Impact of digitalization on hip-hop

Changing business dynamics, artistic choices and social relevance of hip-hop.

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ABSTRACT

Hip-hop has grown into one of the most popular genres of music over the last decade. It is now being acknowledged as a mainstream genre of music, instead of the underground movement it once was. Hip-hop is not just a musical genre but also a cultural art form, that is used to express the experiences of marginalization and inequality by African-Americans and other minorities. Although hip-hop always has been popular among the youth, it seems to have increased significant popularity among millennials. This growth partly came from the rise of streaming platforms, which is a consequence of the digitalization of the music industry. Digitalization is the adoption of digital technology by industries, organizations, and countries. This phenomenon seems to has various implications for the music industry, as it appears to affect its distribution, consumption, business model, profitability, and more. The effect of digitalization on the music industry has been frequently researched over the years, but is limitedly been studied for hip-hop. As the growing popularity of hip-hop has led to its commercialization, critique started to arise regarding its lyrical content and musical production. As the commercialization of hip-hop partly arose from the digitalization of the music industry, there seems to be a link between the impact digitalization has on the music industry and the changing character of hip-hop. Based on this, the research question of this study was: 'How do industry professionals in hip-hop understand the consequences of digitalization of the music industry for the genre of hip-hop?' Due to the explorative nature of this study, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on interviews from various talk shows and podcasts, which featured high-profile industry professionals of the hip-hop community. The interviews were analyzed by using thematic analysis, which showed that the digitalization of the music industry had an impact on the business dynamics, artistic choices, and social relevance of hip-hop. For the business dynamics, digitalization seemed to have led to the necessity of having multiple revenue streams as independent/sub-tier artists or producers, since the income from streaming is perceived to be insufficient to stay profitable. Additionally, the 360 deal seems to have encouraged the bundling of album sales with merchandise and tour tickets, as labels seem to struggle with generating significant income from streaming as well. In terms of the artistic choices in hip-hop, digitalization seems to have changed the art and use of sampling, as there has been a decrease in songs that are consisting of samples, along with the opportunity to dig for samples online instead of record stores. Additionally, there seem to be contradicting views regarding the effect of digitalization on the length of an album and a trend of artists being more-single driven than album-driven. At last, the impact digitalization has on the social relevance of hip-hop, was observed by the lower valuation and use of lyricism among the younger generation of rap artists. Furthermore, digitalization has led to hip-hop being consumed without its cultural context and a change in its image.

<u>KEYWORDS:</u> *Digitalization, Hip-hop, Business dynamics, Artistic choices, Social relevance*

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Abstract and keywords

1. Introduction

In today's landscape of music, hip-hop has grown into one of the most popular genres worldwide (Speers, 2017). It is not just a genre of music, in fact, Rose (1994) describes hip-hop as, "A cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community.", (p. 21). More simply put, it also has been used to express the feelings of African-Americans and other minorities regarding topics like social injustice, racism, religion, and sexuality (Rabaka, 2013).

Although hip-hop always has been popular among the younger demographic, it has increased in popularity significantly among the generation of millennials (Speers, 2017). In fact, hip-hop appears to be the most streamed genre in the world over the last decade (Hooton, 2015). Consumers seem to dictate what is popular today, while in the past, radio, television, and word-to-mouth used to be able to do this (Taylor et. al, 2012; Nguyen et. al, 2014; Burnett, 2002). One of the reasons for this is arguably the rise of streaming platforms, which in turn, emerged from the digitalization of the music industry (Moreau, 2013; Waldfogel, 2017; Morris & Power, 2015).

Digitalization can be defined as the adoption of digital technology by organizations, industries, and countries (Tilson et. al, 2010). This led to the conversion of analog recorded music into CD's and eventually MP3-files, causing changes in multiple areas of the music industry (Moreau, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Meijer, 2018). Music started to be sold digitally, which led to a decrease in the demand for its physical form (Moreau, 2013; Rutter & Curran, 2016). This, among other things, affected the profitability of the music industry, which then resulted in an evolution of its business model (Bustinza et. al, 2013; Tschmuck, 2012; Meijer, 2013). The impact of digitalization on the profitability and business model of the music industry will be explained in a more detailed manner in the theoretical framework.

Another effect of digitalization was the opportunity to operate more independently (Andersen, 2010; Tschmuck, 2016). In fact, it enabled artists to distribute and promote music without being signed to a record label, which increased the possibility to reach consumers directly (Nordgård, 2018). Additionally, it eased the opportunity to create music, which resulted in the entry barriers of the music industry being reduced (Tschmuck, 2016). The consequence of these developments was the growth of independent artists and labels in the music industry (Galuszka, 2015; Karubian, 2009). In hip-hop specifically, the rise of independent artists and labels also stemmed from the resistance against mainstream culture and commercialization since the early 2000s (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b; Hess, 2005). Hip-hop artists, especially ones that signed to major labels, were criticized for the lack of cultural, social, and political values in their lyrics and their musical production over the years (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b; Terkourafi, 2010).

As the rise in popularity and thus the commercialization of hip-hop is a consequence of the digitalization of the music industry, there seems to be a link between digitalization and the changing character of hip-hop. It would thus be interesting to investigate this, as the impact of digitalization is usually studied for the music industry, but limitedly specific to the genre of hip-hop. One of the few studies covering this specification is the paper by Speers (2017). She investigated how digitalization affected the authenticity of London-based hip-hop artists, through in-depth interviews and fieldwork. However, the focus of this research will be on how digitalization has affected hip-hop in general, according to a variety of industry professionals.

This study will thus contribute to the aforementioned literature about the impact of digitalization on the music industry, by focusing on the genre of hip-hop. Moreover, as hip-hop is one of the most popular genres of music today and has unique characteristics, it will contribute to the study of popular music. Additionally, hip-hop predominantly has been researched from a consumer's perspective, whereas this paper will investigate the genre from an industry perspective.

In practice, this study could contribute to the current understanding that artists, labels, and other industry professionals have with regards to the impact of digitalization on hip-hop. Being aware of the effects of digitalization will enable industry professionals to better navigate through the changes occurring in hip-hop.

1.1. *Research question and sub-questions:*

So, the main research question of this paper will thus be:

"*How do industry professionals in hip-hop understand the consequences of digitalization of the music industry for the genre of hip-hop?*"

Since digitalization seems to have an effect on the business dynamics of the music industry, it would be interesting to research this effect on hip-hop. Furthermore, as there appears to be a link between digitalization and the changing character of hip-hop, it would be intriguing to investigate how digitalization affects the artistic choices and social relevance of hip-hop. This leads to the following sub-questions:

- *How does digitalization affect the business dynamics in hip-hop?*
- *How does digitalization affect artistic choices in hip-hop?*
- *How does digitalization affect the social relevance of hip-hop?*

These questions will be answered by using a qualitative research method. Various interviews from talk shows and podcasts that are relevant in the hip-hop community will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This provides the opportunity to gain insight into the thoughts, experiences, and beliefs that industry professionals have about the impact of digitalization on hip-hop.

1.2.   *Chapter outline*

The next chapter will address the theoretical framework of this study. It will first provide an extensive academic literature review of the music industry, popular music, and hip-hop. It will be followed by a review of the literature on digitalization. Lastly, the literature on the digitalization of the music industry will be reviewed as well.

Chapter 3 will explain the research design of this study, including the explanation and justification of using qualitative research and qualitative content analysis. Additionally, it will cover the sampling method that was used, the units of analysis, and how the data was collected. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the operationalization of the key concepts of this study and will also explain the process of thematic analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion about the reliability and validity of the used instrument of analysis.

Chapter 4 will present and interpret the results regarding the understanding that industry professionals have about the impact of digitalization on the business dynamics, artistic choices, and social relevance of hip-hop.

At last, chapter 5 will consist of the conclusion, including a general theoretical discussion of the implications of the research findings and the meanings of particular outcomes, along with an answer to the main research question, the limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Theoretical framework

To provide a theoretical background to this study, academic literature regarding the music industry, hip-hop, digitalization, and at last, digitalization of the music industry will be reviewed. This, subsequently, will contribute to the understanding of the usage of these concepts in the rest of this research. First, a closer look will be taken at the music industry.

2.1   Music industry, popular music, hip-hop

To have a better understanding of what the music industry exactly entails, a look should be taken at the definitions given in the literature. The term 'music industry' was firstly used in an academical manner by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. They defined it as commercial entities that instrumentally produces artifacts for a mass-market (Nordgard, 2018; Adorno, 1991). Other examples of how the music industry has been described are Leonard (2007), who defined it as, "Institutions such as record companies and studios, and individuals as artists, promoters and record company staff" (p. 1), whereas Tremlett (1990), referred to the music industry as a singular industry and in a less detailed manner. He defined it as, "The music industry is nothing more than that: an industry that makes money out of music, dealing and trading in this commodity with as much refinement as the second-hand car trade' (p. 175). Williamson & Cloonan (2007) on the other hand, put more emphasis on the music industry not being a singular industry by defining it as, "There is no such thing as a single music industry. There are, however, people working in a range of industries centered around music. These are music industries and it is them that we should study and engage with.", (p. 320). Lastly, a much wider and more comprehensive definition of the music industry was given by Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki (2017), who defined it as:

"The music industry is defined as an industry selling compositions, recordings and music performances. Individuals and organizations operating within the industry include: (i) musicians (artists) who compose and perform music, (ii) companies and professionals who create and sell recorded music, (iii) organizations involved with and giving music performances, (iv) professionals who assist musicians with their music careers, (v) those who broadcast music, (vi) journalists, (vii) educators, and (viii) musical instrument manufactures." (p. 1).

Considering the above-discussed definitions, the definition of Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki (2017) will be used for how the music industry is referred to as in this paper. It is comprehensive and provides a clear understanding of which individuals and institutions are part of the music industry.

One of the institutions that play a significant role in the music industry, is the record company. According to Burnett (2002), record companies could be distinguished into 'major', 'minor', and 'alternative/indie', labels. Alternative/indie labels usually differ from majors and minors, as they produce and distribute on a smaller scale, combined with the freedom to follow their own vision (Burnett, 2002; Tschmuck, 2012; Nordgard, 2018; Moreau, 2013).

The record company market used to have an oligopolist character, as major labels benefitted from economies of scale in the field of distribution and promotion (Moreau, 2013). Namely, it was costly to build a large distribution network and to distribute a high amount of physical music, resulting in only majors being able to afford that (Moreau, 2013). In terms of promotion, major labels again were the only ones that could afford high initial investments for receiving airplay on television and radio, which over time led to lower variable costs, as successful records needed less promotion (Moreau, 2013). On a global scale, major labels were also able to dominate internationally, as they built partnerships with domestic companies of other countries over time (Burnett, 2002; Wikström, 2020).

Furthermore, major labels were often vertically and horizontally integrated companies, trying to have as many operations under their supervision as possible, in order to reduce the costs of producing and distributing music (Burnett, 2002; Tschmuck, 2012). At the same time, majors outsourced activities such as search and development of artists to smaller record labels, in order to reduce the financial risk of trying out new artists and genres (Tschmuck, 2012).

To focus now more on popular music, research towards the music industry is closely linked to the study of popular music (Nordgård, 2018). It has a significant role in our everyday life and the global entertainment industry (Burnett, 2002; Shuker, 2001; Wall, 2013). Still, it was not until the 1990s that popular music was gaining recognition as a topic of scientific research (Shuker, 2001; Burnett, 2002). The increase in recognition mainly stemmed from the global influence it started to have along with its commercial success (Shuker, 2001).

To have a better understanding of the study towards popular music, a look should be taken at how it has been defined in the literature. Examples could be the definitions of Burnett (2002), who defined popular music as, "Music that is commercially oriented.', (p. 35); whereas Connolly & Krueger (2006) defined popular music more descriptive as, "Music that has a wide following, is produced by contemporary artists and composers, and does not require public subsidy to survive.", (p. 2). Shuker (2001) on the other hand, reviewed numerous academic articles regarding the definition of popular music and came to the conclusion that a satisfying definition of popular music would be, "Popular music consists of a hybrid of musical traditions, styles, and influences, and is also an economic product which is invested with ideological significance by many of its consumers.", (p. 7).

