomy:

> *And, with the change in the industry in 2007, I was right on the edge of it... so, the quandary of how to make put bread on the table so that you can write more songs has been what pushed me towards Patreon.* [10-F]

The study reflects a trend in independent music towards alternative funding, like crowdfunding and cryptocurrency ventures (e.g., Musicoin). These methods enable deeper fan engagement and counter the traditional music industry's extractive model. DIY artists tend to experiment with different platforms, finding more success with crowdfunding sites such as Kickstarter and Patreon, where authentic storytelling and community interaction are crucial for digital transformation in music production and promotion:

> *I think it's like the more you tell your story. And the more genuine you are with that story; the more people just can see that straight away.* [12-M]

Frequently exhibiting a strong personal connection to music, the study shows that artists often begin their creative journey at a young age. Each artist develops a personal set of skills and competencies using different digital tools to support their own DIY practice.

4.5 Challenges of digital transformation

This research shows that DIY artists are at the forefront of digital transformation in music production, distribution, and promotion. They utilize discovery platforms like Twitch, TikTok and Instagram to establish direct connections with their audience. Unlike traditional music discovery platforms, they primarily serve as a support mechanism rather than a discovery hub, building trust and cultivating a loyal fan base can be challenging, as artists need to encourage their audience to venture into or migrate across these platforms:

> *Getting people to go over there and building that know like trust relationship to someone prior to them going over can be a difficult thing.* [14-F]

In some cases, artists might be trying to get their audience to migrate to a specific subscription platform like Bandcamp or Patreon, which enables D2F engagement and the curation of personalized content. The consistent and frequent sharing of content on these platforms emerges as a pivotal strategy for sustaining meaningful relationships and broadening their online presence:

> *The more we post, the more frequently we post, the more data we get, the more people are engaged because they get notifications, right.* [15-F]

4.6 Economic sustainability in the digital music ecosystem

Digital transformation highlights the significance of fan engagement in the creative process, bolstering artistic expression and allowing artists to maintain independence and authenticity. Yet, this transition introduces obstacles in conveying value to fans whilst at the same time attaining financial stability. As DIY artists adjust to this new environment, finding equilibrium among expression, identity, and sustainability appears feasible.

The changes brought by the digital age have paved the way for a more personal connection between artists and their audiences, participants stress the importance of boundaries:

> *Particularly as a woman making music, it's important to have boundaries... I feel like my music is so personal. And my connections are genuine.* [2-F]

Our study suggests that within the DIY community, artistic identity is intricately linked to visual branding, emphasizing the importance of artists curating a brand that aligns with their image. Financial viability emerges as a significant hurdle in this community, where funding models such as fan clubs become essential for sustaining ongoing creativity. Therefore, while DIY practices enable self-sufficiency, they also demand entrepreneurial resilience from artists, as one participant explains:

> *I know that I'm never going to run out of ideas. I can just see what happens once you build on something and where else something else comes from.* [3-M]

The data indicates that while DIY practices grant artistic autonomy, they also pressure artists to produce content regularly, which may impact their artistry. To remain afloat, DIY artists often combine different income streams, including government funding and subscription models. The shift to subscription platforms like Patreon poses challenges in preserving fan relationships alongside financial viability. The trend towards free content on platforms like YouTube complicates the transition to paid models, highlighting the struggle to balance economic needs with artistic authenticity and community engagement.

Furthermore, DIY artists must foster a sense of community via platforms such as Twitch for live video broadcasts and Discord for real-time messaging, where fans can interact with the creator and one another. This enhances the social dimension of enjoying music and strengthens the connection between artists and their audience.:

> *There is a hardcore group of people in my life who will quite literally support me, regardless of what I do.* [7-F]

Moreover, the steady income generated through subscription platforms contributes to the economic sustainability of independent musicians, offering financial stability.

