

How People's Music Consumption Has Changed in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This research paper aims to explore the impact of the digital age on music consumption, analyzing changes in artists' songs and audience preferences. Looking at Lil Nas X as a case study, this paper shows how artists, adapting to platforms like TikTok, modify their song structures. This paper will also look at the evolution from physical copies to digital platforms, underscoring the significant changes in how music is consumed, concluding that our music consumption has changed due to digitalization from artists altering their songs to social media consumption.

Introduction

For millennia, humans have worked with music to create art. These art pieces always have been and always will be a product of their time, meaning it is only natural that as time progresses, both humans and music will follow suit. This can be seen with modern-day digitalization, which we will be looking at in this research paper. More specifically, we will be exploring and answering the following question; how has the way that people consume music changed due to the digital age? My hypotheses that I have on the subject is the following; during the past 20 years, I believe that musical artists have altered the way they make music due to the new ways we consume music. These are the topics that this paper will further research as we first go through a literature review, then go through my methodology and case study and finally conclude this study.

Literature Review

The goal of my research is to inform and demonstrate to people the effects that digitalization has had on music and music taste, whether it be a change in the rate of consumption or a personal change in music taste, which are some of the themes in the aforementioned pieces of literature. To start, looking at the research done by Hannes Datta et al. (2021), we see that they test the impact of a streaming platform named Spotify which only came into fruition because of digitalization. Their research consists of looking at the number of unique artist songs and genres listened to before and after the adoption of Spotify, concluding that Spotify in fact increases the amount of music listened to and the amount of music discovered, more specifically the percentage of unique artists listened to went up by 62%, while the number of unique songs and genres

increased by 49% and 43%, respectively (p.15-19). They further went on to prove how people's music tastes become more personalized due to the implementation of recommendation algorithms. This paper can be used as evidence to prove that music's transformation into the digital age has changed the way people consume music. Up next, we'll look at the study performed by Nguyen, Dejean & Moreau, (2014) which focuses mostly on how social media has changed our music consumption. In their paper, they explore how the implementation of these platforms changed our music consumption in multiple ways. For one, social media allows independent artists to show their music to a more personalized audience. Additionally, it allows users to sample and preview an artist's music before committing to streaming it which reduces the risk of a conflict between a consumer's taste and the songs they choose to stream (Nguyen, Dejean & Moreau, 2014, p.316-317). From these papers, we can take away that music consumption has been altered by new tech such as streaming platforms and social media.

Methodology

In this paper, we will be looking at music artists who have rapidly gained popularity due to new-age methods and relating them to music consumption. Our first subject will be how Lil Nas X blew up due to TikTok. The reason I selected this case is because this situation will give me lots of proof as to how artists have changed the way their songs are laid out due to the new ways that the audience changed their consumption. To conduct my research, I will be looking at articles that touch on the matter, interviews with Lil Nas X and websites that talk about TikTok.

How This Will Help

Using artists as an example of how music consumption has changed for the consumer might seem a bit meaningless at first, but if we look into it we can see that it's actually quite helpful. This is because if we can conclude that artists have conformed their music to fit the new norms of social media and music streaming, we can then infer that our music consumption has changed due to new technology.

Lil Nas X

Lil Nas X is an American music artist who initially gained his fame from his massive hit “Old Town Road” which is currently the record holder for the song that spent the longest amount of time at the #1 spot of the Billboard Hot 100 with 19 weeks. The way this song was brought to fame was via TikTok, which is known for being able to pump out hit songs like no other platform (Granados, 2020), but how is Old Town Road different than any other song? This can be answered by looking at the way songs are structured.

“In a pre-TikTok world, most popular songs would be structured verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus. But on TikTok, it's Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Verse Chorus, and then repeat” (Zimmerman, 2023, para. 6). This Tiktok layout of songs is how Old Town Road differs from other pop songs that were released before. If we compare it to an older, yet still modern song like Mark Ronson’s 2015 hit “Uptown Funk” we can see that it includes a bridge, unlike Old Town Road. The reason newer songs are built this way is because artists have conformed to better suit the audiences' new approach to consuming music.

Music Consumption

Previously, our way of consuming music involved owning physical copies of an album or song, but since digitalization, the vast majority of our music consumption has been digital (Durham, 2022). The two biggest ways we consume music are through streaming platforms at 32% of our intake and social media at an equal 32% (Cooke, 2022). This change in how we consume music can be used to explain why artists have changed the layout of their songs. Seeing as how social media takes up so much of our music consumption, it's only natural that musicians change their songs to fit the rules of social media. Recently, the songs that have been gaining popularity through social media have seemingly been made just to sound good and it's clear that it had been made for a generation that consumes music through small clips of video (Zimmerman, 2023, para. 3).

Conclusion

In sum, this research paper provides an understanding of the relationship between music, technology, and audience consumerism. By looking at Lil Nas X's path to fame and examining the trends of social media, this study confirms the hypothesis that artists are indeed conforming to the new norms of social media and streaming platforms, therefore reshaping the ways of music consumption in the digital age.

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