Considering the above-stated definitions of popular music, authors seem to put emphasis on its commercial aspect. It is also difficult to define popular music in solely musical terms. One of the reasons for this is that the definition of popular music varies among people with different cultural backgrounds, genders, geographical locations, education levels or ages (Burnett, 2002; Robinson, 1986; Shuker, 2001; Connell & Gibson, 2003). Popular music is not a genre on itself, but rather an indication for the kind of music that is popular at a specific time (Shuker, 2001; Middleton, 1990). The popularity of music has always been showcased by the charts, which often dictates what is receiving airplay on radio and/or tv (Burnett, 2002). An interesting trend is that the sound of hit songs has become unpredictable over the years, as genres are blending and the global status quo regarding musical taste, has been changing (Lee, 2009).

Additionally, understanding popular culture will add to the understanding of popular music (Burnett, 2002). Popular culture could be defined as, 'Expressions of culture as they arise from elite, folk, popular, or mass origins' (p. 14), which is a definition of Real (1977). Storey (2018) reviewed various definitions of popular culture and came to the conclusion that it stemmed from something else, as he defined it as, "A culture that only emerged from following industrialization and urbanization." (p. 20). Although it would be interesting to investigate the dynamics between popular culture and popular music, that would be beyond the scope of this study. The focus will now shift towards hip-hop, as it has become one of the most popular forms of music today and will be central to the analysis of this study.

There are different stories about who invented the term 'hip-hop', but, it is often argued to be either Busy Bee Starski, DJ Hollywood and/or DJ Afrika Bambaataa, which all are New York DJs/artists (Smitherman, 1997). One of the first times that the term hip-hop caught the public attention, was in 1979 when the song 'Rapper's Delight' by Sugar Hill Gang became commercially successful (Smitherman, 1997; Dimitriadis, 1996). In the academic field, Tricia Rose's (1994) book 'Black Noise', was one of the first publications that received recognition of academia, as she showcased that the influence of hip-hop went beyond just being a genre of music (Harrison, 2008).

To have a better understanding of the studies that have been done towards hip-hop, a look should be taken at how it has been defined. According to Rose (1994), hip-hop could be described as "A cultural form that attempts to negotiate the experiences of marginalization, brutally truncated opportunity, and oppression within the cultural imperatives of African-American and Caribbean history, identity, and community.", (p. 21). Perry (2004) characterized hip-hop more as a cultural and linguistical phenomenon as he stated, "The primary language is African American Vernacular English; political location in society distinctly ascribed to black people, music and cultural forms; derived from black American oral culture; derived from black American musical traditions." (p. 10). The definition of Schloss & Chang (2014) on the other hand, offers a different perspective, as they define hip-hop as, "Hip-hop was not created by African American culture; it was created by African American people, each of whom had volition, creativity, and choice as to how to proceed", (p. 27).

As the focus of this study will not just be on the musical genre itself, but also on its cultural, political, and social value, the definition of Rose (1994) would be the most accurate for how hip-hop will be used as a concept in this study.

Hip-hop also consists of musical elements that make this genre unique. They are described by Powell (1991) as, "rap - a form of popular music that entails talking, or "rapping," to a rhythmic musical back-ground…" (p. 245), while in the book of Terkourafi (2010), it was described as a, "metaphorical language on time and rhyme" (p. 10). Hip-hop is also often referred to as rap, which historically, has been used by men to show affection to women within the African-American community by using flexible word-play (Smitherman, 1997; Dimitriadis, 1996). As hip-hop started to find its way into the studio, it transformed into a more masculine, powerful, and fluent way of communicating, which changed the perception of its meaning (Smitherman, 1997; Dimitriadis, 1996).

Besides the musical elements, hip-hop can also be identified by its culture, as it consists of breakdancing, DJing, rapping, and graffiti art, which all originated in New York and later transcended to other cities of America (Jeffries, 2010; McLeod 1999; Dimitriadis, 1996). The art of hip-hop DJing has led to a couple of innovations in the field of DJing (Schloss & Chang, 2014).

One of those innovations was a technique called 'breaking' (Schloss & Chang, 2014; Dimitriadis, 1996). 'Breaking' is playing the same song on each of the turntables to generate an effect or repeat a section of that song, in order to create a 'new song', which is now referred to as 'looping' (Schloss & Chang, 2014). Due to the technology in today's turntables, the DJ doesn't have to play the same song simultaneously anymore, in order to repeat a section of that song (Schloss & Chang, 2014). Other fundamental techniques that followed from hip-hop DJing are, 'scratching' and 'cutting', which together with 'breaking', are referred to as 'turntablism' (Schloss & Chang, 2014; Hansen, 2002). Scratching is rhythmically dragging and pushing a record back and forth, whereas cutting, is rhythmically cutting off and bringing back the volume of a record (Hansen, 2002). These techniques are often used at the same time (Hansen, 2002). More importantly, the meaning of the term 'break' has changed from its earlier mentioned definition to the part of a song that would suit well for sampling (Schloss & Chang, 2014).

Sampling, which increased popularity since the 1980s, is incorporating and manipulating pre-recorded music from artists into another piece of music (Demers, 2003; Terkourafi, 2010; Powell, 1991; Baker, 2012). It plays an important role in the history of hip-hop, as it was one of the first main techniques that were used for making hip-hop instrumentals (Schloss & Chang, 2014; Dyson, 2004; Clay, 2003; Duinker & Martin, 2017). Hip-hop producers were looking for a rare, unique sounding vinyl record to use for their production, which is also referred to as 'digging in the crates' (Burnett, 2002; Schloss & Chang, 2014). The use of sampling has been less prominent over the years, due to the high expenses of sample clearances and the preference for other production techniques (Schloss & Chang, 2014; Duinker & Martin, 2017).

Sample clearance is obtaining the copyrights of a record, which allows it to be used in another piece of music (Schloss & Chang, 2014). In hip-hop, sampling has led to many legal issues and copyright infringements (Burnett, 2002; Dyson, 2004). This started to happen in the period between the late 1980s and early 1990s, which often has been referred to as the 'golden era' in hip-hop (Dimitriadis, 1996; Baker, 2012; Duinker & Martin, 2017). During that time, hip-hop started to become commercially profitable, artistically autonomic, and sonically shifting (Duinker & Martin, 2017). Hip-hop also started to be visible and influential throughout the entire United States, instead of just New York and its surroundings (Duinker & Martin, 2017). This led to gaining more recognition and even receiving a specific category at the Grammy awards (Duinker & Martin, 2017). It altogether led to hip-hop artists becoming more cautious when it came to sampling, as only the top-level hip-hop artists had the financial power to clear them, whereas indie hip-hop artists often had not (Duinker & Martin, 2017).

At the same time, subgenres of hip-hop such as 'gangsta rap' started to become mainstream along with the rise in the amount of its successful female rappers (Duinker & Martin, 2017; Baker, 2012). Hip-hop changed from being solely masculine and predominantly aggressive to a more soft and R&B influenced genre, leading to an increase of its female audience (Baker, 2012). Also, the elements of breakdancing and graffiti started to become less visible in hip-hop culture, as rap became its focal point (Baker, 2012). Both elements were being marginalized by rappers and DJ's and were more so used to complement the rapper (Baker, 2012).

Another element of hip-hop culture is the way people dress. Examples of typical hip-hop apparel are baggy pants, sneakers, and 'snap-backs' (caps that were worn backward) (Smitherman, 1997; Cutler, 1999). The caps and sneakers mostly functioned as items that completed the entire outfit, while baggy clothes were mainly worn for their comfort (Brantley, 2000; Marcia, 2007). The hip-hop outfit caused a lot of controversy during the early 1990s, as it was perceived to be a rebellious and innovative way of wearing high-end designer clothes (Smitherman, 1997; Cutler, 1999; Ibrahim, 1999; Marcia, 2007).

Although, at the same time, hip-hop culture was gaining so much popularity that it inspired other communities to adopt it, which was possible due to a couple of reasons (Cutler, 1999; Hess, 2005). According to Cutler (1999), the development of the internet provided the opportunity to look up hip-hop terms and expressions. Furthermore, the emergence of the TV program 'Yo! MTV Raps', also seemed to have played a part in the exposure of hip-hop culture (Dyson, 2004; Dimitriadis, 1996). Lastly, movies that displayed a glamorized version of the life of African-American's inner-city life, seemed to have gained popularity among the youth and simultaneously influenced popular culture as well (Cutler, 1999).

This development often led to various forms of cultural appropriation, which in this case was predominantly the exploitation of black culture by white people, who then were referred to as 'culture vultures' (Hess, 2005; Gladney, 1995; Fraley, 2009; Harrison, 2008).

An example could be the occasion of white artists taking and adjusting black music to make it representable for the mainstream audience, without crediting or compensating black artists or black culture (Hess, 2005). That is why many white hip-hop artists have been judged, as hip-hop is based on the struggle of African-Americans and other minorities against oppression, racism, and poverty, as opposed to the often privileged white population (Hess, 2005; Fraley, 2009).

To elaborate on this, Rabaka (2013) stated that hip-hop functioned as a soundtrack of a social and political movement. Its vision and aesthetics were derived from movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement (Rabaka, 2013; Dyson, 2004). It provided an outlet for African-Americans to express their feelings regarding topics like social injustice, racism, religion, and sexuality (Rabaka, 2013; Dimitriadis, 2001; Smitherman, 1997; Akom, 2009; Clay, 2003; Dyson, 2004; Ibrahim, 1999; Dimitriadis, 1996).

Despite the fact that it helped many African-Americans to have a voice, it was also something that young people and minorities could identify with (Clay, 2003; Ibrahim, 1999). It has been referred to as a 'hidden transcript', as hip-hop consisted of symbiotic lyrics regarding the beliefs of the ideologic and material oppression of African-Americans (Rabaka, 2013). This provided the opportunity to obtain critical literacy and mental freedom from oppressed ideologies (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). The educational value of hip-hop is often highlighted, as it could function as a bridge between urban culture and literature, fostering literary interpretations, raising awareness and discussion of contemporary issues (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). Stovall (2006), Akom (2009), and Ibrahim (1999) had similar visions, stating that hip-hop lyrics could be used in order to make social studies more relatable to young people and to cover a wider range of political and ideological issues.

Although hip-hop lyrics are acknowledged for having social and political value, they are often perceived to be violent and misogynistic (Rebollo-Gil & Moras, 2012; Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011; Travis Jr. & Deepak, 2011). Women, for example, used to be referred to as 'gold-diggers' or 'baby mamas', especially in gangsta rap that caused a lot of controversy by allegedly influencing white suburban teens negatively (Rabaka, 2013; Marcia, 2007; Neal & Forman, 2004; Hunter, 2011). On the other hand, 'conscious rap' is often praised for its pride, creativity, intellectual debate, and positivity (Hunter, 2011). Still, the impact of hip-hop lyrics on the behavior of young people is often found to be ambiguous (Gourdine & Lemmons, 2011).

Another topic that is important in hip-hop, is authenticity, which is often referred to as 'keeping it real' (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b; Terkourafi, 2010; Hess, 2005; Clark, 2013). Hess (2005) described keeping it real as, "An artist performs as a unique individual while maintaining a connection with the original culture of hip-hop", (p. 374). Staying true to oneself is another vital element for being perceived authentic in hip-hop (Fraley, 2009).

As hip-hop became a popular genre of music, resistance against its commercialization and blending with other genres arose, along with questioning the authenticity and quality of its music (McLeod, 1999; Terkourafi, 2010; Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b; Rabaka, 2013; Clark, 2013). As the growing popularity and commercialization of hip-hop could be perceived as positive, it also makes it more difficult for hip-hop artists to preserve their authenticity and to 'keep it real' (Speers, 2017). To elaborate on this, since its commercialization, consumers have been complaining about the lack of cultural, social, and political value of the lyrics from artists, especially ones signed to major labels (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b; Terkourafi, 2010; McLeod, 1999). Those artists specifically are perceived to lack creative freedom and to have commercial targets, as opposed to independent artists (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b).

The popularity and commercialization of hip-hop, has been substantially growing since the digitalization of the music industry (Morris & Powers, 2015; Hooton, 2015). In this study, the focus will be on how digitalization has affected hip-hop besides its popularity and commercial success. In order to understand this dynamic better, it is important to investigate what digitalization exactly entails.

2.2.   *Digitalization*

Nowadays, it is difficult to imagine having no access to any form of digital technology. This development is often referred to as digitization or digitalization. In research, they are used interchangeably, whereas they seem to differ from each other (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016; Legner et. al, 2017; Schreckling & Steiger, 2017; Wells, 2019; Clivaz, 2020; Gobble, 2018). Robert Wachal was one of the first academics who used digitalization as a concept by discussing the fear of the dehumanization of society by digital technology (Wachal, 1971; Clivaz, 2020). To understand the difference between digitalization and digitization, a look should be taken at how they are defined.