4.7 Balancing artistic integrity and economic realities

The findings indicate that Patreon enhances perceived value and fan interaction but complicates artists' personal lives because of the need for balance to achieve financial sustainability, for example, hidden fees with such platforms introduce risk and uncertainty. Moreover, crowdfunding for albums underscores that financial outcomes are unpredictable,

necessitating diversified income sources. This reflects a complex interplay between creative endeavours, economic security, and personal identity within the evolving music industry:

Right now, I'm definitely spending like more time creating stuff and putting it out there than I'm receiving back in terms of like funding but, as it grows, that will balance itself out. [1-F]

Subscription platforms including Bandcamp, Patreon, and YouTube provide a steady income stream, enhancing the financial viability of independent artists. These platforms also support creative experimentation, potentially enriching artistic output. An artist's dedication to treating fans with respect contributes to a supportive community, integral to the artist's local identity and essential in balancing artistic and economic goals. However, while technology helps fan to connect, it can be overwhelming, increasing workload and pressure for constant engagement. The DIY ethos, especially within punk culture, prioritizes authentic fan relationships and informs artists' approaches to music and community:

Because we've come at it from more of a punk ethos, which was always about connecting with your fans anyway... everyone's on the same level. [9-F]

Moreover, the findings reflect how they express scepticism about current monetization practices in the music industry, particularly the trend of monetizing fan interactions through platforms like Patreon. In fact, they will refrain from practices that create privilege based on financial status, such as VIP experiences, and instead strives for a more equitable and community-driven approach to engaging with fans:

So as soon as money is king you lose all artistic integrity of whatever you're doing. [9-F]

DIY artists deeply value their online communities, which include long-term fans, emphasizing the importance of support. While financial contributions are essential, fan motivation often stems from a desire to help rather than receiving perks. This implies that the relationship between artists and their online communities goes beyond transactional interactions. Although, concerns about safety and vulnerability for creators, especially for women artists, point to the need for ethical considerations in how online patronage is monitored.

This study highlights how digital transformation allows artists to prioritize artistic expression and build stronger local and global identities while also securing more sustainable economic models, counteracting the challenges posed by mainstream music industry practices. However, there remains a disparity between fans' perceptions and the financial struggles faced by artists, indicating a need for greater awareness and empathy regarding the complexities of sustaining a creative career:

> *There's a disconnect with the average fan... a fundamental lack of understanding and empathy of how difficult it is for all creatives to sustain themselves.* [11-M]

Nevertheless, the findings show that DIY artists support one another on platforms like Bandcamp, emphasizing co-operation for economic viability. They value authenticity and direct audience interaction as digital platforms are seen to facilitate a real connection with fans allowing for varied artistic exploration, including poetry and other types of exclusive content. Despite this, issues of market over-saturation and financial sustainability remain, presenting artists with the challenge of balancing creative independence, local identity, and economic stability within the music industry's changing environment.

4.7 The future of DIY music

The DIY approach enables artists to focus on artistic expression and local identity, rather than industry norms. Platforms such as Patreon and Twitch cultivate community, enabling deeper connections with fans beyond content consumption. This paradigm shift challenges conventional music industry frameworks, providing artists with a direct and sustainable route to financial stability:

> *I'll keep going as long as people still want it to keep going. And they're not showing any signs of it not wanting to carry on.* [6-M]

However, protecting one's personal space in the open and interactive space of Twitch remains crucial. DIY artists recognize the necessity of direct fan engagement in the digital age, emphasizing its importance for long-term success and creative freedom:

> *There's so many enormous benefits to being on Twitch. One of the key difficulties with being on Twitch is maintaining healthy boundaries with people.* [14-F]

The findings shed light on the complex relationship among artistic expression, local identity, and economic stability for DIY artists. They aim to build patronage on digital platforms but must communicate the critical role of fan support for career viability due to the continued financial obstacles that artists face. Yet, their dedication to distributing music directly to fans and nurturing strong connections offers personal satisfaction despite economic difficulties.

5. Discussion

5.1 Theoretical implications

The findings showcase a convergence between the transformative role of digitalization within the music industry and the ascent of the DIY culture. As indicated in Section 2, digitalization has introduced complexities in visibility and reach for artists, alongside the emergence of a new hyper-competitive environment (Moreau, 2013). This is resonant with the findings where DIY artists must encourage their audience to engage with platforms like Twitch and Patreon. This emphasis on artist-fan engagement, or the "new economy of fandom" (Galuszka, 2015), has been further enriched by the authentic storytelling and community engagement adopted by DIY artists.

Further, the debate surrounding the balance of artistry and commercial pursuits (Klein et al., 2017) finds empirical support in the findings, with many DIY artists prioritizing artistic integrity over financial gain. However, the necessity to sustain economically has driven them to platforms like Patreon and Bandcamp. This confluence of the DIY ethos with economic sustainability challenges the previously held notions of 'selling out' in the digital realm.