According to Brennen & Kreiss (2016), Tilson et. al (2010) and Schreckling & Steiger (2017), digitization could be defined as, "The conversion of analogue data into digital form", whereas digitalization could be defined as, "The adoption or increase in use of digital or computer technology by an organization, industry, country, etc.", (p. 3), (p.749) and (p. 4). The definition of Gray & Rumpe (2015) put more emphasis on how digitalization has affected our everyday life, as he defined it as, "The integration of multiple technologies into all aspects of daily life that can be digitized", (p. 1), which is similar to the definition of Stolterman & Fors (2004), that focused on how it has affected the human life, "Changes that the digital technology causes or influences in all aspects of human life", (p. 689). On the other hand, Parviainen et. al (2017) defined digitalization from a more business point of view, "Changes in ways of working, roles, and business offering caused by adoption of digital technologies in an organization, or in the operation environment of the organization", (p. 64).

So to summarize, based on the earlier mentioned definitions and literature, the concept of digitization seems to be more focused on the technical process of digital technology, whereas the concept of digitalization seems to be more focused on the socio-technical process of it (Tilson et. al, 2010; Schreckling & Steiger, 2017; Imgrund et. al, 2018; Gobble, 2018). As in this study, the focus will be more on the latter mentioned process, the definition of Brennen & Kreiss (2016) would be the most accurate for how digitalization is conceptualized in this research.

According to the literature, digitalization seems to have a positive effect on business performances by enhancing the servitization and employment of highly skilled workers (Bouwman et. al, 2018; Martín-Peña, Sánchez-López, & Díaz-Garrido, 2019). It also seems to stimulate the economic growth of well- and less-developed countries, possibly narrowing the economic gap between them (Myovella, Karacuka & Haucap, 2020).

However, there seems to be more concern about the negative effects of digitalization (Clivaz, 2020; Allwood, 2017). Namely, there seems to be a trend of 'dehumanization', where employees are being replaced by digital technology (Dávideková, 2016; Allwood, 2017; van Winden & de Carvalho, 2017; Bührer & Hagist, 2017). This seems to negatively affect the employment of low-skilled workers, which could lead to even more negative effects on society (Balsmeier & Woerter, 2019).   To change the topic, a well-known phenomenon in the discussion of digitalization is the development of Web 2.0 (Murugesan, 2007; Andriole, 2010). Web 2.0 is a set of technologies and applications that makes it easier to communicate and collaborate with each other (O'Reilly, 2005; Anderson, 2007; Henten & Tadayoni, 2011; Murugesan, 2007; Andriole, 2010). It is responsible for the development of social networks, where user participation has played a significant role in changing the landscape of human communication, value chains of businesses, institutions and other industries (O'Reilly, 2005; Anderson, 2007; Henten & Tadayoni, 2011; Murugesan, 2007; Andriole, 2010). Nevertheless, many scholars expressed their concern regarding the security and privacy of our lives (Andriole, 2010; Zimmer, 2008).

Another important development in the landscape of communication is the emergence of smartphones (Suckling & Lee, 2015). It seems to have various positive and negative effects on businesses and education, as well as on the psychological and social well-being of our society (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013; Gowthami & Venkata Krishna Kumar, 2016).

Whether the overall effect of digitalization is negative or positive, academia argue that it is disruptive. The disruptiveness of digital technology was introduced by Bower & Christensen (1995). According to Reimer et. al (2015), it could be defined as, "Digital disruption refers to advancements in digital technologies, that occur at a pace and magnitude that disrupt established ways of creating value within and across markets, social interactions, and more generally, our understanding and thinking", (p. 4). In other words, it changes the perception of the value proposition as a result of smaller, cheaper, simpler, and/or more user-friendly products and services (Christensen, 1997).

It is often brought up in the literature regarding the competitive advantage companies could obtain, after entering the market with a technology that is innovative (Nordgard, 2018; Danneels, 2004). Digitalization appears to have a disruptive effect on various industries, including the music industry, which extensively will be discussed in the next section of this chapter (Wittman, 2017; Sommarberg & Mäkinen, 2019; Gholampour, 2017; Hesmondhalgh & Meijer, 2018; Allwood, 2017).

2.3. *Impact of digitalization on the music industry*

Before discussing how digitalization has affected the music industry, a closer look will be taken at some of the important developments that occurred before that. One of the first fundamental changes was the decrease in record sales during the late 1970s, as a consequence of the worldwide recession (Gronow, 1983). This decrease also emerged from the invention of music cassettes, which provided the opportunity to copy and share music (Tschmuck, 2012). The decline in record sales sustained until the mid-1980s, after which the record sales started to increase again (Frith, 1988; Shuker, 2001; Koster, 2008). One of the main reasons for this increase was the invention of the CD, which in turn, led to a decrease in the sales of vinyl records (Tschmuck, 2012, Burnett, 2002; Koster, 2008). Because of the CD, record labels could now increase the price and sell their back catalog again, which awakened the consumer's interest in older records (Burnett, 2002; Koster, 2008). It also made it easier for record labels to sell their music globally (Burnett, 2002). Another important development was the lucrative exploitation of copyrights, which made it possible to generate revenue through multiple media outlets (Tschmuck, 2012; Marshall, 2013).

After the significant impact of CDs on the music industry, a stagnation took place (Tschmuk, 2012; Koster, 2008). This was disrupted by the internet, which had a major influence on the consumption, production, distribution, marketing, business model, copyright law, but most importantly, the profitability of the music industry (Moreau, 2013; Hadida & Paris, 2014; Richardson, 2014; Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Rogers, 2013; Bustinza et. al, 2013; Nordgard, 2018). The profitability of the music industry decreased, which led to the 'á la carte download' business model and later developed into the so-called 'music streaming platforms' (Lin, 2005; Bustinza et. al, 2013; Tschmuck, 2012). The á la carte download business model gave consumers the possibility to purchase singles or albums, without being committed to other bundled goods (Lin, 2005; Bustinza et. al, 2013).

The music streaming platform is a subscription-based business model, where consumers pay a fixed fee per month to get access to their entire music catalog (Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Naveed, Watanabe, & Neittaanmäki, 2017; Marshall, 2013; Nordgard, 2018). Besides affecting its business model, digitalization also led to an easier and cheaper way of distributing music through compression, Internet broadband access, and storage (Moreau, 2013; Rogers & Sparviero, 2011; Richardson, 2014; Ganeva, 2012; Nordgard, 2018).

This had positive implications for musicians, as they could now directly distribute their music to consumers, without having to distribute it through a record label (Rutter & Curran, 2016; Tschmuck, 2016; Ganeva, 2012; Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki, 2017; Nordgård, 2018). At the same time, it negatively affected the co-operation between major labels and traditional retailers, as the demand for physical music started to decrease (Moreau, 2013).

For the promotion channels, it led to a rise of electronic word-to-mouth, consumer-to-consumer promotion, and automated recommender systems, which decentralized the promotion of music (Moreau, 2013; Nordgard, 2018). This was another advantage for artists, as they were now able to build a fanbase online through social networks like YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Tschmuck, 2012; Tschmuck, 2016, Yoon, 2007). Digitalization also eased the opportunity to create music, which has led to a so-called 'prosumption' industry (Tschmuck, 2016; Wikström, 2020). These developments altogether have led to lower entry barriers regarding the music industry (Lee, 2009). This sets the music industry apart from other entertainment industries, such as the film and TV industry, where investments are usually high and the division of labor is making it difficult to produce content independently (Tschmuck, 2016). Additionally, the emergence of Creative Commons licensing has increased the spreadability of music as well, as it provided the open licensing of copyrighted works (Katz, 2006; Tschmuck, 2016). This free and easy-to-use legal tool encouraged the sharing of music, while still retaining the copyrights of them (Katz, 2006; Tschmuck, 2016).

Furthermore, research has shown that digitalization also increased the mobility of consuming music and possibility of sharing music, which is perceived to be more of a win for the consumer than for the record label (Hesmondhalgh & Meijer, 2018; Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Richardson, 2014; Najmark-Hvidt, & Espersen, 2012). Other challenges that came along with the emergence of digitalization were copyright issues that followed from the rise of peer-to-peer file sharing and piracy (Moreau, 2013; Hadida & Paris, 2014; Richardson, 2014; Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Bustinza et. al, 2013). An important role herein was the development of the MP3, which increased the accessibility and sharing of music even more (Ganeva, 2012; Utterback & Acee, 2005; Bustinza et. al, 2013). Digitalization basically changed music from being a private good to a public good, which could explain the trend of piracy and free-riding (Ganeva, 2012; Nordgard, 2018). Another factor that seems to be correlated to the level of piracy, is the legal origin of a country (Bustinza et. al 2013).

However, there are also studies which are contradicting that peer-to-peer file sharing has led to lower music sales, as the 'sampling/exposure/penetration effect' could dominate the substitution effect of it (Gopal et al., 2006; Chi, 2008; Tschmuck, 2012; Yoon, 2007; Nordgard, 2018). More simply put, these studies claim that consumers are able to discover more unknown and low-quality music, due to peer-to-peer file sharing (Gopal et al., 2006; Chi, 2008). This, in turn, enhances the legal purchase of music (Curien & Moreau, 2009). Still, it depends, as peer-to-peer filesharing could harm the income of well-known artists, while unknown artists could benefit from the extra exposure (Duchêne & Waelbroeck, 2005; Gopal et al., 2006).

Another advantage of file-sharing is that it could be used as an advertising tool and provide insights into which music is being downloaded or not (Peitz & Waelbroeck, 2005). As a final point, the studies of Blackburn (2004), Oberholzer-Gee & Strumpf (2007), and Tanaka (2004), found no effect of digital piracy on music sales, which shows that academia seems to be ambiguous regarding this matter.

Nevertheless, the development of peer-to-peer file sharing and piracy has led to subscription- and advertising-based business models, as it was perceived to be a way to combat it (Hesmondhalgh, 2009; Dewenter, Haucap & Wenzel, 2011). These business models led to a decline in the music industry's revenue once again, which then led to the emergence of the '360 deal' (Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Meijer, 2013; Vito, 2019; Tschmuck, 2016; Naveed, Watanabe, & Neittaanmäki, 2017; Marshall, 2013; Nordgard, 2018). This was a contract that predominantly was given to smaller artists, as superstars had the bargaining power to retain the old blockbuster contract (Stahl & Meijer, 2012). These deals provided record labels the possibility to obtain a share of the revenues artists were generating outside of music, such as merchandise, ticket and ringtone sales (Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Curien & Moreau, 2009; Dewenter, Haucap & Wenzel, 2011; Nordgard, 2018).

Digitalization seems to not only have changed the income distribution for record labels, but also for artists (Anderson, 2010). Some studies namely argue, that it has increased the channels from which artists could generate revenue from (Anderson, 2010). One of the income sources that seems to has gained importance since the digitalization of the music industry, is the revenue obtained from live performances (Holt, 2010; Stahl & Meijer, 2012). Other reasons for this increase, was the growing demand for merchandise, the more important role of the live music promoter and the increasing interest from other sectors (Holt, 2010). Also the development of online ticket sales, seems to have led to higher revenues for artists and event organizers (Holt, 2010).

However, there are studies which claim that the overall income of artists has not increased since the digitalization of the music industry (Ahn & Yoon, 2009; Peitz & Waelbroeck, 2005). More recent studies seem to contradict this and showed that the revenue generated from live performances, outweighed the loss of decrease in record sales (Andersen, 2010; Tschmuck, 2016; Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmäki, 2017; Stahl & Meijer, 2012).

According to Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmäki (2017), there even seems to be a co-evolution between streaming and live music performances. In other words, when streaming gained popularity as a platform for consuming music, at the same time, live music did as well (Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmäki, 2017). Digital technology such as, virtual reality, artificial intelligence and so forth, has enforced the music industry to shift towards a 'live-concert-streaming music industry' (Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmäki, 2017). Even digital piracy seems to has a positive effect on the income from live music performances and sale of ancillary goods, on the condition that the indirect network effects are sufficiently strong (Curien & Moreau, 2009; Dewenter, Haucap & Wenzel, 2011; Nordgard, 2018).

Nevertheless, there could indeed also be other reasons for why the live music industry has gained popularity over time (Frith, 2007).

Lastly, digitalization seemed to have changed the gatekeepers in the music industry as well (Burnett, 2002; Wikström, 2020; Tschmuck, 2012). Radio, DJ's, television, newspapers and word-to-mouth advertisement, used to be the gatekeepers in the music industry, whereas over the years, they have transformed into digital gatekeepers such as music blogs, online music stores, streaming services and even the consumer (Taylor et. al, 2012; Nguyen et. al, 2014; Burnett, 2002; Jetto, 2011; Nordgard, 2018).

Summary

To summarize this chapter, the music industry underwent many transformations in the field of recording, publishing, and live music up to digitalization. Digitalization is the socio-technical process of the adoption of digital technology. It seems to have an impact on the consumption, distribution, promotion, business model, income distribution, entry barriers, gatekeepers, and profitability of the music industry, based on the discussed literature. Furthermore, in the research towards hip-hop, there is predominantly written about the cultural, political, and social value of it, but at the same time, also about the production, authenticity, and lyrical content of the genre. To my knowledge, research towards the consequences of digitalization for hip-hop has not been frequently studied yet. One of the studies that I came across, was the study from Speers (2017), which investigated the dynamics between digitalization and the practices, struggles, and authenticity of London hip-hop artists. For this thesis, the focus will be more on how digitalization has affected hip-hop in general, leading to the following research question:

"How do industry professionals in hip-hop understand the consequences of digitalization of the music industry for the genre of hip-hop?"

This question will be answered by investigating how digitalization has affected the overarching themes that frequently have been researched in relation to the music industry and hip-hop, leading to the following three sub-questions:

- *How does digitalization affect the business dynamics in hip-hop?*

- *How does digitalization affect artistic choices in hip-hop?*

- *How does digitalization affect the social relevance of hip-hop?*

3. Methodology

This chapter will provide an explanation of the used method, research design, sampling method, data collection and analysis, operationalization, and at last, the reliability and validity of this study. In this way, it provides insight into how this study will be able to obtain the understanding of industry professionals regarding the consequences of digitalization for hip-hop.

3.1.   Method and research design

As this study aimed to gather in-depth information and insights out of rich narrative descriptions of a particular phenomenon, qualitative research was used (Patton, 2015). According to Yilmaz (2013), qualitative research can be defined as, "An emergent, inductive, interpretive and naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world.", (p. 312). The research method was used because of the explorative nature of the study, as the aim was to understand the personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions of industry professionals regarding the impact of digitalization on hip-hop. Due to the data being descriptive, it is often difficult to analyze by using statistical procedures, which supports the lack of commonality to formulate hypotheses in qualitative research and is rather opted for an inductive approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Thomas, 2006). Qualitative research is the overarching term for various research strategies, that has similar characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1997; Snape & Spencer, 2003).

The concrete method of qualitative research that was used for answering the research question and sub-questions, was a qualitative content analysis of existing media material. According to Schreier (2012), qualitative content analysis can be defined as, 'A method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative data', (p. 2). It was used because the data consisted of interviews/episodes from talk shows and podcasts, which is qualitative. The advantages of qualitative content analysis are that it reduces a large amount of data into smaller segments, it is systematic, and it is flexible (Schreier, 2012). This provides a clearer view of the data, which will make it easier to discover relationships between parts of the data (Schreier, 2010).

To analyze the data, thematic analysis was used. It is defined by Braun & Clarke (2012) as, "A method for systematically, identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set.", (p. 57). Its use provided an overall understanding of the perception of hip-hop industry professionals regarding the impact of digitalization on hip-hop (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Joffe, 2012). An advantage of this analysis is its accessibility and flexibility, which provides the opportunity to include potentially relevant concepts that are discovered during the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

3.2.   Data collection and sampling

The sampling method that was used in this study, was purposive sampling. Etikan, Musa & Alkassim (2016) defined purposive sampling as, "The deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a nonrandom technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants.", (p. 2). This method is used to study a small number of cases, which produce rich and detailed information about the research topic (Yilmaz, 2013; Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

To obtain insights from high-profile industry professionals, research has been done towards the most relevant talk shows and podcasts in hip-hop over the last few years. As the sample should contain a set level of diversity, additional research was done towards the background of the industry professionals (Bryman, 2012). This led to the following units of analysis: The Everyday Struggle talk show, the Joe Budden Podcast, and Genius.

The Everyday Struggle talk show gathers between 300.000 and 400.000 views per episode and consists of two hosts and one moderator; DJ Akademiks, Wayno and Nadeska. DJ Akademiks is a popular media personality that is known for giving commentary on news and issues in the hip-hop community, whereas Wayno is an artist manager and the A&R of Asylum Records, who has worked with the likes of Jay-Z and DMX. Nadeska, who is the moderator of the three, is a hip-hop journalist that works for Complex and has her own music show now on Apple Music Beats 1 (Patel, 2017; Genius, n.d.; Warner Music Group, 2019; Scarano, 2019). Apart from the fact that the show is usually centered around the perspectives of those three, they also invite a variety of high-profile industry professionals to share their experiences.

Next, The Joe Budden Podcast was the highest streamed podcast of 2019 on Spotify, making it one of the most popular hip-hop podcasts currently (Spotify, 2019). It consists of Joe Budden, who had a rap career before podcasting, and his two co-hosts Rory Farrell and Jamil "Mal" Clay. Rory Farrell used to be an intern for Def Jam and is now Marketing Manager at Sony Music Entertainment. "Mal" is the younger brother of Kareem "Biggs" Burke, who is one of the founders of Roc-a-Fella Records (Spotify, 2018; Hot New Hip-Hop, n.d.). Although they are mostly discussing content amongst themselves, they also call in other high-profile industry professionals to talk about hip-hop related topics.

At last, Genius is a media company focused on hip-hop music and provider of annotation and interpretation of song lyrics and other hip-hop related content (Wiedeman, 2015). The interviews of Genius are hosted by Rob Markman, who is a veteran journalist in hip-hop himself, and he is assisted by various high-profile hip-hop artists, producers, label-owners, or other journalists (Wiedeman, 2015; Johnson & Lynch, 2016).

These media platforms featured high-profile industry professionals of the hip-hop community and provided different perspectives that would be difficult to obtain otherwise. In order to obtain rich and detailed information about the research topic, interviews/episodes have been selected based on topics that were related to the *business dynamics*, *artistic choices* and/or *social relevance* of hip-hop, in the context of digitalization of the music industry.

To ensure the variety between the topics, guidelines were used in the form of titles and descriptions of the interviews/episodes such as, 'streaming', 'contracts', 'state of hip-hop', which alluded to covering the consequences of digitalization.

Ideally, this data form should be analyzed until no new insights are being obtained (Bryman, 2012), however as this study was restricted to a limited amount of time, a total of eighteen interviews/episodes were analyzed from which the length differed. All data can be found on YouTube and were watched entirely if there were no time-stamps indicating at what moment relevant topics were being discussed.

An advantage of using data that can be found on the internet is that it provided the opportunity to search for extra data if the preselected material is not sufficiently rich. Additionally, the collection of data can be done at any time instead of being restricted to the availability of respondents. Another advantage is its unobtrusive character, which reduces the biases that could arise from the presence of the researcher or measurement instrument (Lee, 2000).

Table 1. Overview of analyzed talk shows/podcasts and industry professionals.

Show/podcasts	Episode	Host	Guests	Profession	Length
Genius	How Do Producers Make Money In The Streaming Era?	Rob Markman	!llmind Statik Selektah	Producer Producer	38:04
Genius	Does Lyricism Still Matter In Hip-Hop? A Discussion With Styles P and Dave East	Rob Markman	Styles P Dave East	Rapper Rapper	27:16
Genius	Musicians Only Make 12% Of The Music Industry's Revenue	Rob Markman	John Lynch Tiffany Ballard Dyme-A-Duzin	Entertainment Editor at Business Insider Entertainment Attorney Rapper	26:17
Genius	'Toosie Slide', 'Savage' & 'Renegade': Which TikTok Hits Are Actually Good?	Rob Markman	Tia Hill Jacques Morel Jr.	Supervising news producer Senior news correspondent	38:10
The Joe Budden Podcast	Are Radio Singles Necessary Anymore? (Ep. 272)	Joe Budden Rory Mal	Carl Chery	Creative Director, Head of Urban Music at Spotify	28:37

		Parks			
The Joe Budden Podcast	How Much Really Is A Stream Worth? (Ep. 232)	Joe Budden Rory Mal Parks			11:24
The Joe Budden Podcast	Are 360 Deals Good For Hip-Hop?	Joe Budden Rory Mal			2:56
The Joe Budden Podcast	Can Artists Thrive In Today's Music Industry?	Joe Budden Rory Mal			9:12
The Joe Budden Podcast	How Can Artists Get Their Worth In The Music Business?	Joe Budden Rory Mal Parks			21:24
The Joe Budden Podcast	Is Chris Brown Trying Harder To Boost The Numbers?	Joe Budden Rory Mal Parks	Kareem Burke	Co-founder of Roc-A-Fella records	12:48
The Everyday Struggle Show	Diddy Says Rap Is Too Diluted In 2018	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Wayno	Star	Radio personality, former employee of record companies	14:06
The Everyday Struggle Show	Is It Fair For Artists To Count Merch Towards Album Sales?	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Wayno			10:51
The Everyday Struggle Show	Do Debut Albums Still Matter?	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Star			6:40
The Everyday Struggle Show	Does Ghostwriting Matter in Rap in 2018?	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Star			15:39
The Everyday Struggle Show	Are Rappers In 2017 Pressured To Drop Too Much Music	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Joe Budden			7:35
The Everyday StruggleShow	Is Lil Yachty Bad For Hip-Hop Culture?	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Joe Budden			7:01
The Everyday Struggle Show	Are Memes The Future of The Rap Industry	Nadeska DJ Akademiks Joe Budden			9:57
The Everyday Struggle Show	How Do Rappers Stay Relevant In 2017?	Nadeska DJ Akademiks	Hit-Boy Dom Kennedy	Producer Rapper	6:47

3.3.   Operationalization

To provide an answer to the main research question, 'How do industry professionals in hip-hop understand the consequences of digitalization of the music industry for the genre of hip-hop?', three sub-questions were formulated to give a more specific explanation to how industry professionals understand the impact of digitalization on hip-hop. As digitalization could affect hip-hop in multiple ways, a distinction was made in how industry professionals understood the impact of digitalization on the business dynamics, artistic choices and social relevance of hip-hop. This led to the following sub-questions: 'How does digitalization affect the business dynamics in hip-hop?', 'How does digitalization affect the artistic choices in hip-hop?', 'How does digitalization affect the social relevance of hip-hop?'.

Although this study was approached inductively, sensitizing concepts were used to give direction to the thematic analysis (Boeije, 2010). These concepts were derived from previous academic literature discussed in the theoretical framework. They were demarcated further during the axial coding process of the thematic analysis, which gave more clarity about how they were used by the industry professionals (Boeije, 2010). In this way, there was a balance between previous research towards the digitalization of the music industry and hip-hop, and retaining an open mind towards new insights from this study (Boeije, 2009).

Digitalization of the music industry and hip-hop were the main sensitizing concepts in this study (Boeije, 2010). To begin with, the digitalization of the music industry, firstly research was conducted on the music industry which was defined as: musicians (artists) who compose and perform music, companies and professionals who create and sell recorded music, organizations involved with and giving music performances, professionals who assist musicians with their music careers, those who broadcast music, journalists, educators, and musical instrument manufactures (Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki, 2017). Afterward, research was conducted on digitalization, which was defined as the adoption of technology by industries, organizations, institutions (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). Following on, research on hip-hop concluded with the genre being defined as, a cultural form that is used to express the feelings of African-Americans and other minorities regarding topics like social injustice, racism, religion and sexuality (Rose, 1994). Reviewing academic literature on the impact of digitalization on the music industry and hip-hop, led to the sub-concepts of business dynamics, artistic choices and social relevance (Boeije, 2010).

The impact of digitalization on the business dynamics was observed by the industry professionals' understanding of its consequences on the distribution, promotion, business model, profitability, income distribution, consumption, gatekeepers and entry barriers for hip-hop. This could mean the opportunities that digitalization provided for distributing and promoting music directly to consumers (Nordgård, 2018; Nguyen et. al, 2014), or how digitalization has led to changes in its business model (Naveed, Watanabe, & Neittaanmäki, 2017; Tschmuck, 2012).