Moreover, the metamorphosis of artists into 'content creators' (Negus, 2019) gets substantiated by their emphasis on personalized offerings and fostering D2F relationships. Lastly, the findings complement Turchet et al.'s (2018) vision of the transformative impact of emerging technologies, as artists begin to consider alternative funding models such as cryptocurrency-based fundraising. The increasing reliance on digital platforms by DIY musicians means there is a need for better understanding of 'digital DIY' as a distinct phenomenon. This involves recognizing how digital tools both empower and constrain artists, offering unprecedented opportunities for creative control and direct fan engagement while

also introducing new dependencies and pressures from platform algorithms and monetization models (Frenneaux, 2023).

Based on the findings and the literature, it is evident that the digital age, with its myriad platforms and technologies, has redefined the landscape for DIY artists. According to Ali et al. (2021), independent musicians have taken on more roles due to blurred boundaries between artists and the broader music industry. The findings corroborate this, emphasizing the increasing importance of fan relationships in the creative process. This evolution has enhanced artistic expression, allowing artists to maintain their unique identity (Spencer, 2005; Guichardaz et al., 2019). However, there is a tension between artistic autonomy and ensuring economic sustainability, identified by Strachan (2007) as a delicate interplay between artistic creativity and commercial interests, is echoed in the findings, where artists struggle to communicate value to fans.

Exploring the duality of digital platforms highlights a paradox within the DIY ethos, where the democratization of music distribution through platforms like Bandcamp and—to an extent—Spotify coexists with challenges of algorithmic visibility and monetization (Tofalvy & Koltai, 2023). This duality necessitates a re-evaluation of DIY principles in the digital age, urging a balance between accessibility and maintaining the authenticity and grassroots nature of DIY culture.

The intersection between the DIY ethos and digital transformation (Guerra, 2018; Bennett, 2018b) has paved the way for platforms like Patreon and Twitch. Yet, while these platforms allow for greater fan engagement and economic sustainability, they also pose challenges, emphasizing the potential disparity between artistic integrity and commercial pressures (Mclean et al., 2010). The sense of community building and local identity preservation, underlined by Kruse (2010), resonates strongly within the findings. While platforms empower artists to foster deeper connections, they also introduce pressures, particularly in a saturated platform landscape, challenging the balance between artistic expression, identity, and sustainability.

5.2 Practical implications

Independent musicians and industry stakeholders can derive significant insights from the inter-relationships between DIY practices and digital transformation. With platforms such as Bandcamp and Patreon providing a steady stream of income, DIY artists may need to rethink their financial strategies, accentuating the importance of using D2F models to build more meaningful relationships with their fans.

Digital platforms have enabled self-production and distribution, thereby artists should invest in skill-building in areas of home recording, video editing, and other digital tools to maintain autonomy and reduce costs associated with traditional studio sessions. The initial rise of these platforms (e.g., Kickstarter) hinted at a paradigm shift towards participatory financing as musicians no longer view fans simply as consumers but also as collaborators and stakeholders in their artistic journey.

Given the profound impact of the pandemic, it is essential for artists to consider hybrid models of performance—combining live streaming with physical concerts. Platforms like Twitch and Patreon are not just tools for income but vehicles for direct fan engagement. However, as noted in the findings, establishing boundaries on such platforms becomes crucial to maintain mental well-being (see Duarte and Gauntlett, 2022).

Finally, for platform developers and innovators in the digital music industry, the findings underscore the importance of prioritizing genuine artist-fan interactions and providing robust support against challenges like automated fraud detection. The transition to digital platforms indicates a need for transparent algorithms, better online safety protocols, and perhaps a reconsideration of how revenue is shared, ensuring that artists receive a fair share for their creative contributions.

For DIY artists, the shift towards a more digital-oriented music industry offers a double-edged sword. On one hand, platforms like Patreon and Twitch present opportunities for D2F engagement, bypassing traditional intermediaries (Everts et al., 2022). This allows artists to derive steady income streams, thereby enhancing economic sustainability. For emerging DIY artists, prioritizing the development of these platforms could be crucial to financial viability.