Furthermore, it could be observed through how it affected the profitability and income distribution of artists and record labels. With regards to artists, live music has become more important, while for labels, the percentage of the merchandise and tour revenue from artists, has become more significant due to the existence of the 360 deal (Stahl & Meijer, 2012; Andersen, 2010). Additionally, the impact on the business dynamics includes the way digitalization affected the consumption of hip-hop, as the accessibility to music has been increased and cheapened (Hesmondhalgh & Meijer, 2018; Richardson, 2014). Moreover, it also includes how digitalization has changed its gatekeepers, as well as the opportunities digitalization provided to create music (Nordgard, 2018; Taylor et. al, 2012). Lastly, a topic that could be observed within the sub-category of business dynamics is how digitalization has lowered the entry barriers of the music industry (Wikström, 2020).

The impact of digitalization on the artistic choices of hip-hop was observed by the industry professionals' understanding of its consequences on the production choices and consumption choices. This could mean how digitalization has affected hip-hop's musical production, as it has been criticized for tending towards pop music and using fewer samples over the years (Vito, 2019b; Schloss & Chang, 2014). Additionally, as digitalization increased the accessibility of music, it provided consumers the opportunity to discover more unknown artists and genres, which could affect the taste of hip-hop consumers as well (Curien & Moreau, 2009).

The impact digitalization has on the social relevance of hip-hop could be observed by the industry professionals' understanding of its consequences on the lyrical content, commercialization, authenticity and cultural appropriation. This means that digitalization could have an impact on the lyrical content of hip-hop, as it is criticized to lack social, political and cultural value since its commercialization (Vito, 2019a; Vito, 2019b). Another topic that was related to the category of social relevance is the authenticity of hip-hop. As hip-hop has become commercially successful, it is perceived to be more challenging for hip-hop artists to preserve their authenticity and to 'keep it real' (Speers, 2017). Lastly, scholars have argued that the success and digitalization of hip-hop have triggered the occurrence of cultural appropriation. Various white artists have been criticized for using black music for their own purposes without crediting or compensating them (Hess, 2005; Fraley, 2009; Cutler, 1999). As cultural appropriation is part of a social issue, any commentary regarding the consequences of digitalization on the cultural appropriation of hip-hop will fall under the category of social relevance as well.

Table 1. Overview of operationalization and topic list.

Sensitizing concept	Sub-concepts	Topics
Digitalization of the music industry	Business dynamics	Distribution
		Promotion
		Business model
		Profitability
		Income distribution
		Consumption
		Entry barriers
		Gatekeepers
	Artistic choices	Production choices
		Consumption choices
	Social relevance	Lyrical content
		Commercialization
		Authenticity
		Cultural appropriation

3.4.   Data Analysis

In order to segment and reassemble the data, thematic analysis was used. As a result of this, the data was transformed into themes that could be interpreted broadly (Bryman, 2012). This was done by open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Boeije, 2010).

The first step consisted of open coding, where labels were assigned to pieces of data that were relevant for the research question, sensitizing concepts or sub-concepts (Boeije, 2010). This required careful reading of the transcripts, along with recognizing relevant information in the statements of the industry professionals (Boeije, 2010). The open codes were developed from the perspective of the theoretical framework, such as 'Increased consumption' and 'Higher accessibility to music', or stayed close to the literal statements of industry professionals, for instance, 'Festivals taking over tours' or 'Need for exclusivity in hip-hop'. This was done for every transcript and repeated until no new codes could be assigned to the data anymore (Boeije, 2010).

After the open coding process was done, the codes were grouped together into more abstract themes, also described as axial coding (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Boeije, 2010). To ensure that these themes were not overlapping, the entire dataset was re-read once again, along with renaming and merging codes, so that the connections between categories and sub-categories were clear (Boeije, 2010). Among others, codes such as 'Preference for shorter albums', 'Consumers liking fast-food music' and 'Consumers liking trap music' were merged into the theme 'Consumption choices' for example. This phase of the analysis gave an overview of the themes that emerged after the evaluation of every single code.

Finally, the last step in the process of thematic analysis was selective coding. This consisted of the examination of the relationships between the axial codes in order to make sense of how industry professionals understand the impact of digitalization on hip-hop (Boeije, 2010). The axial codes, 'Cultural appropriation' and 'Lyricism' were related to the cultural, political and social value of hip-hop, which resulted in the selective code of 'Social relevance'.

For a hierarchically structured overview of all the categories that emerged from the axial- and selective coding process, see the Appendix. This coding scheme, along with the data analysis, formed the basis for the interpretation of the data which was done in the Results chapter.

The program that was used for the coding process of the data was Atlas.ti, which eased the organization and connection of the codes so that the main- and sub-themes could be identified. This program offered various tools that made the coding process more convenient such as, merging and renaming codes along with the creation of code groups. It also helped to indicate relationships between codes, which altogether made interpreting the data easier and faster.

3.5.   Reliability and validity

Despite the fact that a qualitative content analysis depends on the interpretation of the researcher, it is still possible to guard the reliability and validity of qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). The reliability is indicated by the replicability of the results by other researchers (Silverman, 2011). Although this is usually challenging to achieve, transparency is a way to add trustworthiness to the study, by explaining all the steps taken in this research (Silverman, 2011). In terms of this study, this means the coding process that has been explained above, so that other researchers would come to the same results.

The validity of a study is indicated by how accurate the researcher is able to measure the concept he or she is intended to measure (Silverman, 2011). This could be enhanced by providing consistency, trustworthiness and correct interpretation of the data (Silverman, 2011). It is also enhanced by the external validity of the results, which is achieved if the results could be extrapolated to the population other than the selected sample (Boeije, 2009). This study tried to manage this by using a purposive sampling method (Silverman, 2011).

4. Results

This chapter will present the results of the thematic analysis of interviews from talk shows and podcasts, in which the understanding of industry professionals regarding the consequences of digitalization on hip-hop, are covered. It will be divided based on the three sub-questions of this study. The first section contains insights into how digitalization has affected the business dynamics of hip-hop. The second section will cover the influence it has on the artistic choices in hip-hop. At last, the third section will explain the consequences digitalization has for the social relevance of hip-hop.

4.1. Business dynamics

The themes that have been observed in the analysis regarding the consequences of digitalization for the business dynamics in hip-hop, were predominantly how 360 deals and streaming has affected the business strategies of labels, the importance of understanding the music business and artist development. Other themes that followed from the analysis were how digitalization has affected the profitability and income distribution of artists and producers, whereas it also has changed the accessibility, consumption, entry barriers and gatekeepers in hip-hop.

4.1.1. *Business decisions: 360 deal, business strategies, understanding the music business and artist development.*

As the revenue of the music industry started to decline due to its digitalization, record labels invented the 360 deal in order to stay profitable (Nordgard, 2018; Naveed, Watanabe, & Neittaanmäki, 2017). The majority of the industry professionals acknowledged this and perceived the invention of the 360 deal, to result from labels having a harder time to recoup on their investment since music consumption has been digitalized. However, the industry professionals oftentimes questioned the repercussions this deal has, as labels seem to benefit more from this construction than artists:

> *'We would have went to independence quicker had that 360 deal not existed, because it kept the labels alive. From a label aspect, it was amazing, great job Kevin and Lyor, you are now keeping Def Jam afloat, because now you're taking their tour and their merch, that's not great for the artists.'*
> (Rory Farrel, Marketing manager at Sony)

Besides receiving a percentage of their tour and merchandise revenue, publishing royalties also seem to be divided unfairly, often resulting in labels generating more income than the artist. Due to this, hip-hop artists have been resistant against signing to record labels and are staying independent longer. This provides artists more time to achieve success independently, which gives them more leverage during the negotiation with a record label.

Having leverage seems to be important, as it will give artists more bargaining power for owning more of their generated income. One of the disadvantages of having leverage is that record labels will demand a higher percentage of the artist's ancillary income. That is why the profitability of 360 deals often depends on how much leverage an artist has. For this reason, industry professionals often advised artists to stay independent as long as possible. Still, a large number of artists seem to sign 360 deals, since they are unaware of the terms they agreed to and seeing it as an opportunity to escape poverty. The majority of the industry professionals still believe that this is unnecessary, as, in accordance with previous literature, the internet offers artists the opportunity to directly reach their consumers, resulting in owning more of their generated income (Rutter & Curran, 2016; Tschmuck, 2016).

Although 360 deals are perceived to have kept record labels alive, industry professionals noticed that it encouraged record labels to change their business strategies:

> *'Because when people get these deals [360 deals] right, they're trying to get their R.O.I.*
> *[Return on Investment] on, so how are we gonna get the money back...'*
> (Wayno, artist manager and A&R)

One of the business strategies that is used frequently is bundling album sales with merchandise and tour tickets, in order to boost album sales:

> *'So, we noticed that a lot of artists like, Nicki put out 'Queen', Travis put out 'Astro World',*
> *they're bundling album sales with merch and tour tickets and we've seen people do this in the*
> *past, but it's becoming more and more of a thing...'*
> (Nadeska Alexis, moderator and executive producer of The Everyday Struggle Show)

For example, record labels are wholesale buying albums of their artists, after which they package them with merchandise or tour tickets so that the album sales will increase when merchandise or tour tickets are being bought. This is perceived to increase the attractiveness of buying merchandise and tour tickets. Furthermore, as the majority of consumers streams and consumes playlists, record labels are paying people to create those playlists or owning those playlists:

> *'They [labels] are paying people for their influence, they are paying people to create playlists,*
> *they are paying the creators to create.'*
> (Joe Budden, ex-rapper)

Social media influencers are being approached by record labels as well, as social media apps like TikTok, seem to influence the charts, which could translate into higher sales.

Record labels and artists are even implementing strategies that not necessarily are used for generating more income, but more so to create the perception of obtaining high sales numbers. An example is the opportunity for consumers to download an album for free, while these downloads are being counted as album sales. Also, another strategy that is used for obtaining high sales numbers, is adding recent hits to albums. The reason why record labels are using these strategies is that they are perceived to play streaming wars with each other. Those strategies were often debated to be cheating and implemented to cover up low music sales. Even though record labels are perceived to be the ones behind these strategies, artists are often behind them as well.

Although record labels and artists use business strategies that could be up to debate, they acknowledged that the music industry is evolving fast, making it difficult to catch up:

'The thing with the music business, it just reinvents itself every so couple years, so finally when artists started figuring out how to do the label shit, and they started doing their independent labels, they didn't need the majors, then streaming comes in.
So now we have a whole set, a new set of rules that we have to relearn.'
(Rory Farrell, Marketing manager at Sony)

This is one of the reasons why most of the industry professionals pointed out that, it is important to understand the music business, especially nowadays. According to them, plenty of artists don't know the music business, resulting in signing unfairly deals. Hiring a lawyer and being educated as an artist is now more important than ever, as record labels are perceived to offer contracts that are complex. This complexity comes from the fact that streaming is complex. The value of a stream seems to be hard to pinpoint according to industry professionals, as they don't understand what it is based upon. Some of them are of the belief that streams are being valued too high, as it seems to be easier to acquire higher sales numbers. However, they all agree that a stream is valued too low in regards to the rewarding of artists. Understanding the value of streaming seems to go hand-in-hand with understanding the value of technology.

Labels are already deepening their knowledge regarding technology in order to keep up. The use of technology is often critiqued, as labels are using it for signing artists based on algorithms, instead of talent level now.

However, some of the industry professionals acknowledged that record labels have been doing this before algorithms were even technology-based. Aside from signing artists based on technology, artists seem to be signed faster compared to former times as well. Often, they only have a few hit songs on their name, while lacking a catalog. That is why the majority of the industry professionals believe that artist development is no longer practiced by labels:

'Labels are pre-packaging people, they're signing you if you have a buzz, they give you a writer, they give you a beat, they give you a vocal coach, they put you in a studio and they'll create some type of hit.'
(Akademiks, media personality and influencer)

'Artist development. Those days are gone, so now, the machine really is not as compassionate as it used to be, come on in, get the fucking hit or if you don't, get the fuck out…,'
(Star, radio personality and former employee of record companies)

4.1.2.   *Profitability: Profitability of artists and producers, unfair payment, changing main source of income and multiple revenue streams.*

According to previous research, academics seem to be ambiguous regarding the effect digitalization has on the profitability of the music industry (Moreau, 2013; Tschmuck, 2012). From the analyzed material of this study, it seems that the beliefs of industry professionals are divided as well. One of the reasons for why some of them don't believe that the profitability of hip-hop artists has increased, is streaming. Consumers seem to pay less for music, as streaming platforms offer 'free' access to music, by only charging consumers a subscription fee. The publishing royalties that artists obtain from streaming are perceived to be insufficient in order to live off music:

'Artists aren't making enough off of streaming. There's got to be alternate revenues and avenues to find that.'
(John Lynch, Entertainment Editor at Business Insider)

This seems to apply to especially sub-tier and independent artists. Superstars are perceived to be not affected by the low publishing royalties from streaming, as their music is being streamed so much, that they are still able to generate a decent amount of money from it. Superstars also usually have other sources of income that could compensate for the low publishing royalties.