However, it's equally vital for artists to recognize the challenges of these platforms. Over-reliance on a single platform might expose artists to unexpected risks. As the findings indicate, obscure fees associated with Patreon and the difficulty of transitioning viewers to monetized

content can impact revenue. Therefore, diversifying income sources, including government support, direct subscriptions, and other alternative funding models, becomes paramount.

The punk ethos, emphasizing authenticity and D2F engagement (Haenfler, 2017), becomes crucial, especially for women artists facing the challenge of maintaining boundaries amidst gender dynamics on digital platforms (Sharp & Threadgold, 2020). This context demands strategies that balance genuine connections with personal safety, advocating for moderated interactions and clear communication guidelines. Such approaches ensure that digital engagement remains authentic, addressing vulnerabilities while fostering respectful D2F relationships, crucial for navigating the complexities of online spaces effectively. Enhancing digital platforms' responsibility in moderating and acting against misogynistic content and harassment could provide a safer online environment for women to express their experiences and seek support (Park et al., 2023).

Lastly, artists need to actively communicate the importance of direct fan support, educating fans about the financial challenges they face, bridging the gap between perception and reality, and fostering a more understanding and empathetic fan base. Additionally, the global reach facilitated by digital platforms propels the formation of 'global DIY communities,' transcending local scenes and redefining DIY music's geographical and cultural limits. Such a shift underscores the need for artists to leverage digital connections for community building and to navigate the digital economy with an awareness of the gig economy's broader socio-economic impact.

5.3 Limitations and recommendations for future research

The limitations of this study open opportunities for future exploration. While the insights into DIY practices on digital platforms such as Twitch and Patreon are valuable, they represent a proportion of the digital ecosystem available to artists. The focus on these platforms may not fully capture the breadth of options and strategies utilized across the digital domain. Furthermore, the examination of gender dynamics, while crucial, might not adequately represent the diverse experiences and challenges within the DIY music scene. These limitations suggest that the study's findings should be interpreted with caution when generalizing across the broader spectrum of DIY artists.

For future research, a wider examination of digital platforms beyond Patreon and Twitch is recommended to capture a more comprehensive picture of the digital DIY music scene. Incorporating mixed data methods could enrich the understanding of how artists navigate these digital spaces. Additionally, a comparative analysis of DIY practices across different geographical locations could shed light on regional variations and global trends within the DIY music community.

Practically, DIY artists are encouraged to explore and diversify their use of digital platforms, continuously building their digital literacy and engagement strategies. For platform developers, this study highlights the importance of transparency, fair revenue sharing, and robust support mechanisms to address challenges such as fraud, underscoring the need for environments that foster genuine artist-fan interactions.

While this study contributes to the understanding of DIY artists' adaptation to digital transformations, its limitations emphasize the complexity of digital transformation in the music industry. Future research should continue to explore this evolving domain, offering insights that support the growth and sustainability of DIY artists in the digital era.

6. Conclusion

The advent of digital technologies has undeniably revolutionized the music industry, offering unprecedented opportunities and challenges for DIY artists striving to balance artistic integrity with economic sustainability. This study has illuminated the complex dynamics of this digital transformation, underlines the DIY artist's innovative adoption of digital platforms to forge direct-to-fan connections, foster community, and generate income. The DIY ethos, deeply rooted in autonomy and resistance, has found a new expression in the digital realm, enabling artists to maintain their unique artistic identities while navigating the hyper-competitive digital landscape.

However, this evolution is not without its tensions and paradoxes. The findings highlight the delicate balance DIY artists must strike between preserving their artistic authenticity and achieving economic viability. Platforms such as Patreon and Twitch offer vital revenue streams and engagement opportunities, yet they also introduce new pressures and vulnerabilities, especially for women and marginalized artists. This study emphasizes the need for artists to

diversify income sources, invest in digital skill-building, and foster supportive networks to mitigate risks and enhance sustainability.

Moreover, the importance of recognizing and addressing misappropriation of diverse groups within the DIY music scene in the digital domain is paramount. Creating inclusive platforms and fostering a culture of support and solidarity is essential for ensuring that all artists, regardless of gender or background, can thrive in this transformative landscape.

In conclusion, while the digital domain has redefined the parameters of what it means to be a DIY artist, it has also reaffirmed the enduring significance of artistic integrity, community, and resilience. As the music industry continues to evolve, future research endeavours should further explore these dynamics, exploring innovative solutions and strategies to support the flourishing of DIY artists in the ever-changing digital transformations.

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