This seems to grow the income inequality between superstars and sub-tier/independent artists, and possibly affect the number of people trying to pursue music in the future. Another reason is that there are often multiple people involved in the career of an artist that needs to be paid as well.

However, some of the industry professionals believe that even with streaming, hip-hop artists could benefit from the digitalization of the music industry:

'No, with the internet now, you can go straight to your consumer, so it's easier I think to make money than it was before. You don't need a huge outlet to actually give people your music and then buy it. There is regular artists on Apple Music, Spotify all that shit. So, I think it's possible, I just think maybe with streaming, the way they get paid is tougher, because you have to listen to a song a million times for them to make a dollar, so I could see in that aspect, but there's ways to give music to your fans without Apple Music and Spotify. I think the internet direct-to-consumer makes it easier for indie artists to have a career and they can just go on little show runs and make they money.'
(Rory Farrell, Marketing manager at Sony)

As mentioned earlier, the internet enables artists to directly reach their consumers, which provides the option to generate income outside of streaming. This seems to apply to independent artists more than artists signed to record labels. Streaming is also believed to be a good tool against the illegal downloading of music, which could affect the profitability of an artist as well.

Although there are thus mixed beliefs regarding the impact digitalization has on the profitability of hip-hop artists, artists are perceived to be paid unfairly. Industry professionals often pointed out that, artists should fight for higher publishing royalties and should support companies that are for the fair payment of artists such as Tidal, a streaming service owned by Jay-Z. Tidal is known for paying out higher publishing royalties than Spotify and Apple. Besides streaming services, record labels are also perceived to pay-out artists unfairly. As noted in the previous section, the publishing royalties that artists receive in 360 deals are perceived to be insufficient, along with the opinion that, the ancillary income of artists should be completely owned by them.

Although industry professionals encouraged artists to stand up for fair payment, it seems that producers are more willing to take action. The reason for this could be that digitalization has changed the main source of income for producers to publishing royalties, while for artists to touring.

The reason why advances are no longer the main source of income is that they have been lower than the income artists and producers could generate from other sources. The reason for this is that labels are now paying out advances that they know they are able to recoup:

'Yeah, for the most part or the reason why also too, it's [advance] so low is because they're basically paying you money that they know they're going to make back. That's why the days of 50..., like Statik said, 50 grand, 100 grand for a beat upfront is just, those days are over.'
(!llmind, producer)

As the main source of income for hip-hop artists has changed to touring, they are perceived to perform more. Another reason is that artists are aware that labels are receiving a percentage off that as well, once they have signed a 360 deal.

From a producer's perspective, it is a disadvantage to not be able to tour, as artists are generating a lot of income from it. On the other hand, labels are not able to obtain any percentage of another source of income from producers due to this.

As touring is brought up, industry professionals pointed out that, it is taken over by festivals. Artists are now able to generate the same amount of income from doing festivals, as going on tour. As festival sets are usually shorter than tour sets, artists are thus able to generate the same amount of income, while having to perform less. They are perceived to be able to entertain a crowd with just a few hit singles. It is now even possible for artists to do a festival or to go on tour, without having released an album. Also, as consumers are aware of the fact that streaming is not generating a significant income for artists, they are perceived to be willing to pay more for concert tickets and merchandise. The experience seems to be more important for today's hip-hop consumers:

> *'This generation would much rather pay for experiences, so while we technically aren't paying for music, if you're streaming, you're paying for the access to listen to music, but you're not paying to own music, that it seems that fans are willing to go out more and pay a little more for a concert ticket.'*
> (Rob Markman, journalist)

In that way, consumers feel that they are supporting their favorite artists, which artists seem to be aware of and thus put more effort into merchandise lately.

The changed income distribution of artists and producers, seems to have led to the necessity of having multiple revenue streams, especially being an independent artist. As earlier mentioned, the internet is perceived to provide artists more opportunities to generate income outside of their music sales. Industry professionals stated that artists could generate income from creating music for videogame- or sports companies, for example.

As hip-hop is perceived to change rapidly, adapting to its current state seems to enhance the profitability of hip-hop artists today. Being versatile business-wise is a must, as all industry professionals believe that solely depending on income from music, often would not be sufficient, especially being a sub-tier or independent artist.

4.1.3. *Market conditions: Accessibility to music, lower entry barriers and changing gatekeepers*

According to industry professionals, digitalization also seems to have increased the accessibility to music, due to the emergence of mobile phones, internet and streaming. As already mentioned earlier, streaming cheapened the access to music, which led to consumers paying less for music. This caused an increase in music consumption, which is perceived to be a win for consumers. Furthermore, digitalization also seems to increase the possibility of discovering new artists, which could be a win for artists and producers:

'Everybody has a story behind something and then they put it out and then look at Old Town Road or whatever. That's the name of the song? That got picked up on Beat Stars, shout out to Beat Stars. They got a really dope community and look now, that kid is good. If there wasn't no Beat Stars, that kid might be on SoundCloud trying to get randoms to get his beats. It's about being able to get discovered at the end of the day. The world's so big now and the Internet connects so many people that as many things that are bad about that, it's just as many things amazing.'
(Statik Selektah, producer)

However, one of the industry professionals pointed out that digitalization could also harm the discovery of new artists, as technology at some point could enable record labels to boost careers with one press on a button, without having to discover new talent.

Digitalization also seems to have lowered the entry barriers of the music industry. As in former times, there were technical hurdles to produce a track, now, having a laptop is already enough. Also, the submission of music seems to be easier as well, resulting in more music being released faster. Music being released faster, followed from the higher demand and increased competition in hip-hop. The increased competition led to the market being saturated, which means that it could be more difficult to breakthrough. This then contradicts the belief that it is easier to be discovered. The fast pace of music releases seems to be too much for them to digest. Additionally, since access to music has increased, it also caused consumers to be quicker over music as well. However, overall, it seems that digitalization benefits the consumer more than the artist and producer in hip-hop.

Another effect digitalization has on hip-hop is the change in gatekeepers. It seems that they have changed from radio and DJs, towards predominantly playlists, social media and even the consumer self. The majority of the industry professionals acknowledged that artists and labels are now trying to get their music into playlists, as opposed to record stores. The streaming services or companies that own these playlists are powerful, as playlists seem to be commonly consumed today. Also, a few of the industry professionals pointed out that, playlists have been influencing the emergence of today's hits as well. That is why it is important for artists to appear in playlists today. Besides playlists, social media also seems to be an influential gatekeeper in hip-hop:

'Yeah and I've said on here, that the world is much bigger than your timeline, but at the same time, I've seen it work. I've seen memes get artists the fuck out of here and in some cases, it's happened.'
(Rory Farrell, Marketing manager at Sony)

One of the reasons why it is important for hip-hop artists to be present on social media, is that a large part of hip-hop consumers are perceived to be on it. Having a personality is a pre, as that will attract more followers. One of the industry professionals stated that artists could still break through without being consistently present on social media if they are acknowledged for releasing quality music. However, for most upcoming artists now, it seems to be a faster way for obtaining success. The two ways by which artists could breakthrough on social media, is either by having songs that people could dance well to so that people would create dance challenges to it that could go viral, or having songs with lyrics that are funny or relevant so that people would start creating memes about them. Memes have become so influential, that labels are even willing to pay meme-makers to make memes about their music. Additionally, as these dance challenges and memes are predominantly made by young adults and kids, industry professionals pointed out that they could be considered gatekeepers as well. Besides, social media also seems to be a platform where new artists could be discovered.

Furthermore, one of the industry professionals stated that label executives and radio, are no longer gatekeepers in hip-hop. The influence of DJ's seems to be diminished, as consumers are becoming more and more their own 'DJ' by creating their own playlists now. At last, one industry professional stated that there are no gatekeepers in hip-hop anymore, meaning that the consumer is now more powerful than the proclaimed gatekeepers of today. The internet thus seems to give consumers more power in what receives attention, whereas, on the other hand, it gives companies and streaming services who own playlists, more power in what is pushed forward.

4.2. Artistic choices

The themes that have been observed in the analysis regarding the consequences of digitalization for the artistic choices in hip-hop were mostly, how it changed the production of hip-hop sonically, the length of music and singles being more important than albums now, whereas it also changed the taste and attention span of consumers.

4.2.1. Production choices:

Sampling always has been an important production technique for the sound of hip-hop (Schloss & Chang, 2014). However, due to digitalization, older industry professionals expressed their concern for the possible disappearance of sampling. One of the reasons, is the emergence of software that provides the opportunity to create music that sounds similar to sampled music:

> *'I mean, we've got to the point where we have software that's powerful enough to sound real*
> *enough to make your own sample. […] I mean, you have all these producers that*
> *are doing both now.'*
> (!llmind, producer)

So, due to digitalization, producers have more options, as sampling is no longer the only technique that can be used for producing hip-hop now. Industry professionals noticed that sampling is indeed being used less in today's hip-hop production, especially the sampling of older soul records, which is traditional within hip-hop. Instead of soul records, hip-hop itself seems to be more sampled in hip-hop now. Although sampling is perceived to be used less, it still seems to be relevant in hip-hop today. One of the industry professionals stated that, looking at the Billboard Top 10, there are still hip-hop songs consisting of samples, such as the megahit Old Town Road from Lil Nas X, for example. Still, digitalization seems to affect the art of sampling, as younger producers predominantly dig for samples on YouTube and WhoSampled, whereas older producers still dig for them in record stores. Industry professionals see this as a disadvantage, as only 10% of vinyl records are digitalized. They stated that, for finding real unique sounding samples, record shopping is probably better than YouTube or WhoSampled. Plenty of hip-hop producers are thus now both sampling and creating their own samples, as opposed to former times, where the majority of hip-hop producers used samples in their production. Aside from digitalization, producers also seem to sample less in order to avoid sample clearances, which could be costly. Seemingly, there are companies buying up catalogs from artists, in order to profit from the royalties, when one of their songs is being sampled. These companies often ask a high fee to producers, instead of supporting the art of sampling.

Additionally, as hip-hop is the most popular genre in the world currently, using samples without clearing them would be detected easily and could lead to higher additional costs for record labels and producers. This encourages producers to create more of their own samples as well.

Besides digitalization affecting the use and art of sampling, it also seems to have affected the sound of a rap hit. According to the industry professionals, a rap hit used to consist of an R&B hook often sung by a famously female singer, which now seems to be nearly absent from the charts and is perceived to be an outdated formula. Industry professionals assign this development to the decline in popularity of R&B and radio, once streaming emerged. One of the industry professionals disagreed and assigned this decline to just streaming, as he stated that R&B has gained popularity again in a long time. Additionally, as rap artists seem to use more melody and sing their own hooks, the lines between hip-hop and R&B are getting blurred. Although industry professionals believe that rap hits seem to differ a lot sonically, they notice that most of the popular hip-hop songs recently, were trap-centric:

> *'I do, I do, I think if you look at the last few years, all the songs, most of the most popular*
> *songs has been trap centric. Like, think about 'Bodak Yellow', think about 'Bad & Boujee',*
> *think about 'Black Beatles.'*
> *[...]*
> *'Okay, so you know what it is, because shit, it's transition from radio to streaming.*
> *All those songs, like the Meek song didn't stream well. I tried to playlist it personally, it didn't*
> *do well, doesn't react. I think that the audience just likes the trap shit.'*
> (Carl Chery, Head of Urban Music at Spotify)

Streaming and the decline in R&B, are not the only reasons why the sound of hip-hop seems to have changed. Technology seems to have played a part in this as well. As already mentioned earlier, technology eased the opportunity to create music, which seems to affect the sound of hip-hop:

> *'Auto-tune, Fruityloops, the internet, these are a few things that made music very easy to make*
> *for people that probably couldn't make it. So now people were in their basement, people were*
> *just all over the world creating music the way that they with, whatever tools they had and now*
> *we have this sound taking over music, where not a lot of instruments, the beats breathe, so the*
> *soundscape of music is changed is my overall point.'*
> (Joe Budden, ex-rapper)

The technologies above mentioned, are often used in the production of trap music, which led to a new sound in hip-hop and became popular among the youth. Some of the industry professionals stated that they would like to see a change, as trap has been dominating the hip-hop sound for some time now. Also, they believe that the older rap hit formula could come back and does not apply to hip-hop superstars, as they are perceived to have more artistic freedom.

Another topic that was related to how digitalization has affected the artistic choices in hip-hop, was the length of music. Industry professionals seem to have contradicting views regarding the effect of digitalization on the length of an album in hip-hop. On the one hand, industry professionals noticed that some artists are tending to create albums consisting of more songs, as this could generate more streams and thus a higher income. On the other hand, others are discouraged to create more songs for their album, because of the low income of publishing royalties from streaming. Besides that, they also believe that long albums are rather consumed by die-hard fans, while the casual fan is probably not interested into a long album from an artist they are casually into. Furthermore, the length of a song seems to get shorter as well. As 30 seconds is the official threshold for the count of a stream, artists seem to put limited effort into creating longer songs. The shorter albums and songs also seem to be reinforced by the shorter attention span of consumers.

Additionally, social media seems to have lowered the appreciation of a full song, as only a snippet could be consumed on social media:

> *'So it's more about what's the good 15 seconds of these songs and then I think the next step to this and what we're really starting to see is, it's changing the way that artists create, like I need a good 15 seconds of this song for a TikTok-able moment and you know art is subjective, but it really makes me think, you know, is it a good song if you just focus on the 16 seconds.'*
> (Rob Markman, journalist)

So, this doesn't necessarily affect the length of a song, but more so seems to shift the criteria in terms of how full songs are being appreciated today. More importantly, it seems that the choice of artists depends on whether they believe that the income of streaming compensates them sufficiently for the effort they are putting into creating music.

4.2.2. *Albums vs. singles*

Digitalization, and particularly streaming, seems to affect the artistic choice of releasing an album or a single. Namely, there seems to be more single- than album-driven rap artists in mainstream hip-hop today. This is due to a couple of reasons. One is that, as already noted earlier, some artists are not as motivated to release an album, as they feel that streaming is not compensating them enough for all the time and costs involved with creating an album. Another reason is that singles seem to be consumed more than albums now.

That is why industry professionals believe that, most of the younger generation of rappers could do well by just releasing singles and don't necessarily need an album:

> *'See, you say that but there's an entire genre within hip-hop that consist of*
> *artists that are just single artists, they're not album artists at all.*
> *Like, I think a lot of the younger kids only really put out singles, like we didn't*
> *get an Uzi [Lil Uzi Vert] album for mad long, he has about 10 singles and Atlantic [Atlantic*
> *Records] was like: 'No just keep putting out singles, fuck an album,*
> *this is what's working for you.'*
> (Rory Farrell, Marketing manager at Sony)

However, this seems to depend on the type of rap artist, as the ones that are leading hip-hop, are still perceived to rely on it:

> *'But, if you look at who's leading the whole charts, you have your*
> *Kendrick's, your Cole's and your Drake's, who live and die by the album,*
> *well maybe not Drake so much, because he has so many hit singles,*
> *but the people that are still leading rap, still rely on making that album.*
> *Cole and Kendrick are not surviving off hits and they're still leading rap music.'*
> (Rory Farrell, Marketing manager at Sony)

So, according to them, not having to rely on an album seems to be more the case for younger and/or so-called 'mumble' rappers, while it seems to be not the case for lyrical rappers. Mumble rappers are rap artists that are claimed to have low lyrical ability and to be mumbling instead of articulating well. They are also perceived to be more focused on melodies and flows. Additionally, they are not in a rush to make an album, as they are often able to survive off the streams and shows they are doing. That is why currently, in the streaming era, it is perceived to be extra difficult for sub-tier rap artists that care about the art of making albums, as hits and singles seem to dominate:

'There's just so much that goes against the musician that makes albums as opposed to just trying to make hits and having no…, [...] If you're just a great rap artist that makes serious music and album songs, doesn't try to make a hit single, you're.... [...]
It's looking bad for you because the streaming is not for you.'
(Statik Selektah, producer)

Another reason why industry professionals believe it is harder for album artists today, is that consumers seem to get over music more quickly. If they are true fans of an artist, especially lyrical artists, they seem to have more patience with their albums, whereas 'mumble' rap artists are expected to release music at a high pace. Lyrical artists seem to be aware of this, but still, often feel pressured to release music frequently as well.

Most industry professionals were thus concerned that, the art of making an album could slowly disappear in hip-hop, especially in mainstream hip-hop. On the other hand, debut albums are still perceived to be important to labels, especially as an indicator for the longevity of their artists. So, the beliefs regarding the importance of albums seem to be twofold and depend on which perspective the industry professionals are looking from.

4.2.3. *Consumption choices*

As mentioned earlier, due to streaming, consumers tend to listen to singles more than albums. Industry professionals also stated that consumers often preferred shorter albums, instead of longer albums. They would rather listen to multiple artists with short albums, than one artist with a long album. Some of the consumers are perceived to not even need an album from certain artists now. The reason for these choices, is believed to be the fact that consumers have a shorter attention span now. Additionally, there seems to be no room for error anymore, as consumers are not willing to waste their time listening to a long album, realizing that they didn't like it. Besides that, industry professionals believe that long albums are more for die-hard fans, while the casual fan is probably not interested into a long album. Even social media seems to have played a part in this, as social media apps like TikTok and Musical.ly, have made the consumption of snippets popular. However, some of the industry professionals acknowledged that popular songs on social media, not always are consumed outside of social media. Consumption on social media and real-life seems to be separated from each other.

In terms of taste, most industry professionals believe that the majority of the hip-hop consumers today, are now into trap, as hip-hop's most recent hit songs were predominantly trap-centric, along with the fact that trap is doing well in playlists. In support of that, some of the industry professionals believe that certain consumers don't value lyricism and the use of samples as much as other consumers:

'Now we don't give a fuck what you say, just make it sound good.'
(Akademiks, media personality and influencer)

Still, industry professionals acknowledged that hip-hop consumers could be into trap and lyrical rap at the same time. However, the sophisticated hip-hop consumer seems to need more than the so-called 'fast-food' music that mumble rap/trap artists are perceiving to make:

'For people who are a bit more sophisticated who digest and consume a little more, we need we need some food for the soul.'
(Joe Budden, ex-rapper)

The reason is that 'fast-food' music is perceived to be of lower quality, as it could be produced so quickly. They are a firm believer that art should take time, which is something that lyrical rap artists are perceived to do. To conclude, there seem to be different sorts of hip-hop consumers that value certain things differently, depending on what types of hip-hop this consumer is into.

4.3. *Social relevance*

The themes that have been observed regarding the consequences of digitalization for the social relevance of hip-hop were predominantly, that lyricism seems to be valued less among the younger generation of rap artists, cultural appropriation has increased and the influence of social media on the media representation of hip-hop has grown.

4.3.1. *Lyricism*

As lyricism is not explicitly mentioned before, it requires a short explanation. Lyricism in hip-hop, is the ability to share emotions, tell a story and use metaphorical language on time and rhyme (Terkourafi, 2010). It is one of the things that has been a part of hip-hop since its birth. Most of the industry professionals believe that lyricism is not valued as much as before, as the younger generation seems to care more about the energy and feeling of a song. This probably goes hand-in-hand with the fact that, the majority of the younger consumers seem to care less about lyricism as well, which artists seem to be aware of. So, due to a change in taste of consumption and production, which comes from the digitalization of music, lyricism seems to be valued less. As some of the industry professionals believe that lyricism is fading away due to this, others strongly believe that lyricism will always matter. Their argument is that, considering the current landscape of hip-hop, there are still plenty of artists releasing albums that are focused on lyricism. Even though lyricism is not valued as much as before, it seems to be accepted, as they feel that there is room for different types of hip-hop:

>*'So I feel like the lane I love is lyricism, is music you gotta rewind and get in tune with. But that's me, that's what I like. But I feel like overall, there's so many lanes now, you could catch so many different moves, and it's all rap.'*
>(Dave East, rapper)

>*I wouldn't really all the way be, I don't really get mad at the young dudes who not super lyrical or be on they vibe wave, or whatever they on. Like, that's they time. That's what they're doing, and that's how they're doing it.*
>(Styles P, rapper)

That lyricism is not valued as much as before, did the older industry professionals also blame themselves. They believe that they didn't always convey the right message towards the younger generation regarding the norms and values of hip-hop. Hip-hop has often been perceived to be 'just a hustle', while the older industry professionals firmly believe that hip-hop is a real art form and more than just music where you could generate income from.

Additionally, industry professionals acknowledged that lyricism is often sparked by rap artists being aware of their role model status. Younger artists seem to underestimate this sometimes, by not realizing that their lyrics are influencing people from their communities.

Also, aside from the lyrical artists, industry professionals believe that many rap artists are less ashamed to have ghostwriters now. Ghostwriting has become more of a controversial topic, as reference tracks started to float around the internet. Artists were being judged for just copying the same lyrics, same melody, same flow and basically the entire vocal performance of the ghostwriter. Ghostwriting is an important topic in hip-hop, when it comes to the ranking of rap artists. If a rap artist is known for having a ghostwriter or having used ghostwriters, this artist is then often excluded from this ranking. These rankings are namely based on credibility, lyrical ability and technical ability. Working with a ghostwriter, seems to lower their credibility and lyrical ability among the general public. Ghostwriting seems to be less of an issue when it comes to rap artists that are perceived to not care about lyricism in the first place.

Furthermore, as hip-hop is known for its competitive nature, some of the industry professionals stated that hip-hop is becoming less competitive. Rap artists used to brag about being better than others lyrically, whereas now, it seems that artists are cautious to express their competitiveness publicly, as social media often tend to amplify this to a point where it could go beyond lyrics. This predominantly disappoints the older industry professionals, as they believe that competition is something that pushed hip-hop forward and brings out the quality of 'realness'.

Something interesting that followed from the analysis, was a point one of the industry professionals made about mental health. As mental health seems to be a topic that is being discussed more in hip-hop, one of the industry professionals stated that it always has been a significant subject. It just didn't have the label of mental health yet:

> *'Because in the hood, not to be funny, mental health is really a hard thing to pinpoint.*
> *You don't see mental ... everybody got mental health issues.*
> *And it's like, 'This guy is crazy.' In the hood, that's what mental health was. […]*
> *Then it became, 'Yo he is emo.' […]*
> *We just attach new words to it but that feeling is always been there throughout all hip-hop,*
> *throughout 'Suicidal Thoughts', B.I.G.'*
> (Styles P, rapper)

Other industry professionals acknowledged this as well and believed that consumers didn't realize that some of the big rap artists, have been alluding to mental health issues for some time now. The difference is that, this topic is perceived to appear more explicitly in the lyrics of hip-hop artists today than before.

4.3.2.   Cultural appropriation:

As hip-hop's popularity has grown over the years, it has led to various forms of cultural appropriation. Some of the industry professionals noticed that hip-hop is often consumed without the cultural context of it. One of the reasons seems to be the emergence of social media. On TikTok for example, industry professionals are noticing that white kids often seem to consume hip-hop through dance challenges, without knowing its cultural meaning and origin, as they often didn't grow up in areas where hip-hop culture is prominently present. These kids often don't know and care about the artist or producer, as hip-hop seems to be something that they are momentarily into. Outside of not knowing artists and producers, they often go viral without acknowledging black people that created these dance challenges. They even profit from hip-hop culture sometimes, that they don't acknowledge or know anything about. To their defense, industry professionals stated that social media is predominantly used by kids, who are probably not aware of this. Still, they expressed their concern regarding the possible dilution of hip-hop culture if this continues. That is also why industry professionals were protective over hip-hop culture, as there are people working in hip-hop that don't care about it:

> *'Listen, this is my point, I've heard executives out of their mouth tell me I don't give a fuck about rap, but be working rap.'*
> (Joe Budden, ex-rapper).

 One of them seems to be the label, which immediately lowered their credibility to guide hip-hop artists creatively. Labels are often perceived to care merely about streams and the income they could generate off hip-hop music and culture. They also seem to pay social media influencers in the hope of going viral, which is oftentimes perceived to dilute the culture and meaning of hip-hop even more. This is less of a problem, if those social media influencers are a part of hip-hop culture or are perceived to listen to hip-hop already. Labels seem to be late on trends as well, resulting in industry professionals questioning their sincerity and commitment to hip-hop. Some of the industry professionals also questioned labels trying to represent social rejects, as it is perceived to be only used for drawing attention and boosting their streams.

Additionally, there seems to be another form of cultural appropriation, which is not directly related to digitalization, but has led to higher sample clearances. It seems that there are companies buying up catalogs from artists, in order to profit from the royalties when their songs are being sampled:

'You got a lot of these dudes that aren't part of the music culture, but they're buying these catalogs so they can be like, 'Oh, you know, people are going to sample it and we'll get paid off it.''

(Statik Selektah, producer)

This also reveals that oftentimes, the original artist has no say in what happens with their music, as the rights are bought up by companies or investors who are not a part of the music culture. These companies often ask a high fee to producers, instead of supporting the art of sampling, which then leads to producers making more use of software that could recreate those samples.

4.3.3. Media representation

Another theme that followed from the analysis, was that the digitalization of media seems to affect the image of hip-hop. Some of the industry professionals believe that, social media is creating the perception that the majority of hip-hop's most popular rap artists today, are just 'mumble' rap artists, as they get more visibility. The higher visibility comes from the fact that they are more present on social media than lyrical rap artists, resulting in capturing the youth more:

'Let's be clear right, so they have a lane and sometimes it's more publicized, because you know why? Because they [mumble rap artists] are on Instagram more, they're on Twitter more, they capture the youth a little bit more, so we see them more but that's not the totality of hip-hop.'

Although they are more visible on social media, industry professionals believe that it doesn't necessarily mean that they are the most successful in hip-hop. It bothers them, as it is not a realistic representation of today's hip-hop.

Something else that is perceived to drown out on social media, is negativity instead of positivity. The reason for this is that, negativity seems to draw more attention, which is why some of the younger artists try to be disrespectful or funny. This enhances the possibility of going viral and boosting their popularity. They seem to believe that this is necessary in order to breakthrough in the hip-hop industry nowadays. It is also fueled by hip-hop media outlets, as they often cover more negativity than positivity. Older industry professionals pointed out that, younger artists should be careful about how they present themselves on social media, as it could harm their career in multiple ways. So, in hip-hop media, there seems to be a lack of balance in the coverage of negativity and positivity. Also, one of the industry professionals stated that, some hip-hop media outlets seem to promote negative news about artists reported by non-hip-hop media, instead of protecting them. Due to this, industry professionals are longing for people in media that care about hip-hop, as they believe that plenty of them don't:

> *'Or, because now we got so many people in it that don't actually love it. That get a check from it, that work for all of them outlets you just named, and that's fucked up.'*
> (Styles P, rapper)

A positive consequence of social media being popular and influential, is that dance challenges are shining a light on one of the traditions of hip-hop. Social media could also boost the visibility of songs from niche genres or audiences. Additionally, social media provides various opportunities for hip-hop, such as the creation of new jobs and the building of an online fanbase. Still, industry professionals seem to believe that, the digitalization of media has more negative than positive repercussions for hip-hop.

5. Conclusion

As digitalization seems to have an impact on many areas of the music industry and plays a part in the growth of hip-hop as a genre, the aim of this study was to investigate how industry professionals understand the impact of digitalization on hip-hop. In order to obtain those insights, a qualitative content analysis was conducted on interviews from various talk shows and podcasts, which features high-profile industry professionals of the hip-hop community. The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis, which has shown that digitalization has affected the business dynamics, artistic choices and social relevance of hip-hop, mainly through streaming and social media.

One of the effects digitalization had for the business dynamics of hip-hop, was the necessity for independent/sub-tier hip-hop artists and producers to have multiple revenue streams, as the publishing royalties from streaming are perceived to be insufficient to stay profitable. Also, the fact that labels receive a percentage of the merchandise and tour income of artists through the construction of the 360 deal, is perceived to be unfair as well. Plenty of hip-hop artists seem to sign such deals, due to a lack of understanding of the music business, which has been complexified since the digitalization of the music industry. Besides, the 360 deal also seems to have encouraged the bundling of album sales with merchandise and tour tickets, as labels seem to struggle with generating significant income from streaming as well.

Another change in the business dynamics of hip-hop is that playlists, social media and even the consumer are being prominent gatekeepers, which at the same time, seems to be recognized by record labels, as they are adjusting their business strategies to it. Digitalization gave hip-hop consumers more power in what receives attention through social media, whereas companies and streaming services who own playlists, have more power in what is pushed forward. These developments seem to have led to a decline of artist development in hip-hop, as record labels sign artists based on algorithms instead of talent level. Labels often sign artists that are successful already, so that their investment is likely to be recouped.

In terms of the artistic choices in hip-hop, digitalization seems to have changed the art and use of sampling, as there has been a decrease in hip-hop songs consisting of samples, along with the opportunity to dig for samples online instead of record stores. The reason for the lower use of sampling is that technology enabled producers to create music that sounds similar to sampled music. Another disincentive for sampling, are the costs of sample clearances coupled with the fact that consumers don't seem to care about the use of sampling. Digitalization also eased the opportunity to produce and release music, which led to the fewer use of real instruments and faster production in hip-hop. This altogether has led to a more trap-influenced sound.

Furthermore, there seems to be contradicting views regarding the effect of digitalization on the length of an album in hip-hop. On the one hand, some hip-hop artists are making albums with more songs in order to generate more streams and a higher income. However, others are discouraged to create more songs for their album, because of the low income of publishing royalties from streaming. This is reinforced by the fact that consumers seem to have a preference for shorter albums, as their attention span has shortened. Thus, the choice of artists seems to depend on whether they perceive the income from streaming to be sufficient in regards to the effort they are putting into creating an album.

Besides, since 30 seconds is the official threshold for the count of a stream, artists seem to put limited effort into creating longer songs, which have led to the shorter length of songs in hip-hop. Additionally, social media seems to have lowered the appreciation of a full song, as only a snippet could be consumed on social media.

The above described developments coupled with consumers preferring singles over albums, probably have played a part in the trend of artists being more single-driven in hip-hop and a more challenging prospective for artists that are caring about the art of making albums. However, it seems to depend, as mumble rap artists are perceived to be more single-driven than lyrical rap artists.

In terms of the social relevance of hip-hop, digitalization seems to have led to a lower valuation and usage of lyricism today. One of the reasons is that, consumers seem to care less about lyricism than before. This is reinforced by the fact that younger and mumble rap artists are putting more emphasis on the energy and feeling of a song. Additionally, the emergence of social media has led to hip-hop being consumed without its cultural context, as many white kids are consuming hip-hop through dance challenges and memes, without knowing or acknowledging hip-hop culture. Lastly, social media also seems to has changed the image of hip-hop, as it creates the perception that hip-hop predominantly consists of mumble rap artists, while there are still many relevant lyrical rap artists active today. The reason for this is that, mumble rap artists are more present on social media than lyrical rap artists, by which they are capturing the youth more.

Furthermore, the impact of digitalization on hip-hop also shows similarities to how it affects the music industry in general. As the 360 deal seems to favor the record label more than the artist, it has led to resistance against signing with a major label from various industry professionals, which the study of Vito (2019b) showed as well for independent hip-hop artists. Additionally, this thesis also shows that digitalization seems to have increased the accessibility of music, due to the emergence of mobile phones, internet and streaming, which is in accordance with the findings of Tschmuck (2012) and Morris & Power (2015). This has led to consumers paying less for music and the increase in music consumption, which is all perceived to be a win for consumers, conformable to the findings of Hesmondhalgh & Meijer (2018), Richardson (2014) and Najmark-Hvidt & Espersen (2012).

Furthermore, digitalization also seems to increase the opportunity to reach consumers directly and to generate income outside of music sales, which is in line with the studies of Rutter & Curran (2016), Tschmuck (2016), Naveed, Watanabe & Neittaanmaki (2017) and Nordgard (2018). Additionally, digitalization changed the income distribution for artists, as the main source of income has changed to touring, which is similar to the findings of Holt (2010) and Stahl & Meijer (2012).

Previous research has also stated that digitalization seems to increase the possibility to produce music, to be discovered as a musician and to lower the entry barriers (Lee, 2009; Ganeva, 2012; Tschmuck, 2016), but on the other hand, led to a saturation of the market, which can make it more challenging for artists to breakthrough in hip-hop at the same time.

Furthermore, digitalization seems to have led to various forms of cultural appropriation of hip-hop culture, which supports the findings of Hess (2005) and Fraley (2009). Finally, as digitalization has changed the taste in consumption and production in hip-hop, lyricism has been valued and used less, which substantiated the perspective of Vito (2019a), Vito (2019b) and Terkourafi (2010).

This study has empirically contributed to the field of popular music and digitalization of the music industry, by providing a broader understanding of how digitalization could affect a popular music genre within the music industry. It contributed to the study towards hip-hop, by investigating how digitalization has affected the business dynamics, artistic choices and social relevance of hip-hop from an industry perspective.

Also, as this study was conducted during the pandemic, which was not included in its scope, it could be interesting to investigate how that has affected hip-hop or the music industry in general as well. Other two interesting follow-up studies could be the investigation towards hip-hop artists staying independent longer due to digitalization, as well as, the contradicting effect of digitalization on the length of an album in hip-hop. One of the limitations of this study, is the unobtrusive nature of the data, as it reduced the control over the data collected. It was not possible to lead the direction of the interviews, as those were conducted by the hosts of the talk shows and podcasts. This ensured that the data was depending on the topics that were discussed during those interviews and disabled the opportunity to go more in-depth, when one of the industry professionals made an interesting remark. This has led to a potential loss of interesting results, that could not be explored further (Schreier, 2012). Another limitation of this study, could be the bias of the talk shows and podcasts towards either artists or labels, but also towards independent artists or signed artists, which plays a role in the perspectives they are offering. Also, a possible unequal division of artists, producers, record label representatives and other kinds of industry professionals among the talk shows and podcasts, could have influenced the offered perspectives as well.

Also, one of the limitations of this sampling method is that the outcomes of this study are not generalizable for settings other than the settings researched (Yilmaz, 2013). In the case of this study, that means that the perception of the studied industry professionals regarding the impact of digitalization on hip-hop, not necessarily will be the same as the perception of other industry professionals. This applies to the studied media platforms as well.

Based on this study, I would like to recommend hip-hop artists to get an understanding of the music business, as that will avoid signing deals with unfair terms and conditions. According to industry professionals, not enough artists know the music business, resulting in signing deals that are perceived to be unfair. Hiring a lawyer and being educated as an artist is now more important than ever, as record labels are perceived to offer contracts that are complex. Furthermore, in terms of breaking through, being present on social media and in playlist will probably enhance the possibility to break through in hip-hop right now. Another recommendation is to stay independent as long as possible, as that will give artists more leverage, which will help to close better deals. At last, being versatile business-wise is a must, as all industry professionals believe that solely depending on income from music, often would not be enough, especially being a sub-tier or independent artist. This means that having multiple revenue streams seems to be essential in today's hip-hop.

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Appendix

Business dynamics
- Business decisions
  - 360 deal being questioned
  - Changing business strategies
  - Understanding of the music business
  - Artist development
- Profitability
  - Profitability of artists and producers
  - Unfair payment
  - Changing income distribution
- Market conditions
  - Accessibility of music
  - Changing consumption
  - Changing gatekeepers
  - Lower entry barriers

Artistic choices
- Production choices
  - Sonic changes
  - Length of music
  - Albums vs. singles
- Consumption choices
  - Attention span
  - Changing Taste

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                                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                                    │  Use of lyricism │
                                                    └──────────────────┘
                          ┌──────────┐              ┌──────────────────┐
                          │ Lyricism │──────────────│ Value of lyricism│
                          └──────────┘              └──────────────────┘
                                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                                    │   Ghostwriting   │
                                                    └──────────────────┘
                                                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                                    │ Cultural context │
    ┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐         │   taken away     │
    │ Social relevance │───│   Cultural   │─────────└──────────────────┘
    └──────────────────┘   │ appropriation│         ┌──────────────────┐
                           └──────────────┘         │  Culture vultures│
                                                    └──────────────────┘
                           ┌──────────────┐         ┌──────────────────┐
                           │    Media     │─────────│  Media coverage  │
                           │representation│         └──────────────────┘
                           └──────────────┘         ┌──────────────────┐
                                                    │  Image of hip-   │
                                                    │       hop        │
                                                    └──────────────────┘
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